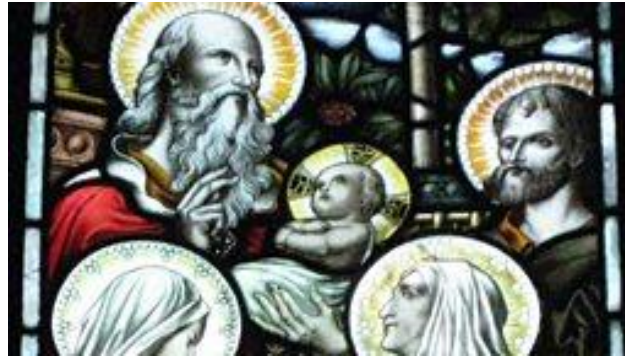


The old stained Glass window from England



Mynd 1: Ráðgátan bakvið steinda gluggann frá Coventry
(<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03xk8x>)

Akureyrarkirkja is a Lutheran Church that is well known for its stained glass windows. With a closer look at them you can see how they tell the story of Jesus Christ, and also tell the church history of Iceland.

The first stained glass window was given to the church by Mr. Jakob Frímansson who was one of the leaders of Akureyri Church congregation from 1939-1960. He was in Reykjavík when he got a word of pictures on stained glass windows. Those windows had the Icelander Helgi H. Zoega bought from an antique shop in London and shipped to Iceland where he ran a similar shop in Reykjavík.

It was said that the windows came from the old Coventry Cathedral before it was ruined in World War II. The story said that as the war began in 1939, the people from Coventry decided to remove the stained glass windows, wrap them carefully and store them in a place as safe as possible. It is said that they chose a farm in the countryside not far away. An inexpensive set of glass windows was put in the Cathedral instead. In November 1940 when Coventry was attacked the Cathedral was destroyed.

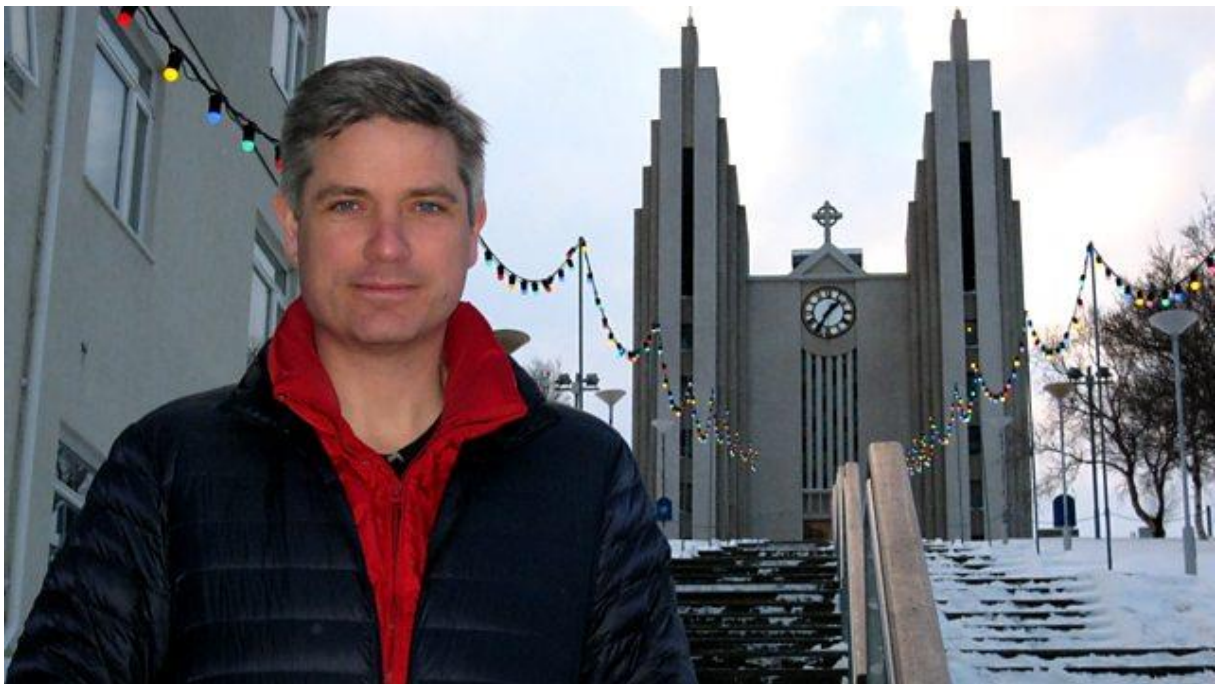
It is said that for some reason the stained glass pictures from three of the windows got separated from the others and that's where they ended up in the antique shop in London for sale where Helgi H. Zoega found them.

Mr. Jakob Frímansson wondered whether the stained glass windows would be suitable as an altarpiece for the new church in Akureyri, which was then under construction by the architect Guðjón Samúelsson. He found out that one of the windows had exactly the same width as the windows in Akureyri church. He didn't think twice and bought it on the spot. The other window parts were bought by a lady in Reykjavík. Later five of them were given to a church in Reykjavík, Áskirkja, but the last one is presumably in a private home in Reykjavík. Jakob went

home to Akureyri with his prize possession and gave Akureyri Church this old and valuable window. From a place far away. It was erected in the church in the summer of 1943, and since it wasn't long enough, coloured glass was put above and below the stained glass picture to make it fit. The coloured glass was later replaced by stained glass pictures that matched the one from Coventry. This window became in fact the altarpiece of Akureyri Church. You can see the window behind the altar. The one in the middle.

This wartime story about how a stained glass window from Coventry Cathedral ended up in Iceland during the war has been taught to generations of Icelandic Sunday School children. It has led to an international ecclesiastical friendship between Coventry and Akureyri. A statue on a brick from the old Coventry Cathedral was given to Akureyri Church by the congregation in Coventry.¹

The story changed in 2014 by a research that was made for a BBC program called *Midlands documentary, The Great Glass Mystery will reveal the tale is a myth.*



Historian Dr Jonathan Foyle met up with Canon Kenyon Wright, who spent 11 years as a minister at Coventry Cathedral. He got the same story from the minister but decided to do some more research. Dr Foyle came to the conclusion that the Icelandic windows were not actually from Coventry but from some other church somewhere in London. He discovered that no Victorian windows were saved or stolen and newsreel shows that the glass was simply destroyed in the raids.

¹ Sverrir Pálsson, *Saga Akureyrarkirkju*, 1990, Akureyri: Prentverk Odds Björnssonar Hf, bls. 287-289.

In a article at *coventrytelegraph.net* webpage it says:

The Dean of Coventry Cathedral, the Very Rev John Witcombe, tells the programme: “We’ve kind of both been duped a bit by the story. There’s a sense of sadness because you always want something to be true, don’t you?”

“There’s a bit of a sense of that but it means we can greet each other well, and not have any animosity.”

Pastor Svavar Jónsson from Akureyri Church tells Dr Foyle: “Yes, it surprised me but we will update our text and continue to cherish this window and it has always been a mystery around this window – how did it get to Iceland? It will be much more mysterious now.”²

The tall tale may be at an end, but the friendship between Coventry and Akureyri has and will continue.

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² Georgia Arlott, *Coventry Telegraph.net*, 2014, sótt af <http://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/coventry-cathedral-wartime-window-story-6754368>