

John Spence Ingall (1850–1936) – 133  
Linen Designer, Traveller, Staithes Group Artist



Untitled watercolour: Clouds on a rocky  
fell-top by John Spence Ingall © Pannett  
Art Gallery, Whitby

JOHN SPENCE INGALL was a Barnsley-born artist and a founder member of the Staithes group of artists, who were based in the fishing village near Whitby on the North Yorkshire coast, but life started out very differently for him. He was born on 28th January 1850 to John and Elizabeth Ingall. His parents had moved to Barnsley with their two older children, Elizabeth and Henry, to run a herbalist and grocery shop at Market Street, Barnsley.



18 and 20 Market Street, Barnsley  
Demolished for redevelopment in 1962  
(The herbalist shop is on the right)  
© Tasker Trust

#### THE BARNSELEY BUSINESS

What was it like running a small shop in Barnsley in the middle of the 19th century? John Ingall's customers might have bought his herbs to use in food or possibly more likely bought herbal medicines or the herbs needed for traditional folk cures for a variety of illnesses. This was a hundred years before the birth of the National Health Service and doctors had to be paid. Herbs as medicine have been used for thousands of years, illustrated in books such as Culpeper's *Complete Herbal* of 1653. In 1849 when John Ingall was running his shop, John Boot, an original member of the National Association of Medical Herbalists and founder of Boots the Chemist, began selling his mother's herbal remedies in Nottingham. John Ingall became an agent for Dr Coffin who had set up the Friendly Botanic Society of Great Britain. Dr Coffin promoted self-medication using his recommended herbs.

Nationally it was a time of social and economic upheaval. Regular trade slumps, for example in 1839 and 1842, meant that people were experiencing a 'boom and bust' economy even then. Barnsley's main industry was linen weaving, with many weavers living in dire poverty. Could John Ingall's potential customers afford to buy his products? One response to the problems in Barnsley was for workers to become very active in the Chartist movement for electoral reform. The active agitation meant that the Riot Act was read in Barnsley several times, for example in August 1839 when shopkeepers had been threatened. Although the situation had calmed a few years later, was the shop at risk of

damage in any agitation? By 1839 all Barnsley Chartist meetings began with an index to exclusive trading. This was, in effect, a boycott of specific civic leaders and tradesmen who had the vote and did not support the Chartist Movement. Some small shopkeepers and businessmen were active Chartists. Did John Ingall support the Chartists or was he on the list? Surely it would have been very difficult to continue running a small shop without at least giving tacit support. Whatever the situation, running a shop in Barnsley had its problems.

#### THE INGALL FAMILY

The Ingall family's roots were in Sheffield and Spence Ingall's grandfather George Ingall worked there as a silver plater in the extensive metal industry. George married Hannah Oldale in 1799 at their local church which later became Sheffield Cathedral. Together they had 12 surviving children and Spence Ingall's father, John, was the eleventh of them. In 1839 he married Elizabeth, daughter of Henry Spence, a caster and his wife Elizabeth. Henry was employed pouring the molten metal from the Sheffield furnaces into moulds. Sometime after 1843, John Ingall moved his wife and two children to Barnsley to run the herbalist shop. John died in 1853 at the early age of 36. His death certificate shows that he had suffered from liver disease, and possibly a stroke causing partial paralysis, for about seven years. John had been employed as a clerk in Sheffield. Perhaps his illness is what prompted the move to Barnsley, to a business that his wife could help him to run. After his death, Elizabeth continued to run the business to support her three young children, Elizabeth, Henry and John Spence. At 18, Henry was a railway clerk before becoming a maker of bird cages, a career cut short by his early death aged 28 in 1871. This left Spence Ingall living with his mother in Market Street. His sister Elizabeth, who was 10 years older than him, began work as a milliner and, in 1861, married Matthew Allerton of Darfield. With him she had eight children. Matthew was a confectioner and the family lived in the streets near the Ingall shop until Matthew moved them to Doncaster in the 1880s. Here he eventually ran his own bakery at St James Street, near the railway station. Their daughters, Lily and Edith, did not move with them, staying in Barnsley.

