

Abel Hold (1815-1896)

Brief biography

Abel Hold was born in Alverthorpe, Wakefield, one of 9 children of Quakers Thomas and Mary Hold. He trained as a house painter, whilst also painting backdrops for theatres and travelling showmen, before finally became an artist.

In 1841 he married Sarah Miller of Barnsley and with her had 9 children, though tragically lost 2 daughters in infancy. Around 1852, he moved his family from Church Street, Barnsley to Brook House in Cawthorne village a few miles away.

Here Walter Spencer-Stanhope of Cannon Hall became his lifelong patron after the vicar, Charles Spencer Stanhope, recommended him. Hold was constantly in financial difficulties and in 1869 he was declared bankrupt but was discharged in 1870. When he was short of money, he sent a portrait of a starving man to Walter and duly received funds.

His oil paintings show rural landscapes, wild animals and still life studies of game. They are typical of a country artist patronised by a local country squire. Between 1849 and 1871, he regularly exhibited at the Royal Academy, London. Other paintings were shown in Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Wakefield.

They were bought by many local and national dignitaries and are occasionally sold at auction. Some can be seen at the Cawthorne Jubilee Museum and at Cannon Hall, Cawthorne. Three of his beautiful portraits of local characters are at the Cooper Gallery, Barnsley.

His contemporaries included Walter's brother, John Roddam Spencer-Stanhope, a well-known Pre-Raphaelite painter and J.F. Herring, the renowned 19th century horse painter. Herring commented on Hold's work in a letter to his friend and patron Charles Spencer Stanhope. Three of Hold's children became artists in their own right, Thomas, Benjamin and Florence.

Abel Hold died in Cawthorne on 8th May 1896 and was buried in Cawthorne churchyard. His grave seems to have been gradually forgotten until local people campaigned to have a memorial erected there in 1996.