

## **Richard Dadd (1817-1886)**

Dadd was born on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1817 in Chatham. He was the fourth of seven children, a total of four of whom would eventually die insane. His father, Robert, was a chemist and the first curator of the Chatham and Rochester Literary and Philosophical Institution's museum, and Dadd attended The King's School at Rochester. When he was seventeen, the family moved to London, and at nineteen he was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools where he completed his training as an artist.

The young Dadd was influenced by both literary and classical themes, and by the early 1840s had begun to create the fairy paintings for which he would become best known. In due course, his work attracted the patronage of Sir Thomas Phillips, a solicitor from South Wales who had been knighted for his part in ending a Chartist riot. Phillips wished to undertake the Grand Tour of classical sites across Europe, and he recruited Dadd to accompany him as his personal artist.

They began their journey in July 1842, travelling first through Belgium, Germany and Switzerland before reaching Italy, then moving on to Greece, Turkey and Palestine. By the time they reached Egypt Dadd had begun to exhibit signs of mental illness. His health seems to have deteriorated very quickly from this point. He and Phillips crossed to Malta and then to Italy

again. He experienced his first desire to kill when he saw the Pope at a public appearance in Rome.

Dadd was sent home from Paris in July 1843. A doctor consulted by the family recommended that Dadd was committed to a private asylum and put under immediate restraint. This caused a crisis. On 28<sup>th</sup> August 1843, Dadd asked his father to accompany him to an inn at Cobham, near Gravesend in Kent. After enjoying a meal together, they walked to nearby Cobham Park where Dadd killed his father by stabbing him with a knife.

Dadd fled to France. Two days later he attacked a complete stranger. He was arrested by the French authorities and identified himself as a wanted man. Initially, he was sent to a French asylum at Clermont, before he was extradited to England in July 1844. He never stood trial for the murder of his father, and was found insane when he came to plead. He was sent to the criminal lunatic ward at Bethlem on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1844.

Notes from his stay at Clermont indicate that Dadd believed that his father was the devil, and that the ancient Egyptian god Osiris had ordered his murder. This was a delusion that Dadd maintained for the rest of his life. Some notes from his time at Bethlem describe Dadd's state: 'For some years after his admission he was considered a violent and dangerous patient for he would jump up and strike a violent blow without any aggravation and then beg pardon for the deed. This arose from some vague idea that filled his mind, and still does so to a certain extent, that certain spirits have the

power of possessing a mans body and compelling him to adopt a particular course whether he will or no.' Dadd also began painting again, a habit he would continue throughout his time in asylum care.

Dadd made the great trek to the Berkshire countryside on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1864, a few days short of his 47<sup>th</sup> birthday. He settled in to his new accommodation quickly. He received money from his family regularly, and in the patients' account books in the Broadmoor archive his careful signature records his receipt of brushes and board that he purchased for his work.

Dadd was a tranquil patient, whose illness only became apparent during conversation. His notes regularly state his seeming contentment, as well as the continuation of his delusions. In summer, he used to like to sit and watch the other patients playing cricket. He suffered from gout, but embarked on some large commissions: he painted decorations around the stage in Broadmoor's central hall, and a mural along one wall in the medical superintendent's house, work which, like most of the hall decorations, is now lost.

In the summer of 1885 Dadd fell ill and was taken to the Broadmoor infirmary. There he remained until his death on the evening of 8<sup>th</sup> January 1886, aged 68, from tuberculosis. He was buried at Broadmoor.