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## Special Attractions

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# Windows into History

**Stained-glass panels rescued from an Oxford basement bring Old World elegance to the new Ames Library.**

While The Ames Library represents the best of modern design, among its most distinguished features is a set of 16 antique, stained-glass windows acquired from Pembroke College in Oxford, England.

The windows are suspended from a skylight above the circular, 16-foot high Bates & Merwin Reading Room on the library's top floor. Originally made in the 19th century and restored to their original elegance, the glass panels complement the room's "Old World" ambience, with its floor-to-ceiling mahogany bookcases and other amenities designed to provide a tranquil space for reading and contemplation.

"Our students have been going to Oxford University for the past several years," says Illinois Wesleyan President Minor Myers jr. "And now we have this beautiful set of stained-glass windows, which is a very visible icon from that ancient and revered institution."

Pembroke College began in 1624 as a renaming and reorganization of Broadgates Hall, which was part of Oxford University.



*Terry Garbe, who led the Pembroke restoration process, scrutinizes the design for one of the window's top panels.*

Over the years, stained-glass windows were installed throughout the Pembroke dining hall, with the final pieces in place by the mid-1850s. Over the next 100 years, however, the windows became dirty and damaged. After World War II, Pembroke installed new memorial windows and 16 of the original panels were removed and placed in storage.

Meanwhile, in 1997 Illinois Wesleyan joined a prestigious group of American colleges annually sending students to Pembroke. Just as IWU was planning the new Ames Library, officials at Pembroke asked Myers if he would be interested in the windows for the new building.

It was an easy choice for the Illinois Wesleyan president, who says he felt

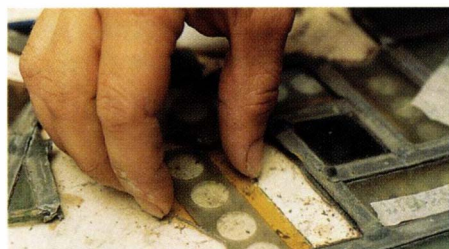
delight, wonder, and amazement at the prospect of such an acquisition. His elation was heightened even more when he found that many others shared his sentiments. "I'm known as a lover of traditional things...But then I discovered there were others on campus who were even more excited than I was about these windows."

The purchase of the windows and their shipment from Oxford to Illinois was funded by colleagues of B. Charles Ames '50 at the investment firm of Clayton Dubilier & Rice. They presented the gift as a 75th birthday present to their partner, who with his wife Joyce Eichhorn Ames '49 made a \$12-million leadership gift commitment to build the new Ames Library. The cost of restoring the glass was shared by Illinois Wesleyan and a gift from David and Ann Lawrence of LaGrange, Ill., whose children David Jr. '79 and Lisa '83 are both IWU graduates.

Each glass panel represents the armorial bearings of prominent scholars, statesmen, and religious and literary figures with ties to Pembroke College. Perhaps the best known is the English jurist Sir William Blackstone, whose *Commentaries on the Laws of England* form the cornerstone of the U.S. legal system.

Once the panels were purchased and arrived on campus, the next task was finding someone to perform the repair and restoration. Given the age and style of the stained-glass windows, few places in the country are qualified to do such work. Fortunately, one of those places was in Illinois Wesleyan's own backyard.

A Touch of Glass in Normal, Ill., has created, restored, and repaired stained glass for more than 25 years. And it has had a long working relationship with IWU, hav-



*Stored for more than 50 years in an Oxford basement, the windows were dirty and broken, with several pieces missing altogether. At right, the unpacked windows were taped together to determine the extent of the damage before the work of carefully repairing them (shown left) could begin.*



## SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS

By Randy Gleason • Photos by Marc Featherly



At right, IWU student library worker Merlin Tristano '03 (left) and Science Librarian Steve Witt get a good look at the stained-glass panels, which were installed above the circular, 16-foot high Bates & Merwin Reading Room on the library's top floor.



The above restored window represents the armorial bearings of Bishop John Hall (1633-1710).

ing worked on many of the university's stained-glass windows.

"Right away, we were interested in doing such a rare and rewarding project," explains owner Terry Garbe. "I'm pretty familiar with English work and I knew we could do this. Actually, anybody in the world would love to do this, but not many can."

Still, it was a time-consuming and often challenging process. Over a period of 10 months, Garbe and his staff combined centuries-old techniques and state-of-the-art computer technology to repair many of the shattered or cracked pieces of stained glass. By the time the project was completed, the art-glass studio had created 500 individual pieces to replace those beyond repair.

*(continued on page 27)*



*From the hallowed halls of Oxford to America's western frontier, two highlights of the new Ames Library reflect Illinois Wesleyan's diverse traditions—both past and present.*



Some, with a basic design, were rather simple to replace. But others, with complicated patterns and paintings, required much more thought, planning, and careful execution. To tackle these, Garbe took a photo of the damaged piece with a digital camera. Once displayed on a computer screen, he and his staff examined the image and experimented with various designs and drawings until they arrived at what they considered the most faithful rendition of the original panel.

Then, using rare and expensive cylinder-blown glass from Europe and rare metallic oxides as the stain, Garbe and his colleagues carefully reproduced the damaged pieces. They applied the color one layer at a time, then fired the glass in a kiln for eight hours to make the paint permanently adhere to the glass. When the piece of glass was done, it was removed and allowed to cool before another color was applied. For some pieces, this process was repeated four or five times.

Ironically, part of the restoration process actually involves “aging” the glass, which entails a recreation of the dirt and grime that formed on the windows, compliments of the sooty London air of the Industrial Revolution. “In addition to the beautiful stained glass, that mineralized patina of dirt is also part of the character of these panels,” explains Garbe, who formulated an olive-green stain to provide the appropriate look.

The project was finally completed and the last of the stained-glass panels were installed in February. “Everything we make we fully expect to last centuries,” says Garbe, “but these panels were special. They were in horrible condition and we brought them back to life.”



*Restored window honoring playwright Francis Beaumont (1584-1616).*