

WASC 2359

WA 663

Article 27-7-2001
on Holman Hunt
Paintings

'The Light of the
World'

'The Desert
Childhood of
St. Elizabeth
of Hungary

Lantern find sheds new light on old masterpiece

It's hard to credit that one of Britain's greatest religious paintings was inspired by the glorious scenery between Surbiton Station and Ewell!

But local topography has changed dramatically since artist Holman Hunt felt moved to embark on *The Light of the World*, a masterpiece described as "one of the very noblest works of sacred art ever produced."

It was conceived on the night of October 19, 1851 when Hunt set out from his lodgings at Worcester Park Farm in Ewell, roughly near where Cuddington Church is today, to meet fellow artist Charles Collins at Surbiton.

Rural

Today his route is covered by busy roads and dense building development. But then it was mainly rural, with the Hogsmill River (yet to be realigned, culverted and generally pulled about) purling delightfully through the fields and glades.

As he walked through the darkness, lantern in hand, he passed an abandoned hut, once used by workers at the nearby gunpowder mills.

Its door was locked and overgrown with ivy, and its step choked with weeds.

"I stood and dwelt upon the desolation of the scene. I pictured the darkness of that inner chamber, barred up by man and nature alike," Hunt wrote later.

*The discovery of the original lamp from Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* has renewed interest in this religious masterpiece. And as JUNE SAMPSON describes, the artist was inspired by the beauty of Surbiton and Surrey.*

The result, completed two years later, was a picture with such impact that when it went on an overseas tour, visitors fainted at the sight of it. It sold hundreds of thousands of prints around the world, and has remained hugely popular ever since.

Now it's in the news again because the original of the lamp held by Jesus in the picture has been re-discovered.

Hunt had it made to order by ironmonger William Hacking, of Chelsea. Its various facets, holes, arched apertures and holes are full of religious symbolism, including the seven churches of Asia in the Book of Revelations, the Star of David, and the Pagans and Jews of the Old Testament.

Hunt gave it to his friend and business adviser Thomas Coombe, and it has passed down to his descendants ever since.

Now the current owner has offered it for auction by Bon-

ham and Brooks.

Bonham's art expert Alistair Laird, who lives in Putney, was sceptical until he travelled to the owner's home and found the lamp was genuine.

"It was hanging in the stairwell of a small terraced house and didn't look as if it had been cleaned since the day it was made," he said. "But finding it - the focus of one of the most famous paintings in the world - was the high-

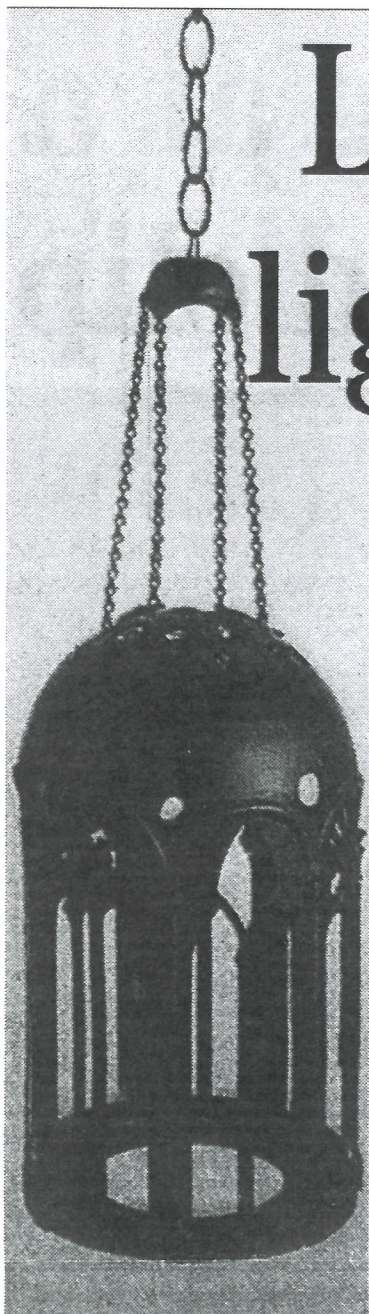
light of my career."

It will be auctioned at Bonham's showrooms at Montpelier Street, Knightsbridge, on October 31, and is expected to fetch between £15,000 and £20,000. Many museums are anxious to acquire it, but it would be specially apt if it went to Kingston. All that's needed is a generous benefactor!

