

St Olave's Churchyard

WILLIAM ETTY RA (1787-1849)

A BRIEF HISTORY



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William Etty - Self Portrait 1823

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St Olave's Church, York

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Website: www.stolaveschurch.org.uk



(Source: Bryan's Dictionary of painters and engravers)

William Etty

Early life

William Etty RA was born in 1787, during the reign of George III in Feasegate, York. He was the seventh child of Matthew and Esther Etty. Matthew owned a bakery and confectionery shop in Feasegate. The Ettys lived above the premises. Esther's family had disapproved of her marriage to Matthew and disowned her, prompting the couple's move from Pocklington to York, where they established their business and raised their family. They were staunch Methodists.

William had three older surviving brothers, Walter, born in 1774, John, born in 1775, Thomas, born in 1780, and one younger brother Charles, born in 1793. The family seems to have been loving and caring and both parents encouraged their sons to aspire to successful careers.

As an infant, William contracted smallpox and bore the scars of this throughout his life. His early schooling included attending a 'dame-school' in Feasegate and a school behind Goodramgate. Later, he became a weekly boarder at an academy in Pocklington. Although basic, Matthew and Esther considered the schooling of their sons important, despite the drain on family finances and during a time when the children of less affluent families were rarely educated.

William showed an interest in sketching and painting from an early age, drawing pictures in chalk on the floor of his father's shop. The first known biography of Etty (1855), using contemporary sources, described him as a shy boy with a '*large head, disheveled sandy hair and a face which the recent scars of smallpox had done little to embellish*'⁽¹⁾. In October 1798, aged 11, at the instigation of his mother, William became an apprentice printer in Hull. Although the hours were long and he disliked his time there, William applied himself diligently to the work, gained his qualification and obtained a good reference from his employer. During his apprenticeship, William had furthered his own education from books, and he continued to practise drawing and painting, whenever he got an opportunity.

1. Alexander Gilcrest wrote the first full biography of William Etty six years following Etty's death. His book '*The Life of William Etty RA*' was published in 1855. Gilcrest gained first-hand information from visits to York and discussion with those who had known William from childhood and throughout his life.

London – student artist

In 1805, aged 18, with his apprenticeship behind him, William went to London to stay with his paternal uncle William, at Lombard Street. His firm intention was to become an artist. His eldest brother, Walter, had already made the transition to London to pursue his own successful career. Uncle William and Walter became significant benefactors for William's artistic ambitions and throughout his life he was always indebted to them for their encouragement and financial support.

He spent his first year in London in private art study and practice. Life in the capital was very different from York in terms of scale, wealth and culture. There were marked contrasts between rich and poor, no police force and crime was rife. The country was at war with France, until the Battle of Waterloo, in 1815. The Prince of Wales (later the Prince Regent and George VI), was engaged in much criticised licentious living. But Etty took to London and seemed to enjoy it, probably because this was the 'place to be' in terms of furthering his career. Yet, he never lost his love and affection for his native York.

Aspiring artists were expected to gain entry as a student to the Royal Academy (RA). To do so, Etty would have to produce work of quality and secure a prestigious recommendation. Whilst tuition was free, standards were stringent. Teaching methods laid stress on classical and historical art, anatomical study of nude figures, mostly through painting female models in life classes.

Etty managed to obtain a letter of introduction from Richard Sharp, the MP for Hull. Armed with this, he approached artist John Opie RA, with a drawing sketched from a cast of *Cupid and Psyche*. Impressed, Opie recommended William to Henry Fuseli, a Swiss born Royal Academician. Shortly afterwards Etty was admitted to the academy as a probationer, becoming a full student in January 1807.

William was assiduous in his studies. Influenced initially by Fuseli, he took an opportunity to assist and study under Sir Thomas Lawrence⁽²⁾, thanks to a £100 fee paid by his uncle. His student contemporaries at the RA included John Constable and Edwin Landseer. William's early focus was on portraits (the most lucrative element of

2. Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830) was a leading English portrait painter and became fourth President of the Royal Academy in 1820. Born in Bristol, he was a child prodigy and largely self-taught. His patron was the Prince Regent. William Etty became his studio assistant following his successful entry to the Academy.

an artist's life). He first painted members of his family, but by 1811, he began to exhibit more varied classical and religious works at the Academy. However, recognition came slowly.

