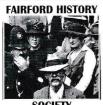
WOMEN in the WINDOWS of ST MARYS CHURCH, FAIRFORD by John Read





FHS Occasional Paper 18

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL TIMES

It is an all too evident fact that the women portrayed in Fairford St Mary's windows mostly appear in a subordinate role to the male figures: even the Queen of Sheba kneels before King Solomon. The notable exceptions are saints and martyrs and, of course, the Blessed Virgin Mary herself, the queen of heaven.

This is an all too accurate reflection of medieval attitudes which nowadays we find alien, though we must remember that it is in only very recent times that we have acknowledged the equal place of women in society and enshrined this in legislation. These changes have been brought about by changes in society undreamt of in the Middle Ages universal education, extraordinary medical advances, unimaginable wealth and the resulting economic independence of women. So it is only in the last 40 years that we have appointed our first woman bishop and that female chief executives and prime ministers have appeared on the scene.

Scholars argue over the origins of the essentially patriarchal view of both the Old and New Testaments and feminists point out, not unreasonably, that matriarchal societies have existed throughout the centuries, though these are clearly in a minority.

Whatever the reasons for a male dominated world view it was made quite explicit in both Jewish and Christian holy texts and this is echoed in the writings of other religions. And it is these texts which shaped attitudes towards women for millennia.

The extent of these attitudes in both the Old and New Testaments is quite extraordinary, for they start with giving Eve the responsibility for the Fall of Man - and the serpent who tempts her has the body of a woman in our window. They then go on to insist that women are the property of their husbands and subject always to them. St Paul weighs in relatively lightly by enjoining them to remain silent during worship.

Every age reinterprets its scriptures and in these times we tend to stress Jesus's often quite revolutionary teachings such as his prevention of the stoning of the woman taken in adultery, the presence in his entourage of Mary Magdalene and the fact that he not only spoke to a Samaritan at the well, but a Samaritan woman which would, to say the least, have been frowned on, on both counts.

THE WOMAN AS TEMPTRESS

Eve, the first woman

The portrayal of Eve must be seen as an example of what is known technically in theology as *typology*, that is the drawing of parallels between the Old and New Testaments. In this context the Virgin Eve says "Yes" to Satan (the serpent) while the Virgin Mary says "Yes" to God so playing a vital part in the Redemption of Mankind.

A WOMAN AS THE MOTHER OF GOD the Blessed Virgin Mary

Fairford's parish church has been dedicated to Saint Mary from at least 1432. A dedication cross which dates from the rebuilding finished in 1497 can be seen on the north wall of the chancel. The formal consecration of saints to a church is a practice begun in the 13th century.

The dedication to Saint Mary is shared with 2,367 other Church of England churches and is by far the most often used dedication.

Given this dedication it should come as no surprise that the Virgin Mary appears in a large number of the Fairford windows. She is easily recognizable by her blue mantle, blue dye for clothing being costly and reserved for royalty and the wealthy. Mary appears in the following windows:-

- 2 Conception
- 2 Birth of Mary
- 2 Betrothal to Joseph
- 2 Presentation in the Temple
- 3 Annunciation
- 3 and 4 Infancy of Christ
- 3 Adoration of the Magi
- 3 Presentation of Christ
- 3 Purification
- 4 Coronation and Assumption

Window 1a



- 4 Finding in the Temple
- 5 Crucifixion
- 6 Deposition of Christ
- 6 Entombment of Christ
- 7 Christ appearing to Mary
- 7 and 10 Virgin and child
- 9 Ascension of Christ
- 9 Pentecost
- 15 Last Judgement

Perhaps the most striking portraits of Mary are, appropriately, in the Lady Chapel, particularly in window 4 which successively shows The Flight to Egypt, Mary's Coronation as the Queen of Heaven, and Joseph and Mary finding Jesus disputing with the Doctors in the Temple. Mary is also given prominence as the central figure in the depiction of Pentecost in Window 9.

The scenes from Mary's life which are portrayed follow the list of the *Seven Joys of Mary*, which started as the Five Joys and was added to until Fifteen Joys were listed. The window number is given in brackets.

