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MARTIN BEISLY FINE ART



Sir EDWARD COLEY BURNE-JONES Bt, A.R.A., R.W.S. (British, 1833-1898)

*Design for a stained-glass window for Nun Monkton, Yorkshire: Repose on the flight from Egypt, St Mary and the Infant Christ*

Pencil, on buff paper

Inscribed 'Nun Monkton/side light right/repose' (upper left) and further inscribed and numbered 'S.F. 223./96a' (upper right)

34 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 26 in. (88.4 x 66 cm.) sight size

44 x 34 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (111.8 x 88.4 cm.) (framed)

**Provenance:**

Probably William J. Webbe (1830-1904?)

John Young Hunter (1874–1955),

then by descent to Marcia Rider

**Related literature:**

A.C. Sewter, *The Stained Glass of William Morris and his Circle: A Catalogue*, New Haven and London, 1975, pp. 143 and 313.

Douglas E. Schoenherr, 'The 'Cartoon Book' and Morris & Company's Sale of Burne-Jones's Cartoons in 1901-1904', *The Journal of Stained-Glass*, Vol XXIX, 2005.

Douglas E. Schoenherr, *The Journal of Stained-Glass Burne-Jones Special Issue*, Vol XXXV, 2011, pp. 141, 210.

**Related photograph:**

Frederick Hollyer, After Morris & Co., After Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones,  
Virgin and Child stained-glass design

photograph

1873

Merton Abbey, London, England

Dimensions: 20 cm x 14.6 cm

*'The finest stained glass in the West Riding'*

This previously unrecorded stained-glass window design by Burne-Jones was executed especially for the east window of the church of St Mary's, Nun Monkton, Yorkshire in 1873: A.C. Sewter remarking on Pevsner's observation wrote of the window, 'Pevsner's comment 'the finest stained glass in the West Riding was not exaggerated'.<sup>1</sup>

St. Mary's Church, Nun Monkton is all that remains of the medieval Benedictine nunnery, founded in 1153, that gave the village its name. The nunnery was dissolved by King Henry VIII in 1536, but after the reformation its priory chapel became the parish church of St Mary's, Nun Monkton. In keeping with prevailing way of thinking of time the interior of the church was plain and undecorated until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, however during the Victorian period, led by the Oxford Movement, there was an increasing emphasis on ritual and ceremony within collective worship to distinguish it from the everyday and designate it as a special act. This attitude resulted in a revival of interest in the medieval period, considered to be the highpoint of Christianity in Britain, and its architecture, and in turn this spurred what was termed 'The Gothic Revival'.

It was against this backdrop that St. Mary's Church was redecorated in the Gothic style between 1869 and 1873. As Suzanne Fagence Cooper notes, 'The Gothic was not just a style, but a way of thinking about art and life. It was based on natural forms of leaves, flowers and trees.... The great propagandist for Gothic architecture, John Ruskin, made the Victorians look at medieval buildings afresh. He showed them how the best of the medieval could be recreated for the modern world. Ruskin demonstrated the continuing vitality of the Gothic style: it could 'coil into a staircase, [or] spring into a spire, with undegraded grace and unexhausted energy'.

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<sup>1</sup> A.C. Sewter, *The Stained Glass of William Morris and his Circle: A Catalogue*, New Haven and London, 1975, p. 143, hereafter 'Sewter' quoting N. Pevsner, *Yorkshire and The West Riding*, 1975, p. 384.

The Gothic was not just about pointed arches, but about ‘grace and energy’ in buildings and in their decoration. The stained-glass windows of Nun Monkton are a perfect example of the Gothic revival in practice.’<sup>2</sup>



The East window of St Mary's Church, Nun Monkton, Yorkshire.

Between 1869 and 1873 the East End of St Mary's, Nun Monkton was re-built and decorated to reflect this change in thinking. Isaac Crawhall, Lord of the Manor and owner of the Priory church since 1860, paid for a large proportion of the rebuilding and redecoration with contributions from the villagers, the total cost was a substantial £4,400. The East window, to which the present drawing relates, features St Anne and scenes from the life of the Virgin, and commemorates Ann Crawhall, Isaac's wife, and mother of this children, who died in 1860. Therefore, it is no surprise that the choice of subject reflects the church's dedication to St Mary and features St Anne, the mother of Mary.

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<sup>2</sup> Suzanne Fagence Cooper, *A Pre-Raphaelite Masterpiece in Yorkshire: The Stained Glass of St. Mary's, Nun Monkton*, 23 May 2012, online article.

The east window has three large lancets, each with four subjects one above the other (fig. 1). The left lancet from the top shows a full-length angel with mandolin, and two angels each with a harp, underneath is Burne Jones's *St Anne teaching the Virgin*, the central light consists of a crown, beneath which is a full-length angel with a dulcimer, followed by *The Nativity* with a choir of angels above, with *The Annunciation* beneath. The right light from the top has three full-length angels with a harp, pipe and organ respectively and then the window which relates to the present cartoon: *The Virgin and child in repose in Egypt*.



