

Herbert Bone and the Design of the *Idylls of the King*
at the Royal Windsor Tapestry Manufactory

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Introduction

The Royal Windsor Tapestry Manufactory was founded in 1876 by Henri J. C. Henry, an artistic advisor to Gillow & Co., and Marcel Brignolas, a French weaver. Success came quickly to the venture, which won a gold medal at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1878 for the *Merry Wives of Windsor*. The prize-winning set, which was commissioned by Gillow & Co., suggested hopeful commercial possibilities.

Although the Windsor Manufactory was established as a business, it also belonged to the idealistic revival of craftsmanship, reflecting the Victorian interest in quality design. The guarantors, who supplied the capital, together with the president, Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany (Queen Victorian's youngest son), were attempting to revive tapestry weaving in England. The Windsor tapestries enjoyed undiminished critical success until the early 1890s. They perpetuated the high-warp, painterly precision that characterized production at the Gobelins, and at the same time reflected the late nineteenth-century taste for faded, antique textiles.

Little research has been done on the Royal Windsor Tapestry Manufactory. Gordon Graham Cullingham provided an overview of the history and production in *The Royal Windsor Tapestry Manufactory, 1876-1890: an Illustrated Handlist of Tapestries Woven at the Old Windsor Works* (1979).¹ Cullingham compiled and synthesized a ground-breaking amount of information, and after a quarter century, his efforts have not been superseded. But although the *Illustrated Handlist* remains the only work on the subject, it is not comprehensive. Cullingham's documentation of the Windsor tapestries is limited to a few pages, at most, for each design. He provides only concise information about the artists and patrons, and he eschews comparisons with Merton Abbey, the tapestry works founded by William Morris (1834-1896), which was for nine years a rival to the Windsor Manufactory.

The discussion of the *Idylls of the King* is representative. Little is known about this series, which was based on Alfred Tennyson's Arthurian poems. Cullingham's entries for the eight tapestries comprising the set are helpful but flawed. The author was uncertain about the

¹ Gordon Graham Cullingham. *The Royal Windsor Tapestry Manufactory, 1876-1890: an Illustrated Handlist of Tapestries Woven at the Old Windsor Works*. (Windsor, Berkshire: Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, 1979)

number of tapestries ultimately woven and some of the provenance information was incomplete or mistaken. Cullingham had little to say about the career of Herbert Bone (1853-1931), the young artist who designed the *Idylls*, or about the motives of the patron, Coleridge Kennard (1828-1890).

The set was dispersed at auction in 1896, and the location of the panels is currently unknown. This obscurity is in many ways representative of the modern mediocre reputation of the Windsor tapestries, few of which are in public collections.²

By contrast, the Merton Abbey workshop has an enduring reputation among scholars and critics. “No praise can be too high in describing the Merton Abbey tapestries” is an early assessment that still meets with agreement among art historians.³ The Merton Abbey also wove a tapestry series on King Arthur (des. 1890-91; woven 1891-95), which is today recognized as the summit of nineteenth-century English tapestry design.⁴ Although the *Holy Grail* reflects Morris’ and Edward Burne-Jones’ lifelong passion for Arthurian legend, the incentive to design the series may have been spurred on, in part, by the Windsor Works’ *Idylls of the King*.

This thesis addresses the *Idylls of the King* in the context of tapestry weaving in England during the nineteenth century, from the founding of the Royal Windsor Tapestry Manufactory until the 1890s, when the Windsor tapestries began to be compared unfavorably with Merton Abbey tapestries. There is also a brief biography of Herbert Bone’s early career and a limited discussion of Coleridge Kennard’s commission of this tapestry series.

Research in this field is made difficult by the scarcity of primary sources. The only related drawings are listed but not published in *The Victorian Watercolours and Drawings in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen* by Delia Millar.⁵ There are likewise few documents related

² J. E. Hodgson’s *English Sports: Cornelius Vanderbilt Fishing*,” which belongs to the Art Institute of Chicago, is one of the only Windsor tapestries in a public collection.

³ W. G. Thomson. *A History of Tapestry: from the Earliest Times until the Present Day*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906), 470.

⁴ Linda Parry. *William Morris Textiles*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), 116.

⁵ Delia Millar. *The Victorian Watercolours and Drawings in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen*. (London: P. Wilson, 1995), 1:99.

to Kennard's tenure as Windsor guarantor and none related to his commission of the *Idylls*. Documents in the Royal Archive focus on the business operations of the Windsor Works, not specific commissions. Despite these challenges, Herbert Bone's *Idylls of the King* emerges as one of the highest achievements of the Windsor Works.

1. The Royal Windsor Tapestry Manufactory and the Revival of English Craftsmanship

When the Old Windsor Tapestry Manufactory was founded in 1876, there was uncertainty about its purpose, with some courtiers at Queen Victoria's court uncertain about how tapestries were made. For Prince Leopold, who was instrumental in setting up and sustaining the enterprise, tapestry was "a connecting link between painting and industry."⁶ But among the courtiers responsible for implementing Leopold's vision, definitions came less readily. "The object they have in mind," wrote Thomas Biddulph, the keeper of the Privy Purse, "is to introduce into England the Gobelin manufacture which is done by hand [and] I believe requires no machinery whatever."⁷ The emphasis on hand looms was necessary to secure space near Windsor Castle for the venture. "There will be no chimney or machinery or noise of any kind whatever in the manufactory."⁸ In royal circles, "hand loom tapestry similar to the Gobelins in France" became the catchall phrase to describe the ambition of the manufactory's founders.⁹ Herbert Bone (1853-1931), who began working at the Windsor Works in 1879, may have been thinking back to this period when he wrote that in the past, tapestry and needlework were "often confounded in the minds even of intelligent and educated people, engrossed upon other matters."¹⁰

The Windsor Tapestry Manufactory was as much a novelty to journalists, and it enjoyed undiminished critical success until its disbanding in the early 1890s. Reviews of the first important exhibition in England of Windsor tapestries, which took place in the town hall of Windsor in 1878, set the tone for much of the reporting during the late seventies and eighties. In the *Times*, an anonymous critic emphasized the hanging of historic English tapestries side by side

⁶ Prince Leopold to municipal governments and universities, 21 February 1884, RA Vic Addl. Mss. A/17, 740.

⁷ Thomas Biddulph to [?] Gore, 1 December 1876, RA PP/VIC/1876/22301.

⁸ Robert Hawthorn Collins to Thomas Biddulph, 30 November 1876, RA PP/VIC/22301. Collins was quoting Henri Henry.

⁹ Thomas Biddulph to [?] Gore, 26 November 1876, RA PP/VIC/1876/22301.

with modern ones. He compared the Windsor Manufactory with Mortlake, the tapestry works which flourished under the Stuarts during the seventeenth century. The suggestion was that tapestry weaving was a native art. Stylistically, the Windsor tapestries were perpetuating this tradition with their “simple, flat style” in “shades of green and gray.”¹¹ Descriptions of the model village, where the mostly French “artist workers” inhabited “brick Elizabethan cottages,” reinforced the perception that tapestry weaving belonged to the revival of English craftsmanship (fig. 10).¹²

The *Illustrated London News* took a similar position in its report on the exhibition, by making the Windsor Works the successor to earlier English tapestry works, the first of which was founded in the sixteenth century. Tapestry weaving “took root for a while in Warwickshire in the days of Cardinal Wolsey; at Mortlake under the Stuarts, and subsequently in Ireland and Soho,” began the familiar recitation of precedents, “but it never continued to flourish; and in the great revival of all the arts of interior and household embellishment in this country it has been the last to receive attention. The [Windsor] Tapestry Manufactory [...] bids fair, however, to remove this reproach, judging from the excellence of its products.”¹³

Press accounts mentioned regularly the support and patronage of the queen and her children, though on at least one occasion doubts were expressed about the suitability of the royal family’s involvement in the furnishings trade.¹⁴ The prominent commitment of Prince Leopold

¹⁰ This essay was first published in 1905 and reprinted with an expanded introduction in 1918. (Herbert Bone. “Tapestry as War Memorials,” *Connoisseur* 51 (1918), 198.)

¹¹ “The Windsor Tapestries.” *Times*, 13 December 1878, 3.

¹² “The Windsor Tapestries” 1878, 3; Mary Gay Humphreys. “The Windsor Tapestries,” *Art Amateur* 17 (1887), 84. Coverage of Merton Abbey and the Baumgarten Works made the same distinction between the exploitation of the mill hand and the generously recompensed skill of the tapestry weaver (William Baumgarten. *A Short Résumé of the History of Tapestry Making in the Past and Present*. New York: Styles & Cash, 1897; Aymer Vallance. “The Revival of Tapestry Weaving: an Interview with William Morris,” *Studio* 3 (July 1894), 98-101); “Start of an Art Industry: Modern Tapestries No Longer Imported from Europe,” *New York Times*, 7 January 1894, 13.)

¹³ “The Tapestry Exhibition at Windsor,” *Illustrated London News* 73 (14 December 1878), 569.

¹⁴ “Exhibition of English Tapestries,” *Furniture Gazette* 10 (14 December 1878), 397.

was vital in ensuring the loyalty of the guarantors, who deferentially refrained from looking into the accounts until after his death in 1884.¹⁵ Sponsorship of a tapestry works would have been considered suitable for a closely surveyed invalid like Leopold, who suffered from hemophilia. But for Leopold, who was befriended by John Ruskin during his brief studies at Oxford a few years earlier, tapestry production was only one manifestation of his interest in art.¹⁶ Equally public was the encouragement of Queen Victoria, who frequently bought Windsor tapestries. She further showed her support in December 1880, by approving that the enterprise should change its name to the Royal Windsor Tapestry Works.¹⁷

Encouragement for the Windsor Tapestry Works went largely unmodified during the next decade. The *Furniture Gazette*, in its regular roundup of industry news, reported on the most important tapestries to come out of Windsor. “The colouring is soft and pleasant, and the drawing generally good” was its assessment of the *Merry Wives of Windsor* while recent production in 1881 was “beautifully worked.”¹⁸ After Prince Leopold’s death in 1884, the Windsor Works continued in operation on a reduced footing.¹⁹ Although the *Furniture Gazette* might not have known the details of the guarantors’ concerns, the number of weavers was, by then, significantly

¹⁵ Typical is the statement by R. H. Collins, who was the secretary of the RWTM and a lifelong friend of Prince Leopold: “Indeed, the Committee never ought to have allowed things to get as bad as they are now but till the Duke of Albany’s death no practical steps were taken to grapple with the situation.” (R. H. Collins to Henry Ponsonby, 23 October [1884?]. RA PP 1/28 5)

¹⁶ Charlotte Zeepvat. *Prince Leopold: the Untold Story of Queen Victoria’s Youngest Son*. (Phoenix Mill, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1998), 86-87.

