



‘Sir Ninian Comper and his Art’

**All Saints Episcopal Church,
Whiterashes AB21 0QP**

allsaintswhiterashes.aodiocese.org.uk



The crucified Christ with four figures on his left and right.

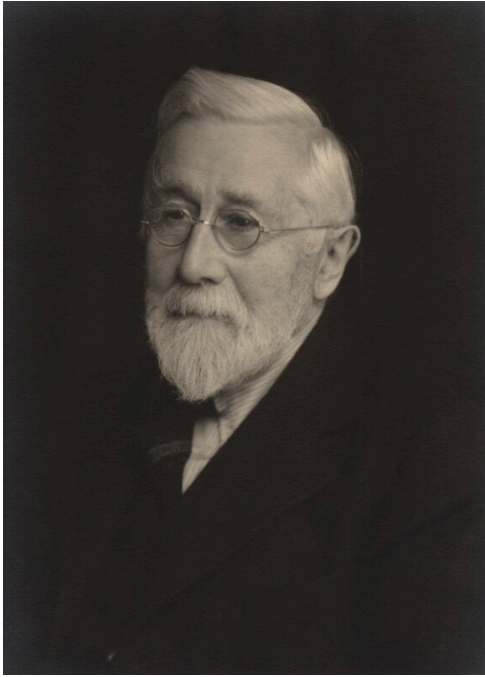
All Saints Church, Whiterashes

All Saints' was established by Major John Ramsay, the Laird of Straloch, (1831-1895) as a school and mission church in 1858. The building was designed by James Mathews. The school function ceased after a Board School was set up in Whiterashes in 1876.

In the 1890s and early 1900s, the coloured glass windows were created by Sir Ninian Comper. Each window commemorates members or associates of the Ramsay/Irvine family of Straloch. The Straloch family's close association with the Church was maintained by his sister Christina Ramsay (1833-1905) and by his daughter, Mary who became Mrs Francis Irvine (1859-1938). The church was transferred into the care of the Scottish Episcopal Church in 1880.

Sir Ninian Comper

Comper was born in Aberdeen, the eldest of five children. He was educated at Kingston College, Aberdeen, Glenalmond School in Perthshire and attended a year at the Ruskin School of Art in Oxford. On moving to London, he was articled to Charles Kempe, and in 1883 to George Frederick Bodley and Thomas Garner. His fellow-Scot William Bucknall took him into partnership in 1888.



Ninian married Grace Bucknall in 1890. They lived in London at The Priory, Beulah Hill, where they entertained friends such as the poet John Betjeman. Comper was knighted by King George VI in 1950. He died in 1960.

Comper's first commission was from his father, Reverend John Comper, who had founded St Margaret's, Gallowgate, Aberdeen in 1867. Ninian was asked by his father to recast and extend the original school chapel built in 1870 by James Matthews. His second commission in Aberdeen was the convent chapel for the Community of St Margaret.

Stained glass as a means to fulfil spiritual growth

Stained glass windows in cathedrals, churches and chapels help create the sense of a sacred space by making a beautiful decoration to the glory of God. They often provide worshipers with inspirational illustrations of figures in the Bible and venerated saints. Some say that these wordless shapes of medieval stained glass served as a sort of "picture Bible" for the illiterate masses. However, whilst it is true that people of medieval Europe were mostly illiterate and uneducated, stained glass windows spoke to them not just as Scriptural pictures but, more importantly, as a lens through which God's word could be more fully understood. Light became the agent to guide the individual toward God's love, through the signs, symbols and expressions that spoke of the divine presence.

Glass has been used for over 5,000 years. It was found in Britain in the remains of Roman sites where it had been used to make windows and pieces of artwork. Use in monasteries began about thirteen hundred years ago and by the twelfth century stained glass was used extensively in churches. Pope Paul II wrote, "In order to communicate the message entrusted to her by Christ, the Church needs art. Art must make perceptible, and as far as possible attractive, the world of the spirit, of the invisible, of God. It must therefore translate into meaningful terms that which is in itself ineffable. Art has a unique capacity to take one or other facet of the message and translate it into colours, shapes and sounds which nourish the intuition of those who look or listen. It does so without emptying the message itself of its transcendent value and its aura of mystery." [Letter to Artists, 4 April 1999]

Sir Ninian Comper and stained glass

Comper was inspired by the artistry and craftsmanship of late medieval glass and its special luminosity, particularly in the use of clear glass, which he knew in time would mellow without losing its brilliancy. He wanted light to enhance the beauty of carved woodwork, furnishings, textiles and embroidery. Draughtsmanship, tonal effects and controlled diffusion of light were important to his work.

