

## The Blackwell Methodist Church Paintings

### Origins

The pictures installed in the entrance hall, on the stairs and in the Historic Roll room of Methodist Central Hall Westminster, came from Holy Trinity Methodist Church, Greenhill, Blackwell, near Bromsgrove, built 1882.

There they covered three of the four walls of the chapel. They were part of the scheme prepared and executed by Bernard Sleigh in 1913 and were a gift to the congregation by the Taylor family.

The five paintings fitted around the windows of the chapel. The largest, of the heavenly city, was over the communion table with the pictures of the Annunciation and Nativity on one side and on the other the pictures of Jesus raising the daughter of Jairus and of Jesus blessing the children. They are in a style known as Pre-Raphaelite.

### Artist

Bernard Sleigh was born in Birmingham in 1872 and at 14 became an apprentice wood engraver. This included attendance at art school and he later became assistant art tutor at the Central school. The Birmingham School of Art was the leading institution at the time for decorative arts. He appears to have studied under Arthur Gaskins who worked with Burne-Jones (a native of Birmingham). At the schools he came under the influence of the Birmingham Group. Burne-Jones style of illustration greatly influenced all who worked or studied at the Birmingham Schools.

He came to public attention through engravings for books. He became a member of the Society of Mural Decorators and Painters in Tempera and was the Frank Kedward Sheldon City & Guilds Medallist. His publicity material (post 1918) offers to do memorial windows, wall paintings and inscriptions in metal or coloured gesso. Reflecting the times, it makes much of acts of heroism (during the Great War) and the need to rediscover the work of mediaeval craftsmen. He experimented with craft work, offering inlays for furniture for sale at the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists exhibitions in 1901 and 1902.

From 1897 he was involved with the Bromsgrove Guild, through whom he received commissions, firstly for the church in Wallasey, Cheshire. Later his work included stained glass, Masonic banners and the decoration of churches, including Blackwell. His first major exhibition was in Bayswater in 1904.

In 1900 the management of the Birmingham Schools of Art began teaching stained glass work after sending Henry Payne to Chelsea to learn the techniques. Bernard Sleight was among those trained to execute designs in stained glass.

He married Stella Phillip in 1902. A son, Brocas Linwood, was born in 1902 and daughter, Barbara Grace de Reimer, in 1906, who feature in the Blackwell paintings. The marriage broke down in about 1914.

The work for which Bernard Sleight is most well known work is *An Ancient Mappe of Fairyland, Newly Discovered and Set Forth*, which is in the Library of Congress collection in Washington DC . He was producing work on the subject of fairies with encouragement from Havelock Ellis in the 1920s, one illustration was selected for *The Gates of Horn* published by J M Dent in 1926 and *The Faerie Calendar* with Ivy Anne Ellis published by Heath Cranton in 1920. The map was first published by Sidgwick and Jackson Limited in 1917 and was the subject of a project to use it as the basis of a nursery mural on fabric in 1936.

One of his final works was *Sea Foam*, which was used in the furnishings of the bedrooms of Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret at Buckingham Palace.

### **A selection of the artist's other known works**

I saw three ships, 2 engravings, in "A Book of Pictured Carols"  
Woodcuts for other books

The Reaper, stained glass at St Mary Magdalene, Crowmarsh Gifford

The Vision of St Eustace – design for stained glass

The Resurrection, stained glass for All Saints, Kirk Hallam, Derbyshire

Murals for St Patrick's Church, Earlwood

## **Work Sites**

All Saints, Kirk Hallam, Derbyshire (east window)  
Holy Trinity Church, Manchester Road, Southport  
St Edward's Church, New John Street, Birmingham\*  
The chapel of Holloway Gaol, London  
The Church of Seven Kings, Ilford  
St Stephens, Newtown Row, Birmingham\*  
St John's Church, Cobham  
Holy Trinity, Ilkeston (5 light east window)  
St Hugh's Church, Garden City  
Unitarian Memorial Church, Manor Road, Liscard, Wallasey, Cheshire

The frieze in the Clarion Café, Market Street, Manchester (which included a room designed by William Morris)\*  
Masonic Banners for (1) Pax Gentium Lodge and (2) Rajah of Gwalior

\* work destroyed

## **Resources:**

An Artistic Pilgrimage, Trevor Morriss, The Bromsgrove Society Newsletter, Vol 19 No. 1 March 1999  
Bernard Sleight, Artist and Craftsman, 1872-1954 Roger Cooper, essay Journal of the Decorative Arts Society, c.1998  
The Victorian Web  
Web site of the Library of Congress, Washington DC.