

Margaret Edith Aldrich Rope, stained glass artist, (1891–1988)



Margaret Edith Aldrich Rope is connected to Edlesborough as she designed the beautiful Nativity window on the south side of the church, in honour of another female artist, Helen Rope who is buried in the churchyard.

Margaret, known as Tor, was born on 29th July 1891 into a farming family in Suffolk. She had many artistic relatives including her uncle, George Thomas Rope, who was a Royal Academician. An aunt and sister were both sculptors and her cousin, Margaret Agnes Rope, known as Marga, was also a stained glass artist.

In about 1911 the two Margarets started working at the Glass House, a stained glass studio in Fulham. The Glass House provided studio space for many artists and fostered a collaborative working environment which at that time was particularly helpful to women artists. Later, Tor shared studio accommodation in Putney with other female artists.

It is likely she was a friend of **Helen Frazer Rock** to whom the window is dedicated. They did in fact go to the same school in Wimbledon although Helen was 13 years older than Tor so they were not contemporaries.

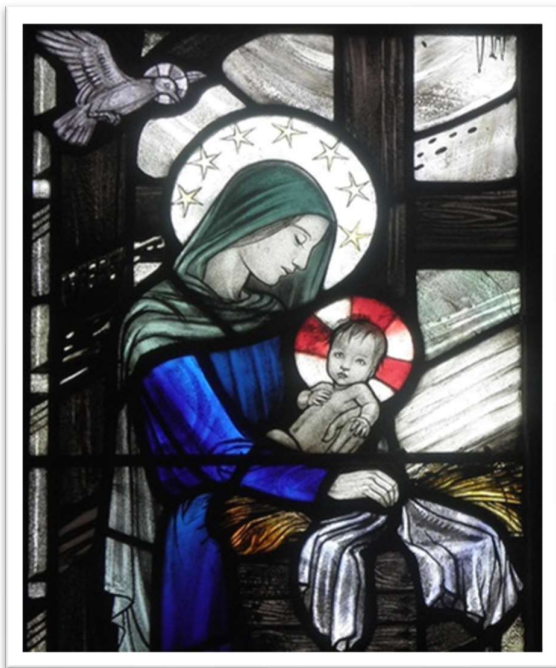
Tor's career spanned a period of over 50 years; her earliest window was at Clippesby, Norfolk in 1919, where her skill at portraying children is first seen as is her interpretation of the Arts and Crafts style. In all, she produced well over 100 windows.

She died at the family home in Suffolk on 9th March 1988, aged 96.

Margaret's family nickname was "Tor", for tortoise. She later used a tortoise symbol to sign some of her windows.

To distinguish herself from her cousin, she used the professional name of M.E.Aldrich Rope (incorporating her mother's maiden name).

When visiting the church, enjoy this lovely window and don't miss:



Crafts movement.

1. The artist's signature

2. The inscription about God as artist:
"All things were fashioned by Him we are His handiwork to bear the fashion of Him. He has put His mystery in us, the great mystery of love."

This is from 'Divine Renaissance' (1929) by John Todd Ferrier, a work which emphasises the Mystery of Godlikeness in all Creation.

3. The Celtic Knot motif of the Arts &

Helen Frazer Rock, sculptor and painter (1878-1932)

Helen Frazer Rock was born in Wimbledon in 1878. She was the daughter of Joseph Rock, an East India Agent and a director of a mining company. From 1904-7 she studied at the Royal Academy Schools where she obtained several prizes.

Helen was primarily a sculptor producing glazed pottery figures, often with quite whimsical titles. She was however also a gifted miniature painter and modeller. Among other things, she created porcelain heads for doll, modelled from real children.

Helen's work was exhibited at Walkers Gallery, New Bond St where her figurines were described in *The Times* as "*lively in movement and pleasantly restrained in colour. 'Pan teaches a human baby to pipe', 'Eve', 'The Sisters', 'Her First Bouquet', 'Wounded Love' and 'Madonna' being characteristic examples*". She also had many works accepted by the Royal Academy.

Miniature of a lady



Bust of a young girl



Helen's connection with Edlesborough

Although she mostly used the address of her family residence in Wimbledon, she also had a home at **Southend, Northall** where we believe she lived with her friend and fellow artist, Kate Elizabeth Olver, in the cottage called 'Restharrow'. They lived there between 1919 and 1932, when Helen died. Kate remained with her husband Charles Higgins, also an artist, and it was quite likely it was they who initiated the idea of a stained glass memorial to their friend.

The friendship between Helen and Kate was long-standing. They had attended the Royal Academy Schools together, and they collaborated on morale raising art work during WW1. In 1919, they joined the **Women's Guild of Arts**, an organisation which was established to offer female artists an alternative to the Art Workers Guild, which was not open to women. M. E. Aldrich Rope and her cousin and aunt also belonged to the Women's Guild, so it is very likely that all these artistic ladies knew each other.

Both Helen and Kate were active Suffragists, supporting the movement with their talents and contributing to its '**Votes for Women**' magazine.

There is no clear reason why Helen & Kate chose to live in this area, but possibly they were seeking the peace and solitude of the countryside to devote themselves to their art. When Helen died in 1932 from a tragic road accident, she was buried in the churchyard at St Mary's, Edlesborough.

Her monument is a fine Celtic cross, decorated with the Celtic Knot, a decorative motif used by the Arts and Craft Movement and also featured in her memorial window.

