

THE FRAME BLOG



Articles, interviews and reviews to do with antique and modern picture frames

TAG: SEDDON

December 4, 2020

Victorians in London



The late autumn of 2020 has seen an influx of interesting Victorian art into London. *The Joe Setton Collection: from Pre-Raphaelites to Last Romantics* will be auctioned at Christie's on 10th December , and Martin Beisly's gallery in Ryder Street has another tranche of paintings which overlap with those in the sale in several interesting ways. In each there are some striking artist's frames.

The Setton Collection, for example, has a work by Archibald Wakley, who died in his early thirties and is perhaps less known that he could be – his painting of *Sleeping Beauty*.



Archibald Wakley (1873-1906), *Sleeping Beauty*, 1901-03, o/c, 48 x 64 ins (122 x 102.5 cm.), Christie's,
10 December 2020, lot 3

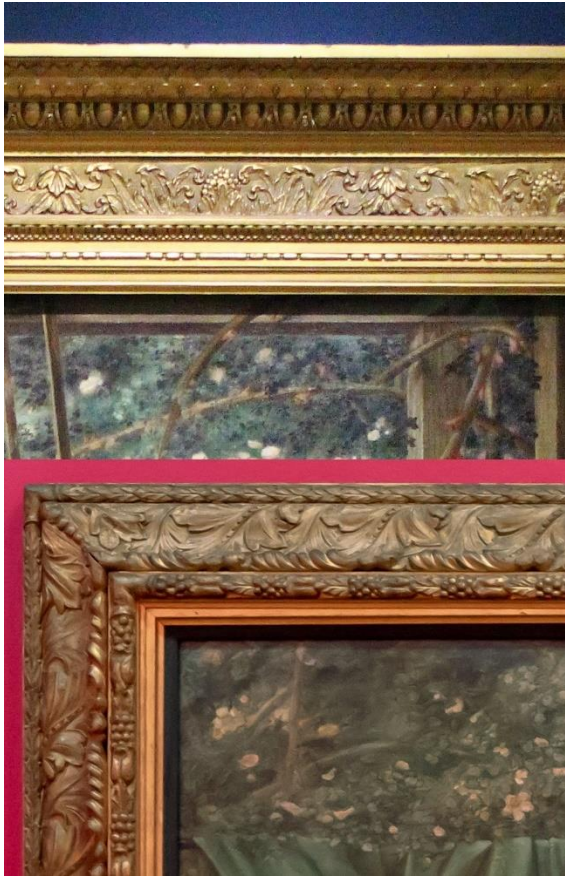




Burne-Jones (1833-98), *The legend of the Briar Rose*, 1871-90, o/c 49 ¼ x 90 ins, with *The rose bower* at extreme right; [Trustees of the Faringdon Collection, Buscot Park](#). Photos: [Howard Stanbury](#)

The catalogue entry remarks the similarities and differences of Wakley's work to and from Burne-Jones's version of the scene (*The rose bower*), in the various sets of paintings known as *The legend of the Briar Rose* which the latter executed from 1869 to 1890. The work on these began from before Wakley was born, and the largest series of four canvases was eventually installed at Buscot Park, Oxon, in a framework of giltwood *boiseries* (with added painted panels) designed by the artist to integrate the original frames with the interior of the saloon. Those four had been exhibited in Agnew's gallery on Bond Street in the summer of 1890, where the young Wakley might well have seen them, as well as in Liverpool, and again in London in 1891, at Toynbee Hall, Whitechapel [1]. Given the closeness of Wakley's reversed composition to that of Burne-Jones's *The rose bower*, and the influence on him, also noted in the catalogue, of Evelyn De Morgan's work, it seems inevitable that he might note and emulate the frames designed or chosen by both artists.

Burne-Jones's Buscot Park paintings and his secondary series of *The legend of the Briar Rose* [2] were given aedicular frames after the artist's design, which seem to have been carried out for him by Agnew's. Up to 1850 the primary business of Thomas Agnew was that of 'Carver, Gilder, Looking Glass, and Picture Frame Manufacturer' in Manchester, where it remained until 1932. Printselling and picture-dealing formed subsidiary trades which grew in importance, until a branch of the business comprising both activities opened in Agnew's Gallery, Waterloo Place, London, in 1860 (later moving to Old Bond Street) [3]. This gallery connected artists with collectors, but also dealt with quite a lot of framing work for the summer exhibition of the Royal Academy via the Manchester manufactory; their daybooks record work framed for artists such as Millais, Thomas Faed and Briton Rivière. Agnew's was thus perfectly placed to execute frames to Burne-Jones's design for the four *Briar Rose* paintings which it had purchased (for £15,000), and probably for the others as well.



Details of the frames for Burne-Jones, *The garden court* (top), Bristol Museum and Art Gallery; and *Rose bower* (bottom), Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin

These aedicular frames featured a wide frieze of waving acanthus leaves, small vine leaves and berries; whilst the different design of the cuckoo frame in Dublin has a bolection profile with a continuous undulating pattern of acanthus leaves, and a torus on the top edge with leaves and berries.



Archibald Wakley, *Sleeping Beauty*, 1901-03, [Christie's](#), detail of frame

Wakley's princess, less other-worldly than Burne-Jones's, seems to have fallen asleep, not inside a palace which has been infiltrated over a hundred years by a tangle of wild (briar) roses, but in an overgrown Victorian garden, full of blowsy deep-pink cabbage roses and forget-me-nots. He was only twenty-eight when he painted her, and almost certainly unable to afford the theatrical Renaissance-revival splendour of the elder painter's frames; however, he has rather cleverly chosen a *cassetta* with a wide frieze of compo bay leaves – which would have been available in any contemporary framemaker's workshop – but here they are obviously meant to be understood as masquerading as rose leaves, enfolding the whole scene appropriately in a spectacular rosy garland.



Archibald Wakley(1873-1906), *A royal princess*, watercolour, 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 24 $\frac{3}{4}$ ins (50.2 x 62.9 cm.), [Christie's, London, 15 November 2012, lot 10](#)

His watercolour of a (slightly) more lively princess was given an acanthus leaf-&-berry frame much closer to the motifs in the details of Burne-Jones's frames, above, indicating that he must indeed have taken quite close note of them at some point.



John Byam Shaw (1872-1919), *The Queen of Hearts*, 1896, o/c., 36 x 28 ins (91.4 x 71.1 cm.), and detail, [Christie's](#), 10 December 2020, lot 5. Photo of detail: with thanks to Jacob Simon

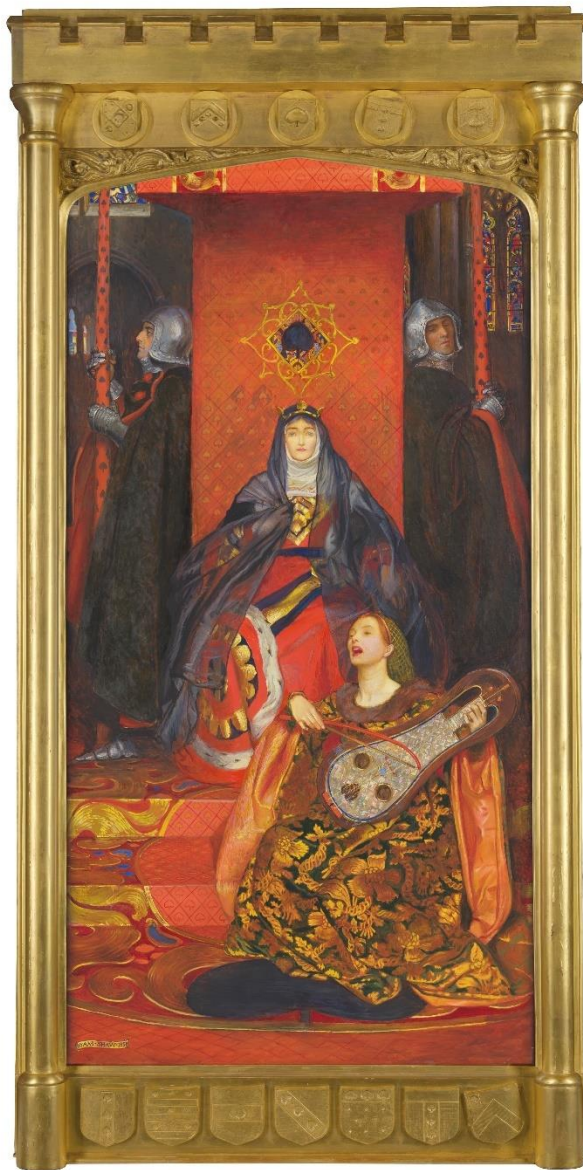
Byam Shaw, a year older than Wakley, was likewise inspired by the Pre-Raphaelites and their frame designs – in his case more directly by Millais and Rossetti. He was also, like Rossetti and Burne-Jones, versatile, designing theatrical costumes and stained glass, and producing book illustrations and murals.

