ST ETHELBURGA'S CENTRE FOR RECONCILIATION AND PEACE
BISHOPSGATE, LONDON

St Ethelburga - East Window
(3.3m x 3.3m) 2002

A transformation has taken place at St Ethelburga's church. Virtually destroyed by an IRA bomb it has risen from the rubble to become an architectural space with a new purpose – a Centre of Reconciliation and Peace to encourage faith communities to work together and to encourage faith leaders to be part of the resolution of conflict. The commission for the new East window had to reflect that new purpose and it was vital that the subject matter should reflect and encourage harmony and hope. I worked with the Bishop of London and Founder of St. Ethelburga's Centre, Richard Chartres, on the idea of incorporating fragments of the previous glazing into a new window with a positive message for the future.

St Ethelburga is shown as an abbess, dressed in black robe and veil with the white wimple of the Benedictine order, holding her staff of office. She is shown striding across the composition as if seen through the cloister openings, her upward gaze held by the radiant vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Her cloak is swirling and billowing behind her, the lining embroidered with a sweeping patchwork of glass fragments salvaged from the original shattered Kempe window of 1872. From a crack in the tiled floor of the first light grows a Hazel bush (Corylus avellana) shedding leaves and fruit – a symbol of Peace and Reconciliation.

The stylised Romanesque arches, columns and canopy heads set against the diamond quarry background also contain fragments of Kempe's architectural glazing and more pieces flank the new inscription: "O pray for the peace of Jerusalem". Each surviving fragment is placed the right way up, and where possible, in its original location. The composition of St Ethelburga is carried through the five existing window lights and reflects the moving forward of Faith. The fragments of the previous window remind us of the tribulations of the past – but give us hope for the future.



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Bomb damaged glass



New stained glass

Photograph: Gordon Plumb

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