

## The Hold Family of Artists

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*Abel Hold (1815–1896), Thomas Hold (1842–1901),  
Benjamin Hold (1847–1917) and Florence Hold (1860–1937)*



Abel Hold and his daughter Florence

IN 1820 ALVERTHORPE was an independent small township one and a half miles north-west of Wakefield with its own industry and community. Did the villagers realise then what a talented family was living amongst them? Certainly by 1830 it must have been obvious that the six sons of Thomas and Mary Hold were being employed in creative and artistic trades.

Abel Hold was born in September 1815 and was one of the nine children of Thomas and Mary Hold. His family were Quakers and he attended the local village school. Later he moved to the Lancastrian School in Wakefield and was eventually apprenticed to a house painter. This would have happened when Abel was about 16 and lasted for seven years. It was not the trade that we might think of today. The two basic ingredients of house painting were white lead, the toxic substance used as a base for colour, and linseed oil for mixing the paint and giving preservative and waterproofing qualities. Apprentices would learn the graining and marbling techniques used to decorate walls, woodwork such as doors, shutters, wainscoting and furniture. These techniques with mixing and layering of paint would stand him in good stead for work as an artist. All during his apprenticeship Abel painted pictures. He also painted backcloths for the travelling showmen visiting the area, filling them with castles and battles.

In 1832, whilst Abel was training, his father Thomas died. In different sources Thomas is said to have been either a colliery worker or colliery manager or a wireworker. When his health deteriorated, he taught his young son Amos how to make the wire sieves, so that he would be able to support his mother. Despite this Thomas's trade is described as a collier in the baptism records of his children and soon after his father's death, Amos was sent to the Rawden School, paid for by the local Quakers. Thomas's death may have been the event that caused the gradual move of the family to Barnsley.

By 1841 Abel was living with his brother and sister, Benjamin and Mary, in Wakefield. It is not clear when Abel moved to Barnsley but many of his close family were already living there. His older brothers Job and John had moved to Barnsley and both were working as house painters there. Job married Jane Brown in 1827, settling in George Yard as a house painter. His younger brother Amos later became his apprentice. Brother John lived at first with his mother and sister Hannah at Nelson Street, Barnsley. After he married he moved to Castlereagh Street. Towards the end of 1841 Abel married Sarah Miller, the daughter of a

local stonemason, at St George's church in Barnsley. On the church register he now called himself an artist. Despite this he worked in partnership with his brother John for several years. Abel lived with his family at 47 Church Street. Later the street was renumbered and the property combined with the house next door to become number 16. It stood almost opposite The Royal Hotel (now The White Bear).

During his time in Barnsley Abel made contact with several businessmen who became patrons. Letters sold at auction in the last few years show that John Staniforth Beckett, the linen manufacturer and banker, commissioned Abel to modify existing paintings in his collection. Abel painted many portraits, such as Mrs Tyas, an elderly lady, widow of one Barnsley solicitor and mother of another.



Former home of Abel Hold at 16 Church Street © The Tasker Trust



Mrs Tyas © The Trustees of  
The Cooper Gallery

He also painted two local characters, Peggy Airey, an old fortune teller and peg seller and Watter Joe, a water seller in the time before clean water was piped into every house. These last two are perhaps not the type of subject we might expect. Did Abel paint them as a commission or did he just find them interesting characters?

In 1842 Abel created a full-length portrait of a young girl with a lamb, recently bought by a private buyer and donated to the Victoria Jubilee Museum in Cawthorne. The background to the painting resembles Rockley engine house and dam in the Worsbrough area. Abel did paint this building. The young girl may be from the Clarke family of Noblethorpe who had a child of about the right age. Further research is needed. In 1846, he persuaded a close friend to sit for a portrait and was distraught when the friend died on the day following the sitting. He had been able to complete the head and shoulders and continued to finish the other parts of the portrait. Another early painting is 'Time for Bed', painted in 1851 and recently bought for the Cannon Hall Museum, Cawthorne by the Friends group at the museum.



