

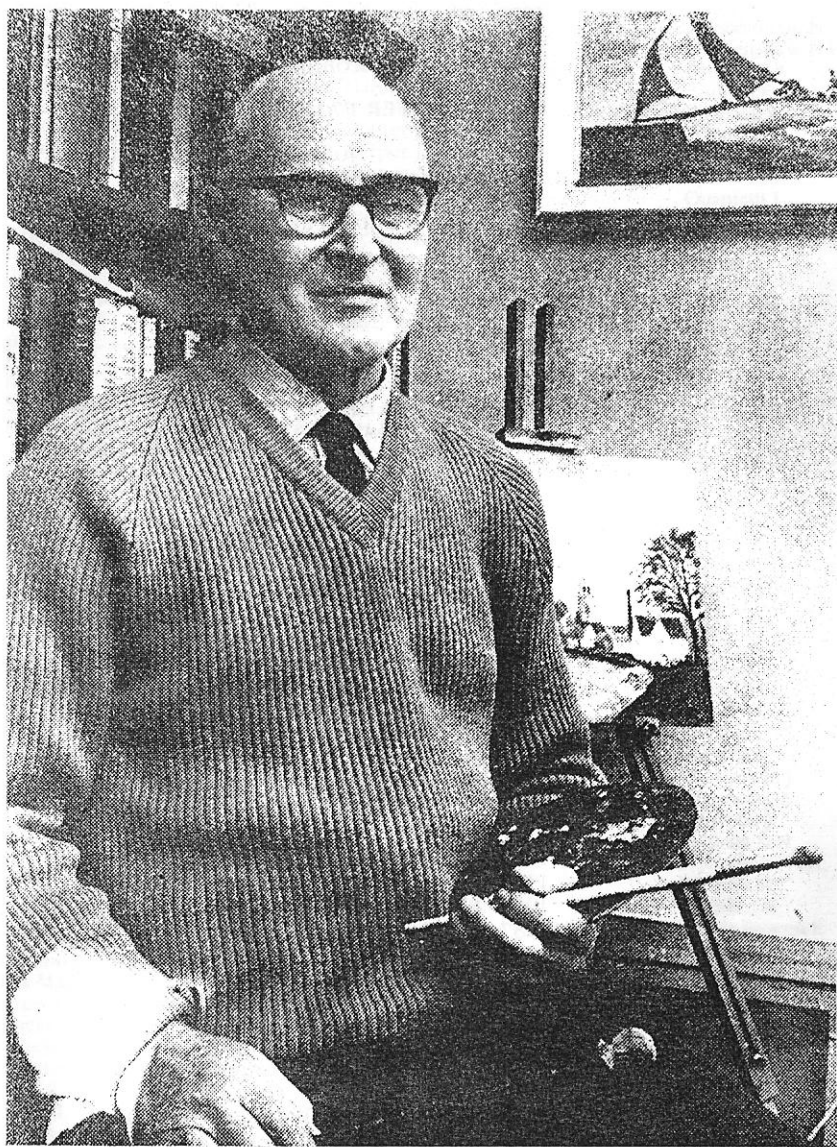
The History  
of the  
Beccles Society of Artists  
1969 - 1990

*by*

*Reg Jones & Joy Holloway*

*Edited by Maurice Woods*





The Founder

## PRESIDENTS

1970 - 78 Frank Forward D.P.A.  
1971 - 73 Frank Delf  
(office discontinued)

## MASTER PAINTER

1983 - 86 Johnston Browne  
(office discontinued)

## FELLOWS

1987 Maurice Dix  
1987 Kenneth Markland  
1989 Joy Holloway

## HONORARY MEMBERS

Molly Mainman  
Nell Holmes

## CHAIRMEN

1969 - 71 Frank Delf  
1971 - 74 Robert Allman  
1974 - 79 Kenneth Markland  
1979 - 89 Joy Holloway  
1989 George Kemp

## VICE CHAIRMEN

1980 - 85 Reginald Jones  
1985 - 86 Joe Crowfoot  
1986 - 87 David Balder  
1987 - 89 George Kemp

## HONORARY SECRETARIES

1969 - 70 Konrad Hunter  
1970 - 83 Johnston Browne  
1983 - 87 Frederick Pidcock  
1987 Angela Bailey

## HONORARY TREASURERS

1970 - 73 Olive Taylor  
1973 - 78 Alan Fairchild  
1978 - 82 Joan Mansfield  
(nee Turner)  
1982 - 83 Z.M. Brzezicki ("Bish")  
1983 - 85 Cyril Bateman  
1985 Alan Fairchild

The catalogue in its present form was instituted in 1977, since then the following members and ex members have exhibited.

