

## THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER: ANTI-SEMITIC CARICATURES BY EDWARD BURNE-JONES

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In 2005, when I was halfway through a four-year project re-cataloguing 1,137 works on paper by Edward Burne-Jones at the Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, four repugnant caricatures that were both troubling and perplexing emerged from the archives. In the decade I had spent exclusively researching Burne-Jones for various degrees and amassing a digital archive of his work for a catalogue raisonné, there was literally and visually nothing remotely comparable in its brazen prejudice.

When the late Tessa Sidey and I prepared the works for inclusion in the *Hidden Burne-Jones* exhibition tour and catalogue, we simply did not know how to handle these, as the entry in the publication attests (Korb and Sidey 58; #49). The entry I drafted is frankly exculpatory, something I have found personally and professionally unsettling. This essay attempts to correct an error by placing the drawings in the appropriate contexts in terms of Burne-Jones's private and public lives, as well as the social climate of the late 1870s and early 1880s when these works were created.

### I

Between 1877 and 1880, Burne-Jones drafted five separate anti-Semitic caricatures in pencil on cream-toned paper: four of these (figs. 1-4) are currently in the collection of the Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery,<sup>1</sup> and one (fig. 5) is found in an album of caricatures at the British Museum.<sup>2</sup> The images in Birmingham's collection were acquired through J.R. Holliday's bequest in 1927, but how he came to be in possession of them is not clear, although it was probably via Charles Fairfax Murray (Sidey 34).<sup>3</sup> The first and second drawings are very closely related to those on page 40 in the British Museum album, which belonged to the Morris family.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the fifth caricature functions as a type of preparatory sketch for the heads found in the first and third images in terms of overall cranio-facial structure; baldness; miniscule, indented eyes; prominent, protruding, wide-set nose; inflamed lips; and