

# A VISION IN GLASS

## Crafting a New Chapter for Eltham College Chapel Created and Made by Pippa Stacey and Wendy Stone

Pippa Stacey

Early in 2023, I received an unexpected and thrilling invitation: glass artist Hazel Parry asked if I'd be interested in designing a new stained glass window for Eltham College Chapel. The commission was to mark a significant milestone – the school's transition to full co-education status during the 2024–25 academic year.

The chapel visit with Hazel was both inspiring and slightly daunting. Towering at three metres, the arched window included a central panel she had created back in 1992 – a breathtaking work, the main feature being the ancient plane tree that sits just outside the chapel in the college grounds. This window would now need to be complemented, not overshadowed. It was clear that this would be a monumental undertaking.

Having never worked on such a large-scale piece before, my first instinct was to reach out to my friend and fellow glass artist, Wendy Stone. Wendy and I had met during our postgraduate glass studies at Central Saint Martins in September 2004. She gallantly agreed to join the project. She has worked on many public buildings, most notably the restoration of the leaded glass and iconic clock faces on 'Big Ben', and her experience proved invaluable.

### DESIGNING WITH PURPOSE

The school's brief was clear yet ambitious: the new window should reflect Eltham's dedication to the arts and sporting excellence, while echoing the academic spirit captured in Hazel's original panels.

I began sketching concepts, and after several drafts and revisions, the final design was approved by headmaster Guy Sanderson. Scaling the figures up to fit the chapel's towering window was another challenge. My initial method – photocopying sections and taping them together on the living room floor –



Planning and designing the right-hand window



Installation nearing completion, showing Hazel's original panel in the middle (top) and the two new sides finished (above)

was quickly upgraded when my son, a graphic designer, offered to digitise and map the figures properly. A welcome relief and an unexpected family collaboration!

### COLOUR, CRAFT AND COLLABORATION

One of the most delicate tasks was selecting and colour-matching glass to harmonise with the existing panel. We realised that our design and individual style would be different from Hazel's, so we decided that the best way to tie in our window would be to try and match the new glass with Hazel's as closely as we could, to help with a seamless transition between the old and new panels.

Wendy and I spent many hours on site, she perched high on scaffolding, holding up samples to the light, while I judged from below. "Yes!" "No!" "Maybe!" Precision was key, especially when it came to templating curves, measuring for a flawless fit and documenting the existing retaining bars. My husband David contributed by producing detailed CAD window plans.

Finding the right mouth-blown glass was a joy and a trial. We delighted in visiting English Antique Glass in Oxford, selecting beautiful handmade glass, and Pearsons Glass in Liverpool with their extensive range of textures as well as colours. We also used salvaged Victorian glass. So much glass is thrown into landfill and it feels more and more important to try and reuse glass where we



Putting together part of the left window Pat's stables – as a stained glass studio



can. The old Victorian Muranese glass was perfect for catching the light and representing cherry blossom shining out against the darker background.

Space was another hurdle. A very helpful contact of mine came to the rescue and he suggested Pat Rae – a 92-year-old local sculptor and ceramicist. She welcomed us into her Coach House Stables, a wonderful, sculpture-filled garden studio that became the creative heart of the project. Pat didn't just host us, she joined in, learning the art of leading stained glass and completing five of the 27 panels herself. Her spirit and generosity made this chapter even more special.

### BRINGING THE VISION TO LIFE

By March 2024, we had transformed Pat's stables into a fully-fledged stained glass studio. We created mock-ups using large glass easels and endless amounts of Blu Tack to hold the cut glass pieces in place to visualise the full composition. The real challenge was achieving visual continuity with Hazel's panel – both in colour and

flow. Dozens of photographs and videos helped us double-check each decision.

With the right side of the window complete and ready to be leaded, we pressed on with cutting, painting, and assembling the left-hand panels. We were fortunate to receive help from my Adult Learning Lewisham students, who brought enthusiasm and curiosity as they assisted and learned traditional leadwork techniques.

The whole process took us much longer than we had estimated. Working on such a large scale came with new challenges that we were not used to. We worked hard to include details for the viewer to spot, and being precise with our colour and shape choices certainly took its time. Everything was individually cut by hand. All the processes are manual: painting, cutting and leading together. Many of the painted glass pieces had to be kiln-fired several times depending on the final result in terms of tone and colour.

Finally, on 1 April 2025, the new panels were ready to be installed by a local glazing team. Wendy's meticulous measurements ensured everything fitted perfectly. As the sun streamed through the glass that morning, the chapel came alive with colour, texture and light. Imagine a giant magic lantern slide!

### A LASTING LEGACY

The finished window stands proudly alongside Hazel Parry's centrepiece, a contemporary companion that honours the past while celebrating a progressive future. It was a labour of love, made possible by friends, family and a community of makers. We hope it will shine on for generations of students to come.



Some of the detail from different parts of the finished windows, including our signatures (bottom right)

