



Friends of York Art Gallery

e-Bulletin 5 July 2021

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EDITORIAL

And so we look nervously around us in the aftermath of 'Freedom Day'. For many Friends, as with me, I'm sure that any movements into our new circumstances will be gradual and taken with some circumspection. York Art Gallery is continuing to request visitors to pre-book tickets, to wear a face covering, to observe social distancing of one metre or more, to make use of the hand sanitisers provided, and not to visit if they are feeling unwell or have been asked to isolate. All Gallery staff will wear face coverings, an enhanced cleaning regime remains in operation, perspex screens are being retained on reception desks, and contactless payments are being encouraged in the Gallery shop and cafés. Checking out the National Gallery and Tate Britain websites suggests that these sorts of precautionary measures are in place in galleries nationwide.

Those willing to accommodate themselves to these conditions will find much to interest them. York Art Gallery is showing the 'Grayson Perry: the Pre-Therapy Years' exhibition, which includes an extensive collection of relevant works, 'Pictures of the Floating World', a selection of Japanese Ukiyo-E prints, and the Aesthetica Art Prize Exhibition. Other galleries, small and large, are likewise mounting exhibitions as restrictions ease. One Friend has alerted me to two exhibitions which anybody with an interest in British twentieth-century art finding themselves on the Sussex coast might like to visit. The Towner Eastbourne Gallery is featuring an exhibition of works by John Nash (moving to the Compton Verney Gallery in Warwickshire in October), while Pallant House Gallery in Chichester is mounting an exhibition of works by Ben Nicholson entitled 'From the Studio'. One hopes that conditions will allow these, and the numerous other exhibitions currently open throughout the UK, to stay open for their planned timespan.

In turning to the contents of this current e-Bulletin, I must again express my thanks to Friends who have made contributions, and likewise express my continuing admiration of the variety of themes which their interests cover. We have appreciations of the work of the nineteenth-century artist John Baverstock Knight, the twentieth-century artist Roy Freer, of Philip de Louthembourg, who operated over the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and of a medal commemorating the nineteenth-century Chartist Feargus O'Connor. To this selection is added a reflective piece by FYAG Committee Member Margaret May, introductions to two new Committee Members, and a reminder from our President, Peter Miller, of his scheme to try to sell for the benefit of the Gallery any

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unwanted art books which Friends are willing to donate. Overall, I feel, this e-Bulletin serves as a reminder of the continuing vitality of the Friends of York Art Gallery as we continue to move through a difficult period, and a harbinger of how that vitality will flourish anew should better times arrive.

Jim Sharpe

July 2021

TWO NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

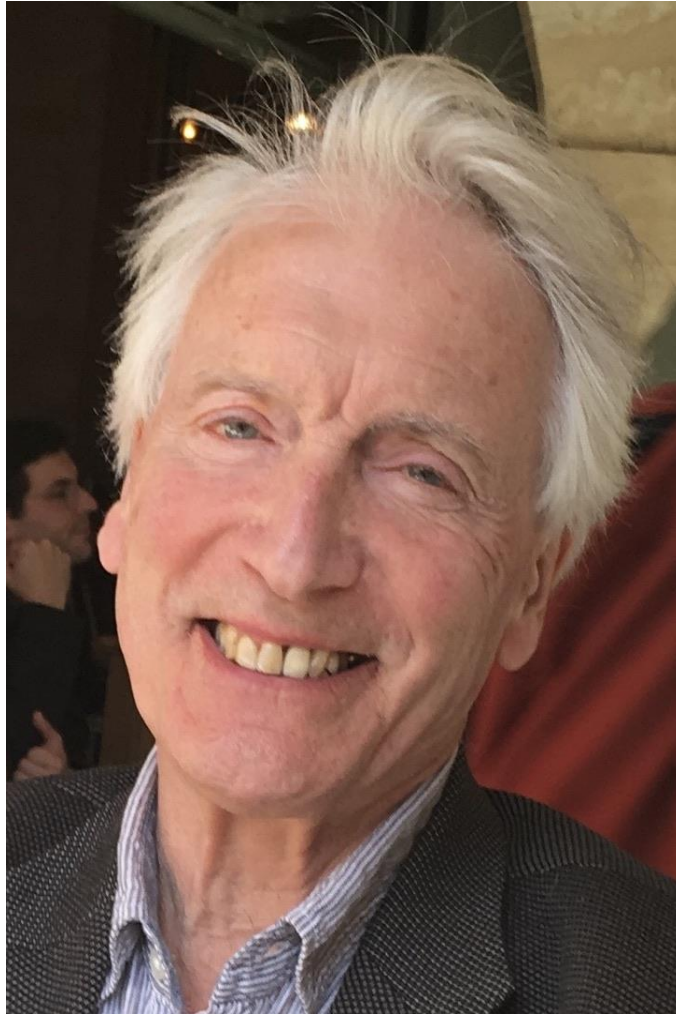
The Committee welcomes new members, Paul McLean and John Roe

PAUL McLEAN, Treasurer



I was born in Woodford Green in Essex and came to Yorkshire in the 1960s to take a degree in Special Mathematics at the University of Hull, where I discovered computers. This led me to a career in business systems development. I took a Diploma in Management Studies in Hull before moving to York in the late 1970s and I have been here ever since. I have been the treasurer of the Sports and Social Club at work and of three local clubs. I have always enjoyed art and design in particular the Impressionists.

