

Artists in Newcastle upon Tyne 1820 – 1900

A booklet on local artists for Tyne and Wear County Council Museums. Written while working at the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle in the early 1980's

At the beginning of the 19th century Newcastle upon Tyne was established as a centre of some artistic merit predominantly in the field of book illustration and printing from the workshop of *Thomas Bewick*. The Literary and Philosophical Society was founded in 1793 and the Society of Antiquaries in 1813.

The Industrial Revolution increased Newcastle's population and its wealth through the shipping, coal and iron industries; railways followed and engineering was developed. Visually the city underwent a change from a medieval town to one of remarkable modern elegance through the partnership of John Dobson and Richard Grainger in the 1820s.

On the 29th July 1822, a group of amateurs and professional artists met at the studio of Thomas Miles Richardson, Senior at 4 Brunswick Place, Newcastle upon Tyne. In common with many groups of artists throughout the provinces they felt that an annual art exhibition should be held in the city and so formed *The Northumberland Institution For The Promotion Of The Fine Arts*.

In September of that year the first exhibition was held in a small gallery in Brunswick Place. The entrance fee was a shilling, season tickets five shillings and the catalogue sixpence. Richardson was Treasurer and amongst the members of the Committee we find such well known names as Thomas and Robert Bewick, Joseph Crawhall, John Dobson, Henry Perlee Parker and James Ramsay.

Exhibitions were held annually up to and including 1827. In 1825, the staircase was altered. According to the Tyne Mercury "the staircase no longer rises through the middle of the floor ... (and) the light is also considerably improved". Another notable feature of the 1825 exhibition was the display of T.M. Richardson's large canvas illustrating a scene from Walter Scott's *Marmion* for which a descriptive pamphlet was available.

Richardson and Henry Perlee Parker decided to speculate further. They bought a plot of land on Blakett Street from Richard Grainger for £113.10s. and commissioned John Dobson to design a building suitable not only for the display of paintings but one which could be adapted to the holding of public meetings and concerts. Unknown to them, however, Grainger built a larger room nearby and called it the "Music Hall" and by doing so deprived Richardson and Perlee Parker of

valuable revenue. Until its demolition in the 1960s the gallery stood almost opposite the south east corner of Eldon Square, built "ornamental polished stone front" contrasting with the other brick built buildings in the street. Architecturally it was an unusual design, ambitious and classical, with two large Corinthian columns and recessed central bays on the first storey.

The name of the Institution was changed to the more imposing title of *Northern Academy of Arts* bringing it into line with the academies of London and Edinburgh. The first of the new series of exhibitions was held in June 1828 and the catalogue price was increased to one shilling; sculpture and drawings were now included and among the important exhibitors were John Linnell, Francis Danby and J.M.W. Turner. The elegance of the design and decor was noted at the time and we learn from the catalogue that there was a border of red cloth designed as a protective barrier between the public and the paintings.

Thomas Oliver's *New Picture of Newcastle upon Tyne*, ("A luminous guide to the stranger") of 1831, notes that "the interior of the building formed two octagonal apartments, by columns that can be removed at pleasure and also contains a room at each side of the entrance."

In the autumn of 1828 the wealthy and aristocratic patrons of the area organised an Old Masters exhibition in the Academy providing examples from their own collections. This was not a popular move with the professional artists who were annoyed at missing an opportunity to have contemporary work on sale. However, such an exhibition was an invaluable experience for any young artists anxious to further their study by copying major works of art.

Although antagonism towards the management of the Academy existed, and occasionally manifested itself in bitter exchanges of letters in the local press, this did not lessen the energies of T.M. Richardson, Senior, who was involved in late 1830 in the foundation and organisation of the *Northern Society of Painters in Watercolour*. This society held its first exhibition the next year. The Northern Academy, however, was taken over by shareholders in 1831, surviving for only a further eight years. After its demise Richardson and Parker, by now no longer on good terms, were obliged to pay off the large mortgage.

In 1844 a Government School of Design was set up in Newcastle. The master appointed was *William Bell Scott* (1811-1890) a Scottish artist of some merit most notable for his close friendship with the Pre-Raphaelite circle, in particular Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His reminiscences in a two volume autobiography provide us with an interesting description of Newcastle in the early 1840s: "the old Northumbrian town was then a mixture of almost medieval tenements with the newest splendidly

built streets. . . this contrast of the old and new side by side was intensely interesting. There was the old market in the open air amid rain and mud, and a canvas booth and covered wagons. . and here the new town. . . and the long arcades of iron and glass with walks appropriated to all classes of goods."

