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# BEVERLEY MINSTER

## BEVERLEY

### EAST YORKSHIRE

Retro-Quire

Artworks on the Theme of Pilgrimage 2004

The Retro-Quire is the easternmost part of Beverley Minster and during the medieval period was the meeting point of thousands of pilgrims who came to visit the shrine of St John of Beverley.



The Friends of Beverley Minster, formed in 1936, have done much to continue the enrichment of this building during the 20th century and their decision to represent the present generation in the building has resulted in the commissioning of an inspirational scheme. An artistic and spiritual journey, a Pilgrimage, has been created by Helen Whittaker of Barley Studio York and is comprised of four parts:

The Pilgrim Window

Two Life-Sized Sculptured Figures

Benches and Seating for Meditation and Prayer

The Candle Stand



Helen Whittaker  
STAINED GLASS  
& SCULPTURE

#### Part One – The Pilgrim Window (1.5m x 6.4m)

The window is situated in the 13th century single lancet opening of the south wall and is adjacent to the elaborate medieval Great East Window. It is 21ft high and has a bold and largely abstract design. The colour palette is broad: cold blues and whites are situated at the top and bottom of the window and are counter-balanced by burning reds, gold's and yellows in the upper central section. Much of the glass has been painted to add an extra layer of texture and pattern to the design, but this patterning gradually diminishes towards the centre of the window creating a sense of a serenity in the middle of a vortex. The design is constructed to draw the spectator's eye along the flowing forms of pattern at a gentle pace, with no sense of disjuncture or finality. Within the rhythm of lines one gradually discerns the figures of pilgrims (created from the juxtaposition of geometric shapes) travelling towards the golden glow at the centre. At the lower edge of the glow a group of pilgrims have been transformed into white light with only the barest of detail forming the outline of their shapes.

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## Part Two – The Sculptured Figures (2m x 2m)

Facing the new window in the north corner of the Retro-Quire are two life-sized figures sculpted in triangles of sheet copper. Their form gives the suggestion that shards of glass have fallen from the Pilgrim window and created them. The leading figure stands with his staff pointing forward. The second shelters behind the first, leaning sideways. Both seem to gaze at the serene heart of the window. The relationship between the figures and the window is firmly established by the incorporation of 'hearts' of glass in the sculptures themselves.



These hearts are composed of small fragments of coloured glass, the pieces forming three triangular arrangements set within the upper torsos of the figures. Care has been taken to blend the ancient and the contemporary. The curved sheets of copper, which compose the heads of the pilgrims, respond to the form of the trefoil niches that line the Retro-Quire.



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## Part Three – The Candle Stand (1.2m x 1.2m)

The candle stand is made of copper and is shaped in the form of a cross. The three narrow, triangular tiers (representing the Trinity) can accommodate up to 70 candles and the central vertical section houses the moneybox. At the base of the stand to the figures, and to the window, are storage spaces for candles.

## Part Four – Prayer Benches and Seating

Positioned at either side of the candle stand are two gently arced prayer benches and beyond them two curved pews. The furnishing is all made from dark oak and the panels on the prayer benches are decorated with a pierced geometric pattern – a theme present in all the pieces within the scheme.



Geometry is at the heart of this scheme. It functions at a practical level as the unifying theme for the work as a whole, as well as being the symbolic medium for the messages of faith and love; the tenets upon which all pilgrimages are based.

The two life-sized sculptured figures have three triangular stained-glass hearts within them. The hearts function as a crucial link between the figures and the window, as within every pilgrim is the knowledge of the love of God in the form of the Trinity. The heart theme continues within the window itself since here the glass triangles create a path and guide the pilgrim's journey. Similarly, the viewer's gaze is invited to follow the spiral pattern formed in the window towards its centre.

The seating and prayer stands are comprised of arcs, which guide the viewer to the candle stand, the new window and the sculptures, where the triangular motif is also continued. The drawing of all geometric patterns, no matter how complex, must begin with the point of a compass. The design for this scheme uses a compass point to represent God the creator, the starting point of all our journeys and, as with all geometric forms, it is impossible to tell the beginning from the end.

Similarly the scheme reflects the intricate pattern of the dual relationship between God the pilgrim. The copper figures, with their upward projection, point to the window with its message of light. The viewer relates the message of light back to the figures which have their hearts full of the light of the love of God.