His frames are particularly eclectic in their use of different techniques and materials; in the example above, the heart motifs seem to spread up the flat surface of the canvas from their seed-like scattering of playing cards on the painted floor, growing in size as they gather on the hem of the vast outspread mantle, flying up the costumes of the ladies-in-waiting, and bubbling out onto the top rail of the frame. Here they join a series of applied rosettes on the frieze of a conventional *cassetta*; but they bring anarchy, asymmetry and an idiosyncratic touch of handcraft with them; they are made of gesso or compo, applied on an area of the frieze which has also been textured with a heart-shaped punch. This setting of the flat, decorative treatment of the painted surface and frame against the three-dimensional treatment of the main figure creates a tension in the overall effect which arrests the attention. It is also reminiscent of the similar tension found in tapestry design – another area which Byam Shaw experimented with.



John Byam Shaw (1872-1919), *When alone she sits with her music and books*, 1899, o/c, 13 x 10 ins (33 x 24.4 cm.), Freeman's Auctions, lot 56

The frame of *When alone...* (quoting the poem, Tennyson's 'Maud') was made only three years later, but seems almost Secessionist in style, with its clean lines, severe rectilinearity and non-classical proportions. There are hearts here, too, but they look out of place on the minimalist white predella panel which holds the title, and in proximity to the tiled mother-o'-pearl frieze beneath the painting. The small inset bronze plaque on the right, which Byam Shaw has signed with his monogram, is more Arts & Crafts than Secessionist, but it balances the oblong painted plaque at the top, inscribed 'MAVD' as though on a Roman stele. Singular, innovative and avant-garde, this frame takes the unVictorian-ness of Holman Hunt's art deco tendencies several steps further, but seems to have had little if any external influence, nor to have been carried on in Shaw's own work. Even the painting it contains has a 19th century Romantic cottagey feeling which hardly lives up to its container.



John Byam Shaw (1872-1919), *The Queen of Spades*, 1898, watercolour/ paper, 70 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 36 ins (178 x 91.5 cm.), [Christie's](#), 10 December 2020, lot 9

Byam Shaw's *Queen of Spades* is also in the sale; it contrasts with *The Queen of Hearts* in almost every possible way – medium (watercolour), size and shape (it's twice as tall and nine sevenths as wide), and sitter (older, dourer, darkly veiled), etc. It is the winter to the spring of the earlier painting; and its frame is suitably different. Rather than a simple open *cassette*, decorated with rosettes and hearts, this is a tall NeoGothic tower with a crenellated top, an arched sight beneath a frieze with coats of arms, lateral gothicizing columns, and a predella panel with further coats of arms. The youthful, beautiful Queen of Hearts, who seems to be walking out of her picture to discover life and love, is displaced by the cynical older Queen, who has been betrayed by the King of Spades and has driven out the maids whom he kissed, leaving her sitting with one maid and two guards in a towering militaristic cupboard.



Philip Webb (1831-1915), Burne-Jones (1833-98), *The Prioress's Tale* wardrobe, 1859, polychrome pine and oak, 219.7 x 157.5 x 53.7 cm., [Ashmolean Museum, Oxford](#). Photo: with thanks to A. Neve

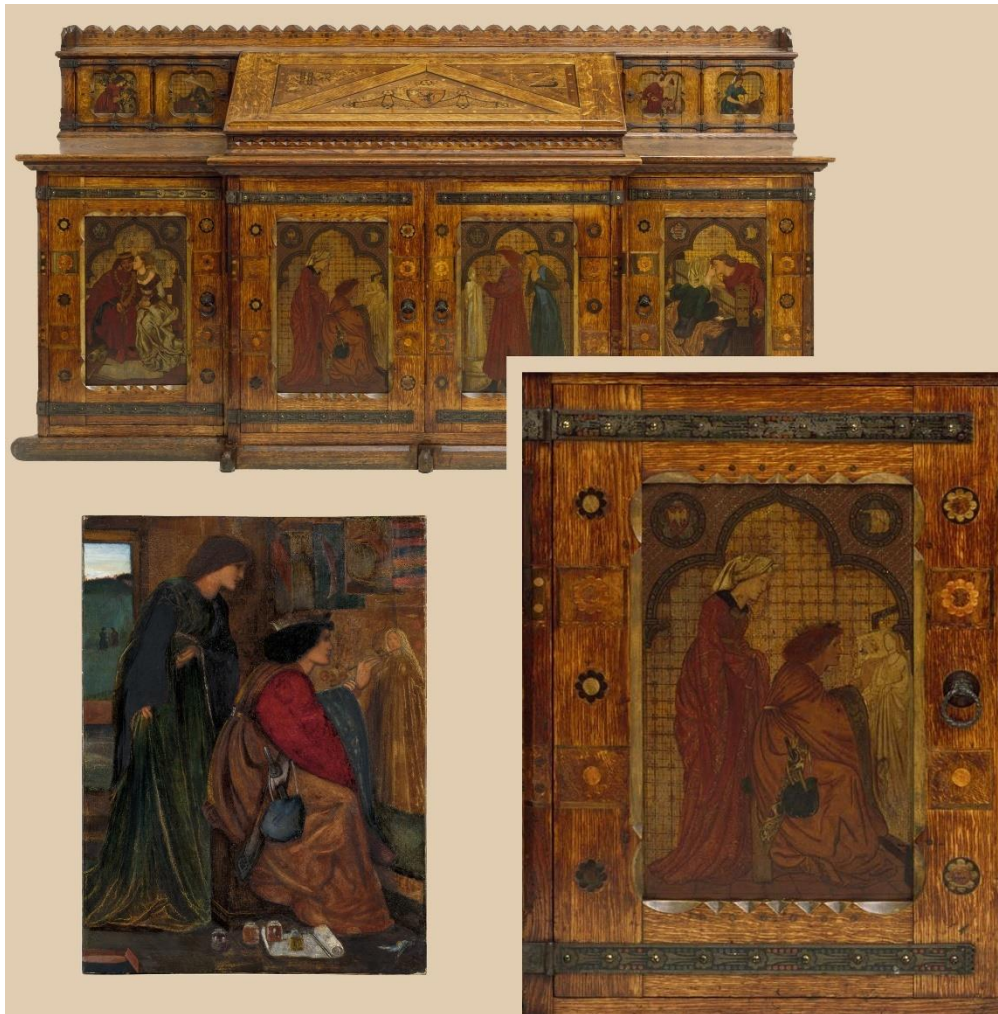
In fact, this setting is much closer to Victorian Gothic revival furniture than it is to contemporary picture frames; it is especially reminiscent of *The Prioress's Tale* wardrobe, designed by Philip Webb, painted by Burne-Jones, and owned by William Morris; and of cabinets and architectural fittings by William Burges. Byam Shaw worked for Morris & Co., after the death of Morris himself, and was in sympathy with its Arts & Crafts style.

The combination of furniture built on mediaeval (or at least Puginesque) lines, and decorated with painted scenes – often surrounded by architectural niches, arches and columned borders – had far less to do with interiors of the Middle Ages than the imagination of the second half of the 19th century; but it was charming, colourful, and a great deal more attractive than the heavyweight mahogany mammoths it was designed to displace. Byam Shaw's use of it as a picture frame as late as 1898 is far from an anachronistic and attenuated survival; it is an operative device, which – like all the best frames – expands on the meaning of the painting



