

HAWORTH ART GALLERY, ACCRINGTON

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"I should advise Observerites to avail themselves of the opportunity to visit the Haworth Art Gallery and Park now that this magnificent gift, the finest ever bequeathed to Accrington, has come into the possession of the town and has been thrown open to the Public". The "Scribbler" of the *Accrington Observer and Times* was writing shortly after the handing over ceremony in September, 1921, and continued his "Observ(er)ations" by meditating on "the beauty of the mansion, its delightful situation and the extent and attractiveness of the grounds. And it will need no connoisseur in art to appreciate many of the very fine pictures, some by famous artists, which go to form a collection of which Accrington can be proud".¹

The Haworth Art Gallery had formerly been the home of William Haworth and his sister Anne who commissioned Hollins Hill in Edwardian "Tudor" style, from the York architect, Walter Brierley (1864-1926). It is situated on the south side of the Lancashire milltown of Accrington and enjoys an elevated position facing east towards Hambleton Hill. The Haworths were the only son and daughter of Thomas Haworth (1819-1891) who was a leading textile manufacturer in Accrington in the later nineteenth century.

Thomas Haworth was brought up in modest circumstances and was sent at an early age to be an apprentice engraver at Broad Oak Printing Works, the most important calico print works in Accrington.² He began cotton manufacturing in 1850, managing various mills in various partnerships until 1871 when William joined the firm and it became Thomas Haworth and Son Ltd.³ An active member of Cannon Street Baptist Church from 1836, Thomas was elected town councillor for Accrington North East Ward in the first municipal elections in 1878; he was a JP and Alderman and Guardian of the Poor. His son William (1849-1913) followed his father in many things although he preferred to serve as a county rather than a town councillor. A staunch Liberal, William was an ardent music lover and was President of the Accrington Choral Society and of the Amateur Operatic Society. He became a JP in 1893 and an Alderman in 1910.⁴

The Haworths were well thought of, philanthropic people who had a reputation for being considerate and fair employers.⁵ They lived at Windsor Place, 142 Burnley Road, a large end of terrace house, from around 1870. In 1908, William approached the Town Council with a planning application to build a large house on the Manchester Road. The services of Walter Henry Brierley were secured and his designs approved.



Haworth Art Gallery, main entrance.



William Haworth.

Hollins Hill

It is not known why the Haworths went to Brierley. It is possible that they had seen the house Northcliffe, at Filey, built by Brierley in 1891, which has a similar ground plan and "Tudor" style.⁶ The letters written by William to Brierley during the construction of "Hollins Hill make fascinating reading. They range in subject from the need to heat the stables building and the approving of the additional cost of "£10 or so" to the more urgent tones of a letter stating that "We are very disturbed and uneasy about the dampness of the house".⁷ The Haworths often requested Brierley's presence to help them make decisions and were capable of changing their minds about important details at inopportune times. Brierley lost patience with William on at least one occasion and kept the upper hand over the questions of hot water in Anne's bedroom and the height of the Manchester Road gateposts.⁸

The Haworths moved in to their beautiful new stone-built Arts and Crafts house in 1910. William was to live there for only three years, Anne for a further seven. In bequeathing their home and pictures to Accrington Corporation, Anne was simply realising her brother's "Pet project to provide pictures for a magnificent art gallery for his native town".¹⁰

Anne's bequest included Hollins Hill, its outbuildings, stables and grounds, and a sum of £28,000 for maintenance. The collection itself consists of one hundred and sixteen items in total; twenty oil paintings, thirty watercolours, thirty-four coins, fourteen gold, silver and bronze medals, fifteen pieces of china and three pieces of ivory.¹¹ The pictures, which all belong to the nineteenth-century British school, include a very popular painting with visitors to the Haworth, *My Lady's Palfrey* by John Frederick Herring Snr (1795-1865). This painting displays the elements most

favoured by William and Anne when buying pictures: children, or animals or a combination of both. They evidently shared the popular preference for art which allowed the viewer an escape from reality and with the exception of a small but fine group of landscape and marine subjects, almost all of their pictures offer an idealised view of everyday life and events.

