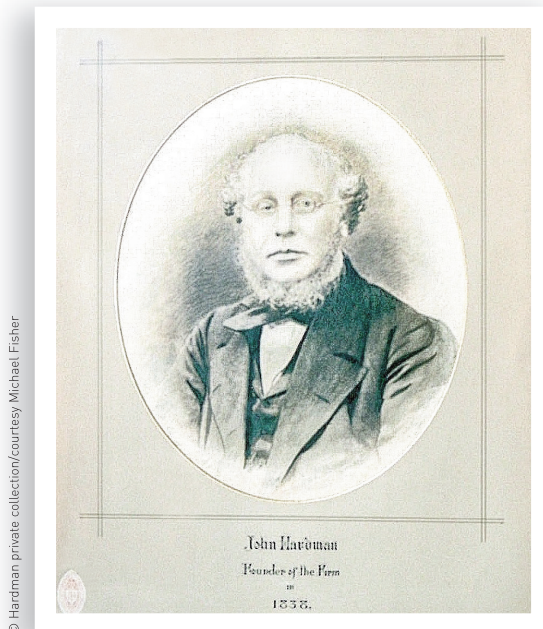


HARDMAN & CO

PUGIN'S GLASSPAINTERS

Michael Fisher

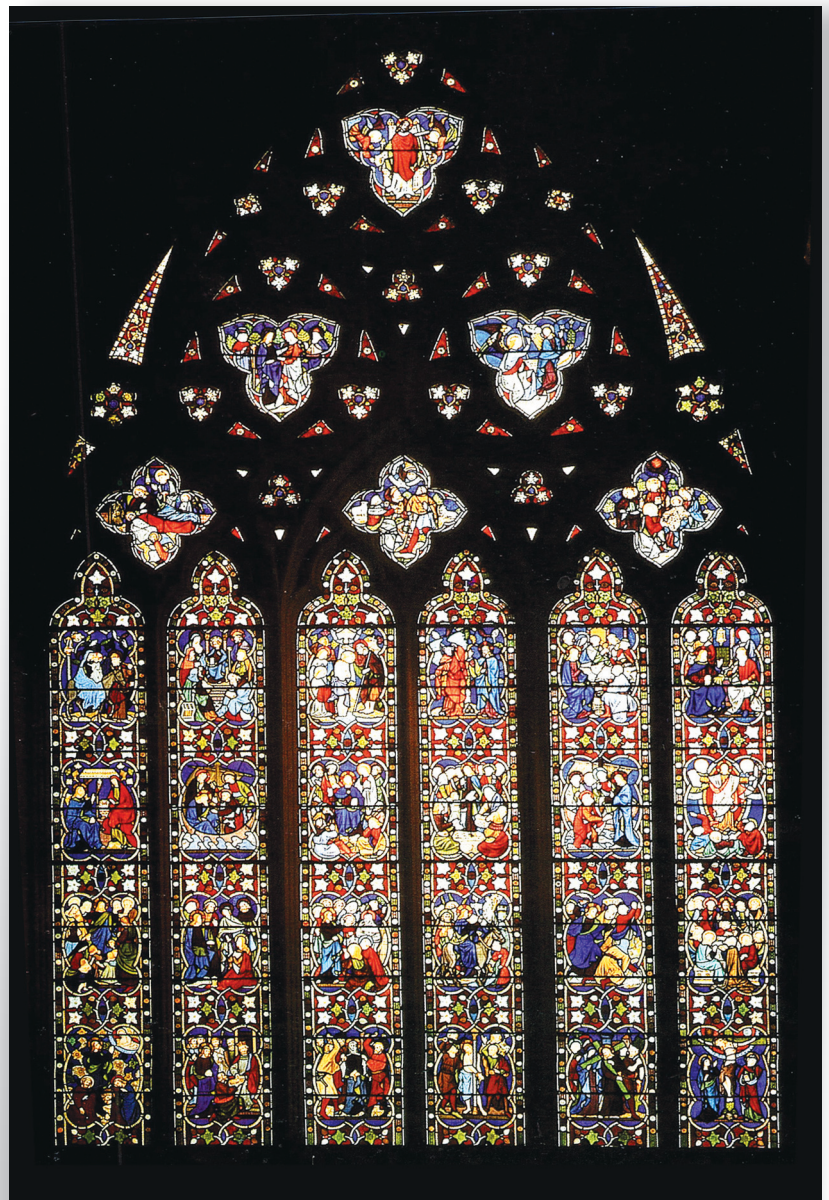
From Shanghai to San Francisco, the name of John Hardman was synonymous with excellence in the design and manufacture of stained glass. Encouraged by his friend Augustus Pugin – the pioneer of Gothic revival architecture – Hardman established new standards of craftsmanship which were maintained by his company for decades after his death. Hardman and Company's windows can be seen in churches, cathedrals and buildings of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