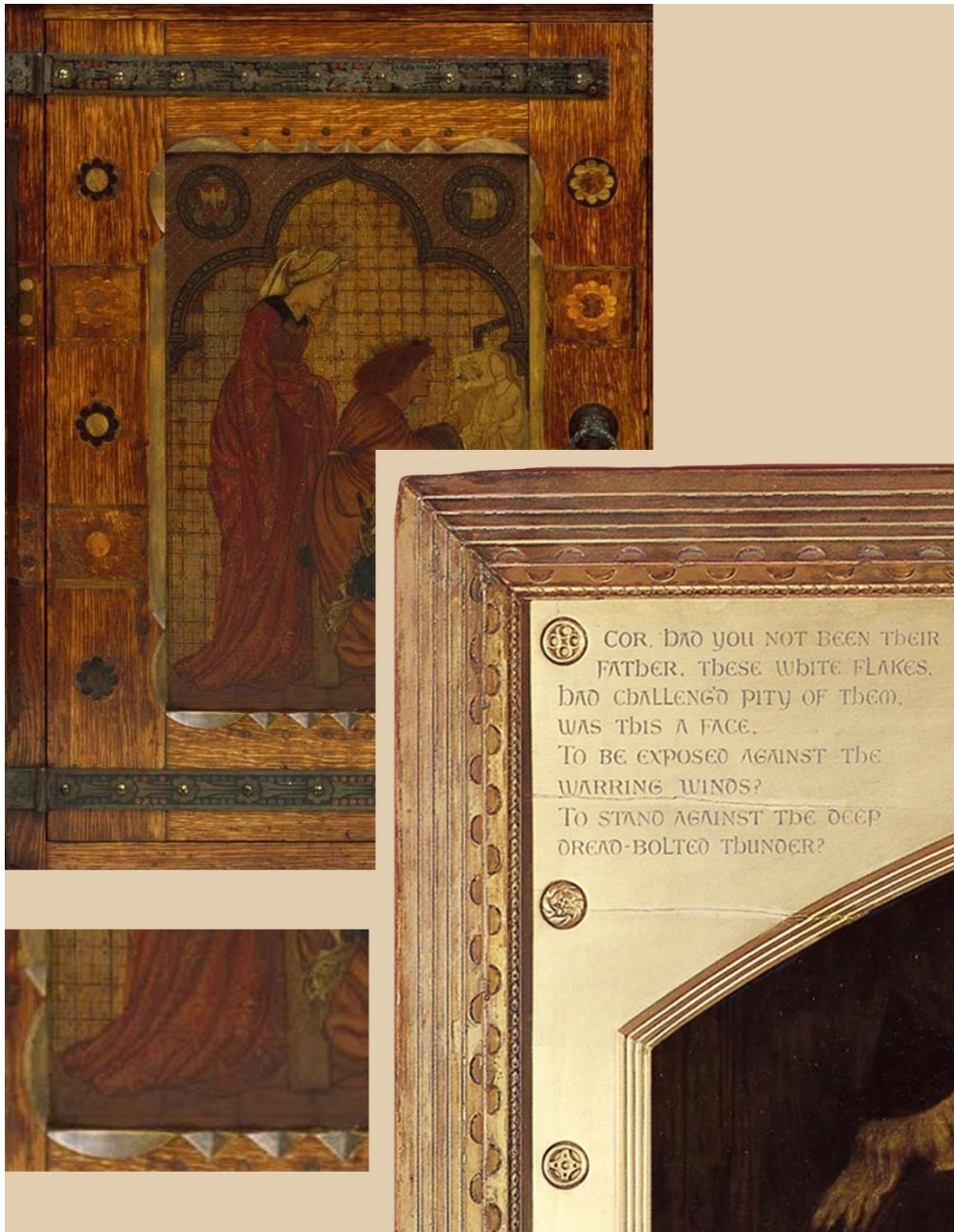
itself.

Burne-Jones (1833-98), *King René's honeymoon: Painting*, water- & bodycolour on paper, 24 x 16 ins (61 x 40.6 cm.), Christie's, 10 December 2020, lot 24



John Seddon (1827-1906), with FM Brown, Rossetti, Morris, Burne-Jones, Val Prinsep; *King René's honeymoon cabinet*, 1861, oak inlaid with various woods, metal, polychrome, 133.4 x 252 x 87 cm., © [Victoria and Albert Museum](#); with detail of painted door (left) and Burne-Jones's painting (right)

Another painting in the Setton Collection which has affiliations with NeoGothic furniture is Burne-Jones's *King René's honeymoon*. Its frame is a replacement, but it is the context of the painting which is important – the fact that it is a worked-up study for one of the painted panels on the cabinet of the same name, designed by John Seddon for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Company. Interestingly, the doors of the cabinet, which combine a 'frame' for each painted panel, are extremely close in their construction and ornament to the early Pre-Raphaelite frames designed for their paintings by Ford Madox Brown and Rossetti.



John Seddon (1827-1906), *King René's honeymoon cabinet*, 1861; FM Brown, Lear and Cordelia, 1849-54, frame c.1863, *Tate*, details

Both use oak (gilded directly on the wood, in the case of the picture frames); are joined at the corners with butt joints rather than mitres; are carved, inset or inlaid with decorative paterae; and feature a moulding (the top edge in the picture frames, the sight edge in the cabinet) which is cut away in a series of geometric 'bites'. In the cabinet, this decorative 'bitten' edge includes arcs of a circle, triangular indents, and long, deep bevels with curved ends; in the frames the indents are semi-circles, and the motif rejoices in the title, Rossetti's 'thumb-mark' pattern. The gilt oak frames seem to date from around 1861, the date of the cabinet; so it is intriguing to speculate which came first, and whether John Seddon may have had a hitherto unsuspected influence on these early PRB frames.

Another design which dates from the 1860s is the 'Watts' frame, which came into use some time between 1861 and 1864, although it can't be ascribed, despite its name, to any one artist [4].



G.F. Watts (1817-1904), *Tennyson*, [National Gallery of Victoria](#); detail & section of 'Watts' frame taken from the Gallery website, after the illustrated entry in John Payne, *Framing the Nineteenth Century*, Images Publishing, Mulgrave, Victoria, 2007

It became quite quickly the most popular style for every kind of subject and style during the last third of the 19th century: it combined Italian Renaissance elements with avant-garde features (such as a gilt oak butt-jointed frieze, as pioneered by FM Brown and Rossetti) in a relatively simple form; it used the oak veneer alongside compo ornament, so was both straightforward to make whilst retaining some interest and stylishness; it could be produced in any size [5]; and there was also an enriched variant of it for special occasions. Jacob Simon has noted a comment two decades on, in an article by Luther Hooper in *The Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher* of 1883, that,

'Fully one-third of the pictures at the various exhibitions for some years past have been framed in mouldings of this pattern in its various sizes, and it is indeed the only pattern of a really satisfactory character for wide frames in the market.' [6]

There are a number of works by G.F. Watts and also by other artists in the Setton Collection which are framed in this pattern (or variants of it); some of them more authentic than others.



G.F. Watts (1817-1904), *A study with the peacock's feathers*, o/panel, 24 ½ x 20 ½ ins (62.2 x 52.1 cm.), Christie's, 10 December 2020, lot 6

The very striking Watts painting, *A study with the peacock's feathers*, for instance, which also dates from the mid-1860s, has been given at some point what could be described as a 'Watts-ish' frame which has been cut down from something larger (the corner configurations have disappeared) and probably much later – the imbricated bud at the sight edge, which Watts seems to prefer for his work, has been changed to a running husk ornament, the astragal-&-triple bead which usually sits under the top edge has become an interrupted astragal, and the frieze is mitred rather than butt-jointed.



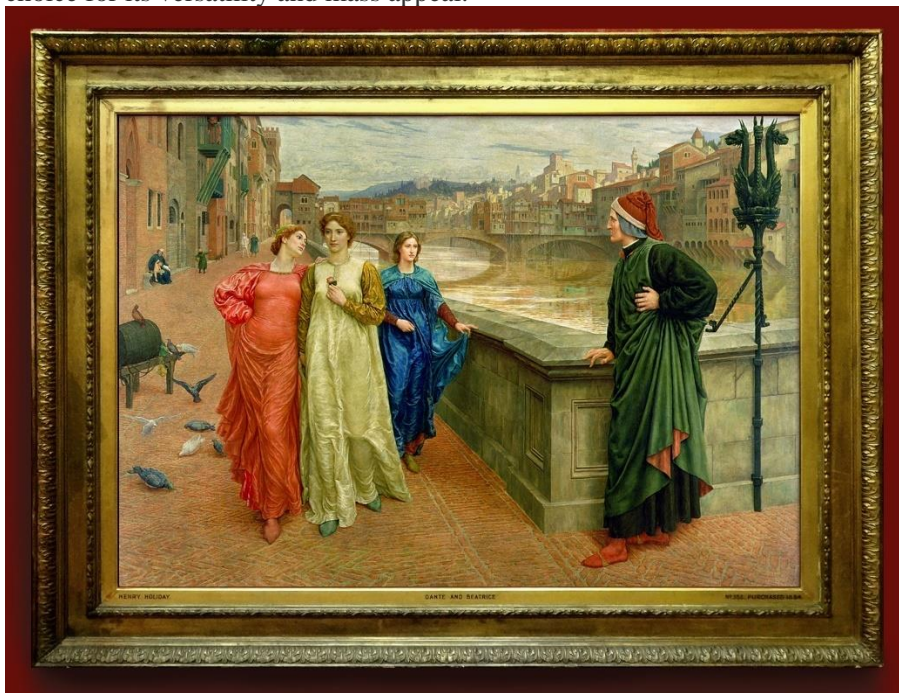
G.F. Watts (1817-1904), *Ellen Terry (Choosing)*, c.1864, o/ board, 18 ⁵/₈ x 13 ⁷/₈ ins (47.2 x 35.2 cm.), [National Portrait Gallery](#). Photo: ©2015 Tim Pickford-Jones

Watts had just painted the young Ellen Terry, briefly his wife, in *Choosing*, which was framed in the enriched version of this style with a gessoed frieze punched in an undulating leaf pattern, and it may be that this was Watts's original choice for the frame of *The peacock's feathers* – something altogether closer to an Italian model – pointing up the association with nudes by Titian and Giorgione. But Watts did like antique and replica Italian frames, too, and may have painted this work to fit one which he had previously bought – one which later taste mistook for a collector's intervention, and disposed of. The status of historic frames is a tangled and thorny problem.



