

The Mellors

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Joseph Mellor (1827–1888), William Mellor (1851–1931) and Everett Watson Mellor (1878–1965)



'Bolton Woods, Yorkshire' by William Mellor
© Calderdale Museums

IT MIGHT NOT be expected that a man, working as a weaver in a northern industrial town, would become a professional landscape painter. This is exactly what Joseph Mellor did. He was born in 1827 into a weaving family in Barnsley, Yorkshire, a centre of excellence for linen weaving. His father, also Joseph, had moved there from Carr Green in the Mapplewell area. It was about two and a half miles north east of Barnsley on the edge of the North Gawber Colliery site. In Barnsley, he found work in the expanding linen industry and there he married Sarah Flather. The family lived in Kingstone Place, a development of

weavers' cottages created by Joseph Beckett, a local linen merchant, entrepreneur and banker.

Handloom weaving was the bigger part of the industry although more power looms were being installed around the town. The handlooms were installed in the cellars of the cottages. The working conditions were dark, with only a small window high in the cellar wall, at street level. They were also damp which helped to prevent the linen thread from breaking. Some cellars actually had standing water for much of the time. The linen weaving industry in Barnsley always had its peaks and troughs and poverty was common amongst the weavers. If sales were poor then weavers would receive no work from the linen merchants or they would have their wages reduced. Barnsley was not alone in the poverty experienced amongst its weavers. Between 1837 and 1841 a Royal commission investigated the plight of workers in the linen industry and took testimony from Barnsley men such as John Vallance. They testified how much they earned and what it cost their families to live, showing how their income could not match their expenses. The Mellors lived in a town where poverty, strikes, weavers' riots and Chartist agitation were common.

In 1850 Joseph married Mary Thackray at St Mary's Church, Barnsley. Mary was the daughter of another linen weaver, William Thackray. William was from Penistone and may well have been the William Thackray who was a key

Weavers' Cottages, Pitt Street
Courtesy of Barnsley MBC Archives and Local Studies



member of the Barnsley Chartist movement. In 1839 a meeting of Barnsley Chartists agreed The Barnsley Manifesto. A William Thackray was a member of the committee chosen to encourage support for the Manifesto. He also testified to the Royal Commission on Handloom Weavers. By 1851, the unrest and the Chartist activity were no longer so pronounced. The couple lived in Castlereagh Street, with Mary's family living in nearby Pitt Street. In this area of the town, along with Racecommon Road, there were many weavers' cottages and several linen mills and warehouses.

Joseph's older brother Thomas was a fabric designer and this may have influenced his move, around this time, to become a Jacquard card stamper. This was a skilled and responsible job. The designer provided a version of his design on a type of graph. The stamper then transcribed these complex designs onto punched cards. The cards were strung together in the correct order and it might take several hundred cards to produce a complex, repeated pattern. The patterned linen could then be woven using a Jacquard loom. The loom was created by Joseph Marie Jacquard to speed up the laborious process of silk fabric weaving in his home town of Lyons in France. It was soon in use wherever patterned fabrics were woven. It also formed the basis of Charles Babbage's design of the first computer, followed by Herman Hollerith's use of punched cards in early computing. A far cry from today's sophisticated technology! The Jacquard loom was introduced into Barnsley around 1829. John Bolton, a Westmorland man, had settled in Barnsley. He had seen the loom in operation in Lancashire. He adapted the design to make it more suitable for linen and shared this with other Barnsley linen manufacturers.

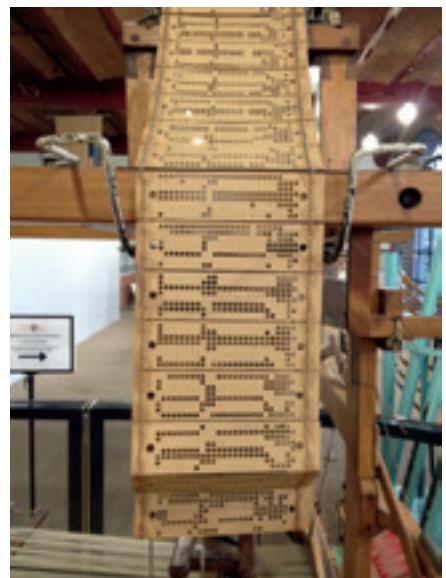
Joseph and Mary had two children, William born in 1851 and Emmeline in 1855 and around this time they had moved again to Racecommon Road. When William and his sister Emmeline were children, Joseph managed to change his occupation and become a professional landscape artist. This might have proved quite a risk for him. He had no artistic training and paints and

RIGHT

Jacquard cards on a loom © Hugh Polehampton. Courtesy of the Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester

