



P E T E R C O R M A C K

THE PRE-RAPHAELITE ROMANCE OF COMMERCE

Henry Holiday: Four Epic Windows



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THE ARTIST

Born in London on 17 June 1839, Henry George Alexander Holiday belonged to the same generation of artist-craftworkers as his friends William Morris (1834-96) and Edward Burne-Jones (1833-98). Like them, he had a lifelong commitment to the 'Unity of the Arts', believing that any distinction made between the so-called Fine and Applied Arts was not only false but positively harmful to the healthy development of art in modern society. In 1881 he was a founder-member of the designers' group 'The Fifteen' and subsequently of the Art Workers Guild (1884) and the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society (1888). Holiday was an idealist who, at various times throughout his long career, espoused and promoted a number of progressive causes, including Dress Reform, Women's Suffrage, Infant Crèches, Irish Home Rule, Garden Cities and Socialism.

Henry Holiday received his artistic training (as a painter) at Leigh's Art School and the Royal Academy Schools (1855-60). In the early 1860s his circle of friends and artistic collaborators included Simeon Solomon, Albert Moore and William Burges. He also met and befriended Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Morris and Burne-Jones and, like them, served for a time in the Artists' Volunteer Rifle Corps. With his accomplished figure-drawing and fine sense of colour, Holiday was ideally qualified to design stained glass windows and, in 1863, on the recommendation of Albert Moore, he began a long association with the glass manufacturers James Powell and Sons (of Whitefriars, London). For the next twenty-seven years, Holiday supplied designs and full-size cartoons for the majority of Powell's most prestigious stained glass commissions. He also worked with the firms of Heaton, Butler & Bayne, Lavers & Barraud and W. G. Saunders. As well as designing for stained glass, Holiday's versatile talents were directed to mural painting, sculpture, relief-enamelling and graphic work (he illustrated Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark* in 1876). His 1883 painting *Beatrice Denies Dante her Salvation* (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool) was one of the most widely-reproduced pictures of the late Victorian era.

In 1890, after a successful visit to the USA, which resulted in a number of important window commissions, Holiday decided to end his collaboration with Messrs. Powell and to establish his own stained glass workshop at 20 Church Row, Hampstead, London, not far from his home, Oak Tree House, in Branch Hill. He had become increasingly dissatisfied with the execution of his designs by Powell's, and the new arrangement, whereby all processes of manufacture were now under his direct control, enabled him to implement, as he put it, 'the cordial and complete assimilation by the artist of the spirit of his material'.¹ Assisted by William Glasby (1863-1941) and J. Dudley Forsyth (1874-1926), Holiday inaugurated a new phase in his career as a stained glass artist. He began to experiment with new techniques and materials and adopted a far richer and more jewel-like palette in the selection of glass for his windows. In 1896, Holiday's book *Stained Glass as an Art*, an extensively illustrated and personal account of the medium's technical and aesthetic dimensions, was published. Despite failing eyesight in his later years, Holiday continued to work in stained glass - to which he devoted over six decades of his career - until his death on 15 April 1927.²



V&A museum no. E.1369-1927

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V&A museum no. E.1370a-1927

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ICONOGRAPHY OF THE WINDOWS

The following section describes the iconography and the original location of the four windows, which were completed and installed in 1895.⁵

WINDOW 1

BRITANNIA ESTABLISHING ORGANIZATION, SUPPORTED BY LAW

Originally the right-hand window at the head of the flight of stairs leading to the Hall's first floor. *Britannia*, helmeted, armoured and carrying a spear, stands at the centre of the composition, holding a scroll which is being unrolled by the seated figure of *Organization*. Facing her is the standing figure of *Law*, holding a sword and a scroll. All three characters wear Greek costume and are positioned within a vaguely classical architectural setting, inscribed (in the arch) 'Colonies, British Isles, India'. In the lower left part, below *Organization's* 'throne', Holiday has depicted *St George Slaying the Dragon* in the form of a sculpted relief. His initial design for the window had included an alternative scene in this position: a figure representing *Fraud and Deceit*, who was shown imprisoned behind the bars of a grille. Perhaps this imagery was rejected as being too close to some of the realities of modern finance – or did the Institute's gallant gentlemen simply feel sorry for the unfortunate imprisoned female?

