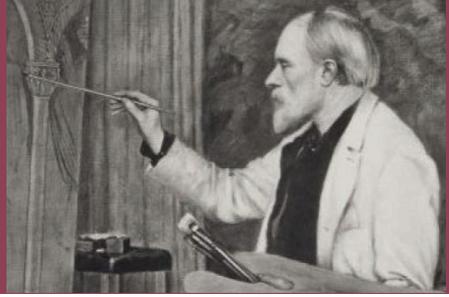


EDWARD BYRNE-JONES

British artist and designer
Pre-Raphaelite movement.
Born in Birmingham, West Midlands
1st Baronet ARA



Edward Coley Byrne Jones was born in Birmingham to Edward Richard Jones and Elizabeth Coley Jones on 28 August 1833.

Unfortunately his mother passed away just six days after her son was born. Edward was subsequently brought up by his father, who was employed as a picture frame maker in Bennetts Hill, and his housekeeper Ann Sampson.

Edward was born at the height of the Industrial Revolution, a time of hard work and innovation. He must have been a good scholar with talent, because at the age of 11 he qualified for King Edward VI grammar school and as a teenager continued his education at Birmingham School of Art (1848 – 1852).

In 1853 he gained a place at Exeter College Oxford, to study theology, with the intention of becoming a priest. While at university he met and became friends with fellow student William Morris who shared his interest in mediaeval romanticism and poetry, particularly the authors Tennyson and John Ruskin.



Hollyer, Byrne Jones & Morris families

Morris was a year older than Byrne Jones, studying the Classics as Byrne Jones but on graduation was to become one of the most important influences within the British Arts & Crafts Movement of the time. Byrne-Jones was certainly influenced by Morris throughout his life, starting in college where they established, with a group of Midlands friends, the ‘Birmingham Set’.

This was the precursor of their society known as ‘The Brotherhood’. Members of the society had a great interest and passion for the ‘Middle Ages’ and ‘Romanticism’ and it was during this time Burne Jones expressed his fascination with

Thomas Malory's 'Le Morte d'Arthur' a reworking of existing tales about the legendary King Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, Merlin, and the Knights of the Round Table.

After university William Morris became an architect and demonstrated his creativity through textile design, writing poetry and novels. In 1856 he founded the Oxford & Cambridge Magazine. Morris and his new friend Burne-Jones used the magazine to promote the ideas of 'The Brotherhood'. He married Jane Burden and became friends with the Pre-Raphaelite artists Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Millais, Ford Madox Brown, Holman Hunt and Neo-Gothic architect Philip Webb. Rossetti was also a romantic and alongside his painting, wrote an extensive amount of poetry, which were used in the magazine. His interest in the English 'romantic' movement enabled him to become a great influence on the lives of his new friends Morris and Burne-Jones.

It is probable that through the friendship with Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Morris decided to change their direction in education from the Classics to design and painting. Burne-Jones in particular chose to leave college without taking his degree to begin his career as an artist.

In February 1857, Rossetti wrote to his friend William Bell Scott who was a Scottish artist, printmaker, poet and art teacher at the government School of Art in Newcastle upon Tyne,

"Two young men, projectors of the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, have recently come up to town from Oxford, and are now very intimate friends of mine. Their names are Morris and Jones. They have turned artists instead of taking up any other career to which the university generally leads, and both are men of real genius. Jones's designs are marvels of finish and imaginative detail, unequalled by anything unless perhaps Albert Dürer's finest works".

Burne-Jones once admitted that after leaving Oxford he "found himself at five-and-twenty what he ought to have been at fifteen". He had not received any training as a draughtsman, but his extraordinary creativity as an artist and designer was already apparent; his mind, rich in the knowledge of classical history and medieval romance, teeming with pictorial subjects. He set himself the task of developing his skills through hard work and practice and during this period he completed innumerable drawings, mostly in the style of Rossetti. Many of these works are pen-and-ink drawings on vellum. Although the subject, medium and manner derive from Rossetti's inspiration, it is not the hand of a mere pupil, but that of a potential master. Rossetti realised the commitment and endeavour and before long avowed that he had nothing more to teach Burne-Jones.

In 1856 Burne-Jones had met and become engaged to Georgiana "Georgie" MacDonald. She was a Methodist minister's daughter, intelligent and gregarious, so well suited to 'The Brotherhood'. Georgie had trained as a painter and proved to be a liked and admired by his new grand friends. Although Burne-Jones had started his career as a watercolour artist within a few years he also began to use oil paint on canvas and it was clear that his enormous 'arts and crafts' talents would provide him with commissions in other media including stained glass at Bradfield College in 1857.

