

Frances Horner and Mells: Model, Muse, Hostess, Friend, Patron, Collector

Essay by Caroline Dakers

When Frances Graham (1854–1940), daughter of the collector William Graham, married John Francis Fortescue Horner in 1883 and settled in Mells Park House, her impact on the family and the environment was dramatic. She brought with her a completely different aesthetic, a different circle of friends and a different approach to living.

Frances ([fig. 1](#)) was one of a number of influential late nineteenth-century hostesses dubbed the ‘Souls’, who included Madeline Wyndham of Clouds, Mary, Lady Elcho of Stanway and Ettie Grenfell (later Lady Desborough) of Taplow Court. The coterie also included A. J. Balfour, Margot Asquith, wife of H. H. Asquith, and her Tennant sisters. Their tastes encompassed the paintings of Edward Burne-Jones and John Singer Sargent, the interior furnishings of Morris & Co., the fiction of Henry James and the architecture of Philip Webb, Detmar Blow and Edwin Lutyens. At Mells their love of intellectual games, philosophical debate, swimming and bicycling courted the disapproval of Frances’s four unmarried sisters-in-law, who lived at the Rectory with their mother and crotchety brother, the Reverend George Horner.



Frances's personal means were limited, and the estate was heavily mortgaged, but she was able to build up a collection

which remains largely intact at Mells.¹ She acquired objects through inheritance and through friendship, as gifts and sometimes with her husband's money. Her taste was developed before her marriage, through the friendships and collection formed by her father.² Born in Glasgow in 1817, Graham joined the family business W. & J. Graham & Co., which dealt in cotton-spinning, importing dry goods from India and port from Oporto (Graham's Port). He was a Liberal MP for Glasgow from 1865 to 1874, living at 35 Grosvenor Place in London with his wife Jane (née Lowndes) and eight children. One of the major collectors of Pre-Raphaelite paintings and works of the early Italian Renaissance, Graham was particularly close to Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones and became a trustee of the National Gallery.

Georgiana Burne-Jones described William Graham's unique attachment to his pictures when his collection was sold in 1886, 'each one of which he hand-picked like a flower to please his own heart.'³ Oliver Garnett agrees: 'Graham's approach to art [was] essentially emotional rather than intellectual.'⁴ Frances's approach was similar: the paintings and drawings, letters, needlework, architectural designs and monuments at Mells all have personal stories; they reflect her friendships with artists, architects and writers, rather than any conscious ambition to build a collection. Her closest relationship was with Burne-Jones. Frances saw him regularly in London, though he visited Mells only once, in 1892. He is memorialised in her autobiography, *Time Remembered* (1933), and through the eleven bound volumes of his letters which remain in the library at Mells. Much of the collection provides evidence of their twenty-four years of companionship.

Frances first modelled for Burne-Jones (1833–1898) in 1870, for the young bride in *The King's Wedding* ([fig. 2](#)). The painting was bought by Graham and came with his widow to Mells.⁵ Rossetti (1828–1882) drew her as *La Donna della Finestra* in 1869 (Mells Manor, [MM62](#)).⁶ In 1875 Burne-Jones presented to Frances, as a Valentine gift, the drawing for *Love leading the Pilgrim* (Mells Manor, [MM67](#)). Frances's friend Mary Gladstone was envious: 'F has got such a beauty from Mr Burne-Jones – a big picture of Cupid dragging a maiden through all meshes and mazes of love.'⁷ She received books, including a copy of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* ([fig. 3](#)), which Burne-Jones had illustrated in 1872, and a copy of the Apocrypha with specially decorated vellum covers. Frances was an accomplished needlewoman and members of the Souls were behind the foundation of the Royal School of Art Needlework. Accordingly, Burne-Jones gave her the design for a large tapestry, *L'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle*, to complete ([fig. 4](#)). She also worked two needlework panels of Ruth, from the Old Testament, and St Elizabeth of Hungary, the artist painting their faces, hands and feet ([MM71](#), [MM72](#)).







Graham commissioned her portrait (see [fig. 1](#)) and the 'Orpheus' piano in 1879. The decorations on the piano can be interpreted as an extraordinary representation by Burne-Jones, then forty-six, of his feelings for Frances, then twenty-five. The nude figure of Mother Earth is only visible when the lid is raised ([fig. 5](#)) and someone – Frances – is playing, creating 'an unexpected dysjunction between the painted female body and the young woman seated at the keyboard.'⁸ The story of Orpheus and Eurydice proceeds in the roundels on the outside of the case ([fig. 6](#)). Frances is depicted as a forlorn Eurydice, trapped forever in the underworld with a doleful Pluto who looks remarkably like Burne-Jones.





