

ARTISTS OF THE BATTLE DISTRICT



While writers seem to have adopted the Battle area in some numbers, less is true of artists. But six deserve notice.

We must discount the earliest artist known to be associated with Battle: the Swiss Samuel Hieronymus Grimm (1733-1794), who spent several years in Sussex and to whom we owe a considerable debt because without him we would not know what now-demolished or rebuilt properties or much-changed landscapes looked like in the late eighteenth century. But he was not of the Battle area, and visited it only to paint. The same was true of J M W Turner. Both left pictures:



Above: Rose Hill, Battle Hill, by Samuel Grimm c1790.



Right: Battle Abbey, by J M W Turner, c1794

James Inskipp



Shortly afterwards James Inskipp was born. References to him in the art world are confused and misleading; some claim that he was a German, born in 1790. But it is clear that he was born at Battle in 1792 or 1793, the son of James and Elizabeth, and the census records for 1851 and 1861 show his age and birthplace. The indenture records suggest that his father James was a carpenter. If so he was highly successful because he took a long time writing his will in preparation for his death in 1813. A family website,¹ while still in error as to his date of birth, describes the younger James as a painter of note who specialised in attractive

A fisherman of the Achill(?) mountains

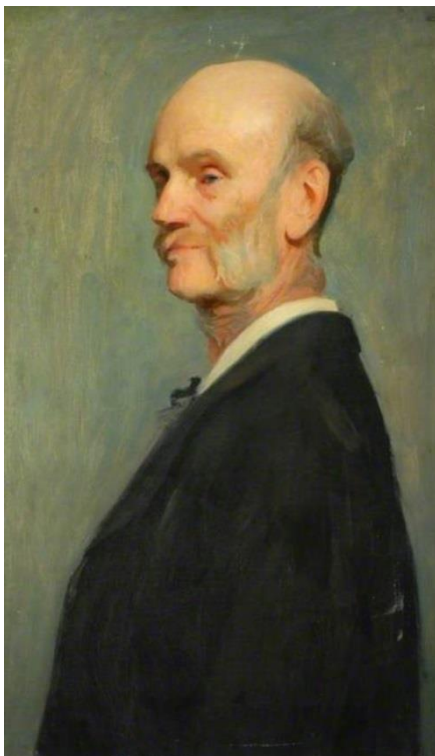
women, everyday life, landscapes and illustration. His pictures were greatly admired in his time. In 1832 he was an illustrator for Sir Walter Scott's Waverley novels. From 1833 to 1836 he illustrated Izaak Walton's *Compleat Angler*. In 1838 he published a series of engravings 'Studies of Heads from Nature'. He exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1816 to 1864, and also at the British Institution and the Royal Society of British Artists. Titles shown at the Royal Academy included 'Boy with Fruit', 'Pere la Chaise', and 'Market Girls'.

Other sources suggest that he started painting 'when he retired from the commissariat service' at the age of 30, that is in 1823 or 1824. This was an early predecessor to the Royal Army Service Corps, but entirely civilian. Presumably he joined it during the Napoleonic war. Towards the end of his life press criticism of his art was not always favourable. The 1851 census has him living, with several others, at Cobham Park, Carshalton; by 1861 he had moved to Godalming, where he died at his house in Cattshall Lane in March 1868. He did not marry.

Inskipp's paintings sell well, and several are in the Government art collection.

Hercules Brabazon Brabazon

Hercules Brabazon Brabazon (27.11.1821-14.05.1906) was a distinguished water-colour painter of the nineteenth-century who had sufficient money not to depend upon selling his work. He did not even exhibit until the last years before his death, and then only after encouragement from John Singer Sargent among others. Ruskin praised him, though that might not be regarded nowadays as an invaluable recommendation. Only much more recently has his work become sought-after. Closely related to Brabazon, the Combe family of Sedlescombe were once powerful in the Battle area.