Peggy Airey  
© The Trustees of The Cooper Gallery



Watter Joe  
© Trustees of The Cooper Gallery





'Girl with a Lamb'  
© Victoria Jubilee Museum



'Time for Bed'  
© Barnsley Arts, Museums and Archives Service

With Sarah, Abel had nine children and their first child, Thomas, was born in 1842, soon to be followed by George and Ben. Unfortunately in August 1850 Abel and Sarah faced the tragedy of the death of their daughter Eliza Alice when she was just eight months old. The partnership between Abel and his brother John was in financial difficulty. In March they were in arrears with their Poor Rate payments with the possibility of a warrant being issued. In November of that year the partnership between them was dissolved and, by 1852, Abel had moved his family to Cawthorne village, about four miles outside Barnsley. Perhaps this was a new start after the difficulties of 1850. He lived there for the rest of his life in Brook House, just off Tivydale, part of the Cannon Hall estate. Here his remaining children were born. The vicar of Cawthorne, Charles Spencer Stanhope, saw Abel's talent and recommended him to his brother Walter at Cannon Hall. Charles appreciated art and became a friend and supporter of J. F. Herring, the artist known especially for the painting of horses. Herring was much older than Abel and is said to have met him and advised and commented on his work.

When Abel lived in Brook House it was two floors with a single-storey section where Abel had his studio.

He used the local countryside as inspiration for his paintings of landscapes, birds' nests and dead game and to provide the pebbles that he ground to make his colours. Could this be a technique adapted from his apprenticeship?

Brook House

© Barnsley Archives and Local Studies



Walter Spencer Stanhope had become his patron and Abel's subjects reflect the interests of a local country squire. Abel also painted portraits of local estate workers and two of these are on display in the Victoria Jubilee Museum in Cawthorne. His painting of Walter Spencer Stanhope's wife, Elizabeth, hangs in Cannon Hall. Unfortunately he could not escape tragedy in Cawthorne and in 1855 his daughter Mary Catherine drowned in an accident in the grounds of Brook House. She was only 18 months old. Perhaps these tragedies in Abel's life caused him to abandon his Quaker faith. His children were baptised into the Church of England as adults at Cawthorne All Saints.

Between 1849 and 1871 he exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy. His paintings were shown at other prestigious exhibitions such as the British Institution, Pall Mall, and Suffolk Street, London. Outside London there were the Royal Institution, Manchester, the art gallery in Liverpool, the Birmingham Exhibition and the Wakefield Exhibition. His output was prolific and he sold many paintings to the landed gentry and to successful businessmen. Amongst these were Earl Fitzwilliam, the Earl of Wharnccliffe, and the Pilkingtons of Brotherton and Chevet Hall.

His main patron was Walter Spence Stanhope of Cannon Hall but despite Walter's patronage, Abel was always short of money. In 1869 he was declared bankrupt but was able to have his bankruptcy discharged in 1870. He continued his work and set up a studio in Huddersfield. He sold many of his works in the Huddersfield area from as early as 1861 when he exhibited in the Christmas Festival at the Huddersfield Mechanics Institute. They appear regularly in the *Huddersfield Chronicle* and *West Yorkshire Advertiser* in auctions, exhibitions and galleries. They also appeared in auctions in the Sheffield and Barnsley areas. In June 1869, an auction in Harrogate saw paintings by Abel and his sons Tom and Ben. In 1892 his work appeared in an auction in Harrogate alongside work by his daughter Florence.





