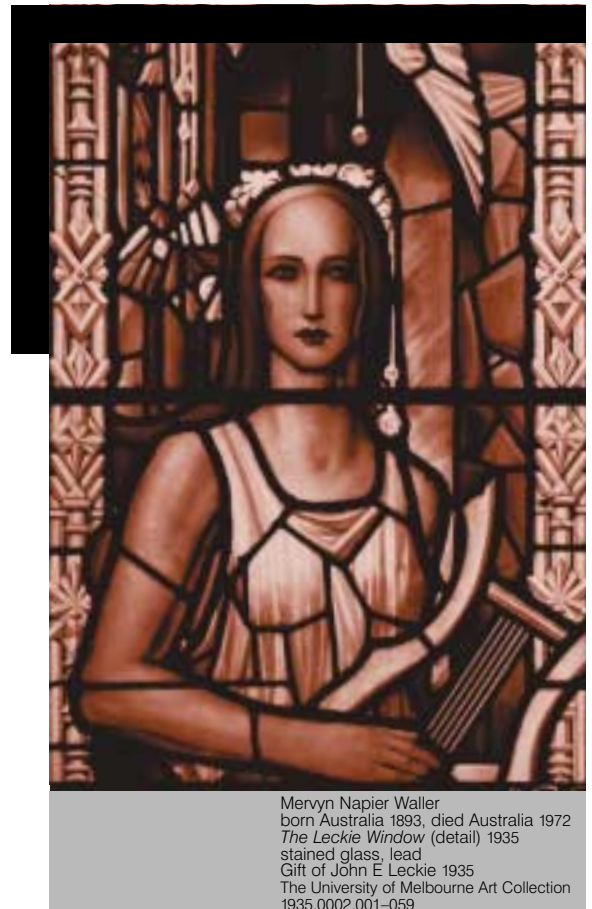


in detail

Napier Waller *The Leckie Window*



Mervyn Napier Waller
born Australia 1893, died Australia 1972
The Leckie Window (detail) 1935
stained glass, lead
Gift of John E Leckie 1935
The University of Melbourne Art Collection
1935.0002.001–059

from hall to foyer

Long before *The Leckie Window* was installed in the foyer of the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the stained glass window was a feature of the University's original Wilson Hall. The Gothic Revival structure, designed by Joseph Reed in the late 1870s, housed the window from 1935 until the fire that razed the Hall in 1952. Decades later, *The Leckie Window* has once again returned to public display, filling the multi-storey atrium of the Potter with history, colour and references to classical mythology.

The Leckie Window was one of two stained glass windows installed in the original Wilson Hall, both of which were completed by Napier Waller. The first – the 'Stevens Window' – was funded by Edward Stevens and completed in 1928. It represents Waller's first foray into the medium of stained glass design.¹ Shortly after its installation, Waller and his wife Christian, also an artist, travelled to London to study the manufacture of stained glass at Whall and Whall Limited.

In July 1934, the University Council recorded the gift of a second window – a gesture to mark the Victorian and Melbourne Centenary Celebrations of 1934–35. The donor was John E Leckie (1856–1942), Managing Director of RG Wilson and Co. Pty Ltd, Wholesale and Retail Grocers of Elizabeth Street, Melbourne. Leckie's inspiration for the gift was his friend Sir John MacFarland (Chancellor of the University, 1918–1935), who had envisaged that the numerous windows of Wilson Hall would be filled with stained glass.² Having completed the 'Stevens Window' in 1928, Waller was offered the Leckie commission, and in August 1934, the Chancellor wrote to the artist accepting his proposal to design, execute and install the window in the south wall of the south-west embrasure of Wilson Hall for the sum of £500.³

The Leckie Window was formally presented to the University at a Conferring of Degrees ceremony, 2 September 1935, as a tribute to Leckie's life-long association with Sir John MacFarland, who had passed away earlier that year.⁴ Sir Harry Lawson presented the window on behalf of Leckie, and spoke of the donor's desire to beautify the University. In accepting the gift the Deputy Chancellor, Sir John Latham, gratefully acknowledged that: 'If the surroundings of a university were beautiful, then the spirit of the university would be better than if the surroundings were merely utilitarian.'⁵