JOHN ROE



Professionally I have taught English Literature for many years at the University of York, and in my retirement I continue to teach a seminar each summer in Germany at the University of the Saarland. My first position was at the University of Geneva, and I have subsequently enjoyed taking up posts in different countries. I completed a PhD at Harvard, in Comparative Literature, prior to coming to York. I taught in Japan for a total of three years over different visits, with my wife and small children, and there I developed an interest in the woodblock prints of the Ukiyo-e school, particularly Hiroshige. Much of my academic work has been in the renaissance with a particular interest in the influence of Italian poetry on the literature of the Elizabethans. Consequently, I enjoy the visual arts of the Italian Renaissance and its successors, and I have a special fondness for the frescoes of Tiepolo.

Here Alan Hitchcock, a former Chair and Vice President of the Friends of York Art Gallery, writes an appreciation of his ancestor, the painter John Baverstock Knight. Alan wishes to express his thanks for the input of members of the e-Bulletin Editorial Team in putting this article together.

JOHN BAVERSTOCK KNIGHT

Artist, Land Surveyor, and Pomologist, 1785 -1859

Although a latecomer to the wonders of the world-wide web, I am finding this amazing invention perfect for explorations into the arts, both visual and musical. In particular, I have been trying to find out more about the artist John Baverstock Knight, who happens to be my great-great-grandfather. I had been aware from an early age of his existence as a noteworthy artist, for I was fortunate enough to inherit some of his work: three excellent watercolour landscapes, some charming pen-and-ink drawings, and two illustrated books. Together these have given me examples of his considerable artistic abilities as well as his general interests in life.

In a way, my investigations into JBK (as he will be referred to from here) started in the late 1940s/early-1950s, when I was starting out on my career as architect with a keen interest in paintings and when my late wife Diana was still an art student, attending evening classes run by David Bomberg at Borough Polytechnic. In the knowledge that JBK's daughter Elinor had married the first Dr Hitchcock (see note at the end of this article) and hence initiated the line from which I am descended, we decided to visit the house in the Dorset village of Piddlehinton where JBK had lived for the last forty-seven years of his life. Although the current owner was absent on military service in Aden, we were shown round by his butler. I recall that this substantial village house, with its adjoining large garden and orchard, had one particularly fine room, the Saloon, which boasted a barrel-vaulted ceiling decorated with murals of gods chasing nymphs. Later in the day, when we visited the local Dorset Museum, it was confirmed by its curator that these were the somewhat uncharacteristic work of its former resident. We also found in this museum a self-portrait in oils of the painter.



John Baverstock Knight (1785-1859), Self Portrait, 1835, oil on canvas 74.5 x 61.5 cm, courtesy of Dorset County Museum

Along the way, we also learned that many examples of JBK's watercolours are to be found in the possession of the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, Tate Britain, the art galleries of Bristol and Manchester, as well as the Yale Centre for British Art in New Haven, U.S.A. So there is strong evidence that he was an artist well recognised and appreciated in his own times.

One 'find' that brought my great-great-grandfather into much sharper focus was the obituary that appeared in 1859 in the *Dorset County Chronicle*. This elegantly written tribute was reprinted the same year in the more nationally read publication *The Gentleman's Magazine*; it describes how:

On leaving school, he became an assistant to his father as land surveyor and land-agent. But his love of painting, which had shown itself from his early childhood, and was encouraged by his father, who was himself a man of science and no mean judge of art, became more and more the leading taste of his mind. In his professional excursions with his father, he carried on his art studies by sketches from nature, and studies of skies, and the foliage and forms of all kinds of trees, with effects of light and colour, and this won in early life that truth and sweetness which are shown in so many of his water-colour sketches and paintings of landscape.

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The 'professional excursions' referred to will have included visits to some of the Oxford colleges for which his father – and later JBK himself - was employed in the capacity of land surveyor.

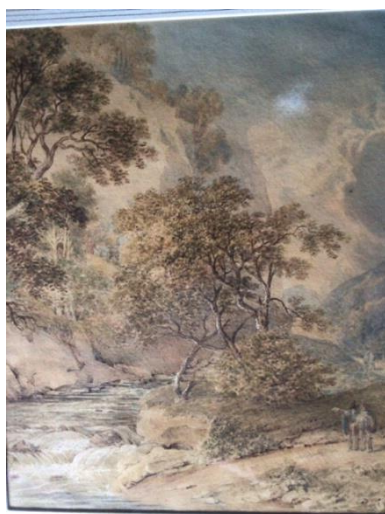
We learn from the obituary that, when his father died, he assumed the support of his mother and younger brother. He married Elinor Bulkeley Evans, a clergymen's daughter by whom he was to have eight children. Consequently, the amount of time he could devote to art was hard won: it seems he disciplined himself to rising at 5 a.m., painting between 6 and 9 a.m., and then attending to business. He was certainly able to make time to continue his sketches of the local countryside, as well as furthering his appreciation of art through the study of locally held collections. From his existing watercolours we know that eventually, like Turner before him, he travelled the country in search of the best subjects, including the Lake District and North Wales, and that he also apparently painted when visiting the continent. It is noticeable how often he includes a figure with horse and groom, and this seems to have become something of a trade-mark. It appears that he was well acquainted with men of learning and many artists, including Sir Thomas Lawrence, perhaps the most eminent portrait painter of the day and President of the Royal Academy between 1820 and his death in 1830. It is an indicator of JBK's standing that he was an Honorary Exhibitor at the Royal Academy in 1818 and 1819. The *Dorset County Chronicle* delicately implies that his health underwent a slow and steady decline over many years, and he was thus obliged to abandon painting well before his death at the age of seventy- four.

