Samson Gilbert Daykin (1886–1939)

INTRODUCTION BY BARNSLEY ART ON YOUR DOORSTEP

THANK YOU TO the Daykin family for allowing us to publish Gilbert's story as told by his son Alec, an architect. Cindy Allenby, Gilbert's grand-daughter, has been a great help in bringing Gilbert back to Barnsley.

Samson Gilbert was the son of Noah and Annie Daykin. Noah was a coal miner who moved to Barnsley between 1866–1871 with his first wife, Olive. They lived at Milner Street, Platts Common. After Olive's death Noah married Annie Brearley in Jump, Barnsley.

Some of Gilbert's work was exhibited at the Cooper Gallery, Barnsley, in October 1980 as part of a travelling exhibition enabled by the Science Museum, London. At the opening Gilbert was described as "the Wilfred Owen of the mining industry".

After Gilbert's death Lilian became an author of children's books.

CINDY ALLENBY WRITES:

Always known as Gilbert, he was born 1886 at Platts Common, Hoyland Nether, Barnsley. Around 1900, he moved with his elder brother, Arthur, to work at the new mine in Shirebrook, Derbyshire. Gilbert rejoined the family after they moved from Worsborough Bridge to 55 Central Drive, Shirebrook. He may have worked on the mine railway but became a miner during the First World War.

He married Lilian Hayes in Shirebrook in 1910. She was the daughter of Thomas Hayes and Mary Ellen Towler and was born in Oldham in 1889 (see below). Gilbert and Lilian had three children: Irene Nellie (1915–1936), Alec born in 1918 and Philip William (1923–2002) Gilbert also earned some fame and success as an artist, exhibiting frequently, and he spent some time in London encouraged by the Duchess of Portland and Malcolm Macdonald MP (son of Ramsey Macdonald). His work included portraits and landscapes and a collection of his oil paintings of miners at work is now held in the Science Museum.

The family moved from Shirebrook to Church Warsop and Gilbert went to work in the Warsop Main colliery. He was killed in a cave-in at the colliery

Gilbert and Lilian with their children Alec, Philip and Irene

in December 1939 and was buried with his daughter Irene in the cemetery at Church Warsop. Lilian became a Collector of Taxes, and, after retirement, an author of some dozen children's books. She died in September 1978 in Sheffield.

ALEC DAYKIN WRITES:

Gilbert was born in a short row of houses standing on the top of a ridge in Platts Common, Hoyland Nether, seven miles north of Sheffield and spent his youth in the small village of Worsborough Bridge. His birth was registered in Darfield, a sub-district of Barnsley, the centre of the West Yorkshire 'Silkstone' coalfield. Although he never lived or worked there, Barnsley has always claimed him as a son.

Gilbert said himself that he began work at the age of 13 at the turn of the century but did not say where or what he did. Boys did not normally work at the coal-face, instead fetching and carrying, operating the ventilation doors, taking messages or looking after the many ponies that were stabled or working underground. He grew to about 5 ft 10 ins, taller than the average miner and, although he never showed it., capable of feats of immense strength. Upon one occasion, when one of the pit ponies had fallen in a narrow heading-tunnel and become jammed, he put his arms around it and bodily lifted it onto its hooves!

On another, late in the strike of 1926 during an ugly confrontation between Trotskyist agitators and the single local policeman 'Bobby' Turner, Gilbert saved

Gilbert in London in 1931

the policeman from lynching by intervening, picking him up as if he were a child and throwing him to safety over a five-foot wall! He narrowly avoided being lynched himself but, being well respected as a reasonable and sensible figure, escaped with a few abrasions. Mother treated his injuries, upbraiding him for getting involved and shut up the house in darkness that night. He reasonably pointed out that the injury or death of a policeman would have been the flashpoint at which the military would have been called in and martial law declared.

Gilbert was a personable man, blonde with a slightly reddish tinge and fair complexion. Strangely, unlike many miners, he never acquired those bluish marks like tattoos, which resulted from injuries in the presence of coal-dust. His manner was quiet and his nature tolerant with a certain amount of natural dignity. Some women found him very attractive, much to Lilian's distraction. Perhaps luckily, the local miners' clubs were 'men only' (there was no 'equality' problem then) and Gilbert disliked 'pubs'.

