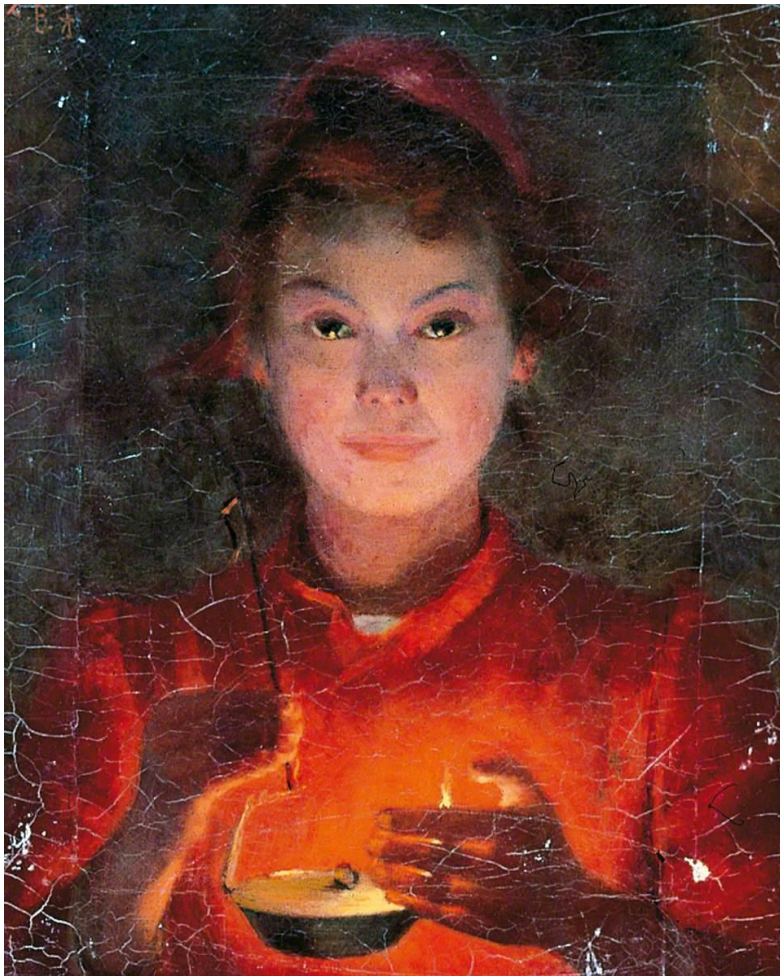


Artwork of the Month July 2021

Peter Gibbard, former Chair of the Friends of York Art Gallery, continues his researches into the remoter recesses and byways of our collection. He offers us one of his recent discoveries here, together with a selection of works by the artist to be found elsewhere.

'The Lamp' by Amy Beatrice Atkinson

Miss Amy Atkinson (1859-1916), an interesting but little-known woman artist with local connections, is represented in the York Art Gallery collection by *The Lamp*. This painting was sold by the Dowdeswells Gallery, New Bond Street, London, during the years 1890 to 1892, when that Gallery promoted artists resident in Cornwall.



Amy Atkinson (1859-1916), *The Lamp*, oil on canvas, 40 x 32.4 cm,
YORAG 185, York Art Gallery by permission

It is one of ten paintings by different artists bequeathed to the Gallery in 1916 by life-long York resident, Major Robert William Richardson. This delightful small oil on canvas study of the use of light is in urgent need of a new frame and conservation!

Amy was born and educated in Fakenham, Norfolk, where her father was the Rector of St. Peter & St. Paul's, just off the Market Square. He later served as a Rural Dean and a Canon at Norwich Cathedral. Following his retirement the family resided at 5 Driffield Terrace, York.

Art and travel were consuming interests throughout Amy's life. Following her father's death in 1890 Amy received an inheritance, and promptly moved to the south coast to paint and exhibit, initially boarding at the Ship Inn, East Looe, Cornwall, and then moving to Newlyn to share a studio with a fellow artist, [Margaret Bird](#) (1864-1948). Amy's key selling exhibitions from this time included Dowdeswells (1890-92), Truro (1893), Passmore Edwards Gallery in Newlyn (1895), and Whitechapel (1902). During this period she completed a few portrait commissions, but most of her work focused on fisher folk (for example, [Repairing the Nets](#)), their children, interior scenes, and seascapes.