After his death, some 300 of his paintings, both oils and watercolours, were sent to a saleroom to be auctioned, only to be lost in a fire that consumed both premises and contents. This disaster must surely account for the relative unfamiliarity of his work.

JBK was described as 'a magnificent specimen of the country squire', tall, handsome and stately, an excellent sportsman, well-respected, well known for his charities, a wit, and a writer of poetry. Although further details of his life and character are yet to emerge, we can enjoy some examples of his work immediately. Below is a pencil drawing of a young unnamed woman, most probably his daughter.



The two examples of his watercolours below show a tree study in Dovedale (left) and a far view of Penrhyn Castle (right).



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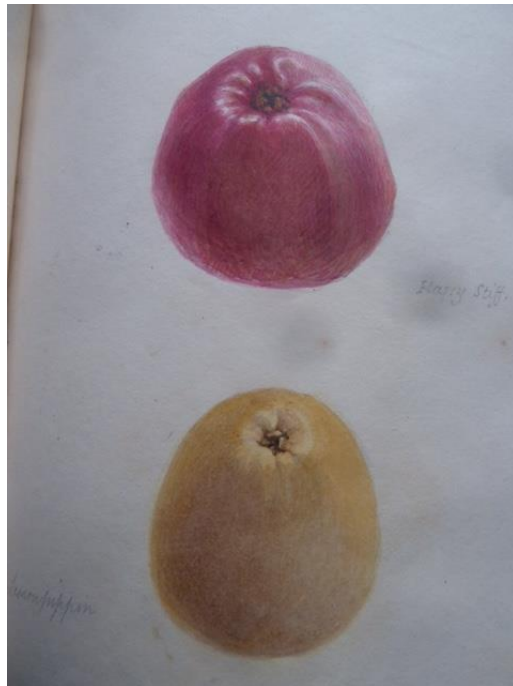
I have found that the best website for his landscape watercolours is www.watercolourworld.org, which offers twenty-seven examples of his work.

The two books that I inherited are first an 1802 edition of Izaak Walton's *The Complete Angler* (a copy of which would have been found in every gentleman's library). Into this copy two original and very detailed pen and wash drawings of anglers, dressed in waders and tall hats, have been carefully inserted.

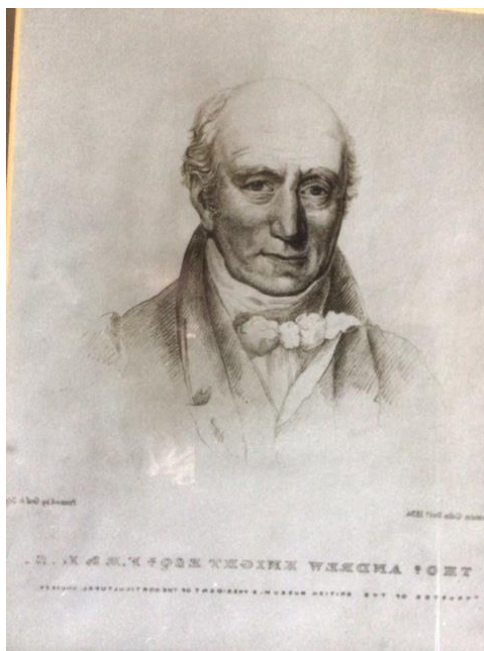


The second 'book' is a portfolio of fifty detailed studies of different types of English apples, pears, quinces and nuts, each named in pencil. The produce must surely come from his own orchard and garden.





I also have an engraving, dated 1834, of the founding President of the Royal Horticultural Society, Thomas Andrew Knight, pomologist. But try as I might, I can find no evidence of any close relationship between him and my great-great-grandfather. However, if any Friend is skilled enough in genealogy to succeed in discovering a link, I offer a reward – the donation of £50 to the Friends of York Art Gallery.



Thomas Andrew Knight (1759-1838)

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Note: This marriage led to an important connection with the City of York for, in 1884, their youngest child, Charles Knight Hitchcock, was appointed Chief Medical Officer at Bootham Park. He brought with him many medical innovations to compliment the radical humanitarian thinking of his predecessor, Frederick Needham, and contributed to the hospital's reputation by the early 1900s as the outstanding European hospital of its kind.

