

The ARTS & CRAFTS MOVEMENT in Surrey

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E-NEWSLETTER

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Chairman's Editorial by Carolyn Smith

The Society's visit to Vann on 15th July highlighted the problems faced by families on inheriting large properties adapted in the Edwardian era. A prime focus on entertaining space, with large numbers of bedrooms and areas for the many servants that were required, means that the answer is often to split them. Let us hope that a way forward can be found for this outstanding property. There will be a report on the visit in the next e-newsletter.

This month, Olive Maggs has contributed an article on the murals at St Mark's church, Upper Hale. This leads on from her zoom lecture earlier in the year on Surrey Women Mural Artists. The article was destined for the newsletter (where it will be reprinted) but this format also gives opportunity for many more pictures in colour.



Forthcoming events for 2021

18th August. A Trio of Sussex Churches

15th September. A visit to Gravetye Manor, West Hoathly, Sussex

5th December. Christmas lunch at The Elvetham



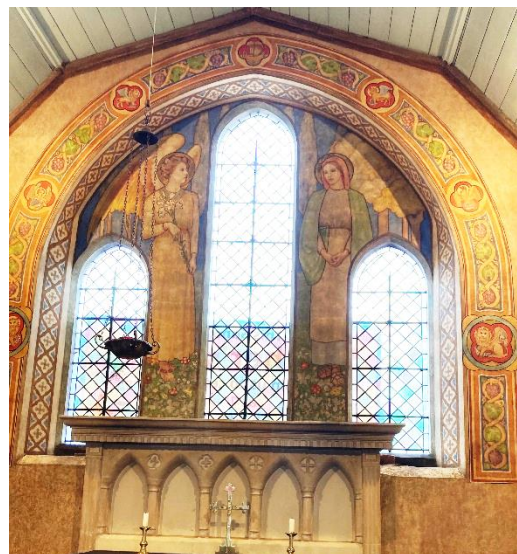
Kitty Milroy Wall Murals, St Mark's Church, Upper Hale

by Olive Maggs

In 1911, Eleanor Catherine Milroy, better known as Kitty, began decorating the chancel of St Mark's Church, Upper Hale, using the spirit fresco medium. St Mark's Church was built in 1885 and Kitty, a devout Christian, undertook the painting of the murals at her own expense, covering three walls of the chancel. As a member of St Mark's church community the project would



take her nearly ten years to paint between 1911 and 1920. Kitty began painting the Annunciation above the altar around the chancel window and its completion was recorded in the Surrey Advertiser in 1915.¹ By 1920 two chancel walls on either side of the altar were completed illustrating the Benedicite, the hymn of nature celebrating God's creation. It is unclear from church records, if Kitty worked alone or with assistants but either way it was a hugely impressive public art scheme for a young woman in her twenties, painted with great skill and ability and using a complex medium. Kitty is not known to have painted any other church decoration before this and no other decorative known scheme of hers still exists. However 'the technical proficiency of her scheme suggests that she was not a novice in wall painting practice'² Kitty also painted a mural for the chapel of St Elphin's School, Matlock, Derbyshire in the mid 1920's but they no longer exist.³



Unlike many women associated with the Arts and Crafts movement Kitty did not have a father, brother or husband associated with art. One of eight children, born in 1885 in Newnham, Hampshire, Kitty's father was a clergyman, as was her grandfather, who was a

¹ *'Miss K Milroy has painted some beautiful frescoes on the east wall of St Mark's church. The subject is The Annunciation.....' 'The colour scheme of the whole', writes the Vicar, "is most beautiful, and we look forward to the time when the side walls of the sanctuary are in keeping with the east wall.'* Surrey Advertiser, 23 Jan 1915

² S. Rickerby and L. Shekede, St Mark's Church, Upper Hale, Surrey: Condition Assessment and Technical Examination, unpublished, 2018

³ Clare Willson, *Mural Painting in Britain 1840-1940*, OUP, 2000

minister of the Free Church in Edinburgh. The family lived in the Isle of Wight for a few years, but, following her father's death in 1901, Kitty moved with her mother and sister, to Oast House, Upper Hale, Farnham. With her church background Kitty was well prepared to dedicate ten years of her life to painting the murals.