Visitors to the newly-opened Art Gallery in 1921 would have been unfamiliar with the Haworth Bequest pictures but several of the rooms contained oils and water-colours belonging to the town of Accrington and previously housed at the Carnegie Library. Here again, the Haworths played an important role, for William, like his father before him, was President of the Mechanics' Institute, which donated the site for the new library to the Town Council.¹² The library was equipped with a lecture room "furnished with a large ceiling light", a special advantage if at any time it should be used for an exhibition of pictures.¹³ In fact the Mayor, Alderman T. E. Higham, organised an exhibition of pictures from private collections to commemorate the opening of the new library which was shown in the lecture room.¹⁴

The earliest acquisition of a picture by Accrington Corporation seems to have been in 1903 when T. H. Osbaldeston Esq. presented an oil painting called *The Saint's Day* by John Prescott Knight (1803-1881).¹⁵ There were no more acquisitions until 1908 when the Mayor presented an important seascape by the French classical painter Claude Vernet (1714-1789) called *Storm off the French Coast*.

These first two acquisitions were increased to nineteen within a year of the library's opening. They were the gifts of local businessmen like "Accrington's Friend and Well-



Anne Haworth.



Drawing room as a private residence, Hollins Hill, 1920.

Wisher" who had given seven items to the collection by 1910.¹⁶ In 1911 the first purchases of watercolours were made "with a view to the building up of a collection of examples exhibiting the birth and development of English water-colour art". Acquisitions continued to be made throughout the Great War so that the total number of Carnegie pictures transferred to the Haworth Art Gallery was sixty-nine.¹⁷

It does seem as if as little as possible was done to alter the atmosphere of the Haworth's home when it opened to the public in 1921. William's much-loved billiard room was displayed with the same pictures as during his lifetime, and so was Anne's drawing room.¹⁸ The memorial plaque in the entrance hall was not installed until sometime after the opening and the commemorative catalogue did not appear for at least four years.¹⁹ Mr A. N. Whiston, the Haworths' housekeeper who had worked with the family for thirty-six

years, was installed as caretaker with his wife helping him undertake his duties.

Minor alterations had been made to the house to make it appropriate for use as a public building. In total, five rooms on the ground floor were modified. Upstairs, the rooms of William and his valet, and Miss Haworth and her companion, Miss Priestley, were also modified, so that six good sized rooms and three small rooms were made available. The Haworth Bequest was hung in three of the five downstairs rooms, the former dining, billiards and drawing rooms. The Carnegie Library Pictures were hung in the morning room and kitchen on the ground floor and in Miss Priestley and Miss Haworth's rooms upstairs.²⁰

Nuttall Bequest

The number of paintings and drawings on display at the Haworth was increased from 119 to 145 in 1925 when the Alice Ann Nuttall Bequest was made to Accrington Corporation. Mrs Nuttall was the widow of George Nuttall, the Managing Director of Steiner's Calico Printing Works, Church, and the daughter of Alderman Entwistle, Mayor of Accrington in 1886 and 1887. The bequest consisted of twenty-six oils and water-colours, notably four examples of the work of Thomas Sidney Cooper (1803-1902). Mrs Nuttall also gave two oil paintings by the little-known French painter Eduard Frère (1819-1886); one of these, *The Laundress*, heavily influenced by Vermeer, is another popular favourite at the Haworth.²¹ The Nuttall Bequest was displayed in William's room, his valet's room and a guest bedroom.

Perhaps because the displays at the Haworth Art Gallery were static, and were expected to remain so, it was not deemed necessary to appoint a professional curator to look after them. When Mr Whiston and his wife retired, Tom Bent took over; while he was called a curator he was paid at the same rate as Mr Whiston had been and was expected to undertake the same caretaking duties. However, Mr Bent



View of entrance hall with case containing ceramics from the Haworth Bequest.



"The Old Chair Mender and Pedlar" by Miles Birket Foster. Watercolour from Haworth Bequest.

saw the benefit of arranging loan exhibitions and in 1936 twenty pictures from the Manchester Art Gallery Rutherford Collection were exhibited. In 1938 another exhibition, this time of reproductions of famous paintings lent by the British Institution, gave Mr Bent the idea of developing a "Circulating Art Library".²² By May 1940 he had purchased nineteen reproduction prints but the war caused these and all other activities at the Haworth to cease. In 1942 the Carnegie, Haworth and Nuttall pictures were taken down to the basement of the gallery for safe-keeping and the Haworth was closed. Tom Bent was then transferred to the enquiry desk at Accrington Police Station.

