2014

‘Resurrecting Harry Clarke’: Breathing life into stained glass tourism in Ireland

Tony Kiely
Technological University Dublin, tony.m.kiely@tudublin.ie

Follow this and additional works at: https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp

Part of the Tourism Commons, and the Tourism and Travel Commons

Recommended Citation
doi:10.21427/D7971S
Available at: https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp/vol2/iss2/6

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License
‘Resurrecting Harry Clarke’:
Breathing life into stained glass tourism in Ireland

Tony Kiely
Dublin Institute of Technology, Dublin, Ireland
tony.m.kiely@dit.ie

Internationally, the exponential demand for ‘cultural/heritage’ tourism is increasingly being viewed by tourism stakeholders as an opportunity for value adding revenue generation, wherein both specialist and ‘media programmed’ tourists can seek out designated cultural attractions to satisfy their respective quests for authentic, and/or emotionally charged experiences. Indeed, this international ‘demand’ re-alignment is exemplified in the growth of churches and cathedrals who openly promote their artistic content as ‘must see attractions’. However, despite such utilitarian attractiveness, one wonders if the counter-influences of indifference, protectionism, or fear of heritage commodification, might act to scupper an opportunity to re-envision Harry Clarke’s iconic stained glass church windows as tourist attractions in Ireland?

Born in Dublin in 1889, into a city consumed with the heady mix of Catholic Emancipation and artistic rebirth, Harry Clarke grew to pre-eminence among international stained glass artists at the turn of the twentieth century. Yet, despite being universally acclaimed as a master of stained glass creativity, his oeuvre, from a tourism perspective, has been sadly overlooked, with most promotion of Ireland’s twentieth century cultural renaissance being focused both on its literary giants (Joyce, Wilde, Swift, Beckett, Yeats and Stoker), and its traditional music culture. However, with the attendant economic spinoff offered by religious and cultural tourism growth, one wonders if the ubiquitous presence in Irish churches of Harry Clarke’s ecclesiastical stained glass windows might be re-imagined by core and peripheral stakeholders as marketable tourist attractions?

Employing a qualitative methodology, involving semi structured interviews with key informants, this paper explores stakeholder awareness of Clarke’s significance as a potential tourist attractor, in addition to the appropriateness of promoting his church bound ecclesiastical windows as de facto attractions. The findings suggest that while there was overarching unanimity on the significance of Clarke’s windows as potential tourist attractions, critical barriers to active promotional engagement emerged from within two core stakeholder groups, thus creating challenges for the development of a stained glass tourist trail.

Key Words: stained glass, heritage, Harry Clarke

Introduction

While the primary motivation for ‘pilgrims’ has traditionally been represented in their overwhelming desire to satisfy spiritual needs at sacred sites, many of today’s ‘less devoted’ travellers may instead wish to avail of opportunities to view ‘must see’ cultural and religious artefacts at these self-same sites (Mansfield, 2008; Williams, 2006; Weidenfeld, 2006; Tilson, 2005; Poria Butler & Airey, 2003; Digance, 2003; Vulkonic, 2002; Tilson & Chao, 2002). Indeed, Williams (2006:483) pointedly addresses such differentiated demand when categorising contemporary religious tourists as ‘self-indulgent, pleasure seeking individuals, easily dominated by marketers, who in acting like sheep, mimic referent others’. Consequently, this vibrant, (often media driven) tourist interest has prompted tourism stakeholders to re-
imagine culture/heritage as an economic asset, rather than an elitist entity (Gordin & Matetskaya, 2012; McCartney, 2008; Chronis, 2005; Bon, Joseph & Dai, 2005; Garcia, 2004). Moreover, evidence would suggest that when collaboratively marketed, cultural/heritage tourism is a key attribute of visitor destination choice (Cullen, 2012; Gordin & Matetskaya, 2012; OECD, 2009; De Carlo, Cugini & Zerbini, 2008; Fáilte Ireland, 2007; Tilson, 2005; Hankinson, 2004; Dolnicar & Grabler, 2004; Hassan, 2000; Hannabuss, 1999). And while such evidence might create ethical challenges for church authorities who feel pressurised to re-vision their richly adorned churches as being other than places of worship (Kiely, 2013; Shackley, 2002; Kong, 2001; Du Cross, 2001; Font & Ahjem, 1999), populist need, when aligned with the synergistic opportunities afforded by stakeholder collaboration (Getz, Andersson & Larson, 2007; Dredge, 2006; Datzira-Masip, 2006; Gali & Donnaire, 2005; Augustyn & Knowles, 2000), might well offset such challenges for cash and congregation strapped churches.