Becoming Established

In 1810, following the death of his uncle, William was forced to find other lodgings in London, supported by a legacy bequeathed to him but managed by Walter. Although yet to become commercially successful, William was becoming respected at the RA for his use of colour and his ability to paint the realistic flesh tones of nude subjects.

In 1815, he made his first visit abroad to Paris to improve his draughting skills. His visit occurred a year following the abdication and banishment of Napoleon to Elba. William next visited Italy to study classical art.

In 1818, William's father died, aged 75. Etty wrote that this event was the 'first and truly heavy blow my heart ever felt'. Matthew was buried at 'All Saints Pavement' Church in York. William always regretted that Matthew did not witness his rise to fame as an established Royal Academician.

By 1820 William was becoming well known in London. He began to receive commissions and attract the attention of some serious art collectors. His work *'The Coral Finder'* was an instant success and was the first time he had used a combination of nude and classical figures, which later became his signature style. Subsequently he was commissioned to paint *'Cleopatra's arrival in Cecilia'*. Gilcrest indicates that the painting *'burst like a bombshell upon the academy and the public alike'*. However, the nude subjects he depicted led many critics to comment on their 'offensiveness' and 'dirty flesh' which they considered contrasted with the purely



Cleopatra's arrival in Cecilia - William Etty 1820 – Lady Lever Art Gallery

Wikipedia

classical works of Titian and Rubens. Critics also commented that his figures were out of proportion and cramped. Regardless, Etty was inspired by his success to paint similar subjects.

Now in his mid-30s, William's next ambition was to become an 'associate' of the Royal Academy, prior to being elected as a full member. To further this, he embarked on a second 'grand tour' of Europe in 1822, remaining there, studying, until 1824. Prior to his departure, William fell in love with his cousin Mary. He wrote to her whilst abroad but received no response. His love was unrequited, possibly because he was then 35 years old and Mary was just 20.

Despite his developing success, William was no businessman. He tended to under-sell his work, haggling over the price and giving in. He remained reliant on Walter to supplement his income, often writing to him, requesting funds. Walter usually obliged without imposing any reciprocal obligations on his younger brother.

Arrival of Betsy

Following his return from Europe, Etty moved to a more permanent address at 14, Buckingham Street. His mother visited him there and brought with her his niece, Elizabeth (daughter of his brother John), known as 'Betsy'. Fourteen years his junior, Betsy stayed with William for the next 25 years. Uncle and niece became devoted to each other and Betsy eventually became his housekeeper and close companion. He grew dependent upon Betsy who was a capable and efficient individual, running his household like clockwork. Whenever they were apart, William would write to her in the fondest terms.

Continued success

William was honoured to be elected an associate of the Royal Academy in 1824. In consequence, he was expected to host social events at home. His shy demeanor made this requirement of his new-found social status challenging. Uneasy in company, William preferred one to one discussion. He rarely drank alcohol, preferring tea, muffins and buttered toast. On a typical day, he would rise at 7am and paint from 9am-4pm. After a meal he took a walk, then attended life classes at the Academy until 8pm, returning home for two cups of tea and relaxation, before retiring around midnight.

William's early biographer and admirer, Gilcrest, described his appearance as: *'Slovenly, short and awkward. He had a large head, feet and hands. His sandy hair was wild and unkempt. He had a pock marked face, all conspiring to make him the oddest of creatures.'*

After years of striving, Etty finally achieved election as a full Royal Academician in December 1828, beating his contemporary, John Constable, to the vacant position. Delighted, he wrote to his cousin and friend Thomas Bodley: 'I have triumphed! I am a Royal Academician of England! Last night the deed was done that made me happy, I am overwhelmed with joy!'

William's mother Esther lived to see her son achieve acclaimed success as an RA. However, following a visit to London to stay with William, she died in 1829, aged 75. Her death affected him deeply. She was laid to rest with her husband at All Saints Pavement Church, York. A memorial plaque (to Matthew and Esther) was subsequently erected on the right side of the nave by Charles Etty in 1852.