War and Aftermath

For three years the Haworth was used as a fire-watching station and there were contingency plans to use it as an emergency hospital, should the Accrington Victoria Hospital be hit. It was also used as a temporary hostel for WAAF personnel.²³ In 1944 Mr Bent was returned to the Haworth because the collections in the damp basement were deteriorating. Some pictures were transferred to Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery but others were in such poor condition that they had to be destroyed. On a happier note, a loan exhibition of watercolours had been offered for temporary display to Accrington by the British Water-Colour Society. Several rooms were redecorated and the Haworth reopened on Saturday 30 June 1945.²⁴ This event marked the beginning of the tradition of presenting a summer season of exhibitions at the Haworth and displaying the permanent collection from October to May.

It was also at this time that the fourth main grouping of pictures was added to the collections at the Haworth. This was the gift of Edwin Hitchon (1874-1966), the son of Alfred Hitchon, who had given over £50,000 to Accrington

Victoria Hospital.²⁵ Edwin had worked for twenty years as Engineering Manager of Howard and Bullough, one of the most important textile machinery firms in Lancashire, before retiring to the Lake District and beginning to collect paintings. The fourteen oil paintings and forty-eight watercolours include topographical and genre subjects and examples of watercolours from the early twentieth-century.²⁶

If the war had caused serious problems for Mr Bent and his pictures stored in the Haworth's basement, it had even worse repercussions at Oak Hill Park Museum. Oak Hill was built in 1815 by Thomas Hargreaves, owner of the Broad Oak Print works. It is a fine local example of Georgian architecture and served as Accrington's museum from 1900. Like the Haworth, it was closed in 1942. In 1945 the building and its contents were found to be in very poor condition. The Museums Association was brought in to advise and an approach was made to the Carnegie Trust for financial support to redisplay the important and extensive natural history collections. However, this project failed and the decision was made not to reopen. The museum's collections were finally dispersed, or destroyed, in 1951.²⁷

In happier times for the museum, a guide had been produced by the curator, Mr A. Hanson, which listed a number of the pictures and decorative arts items on display.²⁸ Travel pictures and portraits hung in the entrance hall and on the stairs; collections of ceramics, reproduction electrotypes and several antique casts were also displayed. Most importantly, Room 8 contained a case of Tiffany Favrite glass. Most of this material, along with other items of local history interest and a large collection of coins, medallions and tokens, was transferred to the Haworth Art Gallery in 1951.²⁹

There have been periodic calls for it to be displayed in an "Accrington Room" at the Art Gallery but it is in poor

condition and is only now being documented. Accrington appointed a new Town Clerk in 1949 who reorganised the committee structures and the Haworth Art Gallery moved from the control of the Parks Committee back to the Libraries Committee. The Librarian, Mr Norman, introduced Spring and Autumn exhibitions in to the annual programme at the Haworth and ran lectures on art appreciation from 1956. Local schools and photographic societies began to exhibit at the gallery on a regular basis.

When Tom Bent retired after twenty-seven years service at the Haworth, there was an attempt to split the professional and caretaking duties of the post but this failed to gain the support of the Libraries Committee. Hubert Rigg, later to become Curator of Towneley Hall, took Mr Bent's place in 1962 and instigated various changes.

The Annual Open Exhibition began as an art competition in 1962; it continues to be a popular event with local artists and the buying public. The exhibitions and WEA lectures programme at the Haworth began to be advertised through *Library News* and a busier temporary exhibitions programme was devised. When Malcolm Fryer was appointed in 1968, he was designated Administrative Assistant [Curatorial Duties] and he worked from Carnegie Library. The "Circulating Art Library", which Tom Bent had wanted to set up in 1940, was now developed further. The picture loan scheme finally came in to operation in 1971 in time for the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Haworth.³¹ The major exhibition which marked the 50th anniversary was of L. S. Lowry's paintings and drawings. The 1970s saw exhibitions being organised across the whole year at the Haworth.³² In 1974 local government re-organisation meant that the Libraries Committee passed responsibility back from County to the new District Authority, Hyndburn, and the Recreation and Amenities Committee took control of the Haworth Art Gallery. Accrington Library also presented a small collection of local history artefacts to the Haworth at this time, including some printing blocks from Broad Oak works and some old street signs.