The Annunciation (3)

The Nativity of Jesus (2)

The Adoration of the Magi (3)

The Resurrection of Christ (7)

The Ascension of Christ to Heaven (9)

The Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and Mary (9)

The Coronation of the Virgin in Heaven (4)

Parallel with the Joys are the Seven Sorrows of Mary

The Prophecy of Simeon. (Luke 2:34-35) (3)

The Escape and Flight into Egypt. (Matthew 2:13) (4)

The Loss of the Child Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:43-45) (4)

The Meeting of Mary and Jesus on the Via Dolorosa. (5)

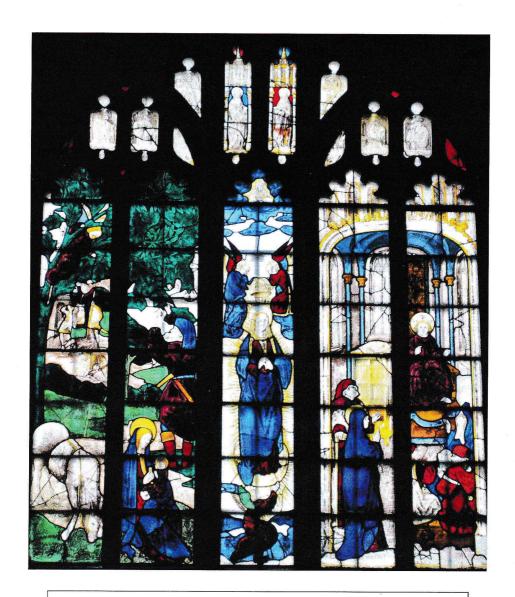
The Crucifixion of Jesus on Mount Calvary. (John 19:25) (5)

The Piercing of the Side of Jesus, and His Descent from the Cross. (Matthew 27:57-59) (5)

The Burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea. (John 19:40-42) (6)

The veneration of Mary and her role as an intercessor has from early times been a central doctrine of the Catholic church and remains so to this day. Anglican tradition explicitly rejects both invocation and veneration and, once again, we can only marvel at scenes depicted in the windows which have survived despite the almost total iconoclasm of the Reformation years.

It is extraordinary that the medieval view of the role of women, which was profoundly misogynistic, with them having an almost exclusively subordinate role to men, gives Mary, as the mother of God, a place which is second only to Jesus in importance.



 $Window\ 4$ Rest on the Flight into Egypt, the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin Mary, Christ disputing with Doctors in the Temple

A slightly more down to earth reversal of the normal role can be seen in the first misericord on the south side of the chancel where a woman is holding a youth by his hair and hitting him with a paddle.



HIGH STATUS WOMEN



There are several examples in the windows of both male and female figures in contemporary high status dress. As we shall see it is suggested that these might be the portraits of courtiers or royal persons.

Window 1d shows the Queen of Sheba kneeling at the feet of King Solomon dressed in a gold gown with a gold crown above a gabled mantle which according to Susan North, Curator of Fashion (1500 to 1800) at the Victoria and Albert Museum is English, dating from after 1490 and bears a resemblance, at least in the clothing, to a portrait of Elizabeth of York, wife of Henry VII which is in in the National Portrait Gallery.



Elizabeth of York, wife of Henry VII, mother of Henry VIII (Wikimedia Commons. In public domain)

Dr. Hilary Wayment, in his book The stained glass of the Church of St. Mary, Fairford states that 'The Queen of Sheba offering gifts to Solomon (I Kings 10:1-13) is normally a type (author's italics - see p3) of the Adoration of the Magi. However, in the overwhelmingly Marian context of Fairford it seems likely that the main parallel intended here is with the Virgin's adoration of Christ at the Nativity (window 3b), or possibly with her submission to the will of God at the Annunciation (window 3a)'. The late Kenneth Munn in Chapter 5 of Life, Death and Art - the medieval stained glass of Fairford Parish Church by Sarah Brown and Lindsay MacDonald states that '(the dress) and the tilt of the head, recalls a portrait of Queen Elizabeth of York (1465-1503) and her representation in the glass of the Chapel of Christ's College, Cambridge. If this is a hidden portrait, then Solomon should represent Henry VII, though there is no known portrait of him with a beard. It is of interest that while working on the glass in 1994, conservator Keith Barley found the letters ROY scratched in the headdress of the queen.' (Author's note - ROY is the medieval French for the modern Roi which translates to King. This is perhaps shorthand for Royal.)



