

THE FRIENDS OF MORLEY

THE MURAL PAINTINGS AT MORLEY

Common Room (Entrance Hall) Painting on canvas by JOHN PIPER (1958)

The artist supplied the following note for the College magazine in 1963 for the opening ceremony.

The painting is abstract landscape founded on a drawing done fairly recently at Nailsworth Mill in Gloucestershire. The mill pool is in front of the mill and other buildings immediately beyond, the town in the middle distance, and the Cotswolds with some trees and houses, beyond. There is no intention on the part of the painter that any of these objects should be recognisable: their forms and colours were the pegs on which the composition was hung. The two opposing walls in the Concert Hall have offered the artist an opportunity to carry out a continuous scheme of decoration. The great length of each panel in relation to its height has called for a design in which emphatic movement is essential to keep the eye moving across the surface. The artist has tried to carve out a space deep enough to allow this movement to take place as though in a panorama.

But it has remained important whilst painting the mural to draw attention to the surface as well and to make it as rich as possible. The painting on the right hand side, the Western wall of the hall, is called *Sundown*; that on the left, the Eastern wall, is *Sun-up*. Here the colours are lightened and the designs more spacious and linear. In both, figures are suggested in movement across a landscape; those in the background are in silhouette against the source of light, whilst the figures in foreground are given the appearance of being lit by the light from the picture opposite, as though they came into the real space of the hall.

Refectory (First floor) Paintings on Wood.

THEMES FROM CHAUCER'S CANTERBURY TALES by EDWARD BAWDEN, C.B.E., R.A., and JUSTIN TODD

The Canterbury pilgrims are shown riding between a double fence, in a line round the room. Above each pilgrim are scenes illustrating episodes in the tale the pilgrim has told, so arranged that the scenes are held together and contained in a box-like setting which is more or less architectural in character. The settings are separated from each other by the arbitrary device of bands of water. The artists have supplied the following key to their work.

Wall on the left of central bow window.

By EDWARD BAWDEN

(1958)

The Squire's Tale. The knight on the brass horse who appears at the court of Cambuskan and above the daughter of the Tartar King with the lovesick falcon.

The Knight's Tale. Two cousins, Palamon and Arcita, are in love with Emily. Palamon, a prisoner in the tower, looks down at Emily in the garden. The Duke interrupts a fight between the cousins and, above, at a splendid tournament held to decide the quarrel, Arcita, is thrown by his horse and killed.

The Prioress's Tale. A sordid story of the murder by Jews of Hugh of Lincoln.

The Manciple's Tale. Phoebus kills his wife, then in vengeance plucks the feathers of the crow who has told him of his wife's adultery

Wall on the right of central bow window By EDWARD BAWDEN
1961

Chaucer's Tale of Sir Topaz. In Fairy-land Sir Topaz seeks the Elfin queen and is put to flight by Sir Elephant a mighty giant.

The Clerk's Tale.

The story of patient Griselda.

The marquis talks to his prospective father in law and leads Griselda away to the wedding. Above, Griselda's first born child is being snatched away to be put to death, and lower down to the right, by the corner, Griselda dressed in rags is returning to father's hovel. The main scene shows the mock marriage feast and the happy return of Griselda to the marquis and her family.

The Pardoner's Tale. Three drunken rioters resolve to catch Death and kill him, but instead they kill each other in turn.

Long Wall on right of Refectory entrance

By EDWARD BAWDEN

(1963)

The wife of Bath's Tale. A knight rapes a girl and is followed to court by an angry mob. The king condemns him to death but his life is spared by the queen, who intercedes for him and sets him a riddle to answer. What is the thing that women most desire? Returning to court at the end of the year he sees a group of ladies dancing near a wood. The ladies vanish, but an old woman appears and gives him the correct answer. She demands that the knight shall be her husband and this demand granted by the queen who forces the knight to marry her.