Up until now little was known about Kitty apart from biographical details from census and church records. Her acquisition of skills in mural painting was a mystery. How had she learnt to use the spirit fresco medium with such competence, painted the murals so skilfully and achieved such beautiful colour with no known artistic education? I made a valuable discovery during the months of Covid lockdown to unlock the mystery. My research in UCL college records led me to discover that, at twenty years old Kitty, enrolled in the Slade School of Art, University of London as a Fine Arts Student between 1906 and 1907 during which she took lodgings in Brunswick Square near the British Museum. She enrolled again between the years 1911-12, again for 1914-15, and yet again for 1922-23. The Slade, the first art school to offer female students art education on equal terms as men, offered mixed life drawing classes. These pre-war years were referred to as the art school's golden age and some of Britain's greatest artists attended during this period.

Henry Tonks was Slade Tutor of Fine Art, the school's most influential teacher, a champion of the English tradition of disciplined, life drawing and draughtsmanship. A member of the New English Art Club, he objected to the artistic constraints of the Royal Academy and was influenced by the modern subject and Impressionism. Known as "*the most renowned and formidable teacher of his generation*"⁴ Tonks would have made a great impression on Kitty. Originally trained as a surgeon, after the war and active service as an official war artist, Tonks became Slade Professor of Fine Art. A powerful advocate of the 20th century revival of mural painting, his pet project was encouraging his pupils by finding mural commissions for them.⁵ In 1924 Tonks painted his own mural *The Four Founders of UCL* for University College London's Centenary using his own modified version of the spirit fresco on canvas. Mural painting classes were offered at the Slade and it is highly likely Kitty attended these classes learning and practising the spirit fresco technique from Tonks.

Women artists were rarely given public mural commissions for a number of reasons. Many considered women working in public spaces inappropriate - working on a large scale, climbing scaffolding and enduring hours of painting monumental mural schemes. Murals' subject matter usually focussed on intellectual and didactic content, and had been considered only appropriate for male artists. However, by the time Kitty began painting St Mark's murals in 1911, Anna Lea Merritt had already painted



⁴ The Henry Tonks, *Oxford Dictionary of Art*. Ed I. Chivers, OUP, 2004

⁵ H. Birchall, "The Most Amusing Room in Europe: the Mural by Rex Whistler in The Tate restaurant." *The British Art Journal*, vol 6, o2, 2005

murals in St Martin's Church, Blackheath completed in 1895⁶ and Mary Watts had designed and decorated the exterior and interior of the Watts Memorial Chapel completed in 1908, both within a few miles.

The 20th century mural painting revival followed an earlier 19th century revival. Murals were considered the most accessible way to promote religious, moral & social values, history & politics leading to a surge in decorated public places. Disastrous experiments with true fresco in the new Houses of Parliament mid-19th century had generated a search to find better alternatives. This pre-occupied British artists for the rest of the century and the beginning of the next, with artists experimenting with many different mural painting techniques. John Ruskin believed that art students should be trained in grand scale mural painting and G.F. Watts spoke of mural painting as '*the highest expression of painting*'.⁷ Mural painting was the true expression of the Arts and Crafts Movement, integrating Art and Architecture.