(Photo: Helen Fields)

*Memorial Plaque to Matthew and Esther Etty
– All Saints Pavement Church, York*

Preserving York's heritage

Soon after his loss, William became involved in the conservation of York Minster and the city's medieval walls. Although raised a Methodist, Etty always favoured the liturgy of the Church of England. He also harboured sympathies for Roman Catholicism, but never seriously contemplated conversion because this would upset his family and career, also until Catholic emancipation in 1829, Catholics were disenfranchised and barred from public office.

William loved York Minster, worshipping there whenever he returned to York. An interest in conservation first became apparent following the Minster fire of 1829 and resulting controversy about the nature of restoration work. He resisted restoration which contemplated removing original features. At this time, it had been suggested by the

Dean and Chapter that, following the fire, restoration should involve removing the medieval rood screen. William wrote to the press and secured the support of influential friends in York and London. A long-standing dispute ensued, continuing until 1831 when the Dean and Chapter eventually withdrew their plans.

Momentous events in England and Europe

In 1830, George IV died. Always unpopular, George was succeeded by his brother, William IV. During coronation year, Etty again visited Paris, meeting up with his brother John's family and some friends. He visited the Louvre making copies of old master paintings. During his visit the 'July Revolution' commenced, beginning with unrest on the streets and people protesting the autocratic rule of King Charles X, who was overthrown as a result and succeeded by his brother Louis.

William unwittingly found himself at risk during street battles, apparently having to flee 'the mob' on a couple of occasions. His attitude to the cause of these events was ambivalent but it was certainly frightening for him. William wrote home to his cousin saying that the scenes he witnessed '*would never be erased from my memory*'. He was understandably relieved to get home unscathed. Events in France caused consternation in England, partly leading the Whigs to pass their Great Reform Bill of 1832. This bill extended the franchise to lower-middle class men in the population and may have helped avoid similar unrest in England. Etty was unsympathetic, writing that reform was '*an evil*'. Tory by nature, William was very much a traditionalist in political outlook. Whilst in France William had, despite the drama of his stay, become enamoured of an unknown English woman (possibly a friend travelling with his family) much younger than himself. Once again, he was rebuffed. He was never to marry.

After this, he continued to produce works for Royal Academy exhibitions and received many commissions. He also continued to attend life classes, which some of his fellow Academicians considered unnecessary due to his status as a full member. He frequently accepted commissions from notable people in London and in his native city of York. York friends included solicitor John Brook (spelt Brooke on his tomb at St Olave's), architect John Harper and surgeon James Atkinson. These friends were particularly active in the conservation of antiquities

in York. Atkinson was also a founder member of York Philosophical Society. Brook, a County Clerk, served as agent to William Wilberforce during his election campaigns and was Under Sherriff of York on several occasions. He also founded the Yorkshire Gazette.

Etty was also a friend of the Camidge family (particularly John and Matthew⁽³⁾). Brook and Camidge are both buried in the churchyard of St Olave's (see photographs on page xx).

Another notable acquaintance was the Member of Parliament for Montgomeryshire, Charles Watkins Williams-Wynn, who was for many years, a Minister in both the Tory and Whig administrations. He served under four Prime Ministers, Lord Liverpool, George Canning, Lord Grey and Sir Robert Peel. Wynn commissioned Etty to paint his two daughters, Charlotte and Mary, in 1833. Entitled '*Preparing for a fancy-dress ball*' this painting is currently on display at York City Art Gallery. Well received, it demonstrated that Etty could undertake commissions from the elite, occasionally abandoning his penchant for nude subjects.

During his later professional life, William rubbed shoulders with the 'great and the good' of early Victorian artistic and literary society, including Alexander Pugin, Robert Browning, William Makepeace Thackeray, fellow artists, Holman Hunt, Joseph Turner, Edwin Landseer and John Constable. One of his more famous commissions was a portrait of the celebrated Swedish soprano, Jenny Lind (known as the Swedish Nightingale), in the 1840s.

William was also popular with his fellow artists, admired for his modesty, honesty and good character. Similarly, he was popular with his students.

3. Successive generations of Camidges supplied York Minster with organists for 103 years. Brilliant organists, John and Matthew were also composers of some standing. Matthew's son (also John) took over as Minster organist following the death of his father and was also a friend of Etty.



