

The Spencer Stanhopes and John Roddam 71

Spencer Stanhope (1829–1908)

AN INTRODUCTION

THE IMPORTANCE OF the patronage of John Roddam's large family to Cawthorne artists, sculptors and craftsmen cannot be underestimated. Roddam is the most well-known artist of the family but there were many amateur artists and sculptors. Roddam's niece Mary Gertrude Spencer Stanhope (1857–1944) was a noted sculptor. His niece Evelyn Pickering (1855–1919) was an artist in the Pre-Raphaelite style who married the ceramicist William Frend de Morgan. His nephew Walter Spencer Stanhope Tyrwhitt (1859–1932) and his wife Ursula Tyrwhitt were also well-known artists of their day. Walter founded the Oxford Art Society and Ursula is very much associated with Augustus and Gwen John. His niece Winifred Julia, the daughter of his brother Walter, was a sculptor exhibiting variously at the New Gallery, Glasgow and the Royal Society of British Artists. An oil painting by her of her sister Mary Gertrude is held at Wightwick Manor, Wolverhampton, who have several works by Roddam.

The family wealth that allowed Roddam to forge a career as an artist was derived from iron and coal. When Walter Stanhope (1750–1821) made Cannon Hall, Cawthorne his main home in the late 18th century, the Spencer Stanhopes became the dominant family in Cawthorne. Through the generations they supported local people in their artistic endeavours, including Thomas Witlam Atkinson (1799–1861) artist, architect and Central Asian explorer, Samuel Swift, sculptor, the Abel Hold family of artists and John Frederick Herring, noted horse painter who was born in London but working on coaches in the Doncaster area.

Walter's son William (1793–1864), Roddam's uncle, changed his name to Roddam under a distant family member's will and thus Roddam acquired the second name he was more frequently known by. His first name John was that of his own father John Spencer Stanhope (1787–1873) an adventurous and bookish man. John had been a prisoner of war of the French, in Spain, between 1810–1813 and when released travelled with the architect Thomas Allason (1790–1852) mapping the topography of the plain of Olympia. Roddam's mother, Elizabeth Wilhelmina, was the daughter of the first Earl of Leicester, Thomas Coke of Holkham Hall, Norfolk. Her sisters were gifted amateur artists and it is said that the girls were taught by Gainsborough. Holkham Hall and its collections must have been a treasure trove for the young Roddam.

Roddam was born on 20th January 1829 and baptised by his uncle, the Rev. Charles Spencer Stanhope on 7th February at All Saints Church, Cawthorne. He attended Rugby school and then Christ Church, Oxford, graduating in 1851. He was a Captain in the First Regiment of the West Riding Militia in March 1853, but painting was his first love and he became a pupil of the sculptor and painter George Frederic Watts (1817–1904). Watts was to become one of the most popular and acclaimed of all the Victorian artists. He spent four years in Italy in the 1840s. It was Italy which became Roddam's chosen home in later life. Through Watts and Watt's friend Valentine Prinsep, Roddam met many of the foremost Pre-Raphaelite artists of the day. He was part of a group who painted the murals at the old library of the Oxford Union. The group included D.G. Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris. Another member of the group was Richard St John Tyrwhitt, the father of William Spencer Stanhope Tyrwhitt. The murals depict scenes from the Arthurian legends.

In September 1859 Roddam married Lilla Wyndham Dawson at St George's Hanover Square London. She was a widow with a daughter, Georgina Frederica. A daughter Mary was born in November 1859 in London. Georgina married Arthur H. Mure a brewer, in 1875, and sadly Mary died in Florence in 1867. Mary and Roddam are buried at the Cimitero Evangelico degli Allori in Florence. The year 1859 was also when Roddam first exhibited at the Royal Academy.

The year 1861 saw Roddam living at Norwood Farm, Elmbridge near Esher, Surrey. He may have been living there during the building of his new home, Sandroyd (now Benfleet Hall), Cobham. Esher was a popular place for the Pre-Raphaelite circle and Norwood has an old workshop which may have served as his studio.

Sandroyd was the second house designed by the architect Philip Webb. In 1859 he had designed the Red House for William Morris. Sandroyd was built with double interconnecting studios and a dressing room for models. Roddam lived there until about 1864. Roddam suffered from asthma and began to spend winters in Italy. He lived in London and later also had a home at Hill House, Cawthorne where he also set up a studio. This brought him close to his parents who were both to die in 1873. After their death he bought the Villa Nuti, on Bellesguardo, Florence.

Cawthorne remained an important part of Roddam's life. After the death of his parents he was responsible for significant alterations to All Saints church, Cawthorne. Much of the work was done by George Swift under the direction of G.F. Bodley (1827–1907) the noted Victorian architect. Roddam painted the pulpit panels of the church which unfortunately are not retained in their setting. In the late 1880s the local Vicar enlisted the support of Roddam and his brother Walter in the building of a museum in the village. Roddam contributed some of his work to that museum which still exists today. Visitors are surprised and joyful at their eclectic collection. Cannon Hall has on permanent loan Roddam's work 'Women of Sorrento'. Church work was important to Roddam. He painted a mural at St John the Evangelist, Hoylandswaine which has recently been restored, and also is responsible for work at St James the Great Flockton and St

Martins-on-the-Hill, Scarborough. In later life he was responsible for much of the work at Holy Trinity, Florence.

Perhaps the most extensive church work he undertook was with his friend G.F. Bodley. This was the work, commissioned in the 1870s, in the chapel of Marlborough College, Wiltshire and comprised 12 murals whose unifying theme was angels. Six angels were from the Old Testament and six from the New Testament. A new chapel was designed by Bodley in 1886 and Roddam modified the colours of the paintings and these were transferred to the new chapel when it opened in 1886.

Although living in Italy Roddam continued to send work to exhibitions in the UK. After his death in 1908 there was an exhibition of his work at the Carfax Gallery in London in 1909. He has work at the Russell-Cotes Gallery, National Museums Liverpool, the Tate Gallery, the Manchester City Gallery and the Whitworth Gallery, Manchester. The Whitworth have a small oil painting by Roddam, of his niece Mary Gertrude, the sculptor. She was much influenced by her uncle. Baptised in Cawthorne in October 1857, the daughter of Roddam's brother Walter, it is her work which rests in Cawthorne, both at Cannon Hall and the Victoria Jubilee Museum. She exhibited widely between 1886–1909 but after Roddam's death seems to have stopped. She is thought to have painted pulpit panels at Christ Church, Isle of Dogs, in memory of her brother Edward. The connection to the church is uncertain but may have been because of a friendship between Gertrude and Kathleen Wintour, daughter of the Vicar at High Hoyland near Cawthorne. Kathleen was on the committee of a women's fellowship in Millwall close to the church. She died in Florence in 1944.

Landscapes by John Roddam Spencer Stanhope from the Hidden Art of Barnsley exhibition
 Courtesy of Victoria Jubilee Museum, Cawthorne

© Sally Hayles for Barnsley Art on Your Doorstep 2014





One of the 12 panels from Marlborough College: Abraham entertaining the angels – 'Adjutorium nostrum in nomine Domini' (Our help is in the name of the Lord) Courtesy of Marlborough College