

The Windows of St Mary's Church

Compton Dando

A Guide to the Windows of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Compton Dando

A visitor's and parish guide to the subjects, saints and memorials depicted in the church's stained glass



Clive Howarth, Churchwarden 2026

The Great East Window – Location: East wall of the Chancel

By Barton Kinder & Alderson of Brighton, installed and dedicated in 1963

The vision behind the design

The design is based on Revelation 4:3, which describes the one seated on the heavenly throne and a rainbow surrounding the throne, shining like an emerald.

“A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.”

The central figure is therefore Christ enthroned in glory, blessing those who look towards him. The sweeping, many-coloured form around him represents the emerald rainbow of the vision.



Can you spot the symbols?

The Sacred Heart — The pierced heart represents the Sacred Heart of Christ and recalls his love and sacrifice.

The Chi-Rho — The letters X and P are the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ. Together they form an ancient Christian symbol for Christ. It has crown in the middle and a red background.

Alpha and Omega — The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. They represent the beginning and the end of all things.

The Marian monogram — The letters MR are explained as referring to Mary — Mater Dei (Mother of God), and possibly Maria Regina (Mary, Queen of Heaven).

The Fleur-de-lis — A symbol associated with the lily and with Mary. It can also represent the Trinity.

A window with a story

The window was dedicated in July 1963 by Edward Henderson, Bishop of Bath and Wells. It cost £450 (about £8,000 today, 2026). Its imagery combines the vision of the heavenly throne with symbols of Christ and Mary, making it both a striking work of modern stained glass and a statement of Christian belief.

When you look again...

Start at the centre with Christ on the throne. Follow the coloured rainbow around him. Then look upwards for the angels and Christian symbols, and downwards for the figures and inscriptions. The window is designed to draw the eye from earth towards the heavenly throne and the eternal reign of Christ.

The Nativity Window - *Location: Left of the main door* ***By James Powell and Sons – Artist Miss Shepherd (possibly) 1868***

This window is a classic three-panel telling of the Christmas story, with each of the three lights depicting a different episode from the accounts of Christ's birth in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew.



Left Light: The Annunciation to the Shepherds

An angel appears to shepherds watching their flocks by night, announcing the birth of Christ. The shepherds are shown with their sheep and goats, responding with awe and reverence to the angel's message. This scene corresponds to Luke 2:8–14, where the angel declares “Good tidings of great joy” and is joined by “a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God.”

Centre Light: The Nativity

Mary and Joseph are shown with the infant Christ in the manger, with the ox nearby and a shepherd kneeling in adoration before the child. The timber framework behind the Holy Family is arranged in the shape of a cross — a traditional artistic device linking Christ's birth with his eventual crucifixion, reminding the viewer from the outset of the window that the child in the manger is also the Saviour who will die for humanity's redemption.

Right Light: The Adoration of the Magi

Mary presents the Christ child to the three wise men (Magi), one of whom is shown crowned, as they arrive bearing gifts. The Star of Bethlehem is depicted above, having guided them on their journey. This scene corresponds to Matthew 2:1–12, in which the Magi, “falling down, worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.”

Together

Read left to right, the three lights form a single narrative arc — the announcement of Christ's birth, the birth itself, and the recognition and adoration of Christ by the wider world (represented by the Magi, who in Christian tradition symbolise the Gentile nations). This is one of the most traditional and widely used subjects for a church's Christmas or Nativity window.

The Baptism Window - *Location: Right of the main door* ***By James Powell and Sons - Artist Henry Casolani 1867***

This window centres on the Baptism of Christ, with two flanking scenes that trace an arc from his infancy through to the start of his public ministry.



Left Light: The Presentation of Christ in the Temple

A bishop-like figure in a mitre and rich vestments receives the infant Christ from Mary, with Joseph alongside. This composition — an infant presented to a robed elder in a temple setting — most likely depicts Simeon receiving the infant Jesus in the Temple, where he prophesies over the child (Luke 2:22–38).

Centre Light: The Baptism of Christ

John the Baptist, identifiable by his rough garment, pours water over Christ's head as he stands in the River Jordan, with the Holy Spirit descending as a dove in a roundel above. This matches the Gospel accounts of Christ's baptism, notably Matthew 3:13–17: “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove.”