'A Wooded River Landscape'

© Barnsley Arts, Museums and Archives Service

BELOW LEFT

'Three Red Grouse'

© Cawthorne Victoria Jubilee Museum Trust

BELOW

'A Bird's Nest'

© The Trustees of The Cooper Gallery





Abel Hold's Headstone in Cawthorne Cemetery  
© M. Wilkinson

Abel died on 8th May 1896, approximately 10 years after the death of his wife Sarah. His funeral was a quiet affair but well attended by his relatives and friends, with many floral tributes. The one from his eldest son Tom was in the form of an artist's palette. Despite his fame locally during his life, no headstone was erected on his grave until 1996 when the residents of Cawthorne erected a small tribute to him.

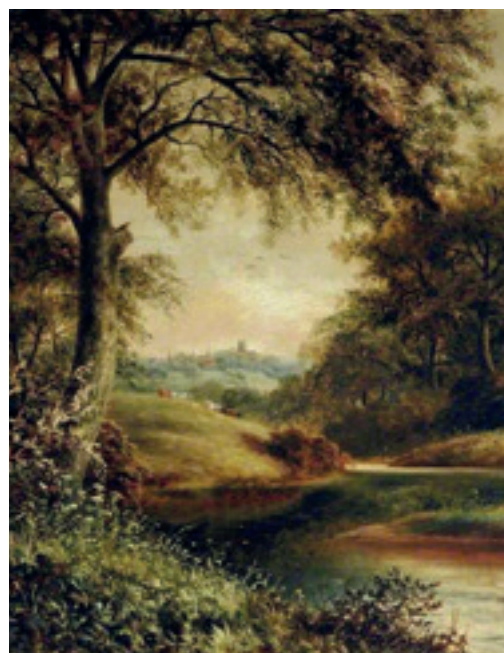
Tom Hold was Abel's eldest son and he also became an artist. He was born in Barnsley and was the eldest of the seven children who survived into adulthood. He was about 10 years old when the family moved to Cawthorne. In November 1871 he married Susannah Midgley, the daughter of a Cawthorne farmer. Their first child, Abel, was born in Cawthorne but around this time they moved to live on Westgate in Barnsley town centre. Their other children were born in Barnsley. By 1891, the family had moved from the town centre to 2 West Road in the Pogmoor area of Barnsley and Tom died there in early January 1902. Although he was a large man, he was kind, friendly and unassuming. Despite his size, his health was poor and he suffered from a chronic chest complaint. He was survived by his wife Susannah.

Tom followed in his father's footsteps as an artist, initially describing himself as an artist, carver and gilder. His uncle Amos Hold had been a skilled wood carver and gilder who displayed his work in the Royal Exhibition of 1851. Later Tom was listed as a still life and landscape painter. He painted mainly in oils and his output was prolific. His subjects were the country landscape and its creatures. Some are shown in their natural habitat and other as the game killed by shooting parties.



View of Cannon Hall Park, South Yorkshire by Tom Hold © Cawthorne Victoria Jubilee Museum Trust





Although he earned a living as an artist, he never amassed a large amount of money. After his death, his estate was valued at £144 9s. His work appears regularly in auction sales. Some of his paintings can be seen in the Cawthorne Victoria Jubilee Museum.

He seems to have influenced his children as two of them, Mary Florence and Eveline Josephine, became art students. His son Hubert Henry followed the original trade of his grandfather, Abel Hold, and became a house painter.

Another of Abel's sons, Ben, was also an artist. He was born in 1847 in Barnsley and would have been about five when the family moved to Cawthorne. In July 1869, Ben, at the age of 22, was baptised there by the Reverend Charles Tiplady Pratt. Several of his brothers were also baptised there as adults. Ben followed the family trade and trained as a house painter. In January 1875 he married Martha Ann Nichols, the daughter of a Cawthorne tanner and by this time he was calling himself an artist. During the 1880s he and Martha lived for a while in the Regent's Park area of London where he was still employed as a house painter. Could he have been trying to further his career as an artist by living in the capital? Their only child, Gladys Jane Mildred, was born there in 1888 but some time after this Martha moved back to live in Cawthorne with her father who was now widowed and retired. Ben stayed in London and took lodgings with six other boarders at Goodge Street. By 1893 Ben had returned to Cawthorne. He lived in Beatson House, Cawthorne with Martha and Gladys and was working as an artist.