John Brook portrait – William Etty 1838

York Museums Trust on-line



Preparing for a fancy-dress ball – William Etty (1838)

York Art Gallery (York Museums Trust on-line collection) Wikimedia

During 1834, Etty became ill, not painting for months. He went home to recuperate in York, staying with his friends (the Bodleys and John Brook) and going on day trips around local parts of Yorkshire including the ruins of Kirkham Priory, Riveaulx and Byland Abbeys. All his life, William frequently succumbed to respiratory problems, later developing rheumatism and arthritis, which plagued him, eventually making it difficult for him to hold a brush.

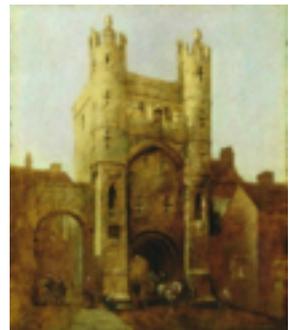
York City Walls

Before his illness, William began a campaign to preserve York's city walls and gateways which were under threat from the railway companies. To his horror, there were proposals to cut a hole into the walls to make way for a station. Etty used every means at his disposal to prevent demolition, lobbying with other campaigners and friends, writing to the press, delivering lectures whilst on visits to York (not easy for a shy man), sending subscriptions and painting pictures of the medieval bars to raise funds.

The lobbyists failed to prevent the arch being cut, but the campaigns continued for years and Etty was always at the heart of them. His campaigning for conservation often distracted him from his career. In a letter to the *Yorkshire Gazette*, in 1837, responding to a proposal to remove Micklegate bar, he wrote:

'Guard your antiquities with religious care, they are what gave you a decided character and superiority over other provincial cities – you have lost much – take care then, of what remains. I wish we had in our country – as they have in France, an officer called 'Conservateur des monument publiques' to guard them (antiquities) from the invasion of petty and private interests and preserve them as records of the past and landmarks for the future'⁽⁴⁾.

There is no doubt William was a passionate, constant and influential defender of York's heritage throughout his professional life, but his achievements in this regard are disputed, to the current day.



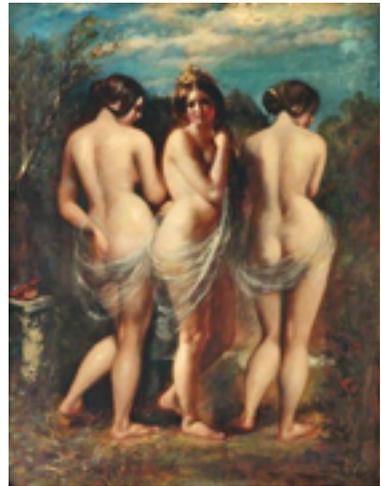
*Monk Bar – William Etty
(between 1832-1843)*

4. Quote from 'William Etty – The Life and Art' – Leonard Robinson 2007 (Chapter 10). Macfarlane and Co.

A Royal Commission

Queen Victoria ascended the throne on the death of her uncle (William IV) in 1837. She married Prince Albert in 1840. Albert was well versed in the arts, taking a great interest in the rebuilding and decoration of the Houses of Parliament, after a disastrous fire in 1834. In 1841, the Prince Consort became Chairman of a Fine Arts Commission, charged with controlling the design and decoration of the new building. A competition was instigated to enable artists to submit entries for frescos illustrating the nation's history. The committee judging these entries included Sir Robert Peel, Lord Lansdown and William Etty. Sitting on the committee increased Etty's reputation and brought him to the attention of the Prince and the Queen.

At the same time, William was busy with producing more works for exhibition. In March 1843, he painted the '*Three Graces*'. It was a significant year for him since Prince Albert, having got to know William on the Committee of Fine Arts, commissioned him, along with some other artists to paint frescos on the walls of a summer pavilion being built in the grounds of Buckingham Palace. Although a great honour, William was totally inexperienced in the art of fresco painting. For him, a painter in oils, the project proved disastrous because the outdoor climate was not conducive to water-based paints and re-touching caused serious flaking. Etty's contribution was eventually taken down and abandoned. He was dismissed and replaced. However, the experience did not seem to do his reputation any lasting damage. Interestingly, the Prince Consort's summer pavilion was eventually demolished by George V and Queen Mary due to deterioration.



