

Pugin Society

e-newsletter

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Pugin and Louis Lafitte

In the last newsletter Rosemary Hill discussed three drawings by Pugin's French uncle Louis Lafitte. Lafitte made a drawing of Pugin at the age of two, which is now in the V&A. Rosemary speculated that perhaps another, untitled, drawing of a boy in a carriage might also have been of Pugin since it came from a disbound album of Lafitte's drawings of friends and family, exhibited in London in 1998. Although the whereabouts of that drawing are not at present known, another from the same album is now in the British Museum where it has been identified by Professor Stephen Bann as a portrait of Pugin as a young man, an identification with which Rosemary takes issue, and so the debate continues



Left: Study of a young man by Lafitte attributed to be of Pugin and held in the British Museum (catalogue number 1999.0327.1). The British Museum catalogue describes this as 'Portrait of a young man, probably Augustus Pugin at the age of fifteen; bust-length, facing three quarters left, with high collar. Graphite.'

Above: Boy asleep in a carriage by Lafitte and possibly of Pugin. Its current whereabouts are unknown.

Alexandra Wedgwood wrote:

I agree with Rosemary's judgment of the Louis Lafitte drawings which she illustrates. I wonder what date she thinks the sketchbook is, or perhaps it was used over a long period? there is documentary evidence that the Pugin family was in France, and particularly in Paris, in 1817, 1819, 1821 and several later years among other later dates. Also Paul Atterbury, (see below) dates the clothes of the smart young man as being of the Regency period. So the date 1819 works well for the sketch of the child as Pugin in the carriage which makes him look about 8 years old, or perhaps a bracket between 7 and 10 years, so 1820 or thereabouts. The slightly sloppy manner of his clothes is very much what one would expect of AWP. Whereas the smart young man, of perhaps 18 to 25 years, does not seem to me at all right for him. His features are all wrong and can you imagine that AWP would ever spend the time required to do his hair

and put on his clothes to look that way. Several of us have stated that Pugin's hair was thick and straight and that he would never have curled it.

I feel worried that such a sketch in the British Museum should be identified as AWP. I think that if enough of us agree with Rosemary and me we should raise the attribution with the BM.

In response to another query about the drawing of the younger Pugin, and whether it was placed inside a carriage or a train, Rosemary Hill wrote:

The boy who does look like Pugin is in a carriage, not a train. France was late to develop railways. They only got going on any scale in the 1840s. Catherine Pugin's letters make many references to the large French diligences (*ed: large, four wheeled, closed stagecoach, employed for long journeys and capable of holding up to 16 people in two or three compartments*) and I think that is what we are looking at.

The article also produced an e-mail from Professor Stephen Bann [*ed: Stephen Bann, CBE, FBA, Emeritus Professor of History of Art at the University of Bristol*].

One of your subscribers has drawn my attention to the doubts raised by Rosemary Hill about my suggestion that a drawing by his uncle Louis Lafitte was in effect a portrait of the young Pugin. She omits to mention that the suggestion was made in the light of a close examination of the letters of Pugin's mother from France and the career of Lafitte on which I will soon be publishing another essay.

I do not expect your readers to have access to my discussion which was published in the proceedings of the centenary conference held at Canterbury. But I would be happy to send you a brief summary of my reasoning and a photo of another Lafitte drawing which may be of Pugin also.

Summary: I was interested to learn from your August bulletin that Rosemary Hill visited the 1998 London exhibition of drawings by Louis Lafitte in the company of Clive Wainwright. He was surely the first person to spot that this French artist was the uncle of Augustus Pugin, and was known to have completed a study



of his nephew as a child, while staying with his relatives in London after the ending of the Napoleonic wars. In the August bulletin, two of the drawings included in this exhibition of 1998 were illustrated, one of which Rosemary Hill considers to be a second sketch of the young Pugin, and the other which leaves her 'unconvinced'. In the published essay based on my plenary lecture for the bicentenary Pugin conference (held at the University of Kent in 2012), I suggested that 'at least one' of the Lafitte drawings, represented his nephew Pugin, and focused in particular on the work now in the collection of the British Museum.¹ This is this drawing that Rosemary Hill now queries. But I quite agree with her that the second drawing which you included in your August bulletin (captioned in the 1998 catalogue as 'The Long Journey: a young Boy dozing in a Carriage') is likely to represent the young Pugin. My argument for both attributions runs as follows.