During his working life underground, jobs included acting as 'ripper', cutting the narrow tunnels into the coal seam that defined each extraction sector called a 'stall'; working as a Deputy's 'Butty' (assistant); taking charge of a 'stall' or maintaining a conveyor road. One of the critical and constant duties of each group of workers was the support of the rock roof above each seam and, towards the end of the 1930s, some steel arches and prop-supports were being introduced instead of beams and posts of pine in the more permanent tunnels. Father always said that the creaking and groans of stressed timber gave warning of collapse: steel did not. It might be stronger but in practice it was more dangerous.

The time when Gilbert first began painting in earnest is not known; a few undated items of juvenilia have been found which appear to predate his marriage in 1910. The first serious attempt at oil painting is from the years immediately preceding or following and, although somewhat amateurish, is quite an elaborate and complex composition. The woman standing almost centrally is intended to be Lilian. Some areas of the work show a surprising promise of dexterity, albeit the setting depicted is an imaginary Victorian fenland which would have been quite unfamiliar to Gilbert. Probably his second major attempt is a seated portrait of Lilian dating to 1911/12. The bodice of her dress is very complicated and colourful, demanding a certain amount of intricate brushwork; the likeness is unquestionable and only the hands, always the most difficult and demanding passage, are somewhat unsuccessful.

Another Victorian or Edwardian essay, clearly inspired by the popular 'Roman' and 'classical' scenes of palatial life painted by Alma-Tadema, Fortunino Matania, Arthur Hughes and Alfred (?) Waterhouse, is a 'Bath of Psyche' scene which he was still working upon in 1924. In between he had painted portraits of both Irene and Alec as small children. The powerful scents of turpentine and linseed oil in the attic studio of 107 Station Road is one of the earliest and still most evocative memories. Each of these paintings marks a clear step forward in Gilbert's vision and technical ability. The painting of the orchard in Sookholme Lane, c. 1926, marks his attainment of a competence which attracted considerable respect when it was exhibited in one of the annual exhibitions in the galleries of Nottingham Castle.

The move into that county at Church Warsop had a profound effect upon Gilbert and his family. The whole ambience was totally different, for the housing accommodation was modern, well designed and supplied with electricity and constant hot water and was sited upon a gentle hill with a wide view southwards over the Meden valley. The village was on the edge of the Welbeck estate, seat of the Dukes of Portland, forming the western section of the Dukeries. Three hundred yards to the west of the house, dense mixed woodland stretched three or four miles to Langwith. In the opposite direction, beyond the old village, with its ancient church and water mill (the *weirshop* which gave the name), began the fringe of Sherwood forest.

With the stimulus of this environment, Gilbert began to paint furiously. Oddly enough his increased output included sketches and oils of life and work upon the surface and below the ground upon which he now lived. Some atmospheric paintings of Warsop Main colliery at dawn and dusk were acquired by the Stavely Coal & Iron Company for its board-room and the Miners' Welfare Committee followed suit with two or three works and offered Gilbert a bursary to enable him to attend the Nottingham College of Art for two days each week. This was a further important stimulus but a mixed blessing; instead of grounding him in human anatomy which he admitted was his weakness, he was encouraged to adopt mannered styles of painting and brushwork which were fashionable at the time but not suited to his individual technique.

One great advantage at this time was the opportunity to see other artists at work, receive sound criticism and see his work exhibited alongside contemporary painters whom he admired such as Arnesby Brown, A.J. Munnings, W. Clausen and Dame Laura Knight (also at Nottingham).

Articles and reviews in the Press were brought to the attention of the MP for the Bassetlaw constituency (N. Notts), Malcolm Macdonald, son of the then-Prime Minister, Ramsey Macdonald. It was the beginning of a friendship between Gilbert and Malcolm Macdonald which lasted for some four or five years, until in 1935 the latter lost his seat and in 1936 became MP for Ross and Cromarty in Scotland. During those years, although a busy politician, Malcolm M. visited when his schedule permitted, or wrote from Downing Street and Lossiemouth when it did not with encouragement and advice. In 1931 he engineered a fairly comprehensive exhibition of Gilbert's work, mounted at an important Labour Party 'bazaar' and conference at Worksop. The Prime Minister was invited to open the exhibition before addressing the conference.

