

Stained Glass Windows

Welcome to Osgoode Hall. My name is Elise Brunet. I'm the Curator at the Law Society of Upper Canada and I'll be your guide for this tour of the stained glass windows in Convocation Hall.

The stained glass windows in this room so obviously belong here that you'd think that they've been around forever. Well... the oldest one was installed in 1986. There was stained glass in Convocation Hall when it officially opened in 1882 but not in these windows. There was stained glass on the short walls of the gallery and a large window on the north side of the room, where the portrait of William Osgoode now hangs. You can still see the outline of the window opening on the wall.

The original windows were not boring, far from it. They had delicately etched glass and the arches of the windows really stood out with a pattern of alternating red bricks and yellow stone blocks, giving the room a Spanish or North African flavour. The lower portion of the windows was framed with pink granite columns on each side of the openings. This all was gone by the late 1930s when the room was renovated and it lost most of its medieval feel.

What was considered modern in 1938 was a tad dark and drab for the 1980s. Reginae Tait, one of the first women on the board of the Law Society, saw the upcoming 150th anniversary of Osgoode Hall as a perfect opportunity to sell the idea of new windows for Convocation Hall. These windows, which could potentially last as long as the building, would promote the heritage of Osgoode Hall and the legal profession, an important cause for Mrs. Tait, as well as improve one of the iconic spaces of Osgoode Hall. It didn't hurt her lobbying efforts that she managed to find private donors, lawyers, law firms and legal associations, to pay the \$30,000 required for each window.

One of Canada's most distinguished stained glass artists, Christopher Wallis, of London, Ontario, was selected to tackle the project. Each window was to tell part of the story of law in Ontario through heraldic symbols. Heraldry seemed appropriate in this heritage room and its simplicity and bright colours worked well in stained glass. The combination of heraldry and story-telling is not a new idea – many castles and churches have windows with the coat of arms of their owners and generous donors, and most church windows are designed to tell a story, but this use of heraldic glass to tell the story of a public, nonreligious institution was unusual. Four thousand years of legal history were transposed into glass images. Each window presents a different chapter of the story. Starting at the right of the balcony we have:

Ancient Law, starting with patriarchal law at the top; Sumerian law, the law of Moses and the Greek era in the centre; and Roman law and Charlemagne sharing the bottom portion.

The second and the fourth windows represent the four British Inns of Court from which the Law Society inherited many of its traditions as regulator of the legal profession. The first is for Lincoln's Inn and Gray's Inn and the second is for the Middle Temple and the Inner Temple. Both windows are based on red crosses. One is the cross of St. George, patron saint of England, and the other is the cross of the Knights Templar, a reference to the origins of those two Inns. The arms of the Inns are prominent in the

centre and are surrounded by those of individuals or institutions associated with the Inns. The greenery on both windows represents the grounds and gardens that are a feature of the Inns.

The centre window is for the law societies of Canada and is dominated by the Canadian arms. The window features the logo of each law society with the flower of its province. The cross of St. George, repeated four times, reminds us of the English roots of common law. The Supreme Court building in Ottawa occupies the bottom right of the window.

The last window on that side is for our English heritage. The shields each have one of the royal crowns from the tenth century onwards. The Magna Carta, the document that set out our rights and freedoms features prominently in the centre, next to the lions of Richard the First.

Let's look immediately across the room to the Canadian Heritage window. The British lion, the French fleur de lis and the American flag tell us about the cultural influences that shaped our legal system.

The next window and the one before last are dedicated to Canadian law schools. Each school is represented by its coat of arms and the flower of its province. I wonder how we'll deal with the new law schools that have been created since the windows were installed.

The middle window, between the law schools, is the Law Society window. At the centre is the shield of the Law Society, surrounded by the shields of Ontario, the University of Toronto, Osgoode Hall Law School and the old shield of the City of Toronto. The Law Society medal, the organization's top honour, appears below, as do Osgoode Hall and the corporate seal of the Law Society.

The last window is about Canadian law. You'll recognize some of the symbols that we saw earlier, the English lions, the rolls of the Magna Carta and the flower emblems of the provinces. You can see the Canadian Parliament Buildings in the centre of the window; the Union Jack, which was Canada's official flag for a good part of the country's history; and the Maple Leaf Flag that has been in use since 1965. The cipher of Elizabeth II, Canada's formal head of state, closes that portion of the window. The bottom of the window illustrates the geography of the country – its mountains, forests and waters. Also included are two wampum belts and a circle wampum, a reference to the first inhabitants and law makers of the country.

Extensive research went into the windows, which doesn't mean there weren't some errors and some... artistic license. When the Law Society window was installed, the wrong King George appeared at the top. A more obscure issue is that of the "coat of arms" of Charlemagne in the first window and of St. Augustine of Canterbury, in the last window. Both men lived before heraldry existed so they would have been very surprised to learn that they had a coat of arms. But the symbols refer to their legacy and they make sense to us, which is what's important in the end.