

Thomas Liddall Armitage (1856–1924) and Edward Liddall Armitage (1887–1967) – Barnsley Artists 165

IN WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES can you call someone a ‘Barnsley’ artist? If defined by birth then neither Thomas nor his son Edward qualify: Thomas Liddall was born in Liverpool and Edward in London.

However, the *Barnsley Chronicle* of 8th January 1927 entitled an article about Edward, ‘A Barnsley Artist’ and it was this article which started the research on Thomas and Edward and led to some surprising discoveries and a decision that indeed both should be included in the Hidden Art project as Barnsley artists.

Edward Liddall Armitage was born in Kensington in London in 1887 to Thomas Liddall Armitage and his wife Kate Marshall. Edward’s baptism certificate describes Thomas’s occupation as an artist. Edward went on to become one of this country’s foremost stained glass artists with no apparent further connection to Barnsley. Why did the *Chronicle* describe him as a Barnsley artist?

Discoveries at St Peter the Apostle and St John the Baptist Church (St Peter’s), Doncaster Road, Barnsley designed by the architect Temple Moore and completed in 1911, link both Thomas and Edward artistically to the town. The *Chronicle* article of 1927 highlights Edward’s many achievements including his first great work, “a beautiful reredos painting” in St Peter’s church. After a two-year-long search this work has been found in its original home. It is thanks to the Parish priest and the congregation that the dots have been joined. Early information from St Peter’s was that the reredos referred to in the article was replaced in the 1960s. It had been sent to a church in Gainsborough and when that closed was last seen on eBay. The only record of it was a black and white photograph hanging at the back of the church. However the *Chronicle* article described a reredos painting and there was a sudden realisation that the large work hanging forlornly in a corner of the balcony, obstructed by furniture, could just be the painting. A comparison with the photograph confirmed it was. It was most likely that the painting which depicts St Peter had been removed as it had no meaning for the Gainsborough church. So the church had a painting which they knew nothing about and the Hidden Art team had information and no painting. Now with huge help from volunteers the painting has a history.

St Peter’s is also important in the story of Thomas. The front page of the 16th December 1911 edition of the *Barnsley Chronicle* has a drawing entitled: ‘View of the Chancel from the South-West corner of Nave, drawn expressly for the *Barnsley Chronicle*’ by T. Liddall Armitage. In the background is a reredos. The



outline shape is the same as the original one. If the painting was there for the opening of the church then Edward would have been aged 24 when the work was executed.

Thomas and Edward were descendants of John Armitage and his wife Elizabeth Liddall. John Armitage's son Thomas, baptised in 1819 at St Mary's church, was Thomas Liddall's father. The Armitage family were mainly wine and spirits merchants, but also grocers and butchers with premises in Shambles Street and there still exists an Armitage Yard off Shambles Street.

A *Barnsley Annual* describes Armitage Brothers as:

By supplying none but the best quality of goods, this firm does a large trade both in the town and country, the house is well known for the general excellence of its wines and spirits....orders entrusted to them are most carefully attended to, and, with a reputation such as that borne by this house, we have no fear in stating that they are leaders in their special lines.

Thomas Armitage, John's son and Thomas Liddall's father, went to Liverpool and there in 1845 married Mary Stubbs, born in 1819, daughter of Lewis Stubbs. Mary was one of nine children and her father Lewis was a merchant in Liverpool and a Freeman of the city.

Thomas and Mary had six children including Thomas Liddall who was born in 1855 at Knowsley Terrace, Boundary Lane, West Derby, Liverpool. His birth certificate describes his father as a merchant's book-keeper, and it may be that Thomas worked for the Stubbs family.

ABOVE LEFT

Photograph of the reredos with painting

ABOVE

Reredos painting St Peter's by Edward Liddall Armitage

By 1861 Thomas and Mary had moved to Barnsley and were living at 7 Shambles Street. Thomas was a clerk and Mary a schoolmistress. In 1863 the family were living at 10 Churchfield.

Perhaps Mary was a schoolmistress or possibly a governess at the Church Field Academy, a school for young men between the ages of 10–14 or the Churchfield Ladies School.

