

Frederick James SHIELDS - Artist (1833-1911)

Frederick James Shields was born in High Street, Hartlepool, Durham, on 14 March **1833** to John Shields and Georgiana Storey. He died on 26 February **1911** and was buried at St. Mary the Virgin, Merton, on 2 March 1911, aged 78. His wife was Matilda Booth, born c.1856, in Sheffield. They were married at Salford on 15 August **1874** at Irwell Street Chapel by Rev. Mr. Wm. E. Codling. ('Cissy' - his model and later wife).

Page								
18. MARRIAGE solemnized at _____ in the _____								
in the County of _____								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank, or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
	August 15 th 1874	Frederick James Shields	41 years	Bachelor	Artist	Ordsall Hall	John Shields (deceased)	Bookbinder
		Matilda Booth	18 years	Spinster		7 Pond Place, Oct. Street, Hulme	John Booth	Bookbinder
Married in the <u>Irwell Street Wesleyan Chapel</u> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Wesleyan Methodists, by _____								
By me, <u>Wm E Codling</u> Minister.								
Registrar.								
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		<u>Frederick James Shields</u>			in the Presence of us,		<u>Edwin Gibbs</u>	
		<u>Matilda Booth</u>					<u>Robert Daniel</u>	
18. MARRIAGE solemnized at _____ in the _____								



John Shields had moved from Hartlepool to London by July **1839**, to the parish of St. Clements Danes, with Frederick and his young sister. He was a man with artistic talents and sought to become an engraver and bookbinder, encouraging his young son, Frederick, to develop his own artistic talents. Frederick's mother had a small dressmaking business in the city. He attended St. Clement Danes Charity School until the age of 14, though at 13 he had started to attend evening drawing classes at the Mechanics Institute, followed by a few months at the School of Art at Somerset House.

In **1848**, he began to keep a diary - a practice he continued with regularity until his death. It shows the difficulties, rigours and strains upon a young working boy who was aged 15 at that time. In spite of these difficulties, his diary shows that he was a very talented, well-read and industrious boy. By this time, his father was struggling with his business in London and had been working for a number of firms in the North of England. He found a job as foreman bookbinder at MacCorquodales's in Newton-le-Willows and sent for Frederick to join him, leaving his mother with three other children in London, working as a dressmaker. The young boy spent his time initially wandering the countryside, sketching and doing odd jobs. His father found him a position with a Scotsman named Cowan at 5 shillings a week in Manchester, but recognising that his health was failing him, he returned to London for medical help at the Brompton Hospital. Frederick found lodging in Cupid's Alley and wrote in his diary:

"I used to buy a bag of Indian meal for the week, and this served for all my meals, while my dress wore shabbier and my shoes wore out with little margin to amend them. Then Cowan failed, and I was without any opening and friendless in the great city. I wandered from public-house to public-house, offering for a penny to sketch the profile of any man there, but few were my paltry gains."

Then, one day he wandered to Worsley and sketched the hall and the church. He wrote to his father :

MY DEAR FATHER, August 2nd, 1849

I received your kind letter on Tuesday. I have also to thank you for the Illustrated News you sent me. It is a splendid number; the prize cattle, and the views of the cascade, and the Gap of Dunloe are worthy of any work.

Often as I lie in bed I think of your thin body and face, and in my fancy see you beside me. Are you getting any stouter with your increase of strength ? I wish to God your cough was well, then you would soon recover. I hope to hear of your admission into the Hospital next letter. I intend to go down to Worsley in the course of two or three days with my drawing of the church. I hope that I may see the Earl or the Rector. I have got some jobs at ticket designing for a private printer named Bardsley, in Oldham Street, and several portraits, at which I have improved wonderfully.

Regrets are useless now, father, but still I wish I could get apprenticed to the woodcutting, the lithog writing, or even the bookbinding. O, how I wish I could get to the painting under a good master. Tell me always how you are. I remain, your affectionate son,

FREDERICK JAMES SHIELDS!

Worsley Hall seems to have been a promising sketching ground, as the next two or three letters relate.

It is perhaps a point of interest to those possessing early drawings by Shields, that, until about 1864, he signed his name " Frederick." Subsequently, he omitted the final letter.

MANCHESTER, October 2nd, 1849.