Described by poet, mystic and art critic George Russell as ‘one of the strangest geniuses of his time’ who ‘might have incarnated here from the dark side of the moon’ (Gordon Bowe, 2012:25), stained glass artist Harry Clarke was born in Dublin on St. Patrick’s Day 1889, into a city consumed with the heady mix of artistic rebirth and feverish, post Catholic Emancipation church decoration. Furthermore, during his short life, Clarke became the most sought after stained glass artist of his era, by way of his magnificently drawn church windows, whose distinctive delicacy of design (fig. 1), were unequalled in the early years of the twentieth century (Gordon Bowe, 2012; Costigan & Cullen, 2010; Gordon Bowe et al., 1988). Additionally, his gift for mischievously placing Biblical figures within the incongruous environments of early 20th century fashion and/or jeweled medieval attire, often in equally incongruous Art Nouveau and Art Deco styles, further framed him as the most radically innovative stained glass artist of his time (Gordon Bowe, 2012; Costigan & Cullen, 2010; Dowling, 1960). But despite such unparalleled genius, Dowling (1960:58) argues that Clarke’s style, being both ‘new in the realm of sacred art’, and moving ‘a long way from the excessively sentimental style generally accepted at the time’, marked him out as being both irreverent and contentious. Indeed, Gordon Bowe (2012:25), argues that Clarke displays ‘a willful decadence, and an ambivalent religious
mysticism of medieval intensity’, ranging from the ‘sublimely beautiful (fig. 2) to the grotesquely macabre’ (fig. 3). Furthermore, Clarke’s flirtation with radical decadence, (graphically detailed in his fearsome Gothic illustrations for Edgar Allen Poe’s Tales of Mystery and Imagination, and Goethe’s Faust), brought him into direct conflict with an idealized national template, as presented by ‘an arch-conservative church, acting hand in glove with a newly formed and compliant Irish State’ in 1920’s post revolution Ireland (Sullivan, 2012:10).

So, while the hypnotic and dignified representations of Clarke’s religious subjects (fig. 4), were trumpeted by progressives and art critics alike (Sullivan, 2012; Clerkin Higgins, 2010; Costigan & Cullen, 2010; Dowling, 1960), his imaginative and at times dysfunctional illustrations (fig. 5), (illustrated within his windows, busily populated with the faces of ordinary sinners), contributed to categorizing him as a dangerous, anti-establishment artist, whose dalliances with the dark side fueled perceptions of his ‘unacceptability’ among some church authorities (Osier, 2011; Dowling, 1960). Indeed, Gordon Bowe (2012:28) considers it astonishing that a number of his
‘gaunt and decadent figures, worn out with the contemplation of strange sins, did in fact find happy homes in staid ecclesiastical surroundings’. Sadly however, such was the huge demand for church commissions, which when complicated by his increasing bad health, contributed to his working himself to an early death from tuberculosis on January 6th 1931, in the village of Coire, Switzerland, at the tragically young age of forty one.

So, in considering the magical marriage of stained glass art within incongruous contexts with the differentiated desires of the postmodern tourist, one wonders, might the opportunity to promote the ubiquitous presence in Irish churches of iconic ecclesiastical stained glass windows as de facto visitor attractions, add value to ‘de-spiritualised’ quests for cultural/heritage attractions, while simultaneously creating economic opportunity for both core and peripheral stakeholders? As such, this paper will endeavour to establish if the recent economic downturn, (a pressing concern for tourist authorities), when mapped against a significant congregational decline, (an equally pressing concern for church authorities), might offer the opportunity for collaborative promotional marketing of Harry Clarke’s stained glass windows, or might any hope of innovative collaboration be compromised by the protectionist motivations of disinclined or disinterested stakeholders?

Seducing Congregations

Although spiritually motivated travel has existed for well over a thousand years (Simone-Charteris & Boyd, 2010; Kaebler, 2006; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005; Rinchede, 1992), so too has the practice of employing competitive strategies to attract pilgrims to ‘designated’ sacred sites (Croft et al., 2008; Tilson, 2005). Using Glastonbury Abbey as an illustrative study, Croft et al. (2008) record how in medieval times, financially strapped Benedictine monks partnered with the newly emerging English State to create a series of ‘localised’ narratives ranging from mythologising the Abbey’s link with Camelot’s Arthurian legends, to ‘rebranding’ a non-descript water well in the Abbey grounds as the final burial place of The Holy Grail. Furthermore, Tilson (2005) evidences a booming souvenir trade in religious artefacts and reliquary during the early days of Christian travel, which suggests that commercial and promotional aspects were opportunistically intertwined with the quest for spiritual experiences. Interestingly, such promotional formats mirror the modern practices of tourism promoters who target the personal and social values of de-differentiated tourist audiences (Schmitt, 1999), whereby traditional visitor motivations, (asking forgiveness, seeking cures, or offering thanksgiving), are functionally expanded, to facilitate emotional, cognitive and affective motives of the modern church visitor (Kiely, 2013; Ron, 2009; Poria et al., 2003; Digance, 2003; Santos, 2002; Shackley, 2002; Vukonic, 2002; Rinchede, 1992). Consequently, by promoting their unique art collections, many European churches have allowed themselves to become value-added magnets for the modern tourist in search of iconic cultural attractions (Richards, 2000; Silberberg, 1995). The paintings of Caravaggio for example, which hang in San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome, St. John’s Co-Cathedral, Valletta, and Santa Lucia Alla Badia, Siracuse, have become designated stopping points in the tourist’s itinerary, while Leonardo da Vinci’s ‘Last Supper’ in Santa Maria della Grazie, Milan, and Michelangelo’s ceiling in Rome’s Sistine chapel, are openly touted by tour guides as ‘must see attractions’, whether or not the visitor espouses any knowledge of art. Similarly, the 12th and 13th century stained glass windows in Chartres, St. Chapelle, and Cologne cathedrals are widely promoted as critical touch-points in the visitor’s travel itinerary, while Zurich’s Fraumunster Cathedral boasts its modern Chagal windows as its most significant attraction.