Father imported me to assist and help hang the pictures. The hall was seething with eager young politicians who later were to become familiar faces and names. Some names were, in later years, also to become revered: Smith, Bevan, Foot, Henderson and so on. It was strange to hear the overheated language, the mouthing of questionable platitudes, raised voices hoping to be noticed in the crowd, to see the cliques and cabals forming, and the rebuffs handed out. This was only a few years after the General Strike and some of the attitudes on display were astonishingly ill-informed and even viciously misdirected. I believe that, thinking back to Granddad Hayes' old form of socialism, compared with this virulent form of social warfare, this was the moment when I came to distrust all politicians.

When the great man shook my hand and asked if I 'young man' was going to be an artist like my father or perhaps enter politics, he was rather taken aback by my brusque reply that, as far as I could see, there was no real reward in either and I was going to be an architect or a surgeon! Malcolm, standing beside his father, actually guffawed and grinned gleefully. The great man went on to have lunch and then make his speech: it was the one in which his intent to abolish the House of Lords was first mentioned. They are still chipping away at it over 75 years later! Politicians! Actually neither of us, father and son, were really acceptable to the body politic. Miners were supposed to be small aggressive members of the Union bloc, votes with dirty faces and Marxist views. A miner with creative talent was a novel anomaly. And I, of course, was wearing a grammar-school blazer! The national press which was there in force seemed to think this was prime stuff and during the next week or so, descended on the family for a series of interviews. It was interesting to compare the resulting copy and the editorial attitudes, the distortions of truth and reality.

The interest of the national 'dailies' and even the 'weeklies' became almost frenzied when, a few days later, the Duchess of Portland considerately sent to enquire whether we would be 'at home' before she arrived in her Rolls. Although a woman of great charisma and natural 'presence', her manner was easy and unrestrained. She was six feet in height with a slim, graceful figure, a porcelain complexion and a brilliant awareness. She took tea and viewed a series of Father's paintings with critical intelligence and was very attracted by a landscape with sheep, painted near Cuckney, and arranged for it to be sent to Welbeck Abbey.

Most of the paintings which were available had been collected to be sent to No. 10 Downing St as the Prime Minister wished to show some of them to Sir Wm Rothenstein. When the Duchess heard that Gilbert had not had a proper opportunity of studying in the London galleries, she cried, "Oh but you must!" and invited him to spend as much time as he could manage at her town house in Grosvenor Square. She immediately set about making arrangements with her housekeeper and butler. So that August Gilbert spent over a fortnight at 3 Grosvenor Square, W1.

In London he was lionised – it was a sort of fairy-tale which suited the prevailing national mood (Anyway August is the 'Silly Season'). The newspapers took up the story as a 'ninedays-wonder' and the *Daily Express* appointed Gilbert as 'special (temporary) Art Critic', arranging some joint interviews with controversial artists such as C.R.W. Nevinson. Some paintings were hung in the Brook Street gallery in Bond Street and Gilbert was also elected a member of the Savage Club and was taken by Professor Hobday, the eminent veterinary surgeon, to meet the Lord-Mayor of London at the Mansion House. He visited No. 10 Downing St with Malcolm MacDonald and was shown the more esoteric parts of the Palace of Westminster. How much time was spent in the galleries is not known!

After about a fortnight of hectic correspondence, I suspect Mother began to feel that London might have opened its heart but not its coffers and she hied down to get her breadwinner back. She had visions of losing him for good and

THE DAILY MIRROR, Monday, August 3, 1931.

DUCHESS'S MINER GUEST—P. 2

Daily Mirror

THE DAILY PICTURE NEWSPAPER WITH THE LARGEST NET SALE

No. 8,642 Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper MONDAY, AUGUST 3, 1931 One Penny

WIRELESS IN FULL ON PAGE 14

BRIDAL CAR KILLS CHILDREN

TWO GIRLS PINNED AGAINST WALL

The scene of an accident at Ancoats, Manchester, when Angela Maggi (inset) and Silvia Boggiano, both eight years old, were killed. After being in collision with a private car, a taxicab, containing a bridal party, pinned the children against the wall.

Silvia Boggiano, one of the dead children.