They later moved to Scarborough and lived first in Oak Road near Falsgrave Park and then a short distance away in Stepney Road. Their daughter Gladys married Henry Marshall, a costume-maker, early in 1906 and with him had two daughters, Jenny and Victoria, and a son, Richard. Henry earned enough to allow them to employ a young girl as a domestic servant. By the time

ABOVE LEFT  
'Red Grouse' by Tom Hold  
© Cawthorne Victoria Jubilee Museum Trust

ABOVE  
'River Landscape with Church' by Tom Hold © Cawthorne Victoria Jubilee Museum Trust





Beatson House, Cawthorne (now a restaurant)  
© M. Wilkinson

she was three years old Jenny was living with her grandparents and she had fond memories of them. Although Martha was very strict, Ben was great fun. Jenny often accompanied him on his days out painting. She would sometimes be allowed to mix paints and pass brushes. She stayed with them until Ben's death in 1917. Ben had become a respected artist in Scarborough but is said to have worked under the name of Benjamin Lester. He had been suffering from chronic bronchitis and his heart was affected. He died at the home of his daughter Gladys. Her marriage was not successful. Her husband abandoned the family for a French woman that he met whilst serving in the First World War. Although Gladys settled with another partner, there were no more children. Later Jenny went with her husband to Kenya and finally settled in New Zealand with her family.

Ben was influenced by the artwork of his father who chose his subjects from the local countryside. Abel had also served an apprenticeship as a house painter and several of Ben's uncles worked in artistic and creative jobs. Ben painted rural landscapes, animals and birds, in oils. Reflecting the subjects chosen by his father,

RIGHT  
Cannon Hall Park River Meadow  
by B. Hold  
© Cawthorne Jubilee Museum Trust



BELOW  
'Still Life' by B. Hold  
© Barnsley Arts, Museums and Archives Service

BELOW RIGHT  
'Fish on a Grassy Bank' by B. Hold  
© Barnsley Arts, Museums and Archives Service





they varied from the small, detailed studies of birds' nests to the wider landscapes of the English countryside. They were of a typical Victorian style and examples are held at Cawthorne Victoria Jubilee Museum and by Barnsley Arts, Museums and Archives Service. They also appear occasionally in auction sales.

The last of the artists amongst Abel's children is Florence. She was born after the family had moved from Barnsley to Cawthorne village and after the deaths of her two older sisters as babies. Her father's Quaker faith seems to have lapsed as he became an adult, possibly tested by the deaths of his two daughters, and Florence was not baptised until 1872 when she was about 12 years old. She never married and when her father died, she was 36 years old and needed to make significant decisions about her future life. Where would she live and how would she earn a living? As Abel's only surviving daughter she would have helped her mother to look after her father and six brothers. After her mother's death in 1886, Florence continued to live with her father and act as his housekeeper. She had been painting for many years and two interesting oils of birds' nests, signed and dated 1882 when she would be about 21 years old, were sold by Bonhams in 2007. She sold a painting at auction in Harrogate in 1892 alongside work by her father. Despite this she had never been officially called an artist, in the censuses for example.

For some time she continued to live in the area and seems to have dealt with any of her father's affairs that needed attention. She arranged an auction in May 1897, a year after Abel's death, to dispose of all the contents of Brook House before it was returned to the Cannon Hall estate. She kept just a few items of furniture and some of Abel's art materials. Over the next few years she travelled regularly often by train. For a while, she stayed with her friend Isabella, wife of Joe Clegg, one of the Cawthorne blacksmiths. Their home was on Taylor Hill near Brook House. When in Barnsley she stayed with a cousin Mrs Rudd on several occasions. Early in January 1897 she visited Jane Hind, widow of her cousin Thomas, in Kendal. Thomas was the son of Abel's sister Hannah. He had qualified as a pharmacist and set up in business in Kendal where he was also a farmer. Florence stayed for some time with Jane and visited Windermere and