When, in 1883, Frances married John Horner, Burne-Jones was mortified. Ruskin had written asking for a list of his works and the artist recalled, bitterly, all the items he had given as gifts:

But to name every one how could I remember? For instance, many a patient design went to adorning Frances' ways. Sirens for her girdle, Heavens and paradises for her prayer-books, Virtues and Vices for her necklace-boxes – ah! The folly of me from the beginning – and now in the classic words of Mr Swiveller 'she has gone and married a market gardener'.⁹

However, he soon recovered and came to appreciate the impact of so many of his works side by side in Mells. He wrote to

Frances in 1892: 'it is a new source of infantile delight to me that you like to have things of my hand in your house. I do hate to sell anything so much and it is a real kindness if you will let some things live with you.'¹⁰ And such a display on show to the wealthier members of the Souls who stayed at Mells was presumably no bad thing, however much Burne-Jones claimed to dislike selling his work.

Certainly, visitors to Mells before the First World War made a particular note of the connection between Burne-Jones and Frances. Margot Asquith commented on Frances having 'Burne-Jones at her feet and Ruskin at her elbow.'¹¹ Doll Liddell, an early guest, described Mells Park House in March 1884: 'It was an old-fashioned house, like a lot of packing-cases set down side by side and joined with doors. The park an attractive one, just the right mixture of nature and culture. The Burne-Jones pictures looked a little strange in the comfortable rooms, especially an immense cartoon for tapestry, representing Love with great red wings.'¹²

Raymond Asquith, visiting in the summer of 1900, found the paintings not to his taste but recognised Frances's special position. '[Mells Park House] is a typically comfortable English country house in an Elizabethan Park full of magnificent trees. The house itself is crowded with priceless pictures, which I don't appreciate – my hostess, a clever and charming woman, having been one of Burne-Jones's earliest models.'¹³

Settling in to the Park House ([fig. 7](#)) as a young bride, Frances had little time for the Horner and Hippisley portraits or the typical Victorian ephemera she found cluttering the rooms. There were:

Stuffed birds and stuffed animals on all the tables and shelves; collections of seaweed, birds' eggs and dried fish filled every corner . . . [portraits] mostly rather bad ones, one or two by Benjamin West, or Angelica Kauffman, etc., but those were the best; some were really the worst sort of family portrait in oil, painted about eighteen hundred and forty.¹⁴



Her father was equally unimpressed, visiting the house shortly before Frances was married. She later recalled that he was 'rather distressed at the portraits and kept saying he must send us some pictures. He couldn't bear portraits of the English school; even when they were masterpieces, he didn't much care about them, and of course he did not quite realise what the family feeling about them was.'¹⁵ Five paintings by Jacopo Bellini arrived as a wedding present, *The Meeting of St Elizabeth and St Joachim*, *The Visitation*, *The Presentation of Christ in the*

Temple, Christ disputing with the Doctors and *The Wedding Feast at Cana* (MM7–11).

Graham died in 1885 and Burne-Jones was commissioned to design a headstone for his grave in the Glasgow Necropolis. Frances framed one of the last illustrated letters her father received from Burne-Jones: 'his love of colour was so great that they made him happy . . . My sister and I each have one, and the others lie in his coffin.'¹⁶ A year later, at the sale of Graham's collection, Agnews bid on behalf of his children. As a result, more paintings by Burne-Jones and Rossetti, including Rossetti's *Proserpina* and Burne-Jones's *Hermia* and *St Cecilia*, arrived at Mells and some forty early Italian paintings. When the family had to sell paintings, the Italian pieces were selected rather than work by Burne-Jones.¹⁷

Frances's connection with Burne-Jones continued after her marriage, through frequent meetings in London and by letter. In 1886 the Souls were deeply affected by the death in childbirth of Laura Lyttelton (née Tennant). Frances commissioned Burne-Jones to design a memorial. He proposed 'a tomb and the peacock . . . stucco would last for ever . . . you & I would share the cost [£60].'¹⁸ In 1891 Burne-Jones received a lighter commission, a bookplate ([fig. 8](#)), though he made a fuss about Frances's married surname. 'Tell me about the book-stamp – how big is it to be and what you would like . . . what are your initials dear and is F. enough or must it be F.H. and H. [Horner] necessary, or shall it be subdued and F. triumphant or is it to dominate F. and rule over her – will you tell me all these things.'¹⁹ From sketches of a little ship at sea, a tree and babies, she picked the babies.