Henry Holiday (1839-1927), *Sara, belle d'indolence*, exh. RA 1879, water- and body- colour, 17 ¼ x 26 ¼ ins (44 x 66.5 cm.), [Christie's, 10 December 2020, lot 15](#)

Another painting in the Setton Collection with a 'Watts' frame is Henry Holiday's *Sara, belle d'indolence*, a harmony in blues and greens for which the gilding provides a complementary foil, whilst echoing the tones of the hammock and sleeping girl. The frieze may have been resurfaced and rather anachronistically redecorated, and there is no sight moulding; however, one of Holiday's more famous works – *Dante and Beatrice* – can be found in an aged and conventional 'Watts' frame, perhaps indicating that it was the artist's choice for its versatility and mass appeal.



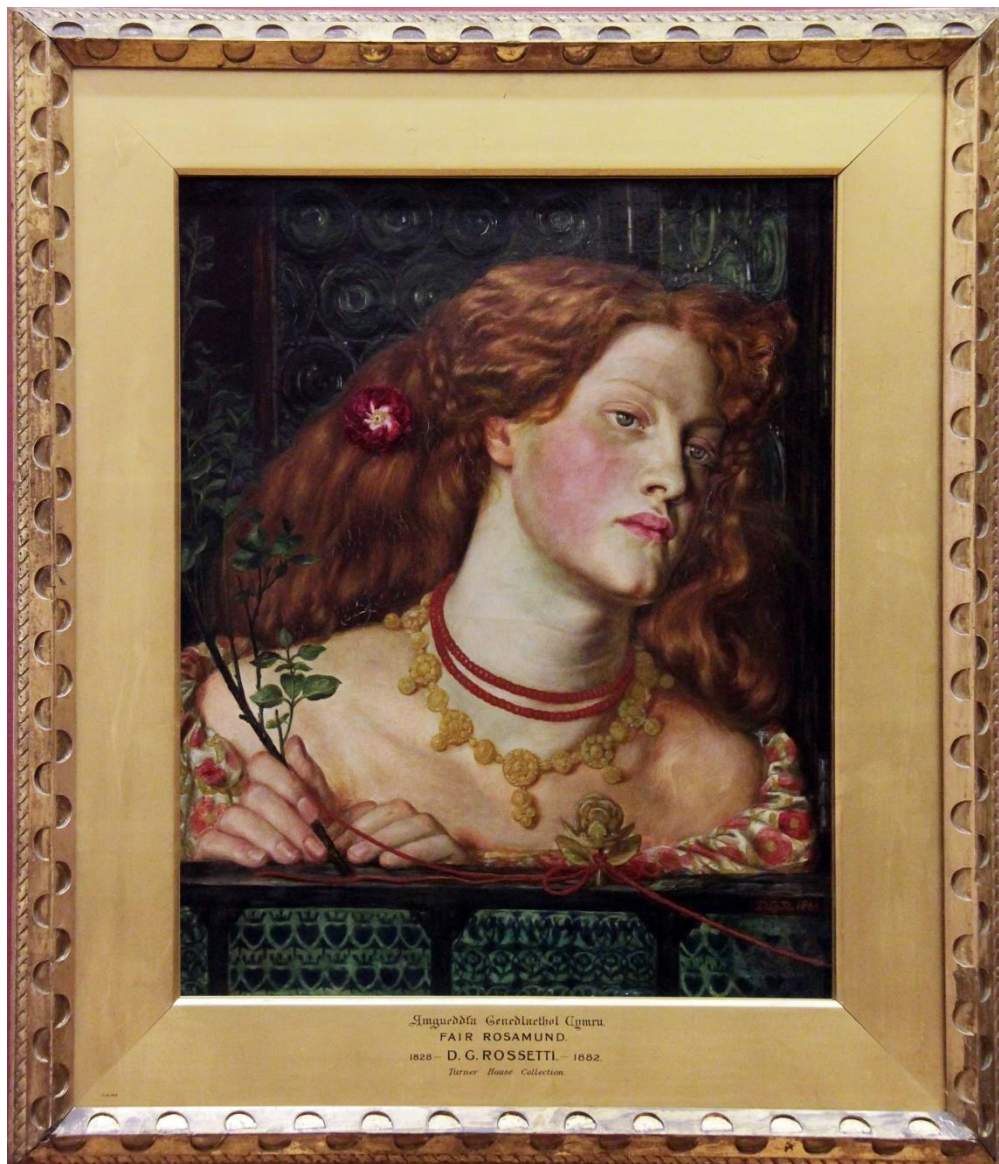


Henry Holiday (1839-1927), *Dante and Beatrice*, 1882-84, o/c, 142.2 x 203.2 cm., Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

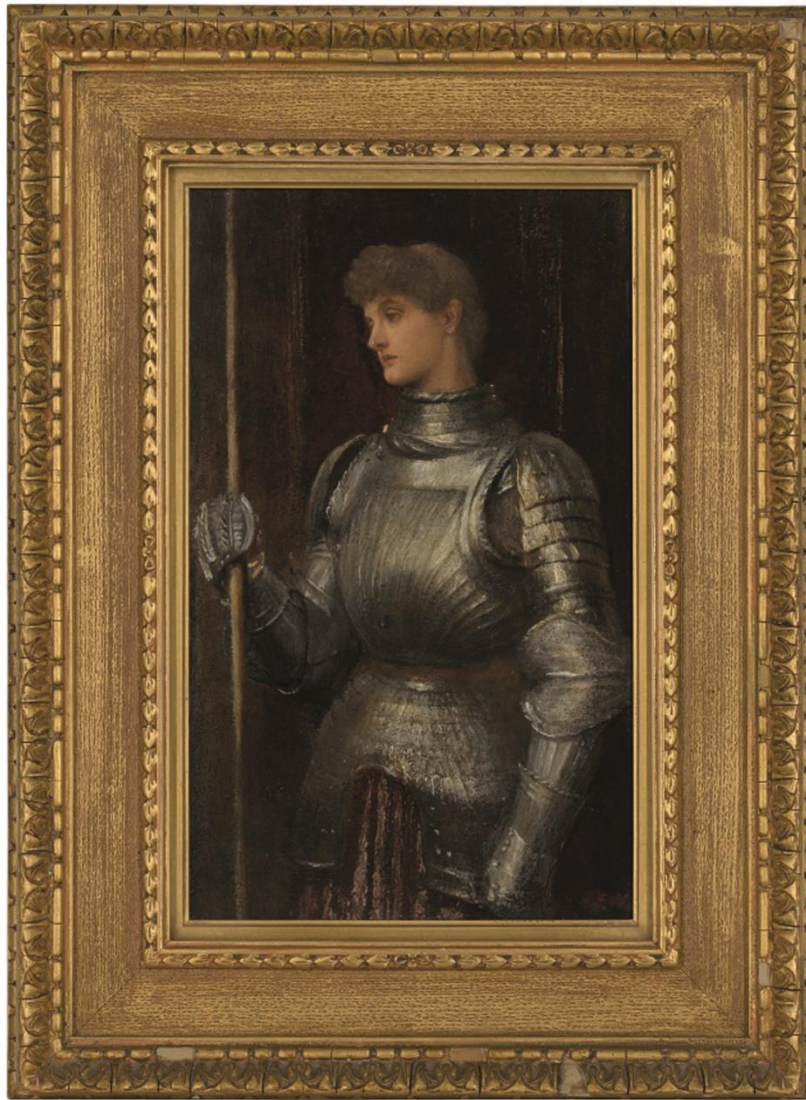


Henry Holiday (1839-1927), *Dante Alighieri*, exh. RA 1875, water- & body- colour, 25 x 19 ½ ins (63.5 x 49.5 cm.), Christie's, 10 December 2020, lot 21

This is supported by lot 21 in the Setton Collection; it has the outer mouldings of a contemporary ‘Watts’ frame, an idiosyncratic leaf pattern punched on the frieze; and a clever conversion of the sight mouldings to a subsidiary plain frieze and deep bevel at the sight edge. This inner section emphasizes the window-like opening of the frame onto the marble parapet and the shallow, curtained space in which the poet stands; it undercuts the flatness of the composition, giving much greater depth to the foreground, and highlighting the thrust of the book and paper forwards, over the sill of the parapet.