HOME AGAIN

Mrs. Egerton at her Wandsworth Common home with her dog, which was also in the accident.

Miss Beryl Riggs, who with her sister Daphne and their cousin, Mrs. Egerton, was injured in a collision in which the Prince of Wales's car was involved, photographed after returning to London from hospital at Windsor.

MINE TO MANSION

Mr. Gilbert Daykin, a Notts miner artist, in London yesterday to stay as the guest of the Duchess of Portland in Grosvenor-square. He has come to study old masters.—("Daily Mirror.")

TIDE THREAT TO SLEEPERS

A waterman waking sleepers on Southend beach late at night. Although it was raining and the incoming sea had reached their feet the sea air made these tired holiday-makers sleep soundly.

Front page of the *Daily Mirror* on Monday 3rd August 1931

Page 2 THE DAILY MIRROR Monday, August 3, 1931

PIT-ARTIST GUEST AT LONDON MANSION OF DUCHESS

VISIT TO STUDY OLD MASTERS

The Duchess of Portland.

"I FEEL NERVOUS"

Galleries Tour to Augment Scanty School Lessons

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Leaving his humble cottage a poor miner came to London yesterday as guest of the Duchess of Portland in her magnificent Grosvenor-square mansion.

Early yesterday the miner, Mr. Gilbert Daykin, kissed his wife and three children good-bye and left the murky Nottinghamshire colliery town of Warsop for one of London's most aristocratic squares.

For two weeks he will be enjoying what he terms "Paradise"—studying the pictures in the art galleries and meeting those who share his devotion to art.

He told me how he laboured in the mines and painted pictures in his spare time; how his pictures aroused the interest of the Duchess of Portland, whose generosity has made his cherished dreams come true.

BEWILDERED

At six o'clock last evening Mr. Daykin was standing on the pavement in Grosvenor-square, looking with wonderment at his temporary London home. Dressed in a simple tweed suit and cap and carrying a suit case, he looked almost bewildered with the excitement of his adventure.

"I can't help feeling nervous," he told me. "You Londoners are so smart and cute that I don't know what sort of figure I shall cut here.

"You can imagine that my wife is very pleased with my opportunity to come to London. Of course, it means my losing two weeks' work in the mines, but my wife and I have been short of money before, and I'm sure we shall pull through all right again this time.

"You see, making good at painting means everything to me. I work down the mines for a living, but art is sheer pleasure.

"My artistic education consisted of three months in Nottingham Art College, and now it is to be augmented with this London art gallery tour.

PICTURES AT NO. 10

"Strangely enough, this wonderful trip of mine is the result of a church bazaar at Warsop, where the vicar persuaded me to show some of my pictures.

"Mr. Ramsay MacDonald was there, and he liked my pictures. In fact, he had twenty of them, painted in my little cottage at Warsop, taken to No. 10 Downing-street to be shown to experts.

"The Duchess of Portland became interested in my work and bought a landscape. And now she has invited me to stay at her house."

"I'm used to miners' cottages, not ducal mansions, so I certainly feel somewhat bewildered in Grosvenor-square."

But mention of pictures in the National Gallery made Mr. Daykin forget everything but art. For five minutes he lingered on the pavement lecturing me on various artistic schools and methods.

Then he rang the bell of the mansion, where a servant took his suitcase and bowed him inside.

MURDERER REPRIEVED

Saved from Death After Appeal Against Sentence Had Been Dismissed

A reprieve has been granted [illegible] William Ryder [illegible] widower, of [illegible], who was sentenced to death last month for murdering Mrs. Ethel Layton, who was employed by him as a charwoman.

An appeal by Ryder against his sentence was dismissed by the Court of Criminal Appeal. His execution had been fixed for Thursday.

IONIC TO-DAY—AND WHY

The "Daily Mirror's" New Easy-to-Read Type

To-day's issue of the *Daily Mirror* marks a notable advance in newspaper production. For the first time in its history the *Daily Mirror* is printed in IONIC type.

In its latest form IONIC, which will be used in all future editions of the *Daily Mirror*, is an ideal type for newspaper purposes.

Ionic is clean-cut, bold and incisive; at the same time restful to the eye, and achieving a clearness only possible in the larger sizes of other types.