¹⁷ Queen Victoria granted approval for this change on 19 December 1880. The RWTW were a frequent destination for guests at Windsor Castle, judging by stories passed down in the Bone family. Also, an autograph collector stole the visitors’ book in 1888 for the entries for the queen and her family. (A. H. Leddell to Henry Ponsonby, 18 December 1880, RA PP/VIC/1880/9196; “News, Notes and Comments,” *Furniture Gazette* 15 (8 January 1881), 35; Cullingham 1979, 40-41; “Windsor Tapestry Works,” *Times*, 31 October 1888, 10.)

¹⁸ “Furniture at the Paris Exhibition,” *Furniture Gazette* 10 (7 September 1878), 155; “News, Notes and Comments,” *Furniture Gazette* 15 (8 January 1881), 35.

¹⁹ Robert Hawthorn Collins to [Unknown], 15 March 1885 (RA PP 1/28/44).

and visibly reduced—a fact that would have been apparent during visiting hours.²⁰ (The magazine had published the schedule some years earlier.)²¹ Even after it should have been evident that the Windsor Manufactory was a business failure, the trade journal was still reporting on new orders and, as late as 1887, reviewing an exhibition of “some very fine examples of decorative tapestry, manufactured at the Royal Windsor Tapestry Works.”²²

Significantly, the burgeoning art press took the same supportive view, with the *Magazine of Art* and *Art Journal* just as encouraging as the business-oriented *Furniture Gazette*. By the late eighties, the guarantors maintained operations at the Windsor Tapestry Works only so long as there were commissions. This fact went unmentioned in the *Art Amateur*, which ran an article more noticeable for optimism than accuracy. After the customary reference to Mortlake, the journalist wrote that “the second attempt to introduce the making of tapestries in England” was proving successful, with the six French weavers increased to twenty-five and a larger factory built to answer “the demands of increasing production.”²³ Occasionally, though, there were hints that the tapestry works had financial problems. Thus the *Royal Album of Arts and Industries of Great Britain* (1887) stated “that the Royal Windsor Tapestry Works have not been founded with a view to the acquisition of gain. They have been established for the national good, and on grounds essentially patriotic.”²⁴ It was a position not at all different from the one maintained by those responsible for the Windsor Works.²⁵

²⁰ “We have latterly sent away several workmen, recognising the critical position of affairs.” (R. H. Collins to [?] Ponsonby, 23 October [1884] (RA PP 1/28 5))

²¹ “News, Notes, and Comments,” *Furniture Gazette* 8 (1 December 1877), 417.

²² “News and Comments,” *Furniture Gazette* 24 (1 September 1886), 291-292.

²³ Humphreys 1887, 17:84.

²⁴ *Royal Album of Arts and Industries of Great Britain*. (London: Wyman & Sons, 1887), 483.

²⁵ “We have started this enterprise from purely artistic and philanthropical motives, and with no desire or expectation of profits,” wrote R. H. Collins, who was the secretary for the RWTM. (Robert Hawthorn Collins to Henry Ponsonby, 23 October [1884], RA PP 1/28 5; Cullingham 1979, 4-6)

However unreliable the reporting, the positive tone is noteworthy. There was no connection yet made between the artistic achievement of the Royal Windsor Tapestry Works and its failure as a business. This failure owed much to poor judgment—despite later attempts to insinuate a more scandalous explanation—but there was another important explanation.²⁶ The venture coincided with a period in interior design when tapestries had declined in fashion. Tapestries continued to be hung in stately homes and public buildings, but as early as the 1860s, the advocates of design reform were excluding tapestry from the modern, healthful interior.

The principal criticism was, in fact, on the grounds of hygiene. The designer Charles Eastlake (1836-1906) pointed out these concerns, in *Hints on Household Taste*, which was first published in 1868, though his arguments on the subject were only fully developed by the time of the second edition a year later:

In the Middle Ages it was customary to decorate the walls of the most important rooms of a public building or private mansion with tapestry; and there is no doubt that a rich and picturesque effect was thus obtained which no other means could produce. But it is obvious that the mere expense of such a practice, to say nothing of the consideration of cleanliness (especially in town-houses, where dust collects with great rapidity) would render it out of the question for modern appliance.²⁷

Instead Eastlake recommended “the more recent invention of paperhangings [that is, wallpaper],” which supplied “a cheaper, readier, and, to our English notions of comfort, a more satisfactory means of internal decoration.”²⁸ The simple, flat patterns issued by Jeffrey & Co., the manufacturer of William Morris’ designs, were what Eastlake had in mind, and they give a clue to the style of tapestries that produced the “rich and picturesque effect” that he admired. Doubtless he was describing old Flemish verdure, judging by one of his many criticisms of design that directly imitates nature:

²⁶ William Baumgarten insinuated that there was some financial misappropriation at the Windsor Works. (Baumgarten 1897, 36-38)

²⁷ Charles Eastlake. *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery, and other Details*, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1869), 105.

²⁸ Eastlake 1869, 106.

The *quasi*-fidelity with which the forms of a rose or a bunch of ribbons, or a ruined castle, can be reproduced on carpets, crockery, and wall-papers will always possess a certain kind of charm for the uneducated eye...²⁹

So resilient were these arguments, that the architect Robert Edis (1839-1927), writing in the 1880s, simply repeated them, adding only the following qualification:

I see no reason why good pieces of old tapestry should not be strained and hung on the walls of the halls or staircases as pictures, or any other objects of art, so long as they are moveable and easily shifted for cleaning purposes.³⁰

Edis did not describe these “good pieces of old tapestry,” although his views were similar to those of other reformers both in theory and practice, and he was probably recommending the same faded tapestries that Eastlake admired.³¹

Inevitably these concerns were applied to the Windsor tapestries, so that the *Furniture Gazette* hedged its early appreciation with the observation that “the wide extension of sanitary knowledge will prevent anything like a general adoption of tapestry, which from its very nature, is calculated to absorb, instead of to repel, infection and the germs of disease.”³²

At the time of production the Windsor Works was appreciated as an important influence in the revival of English craftsmanship, despite concerns about hygiene. Beginning in the early 1890s, though, Windsor tapestries came to be regarded as at odds with the principles of this movement.

²⁹ Eastlake 1869, 103.

³⁰ Robert Edis. *Decoration & Furniture of Town Houses*. (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1881), 59-60.

³¹ Edis papered his drawing room with Morris’ *Pomegranate*. (Charlotte Gere. *The House Beautiful: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetic Interior*. (exh. cat., London: Geffrye Museum, 2000), 79.)

³² “Furniture at the Paris Exhibition” 1878, 10:155.

Chapter 2: Herbert Bone: the Early Years

The earliest tapestries that were woven by the Windsor Tapestry Manufactory were designed by T. W. Hay and E. M. Ward (1816-1879). Hay, a decorative painter with Gillow & Co., was responsible for *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1877/78) and continued to design tapestries through at least the mid-1880s.³³ Ward's contribution was substantial but brief. A well regarded history painter, he was living in Windsor, in frail health since 1874. He designed the four hunting scenes (1877/78) commissioned by Christopher Sykes, and a few other tapestries before dying in January 1879. The cartoons must have been time-consuming, judging by his Royal Academy submissions, which ceased after 1877. Although there are few primary sources about the Windsor Tapestry Works, the early years are especially obscure. Even the memoirs of Ward's wife, Henrietta Maria Ward (1832-1924), pass over the details of her husband's tapestry designs in favor of the couple's cordial relations with the royal family. "The Duke of Albany asked Edward to paint several designs for tapestry, and these proved a real joy to my husband," she abridged before recounting anecdotes of Prince Leopold's affection for her dog.³⁴

But the *Idylls of the King* was not entrusted to Hay or the ailing Ward—or, for that matter, to Ward's sociable widow, who was a painter in her own right.³⁵ Instead the artist was

³³ Hay is not listed in Bénézit or Thieme-Becker. He is probably the same artist as Thomas Wallace Hay, a decorative painter who exhibited four times at the Royal Academy from 1884 to 1903 (Cullingham 1979, 7; Algernon Graves. *The Royal Academy of Arts: a Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their Work from its Foundation in 1769 to 1904*. (London: H. Graves; George Bell, 1905-1906), 4:35)

³⁴ Henrietta Maria Ward. *Memories of Ninety Years*. (London: Hutchison, 1924), 187-188. E. M. Ward may have committed suicide. (Cullingham 1979, 27; Pamela Nunn Garish. "Edward Matthews Ward," in *Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner (New York: Grove's Dictionaries, 1996), 32:856)

³⁵ "Mrs. Henrietta Maria Ward worked on several cartoons" after her husband's death (Cullingham 1979, 4). However, Cullingham lists only the cartoons she made based on sketches by Louisa Beresford, Marchioness of Waterford (1818-1891) for "The Seasons," a four panel screen (Cullingham 1979, 78; "The Windsor Tapestries" 1878, 3). These designs might be related to the four tapestries that were sold at Bonham's in London, 25 September 1975 ("£8,000 for Emerald Ring," *Times*, 26 September 1975, 19).

Herbert Bone, who was hired as a designer at the Windsor Works in 1879.³⁶ Bone was born on 2 September 1853 in Camberwell, in southeastern London, where his father John was a draper.³⁷ Beginning in 1864, he (Herbert) studied at Dulwich College, which was then a model for education reform.³⁸ It was in this supportive environment that he first met J. C. L. Sparkes, who was the principal drawing master there from 1860 to 1881.³⁹ Like many of his artistic classmates, Bone left Dulwich to study at the Lambeth School of Art, the local government design school, which Sparkes directed from 1856.⁴⁰ The Lambeth School was known for its close ties with Doulton, originally a manufacturer of utilitarian ceramics located in Lambeth. (Colloquially, it was known as the Lambeth Pottery.)⁴¹ In the 1860s, thanks largely to Sparkes' persistence, Doulton added art wares to its stock of drainpipes and plumbing fixtures.⁴² As a student, Herbert Bone was a designer and painter for Doulton, and he continued to work there after he left the Lambeth School a few months after enrolling in 1871.⁴³ According to one critic in 1879,

³⁶ Thomas Lane Ormiston, comp. *Dulwich College Register, 1619 to 1926*. (London: The College, 1926), no. 284.

³⁷ The Bone family lived at Melton Lodge, Grove Lane SE (Ormiston 1926, no. 284; "Dulwich College Register: Herbert Arthur Bone, 18 September 1925," Archives, Dulwich College). The latter source is a summary of Bone's life and career that was supplied by the artist.

³⁸ "Dulwich College Register: Herbert Arthur Bone, 18 September 1925" (Dulwich). Bone's middle name was Arthur, though it is sometimes mistakenly listed as Alfred. (Jane Johnson. *Works Exhibited at the Royal Society of British Artists, 1824-1893 and the New English Art Club, 1888-1917*. (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1993), 48; Royal Society of British Artists. *Winter Exhibition*. (London: The Society, 1874), no. 64)

³⁹ William Harnett Blanch. *Dulwich College and Edward Alleyn*. (London: E. W. Allen, 1877), 38; *Dulwich College: a School and its Art* 1981, 10; Ormiston 1926, no. 4.