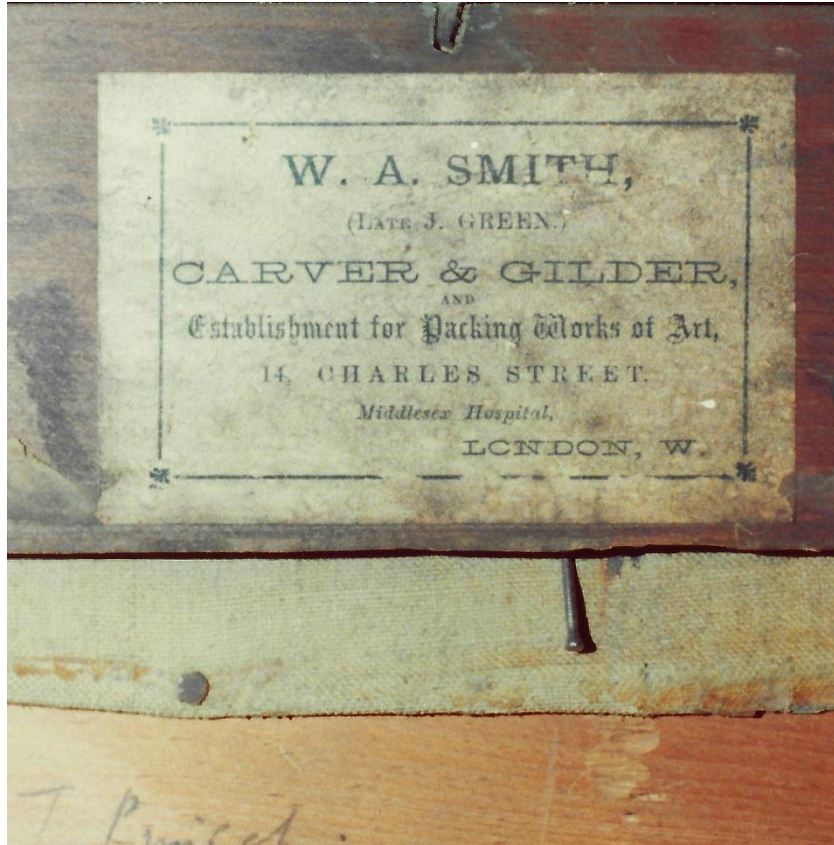


D.G. Rossetti (1828-82), *Fair Rosamund*, 1861, o/c, 51.9 x 41.7 cm., [National Museum of Wales, Cardiff](#)
Holiday must have been echoing the composition of Rossetti's 1860s small bust-length portraits of women, set in a similarly shallow space, frequently behind a sill: but with these, the wide friezes and geometric thumb-mark mouldings of Rossetti's frames intensify the lack of recession and decorative flatness of the image. Holiday's remaking of the 'Watts' frame for *Dante* is an imaginative and effective reversal of this tendency towards abstraction, helping instead to enhance the volumetric presence of the portrait.



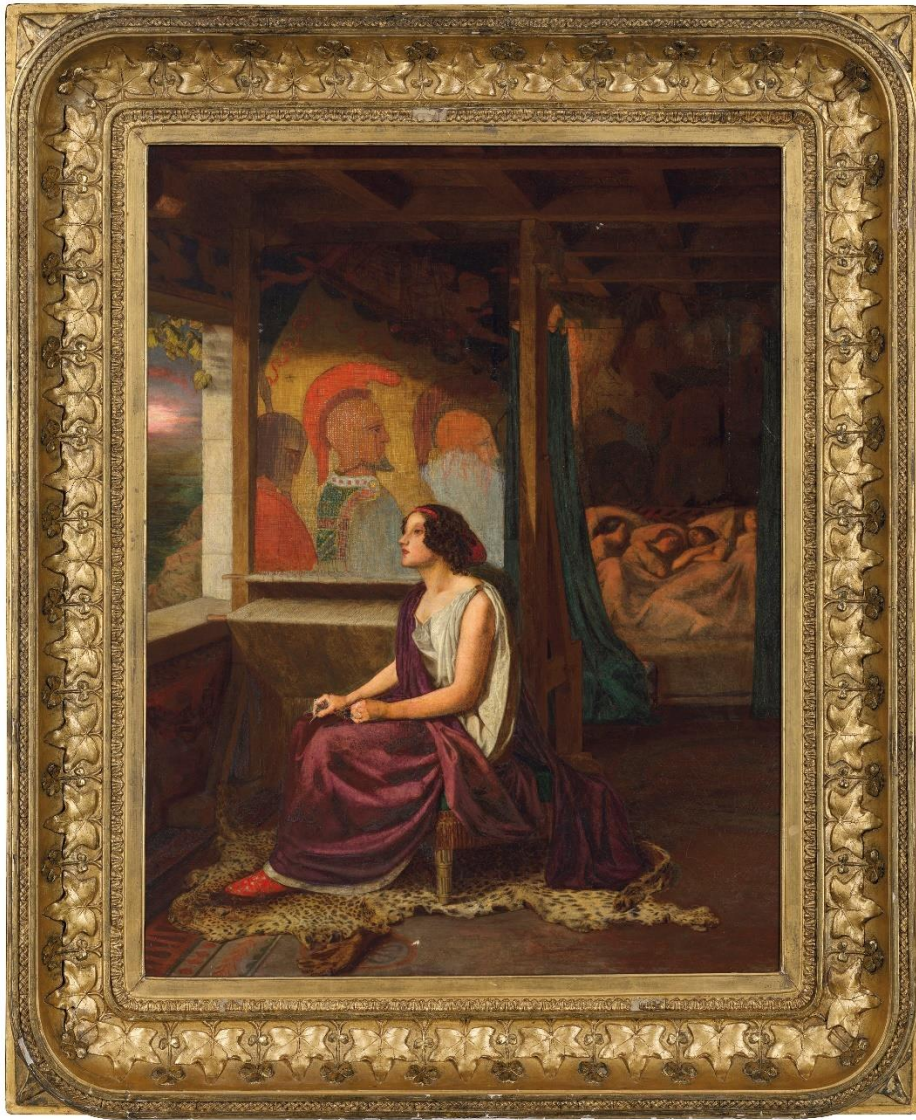
G.F. Watts (1817-1904), *Joan of Arc*, o/panel, 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 7 $\frac{5}{8}$ ins (32.4 x 19.5 cm.), and detail of labels on reverse; Christie's, 10 December 2020, lot 32

Another work by Watts himself in the Setton sale is his *Joan of Arc* of c.1880; this has a 'Watts' frame, but it appears to have been fitted later to the painting from a larger work, with an inlay to fill the gap at the sight edge. Ironically, this is the only work in the collection to have retained a framemaker's label on the reverse of the painted panel, although even this has been obscured by the Agnew's label pasted on top of it. If we were able to see more than the two ends of it, it would look something like a slightly later and more decorative version of this:



Framemaker's label of W.A. Smith, on reverse of G.F. Watts, *Thoby Prinsep*, 1871, [Watts Gallery](#)
W.A. Smith (William Augustine) took over the business of Joseph Green the younger, carver and gilder to the Pre-Raphaelites, possibly after the latter became ill in about 1871. Some of Green's artist clients moved to the rival Foord & Dickinson on this takeover, but Watts remained with 'W.A. Smith (late J. Green)' – as both labels above describe him – through all the later iterations of the business until about 1899, when it was taken over by James Bourlet. What the label on *Joan of Arc* shows is that the painting originally had a frame obtained from Watts's usual framemaker, which was probably also a 'Watts' frame – if not the one which contains it now [7].

There are some nicely offbeat and idiosyncratic frames on some of the paintings in the sale; the experiments of the Pre-Raphaelites generally, and the designs specifically of Holman Hunt, and later of Arthur Hughes, Leighton, Alma-Tadema, Poynter, &c., produced rippling circles of custom-made frames well into the first decades of the 20th century. Thomas Seddon, however, the brother of the architect John Seddon, who designed *King René's honeymoon cabinet*, above, was there at the beginning of the PRB, associating particularly with F.M. Brown and Holman Hunt.



