



Merton College – Upper Library

### Merton – Saving by Design....

A programme of conservation of the fine medieval stained-glass windows to the Upper Library at Merton College, Oxford is being undertaken by the York Glaziers Trust. The work on this fine set of windows of national importance has been underway since 2021.

The methodology involves: -

- Carefully removing the historic glass from the glazing grooves in the original stone jambs
- Transporting the glass to YGT studio in York where it is repaired and conserved, then set into new metal frames
- These are then returned and inset on the inside face of the original stone aris, allowing a small ventilation gap behind
- New plain UV glass with slight distortions fixed in a leaded frame and inserted into the original glazing grooves.

Whilst there is some obscuring of historic detailing of the windows, the importance of the medieval glass and its long-term conservation outweighed any loss of setting within the stone jambs. Nevertheless, externally the effect of the plain glazing is negligible during the day, with the leadwork being readable, and when light is coming through the windows after dark there is no detrimental effects whatsoever.

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Panelled window reveals.... The perfect answer to the question of how to preserve Medieval Stained Glass



Distortions in Paneling W side of N I



West Reveal of N I (Photo Jane Reid)

### The Challenge!

The new metal glazing frames positioned inside some of the stone window jambs will conflict with the panelled window reveals. Therefore the Clerk of Works and the College commissioned Owlsworth Conservation to produce a study to identify the options to resolving this conflict.

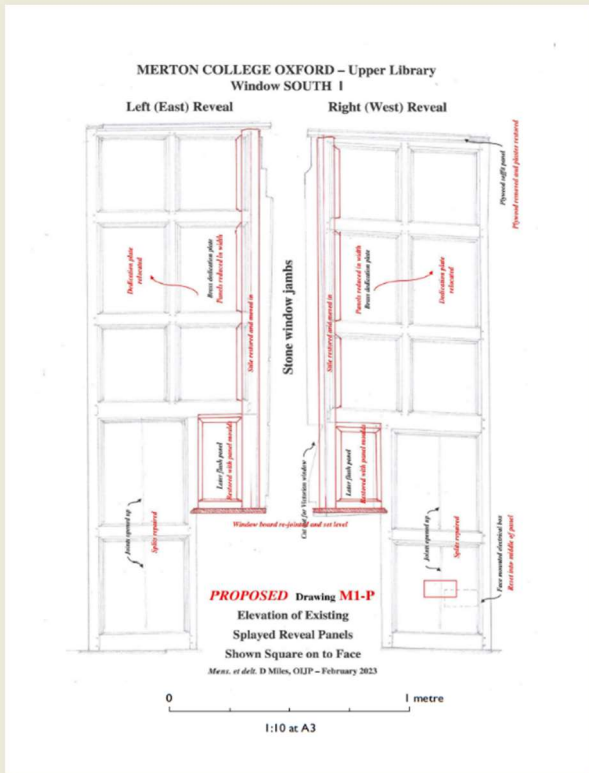


Conserved glass in new metal frames

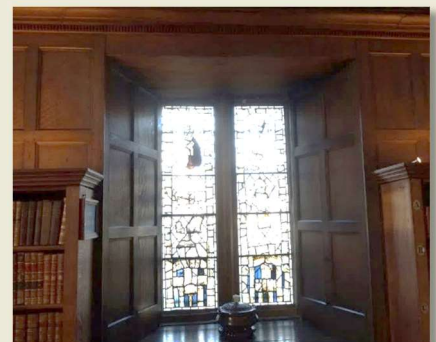
### Owlsworth Rising to The Challenge!

Various options were explored ranging from no intervention to trimming the leaded light panels. It was decided after consultation with Historic England, the City, and the College, to adopt a compromise approach in that the stained-glass panels are sacrosanct, and that they would be conserved and mounted inside, consistent with the other windows, and the paneling would be carefully adopted to suit.

The panelled splayed reveals were recorded in detail, with the proposed alterations and realignment shown in a complimentary set of proposal drawings. Many of the splayed panels had become loose over time, and the opportunity was taken to replace these in their original historic position. The historic deformation was retained.



The panels are carefully removed and dismantled, the horizontal rails and edges are reduced in width to suit and replaced to align with the very edge of the new mounting frames for the stained glass. Samples of the panels are being dendro-chronologically analysed to learn as much as possible. The Library has been dated in the same manner to 1377.



In most instances the window stone jambs windows are not straight, plumb, or of consistent width. Nor are the stained-glass panels. Therefore the new metal frames are all bespoke to vary in relation to the stone jambs. Furthermore many of the stone jambs have had a cement mortar applied which is difficult to eradicate whilst the leaded stained-glass panels are removed. All the stonework has been carefully repaired by Owlsworth.