

The Wilfred Owen Window

All Saints Church, Dunsden Green, Oxfordshire



This window is dedicated to Wilfred Edward Slater Owen (1893-1918) - Radical First World War Poet and Lay Assistant to Rev'd Hubert Wigan from 1911-1913.

Wilfred was just 18-20 years of age during his time in Dunsden Green, it was an important time in his young adult life, a time of awakening, questioning and maturing. His poems reflect people and scenes he knew from the area; his mother, father and sister are buried in the churchyard.

In 1912, in a tragic horse and cart accident, a mother and child, Alice Mary and Hilda Agnes Allen, aged just four, were killed. Wilfred assisted at their funerals and asked himself, 'What God, would allow such a thing?'. In response to this incident he wrote Deep Under Turfy Grass which inspired this window. (Appendix 1)

*Deep under turfy grass and heavy clay,
They laid her bruised body, and the child,
Poor victims of a swift mischance were they,
Adown Death's trapdoor suddenly beguiled*



Loss of faith in the face of suffering and death is understandable, as one bears witness, at times, to the inexplicable tragedy in life. To still believe that there is a loving God takes great faith, courage and strength. In Stoic philosophy the way to live with suffering is to invite in the divine perspective. (Appendix 2) This window is there to remind us to look upwards towards Gods loving embrace and his healing of all sorrows as reflected in Revelations 21:4:

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Appendix 7)

This window invites the viewer to start at the bottom, deep under heavy clay, reflected in the terracotta/brown colour of the glass and gently allow their eyes to ascend, through the green of grass of daily life and travel further still through the light blue of the sky and beyond to the stars and unknowable universe. The ascending movement is guided by the curvature of the text, which is based on geometric patterns of the window and lead the eye up and round and down again, so as to complete the circle of life and death and life.

Earthly Perspective

1) Flowers:

Nature speaks to us in its own language.

'Poetry and botany were natural companions, especially at a time when English poetry was still rooted in the countryside. Owen's interest in botany, which he had held throughout his years in Shrewsbury, had been stimulated by being in rural Dunsden, where he spoke to the choirboys about the local flora and wrote home about hedgerow flowers.' (Extract from Cuthbertson's biography).

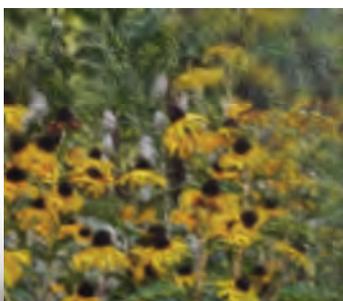
Snowdrops: *Delicate and vulnerable, they appear after winter and remind us that spring is on its way. These beautiful flowers face the earth, looking down in the direction of the 'turfy grass and heavy clay'. We see them also reflected higher in the window in the Divine sphere, in their trifold geometric form.*

All Saints, Dunsden Green hold an annual Snowdrop celebration. For more information: <https://owenindunsden.org/snowdrops/>



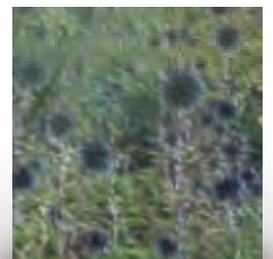
Poppies: *As symbol of Remembrance to all those brave souls who lost their lives during the wars.*

English Bluebells: *Connecting to the British countryside and the ethos of many during the war of constancy, humility and gratitude. Closely connected to the snowdrops.*



Daisies: *Symbolising hope, innocence and purity reflected in the child Owen describes towards the end of his poem Deep Under Turfy Grass.*

Thistles: *To honour Wilfred Owen's time in Craiglockhart in Edinburgh where he met Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves.*



*Then, I had no doubt
That snowdrops, violets, all creatures, I myself
Were lovely, were loved, were love....*

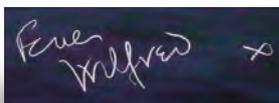
(Excerpt from poem by Kathleen Raine)

2) Wilfred Owen:

Here we see a young Wilfred Owen, sitting on turf grass, writing.

Wilfred did not shy away from looking at the pain and meaninglessness of what he witnessed; instead he took his raw emotions and transformed them into powerful poems, wrought out of human suffering, which still resonate and speak to us to this day.

In the bottom section we see Wilfred's birth and death dates next to his signature 'Ever Wilfred'.



In the top left hand section of the bottom panel we see the Alpha and Omega sign.