Frances sent Burne-Jones presents, including a red-and-blue dressing-gown and a silver ring with a heart, but her few

surviving letters avoided the intimacy he craved. She frequently expressed frustration at the limitations of life at Mells: 'I hate the country – I always thought I did, but now I am quite sure of it – It is cold & you cant stay out, & when you are indoors you might as well be dead. Don't believe people who say they like living in the country, they are silly, or deformed or offended with the world: or lying.'²⁰

His letters are startlingly passionate and needy. One example will suffice, written in October 1892, en route to Mells Park. He breaks the journey at Clouds House, across the border in Wiltshire, and writes to Frances from his moonlit bedroom:

The moon is so beautiful tonight – its [*sic*] almost more beautiful than can be borne, & it made me heart breaky to think of you, & my life sundered from you as it is & fleeting fast to the great sea – yet if I saw you daily I couldn't worship or love you more . . . I am alone at night always – always – how can I help thinking & grieving & pining for life – I have missed so much – if I could turn now to you & touch you do you think I should have sad thoughts? I should never know any sadness if I might live with you.²¹

Burne-Jones was commissioned to paint Frances's eldest daughter, Cicely, in 1893 ([fig. 9](#); [MM79](#)). However, he was not the only artist patronised by the family. John Singer Sargent (1856–1925) stayed at Mells Park in May 1896, with members of the Asquith family. Frances wrote to Burne-Jones: 'I liked Mr Sargent, he was very nice & not the least like an American & he wasn't very like an artist either!' She found him shy. He 'hated discussing all his great friends and having his coat stroked' by Margot Asquith.²² He agreed, tentatively, to paint Frances's four

children the following year, beginning with Cicely. 'I have been thinking ever since those pleasant days at Mells of those four beautiful faces that I mean to do – and of how to do them.'²³ Burne-Jones was jealous:

Of course I felt a bitter pang when you told me Sargent was going to paint from Cicely (who is mine – who was made to fulfil a dream of mine). . . . I rather hate criticising the living . . . but the dabs are all that I hate in execution – and the colour is often hideous – & not one faintest glimmer of imagination has he – the world is growing sick of what is beautiful.²⁴



Burne-Jones died in 1898, so never saw Sargent's 'dabs'. Many of his admirers wrote to Frances commiserating with her and

expressing their own sense of loss, Henry James included, and she carefully preserved the correspondence, along with the hundreds of letters she had received from the artist. She wrote to her friend Edith Lyttelton explaining the significance of her relationship with 'Angelo':

I think I had got to depend on him as a kind of background for life . . . I lived in his love – it was the most unfailing thing I ever knew: and now at home I can't move or look up without seeing him; a picture on the wall, or a photograph or books which he gave – everything in my life seems to have been steeped in him. It is twenty four years now since he came into my life.²⁵

The following year Cicely sat to Sargent ([fig. 10](#)). She recalled being painted in the schoolroom at Mells. He 'was staying with my mother & gave both portraits to her. Actually we never liked them very much which was I think why my mother eventually sold them!'²⁶ Sargent was also dissatisfied, writing to Frances after completing the first sketch: 'Do you know I do not think that sketch is fit to hang in your dining room, or in fact in the same parish as Cicely. It makes me unhappy. Please put it in a dark corner at Mells until I do a better.'²⁷ Both the sketch and the finished portrait were sold in the 1920s, coinciding with the sale of a large part of the Mells estate and high prices for Sargent at auction. Sargent's drawing of her daughter Katharine ([MM81](#)), was completed four days short of her wedding in 1907, and retained by her in her various houses, finally coming to Mells in 2000, on the death of her daughter, Lady Helen Asquith.



In 1896 the Horners bought a house in London, 2 (later 9) Buckingham Gate. Horner was appointed Commissioner of

Woods, Forests and Land Revenues with a welcome annual salary of £1200. The architect Frances approached to work on alterations to Buckingham Gate was Edwin Lutyens. It was the first of many commissions from the Horners.²⁸

Lutyens was the obvious choice. Frances's sister Agnes had married, in 1881, Colonel Herbert Jekyll of Munstead House, Surrey. In 1893 Herbert's sister Gertrude commissioned Lutyens to design a house for her next door, called Munstead Wood. Gertrude and Lutyens became life-long colleagues but Herbert Jekyll was also a friend and patron. He was instrumental in commissioning Lutyens to design the British Pavilion for the 1900 Paris Exposition and, following the marriage of his daughter Pamela to the Liberal politician Reginald McKenna in 1908, initiated the architect's lucrative position as architect to the Midland Bank (McKenna became the chairman in 1919).²⁹

Lutyens was next asked by the Horners in 1902 to prepare designs for alterations to the Manor House at Mells. Following the death in 1900 of Frances's mother, who had lived with her at Mells Park House and in London, the decision was taken to economise and 'downsize' at least in the country. Mells Park was let to Gilbert Thompson Bates, son of Sir Edward Bates, a wealthy Liverpool shipowner. The Horner and Coxe Hippiisley portraits and many of the Italian paintings were left in the house, Frances taking the Burne-Joneses to be with her in London and in the Manor House.