⁴⁰ Desmond Eyles. *The Doulton Lambeth Wares*. (Shepton Beauchamp: Richard Dennis, 2002), 35; Sheila Hodges. *God's Gift: a Living History of Dulwich College*. (London: Heinemann, 1981), 277.

⁴¹ John Cushion et al. *A Collector's History of British Porcelain*. (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1992), 383.

⁴² Eyles 2002, 35.

⁴³ "How the Danes Came up the Channel a Thousand Years Ago, by Herbert A. Bone," *Bulletin of the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery* 10 (June 1931), 14; Ormiston 1926, no. 284) "H. Bone Nightingale" is cited in a list of Lambeth students who were sent by Sparkes to work for Doulton

“‘Philosophy’ by Mr. Bone was among the highest developments of faience,” suggesting that Bone was contributing designs to Doulton until the end of the decade.⁴⁴

On 23 January 1872, Herbert Bone enrolled in the School of Painting at the Royal Academy Schools, which was organized on neoclassical principles, with an emphasis on depicting the human figure and classical drapery.⁴⁵ Bone distinguished himself as a talented and hardworking student, winning a silver medal for the second best drawing from the antique in 1873 and another silver medal two years later for the best drawing of a figure from life.⁴⁶ The latter was cited in the *Times* in an article on the school’s prize distribution that conveys the traditional values of the Royal Academy in the late nineteenth century. Representative of these values was the address made by Sir Francis Grant (1803-1878), the bon vivant president of the Royal Academy, who warned students against indulging “in the florid and bravura”—a temptation he described in pseudo-medical language (“this danger when the eye and the brain had been disturbed by the glare of a modern exhibition”).⁴⁷ To protect themselves, they were told to study ancient art, visit the National Gallery, and beware Turner’s later works, which were “wild and extravagant.” Grant also encouraged the acquisition of “mental culture” both as an artistic resource and as a qualification “to mix in those social and literary circles which were always ready to hold out the hand of

in 1873 (Eyles 2002, 42). The author seems to have conflated Herbert Bone with Leonard Charles Nightingale, another alumnus of Dulwich College who went on to study at the Lambeth School from 1870 to 1872. (*Dulwich College: a School and its Art*. (exh. cat., London: South London Art Gallery, 1981), 10; Ormiston 1926, no. 163)

⁴⁴ W. H. Edwards. “Lambeth Faience,” *Magazine of Art*, English ed. 2 (1879), 41. Bone was a lifelong resident of Camberwell and Lambeth, in southern London. From 1874 to 1876, his address was 34, De Crespigny Park, Denmark Hill in Camberwell. From 1877 to 1878, his address was 69, South Lambeth Road. (Graves 1905-1906, 1:234; Johnson 1993, 48; *An Alphabetical List of 7,000 Streets to Accompany the Indicator Map of London*. (London: C. Smith, 1885)

⁴⁵ Jeanne Sheehy. “The Flight from South Kensington: British Artists at the Antwerp Academy, 1877-1885,” *Art History* 20 (March 1997), 138

⁴⁶ Elizabeth King, Research Assistant at the Royal Academy, London. Letter to Author, 30 September 2003; Royal Academy. *Annual Report*. (London, 1873), 23; Royal Academy. *Annual Report*. (London, 1875), 30.

⁴⁷ “The Royal Academy,” *Times*, 11 December 1875, 9; John Steegman. “Sir Francis Grant, P. R. A.: the Artist in High Society,” *Apollo* 79 (June 1964), 479-485.

sympathy and friendship to artists of distinction.”⁴⁸ Certainly, Bone’s work never had any of the “florid” tendencies so loathsome to Grant. Also, at Dulwich College, he received a solid scholarly grounding, though it afforded him little in the way of social mobility. All his life, his finances ranged from humble to precarious.⁴⁹

Towards the end of his studies at the Royal Academy, in 1878, Bone received the Armitage Prize, a newly established award for the best figure picture on a set subject from the Bible, ancient history, or mythology.⁵⁰ His *David returning from the Slaughter of Goliath* was illustrated in the *Magazine of Art* and the young artist received thirty pounds in prize money.⁵¹ In another promising sign, between 1874 and 1878, Bone exhibited twice at the Royal Society for British Artists (*Pro Rege as Patria*, 1874/75; *The Prisoner*, 1877/78) and once at the Royal Academy (*The Child’s Grave*, 1876). Descriptions of these works are unknown, though the titles suggest his reliance on historical and literary themes.⁵²

After finishing his studies at the Royal Academy, Bone probably spent some time in Antwerp, studying at the Académie des Beaux-Arts, which offered classes in history and genre painting. In contrast with the Royal Academy, where students spent a significant amount of time painting antique casts in monochrome, the Antwerp Academy offered instruction in painting costume, landscape, and animals, and placed a practical emphasis on handling color. During the

⁴⁸ “The Royal Academy” 1875, 9. The painter George Dunlop Leslie recalled thus Grant’s speeches: “Sir Francis took a considerable amount of pains and trouble in the preparation of the discourse which he delivered to the students on the occasions of the annual distribution of the prizes...I heard most of Grant’s discourses, and I greatly admired them for their straightforward soundness and common sense.” (George Dunlop Leslie. *The Inner Life of the Royal Academy*. (London: John Murray, 1894), 94)

⁴⁹ In 1891, the census enumerator recorded him living with his wife and daughter in three rooms in a neighborhood of laundresses and laborers. (Great Britain. 1891 Census. County: Surrey, Civil Parish: Capel, District: 2, Parish: St. John the Baptist, 1 (inside the margin)/22 (outside the margin).)

⁵⁰ The Armitage Prize was established in 1877 by Edward Armitage RA (Sidney Hutchison. *History of the Royal Academy*. London: Robert Royce, 1986, 118)

⁵¹ “The Royal Academy Schools,” *Magazine of Art* (English ed.) 2 (1879), 60; Royal Academy. *Annual Report* (London, 1878), 36.

⁵² The location of these works is unknown. (Graves 1905-1906, 1:234; Johnson 1993, 47)

1870s, it became especially popular with students from the “South Kensington System,” the network of government design schools. The number of students from the Royal Academy, however, was quite small, which makes Bone’s attendance significant. If Bone had a mentor, it was probably J. C. L. Sparkes, who was made headmaster of the National Art Training School at South Kensington in 1875, and was an influential advocate of studying in Antwerp.⁵³

In early 1879, Herbert Bone began working at the Windsor Tapestry Works.⁵⁴ John Everett Millais (1829-1896) is traditionally credited with recommending him for the post but it is unknown which representative of the manufactory was in touch with Millais.⁵⁵ Millais was a fashionable painter and some of the guarantors and their relations were possibly collectors of his work.⁵⁶ Then again, Millais had known Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892), the poet laureate, since the 1850s and had illustrated some of his work during the same decade.⁵⁷ This connection might have been relevant since Bone’s first important project was a tapestry set based on Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*. In either case, it is unlikely that Bone was a protégé of Millais, who would

⁵³ Bone’s studies in Antwerp are mentioned without a date in the biographical essay published shortly before his death in the *Bulletin of the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum* (“*How the Danes came up the Channel a Thousand Years Ago*, by Herbert A. Bone” 1931, 10:14-15). This source is reliable in all aspects of Bone’s career, which compensates for the absence of corroborating written sources on Bone’s stay in Antwerp. For example, he is not listed in Jeanne Sheehy’s transcription of the names of British and American students from the Antwerp Academy register from 1877 to 1885 (p. 139-151). However, registration procedures were erratic during those years. Although Charles Verlat (1824-1890) was a popular painting professor with British students, none was officially enrolled in his studio (p. 153, note 68). According to Sheehy, only two students from the Royal Academy enrolled at the Antwerp Academy during this period (p. 127). For a discussion of Sparkes’ career, see p. 127. (Sheehy 1997, 20:124-153) Bone made two stencil tints based on his travels in Belgium, titled “*Souvenirs de Bruges*,” ca. 1890, which are in the South London Gallery. (G. Johnson to Margaret Bone, 28 March, 1956, Archives, South London Gallery)

⁵⁴ Ormiston 1926, no. 284.

⁵⁵ “*How the Danes Came up the Channel a Thousand Years Ago*, by Herbert A. Bone” 1931, 10:14.

⁵⁶ A checklist of paintings by Millais’ includes collectors with the names Brassey and Kennard, which are also the names of two of the guarantors at the RWTW. (John Guille Millais. *The Life and Letters of Sir John Everett Millais*. (New York: Frederick S. Stokes, 1899), 2:466-2:497)

⁵⁷ *Tennyson and Trollope: Book Illustrations by John Everett Millais (1829-1896)*. (exh. cat., Cambridge, England: Fitzwilliam Museum, 1996), 1-3.

have had only periodic contact with the students. As a Royal Academician, he would have taught only one month during the ten-month school year.⁵⁸

In August 1879, Bone was recognized at a ceremony at Dulwich College, honoring students' achievements. The *Times*' concise account of the speech day did justice to the Dulwich reputation for success at national exams, and in the long list, Bone was cited for his award of the Armitage Prize.⁵⁹ By then, Bone was working at the Windsor Tapestry Manufactory, the design for the "Idylls of the King" was partially completed, and a watercolor of the *Passing of Arthur*, the final scene in the series, was hanging at that summer's Royal Academy exhibition.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Sheehy 1997, 137; Christopher Wood. *Victorian Painters*. (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1995), 354.

⁵⁹ "Dulwich College," *Times*, 4 August 1879, 6.

⁶⁰ Graves 1905-1906, 1:234.

3. The Design and Weaving of the *Idylls of the King*

Little is known about Herbert Bone's transition from student to tapestry designer. Whatever the circumstances of the appointment, he became quickly immersed in his new responsibilities at Windsor. His most important project from these years was the design for the *Idylls of the King*, a tapestry series based on Tennyson's Arthurian cycle. The first installment of the *Idylls* (the poem) was published in 1859, and it immediately attracted the notice of the Prince Consort who wrote the poet to express his appreciation. The work became a strong tie between Tennyson and the royal family, especially after Prince Albert's death in 1861. "I cannot separate the idea of King Arthur from the image of him whom I most revered on Earth," one of Queen Victoria's daughters told Tennyson after her father's death.⁶¹ The poet composed the *Dedication* (1862) in the Prince Consort's memory, which was included in all later editions of the *Idylls*.⁶²

Like most important Windsor tapestries, the set based on the *Idylls* was commissioned by one of the guarantors.⁶³ The patron, Coleridge Kennard (1828-1890), was the founder of the *Evening News* and he served in Parliament briefly in the 1880s.⁶⁴ He was by profession a banker and a newspaperman, whose independent opinions included support for women's suffrage.⁶⁵ Thanks to his work on behalf of the Windsor Works, where he was known for his dedication, he became a friend and adviser to Prince Leopold.⁶⁶ The two men were involved with some of the

⁶¹ Hope Dyson et al. *Dear and Honoured Lady: the Correspondence between Queen Victoria and Alfred Tennyson*. (London: Macmillan, 1969), 66.