The Three Graces: William Etty (1843-7)
Lady Lever Art Gallery

Wikipedia commons

Last decade

In 1842, four years after he began lobbying, William created and established a provincial School of Design in his native city, providing

a legacy for art in York. The following year, William again travelled to France, visiting sites associated with Joan of Arc, to inform his growing interest in painting the martyr. However, his ambition for this project did not materialize for another three years. In the meantime, Etty began exploring the potential of buying a property and thinking about retiring to York. His brother Charles, a successful sea captain and later a plantation owner in Java, visited and stayed with William, after a long absence abroad. William was obliged to entertain Charles. In consequence, some of his plans were put on hold. Eventually, in 1846, William purchased a house in York, off Coney Street, close to the parish church of St Martin-Le Grand and the River Ouse. The purchase price was £1,110, a considerable sum at the time.

Etty was by now financially independent, making most of his money in the last decade of his life. He had discharged his debts to Walter and after 1845 had a degree of financial security he had never experienced. Despite this, he was not lacking in generosity for causes which interested him, such as conservation. Generally, he did not seem particularly driven by the acquisition of wealth, evidenced by the regular underselling of his work.

In 1846, William visited and stayed with Alexander Pugin, at his home in Ramsgate. Pugin was a renowned architect, sharing much of Etty's interest in medieval and gothic art. Pugin was also a Roman Catholic which appealed to Etty's own religious inclinations, but despite Catholic emancipation he remained in the Anglican Church. His visit to Pugin inspired work on Joan of Arc and William returned to London with renewed motivation. Although plagued by a persistent cough and rheumatism, he completed a large triptych, depicting Joan of Arc scenes, in 1847. When exhibited, they elicited mixed reviews and were not particularly successful. His work was perceived by some to be declining in quality and inventiveness and his health began to deteriorate markedly.

In Winter 1847, according to Gilcrest, Holman Hunt (then a student at the RA) described encountering Etty struggling to reach the top of



Betsy Etty, Captain Charles Etty and William Etty RA – Photo 1844 (Hill and Adamson during a visit to Edinburgh.

the stairs at the RA life class. Etty was apparently so breathless he could hardly speak. Other colleagues recalled that William's insistence on walking home in the cold meant that he was frequently breathless, clinging to lamp-posts and railings for support.

Although William continued to paint, failing health hastened plans for his retirement. He therefore resigned from the Royal Academy in 1847. The following year he wrote a brief autobiography, published in the art journal. In this, William defended himself against long standing criticisms of pornography in his nude paintings)⁽⁵⁾, insisting his style was borne out of the 'worship of pure beauty'.



*Male nude holding staff –
William Etty 1814-16*

William finally made the decision to leave London in 1848, retiring to his house in York. Betsy soon joined him. Although he missed London and the Academy, he was happy to visit old haunts in York. He continued to paint, attending life classes and giving advice to students at the York School of Design. When able and not troubled by coughing, he took walks with Betsy along the riverside and frequently attended services at his beloved Minster. His brother Walter also retired to live in Scarborough.

In August 1849, the Royal Society of Arts organised a retrospective exhibition of William's work. 133 paintings were on display. The exhibition was well attended and received. However, it made a huge loss due to the costs of transporting fragile art works from around the country. William attended the exhibition but suffered a serious bout of rheumatic fever which exhausted him. He returned to York to recover.

In October, he indicated in letters that he was improving but friends were convinced he would not last the Winter. Despite occasional rallies, William died at 7.45pm on Wednesday 13th November 1849. He was 62 and apparently reconciled to dying, saying to a servant, 'Wonderful, Wonderful! This death!'. His doctor entered the cause of death as 'Congestion of the lungs'. The most probable cause was Broncho-pneumonia.

5. Etty's autobiography in the *Art Journal* (1849) explains 'No immoral sentiment is intended; I affirm that the simple undisguised naked figure is innocent. To the pure in heart, all things are pure.'

