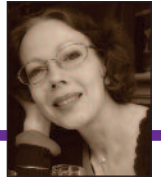


# Style Snapshot

by Lynn Roberts



**What style of frame is this?** This is a one-of-a-kind design created by Ford Madox Brown as a variation on the reed-and-roundel Pre-Raphaelite frames that he had helped introduce in the 1850s and 60s. It contains a variety of the materials, motifs, and mouldings that characterize the Pre-Raphaelite patterns, unified into a strikingly geometric border that would have appeared extremely avant-garde in comparison with the revival Baroque and Neoclassical composition frames common at the time.

**Where is it from?** It was made in London for Brown for the painting “Jesus Washing Peter’s Feet” on behalf of its third owner, James Wyllie. The framemaker was Joseph Green (1808-1873?) who ran a flourishing business and was responsible for making many of the innovative Pre-Raphaelite frames from the 1850s to 1870.

**What time period is it from?** This frame was made in 1865-66, replacing an earlier, possibly commercial stock frame that had been ordered by the first owner of the painting, T.E. Plint.

**Who was instrumental in developing this style of frame?** Brown and Dante Gabriel Rossetti developed the reed-and-roundel frames together, along with the various motifs and unusual finishes for which these are noted. They had produced Puginesque Gothic designs in the late 1840s, which were first greeted with hostility by the art establishment, but, by 1854, had embarked on a very fertile and imaginative field of design and influenced artists’ frames for the next half century and more.

**What are the defining/common characteristics of this style?** The central reed-and-roundel section sets half-round reeds against a square-sectioned top edge



Ford Madox Brown (1821-93), “Jesus Washing Peter’s Feet,” 1852-56, frame 147.5x164x9.8cm, Tate, N01394. The central reed-and-roundel section sets half-round reeds against a square-sectioned top edge and frieze. (Below) A corner detail shows square motifs designed to contrast with the inset roundels.



and frieze, just as square motifs in the corners are contrasted with the inset roundels on the frieze. This geometric tension is continued in the canted back edge,

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with narrow ebonized reeds, and the canted and fluted sight edge. The frame is made from oak on a pine carcass and gilded directly on the oak with no intervening gesso layer.

**What design departures might be seen on some frames of this style?**

Most contemporary Victorian frames in the 1850s-60s were revival Régence, Louis XV, or Louis XVI styles, where the ornament was molded and applied “compo,” gilded to look like polished ormolu. Brown and Rossetti followed John Ruskin’s idea of truth to the material, so their frames were mainly carved from wood. Most radically, the oak grain was visible through the gilding. The frieze of the frame also met in a horizontal or vertical “butt” joint rather than a miter, in a conscious salute to an archaic “pre-raphaelite” style.

**What type of artwork would this frame most likely house?**

Brown and Rossetti used reed-and-roundel frames for their own work, which included landscapes, portraits, subject, and decorative paintings; this version of it is unique to Brown and only seems to have been used once, for this particular work. Over time, followers of the Pre-Raphaelites adopted or adapted the general style, and by the late nineteenth century it was being reproduced by dealers for almost any late Victorian painting.

**What furnishing/interior styles accompanied these frames in their time?**

Many of the original patrons of Brown’s and Rossetti’s works were newly rich entrepreneurs and industrialists who tended to build their houses in imposing Neo-Gothic, Renaissance, or Jacobean style; Pre-Raphaelite paintings often hung on dark paneling or leatherwork or, later on, William Morris wallpaper. Oak

or painted furniture was acquired from Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., or from William Burges, and Japanese porcelain and lacquerware were popular accessories from the early 1850s.

**Additional comments and/or anecdotes.**

Because this frame has a severely linear structure, it is easy to overlook how rich it is in its combination of different surfaces, ornaments, and textures. There are three different roundels carved on the main reeded moulding, and two variants of what Rossetti called “chefs-square” in the corners; the frieze has three more different roundels let into the lateral sides, and the title is painted on the bottom rail (titles, poems, and quotations were a feature of Pre-Raphaelite frames). The structure is enhanced and given definition by the canted band of ebonized and gold-stripped reeds at the back edge. All in all, it acts as a proclamation of an alternate framing idiom to the tired revivalist styles populating the Royal Academy and could be summed up in Holman Hunt’s phrase for one of his own frame designs: in contrast to stock commercial frames, it uses a vocabulary appropriate to the subject, of “semi-barbaric splendor.” **PFM**

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**Lynn Roberts** is a picture frame historian. She read for an M.Phil in the history of art at the Courtauld Institute of Art, producing a dissertation on Victorian picture frames, and has been associated with Paul Mitchell, Ltd., since 1988. She has written numerous articles, catalogue entries, and essays on antique picture frames, and, with Paul Mitchell, co-authored “A History of European Picture Frames” and “Frameworks” (both 1996). She worked for nine years on the Frame section of the National Portrait Gallery website (London), and now works occasionally for the National Gallery. Since 2012 she has run the online magazine, The Frame Blog (<http://theframeblog.wordpress.com>).