Thomas died in 1867 leaving less than £100. Mary and the children including Thomas Liddall continued to live at Churchfield and by 1871 Thomas Liddall was a grocer's apprentice, no doubt in the family business. Mary died in 1886 and she and her husband are buried in Barnsley cemetery.

In 1878 Thomas Liddall married Kate Marshall Wells at Silkstone parish church. Kate was the daughter of Edward James Wells, a steel manufacturer in Sheffield, and Elizabeth Marshall who was the daughter of Thomas Marshall the Clerk to the Justices in Barnsley. Edward and Elizabeth had married at St Mary's Barnsley in 1850. Edward Wells was a steel spring maker from Sheffield. By 1860 Edward was dead. The exact circumstances of his death are not known but legal documents say that he died in or about January 1860 and that he was "late of Sorrento".

A child, Douglas, was born in Barnsley in 1879 but died in 1880. He is buried with his grandparents in Barnsley cemetery. By this time Thomas's mother was living with three of her other children at 36 Shambles Street. In 1881 Thomas Liddall and Kate were visiting friends in Ossett, Yorkshire. Thomas is described in the census as a grocer and wine merchant and they are visiting the Nettleton family who were prominent in Ossett affairs.

Between 1881 and 1888 Thomas and Elizabeth moved to London where their son Edward Liddall was born. Edward's baptism certificate of 1st February 1888 describes Thomas's occupation as an artist. In the space of seven years Thomas had gone from grocer to artist. In January 1886 he drew up a will describing himself as an artist in Paris. It is assumed that he therefore travelled to Paris for training. This is the same year as his mother Mary's death and that event and/or her failing health may have been a significant factor in his change of occupation and move to London.

Perhaps the earliest dated work of Thomas's in the public domain is an oil painting of fish in a basket. This was for sale at Bonham's Auctioneers in 2004, described as being by J. Liddall Armitage, perhaps an error.

If he was painting full time few of his works are known to be in public collections and quite how he earned his living at this point is not known.

His choice of home in London is interesting. Blenheim Crescent, Notting Hill, was until the mid-19th century open country. By the 1871 it had been significantly developed into a middle-class residential area. Blenheim Crescent on the south side has three sets of houses, each of a different design. Thomas's house was at number 43 which was a detached house built over two plots (to include number 45). It is in effect two houses with a single front door and a communicating door in the interior wall. It contains purpose built artists' studios with large north-facing windows and three flats for accommodation purposes. Planning documents at the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea reveal

that Thomas is thought to have adapted the house between 1900–1924. The house's first occupant was an artist and a succession of artists and sculptors have lived there over the years. The area declined in the first half of the 20th century but now is a very desirable location. Number 13 Blenheim Crescent is the home of the travel bookshop which featured in the film *Notting Hill*. The family also seem to have owned numbers 47 and 49 Blenheim Crescent.

In 1890 Thomas joined the Ipswich Fine Art Club and remained a member until 1897. He only exhibited with them in 1890 and is recorded as showing eight works, including two large oils: 'A Rocky Shore' and 'Rustic Belle'. Other works were: 'The Apple Gatherers', 'Marguerite', 'In the Shade', 'An Anxious Watcher', 'A Sunny Shore' and 'By the Summer Sea'.

The family seem also to have owned a home in Perry Street, Billericay, Essex as this address is given in numerous documents relating to Thomas and Edward.

Eighteen ninety-one must have been a good year for Thomas. Living at 43 Blenheim Crescent with Kate and Edward and Kate's brother Thomas Henry Wells, a work of his, 'When we were Young' was accepted for exhibition at the Royal Academy. In 1989 the painting sold at Sotheby's New York.



Artisan's House Blenheim Crescent
London. Courtesy of Thomas Erskine

In 1892 a third son, Hereward Marshall Armitage, was born. Sadly he died in 1894 and is buried in Kensal Green cemetery, London. Thomas continued to paint and from this period it is likely that his only oil painting in a public collection is dated: 'The Postman', which can be found at the British Postal Museum in London. Another work, 'Spring in London', was sold at auction in America in 2013. This work was said to come from the private collection of Senator George McGovern and sold for \$24,000. George McGovern was a presidential nominee in 1972 and amassed a large collection based, it is said, on what he liked. He died in 2012. In 1972 the *Times* of 1st March contained a private advertisement. It said: "I am anxious to trace paintings by my late grandfather T. Liddall Armitage and would be grateful to hear of any of them, particularly 'The Flower Girl in Piccadilly Circus'." This may be the same work as 'Spring In London'.

