

Guide to the Edward Burne-Jones Letters to John Ruskin

MSS 56



YCBA Library Court. Photograph by Richard Caspole, YCBA, 2016.

compiled by Victoria Hepburn; edited by Francis Lapka

2018

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Yale Center for British Art, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts
1080 Chapel Street
P. O. Box 208280
New Haven, CT 06520-8280
203-432-2814
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CALL NUMBER: MSS 56

CREATOR: Burne-Jones, Edward Coley, 1833-1898

TITLE: Edward Burne-Jones Letters to John Ruskin

DATES: 1862-ca. 1889

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: .42 linear feet (1 box)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The collection comprises letters from Edward Burne-Jones to John Ruskin, written from 1862 to ca. 1889.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/ycba.mss.0056>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use on site, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/ycba.mss.0056>.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The collection is the physical property of the Yale Center for British Art. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts.

Preferred Citation

Edward Burne-Jones Letters to John Ruskin. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund.

Scope and Contents

The collection comprises six letters from the painter Edward Burne-Jones to his friend, the art and social critic John Ruskin. Three of the letters were written in June 1862 while Burne-Jones was in Venice with his wife Georgiana. While there, Ruskin commissioned Burne-Jones with making copies of works by Venetian masters. These letters to Ruskin, who was in Milan at the time of their writing, reveal Burne-Jones's anxiety about carrying out the task of copying satisfactorily. In one letter, Burne-Jones remarks upon the restoration work occurring at St. Mark's, and in another letter he describes a trip to Torcello. This letter includes a cartoon sketch by Burne-Jones of himself and Georgiana with the Venice skyline behind them. These three letters are partially reproduced in Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, vol. 1. (London: Macmillan, 1904), 245-248. This period is also addressed in Fiona MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 144.

Two more of the letters are written on printed stationery from the Burne-Jones family home, The Grange, in West Kensington. In one of these, dating from the 1880s, Burne-Jones remarks that he has just read the latest installment of *Praeterita*, Ruskin's serialized autobiography. He reminisces about their trip to Milan together in the 1860s and wishes that he and Ruskin could be monks "painting books and being always let off divine service because of our skill in said painting." In the same letter, Burne-Jones is glad that Ruskin is pleased with Thomas Matthews Rooke—Burne-Jones's assistant whom Ruskin commissioned with making architectural drawings. This letter is partially reproduced in the introduction to *The Complete Works of John Ruskin* (Library Edition), ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903-1912), vol. 36, lv. The other letter written from The Grange contains a comedic set of cartoon sketches by Burne-Jones, illustrating the difficulties he has keeping his pictures straight on the wall. He wonders if Ruskin also has this issue.

A final, undated note pertains to a proposed meeting, which Burne-Jones must reschedule due to a conflict with a portrait "sitter."

All six of the letters intimate the very great esteem Burne-Jones had for Ruskin. They are addressed variously to "dear Papa," "My Blessed," and "Oh Blessed One."

Collection Contents

b. 1, f. 1 Edward Burne-Jones letter to John Ruskin 1862 June

1 sheet (3 pages) : autograph letter, signed ; 21 x 26 cm folded to 21 x 13 cm
Burne-Jones, Edward Coley, 1833-1898

Burne-Jones is working on a "little head of Paolo in the Ducal Pal[ace]" for Ruskin and is anxious about the quality. (Fiona Macarthy has identified this to be a study from Veronese's *Thanksgiving for the Victory of Lepanto in the Sala del Collegio*. See Macarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 144.) Burne-Jones asks Ruskin to stay in Milan and not to visit "the mountain" (presumably the Alps). Burne-Jones describes his encounter with Gentile Bellini's painting of St. Mark (*St. Mark Preaching in Alexandria*, 1504-7) and his amazement over its detail: "it is quite as exact as a photograph, with colour besides." Burne-Jones writes of the restorations at St. Mark's: "all the R[ight] side is covered up and sealed off, it is so miserable." Burne-Jones worries that the Bellini painting soon "might be the only record of that 7th heaven." Burne-Jones ends his letter to Ruskin with, "Goodbye, of course Georgie [Georgiana Burne-Jones] who is madly in love with you sends love. We have endearing names for you which wild horses would not extort from us in confession. Ned."