Thomas B. Seddon (1821-56), *Penelope 'Then during the day she wove the large web, which at night she unravelled'*, 1852, o/c, 36 x 28 ins (91.4 x 71.1 cm.), and detail, Christie's, 10 December 2020, lot 22

His painting of Penelope, unpicking her weaving at night whilst she waits endlessly for Odysseus to come home from Troy, has a handsome frame in which the single palmettes you might expect on a classical subject are replaced by single ivy leaves, alternating with flowers. F.M. Brown had used ivy-leaf garlands to frame *An English autumn afternoon* (1852-54), and for two family portraits (1837 and 1849) [8]; and Millais wrote to Holman Hunt: ‘I want them (pieces of ivy) for Chiswick the framemaker to cast for a frame he is going to make for the lovers...’ (*A Huguenot* of 1851-52) [9]. 1852 and thereabouts was thus definitely the time of ivy leaf frames, and very decorative they were, too. In Seddon’s case, however, it seems to be used symbolically – probably as indicating a prayer for immortality for the truanting Odysseus, and in opposition to the flowers: anemones for the blood of Adonis and death? or poppies, for sleep? (which Penelope isn’t getting much of).



Thomas Matthews Rooke (1842-1942), *Venus*, o/c, 14 ins diam. (35.6 cm.), [Christie's, 10 December 2020](#),

[lot 11](#)

Another striking frame is the anti-sunburst design on T.M. Rooke’s tondo of *Venus*. Rooke was studio assistant to Burne-Jones for around thirty years, and also worked for Ruskin, recording important but endangered European architecture. He seems to have had the versatility of a ‘Watts’ frame, drawing, painting; working on Burne-Jones’s pictures and things such as the inscriptions on frames, and probably organizing the framing of everything in his employer’s studio; he evidently executed designs for his own frames, as well, others of which have survived.



Thomas Matthews Rooke (1842-1942), *Apollo and the Muses*, o/c, 20 ½ ins diam. (52 cm.), [Christie's](#), 14 November 2013, lot 35

The setting for his tondo of *Apollo and the Muses*, for example, is very much indebted to F.M. Brown's and Rossetti's reed-&-roundel frames, with its square centre-&-corner cassettes decorated with rosettes, and torus of fine reeds. It varies the profile and the rosettes themselves from its model, however; and it is also inscribed on the spandrels of the mount with a poem on the various areas of the arts looked after by the Muses [10], and with decorative sprigs of flowers. This design was probably used for more of the small tondi of various classical gods which Rooke produced.





Thomas Matthews Rooke (1842-1942), *Herod's feast*, 1895, water- and body- colour, 29 ½ x 61 ½ ins (75 x 156.2 cm.), and detail, [Christie's, 16 June 2010, lot 157](#)

Herod's feast has a very much more original frame, which combines a great many motifs in the Egyptian/Assyrian taste taken from [Owen Jones's *The grammar of ornament*](#) (1856), skilfully assembled on an aedicular structure, the shape and free-hand treatment of which increases the feeling of ancient symbols carved in rock, and the Near Eastern-ness of the whole work.



T.M. Rooke, *Venus*, lot 11

The spandrel frame of *Venus* shares this quality of unsettling attention to descriptive detail; it catches the eye partly because of the way it has been arranged. In a conventional sunburst frame the rays fly outwards from the notional centre, getting further apart from each other as they go; but here the rays are flying inwards from each corner towards the figure of Venus. When looked at closely, they can also be seen to be carved with arrows, shooting from all four corners towards the goddess: a direction which makes no logical symbolic sense. Venus is the one who slays with the shafts of love (normally by means of her son's bow, but Eros, or Cupid, isn't about here, and there would hardly be room for him). Why are the arrows shooting towards Venus, rather than outwards from her? Whatever this arrangement is meant to convey – perhaps that Cupid is in every corner of the earth, creating simultaneous havoc with flights of arrows which end in the domain of Love – the optical result is interesting, since it directs the attention firmly towards the tondo and to Venus, and seems to push the painting forward, in Baroque fashion, towards the viewer. The distant seascape reinforces this feeling, since it is evident that the goddess has been painted in a high (possibly Olympian) place, and this height is echoed and enhanced by the illusionistic height conveyed by the frame.

Evelyn De Morgan is represented by work in both the Setton collection and in Martin Beisly's gallery. Lot 1 in the sale at Christie's – *The Light shineth in the darkness* – has been reframed, probably fairly recently, in a version of the gilt oak Pre-Raphaelite reed-&-roundel frame, which certainly suits it in terms of colour.



Evelyn De Morgan (1855-1919), *Gloria in Excelsis*, 1893, o/c, 46 ½ x 31 1/8 ins (118 x 79.3 cm., Christie's, 10 December 2020, lot 8

Lot 8, *Gloria in Excelsis*, must also been reframed – although some while ago – since its current setting is flimsier, flatter, much less sculptural and less laden with ornament than Evelyn De Morgan’s other aedicular frames.



De Morgan’s *Gloria*... hanging on the chimneypiece in the library of Holmestead, Mossley, Liverpool, in 1901; photo by H. Bedford Lemere, [Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight](#)

It belonged at first to William Imrie, a partner with J. Bruce Ismay in the shipping line which eventually passed to J.P. Morgan and (some years after Imrie’s death) built the Titanic. Imrie was also a collector of Pre-Raphaelite and associated art. Amongst other things, he owned [Burne-Jones’s *The tree of forgiveness*](#), two versions by [Rossetti of *Dante’s dream*](#), paintings by J.M. Strudwick and Spencer Stanhope, and at least two works by Evelyn De Morgan, which are shown in the photo of his library, above.



Evelyn De Morgan (1855-1919), *Dryad*, 1884-85, o/panel, overall size in frame, 128.6 x 67.4 cm., De

Morgan Collection



De Morgan's *Gloria...* hanging in the library of Holmestead, 1901; detail

Her *Dryad* hangs on the window wall, and *Gloria in Excelsis* hangs near it, above the fireplace. The *Dryad* is still in the original wide garland frame, carved with a ribbon-bound torus of roses, paeonies, lilies, daisies and leaves, which can be seen in the photo; but *Gloria...*, now in the later aedicular frame, was then in a rectilinear moulding frame with what appears to be a large spiral ribbon at the sight edge, and several orders of various small foliate ornaments.

Evelyn De Morgan had nearly all her frames carved in Florence, where a flourishing business of workshops continued to produce hand carved giltwood and walnut frames as they had done for the previous five hundred years, apparently relatively unscathed by the rise of mechanically-sawn mouldings and composition ornament, and at a much lower cost than was offered by London framemakers. J.R. Spencer Stanhope seems to have started this practice by buying his own frames in Florence, probably from around the time in 1863 that he began to spend his winters there. In 1880 he settled permanently in the Villa Nuti, where Evelyn De Morgan – his niece – frequently stayed. J.M. Strudwick, a friend of Spencer Stanhope and a fellow artist, also began to order his frames from Florence (although as he was not on the spot, he found himself

occasionally having to excuse the non-appearance of frames to his clients, and eventually gave up this source [11]).

The frames used by all three are notably different in style from contemporary British frames, whether these were the 'Watts' pattern, Pre-Raphaelite reed-&-roundel frames, academic frames in various revival styles, or customized designs with compo ornament, such as Wakley's leafy *cassetta*, and Burne-Jones's aedicular frames.



Evelyn De Morgan (1855-1919), *Gloria in Excelsis*, 1893, lot 8



Evelyn de Morgan (1855-1919), *Aurora Triumphans*, 1886, o/c, 114.5 x 170.5 cm., [Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth](#)



Evelyn De Morgan (1855-1919), *Our Lady of Peace*, 1907, o/c, 195.2 x 100.2 cm., [De Morgan Centre](#)

Because the Florentine frames are made completely out of carved wood, they are generally more three-dimensional and more robustly constructed than many of their British counterparts, which becomes immediately evident if some of the original aedicular frames on Evelyn De Morgan's work are compared with the replacement frame on *Gloria in Excelsis*. The originals have hefty pilaster plinths, a projecting moulding (even quite a wide shelf) above the predella; sculpturally deep capitals, and a jutting cornice supported by rows of classicizing ornament. The decoration of all the flat panels is in correspondingly deep relief, whereas on *Gloria...* it is markedly shallow. These frames were, of course, also being produced in a location where every church, and galleries such as the Uffizi (open to the public from 1795, and designated a museum in 1865), were overflowing with Renaissance altarpieces; British framemakers were dependent on black-&-white photographs and casts for their models.



