

**Sunnycroft, Wellington Shropshire/Biblical illustrator  
Gustave Dore**



**Sunnycroft**, a Victorian town house in Wellington, Shropshire is one of the smaller National Trust properties that can tend to be overlooked in favour of bigger neighbours in the region such as Dudmaston and Attingham Park. Yet among its many artworks it contains four works of particular interest because of their religious nature, with intriguing background stories.



The trip from Sedgley takes around 45 minutes - it's quite easy to miss the entrance along Holyhead Road (I did!) as the sign isn't that prominent. The property is well hidden from the road, approached by an impressive colonnade (locally known as Wellingtonia Avenue) of mature trees. Our intention was merely to go on a gentle lunchtime outing on a lovely sunny day at the start of September, but immediately on entering the property I was captivated by a very imposing painting in the hallway.



'Suffer the Little Children' by Simon de Vos

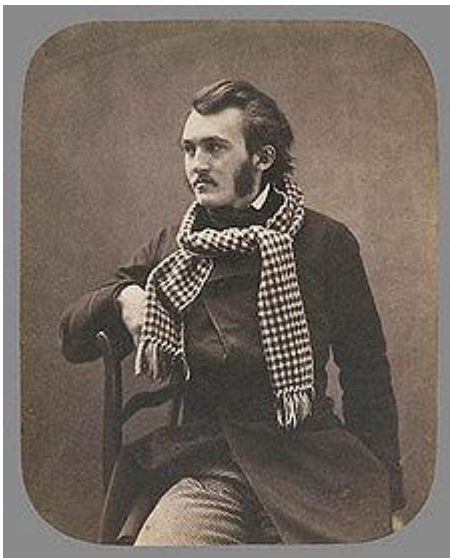
Having recently looked into the panel on the same theme on the south wall of 'All Saints', I actually (smugly!) guessed the name of the painting before asking a volunteer guide, who looked it up and confirmed it was: **'Suffer the little children'** (Latin title: 'Sinite Parvulos').

The work is by **Simon de Vos** who was, according to Wikipedia 'a Flemish Baroque painter of genre and cabinet pictures' who lived in Antwerp 1603-76. The Bible passage on which it's based is Mark 10:14-16: "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them." The theme is a popular one with artists - in fact another famous painter, **Van**

**Dyck**, also of the Flemish School and a contemporary of de Vos - also painted it.



**Ecce Homo by Gustav Dore in the Library of Congress**



**Gustave Dore.** Dore was a prolific engraver of Biblical - often apocalyptic - scenes and an illustrator of Bibles.

In the billiard room, a later extension to the property, hang three striking lithographs on Biblical themes: 'The Last Judgement'; 'Daniel in the Lion's Den' and 'Ecce Homo'. There was little information on the artist(s) or when they were acquired so I contacted the Trust to see if they could assist me.

The Daniel lithograph is captioned 'after Gustave Dore'. A label tells us it was 'entered according to act of Congress by William T Blodgell in the year 1875 in the office of the Library of Congress Washington'. The engraver's name is given as N Bourne.

The Library of Congress is the largest library in the world and holds many artworks including some of Dore's. I'm speculating, but possibly Bourne was asked to create a lithographic engraving from Dore's original artwork, and copies (lithographs) would be made and sold - and that is what these works at Sunnycroft are. Quite how the works came to Sunnycroft is unknown - possibly one of the owners acquired them in the US or the prints were exported and sold in England.

Apart from the religious-themed works there are many portraits on the walls of Sunnycroft that can be found on the BBC Sunnycroft [artworks site](#).



Former owners: Mary Jane Slaney; John Vernon Thomas Lander

The house had five owners before the Trust acquired it. It was built in 1880 by **John George Wackrill** who owned the Shropshire Brewery. The house

was greatly extended by **Mary Jane Slaney** who acquired it in 1894 and added the billiard room and a new wing in 1899. **John Vernon Thomas Lander** bought it in 1912, his son **Thomas Offley Lander** acquired the house on his father's death in 1943 and his daughter **Joan Margaret Lander** inherited it in 1973. She lived there until her death in 1997. Joan was a wartime nurse and attended the Royal School of Needlework after the war.



Joan Lander worked on the gold embroidery on the Queen's Coronation gown

She was chosen as one of 12 women to embroider the gold thread work on Queen Elizabeth's Coronation gown. There's a display of her work in one room and a film about her work on the Queen's Coronation gown in another. Sunnycroft opened to visitors in 1999.



**The rose garden and greenhouse**



The verandah and tea room





### **The croquet lawn**

Outside there are some charming formal gardens and a large area of wild garden that would have been a paradise for the children of the house to play in. There's a lovely tea room that alas was rather too busy when we were there, so we went elsewhere to eat - an additional reason was that the cost is quite high compared with other places locally. That's not unusual for the Trust and of course the higher prices reflect the need to provide revenue for the upkeep of their properties. If you're not a Trust member the entrance fee is, in our opinion, quite high: £6.50 per person (nearby Attingham Park is £9.00 but it is a huge estate with a deer park, walled garden etc).

However overall it was a very pleasant visit and highly recommended.

**Martin and Magda Jones, September 2012**

**[Please let us know about any errors](#)**

**[More about the owners of Sunnycroft](#)**

Please note: The house is located in Holyhead Road, Wellington, Shropshire. It's open in spring and summer, from Friday to Monday. In the winter entry is by guided tour only. Check the official site: **[Sunnycroft](#)**