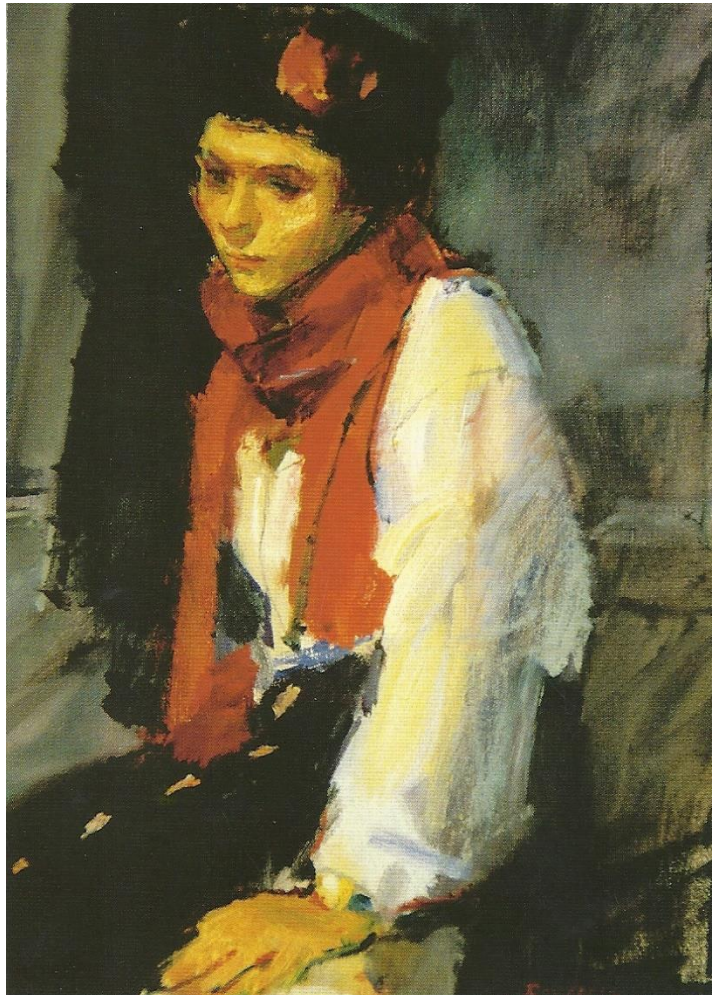
© Alan Hitchcock

Past Chairman and Vice-President of the Friends of York Art Gallery
July 2021

Photo credits: The self portrait of John Baverstock Knight is by courtesy of Dorset County Museum. All other photo images are by Alan Hitchcock.

Here Ann Petherick, owner of York's Kentmere House Gallery, gives an overview of the work of the recently deceased artist Roy Freer. A major retrospective of Freer's work is planned this Autumn at Kentmere House.

ROY FREER, R.I., R.O.I., N.E.A.C. (1937-2021)



Roy Freer, *Autumn Red Scarf*

Photo: David Petherick

Roy Freer was not only one of Kentmere House Gallery's first artists but, in my view, one of the finest artists of his generation: deeply admired by fellow painters, elected to three of the most prestigious national societies, and collected by knowledgeable buyers.

His paintings reflect his approach that a collection of objects is a series of colours, directions, and forms before they are cups and saucers, trees, or

street scenes. His paintings contain a fluidity, based on the premise that 'observation is a living experience, full of energy and vitality'.



Freer declared that 'scattered objects, shaded objects, bright objects; snatches of coloured material and papers; windows of summer brightness and the darkness of winter; familiar objects not quite seen, veiled behind light, shadow and colour. These are the concerns of my painting'.

Roy Freer, *Table Top*
Photo: David Petherick

Roy studied at Birmingham College of Art. He then became a tutor of adults in colleges throughout the country, including Artist in Schools for the Eastern Art Association, combining this with his own painting. He also demonstrated at events such as 'Art in Action', where he was much in demand.

At the time he was painting mainly in watercolours or pastels, but, after becoming a full-time artist over forty years ago, Roy focussed increasingly on oils, and developed his instinctive style of using overlays of rich colour to depict still-life, landscape, and occasional portraiture. He was concerned with the interpretation of the subject as a visual experience rather than a factual response. Objects are seen visually modified by light, shade, space, and distance, resulting in the fragmentation of colour and form; he stated that:

I am naturally drawn to colour, seeing the world as a very colourful place even on rainy days. For me the fascination of painting is to be found in the experience of the subject as moments of stillness and change. A landscape, for example, is a continual source of change, and one is ever aware of the passage of time, as with the movement of light from morning to afternoon. Both in landscape and still life I want to show through colour and brush mark, a visual interpretation of the subject which reflects the magical substance of sensation and experience. His work is characterised by over-layering brush marks, underpinning the structure of his paintings;

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and the whole is suffused with light, depicted in strong shafts of colour across the canvas. He talked of 'releasing his images from the confines of reality', and interpreting forms with the freedom that this criterion allows.

He was commissioned by Shell UK to provide work for their calendar, and portrait work included Steve Davis and Jimmy White for *Snooker International*. Although most of his work was shown in the South, he took part in two exhibitions of paintings of Yorkshire gardens in association with the National Gardens Scheme, and was artist-in-residence at the York Early Music Festival, both organised by Kentmere House Gallery. The Gallery continues to show his work and is planning a major retrospective in the autumn.



Roy Freer, *Concert at Bishophill*

Photo credit: David Petherick

Ann Petherick

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York Art Gallery holds works by a number of artists who, although perhaps not familiar to most gallery visitors, were famous and admired in their day. In this article Hannah Savage, a member of the Gallery's Visitor Experience Team, throws light on an exceptionally colourful representative of this body of painters who deserve to be better known.

PHILIP JAMES DE LOUTHERBOURG (1740 -1812)

Philip James de Louthembourg (to use the Anglicized version of his name) had a life that was full of surprises. An eighteenth-century French painter of historical subjects, landscapes, and naval scenes, de Louthembourg was greatly admired by Turner, Gainsborough, and Reynolds. For many years he was also a successful designer of theatre sets. However, he was a 'hot head' who was also a blackmailer, a bigamist and a fraudster!