She wrote to Edith Lyttelton expressing her dismay at the state of the Manor House, also its unsuitability for her family of four lively children:

No windows keep out air, all the chimneys smoke, the floors are all switch backs and they've painted all the wood-work yellow! I suppose in time I shall get it a little less squalid but I feel rather despairing . . . I don't feel as if I should settle to liking it much but we shall see – I believe you would love it – I know really what makes the difference: there are certain houses which are good for a large noisy untidy family like mine – Mells [Park] was – much smaller houses maybe – and certain ones which are dignified and require doors shutting, and nothing ever moved and a quiet tread upstairs, and casements handled delicately and the furniture set carefully in an appropriate place – this is that, and Mark bangs and Katharine litters me to distraction . . . There is a sad dearth of books here, and I shall have to set to and collect again! for I can't live in a house without . . . I haven't had E. Lutyens's estimates yet so I don't know when we shall begin to build.³⁰

Lutyens's plan for an entire three-storey addition was rejected as far too ambitious and expensive.³¹ He did add a music room (with a roof that continues to leak), then Owen Little designed a single-storey kitchen wing. Other alterations were basic: 'first the house was made sound, a bathroom put in, and the garden laid out [designed by Norah Lindsay]. Then followed electric light, the building of the loggia, a new kitchen, heating, additional bathrooms, and some small improvement almost yearly.'³²

For the Horners, financial difficulties were continuous. In 1906 both the London house and a number of paintings were sold. The sale at Christie's on 30 June was the first of several. They even contemplated letting the Manor House. Two years later,

the family was plunged into mourning when their son Mark died aged sixteen. Almost immediately Frances was planning a memorial; sadly, this became a regular feature of her patronage until her death in 1940. Both Lutyens and Eric Gill were involved. Lutyens rejected the first idea of an altar tomb, writing to his wife on 3 May 1908:

They wanted to put an altar tomb in the middle of their chapel here [in the parish church], with a figure of Mark on the top and I am against it as it is too prominent a position for a small cadet of a house. It was rather difficult to explain but people are so apt to overdo that sort of thing . . . It means here that they would have to turn out of their seats and would leave little Mark alone – that was my instrument in the destruction of the idea.³³

Instead, Lutyens designed a gravestone with lettering by Gill and provided the village with a memorial well, also with Gill's lettering.

The losses endured by the Horners during the First World War were devastating: Raymond Asquith, the husband of Katharine Horner, was killed in 1916, then Edward Horner, the surviving son, died in 1917. Lutyens and Gill were again commissioned to respond. For Raymond, Lutyens mounted a simple bronze wreath on the south wall of the church, Gill engraving the inscription directly into the stone. He wrote to Frances in 1920: 'of course I'll be pleased to do the inscription for you & will write fully this evening.'³⁴

Shortly before Edward's death, on 11 October, Mells Park House caught fire. The tenant, Gilbert Bates, had died suddenly in March 1917 and the house was decorated and furnished ready

for the Horners to move in again (the Manor House was let every year for six months during the war). Frances described the impact of the fire to her daughter Cicely:

Most of the Italian pictures saved – all the worst family portraits of course: Grandpapa and Grandmama Horner survived, smelling horribly – nothing will ever destroy them – and some china – but I don't feel as if I cared. The whole thing is gone and I wonder shall we ever rebuild? . . . The house looks *too* terrible – an empty blackened frame with fallen keystones and inside piles of debris, like pictures of the Cloth Hall at Ypres, I can hardly bear to look at it.³⁵

In a typescript Frances later recalled that 'all the books, a good many thousand, most of the china, and most – though not all – of the pictures were saved.'³⁶

The house was insured, so to begin with the Horners considered rebuilding, approaching Lutyens for an initial design ([fig. 11](#)). However, the memorialisation of the dead took priority, not just for the Horners but the whole village. It would be Frances's niece Pamela and her husband Reginald McKenna who would take up the building project, Lutyens designing a new Park House for them in 1923. The Horners, with their widowed daughter and three grandchildren, were now committed to living in the Manor House and a sale at Christie's, London on 11 July 1919 disposed of any books and pictures that would not fit in.