⁶² Dyson et al. 1969, 42, 46, 88.

⁶³ The most significant exception was the *Merry Wives of Windsor* (1877/78), which was commissioned by Gillow & Co. and later acquired by Sir Albert Sassoon. (Cullingham 1979, 7, 19)

⁶⁴ Charles Mosley, ed. *Burke's Peerage & Baronetage*. (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), 1:1560; "Obituary [Coleridge Kennard]," *Times*, 31 December 1890, 4.

⁶⁵ "Women's Suffrage," *Times*, 10 July 1885, 9; Coleridge Kennard, letter to the editor, *Times*, 3 June 1884, 6; "Obituary [Coleridge Kennard]," *Times*, 31 December 1890, 4.

⁶⁶ R. H. Collins to Henry Ponsonby, 23 October [1884], RA PP VIC 1/28 5, Royal Archives; Zeeprat 1998, 179.

same charities and Leopold, despite his poor health, visited Kennard and his wife at their country place in Wiltshire.⁶⁷

Certainly, Kennard would have understood the significance of the *Idylls of the King* for the queen and her children, but his tapestry commission should not be regarded simply as a courtier's essay at royal ingratiation. Arthurian themes were popular during the nineteenth century, and the *Idylls* were being adapted by many artists in the 1860s and '70s.⁶⁸ Kennard, a collector of Italian Renaissance painting and majolica, presumably shared this fashionable taste.⁶⁹

Bone must have started right away on the Kennard commission. The preparatory sketches for the *Passing of Arthur* are dated late February and early March 1879.⁷⁰ The watercolor exhibited at the Royal Academy probably dates from the same period since the selection committee for the Summer Exhibition traditionally met in late March or early April.⁷¹ By September, the *Furniture Gazette* could report that, "Other subjects in course of treatment are a series illustrating Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, in ten panels varying in length and proportionate height from 6ft to 12ft."⁷²

Despite Bone's rapid start, the project advanced slowly, and both the design and weaving were still in progress by mid-1881—a strong contrast with the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, which

⁶⁷ "Duke of Albany on Charity Organization," *Times*, 21 December 1882, 4; "Prince Leopold in Wilts.," *Times*, 21 December 1881, 9.

⁶⁸ Debra N. Manicoff. *The Return of King Arthur*. New York: Abrams, 1995, 49-71.

⁶⁹ *Catalogue of Pictures, Sold by Order of the Executors of Coleridge J. Kennard, Esq., Deceased; also a Large Assemblage of Modern Pictures, from Different Collections and Various Sources: [...] July 20, 1895*. (London: Christie, Manson & Woods, 1895); *Catalogue of Old French Furniture, Porcelain and Faience, and Objects of Art from Various Sources; and a Few Pieces of Porcelain and Faience, the Property of Lady Coleridge Kennard [...]: December 1, 1905*. (London: Christie, Manson & Woods, 1905).

⁷⁰ Dated preparatory sketches for the *Passing of Arthur* in the Royal Library include RL32339 (*Untitled*, 3 March 1879), RL32342 (*Study for Sir Bedivere*, 25 February 1879), RL32345 (*A Sketch of Armour and Drapery*, 8 March 1879).

⁷¹ The location of this work is unknown. (Graves 1905-1906, 1:234; Dunlop 1914, 81)

⁷² "News, Notes, and Comments," *Furniture Gazette* 12 (20 September 1879), 207.

was woven in under a year.⁷³ Although the sets are comparable in size, the *Idylls of the King* had a much finer weave than the *Merry Wives* (twenty-five warps per inch versus sixteen warps per inch.)⁷⁴ Moreover, the *Idylls* coincided with the manufactory's most optimistic period, when more weavers were brought from France to accommodate an increase in business. "The operations of the Windsor *atelier* are extending, and a greater number of artificers are being employed," reported the *Furniture Gazette* at the time.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, it was perhaps difficult to schedule the *Idylls* for weaving, and Kennard, as one of the guarantors, may have accepted the postponement of his commission in favor of other projects. Until 1880, work on Bone's designs overlapped with the three-panel series on Kentish history, which included Ward's outsized *Battle of Aylesford*.⁷⁶ Another cause for delay may have been the furniture coverings in the style of eighteenth-century Beauvais (fig. 11), which Henry was trying to develop into a bread-and-butter sideline, judging by their regular inclusion in exhibitions and world fairs.⁷⁷ Then there were the tapestries designed on spec, such as the series on royal residences, to which variant weavings attest a steady popularity.⁷⁸

⁷³ "Furniture at the Paris Exhibition" 1878, 10:155.

⁷⁴ Cullingham 1979, 17-27.

⁷⁵ "News, Notes and Comments and Comments" *Furniture Gazette* 12 (20 September 1879), 207.

⁷⁶ This work is in the collection of the Maidstone Council, Kent. Shortly after her husband's death in 1879, Mrs. Ward notified the Royal Academy "that she intended to send for exhibition the last work of her late husband [...] a tapestry cartoon of the Battle of Aylesford." The Royal Academy would be responsible not only for finding space to exhibit the work but also for the framing, which could not be done prior to shipping "owing to its great size." (The tapestry measures 12ft 1 in x 22ft 5 in.) The letter was discussed at the monthly meeting of the General Council, which declined Mrs. Ward's request. (Cullingham 1979, 32-33; Minutes to the Monthly); "Duke of Albany on Charity Organization," *Times*, 21 December 1882, 4; "Prince Leopold in Wilts.," *Times*, 21 December 1881, Meeting of the Royal Academy General Council, 2 April 1879. Royal Academy of Arts. *Council Minute Books, 1768-1950*. Wick, Caithness: Academic Microforms, 1990; reel 6)

⁷⁷ Cullingham cites a variety of furniture covers, though there probably are other commissions for which there are no records (Cullingham 1979, 44; "Court Circular," *Times* 10 February 1881, 5).

⁷⁸ Cullingham 1979, 45-49; "News, Notes, and Comments" 1879, 12:207. Queen Victoria was reported to be interested in the *View of Windsor Castle* ("News, Notes and Comments," *Furniture Gazette* 18 (23 December 1882), 440.) Also, the 1st Duke of Westminster, who was one of the advisors, commissioned some seat covers. His successor bought the Stanmore tapestries at

The cartoon for the *Lily Maid of Astolat*, another design for the *Idylls*, was finished by early 1880, since a partial copy was exhibited at that year's Royal Academy exhibition.⁷⁹ However, Bone was also responsible for creating other designs. The *Idylls* had to wait while he worked on the *Salviati Mosaics* (des. 1880-1881) (fig. 10), a set of six panels of historic figures that were judged—or misjudged—suitable for multiple weavings with their gold silk background. Queen Victoria bought some in the series, though other collectors were less enthusiastic, and by the late eighties, the works still had many copies in stock.⁸⁰

An unknown number of scenes from the *Idylls* were finished by December 1880, when they were used for decoration at the New Years Eve ball that Henry hosted for the artists and weavers of the (by now) Royal Windsor Tapestry Works.⁸¹

In June 1881, there was an exhibition at the Bassano Galleries in London of the most recent Windsor production. Four of the eight tapestries that were woven for Kennard were displayed: the *Passing of Arthur* (fig. 7), the *Coming of Arthur* (fig. 1), the *Lily Maid of Astolat* (fig. 4), and the *Holy Grail* (fig. 5).⁸² The exhibition checklist also lists the *Castle of Astolat*,

auction in 1920 (Cullingham 1979, 44; Emmeline Leary. *The Holy Grail Tapestries*. Birmingham: Museums and Art Gallery, 1985, 6)

⁷⁹ This tapestry is also known as the *Arrival at Camelot of the Body of Elaine*. The location of both the cartoon and the tapestry is unknown. (Graves 1905-1906, 1:234).

⁸⁰ This set is known as the *Salviati Mosaics*, because it was first designed as mosaics for Dr. A. Salviati, an Italian lawyer. Dated preparatory sketches in the Royal Library include *Jeanne d'Arc* (RL32114, 19 July 1881), *Vittoria Colonna* (RL32115, 11 August 1881), *Savonarola* (RL32116, 6 April 1880), and *Richard Cœur de Lion* (RL32110, 3 April 1880). The stock list for 1888 lists several copies of this set, which also included *St. Agnes* and *Cimabue*. (Cullingham 1979, 71; "The Royal Windsor Tapestry Works," *Times*, 26 May, 1882, 11; *A List of Tapestries in Stock, at the Royal Tapestry Works*. (Windsor: R. Oxley and Son, 1888); Elaine M. Goodwin. *Encyclopedia of Mosaic*. (North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Press, 2004), 176)

⁸¹ "News, Notes and Comments" 1881, 15:35.

⁸² Some of these tapestries have variant names: the *Marriage of Arthur* for the *Coming of Arthur*; the *Nun and Sir Galahad* for the *Holy Grail*; and the *Arrival at Camelot of the Dead Elaine* for the *Lily Maid of Astolat*. (Cullingham 1979, 35-40).

which is believed never to have been woven.⁸³ In contrast with the other checklist entries, there is no corresponding passage from the poem, which suggests that the *Castolat of Astolat* was not exhibited at the Bassano Gallery. Resolving this question is difficult because the one known review was published the following April. According to the *Illustrated London News*, “Mr. Herbert Bone’s five cartoons of subjects from Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*, worked in fine Windsor tapestry for Mr. Coleridge Kennard, were much admired in the exhibition.”⁸⁴ The statement is clear, but the critic was, after all, writing ten months after the exhibition.⁸⁵ As for the remaining four tapestries that were eventually woven, *Merlin & Vivien* (fig. 3) was, at that time, still being worked out in sketches while the others—*Gareth and Lynette*,⁸⁶ *Geraint and Enid* (fig. 2), and *Guinevere* (fig. 6)—were presumably also in some stage of design or production.⁸⁷

The exhibition was organized by Alexander Bassano, a portrait photographer, who advertised his professional ties with the royal family in the *Times*’ classifieds. (His portrait of the Princess of Wales was promoted as “not only a striking portrait but a work of art.”)⁸⁸ The exhibition at “Mr. Bassano’s Galleries” at 25 Old-Bond Street was marked by the didactic

⁸³ It was not sold with the other tapestries in the set at the auction in 1896. (*Catalogue of a Choice Collection [...] a Suite of Eight Panels from the Royal Factory at Windsor, Illustrating Tennyson’s “Idylls of the King” [...] March 13, 1896.* (London: Christie’s, 1896); Cullingham 1979, 44)

⁸⁴ “The Royal Windsor Tapestry Manufactory,” *Illustrated London News* 80 (29 April 1882), 414.