Although in future the *Daily Mirror* will be easier to read, there will be no diminution in the amount of news, nor in the length of the many features which have made the paper so popular.

In deciding to adopt IONIC, the *Daily Mirror* is continuing the policy which it has followed since its inception, and on which its exceptional success is based; the policy of insisting that only the best is good enough for its readers.

As the Premier Picture Newspaper, the *Daily Mirror* has always employed only the most up-to-date machinery and the most modern methods in journalism.

The introduction of IONIC, the type that is easy to read, is only another step forward in the development of the picture newspaper.

If you read the *Daily Mirror* news columns you know all you need to know of the day's news. In bus, tram or tube, however poor the light or however big the crowd, the news will be easier to read—in Ionic.

Jennifer's advice on dress and household matters will be even more enjoyable—in Ionic. Merry Andrew will be funnier—in Ionic. City Comment and News and Views for Motorists are better than ever—in Ionic.

All the Sporting News, the Theatre and Cinema criticism, the Dog Notes and the Hiking Hints will be more enjoyable in Ionic—the type that is easiest to read.

REJOINED FORCE

Reinstatement as Sergeant of a Former Divisional Inspector

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

[illegible]

DIVERS RESCUE HANDBAG

Recovered by Two Men After Repeated Descents—Dropped by Woman

[illegible]

U.S. HORSE FOR ASCOT

Sun Beau's £86,000 Winnings—His Cat and Dog Friends

[illegible]

TWO 'HOLD BABY' CASES IN LONDON IN TWO DAYS

Young Woman Left with Twelve Months Old Boy at St. Pancras

[illegible]

£3,000 MUST BE WON

[illegible]

ACROBATIC THIEVES

Lower Themselves by Rope into Jeweller's Shop After Cutting Hole in Staircase

[illegible]

Holiday breakfast on the Hog's Back, near Guildford, for motor-caravanners.

PRINCE GEORGE SEES THE EIGHT

"Daily Mirror" Girls at Big Naval Ball

LOVELY SETTING

Sports Tableaux Enthusiasm by Distinguished Gathering

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

[illegible]

BRIGHTEST AND PRETTIEST

[illegible]

EXQUISITE DRESSES

[illegible]

HOME NEWS IN BRIEF

[illegible]

TO-DAY'S WEATHER

[illegible]

Inside page of the *Daily Mirror* on Monday 3rd August 1931

all in the fleshpots of the capital but need not have worried overmuch: his few letters to her and cards to me show that, much as he was dazzled by it all, he was astonished and scandalised at the luxury and hedonism in the corridors of power and affronted by the indifference of the powerful to the people as a whole. He clearly recognised that his period of fame or notoriety would be brief but could not see any way to turn it to his advantage.

It was hard for him to return to his old way of life but he faced it with no outward lack of grace and there was certainly a greater sophistication in his composition and artistic technique. There was also a hardening, an increased political aspect in his mining paintings. The most controversial painting of the Doncaster Summer 1932 Exhibition of the Work of Living Artists was No 90: 'Moloch' by Gilbert Daykin. It was a painting of a pit-head (Warsop Main) with the night-shift approaching the cages that would lower them half a mile down to their work. The openings of the head-gear glowed with fiery light like the eyes and open mouth of the baleful god. Gilbert well knew that it was babies and prisoners who were sacrificed to the deity but he had substituted miners. Other paintings showing the working life of a coal miner were to follow in a similar realistic vein: 'Firedamp', 'Markham's Ponies', 'Choke Damp' and 'Thirst'.

The beauties of the Nottinghamshire countryside and fauna above the coal seams were also painted and these appealed very much locally: some of Gilbert's pictures were bought by Boots of Nottingham and reproductions sold in their shops countrywide. Some of his finest work belongs to this period. The fact that his work was exhibited by the galleries in the company of those painters of the Royal Academy and the R.O.I. whom he admired was a great solace to him.