De Louthembourg was born in Strasbourg on 31 October 1740. His father, an immigrant from Poland was a miniaturist and engraver. Philip, who wished to be an artist, initially studied under his father, and then at the age of fifteen he moved to Paris to study under Charles-André van Loo, who was a respected genre and portrait painter. Following that, he studied under the battle and marine painter Francesco Giuseppe Casanova (1727 – 1803) whose work [Smuggler Asleep](#) is in York Art Gallery's collection. Obviously very talented, he was elected as a member of the French Academy, even though, according to that institution's rules, he was too young. He became well known for painting storms at sea, landscapes and battles, and was particularly influenced by the artist Claude Joseph Vernet (1714 – 1789).

At the age of twenty-one Philip met an older widow called Barbe, and together they enticed a retired, married captain of the French East India Company, Antoine de Meyrac, into paying Barbe 600 livres to become his mistress, gradually demanding more money and gifts from him. When he finally refused to pay any more, Philip threw him out of Barbe's house, using a drawn sword and, a few days later, married Barbe himself. He and Barbe went on to have five children, but Philip's behaviour deteriorated, and he became involved in gambling and also had sexual liaisons with numerous women, among them servants and prostitutes. Finally, he ran away to London leaving behind the heavily pregnant Barbe and their children.

Despite his chaotic domestic life, de Louthembourg had embarked on a European Tour in 1768 at the age of twenty-eight. He left Paris and travelled through southern France, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. During this time, he promoted his painting skills, as well as developing his talent for mechanical inventions. He created a model theatre, which was very innovative for the time, as he used lights behind a canvas to depict the moon and stars. He also managed to give an appearance of running water by using blue sheets of metal gauze and silver thread.

By the time Philip, at the age of thirty-one, settled in London in 1771 he was an established painter, and was offered work painting sets at Drury Lane Theatre for the actor David Garrick. In 1773, Garrick made him scene director, paying him the considerable amount of £500 a year. He continued to work there for ten years creating spectacular stage sets, working on costume design and overseeing stage machinery. When Garrick retired, de Louthembourg continued at Drury Lane working under Richard Brinsley Sheridan. While at the theatre he gained a huge following among the general public, and continued to create illusions. His theatre maquettes can be seen in the V & A's collection.

De Louthembourg's private life continued to be colourful. In 1773 he met Lucy Corson, a young widow, who at twenty-eight was five years younger than he was. Despite not being divorced, Philip married her the following year in Staffordshire. She was considered to be one of the most beautiful women of her time, and they remained together for thirty-eight years until Philip's death.

Philip and Lucy shared an interest in the occult, and became involved with a self-styled magician and notorious occultist 'Count' Alessandro di Cagliostro, born Giuseppe Balsamo (1743–1795). In 1788 de Louthembourg surprised the art establishment by saying that he was giving up painting to pursue his interest in alchemy and the supernatural. He and his wife, Lucy, decided to become faith healers, and with the help of a follower called Mary Pratt, produced a pamphlet titled *A list of a few cures performed by Mr and Mrs de Louthembourg, of Hammersmith Terrace, without medicine*. They treated two thousand people for seven months, between December 1788 and July 1789, although some people demanded their money back saying that the treatment did not work and that they had only been given barley water!

Due to public opposition, de Louthembourg was forced to give up faith healing and returned to painting, focussing on battle scenes and Biblical scenes. He produced two collections of engravings of his work – *The*

Picturesque Scenery of Great Britain (1801) and *The Romantic and Picturesque Scenery of England and Wales* (1805). Even though he had travelled widely, de Louthembourg particularly admired the English landscape, saying that 'No English landscape painter needed foreign travel to collect grand prototypes for his study'. His painting *Dovedale in Derbyshire* would bear this out. It is part of York Art Gallery's collection, where it can be seen on the stairs. He had visited Dovedale to look for material for the production, *The Wonders of Derbyshire*, for which he created the set designs.



Philip James de Louthembourg (1740-1812), *Dovedale in Derbyshire*, 1784, oil on canvas 97.8 x 129.5 cm, York Art Gallery, YORAG 395
© York Museums Trust

In 1781, de Louthembourg set up his own theatre entertainment peep show, called *Eidophusikon* – meaning 'Image of Nature'. The Press announcement described it as 'Moving Pictures representing Phenomena of Nature'. This miniature mechanical theatre, with its dramatic effects, was set up at his home in Lisle Street, Leicester Square. It measured six feet by eight feet, and used moving painted screens to create panoramas and dioramas. He is often thought to be the first person to create such panoramas, although it is uncertain whether he or the Scottish painter Robert Barker was the first to do so. De Louthembourg's theatre was a huge success and its auditorium could seat 130 people.

De Louthembourg continued to paint whilst he was engaged in his theatre project, and from 1807 he was the Historical Painter to HRH the Duke of Gloucester. He also exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy from 1772 until his death. Philip de Louthembourg's paintings often have the feel of a

stage set, especially in dealing with such topics as the *Defeat of the Spanish Armada* (1796) at the National Maritime Museum; the *Great Fire of London* (c.1797) at the Yale Centre for British Art, USA, and *Coalbrookdale by Night* (1801) at the Science Museum, London.