Note: Hunt and John Millais were founders of the Pre-Raphaelite painters, which had strong links with the area.

*The Millais family lived in Kingston, and Hunt and Millais lodged with the Coleby family at Ewell Road, Surbiton, before moving to Worcester Park Farm, where Hunt worked on *The Light of the World* in the orchard from 9pm to 5am each day.*

Hunt and Millais are interred side by side in St Paul's Cathedral.



The lamp, now an empty shell.



The *Light of the World* made its public debut at the Royal Academy in 1854. Inscribed on the frame was the text from Revelations: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Archives

From: Rupert Maas <rupertmaas@me.com>
Sent: 05 November 2014 19:35
To: archives@royalgunpowdermills.com
Subject: Door Research

Hi

I am researching two Pre-Raphaelite paintings featuring the same very interesting door. It turns out that it is not just any door, but possibly the inner of the double doors to a powder mill building on the Hogsmill River near Ewell in Surrey. The paintings are Holman Hunt's 'The Light of the World', and a newly discovered painting by his friend and Pre-Raphaelite 'Brother', Charles Allston Collins, 'The Devout Childhood of St Elizabeth of Hungary', that has been recently rediscovered. They started painting these pictures whilst staying at Ewell in 1851, with another PRB, John Everett Millais, who was painting his 'Ophelia'.

When Collins, after a visit to his mother in London, arrived by train to rejoin Hunt and Millais at Ewell in Surrey where they all were painting together in the autumn of 1851, Hunt set off by moonlight to meet him with a large lantern because Collins was afraid of the dark. On the way to meet Collins, fascinated by the effects of moonlight and lamplight by the wayside, Hunt found an abandoned hut once used by workers at the Worcester Park gunpowder mills: 'On the riverside was a door locked up and overgrown with tendrils of ivy, its step choked with weeds', wrote Hunt. It was to become the door at which Christ knocks in Hunt's 'The Light of the World', and the chapel door at which St. Elizabeth prays in Collins's painting. They have the same hinges, and neither has a handle or a lock.

It has oft been proposed, in art historical circles (my father wrote a book about Hunt's 'Light of the World'), that Hunt left the handle off deliberately to suggest that the door was the door to man's soul, and could only be opened from the inside, to let Christ in. Collins' door also has no handle: He seems to have meant this to mean that the Church was excluding the pious, but it also raises the possibility that the door they found that night actually had no handle!

My query is this: did powder mills have inner doors with no locks or handles, for safety reasons? I don't know if there are any illustrations or descriptions of the construction of those doors, or indeed if there are any extant examples of such doors.

It is of singular importance, because if so, the symbolism of the 'door with no handle or lock' takes on a much greater significance to both artists, because it must have mystified them greatly when they found it, and seemed inexplicable, and so they made it miraculous in their paintings.

I do hope that someone may be able to help. I can supply images of the paintings and further information....

Rupert Maas

The Maas Gallery
15a Clifford Street
London W1S 4JZ
W +44 (0)20 7734 2302
M + 44 (0)7786 176514
mail@maasgallery.com

Ian MacFarlane

From: Les Tucker <les10tucker@btinternet.com>
Sent: 14 November 2014 13:02
To: rupertmaas@me.com
Cc: imacfarlane@royalgunpowdermills.com
Subject: Door Research

Dear Mr. Maas

Thank you for your enquiry on Holman Hunt's 'The Light of the World'.

Could I start by asking a question.

I note that you mention an inner door. But the figure in the painting is knocking at what appears to be an outer door. Did they actually enter the building and discover a separate inner door or is this the outer door discovered by 'the riverside'.

The main safety aspects of gunpowder mill door furniture concerned the material from which the fittings were made – non ferrous anti spark and at least in the case of the Waltham Abbey Mills the inner face of the lock being blanked off, presumably to permit locking from the outside after hours whilst avoiding the possibility of inadvertent locking from the inside blocking an emergency exit.