But, while Ireland openly promotes its exceptional literary and musical heritage to visitors by way of literary and music festivals commemorating ‘cultural
icons’ such as James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, William Butler Yeats, Oscar Wilde, Jonathan Swift, Bram Stoker and Willie Clancy, its visual art appears to be under-promoted. Yet from a tourism perspective, Harry Clarke’s church art ticks many boxes, in that his oeuvre is delightfully ubiquitous, with over one hundred and sixty original windows available for viewing, free of charge, in churches throughout Ireland (Gordon Bowe, 2012; Costigan & Cullen, 2010; Gordon Bowe et al., 1988). Moreover, as many of these windows are located in what are considered the tourist rich areas of Ireland, such as Cork/Kerry (hosting eighteen windows within three churches), Galway/Mayo (featuring thirteen windows across six churches), and Dublin (a staggering thirty five windows spread across fourteen church and non-denominational locations), the availability spread becomes significant in terms of the potential for a designated tourist trail. Furthermore, from a promotional perspective, it would be relatively easy to frame Clarke in the seductive imagery beloved of the post-modern tourist. Writing in his Irishman’s Diary, Myers (1989:13) concludes:

Had Harry Clarke been of any nationality other than Irish, his name would be a household word in any home which valued art, much as Francis Bacon’s is.

Similarly, in addressing the unique attractiveness of his church windows Boland (2011:15) comments:

It is their distinctive jewel-like appearance, dazzling use of colour, and near-shocking reinterpretations of religious subjects (see fig. 6), that make his work so distinctive and outstanding.

More recently, Galvin (2013:25), in citing the presence of Clarke’s magnificent windows on the Yeats heritage trail in South Galway concludes:

you don’t have to be a fan of ecclesiastical architecture, or even stained glass to appreciate that Clarke’s work is a national treasure, which deserves a wider audience,

while also opining that highlighting the artistic heritage of Ireland is ‘sometimes a little neglected by tourism oficialdom’.

Additionally, testimonials from the disparate worlds of academia and travel blogging also abound. For example, Gordon Bowe (2012:25), describes Clarke as Ireland’s major Symbolist artist, ‘whose stained glass is both impeccably painted and imaginatively realised’. Agreeing with this plaudit, noted American art curator

![Figure 6](Photo by Author)

![Figure 7](Photo copyright Tina and Barry Fangmann)
Mary Clerkin-Higgins (2010:11) writes of his oeuvre as

easily ranking alongside that of giants of the art, such as Wilhelmina Geddes, Michael Healy, Edward Burne Jones, Henry Holiday, John La Farge, Henri Matisse, Frank Lloyd Wright, Marc Chagall, Ludwig Shaffrath, and Rowan Le Compte.

Indeed, even to the artistically uninitiated, the names of Matisse, Chagall and Lloyd Wright are instantly synonymous with cultural attractiveness such are their respective artistic reputations. And while critiquing Clarke’s windows in The Chapel of The Sacred Heart in Dingle, Co. Kerry (fig. 7), as ‘hidden jewels, often undiscovered by the average traveler’, American travel blogger Mindy Burgoyne (2011), boldly describes the viewing experience as being ‘unique’, adding that

so many churches in Ireland will claim one Harry Clarke window as an element to attract visitors, and while viewing one window is worth a visit anywhere, to have twelve all together in one spot is enough to take one’s breath away.

Experiential Co-Construction

While stained glass windows were traditionally employed to passively illuminate church interiors, or instruct static, sub-literate congregations (Clerkin-Higgins, 2010; Costigan & Cullen, 2010; Morris, 1990), today’s technologically empowered tourist may instead seek more active interaction in the form of self-guided, experience enhancing narratives to satisfy their subjective needs, (Han et al., 2014; Hager & Sung, 2012; Dickenson et al., 2012; Chronis et al., 2012;
Chronis, 2012; Rickly-Boyd, 2010; Everett, 2010; Tussyadiah & Fesenmayer, 2009; Lorenzen, 2009; Hyun et al., 2009; Camprubi et al., 2008; Caton & Santos, 2007; Richards & Wilson, 2006; Williams, 2006; Gali & Donaire, 2005; Shepherd, 2002; Petkus, 2002; Prentice, 2001; Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Indeed, Lorentzen (2009) suggests that a willingness to facilitate such co-constructed experiences becomes a source of competitive advantage, when the objects of interest are both accessible and integrated into the global flow of people and information. Illustrating the power of narrative enhancement, Honza (2008) details how the town of Sarasota, Florida has successfully integrated an historical narrative at St. Martha’s church, where the story of John Ringling and William Burns, pioneers of the town’s development into an international tourist resort, is forever commemorated in stained glass, while in Dublin, many visitors en route to Ireland’s most popular visitor attraction (The Guinness Storehouse), stop to view the Guinness window in The Lady Chapel of the nearby St. Patrick’s Cathedral, which commemorates Annie Lee Plunkett, daughter of Benjamin Lee Guinness (of the famous brewing family), who while renowned for her charitable work, is instead connected with the viewer by an amusing scriptural narrative ‘I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink’. Similarly, Harry Clarke’s stained glass windows offer so much more than an opportunity to passively gaze at aesthetic beauty, in that they facilitate the co-construction of thought provoking narratives by their contemporaneous associations with World War 1, Ireland’s Civil War, early twentieth century Irish literary figures, incongruous fashion and form, and their deliberate dislodging of the normal viewer-viewed relationship.