Partially reproduced in Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, vol. 1. (London: Macmillan, 1904), 245.

With later annotation, in graphite: Hotel de Ville, Venice.

Genres / Formats:
Correspondence

Names:
Bellini, Gentile, -1507
Burne-Jones, Edward Coley, 1833-1898 -- Correspondence
Burne-Jones, Georgiana, Lady, 1840-1920
Ruskin, John, 1819-1900 -- Correspondence
Veronese, 1528-1588

Corporate Body:
Basilica di San Marco (Venice, Italy)

b. 1, f. 2 Edward Burne-Jones letter to John Ruskin 1862 June

1 sheet (4 pages) : autograph letter, signed ; 21 x 26 cm folded to 21 x 13 cm
Burne-Jones, Edward Coley, 1833-1898

Burne-Jones writes that (John William) Inchbold has arrived, bringing Ruskin's letter. Burne-Jones remarks upon his copies made for Ruskin: "four rotten little sketches; one of a head in the Veronese *Triumph* at the Ducal Palace, one of the *Bacchus* head of Tintoret (as nearly original size as I could guess), one of St. Catherine, and one of the Harem or Marriage of Cana. They really are so far more faithful than those I did under your eye, for you frightened me, you did." Burne-Jones describes a trip to Torcello: "Cat [Georgiana] and I went early to Torcello and confided much poetic sentiment to each other." Despite their enjoyment, Burne-Jones writes of his and Georgiana's homesickness.

Includes a cartoon sketch by Burne-Jones of himself and Georgiana with Venice behind.

Partially reproduced in Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, vol. 1. (London: Macmillan, 1904), 246-247.

Geographic Names:

Torcello (Italy)
Venice (Italy)

Genres / Formats:

Correspondence
Pen and ink drawings

Names:

Burne-Jones, Edward Coley, 1833-1898 -- Correspondence
Burne-Jones, Georgiana, Lady, 1840-1920
Inchbold, John William, 1830-1888
Ruskin, John, 1819-1900 -- Correspondence
Tintoretto, 1518-1594

b. 1, f. 3

Edward Burne-Jones letter to John Ruskin
1 sheet (1 page) : autograph letter, signed ; 21 x 26 cm folded to 21 x 13 cm
Burne-Jones, Edward Coley, 1833-1898

1862 June

Burne-Jones writes in reply to a letter from Ruskin. He references a "Harry VIII," a nickname for a shared acquaintance who Georgiana Burne-Jones describes as "the boy." Burne-Jones writes that he has had a hard time seeing in the dark to make his copies for Ruskin. He has completed the "sketch of St. Sebastian" and states "today I make a sketch of the St. Catherine" (of Alexandria?). Burne-Jones and Georgiana are "longing" to be with Ruskin in Milan. "William started yesterday for Venice so we shall miss I fear unless we meet at Padua."

Partially reproduced in Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, vol. 1. (London: Macmillan, 1904), 247-248.

Genres / Formats:

Correspondence

Names:

Burne-Jones, Edward Coley, 1833-1898 -- Correspondence
Burne-Jones, Georgiana, Lady, 1840-1920
Catherine, Saint, of Alexandria
Ruskin, John, 1819-1900 -- Correspondence
Sebastian, Saint

b. 1, f. 4 Edward Burne-Jones letter to John Ruskin (?) between 1860
1 sheet (1 page) : autograph letter, signed ; 11.5 x 18 cm and 1890?
Burne-Jones, Edward Coley, 1833-1898

"Dearest Oldie[?] So disappointed & sorry that[?] my reason against Friday is that I have a sitter that day, and shall be in extreme misery as I am always on these occasions - if Thursday would do as well for you I would [...] - or today but if Tuesday is your only day be sure & come. Ever your loving Ned."

If, indeed, addressed to 'Oldie' then this is written to John Ruskin. Ruskin signed his letters 'Oldie' in his correspondence with Burne-Jones.