MY DEAR FATHER, I received your kind letter of the 27th ult. (but I thought I would not answer you until I had seen either the Earl or the Rector. I went yesterday to Worsley, and saw the Rector; he told me to make him another drawing of the church, in addition to the one I have already done. He gave me a shilling. At the lodge I found my endeavour to see the Earl would be fruitless, as the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, Lord Wilton, and several other of the nobility were dining with him that day. In a week I will go down again. father, you know not what pleasure it gives me to know that you are better; God grant that you may continue to progress towards recovery and go forth from the Hospital with a thankful heart for God's mercy. I get 4s. to 6s. for portraits, according to the style they are done in. I thank you, father, for your kind consideration, but I have got a good pair of boots.

I am sorry to tell you that I am about 12s. in debt, but by the efforts I am making I hope soon to be free. There is a young man named James Tait, a Scotchman, lodging here. He is a painter, and his father is in business for himself in the same line, in the small town of Gatehouse, in Kirkcudbright. He is out of work just now and thinks of returning to Scotland. He has offered to take me with him to Gatehouse and apprentice me to the painting and graining with his father, providing me with meat, lodgings, and clothes. Of wages he can say nothing until he asks his father. I would wish you to weigh well this offer before you return any positive answer. Adieu, dear father, for the present. Your affectionate son,

FREDERICK JAMES SHIELDS.

MANCHESTER, November 18th, 1849.

MY DEAR FATHER, It is the old prologue "I went to Worsley" again, but I am happy to be able to add that the performances on this occasion were of a very novel kind. Upon my arrival at the hall, I enquired for the steward, Mr. Rasbotham, and was informed that he had gone to his own house in the village. I immediately repaired thither. He was at dinner. The servant undertook to announce my name, and returned with the kind answer that I was to have something to eat and drink, and that he (Mr. Rasbotham) would see me afterwards. I had a capital dinner (at tea-time) of roast beef, boiled salary, bread, potatoes, &c. The servant then told me that Mr. Rasbotham was waiting for me. But before I proceed further, I must ask you if you remember the large sketch of Shakespeare which I did at Newton. Be that as it may, I have since made a large drawing in chalk of the same subject. This, together with a portrait and some smaller drawings, I took with me to show him. He took them into the dining-room to let the company see them, and asked me what would be the price of a copy of the Shakespeare. I scarce knew what to ask but at last I said ten shillings, which I did not consider too much, as there is four good days' work on it, besides materials. He said he would see about it. He then said that the Earl did not see how he could be of any assistance to me with regard to a situation, but he would consider the matter. In the meantime his lordship wishes me to do a drawing of the Church for him in pencil. Now for the grand climax, the last scene of all. Mr. Rasbotham put his hand into his pocket and asked if a trifle would be of any service to me, at the same time putting into my hand half a sovereign. I thanked him almost with tears in my eyes, so kindly and considerately was the action performed, took my leave and walked home praising God for His great goodness in having found me at least a temporary friend. You ask if my landlady trusts me. It will give you great pleasure, I know, when I tell you that for nearly a month, when I only brought a few shillings, she never grumbled. It is true, she is a little hasty at times, but she is good at heart, and I can put up with her. My dear father, you ask me to tell you all my wants. Believe me, my chief want, I might almost say my only one, is you, for I cannot speak in a letter as I would if you were beside me, for when I sit down to write, it chills the heat and fervour of what I could wish to say into an arctic coldness. I know well what must be your feelings concerning me, you could swallow all, ah! and much more than all, that I could tell you, at least so I feel with regard to you.

I remain, your affectionate son,

FREDERICK JAMES SHIELDS.

The father, now in Brompton Hospital, is evidently worse, and soon to be discharged as incurable.

MANCHESTER, November 27th, 1849.

MY DEAR FATHER, I received your kind and affectionate letter. I am grieved to hear that you have been worse again. Oh ! tell me whether you are better. It gives me the greatest pleasure to know that Dr. Roe is kind to you, God will reward him. I went to the Hall yesterday, the day appointed. I was shown in to Mr Rasbotham, whom I found seated at his desk writing. Upon my entrance he rose, and bade me good morning. I returned his salutation. We then proceeded to business. He seemed to like the view of the Church very well and took it in to show his lordship. He returned with the gracious information that his lordship was very well pleased with it, and that I was to execute two more views of the hall, to be sent down to the house in London, 10 Belgrave Square, where they

intend proceeding on Friday. He then gave me 2s for the view of the Church, and I consider that I was exceedingly well paid. I am glad that I left the Shakespeare with Mr. Rasbotham, this time he told me he should consider the ten shillings he gave me as an equivalent for it. I gratefully acceded. I have great pleasure in being able to send you an order for ten shillings payable at the Brompton Hospital. I send you a rough sketch which I took of John Bright, M.P.

