

INFORMATION PREPARED BY
FRIENDS OF MORLEY

BAWDEN/TODD PAINTINGS IN REFECTORY

These fine paintings were done by Edward Bawden C.B.E., R.A and his pupil Justin Todd between 1958 and 1963. There had been some earlier paintings which had been destroyed by enemy action in World War II and the ones in the refectory replaced these.

The FRIENDS of MORLEY raised funds to carry out repair and restoration of these paintings which have suffered some damage owing to their location.

The paintings represent scenes from Geoffrey Chaucer's book. Quotations below are taken from the Penguin Classics edition translated into modern English by Nevill Coghill.

THE CANTERBURY TALES.

As you enter the refectory the first painting on the right wall is also the most recent. It was painted by Edward Bawden in 1963 and represents "The Wife of Bath's Tale" and "The Nun's Priest's Tale"

THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE

A knight violates a girl and is followed to court by an angry mob. He is condemned to death by the King but his life is spared by the Queen who intercedes for him. He is to find the answer to the riddle "What is it that women most desire" within one year, or his life will be forfeit. After searching the whole world unsuccessfully he returns to court with a heavy heart. Seeing some ladies dancing, he rushes to ask them to help him find the answer to his riddle. As he approaches they vanish and are replaced by a hideous old woman. In desperation he asks her to give him the answer to the question. She says that she will give him the answer if he will do what she requires of him.

She tells him the answer "A woman wants the self same sovereignty over her husband as over her lover, and to master him; he must not be above her." When the knight is brought in front of the Queen he gives this answer and is freed. He wants to go but the old woman demands that the knight marry her.

On the wedding night he cannot stand to look at her and at last she offers him to choose that she will always be ugly and therefore not desirable to other men, or beautiful and a source of anxiety. He cannot choose but leaves the choice to her thus giving her the mastery. They live happily ever after.

The story starts at the bottom right where the injured girl is being taken to the court. The girl is covered with a blanket. The people follow the knight in to the court. In the upper right of the picture the girl and her mother are complaining and the knight is to be sentenced to death. Bottom left is the party of women dancing and the knight is seen talking to the old woman. In the middle upper picture the knight is shown with the old woman in front of the queen. In the top left the knight and the old woman are in the bed.

THE NUN'S PRIEST'S TALE

This is the wonderful allegorical story of the cockerel Chanticleer and his wives. The story is full of tidbits of medieval philosophy and wide learning of sciences including pharmacology. A cunning fox

seizes Chanticleer by praising him and asking him to crow. To crow he has to close his eyes and stretch his neck. The fox pounces and runs off, but is hotly pursued by all the villagers. Chanticleer manages to get free by in his turn persuading the fox to sneer at the pursuers. When the fox opens his mouth Chanticleer flies to the tree top to be out of reach.

The fox tries to coax him down again.

"But sir, I meant no harm, be not offended, Come own and I'll explain what I intended, So help me God I'll tell the truth - on oath!" To which Chanticleer responds: *"No", said the cock "and curses on us both, And first on me if I were such a dunce As let you fool me oftener than once"*

The fox learns to keep his mouth shut.

In the lower part of the picture Chanticleer can be seen with his first wife, Pertelote and all his other wives. In one part they are being fed, in the other they are roosting. Above this the fox has caught Chanticleer and is being chased by villagers with sticks and with dogs. At the top Chanticleer has escaped and is sitting in the tree.

Paintings to the right of the bow window by Edward Bawden 1961

CHAUCER'S TALE OF SIR TOPAZ

Sir Topaz has to fight a mighty three-headed giant, Sir Elephant in order to gain the love of an Elfin Queen. -This is a strange story which rambles on somewhat until the host at the Tabard Inn (in Southwark) stops it in mid flight. In the original it goes on to Chaucers Tale of Sir Melibee which is in the form of a dialectical homily or moral debate. This rather theoretical story is not illustrated.

THE CLERK'S TALE

A Marquis, after being begged by his vassals to marry decides at last to marry the daughter of one of his humblest subjects. Griselda is a patient and obedient wife but the Marquis puts her through several trials including kidnapping her children and humiliating her throughout. At last he sends her back to her father's humble home with nothing but a simple smock she was wearing when she left. She endures all with great patience. He then asks her to take charge of preparations for her replacement. She willingly agrees. It is all a trick. Her daughter is the "replacement". At last the Marquis relents his cruelty and Griselda is restored to her place as his wife.