Funeral and Burial

Etty's wish was to be buried in York Minster, but it was not customary to inter lay people there and he had failed to make provision for this in his will. Neither could he be buried with his parents because city regulations no longer allowed burials within the walls.

It was decided (probably through the intervention of his friend, John Brook), that William should be interred in St Olave's churchyard. Here his grave could be seen through a ruined arch of St Mary's Abbey and be reasonably close to the Minster. His friend, Thomas Bodley, an executor, arranged the funeral and burial on behalf of William's brother Walter, who was by now ill himself. In the event, Walter was too ill to attend. The funeral was set for 11am on Thursday 23rd November. William's grave was prepared in the position chosen in the churchyard. In his biography, Gilcrest reported that Etty's grave was excavated through previous Roman graves, in which some artefacts were found.

The *Yorkshire Gazette* of November 24th, 1849 reported the funeral thus:

On Thursday, the mortal remains of our fellow citizen, William Etty Esq, the distinguished artist, was consigned to the tomb. It could hardly be conceived that such a man would not have every possible respect paid to his memory, whether as a townsman who had ever been distinguished for his efforts to serve the city which gave him birth, or as one who, in his professional capacity, had, by a useful life, become one of the great ornaments and shed a brilliant lustre upon the character of the country. Mr Etty was indeed a man of whom not only the City of York, but England, as a nation, has a right to be proud.

His funeral was attended by a numerous assembly of citizens, headed by the Lord Mayor and Corporation and accompanied by the Council of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society, and the pupils of the York School of Design.

Shortly after the hour of eleven, the coffin was brought forth and placed in the hearse. The body was enclosed in a lead shell and the coffin was formed of the very best oak and covered in a black cloth. The Corporation assembled at the Mansion House and headed the procession, which moved mournfully along. The passing bell of the Minster and at the deceased parish church St Martin Le Grand, were tolled. Shops in Coney Street and in the line of procession, were wholly

or partially closed. The route taken was Coney Street, Blake Street, St Leonard's Place, Bootham into Marygate.

Order of procession:

The Lord Mayor and the Chaplain (Rev Canon Turner)

The Ex-Sheriff

Aldermen

Council of Yorkshire Philosophical Society

Citizens

Master and pupils of York Government School of Design

Citizens

Undertaker

The Hearse and Bearers drawn by four black horses

Four mourning coaches (containing family and friends)

On arrival at St Olave's, the family and attendees gathered in the nave. A numerous body of ladies were seated in the gallery. The Reverend W.H Strong read the funeral service in a solemn and impressive manner. After the lesson, the corpse was carried forward to the vault situated close by the ruins of the venerable Abbey of St Mary, in which relics of bygone times connected with our city, the deceased artist ever took such a lively interest. The service being concluded, the relatives of the deceased and a great number of friends surrounded the vault and having taken a last look at the remains of the departed, who lived and died in the esteem of all who knew him, the assembly dispersed. Altogether there would be upwards of 200 people assembled on this mournful occasion. All was most admirably conducted. In the evening, a muffled peel was rung upon the bells of St Martin-Le-Grand as a mournful tribute to the memory of the deceased.'



Photo: Helen Fields

William Etty Tomb (from viewpoint of St Olave's Churchyard, York)

Tomb inscription below:

William Etty, Royal Academician

Who in his brilliant works has left an enduring monument of his exalted genius. Earnestly aiming to attain the lofty position on which his highly gifted talents have placed him, he throughout his life exhibited unabated perseverance in his profession, to promote its advancement in his beloved country. He watched the progress of those engaged in its study with the most disinterested kindness. To his elevated and highly poetical mind were united a cheerfulness and sweetness of disposition, with great simplicity and urbanity of manners. He was richly endeared to all who knew him. His piety was unaffected, his faith in Christ sincere and his devotion to God exemplary.