Thomas Liddall exhibited again in 1893, this time at the Derby Art Gallery. The painting was entitled 'The Geese in the Hayfield'. He also exhibited at the Cheltenham Fine Art Society some time later.

We know that Thomas painted a work entitled 'The Maid of the Mill' through a document at the National Archives, Kew. They hold a photograph of the work for which copyright was being sought by Joseph Batstone of Putney, the copyright author being The Richmond Collotype printing company of

'Spring in London' by Thomas Liddall Armitage



Twickenham. Presumably they were seeking to print images of this work, which has not been traced.

Eighteen ninety-six saw the birth of another son to Thomas and Kate, Harold Marshall Armitage in London. Much less is known of him than his brother Edward, Harold studied architecture at the Architectural Association, London, between 1921 and 1926 and was responsible for the design of a large part of the Blackheath Estate. He did however submit in 1931 a design for an Employment Exchange at West Street Sheffield. Harold died in 1995. He had served in the Dardanelles as a Lieutenant in the Royal Artillery in the First World War.

That Thomas felt Barnsley was his home is evidenced by letters to the *Barnsley Chronicle*. In September 1897 he writes praising the quality and colour of the new glass in St Mary's church, describing it as a "treasure house of beautiful glass". In November 1897 he writes from Heathcotes, Barnsley, a scathing attack on the Council who he believes are trying to obliterate "all traces of the



'Reverend William Stafford Barker' by
Thomas Liddall Armitage
Courtesy of All Saints Church Silkstone

connection between our modern town and the Barnsley of the ages gone by". The letter refers to the renaming of Louisa Lane to Victoria Crescent West.

Thomas may have been in Barnsley in 1901 as Silkstone Church has a work by him. It is a portrait of the Reverend William Stafford Barker who was their vicar for 18 years before becoming the vicar of Dodworth. The portrait may have been a retirement gift. The link between the two men is not known.

Thomas may have earned his living by working for magazines. From about 1905 to 1912 he was illustrating articles for *Boy's Own* magazine. This magazine was published by the Religious Tract Society which dated from 1799. The Society was set up initially to evangelise and then became a publisher of Christian literature with a focus on women, children and the poor. *Boy's Own* was published weekly and then monthly and concentrated on stories, puzzles and sport. Its contributors included W.G. Grace and Robert Baden-Powell. An edition of *Boy's Own* in 1902 featured a drawing by Thomas entitled 'Broken Melody' and one entitled 'Digging for Bait' by Thomas appeared in 1909. In 1912 'His First Brush with the Enemy' depicted an early image of a Boy Scout.

Thomas was in Barnsley in 1901 when the census shows him staying with his brother William, a wine and spirit merchant, at 18 Kensington Road, whilst Kate remained at Blenheim Crescent with their children.

In 1905 Thomas illustrated a book by Dorothy Baird, *By the Path of the Storm*, also published by the Religious Tract Society, and Geologists Association records of 1907/1908 record that Thomas had painted the portrait of Professor John Wesley Judd, a past President of the Geological Society, which was presented to him in 1906.

At the time of the publication of the drawing of St Peter's in 1911, Thomas was still living at 43 Blenheim Crescent, a house listed as having 15 rooms. Other residents at the house were artists Robert Christie and his wife, the Swedish artist Lily Wrangel Christie, and Emile Antoine Verpilleux who was 23 years old. Emile was the first artist to have a colour print hung at the Royal Academy and is now thought to be one of the finest colour woodcut print makers in Britain in the first half of the 20th century. He was born in Notting Hill and served as a Captain in the First World War; many of his war/RAF related oil paintings can be found in the RAF Museum at Shifnal, Shropshire.