Louis Lafitte (1779-1828) was a classically trained French academic artist whose career faltered in the revolutionary period, picked up towards the end of the Empire, and reached its peak after the Restoration of the Bourbon

Joseph Nash portrait of Pugin as used as a frontispiece of Benjamin Ferrey's *Recollections of ANW Pugin* but flipped.

dynasty, when he was given the prestigious post of draughtsman to the royal court ('dessinateur à la Chambre du Roi'). Yet the collection of drawings brought together in 1998 had nothing to do with his official duties, and were not done for sale. They were (in the words of the 1998 catalogue) 'charming records of the artist's personal life'. Not surprisingly in the light of this status, the information that Lafitte added was limited to a few dates, and an occasional place name. But the mention of the place name 'Rosny' is enough to alert us to the fact that several of the drawings relate specifically to the period after 1820, when Lafitte was designing items for the country home of the Duchesse de Berry in the Seine valley. The Chateau de Rosny was a place of personal as well as professional interest for Lafitte, since in 1820 his only daughter, Antonia, married Auguste-Isidore Molinos, the steward of the estate.

The highly informative letters written from France by Pugin's mother at various stages in the 1820s alert us to the major role that Lafitte played in organising, and accompanying, the journeys outside Paris that she made in company with her son. Auguste Pugin Senior was doubtless occupied with the professional duties that detained him in the city. In a letter from Rouen dated 24 September 1824 (on its arrival in England), Mrs Pugin recounts that she and her son had been accompanied to Rosny by Lafitte, and met there by the carriage of the Molinos family. This information of the joint carriage journeys fits well with the subject of Lafitte's 'Boy dozing in a carriage', Augustus being 12 years old at the time. Mother and son did not accompany their father to Paris in the following year, because of Augustus's ill health. But they were back in Paris once again in September 1827, when the young Pugin's enhanced drawing skills are demonstrated by the signed sketch of a view from a hotel bedroom in the Rue Jacob. Once again, a trip to Rosny was arranged, and it is carefully described in Mrs Pugin's letters. We learn of a mild flirtation on the part of the Molinos' small niece, 'who began her courtship with Augustus (from who she had rather permitted than gave a kiss)'.

My suggestion is that, in the course of the 1827 visit to France, Lafitte depicted his precocious, smartly dressed nephew in two drawings: not only the portrait study in the British Museum, and also possibly shown in the exquisite little landscape of the Seine valley, labelled by Lafitte 'Route de Vernon', and so located just a few



Louis Lafitte, *Route de Vernon*, 1827

miles from Rosny. The carriage has broken down, and the female members of the party (including Mrs Pugin, and possibly Antonia?) have taken refuge from the sun under a tree. Lafitte is of course the artist sketching, and a diminutive male figure with an umbrella (possibly Molinos?) directs the necessary repairs to the carriage in the right background. A young man (possibly Pugin?) is stretched out in the left foreground, disdainful of the heat.

In case it seems here that my imagination has run riot, I should point out here that there seems to be no other plausible candidate for the young male whom Lafitte seems to have sketched once, or twice, or even three times between 1824 and 1827, having undoubtedly done already so in 1816. Antonia was an only child. Lafitte's son-in-law Molinos, being born in 1795, was a grown man in the period. Yet Rosemary Hill is, of course, quite right to raise the fundamental question: does the portrait drawing in the British Museum actually look like Pugin? Apart from these potential cases, there are unfortunately no authentic images of Pugin for this whole period, and in fact there is no record for the rest of his life, in my view, which can stand comparison with the drawing skills of Lafitte. The British Museum sketch by Lafitte is a portrait in 'half profile', which necessarily gives a less fleshy caste to the nose, while as a general rule Pugin's facial features have been rendered more frontally. It is however important to bear in mind that printed images (such as the print after Joseph Nash's recollected portrait which serves as the frontispiece to Ferrey's *Recollections*) invert the orientation of the features, and so should be 'flipped' from right to left to achieve a direct comparison with an original drawing.