The new School encountered many problems, including the antagonism of Richardson. Senior who felt his livelihood and that of other drawing masters was being threatened.

However, the scheme began to improve and develop and many notable local artists studied at the Government School including *Henry Hetherington Emmerson, John Surtees, Charles Napier Hemy, and Ralph Hedley.*

Thomas Miles Richardson, Senior (1784-1848)

Thomas Miles Richardson was born on Ballast Hills in the parish of All Saints, Newcastle upon Tyne, in 1784. The primary force in the artistic development of early 19th century Newcastle he is also notable as the father of the Richardson family of painters. His sons Thomas Miles Junior, Henry Burdon, Edward, Charles, George and John Isaac all became professional painters. Apprenticed to a cabinet maker he continued in that trade until 1806 when, on his father's death, he took over his job at St. Andrew's Free School and began to give private drawing lessons.

Supposedly inspired by seeing a drawing by David Cox whilst on a recuperative holiday in London, Richardson returned to Newcastle and in 1815 took up painting professionally.

His first success came in 1814 when his *View of the Old Fish Market, Newcastle upon Tyne* was exhibited at the Royal Academy and his reputation widened. Throughout the 1820s Richardson was involved with the foundation of various art academies in the City. To attract visitors to the Northern Academy in Blckett Street and away from Grainger's rival Music Hall, Richardson painted a series of large dramatic dioramas in 1830.

Richardson gained official recognition in 1833 when the Corporation of Newcastle upon Tyne purchased for the sum of 50 gns. his very large landscape view of *Newcastle from Gateshead Fell*. In 1835 the view of *The Side, Newcastle, procession of The High Sheriff of Northumberland Going to Meet the Judges* was also purchased by the Corporation and is now in the Mansion House, Newcastle.

Richardson exhibited in London at the Royal Academy and the British Institution throughout his career but lived and worked in Newcastle until his death in 1848.

Henry Perlee Parker (1795-1873)

An important Tyneside artist, Perlee Parker was, however, born in Devonport in 1795. About 1808/9 he gave up working as a tailor and coachmaker and began painting portraits. In 1814 he married and moved to Plymouth and set up as a portrait painter. Although his work was admired he was not able to make a living from his sales and decided to move North to stay with his aunt in Sunderland. Later his wife joined him and after visiting Newcastle they took "such a liking to that town he resolved to try his fortune there"; They moved to Newcastle in 1815 with five pounds between them, and, for four shillings a week, found lodgings in a "two-pair-of-stairs backroom".

His success as a portrait painter grew; he made sufficient money "to take respectable apartments in the most public street in the town" - Pilgrim Street. In 1816 he also took on pupils and began to move in the artistic circles of the town, most significantly, making the acquaintance of Thomas Miles Richardson, Senior and Thomas Bewick. Moreover, the next year, Parker exhibited at the Royal Academy for the first time.

He became generally well known for his painting of *The Eccentric Characters of Newcastle upon Tyne* showing such figures as Judy Dowling and Blind Willie in their lair, the Hell's Kitchen. The engravings of this picture proved immensely popular but, although copies exist, the original painting remains to be traced. In 1824 he became Secretary to the Northumberland Institution and moved his studio to Brunswick Place.

His subject matter expanded from notable local events, such as *The Opening of the Grainger Market*, and portraits to smuggling scenes and he continued to show paintings in major London exhibitions. Smuggling scenes became his trademark, and his habit of wearing smugglers costumes to fancy dress balls earned him the nickname "Smuggler" Parker.

In 1828 he became involved with Richardson in the founding of the Northern Academy of Arts. Although a major figure in the Newcastle art establishment in 1841 he accepted the post of drawing master at Wesley College, Sheffield. Lack of promotion in later years led him to move on to London, and his son Raphael Hyde Parker took over the post.

About this period in London we have little or no information; Henry Perlee Parker died penniless in 1873.

John Wilson Carmichael (1800-1868)

John Wilson Carmichael was born in 1800 off Tyne Street in the East End of Newcastle. He was apprenticed as a ship's carpenter to the firm of Farrington & Bros, where his employers encouraged his interest in drawing and painting: Joseph Farrington is supposed not only to have given Carmichael his first box of watercolours but later to have secured him commissions from Trinity House and the Corporation of Newcastle.