Meanwhile, Frances planned a memorial for Edward Horner and for the village, involving Lutyens on both occasions. He visited her first in London, in July 1918, and the idea emerged for a memorial to Edward to be placed in the parish church. The tablet and base would be designed by Lutyens, with lettering by Gill, and a statue. The total budget was £2000. The tablet was completed first and delivered personally to Mells by Lutyens in August 1919:

I took down with me Edward Horner's memorial tablet. The train was very late and I arrived and found Lady H. alone, had tea and then unpacked the memorial and we carried it into the church – so there was no fuss and it was an excellent excuse not going to see a Shakespeare play in the Vicarage garden
– *Cymbeline*.³⁷

Frances approached a number of sculptors for the statue of Edward, including Bertram MacKennal, 'but I couldn't get any idea that pleased me', as she later recalled.

Sir Edwin [Lutyens] always out for the line of adventure said he thought perhaps Munnings might so we approached him and found that he very much liked the idea. He started it at once, but he refused to let me see his cast and I got very nervous about it – it was to cost £1000 horse and statue and I was so afraid that if I didn't like it I should not know where to put it.

She visited Munnings's studio in Dedham, Suffolk, with Katharine:

the door of the studio was thrown open and we saw the cast of the statue – it was so beautiful that it took my breath away and so sad it brought tears to my eyes. The head of the rider was bowed and the horse standing at ease drooping. . . . I wanted it to be the morning glory . . . [so Munnings] made Edward looking straight out between his horse's ears and he made the horse less at ease.³⁸

Munnings recalled the commission: 'the very first job I did in that newly-moved studio was a model in clay of Edward Horner on his charger . . . The bay horse, Patrick was led into the studio

day after day.’³⁹ Patrick had been kept by Munnings at Lamorna in Cornwall for the duration of the war, saved from near-certain death in France.

The artist was both grateful and flattering when he received news that Frances was pleased: ‘I am very glad the bronze pleases you & I would very much like to see it now Sir Edwin has set it on its base. I am sure it has been beautifully done & if it pleases you then it must be right for your taste is never anything but the most artistic.’⁴⁰ The memorial was placed in the Horner chapel of St Andrew’s, not actually Frances’s preferred location. ‘I wanted it to go under the tower riding up the Church – but the Church Wardens and the village objected . . . they were altogether rather alarmed at the idea of a horse being put in church.’⁴¹

Students from the Kensington School of Art carved a memorial inside the parish church to the fallen from the village, while Frances recorded their names, the details of parcels sent to them and their deaths, to be kept in her personal collection of papers. She also invited her neighbours to consider something larger in scale to be designed by Lutyens: ‘was it something useful – such as seats, or a village fountain, or a playground or a garden, and they said it was something to look at . . . on the road so that passers by might say “look, there is the Mells Memorial”’.⁴² Lutyens described his visit to Mells at the beginning of August 1919 in a letter to his wife:

I walked miles Sunday morning with Katharine Asquith to have a preliminary survey. Found a perfect site in the centre of the village, which no one else found, or thought of, and with a little tact and patience it was carried by the villagers with acclamation. . . . The evening I spent in the church, repainted the

inscription to Raymond Asquith, for which they were grateful, so my weekend was as a spring day, fun and tears. All their young men are killed.'⁴³

The statue of St George was copied from a statue in the chapel of Henry VII in Westminster Abbey. Frances recalled that she had 'tried to get a modern one, but the modern sculptors came in so much that it was beyond the village limits.'⁴⁴ The whole memorial cost more than £400.

Frances's relationship with Lutyens overlapped with her friendship with and patronage of the artist William Nicholson. They first met in 1897 in Rottingdean, East Sussex. Nicholson was commissioned to paint Rudyard Kipling who was living at The Elms; Frances was visiting Burne-Jones (Kipling's uncle) at North End House, diagonally opposite.⁴⁵ Nicholson's own friendship with Lutyens began in 1902. In 1914 he was commissioned to paint the Viceroy of India through the influence of Lutyens and from 1917 they both occupied studios in Apple Tree Yard, St James's, Piccadilly.