Genres / Formats:
Correspondence

Names:
Burne-Jones, Edward Coley, 1833-1898 -- Correspondence
Ruskin, John, 1819-1900 -- Correspondence

b. 1, f. 5 Edward Burne-Jones letter to John Ruskin between 1885
1 sheet (4 pages) : autograph letter, signed ; 18 x 23 cm folded to 18 x 12 cm and 1889?
Burne-Jones, Edward Coley, 1833-1898

"Ho blessed one, I have just read the last *Praeterita* - it has been in the house a week - and it is the first time in my life that this has happened that I haven't instantly read *Praeterita*, *Fors*, or new book of thine - and it means that I am very down this winter and sad and flat - and old and tired. But it picked me up brightly, and I wish I had lived with you always - and that we had been monks - Joan & Georgie & Margaret monks too - painting books and being always let off divine service because of our skill in said painting. My dear there has been nothing in my life so sweet to look back upon as that journey to Milan twenty-five years ago - that was the best of my days, and can't be again.

I wish we could play together sometimes - all you say of little [Thomas Matthews] Rooke is true, and I'm glad that I had him to give you - he is really a son of mine - the faithfulest & best of sons.

But of all sons Phil is best and every day comforts me more & more - and now I can really ask and take his advice about my work and help myself with his criticism[?] - [...] that happy for me.

But I'm not well this winter, and wish I could see you sometimes most blessed of friends. Goodbye - this time a letter to answer - I write it because I want to talk to you, but I have nothing to say, and am such [...] your most loving Ned."

Ruskin's *Praeterita* was published in parts between 1885 and 1889. Burne-Jones first visited Milan in 1859.

A portion of this letter is reproduced in the introduction to *The Complete Works of John Ruskin* (Library Edition), ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903-1912), vol. 36, lv.

Printed letterhead: The Grange, West Kensington, W.

Preferred Titles:
Ruskin, John, 1819-1900. Praeterita

Genres / Formats:
Correspondence

Names:

Burne-Jones, Edward Coley, 1833-1898 -- Correspondence
Burne-Jones, Philip, 1861-1926
Rooke, T. M. (Thomas Matthews), 1842-1942
Ruskin, John, 1819-1900 -- Correspondence

b. 1, f. 6

Edward Burne-Jones letter to John Ruskin

1880s?

1 sheet (4 pages) : autograph letter, signed ; 17.5 x 23 cm folded to 17.5 x 11.5 cm
Burne-Jones, Edward Coley, 1833-1898

"My Blessed, Do maids dust your pictures - and if so do they treat you as I am treated? Every morning my engravings, pictures, all my treasures hanging on the wall look like this: [Pen-and-ink sketch of pictures hanging off-kilter on the wall]. Every evening I set them straight and look at them longingly like this: [Sketch of Burne-Jones reclining on a sofa with straightened pictures behind him on the wall]. And every morning again: [Sketch of Burne-Jones crouched below his pictures hanging in disarray.] Do they do that to you? Ever your old same, most ancient, Ned. My love to Joan - O what a dear priceless Joan - Joan to nurse me when I'm poorly -"

Printed letterhead: The Grange, West Kensington, W.

Subjects:

Picture frames and framing

Genres / Formats:

Correspondence

Names:

Burne-Jones, Edward Coley, 1833-1898 -- Correspondence
Ruskin, John, 1819-1900 -- Correspondence
Severn, Joan, 1846-1924

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Painters -- Great Britain
Painting, British -- 19th century
Picture frames and framing
Pictures -- Copying

Geographic Names

Torcello (Italy)
Venice (Italy)

Genres / Formats

Correspondence

Names

Bellini, Gentile, -1507
Burne-Jones, Edward Coley, 1833-1898
Burne-Jones, Georgiana, Lady, 1840-1920
Burne-Jones, Philip, 1861-1926
Rooke, T. M. (Thomas Matthews), 1842-1942
Ruskin, John, 1819-1900
Severn, Joan, 1846-1924
Tintoretto, 1518-1594
Veronese, 1528-1588

Corporate Body

Basilica di San Marco (Venice, Italy)