Margaret,
daughter of Henry
VII, sister of Henry
VIII (Wikimedia
Commons. In public
domain)
Left: Woman with
turtle doves
Window 3
Light 4



Window 3d which shows the Presentation of Christ in the Temple contains another high status woman. As Kenneth Munn says "She is wearing sumptuous clothes and her hair is elaborately coiffured.......the tilt of the head, the face and the hairstyle bear a striking resemblance tothat of Princess Margaret, elder daughter of Henry VII, in the illuminated manuscript *Hours* of James IV of Scotland, to whom she was married in 1503......the writer found a small 'ROY' scratched in her hair in the Fairford window". (Author's note – see above.)

Window 7e shows a strikingly dressed woman kneeling at the feet of Jesus in the company of the Virgin Mary and St. Mary Magdalene. Dr Wayment notes that her dress is similar to the rather theatrical clothes worn by Antwerp ladies around the turn of the century – evidence of the Flemish origin of the designers of the windows. Wayment also draws attention to the similarities of the face to a portrait of Princess Mary, younger daughter of Henry VII in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs.



WOMEN AS SAINTS AND MARTYRS

The list of women saints and martyrs appearing in the windows is a long one. Many are contained in the tracery lights which are difficult to see without the aid of binoculars.

Window 2 - Tracery - St Catherine and St Margaret

Window 4 - Tracery - St Mary Magdalene, and St. Anna

teaching the Virgin to read

Window 7 – Main light – Virgin Mary, St Mary Magdalene, Mary Jacobi or Mary Salome

- Tracey - St Catherine(?), St Margaret, St Apollonia

Window 10 - Tracery - St Catherine

Window 13 - Tracery - St Mary Magdalene and St Apollonia

Window 17 - Tracery - St Margaret and St Barbara

Window 18 - Tracery - St Catherine

Window 19 - Tracery - St Dorothy and St Sitha

Window 21 - Main lights - St Dorothy and St Agnes

Window 22 - Main lights - St Catherine(?) and St Margaret

Saints in medieval England included those contained in the New Testament, particularly the Apostles and early martyrs. The Anglo-Saxon period had recognized many saints who had fought against paganism and contemporary saints such as St Zita (see p14) and St Thomas Becket. Frequently the history of the saints was shadowy at best and as a result many have been removed from the Catholic list in recent years. It was only in 993 that the Catholic church canonized its first saint. Prior to that those leading exemplary holy lives and those martyred for their faith were informally recognized. In the West Country particularly there are many churches dedicated to forgotten saints for whom there is no historical record.

SAINT CATHERINE

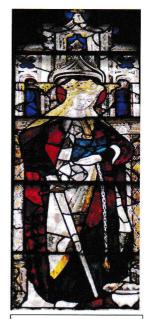
Tradition has it that Saint Catherine of Alexandria was a fourth century virgin martyr who died at the hands of Emperor Maxentius. An early convert to Christianity she rebuked the Emperor for his suppression of Christians. He scourged and imprisoned her, then when she refused marriage with him had her tortured. She was condemned to death on a spiked breaking wheel. When this broke at her touch Maxentius had her beheaded.

In medieval times she was considered one of the most important saints and greatly valued as an intercessor and as an exemplar for young women and is one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers (see p16).

SAINT MARGARET

There are a number of sainted Margarets but our window refers to Saint Margaret of Antioch. Supposedly she was the daughter of a pagan priest, who was nursed by a Christian woman. She embraced

Christianity and consecrated her virginity to God. The Roman Governor Olybrius asked to marry her if she would renounce Christianity which she refused. She was then cruelly tortured when she was swallowed by Satan in the form of a dragon from which she escaped as the cross she carried irritated the stomach of the dragon. Saint Margaret is one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers (see p16).



Window 22 Light 1



Window 22 Light 3

SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Saint Mary Magdalene was a follower of Jesus and is mentioned in the Gospels at least 12 times which is more than most of the Apostles. Both Luke and Mark state that seven demons had gone out of her. She was present at the crucifixion of Jesus and is specifically named by Mark and John as the first person to see the resurrected Christ. In medieval times the tradition grew up that Mary was a reformed prostitute but these claims are not supported by the canonical gospels. The apocryphal gospels and early writers of the church abound in legends about Mary.



Saint Anna was the mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary and therefore the grandmother of Jesus. She is not mentioned in the canonical gospels and the earliest sign of her is in the apocryphal Protoevangelium of James which dates from the middle of the second century and which was recognized as unreliable by Saint Jerome. A belief arose that Anna, though married three times, first to Joachim, then Clopas and finally Solomas gave birth to Mary though remaining a virgin. It is of little surprise that Saint Jerome thought this account of her life unreliable.