It is thought his skilful designs were closely linked to the rejuvenation of the tradition of stained glass art in Britain. His commissions included windows in St. Philip's Cathedral, Birmingham, St Martin in the Bull Ring, Birmingham, Holy Trinity Church, Sloane Square, Chelsea, St Peter and St Paul parish church in Cromer, St Martin's Church in Brampton, Cumbria, St Michael's Church, Brighton, All Saints, Jesus Lane, Cambridge, St Edmund Hall and Christ Church, two colleges of the University of Oxford. His stained glass works also feature in St. Anne's Church, Brown Edge, Staffordshire Moorlands and St. Edward the Confessor church at Cheddleton Staffordshire.

In addition to being a successful painter and stained glass window designer, Burne-Jones also



produced ceramic tiles, jewellery, tapestries, and mosaics.

However this diversification of skills was not always a success.

In 1857 Burne-Jones joined William Morris, Valentine Prinsep, J.R. Spencer Stanhope and others in Rossetti's ill-fated scheme to decorate the walls of the Oxford Union. None of the painters had mastered the technique of painting frescoes and it is said their illustrations began to peel from the walls before they were completed.

Byrne-Jones extended his use of materials when he was asked to decorate a large cabinet with the 'Prioress's Tale' from Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales in 1858. With his particular interest in medieval history and love of the poetry, it was the ideal project for him. During 1859 Byrne-Jones visited Italy and went to Florence, Pisa, Siena and Venice. He particularly liked the Sieneese style because he commented it appeared more gentle and romantic.

In 1860 he produced two watercolours based on 'Sidonia' and 'Clara' Von Bork. Both paintings illustrate the 1849 gothic novel 'Sidonia the Sourceress' by Lady Wilde.

Byrne-Jones eventually married Georgiana in 1860. She was one of four sisters, born into a well educated, middle class family, with a Methodist minister father, living in Scotland. Their father was well connected and his daughters all became wives to some of the most prominent men in history including the artist Sir Edward Poynter and Ironmaster Alfred Baldwin, father to future Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin. The third sister became the mother of the famous author Rudyard Kipling. Kipling and Baldwin therefore were nephews to Byrne-Jones by marriage.

The Byrne-Jones's first son Philip was born in 1861. A second son was born in 1864 but died soon after birth with scarlet fever; then in 1866 while living in Kensington Square their daughter Margaret was born. A year later Byrne-Jones settled his family at 'The Grange' which was an 18th century house with a large garden in North End, Fulham. 'The Grange' became a focus for intellectual analysis and the three friends discussed at length, their work, poetry, writing and passion for medieval times. They shared so many things together that their style of life could have been compared to a commune.

This lifestyle contradicted the many strict Victorian values of the time. The friends and their partners became much more open in their relationships. Byrne-Jones had a passionate affair with his Greek model Maria Zambaco and his wife Georgiana formed a close relationship with William Morris whose wife Jane had fallen in love with the dashing figure of Rossetti. It appears all three relationships existed without any falling out and they are all said to have stayed with their marriage partners throughout their lives.



In 1880, the Byrne-Jones's purchased Prospect House in Rottingdean, near Brighton as a holiday home. Shortly after he bought the cottage next door (Aubrey Cottage) and renamed it North End House, in fond memory of their former Fulham home.

In 1861 William Morris founded his decorative arts firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. with Rossetti, Byrne-Jones, Ford Maddox Brown and Philip Webb as partners, together with Charles Faulkner and Peter Paul Marshall. The prospectus set forth that the firm would undertake carving, stained glass, metalwork, paper hangings, chintzes (printed fabrics) and carpets. The company exhibited in 1862 at the International Exhibition, in London (Royal Horticultural Society, South Kensington). Their stand attracted a lot of attention and within a few years the business was flourishing with stained glass orders for churches and two significant secular commissions for St. James's Palace and the 'green dining room' at the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A). The firm influenced interior decoration throughout the Victorian period and Morris commissions included tapestries, wallpaper, fabrics, furniture, and stained glass windows.