It was in this spirit that in 1911 Kitty began painting directly onto St Mark's chancel wall above the church altar. The walls to be decorated were newly plastered with a layer of white zinc oxide although the rest of the church interior walls were red-brick.⁸ The subject of the Annunciation was skilfully composed around the chancel window. The feminised Angel Gabriel holding lilies to the left, with Mary, to the right, humbly bowing. Country and cottage garden flowers form a carpet in the foreground and the painted arch is decorated with



the vine, representing Christ and the Lion, representing St Mark, patron saint of the church, connecting painting and architecture together. The composition bears a strong similarity with Phoebe Traquair's murals in the Song School, St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh. Kitty had family in Edinburgh, her grandfather was minister in the Free Church Edinburgh and she could have become familiar with Traquair's work on visits to her relations in Edinburgh. Traquair's designs were

immensely popular and she had great success not only in Edinburgh but also exhibiting her needlework and crafts in the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in London's Grafton Galleries. Elizabeth Cumming, who has extensively researched Phoebe Traquair's work, offered me the opinion that

*'Milroy must have known Phoebe Traquair's work in the flesh, seen her Edinburgh buildings, especially the Song School at St Mary's Cathedral (1888-92). There is much more affinity there than simply reflections of published black and white photographs.'*⁹

⁶ Olive Maggs, *Anna Lea Merritt's Murals: Wall Paintings in a Surrey Church*, ACMS 2011

⁷ Clare Willson, *Mural Painting in Britain 1840-1940*, OUP, 2000

⁸ S. Rickerby and L. Shekede, *St Mark's Church, Upper Hale, Surrey: Condition Assessment and Technical Examination*, 2018

⁹ Elizabeth Cumming, Jan 2021

Milroy used the spirit fresco medium, developed by Thomas Gambier back in 1859 and used for major 19th century public commissions- Lord Leighton's *The Arts as Applied to War and Peace* in the V&A Museum and Ford Madox Brown's murals of the history of Manchester in Manchester Town Hall. Kitty however adopted the technique in a similar way to that used by Phoebe Traquair. An unattributed source in St Mark's Church archives describes Kitty's technical spirit fresco recipe using oils diluted with

'a walnut of beeswax to half a pint of turps as a paint binder'

It is interesting to note Edward Reginald Frampton in nearby St Barnabas Church, Ranmore near Dorking, also used the spirit medium technique which Kitty may have known.



From 1915 and 1920, against the tragic backdrop of World War 1 and its aftermath, Kitty painted the 2 long chancel walls illustrating the Benedicite, a glorious mixture of imagination and realism to illustrate the Song of Creation. This part of the murals contrasts in both subject content and composition with the first mural. The east wall over the altar contains narrative subject matter. In contrast no narrative appears in the north and south chancel walls, the second part of Kitty's project, a frieze design of eight figures celebrates nature and God's creation. Kitty's hand painted designs and observations of nature, covering every inch of the wall surface appear like painted medieval manuscripts, referencing Traquair's designs. This change in subject and composition may have been Kitty's response to the horrific events of the first World War.

A church document of uncertain date identifies the figures as 'the powers of nature', personifications of seasons and natural elements, each painted almost life size to engage with the viewer, silhouetted against and united by the sky. Kitty's composition references Botticelli's *Primavera* (*Springtime*) rediscovered by Ruskin and adopted by other artists like Walter Crane.

Starting on the north wall the figure of Showers, rain drenched and wearing a grey tunic stands in contrast next to Sunshine, whose outstretched hands represent rays of sunshine. In a flame-coloured tunic the figure stands against a blue sky. A rainbow connects the two figures, symbolising unity of heaven and earth. At Sun's feet spring a host of cornflowers and poppies, flowers symbolising sleep, and remembrance. Next, the figure of Moon. Personifications of the Moon were popular at this time, but Kitty's Moon is unusual. Nun-

like in appearance she represents the passing of time, day into night, the end of the day, the end of life. At her feet upright tulips and violets symbolise eternal love. Last, a figure recorded in the church document as Clouds, lifts a veil from his face. Abundant primroses symbolise eternal life.