223.5 cm (88 in) x 105.5 cm (41 in)



WINDOW 2

*ENTERPRISE GUIDED BY KNOWLEDGE
AND PRUDENCE*

Originally the left-hand window at the head of the flight of stairs leading to the Hall's first floor. The figure of *Enterprise* (or 'Enterprize' in Holiday's archaic spelling) is depicted as a sixteenth-century mariner looking to the horizon as he searches for mercantile opportunities. His boat is steered by the seated figure of *Prudence*, while *Knowledge* holds the chart that will guide him in his travels. The two female figures are clothed in costumes of loosely Classical Greek style. A winged figure, symbolising a fair wind (and its pose derived from the sculpted figures on the famous Tower of the Winds in the Athenian Agora), hovers in the sky above.

223.5 cm (88 in) x 105.5 cm (41 in)



WINDOW 3

*MANUFACTURE AND COMMERCE DIRECTED
BY EXPERIENCE*

Originally the left-hand window at the head of the staircase leading to the Hall's second floor. Seated on a central throne, of an arched and pedimented classical form, *Experience* holds a book on one knee and places her other hand upon the shoulder of *Manufacture*, a heroic young man in vaguely medieval dress with a leather apron and a metalworker's hammer. Cogs and other pieces of ironwork are at his feet, and a crane and industrial workshops are visible in the left background. Facing him is *Commerce*, depicted as a seafarer in a tunic and Greek woven hat. He cradles a model boat and, in the other hand, holds a coil of rope. Behind him, in the right background, is a galleon in full sail.

223.5 cm (88 in) x 105.5 cm (41 in)



WINDOW 4

FINANCE GUIDED BY ACCURACY
AND PROBITY

Originally the right-hand window at the head of the staircase leading to the second floor. The central figure of *Finance*, a bearded man of mature years, represents a sixteenth-century auditor. Wearing a fur-trimmed coat over a rich damask gown, he holds a book of accounts on his knee and a quill pen; at his feet are piles of paper accounts and a chest containing gold and silver coins. Standing on the left is *Accuracy*, a woman in classical garb who uses compasses and a measuring ruler. Her counterpart on the right is *Probity*, whose attribute is a pair of equally-balanced scales. Behind the three figures is a pedimented arcade with a central niche, in which stands a statue of *Plenty* holding a cornucopia.

223.5 cm (88 in) x 105.5 cm (41 in)



In his *Reminiscences of My Life*, Holiday records that in 1896 he was invited by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales (ICAEW) to enter a competition for the design and execution of four stained glass windows for their new Hall. The splendid edifice in Moorgate Place in the City of London, designed in a blend of Renaissance and Baroque styles by the architect John Belcher R.A. (1841-1913), had been opened in 1893. Richly embellished with exterior sculpture by William Hamo Thornycroft R.A. (1850-1925) and Harry Bates A.R.A. (1850-99), the Hall was equally lavish in its interior decoration. The four windows were on the main staircases leading to the first and second floors. Holiday declined to enter a competition – although others who had been approached included Morris and Burne-Jones – but he told the Institute that ‘if they liked to pay me for a design they could do as they thought best with it’. Initially, and perhaps unsurprisingly, given the somewhat prosaic reputation of accountancy as a profession, Holiday had some difficulty in finding inspiration for his design. However, his friend Russell Rea (1846-1916), a successful businessman and ship-owner, ‘came to the rescue’ by telling him that the Institute ‘often carried on whole businesses temporarily, which widened my scope’. He designed one window and suggested a scheme for the other three. His ideas were accepted and he then developed the designs for all four windows. Holiday’s four designs, along with a further alternative design for the *Enterprise* window, are now in the Word & Image Department of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (cat. nos 1369, 1370, 1370a, 1371 and

1372-1927, see figs 2-5). The completed designs were subsequently discussed at ‘an interesting and amusing meeting’ of the artist and his accountant clients. As Holiday recalled, ‘[t]here were many allegorical figures in the designs (females of course), and I noticed there was some anxiety to know if the ladies would be as pretty in the glass as they were in the sketches’.³

The concerns of the Institute’s representatives proved to be needless, for Holiday ensured that the nine female figures (including the statue of *Plenty* in Window 4) depicted in the windows all have the idealised Hellenic beauty characteristic of the artist’s mature work. Holiday always worked from life studies, drawn from nude and draped models, and although most of his models cannot be specifically identified, the names of a few are known. Almost certainly, Miss Jessie Dillon was one of these who posed for the ICAEW windows – her features are recognisable in the figure of *Law* in Window 1.

