

A Burne-Jones Discovery

Author(s): W. A. L. Seaman and S. C. Newton

Source: *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 107, No. 753 (Dec., 1965), pp. 632-633

Published by: Burlington Magazine Publications Ltd.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/874794>

Accessed: 08-12-2022 15:48 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*Burlington Magazine Publications Ltd.* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Burlington Magazine*

Vatican Library set aside for the Latin papyri of the Vettori collection; these brightly coloured allegorical frescoes were greatly admired by contemporaries.<sup>1</sup>

The Mr Beckford who was said to have purchased the sketch cannot have been the author of *Vathek*, who was then only 12 years old; he must have been William's cousin Peter Beckford, the cultivated author of *Essays on Hunting*, of whom it was written that he 'would bag a fox in Greek, find a hare in Latin, inspect his Kennels in Italian, and direct the economy of his stables in exquisite French'. In *Familiar Letters from Italy* (1805) Peter Beckford describes his travels on the Continent shortly before the French Revolution, and alludes to earlier visits to Italy.

Fr Thorpe's reference in his letter of 18th October 1771 to the 'unpardoning Roman Criticks' finds a parallel in a letter from Byres of 21st September 1771, in which he speaks in an exactly similar context of 'the general opinion of our Roman Artists (who spare nobody)'. In the same letter Byres encloses Mengs's receipt for 'three Hundred and fifteen Pounds, the Price agreed for the Picture'. 'Less than six weeks work' may have been unfair to the artist: Dr Burney had seen a study for the picture in Mengs's studio in Florence a year before.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PASTOR: *History of the Popes*, tr. E. F. Peeler, xxxviii, London [1951], pp.510-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Dr Burney's Musical Tours in Europe*, edited by Percy Scholes, Oxford [1959], 1, p.190.

## A Burne-Jones Discovery

BY W. A. L. SEAMAN AND S. C. NEWTON

THE Durham County Record Office has recently acquired, with other material, four undated letters of unknown provenance signed simply 'Ned' or 'EBJ'. References contained in them to various artistic matters, notably to Rossetti and the Grosvenor Gallery and the use, on two occasions, of the address 'The Grange' has led to the discovery that they are in fact letters written by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, two to Sidney Colvin, Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum 1876-84 and eminent man of letters, and two to Mrs Sitwell, whom Colvin subsequently married. It has proved possible to assign approximate dates to these letters with confidence. They are all from the period 1878-87 when Burne-Jones was at the height of his powers as a painter, producing such works as *Laus Veneris*, *Wheel of Fortune*, *Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, and *The Briar Rose*. These were also the years when he was helping to direct the Grosvenor Gallery.

The first letter is to Colvin and was written in the late spring or early summer of 1878. The artist had sent Colvin a drawing possibly a self-portrait, '... though it is so far from my fate to make good likenesses that I feel very low about the result ...'. Most of the letter is taken up with a discussion of the theft of a portfolio of engravings which Colvin had on approval from a London dealer. '... one thing I was glad to see by your letter that the engravings were not the Fitzwilliam property [Colvin was Director at this time] and that was what I dreaded at first because that would have been an additional tiresomeness ...'. The writer goes on to make some interesting remarks about Howell, who, he suspected, was behind the theft. 'I said Howell not at all in fun because all suspicions are worth considering - he and Attenborough in the Strand have great dealings and are forging and selling false Rossettis here at a great rate and from a history I know he is quite capable of real burglary.' Charles Augustus Howell, Ruskin's Anglo-Portuguese secretary and at this time confidant of Rossetti, was 'renowned for wit, knavery and braze-

ness'. He subsequently set himself up as an art dealer, partly by selling works it has long been thought he pilfered from Rossetti. The remarks reproduced here indicate that he had already other means of acquiring his stock. Indeed in the following year Rossetti was moved to protest against the forging of his works, though he seems to have been uncertain as to the culprit. Attenborough is also known to have had doubtful financial connexions with Rossetti who was at one time pledged to him in the sum of £500.<sup>2</sup> The two persons who actually stole the prints were caught but they refused to disclose how they had disposed of them and they were never recovered.