Brabazon was born Hercules Brabazon Sharpe. His father (also Hercules) is in the 1841 census as living at Oaklands in the parish of Sedlescombe. The Sharpe family had been long established in County Durham, where their wealth was enlarged by inheritance from Brass Crosby (1725-1793), the controversial Lord Mayor of London who was associated with the radical John Wilkes and whose sister married Brabazon's grandfather; but the southern branch had lived at Domons (recorded sometimes, perhaps wrongly, as Demons) at Northiam for some years. Their connection with Sedlescombe dates only from 1830, when Sharpe bought a farm there and had Decimus Burton replace it with Oaklands. Brass Crosby's father was Hercules Crosby, which explains the immediate origin of the name.

**Hercules Brabazon Brabazon,
by Sir John Singer Sargent**

The name Brabazon descends from the artist's mother, Anne Mary, the daughter of an Irish baronet and a distant cousin of the earls of Meath. Her son inherited Brabazon Park at Swinford in County Mayo in 1847; it may be noted that the inheritance of the Park itself must have been complicated because some records suggest that at first another relative inherited.² A condition of inheritance was that that he change his surname; that explains the slightly odd double use of *Brabazon*. With their income largely destroyed by the effects of the famine (more than 500 died at Swinford and rental income collapsed), the Brabazon family fairly soon retreated to England and the house there was bought by the Congested Districts Board in 1914. It was demolished in 1980.

When his father died in February 1858 Brabazon inherited Oaklands too and was therefore well-off for the rest of his life. He leased Oaklands to his brother-in-law Boyce Harvey Combe, who had married his sister Anne Sarah.

Born in Paris, Hercules Brabazon was educated at Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he read mathematics but then moved on to law; but a life in the courts did not appeal to him. Rome was calling, with its artistic heritage; and back in England he made other contacts useful to a largely self-taught painter. As an adult he spent much of his time abroad but was at home for most of the various censuses. The 1861 census shows him at Oaklands with Combe's family: Combe's wife Ann(e) Sarah, their son Harvey and their daughter Mary Catherine. (Another son, Herbert, had died in infancy and the last, William, was to be born in 1864 but died in 1892.)

At the 1871 census Brabazon was alone at his flat at 2E Morpeth Terrace, a street just to the west of Westminster Cathedral; he was again there in 1881. In the first instance he is described as a landowner and in the second as a magistrate. He never married.

In 1891 he was at Oaklands with Boyce and Anne and what were now their three children plus a daughter-in-law and a son-in-law. William was unmarried; Mary Catherine had married the baron Charles von Roemer who, despite his name, had been born at Lambeth; he had served in the Royal Sussex Regiment in the second Boer War and had reached the rank of Major. Charles and Mary's son, also Charles, enlisted early, being in France by 19 August 1914, also ending as a Major. During the war the family changed its name to *de* Roemer, though it appears that *von* also continued in use. Their family seat was Lime Park at Herstmonceux, and the younger Charles creeps into the records as the promoter and supplier of electricity in that village.

In his last census, 1901, Brabazon was back at Morpeth Terrace. He was to die at Oaklands five years later, leaving the comfortable sum of £39,271 8s 6d. Harvey Combe's wife Amy opened a gallery of his work at Sedlescombe in 1910 but as so often in the twentieth century the family fell on harder times. In 1926 they sold their collection of his paintings but for small if not derisory sums. Unwisely they sold them all at once: three sales in just over two years, and 3200 works. Prices were as low as £1 per drawing; they would do much better now. His style is regarded as following Turner, though probably everyone would agree that Brabazon was much better at portraiture than the great master.

Brabazon specialised in watercolours, in a sub-Turner style:

He did not concentrate on Europe alone but travelled widely outside, including the Middle East, India and Africa. He was prolific, producing thousands of works, including watercolours of Athens, Capri, Delhi, Cairo, Algiers, Geneva, Amiens and Venice. He was no loner, however, counting among his friends many of the literary and artistic circles in which he moved.