#### ABOVE LEFT

'Landscape of Cawthorne Village, South Yorkshire with Church' by B. Hold  
© Barnsley Arts, Museums and Archives Service

#### ABOVE

'Bird's Nest with Eggs', attributed to F. Hold  
© Barnsley Arts, Museums and Archives Service

Bowness. The country lanes, the old stone walls and tree roots covered in mosses and the sheep with their curly horns and black faces captivated her.

In 1898 she travelled from Barnsley to Huddersfield and stayed with several different friends there over the next few months. One of these friends, Reuben Williamson, a Huddersfield pharmacist had a daughter, Grace, who was a similar age to Florence. Whilst Florence was there she painted six bird's nests, including a hedge sparrow's and a linnet's and these she sold.

In August 1898 she and her friend Grace visited Florence's brother Joe and stayed in his home, Bradgate Lodge, Charnwood, Leicestershire for several weeks. Florence was just two years younger than Joseph and was a witness at his second marriage in 1890, to Louisa Milnes, the daughter of a Cawthorne farmer. Joseph was a gamekeeper and at the time he was working in High Leigh, Cheshire. He moved regularly for his job and by 1898 he was working in Charnwood, Leicestershire.

Sometime after 1898, Florence moved to live with Joseph, Louisa and their children. We see her with them on both the 1901 and 1911 censuses. By 1901 Joseph had moved again to Kinlet on the edge of the Wyre Forest, Shropshire. From this time Florence also calls herself an artist. When the family later moved to Great Marlow, Buckinghamshire, she moved with them. Joseph's daughter Janet married an underkeeper, John Dixon, and moved with his job to a moorland estate near Staithes, North Yorkshire. When their children were born, they decided that the moorland life was too isolated. This prompted Joseph to make his final move to take the lease on Blake Hill Farm, Shibden, Halifax. Janet and her family moved to live with them there and Joseph died at the farm in 1928. He was survived by Florence and his wife Louisa. Florence died at the farm in 1937 but she was buried in Cawthorne cemetery on 11th March that year.

Florence had lived in the rural community of Cawthorne for at least 36 years and during this time she would have watched her father painting and, like him, she chose subjects from nature that she painted in oils. Her later life with Joseph meant that she lived in rural areas where she could continue to find inspiration for her paintings. Barnsley Arts, Museums and Archives Service have two oil paintings by Florence, one of a dead game bird, dated 1896, the year her father died, and another of a vase of roses.

They do have several others but these are only attributed to her. They include the bird's nest shown previously, similar in style to those painted by her father, grouse, pheasants and a garden scene. They were all donated by Ted Collins, a great grandson of Joseph and this makes me think that they are all genuinely by her.