For example, might the heartache of a grief stricken mother, exemplified in Clarke’s stunning ‘Madonna with Saints Aidan and Adrian’ window (fig. 8), commemorating Lt. William Henry O’Keefe, a young soldier killed at the battle of Arras, in France in 1917, re-imagine for the viewer the tragic end of many young men who went to war and never came home? Equally, connections with Ireland’s violent Civil War (1919-1922) also play into the viewer’s imagination. For example, the Lea-Wilson Memorial Window (fig. 9), commissioned by a distraught wife, in memory of her beloved husband, Percival Lea-Wilson, a member of The Royal Irish Constabulary, who was shot by Irish Republicans outside of his home on June 15th 1920, acts to focus the viewer on a shocking moment in the life of a young wife, suddenly stripped of the love of her life.

Representatives from Ireland’s literary landscape also dot Clarke’s commissions, with narrative inducing back stories. For example, legend has it that the Tullycross Triple window, situated in an isolated church in Connemara (fig. 10), was commissioned by noted Irish poet, physician, author, athlete, politician

\[\text{Figure 10}\]
Photo by Author

\[\text{Figure 11}\]
Photo by Author
and wild miscreant Oliver St. John Gogarty, whose works include ‘As I was going down Sackville Street’, and who was famously characturised as ‘stately, plump Buck Mulligan’ in the opening pages of James Joyce’s iconic novel, Ulysses, as an abject apology to his wife for his ongoing wild behaviour. Also, in depicting Harry Clarke’s windows in Cork’s Honan Chapel Cork as the perfect mix of ‘gorgeous and sinful’, famed Anglo Irish writer Edith Sommerville, whose books on the Anglo Irish Ascendancy with Martin Ross (aka Violet Florence Martin), were translated into a successful television series ‘The Irish RM’, commissioned one of Clarke’s windows in St. Barahane’s Church, Castletownsend, Cork (fig. 11), as ‘the perfect template for the commemoration of her parents’, who are buried in the church graveyard (Gordon Bowe, 2012:138).

Addressing more disjointed narratives, Gordon Bowe (1988; 104) suggests that while Clarke’s ‘elegant, exquisite saints, dressed in richly ornamented attire, redolent of the Parisian Ballet Russes, gaze dreamily through us, as though hypnotised’, their intimate representations can range from the bizarre and macabre, to the exquisite and evocative. Indeed, an interactive co-construction is facilitated through Clarke’s incongruous dressing of androgynous characters in turn of the century fashion, jeweled ballet slippers, and ornate medieval costume (figs. 12 and 13), which, while magical to behold, was radical in the context of religious iconography at the time. A further example of this mixed metaphor is depicted in Clarke’s two-light window, depicting both the Annunciation and Coronation of the Virgin Mary. In the Annunciation window (fig. 14), the youthful Mary, seen robed in a pastel pleated cloak, covering a perfectly pleated blue gown, appears troubled at the news of her pregnancy, as she stares, almost apologetically, out at the viewer, beneath a hovering Angel Gabriel wearing a pair of matching blue silk slippers. Conversely, the neighboring Coronation window (fig. 15), articulates a strikingly different narrative in that it depicts a more confident, controlled Mary, who now fixes the viewer with a mature and majestic stare. Here, Mary, whose explosively expressive eyes and seductively tapering elongated fingers draw the viewer into the window, is again anachronistically attired in a stunning, almost three dimensional dark blue cloak, covering an emerald and turquoise robe (Costigan & Cullen, 2010).