Detail of the East window of St. Mary's Church, Nun Monkton, showing the Virgin in Repose.

The figures are all set against a background of dense foliage, without divisions except below the Nativity which bears the inscription 'verbum caro factum est alleluia alleluia [The Word was made flesh alleluia alleluia].' The angels were all designed by Morris and the scenes from the life of the Virgin at the bottom of each light by Burne-Jones. Interestingly Burne-Jones's design was reversed in order to balance *St Anne teaching the Virgin* in the left light of the window. The design for St Anne, was originally designed in 1873 for a two light window on the north side of the chancel of St James's Church, Brighouse, Yorkshire, which also included another design for *The Repose in Egypt*, the only other example of this subject by Burne-Jones.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Sewter, p. 32, pl. 470, for which Burne-Jones was also paid £10.

Therefore, Burne-Jones designed two different *Reposes* in the same year, re-considering the subject and making it more tender for Nun Monkton.<sup>4</sup>

Although Burne-Jones's stained-glass window designs continued in use thirty or more years after his death, unlike the other designs for the east window, the present cartoon was designed especially for Nun Monkton and was the sole use of this version of *The Repose in Egypt*. It depicts the Virgin and child escaping from Herod and unusually for the treatment of this subject there are no background details such as pyramids and camels to elucidate the subject. Burne-Jones has simplified it down to its essence- the miracle of God made man.

Documentary evidence for the window consists of an entry in Burne-Jones's account book dated June 1873: 'A Repose, Nunmonkton. £10.' and the entry in Philip Webb's (1831-1915) account book, dated 15 May 1873: 'Monogram and Crown (Nun Moncton)...£1:10:0'.<sup>5</sup> Sewter records a design for the left and centre lancets, dated 5 December 1872<sup>6</sup> and eb-j.org includes a pencil sketch of the *Virgin at the foot of the cross* inscribed 'Nun Monkton', but this was presumably unexecuted. The present drawing is an important addition to the artist's oeuvre of stained glass designs.

The letters and number 'S.F. 223' in the upper right corner of the drawing refers to the Firm's later cartoon filing system. The cartoon was filed in the Firm's original filing system under the number '96a' (also in the upper right corner), the 'a' indicating that it was the original drawing, (subsequent letters (b), (c) etc indicating second, third or even further copies as there were often several versions of the same design and designs were often enlarged or reduced in scale). A Hollyer photographic record in the Huntington Library (fig. 3) shows the same design as the present cartoon annotated with 'S.P. 223' and numbered '96a' and also annotated with H.C. Marillier's<sup>7</sup> photographic negative number (561), which was the numbering system followed by Sewter, in his unrivalled work on Morris stained glass.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting that the Hollyertype reproduction was possibly made after a later stage in the window's production as it is clearly squared for transfer and with additional background details sketched in.

Morris and Company were the most successful glass makers of their generation. Morris had thought about forming a company to produce high-quality artist-designed objects since his time as a student at Oxford and he was heavily influenced by the writings of art critic John Ruskin. Morris's ideas were made reality partly as a consequence of his discovery that he was unable to buy furnishings of the kind he wanted for his new marital home the Red House, Bexley Heath, which was designed and built by Morris's architect friend Philip Webb. In his biography of Morris, Mackail writes, "The notion of building a house after his own fancy was one which had already been in Morris's mind for a considerable time. He wanted it not merely as a place to live in, but as a fixed centre and background for his artistic work. He hated designing in the air, without relation to a definite material and a particular purpose. While his whole work as a decorative manufacturer may be not untruly said to have sprung directly out of the building and furnishing of this house, it would almost be equally true to say that the house, first in idea and then in fact, sprung out of his devoting himself to the practice of decorative art and requiring, as one might say, a canvas to work on."<sup>9</sup> The Firm was formally established in April 1861 with seven partners.

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<sup>4</sup> See W. Waters, eb-j.org, 08/11/20.

<sup>5</sup> Sewter, p. 143. and Schoenherr, *op.cit.* p. 141.

<sup>6</sup> Sewter, *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> H.C. Marillier was the Morris's last managing director.

<sup>8</sup> Sewter, vol. II, p. vi. and p. 143.

<sup>9</sup> J.W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, London, 1911, vol. I, pp. 139-140.