Fame seemed to have reminded the family of his existence and they came to visit. Chief among them was Grandmama Charlotte Barker. I think this was actually Annie Brearley who must have remarried after Noah's death in 1905 and preferred to use another forename. She arrived in state in an Edwardian touring car with open seating, a green body with gold lining and enormous brass headlights. It was driven by a young man in a brown bowler hat who I always understood was the mysterious Frank, Arthur's first son, my cousin whom I had never met. Grandmama was much more imperious than the Duchess! She was dressed and veiled in black, carried a silver-topped cane and sat enthroned whilst we children were paraded for inspection. Both our parents seemed quite un-intimidated by this august presence but we kids were somewhat awed by this sudden apparition from a former age. It was good theatre, however!

All this came to an end in 1935 when Gilbert's beloved daughter, Irene, was struck against a wall in Mapperly, Nottingham, by the young driver of a Morgan three-wheeler who lost control and mounted the pavement. She was not killed outright but suffered injuries which were infected with an untreatable bacillus. She died in September 1936. Her father lost all desire to paint and did not touch brush or pencil for over a year. It was a grievous time and there was more to come for, not long afterwards, as Lilian and Gilbert were leaving the cemetery after placing flowers on the grave to mark Irene's birthday, a small Morris car came careering down Cuckney Hill out of control, mounted the grass verge and threw Gilbert 20 yards further down the hill. A man less strong would probably have been killed outright but he was, nevertheless, severely injured.

Insurance pay-outs were meagre in those days and, for a time, life was very hard for the family. Philip, at 15, had followed me into The Brunt's School, Mansfield, hoping to become a vet. I was at Sheffield University but had to be home as much as possible so that my maintenance allowance could help.

The desire to paint returned the following spring to Gilbert when, walking to work through the woods at dawn, he came upon great drifts of bluebells beneath silver birches. It reminded him of his boyhood in Worsborough Bridge where there had been a similar bluebell wood in the old cemetery. It was called Lob's Wood. This linked on to Barrie's Lobs Wood where spirits lived and also the fact that Irene had always loved the bluebells because her birthday was 1st May. So he painted that dawn and it was a kind of epiphany and a memorial.

In the autumn of 1939, the government shambled into a war for which, despite many warnings, it was totally unprepared and ill-equipped. The armed forces had been neglected for 20 years and what equipment they had was as outdated as the strategic and tactical thinking (When I joined the Royal Engineers Second Training Battalion at Newark it was teaching the drill manual of 1918 and the construction of trench systems as for the Somme. This in the face of the *blitzkrieg* destruction of Poland! The result, of course, was the debacle of Dunkirk.) There were immediate patriotic calls to the miners to increase output of coal for the urgent production of ships, weapons and munitions.

The last time I saw my father in daylight was in September 1939 when we met by chance while helping to distribute gas-masks to old ladies in Market Warsop. Before he came home that afternoon I left to go back to Sheffield to work upon my final year and did not return until the morning of Wednesday 21st December. Some shopping was urgently required but, on the bus to Shirebrook I heard that there had been a disaster at Warsop Main so stopped the driver at Warsop Vale and walked to the pit-head. The expression upon the face of the under-manager told me instantly that the nightmare that haunts every mining family was a ghastly reality: Father was one of the missing six men! A fault fissure had apparently opened up and a thousand tons of shale and rock had cascaded down to fill and block a conveyor road. An hour later, and the last shift before Christmas would have ended and the area would have been clear. The first relay of rescue teams was already at work but it would take hours of frantic and strenuous labour to reach the entombed men. I could do nothing but go home to break the news to Mother, dreading the look upon her face but our friend the Rev. W.E. Morgan was already there and she already knew.

So began three days of agonised waiting before the men could be recovered and identified. Because of the state of the bodies and the onset of Christmas, the preliminary inquest and formalities had to be completed immediately and Gilbert was buried upon Christmas Eve in the same grave as his daughter. Warsop church was already decorated with holly, ivy and flowers and, although large, with broad aisles, was densely packed. Father's family came in force, including his mother. Neither Lilian nor I could ever remember much of that day or the people to whom we spoke: we must have coped with the stresses and the crowds somehow but we were both markedly aged by the time it was all over. The Christmas season, since then, has never quite regained its normal cheer.