FAR RIGHT

Detail of Jacquard cards



canvases were expensive but the weaving industry continued to experience its peaks and troughs. The Mellor ties to Barnsley were also lessening. Between 1853 and 1854 William Thackray emigrated, with most of Mary's family, to Fall River, Massachusetts in the United States. This was a centre for cotton weaving and the Thackrays worked in the mills there. William had been a manager of power looms in Barnsley. In 1858 Joseph's brother Thomas died and his father Joseph Snr died in 1859. Joseph's older brother Henry had a small weaving business in Leeds. Around 1866, Joseph moved the family there, possibly to find employment for his children. Certainly both William and Emmeline worked in weaving in Leeds. Joseph may also have hoped to improve his opportunities to exhibit and sell his artwork to the growing middle class of businessmen in Leeds. His mother Mary moved to live with them there. They lived first in Caroline



'A Shady Lane near Bolton Bridge' by
Joseph Mellor
© T.A. Fisher

Street, an area of red brick terraces with small gardens in the city centre. It has been redeveloped and the Civic Hall and car parking now stand there. By 1881 they had moved to Portland Crescent, a residential area close to Leeds General Infirmary. Joseph regularly painted in the Yorkshire Dales.

A frequent subject was the area around Bolton Abbey, just north of Ilkley and east of Skipton in what is now the Yorkshire Dales National Park. We don't know how he travelled to his location but the train is a possibility. There was a rapidly expanding rail network in both this area and the rest of the country. His paintings cover areas between the Welsh borders and the Scottish borders. One of his earliest known paintings is of Knaresborough, painted in 1849. Mary's mother was from the Knaresborough area. Many of the weavers there moved to Barnsley when the industry collapsed in Knaresborough. Could he have painted it whilst visiting to meet Mary's relatives before their marriage in 1850? We can only speculate.



'Near Froggatt Edge, Derbyshire' by
Joseph Mellor
© M. Wilkinson

Although there is no evidence of Joseph exhibiting in London, he did travel there. In 1870 he was involved in an accident on a train travelling from London to Leeds. A goods train had broken an axle and left the tracks just south of Newark. With no time for a warning, the London to Leeds train crashed into it. Eighteen people died and Joseph was listed amongst the injured. His legs and the lower part of his body were crushed.

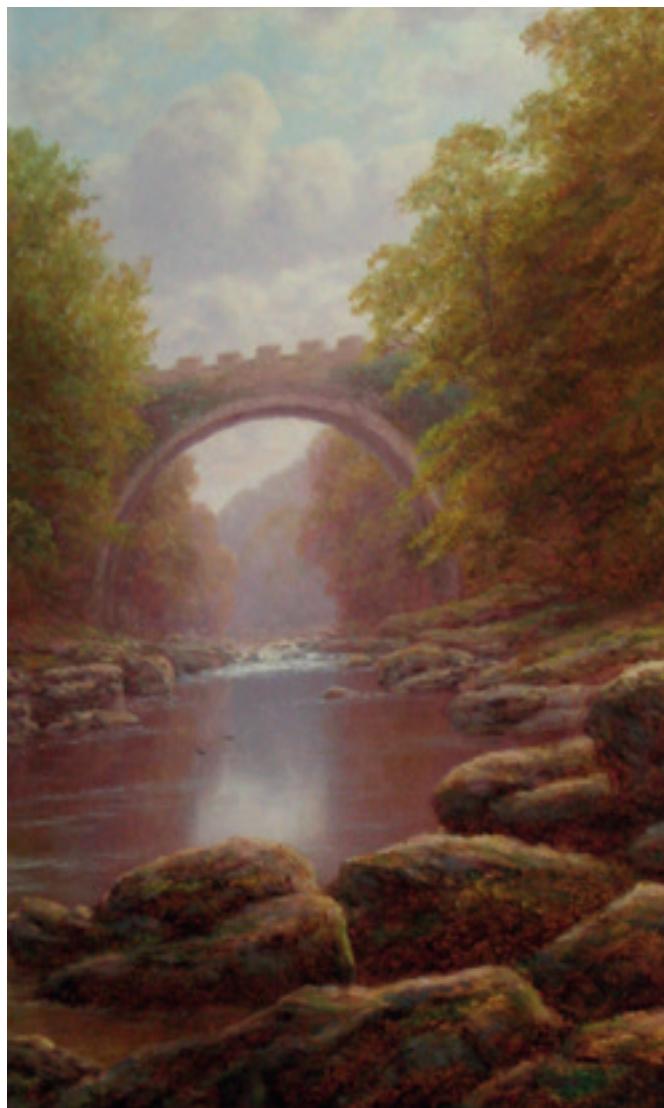
Joseph died on 14th July 1888 in Bradford and is buried there in Undercliffe Cemetery. He had been suffering for some time from Bright's Disease, a chronic kidney condition which today is referred to as nephritis. It can be a symptom of several different health problems and is sometimes linked to drinking alcohol. It is not clear whether his train accident injuries could have contributed to his kidney problems. At the time, his death was attributed to uraemic poisoning which would happen in the final stages of kidney failure. He died at Victoria Street, Bradford with his son William present. He had moved to Bradford sometime after 1881, when he was still living at Portland Crescent, Leeds. His daughter Emmeline lived in Bradford with her husband Henry Mellor. Joseph and Mary may have moved there when his health began to fail. After Joseph's death, Mary lived with Emmeline and her family. She died in 1901.