⁸⁵ The statement also is ambiguous in suggesting that Bone’s cartoons for the *Idylls* were part of the exhibition. There were cartoons on display but none was by Herbert Bone. The cartoons were the *Swing* by T. W. Hay; the *Falconer* by E. M. Ward; and an untitled cartoon, perhaps for furniture coverings, by T. W. Hay for a commission from Lady Rothschild. (*Catalogue of Windsor Tapestries, Sculptures and Carved Woodwork, &c., &c.* (exh. cat., London: Bassano Galleries, 1881)

⁸⁶ There is no published image of *Gareth and Lynette*.

⁸⁷ *Catalogue of Windsor Tapestries, Sculptures and Carved Woodwork, &c., &c.* (exh. cat., London: Bassano Galleries, 1881). In the Royal Library, the untitled studies for *Merlin and Vivien* are dated 2 May 1881 (RL32118) and 9 May 1881 (RL32119). There are no drawings for *Geraint & Enid* or *Gareth & Lynette* in the Royal Library, and those for *Guinevere* are undated.

⁸⁸ “The Drawing Room Portrait of H.R.H. the Princess of Wales [Classified Advertisement],” *Times*, 4 July 1881, 1.

showmanship characteristic of Windsor tapestry exhibitions.⁸⁹ Henry wanted not only to attract orders but also to educate the public about tapestry weaving. Thus in addition to the tapestries, there were cartoons as well as some furniture on loan from Gillow & Co.⁹⁰ Despite the attendance of the Duke of Albany and his sister, the Marchioness of Lorne, the exhibition did not receive nearly as much press coverage as the one held three years earlier at the Windsor Town Hall.⁹¹ Modern tapestries were no longer a novelty, a situation owing largely to the efforts of the Royal Windsor Tapestry Works.

Shortly afterwards, in late 1881 or early 1882, Bone's first period of employment at Windsor came to an end, and he resumed painting history and genre scenes.⁹² The *Idylls* were his principal work from these years, and he gave Prince Leopold some related sketches for a wedding gift in May 1882.⁹³ By then, the weaving was probably finished too, though it is unknown why the series stopped at eight tapestries, rather than the nine or ten originally projected.⁹⁴ Bone did not derive much prestige from the Kennard commission. In April 1882, *The Illustrated London News* spoke of T. W. Hay as the principal tapestry designer in an article that relegated Bone to the

⁸⁹ "Mr. Bassano's Galleries [Classified Advertising]," *Times*, 18 May 1877, 2.

⁹⁰ *Catalogue of Windsor Tapestries, Sculptures and Carved Woodwork* 1881; Cullingham 1979, 4.

⁹¹ "Exhibition of Royal Windsor Tapestries," *Times*, 23 June 1881, 10.

⁹² Bone worked at the RWTM from 1879 to ca. 1881-82, and from ca. 1885 to 1888. During the interval, he exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1882, 1884, and 1885, and at the Royal Society for British Artists in 1882-1883. His paintings from these years were unrelated to tapestry design. He probably returned to the RWTM in 1885 since some of the sketches (RL32295-RL32332) for Bone's second series on King Arthur, which was commissioned by Henry Hucks Gibbs, are dated May 1885. (Graves 1905-1906, 1:234; Johnson 1993, 47)

⁹³ The location of these works is unknown. A wedding gift to the Duke and Duchess of Albany, Bone's sketches probably remained at Claremont, the couple's home in Surrey, until the Duchess' death in 1922. The estate sale held the same year included tapestries from the RWTM, though it is uncertain if Bone's gift was also sold. At some point, the sketches were seen by the Royal Librarian who left a description but no indication of their whereabouts in 1930. ("The Marriage of Prince Leopold," *Times*, 8 May 1882, 11; Cullingham 1979, 37). They are not listed in Delia Millar's *Victorian Watercolours and Drawings in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen*. (London: P. Wilson, 1995).

⁹⁴ In 1879, the *Furniture Gazette* reported that ten tapestries were planned for the *Idylls*. Bone's sketches for Prince Leopold depict the eight tapestries that were woven plus *Astolat*, the design

second rank, alongside Monblond and Gerard, two shadowy freelancers occasionally employed at Windsor.⁹⁵

By late 1882, critics had shifted their interest to J. E. Hodgson's *English Sports*, which Cornelius Vanderbilt commissioned for his New York townhouse. William Baumgarten, an American interior designer who later founded his own tapestry works in the Bronx, New York, was dispatched by Vanderbilt to check up on the weaving. "I had occasion in 1882 to visit the works for the purpose of inspecting the progress of the tapestries then being made for the hall and staircase wall frieze in the residence of Mr. C. Vanderbilt," he later recalled, without providing further details about other designs also in progress or any of the artists he may have known.⁹⁶

English Sports were the most well publicized tapestries to come out of the Windsor Works since the *Battle of Aylesford*, although the patron seemed to cause greater stir than the designs. The series was written up in *Studio* and, upon completion, shown to Queen Victoria.⁹⁷

The reputation of the *Idylls of the King* was more obscure. There is no record that it was ever "submitted to her Majesty's inspection" and until its dispersal at auction in 1896, the finished series was not shown in public.⁹⁸

that was probably not executed. ("News, Notes, and Comments," *Furniture Gazette* 12 (20 September 1879), 207; Cullingham 1979, 37-38)

⁹⁵ Cullingham does not give the first name for either. ("The Royal Windsor Tapestry Manufactory" 1882, 414; Cullingham 44, 52)

⁹⁶ Baumgarten 1897, 36; A. M. Zrebiec. "Tapestry," in *Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner (New York: Grove's Dictionaries, 1996), 31:659.

⁹⁷ "News, Notes and Comments" 1882, 18:440; "English Tapestry," *Times*, 3 October 1882, 7; "From our English Correspondent," *Studio* 1 (1883), 84.

⁹⁸ The next known exhibition of Windsor tapestries took place at the International Fisheries Exhibition in London in 1883. There are no tapestries listed in the *Official Catalogue* for the event, and it remains unknown which ones were exhibited. The catalogue lists paintings and watercolors with marine and fishing themes, which makes it unlikely that the *Idylls* were also on display. *Dead Salmon and Trout*, which J. E. Hodgson is believed to have designed in 1882, is an example of what was more likely brought out on that occasion. (International Fisheries Exhibition. *Official Catalogue*. (London: W. Clowes, 1883); Walter Henry Harris. *Royal Windsor Tapestries*. ([London?]: Printed for Private Circulation, [1893?]), 3; "News, Notes and Comments" 1882, 18:440; "Exhibition of Royal Windsor Tapestries," *Times*, 23 June 1881, 10; Cullingham 1979, 75)

4. A Description of the *Idylls of the King*

“Designed tapestry (Arras type)” was Herbert Bone’s account of the years 1879 to 1888, in the professional précis, that he compiled for Dulwich College at the end of his life.⁹⁹ Indeed, tapestry design dominated his early career, but very little is known about his approach to these projects, especially those from his first period at Windsor.

In the case of the *Idylls*, information is typically scarce, and the nearly two dozen sketches in the Royal Library suggest little about the evolution of the design.¹⁰⁰ Less obscure, though, is the choice of subject, which belongs squarely to the nineteenth-century revival of King Arthur. After an interval of neglect dating back to the end of the Middle Ages, writers and artists once again turned to the legends of the Round Table for inspiration.¹⁰¹ In the *Idylls of the King*, Tennyson recounts the destruction of Arthur’s kingdom and the betrayal by his knights because of Guinevere’s love for Lancelot. The work was immensely popular, although not everyone admired it. William Morris’s enthusiasm for Tennyson did not survive his university days. His opinion gradually shifted to contempt after his discovery in the mid-1850s of the fifteenth-century writer Thomas Malory and his *Morte d’Arthur*.¹⁰² “Tennyson is publishing another little lot of Arthurian legend,” he wrote to a friend in 1872, adding “I confess I don’t look forward to it.”¹⁰³ However, judging by sales, more readers shared the opinion of the Prince Consort, and the first edition in 1859 sold ten-thousand copies during the first week.

⁹⁹ Dulwich College Register: Herbert Arthur Bone, 18 September 1925,” Archives, Dulwich College.

¹⁰⁰ The location of all tapestries in this set is unknown. Although some occasionally pass through auction salerooms, none is in a public collection. Most recently, the *Lily Maid of Astolat* (lot 26) was sold at Sotheby’s, London, on 22 March 2002; the *Holy Grail (Nun and Sir Galahad)* (lot 22) was sold at Sotheby’s, London, on 25 May 2001.

¹⁰¹ Mancoff.1995, 8.

¹⁰² Fiona MacCarthy. *William Morris: a Life for our Time*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 61-62.

¹⁰³ William Morris to Aglaia Ionides Coronio, 24 October 1872 (Norman Kelvin, ed. *Collected Letters of William Morris*. (Princeton: Princeton University press, 1984-1996), 1:167)

The *Idylls* supplied artists with themes for many years, especially in the 1860s and '70s, thanks, in part, to the poem's long, drawn-out publication. (The final installment was issued in 1872.) But if Arthurian legends were a convention of Royal Academy exhibitions, it was nonetheless exceptional to adapt them to a tapestry series, and Herbert Bone was probably the first designer in many centuries to make the attempt.¹⁰⁴

Although some scenes were popular with artists, there was no established iconography for the *Idylls*, which left Bone considerable freedom in his choice and development.¹⁰⁵ He made use of this freedom in the panel, the *Coming of Arthur* (6ft 3in h x 12ft 3 in l) (fig. 1), where he dispensed with the earlier, more exciting events like Merlin's discovery of the newborn Arthur and Arthur's battles with the barbarian kings, and depicted instead the marriage of Arthur to Guinevere.¹⁰⁶ Bone necessarily invented most of the details, which Tennyson omitted in his concise wrap-up of less than a dozen lines.¹⁰⁷ According to Bone, the wedding was a gala day, celebrated by musicians and swordsmen, and a pretty girl leading a peacock, while foliage, cavaliers, and a castle fill the background. Arthur and Guinevere stand in the doorway of the church, which is abloom with spring flowers. Tennyson mentioned none of these things, describing only the ceremony inside the church.