Philip James de Loutherbourg (1740-1812), *The Wreckers*, 1767, oil on canvas 62 x 78 cm, York Art Gallery, YORAG 33.
© York Museums Trust

York Art Gallery is fortunate to have one of Philip de Loutherbourg's dramatic paintings, entitled [The Wreckers](#). It was painted in 1767 when he was twenty-seven years of age, in the style of Claude Joseph Vernet. It depicts a rocky coastal scene, with a group of figures removing wreckage from the sea. In the distance two men are carrying a stretcher with either a body or booty on. It may be that they have some sort of hideaway high up in the rocks, where a door can be seen. A structure has been placed on a rock, with rungs to climb up, so that a lamp can be hung, to entice ships to sail towards what they may perceive to be a harbour light. Two men resting on the rock may be lookouts. Three men are dragging something heavy out of the sea on to the shore, whilst a fourth man is loading up his horse. The sun appears to be rising from behind the clouds, which suggests that it is early morning. I get a sense that these men are hurrying to finish their night's work and hiding any contraband

before day-break. There are two men in a boat being buffeted against the rocks by the rough sea. A few boats can already be seen on the horizon, so the men need to be quick. The false light has been removed from the structure, and the men on top of the rock look as if they are in repose. There are a few fish that have been laid out on the rocks in the foreground. This may be a cover-up for what they are actually doing. If anyone were to ask what they were up to, their reply would be, 'We're only fishing!'.

Suggestions have been made that as there is no visible wreckage, the men in the scene are probably just fishing – but why would de Loutherbourg call the painting *The Wreckers* if they are only fishing? It could be that the wreckage of the boat is on the other side of the rock. Deliberate ship wrecking was well known in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when ships were lured on to the rocks with lights; in 1735 a law was passed making it an offence to make false lights and attach them to poles or horses' tails. De Loutherbourg, who enjoyed producing historical paintings, would have been aware of the activities of ship wreckers, and so might have wanted to portray the activity. The subject might well have appealed to a man who was also a rogue.

It occurs to me that *The Wreckers* could almost represent de Loutherbourg's own life, since he seemed to have a desire to wreck the lives of those around him, though amazingly his artistic career was not destroyed by his chaotic behaviour. De Loutherbourg is buried in a chest tomb with his second wife, Lucy, in Old Chiswick Cemetery, London. Weathering has obliterated the inscription over the years, so it can no longer be read. Perhaps this could be seen as another disappearing act for this colourful character.

© Hannah Savage

Visitor Experience Team Member, York Art Gallery

July, 2021

Anne McLean, a member of the Friends' Committee and an historical medal enthusiast, discusses a medal which celebrates the release of the Chartist leader, Feargus O'Connor, from York Castle prison in 1841. A charming drawing from the Gallery's collection links the episode to the history of the Castle site and to Anne's own family history.

THE FEARGUS O'CONNOR LIBERATION MEDAL



The Feargus O'Connor Liberation Medal, 1841, white metal, 43 mm

Photo credit: Whyte and Sons Auctioneers Limited

The [Feargus O'Connor](#) Liberation Medal was issued in 1841 to celebrate the Chartist leader's release from York Castle prison. On one side is a portrait of O'Connor with the slogan 'UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE AND NO SURRENDER'. The reverse shows the gateway to York Castle prison and the legend 'FEARGUS O'CONNOR WAS CONFINED FOR 16 MONTHS IN THE CASTLE OF YORK BY THE WHIGS FOR LIBEL'. The words below the image, in the exergue, read 'LIBERATED 27 AUG 1841'. This is a rare medal, by an unknown artist, made of low value white metal for mass distribution to supporters of the Chartist movement. An example is held in the collection of the Yorkshire Museum (YORYM : 1995.530).

O'Connor's imprisonment in York Castle embroiled the city in a national political controversy. He was the founder and proprietor of the radical newspaper, the *Northern Star*, which was based in Leeds, and which he exploited to develop a sense of Chartism as a national movement and

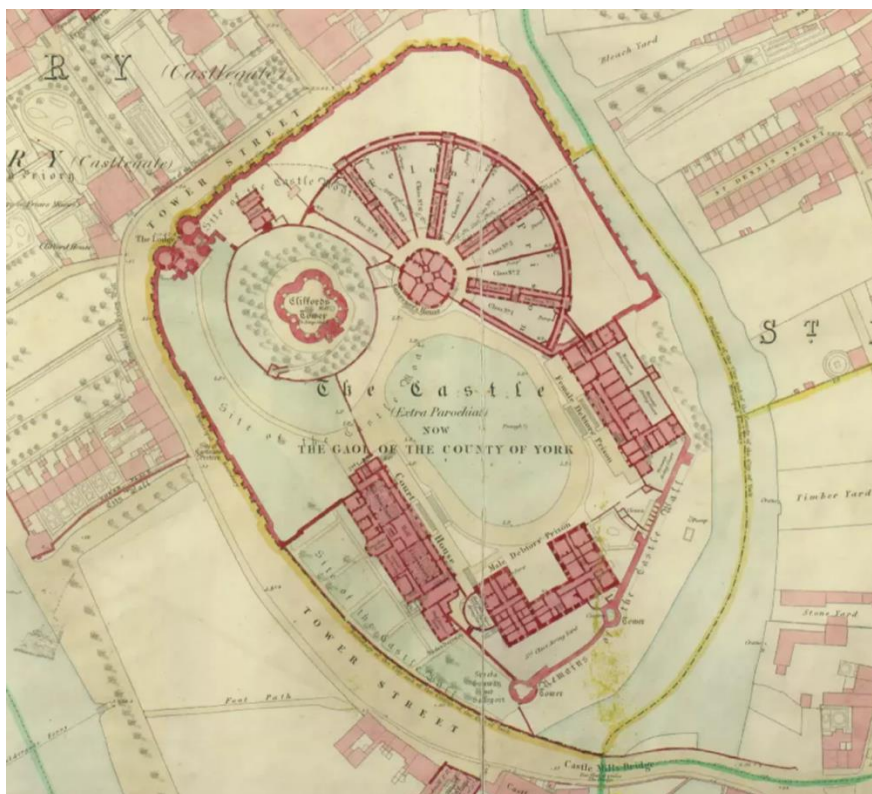
himself as its leader. A popular innovation was the distribution with the newspaper of portraits of prominent figures, including one of O'Connor himself.