Joseph's son, William, found work in Leeds as a power loom tuner. He would be responsible for maintaining a section of factory looms and ensuring they ran efficiently. His sister Emmeline became a power loom weaver. In 1876 William married Mary Elizabeth Watson who was born in Ouzlewell Green between Wakefield and Leeds. Her father John is described in different documents as a surgeon or as a medical assistant. Around this time William decided that he, too, could earn his living as a professional landscape painter.

He moved to London with Mary, possibly to try to advance his career. His eldest child Everett Watson was born there on 17th March 1878 at Pentonville Road, Islington. Soon after Everett's birth the family moved to Scarborough. Here their second son Herbert Arthur was born in April 1879. This was the start of regular moves for the family, westward across the North of England. It is not apparent why William made these moves but it is likely to have been to promote his work and find commissions. He chose to live in pleasant areas that gave him access to the expanding middle classes in the industrialised cities of Manchester and Liverpool. These people had disposable income and were willing to invest in works of art.

In Scarborough, the family lived in Barwick Street and William was able to employ a servant. A few weeks after Herbert's birth, both boys were baptised at St Mary's, Laisterdyke, Bradford. Unfortunately tragedy struck and Herbert died when only two years old. Soon after their daughter Hilda was born, in 1884, they left Scarborough. The move was to Manchester to live at Laurel Bank, Brighton Grove, Rusholme. This was a desirable area just south of Manchester city centre where many villa style houses had been built. William exhibited several times at Manchester Art Gallery.

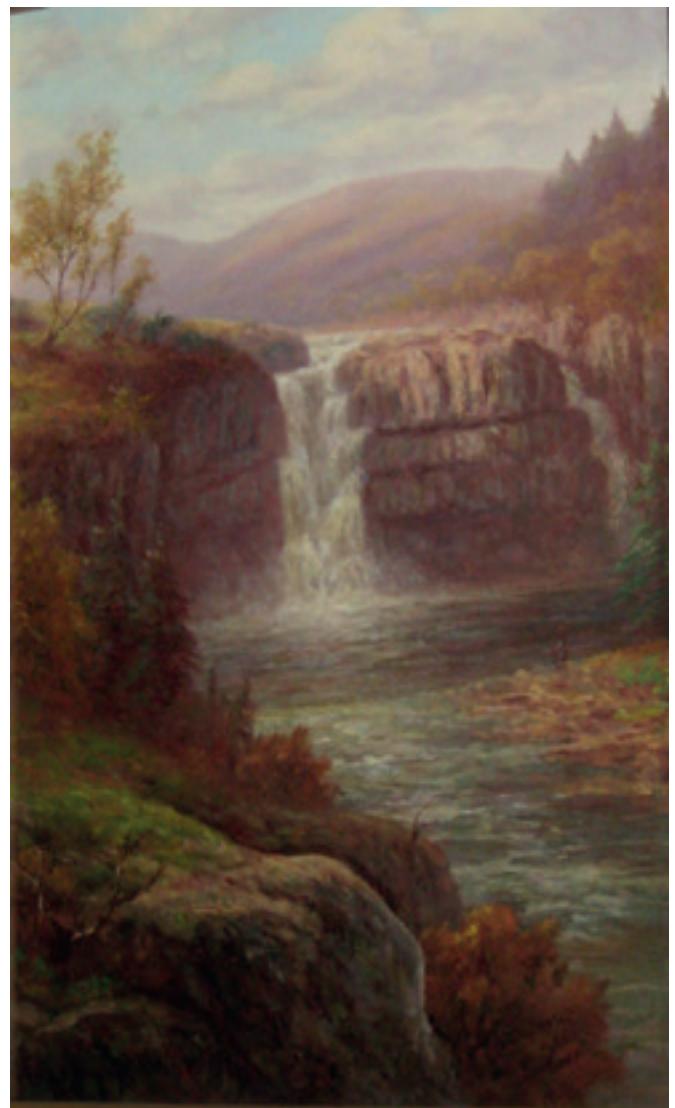
However it was not long before the family moved on again to Southport. In 1888, William travelled from his home there to be with his dying father, in Bradford. The family lived in Sefton Street, Southport where their last child



'Barden Bridge on the Wharfe' by William Mellor
© T.A. Fisher

FAR RIGHT

'Moorland Falls' by William Mellor
© T.A. Fisher



Leonard was born in 1890. Mary's widowed mother, also Mary, lived next door with two of Mary's younger sisters. Southport was a well-established seaside resort connected to Manchester and Liverpool by the railway. Liverpool was just 12 miles to the south. William exhibited several times at the Walker Gallery in Liverpool.