Right Light: Angels Ministering to Christ (likely)

Two winged figures (angels) are shown attending to a robed figure. Given its place alongside the Baptism, this most plausibly depicts the angels who came and ministered to Christ following his fasting and temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:11), a scene traditionally paired with the Baptism as the next stage of his story. This identification is the least certain of the three.

Together

Read left to right, the three lights trace Christ's early life and the beginning of his public ministry: his presentation as an infant, his baptism in the Jordan, and the angelic ministry that followed his time of testing in the wilderness.

The Passion Window - *Location: North wall, by the font* ***By James Powell and Sons – Artist J Doyle 1869***

This window depicts three episodes from Christ's Passion — his suffering and death — moving from his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, through the Crucifixion, to the grief of his followers afterward.



Left Light: The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane

Christ is shown kneeling alone in prayer in a garden setting, with his sleeping disciples — Peter, James and John — below him. This matches the Gospel accounts in Matthew 26:36–46 and Luke 22:39–46, in which Christ prays “not my will, but thine, be done” the night before his arrest, while the disciples repeatedly fall asleep.

Centre Light: The Crucifixion

Christ hangs on the cross with the “INRI” titulus above him (Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum — “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews”), flanked at the foot of the cross by St John and the Virgin Mary. A skull is shown at the base of the cross, the traditional symbol of Golgotha, “the place of the skull,” and often also an allusion to Adam, whose burial there in legend is overcome by the new life brought through Christ.

Right Light: The Lamentation

Christ's body, taken down from the cross, is supported and mourned over by a group of grieving figures, including Mary and John. This scene, sometimes called the Lamentation or Deposition, depicts the grief of Christ's followers immediately after his death, before his entombment.

Together

Read left to right, the three lights trace the course of Christ's Passion: his anguish and submission to God's will in the garden, his death upon the cross, and the sorrow of those who loved him in its immediate aftermath.

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The Ascension Window - *Location: North aisle, by the Millennium Cross* ***By James Powell and Sons – Artist Henry Holiday 1871***

This window depicts three episodes from the end of Christ's earthly ministry and the beginning of the Church, moving from his final hours, through his Ascension into heaven, to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.



Left Light: The Agony in the Garden (tentative)

A reclining figure in white is shown being supported by others, with an angel present in the scene. This composition most likely depicts Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, comforted and strengthened by an angel before his arrest (Luke 22:43: “And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him”). This identification is less certain than the other two lights and is worth confirming against parish records or the window's dedication, if available.

Centre Light: The Ascension

Christ rises upward with arms outstretched, robed in white against a blue sky with clouds, while the disciples below look up at him in wonder. This is the traditional composition for the Ascension, as recorded in Acts 1:9–11: “And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.”

Right Light: Pentecost

A close-knit group of figures is gathered together, with a dove-like form visible above them. This depicts Pentecost — the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles as they were gathered together, traditionally shown as a dove or as tongues of flame (Acts 2:1–4).

Together

Read left to right, the three lights trace the culmination of Christ's earthly ministry and the founding of the Church: his suffering and strengthening before the Passion, his return to heaven, and the gift of the Holy Spirit that empowers the apostles to carry his message forward.

The Teaching and Service Window - *Location: West end of the north aisle* *By Joseph Bell of Bristol*

This window is unusual in that each of the three main lights carries its own inscription, drawn directly from scripture, making the identification of each scene certain. Above the three lights, the tracery contains figures of the virtues and a symbol of the Holy Spirit.



Left Light: Christ and Nicodemus

The inscription below this light reads “...that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). This is drawn from Christ's night-time conversation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee who came to him secretly to ask about being “born again.” The scene shows Christ teaching a seated older man, consistent with this account (John 3:1–21).

Centre Light: “Suffer Little Children to Come Unto Me”

The inscription quotes Christ's words directly: “Suffer little children to come unto me” (Mark 10:14; also Matthew 19:14 and Luke 18:16). Christ is shown with arms open in blessing as a woman brings a child to him. This is one of the most popular subjects for Victorian church windows, often chosen for memorial windows to children.

