

## Throwback Thursday: Mural mania (part 1)

### Thursday 23 April 2020

Welcome to Throwback Thursday: Mural Mania (part 1) – sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

Today we're looking at some of the murals (wall paintings) that we have (and had!) in the borough. Murals are works of art, displayed inside a building or outside on the façade of buildings or on walls. They sometimes stand out, obvious and bold for everyone passing by to see, but they can also be tucked away and 'hidden' in private buildings or places not easily accessed by the public. This can make them vulnerable to not only decay but also to damage and in some cases their demise.

From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, public bodies commissioned artwork as part of their development and regeneration programmes to enhance the environment for their residents. This civic or municipal art was thought to encourage a more culturally enlightened and progressive society.

One such celebrated mural we have in Haringey which, in normal circumstances, is accessible to all, can be found in the [Muswell Hill Library](#) on Queens Avenue. We have previously talked about the map of Hornsey etched into a window in the Hornsey Library ([see the post dated 3 April](#)), by Frederick J. Mitchell, who was the Head of Design at Hornsey College of Art in 1965. Along similar lines, the College also created the mural (below) which has been in place in the Children's Section of the Muswell Hill Library since its unveiling on 24 February 1938.



The mural in the Children's Library on the first floor of Muswell Hill Library in 2010.  
© Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Muswell Hill Library was built by W. H. Adams for Hornsey Borough Council and opened in 1931. It is here in the Children's Library today that we see the panels displayed. [Historic England](#) note that these murals are "*the earliest mural*

*decorations known to survive in a children's library. Children's libraries were once a popular place for mural painting as a way to encourage learning, but it is now rare."*

The survival of the murals was cited as part of the reasoning for the building's Grade II listing in 1994.



Muswell Hill Library, soon after its opening in 1931.  
© Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Decorating the library with murals was proposed at the time of it being built by the Hornsey Borough Librarian, Mr J.G. Faraday, as a way of instilling a cheerful and interesting way to encourage people into the library. Mr Faraday engaged the Principal of Hornsey School of Art, John C. Moody, to have his students create the murals.



**PROGRAMME**  
OF THE UNVEILING CEREMONY  
OF DECORATIVE PANELS AT  
THE MUSWELL HILL LIBRARY  
THURSDAY, 24 FEBRUARY, 1938  
BY HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR  
ALDERMAN H. G. J. WILLIAMS, J.P.  
at 3.30 p.m.

**ORDER OF PROCEEDINGS**

- I The Chairman of the Public Libraries Committee, Councillor S. H. Baker, receives the Mayor and guests with a speech of welcome in which he outlines the purpose of the gathering.
- II The Principal of the Hornsey School of Art and Crafts, Mr. J. C. Moody, A.R.E., R.I. presents the panels.
- III The Mayor unveils the panels and thanks the Hornsey School of Art and Crafts.
- IV A vote of thanks to the Mayor proposed by Councillor G. K. M. Hutchinson and seconded by Councillor L. J. Valette.
- V The guests are invited to take tea.

The programme to commemorate the unveiling of the second series of murals on the 24 February 1938.  
© Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

The murals are painted in oil on canvas, surrounded by plaster moulding and are adhered directly onto the wall. There are three separate paintings measuring in total nearly 1.5 metres high and 10 metres long!

The unveiling ceremony programme describes the murals as such:

*"The three panels completing the decorative scheme are from designs by Mr D. Fuller, and present various incidences in the history of Muswell.*

*The first panel executed by Mr R. Woodward, and Mr M. Penny, represents the early history of the Borough, when the land was mainly forest, famous for hunting and the chase.*

*The large centre panel executed by Mr J. B. Shaw represents the use of the sacred Mus Well as a source of healing, and sufferers are depicted being brought by their friends and relations to be succoured [given aid] by the Priory of Clerkenwell, which was under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London. A group on the left hand suggests a gathering of farmers who met to pay their dues at what is now the Clock Tower.*

*The third panel executed by Miss M. Gamlen and Mr G. Makins, brings us to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when Muswell and Hornsey were a centre of culture and depicts a gathering of poets and authors at a garden party in the district."*

There are two wood plaques beneath the outside pair of paintings which read:

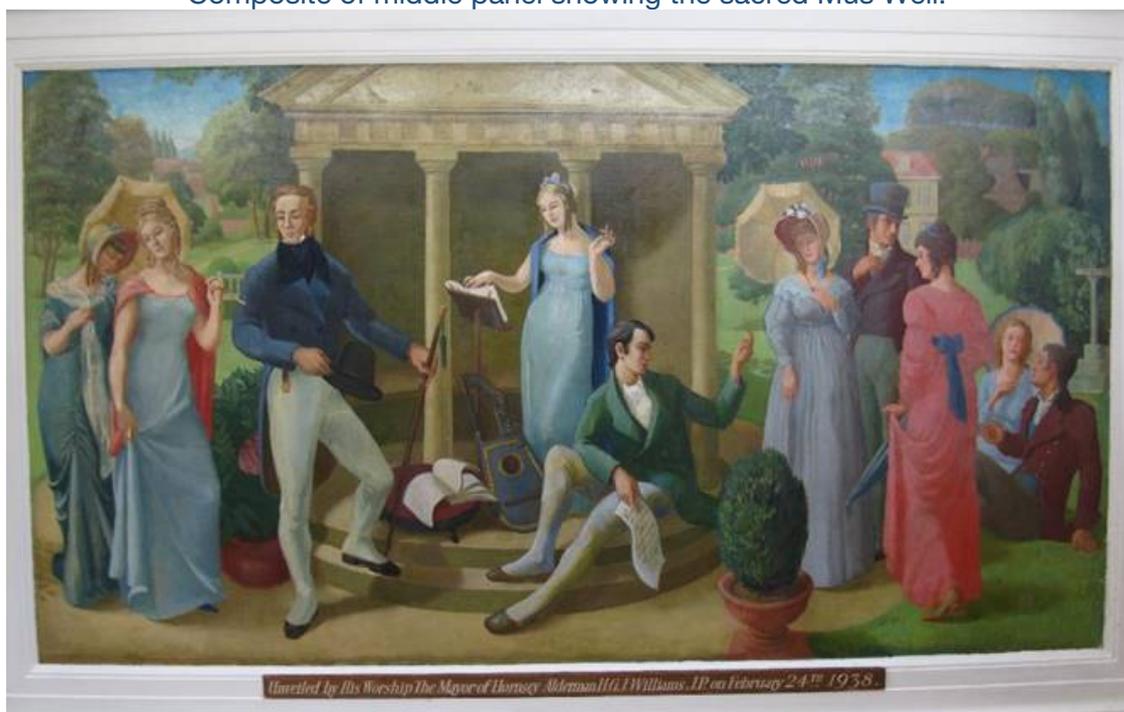
*"Designed and Executed by students of Hornsey School of Art. Messrs. J. B. Shaw, D. Fuller, R. Woodward, G. Makins, M. Penny and Miss W. M. Gamlin  
Unveiled by His Worship the Mayor of Hornsey, Alderman H. G. J. Williams, J.P.  
February 24<sup>th</sup> 1938"*



Left hand panel of mural showing hunting and forest scene.



Composite of middle panel showing the sacred Mus Well.



Right hand panel of mural showing 19<sup>th</sup> century poets and artists.  
© Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

## MUSWELL HILL.

### PICTURED HISTORY OF MUSWELL HILL.

#### THE MURAL PANELS IN THE LIBRARY.

The new mural panels at the Muswell Hill library, from designs by the late Mr. D Fuller and carried out by students of the Hornsey School of Art, which were unveiled by the Mayor of Hornsey on Thursday in last week, have aroused a good deal of interest among visitors to the library. They represent various incidents in the history of Muswell Hill. "A" writes:

The three panels complete a decorative scheme for the lending library and they provide a pleasing contrast to the earlier series—representing the evolution of printing—on the opposite wall. They are beautifully executed; the drawing is clean of line and clear and the colouring is very cool and fresh, a happy medium for the Arcadian scenes they picture.

The middle panel, which is the largest of the three, was carried out by Mr. J. B. Shaw and shows Muswell Hill as a kind of little Lourdes, with sufferers being brought for healing to the sacred well. White-robed monks are standing by the well and the sick, with a sort of fierce, pathetic eagerness, that is well portrayed, are drinking the healing water from simple, grey bowls. The monks in the picture should, perhaps, have been nuns, but the picture, on its own merits, is a fine piece of work.

A symbolic mural painting, like the cinema, can create its own conventions with regard to unity of event and scene and within the middle panel, to the left of the sacred well, is a separate group of figures depicting a scene elsewhere in the borough. This group met, one is told, at what is now the Clock Tower and shows a gathering of farmers, who have come to pay their dues and who are using the occasion for animated discussion of the weather and their crops.

