

LEIGHTON THE OUTSIDER



Although socially charming and an adept public speaker, Leighton was essentially a very private person. Surprisingly little is known about his personal life. However, it is clear that he stood apart from many of his contemporaries. There was something of the 'outsider' about him.

Leighton's early years living and studying abroad resulted in his 'Britishness' being questioned as he began to establish himself in London. His first biographer, Emilie Barrington, wrote in 1906:

'... his rapid utterance, his picturesque gesture, his very appearance were not emphatically English. Certain Englishmen who knew Leighton felt out of sympathy with him for this reason and had difficulty in recognising him as one of themselves'.

Barrington goes on to mention more troubling Victorian attitudes when she wrote that the famous nineteenth-century author and cartoonist George Du Maurier was:

'... convinced that in Leighton existed indications of foreign or Jewish blood but was quite unable to discover any facts in support of this theory and was troubled on this point'.

There is no evidence that Leighton was a practicing Christian or that he held any particular religious convictions. His sister Augusta was clear in her scepticism:

"I could never satisfy myself of the truth of Christianity...the Bible would still have no more effect upon me than it were an old wife's fable!"

Leighton remained a life-long bachelor. Theories that he had an illegitimate child by Lilly Mason, one of his models or that he may have been homosexual continue to be discussed and debated.

He left no diaries and his letters are telling in their lack of references to his personal circumstances. During his lifetime the press speculated about his relationship with Dorothy Dene, his last model and muse, but definite evidence has yet to come to light that allows us to be clear about his sexuality.