



Stained glass fragment of a lion

Not on display

Title/Description: Stained glass fragment of a lion

Born: 1470 - 1490

Object Type: Stained glass

Materials: Lead, Painted glass

Measurements: h. 133 mm

Accession Number: 760

Historic Period: 15th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe, Norfolk

The curled mane, relatively soft modelling of the fine black lines and the solidity of the lion's body suggest a late fifteenth-century date.

The clear glass panel has been painted with silver stain, a silver nitrate mixture first used in the early 1300s which stains the glass to varying shades of yellow. Pot metal glass, which is already coloured yellow, was often used for large areas of yellow as it was cheaper, and less liable to be damaged during the firing process, but the pale section under the lion proves that this is a painted piece of clear glass rather than a piece of glass which is solidly yellow throughout.

The fragment is entirely divorced from its original window, so it is not possible to be sure of the lion's original context. Lions appear in stained glass as a symbol of St Mark the Evangelist (though these are usually winged, as at St Michael's, Doddescombsleigh, Devon), or occasionally as part of the throne of Solomon or in narrative scenes, such as the pair being herded by Noah at St Neot's church, Cornwall. On balance, this example seems more likely to have had a heraldic function, although the pose is relatively unusual. Lions *rampant* (standing erect) and *passant* (walking horizontally) are the more common variants, but *sejant* (or seated as here) is a known pose in contemporary heraldry, and is seen for example in a fragment of fifteenth-century glass preserved at St George's, Shimpling, Suffolk. If the lion was heraldic, it may have indicated the patron of the original window.

Eleanor Townsend, March 2022

Further Reading

R. Marks, *Stained Glass in England during the Middle Ages* (London, 1993)

P. Cowan, *English Stained Glass* (London, 2008)

E. Carson Pastan and B. Kurmann-Schwarz (eds.), *Investigations in Medieval Stained Glass* (Leiden and Boston, 2019), particularly S. Brown, 'The Medieval Glazier at Work'

For examples of animals sejant:

<https://rarebooks.library.nd.edu/digital/heraldry/charges/beasts.shtml>

Dictionary of British Arms, Medieval Ordinary, vol. 1, D. Chesshyre and T. Woodcock (eds.), London, 1992, pp.xvii-viii:

<https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/31216/634733.pdf?sequence=1>

Provenance

Acquired 1980