A coastal scene, believed to be of Mont St Michel

See also

Oaklands and the Combe family

Edward Patry

In his day Edward Patry was a well-known portrait painter whose work commands a fairly low price by today's standards. Nevertheless he is very much in the Sargent tradition, and some of his pictures seem very clearly to show the sitter's character. They are generally of Society figures.



Patry was a Londoner, born at the end of 1856. His father was a colonial broker, and it is clear that the family had considerable money: the 1881 census have them living at Kidbrooke – father, mother, four children and eleven servants. He appears to have lived all his life in London until he was 72 when he bought Brickwall at Sedlescombe in July 1929, to which he made some alterations, some to provide himself with a studio and others for aesthetic reasons.

Study of a gentleman in hunting coat (R R Barker), by Edward Patry, 1912.

Unfortunately we cannot see the changes today because the house was almost completely destroyed by fire in 1951 and subsequently rebuilt. He seems to have enjoyed Sussex, having moved to escape the noise of the capital; he continued painting throughout the 1930s and involved himself in local artistic groups.

At the end of his life he was living at Annington, in Sedlescombe Road South in St Leonards; it is not known when he left Brickwall. He died at a hotel at Farnham in September 1940. His wife Beatrice (they had married in 1900) sold Annington in 1942 and retired to Eastbourne where she died ten years later. There were no children.

Herbert Arnould Olivier

The Olivier family made quiet contributions to British life in the nineteenth century, moving to greater things in the twentieth: a major painter, a politician-cum-colonial governor and an internationally-acclaimed actor. Along the way they collected two peerages, both now extinct



Battle's contribution to the family was Herbert Arnould Olivier, born in the town on 9 September 1861. His father Henry Arnold (sic) Olivier was Rector of Crowhurst in 1861-64, but it is clear that Herbert was born in the town not the village. (His sister Maud was born at Crowhurst. She is mentioned in specialist journals for her work with her brother Henry in collecting and cataloguing seashells. She died unmarried at the age of 91.) After school at Sherborne he determined on an artistic career and studied at the Royal Academy, winning the Creswick Prize there in 1882. From then on he exhibited and taught in various

Marshal Joffre, by Herbert Olivier

places, including India, and in 1917 he was appointed an official war artist. His war paintings are in the possession of the Imperial War Museum. In 1903 he married Margaret Barclay Peat at Barnet, and they had three children. He died on Hayling Island in 1952, and she died there in 1960.

His style was very much of the period. He was subject to early influence by the pre-Raphaelites but soon moved on. His portraits are highly regarded, though his landscapes seem to have attracted less notice.

Herbert gained his slightly odd middle name from his mother, born Anne Elizabeth Hardcastle Arnould. His male antecedents, descended from immigrant Huguenots, were almost always Anglican clergy and as such moved around the country with some speed. His father had connections with the dioceses of Hereford, Salisbury, St Edmundsbury, St Albans and Winchester as well as with Chichester. Herbert's brother Gerard tried to avoid this tradition but gave in, but as he was of a particularly high church persuasion he had to move around rather a lot too.

Another brother, Sydney, achieved some fame. His radicalisation began early: at Oxford he became a friend of Graham Wallas, one of the founders of the London School of Economics. He entered the civil service in 1882, beating Sydney Webb (another LSE founder) into second

place – no mean achievement – and the two became friends and in due course fellow-members of the Fabian Society, of which Sydney was secretary for some years. This brought Sydney into contact with a wide variety of people. He was sent abroad by the Colonial Office from time to time, notably as Governor of Jamaica from 1907, and he became Secretary of State for India in the first, very short, Labour government of 1924, when he received a peerage. He was also a writer and playwright, generally on radical topics.

Both these men were uncles to Laurence Olivier, whose fame now rather eclipses them. Laurence was not local, having been born in Surrey.