Personally I find there is no problem in comparing the figure in Lafitte's portrait drawing with Nash's later portrait (when flipped), given the effect of such telling details as the set of the eyes and lips, and the springing of the abundant hair from a broad forehead. Nash was of course recalling Pugin as he had developed in his early manhood, and not as the fellow pupil of Auguste whom he had rescued from a fainting fit in Notre Dame during the 1827 visit. But I would argue that Lafitte's penetrating portrait well conveys the febrile intensity of Pugin in the earlier period.

Note: 1 See Stephen Bann, 'Pugin - the French Connection', in Timothy Brittain-Catlin, Jan De Maeyer and Martin Bessani (eds), *A.W.N. Pugin's Global Influence: Gothic Revival Worldwide* (Leuven University Press, 2016), pp. 16-31.

Rosemary Hill's response follows.

To take Professor Bann's points in order:

Clive Wainwright was a great scholar and a friend and mentor to me in the early days of my work on Pugin, but it was not he who 'spotted' the Lafitte connection. There was no need, it was never lost. Benjamin Ferrey, in his biography of 1861, mentions Auguste Pugin's 'brother-in-law Monsieur Lafitte' and gives a brief outline of his career [p 31 in the 1978 edition].

The evidence to support Professor Bann's identifications of both images, is circumstantial. For the first it depends on the assumption that the (delightful) sketch with the broken-down carriage depicts one particular visit to Rosny. While such a visit was a noteworthy event for Pugins it was, as Professor Bann points out, a fairly regular occurrence for the Lafittes. This may show another occasion. The identification thus depends on the Lafittes having no other friends or relatives who might have come on such an outing. We cannot know for sure, but it seems unlikely. We do know that another of A C Pugin's sisters, Mme Bernard, was on friendly terms with her sister and brother in law, which suggests a wider family circle. The short biography that prefaces Lafitte's post-mortem sale catalogue describes him having a 'coeur bon et des moeurs douces' (a good heart and easy manner) he probably had many friends.

As for the portrait of the young man, all the undisputed depictions of Pugin, including the only photograph, concur with the eye witness account of Kerril Amherst, who describes him as having 'long thick straight' hair and presenting 'a striking figure, though rather below ordinary stature and thick set'. Amherst was recalling Pugin at Oscott, when he was in his early twenties, but it seems unlikely that he changed so very much. He could never have had curly hair and he would certainly never have curled it. He was vocally opposed to anything he regarded as vanity and dandyism and was notoriously slovenly in his dress. By the time he was 15 he was annoying his parents by wearing workman's clothes. His mother remarks in one of her letters that his only fault was that he didn't know 'how to dress himself'. The sitter in this portrait is carefully dressed and the opposite of 'thick set'.

I'm not sure I see 'febrile intensity' in the drawing, which is highly accomplished, but very much within the conventions of the period. The expression may be a subjective matter but objectively I simply cannot see any resemblance between this young man and Pugin, as depicted and described. I think that at the very least a large question mark should be put against the identification. But perhaps the next step is to consult the BM.

Paul Atterbury also responded:

The relationship between the Lafitte and Pugin families, highlighted by Rosemary Hill, was certainly an interesting one, and adds another dimension to our understanding of the world in which the young Augustus grew up. However, I too have doubts about the possible identification of the anonymous young man in the drawing as A N W Pugin. Apart from the facial dissimilarities highlighted by Rosemary, there is also the problem of chronology. The young man in the drawing would seem, from the style of dress and hair, to be in his mid to late teens. When Louis Lafitte dies, Pugin is 16. The young man in the drawing could be older and the style of dress, the high collared coat and shirt, the complex stock held in place by a jewel or pin, could suggest quite a grand background and a way of life, contrasting somewhat with the well-known bohemianism of the Pugins. In addition, this style of dress suggests a fashion prevalent at the height of the Regency period rather than in the late 1820s. For me the existing title, Drawing of a Young Man, seems the right one.