Amy Atkinson, *Bubbles*, Manchester Art Gallery

Early in 1901 she moved to London, residing first in Kensington and then in Chelsea, where Anne Macdonell joined her as a boarder for most of the decade. Anne, pictured below in a portrait by Amy, was a writer of non-fiction on a very wide range of subjects including 17th-century cookery recipes, biographies of Catholic saints, a memoir of Benvenuto Cellini, Italian folk tales, and travel.



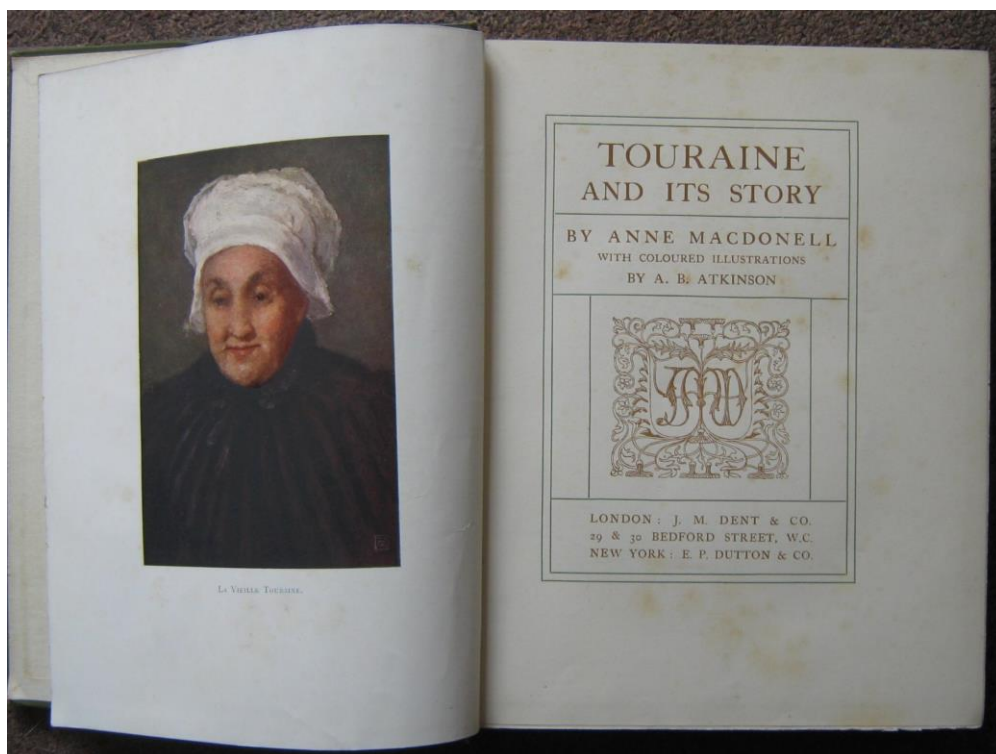
Amy Atkinson, *Lady with A Dog*, Portrait of Anne Macdonell
(Keele University Art Collection)

Between 1903 and 1906 Anne and Amy travelled extensively by carriage, horse, and on foot in Italy and France, while researching material for two books on travel. For two single women in their forties this would have been a demanding undertaking, and socially for this time quite unusual. The resulting books, *In the Abruzzi* (1908) and *Touraine and its Story* (1910), are what I call modern travel writing, of appeal to both the armchair traveller and the traveller following in Anne and Amy's footsteps. They are nominally travel guides; but the books are as much about their journeys as they are about the history and tourist sites in these regions. Published in London and New York (Chatto & Windus, J. M. Dent, J. Dutton, and others) the books sold well, and were reprinted during Anne's lifetime;

subsequently *In the Abruzzi* has remained in print. Both books enjoy something of a cult following among fans of travel writing!



Amy provided 12 watercolours to illustrate *In the Abruzzi* (an example above), and 50 watercolours and 30 drawings to illustrate *Touraine and Its Story*.



Amy ceased to be an active artist from about 1910, dying in Tunbridge Wells in 1916, while Anne continued to write and live in London until her death in 1924.

Artworks by Amy Beatrice Atkinson

- 1: *The Lamp* (York Art Gallery)
- 2: *Bubbles* (1907, Manchester Art Gallery)
3. *Repairing the Nets* (sold Bonhams 2004)
- 4: *Lady with a Dog*, Portrait of Anne Macdonell (Keele University Art Collection)
- 5: *Celano (In the Abruzzi)*, 1908
- 6: *La Vielle Touraine (Touraine and its Story)*, 1910

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