Equally disturbing narratives emerge from Clarke’s deliberate embedding of visually unsettling Gothic decadence, emotional insecurities and decay within the ecclesiastical majesty of his windows, exemplified in his St. Maculind window (fig. 16), in which the main
panel depicts the saint as sublimely serene, and in control. However, as the viewer’s eyes are drawn downwards, the lower panel (fig. 17), unsettlingly portrays a befuddled looking St. Maculind, being desperately clung to by an array of anonymous sinners and misfits, including a skull-like character, a deranged man, a beautiful fair haired woman, two praying peasant women, a physically deformed man, and a young attractive girl (Costigan & Cullen, 2010). Interestingly, a self-portrait of Clarke, as part of that discordant grouping is visible under the saint’s left hand, which, considering Clarke’s openness to the macabre, creates a seductively decadent narrative for the viewer (Ossier, 2011). Furthermore, a provocative interaction also results from Clarke’s deliberate unbalancing of the traditional viewer-viewed relationship, wherein engagement with the viewer overrides the facilitation of a more traditional passive observation. This results in his windows becoming ‘uncomfortably alive’, due to his ‘place bound’ characters appearing to challenge the viewer as to why they are ‘prying’ into the window’s activity (fig. 18).

Sullivan, (2012:20) addresses this disjointed engagement, when suggesting that disturbing the balance between subject and object, directly implicates the spectator in the temporal experience of the narrative, as exemplified in Clarke’s Visitation of Mary to St. Elizabeth (fig. 19), where Elizabeth’s husband Zacharias, in provocatively gazing over his wife’s shoulder, appears to ‘interrogate the viewer, as he captures them in the act of perceiving’ (Sullivan, 2012:21), while demanding she be left alone.

Methodology

So, one wonders what might be required to communicate Clarke’s ‘attractiveness’ to the post-modern tourist? Indeed, the fact that his stained glass windows are so easily accessible within churches situated in what are characterised as the tourist rich areas of Ireland, and in many cases, so close, that tourists can almost touch them (figs. 20 and 21), would appear to offer the opportunity to primary and peripheral stakeholders to facilitate viewing opportunities for the visitor. However, it would also appear that despite Clarke’s acknowledged genius, wherein testimonials to his world renown as an illustrator and stained glass artist from both academic and non-academic sources abound, that his oeuvre might be under-promoted through a combination of indifference, protectionism, or fear of cultural commodification. To that end, perspectives were elicited on the appropriateness of considering Harry Clarke’s church windows as de facto tourist attractions.
In attempting to incorporate attitudinal differences among those who might wrestle with the pressure to balance church integrity with the provision of visitor experience (Kiely, 2013; Shackley, 2002; Kong, 2001; Du Cross, 2001, Font & Ahjem, 1999), with others, who might alternatively posit that stakeholder interconnectedness would enhance the congruence of tourism objectives (Pechlaner et al., 2009; Dredge, 2006; Fyall, 2003; Fyall et al., 2001; Garrod & Fyall, 2000), defining an inclusive suite of core and peripheral stakeholders to resolve the above conundrum was deemed imperative. Consequently, Freeman’s (1984:46) definition of stakeholders as being ‘any group or individual who can affect or be affected by the achievement of objectives’ was central to the strategy. Accordingly, the selected stakeholder suite encompassed fourteen art historians/curators, sixteen church administrators (of differing denominations), ninety five tourists and locals, representatives from national and regional tourism promoting agencies, two independent travel agents, and one government official responsible for tourism promotion.

Furthermore, while themed, semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2002; Freeman, 2002; Burt, 1992) were utilised with the above suite of respondents, a conscious effort was made to avoid assumption bias in the suite of questions employed. For example, it was felt that the stereotyping of stakeholder groups might incorrectly pre-categorise church administrators and art historians/curators as favouring a curatorial stance, while similarly, categorising all tourists and tourism promoters as either seeking informed and unfettered access to Clarke’s windows, or seeking to actively encourage the promotion of Clarke’s windows as ‘must see attractions’, was studiously avoided. And while this essentially qualitative study predominantly utilised a combination of face to face and telephone interviews, tourists and locals were approached on an ad hoc basis as they viewed the windows, thus gaining a more immediate perspective. Broadly speaking, interview questions were aimed at soliciting perspectives under the following headings;

- Stakeholder awareness of the significance of Harry Clarke as a visitor attractor
- The appropriateness of promoting Harry Clarke’s church windows as de facto tourist attractions.

**Findings and Discussion**

**Stakeholder awareness of the significance of Harry Clarke as a tourist attractor**

While a majority of church administrators agreed that visitor numbers to their respective churches were lower than they would like, there was an acute awareness of the significant potential of a Harry Clarke window to deliver a healthier visitor flow. In articulating visitor centered perspectives, a representative of St. Joseph’s church in Dublin, which houses windows allegedly considered by Clarke as his best work in the city (fig. 22), commented:

> although we don’t get huge numbers of visitors, those who do seem to spend ages just looking at the windows [while adding] last year, we
opened up the church for the first time for Culture Night, and we had over three hundred visitors here just to see the windows.

Similarly, when asked if he was aware of the significance, of Clarke’s window in St. Peter’s Church, Dublin, the parish priest commented ‘you bet I am’, adding:

we are hoping to hold a public lecture here soon, and we are fundraising to move the window back to its original location, where it will lie in the path of best light to show it off to visitors.