Bone, however, was following the convention of Flemish tapestry, which compelled him, he later wrote, "to cover a large space pretty equally, with as much variety and as many interesting or amusing details as would crowd into it."¹⁰⁸ His emulation of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century

¹⁰⁴ Examples of Arthurian paintings at the Royal Academy during these years include *Sir Galahad* (1870) by Arthur Hughes; *La Morte d'Arthur* (1861) and *Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere* (1864) by James Archer; and *Sir Galahad* (1862) by George Frederick Watts. One example of an early Arthurian tapestry is "An Episode from the Arthurian Legend," a part of the *Galehaut Tapestry*, ca. 1500, in the Saint Louis Art Museum. (Mancoff 1995, 15)

¹⁰⁵ Michael Girouard. *The Return to Camelot*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 182.

¹⁰⁶ Catalog entries with illustrations for seven of the tapestries are in Cullingham 1979, 35-44.

¹⁰⁷ Alfred Tennyson. *Idylls of the King. The Coming of Arthur* (New York: Penguin, 1996), lines 452-462.

¹⁰⁸ Bone 1918, 51:204.

tapestry was an implicit rejection of contemporary tapestry design, especially at the Gobelins in Paris, which was often criticized for replicating paintings. Characteristic of this practice was the copy of the *Visitation* (1491) by Ghirlandaio, which the Gobelins wove in the 1870s and donated to the South Kensington Museum in 1881.¹⁰⁹ “Trop tableau et pas assez décor” was one representative criticism of this practice.¹¹⁰ “Neither a tapestry nor a picture” was Bone’s similar opinion.¹¹¹

Gareth & Lynette (6ft 3in h x 4ft 10in l), the second in the series, is the least well known. The scene depicts Gareth, one of Arthur’s knights, riding to meet “the monster” costumed as death, who turns out to be a young boy, mounted on a black horse. This fight was Gareth’s last on behalf of Lyonors, the sister of Lynette, who was held captive by four knights. The top border is decorated with honeysuckle and foliage. The bottom border is inscribed, “In the half light through the dim dawn advanced the monster.”¹¹²

Geraint and Enid (6ft 3 in h x 5ft l) (fig. 2), the third in the series, is also known as *The Wedding of Geraint*. Prince Geraint bows before his bride Enid in the presence of her mother and father. The rusticity of their life is evident, from Enid’s “faded silk” dress to the rocky ground and the Romanesque doorway. The top border is decorated with convolvulus flowers and foliage. The bottom border is inscribed, “Like a blossom vermeil white fair Enid all in faded silk.”¹¹³

Merlin and Vivien (6ft 3in h x 2ft 10in. l) (fig. 3), the fourth in the series, is sometimes known as *For Merlin told the Charm and Slept*. Vivien has seduced Merlin, the magician, into revealing his most powerful charm. Exhausted, Merlin falls asleep against a hollow oak. Vivien

¹⁰⁹The copy of Ghirlandaio’s *Visitation* was woven from 1874 to 1876. The original painting is in the Louvre. (Maurice Fenaille. *État Général des Tapisseries de la Manufacture des Gobelins, 1600-1900*. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1903-12), 5:332-333; A. F. Kendrick. *Catalogue of Tapestries*. (London: H.M.S.O., 1914), 69-70)

¹¹⁰ *Art Moderne à l’Exposition de 1878*. (Paris: Quantin, 1879), 458.

¹¹¹ Bone 1918, 51:204.

¹¹² An image of *Gareth & Lynette* was unavailable for study. A description is in Cullingham 1979, 38.

¹¹³ Cullingham 1979, 38-39.

uses the new charm to seal Merlin inside the oak tree. The top border is decorated with interwoven oak leaves. The bottom border is inscribed “For Merlin told the charm and slept.”

The Arrival at Camelot of the Dead Elaine, (6ft 3in h x 6ft 11in l) (fig. 4), the fifth in the series, is also known as the *Lily Maid of Astolat*.¹¹⁴ Arthur greets the barge carrying the corpse of Elaine who died because of her love for Lancelot and because of her shame over Lancelot’s love for Guinevere.¹¹⁵ The *Lily Maid* was another scene from the *Idylls* that was popular with painters, which explains, at least in part, why an adapted version of the cartoon was chosen by Bone for the Royal Academy exhibition in 1880.¹¹⁶ Traditionally, the scene depicts the barge alone on the water, rowed by the dumb servant. This was the composition used by both Alfred Courbould (*Elaine, the Lily Maid of Astolat*, 1867) and, more famously, Gustave Doré (*The Dead being rowed by the Dumb*, ca. 1868) (fig. 11).¹¹⁷ As a tapestry designer, Bone conceived a more crowded composition, which included a castellated wall and water lilies, and creeping plants and flowers behind Arthur and his retinue. The top border is decorated with lilies. The bottom border is inscribed “The Lily Maid lay smiling like a star in blackest night, then turned the tongueless man and pointed.”

The Holy Grail (6ft 3in h x 6ft 10in l) (fig. 5), the sixth in the series, is also known as *The Nun and Sir Galahad* and *Sir Percivale’s Tale*.¹¹⁸ A nun ties a sword belt woven with her own hair around the waist of Sir Galahad. Like most of the *Idylls*, the *Holy Grail* is as much a verdure as a figure tapestry. Bone covered the composition with pattern, down to Sir Galahad’s horse,

¹¹⁴ Cullingham 1979, 39-40.

¹¹⁵ A color image and the correct dimensions of this tapestry are published Sotheby’s, London, 22 March 2002. The lot title is *Lancelot and Elaine*.

¹¹⁶ Graves 1905-1906, 1:234.

¹¹⁷ Both versions are illustrated in Mancoff 1995. The location of Courbould’s version, which dates from 1867, is unknown. Doré’s version was executed for the edition of the *Idylls of the King*, which was first published in 1868.

¹¹⁸ Cullingham 1979, 40-41.

which is wearing a floral saddle blanket. *The Holy Grail* sold for significantly more than the others in 1896.¹¹⁹

Guinevere (6ft 3in h x 4ft 10in l) (fig. 6), the seventh in the series, is also called *Lo, I Forgive Thee*. In this scene Arthur reproaches and then forgives his faithless wife who is remorseful about her love for Lancelot. Arthur comes to the nunnery where she sought sanctuary and where she will remain for three years until her death. Due to the rich textiles and furnishings, the only visible stonework is the floor where Guinevere lies prostrate at her husband's feet.¹²⁰

Passing of Arthur, the eighth in the series, depicts the dying Arthur, being rowed to Avilion, in the company of the three queens.¹²¹ This scene was popular with painters, which explains, in part, its choice to represent Bone's *Idylls* at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1879.¹²² A bleak sky is broken up by a mountain range in the background and in the foreground are a leafless tree and Sir Bedivere, one of the only knights still loyal to Arthur.¹²³

With their varying lengths, the *Idylls* were evidently designed for a specific space, either in London or Wiltshire.¹²⁴ But in the absence of hanging directions, it is impossible to know fully how this constraint shaped the final design. At the time, tapestries were believed to look best in rooms that were dimly lit and sparsely furnished in dark oak. *Art Amateur* even ran an article in favor of feeble illumination, drawing on the opinion of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882).¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ *The Holy Grail* sold for 115 guineas. *The Coming of Arthur*, which sold for 80 guineas, was the second most expensive tapestry in the series. ("Art Sale," *Times*, 14 March 1896, 12.) This tapestry is illustrated in color as lot 22 in *Fine Continental Furniture and Tapestries: May 25, 2001*. London: Sotheby's, 2001.

¹²⁰ Cullingham 1979, 41-42.

¹²¹ Cullingham 1979, 43-44.

¹²² Graves 1905-1906, 1:234; Mancoff 1995, 49-71.

¹²³ *The Passing of Arthur* is also illustrated in black and white in: Frank Davis. "Bellicose Hudibras on a Green Horse," *Country Life* 140 (3 November 1966), 1139.

¹²⁴ Kennard's London address was 39 Upper Grosvenor Street, Park Lane. ([Classified Advertisement]. *Times*, 20 May 1891, 16)

¹²⁵ "How Tapestries should be Lighted," *Art Amateur* 34 (1896), 145; Bone 1918, 51:204.

The top and bottom borders are different for each tapestry. Each top has a floral motif and each bottom border has a line from Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. There are no side borders. Some of Bone's later commissions for Windsor have substantial borders, like his tapestries on King Alfred (1887) and his second series on King Arthur (des. 1881; woven ca. 1885/ca. 1886).¹²⁶ The borders for the *Idylls*, however, were woven by the apprentices, which probably influenced the simplicity of the design.¹²⁷

Bone was in his late twenties when he designed the *Idylls*, and it is not known how educated he was about the Flemish tapestries that he took for inspiration. In any case, it is he did not base the *Idylls* on any one antique tapestry. He expressed regret in later years that the "stately symbolisms and histories of the great Flemish designers and weavers" were rarely seen outside museums and historic houses.¹²⁸ Such pieces seem to have been even rarer in the late 1870s and early 1880s. They were not then very well represented in London public collections, and at the South Kensington Museum, there were only about a half dozen tapestries antedating the seventeenth century.¹²⁹ His studies in Antwerp were not much more informative because tapestries were not well represented in that city's public collections either.¹³⁰

Bone was not alone in his appreciation for medieval tapestry, especially in his choice of palette, which used subdued, autumnal colors to suggest centuries of fading. Beginning in the

¹²⁶ The second series on King Arthur was based on Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. The two tapestries on King Alfred were commissioned by William Gibbs for Tyntesfield, a Gothic Revival house in Somerset. In 2002, the National Trust acquired Tyntesfield and its furnishings. The inventory possibly includes the King Alfred tapestries, which would make them the only Windsor commission still in situ. (Cullingham 1979, 64-68)

¹²⁷ "Art Notes," *Magazine of Art* 5 (1882), xxxi.

¹²⁸ Bone 1918, 51:198.

¹²⁹ "The left wall of the North Division of the School Cloister is hung with fine pieces of French and Flemish tapestry of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries" was the summary provided by the collection handbook, which gave more space to plaster casts and electrotype reproductions of plate and armor. (*A Guide to the Art Collections of the South Kensington Museum*. (London: Spottiswoode, 1870), 32; Kendrick 1914; "How the Danes Came up the Channel a Thousand Years Ago, by Herbert A. Bone" 1931, 10:14; Karl Baedeker. *London and its Environs*. (Leipzig: K. Baedeker, 1878).