The two other panels in the series, carried out by Mr. R. Woodward and Mr. M. Penney and by Miss M. Gamlen and Mr. G. Makins, represent first, the life of the district, when the pleasant, rolling landscape was mainly forest, and, secondly, a more sophisticated scene in the early 19th century when a group of poets and authors, with their fluttering, feminine admirers, have met at a garden party somewhere in Muswell Hill or Hornsey. Both panels are charming. The first, with a woodcutter at work and a lithe, white hound eager for the chase, skips the centuries and carries back the mind to a fairy-story world of charcoal burners in the forest, rich barons and poor, but honest youths destined to win the baron's daughter; the second, with its formal stone summer-house and a group of gracious figures shows one another world (alas, not less vanished than the other!) when the polite arts were wooed with an exquisite politeness.

Article dated 4 March 1938 in the *Hornsey Journal*, about the panels and their unveiling.  
From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

In 2010 conservation work was done to clean and restore the mural and to ensure its long-term preservation. Picture Restorer and Conservator [Jim Dimond](#) was brought in to do the extremely detailed and delicate work, removing over 70

years of wear and tear on the mural. Jim had done other conservation work at Bruce Castle, including the restoration of our amazing [1686 painting of Bruce Castle](#), but that is another story, for another time!



Jim Dimond on scaffolding conserving the mural in 2010.  
© Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



Images of the right hand side of the mural showing (from left to right) the mural before, during and after the restoration. © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

So, we can thank a forward-thinking Borough Librarian, students of Hornsey College of Arts and the painting restorer Jim Dimond for the wonderful mural available for all to see (in better times!) in the Muswell Hill Library.

Unfortunately, the nature of murals, often being part of a building, can mean that they can be damaged or even lost when the building itself is refurbished or demolished. This was the case of a particularly extraordinary mural depicting the fairy-tale Cinderella in the Devonshire Hill School's dining rooms in Tottenham. The mural was designed and created by [Duncan Grant](#) and [Vanessa Bell](#), both

renowned artists who collaborated together on other murals and were part of the noted [Bloomsbury Group](#).

The work was commissioned by Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), which was the forerunner of what is now Arts Council England, and the British Institute of Adult Education in 1943. As [described in this article](#) about the artists and the work, the unveiling of the work was attended by [John Maynard Keynes](#) who was at the time not only Chair of CEMA and a leading economist, but was also a fellow Bloomsbury Group member.

“The completed mural was unveiled in February 1945, although Grant was not present due to illness. The evening took a theatrical theme as the mural was revealed panel by panel with assistance of former pupils of the school against the backdrop of whimsical commentary by Lord Keynes. Newspaper cuttings from the time describe how the audience found themselves;

*moved by this charming part of the ceremony, demonstrating as it did what a magnificent contribution had been made to beautifying the dining room of the school.”*

Mr Peverett, on behalf of the British Institute of Adult Education was quoted on the night as hoping that:

*‘such mural paintings, as now adorned the school would lead to a new age in education in which appreciation of art would spread through the education system.’*

Unfortunately, the murals no longer exist, having been removed during building refurbishment. But we can see how lovely and detailed the murals were in the images below. They show pupils eating and the dinner ladies serving up their lunches while surrounded by the murals, pictured soon after they were installed at the school. It is possible the children were more interested in what they were having for their lunch than the murals’ wider significance, of course, although the last image does hint at their appreciation of it. The general public were also given access to admire the murals in August 1945 as part of the Government’s ‘Holidays at Home’ initiative, which was instigated to increase morale through art and community events during the Second World War.



From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



[From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum \(Haringey Archive and Museum Service\)](#)

So, there we have the stories of one restored and one lost mural in the Borough. Like the 'Holidays at Home' scheme, we hope that this has lifted your morale a little.

There are of course many more murals and street-art throughout the Borough to admire and appreciate. Those from the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have often not been commissioned by the borough, but created by residents or community groups themselves, often as expressions from within the community or visual statements mirroring societal issues. We plan to take a virtual wander around Haringey, in a future post, looking at some these contemporary murals and street-art.

Remember, tonight is Clap for Our Carers – at 8pm.  
In the meantime, stay home and stay safe.

With our best wishes  
From all at Bruce Castle

**Julie Melrose**  
Archivist

**Deborah Hedgecock**  
Curator

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