Aikman J.M.	Hall H.E.	Ollerenshaw N.
Aldis C.C.	Hall N.J.	Ollerenshaw N.F.
Allman R.A.	Hamlett A.	Parnell T.A.
Allman J.	Harding P.L.	Phillips E.M.
Andrews K.	Hardman J.	Pidcock F.
Antram A.	Harper G.	Pollock J.
Asquith P.	Harper J.	Pratt G.M.
Asquith T.	Harper N.R.	Pymm M.
Austin J.	Hennington J.	Quantrill J.
Bagot A.	Hern I.	Reay N.
Bailey A.	Heryet R.	Redgrave D.M.
Balder D.	Heygate J.	Reeve D.
Ball E.M.	Hickling T.	Rice B.
Bannister M.	Hill P.	Ritchie P.
Barlow S.M.	Hird Y.	Roberts G.
Bateman C.A.	Hodge J.	Roberts M.
Batten M.	Holloway J.	Roffey N.
Beadle I.	Hosca J.D.	Rose D.
Bedingfield R.	Holmes E.	Schofield E.
Betney M.F.R.S.A.	Humphreys J.	Seymour G.V.
Beverley A.M.	Hurr S.M.	Seymour P.
Bird E.L.	Jarvis B.	Sheed M.
Boosey R.	Jeffery J.	Shipley A.
Brock C.E.	Jeffery C.	Smith F.
Brock F.M.	Johns B.L.	Smith J.G.
Brown P.	Jones R.G.	Sneddon A.
Browne G.E.	Kaye A.	Sneddon D.
Bunn N.	Kemp G.	Soloman A.W.
Cater J.	Kendrick J.	Southwell M.
Cator K.	Kettle A.	Strickland E.
Charlton P.	Knight A.	Standish-King K.
Chase W.B.E.	Knights D.E.M.	Stuttard J.
Church B.	Kruges S.	Taylor D.W.
Clarke F.	Langley P.	Taylor O.
Conder M.	Lyster R.G.	Teed T.H.
Corley L.	Macnamara H.	Thompson J.
Cossart N.	Mainman M.	Thomson M.
Coules J.	Maisey E.L.	Turnbull J.
Coy P.	Mansfield J. nee Turner	Urquhart D.N.
Crake A.	Markland K.	Walbancke N.H.
Crake S.	Markland P.D.	Walden M.
Crisp N.	Martin C.	Walker J.G.
Crowfoot J.	Martin E.	Webb-Bowen E.
Cushing H.	Martin P.A.	Webb-Bowen M.H.
Denton J.	Masters I.	Welch A.
Dix M.C.	Masters H.L.	Wells G.
Drew G.L.	Mattin T.	Wells G.E.
Ducker P.	Miller A. of Glenlee	Whitaker E.
Fairchild A.	Montagu R.A.	Whitaker N.
Fairchild M.	Nelson G.	White R.A.
Ford B.	Nicholls H.T.	Williams A.
Ford M.	Nicholls R.	Williams C.E.
Gardner R.B.	Nicholson J.	Willis B.P.
Goodman J.R.	Noyes O.	Wise L.
Gorrod H.	Offord E.	Woods M.

FOREWORD by the Rev. Kenneth Smart

24, Stobart Close,  
Beccles

It is with great pleasure that I write a short introduction to this History which records the activities of the Beccles Society of Artists.

