

## ELIZABETH SIDDAL IN SHEFFIELD AND MATLOCK

Jan Marsh

It has long been known that in autumn 1857, Dante Gabriel Rossetti left Oxford, where he and close friends had been decorating the walls of the University Union debating chamber, to join Elizabeth Siddal in Sheffield. From the surprisingly few letters that survive from this period, plus one much later letter, we know that they lodged in Matlock, some distance southwest of Sheffield, in a guesthouse run by William Cartledge.

What more can be discovered, or inferred, of this time? Following my researches way back in the 1980s, we know that Siddal's visit to Sheffield was remembered by others in the city, whose recollections were published in local newspapers in 1911.<sup>1</sup> Salient details include her presence in the municipal art school, and her participation in an excursion to visit the Art Treasures exhibition in Manchester, which ran from May to October 1857.

In this article, I attempt to enlarge on the scanty information.

In May 1857, works by both Siddal and Rossetti were included in the small "Pre-Raphaelite" exhibition at Russell Place in London organized by Ford Madox Brown, some of which travelled to North America as a display of contemporary British art. As it turned out, in London Siddal was the only female exhibitor, the event being too hurriedly organized to include work by Joanna Boyce, as Brown had intended. Happily for Siddal, her watercolour illustration to the Border ballad *Clerk Saunders* sold from the exhibition (for 40 guineas) to Charles Eliot Norton, a Harvard art professor from Boston, and a good friend of John Ruskin.

At around this same time, Rossetti joined the young artists in Oxford, including William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, in a "summer vacation" project, painting scenes from Malory's tales of the Knights of the Round Table, known as *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

Siddal was living in lodgings of her own in Hampstead. Sometime in June or July, she left London with her sister Clara to visit Sheffield, their father's birthplace. Clara Siddal had a managerial job in a garment wholesale business, so this trip was presumably in the nature of a summer holiday, after the