In 1887, Spence Ingall's mother, Elizabeth, died and by 1891 he was living in Bow Street in the Old Town area of Barnsley. His two nieces lived with him, Edith working in a bootmaker's shop and Lily acting as housekeeper. The shop in Market Street continued to be run as a herbalist until it finally disappeared in the redevelopment of the 1960s. Unfortunately, Edith also died in early 1892 when only 18 years old. By this time Spence Ingall had built a house, the Willows, on Granville Street. He submitted it for sale at Lancaster's auction at the Royal Hotel Barnsley. When it did not achieve its reserve price of £550, he withdrew it and continued to live there. He was a respected business man and possibly at this time he began to invest his money to provide an income. Certainly by the time he died he had shares in the National Provincial Bank, Clarkson's Old Brewery, Barnsley, and the London North Eastern Railway Company.

In 1894 Lily married John Augustus Parkes in Doncaster. His father was from Sheffield and a sergeant in the Royal Artillery. The family moved with his postings, and John Augustus was born on Jersey in the Channel Islands. Lily and her husband returned to Barnsley and lived in Park Road, with Parkes working as a butcher's salesman. They had three children but only one, Frederick, survived to adulthood. They eventually moved to Doncaster and ran a butchery business on Balby Road. After Lily's mother died in 1908 her father, by this time retired, moved to live with Lily and her family.

#### INGALL'S EARLY CAREER

When he started to work, Spence Ingall became a printer compositor at Moxon's of Church Street, setting up type for printing. However he was soon to follow a more artistic path. He began classes at Barnsley School of Art where he met Henry Summers, who became a close friend. They went out walking and sketching together and both he and Summers later did some teaching at the School.

View through trees by John Spence Ingall  
© The Pannett Gallery, Whitby



In 1876 Spence Ingall gained a government third prize for design through the School of Art. The national first prize winner, Fred Bedford, also from Barnsley, created a design for a linen damask tablecloth. The school had opened a few years earlier and was housed in various temporary premises until it moved to the Public Hall in 1878. William Jones, father of the artist and Egyptologist E. Harold Jones, was head of the school, moving to Barnsley from South Kensington School of Art. The prize-giving was at York Street School with prizes presented by Walter Spencer Stanhope MP of Cannon Hall, Cawthorne. In his speech he expressed ideas that are still relevant today about the study of art: “in the first place it was ennobling and gave culture to the mind; in the second place it was a mode for expressing ideas; and in the next it was an acquirement that had its own commercial value.”

This last was certainly true for Spence Ingall who became a damask linen designer at Richardson’s factory. He also created illuminations and designs for the *Magazine of Art*. This was an illustrated monthly magazine for the visual arts published between 1878 and 1904. It contained exhibition reviews, articles about artists, poetry and many beautiful illustrations. Creating artwork for printing is a specialised technique, if it is to transfer successfully. His early job as a printer compositor may have given him an insight into this and helped him to adapt his work accordingly.

He painted mainly in watercolour, although an exhibition at the Pym’s Gallery in London showed an Ingall painting of corn stooks in a field using oil on board painted in 1895. As his mastery of watercolour progressed he submitted paintings to various large exhibitions in Yorkshire, often organised by the Yorkshire Union of Artists. This group was formed around 1880 and continued into the 1920s promoting the work of Yorkshire artists or those with





Mulgrave Woods, near Whitby by John Spence Ingall © Brockfield Hall

a strong Yorkshire connection. Their exhibition in September 1896 at the West Cliff Saloon, Whitby included a Spence Ingall painting. He also exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1897 and occasionally at the Walker Gallery Liverpool, Manchester City Art Gallery, and the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours. Later in life he seemed to lose interest in exhibiting and sold his paintings through private sales. He painted scenes in the north of England and spent a great deal of time visiting and painting in and around Staithes, a fishing village on the Yorkshire coast, just north of Whitby.

The railway system had reached Staithes in 1883, making access much easier. Spence Ingall was part of a group of artists drawn to that area of the North Yorkshire coast. Despite this he continued to live as part of the community in Barnsley and work as a damask linen designer.

In 1890 Barnsley Town Council nominated him as a member of the committee to manage the Barnsley Art School, by then based in the Harvey Institute on Eldon Street.