The Nun's Priest's Tale. In the foreground the widow is feeding Chanticleer and his wives; towards the right the fox is urging Chanticleer to sing; the chase takes place above, whilst in the wood at the top Chanticleer manages to free himself.

Wall on left of Refectory entrance.

By JUSTIN TODD (1961)

The Reeve's Tale, set in windmill on left. Two Cambridge students attempt a jape the expense of a thieving miller, at whose mill they are stranded for the night. One 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 the daughter of the house. The miller soon disillusiones him and in the dark a fight breaks out, with the result that the miller is thoroughly beaten by his own wife.

The Merchant's Tale. Set in castle centre. An old knight marries a young wife who attracts the love of her husband's squire. The knight goes blind with age and becomes very possessive. His young wife accordingly has no opportunity to requite the squire's love until one day the squire contrives to slip into his master's walled garden and hide 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. 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 of an old carpenter devises a scheme to remove her unwanted husband whilst she spends the night with their lodger, a poor scholar. She succeeds in persuading her husband a second deluge is about to overtake humanity and that the only way to be saved is 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 arrives outside and begs a kiss from the window. In the dark the woman fools this suitor into kissing her buttocks, and when he returns to beg another favour the lodger attempts to repeat (and improve upon) the joke. Unfortunately, the man outside has come prepared with a red-hot iron from the smith's. With this he brands the buttocks of his successful rival.

HISTORY OF EARLIER WALL PAINTINGS

1. The Murals Destroyed in 1940

The history of mural paintings at Morley College goes back to the 1920s. After the youthful Rex Whistler, with Sir Joseph Duveen as patron, had struck a new note in British mural painting by his decoration of the Tate Gallery Refreshment Room, the then Director of the Tate, Charles Aitken, persuaded Duveen to finance a further scheme. Morley College was the place selected; and Sir William Rothenstein, head the Royal College of Art, was invited to submit the names and designs of six young students or ex-students, of that College. The winners proved to be three young ex-students in their twenties Edward Bawden, Eric Ravilious and Cyril Mahoney. Bawden and Ravilious decorated the College Refreshment Room, Mahoney the Concert Hall. The formal beauty of Mahoney's figures representing 'The Pleasures of Life in Work and Play' and still more the wit and freshness of the Bawden and Ravilious paintings (representing London Life, and scenes from the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatist made a great impact on press and public alike. The Opening Ceremony was performed February 1930 by Stanley Baldwin and drew forth some of his best vein of oratory. Graham Wallas, the College President, introducing him, recalled that someone had once said of Morley College that nothing useful was studied there. Baldwin seized this and developed it. 'I thank God', he said 'that such a place still exists'. The opening was well reported. Within a few days Queen Mary asked to see the painting and thereafter retained an interest in the College for the rest of her life.

Unfortunately these decorations were all destroyed In October, 1940, when the College received a direct hit in one of the first big incidents of the London 'blitz'. Fifty seven people in the building, mainly shelterers, were killed, and three quarters of the College accommodation was lost. Not until 1955 was it possible to secure the necessary finances and permissions to rebuild. In view of the enjoyment which had been given by the destroyed paintings, the College Council was throughout determined to commission a further series of murals, whenever it should succeed in its struggle to secure a new building.

2. THE NEW MURALS

As the plans for the new building took shape, it became apparent that there would three sites in the College particularly suitable for decoration, both because of their function and their size.

These were the Common Room, Entrance Hall, and the Refectory. The members of the small College Council Committee deputed to consider the question of the murals (Miss Peggy Pittock, the late Mrs. Mirna Freeman, Mrs Judith Hubback, and Mr Alan Collingridge, together with the Principal) had no difficulty in agreeing that each of these sites demanded Murals of a different kind or mood. For the Common Room, place for reading and quiet conversation, they envisaged something warm and glowing which would lift the spirits as one came into the building and help at once to establish a distinctive atmosphere in the College. For the decoration of this site the College approached Mr John Piper, who had links with the College - among them the fact that his wife had earlier lectured here in English literature.