Right Light: The Washing of the Feet

The inscription reads “Except I wash thee, thou hast no part with me” — Christ's words to Peter in John 13:8, spoken during the Last Supper as Christ washed the disciples' feet as an act of humility and service. The kneeling figure with the basin is Christ; the standing figures are two of the disciples, most likely Peter, who initially objected, and John.

The Tracery – at the top of the window

The upper lights contain four standing robed figures, each crowned above and each identified by a partial label: FAITH, HOPE, CHARITY, and RELIGION. These are personifications of the theological and cardinal virtues, a common Gothic Revival scheme used to crown a set of narrative scenes. At the very apex, a small roundel shows a dove with rays — a symbol of the Holy Spirit — above the whole design.

Together

Read left to right, the three lights trace themes of spiritual rebirth, childlike faith, and humble service — core teachings from Christ's ministry — crowned above by the virtues these teachings are meant to inspire.

The Gyllett Memorial Window - *Location: South Chancel wall*

This window is a family memorial, identifiable from its own inscriptions. Read together across the four lights, they read: “Thomas Gyllett, Vicar of this Parish, died August 26, 1818, Aged 66. Ann his Wife died April 24, 1806. Matilda Alderton, daughter of Thomas and Ann Gyllett, died November 15, 1837, Aged 44.” It commemorates a former Vicar of the parish, his wife, and their daughter.



Top Left: The Virgin Mary (likely)

A veiled female figure is shown with her hands folded in prayer. Paired directly opposite St John, this most likely depicts the Virgin Mary, who is traditionally shown together with John at the foot of the Cross. But she is not in blue- a traditional colour for Mary. It is possible this instead depicts a matron saint chosen with Matilda in mind. It is not clear.

Top Right: St John the Evangelist

Identified by his attribute, a chalice with a small serpent emerging from it. This refers to the legend that John was given a cup of poisoned wine, which he blessed, causing the poison to leave harmlessly in the form of a serpent — one of his most common identifying symbols in English church glass.

Bottom Left: St Peter

Shown holding a large key and a book. The key is Peter's near-universal attribute, referring to Christ's words, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19).

Bottom Right: St Andrew

Shown with a large saltire (X-shaped) cross, the traditional instrument of his martyrdom and his standard identifying attribute in Christian art.

The Memorial

Thomas Gyllett served as Vicar of the parish and died on 26 August 1818, aged 66. His wife, Ann, predeceased him, dying on 24 April 1806. Their daughter, Matilda Alderton (née Gyllett), died on 15 November 1837, aged 44. The window was commissioned by surviving family members to commemorate all three.

The West Window – *Location: at the back of the church*

They were probably made by Hardman & Co. glass designed by John Hardman Powell, perhaps dating from around the early 1850s



Central cross – Christ's Crucifixion and therefore the central symbol of his Passion and death.

Three long objects below/around the cross – these are very likely the **three nails** of the Crucifixion, represented in a highly stylised manner.

Curved forms at the top – probably elements of the **Crown of Thorns** or associated Passion ornament. The elaborate gold scrollwork is **decorative Gothic foliage**, rather than additional Passion objects.



In English church heraldry, this motif is often used in the arms of the **Diocese of Bath and Wells**. That diocese's arms are famously "*Azure, a saltire per saltire and a pillar argent*" (a white pillar with a saltire behind). The one you see here is a version of that.



Christ's suffering and death, represented through the objects of the Passion rather than by showing Christ himself. □ **NRI** – *Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum*, Latin for "**Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.**"

This was the inscription traditionally placed above Christ's cross by order of Pontius Pilate.

Three nails – the nails used to fasten Christ to the Cross. The three became the conventional representation of the Crucifixion nails.

Hammer – representing the hammer used to drive the nails into the Cross.

Pincers/pliers – associated with the removal of the nails after the Crucifixion. □



This window is also an **Arma Christi / Instruments of the Passion** window, but it uses a rather different selection of symbols from the others. The two windows may therefore have been designed as a pair.

The ladder — the ladder used in the traditional Passion imagery to take Christ's body down from the Cross.

The scourges/whips — instruments of the Flagellation.

The hammer — used for driving in the nails.

The nails — symbols of the Crucifixion.