He was also a member of the Barnsley Friendly Lodge of Freemasons which was created in 1874. The Lodge is a social and charitable organisation with membership restricted to men. The aim of the Lodge is to uphold moral behaviour and to use members' talents to benefit the community. They undertook not to show unfair bias toward members and raised funds amongst

The King's Head Hotel, Market Hill  
© Barnsley MBC Archives and Local  
Studies



themselves for charitable use. Freemasonry would also provide a useful network of business contacts for Spence Ingall. He joined in May 1883, proposed by Thomas Braithwaite, master coach builder and Past Master of the Freemasons and seconded by John Sutton, a linen manufacturer. Members were business men of varied incomes but one was James Addy, Director of the Carlton Coal Company. He was the father of art collector Captain Roland Addy, who donated part of his collection to the Cooper Gallery, in Church Street, Barnsley. Other members were Charles Fox, a wine merchant and Captain Bruce Wentworth of Stainborough Castle. Meetings took place at the King's Head Hotel on Market Hill until 1885 when the Lodge bought a warehouse in Eastgate and converted it as their Masonic Hall. The King's Head is reputed to be where the Barnsley Chop originated in 1849. This is a thick piece of lamb cut across the whole loin, giving a butterfly shape. Perhaps it was enjoyed at the regular Masonic banquets.

Spence Ingall participated fully in Lodge activities, proposing new members and taking part in induction ceremonies for them. When his mother died in

Two Lakeland scenes in watercolour by  
John Spence Ingall  
© M. Wilkinson



1887 he received a letter of condolence. In 1891 he presented a cushion to the Lodge on behalf of Mrs Norfolk, Mrs Wood and Miss Allerton, one of his two nieces, Lily or Edith. Progressing through the positions in the Lodge, by 1896 at the annual installation banquet, he became Worshipful Master, the highest honour in a Lodge. Gradually his attendance at meeting became less frequent and in early 1909 he resigned, though this was long after he had moved permanently to the Staithes area.

During this period he is also thought to have studied in Paris at the Academie Julian. Rodolphe Julian's art school was an alternative to the official Ecole des Beaux Arts and broke with tradition by accepting women. He employed well known and respected tutors and attracted many foreign students. The school was open to new ideas in a supportive environment. Certainly at least 10 other members of the Staithes group studied there including Ingall's friends Fred Mayor, Fred Jackson and Henry Hopwood. He may have heard about the budding Staithes community in Paris. Alternatively, if he was visiting Staithes regularly from the 1880s, perhaps he went to Paris after speaking to ex-pupils that he met there.

#### INGALL'S LATER CAREER AND THE STAITHES GROUP

It was not until the turn of the 20th century that Ingall finally moved permanently to the Staithes area. In 1897, he exhibited a painting called 'The Stackgarth' at the Royal Academy and is listed as living in Hinderwell. It was around this time that the Staithes Group of artists was created, with Spence Ingall as one of its founder members. There were approximately 30 artists in the group coming from very different backgrounds, with very varied ages and many different styles. What they had in common was their determination to record nature and the working lives of the fishermen and other villagers in and around Staithes and Runswick on the North Yorkshire coast. Although some of the artists began painting here as early as the 1880s, the group flourished for a very brief period between 1894 and 1909. Few of the artists were from the area but were drawn there by the wonderful opportunities of painting from life, mostly out in the open air. Possibly they were a natural development of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement. The villages were small working communities dependent on fishing for their living and lacking the outside influence brought by tourists to the holiday towns further down the Yorkshire coast. The artists became a community within a community, enjoying a social life alongside their painting. Some lived in the area, buying or renting property whilst others came regularly sometimes several times a year.

The villagers were grateful for what they earned from renting accommodation to the artists and posing as models in their paintings. They were strict chapel folk and it is said that when Ernest Higgins Rigg painted on the beach on Sunday, he was pelted with fish heads until he had to stop. After this the artists respected the villagers' Sunday observance. Despite the dour temperament of the villagers, the artists were readily accepted into local life and arranged events such as cricket

matches and concerts. Some became more well-known such as Miss Laura Johnson, later to become Dame Laura Knight, and her future husband Harold Knight. The couple painted in the open air but also paid the Staithes folk to be allowed to paint them in their homes. Other couples were Robert and Isa Jobling from Newcastle and Fred and Hannah Mayor, both born in Yorkshire.