In 1880 Mrs Sitwell, as she then was, and her son Bertie were compelled to travel hurriedly to Davos in Switzerland for the sake of the latter's health, Colvin accompanying them as far as Paris. At this time Davos was just beginning to attain fame as a health resort - R. L. Stevenson was there at the same time - but a seven-hour sledge journey was still necessary in order to reach it. Burne-Jones wrote to Mrs Sitwell, probably in February, a characteristic letter:

'... it seems so strange to think of you tonight all those miles away and all those miles high up in the air I have seen Sidney two or three times and he is a good boy and bears his lonely life hear [*sic*] very pluckily. I couldn't go to his lectures because they were all of them in the middle of the day - this was done out of spite - and I am busy at work again in the old way - and nothing is changed - Margaret [his daughter, afterwards Mrs Mackail] and Georgie [his wife Georgiana] are gone to a concert to night and I am alone and so I can write - but I am hardly ever alone for any five minutes of the day, until the night comes when I go tired to bed, and this is the quietest minute I have had for a long time and it is given to you ... is it very lonely? it feels as if it must be so desolate in those snow heights, and bleak to look out upon. ... and I do pray all may prosper with you and that Bertie will do nothing but get strong ...'

The cure, however, failed and the boy died in April.

The third letter is probably the most interesting of all for its revelation of the writer's character, his lack of resilience, his *fin de siècle* yearnings and, it must be said, his childishness. This letter is probably addressed to Mrs Sitwell again and must have been written from Rottingdean, the Burne-Jones family's summer home, soon after the death of William Graham on 16th July 1885. Graham, who was a close friend of both Burne-Jones and Rossetti, had been Liberal M.P. for Glasgow from 1865 until 1874. According to Lady Burne-Jones's *Memorials*<sup>3</sup> he was the person upon whom Edward relied for advice in the affairs of life.

'I have been very down in the depths', he writes, 'for his death is a great and real loss to me and the breaking of an epoch in my days - it has been an evil year, and of course I haven't been well - not that anything has greatly ailed me but as we fail for want of sunlight often I have failed for want of some happiness to give life to the time and have let myself feel dull and downcast for weeks together without making any effort to mend. ... I didn't see SC [Colvin] before leaving town we couldn't arrange an evening in which we were both free and at the last I hurried here being exhausted and without any energy in me for anything: perhaps soon things will mend and the year have done its worst and let us breathe again ...'

The causes of Edward's melancholy are not easy to discover, apart from Graham's death, and indeed may have been largely imaginary. It is known, however, that he was disturbed by his

<sup>1</sup> DOUGHTY: *A Victorian Romantic*, p.331.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. ROSSETTI: *Rossetti Papers*, p.300.

<sup>3</sup> II, p.154.

election to the Royal Academy the previous month as he felt this would hamper his artistic freedom. He did in fact resign from the Academy in 1893. As a supporter of the Liberals he was probably much agitated by their recent defeat and by the growing crisis in Ireland, but his wife in her Memoirs certainly gives no indication that he was physically or emotionally unwell at this time.

The fourth letter can be dated with certainty to November 1887. On the second of that month Burne-Jones, in company with C. E. Hallé and J. Comyns Carr, resigned from the Directorship of the Grosvenor Gallery as the result of a dispute over the uses of the premises for dances and other social occasions. He wrote to Colvin:

The Grange,  
West Kensington W.

'My dear SC

Wants to see you – how about Saturday at lunch? Wants to tell you my version of Grosvenor Gallery bother – would sooner tell it you than the special correspondent of the Pall Mall.

Meantime if anyone by chance asks you, say the Vereshagen exhibition has NOTHING AT ALL IN THE BLESSED WORLD\* to do with it – beer, brandy, cigars, comic songs, Jew money lenders may have influenced me, but of that anon.

Yours affct.  
Ned.