This links not only to the written words of Owens, but also a reflection of the top section of the window, the divine light & reminds one of the words in T.S.Elliots poem,

'In my beginning is my end'

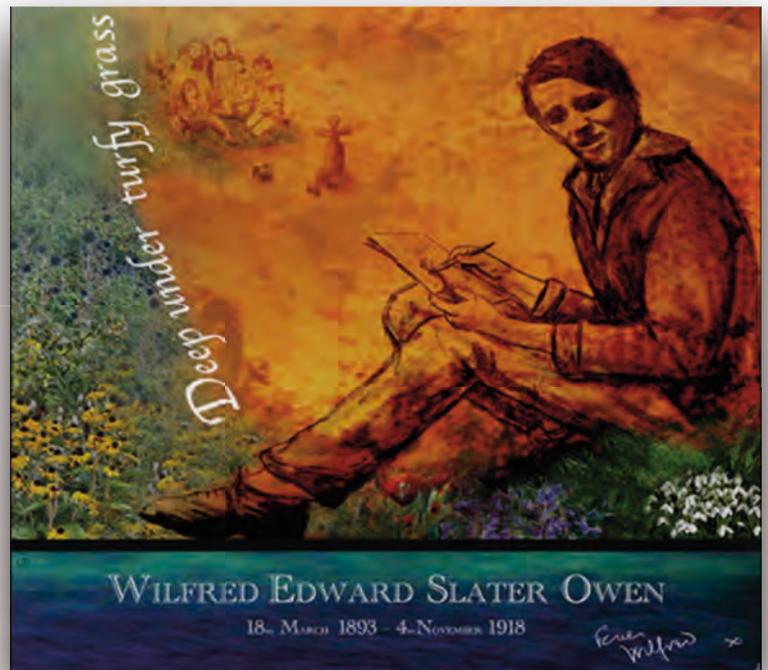
(Four Quartets, Part II, Easter Cocker).

3) Children & Tree



This tree is a sketch of the actual tree in the graveyard, opposite the window. Though all its leaves were shed and it had the outward appearance of death, on closer inspection it was replete with new shoots and was awaiting for Spring so as to blossom again. The top part of the tree in green symbolises spring and new life, whereas the bottom section in terracotta is autumn, the cycle of life, death and rebirth.

Out of the mists in the far distance we can just about make out the church, a tree-line, a local traditional Oxfordshire waggon, a kite and the well in Dunsden Green. We can also just make out workers in the field and sheep inspired by the work of painter Samuel Palmer.





The church and workers in the field.



A Kite.



Oxfordshire Waggon.



This sketch os of the children described in Owen's poem, sitting looking at the grave of their little friend, which is surrounded by snowdrops.

Some of the faces of the children drawn are from this picture of schoolchildren in Dunsden Green.



*But as I spoke, came many children nigh,
Hurrying lightly o'er the village green;
Methought too lightly, for they came to spy
Into their playmate's bed terrene.
They clustered round; some wondered what might mean
Rich-odoured flowers so whelmed in fetid earth;
While some Death's riddle guessed ere that of Birth.
And there stood one Child with them, whose pale brows
Wore beauty like our mother Eve's; whom seeing,
I could not choose but undo all my vows,
And cry that it were well that human Being
And Birth and Death should be, just for the freeing
Of one such face from Chaos' murky womb,
For Hell's reprieve is worth not this one bloom.*

(Excerpt from Wilfred Owens poem, Appendix 1)

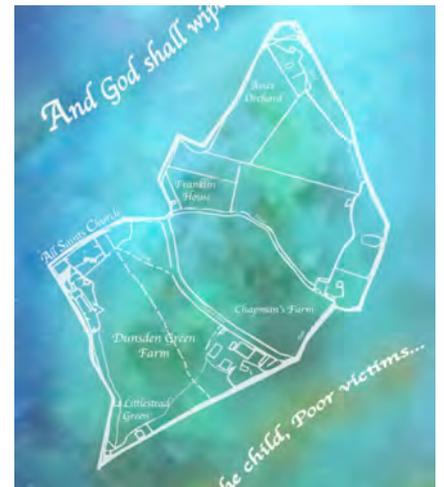
Intermediate Perspective

4) Map of Wilfred Owen Trail in Dunsden Green & Connected to Wider Pilgrim Paths.