Similar sentiments were articulated by a priest from St. Flannan’s Church in Killaloe, Clare, who in responding to the same question said:

we do get visitors over the summer to see Harry Clarke’s Presentation window (fig 23) in our church, and all you hear from them are oohs and aahs.

while also speaking in promotional terms, the parish priest of St. Mary’s Church, Ballinrobe, Mayo, which contains an astonishing eight of Clarke’s windows simply stated that ‘Harry Clarke is significantly (emphasis) significant’, while enthusiastically commenting:

we will be hosting our 150th anniversary soon, and we are producing a booklet on these windows for the event.

Interestingly, many churches containing ‘studio’ windows, created and installed in the immediate years after Clarke’s death, openly referred to them as if they were originals, and did not see any diminution in their potential attractiveness despite their ‘diluted’ authenticity. For example, interviewees from four separate churches (John’s Lane, St. Nicholas of Myra, St’s Peter and Paul in Dublin, and The Church of the Immaculate Conception, in Oughterard, Co. Galway), all of whom contain excellent examples of ‘studio’ windows commissioned soon after Clarke’s untimely death in 1931, were totally tuned into the possibility that visitors could be interested in viewing their ‘Harry Clarke’ stained glass windows. For example, the John’s Lane interviewee commented:
we are on the footpath which directly leads to the Guinness storehouse, and many tourists on the way there come in to photograph our Harry Clarke windows, even sometimes during mass, and we just love to see them coming in.

Furthermore, while St’s Peter and Paul houses two of Clarke’s most stunning originals (‘The Visitation’ and ‘The Widow’s Son’), a church spokesperson was at pains to stress that their collection of ‘studio’ windows, which includes the grotesque depiction of The Twelve Lepers (fig. 24), ‘attract a high level of interest from visitors, due I think to both their brilliance and their strangeness’. And while a relatively small number of church interviewees were unversed in Clarke’s significance as an artist, they too were intrigued by the drawing power of his church windows, exemplified when a spokesperson from The Church of the Sacred Heart in Dublin, which boasts Clarke’s depiction of St. Rita and St. Bernard commented

you know we didn’t really know what we had, and embarrassingly, because of this, we ourselves were not in a position to talk about the window, but now when we advertise that a talk will be given by a local historian, we normally get over a hundred visitors to hear the talk.

In articulating their perspectives on tourism potential, views from the arts community were mixed, with some focusing heavily on Clarke’s artistic ability, while others apportioned a greater weighting to attractiveness for tourists. For example, an historian from the Ballinrobe Heritage Society commenting on the St. Fechin window in the nearby St. Mary’s church, laughingly described an image of one of the saint’s followers, who is depicted by Clarke wearing a pair of modern round rimmed spectacles, while indifferently reading a book, as the saint preaches to his otherwise enraptured followers as being ‘of peculiar interest to tourists’, adding that it had become known as ‘the Harry Potter window’, among young visitors to the church. Similarly, while other arts representatives were fulsome in their views on Clarke’s uniqueness as a visual artist, they also appeared to stray into considering him in tourism terms when describing him as ‘an artist of incomparable brilliance’, or

the fact that he never became the template for other stained glass artists was simply because, no one else, either at the time, or since, could recreate what he did

and again,

even his church windows, could have you absorbed for hours, such is the level of detail within one small panel

(fig. 25), while another grudgingly accepted that

although he is (emphasis) an artist, and not (emphasis) a tourist attraction, I guess we could try to be in the business of tourism.
However, an alternative view was articulated by a minority who appeared to downplay his significance as a tourist attractor, mainly through their disinclination to want to consider him as such, exemplified in one interviewee lamenting the possibility that ‘mass tourism might create risks for our cultural heritage’, adding, ‘Anyway, I’d rather he not be promoted to beer swilling stag parties’.

However, a different set of perspectives emerged when interviewing representatives from independent, local, and national tourism promoting agencies. Respondents from a small group of independent promoters felt that it was difficult to single out Clarke as being a particularly significant attractor, with one stating when we were promoting our tours in America, we found him difficult to promote, as so few knew about him, so we have now moved to delivering stained glass tourism holidays, which include Clarke.

Similarly, Clarke’s oeuvre did not appear to be on the promotional radar of either the regional, or national tourism promoting agencies, exemplified by one regional agency representative commenting: if anyone coming into this office asks about him, we will tell them, but he would not automatically constitute one of the things to do that are normally suggested to tourists.

Indeed, when one perused the available literature in the tourist office, there was no mention of Harry Clarke’s windows, even though there were fine examples of these situated in two churches within walking distance of the tourist office. Interestingly however, when questioned about the significance of Clarke as a visitor attraction, a Government official responsible for the development of heritage tourism responded churches are churches, and can be repetitive for the tourist, but from an international perspective, Harry Clarke changes the game.