Thomas Liddall's later years seemed to involve him in local politics in London. He was elected in 1922 as a Councillor for Kensington, Pembridge ward, as a member of the Municipal Reform Party. The party was set up in 1906 and ceased to exist in 1946. It was formed to break the stranglehold of the Labour Party in London municipal government. Its policies included having much firmer financial controls of local government expenditure, including the need for proper accounting.

Thomas died in April 1924 in London, leaving an estate of £5296 18s 10d. His executors were his sons Edward and Harold and an artist, John Greene. His wife Kate died in 1942.

The article in the *Barnsley Chronicle* of 1927, says that after he painted the reredos Edward went to Antwerp and then to Russia where a friend had said that a portrait commission awaited Edward. It then relates that Edward spent

three years in Vilna painting the Russian society people, only returning at the outbreak of war in 1914. In that period the society people referred to would have been mainly Polish but the bureaucrats and soldiers were Russian and it may be those families he painted. Whether this is account is true is not known. Edward fought in the First World War as part of the Household Cavalry and at the end of the war became a student of drawing and painting at the Slade School of Art, London, between 1919 and 1920. His home away from London was at Perry Street, Billericay.

In about 1920 he became a pupil of the Arts and Crafts stained glass designer, Karl Parson. It is thought that he produced in this period stained glass designs at Inchinnan and Nuneaton. He also trained under Henry Holiday and completed some of Holiday's work after his death . He was for a time in partnership with Victor Drury who, with Mary Lowndes, formed the Glass House at Lettice Street, Fulham, London in 1906, which was a purpose-built studio for glass artists.

According to the *Barnsley Chronicle* article he designed windows for The Ethical Church at 46 Queens Road, Bayswater, London. This church was founded by the American Stanton Coit, an ethical reformer and sometime failed parliamentary candidate for Wakefield. He purchased the church in 1909 and the windows, designed by Edward, were said to depict Elizabeth Fry, Bernard Shaw and Saint Joan.

In about 1940 he started work for James Powell and Sons/Whitefriars where he was to spend the rest of his career. In about 1963 he became their chief designer. In 1959 he wrote what became the standard work on stained glass: *Stained Glass: History, Technology and Practice* which was dedicated to his wife. His own work or life is not mentioned in that book and the impression is of a very private person. James Powell and Sons/Whitefriars were glass makers, lead lighters and stained glass window manufacturers of very long standing who in the 19th and early 20th centuries had close relationships with Evelyn de Morgan and Edward Burne-Jones.

The company set up a factory in 1923 at Wealdstone near Harrow, north London, from which Edward worked.

His original sketches for his work with Whitefriars can be found at the Museum of London who hold the archive of James Powell/Whitefriars and there are also records relating to his work at the Art and Design archive at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

The Stained Glass Museum at Ely have produced a list of Edward's work and that under the name of James Powell/Whitefriars, throughout the UK and across the world. His work can still be seen at Nevern, Pembrokeshire and churches around Swansea. The Parish Church of St George, Headstone, Harrow has examples of his work. Closer to home, perhaps, his last works before retirement can be seen at St Bartholomew's Church, Marsden, Huddersfield and St Mary the Virgin, Leake, North Yorkshire. Further afield his designs can be seen at St Paul's Cathedral, Wellington, New Zealand, Trinity College chapel, Toronto, and in Jamaica and South Africa.

Stained Glass design by Edward Liddall Armitage for St Mark's Church Bromley
 Courtesy of the Museum of London



Perhaps his father's appreciation of stained glass mentioned in his letter to the *Barnsley Chronicle* may have initiated Edward's career in stained glass but he became a master of this ancient craft and was part of the revival of its techniques in the 19th and early 20th centuries by people such as A.W.N. Pugin. He seems to have been a quiet, modest man who had all the skills required such as a flair for design, a sense of colour and the abilities of a very skilled craftsman. He died in 1967 in London, shortly after his retirement from Whitefriars.

Father and son were artists in very different fields. Edward's public work can still be seen and admired. He must have been influenced by the work and love of art of his father, who struck out courageously in a very radical direction from his grocer family. We are proud to call them Barnsley artists.

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