He was born in York March 10th, 1787

And died in his native city November 13th, 1849

Why seek ye the living among the dead? Luke XXIV. V

Aftermath

The *Art Journal*, national and provincial newspapers reported Etty's death. One author in the *Art Journal* going so far as to write that William was '*the most poetical painter of modern times.*' From the sale of his paintings together with investments in Government stock, William was worth around £17,000, significant money in 1850. His house and contents, in Coney Street, he left for Betsy during her lifetime, with an annuity of £200. The rest was left to his brother Walter. However, Walter died a few months year later at Scarborough, in February, 1850. He was interred at the base of his younger brother's tomb, with the inscription:

Walter Etty

Late of 31 Lombard Street, London

*He was the eldest and best loved brother of William Etty RA and died
February 23rd, 1850*

Betsy was grief stricken by the loss of her Uncle William. In letters addressed to her later in his life he had referred to her as 'My

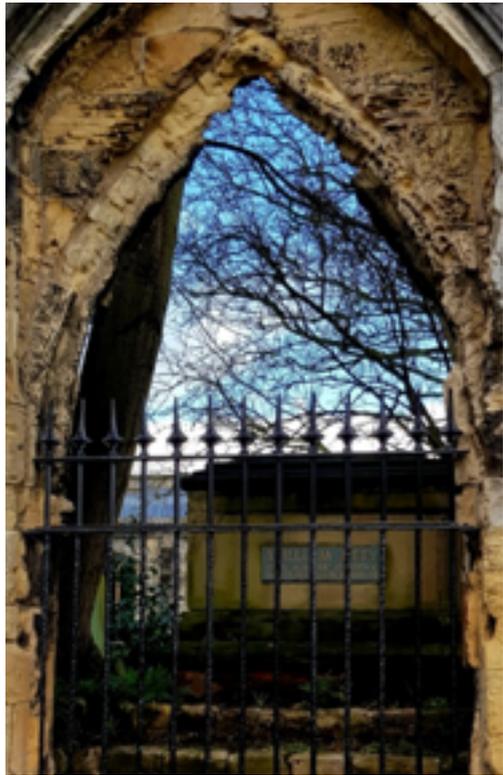
sweetest darling child'. He was constantly worried that she would marry and could not contemplate her leaving him. She did in fact express a desire to marry but sacrificed her own happiness to look after William. After his death she wrote:

'I am heart-broken, I have lost my best friend, I know not what to do and can say no more'.



Matthew Camidge Grave – St Olave's Churchyard, York

Photo: Helen Fields



William Etty Tomb from 'arch viewpoint' of St Mary's Abbey, York Museum Gardens

Photo: Helen Fields

Robinson⁽⁶⁾ suggests that although there may have been speculation about the close, prolonged and loving relationship between uncle and niece, William was such a pious man that he would never have 'stepped outside the bounds of propriety'. Betsy was his right arm, he trusted and was totally dependent on her. She in turn had an unstinting sense of duty to him. Six

6. Leonard Robinson 'William Etty – The Life and Art' (2007) Appendix 'Betsy'.



Photo: Helen Fields

John Brooke Grave – St Olave's Churchyard, York

months after William's death, devoid of further obligations, Betsy married widower Stephen Binnington (who had been known to her for some time and was living with his daughter in London). The family subsequently lived in Haymarket. Betsy outlived her husband, dying in Kensington in 1888, aged 87.

Posthumously, Etty did influence other artists, particularly the early Pre-Raphaelites, but he never attracted a large circle of admirers and imitators. The fashion in art had changed. Etty's work became less valued and somewhat neglected.

In February 1911, the City of York belatedly honoured William Etty by unveiling his statue, outside the Art Gallery, sculpted by G.W. Milburn. A stained glass window, memorialising him, was also placed in the north aisle of St Olave's church. In the same year, coinciding with the erection of William's statue, the Art Gallery exhibited 164 of his paintings. Minor exhibitions were held in the 1930s and 40s and, half a century later, in 2001-2, his largely forgotten work was the subject of a 'Tate Britain' exhibition on the Victorian Nude, helping to revive his reputation. York Art Gallery had a major exhibition of his work in 2012. York currently holds the largest collection of Etty paintings in the country. It is fair to say, William Etty, is now slowly returning to some level of recognition for his undoubted talents.

Helen Fields
June 2016



Photo: Helen Fields

*William Etty - Royal Academician – Statue in
Exhibition Square, York City Art Gallery*



Photo: Helen Fields

*William Etty Memorial
Window – North Aisle
St Olave's Church, York*