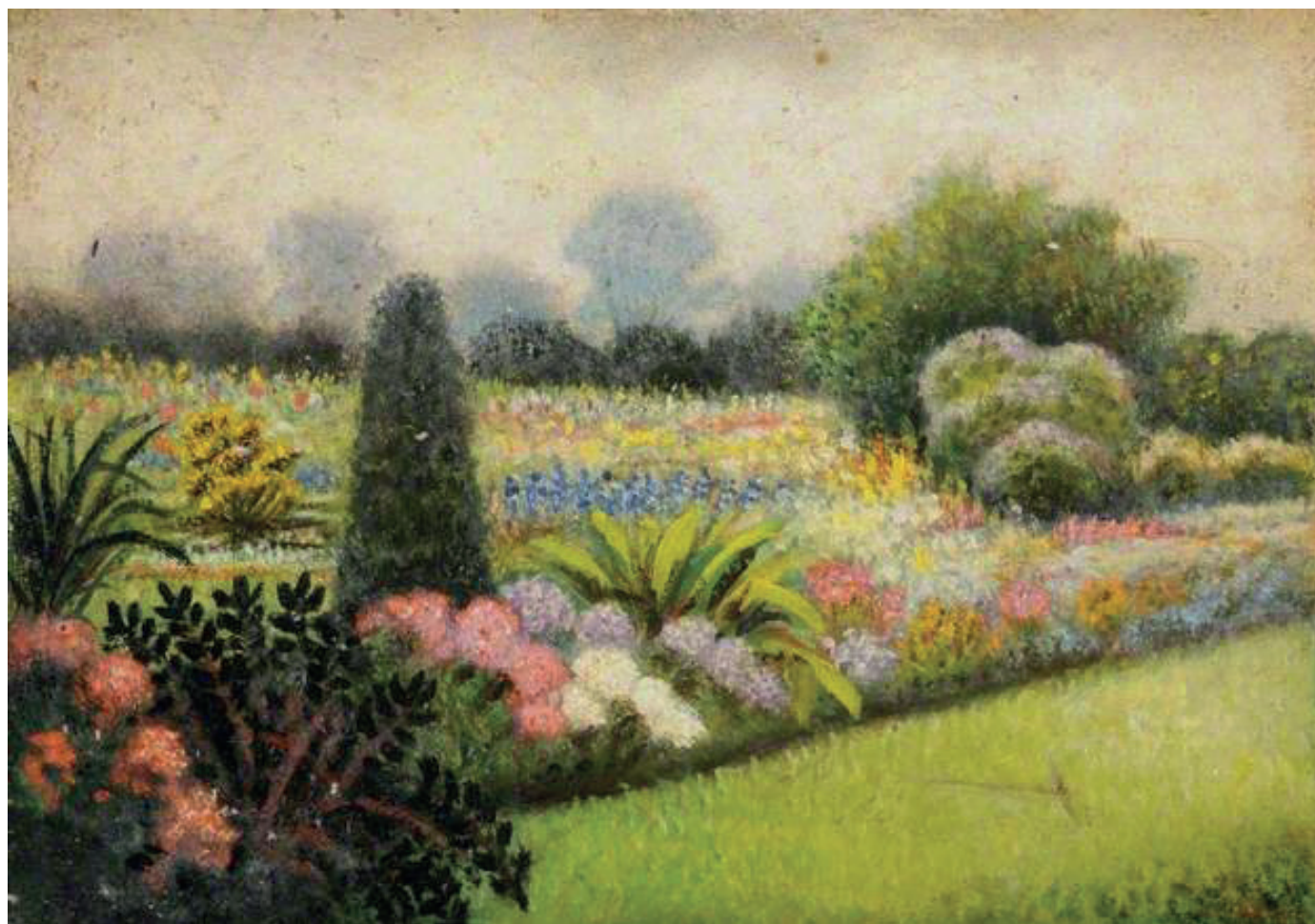
Her paintings do appear at auction from time to time. She is sometimes confused with her niece Mary Florence, the daughter of her eldest brother Tom. Mary Florence was also an artist and she too never married. In 1901 she was an art student, living in the family home in West Road, Pogmoor. She painted the same kind of subjects as her grandfather and aunt. In July 2008 one of her paintings of a dead mallard on a river bank was sold by Christie's auctioneers. She died in the winter of 1950 and was still living in Pogmoor.





'Flowers in a Vase' by F. Hold  
© Barnsley Arts, Museums and Archives  
Service

The Holds were an artistic family with a prolific output. They were of their time and painted works that they knew would be well-received and saleable. Their clients were both the gentry and the business people with disposal income generated by the Industrial Revolution. They were successful in earning a living by their painting but never made a great deal of money. Despite this they persevered, so may have felt a compulsion to paint that has left us a legacy of beautiful works.



'Garden View', attributed to F. Hold  
© Barnsley Museum and Heritage  
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