Eileen Villiers-Stuart

This woman, born Eileen Nora Maclaughlin in London in 1902, lived for some 18 years at Peppering Eye. Anyone investigating her life should take care to distinguish her from a near-namesake who featured in a spectacular court case in 1918 and shortly afterwards did time for bigamy. Similarly the records of her husband, John Patrick Villiers-Stuart, can all too easily be confused with those of another professional soldier of very nearly the same name. And there are several better-known artists of this surname.

Her husband was a soldier of some repute. He fought in the suppression of the Boxer Rising in China in 1900, then on the North West Frontier and in east Africa. In the First World War he was mentioned in despatches five times and was awarded the DSO in 1915. Later he was also awarded the French Légion d'Honneur, ending as Colonel in the 1/13th Frontier Field Regiment. Then he fought in the Afghan war of 1919. He seems fortunate to have survived. He was later awarded the OBE and then the CB. His first wife died in 1933, and he married Eileen later that year. They had no children and lived on Skye until his death in 1958. She died near Battle in 1985.

Villiers-Stuart paintings are not highly prized. The latest auction (2010) had two of her paintings in a lot of three pictures, the whole estimated at £40-£60.

Cecil Walter Bacon

Bacon was born at Battle in 1905 and died locally in 1992. He made his name as a poster artist and illustrator.

Bacon's family was once well-known in Battle because from about 1899 it owned the tannery formerly owned by George Noakes. Cecil's father Walter was not a Sussex man, being born at Peckham Rye in 1870 (he died at Hastings in 1932); nor was his mother Mary, who died at Hastings in 1908. Walter remarried in 1910.

Cecil Bacon was sent away to school, where he developed his artistic talent, going on to Hastings School of Art and moving to London in 1926. Having worked briefly for others, he turned freelance in 1929 and quickly made a name for himself – most obviously through his posters for London Transport, which inevitably came to a wide audience (see below). An

artist must represent the spirit of the age if he or she is to prosper, and Bacon did this very well.

Someone who knew him³ wrote:

Cecil was that generation of great craftsmen who had developed a freelance career by the dint of energy, determination and ceaseless sharpening of his own skills. He of course knew the others of this generation who developed commercial art as a career after 1918 - such as Walter Hodges, and Eric Fraser. Cecil had become particularly associated with scraperboard illustration which because of its very nature presented strong contrasts of light and dark. He also produced commercial work for children's encyclopaedias and text books, but also ... packaging and press ads.

He also had produced some of the best London Transport posters of the 1930's ... He specialised in bold diagrammatic representations of the London Transport network and bold posters for exhibitions. He ... drew the images of his time in a way that helps later generations understand the important icons of post-War Britain. Irene organised a posthumous show and its popularity and success showed that many others loved and respected this wonderful man.

His posters were widely sought, for example by British Railways and the Post Office Savings Bank, though as time went on his style slowly went out of fashion; but they hold their own as works of art.



Two of Bacon's posters, relating to local events, are displayed in the Battle Museum.

Bacon's father and stepmother moved to Hastings early in the twentieth century (though remaining in charge of the Battle tannery), and Cecil was locally involved – particularly with the Twenty Club of writers and artists also frequented by Sheila Kaye-Smith, and as a founder member of the Burton St Leonards Society, which has been generally successful in preserving the Georgian look of St Leonards.

This extension was opened in 1932 by the Underground Electric Railways Co. Bacon reached the age of 27 in August of that year.

George Kiloh

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See also Oaklands and the Combe family

Sources

Other than given in the end-notes much use has been made of www.ancestry.co.uk for births, marriages and deaths and related information.

¹ http://one-name.org/name_profile/inskip/

² The aviator Lord Brabazon of Tara (1884-1964) was descended more directly from the Meath line and was therefore a very distant cousin of the artist.

³ Chris Mullen at www.fulltable.com/vts/b/bacon/bacon02.htm