Evelyn De Morgan (1855-1919), *The angel with the serpent*, c. 1873-75, o/c, 35 x 44 ins (89 x 112 cm.), [Martin Beisly Fine Art](#)

The painting by Evelyn De Morgan in Martin Beisly's gallery has a frame which is distantly related to the garland frame of *Dryad*, although this is a very British frame with a torus decorated in low-relief compo, and cannot in any sense be described as three-dimensional or sculptural. The painting was executed 'early in De Morgan's oeuvre, dating from the early to mid-1870s' [12], and therefore probably before she started obtaining her frames from Florence – and although a related and contemporary painting of *Mercury* at Cannon Hall has a much more weighty garland frame of leaves and fruit in 16th century Italian style, it seems to be a later addition which has been reduced at some time to fit the painting. The frame of *The angel and serpent* is, however, almost certainly the original, and is interesting because it indicates the artist's awareness – even when a student – of the importance of setting to painting. It also shows that she recognized its

functional capabilities: that it was possible to use, for instance, emphatic corner and centre ornaments to set up focal lines across the painted surface, reinforcing the diagonal and axis lines of the composition. This painting, with the inverted Vs of shoulder and knee, echoed by the lower folds of the snake and the peaks of distant mountains, is cross-hatched with diagonals; the burnished ribbons on the frame pull the eye towards them, and point it towards the central V of serpent, face and hand.

Evelyn De Morgan's work has to be seen in the original frames. Without them it can appear etiolated and flat; properly presented, it gains depth and spatial and decorative context, as well as an important connection to the Renaissance models from which it derives.



Leighton's studio, Leighton House, in 1895, with the paintings to be sent to the Royal Academy exhibition: a montage with the works as they are today. Photo: [H. Bedford Lemere, ©Historic England Archive](#)

Like Evelyn De Morgan's, Lord Leighton's work spans both the Setton Collection and Martin Beisly's gallery. The latter has *Candida*, one of the group of six paintings Leighton prepared for the last exhibition at the Royal Academy in which he took part; the former has *'Twixt hope and fear*, another in the same group (shown in the Bedford Lemere photo, above).

Leighton, like the Pre-Raphaelites, experimented with the framing of his paintings from the time that he was dealing with one of his first commissions, at the age of twenty-one. This early frame dates from 1851-52 when Leighton was studying in Frankfurt, and may have been catalyzed by Pre-Raphaelite work exhibited in the Royal Academy, London, in the summer of 1851 [13]. In 1855 Leighton moved to Paris, where he met Delacroix and Ingres, both concerned in the choice or design of appropriate frames for their paintings. The influence of artists such as these, British and European, as well as a fascination with the details of

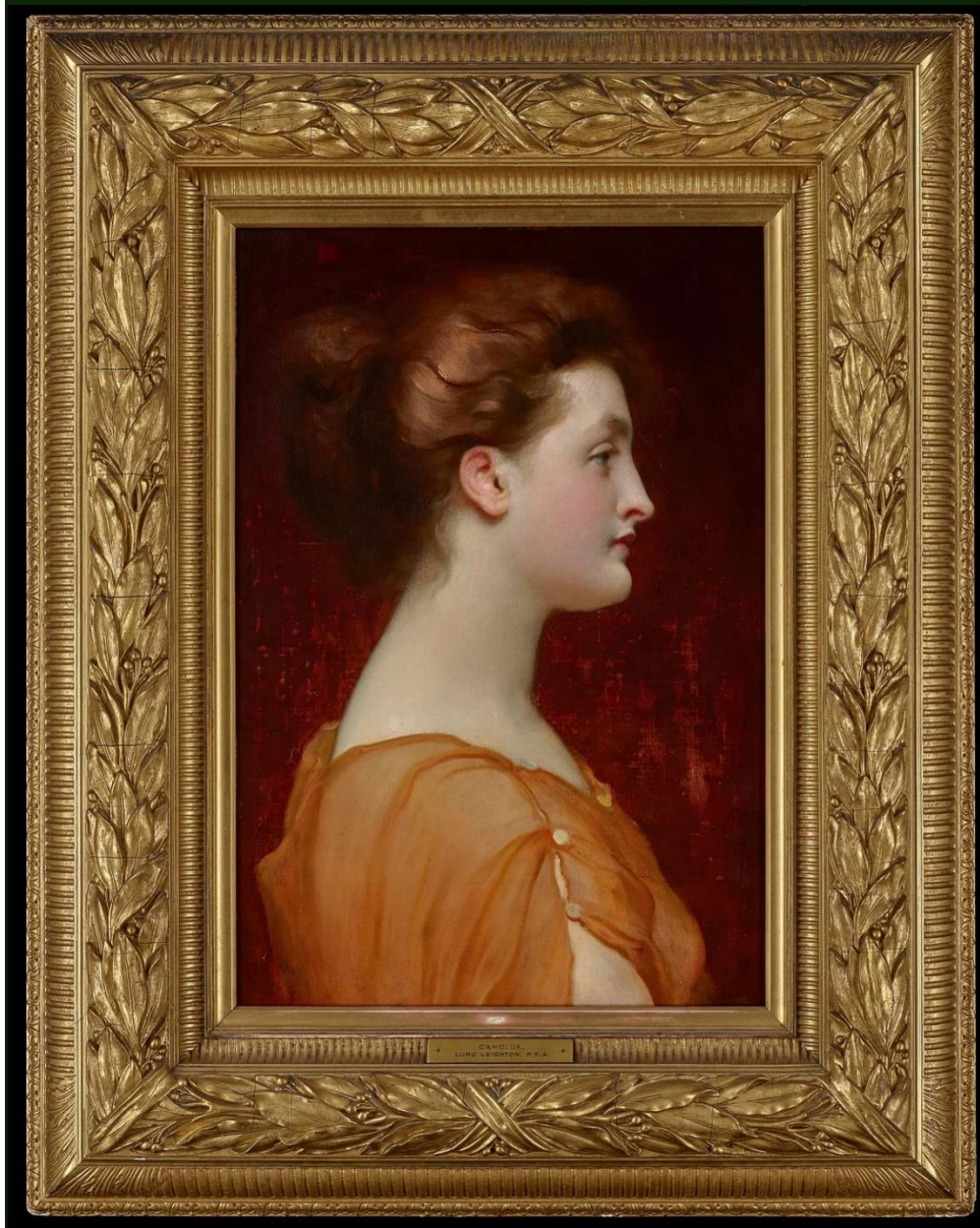
classical architecture, and a concern that the aesthetic values of every painting should be carried on into its setting, meant that he continued to produce original frame designs throughout his career.



Frederic Leighton (1830-96), *Jonathan's token to David*, c.1868, o/c, 67 ½ x 49 ins (171.45 x 124.46 cm.), [Minneapolis Institute of Arts](#)

One particular example arose from Leighton's experiments with single or loosely-linked classicizing styles. He continued to use this at intervals, and it appears on four of the paintings lined up in his studio for what was to be his last submission to the Royal Academy's summer exhibition. Its earliest – or one of its earliest – appearances was on his painting of the Old Testament figure of Jonathan in about 1868. It has a simple but unusual profile, with a bolection moulding falling from the torus on the top edge through a quarter-round fluted concave moulding at the back edge. The torus is formed of two festoons of bay leaves, springing from the ribbon-bound top centre to their meeting on the bottom rail, in another crossed ribbon binding.

This was a design which was easily repeatable in many different sizes, the ornament being made of compo; it was classical, with the architectural fluting and the bay leaves, but understated – something which would fit in with the heaviest *horror vacui* of drawing-rooms, the chastest of NeoClassical galleries, and the most Palladian of British country houses. It worked equally well with aesthetic arrangements of form and colour as on the more realistic picture; and it could be used (as in 1868) for Biblical subjects; on ‘Greek’ paintings; and for portraits and contemporary subject paintings.



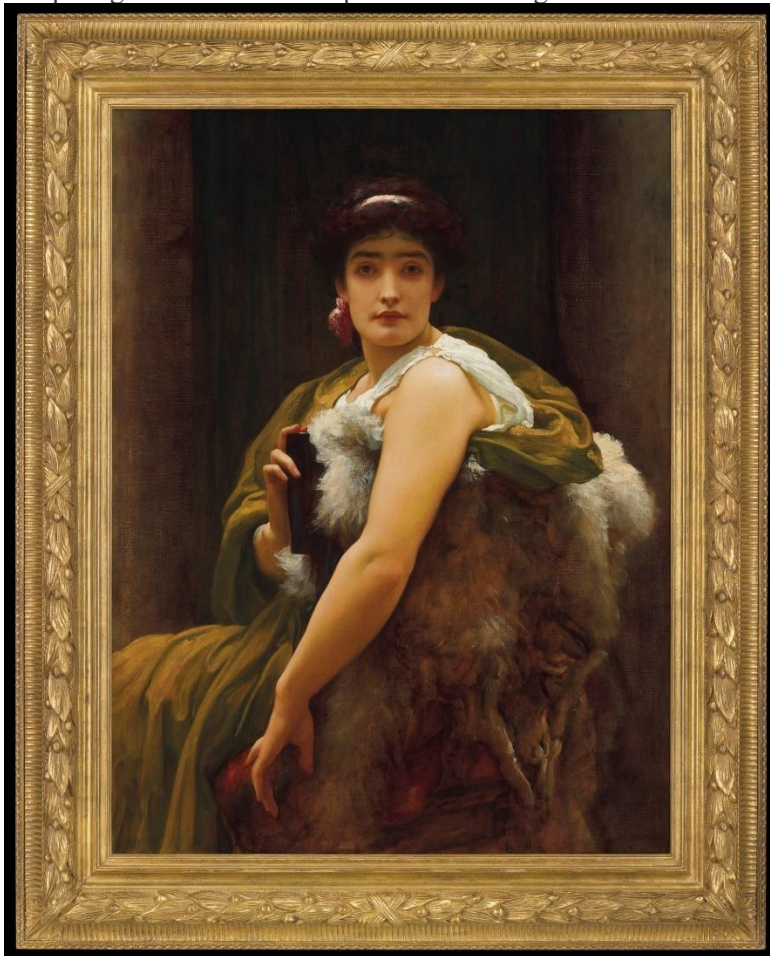
Frederic Leighton (1830-96), *Candida*, c.1894-95, 21 x 15 ins (55 x 38 cm.), [Martin Beisly Fine Art](#)

