

William James Neatby (1860-1910)

Brief biography

Born on 24th May 1860 at 6 Wellington Street, William is now perhaps best known for his ceramic designs in the meat hall of Harrods store in London.

His father Samuel was a clerk in the family timber merchant's business on Wellington Street. The family business was not for William and he became an assistant to an architect, but it is not certain where. The family later moved to Hopwood Street.

In 1881, he married Emily Arnold of Prospect Street, Barnsley and soon after they moved to the Whitby area.

Changing direction, in 1884 he went to work for Burmantofts Potteries in Leeds designing decorative, architectural pieces of ceramics and also designing their catalogues. This was a very successful period of his life.

The first time he describes himself as an artist is in his wedding certificate on his second marriage to Jane Isabella Dempster, Emily having died in 1885.

London beckoned and in 1890 William went to work for Doulton and Co. He worked on public and private commissions for the company including relief panels for the New Physical Observatory at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, the Winter Gardens Blackpool, and the Everard Building, Bristol.

In 1901 William left Doulton to broaden his experience but still acted as an independent designer for Doulton and Co. He joined forces with E. Hollyer Evans to form the firm Neatby, Evans and Co. They were involved in the design of stained glass, textiles, furniture, metalwork and anything related to interior decoration, including wallpaper for Jeffrey and Co.

As an artist, which Neatby considered himself to be, he executed mural work and in particular book illustration mainly for Hodder and Stoughton. He worked with the Norwich based architect George Skipper (1856-1948) on a number of mural designs.

By 1906 he was working from a studio at 56 Glebe Place, Chelsea and then from Wentworth Studios in Chelsea. However his home was near High Wycombe and it is here that he is buried, after suffering a heart attack in April 1910.

The architect Ernest Runz, said in his obituary :

“He was a true artist, and a man of fine character, and he pursued his art with a direct and single purpose”.

Extracted from a longer article written for this project by Dr. Alastair Scott Anderson. Our thanks go to him for his contribution to the Hidden Art of Barnsley Project.

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