The four windows were made under Holiday’s close supervision in his Hampstead workshop. He chose all the coloured glass, either selecting from his existing stock or ordering new pot-metal ‘antique’ colours from manufacturers such as W. E. Chance (probably through their London agents, Hetley’s of Soho Square, who also supplied Morris & Co.). Amongst the most beautiful tints and hues are the many varied blues, used in the densely-leaded background glazing and in the costumes, and the sea-greens and deeper emeralds found, particularly, in Windows 1 and 2. The exquisite ‘streaky’ purple, featured most spectacularly in the gowns of *Accuracy* and *Probity* in Window 4, is a distinctive colour that was used with great effect in a number of Holiday’s later windows, often – as here – in combination with silvery-white and a pinkish brown. The painting on the glass was doubtless mostly done by Glasby, assisted perhaps by Dudley Forsyth, but it is probable that Holiday himself added finishing touches or adjustments before the glass was fired and then leaded up. Stylistically, the series of windows reflects Holiday’s admiration for the later work of Burne-Jones and Morris, especially in the quasi-tessellated leading in the background skies and the use of relatively small pieces of glass throughout, creating the effect of a luminous mosaic.

Holiday was evidently proud of his work on the commission, for he exhibited the designs (or the full-size cartoons) at the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society’s Sixth Exhibition at the New Gallery in 1899 (cat. no. 30). In 1900, he adapted the design of Window 3 for the main staircase window in

the newly-built Town Hall (designed by Henry T. Hare) at Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire. Originally, all four of the ICAEW windows were framed by wide ornamental borders of acanthus foliage or vine-leaves (both patterns are shown in the V&A sketch-designs). The borders were removed when, following the enlargement of the Hall in the 1930s, the windows were partially re-glazed in surroundings of tinted ‘slab’ glass, with inset shields (by another artist) showing the ICAEW’s emblem. Henry Holiday’s stained glass was removed from the ICAEW Hall in 1970, when extensive alterations to the building were carried out. When it was found that the four windows could no longer be accommodated within the Hall, they were sold and subsequently acquired by Peter Grant (1935-1995), manager of the rock group Led Zeppelin. Mr Grant’s family sold the windows in 2014.

In devising his iconographical scheme for the windows, Holiday made good use of his historical research into costume and his extensive knowledge of art and architectural history. Whilst he was always happy using visual allegories in his designs, he insisted that their meaning should be clear. ‘Symbols should help’, he wrote (in *Stained Glass as an Art*), ‘not hinder, the imagination’.⁴ In spite of the ostensibly unpoetic theme of Accountancy, Holiday succeeded, with considerable ingenuity, in finding suitably uplifting, and indeed beautiful, subjects for his stained glass. With their appealing imagery, meticulous craftsmanship and superb colour, the four windows are amongst the finest secular stained glass of the



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OTHER IMPORTANT COMMISSIONS

- Westminster Abbey, London: Isambard Kingdom Brunel memorial window
- St Paul's Church, Richmond, Virginia, USA: General Robert E. Lee memorial, *Moses leaving the Court of Pharaoh* (there is a second version of this design in Durham Cathedral)
- Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool: *Dante and Beatrice*
- St Mary Magdalene church, Paddington, London: complete scheme of stained glass, begun in 1869
- Guildhall Art Gallery, London: *The Burgesses of Calais*
- Cecil Higgins Art Gallery, Bedford: *Sleeping Beauty* painted headboard for the bed designed by William Burges for his own use
- Chapel of Worcester College, Oxford: complete scheme of stained glass and painted frieze
- Ashmolean Museum, Oxford: painted panel, part of the *Great Bookcase* designed by William Burges

Examples of Holiday's work in various media can also be found in the British Museum, the V&A Museum and the William Morris Gallery, London; Birmingham City Art Gallery; Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal, Cumbria; the Stained Glass Museum, Ely; and the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

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Peter Cormack, *Arts & Crafts Stained Glass*, London and New Haven, Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2015

CAPTIONS AND IMAGE CREDITS

- 1 Albumen print, Portrait of Henry Holiday, circa 1870
© National Portrait Gallery, London
- 2-5 Watercolour window designs:
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

ENDNOTES

1. Henry Holiday, *Stained Glass as an Art*, 1896, p. 93.
2. For details of Holiday's life and work, see: Henry Holiday, *Reminiscences of My Life*, 1914; and Peter Cormack, 'Henry Holiday 1839-1927', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004.
3. Holiday described the commission in *Reminiscences of My Life*, 1914, p. 435.
4. Holiday, *Stained Glass as an Art*, 1896, p. 146.
5. The details of the windows' original location are given in an anonymous booklet, *The Hall of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, Moorgate Place, London, E.C.2: Some Notes which may be of Interest to those who visit the Hall*, London: Institute of Chartered Accountants, 1955.

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