During the war most of Gilbert's mining pictures remained with Lilian in Mansfield but came with her when she moved to Sheffield to live with us in her 'granny flat' at Gladstone Road. In the meantime she had become 'Grandee' to distinguish her from John's Granny Sales. The paintings remained in her small storeroom until her death in July 1978. Then they were seen by Pippa Richardson, a student who 'digged' with us during a period of shortage of University accommodation. It so happened that when, after graduation, she went to an appointment at the Science Museum, London, she mentioned their existence to the head of the department concerned with the history and technology of mining. He immediately expressed a keen interest and came up especially to Sheffield to see them. He said that the small collection was a unique and historic, social and technical document of a virtually vanished age and should be preserved intact. I had to make a decision more or less immediately and so the whole group was formally handed over to the Nation to form the nucleus of a collection in the Department of Mechanical and Civil Engineering. It is, or was, the intention to form a replica timbered mine adit with the pictures hung in the bays against a coal-face. The space to do this is still 'forthcoming'! However, Gilbert would have been overjoyed that his work now forms part of the national heritage for all time. That is his real memorial. The Science Museum did not merely store the pictures in Kensington but formed a touring exhibition with other material, artefacts and tools and sent it out on tour to galleries and museums around the whole country accompanied by a short illustrated handbook.

In 1979 a visitor to the Museum and Art Gallery in Mansfield gave to Ms Susan Howard cuttings from the *Nottingham Evening Post* and the *Sheffield Morning Telegraph* referring to the Science Museum exhibition. By coincidence, a letter arrived a few weeks later from a woman who had one of Gilbert's paintings but knew little of the artist although he was a local man, and was there any information available? Ms Howard did some research, went to see the exhibition in London and, realising that it was eminently germane to Mansfield, requested that it be sent on loan. The request was granted and, in 1980, she was further able to augment the collection by energetically locating and assembling a further 30-odd paintings of the Nottinghamshire countryside nudes, portraits, etchings and still-life. The combination made an impressive retrospective exhibition of Gilbert's range and skills.

After the close of the Mansfield exhibition, the combined collection went on a further tour of Humberside and West Yorkshire. I was invited to attend the opening and dinner in Barnsley and inveigled into 'saying a few words' about father and his life and times. A delegation of German miners from the Ruhr was present as well as all the local politicians so it turned out to be quite a speaking engagement 'off the cuff'! The language and ideas of the politicals did not appear to have changed since 1931; the Germans seemed pleasantly surprised that a miner should paint! I could not help thinking, as one of the local officials congratulated Barnsley upon its talented son, that the whole of Gilbert's working life from the age of 13, and the whole of his painting took place in the Mansfield area and that he not only painted North Nottinghamshire and

the edge of Sherwood forest but also died beneath it! He was a miner of the Nottinghamshire coalfields, not South Yorkshire, and his spirit is more tru1y in the paintings of the skies over Sookholme and the bluebells of Warsop Wood.

Considering the handicaps of a limited education and lack of worldly means, Gilbert Samson Daykin rose to relatively great achievement in a difficult era; perhaps it was the enormous contrast between the light and darkness of his working life that drove the talent in the art of his life above ground.

FOOTNOTE

Examples of Gilbert's mining paintings can be seen on the BBC 'Your Paintings' website.

APPENDIX

The following is an account of the accident that led to Gilbert's death.

Six Miners Entombed

Probably the worst and most tragic accident recorded at Warsop Main occurred around 1pm on the afternoon of Wednesday 20th December 1939 when six men were entombed by an extensive fall of roof nearly three miles from the pit bottom. Ironically they were working in what was considered to be the safest place in the pit. This was probably the worst accident since the Bilsthorpe Colliery Disaster in July 1934.

A deputy, two rippers and three stallmen were working with over 40 other men in the Birklands district of the Top Hard seam, which was said to be one of the safest areas in the pit. Suddenly, without any warning, an area of about eight to nine yards of roof crashed in at one corner of the face, bringing down the props and bars and completely burying the six men.

Rescue operations commenced immediately but were hindered by further falls. The sheer amount of debris made the operation very slow, and it was still going on when *Mansfield & North Notts Advertiser* went to press in the early hours of Friday morning. As a mark of respect the Thursday afternoon shift decided not to work and the men employed in the district volunteered to assist in the rescue work.