Less than twenty years after its installation, *The Leckie Window* was threatened by fire that engulfed Wilson Hall on 25 January 1952. Afternoon temperatures of up to 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37°C), high humidity and a strong west-north-westerly wind fuelled a fire that started in the rafters of the Hall and reduced the structure to ruins within the hour. *The Age* reported that: 'When it became obvious that Wilson Hall could not be saved the firemen turned their hoses onto the southern end of the building to prevent the flames reaching the nearby administration offices.'⁶ As a result, *The Leckie Window* was saved.

In the decades between its removal from the Hall and installation in the foyer of the Potter, the window was in storage – initially with the professional company assigned the task of its safe removal from the ruins of Wilson Hall, and then, from 1956, at the University. The permanent re-location of the window appears to have been an on-going interest of the University – a concept that gathered momentum in the mid-to-late 1970s as a survey exhibition of the art of Napier Waller was developed by the Art Gallery of New South Wales and also exhibited at the National Gallery of Victoria.⁷

It was not until the late 1990s however, that *The Leckie Window* was again on public display, when, at the suggestion of the then Director Frances Lindsay, it was incorporated into the design of the Ian Potter Museum of Art by architect Nonda Katsalidis, and conserved and framed by Geoffrey Wallace.⁸ Positioned in the foyer of the Potter, *The Leckie Window* once again beautifies the surroundings of the University as it did when it was a feature of the original Wilson Hall.

a 1930s interpretation

... the Leckie Window contains but six figures, of which two only are human, and, through the medium of Bible story and Greek mythology, represents in allegory the evolution of man and human culture. The six small tracery lights in the arch at the top of the window depict the Six Days of Creation of the Book of Genesis, the upper two showing from left to right:

1. The Separation of Light from Darkness;
2. The Division of the Waters Above from the Waters Beneath; and the lower four showing from left to right:-
3. The Creation of Earth and Trees and Herbs;
4. The Creation of Sun, Moon and Stars;
5. The Creation of Whales and Creatures that Live in the Sea;
6. The Creation of Man.

The main window consists of six oblong panels, in pairs, from top to bottom, and here Greek mythology is used. The female figures in the three panels on the left, in descending order, are Artemis (the Moon); Persephone (the Roman Ceres); Sappho; and the corresponding male figures on the right are: Apollo (the Sun); Prometheus; Pheidias. Artemis and Apollo, twin offspring of Zeus, the supreme father god of Greek polytheism, provide a happy link with the Fourth Day of Creation, Artemis the goddess of all nature, the mother of every living creature, from whom came the fruitfulness of all the earth, and patron goddess of the domestic arts, Apollo, her male counterpart, and inspirer of music, poetry, and wisdom.

Ceres, goddess of corn, and Prometheus, the Titan, symbolise the material discoveries, agriculture and fire, which are the starting-points of all civilisation.

In Sappho, the immortal lyric poetess who lived and sang on Lesbos in the seventh century before Christ, and Pheidias, the Athenian, greatest name in the greatest period of Greek sculpture, whose genius gave to his countrymen an ennobled ideal of godhood, stand embodied the pinnacle of human achievement in every shape of art...

