

The Sunday School Window

At the end of November 1945, an artist and stained glass window designer, called Morris Meredith Williams, received a short letter from Reverend Guy Longe of West Stow Rectory, Bury St Edmunds.

“Dear Meredith Williams,” it read.

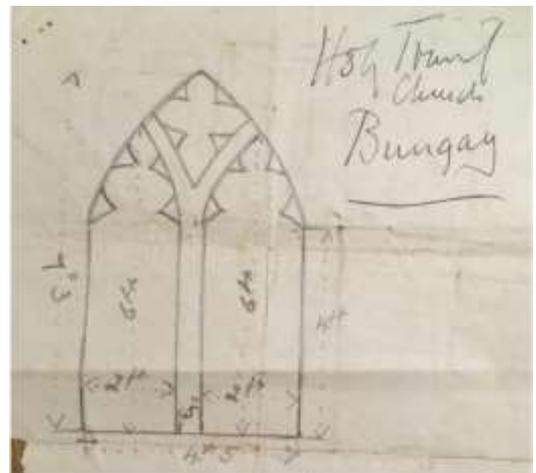
*“I hope you and Mrs Williams are well and before long will visit East Anglia, now the war is past. An old friend, an infant teacher at Bungay, where we used to be, asked my advice about a little window her children wanted to put into Holy Trinity Church. They have collected £16 [the equivalent of almost £700 in 2020]. Will you give me some advice as to how much a simple design and all expenses should cost? I don’t know how far you could possibly help yourself. We might wangle a visit from you perhaps!
Yours ever, Guy Longe”*

Reverend Longe had been vicar of Holy Trinity, Bungay for only three years, between 1909 and 1912, but he and his wife, Ivy, had stayed in touch with Sybil Lerner, a young teacher at the start of her career. Born in Ditchingham in 1892, Sybil was one of eight surviving children of a printer’s compositor and his wife and one of two to become a teacher. Two world wars later she was still in Bungay, inspiring children.

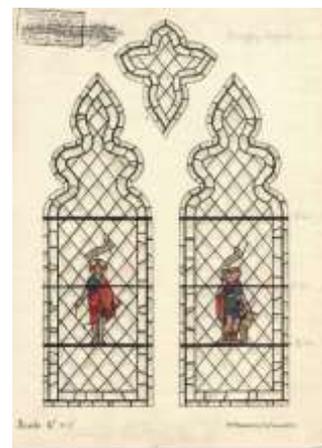
Morris Meredith Williams had gone to the Slade School of Art in London at 14, then on to Paris. He married a sculptor, Alice Williams and settled in Edinburgh, where he earned a living, illustrating books and teaching drawing. After four years with the army during the First World War, Morris and Alice spent most of their time on war memorials and stained glass windows, including two spectacular windows in the Cathedral of the Most Holy Trinity in Bermuda. It is not known how Guy Longe knew Morris but he must have seen some of his other windows, perhaps including his design for All Saints, North Runcton, near Kings Lynn, which had been completed in 1932.

By now, Morris was living in Devon, with his second wife (Alice having died in 1934) and could not easily pop over to Bungay. At some point, he received this rough sketch, showing the dimensions of the window.

Morris will have explained that £16 would not be enough to cover the cost of designing, making and installing even a simple window, with little colour. More fundraising would be needed. This and Morris’s other commitments (including a war memorial window for All Saints in Beyton, near Bury St Edmunds, 1948) probably explain why the Sunday School window at Holy Trinity was not completed until 1952.



Designers of stained glass windows first produce a sketch design for the client's approval. They then make a full-size drawing, known as a cartoon, from which the glassmakers work. This is the sketch design approved by the Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches on 2nd November 1951, with conditions: "...figures should be slightly larger and set slightly higher in window with backing of clear glass". It is interesting that the design shows Jesus on the left and David, with his sheep, on the right. The window has been installed with David on the left and Jesus on the right, above a scroll that reads: A thank offering from the infant Sunday School. Morris sometimes initialled his work MMW, but he does not appear to have done so in this case.



The window was made by one of the best known glassmakers of the day, Lowndes & Drury. They made many of Morris's windows, including those in Bermuda, North Runcton and Beyton.

The total cost of the window was £73 1s 7d (about £2,310 today). Of this, Charles E. Bedwell was paid £10 0s 3d for making a template of the window and for fixing the finished work in place. The fee for Lowndes & Drury was £53 1s 7d. Morris paid himself £10 for his design.

On 11th June 1952, Sybil Larner wrote to Morris for the service of dedication:

*"Dear Mr Meredith Williams,
Thank you so very much for your letter. Everybody seems very charmed with the window. It really is lovely and I don't know how we can ever thank you sufficiently. You have been so very kind to us. The children, or a child, will be writing you later. Mr Longe was not able to get to the service, but he came the next day on his way to Ditchingham. He thought the window was very, very lovely. I think he is writing you. I do hope you will be able to see it yourself one day. Mr Lummis is sending you the cheque, if he has not already done so.
Thank you again so very much.
Yours most gratefully,
Sybil F. Larner"*



Photography: Saffron
Summerfield, October 2020

For more information about
Morris and Alice Meredith
Williams, please go to
anartistswar.com or email
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