Back in Rottingdean, in 1909, Nicholson bought North End House after the death of Burne-Jones's widow Georgiana. According to their granddaughter, Angela Thirkell, Nicholson discovered her grandfather's painting of an angel 'pulling away the curtain of darkness to let the daylight in' surviving intact on the whitewashed wall of her attic night-nursery. Nicholson 'removed the angel piecemeal from the wall and gave the fragments to Frances' ([fig. 12](#); [MM76](#)). She restored the angel 'and it now looks down on her in her home in Somerset where the artist would like it to be.'⁴⁶



From 1923 Nicholson and his second wife lived at Sutton Veny, across the border in Wiltshire.⁴⁷ He was a regular visitor to Mells, receiving commissions from Horners, Asquiths and

McKennas. He painted the library door at Mells in 1923 (MM82), *The Elm Tree by Mells Church* (MM86) in 1927 and *The Manor House and Church* (MM85).

Sir John Horner, who had been made a KCV0 in 1907 on retiring from government office, died twenty years later in 1927. Four years before, he had sold slightly more than three-quarters of the Mells estate, comprising 4300 acres and twenty-two farms. But he had been able, finally, to pay off the mortgage of £55,000 taken out by his father in 1865. Frances commissioned Nicholson to design a memorial window of St Francis of Assisi in his memory. Her decision was not without controversy, particularly in the village. She explained to her friend the Liberal politician and historian H. A. L. Fisher: 'I'm going to see my window today with fear – but also in hope. My sisters in Law are *very* much annoyed with me for taking out what is easily the worst window in this county & putting in one to Jack but one can't hope to do right by in Laws.'⁴⁸ The dedication service was held on Whitsunday 1932.⁴⁹

After Sir John's death Frances continued to live at Mells and in London, with her daughter Katharine and grandchildren Julian, Perdita and Helen. In 1928 she received a letter from Virginia Woolf, in her capacity as joint owner of the Hogarth Press: 'Desmond MacCarthy and Lytton Strachey think that it is possible that you may not mind my asking you whether there is any chance that you would write your memoirs . . . for the Hogarth Press.'⁵⁰ Memoirs by her friends were proving fashionable. The Earl of Oxford and Asquith's two-volume *Memories and Reflections 1852–1927* were published in 1928; Viscount Haldane's *Autobiography* in 1929; A. J. Balfour's *Chapters of Autobiography* in 1930; Lady Frances

Balfour's two volumes, *Ne Obliviscaris*, in 1930; the Countess of Wemyss's *A Family Record* in 1932. Frances's own *Time Remembered* was published in 1933, though not by the Hogarth Press. Woolf was still delighted: 'to think that I was in any way responsible for it.'⁵¹

Nicholson was called on once more. He used blueprints for all the illustrations for *Time Remembered*: 'the very point of a blueprint, which is rarely employed in fine-art prints, is that the negative, or backward, state of the process is what is used in the finished piece' (fig. 13).⁵² Frances, writing to her friend Mary Countess of Wemyss, expressed her surprise at the success of her autobiography: 'it has had an astonishing sale . . . of course I know it is the stars that glitter thro' its pages B.J. Ruskin H. Asquith etc. that have made people care for it.'⁵³ At the time, political figures such as Haldane and Asquith were of public interest but Burne-Jones was undoubtedly at the centre of the book. The epilogue described the rituals of Mells, ringing in the New Year: 'Over us all, Mells Tower stands to-day as it stood in the lives of the Horners and their companions four hundred years ago, a symbol of strength and calm dominating alike those who live and move, and those who sleep beneath its shadow.'⁵⁴



However, Frances chose to omit much that was painful, including the losses of the First World War, the creation of

memorials to the dead at Mells and the conversion of Katharine to Roman Catholicism in 1923. Mother and daughter welcomed a new generation of writers to Mells who were (or became) associated with Catholicism: Evelyn Waugh, Father Ronald Knox, Siegfried Sassoon. When Sassoon visited for the first time in 1933 he was already struggling with his faith. Although Frances was a nominal Protestant, one of her final acts of patronage was to recommend Lutyens to the Reverend Martin D'Arcy to design Campion Hall in Oxford. Father D'Arcy was a frequent guest at Mells and responsible for Waugh's conversion. Frances attended the opening of Campion Hall with D'Arcy, Knox and Waugh.

Frances's focus in her memoirs on her friendships before the war involved her collecting together letters and making up scrapbooks of cuttings. The Burne-Jones correspondence comprising eleven volumes forms a significant part of the Mells collection but it also reflects their extraordinary relationship. Burne-Jones wrote to Frances repeatedly in this vein: 'all the romance & beauty of my life means you and my days are ending in splendour through you.' 'You fill me through & through & only to look at you is to love splendidly.'⁵⁵ There is no evidence that she returned his affection physically but she did enjoy basking in his appreciation and being known to do so by her circle of friends.

