

Pugin Society

e-newsletter

Issue 5

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Four Pugin Etchings

Following on the interesting note concerning etchings in Issue 4, I thought it might be of interest to add a little more about the author of the book which the etchings were to illustrate.

This was Frederick Charles Husenbeth (1796-1872), ordained a Catholic priest at [Old] Oscott in January 1820, and in July of the same year appointed as chaplain to Sir George William Jerningham, 7th Baronet, (and from 1824 Lord Stafford), at Costessey Hall in Norfolk.

The etchings seem likely to have been destined for the second edition of Husenbeth's *The Missal for the Use of the Laity*. The first edition was published in 1837. All the editions listed by Gillow are 12mo, which corresponds nicely with the size of the etchings.

So just as Pugin was working on these etchings J.C. Buckler had just finished rebuilding his gothic masterpiece Costessey Hall, as well as St Walfstan's church and presbytery in the village of Costessey, where Husenbeth would serve until his death. Buckler also worked on the Jerninghams' Catholic cousins, the Bedingfelds, at Oxburgh Hall.

More information on Husenbeth may be found in Gillow, Joseph, *A Literary and Biographical History, or Bibliographical Dictionary of the English Catholics*, London, Burns & Oates, 1887, vol II, pp 492-507

Timothy Fenwick

Pugin and Louis Lafitte

Rosemary Hill

Pugin's uncle, the French artist Louis Lafitte (1770-1828) certainly drew his nephew once. That drawing, made when Pugin was two, is in the V&A. But did Lafitte draw the young Pugin on other occasions? The exquisite study of 1814 was made when Lafitte and his wife, Auguste Pugin's sister, and their young daughter Antonia, were in London. The Napoleonic wars, which had kept the two families apart came to an end that year with the Treaty of Paris and the Lafittes were among the thousands who crossed the Channel in both directions to see people and places that had been inaccessible for more than twenty years. They were still in London for Pugin's third birthday on March 1st, 1815, the day Napoleon escaped from his exile on Elba and the war resumed. The Lafittes were stuck in London for the duration.

Auguste found useful commissions for his brother-in-law, who had become an expert in trimming his sails to changing political circumstances. Lafitte was the last artist to receive the Prix de Rome from Louis XVI but after a narrow escape from revolutionaries in Italy, he had returned to Paris, where he was happy to make drawings for *Calendrier Revolutionnaire*, illustrating the ten months of the new Republican year. He made a series of medals to commemorate Napoleon's victories and now in London he helped Auguste to commemorate his defeat. They worked together on designs for the festivities at Carlton House and Lafitte designed a ceremonial shield to be presented to the Duke of Wellington, after Waterloo had brought a more lasting peace in 1815.

From then onwards the Pugins were able to visit the Lafittes in Paris. The families became great friends and Pugin's mother and his aunt Selina cherished the hope that he might marry his cousin Antonia. By the 1820s,



Left: Study of a young man

Above: Boy asleep in a carriage

under the restored Bourbon monarchy, aristocracy was back in fashion and so the Lafittes adapted yet again. Louis Lafitte's father was a barber and his wife's a footman, but, to Catherine Pugin's great delight, the Pugin 'arms' now appeared, to be later much elaborated by Pugin, who added the motto.

Lafitte's work is not well-known in Britain, but in 1998 Thomas Williams Fine Art in London held an exhibition of fifty-one drawings by him. They were the contents of a single album, disbound for sale, which included pictures of the young Antonia and charming informal studies of Lafitte's close family and friends. Lafitte did not label many of the pictures, presumably he felt no need, as the subjects were so familiar. The late Clive Wainwright and I were both struck by no. 6 in the catalogue 'A boy dozing in a carriage' and wondered if, given that the Lafittes had no son, it might be Pugin. The present whereabouts of that drawing are unknown to me, but another from the same group, 'Portrait of a young man' is now in the British Museum and has been identified by Professor Stephen Bann as the teenage Pugin. For myself I am unconvinced. The face is long and the cheekbones pronounced, unlike the rounder face in the authenticated portraits, and in the boy in the carriage. It is impossible to be certain unless further evidence is found, but in the meantime it would be interesting to have members' views.

Pugin Studies in Spain

We are very pleased to be able to report that we have recently heard from Dr Leticia Bermejo de Rueda, a Spanish Pugin scholar with whom the Society has been in contact since 2014, that she has had an article published in *Goya*, Spain's most prestigious art-historical journal. The title, in translation, is: 'On Collecting in England in the 19th Century: Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin'. We were first in touch with Leticia when she was working on her doctorate which – again in translation – was entitled *A.W.N. Pugin: the theoretical work and its importance in the recovery of medieval models in Nineteenth Century Decorative Arts*. She is particularly interested in Pugin's interaction with medieval metalwork and his own design response to such pieces.

It is refreshing to see interpretations of Pugin and his world that come from a rather more unusual starting point, such as Leticia's, and also to consider who her readership and students will be. And of course, it is great to think that information about Pugin is reaching an ever wider audience. Leticia also has an Instagram page – [awnpugin](#) – with an excellent and extensive collection of Pugin-related images. Our congratulations.

The Chapel of St Michael, Convent of the Holy Child Jesus, St Leonard's on Sea, East Sussex

Catriona Blaker

Since David Bushell's piece on the chapel in our last e-newsletter Christopher Maxwell Stewart, a contact of the Society and a long standing conservationist and resident of St Leonard's, has also sent us some further details.

The current condition of the magnificent Edward Pugin chapel of St Michael, listed Grade 11*, is tied in with the situation of the whole convent site, now owned by a Spanish family and used as a foreign language school, but only for three months of the year, which does not help the overall maintenance of the various buildings that comprise the convent and school. The planning application put in by the owners in 2010 to build on the site and hopefully generate money to restore the chapel has still not been decided; there has been a long standing impasse, which is destructive to the buildings. Christopher Maxwell Stewart comments that it should be noted the owners are aware of the problems and have no wish to deliberately neglect the site; they simply do not have the necessary resources to maintain it, as things stand.



A richly carved reredos in one of the side chapels at St Michael's. (Catriona Blaker)

The chapel meanwhile has been put on Historic England's Heritage at Risk register and the threat of a Repairs Notice given to the owners. Although an application for Lottery Funding is understood to be under consideration and some work on the structure has been done quite recently, such as unblocking the original access to the sacristy, which is in poor condition, and re-opening a northern entrance to the main building, all is very far from resolved and any attempts to improve on this situation have not been helped by Covid 19, which has caused so much conservation and restoration work to be put on hold. The chapel is full of riches and apart from the east window, which was a victim to World War II and was then replaced, is a very complete example of a convent chapel, with remarkable fittings not only by Edward Pugin but by other members of the family also. The Society has been commenting on St Michael's for years; it would be so wonderful if light should ever appear at the end of this particular tunnel. In the meantime, we shall have to live in hope.

A Stationery Box

I am sending you these images at the suggestion of Rosemary Hill in the hope that one of your members might be able to help pin down the provenance of this (not very) portable stationery box that I bought recently at auction.

There were only five extant Earls in the mid 19th century whose titles started with a P. Of these the 3rd Earl of Portarlington is my favourite as he had some documented dealings with AWN Pugin albeit rather unsatisfactory to both parties, over stained glass windows for his parish church. These were set out in detail by Stanley Shepherd in his comprehensive book on Pugin's stained glass, as no.35 in the gazeteer and illustrated on the back of the jacket.

Unless and until Birmingham provides access to the Hardman archive again I am at a loss how to pursue my own researches any further.

In hope.

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