

UWTSD launches new Apprenticeship in Stained Glass to save endangered craft

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A new apprenticeship has been launched through a collaboration between the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) and partner organisations, after research showed a worrying decline in the traditional craft of stained glass.



This year (2023), the Heritage Craft Association put the craft of making and restoring traditional, large-scale stained-glass windows on the Endangered Craft Red List.

With a diminishing market of new commissions and an ageing demographic of practitioners, combined with increasing costs and decreasing opportunities for formal training, there are very real concerns among practitioners about the craft's future.

Addressing this problem, Swansea College of Art at UWTSD, the British Society of Master Glass Painters, the Worshipful Company of Glaziers, and industry professionals came together to rectify the issue.

Collectively, they have developed a brand new, government-funded [Stained Glass Craftsperson Apprenticeship](#) with training provided by UWTSD and final assessment by the Institute of Conservation (ICON). Apprentices will study at UWTSD in blocks over three years, undertaking tuition in a comprehensive range of stained-glass craft techniques.

The apprenticeship was launched by Professor Elwen Evans KC, Vice-Chancellor of UWTSD at the University's Reading Room at the Alex Design Centre on Friday, November 24. The event also featured a symposium with speakers including Martin Crampin of the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies (CAWCS), Reinhard Kopf from the Heritage Department, Monchengladbach, and Jasmine Allen, from the Stained-Glass Museum in Ely, Cardiff.

The symposium in Swansea was an opportunity to reflect on the remarkable achievements of staff and students of the Architectural Stained-Glass department over recent decades. Dr Reinhard Köpf, an expert on German post-war stained glass, came from Düsseldorf to speak about the influential German artists who came to teach at Swansea in the 1970s and 80s.

A panel discussion with some of the major figures in British architectural stained glass – Alex Beleschenko, Amber Hiscott, and Rodney Bender – recalled their time in Swansea College of Art and the masterclasses held by these German artists who were invited over to Swansea by Tim Lewis, head of the stained-glass course from 1972 until 1995.

An impressive display of stained-glass panels, drawings and archive photographs from the college collection was set up by Christian Ryan with Owen Luetchford and Stacey Pountney of the Architectural Glass Centre. The afternoon presented an opportunity to assess the research potential of this archive along with others in Wales and was joined by the curator of the Stained-Glass Museum, Dr Jasmine Allen, Kim Collis of West Glamorgan Archive Service and Felicity Grey, Archives and Records Officer for UWTSD.

Following the day considering the stained-glass archives at Swansea College of Art and the legacy of the teaching of architectural stained glass at Swansea College of Art, a visit to Coychurch Crematorium presented an opportunity to see the extraordinary collection of artworks made by staff and students at the college for one of the most remarkable Modernist crematoria anywhere in Britain.

Several artists spoke about their commissions at the crematorium, the first of which was completed in 1970 by Roger Hayman. Roger talked about the making of and Rodney Bender remembered the experience of making the windows by Ludwig Schaffrath, Johannes Schreiter, and others.

Alex Beleschenko brought along some of the original drawings for his set of windows and Christian Ryan, Liaison Officer for the new Apprenticeship, discussed the techniques in his windows of Capel Crallo.

New works in glass have recently been made by Rodney Bender for the new courtyard outside the chapel, so the series of commissions in glass at the crematorium span a period of more than fifty years.

The University is grateful to Joanna Hamilton, the manager at the crematorium, for the opportunity to arrange the visit, and Christian Ryan for planning. A book on the stained glass at Coychurch Crematorium will be produced next year by Martin Crampin, author of *Stained Glass from Welsh Churches*, in collaboration with other experts and artists.



Essential Health & Safety and COSHH has been built into the new Apprenticeship programme, alongside a range of decorative processes including glass painting, staining, enamelling, acid etching, sandblasting, and French embossing. Apprentices will be introduced to design, heraldry, lettering, and the history of stained glass to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the craft.

Swansea College of Art at UWTSd is recognised as one of the UK's centres of excellence in stained glass. The department has a rich heritage in stained glass education and has an impressive archive of panels, cartoons and designs spanning 80 years, providing an invaluable teaching resource.

Apprentices will be based in UWTSd's ALEX Building, the original home of the stained-glass department, where they'll have access to high quality glass workshops and facilities.

Christian Ryan, Stained Glass Apprenticeship Liaison Officer at UWTSd said: "This programme is a significant development in the continuation of stained-glass training and is a wonderful opportunity to instruct the next generation of craftspeople.

"With the hard work and perseverance of all involved, and the support of the stained-glass community, we hope that soon, stained glass can be removed from the Endangered Craft Red List and that the specialist knowledge and skills continue to be passed on in future."

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