

RUSKIN AND THE ART-WORKMEN:
FREDERICK BRIGDEN, SR., ENGRAVER

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The impact of the British Pre-Raphaelite movement on Canadian art of the nineteenth-century has generally been given limited space in the art history literature. References are usually confined to the work of William R. Hind and Frances Anne Hopkins. Hind, who travelled and painted in western Canada in the 1860s, has been given credit for introducing into Canada “a Pre-Raphaelite note from the currently fashionable English style” (Harper, 126-27), while the “scientific inquiry” of the Pre-Raphaelites has been described as present in the work of Hopkins as she recorded the rivers of Quebec and Ontario when travelling with her husband on Hudson’s Bay Company business (Clark and Stacey, 51). These references have, however, been discussed in terms of style and subject-matter rather than in terms of the aims and ideals behind the movement itself. That these, in turn, owed a great deal to John Ruskin and his theories of the interrelationship between art and work, is also a factor that has not received its due in a Canadian context.

Timothy Hilton, in his study of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, emphasizes that Pre-Raphaelitism was “the art of the English Industrial Revolution,” and that its concern to bring work and art together stressed “the continual nags and indecisions about the value of art in an industrial society.” Hilton also refers to those who were “hardly good enough, as artists, to get into the official history books,” but who through their attendance at the art classes of the mechanics’ institutes were able to combine the worlds of work and art (210). One of the most famous of the art classes held for working men was John Ruskin’s at the London Working Men’s College. The importance of these classes and their relevance to Pre-Raphaelitism is described by Hilton as reminding us that

the central moment of Pre-Raphaelitism is located, not at a point where any single artist, alone in his studio, first sketched out a new subject, nor yet when a picture at the Academy private view was received with interest and a mark in the catalogue from a gloved hand, but rather in the evenings in smoky Bloomsbury, at the