In the group of 1895 paintings, we find it being used – very effectively – for all of the last three types. The version on *Candida* has been given additional oomph with an acanthus leaf moulding at the back edge, and an auxiliary fluted hollow at the sight. The acanthus leaf branches on the top torus moulding spring from the centre of the bottom rail and meet at the top; they form a rich ornamental foil to the simple lines of the composition, and harmonize with its deeper shades of amber, chestnut and red.



Leighton, *Jonathan's token to David*, c.1868, and *Candida*, c.1894-95, details of frames
(*Candida* reversed)

Although the two frames for *Jonathan's token...* and *Candida* were presumably made thirty years apart, they were created using the same reverse moulds for the composition acanthus leaves, as can be seen by comparing corner details. It is probable that Leighton's framemaker kept these moulds for his exclusive use.



Frederic Leighton (1830-96), *'Twixt hope and fear*, 1895, o/c, 44 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 33 $\frac{3}{8}$ ins (112.5 x 84.5 cm.), [Christie's](#), 10 December 2020, lot 18

'*Twixt hope and fear* is another 1895 painting in a similar frame: as with the 'signature' patterns used by artists such as George Romney or Sir Thomas Lawrence, Leighton's design would give his paintings connection in the Academy exhibition, and enable people to pick out his work more easily on the crowded walls. This explains the group of four identical frames in his 1895 exhibition paintings.



Leighton, '*Twixt hope and fear*, 1895, and *Candida*, c.1894-95, details of frames (*Candida* reversed)
 Sadly, however, '*Twixt hope and fear* does not retain Leighton's original signature frame but now occupies a much more modern version. This has been assembled from the right elements, but lacks the finely-achieved naturalism of the moulded bay leaves and berries on the frame of *Candida*, which almost convince the viewer that the top moulding is made from real gilded leaves. The new frame – which, ironically, may well be carved wood rather than compo – is coarser and its leaves generic.

The other designs which became signature styles for Leighton are two forms of aedicular frame. After some early experiments for two of his monumental processional paintings, *Daphnephoria* and *The Syracusan bride*, which placed showy detail above classical decorum, he evolved two different versions of the classical aedicular frame – much sleeker, stripped back and better-proportioned – which would serve his work from the 1880s to the end of his life.



Frederic Leighton (1830-96), *Fatidica*, 1894, o/c, 153 x 111 cm., [Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight](#)
One of these used a conventional version of the Ionic order with flat-topped capitals, like this one on *Fatidica* (above; 1894); the other was topical, inventive, and completely original – as far as frames were concerned – deriving from his contact with the archaeologist and architect, C. R. Cockerell.



Diagram (top left) of normal Ionic order; diagram (top right) Bassae capital; surviving capital from the Temple of Apollo Epikourios, Bassae, Arcadia, marble, 45.72 cm. high, [British Museum, 1815,1020.25](#) Cockerell had taken part in the investigation of the Temple of Apollo at Bassae, and the unique curved Ionic order which had decorated the interior of the temple appeared in his own architectural projects in England. The result of this is also evident in many of Leighton's aedicular designs for frames from at least the 1880s: a Bassae model became the second of his variations on the Ionic order. This group of frames and their genesis will be explored in greater detail in a future article on Leighton's frames.

They form a group, rather than being an iteration of one uniform pattern, because they are continually varied by the small running mouldings which define entablature and predells panel, or by the decoration of the frieze. Occasionally the latter is studded with roundels (like those used on the frame of *Fatidica*, above); sometimes a pattern of anthemion and buds is used, repeating the ornament on, for instance, the *cassette* of *Psamathe* (1879-80, [Lady Lever Art Gallery](#)), and that of *Pavonia* (1859, [Leighton House](#)). An impressively large form of the Bassae structure, with this anthemion frieze, is used to frame *Captive*

Andromache (another processional composition which is just over 13 feet wide and 6 ½ feet high) in Manchester [14].



Frederic Leighton (1830-96), *Captive Andromaches*, 1888, o/c, (197 x 407 cm.), [Manchester City Art Gallery](#)



Frederic Leighton (1830-96), *Whispers*, 1881, o/c, 49 x 30 ins (124.5 x 76.3 cm.), [Martin Beisly Fine Art](#)

Leighton's *Whispers*, which was with Martin Beisly in March this year, has another fine example of a Bassae frame very close to that on *Captive Andromache*, although obviously much smaller and in a vertical format. It has a predella or plinth with roundels beneath each pilaster, and in this form seems to present the lovers as if through a classical doorway or window, silhouetted against the sunset behind them. Hardly a subject painting at all, *Whispers* is more an arrangement of curving forms and colour harmonies for which the linear beam and lintel frame creates a geometric foil, undercut by the swooping capitals and the roundels. Together painting and frame epitomize Burne-Jones's famous definition of a picture as 'a beautiful, romantic dream... in a light better than any light that ever shone – in a land no one can define or remember, only desire – and the forms divinely beautiful...' [15]

All images courtesy of Christie's, save those labeled otherwise

[1] Fiona MacCarthy, *The last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian imagination*, Harvard UP, 2012, p. 401

[2] This iteration of Burne-Jones's other *Briar Rose* series (three paintings) is split between the [Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington](#); [Bristol Art Gallery](#); and the [Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin](#). There are also other versions of some of the paintings, in different sizes

[3] See the [Directory of British picture framemakers, 1600-1950, NPG website](#)

[4] For a discussion of the 'Watts' frame and its genesis, with a range of explanatory illustrations, see 'G.F. Watts: framing myths and portraits'. FM Brown described it in 1872 as 'a Venecian pattern [sic]', rather than connecting it with Watts, which immediately makes one think of Ruskin

[5] A 'Watts' frame on a full-length portrait could easily measure upwards of eight feet high

[6] Jacob Simon, *The Art of the Picture Frame*, 1996, p. 73

[7] See more about W.A. Smith in the [Directory of British Picture Framemakers, 1600-1950, on the National Portrait Gallery website](#)

[8] For F.M. Brown and ivy, see Mary Bennett, *Ford Madox Brown: a catalogue raisonné*, 2010, nos A60, B29 and B35, in the appendix on frames. *An English autumn afternoon* is in [Birmingham MAG](#)

[9] Millais's letter to Hunt is in the Huntington Library, San Marino, and *A Huguenot*, 1851-52, is in the Makins Collection.

[10] 'Her royalties Polymnia lays down/dance on Terpsichore/Urania sees/the stars/go round/wan/dering sings Calliope/the pipes Euterpe culls from off the ground/Thalia mocks Melpomene who/arms herself for play/with weapons/of divin/ity/Erato's/lyre/Apollo sounds/Clio knows/all man's strange history'

[11] See Strudwick's letter to his patron's widow, Emma Holt, 29 June 1896, reproduced in a catalogue of Sudley Art Gallery; information with thanks to Mary Bennett:

'I always, or almost always, have carved frames for my pictures, and it is not easy to get such work satisfactorily done in England. I used to have my frames from Florence... but I found it troublesome dealing with people so far away... My trouble with the London man is hardly less.'

[12] See [catalogue entry](#) for this work

[13] A full study of Leighton's frames will be published later this month (December 2020)

[14] See also *The return of Persephone* in [Leeds Art Gallery](#)

[15] Burne-Jones, in a letter to May Gaskell; quoted in 'Burne-Jones, Sir Edward', *Encyclopædia Britannica*, ed. Hugh Chisholm, Cambridge University Press, 1911