Portrait of Feargus O'Connor, December 1840, issued by the *Northern Star*
(Reproduced by permission of the National Portrait Gallery)

In May 1840 O'Connor was found guilty at York Assizes of publishing seditious libels in the *Northern Star*, and sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment at York Castle, the county gaol of Yorkshire. The Liberation Medal, as it was referred to in the newspaper, was distributed to subscribers after O'Connor's release the following year.

The image of York Castle shown on the medal is not one that we easily recognise today because the building no longer stands (it was demolished in 1935). The prison was newly built when O'Connor arrived there, having only opened in 1835. Built over a period of ten years, it was designed to a radial plan and enclosed by a boundary wall, which was six feet wide at its base and forty feet high. The footprint of the building, its boundary wall, and gatehouse can clearly be seen on the [1852 OS map](#), as can Clifford's Tower, the Court House (now the Crown Court), and the Female and Male Debtors' Prisons, all of which still stand. The latter two buildings now house the Castle Museum, while the site of the felons' prison has for many years been occupied by a municipal car park.



York Castle Prison, detail from OS map 1852

© parallel | York Council Archaeology | Mapbox | OS OpenData

To his outrage, O'Connor was committed to the felons' prison, where he refused to co-operate with the authorities, arguing that a man of his status (a barrister and former Member of Parliament) should be housed with the debtors, not the criminals. However, despite his incarceration, he was able to continue issuing instructions to his supporters and writing for the *Northern Star*. His well-publicised claims of ill-treatment, strenuously denied by the York prison authorities, resulted in a petition being raised and debated in Parliament, but the Home Secretary refused to sanction his move to a debtors' prison or transfer to London.

O'Connor was not in fact badly treated at York Castle prison, and was allowed concessions which included access to the Castle Yard. As can be seen from the contemporary drawing in York Art Gallery's collection, *York Castle Yard*, by Francis Bedford, this was not the grim exercise yard that one might imagine, but an open and sociable space, within the Castle precincts but outside the prison walls.



Francis Bedford, *York Castle Yard*, drawing c. 1840, YORAG : R90

Image courtesy of York Museums Trust ::

<https://yorkmuseumstrust.org.uk> :: Public Domain

One of the cell blocks of the prison can be seen in the distance between Clifford's Tower on the left and the round building, the Governor's House, on the right. It is not difficult to imagine O'Connor exploiting the relative freedom of this environment to pass instructions and copy for the *Northern Star* to his associates. It is also likely that he met an ancestor of mine, who was an inmate of the debtor's prison. Thomas Charlesworth was imprisoned there for almost thirty years, from 1816 to 1845, not for debt but for contempt of court (unsurprisingly, this is a national record). His offence was to refuse to comply with a court order to lower the height of a weir at his woollen mill in Holmfirth. He was released in 1845 at the age of seventy-six, with the help of 'several highly respectable and influential people'. Could one of these have been O'Connor? There is certainly evidence of a connection between the two men. After his release, Charlesworth was represented *pro bono* at a public meeting by the Chartist lawyer William Prowting Roberts, who was a known associate of O'Connor and the subject of one of the *Northern Star's* portraits.

O'Connor's release was expected to take place in November 1841, eighteen months after sentencing, and plans were announced in advance in the *Northern Star* to mark the occasion with rallies and a Liberation Medal. The government's reaction was not to risk civil disturbance and to bring forward the release date by two months (hence the inscription on the medal mentioning sixteen months' imprisonment rather than eighteen). On being told that he was free to leave, O'Connor refused to go, playing for time to allow publicity to be organised. After a week's impasse, he was ejected from the prison and obliged to move to a hotel, returning to the Castle gates on Monday 30 August to be greeted by supporters, many of whom had travelled by train from the West Riding. Dressed in a splendid velvet suit which had been donated by sympathisers in the Leeds textile trade, he was paraded through the streets in a decorated carriage drawn by six horses and attended by three postillions dressed in the green Chartist colours. In the evening a rally was held at the racecourse where O'Connor addressed the crowd, estimated at 2,000, at length. The *Yorkshire Gazette* reported that 'the affair was peaceably conducted and as a whole passed off well'. No doubt York's civic and prison authorities were relieved to see the final departure of their controversial guest.

O'Connor's early release disrupted plans for the distribution of the medal, but, by the end of the year, most subscribers had received it, and could display their loyalty to the People's Champion and the principles he stood for with pride.

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Further reading: M. Eames, *York Castle, The County Gaol of Yorkshire 1823-1877*, Borthwick Paper 121 (York: Borthwick Institute), 2012.