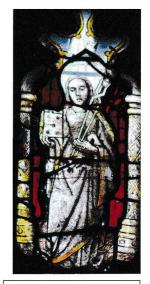
Window 7 Light



Window 4 Tracery 4

SAINT APOLLONIA

According to legend Saint Apollonia was one of a group of virgin martyrs who suffered in Alexandria during a local uprising against the Christians in the third century. Her torture took the form of having all her teeth pulled out or shattered. Her torturers then erected a pile of faggots and threatened to burn her unless she repeated blasphemous words. This she refused to do and of her own volition sprang into the fire and was burned to death. Not surprisingly she is the patron saint of dentistry.



Window 13 Tracery 4

SAINT BARBARA

According to the hagiographies, Barbara, the daughter of a rich pagan named Dioscorus, was carefully guarded by her father who kept her locked up in a tower in order to preserve her from the outside world. Having secretly become a Christian, she rejected an offer of marriage that she received through him.

Before going on a journey, he commanded that a private bath-house be erected for her use near her dwelling, and during his absence, Barbara had three windows put in it, as a symbol of the Holy Trinity, instead of the two originally intended. When her father returned, acknowledged herself to be a Christian;

upon this he drew his sword to kill her, but her | Window 13 Tracery 5 prayers created an opening in the tower wall



and she was miraculously transported to a mountain gorge, where two shepherds watched their flocks. Dioscorus, in pursuit of his daughter, was rebuffed by the first shepherd, but the second betrayed her and was turned to stone and his flock changed to locusts.

Dragged before the prefect of the province, Martinianus, who had her cruelly tortured, Barbara held true to her faith. During the night, the dark prison was bathed in light and new miracles occurred. Every morning her wounds were healed. Torches that were to be used to burn her went out as soon as they came near her. Finally she was condemned to death by beheading. Her father himself carried out the death-sentence. However, as punishment for this, he was struck by lightning on the way home and his body was consumed by flame. Barbara was buried by a Christian, Valentinus, and her tomb became the site of miracles. She is the patron saint of artillerymen (because of the association with explosions in the form of thunder and lightning which killed her father) and is one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers (see p16).

SAINT DOROTHY OF CAESAREA In

the oldest version of the legend Saint

Dorothy, virgin and martyr, suffered during the persecution of Diocletian, 6 February, 311, at Caesarea in Cappadocia. She was brought before the prefect Sapricius, tried, tortured, and sentenced to death. On her way to the place of execution the pagan lawyer Theophilus said to her in mockery: "Bride

of Christ, send me some fruits from your bridegroom's garden." Before she was executed, she sent him, by a six-year-old boy, her headdress which was found to

be filled with a heavenly fragrance of roses and fruits. Theophilus at once confessed himself a Christian, was put on

the rack, and suffered death. This is the oldest version of the legend, which was later variously enlarged. She is the patron saint of gardeners.



Window 21 Light 1

SAINT SITHA (ZITA)

unusually there is good Most documentary evidence for the existence of Saint Sitha or Zita. She was born in 1218 in Tuscany in the village of Monsagrati, not far from Lucca where, at the age of 12, she became a servant in the Fatinelli household. For a long time, she was unjustly despised, overburdened, reviled, and often beaten by her employers and fellow servants for her hard work and obvious goodness. The incessant ill-usage, however, was powerless to deprive her of her inward peace, her love of those who wronged her, and her respect for her employers. By this meek and humble self-restraint, Zita at last succeeded



Window 19 Tracery 5

in overcoming the malice of her fellow-servants and her employers, so much so that she was placed in charge of all the affairs of the house. Her faith had enabled her to persevere against their abuse, and her constant piety gradually moved the family to a religious awakening. One anecdote relates a story of Zita giving her own food or that of her master to the p oor. On one morning, Zita left her chore of baking bread to tend to someone in need. Some of the other servants ensured the Fatinelli family was aware of what happened; when they went to investigate, they claimed to have found angels in the Fatinelli kitchen, baking the bread for her. Zita died peacefully in the Fatinelli house on April 27, 1272. It is said that a star appeared above the attic where she slept at the moment of her death. She was 60 years old, and had served and enlightened the family for 48 years. By her death, she was venerated by the family. In 1696 she was canonized after one hundred and fifty miracles were formally attributed to her by a jury. Her body was exhumed in 1580, discovered to be incorrupt, but has since become mummified. St. Zita's body is currently on display for public veneration in the Basilica di San Frediano in Lucca. She is the patron saint of domestic servants.