One of his last completed paintings ought to be in the collection at Mells rather than in Birmingham ([fig. 14](#)). It represents in visual terms their special relationship. Within an austere interior space, lit by a partly opened window and the glow of a brazier, an old man – Burne-Jones – reveals to a young woman –

Frances – the image of a shipwreck. There is an obvious reference to Prospero and Miranda although Burne-Jones referred to the painting as 'Maiden and the Necromancer'. So, is the magician teaching his pupil or is he merely showing off his skills? His gaze is fixed on her but she stares impassively at the vision which floats before her.⁵⁶



At Burne-Jones's death in 1898, Frances had described Mells Park House as being 'steeped' in him: 'I can't move or look up

without seeing him; a picture on the wall, or a photograph or books which he gave – everything in my life seems to have been steeped in him.’⁵⁷ Once the Manor House became the Horners’ home, it also presented this unusual link between artist and patron and muse, evidenced all around through pictures, drawings, needlework and letters. Frances died in 1940. In memory of her father, who first introduced her to Burne-Jones, she left one of the artist’s books of drawings to the Victoria and Albert Museum and his decorative panel, *Eight Women gathering Apples* (1876), to the National Gallery (now at Tate). She left the whole contents of the Manor House to her daughter Katharine, specifically mentioning Burne-Jones’s piano. Her two daughters divided the contents of her London house between them. Now, the presence of Burne-Jones, and her relationship with him, fills the Manor House and the parish church where the family display her embroidered panel of Love (see [fig. 4](#)) and the gesso memorial to Laura Lyttelton.

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Footnotes

1. 'The cottages at Mells were very old, very picturesque, and very unfit for modern standards of life. The roofs, generally of thatch and miserably bad, leaked everywhere . . . the rents were almost *nil* . . . the landlord did all the repairs': Frances Horner, *Time Remembered*, London: William Heinemann, 1933, p. 75.
1
2. See Oliver Garnett, 'The Letters and Collection of William Graham: Pre-Raphaelite Patron and Pre-Raphaelite Collector', *The Walpole Society*, vol. 62, 2000, pp. 145–343.
2
3. Georgiana Burne-Jones to Mary Lady Elcho, 2 April 1886, Stanway Papers, Stanway House, Gloucestershire.
3
4. Garnett, 2000, p. 150.
4
5. Burne-Jones's *King's Wedding* passed by descent to Cicely Lambton (née Horner), sold 9 July 1974.
5
6. Rossetti's *La Donna della Finestra* was not included in the Graham sale in 1886 and it is not known when the Horners acquired it.
6
7. Diary of Mary Gladstone, 14 February 1875, quoted in Fiona MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination*, London: Faber, 2011, p. 275.
7
8. Alison Smith, ed., *Edward Burne-Jones*, exhibition catalogue, London: Tate Publishing, 2018, p. 210.
8
9. Edward Burne-Jones quoted in Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, London: Macmillan, 1906, p. 130.
9
10. Edward Burne-Jones to Frances Horner [18 June 1892], Letters, 11 vols, Mells Manor Archive, M/04/1353, vol. 4.
10
11. Margot Asquith, quoted in Jane Abdy and Charlotte Gere, *The Souls*, London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1984, p. 131.
11
12. A. G. C. Liddell, *Notes from the Life of an Ordinary Mortal*, London: John Murray, 1911, p. 222.
12
13. Raymond Asquith to H. T. Baker, 15 July 1900, in John Jolliffe, ed., *Raymond Asquith: Life and Letters*, London: Collins, 1980, p. 69.
13
14. Horner, 1933, pp. 65–6.
14
15. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
15
16. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
16
17. Rossetti's *Proserpina* was sold in 1919 but the Burne-Jones works remain at Mells: Garnett, 2000, p. 285, no. a29. The Italian collection was halved through sales in 1919

and 1949: see Lady Horner (Frances Jane Graham) sale, Christie's, London, 11 July 1919; Mrs Raymond Asquith sales, Christie's, London, 17 June and 11 July 1949.

17

18. Edward Burne-Jones to Frances Horner, [June 1886] Letters, Mells Manor Archive, M/04/1353, vol. 1.

18

19. Edward Burne-Jones to Frances Horner, November 1891, *ibid.*, vol. 3. The bookplate was cut by William Harcourt Hooper (1834–1912), the artist, wood engraver and printmaker, who also worked for William Morris at the Kelmscott Press.