¹³⁰ Baedeker, Karl. *Belgium and Holland*, 10th ed. (Leipzig: K. Baedeker, 1891)

second half of the nineteenth century, tapestry designers and collectors rejected the traditional criteria of bright colors and good condition, in favor of pieces that looked faded and even worn.¹³¹ The most articulate advocate of this look was William Morris, who evoked in a speech the boyhood memory of “a room hung with faded greenery.”¹³² “What a noble art it was once!” he said on the same occasion in January 1882.¹³³ (Exceptionally, though, Morris also looked back to when they were newly woven. “I was thinking how splendid those tapestries must have looked when they were new and bright all over,” he wrote his wife in 1887.¹³⁴)

In artistic circles, old tapestry was part of the inventory of the painter’s studio, both as prop and decoration.¹³⁵ In Joseph Noël Paton’s *I Wonder Who Lived There?* (1867) (fig. 9) a little boy contemplates a medieval helmet, with an old tapestry—some suitably chivalric tableau—in the background.¹³⁶ So enduring was this look that in the 1890s, at Frederick Vanderbilt’s country place in Hyde Park, New York, there was a frieze mural of a medieval Flemish tapestry in the den

¹³¹ At the most extreme, collectors followed the advice of interior design writers like Clarence Cook, who recommended “incoherent, faded, ill-used” fragments to serve as “soft, rich, autumnal” background for artistic bric à brac like prints and plaster casts. By the end of the century, the ideal of the moth-eaten was sufficiently widespread, especially in the United States, to have become a source of satire, and anecdotes abounded of collectors passing up artistically important tapestries in good condition in favor of worn and deteriorated ones. “To be worth owning,” one antiques writer reminded his readers in 1894, a tapestry must be “more than a bit of rag carpet.” (Clarence Cook. “Casts and Tapestry in Room-Decoration,” *Monthly Illustrator* 4 (June 1895), 324; “Facts, Hints and Suggestions,” *The Collector* 5 (15 May 1894), 1; “The House,” *Art Amateur* 22 (1890), 85)

¹³² William Morris. “The Lesser Arts of Life,” in *Lectures on Art, Delivered in Support of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings* by Reginald Stuart Poole et al. (London: Macmillan, 1882), 206; Kelvin 1984-1996, 2:92)

¹³³ Morris 1882, 206.

¹³⁴ William Morris to Jane Morris, summer 1887. (Kelvin 1984-1996, 2:672)

¹³⁵ Cook 1894.

¹³⁶ The location of this work is unknown, but it is illustrated in Mancoff 1995.

(fig. 8). In dim light, the trompe-l'œil painting resembles a worn, brownish arras, such as were then commonly used for decoration.¹³⁷

Bone shared this taste and, through the use of modern dyeing practices, he sought to make the *Idylls* look antique. According to *Art Notes*, the tapestries were woven, using three-thousand colors, which represented a considerable advance, technically speaking, on the number available in the sixteenth century.¹³⁸ The result, noted the *Magazine of Art*, was a “blending and gradation of delicate and harmonious tones.”¹³⁹ The *Holy Grail* (fig. 5) for example, comprises variant shades of brown, red, and green. The cloister is partially sunk into the background and the grass and flowers are a washed out field of once vibrant greens. Even the parts of the design, which are naturally brown, like the tree trunk or the nun’s habit, look as if they were once a much darker brown. Likewise for the *Lily Maid of Astolat* (fig. 4) which is a drab mélange of greens, yellows, and browns. The one apparent exception is *Guinevere*, which contains deep reds and pinks.¹⁴⁰

In 1905, more than two decades after completing the *Idylls of the King*, Bone published an essay on tapestry design.¹⁴¹ In contrast with Morris’ doleful nostalgia, the piece is full of practical advice. For colors, Bone might have been thinking back to the *Idylls* when he advised “reducing the entire range [...] required into a series of ‘gamuts’ of red, blue, green, and so forth.”¹⁴² More curious was his belief that “the conventions of Arras Tapestry are the voluntary

¹³⁷ In the same spirit, scenes from the *Bayeux Tapestry* (a work of embroidery) were painted on the drawing room frieze of William A. Hammond’s house in New York, ca. 1879. (Michael Middleton Dwyer, ed. *Great Houses of the Hudson River*. (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 2001), 98; Arnold Lewis et al. *The Opulent Interiors of the Gilded Age*. (New York: Dover, 1987), 126)

¹³⁸ “Art Notes” 1882, 5:xxxi.

¹³⁹ “Art Notes” 1882, 5:xxxi.

¹⁴⁰ A color image is in the Bridgeman Library, London.

¹⁴¹ Bone 1918, 51:197-206.

¹⁴² Bone 1918, 51:204.

limitations of a strenuous realism.”¹⁴³ For the *Idylls*, like most Windsor tapestries, relied on the same high-warp weaving that characterized production at the Gobelins. Their pictorial perspective became, in fact, one of the principal criticisms against them after the closure of the Windsor Works in 1890.¹⁴⁴ However, in 1882, the *Magazine of Art* wrote that in Bone’s *Idylls* “the manner in which intricate problems of light and shade and reflected lights are rendered is surprising.”¹⁴⁵

Critics admired the Windsor tapestries for their painterly precision together with their faded, antique colors. Nonetheless, this style was not appreciated by William Morris. In 1882, a year after founding his own tapestry works, he declared that tapestry was “an art that has practically perished.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Bone 1918, 51:206.

¹⁴⁴ H. C. Marillier. *History of the Merton Abbey Tapestry Works*. (London: Constable, 1927), 15-16.

¹⁴⁵ “Art Notes” 1882, 5:xxxii.

¹⁴⁶ Morris 1882, 208.

5. William Morris and the Historic Reputation of the Royal Windsor
Tapestry Manufactory

In 1893, Herbert Bone exhibited at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society where his work was on display in the usual place—in the balcony that was accessible by the same staircase leading to the “Ladies Retiring Room.”¹⁴⁷ Despite the comparative obscurity, Bone’s *Return of the Vikings* was cited by a critic for the *Times* as one of three gesso panels that “should not be missed.”¹⁴⁸ A much bigger draw, however, was on the ground floor. “A large tapestry, ‘Sir Galahad and the Holy Graal,’ designed by Mr. Burne-Jones and executed by Morris and Co., occupies most of the end wall, but leaves room underneath it for Mr. Burne-Jones sketches for other tapestries of the San Graal series.” The critic added, “It may be hoped that the revival of English tapestry will admit of these being soon executed.”¹⁴⁹

After leaving the Royal Windsor Tapestry Works in 1888, Bone taught art at the Crystal Palace at Sydenham and undertook, in his words, “miscellaneous pictorial work,” a category that included both magazine illustrations and Royal Academy pictures.¹⁵⁰ He never designed tapestries again.

The closure of the Windsor Manufactory in 1890 signaled the decline of its critical reputation. Beginning in the 1890s, it came to be regarded as a failure—not simply a business

¹⁴⁷ At the second, fourth and fifth exhibitions of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, Bone’s work was exhibited in the balcony of the New Gallery at 121 Regent Street, London. (“The Arts and Crafts Exhibition,” *Times*, 2 October 1893, 5; Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. *Catalogue of the Second Exhibition*. London: New Gallery, 1889, nos. 635-637; Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. *Catalogue of the Fifth Exhibition*. London: New Gallery, 1896, no. 624)

¹⁴⁸ “The Arts and Crafts Exhibition,” *Times*, 2 October 1893, 5.

¹⁴⁹ “The Arts and Crafts Exhibition,” *Times*, 2 October 1893, 5.

¹⁵⁰ Bone taught at the Crystal Palace from 1890 to 1899, and he exhibited often at the Royal Academy. His most well known work from this period is *How the Danes Came up the Channel a Thousand Years Ago* (ca. 1890), a painting that Bone first conceived as a tapestry and which is today in the collection of the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum, Bournemouth. The preparatory sketch, the *Coming of the Danes* (1886) is in the Royal Library (RL32352). (“Dulwich College Register: Herbert Arthur Bone, 18 September 1925” (Dulwich); “Pictures at the Crystal Palace,” *Times*, 6 May 1898, 10; Graves 1905-1906, 1:234.

failure, which was the case, but an artistic failure, too.¹⁵¹ It was at Merton Abbey, which was founded by William Morris in 1881, that the tapestry revival, alluded to in the *Times*, was taking place.¹⁵² Although Merton Abbey was a commercial rival to the Windsor Works for nearly a decade, there remains the historic perception that the Windsor Works belonged to a much earlier period. “The abortive effort at Windsor had been dead some years,” was how the origins of William Morris’ workshop were evoked by H. C. Marillier, a tapestry historian who was also a director of Merton Abbey beginning in 1905.¹⁵³ Significantly, William Morris and his supporters were the most articulate critics of the Windsor Works, and so enduring were their comments that Windsor came to be regarded merely as the establishment foil to the more “authentic” production of the Merton Abbey Workshops.¹⁵⁴

Morris’ appreciation for tapestry dated back to childhood, but it was only in the late 1870s, that he investigated the possibility of setting up a tapestry works. The emergence of the Windsor Tapestry Manufactory added urgency to his ambition because Morris grasped—more fully than the management at Windsor, it turned out—that the market for tapestries was limited. His negotiations with a potential business partner reveal his anxiety that the Windsor Works would be successful. “The Widow Guelph [that is, Queen Victoria] has been enticing customers from us and has got an order for tapestry that ought to have been ours,” he wrote in 1877.¹⁵⁵ Two days later, he added, “We ought to have started the tapestry before.”¹⁵⁶ At one point during this period, he even privately threatened to undersell the Windsor Works.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵¹ “Start of an Art Industry: Modern Tapestries No Longer Imported from Europe,” *New York Times*, 7 January 1894, 13.

¹⁵² *Merton Abbey Arras Tapestries*. (London: Morris & Co., 1909), 2.

¹⁵³ Marillier 1927, 15-16. For Marillier’s starting date as a director of Merton Abbey, see Parry 1983, 121.

¹⁵⁴ This disparagement continues today, with many critics and art historians expressing at best a hedging approval of the Windsor tapestries. For a rare example of unqualified appreciation, see *Four Hundred Years of English Tapestries* (exh. cat., London: Vigo-Sternberg Galleries, 1971), 4.

¹⁵⁵ William Morris to Thomas Wardle, 24 October 1877 (Kelvin 1984-1996), 1:403

¹⁵⁶ William Morris to Thomas Wardle, 26 October 1877 (Kelvin 1984-1996, 1:404)

Morris's tapestry works was a purely domestic operation at this time, with Morris rising early to weave for a few hours, eventually finishing a small verdure panel (*Cabbage and Vine*, 1879).¹⁵⁸ His apprenticeship coincided with the early momentum of the Windsor Manufactory, which included the success of the *Merry Wives* at the Paris World's Fair in 1878. When Morris finally opened his own workshop at Merton Abbey in 1881, the prospects at Windsor looked especially bright, with the expanded workforce busy with major commissions like the *Idylls* and the *Battle of Aylesford* in addition to a range of furniture covers and speculative designs.