Opposite on the south wall Water, stands on the shores of a lake with thrift flowers at his feet. It is recorded that the Milroy's gardener at Oast House, Edwin Warner, modelled for Water, as did other members of the community. In contrast the young figure of Summer wearing a tunic, described in a church document as '*the colour of ripening corn*' lazily stretches arms behind the head, standing amongst a profusion of summer flowers- poppies, cornflowers and corn marigold. Winter in contrast, wrapped up warmly, stands in a barren cold landscape referencing the changing seasons, the passing of time and the cycle of life. Snowdrops spring from the ground, symbols of life after death. The last of the figures, Wind, is the only figure that moves in the frieze, her fluttering tunic again references figures from Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and *Primavera*. Daffodils, bent in the wind, and windflowers or anemones, signalling spring, grow at her feet. In both friezes Kitty uses repeated single mythic figures standing on flower filled ground, each figure framed by an arcade of apple trees, creating a decorative ecclesiastical pattern similar to stained-glass window design. Kitty's figures gaze out at the congregation, silhouetted against landscapes emptied by the absence of men at war, panoramic vistas of Kitty's adopted home.

Painted after the start of WW1 the chancel wall murals, with models from the community, bear witness to the experience of war and the memory of those lost in the community. The two chancel walls differ in composition and content to the first altar wall with its biblical narrative subject. The chancel walls are influenced by the war-ravaged world Kitty found herself living in. Many had left the community of Hale that Kitty was part of, never to return. These figures respond to this tragic loss, equal in the face of God, war and death, sadness and despair personified in the monumental figures standing respectfully in silence. The whole design of frieze and borders celebrating nature reference the Christian message of death and rebirth. The chancel walls mourn the loss of those from their community but simultaneously offer renewal and hope, eternal love and remembrance. The spirit fresco technique using oil paints diluted with turpentine, applied to the dry white-painted plaster gave the colour a translucency similar to watercolour on white paper, creating an immediate impact. The vivid fresh colour enhances the impression of rebirth. Kitty used a great variety of newly available colours to achieve this intensity. The celebration of Creation was popular with Arts and Crafts artists, offering the opportunity to represent the flora and fauna of nature. Milroy painted every inch of both chancel walls with complex images of nature set into Italianate quatrefoils. The rising sun, the stars of heaven, darkness and light and more mix with familiar local scenes like Elephants Clump Wood close to Kitty's home. Beautifully observed drawings of nature appear with the dead leaves of winter or the bunch of late summer flowers and fruits.



Unbelievably the Art Workers Guild did not accept women until the 1960's but in 1913 Kitty exhibited at the local Farnham Art Workers 1913,¹⁰ her work sympathetic with their aims and ideas and in 1923 Kitty Milroy exhibited two sketches of her completed murals in St Mark's Church in the Royal Academy Exhibition of Decorative Art. Following the end of WW1 there was new renewed enthusiasm for mural scheme and, Kitty may have been hoping to secure a murals commission enrolling again at Slade school of Art 1922-23.



Kitty's mural scheme follows in the tradition of other Surrey mural schemes by women artists Anna Lea Merritt and Mary Watts whose independent projects form '*a small but significant group of women muralists in Surrey.*'¹¹

Examples of female empowerment through +artistic practice, demonstrating support for women artists. Kitty motivated villager's interest, kept abreast of artistic and technical change, created images of strong female figures and supported women's achievements. Fully immersed in the social developments of her time and against a background of disruption and change she exercised imagination & painterly skill, technical achievement and social conscience.

Kitty Milroy's murals in St Mark's Church, Upper Hale are a really important addition to the history of women's artistic achievements in the Arts and Crafts Style and to the history of British Mural Art.

Conservation of the murals was completed in June 2021. In light of Kitty's skill in using the spirit fresco medium English Heritage are considering awarding the murals a Grade 11 listing to preserve them for posterity.

This article was written with the help of church records & archival material provided by Nick Severswey and follow an ACMS Lecture via Zoom, '*Surrey Women Muralists: Anna Lea Merritt, Mary Watts & Kitty Milroy*', by Olive Maggs, 17th March 2021

^{1 1} S Rickerby and L. Shekede, St Mark's Church, Upper Hale, Surrey: Condition Assessment and Technical Examination, 2018

¹⁰ Surrey Advertiser 1913



Property for Sale

Barneswood House in Harmer Green, Hertfordshire, was built in 1902 for Charles Behr. I have not found out the architect for this property.