Articulating similar sentiments, the parish priest of Tullycross Church, Connemara, spoke of his church being ‘so remote, we would certainly welcome a lot more visitors’. But when asked if he would be willing to actively promote their Harry Clarke window to tourists visiting the area, concluded ‘it would not be altogether different proposition for church administrators. This differential perspective was articulated by the rector of St. Barrahane’s church in Castletownsend, Cork, who commented

if you mention Guinness to a visitor, they would know exactly what you are talking about, but if you mention Harry Clarke, I’m not so sure that they would, so I think there is a promotional issue here,

So I guess we are not making the best use of Harry Clarke’s work here, but look, we are struggling just to keep the wheels turning. However, we would be very open to an intervention from Fáilte Ireland to do the promoting for us [while adding] church administrators might be embarrassed to be seen to capitalise on the artistic content of their churches.

ii) The appropriateness of promoting Harry Clarke’s windows as de facto tourist attractions

While the mere presence of Harry Clarke windows within churches appears to offer significant tourism potential, the appropriateness of actively promoting them as part of a recognised tourist trail constitutes an
right for me to be seen to do that here’. Stridently echoing the above perspectives, the parish priest of Killaloe Catholic Church in Clare commented that although he would love to see more tourist activity, he would ‘not be doing the promoting’, while an interviewee from John’s Lane Church in Dublin was equally direct when stating ‘Of course Clarke should be promoted. Look, we have asked the tour bus guides passing our door to stop pointing out that art rubbish across the street to tourists, and tell them instead what we have inside here’, indicating perhaps the opportunity for a more passive ‘involvement’ in promotion of their stained glass windows.

However, while church interviewees appeared to articulate a considered leaning towards externally driven promotion, a number of church visitors were quick to point out the dearth of directional signage or on-site information on the windows that they were observing. But despite the lack of an explanatory narrative, there was an overwhelming unanimity that Harry Clarke’s windows should be promoted to them as attractions, exemplified in one French visitor commenting, ‘If the tourist bodies bothered to promote this guy, there would be queues around the block’. Addressing the seductiveness of Clarke, an American couple, in commenting on a single window pane (fig 26) suggested ‘We could stay here all day, because we are looking at the work of a genius’. A similar response was voiced by a group of seven German visitors viewing two of Clarke’s church windows who enthused, ‘this must be the best kept secret in Ireland’. Corresponding views on the accidental discovery of Harry Clarke were also expressed by residents of local communities during the research. A Wicklow based resident for example, spoke of how ‘it was only when I joined a local history society that I became aware of Harry Clarke’s windows in the local churches, and I haven’t stopped looking at them since’, while a girl working on the restoration of the church organ in Gorey, Wexford was ‘flabbergasted at how beautiful the Clarke windows are’ (fig. 27) adding ‘I have lived in this town all my life, and I have walked past the doors of this church for years, but I never knew that this was inside’. A similar view was also evident in Kerry, with one interviewee stating ‘Of course he should be promoted. Look, I was walking up the street in Dingle, and I saw a sandwich board advertising Harry Clarke’s windows in the convent. I went in and was blown away’, while another, engrossed in studying Clarke’s windows stated that ‘for years, I knew nothing about Harry Clarke, but thanks to Nicola Gordon Bowie’s book, my husband and I have toured Ireland to see every one of his windows’.

Broadly speaking, members of the arts community also appeared to express a vested interest in promoting Ireland’s visual arts to tourists, with one Dublin based art historian commenting

*Look, I go to Prague to the Monck House and Museum, and in a way, he is their Harry Clarke, and the tour guides in Prague tell you that you must go there, and when you go, you can buy everything from giant wall hangings with depictions of his work, to tiny fridge magnets.*

A contingent opinion was articulated by a Wexford based art historian when commenting

*I can’t believe how he is not a tourist attraction, particularly in Dublin, where it should be easy to create a trail to bring awareness of him to tourists, because he is so unique and so fascinating*

while adopting an unusual tourist centric perspective, a fashion historian enthused:
anyone interested in fashion design would have to be drawn to Harry Clarke, because art reflects the fashion of the time, and Clarke’s stunning depiction of turn of the century fashion on his biblical figures would be so interesting to all sorts of visitors, if they were told about it.

Additionally, more pragmatic views on the relationship between tourism and the visual arts were addressed by other arts representatives who argued that people who don’t know anything about the culture they find themselves in, are open slates, and could easily be encouraged to look at Harry Clarke in a non-elitist way,

while another, in attesting to the raw functionality of arts tourism stated that ‘no artist would ever want their work locked away in a church or a basement’. Furthermore, opinions from arts curators appeared to align with those expressed above, with a spokesperson from The Hugh Lane Gallery commenting

Harry Clarke’s Eve of St. Agnes window is one of our most significant attractions, and while we have a constant stream of visitors coming to the gallery, we could do with marketing him a lot better, and tying him in with some local churches where his windows are.

However, addressing the frustrating dilemma created by the ubiquity of Harry Clarke’s work, and his under-promotion as a tourist attraction, the local arts heritage officer in North Mayo, though welcoming the possibility of an official Clarke tourist trail, seemed to operate in isolation from the main tourist authorities, when she spoke of having to produce her own guide to Clarke’s windows in Mayo, adding that ‘other cultural groups in the area, and the local tourist authorities did not seem particularly interested’. Similar sentiments were encapsulated in the voice of one Dublin based art critic commenting

Dublin has such enormous untapped potential as a cultural artistic centre, where the use of intelligent tourism could coalesce with the needs of heritage stakeholders’, while soberly adding that, ‘anecdotal evidence would suggest that cultural bodies do not relate to one another in a coherent way.