Earth and Clay
Green Grass
Life sends up in blades of grass
It's silent hymn of praise
To the unnamed light

Rabindranath Tagore

This section of the window is primarily green glass and represents life; the paths we take in life, the routes taken and the routes unexplored. In the middle section of the window you will see a map of Dunsden Green created by the Dunsden Owen Association which depicts a trail dedicated to his time in the village. It creates a bridge from the window into the landscape, so we can trace the same footsteps taken by Wilfred and connects us to the Genius loci and the surrounding landscape. The trail starts at the Village Green in the heart of the old village and it invites pilgrims to trace Wilfred Owens footsteps; to walk through the same woods, muddy paths and pass many of the same buildings. For a detailed map and further information please visit: <https://owenindunsden.org/the-trail/>



All Saints is in very close proximity and could potentially be linked up to four pilgrim routes:

- 1) United Benefice of Shiplake with Dunsden and Harpsden cum Bolney (Appendix 3)
- 2) Oxford Diocese (Appendix 4)
- 3) St Jame's Way (Appendix 5)
- 4) St Sigfrid's Way (Appendix 6)



A walk along the trail...

*I came to the place where the lone pilgrim lay,
And patiently stood by his tomb,
When in a low whisper I heard something say:
How sweetly I sleep here alone.
The tempest may howl and the loud thunder roar
And gathering storms may arise,
But calm is my feeling, at rest is my soul,
The tears are all wiped from my eyes.
The call of my master compelled me from home,
No kindred or relative nigh.
I met the contagion and sank to the tomb,
My soul flew to mansions on high.
Go tell my companion and children most dear
To weep not for me now I'm gone.
The same hand that led me through seas most severe
Has kindly assisted me home.
And there is a crown that doth glitter and shine,
That I shall for evermore wear:
Then turn to the Savior, his love's all divine
All you that would dwell with me there.*

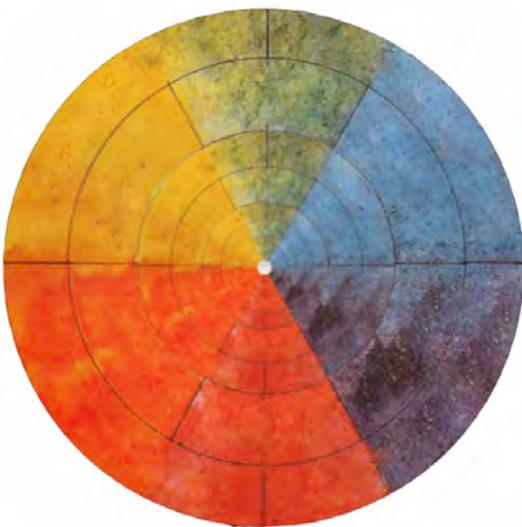
The Southern Harmony, 1835 William Walker

The Divine Perspective

Symbology: *Divine Light - Alpha and Omega - God - Unknowable - Noumenal Level - Inspiration - Creation - Unknown - All pervading yet often unseen and forgotten*

Images: *Goethe's Colour Wheel (5) & Trifold Geometric Pattern (6) Woman & Child (7)*

Text: *Revelations 21:4 (Appendix 7)*



5) Goethe's Colour Wheel

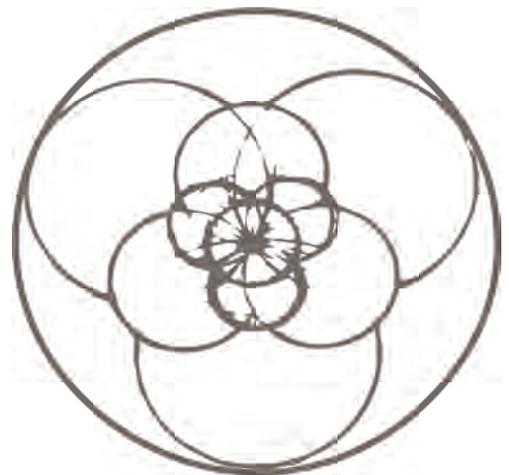
Within Goethe's colour theory Blue is Darkness Through Light. As we look up at the blue sky we are in fact looking through light into the darkness beyond of the unknowable infinite universe.

Goethes, a fellow poet's, colour wheel was chosen to reflect diversity and inclusivity of all and the circular shape reminds us of the turning of the wheel of the year and of life and death. Goethe encouraged us to think about the cosmos in a qualitative way, not merely a quantitate one. The cosmos is composed of a continual dying away, the past dying away in the light, and a future arising out of the darkness.

6) Trifold Geometric Pattern

The patterning hidden in a flower also enables all life to achieve an active state of balance that we call 'harmony', which is the prerequisite of the health of each of the Earth's vital life support systems.

*HRH The Prince of Wales (now King Charles III)
(Intro to Keith Critchlow The Hidden Geometry of Flowers. 2011.
Floris Books.)*



Symbolising 3 petals of Snowdrops & Trinity. This trifold design is of a Snowdrop based on the work of Keith Critchlow. Thus the window encompasses the symbol of the snowdrop both above in its perfected geometric form and below in its perfected earthy form.