I remain, your affectionate son,

FREDERICK JAMES SHIELDS.
I thank God that I am out of debt.



MANCHESTER, December 2nd, 1849.

MY DEAR FATHER, I received your wished-for letter on Thursday morning. On that day I went to the Hall with a portrait for one of the servants. They were all very busy making preparations for the Earl's departure. I believe he is in London by this time. I have not yet taken the sketches of the Hall, for I did not like to be seen cutting and capering about the grounds adjacent to the Hall in search of a point of view while the family were at home, but I intend making them tomorrow. It will be cold work taking them, but that is not the worst of it. I shall have to turn the leafless, skeleton-like trees of winter, into flourishing summer plants heavy with foliage, a somewhat difficult task, but if I succeed in it, the more triumph. They shall be done on tinted drawing board. Oh! father, if you had been at my side when I received the money, and been able to see as it were through a glass into my mind, you could not better have interpreted my feeling than you have in your last letter; which I have read over and over again, until it has almost made me cry, teeming as it does with kindness and affection. But you say you cannot think of accepting the money; believe me, father, you could not hurt my feelings more than by returning it. My only grief has been that I have never been able to send you anything before, and my present grief is that I am not able at present to send you more. Think you I can forget one who, with disinterested affection, sent me money so often, when he

himself so badly needed it. I pray God I may never be forgetful and ungrateful, and do I not respect Gibson (whose portrait and life you were kind enough to send me) the more for that, in the words of his biographer," in affluence at Rome he never forgot the duty of sharing his means with his parents in Liverpool." I have been enabled, too, to buy myself a new waistcoat, two pair of stockings, two cotton handkerchiefs, and a pair of woollen gloves, so that you will perceive that I am not in immediate want for anything.

You say well ! How often have I sighed, vainly sighed, even as you now sigh, for a repetition of the happy evenings we spent at Newton. It is only when in adversity that we know the value of health and prosperity. Write soon.

I remain, your affectionate son,

FREDERICK JAMES SHIELDS.

MANCHESTER, December 16th, 1849.

MY DEAR FATHER, I received your kind letter, returning the money order, this morning. I have been induced to accept the money, the more especially as you say you are not in want of anything, and yet (forgive me for it) I scarce know whether to believe you or not, I know so well your self-denying love. You say you have no tire, for the love of God try to get some. Will the landlady not let you sit at hers? How do you spend your time, have you any books ? I would have liked to have sent the sketch of the Hall to you with this letter, but that I am not finished with it yet, it would give you an idea of the place. It is a very elaborate building in the Elizabethan style.

My dear father, do not grieve about me. Here I am not as I should like to be, but thank God I am not so bad as your fears lead you to suppose. On Monday I got six shillings for a portrait of a child, on Tuesday, sixpence and my tea for a sketch of a head, and to-day I shall get two shillings and my dinner and tea for another portrait, a small one, and last night another sixpence for an hour's tuition in drawing. So that I am not so badly off as you think, and I beg of you, dear father, not to make yourself ill concerning me. If you were well and by my side, I could endure ten times the misfortune I am now subject to with pleasure.

Your affectionate son,

FREDERICK JAMES SHIELDS.

He was at this time sixteen years of age.

For the two drawings the Earl of Ellesmere paid the boy the fabulous sum of five pounds, and he also drew the portraits of several of the servants at the Hall for five shillings a head. But this could not last, and no one seems to have heeded or inquired what prospects the boy had. So he wandered back to Manchester, and suffered every misery of cold, loneliness, and starvation. His father, discharged from Brompton Hospital, died, having succeeded in obtaining, a few weeks before his death, a situation for his son at Bradshaw & Blacklock's, at a salary of seven shillings a week.

His career blossomed after these early tragic events. He was still in Manchester in **1857** when an exhibition entitled *The Art Treasures Exhibition* took place there, with over 16,000 works on display. He was greatly impressed by what he saw and he started to work as a book illustrator. Eventually, in **1864**, he moved back to London where he met Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Through him he came to know members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, people like Ford Madox Brown, Rossetti and William Holman Hunt. He was present at the death of Rossetti on Easter Sunday 1882. Sadly for Frederick, his marriage was not successful, and he

and Matilda spent much of their time living separately. He died on 26 February **1911** and was buried in Merton Old Church, Merton, London SW19.

Amongst his many important commissions, Shields designed the windows in the Chancel of St. Ann's Church, Manchester. He drew out a complete scheme for the church's stained glass based upon the theme of a Shepherd.



'The Good Shepherd' 1894



'Factory Girls at Knott Mill' 1875