But while it could be construed that the apparent under promotion of church art might well resonate from a time when churches were traditionally viewed as spaces for spiritual reflection and renewal, a more pragmatic motive for the lack of promotion emerged during interviews with representatives from national and local tourism promoting agencies. When questioned on the possibility of actively promoting Harry Clarke’s work to tourists, or even undertaking a key leadership role in doing so, a representative from Ireland’s National Tourism Promoting Agency commented

we have very limited funding, and therefore, we are concentrating on promoting a small number of events that we feel will give us the best bang for our buck.

A similar reluctance emerged when another interviewee appeared to articulate the agency’s role in utilitarian terms, when stating that they were ‘particularly focused on attracting critical masses of visitors’ which he felt was a consequence of their ‘only reacting to market intelligence’. Indeed, he added that there was ‘no market intelligence to suggest that there was a demand for church tourism in Ireland, let alone for Harry Clarke’. Asked if he was even curious to find out if there might be a worthwhile demand, he continued ‘look, it would be mad to buy marketing space when we would be unsure of the outcomes’, adding that they were happiest when supporting groups who ‘know how to do things’, citing festivals, and golf tourism as ‘sure fire examples of how best to attract a crowd’. Conceptualising the gamble involved in investing in the promotion of visual arts to tourists, another promotional agency commented

in my own opinion, appreciation of the visual arts is more intellectual that emotional, whereas music, theatre, film and photography are more democratized, and that’s why we are more inclined to promote them.

And while well aware of Clarke’s significance as an artist, albeit to ‘those with a specialist interest’, a representative from a regional tourism agency nonetheless commented, ‘We don’t have anything on our things to do website relating to Harry Clarke’. When asked why, the interviewee continued, ‘I have been working in this office for a number of years, and in that time we have had, two, maybe three enquiries about Harry Clarke’. Interestingly, when probed further to know if her office ever felt inclined to tell the tourist of what she knew to be significant, she paused, before stating, ‘no, we never got around to it, because we were not asked much’ before adding ‘but maybe we should’.

**Conclusion**

Using the ubiquity of Harry Clarke’s iconic stained glass windows in designated tourist destinations as a template, this paper sought to explore the extent of
stakeholder awareness on the significance of Harry Clarke as a tourist attractor. Furthermore, it endeavoured to explicate attitudes among core and peripheral stakeholders on the concept of actively (or collaboratively), promoting Clarke’s church windows as quasi-religious tourist attractions. And while a stereotypical reaction to converting church art into tourist attractions was expected from church authorities, and the arts community, by way of their being either anti, or indifferent to tourism promotion, (as distinct from an expectation that the tourism agencies would incline to promote his oeuvre for all it was worth), the opposite was found to be the case. Indeed, the findings suggest that there was instead a substantial, knowledge based awareness among church administrators and the arts community with regard to the significance of Harry Clarke’s potential attractiveness to tourists. Similarly, albeit in an emotional context, there was overwhelming support from tourists and locals for the promotion of Clarke’s stained glass as significant tourist attractions. However, such perspectives appeared to be compromised by views from the tourism promoting agencies who felt that, based on their market intelligence there was a limited demand for church tourism, with perhaps an even lower demand for Harry Clarke’s stained glass. Moreover, it was deemed that he might only appeal to those with a specialist interest, and more worryingly, in adopting a utilitarian approach, they, (having the power to inform tourists of what they should invest their time in seeing), appeared disinclined to do so.

Furthermore, while there was a palpable enthusiasm for the development of Harry Clarke themed tourist trails among representatives from both the arts community (who expressed a vested interest in doing so), and visitors and locals (who in a number of cases, could not understand why this had not already happened), church administrators, in adopting ethical and pragmatic perspectives, articulated problematic issues associated with their being either willing or able to do the promoting. However, in expressing a desire to ‘be promoted’ as tourist attractions, albeit indicating a discomfort with their ‘legitimacy’ being compromised, they appeared to open an opportunity for the tourism promoting agencies to adopt a leadership, or coordinating role in positively aligning stakeholder attitudes towards the development of a Harry Clarke tourist trail. And yet, this ‘opportunity’ also presented a challenge It would appear from the findings that since the tourism agencies did not view Harry Clarke as having high tourism capital, they were not inclined to become actively involved in, or offer leadership towards the development of such a tourist trail in Ireland.

The significance of these findings suggest that despite extensive enthusiasm, perceptual difficulties within two of the stakeholder groupings, (church administrators and tourism promoters), appeared to create a barrier to resurrecting Harry Clarke as a tourist attraction for visitors to Ireland.

References


Dowling, W., J., (1960), Harry Clarke: Dublin Stained Glass Artist, The Dublin Historical Record

~ 78 ~


Lorentzen, A. (2009), Cities in the Experience Economy, European Planning Studies, Vol. 17, No. 6, pp. 829-845


OECD (2009), The Impact of Culture on Tourism, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development Report