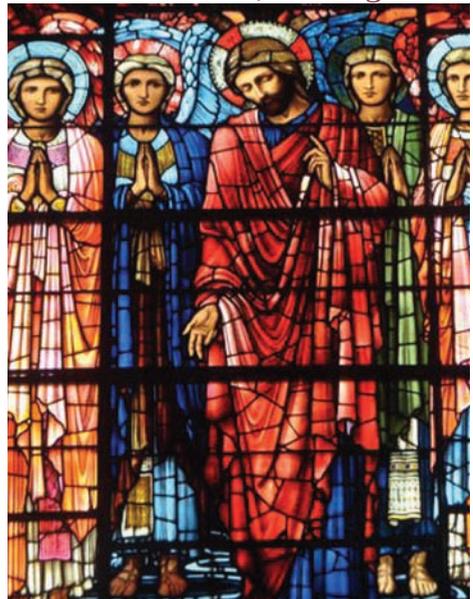
Morris was influenced by visits to Iceland with Eiríkr Magnússon, and he produced a series of English-language translations of Icelandic Sagas. He also achieved success with the publication of his epic poems and novels, namely *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–1870) and *A Dream of John Ball*. (1888)

During this time, Byrne-Jones stained glass window designs were a major part of the success of 'Morris & Co.'. His commissions included 14 windows at All Saints Church, Wilden Lane near Stourport, Christ Church in Oxford and Stanmore Hall in Middlesex. which also included a series of tapestries based on the story of the Holy Grail, Arthurian romances and Greek mythology.

Byrne-Jones quote:

The more materialistic science becomes, the more angels shall I paint. Their wings are my protest in favour of the immortality of the soul.

St. Peters Church, Birmingham



In 1891 Jones was elected a member of the Art Workers Guild. This was an organisation established in 1884 by a group of British architects to promote the 'unity of all the arts', and reduce the perceived difference between fine and applied art. The Guild opposed the strict professional guidelines of architecture being promoted by the Royal Institute of British Architects because the Guild believed that these guidelines would inhibit design. Byrne-Jones talent encompassed all the arts and he showed his skill as an illustrator when working with the Kelmscott Press during the years 1857 to 1898. His work appeared in the following publications:

1857 – *The Fairy Family* by Archibald Maclaren

1872 – *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* by William Morris

1881 – *Bible Gallery* by Dalziel

1896 – *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* by Geoffrey Chaucer

As a Pre-Raphaelite painter Byrne-Jones received many accolades. In 1864 he was elected an associate of the Society of Painters in Water Colours. During the next 6 years Byrne-Jones exhibited a number of watercolours at Society Shows until in 1870 the undraped nakedness of his model, coupled with the suggestion of female sexual assertiveness offended the Victorian sensibilities of the time. Byrne-Jones was asked to make alterations to the painting and was so offended he withdrew the painting and resigned from the Society.



Georgiana Byrne-Jones

The painting in question was 'Phyllis and Demophoon which featured his model and mistress Maria Zambaco, the daughter of his patron Mrs Cassavetti.

Between 1870 – 1877 he only exhibited two watercolours paintings and those at Dudley Art Gallery.

In 1877, he was persuaded to show eight oil paintings at the Grosvenor Gallery (a new rival to the Royal Academy).

These included The Beguiling of Merlin. His style and chosen subjects were right for the times and he was heralded as the star of the new and evolving Aesthetic Movement.

His energy and output were now focused on painting in oils at a larger scale. To facilitate his method of working and complete as many

canvases as possible, he now painted a number of canvases at the same time and rotated their various stages of finish. His output increased and included the Briar Rose series, Laus Veneris, the Golden Stairs, the Pygmalion series and The Mirror of Venus.

The increase in popularity of Byrne-Jones's paintings began when he met and worked with the fine-art photographer Frederick Hollyer.

Hollyer photographed many of his

In 1881 Burne-Jones received an honorary degree from Oxford, and was made an Honorary Fellow in 1882.

As his fame spread the art establishment gave him further honours and in 1885 Burne-Jones was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy. The following year he exhibited 'The Depths of the Sea' at the Academy show.

The painting represented a mermaid in the depths of the sea with a youth in her arms. She it appears has unconsciously drowned the youth in the impetuosity of her love. In 1885 he became the President of the Birmingham Society of Artists and it is believed that at this time he began hyphenating his name, merely as he wrote later—to avoid "annihilation" in the mass of Jones's. Byrne-Jones continued to exhibit annually with the Academy until 1893 when he resigned his Associateship.

In November 1893, he was approached to see if he would accept a Baronetcy on the recommendation of the outgoing Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone. He was formally created a baronet of Rottingdean, in the county of Sussex, and of the Grange, in the parish of Fulham, in the county of London in the baronetage of the United Kingdom on 3 May 1894. He wasn't totally happy about accepting the honour because it disgusted his socialist friend Morris and was scorned by his equally socialist wife

Georgiana. Only his son Philip, who mixed with the set of the Prince of Wales and would inherit the title, truly wanted it. In 1894 Byrne-Jones expanded his artistic repertoire to include theatrical set and costume designer for Henry Irving at the Lyceum Theatre.

