

John Wood Shortridge (1852-1921)

Brief biography

Born on Mount Terrace, Sackville Street, John Wood painted all his life. This is the first time his work has been exhibited anywhere and we are indebted to his family in New Zealand for the loan of the works in the exhibition.

John Wood's grandfather was John Shortridge, born in Cumberland. He built the Wicker arches in Sheffield and was a Victorian industrialist on a grand scale.

His son Richard, the father of John Wood came to Barnsley to start the gunpowder works at Worsborough, having been given permission to do so by John Stanhope, the father of John Roddam Spencer Stanhope. The gunpowder firm was known as Shortridge and Wright.

John Wood's parents died in 1865 and 1867 and his grandfather apprenticed, in about 1868, the young John Wood to Piggot and Farrar on Summer Lane where he was to be taught engineering and fitting skills. John Wood ran away to sea in the company of Edward Wainwright and Walter Dunstan soon after.

So began John Wood's life time odyssey. Arriving in Nova Scotia, his travels over the next few years took him to East coast America, India, Burma and throughout Europe.

In about 1880 he settled on the island of Capri buying an old fort which later formed part of Gracie Field's estate on the island. He married a local girl Carmela Esposito and for the next few years lived on Capri and Massa Lubrense on the mainland. In 1888 he met and befriended the Victorian novelist George Gissing who was born in Wakefield and it is likely that their families knew each other.

By 1897, John Wood and his growing family were living near Falmouth from whence they moved to the Isle of Man and then Tideswell.

The family split when John Wood left for New Zealand with five of the children leaving two and his wife Carmela in Sheffield. Carmela rejoined her family only after John Wood's death in 1921.

John Wood lived first in Auckland and then the Bay of Islands. He was never far from water. Part of his land was bought subsequently by the noted Austrian artist F. Hundertwasser.

The one constant in John Wood's life was painting. Emeritus Professor Pierre Coustillas, former editor of the Gissing Journal said in 1999 about John Wood :
"he remained to the end first and foremost an artist."

Copyright Barnsley Art on Your Doorstep 2014