7) *Woman & Child*

Symbolising hope. Looking up at the stars, we can just about make out the faint image of mother and child, Alice Mary and Hilda Agnes Allen, for whom Wilfred wrote the poem, and to whom this window is also dedicated. And to all those that have lost loved ones in tragic circumstances.



In context with the other windows at All Saints:

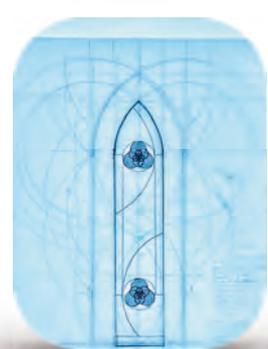
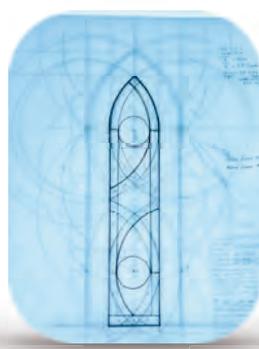
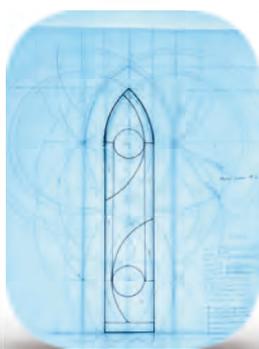
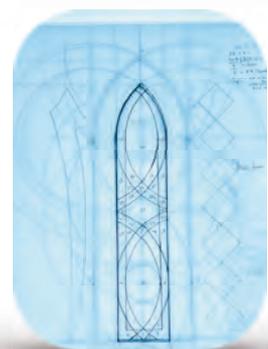
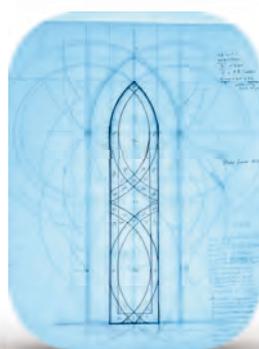
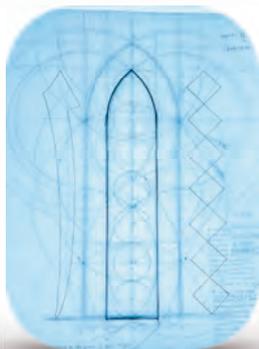
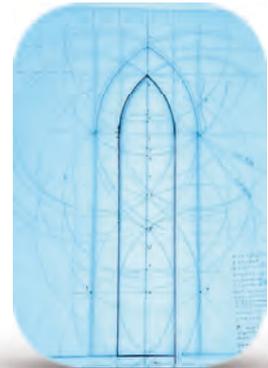
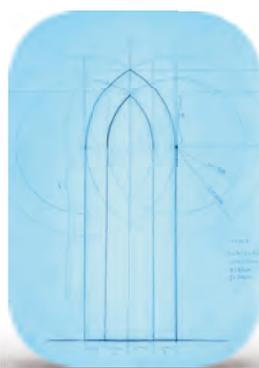
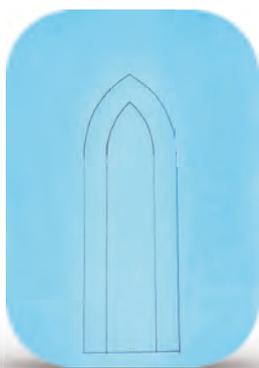
Similar themes of healing are threaded throughout many of the other windows in All Saints Church, Dunsden. The three lights of the East window reflect the same process of division between the lower aspects which represent the experiences within life, whereas the upper parts show the future reign of glory in heaven.

The West windows deals with themes of death, resurrection and the ascension & the three of the North windows tare also linked with Resurrection. The various windows are also relate with roundels - for example the North aisle window Eastern end reads - He is Not Here for He Has Risen.



Underlying Geometric Design

The basis of the design was based on Geometric dimensions of the church window.



Appendix 1

Deep Under Turfy Grass.