© Hardman private collection/courtesy Michael Fisher

John Hardman Jnr. 1811-1867: goldsmith and glasspainter.

“**T**he Glass painters will shorten my days, they are the greatest plagues I have”. Thus the Gothic-revival architect A W N Pugin (1812-1852) bemoaned the lack of glassmakers able to execute satisfactorily his designs for the many churches which he was building in the mid-1840s. Having tried Thomas Willement (1786-1871), who became too expensive, and William Warrington (1796-1869), whose heraldry he dismissed as ‘wretched’, Pugin turned to William Wailes (1808-1881) of Newcastle-on-Tyne, but he too proved disappointing. So in 1845 he persuaded his Birmingham metalworking friend, John Hardman Jnr (1811-1867) who was already making church furnishings to his designs, to add a stained glass workshop to his ‘Medieval Art Manufactory’ in Paradise Street.



West window of Erdington Abbey, Birmingham, 1850. The use of white glass by Pugin and J Hardman added sparkle and brilliance.

© Graham Miller/courtesy The Pugin Society

Glassmaking skills already established in Birmingham worked to their advantage, and when setting up their new enterprise Pugin and Hardman enlisted the two sons of Robert Henderson, a glasspainter based in nearby New Street, who brought with them their chief painter, a Mr Hinckley, who had twenty-four years' experience in the trade. A new showroom – designed by Pugin – was opened in Great Charles Street, giving Hardman a shop-window on the world in which visitors could inspect and order everything they needed.

Pugin's Vision

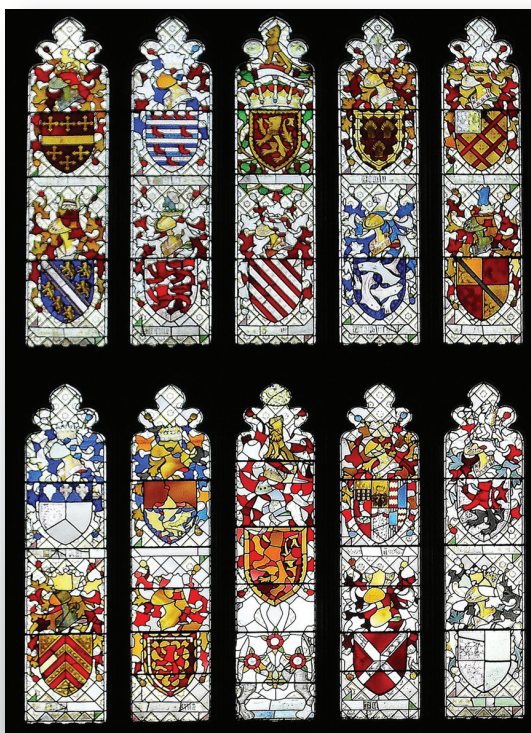
Pugin understood stained glass to be an integral part of the design of a church interior, and, as with everything else he did, to have a practical and instructive purpose. With its depiction of Biblical scenes and figures of saints, stained glass was needed no less in the nineteenth century than it had been in the fourteenth, for, as Pugin observed, 'while the children of this enlightened age are ignorant of the very saint by whom their country was converted to the Christian faith, they are well versed in the legends of Mother Hubbard and Puss in Boots!'