19

20. Frances Horner to Edward Burne-Jones, 30 November 1894, *ibid.*, M/05/1353.

20

21. Edward Burne-Jones to Frances Horner, 6 October 1892, *ibid.*, vol. 5.

21

22. Frances Horner to Edward Burne-Jones, 20 May 1896, *ibid.*, vol. 9.

22

23. John Singer Sargent, 1897, quoted in Horner, 1933, p. 97.

23

24. Edward Burne-Jones to Frances Horner, July 1897, Letters, Mells Manor Archive, M/04/1353, vol. 10.

24

25. Frances Horner to D. D. (Edith) Lyttelton, June 1898, Mells Manor Archive, M/01/1265.

25

26. Hon. Cicely Lambton, née Horner, to [?] McKibbin, 29 June 1947, quoted in Caroline Dakers, 'Culture and the Country House 1880–1940: With Selective Catalogue', MA thesis, Royal College of Art, London, 1988, p. 406.

26

27. John Singer Sargent to Frances Horner, n.d., Frances Horner bound letter books, 2 vols, Mells Manor Archive, M/01/1260, vol. 1.

27

28. Edwin Lutyens, alterations to 2 Buckingham Gate, 1896, Mells Manor Archive, K/01/1129.

28

29. For details of Lutyens's circles of patronage see Jane Brown, *Lutyens and the Edwardians*, London: Viking, 1996.

29

30. Frances Horner to D.D. (Edith) Lyttelton, 3 January 1902, Mells Manor Archive, M/01/1265.

30

31. Lutyens's designs, Mells Manor Archive, M/01/1285.

31

32. Frances Horner, typescript written after *Time Remembered* (1933), Mells Manor Archive, D/10/1265.

32

33. Edwin Lutyens to Emily Lutyens, 3 May 1908, in Clayre Percy and Jane Ridley, eds, *The Letters of Edwin Lutyens to his Wife Lady Emily*, London: Collins, 1985, p. 152.

33

34. Eric Gill to Frances Horner, 15 December 1920, Frances Horner bound letter books, Mells Manor Archive, M/01/1260, vol. 2.
34
35. Frances Horner to Cicely Lambton, October 1917, Mells Manor Archive, M/01/1280.
35
36. Horner, typescript, Mells Manor Archive, D/10/0677.
36
37. Edwin Lutyens to Emily Lutyens, 4 August 1919, in Percy and Ridley, 1985, p. 371.
37
38. Horner, typescript, Mells Manor Archive, D/10/0677.
38
39. Alfred Munnings, *The Autobiography of Sir Alfred Munnings*, 2 vols, London: Museum Press, 1951–2, vol. 2: *The Second Burst*, pp. 41–2.
39
40. Alfred Munnings to Frances Horner, 28 September 1923, Frances Horner bound letter books, Mells Manor Archive, M/01/1260, vol. 2.
40
41. Horner, typescript, Mells Manor Archive, D/10/0677.
41
42. Ibid.
42
43. Edwin Lutyens to Emily Lutyens, 4 August 1919, in Percy and Ridley, 1985, p. 372.
43
44. Horner, typescript, Mells Manor Archive, D/10/0677.
44
45. Sanford Schwartz, *William Nicholson*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004, p. 130.
45
46. Angela Thirkell, *Three Houses*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950, pp. 59–60.
46
47. Nicholson's new father-in-law, Sir Lionel Phillips, gave them the White House, Sutton Veny: see Schwartz, 2004, p. 131.
47
48. Frances Horner to Herbert Fisher, n.d., Mells Manor Archive, M/01/1289.
48
49. Sir John Horner memorial window dedication service booklet, Whitsun 1932, *ibid.*, K/01/1139.
49
50. Virginia Woolf to Frances Horner, 6 May 1928, Frances Horner bound letter books, *ibid.*, 'Time Remembered' letters, M/01/1297.
50
51. Virginia Woolf to Frances Horner, 18 June [? 1933], *ibid.*, M/01/1297.
51
52. William Nicholson quoted in Schwartz, 2004, p. 145.
52
53. Frances Horner to Mary Countess of Wemyss, 28 January [? 1934], Stanway Papers, Stanway House, Gloucestershire.
53
54. Horner, 1933, p. 231.
54

55. Edward Burne-Jones to Frances Horner, n.d. [13 September 1892]; n.d. [20 October 1892], Mells Manor Archive, M/04/1353, vol. 5.
55
56. See Caroline Dakers, 'Yours affectionately, Angelo: The Letters of Edward Burne-Jones and Frances Horner', *British Art Journal*, vol. 2, no. 3, Spring/Summer 2001, pp. 16–21.
56
57. Frances Horner to D.D. (Edith) Lyttelton, 3 January 1902, Mells Manor Archive, M/01/1265.
57

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