Hollyvertype reproduction of the cartoon of the Virgin in Repose, Nun Monkton, image from eb-j.org

*'The growth of decorative art in this country ... has now reached a point at which it seems desirable that artists of reputation should devote their time to it.'*

- Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co prospectus, 1861

Besides Morris himself, the partners consisted of his closest friend, Edward Burne-Jones, whom he had met at Pembroke College, Oxford. Edward Burne-Jones was the Firm's chief designer of tapestry and stained glass. His ability to draw figures complemented Morris's talent for repeat patterns and decorative detail. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), a founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, painter and a poet, who was slightly older than both Morris and Burne Jones and well-connected in the artistic and bohemian circles which were essential to the successful launch of the new Firm. Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), although not a formal member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, was closely associated with them, being slightly older than the others he was something of a senior figure within the group. Philip Webb (1831-1915), an architect, built the Red House for Morris and was a colleague of Morris during his brief spell at George Street's architect practice. Charles Faulkner (1833-1892) was a friend of Morris and Burne-Jones from their time at Oxford. He was a mathematics don and trained as an engineer. Initially Faulkner kept the accounts, but he was also an amateur painter and contributed to tile painting for the Firm. The final original member of the Firm was Peter

Paul Marshall (1830-1900), a surveyor and sanitary engineer by profession, but also a friend and pupil of Madox Brown and a talented amateur painter.

The Firm began its activities at 8 Red Lion Square, Holborn with a nominal capital of £7 consisting of seven single shares of £1 contributed by each partner. This tiny amount was supplemented by an unsecured loan of £100 from Morris's mother and, on 15 January 1862, by a further call on the partners of £19 each, making a total capital of £240. The partners described themselves as 'Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co, Fine Art Workman in Painting, Carving and the Metals', but from the beginning stained glass occupied an important place in their activities. Their designs had drawn attention at the International Exhibition in London in 1862 with their designs and the Firm quickly expanded and in June 1865 moved from Red Lion Square to larger premises at 26 Queen Square, Bloomsbury, London.

The present design dates from perhaps what could be seen as the second phase of the Firm's development after 1869, when Burne-Jones's share of responsibility gradually increased and 'it was in connection with his cartoons that Morris's colouristic imagination was stimulated to its highest flights'.<sup>10</sup> Characteristic of this period of the Firm's output is the use and exploration of types of a foliate background, which became characteristic of a great many later Morris windows with some taking a more naturalised form, whereas those at Nun Monkton are a somewhat more formalised willow pattern and less naturalistic, the background is lightly sketched in within our drawing. As Sewter notes Morris's windows at this date were 'inclining steadily towards richer effects of texture tone and colour'.<sup>11</sup> These backgrounds had 'the great advantage of giving dramatic emphasis to the figures and enhancing by means of the deep surrounding tones the brilliant yellows, blues, reds and green of their robes. It was in windows of this type that Morris was most eminently a colourist and ventured with unmatched boldness'.<sup>12</sup> During this period Burne-Jones produced designs of great vigour matched by the boldness of Morris's colour, their pictorial tendencies gained new momentum, with single figure compositions filling the entire expanse or one subject extending over three lights, totally integrated. As Sewter concludes, 'these immensely productive years, full of experiment and rich in creative enterprise, may thus be regarded in some sense as the Firm's best period, Morris's own participation in the work of the studio, especially as colourist and as designer of backgrounds, was still active and intimate; Burne-Jones's powers as designer had reached maturity ... with a new pictorialism which was yet restrained, with very few exceptions, by a sense of the limitations of the window as an architectural member'.<sup>13</sup>

In March 1875 the original partnership of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co was dissolved and Morris bought out the others with an agreed payment of £1000 each. This followed difficult discussions with Rossetti and Madox causing a permanent breach between them and Morris, although Webb, Burne-Jones and Faulkner remained close friends and continued to work for The Firm. They were paid fees for each piece of work undertaken but no longer as partners. In the 1870s Morris & Co. produced a more diverse range of products designed to appeal to a wider customer base, with hand-printed textiles, design schemes for more affluent clients and cheaper ranges for the less well off.

The enduring influence of Morris & Co.'s designs can be seen in the provenance of this work. It was probably the drawing in the collection of the Victorian artist William James Webb,<sup>14</sup> a disciple of William Holman

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<sup>10</sup> Sewter, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> Sewter, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> Sewter, p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> Sewter, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> We are grateful to Scott Thomas Buckle for drawing our attention to Douglas E. Schoenherr's article, 'The 'Cartoon Book' and Morris & Company's Sale of Burne-Jones's Cartoons in 1901-1904', in the *The Journal of Stained-Glass*, Vol

Hunt and a painter of rustic scenes, allegorical subjects and detailed animal pictures. It then entered the collection of another artist John Young Hunter, son of the marine painter Colin Hunter, R.A. (1841-1904), who was a friend of John Singer Sargent. Young Hunter was influenced in his own painting by the Pre-Raphaelites.

This stained glass cartoon, dating from a period noted for the quality of its creations, is both a beautiful and tender depiction of divine motherhood and provides a valuable insight into the design process for one arguably one of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co most beautiful stained-glass creations.

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XXIX, 2005, where he notes a second version the Brighthouse *Rest in Egypt*, sold to 'Webbe', which is however inscribed with the same file number as the present work and presumed to be same.