At the bottom the Marquis approaches Griselda and Janicula, her father so that he might marry her. Then the humble girl is dressed in finery and taken in to the castle. A man on horseback carries off one of her children in the top right. At the bottom right she is turned out of the castle in nothing but the rags she came in. In the centre there is a wonderful scene showing the final feast.

*"They stripped and set on her a crown of gold;
A coronet of jewels manifold
They crowned her with and led her into hall
There to receive the homage of them all. "*

THE PARDONER'S TALE

This short set of scenes on the corner depicts three drunken rioters. They find a man who tells them where to find Death and kill him. When they reach the place he told them of, they find some treasure. Now they plot to cut each other out and in their greed succeed only in killing one another.

The Pardoner ends by offering to have the Host kiss relics which he carries that his sins might be forgiven. The Host makes fun of the pardoner who becomes very angry.

Painting in the annex to the left of the bow window by Edward Bawden (1961)

THE SQUIRE'S TALE

The Squire's tale takes place in Tartary. Cambuskan, the King of the Tartars proclaims a feast to mark his reign of 20 years. They eat magnificently of swan and heron and while they are listening to music a knight comes in on a horse made of brass and carrying a mirror. He is wearing a golden ring on his thumb and wears a naked sword. He is an emissary from the King of India and Araby and has brought four gifts: a brass horse that can go around the earth in a day, a mirror which will give warning of coming adversity (it will also show ladies any gentleman's false intent), and a ring which will allow the wearer to understand the language of birds and a sword which will cut through any armour, but if turned over and laid with the flat on a wound will heal it.

The ring is given to Cambuskan's daughter, Canace. After a night's carousing everyone has to sleep it off except for the abstemious Canace. She rises early puts on the ring and goes for a walk. She can understand all the birds. One poor falcon is so overcome with grief at having a faithless lover that she is trying to tear her own heart out. Canace comforts her and takes her home and cures her.

The painting shows a knight on a brass horse in the court of Cambuskan. The King and Queen are dressed in finery and the table has the swan and heron. Above is Canace, the daughter of the Tartar King with a lovesick falcon in the tree.

THE KNIGHT'S TALE

The Knight is selected by drawing lots to tell the first tale. Theseus the Duke of Athens having subdued the Amazons and marries Hippolyta the Queen of Scythia. Along with her came her younger sister Emily. On the way home he conquers Thebes after an appeal from its women. Two cousins, from Thebes, Palamon and Arcite, of royal blood, survive the battle but are kept as prisoners in a tower. Spying Emily below gathering flowers in May, they fall in love with her in turn and become deadly rivals. A visitor to the Duke through long friendship secures Arcite's release, on condition that he will never again set foot on the lands of Duke Theseus. Arcite, his features changed in grief returns to Athens in disguise and gets employment as a servant in the palace of the Duke.

Through intelligence and diligence he gets promoted and rewarded. Meanwhile Palamon having languished in prison for seven years manages to affect his escape with the aid of a drugged potion. They meet perchance in the nearby woods and although Arcite is armed, chivalry forbids him to kill Palamon. He therefore brings armour and weapons so that they can have a duel to the death over Emily. The Duke arrives suddenly on a hunting expedition and interrupts a fight between the cousins.

Being apprised of the situation he decides that each will go away for a year and gather 100 knights to have a battle and the winner will have Emily as the prize. In a splendid tournament governed strictly by rules forbidding stabbing weapons or arrows, Arcite is thrown from his horse when a spirit sent by Pluto jumps out of the ground and is killed. Behind the scenes Palamon (supported by Venus) and Arcite (by Mars) have their supernatural supporters. Palamon has already been unhorsed and would otherwise have lost. Everyone is very much saddened by his dying and give him a splendid funeral. Palamon and Emily are married.

In the picture the left hand side shows Palamon in the tower is looking down on his beloved Emily gathering flowers by the fountain. On the bottom right Duke Theseus out hunting comes upon the two friends having a duel, clad in armour in the woods. The left hand part of the panel shows the 100 knight battle. While the battle is in progress with the Duke and court are looking on. The splendour of the scene with towers and temples erected by the Duke are shown as well as the armed might of the combatants. The spirit carrying a flaming torch frightens the horse and Palamon is thrown to his death.

THE PRIORESS'S TALE

The story of Hugh of Lincoln supposedly killed by the Jews. Little Hugh is shown (with angel wings) in a ditch with his mother and a parson looking down at his body. Above this the Jews in red robes are being herded by some men in armour to their trial and execution.