*Deep under turfy grass and heavy clay
They laid her bruised body, and the child
Poor victims of a swift mischance were they,
Adown Death's trapdoor suddenly beguiled.
I, weeping not, as others, but heart-wild,
Affirmed to Heaven that even Love's fierce flame
Must fail beneath the chill of this cold shame.
So I rebelled, scorning and mocking such
As had the ignorant callousness to wed
On altar steps long frozen by the touch
Of stretcher after stretcher of our dead.
Love's blindness is too terrible, I said;
I will go counsel men, and show what bin
The harvest of their homes is gathered in.
But as I spoke, came many children nigh,
Hurrying lightly o'er the village green;
Methought too lightly, for they came to spy
Into their playmate's bed terrene.
They clustered round; some wondered what might mean
Rich-odoured flowers so whelmed in fetid earth;
While some Death's riddle guessed ere that of Birth.
And there stood one Child with them, whose pale brows
Wore beauty like our mother Eve's; whom seeing,
I could not choose but undo all my vows,
And cry that it were well that human Being
And Birth and Death should be, just for the freeing
Of one such face from Chaos' murky womb,
For Hell's reprieve is worth not this one bloom.*

Appendix 2

The Stoics, when confronted by tragic circumstances invited in a change in viewpoint from the part, or the individual, 'διακόσμησις', to the whole, or the universe, 'το εκ πάσης ουσίας ιδίως ποιόν', or God-like view.

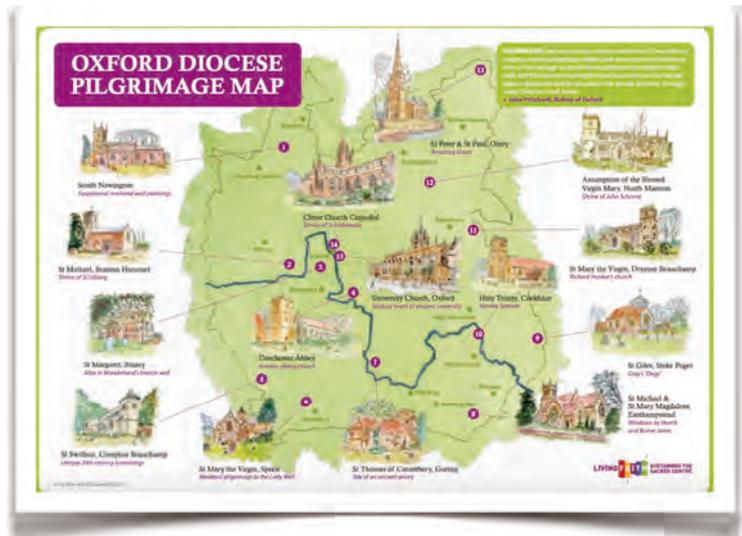
Appendix 3

United Benefice of Shiplake with Dunsden and Harpsden cum Bolney.



Appendix 4

All Saints could easily be incorporated into the Oxford Diocese Pilgrim Paths.



Appendix 5

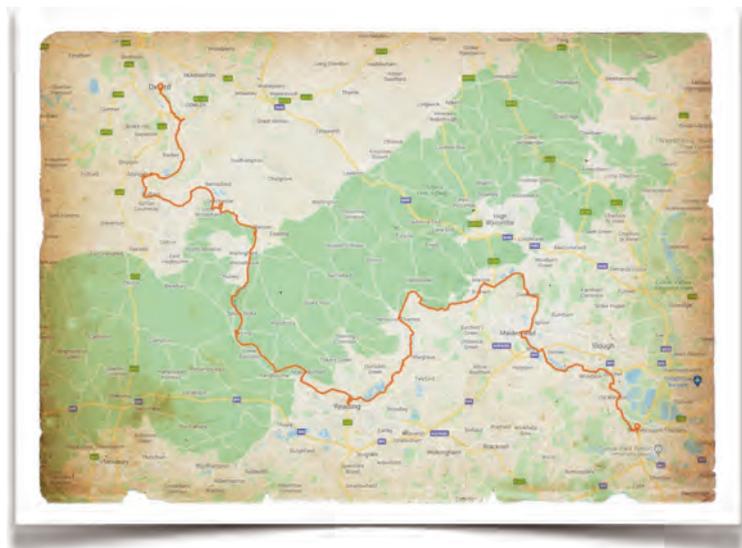
St James's Way. Currently starting at Reading Abbey. Dunsden Green is merely an additional 1hr8min walk to join the route. And it would be good to point out St. James the Great Pilgrim himself is depicted in the left hand 3rd up East window.

<https://britishpilgrimage.org/portfolio/st-james-way/>



Appendix 6

St Sigfrid's Way. For more information visit: <https://www.stsigfridstrust.org/the-route>



Appendix 7

There are various scriptures in the bible which talk of the loss of faith in the face of suffering and the journey to again it.

In Habakkuk 1:2 he cries out: O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!

Yet in 3 he says:

18: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

19: The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

A scripture of comfort is also:

John 14:37 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Revelations 21:4: And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

The whole of Revelations 21 is of great interest and is worth looking into in more depth.