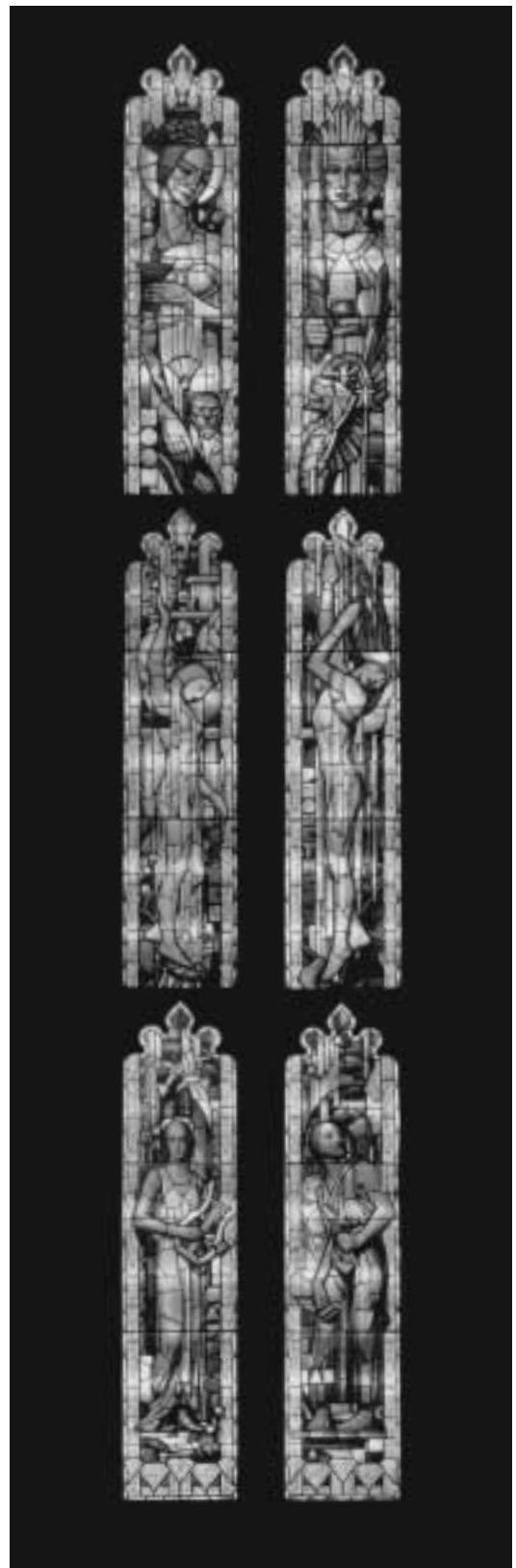
In a manner appropriate to the spiritual and symbolic nature of the theme, the colour tones of this window have a gentler, softer, subtler, quality of liquid transparency; pale and ethereal in the divine region of the upper panels, they gradually become deeper and richer towards the human region of the lower ones.⁹

Related works by Napier Waller from the University of Melbourne Art Collection:

- Sketch for the top lights, *The Leckie Window*, c. 1935, pencil on paper
- Sketch for window in *Wilson Hall*, c. 1935, gouache on cardboard
- Set of six study drawings for panels of *The Leckie Window*, c. 1935, pencil on buff paper
- *South Window, Wilson Hall*, n.d., oil on photograph
- *Orchids*, c. 1940, stained glass window (located in the School of Botany)

Additional information available at www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au

Lisa Sullivan The Ian Potter Museum of Art, 2002



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- 1 Stained glass artist William Montgomery was commissioned to design the window and oversee its manufacture however, after his death in 1927, the project was offered to Waller. The 'Stevens Window' was positioned in the southern wall of Wilson Hall and its design incorporated representations of men of literature, exploration, music and the sciences.
- 2 'University Window Unveiled', in *The Sun News-Pictorial*, 3 September 1935, p.34.
- 3 Correspondence, Sir John MacFarland to Napier Waller, 16 August 1934 – Potter files (copy).
- 4 'University Window Unveiled', in *The Sun News-Pictorial*, 3 September 1935, p.34.
- 5 'Stained-Glass Window. Mr Leckie's Gift to the University', in *The Age*, 3 September 1935, p.11.
- 6 '£250,000 Fire at University. Wilson Hall a Mass of Ruins', in *The Age*, 26 January 1952, p.1.
- 7 *M Napier Waller, 1893/1972*, curated by Nicholas Draffin, exhibited at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (14 May – 19 June 1977) and the National Gallery of Victoria (29 July – 28 August 1977).
- 8 Wallace, Geoffrey, *Maintaining stained glass windows. A handbook for custodians and caretakers*, Melbourne, 1998.
- 9 The University of Melbourne, *The Leckie Window in Wilson Hall*, Melbourne, c. June 1936. Correspondence suggests text compiled by Professor CA Scutt from the original description by Napier Waller – Potter files (copy).