

**A beautiful gift and a fragment of St
James the Less church history uncovered**
Georgina Phillips



St James the Less Penicuik

A Scottish Episcopal Church

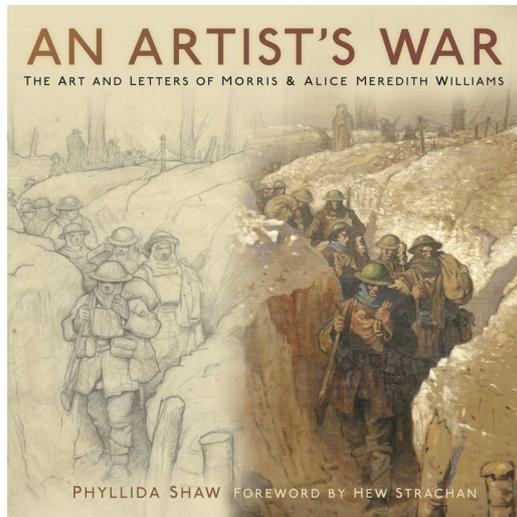
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Outreach is now produced as a series of articles posted on the website of St James the Less Church. When there are enough articles, they will be compiled into a magazine which will be printed in limited numbers for those with no internet access. Your feedback and ideas for articles are welcome.

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OUTREACH

A beautiful gift and a fragment of St James the Less church history uncovered



In July 2018, the Vestry Secretary received a call from author Phyllida Shaw, who had a while back contacted Revd Lynsay concerning a book she had written about the war art of husband and wife artists Morris and Alice Meredith Williams. This book was based on family letters and other documents the author had inherited. Alice had designed the reredos, memorial board and the Cowan window, all in St James the Less church.

Phyllida had been sent photos of the reredos by Andy Longmore, member of St James. As she was also writing another book about Alice's work, she asked to take a photo of the Cowan window. Margaret Coull, Richard and Georgina Phillips arranged a meeting with Phyllida for 24 July 2018 so that the photograph could be taken.

As a thank you for our help, Phyllida kindly donated a copy of her book:

An Artist's War: The Art and Letters of Morris and Alice Meredith Williams to St James the Less. [see p. 201 & 202 for the St James reredos].

Some interesting information later emerged, and this is what Phyllida wrote to us:

"I've checked my notes and can confirm that Alice Meredith Williams' brother, Severs Williams, married Margaret Symington (from North Lanarkshire) in 1904.

On 8th November 1913, her sister Florence Symington married Alexander Cowan. They had a son in 1919, Charles David Symington Cowan, presumably named after Alexander's late son, Charles John Alexander.

So now we know how Alice came to be commissioned to design the window in 1920 (possibly with some input by Morris) and how, a year later, she came to design the reredos and later still, the roll of honour, carved by Thomas Good.

The other Cowan I mentioned was Thomas Cowan, a shipping magnate who apparently made a donation to Edinburgh university to thank the students for helping his business during the 1926 General Strike. Cowan House was a student residence and Alice was commissioned to make a plaque of Thomas Cowan to acknowledge his donation. I wonder if he was related to your Cowans?"