For the decoration of the Refectory something very different seemed required. Here people would eat, laugh, talk, have leisure to gossip and look around. Something detailed and anecdotal could here be appreciated, and something with wit and gaiety would perhaps strike the most appropriate note. The Committee's thoughts naturally turned to Mr. Bawden, whose earlier decorations for the College had been so much enjoyed. In accepting, Mr Bawden asked that one of his students in the mural painting class at the Royal College of Art, Mr Justin Todd, should take on the decoration of one of the Walls, and this was gladly agreed.

The Emma Cons Hall was in many ways the biggest problem. The side walls were the obvious places to decorate; but as the lower half of tile wells would be obscured when the seating was in position and the hall full of people, this meant concentrating on the upper walls only - an elongated rectangle on each side measuring 55 feet long by 9 feet high. The Committee nevertheless decided that it would seek, if possible, a unified design covering the whole of this area, rather than an episodic or sectional treatment in panels. The Committee also looked for something which would suit both the general appearance of the hall (for which the architects had already envisaged a deep blue ceiling), and would provide, when the lights were lowered for performances on the stage, some kind of unobtrusive enhancement of the dramatic atmosphere. In particular they were anxious that the murals should contribute to general effect rather than stake so strong a claim to exclusive attention that they would compete with what might be occurring on the stage. For the purpose of selecting the artist, the Committee decided to organise what was in effect a private and limited competition. Sir Anthony Blunt, Sir William Coldstream and Mr. Robin Darwin agreed to assist in the judgment; and from their suggestions and those of others; including the Secretary of the Contemporary Art Society, a short list of possible artists, including some fairly young ones, was compiled. Eight or nine of these were approached, and nearly all agreed to submit designs. Those of Mr. Martin Froy, then teaching at the Bath Academy of Art at Corsham Court, were selected, and tile paintings later executed by the artist in situ. In view of the excellence of some of the other designs, it was a considerable grief to the Committee that they had not further suitable walls to decorate, and a further sum to expend. The College has, however, now secured a site for an extension; and when this comes to be built. The College Council will doubtless strive to continue the mural tradition at Morley by commissioning further decorations.

A last word may be added on the financing of the murals. When the earlier murals were painted in the 1920s, Duveen paid for the materials, and the 'wages' of the young artists, who received 1 for a whole day's painting, 10/- for half-a-day's. The total cost of this earlier scheme amounted to 1,300. When these murals were destroyed, the College became entitled to a War Damage payment in respect of them; and this sum became the means - and the only means - of financing the new murals. The War Damage Commission declined to recognize any arguments relating to the artistic merit of the destroyed paintings, or the enhanced value which had arisen from the later fame of the artists who executed them as young men. The Commission, in its arithmetical way, recognised only the destroyed murals had cost 1,300 in 1930, and that since then costs and prices had in general risen by three times. The best the College could get from the Commission was thus a payment of 3,900, and this sum has had to cover all the materials and the artists' fees for the scheme now completed. From this it will be apparent how heavily the College is indebted to the two older artists concerned, who by reason of their interest in the College have been content to accept fees which must, in their cases, be described as nominal.

Morley Refectory Murals

Starting from the panels on the right as you walk into the refectory from the main staircase:

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| 1. The Nun's Priest's Tale | Edward Bawden |
| 2. The Wife of Bath's Tale | Edward Bawden |
| 3. The Pardoner's Tale | Edward Bawden |
| 4. The Clerk's Tale | Edward Bawden |
| 5. Chaucer's Tale of Sir Topaz | Edward Bawden |
| 6. The Manciple's Tale | Edward Bawden |
| 7. The Prioresses' Tale | Edward Bawden |
| 8. The Knight's Tale | Edward Bawden |
| 9. The Squire's Tale | Edward Bawden |
| 10. The Reeve's Tale | Justin Todd |
| 11. The Merchant's Tale | Justin Todd |
| 12. The Miller's Tale | Justin Todd |