

A BBC INTERVIEW WITH MRS. HELEN ROSSETTI ANGELI

Mr. Vincent Brome introduced the programme.

Mr. Brome: Living in the beautiful village of Woodstock, outside Oxford, is a lady of eighty-three whose memory goes a long way back into the mists of the Victorian period. More particularly, she remembers the famous Pre-Raphaelite figures, who left such a deep impression on their period, because she is the daughter of William Michael Rossetti, who was the brother of Dante Gabriel Rossetti; and as a young girl, she moved among people like Christina Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Ford Madox Ford, and Jane Morris, wife of William Morris. She was born in 1880 into a world where Queen Victoria was fast assuming characteristics of immortality. I went down to Oxford, one beautiful autumn day, and met Mrs. Helen Rossetti Angeli, who received me with Old World courtesy and quickly began to talk about those early days.

Mrs. Angeli: I was born within sound of Bow bells in the middle of the Euston Road, near Euston Station, in Endsleigh Gardens.¹ It was a very noisy, crowded -- for those days -- part of London, and I remember very well the general atmosphere of it: very dirty, a lot of poverty; and our house was large, commodious, rather ugly, I suppose. It was late Georgian, would it be, or very early Victorian, and I remember my father and mother received a good many people there. My father's great interest in life, you know, was Shelley, so I remember a good deal of the Shelley friends of my father. Oh, Buxton Forman² used to come, Mr. Wise -- Thomas J. Wise³ -- and many others. The Shelley Society,⁴ I think, used to meet in his little smoking-room at the end of the passage. Oh, Dr. Furnivall,⁵ who was a great character. I don't think my mother much liked Dr. Furnivall. He used to retire with my father into the smoking-room and discuss Shelley.

Mr. Brome: What sort of man was your father?

Mrs. Angeli: Oh, he was a very good-looking man. He was a very dear man, a wonderful man. It's fashionable now to talk of him as an old bore. He was anything but an old bore. He was a very modest man, very retiring, very unassertive, but he could hold his own anywhere.