THE MANCIPLE'S TALE

The Manciple (one who buys provisions for a College or court) is a great cynic and no believer in the manners of the upper classes being any more than a thin veneer. Phoebus described as "a paladin of lustiest marrow" has white crow, which he teaches to speak. He is married but his wife has a lover. Phoebus goes away and his wife immediately sends for her lover. The crow starts saying "cuckoo, cuckoo" when Phoebus returns. In a rage kills his wife for being unfaithful and then in revenge plucks the feathers of the crow who told him of his wife's adultery. The Manciple ends his story with a little homily against those who tell tales.

Painting next to the bar by Justin Todd (1961)

This is a masterpiece of integrated design. The centre is held by a nuptial feast, a walled garden and above it the nuptial bath and bed blessing (The Merchant's Tale). Supporting this is the scene in the mill on the left (The Reeve's Tale and one in a tall medieval house, The Miller's Tale. This is very apt because the Miller and the Reeve (magistrate but also a carpenter are in competition with one another)

THE REEVE'S TALE,

Set in windmill on left. Two Cambridge students attempt a jape at the expense of a thieving miller, at whose mill they are stranded for the night. The miller who is portrayed as a "market bully" is quite obviously a nasty bit of work with a proud wife; clearly being set up for a fall. There is an amusing start to the story. The students are not very worldly. The College Manciple is very ill and they have to take care of the grinding of the corn. They are from the North and are given Geordie accents. The miller looses their horse to distract their attention while he steals some of their flour, but they have no means of getting back to College. So they have to ask the miller to put them up. During the night there is much creeping around in the single bedroom. One student deceives the miller's wife, who is unaware that she is not in her husband's bed, into sleeping with him; while the other climbs into bed with the miller under the mistaken supposition that the bed contains his friend. The miller soon disillusions him and in the dark a fight breaks out, with the result that the miller is thoroughly beaten by his own wife. This story is told in revenge for The Miller's Tale below by the Reeve(magistrate) who is also a carpenter.

THE MERCHANT'S TALE,

This story deals with the issue of whether a man should marry or not. It concerns a knight of good renown (January) who had been a bachelor for over 60 years but in that time had had been quite

active in love. Now he has decided that the time has come to seek a wife. There is a long discourse between his various friends and advisers with many quotes from the classical authors but finally he decides that he must choose a girl under 20 years old and finds a really attractive one (May) in the town. Quite soon the new wife and the knight's squire find they are attracted to one another but have no opportunity. After a while the knight suddenly goes blind and now will not let his wife go anywhere without he has his hand on her. One evening they go in to his walled garden. The young people contrive that the squire sneaks in too and hides in a tree, to await the arrival of his loved one and her husband. On the pretext of picking some fruit the wife climbs from her blind husband's back into the tree where her lover is waiting, watched, however, by the king and queen of fairyland. Without more ado her smock is lifted over her head by the young squire. Meanwhile the King and Queen of the fairies are also in the garden. Outraged, the fairy king restores the old man's sight in time for him to see the pair at their deception. But the fairy queen, being more romantic by nature enables the miscreant wife to answer her jealous husband's accusations so that he comes to believe that he was mistaken in what he saw. The garden scene is supported by pictures of the nuptial feast and ritual bath and bed blessing.

THE MILLER'S TALE

Set in carpenter's house on the right. The young wife (Alison) of an old carpenter devises a scheme to remove her unwanted husband whilst she spends the night with their lodger, a poor scholar (Nicholas). She succeeds in persuading her husband that a second deluge is about to overtake humanity and that the only way to be saved is to pass the night in tubs suspended from the eaves of their house. Later when the elderly husband is thus engaged and the wife and the lodger have descended and are at play, an unwanted suitor (Absalon) arrives outside and begs a kiss from the window.

*Now dearest lady, if thy pleasure be In
thoughts of love, think tenderly of me*

In the dark the woman fools Absolon into kissing her buttocks.

Teehee she cried and clapped the window to

and when he returns later to beg another favour Nicholas attempts to repeat (and improve upon) the joke, by sticking his own backside out to be kissed. Unfortunately, Absalon has come prepared with a red-hot iron from the blacksmith's. With this he brands the buttocks of his successful rival.

In the ensuing chaos caused by the shout of the lodger for water to cool his burning posterior the carpenter is convinced that Noah's flood has returned. He cuts the rope of the "ark" (tub) in his rafters and falls on the floor. Alison, the wife and Nicholas the student tell everyone that he has gone mad.

The painting shows the old carpenter in the attic in the tub, Alison on the bed with nothing on, Nicholas sticking his behind out of the window and Absalon outside.

Original by Mark Windisch, Revised January 2008 by Mark Windisch