The artists formed the Staithes Art Club in 1901 with early exhibitions held in the Staithes Fishermen's Institute in August to catch the summer visitors. The first exhibition of the Staithes Art Club opened in the Institute on Monday 26th August 1901. The details of the opening seem confused and it was delayed by a furious storm until late afternoon. The entrance fee was 2d, and certainly from 1902 the proceeds were given to the Institute. A committee meeting decided the date of 1st August 1902 for the next exhibition and new members including Spence Ingall were elected. The 1903 exhibition was also held in Staithes but it was obvious that, as the number of exhibits increased, it was outgrowing the Institute. From 1904 the exhibition was held in galleries in Whitby and links were formed with the Yorkshire Union of Artists. The Staithes Art Club was part of their exhibition after 1904. There is no record of a 1907 exhibition. Around this time the Art Club began to decline. The Staithes and Whitby venues meant that the paintings submitted were restricted in size and number. The date, in August, clashed with national exhibitions. The pool of buyers in the area was very restricted. By contrast, the Yorkshire Union of Artists held their exhibition

Runswick Bay from near Bank Top



in the autumn and moved it around the larger venues and population centres such as Bradford, Leeds, Harrogate and York.

Harold and Laura Knight left Staithes around this time and gradually many of the others drifted away so that by the start of the First World War they no longer existed as a group. However along with a few others, Spence Ingall did stay in the area, buying a small terraced cottage at Runswick Bank Top. His particular friends were Fred Mayor, Fred Jackson, Henry Silkstone Hopwood and Rowland Henry Hill.

#### INGALL'S TRAVELS

Around the time that he moved to the area, Ingall suffered a serious illness and was advised to avoid the harsh British winters. As a result he began to winter in Tangier, mixing easily with the ambassadors, diplomats and ex-patriots living there. Ion Perdicaris, an American citizen of Greek descent and the acknowledged leader of the foreign community, was a friend. Fearing the loss of his fortune in the American civil war, Perdicaris left America, renouncing his citizenship. He led a colourful life and in 1871 he met Ellen, the wife of English telegraph engineer C. F. Varley. Eventually she was divorced and they set up home in Tangier. Perdicaris built a beautiful mansion outside the walls of Tangier called the Place of Nightingales. Although he admitted the need for an official foreign presence to keep order in Morocco, Perdicaris constantly publicised the abuses carried out by foreigners and campaigned for reform. He produced several books about the area and wrote letters to British newspapers. In 1904 he was kidnapped, with Ellen's son Cromwell, by Mulai Ahmed el Raisuli, a tribal chief and bandit, who demanded a ransom from the Sultan. This caused an



Tangiers Souk by John Spence Ingall  
© Brockfield Hall

international incident and President Theodore Roosevelt sent gunboats to the Mediterranean before the Sultan eventually paid the ransom and both men were freed. It is said that Spence Ingall had been invited to the dinner party where the kidnapping happened. He had a prior engagement and, luckily, was not able to attend. Soon after this Perdicaris left Morocco to settle in England and Spence Ingall continued to keep in touch with him there.

In Tangier, Spence Ingall painted scenes depicting the bright sunlight and vivid colours of North Africa. Friends from the Staithes Group regularly stayed with him there. Fred Mayor, Fred Jackson and Henry Silkstone Hopwood were guests. From 1902, Fred Mayor and his wife also lived for several years in Montreuil-sur-Mer and Staithes Group artists, such as Jackson and Hopwood, visited him there. Could he have extended an invitation to his friend Spence Ingall and is this where this untitled watercolour of a canalside scene was painted? Or perhaps Spence Ingall painted it in France whilst at the Academie Julian. Another friend, Rowland Hill, painted in Bruges. Could Spence Ingall have been there too?

We can trace some of Ingall's journeys back from Tangier as he appears on passenger lists in 1909 and 1910 returning to Liverpool via Gibraltar.