Their final move was to Harrogate where William, Mary and their sons Everett and Leonard lived in Dragon Road. These houses are large Victorian terraced villas. William seems to have been settled and lived there for more than 20 years. He died there in 1931. Both sons had become professional artists. Everett is described as a landscape artist earlier, at the age of 23 and his works appear in private galleries and auction houses. No works by Leonard have been found. He married and moved to Middlesbrough where he died in 1953. Hilda and Clifford do not seem to have followed in their father's footsteps. Hilda married an engineer, Foster B. Jesper, on Christmas Day 1905 and they also lived in Dragon Road. Although Hilda did not become an artist, Foster had been an

engraver. Their son Denis followed in this, quite an artistic occupation. Everett did not marry but he too moved to the Middlesbrough area where he died in 1965.



'Pecca Falls, Ingleton' by William Mellor
© T. A. Fisher

THE PATH TO AN ARTISTIC LIFE

Joseph, William and Everett, the three generations of Mellor artists were all landscape painters. Both Joseph and William worked as weavers before feeling confident enough to change their occupations to landscape painters. Joseph had to consider whether he could support his family before making up his mind. Although he continued to earn his living as a self-employed painter for the rest of his life, his son William still needed to find a job before he could do this. However by the time of his marriage, when he was 25, William too had become an artist. He was able to support his wife and four surviving children by his painting, allowing Everett to become an artist too. They painted in similar styles, producing realistic views and this is not surprising. It is said that Joseph taught William and he, in turn, taught Everett. The influence of father on son can be seen. They do not seem to have been influenced by art movements such as the Pre-Raphaelites or the Impressionists, developing in the second half of the 19th century. Their main patrons were the businessmen and industrialists of northern England who appreciated lifelike depictions of the open countryside. These were very different from the industrial towns and cities that they lived in.



'Burbage Brook, Derbyshire' by William Mellor
© T.A. Fisher

SELLING AND EXHIBITING

We do not know how the Mellors sold their paintings. Joseph visited London in 1870 and William and his family lived there at the end of that decade. Despite this, there is no evidence of them exhibiting in London, for example at the Royal Academy. They did exhibit at galleries in the north of England so are likely to have made sales in this way. Whilst he was living in Leeds, Joseph also made use of entries in local directories. These showed his address and profession as an artist. In 1901, William stayed with the Dalbys in Claremont Terrace in the Heaton area of Bradford. The Dalbys were a family of fine art dealers and picture framers. Samuel Dalby had started out as a bookseller and stationer before moving into fine art. Joseph's son-in-law Henry Mellor worked as a bookbinder in Bradford. This may be how the connection was made. Samuel Dalby was a fine art dealer by the time that Joseph and his wife Mary moved to Bradford. It is possible that both Joseph and William used the Dalbys to frame and sell their work.

The Mellors painted scenes in the north of England from Derbyshire, through the Yorkshire Dales to Durham, the Lake District and the Scottish Borders. William also painted in North Wales. They all used oils but William and Everett used watercolour too. William is the one whose works are most often

'Posforth Ghyll, Bolton Woods' by
William Mellor
© Calderdale Museums



seen. It's said that his favourite season was autumn and he is highly regarded for his delicate treatment of leaves and foliage. Many examples of William's paintings appear for sale in private galleries, auctions and antiques centres. They are more sought-after than those of his father or his son. Some are also held in museums and galleries hosting national and local art collections. These are mainly across the north of England in places such as the Bankfield Museum in Halifax, the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery at Leeds University, Rotherham Museums and Galleries, several in Lancashire and the Laing in Newcastle. One has found its way to the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum in Eastbourne. A list of the 13 oil paintings in public collections can be seen on the BBC website 'Your Paintings'. Although paintings by Joseph and Everett are less common, they still appear regularly in auctions and for sale in private galleries. Occasionally Everett's paintings are confused with William's, as their styles are so similar. All three artists had a prolific output.

This family of artists emerged from the poverty and harsh working conditions of the linen industry in Barnsley. They have left us a legacy of paintings showing the British countryside over a period of 100 years.

'On the Wharfe, Bolton Woods' by
William Mellor
© Calderdale Museums



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