SAINT AGNES

According to tradition, Agnes was a member of the Roman nobility born in AD 291 and raised in a Christian family. She suffered martyrdom at the age of about 12 during the reign of the Diocletian, on 21 January 304.

Agnes was a beautiful girl from a wealthy family and therefore had many suitors of high rank. Details of her story are unreliable, but legend holds that the young men, slighted by her resolute devotion to religious purity, submitted her name to the authorities as a follower of Christianity. The Prefect Sempronius condemned Agnes to be dragged naked through the streets to a brothel. Various versions give different methods of escape from this predicament. In one, as she prayed, her hair grew and covered her body. It was also said that all of the men who attempted to rape her



Window 21 Light 3

were immediately struck blind. In another the son of the prefect is struck dead, but revived after she prayed for him. At her trial she is sentenced to death. When led out to die she was tied to a stake, but the wood would not burn, and the flames parted away from her, whereupon the officer in charge of the troops drew his sword and beheaded her, or, in some other texts, stabbed her in the throat. It is also said that her blood poured on to the stadium floor where other Christians soaked it up with cloths. Agnes was buried beside the Via Nomentana in Rome. The daughter of Constantine I, Saint Constance, was also said to have been cured of leprosy after praying at Agnes's tomb. Agnes's bones are conserved beneath the high altar in the church of Sant'Agnese Fuori le Mura in Rome, built over the catacomb that housed her tomb. Her skull is preserved in a separate chapel in the church of Sant'Agnese in Agone in Rome's Piazza Navona.

Saint Agnes is often portrayed with a lamb, as she is in our window, as the Latin word for 'lamb', *agnus*, sounds like her name. The name Agnes is actually derived from the feminine Greek adjective *hagne* meaning 'chaste, pure, sacred'.

THE CHOICE OF WOMEN SAINTS IN THE WINDOWS -THE HOLY HELPERS

From reading through the lives of the saints, two themes are obvious – their virginity, which parallels that of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and their martyrdom, often under horrific circumstances, which may have appealed to the medieval mind and is exemplified in the great West window which shows the fate of persons judged and found wanting and therefore condemned to an awful death.

What is less obvious is that three of our women saints are from the list of the Fourteen Holy Helpers and indeed are the only women saints on that list. Saints Margaret, Barbara and Catherine formed the original basis of the list which was drawn up in the Rhineland at the time of the Black Death. Male saints in our windows are represented by Saints Simon, Peter, Jerome, Gregory, Ambrose, Augustine, James the Great, Michael, George, Paul, John the Baptist, Thomas, Philip, Mathew, Thadius, Matthias, Sebastian, Mark, Luke and John. None of these male saints are on the list of Holy Helpers so though they appear in larger numbers it would seem that Saints Catherine, Margaret and Barbara would be expected to intercede in times of trouble.

The Fourteen Holy Helpers are honored in Bavaria as the 'vierzehn Heiligen,' (Fourteen Saints) and the Basilica of the Vierzehnheiligen is dedicated to these 'Helper Saints'. The rococo pilgrimage church in the town of Bad Staffelstein was designed by Balthasar Neumann and built between 1743 and 1772.

Devotion to these saints began in that region on 24 September 1445 when Hermann Leicht, the young shepherd of a nearby Franciscan monastery, saw a crying child in a field that belonged to the nearby Cistercian monastery of Langheim. As he bent down to pick up the child, it abruptly disappeared. A short time later, the child reappeared in the same spot. This time, two candles were burning next to it. In June 1446, Leicht saw the child a third time. This time, the child bore a red cross on its chest and was accompanied by thirteen other children. The child said: "We are the fourteen helpers and wish to erect a chapel here, where we can rest. If you will be our servant, we will be yours!" Shortly after, Leicht saw two burning candles descending to this spot. It is alleged that miraculous healings soon began, through the intervention of the fourteen saints.

Dr Wayment also points out that the vast majority of female saints depicted are Catherine, Margaret and Mary and that these are all princesses - Catherine (Katherine of Aragon, a wife of Henry VIII) and Margaret Tudor, daughter of Henry VII and wife of James IV of Scotland and Mary Tudor, third daughter of Henry VII. Furthermore it is possible that portraits of these, clothed in high status dress appear in the windows; Katherine as the Virgin Mary in window 3b, Margaret Tudor as the attendant with doves in window 3d and Mary Tudor as Mary kneeling at the feet of Jesus in window 7e.