I have trawled the literature but have not found any specific mention of the omission of lock or handle, on outer doors. I cannot imagine any gunpowder building being unlocked. This does return us to the 'inner door' question. If it was a completely separate door within the building there would not have been the same need to lock and perhaps it was merely pushed open. I'm sorry to labour this aspect, but it does seem fundamental. An article written by June Sampson in 2001 states 'its door was locked' – and quotes HH

'I stood and dwelt upon the desolation of the scene, I pictured the darkness of that inner chamber, barred up by man and nature alike', - inner chamber .

presumably being poetic phraseology for the interior

This does raise the question if the outer door was locked how did HH know about an inner door but then which was the door without lock or handle or is Ms. Sampson in error in saying the outer door was locked.

Having said the above I would like to advance a totally separate hypothesis:

Gunpowder regulations specified that material awaiting processing or having been processed had to be stored overnight away from the processing buildings in storage buildings – magazines. No interior lighting was permitted and certainly not naked flame candles. It is known that the practice for charge magazines was to place shielded candles at the entrance doors to magazines yielding just enough light to work inside. Could the building in question have been subject to this practice and did

HH become aware of this from local lore, setting up the train of thought which translated the gunpowder worker at the door with candle waiting to illuminate the darkness of the inner chamber into the figure in the painting. In other words the figure would have remained at the door when it was opened without actually entering. The need to knock on the door certainly appears to support the idea that it was locked – and the text on the door frame mentions standing at the door and knocking, implying the need to unlock the door.

I am sorry not to be able to provide a definitive answer to this contentious subject, but hope this has at least added something to the debate

Best Wishes

Les Tucker
Archivist Royal Gunpowder Mills

From: Rupert Maas [<mailto:rupertmaas@me.com>]
Sent: 14 November 2014 15:34
To: Les Tucker
Subject: Re: Door Research

Dear Mr Tucker

Thanks very much for your reply. Hunt's memoirs, from which June Sampson quotes, were written over forty years later and are unreliable. They differ in several respects from other accounts that were written at the time (e.g. the diary of Millais). The building he found was abandoned, and it is possible that if it was a powder store then it would have originally had two doors. The outer door, being faced with iron, could have been nicked as being rather useful elsewhere, leaving the inner, which was the one he found. It may have been jammed shut - with no handle or lock. The reason I say that is because in neither Collins nor Hunt's paintings (or their sketches for them) is there either a handle or a lock (see attached). I doubt that Hunt had any understanding of the double door design, and would not have know that the inner door opened inwards, although I like your idea that local lore may have set up a train of thought involving a candle and the need to knock. I can't find any mention of it in his letters or reminiscences. I know that my idea may seem a little far fetched, but I come back to the fact that neither artist depicts the door they found with lock or handle (I actually think that Collins may have been with Hunt when he found the door but can't yet prove it).

This is why I am so keen to establish what they actually found.

What I am very keen to find is any kind of illustration of powder mill doors, that might help...

Thanks you again for your interest.

Regards,

Rupert Maas

Lantern that became light of the world bought by private collector for £52,100

© Copyright of Telegraph Media Group Limited 2014

By Will Bennett

12:01AM GMT 02 Nov 2001

THE original lantern designed by the Pre-Raphaelite artist William Holman Hunt for his greatest painting, *The Light of the World*, sold for £52,100 at an auction in London yesterday.

The picture - regarded as the most important religious painting of the Victorian era - depicts Christ holding the lantern in one hand while he knocks on a weed-choked door with the other.

Holman Hunt, one of the three founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood which aimed to revive the purity of art, was illustrating a biblical passage from Revelations.

The passage reads: "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

When the painting first went on tour it was viewed by seven million people throughout the British Empire. The image has since been reproduced in prints, on posters and in religious literature throughout the world.

Yesterday, the brass heptagonal lantern, made by an ironmonger to Holman Hunt's specifications, fetched far more than its pre-sale estimate of £15,000 to £25,000 at Bonhams & Brooks in London.

It was bought by an anonymous British private collector who beat off competition from The Fine Art Society, an art dealership, bidding for the Manchester City Art Gallery and two unnamed British institutions.

The dirt-covered lantern, which originally cost 30 shillings (£1.50) in 1851, was given by Holman Hunt to his friend and patron, Thomas Combe, who had bought *The Light of the World*.