His apprenticeship complete Carmichael made painting his profession and set up a studio near the Quayside on New (now City) Road, and began to give drawing lessons and to paint miniatures. A story is often cited that shortly after this, on the day he married Mary Sweet, he was told his studio had burned down. He was accredited with the optimistic response: "Well, we can begin all over again!"

Self taught, he later acknowledged the importance of the exhibitions of the Northumberland Institution and the Northern Academy to his studies and first exhibited at the Northumberland Institution himself in 1825, becoming a friend of T.M. Richardson Senior. By 1828, he, like Richardson, had moved his studio to Blackett Street.

From 1835 Carmichael exhibited in London, too, in an attempt to reach a wider public. Subjects in which he specialised were almost exclusively ship portraits and marine views.

By 1846 he was sufficiently encouraged by his exhibition successes to move to London where he established his reputation and gained many wealthy and influential patrons. The popularity of his historic sea pieces, most notably the *Heroic Exploit of Lord Collingwood at the Battle of Trafalgar* (Trinity House, Newcastle upon Tyne), led to the following inclusion in the Illustrated London News, 2nd June 1855, (during the Crimean War): "We have the satisfaction to announce that on Saturday last Mr. J.W. Carmichael, celebrated marine painter, formerly of Newcastle upon Tyne, sailed for the Baltic to sketch the Events of the War for the "ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS".

His smaller sea pieces were very popular, too, and sold well. William Bell Scott quotes his explanation that "ordinary people only buy what they saw and enjoyed every day, or wanted to enjoy, fresh sea, midday with a blue streak in the sky".

Seascapes were by no means Carmichael's only interest. Earlier works whilst in Newcastle had included paintings of buildings by John Dobson, such as *Beaufront Castle*, and Carmichael also collaborated with the architect on some watercolour views of his buildings. Another major undertaking was a series of drawings of the

Tyne to be engraved and a series of landscapes to be published in a book entitled *Views on the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway*, published in 1839. However, the titles of the two books Carmichael wrote himself. *The Art of Marine Painting in Watercolours* (1859) *The Art of Marine Painting in Oil Colours* (1864) indicate where his greatest enthusiasm lay.

Due to the death of his son in 1862 and a decline in his own health, Carmichael moved to Scarborough and continued to paint there until 1865. He died in 1868 and was buried in Scarborough.

Charles Napier Hemy (1841-1917)

Charles Napier Hemy was the eldest son of Henri F. Hemy the Newcastle composer and music teacher. His two younger brothers also became professional painters, Bernard Benedict Hemy (circa 1855-1913) and Thomas Maria Madewaska Hemy (1852-1937).

Before his success as a professional painter (he later became a Royal Academician and a member of the Royal Watercolour Society) Charles Napier Hemy went through many remarkable changes of career.

Before the age of eleven Hemy studied art at the Newcastle Government School of Art under William Bell Scott. Aged eleven he emigrated with his parents to Australia on the passenger ship *Madawaska*, (his brother Thomas was born on board which explains one of his curious Christian names). The emigration was a brief one and Hemy returned to Durham in the mid 1850s. Deciding to enter the priesthood he studied at Usher College, Co. Durham but, perhaps inspired by a long ocean voyage at an impressionable age, he became an apprentice on a collier brig. This lasted until he was nineteen when he reverted to the idea of becoming a priest. He spent three years with a Dominican order in Newcastle and one in Lyons, France. Hemy continued to draw and paint throughout this period and eventually renounced the cloth for a professional painting career.

He studied art under Baron Leys in Antwerp but settled in London in 1870. In the early 1880s he moved to Falmouth where he lived until his death in 1917. Hemy's work is noted for its accuracy: both in his knowledge of the sea and its many moods and of the technical details of shipping. He achieved this high standard of veracity through his inventive working methods. At first he worked from a seine-boat, later graduating to a well-built and sumptuously furnished yacht called the *Vandermeer*. This floating studio enabled him to follow boats out sea and made on-the-spot studies of them.

He exhibited extensively in London, starting at the Royal Academy in 1863. The paintings of this early period, often coastal scenes, show the influence of both the Pre-Raphaelite painters and developments in photography in the clear and minute attention paid to detail. A fine early example is *Among the Shingles at Clovelly*. Later, Hemy's technique became much broader and more flamboyant in keeping with the change of emphasis in subject matter from the beach to the open sea. *Through Sea and Air* is a splendid example of his later work.