By 1981 the stated aim of the local authority was to arrange "monthly exhibitions allowing contemporary artists and

craftsmen their first major exhibition in a Municipal Gallery".³³ Opportunities for artists to exhibit increased enormously in the 1980s; by 1989, the monthly exhibition sheets were listing five or six different exhibitions on show at the same time.

Tiffany Glass

The permanent collections took very much a back seat in these years except in respect of the internationally-renowned collection of Tiffany Favrile glass which Accrington is fortunate to own. It consists of 146 items from the studios of Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933), the foremost exponent of Art Nouveau in America, and given to his home town by Joseph

Briggs (1873-1936). Briggs, an apprentice engraver at Steiner's Calico Printing Works, Church, went to America in 1890 for three months holiday but stayed for forty years.³⁵ After a chance meeting with Louis Comfort, he worked for him in various capacities, notably as manager of the Favrile glass studios from 1892. On Tiffany's death he had the task of disposing of hundreds of unfashionable pieces of glass.³⁶ Briggs's speciality was mosaics and on one of his visits home he made a mosaic which may be the famous Silver Crested Cockatoo panel at the entrance to the Tiffany display at the Haworth.³⁷

In 1932 Briggs began shipping his personal

collection of Favrile vases to Accrington and two consignments followed in 1933.³⁸ Forty-two vases are listed as being on display in the 1933 Oak Hill Park Museum Guide and presumably they continued to be available until the museum shut in 1942. They may have been moved to the Haworth in 1945 when it re-opened as they do not appear in the "Museum Inventory" of items for disposal for discussion at the Council meeting on Friday 13 April, 1951. They were certainly on display at the Art Gallery in 1961.³⁹

The importance of the Tiffany Favrile Glass Collection was recognised by Norman Potter, who was appointed as Curator in 1974, and the collection was put on permanent display in single-sided cases in 1977. The success or otherwise of this display, which was organised by the



Joseph Briggs.

North West Museum Service, was a subject of discussion at the time.⁴⁰ In the mid 1980s the discovery of dry rot in the walls of the gallery meant that the collection had to be redisplayed and this was arranged in free-standing cases, again by the Area Museum Service, in 1991. The collection continues to be a source of inspiration to specialists and lay visitors alike and is very much the jewel in Accrington's crown, the Local Authority having twice fought off attempts by private collectors to buy it.⁴¹

The Haworth Art Gallery is now at a turning point. A more structured approach to the care and management of the gallery, its collections and services, has recently been defined, and approved by the local authority. An acquisitions and disposals policy has been agreed and retrospective documentation of the collections has begun.⁴² The Tiffany Favre Glass Collection is to be at the centre of a move towards placing more emphasis in the exhibitions programme on the house, its collections and their

relationship with the town that produced them. It is hoped that the Haworth will become a dynamic resource for specialist and lay visitor alike through the bringing together of the creative skills of contemporary artists and craftspeople, and the knowledge and enthusiasm of those people of whose history it is a manifestation.

Haworth Art Gallery, Manchester Road, Accrington is open from 2pm–5pm from Monday to Thursday and on Saturday and Sunday; it is closed on Friday. Study access is by appointment with the Curator only and should be arranged by letter at least two weeks in advance. (Tel: 01254 2337827).

Acknowledgements

I would particularly like to thank June Huntingdon, Helen Barrett, Catherine Duckworth and Josie Green at Accrington Library for their help in tracing information for this article.