A reminder from an FYAG Committee Member of the input the Friends have made, and will continue to make, towards the purchasing of artworks for York Art Gallery

YORK GALLERY'S COLLECTION - A GLANCE BACK AND A PEEK FORWARD

[Since] The Friends of York Art Gallery was founded in 1948, the emphasis has always been on supporting acquisitions and [Friends have helped to acquire] well over one hundred works of art and ceramics for the Gallery.

Our President Peter Miller in his foreword to *The Friends of York Art Gallery: A Brief History* (2017)

A Glance Back at Works – One Aspect of the Collection Acquired with your Support

You may have seen press reports that the Imperial War Museum is making £2 million available to artists and cultural organisations for new art commissions in 2021. The programme is being funded by a share of the royalties of Academy Award winner Peter Jackson's film *They Shall Not Grow Old*, commissioned to commemorate the centenary of the First World War.

You may also recall York Art Gallery's major exhibition in 2016 entitled *Truth and Memory: British Art of the First World War*, which had first been shown at the Imperial War Museum in London. Those who had visited the exhibition there noted that the pictures were displayed to better effect in York than they had been in the rather cramped surroundings of their London home.

Changes that have taken place in war art over time are reflected in York's own collection of artworks. The collection contains several paintings showing traditional scenes of opposing armies on the battlefield produced in the artist's studio. Artists were involved as soldiers, or sent out officially to the front to record their experiences, for the first time during the First World War. York has [*Troops Going over the Top*](#) in the battle of the Somme by Arthur Radclyffe Dugmore (1870–1955), [*The Return to the Front: Victoria Railway Station*](#) (1916) by Richard Jack (1866–1952), long a popular favourite, and [*The Trail of War*](#) (1919) by Sydney Carline (1888–1929). Its collection also contains the fine [*Winter Sea*](#) by Paul Nash painted in Dymchurch Kent when the artist was recovering from a

breakdown following his experiences at Ypres. From the conflict of the Second World War, YMT's collection holds [Gun Crew](#) (1944) by Henry Lamb (1883–1960) and [Nurse Ellis](#) (1943) by Beryl Trist Newman (1906–1991).



Richard Jack (1866-1952), *Return to the Front, Victoria Station*, 1916, oil on canvas, 203.3 x 319cm, York art Gallery, YORAG 395
© York Museums Trust

In 2013 York added to its collection of works by war artists by purchasing seven watercolours by Jules George (b. 1969) who had been 'embedded' with the 2nd Battalion the Yorkshire Regiment (at the time known as the Green Howards) in Afghanistan in 2010. 'Embedded' meant that the artist accompanied foot patrols, and on one occasion was caught up in a fire fight with Taliban militants, who had laid improvised explosive devices (IEDs). He filled five sketchbooks with paintings and drawings, believing that his job as war artist was to record a particular war in a way that film and photography cannot. An exhibition of his work *Contemporary Interventions* (War Drawings) took place in the Gallery from 2011 to 2013.

Most recently the Friends were instrumental in adding to the Gallery's collection of war art by the purchase of *British, American Scarecrow* (2017) by Mohammed Sami (born 1984). While Sami is not a war artist, he grew up in war-torn Iraq and his work is profoundly influenced by his experiences. Dr Louise Wheatley gave a lunch-time talk in 2019 about this painting, which alludes to the destruction of once scenic landscapes now heavily scarred by military interventions. As Beatrice Bertram, Senior Curator, said of its purchase: 'Sami's work conflates themes in York's collection of war, memory and loss'.



Mohammed Sami (1984-), *British, American Scarecrow*, 2017,
York art Gallery, YORAG_2018_42-1 - Sami
© York Museums Trust

Now in the Burton Gallery, the dominant central image of Sami's painting is a scarecrow dressed in historical military clothing cast off by British and American soldiers. It alludes to the frightening presence of a distant and unseen enemy, and hints at the increasing use of unmanned aerial vehicles in the conduct of modern warfare.

A Peek Forward

Those of you who were able to attend the recent AGM will know that the Friends have recently helped to make a major acquisition for the gallery – a work by Dame Laura Knight, who was the first woman artist to be elected to full membership of the Royal Academy. Beatrice Bertram, our Senior Curator, did not want to show an image of this significant addition to the collection until she can present it to us in person. We all look forward to that!

© Margaret May

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And, lastly, a message from the Friends' President, Peter Miller

A REMINDER TO GIVE YOUR SURPLUS ART BOOKS TO SUPPORT THE
GALLERY

In February I made an appeal through the Newsletter for donations of art books to support the Gallery. There was a good response, and many thanks to those who have made donations. The shop in the Gallery will shortly be opened in the entrance, and the Friends' bookstall will have pride of place.

I anticipate that the book sales will be brisk, and would encourage Friends to continue to donate their surplus art books. 'Art books' includes books on architecture as well as fine and applied arts. All profits go directly to the Gallery, and will help towards the proposed refurbishment of the Burton Gallery.

I am very willing to come and collect your books or you can deliver them to me at 10 St Oswald's Road, Fulford, York YO10 4PF. Please don't take them to the Art Gallery, as they have nowhere to store them - and also I need to sort and price them.

Do contact me if you have any queries. My contact details are:

Tel: 01904 612751 Email: peter.miller30@btinternet.com

I look forward to hearing from you.

Peter Miller
President of the Friends

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