

William Wilson RSA

RSA Obituary transcribed from 1972 RSA Annual Report

William Wilson, who was born on 21st July 1905, began work in a stained-glass studio (Messrs Ballantyne) in 1920, and studied in evening classes at Edinburgh College of Art.

He distinguished himself, especially as a student of etching, on which he concentrated. He won the Royal Scottish Academy Carnegie Scholarship, which enabled him to travel to Spain, where he made a series of drawings, from many of which he later made engravings and etchings.

Subsequently he was awarded a fellowship of the College of Art, and he employed this two-year period in studying for a year at the Royal College of Art, London, where he gained further experience in etching; and he also drew in England and extensively in Italy.

About this time he began to paint in water-colour, a medium in which, through his practise and experience in designing and use of colour in glass, he showed unusual fluency from the outset.

On returning to Edinburgh he began his career in his own studio as a designer and maker of stained glass windows. His reputation was rapidly established and he was commissioned to execute many windows in churches and commercial buildings in Britain and abroad.

Included in these were; Canterbury Cathedral - Warrior's Chapel; Glasgow Cathedral - Regimental Window; Liverpool Cathedral - Bishop's Window; Brechin Cathedral - many windows, including a number in the Clerestory which were donated by him; St Andrews - St Salvator's Chapel; The British Linen Bank, St Andrew Square, Edinburgh; The Scottish Life Assurance Building, and he is also represented in New Jersey, USA; New Zealand; Nairobi; Nyasaland; S. Africa; Canada, etc.

Between 1945 and 1970 he executed windows, many of which were important and large in scale, for about 150 churches.

Willie, as he was known to all his friends, was capable of intense concentration. Fertile in his imagination, a rapid worker, his use of glass was highly personal; his rich designs were always expressive, significant in their symbolism, of rich pattern and glowing colour.

Complementary to the making of windows, he continued to draw, etch and paint, and to exhibit work in the Royal Scottish Academy of such high quality that he was elected an Associate of the Academy in 1939 and an Academician in 1949. He acted as Librarian from 1949 to 1966.

In 1946 he was elected a member of the Royal Scottish Society of painters in Water-colours and was prominent in its affairs.

For many years he served on the Board of the Edinburgh College of Art, to which he gave most valuable service. His great interest in students continued, and numerous former students gratefully acknowledge the help he had so generously given.

In recognition of his services to Art, the honour of O.B.E. was conferred on him in 1961.

When in 1960 he became blind as the result of an illness, he faced this calamity with great courage. For a number of years he carried on making of windows at his Studio with the help of the assistants whom he had trained.

Unmarried, he moved in 1971 to his sister's home in Bury, where he died on 16th March 1972.