Henry Irving was a famous theatre manager and actor. His new production was to be 'King Arthur' by playwright J. Conyns Carr. Carr was also Byrne-Jones's patron, and director of the New Gallery where he exhibited.



The designs, costumes and acting made the play a huge success with Irving as King Arthur and Ellen Terry as Guinevere. It went on to tour America to great acclaim but it is recorded that Byrne-Jones was not pleased with the interpretation of his designs for the production. Burne-Jones had his own standards and principles and although his paintings became a fashionable because of the growing Aestheticism throughout the 1800s. The Pre-Raphaelites thought that true art should be valued primarily as an object of beauty. It should be produced to engender a sensual response, and not just an image with moral implicit in the subject matter. Burne-Jones's wrote to a friend:

"I mean by a picture a beautiful, a romantic dream of something that never was, never will be - 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 - and then I wake up, with the waking of Brynhild."

No artist was more true to his aim. His ideals were resolutely pursued in all his work. Inevitably they provoked resentment in the establishment and Burne-Jones had to endure an extraordinary amount of angry criticism.

Edward Burne-Jones did not set out in his career as an artist to produce paintings of the everyday. His work is much more allegorical and charged with beautiful line, forms and colours. The paintings have sometimes been described as dream like and it was this, more than anything else that estranged him from the age into which he was born. Burne-Jones's output was impressive. His industry was almost inexhaustible, and needed to be, if it was to keep pace with his creativity since his paintings have always portrayed the virtue of good design.

Burne-Jones exerted a considerable influence on French painting. He was also highly influential among French symbolist painters, from 1889. His work inspired poetry by Swinburne. His 1866 publication of 'Poems & Ballads' is

Three of Burne-Jones's studio assistants, John Melhuish Strudwick, T. M. Rooke and Charles Fairfax Murray, went on to have successful painting careers. Murray later became an important collector and respected art dealer. Between 1903 and 1907 he sold a great many works by Burne-Jones and the Pre-Raphaelites to the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery now has the largest collection of works by Burne-Jones in the world, including the massive watercolour Star of Bethlehem, commissioned for the Gallery in 1897.

The paintings are believed by some to have influenced the young J. R. R. Tolkien (author of *The Hobbit*), then growing up in Birmingham. Burne-Jones was also a very strong influence on the 'Birmingham Group' of artists, from the 1890s onwards.

William Morris died in 1896, and the health of the devastated Burne-Jones declined substantially. In 1897 he was elected member of the Royal Academy of Science, Letter and Fine Arts of Belgium. During 1898 he suffered an attack of influenza, and had apparently recovered when he had a relapse and died on 17 June 1898. Six days later, a memorial service was held at Westminster Abbey. It was at the request of the Prince of Wales and the first time an artist had been so honoured. Burne-Jones was buried in the churchyard at St Margaret's Church, Rottingdean, a place he had visited on summer family holidays.

On 16 June 1933, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, a nephew of Burne-Jones, officially opened the centenary exhibition featuring Burne-Jones's drawings and paintings at the Tate Gallery in London. In his opening speech at the exhibition, Baldwin expressed what the art of Burne-Jones stood for:

“In my view, what he did for us common people was to open, as never had been opened before, magic casements of a land of faery in which he lived throughout his life ... It is in that inner world we can cherish in peace, beauty which he has left us and in which there is peace at last for ourselves. The few of us who knew him and loved him well, always keep him in our hearts, but his work will go on long after we have passed away. It may give its message in one generation to a few or in other to many more, but there it will be for ever for those who seek in their generation, for beauty and for those who can recognise and reverence a great man, and a great artist”.



Unfortunately Burne-Jones's work was out of fashion by then and the exhibition marking the 100th anniversary of his birth was a sad affair, poorly attended. It was not until the mid-1970s that his work began to be re-assessed and once again acclaimed. Penelope Fitzgerald published a biography of him in 1975. A major exhibit in 1989 at the Barbican Art Gallery, London (in book form as: John Christian, *The Last Romantics*, 1989), traces Burne-Jones's influence on the next generation of artists, and another at Tate Britain in 1997 explored the links between British Aestheticism and Symbolism.

A second centenary exhibit, this time marking the 100th anniversary of Burne-Jones's death, was held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1998, before traveling to the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and the Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Burne-Jones's legacy is that as a painter who was born in fast changing Victorian times, he represented an age long past but, at the same time, leads us forward to the psychological and sexual introspection of the early twentieth century.

There is a Blue plaque dedicated to him on a building in Bennetts Hill, Birmingham.

THE END