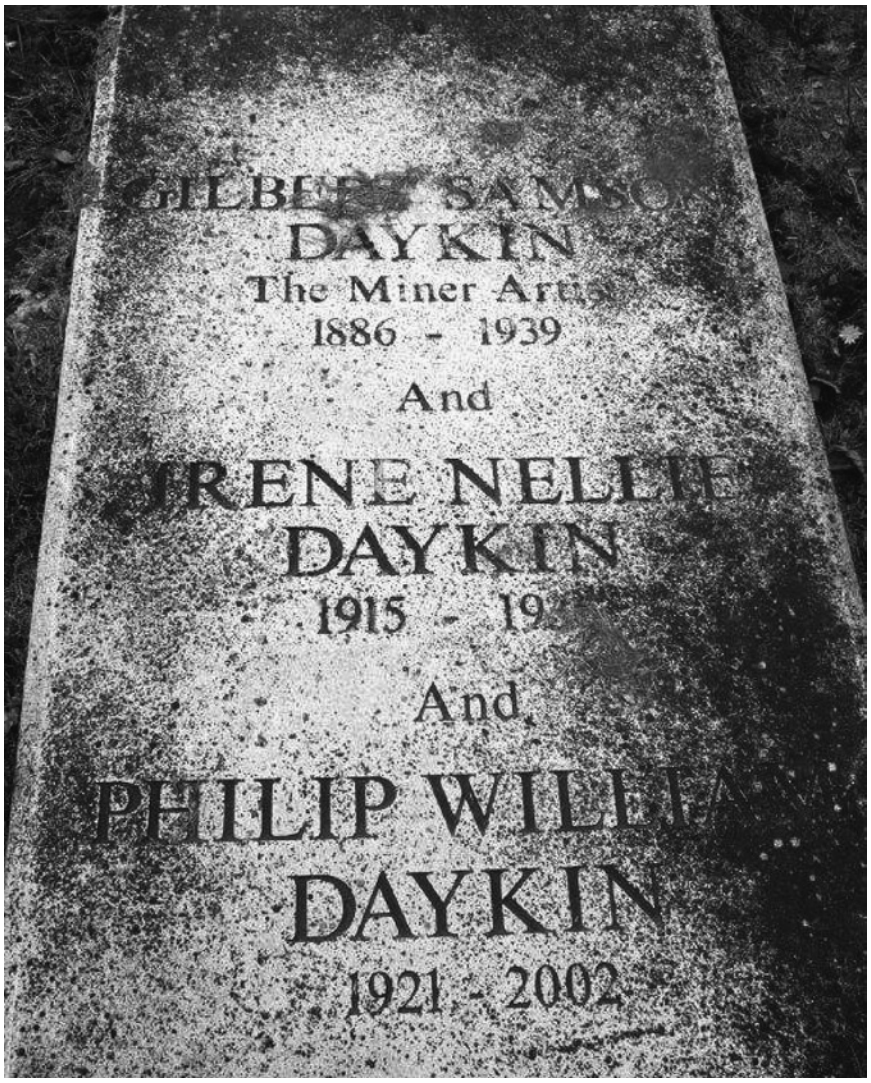
The mine manager, Herbert Gent, who had only just come to the surface from the morning inspection, immediately went down again with other officials to superintend the rescue operation. He was still down there on the Thursday night apart from a brief break to receive Mr R. Ringham, General Manager of the Staveley Coal & Iron Company and a former manager of Warsop Main, on Wednesday evening. Mr Ringham had been on business in London and had returned immediately he heard of the tragedy. The managers of the Markham and Ireland Collies. Messrs

W. Fry and C. Ringham also hurried to the scene to render what assistance they could. About midday on Thursday the Duchess of Portland arrived from Welbeck Abbey and enquired into the progress of the work.

The entombed men were Fred Fowler, Albert Leatherland, Thomas Cooper, John James Widdowson, James Eaton and Gilbert Daykin, the well known miner-artist. The first bodies were brought out on Christmas Day and the remainder at New Year.

Jack Winfield was under-manager's clerk at the time and remembers being told by his boss to stay in the office until his boss returned from down the mine. He was still there 24 hours later. He also remembers Rex. Ringham arriving by chauffeur driven car.

The Hundred Year History of Warsop Vale and Warsop Main Colliery (1889–1989) by Mave Calvert & Terry White, 1999.



Gilbert's gravestone in Warsop