THE ROLE OF SAINTS IN THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH

Saints are a feature of many religions but particularly of Catholicism. As has been noted above saints were recognized in the early days of the church and came to be officially recognized from 993. Saints are seen as intercessors and objects of veneration. Certain saints were seen as being effective in the relief of specific complaints – for example Saint Apollonia was called upon to intercede in cases of toothache, having herself had all her teeth smashed or pulled out.

Canonization by the Catholic church was and is a lengthy process requiring a close examination of the life of the candidate when evidence of leading an exemplary life, being an extraordinary teacher, and refusing material comforts is weighed. If these tests are passed then there must be testimony of a minimum of two important miracles obtained from God through the intercession of the candidate.

The Anglican Church recognizes saints as those who have a high level of holiness and sanctity. The saints are seen as models of holiness to be imitated. There is however an important difference between the Anglican and Catholic churches' view of the role of saints. One of the Church of England's Articles of Religion 'Of Purgatory' condemns 'the Romish Doctrine concerning...(the) Invocation of Saints' as 'a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God'. The harsh tone of this Article was underlined by the deliberate destruction of the images of saints in all English churches - which makes the survival of our windows all the more remarkable. To this day most of the niches in our church which would have contained statues of saints are empty.

OTHER WOMEN







Window 2a depicts St Anna – the mother of Mary – in a tender embrace by her husband Joachim. St Anna appears in 2b giving birth to Mary and then with Joachim in 2c at the Presentation of Mary in the Temple. These events do not appear in the canonical gospels but are drawn from apocryphal writings such as the Book of James.

WOMEN IN THE JUDGEMENT WINDOWS (Windows 14,15,16)

The West end of the church has three windows – the central one shows Christ in Judgement and those on either side show the Judgement of King David on the Amalekite and the Judgement of Solomon. Both of the latter windows and the central windows were severely damaged in the storm of 1703 and much of the glass is a modern replacement.

The Judgement of Solomon contains two women as recounted in 1 Kings 3:16-28. Two young women who lived in the same house and who both had an infant son came to Solomon for a judgement. One of the women claimed that the other, after accidentally smothering her own son while sleeping, had exchanged the two children to make it appear that the living child was hers. The other woman denied this and so both women claimed to be the mother of the living son and said that the dead boy belonged to the other.

After some deliberation, King Solomon called for a sword to be brought before him. He declared that there was only one fair solution: the live son must be split in two, each woman receiving half of the child. Upon hearing this terrible verdict, the boy's true mother cried out, "Oh Lord, give the baby to her, just don't kill him!" The liar, in her bitter jealousy, exclaimed, "It shall be neither mine nor yours — divide it!"

The king declared the first mother as the true mother, as a true, loving mother would rather surrender her baby to another than hurt him, and gave her the baby. King Solomon's judgement became known throughout all of Israel and was considered an example of profound wisdom.



Window 16 Judgement of Solomon

The central window showing Christ in Judgement in its lower half has St Michael weighing souls with the righteous ascending to heaven on the left and the damned being as Wayment describes 'spiked on sharp stakes, roasted in a furnace, or ground in a machine resembling a mill into a vat and from there into a cauldron below. In the lower right corner a shoal of the damned are impelled into the wide open mouth of the giant figure of Hell, whose torso is like a second ravenous head.'

It is difficult to tell what proportions of men and women go to Heaven and to Hell. Amongst the men a Pope and a King as would be expected both go to Heaven as evidenced by their headgear. The women are all naked and show no symbols of status. Perhaps this is yet another indication of medieval attitudes regarding women.







Details from Window 15 bottom lights 5,6,7

REFERENCES

All information regarding saints is extracted from Wikipedia entries by the author.

Other information from:- The stained glass of the church of St. Mary, Fairford, Gloucestershire by Dr Hilary Wayment (published by the Society of Antiquaries 1984 and distributed by Thames and Hudson ISBN 0 500 99040 9)

Life Death and Art – The Medieval stained glass of Fairford Parish Church by Brown and Macdonald (published 2007 by Sutton Publishing ISBN 0750915234)

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Cover: Tracery Saints Sitha, Apollonia, Barbara, Anna, Margaret



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