He defended himself against the accusation of antiquarianism and reflected on his work as a stained glass artist,

....the aim of such a work is not to make a museum of antiquities, or to copy for the sake of copying, but simply to tell afresh, in glass, the old story of the Faith in its most beautiful manner, and by the most direct means attainable. It is with this end in view that, like the merchantmen of the parable, its maker takes from his treasures things old as well as new: if what is old will best serve his end: new, if he cannot find what he requires in the store-house of the past. [*Sir Ninian Comper*, Anthony Sampson and Stephen Bucknall, Spire Books and Ecclesiological Society, 2006, p.49]

Is an artist, the instrument of the Creator Spirit, to express *himself* in building the Temple of Christ? Is there such a supremacy of goodness, beauty and truth in the present age as to mark it as distinct from the past, and demand that we invent a new expression of it? The purpose of a church is not to express the age in which it was built or the individuality of its designer. Its purpose is to move to worship, to bring a man to his knees, to refresh his soul in a weary land. This would seem to be the Creator's purpose towards man in giving him the beauty of nature, and it should be the purpose of all art. In art man partakes in this purpose of his Maker and objectively he brings the best of all that He has given him to create of beauty (in liturgy, poetry, music, ceremonial, architecture, sculpture and painting) to be the expression of his worship. For mankind in the mass the neglect of beauty spells the hardness and narrowness either of a puritan or of a materialist; though the saint and the mystic may pass directly, without the aid of external beauty of art, and even of nature, to God Himself.[*ibid*, p.234]

I have worked all day in a church decorating in gold and colour and felt a deep despair, when suddenly, with the evening light, what before had seemed so hopeless became beautiful. [*ibid*, p.242].



North window of the chancel

[L] St. Quentin was a Roman missionary to Gaul, who was beheaded with a sword.

[R] St James, son of Zebedee and one of the first disciples to follow Jesus. James is the patron saint of Spain and, according to legend, his remains are held in Santiago de Compostela in Galicia. The traditional pilgrimage to the grave of the saint, known as the "Way of St. James", has been the most popular pilgrimage route from the Early Middle Ages. James' emblem was the scallop shell, and pilgrims to his shrine often wore that symbol on their hats or clothes.



South window of the chancel

[L] St Hugh, also known as Hugh of Avalon, was a Benedictine and Carthusian monk, later bishop of Lincoln. Hugh's primary emblem is a white swan, in reference to the story of the swan of Stow which had a deep and lasting friendship with the saint, even guarding him while he slept.

[R] St Francis of Assisi created the Franciscan Order. He was born wealthy but lived a life of poverty, as freedom from earthly life. As a friar, deacon and preacher he later became associated with patronage of animals and the natural environment. Francis is shown with the stigmata evident in his bare feet and hands.



Window in Nave, South side

[L] St Barnabas, holding the Gospel of St Matthew; the flame above his head represents the statement in the Book of Acts that “he was full of the Holy Ghost and of faith” [Acts 11.24].

[R] St Nathanael (or Nathaniel) is introduced to Jesus by Philip who found Nathanael [Jn 1.45-51]. Some scholars hold that when Jesus said, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you”, is based on a Jewish figure of speech, referring to studying the Torah. In the other gospels Nathanael is referred to as Bartholomew [Mt 10.3; Mk 3.18; Lk 6.14].



Window in the nave, South side

[L] St Christina a Christian martyr of the 3rd century, was the daughter of a wealthy pagan magistrate who had his daughter tortured because of her faith. The nature of the torture varies. Her symbol shows a millstone and arrows; she was tortured by drowning tied to a millstone and assailment by arrows.

[R] St Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha and Lazarus depicted carrying a jar of perfume. In the Gospel of John she is identified as the woman who pours the entire contents of an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume over the feet of Jesus [Jn 12.3-8].



Window in nave, North side

Michael the Archangel, whose name means "Who is like God?", is referred to in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. His exalted position is stated in the Book of Daniel [12.1]. In the Letter of Jude he is "the archangel Michael"[v.9], the principal or chief angel.

Portrayed in religious and church art as a winged soldier as he is a protector and fighter. Michael leads God's armies against Satan's forces in the Book of Revelation [12.7-9], where during the war in heaven he defeats Satan. Here he is about to strike "the great dragon the one that is called Slanderer and Accuser, the one that leads the whole inhabited world astray - it was cast down to the earth and its angels were cast down with it" [*The New Testament: A Translation*, David Bentley Hart, p.514]. The "accuser" is a popular Hebrew term referring to "the dark power that appears to grip, distort, and ultimately destroy human societies and individuals" [*Paul: A Biography*, Tom Wright, p108].

Michaelmas is, by tradition, the last day of the year on which you are meant to pick blackberries. Legend has it that when Michael threw Satan out of heaven, Satan landed on a prickly bramble patch. Satan cursed the fruit, scorched them and stamped and spat on them [the legend may have something more to do with the first frosts that come in October making the fruit inedible].

All Saints Ministerial Team

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Priest-in-Charge who is available to minister baptisms, marriages and funerals for all who live in the area of Whiterashes, Newmachar and district.

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Lay Reader

We hold a monthly service on the first Sunday of each month at 3.00pm. Refreshments are served afterwards. Weekly meetings for quiet prayer are held on Thursday at 11.30am. The Eucharist is celebrated on the third Thursday of the month at this time.

A Book Club meets on the last Tuesday of each month at 1.30pm. The Oldmeldrum Librarian provides multiple copies of chosen books. A charge of £1.00 per person per session is made. Please contact Mrs Gill Marshall 01651 842828 for further information.

All Saints supports the work of Eco-Congregation Scotland, an ecumenical charity, helping churches make the link between environmental issues and Christian faith, by responding with practical action in the church, in the lives of individuals, and in the local and global community.

Visit our website at

<http://allsaintswhiterashes.aodiocese.org.uk>

for further information about our church and services