As with medieval metalworking techniques, the revival of glass-painting meant the recovery of a long-lost art. Here Pugin's scholarship was of paramount importance. He travelled widely in England and Europe to study surviving medieval glass of various periods, noting not only the design of the figure-work and ornament, but the colours and textures of the glass, and the details of the leading. He also acquired many samples of old glass for Hardman's glassmakers to handle and study. Pugin's aim was not simply to copy medieval windows but to create new work on the same principles, taking account of new materials and post-medieval advances in botanical and anatomical knowledge.

The first glass produced commercially by the Pugin-Hardman partnership was for St Cuthbert's College, Ushaw, in Durham, a Catholic seminary of which Pugin was the architect. Both Pugin and Hardman were devout Catholics, and so it is not surprising that many of their commissions came from Catholic clients at a time when the church was expanding significantly. Anglican commissions also came their way, and as early as 1847 Hardman's were making glass for the New Palace of Westminster, where Pugin was responsible for the overall design and furnishing of the interiors. Great country houses such as Alton Towers (Staffordshire) gained a significant number of Hardman windows.

The Growth of the Firm

The close friendship between Pugin and Hardman was reinforced in 1850 by the marriage of Hardman's nephew, John Hardman Powell (1827–1895) to Pugin's eldest daughter, Anne (1837–1897).



Banqueting Hall window, Alton Towers, Staffordshire by Pugin and J H Powell. The window was incomplete by the time of Pugin's death in 1852.

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Powell was Pugin's one-and-only pupil in the formal sense, and so, when 'the Master' died – aged only forty – in the autumn of 1852, Powell succeeded him as chief designer for Hardman's.

Though he upheld the design principles imbued from Pugin, Powell also developed his own interpretations of the Gothic style, and this was particularly true of his figure-work which became more fluid and naturalistic than Pugin's had been. Powell's elder son, Dunstan (1861–1932) was a brilliant designer who continued the best traditions of the firm well into the twentieth century.

Their work can be seen at its very best in the many windows they designed for Tewkesbury Abbey between 1886 and 1908. At Worcester Cathedral, restored at this time by George Gilbert Scott, they designed the great east and west windows in addition to carrying out

the painted decoration of the choir and transepts.

To cope with the increasing volume of work, Hardman's opened a new stained glass studio at Newhall Hill in about 1861, and eventually employed a workforce of some 200 men. As the Gothic movement spread to America, Hardman's made windows and other furnishings for many new churches being built in Albany, Baltimore, New York and Philadelphia, including the huge east window of the cathedral of St John the Divine, New York (1908–9), the most celebrated of America's Gothic buildings.

The last of the Hardman family to be involved with the firm – John Tarleton Hardman – retired in 1936; thereafter the firm was managed by others, including Donald Taunton (1885–1965), a highly skilled designer who trained at the Birmingham School of Art which John Hardman Powell had helped to establish.

A Fascinating Archive

An abiding legacy of the Hardman firm is a huge archive of business records, designs, watercolours and working drawings covering the whole period of the company's activities. Housed at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (drawings) and the new Birmingham Library (business records), the archive is a prime source for those wishing to research Hardman windows in their own locality. ●

Michael Fisher is a widely-acknowledged authority on the work of A W N Pugin, the author of several books on Pugin and the Gothic Revival, and former archivist for the firm of John Hardman & Co.

Further Reading

M.J. Fisher, *Gothic For Ever: A W N Pugin, Lord Shrewsbury, and the rebuilding of Catholic England* (Spire Books 2012).

M.J. Fisher, *Hardman of Birmingham: Goldsmith and Glasspainter* (Landmark Publishing, 2008).

Stanley Shepherd, *The Stained Glass of A W N Pugin* (Spire Books, 2009).