<https://www.knightfrank.co.uk/properties/residential/for-sale/harmer-green-hertfordshire-al6/cho012188600>

Winterfield, Melbury Abbas, Dorset, was built in 1921 by Edward Turner Powell. Edward Turner Powell (1859-1937) was articled to Sir Alexander Rose Stenning (1846-1928) and spent three years in his office, before going into independent practice from 1885 in Queen Anne's Gate, Westminster. Much of his work is in the Arts and Crafts style. The greater part of this consisted of houses, including many in Surrey and Mid-Sussex, though he also designed buildings abroad; on at least one occasion he worked on a house in Buenos Aires with Walter Bassett-Smith.

<https://www.jackson-stops.co.uk/properties/14309769/sales/shaftesbury>

Dun Eaglais, Kippen, Scotland. The historic home of the artist D.Y.Cameron, built in stages between 1902-1924 and finished in the Scottish Renaissance and Arts and Crafts manner. It is thought that the terraced gardens were influenced by landscape designer, T.H.Mawson.

<https://www.knightfrank.co.uk/properties/residential/for-sale/station-brae-kippen-stirlingshire-fk8/edn012188708>

St Joseph's Hall, Storrington, West Sussex, was designed and built between 1908 and 1910 in the Vernacular Revival style of E.S. Prior. For forty years it was the home of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Arundel and Brighton. <https://www.hamptons.co.uk/for-sale/property/8-bedroom-detached-house-storrington-rh20-ref-5297765/>



Other organisations – Events of interest

Dorking Museum

Forster@50. E.M. Forster lived at West Hackhurst, Abinger, Surrey and this tiny exhibition looks at the relationship between Forster and the local community as well as his literary work. *A Room with a View* was set in Holmbury St Mary.

Opening hours: 10am-4pm, Thursday, Friday and Saturday

This temporary exhibition closes on 4th September 2021.

The Lutyens Trust

The latest webinar from the Lutyens Trust America was on the topic of 'Lutyens and the Hampstead Garden Suburb: An Exploration of Lutyens's church designs with the masterplan for the Central Square.'

<https://lutyenstrustamerica.com/about/webinars/> No charge.

The Pre-Raphaelite Society

Zoom lecture. 'The Phantom of a flower in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*' by Julie Whyman. Non-member ticket price £8. www.ticketsource.co.uk/pre-raphaelitesociety

The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

An exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite Drawings and Watercolours, was briefly held in June. I did not hear about it until it was over. However, the website has a trailer and 39 minute curator-led tour to watch online. The latter is an excellent short film that looks in detail at one picture in each of the sections of the exhibition: informal portraits, contrasting traditions, stunners, history and literature, sketches and studies, John Ruskin and landscapes.

<https://www.ashmolean.org/pre-raphaelites>

Court Barn Museum, Chipping Camden

Exhibition: 'Pioneers: 101 years of the Leach Pottery'. 10 July – 25 September 2021. This exhibition provides an overview of the Leach Pottery, showing how it developed in the wake of other British potters and has made a major impact up to the present day.

<https://courtbarn.org.uk/exhibition/a-hundred-years-of-the-leach-pottery/>

Craft Study Centre, Farnham

Exhibition: 'Bernard Leach: 100 Years on from St Ives'. Extended to 25th September.

Tuesday to Friday, 10am-5pm, Saturday 10am-4pm

Also an exhibition on the Craft Study Centre at 50.

<https://www.csc.uca.ac.uk/programme>

As always, we would welcome any ideas for events, visits and lectures that you would like to propose to the Events Committee and any news or articles that you might like to submit for the Society e-newsletter or printed newsletter. Also, if you are aware of any planning applications relating to Arts and Crafts buildings in Surrey we should be pleased if you would bring them to our attention.

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The Arts and Crafts Movement in Surrey website : www.artsandcraftsmovementinsurrey.org.uk