Ralph Hedley (1848-1913)

Born at Richmond, North Yorkshire, on the last day of 1848

Hedley came to Newcastle at an early age and became apprenticed to Tweedy the woodcarver in Grainger Street. He also studied at the Government School of Art and the evening classes in the Life School under *William Bell Scott*.

At the end of his apprenticeship he chose painting as his career and, although little known outside of this area, pursued it very successfully.

He exhibited for many years at the Royal Academy and became a member of the Royal Society of British Artists, Vice-President of South Shields Art Club and in 1895, president of the Bewick Club in Newcastle. In 1869 he founded a firm of wood and stone carvers which was carried on by his sons Roger and Frederick well into this century.

Hedley is one of the best loved of the Tyneside artists because of the obvious affection with which he recorded the daily lives of the people in the area in the last years of the 19th century, concentrating mostly on the lives of working people in the town and country, as in *Paddy's Clothes Market*, *Sandgate*. His paintings provide us with a very valuable record of the social history of his day with an added touch of humour especially in the studies of children, such as *The Carrier's Cart*. Not only does he record now-vanished scenes just within living memory but some of the people who modelled for the children in his paintings can still remember him vividly when he worked in his New Bridge Street studio.

Barras Bridge

Now a busy city road, lying between the major transport development of the 1970s in Newcastle, the Central Motorway East and the Haymarket Metro Station, who could guess Barras Bridge was ever such a tranquil and leafy spot as Richardson has painted?

The name Barras is possibly derived from the barrows or burial places, of the leprosy victims of the hospital of St. Mary Magdalen founded by Henry I which used to stand on this site. Once the Sandeford Dene flowed through this area and the Barras Bridge crossed it. Descriptions of the spot stress the number of trees that grew round about. A flour mill added to the rural atmosphere and on the spot where the old Grand Hotel building now stands was a grain store. As we might imagine a hay market was also held just down the road.

It is the picturesque atmosphere, leafy and peaceful, that Richardson has captured.

Although the painting is not dated we know it can not have been painted later than 1835 when the Dene was filled up, and the Mill, its pond and the bridge all disappeared.

Excavations for the Railway in Newcastle upon Tyne

During the early years of railway development in England the river Tyne caused grave engineering problems. Crossing the river at Newcastle the High Level seemed to present such difficulties that at one time the authorities considered leaving the city out of the main railway route and having the Edinburgh to London line cross the river somewhere in the vicinity of Bill Point. However, the bridge designed by Robert Stephenson, consisting of six cast iron arches supported on solid masonry piers and which became known as the High Level, solved the problem.

The first pile for the foundation of the bridge was driven on 1st October 1846. It is the excavation work that was carried out at the time that Richardson has illustrated in this picture painted very late in his life. The painting was once owned by Robert Stephenson.

A fascinating example of an early industrial landscape it is a splendid contrast to the tranquil view of another much altered part of the city, *Barras Bridge*, seen in another painting by Richardson.

The Opening of the Grainger Market, 1835

This painting is a commemoration of the celebration banquet held on the afternoon of 22nd October 1835 to mark the opening of the covered market designed by John Dobson and built by Richard Grainger after whom it was named.

Nearly two thousand people attended the banquet, including the Mayor, Dobson, Grainger, Clayton and other local dignitaries. Charges varied according to position. Those nearest the elevated table for V.I.P.'s. paid five shillings and those furthest away two shillings, although a black market flourished. Ladies were relegated to

pecially constructed galleries, and it is from their vantage point that we look down upon the scene.

One of the many speakers is reported to have said that there has been nothing like since the feast of Belshazzar. How ironic that in the Laing Art Gallery we can also see a painting of that biblical subject by the Haydon Bridge born artist *John Martin* (1789-1851). Perhaps Perlee Parker had this design in mind when he produced his own secular version.

Pitmen Playing Quoits, 1840

'Odds - smash I'll bet a quart Pze first,
nd by mitting prove it.
The boy declares the games unjust.
He saw wor Geordy move it'.

A fascinating social record of life in the Industrial Revolutions subject not very often chosen by artists. Here we see how pitmen dressed, the tools with which they worked, the Davy lamps used to protect their lives underground and how they relaxed between shifts.

The sombre light indicates the exhausting hours worked and provides Perlee Parker with opportunity for painting other light sources such as the lamp and candle. Here is a near contemporary description of such miners "the men, with their sooty and grimed faces, glancing about their sparkling eyes.while the talking motion of their red lips disclosed rows of ivory."