Privately, Morris dwelled on his business anxieties, but publicly, he condemned Windsor on aesthetic grounds.¹⁵⁹ "I am sorry to have to say," he said in speech in 1882, "that an attempt to set the art going, which has been made, doubtless with the best intentions under royal patronage at Windsor within the last few years has most unluckily gone on the lines of the work at the Gobelins, and if it does not change its system utterly, is doomed to artistic failure, whatever its commercial success may be."¹⁶⁰ Then, perhaps thinking of his own experience, he went on to say

¹⁵⁷ "The Empress Brown [that is, Queen Victoria] is hard at work at her rival establishment: I am sure she expects to get the whole of the ornamental upholstery business of the Kingdom into her hands: let her tremble! I will under-sell her in all branches." Fiona MacCarthy does not include the source or date for this quote although it appears in the chapter covering the years 1879 to 1881 (MacCarthy 1994, 408)

¹⁵⁸ Parry 1983, 101-102.

¹⁵⁹ Similarly, in the United States, William Baumgarten regarded the disbanded Windsor Works as a threat to his own tapestry workshop in the Bronx. After the closure of Windsor, he criticized some of the tapestries that were for sale in America. An article in the *New York Times* in 1894, which supported Baumgarten's efforts, remarked unfavorably that "the Windsor experiment did not perish from lack of encouragement; perhaps it was overcoddled and died like the infant overnourished, and left too little to struggle for itself." By contrast, "In New York, there is little save the taste of private individuals to guarantee that the seed sown during the past year by Mr. Baumgarten will produce more than a sickly plant. Meantime he has gone quietly to work, hired his quarters, engaged capable men, and arranged to extend his establishment if the public says it is a good thing." Tapestry was evidently one of those industries best left to the compatible forces of good taste and Darwinian capitalism. ("Start of an Art Industry: Modern Tapestries No Longer Imported from Europe," *New York Times*, 7 January 1894, 13; Baumgarten 1897, 38.)

¹⁶⁰ Morris 1882, 206. Herbert Bone had better manners than William Morris. Speaking of the Windsor Works and Merton Abbey, he wrote, "During the last forty years, two previous movements, although inaugurated, one under the highest social, the other under the most favourable artistic auspices, have both run their course." (Bone 1918, 51:197-198)

that tapestry was formerly “almost a domestic art, and all sorts of naïve fancies were embodied in it.”¹⁶¹ It was on this occasion, too, that Morris declared tapestry “an art that has practically perished.”¹⁶² The remark was later confirmed by Morris to have been a swipe at Windsor although at the time it might have also been inspired by his frustrations over Merton Abbey.¹⁶³

The first figure tapestry to come off the looms at Merton Abbey was *Goose Girl* (1881/82), which Walter Crane adapted from one of his illustrations for a collection of Grimm’s fairytales.¹⁶⁴ Although he never disowned *Goose Girl*, it was evident from comments to his wife, that, thematically, Morris considered the work a disappointment. “I thought the *Goose Girl* was not bad, my dear, on the whole,” he wrote in 1882, shortly after it was finished. “But when all is said it was not a design quite fit for tapestry.”¹⁶⁵ The sort of designs he regarded as fit for tapestry were the legends of King Arthur, which inspired him with lifelong feelings of possessiveness.¹⁶⁶ While Morris was struggling with *Goose Girl*, the Windsor Works was “turning out” a set on that very theme.¹⁶⁷ Morris loathed Windsor and he also had great reserves of contempt for Tennyson and Queen Victoria. (“Poor old Tennyson” and “fat Vic,” he wrote in a letter in 1887.)¹⁶⁸ The situation must have been galling.

Although there is no record of his comments on any specific Windsor designs, it is next to impossible that Morris did not know that the *Idylls of the King* were being woven at Windsor. Among tapestry connoisseurs, the Windsor Manufactory was a high profile enterprise with regular

¹⁶¹ Morris 1882, 207.

¹⁶² Morris 1882, 208.

¹⁶³ Vallance 1894, 3:100.

¹⁶⁴ *The Merton Abbey Tapestries*. (London: Morris & Co., 1909), 2.

¹⁶⁵ William Morris to Jane Morris, 1882. (Kelvin 1984-1996, 2:184)

¹⁶⁶ MacCarthy 1994, 61-62.

¹⁶⁷ “Turning out” was Morris’ phrase to describe production at the Windsor Works (Vallance 1894, 3:102.)

¹⁶⁸ Morris to Jenny Morris, 30 March 1887. (Kelvin 1984-1996, 2:633)

visiting hours and, despite his own certain avoidance of the place, he would have known those who were familiar with its production. Moreover, as an advisor on tapestry acquisitions at the South Kensington Museum, Morris would have necessarily been informed about the tapestry market.¹⁶⁹ It is uncertain, though, if Morris had personally seen the *Idylls*, which were exhibited only once in 1881. Due to his dislike of the Royal Academy, it is also likely that he missed Bone's watercolors for the *Idylls* 1879 and 1880.

There is, nonetheless, some evidence that Bone's designs for the *Idylls* were known at Morris & Co., which issued a little known series of embroidery panels on the *Idylls of the King*.¹⁷⁰ Significantly, the Morris & Co. *Idylls* include a scene for the *Coming of Arthur* (fig. 7a), which seems to have been at least partly inspired by the earlier designs. In the Morris & Co. version, Arthur greets Guinevere, who has been brought to his kingdom by Lancelot. Instead of a church door, though, the couple stands in front of an archway, and the many witnesses and revelers indicated by Bone are here reduced to less than a half-dozen. Another difference is the peacock, one of Bone's ornamental touches, which in the Morris & Co. version, is now unleashed. Finally, the embroidered *Coming of Arthur* has a fine border of mayflowers, which is similar to the top border of the tapestry.

In the 1890s, William Morris oversaw the weaving of the *Holy Grail* (fig. 12), yet another tapestry set on King Arthur (des. 1890-91; woven 1892-95). This series was designed by Edward Burne-Jones (1833-98) and John Dearle (1869-1932) to be hung in the dining room of William Knox D'Arcy at Stanmore Hall, Middlesex.¹⁷¹ Comprising five narrative panels and five

¹⁶⁹ Parry 1983, 103.

¹⁷⁰ "William Morris's firm supplied many patterns for home embroidery, together with appropriate yarns. Some of these designs were by William Morris, some by his daughter May, and the more elaborate figures by Burne-Jones." (*Four Hundred Years of English Tapestries* 1971, 62.) Three of the *Idylls* embroidery panels are illustrated in this source. The catalog also estimates that the Morris & Co. *Idylls* were completed in the 1890s.

¹⁷¹ The Merton Abbey *Holy Grail* was, in fact, the third nineteenth-century tapestry set on King Arthur, the second being Herbert Bone's little known two-panel series on King Arthur for Henry Huck Gibbs. (Cullingham 1979, 66-67)

verdures, the *Holy Grail* reflects Morris' and Burne-Jones' lifelong passion for Arthurian legends.

Partial sets of the *Holy Grail* were woven in 1895-1896, in 1898, and in the years after 1920.¹⁷² The multiple weavings have contributed to its reputation in the history of tapestry history. The set is in public collections, such as the Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery, and it is exhibited in exhibitions. Recent sale prices are also revealing. One tapestry in the Merton Abbey's *Holy Grail* sold at auction in 2004 for \$701,909.¹⁷³ By contrast, the fate of Herbert Bone's *Idylls* is more obscure. None is in a public collection and the prices for individual panels are comparatively low. In 2001, the *Holy Grail*, the sixth tapestry in the Windsor *Idylls*, sold at auction for \$16,364.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Linda Parry. "The Stanmore Hall Tapestries," *Art at Auction*, 1977/78. (New York: Horizon, 1978), 418-422.

¹⁷³ *Important British and Irish Art: June 9, 2004*. (Christie's: London, 2004), 40.

¹⁷⁴ *Fine and Continental Furniture and Tapestries: May 25, 2001*. (Sotheby's: London, 2001), lot 15.

Conclusion

Herbert Bone's *Idylls of the King* remains an obscure tapestry set woven at a poorly appreciated Victorian tapestry works. The Royal Windsor Tapestry Manufactory is an important chapter in the history of English decorative arts. During the 1870s and 1880s, Windsor tapestries were regarded as part of the revival in English craftsmanship. They were appreciated for the quality of weaving and dyeing, and for the attractiveness of their designs. The *Idylls of the King* was part of that tradition. It was also the first tapestry series in many years to depict Arthurian legends, anticipating by more than a decade Merton Abbey's own treatment of this theme.

Further research is necessary. Bone's drawings in the Royal Library give an incomplete idea of his design of the *Idylls*. The patron, Coleridge Kennard, remains an indistinct figure, with little known about his interest in tapestry and his dedication to the Windsor Works. The location of the tapestries also needs to be established. Greater appreciation of the *Idylls of the King* would give a more complete picture of Victorian tapestry design.

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Images



Fig. 1. Herbert Bone/RWTM. *The Idylls of the King: the Coming of Arthur*, ca. 1879-ca. 1881.



Fig. 2. Herbert Bone/RWTM.
The Idylls of the King: Geraint and Enid, ca. 1881-ca. 1882.



Fig. 3. Herbert Bone/RWTM.
The Idylls of the King: Merlin and Vivien, ca. 1881.



Fig. 4. Herbert Bone/RWTM. *The Idylls of the King: the Lily Maid of Astolat*, ca. 1880.



Fig. 5. Herbert Bone/RWTM. *The Idylls of the King: the Holy Grail*, ca. 1880-ca. 1881.



Fig. 6. Herbert Bone/RWTM.
The Idylls of the King: Guinevere, ca. 1881-ca. 1882.



Fig. 7. Herbert Bone/RWTM. *The Idylls of the King: the Passing of Arthur*, ca. 1879



Fig. 8. John O'Connor/RWTM. *View of Windsor Castle*, 1882



Fig. 9. T. W. Hay/Royal Windsor Tapestry Manufactory.
The Merry Wives of Windsor: Ye Merrie Wives, 1878



Fig. 10. Herbert Bone/Royal Windsor Tapestry Manufactory.
Salviati Mosaics: Cimabue and Savonarola, des. 1881



Fig. 11. T. W. Hay/Royal Windsor Tapestry Manufactory
Sofa Coverings



Fig. 12. The Royal Windsor Tapestry Manufactory. *Illustrated London News*, April 29, 1882.



Fig. 13. Tapestry exhibition at Windsor Town Hall, 1878



Fig. 14. Edward Burne-Jones/Merton Abbey.
San Graal: the Arming and Departure of the Knights, 1895-1896



Fig. 15. Walter Crane/Merton Abbey. *Goose Girl*, 1881/82



Fig. 16. Morris & Co. *The Idylls of the King: the Coming of Arthur.*



Fig. 17. Alfred Courbould. *Elaine, the Lily Maid of Astolat*, 1867



Fig. 18. Gustave Doré. *The Dead being rowed by the Dumb*, 1867



Fig. 19. Studio of Thomas W. Dewing, ca. 1895



Fig. 20. Studio of Walter Shirlaw, ca. 1895



Fig. 21. The Den in the Vanderbilt Mansion at Hyde Park, New York, ca. 1890s.