NOTES

- 1 Observ(er)ations, in *Accrington Observer and Times* (hereafter *AOT*), 24 September 1921.
- 2 M. Rothwell, *A Guide to the Industrial Archaeology of Accrington* (1978).
- 3 Thomas began cotton manufacturing at Fountain Mill with John Anderton & Peter Hindel. This partnership was dissolved in 1854 when Thomas took on Alliance Mill. In 1857 William Entwistle became his partner and they also managed Melbourne Mill together until 1871 when William Haworth took Entwistle's place. Thomas and William gradually increased the number of looms from 100 to 1,200 at Melbourne and also ran Scaitcliffe and Willow Mills. The firm ceased trading in 1936.
- 4 Obituary notices for Thomas, *AOT*, 5 September 1891, & William, *AOT*, 11 October 1913.
- 5 The Haworth's windows remained undamaged during the 1878 cotton strike when rioting workers gathered in the Burnley Road to break the windows of mill owners' houses.
- 6 C. Aslet, 'Scholarly Sensibility: The Country House of W. H. Brierley' in *Country Life*, 23 September 1982.
- 7 Letters from William to Brierley, 11 November 1908, 13 November 1908, and 24 November 1908. Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, University of York.
- 8 Letter from William to Brierley, 21 January 1909.
- 9 The main features of Hollins Hill are the two-storey bay windows on either side of the porch which is surmounted by eleven 'gargoyles' and the well staircase, which is lit by a large stained-glass window. The interior is decorated with oak panelling in the entrance hall and on the stairs, a carved wood arcade in the billiards room and two elaborate stucco ceilings. The reception rooms are charmingly detailed with birds, animals and foliage. All the decorative elements were by Brierley except for the two ceilings which were designed and made by George Bankart.
- 10 *AOT*, 24 September 1921.
- 11 Accrington Borough Council Minutes, 14 March 1921.
- 12 There was a Subscription Library called 'The Institution' which transferred its stock to the Accrington Subscription Library in 1845. This became the Accrington Mechanics' Institute Library in 1851 and was the sole library provision in the Borough until 1899 when a portion of the Mechanics' Institute was rented by the town as a lending library. This provision continued until the Carnegie Library opened in January 1908. (John Singleton, *Jubilee Souvenir 1878–1928*, Accrington Borough Council).
- 13 *Souvenir Programme* to commemorate the opening of the Carnegie Public Library, Accrington Borough Council, 18 January 1908.
- 14 *Catalogue of Loan Exhibition of Pictures* held in the Carnegie Library, February and March 1908.
- 15 Annual Reports of the Library Committee, Accrington Borough Council, 1902–1952.
- 16 'Accrington's Friend and Well-Wisher' was Henry Parkinson (1855–1938) who endowed Oak Hill Park with a beautiful rock garden of Westmorland granite in memory of his grandfather in 1932.
- 17 Annual Reports, op cit.
- 18 *AOT*, 18 September 1921.
- 19 *Haworth Art Gallery Commemorative Catalogue*; printed after 1925.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 As a result of Bent's initiative, and because the temporary exhibitions were so popular, a sum of £20 per annum was allocated for exhibition provision in January 1940. (Annual Reports, op. cit.)
- 23 Helen Barrett, 'The Haworth Art Gallery: its Origins and Development 1921–1974' dissertation, 1983, (copy in Accrington Library).
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Obituary notice for Albert Hitchon, *AOT*, 14 September 1946.
- 26 *Catalogue of the Edwin Hitchon Gift* (1946).
- 27 Michael Taylor 'Oak Hill Park Museum, Accrington 1900–1951' in *Journal of the Accrington Naturalists Society*, 1978.
- 28 A. Hanson, *Guide to Oak Hill Park Museum*, (1933).
- 29 Some of the medals came from the collections of local antiquary William Ashworth (1844–1895).
- 30 Helen Barrett, op. cit.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 Information Sheet 1972–73 Exhibition at the Haworth, Borough of Accrington Libraries and Art Gallery Department.
- 33 C. Dillon, Mayor of Hyndburn in the Introduction to *The Best of British*, catalogue for the 60th Anniversary Exhibition, 1981.
- 34 The 1989 Information Sheet for 7–29 October lists the following six exhibitions: Accrington Pals display; Silvija Buss – Ceramics; Michael Howley – Pastels; Annual Pendle Artists Exhibition; annual Pendle Print Circle Exhibition and Kathleen Watson – Paintings.
- 35 'He obtained a three-months leave to go to America: this leave was granted and is still extending' *AOT*, 15 October 1932.
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 Incomplete typed accessions lists for Oak Hill Park Museum, 1909–1933.
- 39 Jack Dove, 'Pride in the Arts: Accrington's Favre Glass' in *Municipal Journal*, 5 May 1961.
- 40 Susan Green, 'Tiffany Glass and the Accrington Collection' Leicester Polytechnic thesis, 1983.
- 41 Two approaches by private collectors were made to Accrington Corporation in 1964 and 1968. Both were discussed by the Libraries and Art Gallery Committee and rejected see Susan Green, *op.cit.*
- 42 Minutes of the Development Services Committee meeting, 10 August 1994.