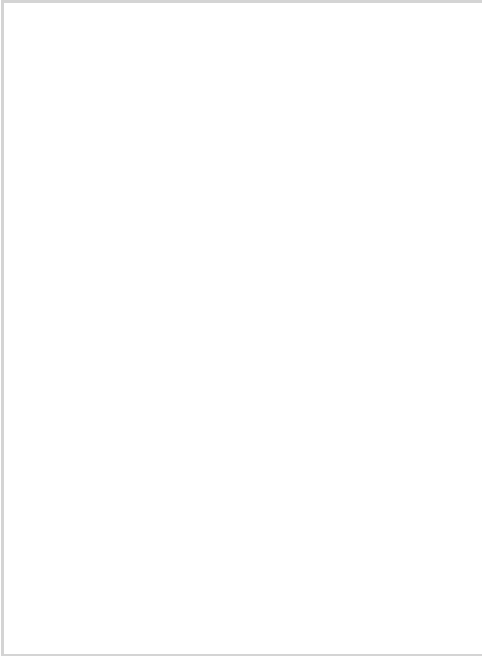
After Combe's death, it was bought for 10 guineas at an auction by his nephew, John Crossley, whose descendants owned it until yesterday's sale.

The family recently contacted Bonhams & Brooks, which sent an expert to their terrace house in London where he found the lantern rigged for electricity and hanging in a stairwell.

Holman Hunt's Story Paintings Fill Manchester Art Gallery

By Dawn Marshallsay Published: 14 October 2008

Tags: Manchester, drawing, symbolism, Painting, Pre-Raphaelites, Design



The Awakening Conscience,
1853. © Tate, London 2008

Review - Dawn Marshallsay visits Manchester Art Gallery and discovers how there's a lot going on in the paintings of master Pre-Raphaelite, Holman Hunt in an exhibition that runs until January 11 2009.

One girl drapes her hair over a pot of basil, a second perches on a man's lap in front of a piano, while a third lounges in a field of sheep.

These scenes may seem unexceptional until you spot the name tag: Holman Hunt. Every intricate object painted by the one true Pre-Raphaelite plays a vital role in a tale of love, sin and redemption.

Isabella and the Pot of Basil (1867), The Awakening Conscience (1853) and The Hireling Shepherd (1851) are among 30 works on display in Manchester Art Gallery's Holman Hunt and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision exhibition, which has been organised by the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto and runs until January 11 2009.

This is the first exhibition in over 40 years to focus on Hunt, and the first ever opportunity to see all three versions of Hunt's *The Light of the World* together – Hunt's 1900-04 version became the most viewed painting in the world, after touring in front of 7 million people across the globe.

The Hireling Shepherd, 1851. © Manchester City Galleries

Each painting tells a story, and part of the fun is trying to decipher the symbolism yourself before looking at the label. While targeted at 19th-century Bible-reading audiences, the paintings also play on the works of Shakespeare, Keats and Tennyson.

Isabella, from Keats' poem of the same name (also known as *The Pot of Basil*), is actually caressing the pot in which the head of her murdered lover is buried; the mistress in *The Awakening Conscience* has literally seen the light and seeks to repent after sleeping with a married man; and the third girl has distracted a shepherd (symbolising the Catholic church) from tending to his sheep, letting them fall ill from eating apples and corn.

But even if you are familiar with Bible stories and classic literature, "Hunt liked to reinterpret other people's work and create his own narratives, often mixing stories together," says Dr Carole Silver, author of *Visions and Revisions* in the book of essays accompanying the exhibition, *Holman Hunt and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision* (compiled by Katherine Lochnan and Carol Jacobi, 2008).



The Light of the World, St Paul's Cathedral version, 1900-04. © Christie's 2008, reproduced with permission of the Dean & Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral

Hunt took tragic circumstances and relationships and infused them with hope, symbolising the forgiveness promised by Christ. Though strong religious symbolism was a main theme of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, it was not until painting his first



Lantern designed by William Holman Hunt.
© Manchester City Galleries

Every object had to be painted from real life, which is why Hunt designed, and had made, the lantern that Jesus holds in *The Light of the World*. This lantern is on display in the exhibition, along with Hunt's palette, brushes and spectacles, and maps and notebooks from his travels.

"This exhibition reveals a new Hunt," says Locnan. The painter seemed to select the most complicated scenes and designs that would keep him occupied for years, giving him more time to think about his faith.

Was Hunt's obsession with *The Light of the World* a plea for others to hear Christ's knocking, or a reminder to himself to keep opening the door?