Grace Dieu Manor School Leicestershire

Rory O'Donnell

The school announced its closure for 3 July 2020. The estate of Grace Dieu was given to Ambrose Phillipps by his father on his marriage to Laura Clifford, a cousin of Lord Clifford. His architect was William Railton, who designed an E-plan Tudor Revival manor house, unusually also including a private chapel (1833-5). Phillipps, who had become a Catholic as a schoolboy, seems to have been advised on the missionary role of the chapel and its furnishing chapel by the leading Jesuit Fr Randall Lythgoe. A four bay nave was added which most unusually included a rood screen. Pugin, arrived weeks after the opening of the chapel in 1837 and was soon redesigning the screen and altering the chancel. In 1848 he added an aisle with a beautiful stone baldachino over the altar with a new arcade and parclose screens looking into the older church. The chapel was filled with metalwork, Nazarene paintings, stained glass, tiling and textiles. Pugin also added a severe ancillary wing and a stable court entered through a characteristic penticed gateway. In 1862 Phillipps inherited the family seat Garendon Hall. He added 'de Lisle' to his name and allowed EW Pugin to mangle Garendon's Palladian forms. Grace Dieu was let and later sold. The sanctuary of the chapel was truncated, but otherwise left largely intact.

With an eye on its historic role, the Rosminian Order at Ratcliffe College opened it as their prep-school in 1933. Certain works of art were returned to the chapel, such as the painting of St Philomena in its Pugin frame. But during the '60s the school was to be the scene of two scandals, one of which only emerged much later. The other was the ruthless denuding of the chapel on the specious plea of Liturgical Reform. The rood screen had been removed c1962. Then c1965 went the painted wooden high altar and reredos – either to JJ Scoles's or to Pugin's design, I still can't decide which – the two Pugin side altars and their Nazarene altar-pieces, the pulpit used by Newman and some parclose screens. The St Joseph, stripped of its Pugin frame, was refixed as was the Italian Primitive icon of Our Lady, but once again removed from its intended framing. The St Philomena was for sometime in the collection of the singer Cher. The culprits were a priest (who later married) and the art master, who, it was rumoured, fancied the reredos for his marital bed. Thus ends an attempt to revivify a famous Catholic Revival site notable for Pugin's involvement as both architect and family friend. The Grade II listed buildings are now for sale as commercial property.

Pugin's St Osmund's and Church TV

Pugin designed this small Catholic church in Salisbury which was built between 1847 and 1848. It was much extended in 1893 and now accommodates a maximum of about 200 under normal conditions. There are three Catholic churches in Salisbury and between them they service a total Catholic population of about 800 which includes a number of Indian and Filipino Catholics who work in the local hospital, as well as a small congregation of Polish immigrants.

Conventionally St Osmund's has had Masses at 9 and 11 am on a Sunday morning and again at 6 pm. During the week there has been a daily Mass, though during the pandemic lockdown this has been extended to include a Mass at 10 am and another at 7 pm.

Some three years ago it was decided to install ChurchTV in St Osmund's. This is a system whereby all services are live-streamed onto the internet and can be watched anywhere in the world. Just Google Church TV if you want to see the extent of the network.

The results have been spectacular with online 'attendance' of something like 1,400 for most Sunday Masses, and with this "attendance" spread throughout the UK but also throughout the rest of the world. Some seem to have adopted St Osmund's as 'their' church during the lockdown.

It is common in the current age to suggest that religious attendance is on the decline but the evidence in Salisbury is very much the opposite with huge online congregations for most Masses. Perhaps the old conventional system of 'attending' church may no longer be relevant to a modern age, but the statistics in Salisbury suggest that the interest in religion is as high as it ever was. I am sure that Pugin would be delighted, and while he would have preferred physical attendance at Mass, he would have been fascinated by the new development that created such a huge online congregation. Perhaps the lockdown was not all bad news.

A Stationery Box



In the last edition we also published three illustrations of a stationery box which were provided by James Joll. Again Alexandra Wedgwood has responded:

'I am worried by the uncomfortable fit of the 'P' and the earl's coronet in the quatrefoil. AWP and Hardman would never have done that and probably not EWP either.'

Ramsgate Pugin Week 7-14 September

Some short streamed talks, two walks with commentary, and a requiem for Pugin on 14th. To find out more, and for St Augustine's opening times, consult www.augustine-pugin.org.uk

Future editions

This edition is largely devoted to a debate about the identity of the sitter in a drawing which purport to be of Pugin. However, the e-newsletter has no fixed format and will vary depending upon the inputs we receive.

Please keep your inputs flowing and we will promise to publish them as quickly as is possible. The Society is your Society and the e-newsletter is *your* e-newsletter so use it as you feel appropriate.

Contributions should be sent to the editor at jpelliot@btinternet.com