

# The Tiles at Findon Church

## Jan Marsh

The missing name from Tessa Kelly's excellent item (with its terrific colour pictures) on the decorated tiles supplied by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co for two west Sussex churches is that of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. It is he rather than (or maybe as well as) G.G. Scott Jnr. who can probably be credited for securing the commission for the tiles at St/ John Baptist, Findon.

As a partner in the Firm, Rossetti was also an effective salesman whenever he heard of ecclesiastical or domestic decoration projects for which the Firm could supply products or expertise. And he would have heard of the Findon refurbishment in 1867 from his aunt, Charlotte Polidori, who was employed by the Dowager Marchioness of Bath and lived at Muntham Court, in Findon parish. Indeed, he may have heard of it – or at least of local concern regarding the fabric of St. John Baptist – at an earlier date, for in June 1866 he welcomed a visit from Lord Charles Thynne, auxiliary patron at Findon and Lady Bath's brother-in-law, who came with his wife to see works-in-progress in Rossetti's studio.<sup>1</sup>

Being the major patron of the Findon restoration, according to Tessa Kelly, Lady Bath was in a position to suggest embellishments to the re-decoration, and thus respond to Rossetti's urging. Coincidentally, she had been his own earliest patron, having purchased *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, his first canvas, in 1849. She continued to take an interest in his career, through Charlotte Polidori (who was herself around this time involved in commissioning the Firm to supply a window in memory of her sister Margaret, in London). With such a contact, it may well have been a source of chagrin to the Firm that at Findon competitors were contracted to supply stained glass and a carved wooden reredos. But it helps explain the note Kelly quotes from Warrington Taylor: 'About this Findon reredos – we cannot do it . . . Must write Lady Bath saying circumstances have compelled us to discontinue the manufacture'.

### NOTE

- 1 *The Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. O. Doughty and J. R. Wahl, Oxford, 1965, no. 681.