Ingall did travel further afield and in October 1914, he made a trip to Calcutta on the British India Steam Ship *Mombassa*. On June 13th 1915 we

Unknown Canalside Scene Watercolour  
by John Spence Ingall  
© M. Wilkinson



find him returning to London from Assam, India on the P&O ship *Nore*. He must have returned to Assam quite quickly as on July 15th 1916 he is again arriving in London from Assam on the P&O ship *Morea*. For this later return, he embarked on the ship in Calcutta and gives his returning address as a small hotel on Bloomsbury Street, London. I have not been able to establish why he travelled to Assam but there is a suggestion that he may have had a commission from Kaiser Wilhelm II to paint there. The commission is mentioned in a Pym's Gallery catalogue and in Spence Ingall's obituary in the *Whitby Gazette*. The obituary in the *Barnsley Chronicle* says that he received the Kaiser's commission to paint six watercolours of Tangier. Perhaps this is where the story came from or perhaps it is true and he received the second commission, for Assam, after providing good paintings of Tangier.

#### INGALL'S TECHNIQUE

Ingall painted almost exclusively in watercolour. He particularly liked to represent the different types of light from the harsh, vivid light of North Africa to the more muted light of northern Europe and the North Yorkshire moors

St Michael's Mount, Cornwall by John  
Spence Ingall  
© M. Wilkinson



and coast. He was willing to experiment with his techniques and some of his paintings are very impressionist in style whilst others have a much greater level of detail as in the canalside scene or Mulgrave Woods.

To achieve the softer outlines, as in the lakeside scenes, watercolour can be used on a wet paper. These paintings are on paper cut from a larger sheet and could be studies for another work. Using wet paper would allow Ingall to meld his colours, giving a much less distinct line.

#### INGALL IN THE STAITHES COMMUNITY

Despite all his travels Spence Ingall always returned to his little cottage at Runswick Bank Top. He got on well with the local fishing families and although they knew many Staithes artists by their first names, he was always Mr Ingall. He willingly offered technical advice to younger artists and enjoyed discussing art with friends, acquaintances and his fellows. This resulted in a constant stream of visitors to his cottage.

Roland Hill, another Staithes group artist, was a close friend and Ingall became godfather to his son Peter, born in 1909. In his excellent book about the Staithes group, Dr Peter Phillips quotes correspondence with Peter Hill saying Peter had “many memories of Spence Ingall; constant discussions on art with his father; the unusual smell of tobacco in Ingall’s house from his hand-rolled cigarettes (using material no doubt brought over from North Africa!); meals being cooked on the open fire of the sitting room and wonderful tales of far-off lands illustrated by simple watercolours of outstanding quality.”

Ingall died in Runswick on 6th May 1936 and is buried in Hinderswell cemetery. At his death, he left a substantial estate of £8670 5s 9d. His executor was his friend Timothy Patton, a local shopkeeper and businessman, trusted to ensure that his wishes were carried out. He left small bequests to Patton, to his housekeeper Jane Ann Calvert and to two other friends, William Henry Calvert and John A. Summerville. Both the Pattons and the Calverts were local Runswick families. Despite the fact that he had not lived in Barnsley for almost 40 years, Ingall did not forget his family. His brother, sister and his niece Edith had died but the remainder of his estate was divided between his sister Elizabeth’s children. His niece Lily was to have an income for life from the interest on his investments and there were small bequests for her son F. J. Parkes and her husband John Augustus Parkes. After Lily’s death the estate was to be divided between Lily’s son and her three brothers Herbert, Fred and Ernest Allerton. He even made provision for the sale of his little cottage with Miss E. Calvert of Runswick Bay to have first chance of buying it.

This photograph of Spence Ingall at his cottage gate was kindly supplied by Mrs Jean Eccleston, ex-postmistress at Staithes who received it from her friend Peter Hill, Spence Ingall’s godson



#### THE RESEARCHER’S IMPRESSION OF SPENCE INGALL

My research has given me a much fuller picture of John Spence Ingall. He was always willing to discuss art and to offer advice to other artists. He also had an

adventurous spirit and after his regular visits to Tangier was inspired to venture further afield to the Indian territory of Assam. He returned with a taste for the 'exotic' foreign foods that we take for granted today. My impression is of a gentle but sociable man who could mix easily with people at all levels of society. Although he became a businessman, his first love was his art. By making the break and moving to Staithes he was able to focus on his painting and on passing that love on to others.

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