\* proverbial saying – don't agree with it.'

Weretschagin, the remarkable and controversial Russian painter, was at this time holding an exhibition of his works in London under the patronage of the Prince of Wales.

Colvin in his *Memories and Notes* remarks that Burne-Jones held it a point of honour never to betray his feelings to anyone. Two of the letters reproduced here are at odds with this judgement and indicate that, in fact, his work was very much of a piece with his life. Binyon made the perceptive remark about him that 'he had an inbred revolt from fact' and this discovery made at the Durham County Record Office strengthens considerably the opinion that he lacked the energy and maturity to produce an enduring masterpiece.

The art historian can learn much from archives and the local record office can play its part in illuminating some of the obscurer facets of his subject, sometimes in such unexpected ways as the case described in this article.

## Letters

### *The Toledo 'Horatii'*

SIR, Should anyone still be interested in the question of the authorship of the Toledo variant replica of the *Horatii*, I have recently come across further documentation that the picture is indeed by Girodet. Again in the Collection Deloynes at the Cabinet des Estampes (Vol.23, p.380), a manuscript commentary in the lower margin of an early discussion of the *Horatii* (T. C. Bruun Neergard, *Sur la situation des beaux-arts en France, ou lettres d'un danois à son ami*, Paris, 1801, p.88) tells us that 'on voyait il y a quelques années\* (*chez Didot*) une réduction de ce tableau exécutée par

*Girodet sous la direction de David. Elle porte la signature de ce dernier.*' The asterisk after 'quelques années' refers to another marginal notation, '1840', a date that once more locates the attribution to Girodet long before its reiteration in Jules David's catalogue of 1880.

ROBERT ROSENBLUM

### *Hampstead Arts Centre*

SIR, The opening exhibition of the new Hampstead Arts Centre, provided by the Camden Borough Council, is concerned with the artist at work, showing the working conditions of artists from the Renaissance period to the present day. We would be interested to hear of suitable material for this exhibition, particularly studio equipment, eighteenth and nineteenth-century lay figures, paint-boxes, palettes, etc. We would also like to locate pictures of artists at work, sketch-books, letters and certificates, also work involving unusual techniques. This exhibition excludes sculpture and printing techniques.

The exhibition, which will open on 26th February 1966, will be the first ever staged in the new Centre. These exhibition rooms will be by far the latest and best equipped in north London and ought to provide a much needed space for major exhibitions. Conditions will be acceptable to museums should they be willing to loan work. Further information and all inquiries to the Secretary.

Hampstead Arts Centre,  
Arkwright Road,  
London, NW3.

SHIRLEY BURY  
JOHN CHRISTOPHERSON  
CAROLINE GABRIEL  
FREDERICK LAWS  
HANS SCHWARZ  
JEAN PAPWORTH  
BERNARD GAY  
JEANNETTE JACKSON, *Chairman*  
*Hampstead Artists' Council*

### *Marie-Anne Collot and Miss Cathcart*

SIR, Without wishing to detract from Mr Opperman's interesting detective work on this subject in your August issue, I should like to point out that Mary Cathcart (later the Hon. Mrs Graham, made memorable by Gainsborough) can hardly be the subject of the Collot bust executed in Russia in 1768. Mary Cathcart was only 11 years old that year, having been born on 1st March 1757. Mr Opperman seems unaware of this fact when he speaks of the sitter being a 'young woman . . . of about the same age as the second Cathcart daughter would have been' in 1768. The bust is indeed of a young woman – not a child of 11 – and there seems no need to argue this point. I am not absolutely sure that the bust must be of any Cathcart, but if so it is presumably of the correctly termed Miss Cathcart, *i.e.*, the eldest daughter, Jane, born on 20th May 1754. She is mentioned already in a letter of her mother's of 8th February (O.S.) 1768 as liked at the Russian court, particularly by the Empress. This and the other relevant facts will be found in E. Maxtone Graham's *The Beautiful Mrs Graham*, 1927.

MICHAEL LEVEY