As a town Beccles has had its life enriched by many Societies which have made the quality of the life in our town so outstanding, and this at a time when so many people believe that the richness of the life of our country is becoming less and less. Among these Societies the Beccles Society of Artists stands out as a worthy contributor to the cultural life of our Town. In many homes in Beccles can be seen the fruits of the work done by members of the Society, so varied in their subjects and styles.

In the History of the Society many well known names are mentioned, names which are known in Beccles and remembered for the service they gave to the Society, also for the service they gave to our Community.

To the Beccles Society of Artists we give our thanks for all that it has done for our Town, and we wish the Society, together with all its members every success in their efforts, and great personal satisfaction as they cultivate their artistic talents.

*Kenneth Smart (Rev.)*

The Beccles Society of Artists started as an acorn with the big question mark, "Would it grow into an oak?" The acorn took root with a successful exhibition at the Corn Hall in 1966, which was staged by the members of an art class tutored by Frank Forward. Thus the desire for a local Art Society was born, but did not materialise until later when Frank Delf, newly arrived in Beccles, and keen to start an Art Society, set the wheels in motion. The first meeting was held in the hall of the Hungate Church on the 29th October 1969 with twelve members present.

Frank Delf, who came from a well-known Yarmouth family, was a marine engineer in the Merchant Navy until his retirement. He was a man of exceptionally wide interests, art and natural history being chief among them. He had been president of the Yarmouth Naturalists' Society for 13 years, as well as a member of the Great Yarmouth and Southwold art circles.

When he retired to live at Worlingham, he also became known locally for his extensive knowledge of East Anglian Windmills and round-towered churches, on which subjects he spoke with charm and authority. He died in 1973. Though he was greatly missed by the Society, his memory lives on through his widow, Mrs. Beatrice Delf, and his family, who have retained a close interest in the Society's work. Members have the pleasure of meeting them at the annual exhibition preview.

Frank Forward, who paved the way for the Society's foundation, had enjoyed a fruitful artistic career. His early untutored work so impressed a former M.P. for Lowestoft, Pierce Creagh Loftus, and his artist wife, that they became his benefactors. They sent him to Ipswich School of Art, where he came first in all subjects, finally winning the coveted Slade Diploma and a scholarship to London University.

He was working with a firm of architects in Hanover Square, London, when the second world war intervened. After the war he decided to freelance, lived at Reydon, and became a well-known and respected East Anglian artist. His classes in the Youth Centre attached to the Modern School in Beccles, and at the Sir John Leman School, always overflowed with eager students. His influence is felt to this day. He died in 1978.

Any newly-formed society will have ups and downs in its early days, but with the advantage of Frank Delf's experience, the Beccles Society of Artists was singularly free from problems. At its first meeting on 29th October 1969, a committee was formed. It consisted, apart from officers who are named elsewhere, of Frank Forward, A.S. Pye, T.E. Legg, Nell Holmes and Molly Mainman. The rules drafted then remain almost unchanged today.

The subscription, fixed by the meeting at 10 shillings a year, has risen slowly to its present level of £5. Then, as now, meetings were to

be held on the first Wednesday in the month, at which demonstrations, lectures, and critical appraisal would encourage the members to greater endeavour.

Membership was open to all, irrespective of distance. This rule had to be amended when the Society eventually exhibited in the Public Hall, as artists, eager to show their work in such an excellent setting, became members but were unable through distance to take an active part in the Society; so a clause of a fifteen miles radius from Beccles, was introduced.

At a following meeting on December 3rd 1969 in the Hungate Hall, twenty members enjoyed the first criticism of paintings conducted by the late Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Bloom and were inspired by their comments to achieve better results in the future. To see ourselves as others see us, as Burns remarked, is a salutary experience. To see their work through the impartial eye of a seasoned observer, though sometimes painful, seldom flattering, is helpful to artists in their quest for better results.

Following that first critique there have been many more; three of which, in the seventies, were conducted by the late George Odam, a delightful character with a forthright manner, and who had the members wilting in their seats so pungent were his comments. He had the habit of awarding so many marks out of ten for each picture, but at the end of the evening nobody was at the bottom of the class; and everybody revived after a cup of tea. There was an amusing evening, also in the seventies when a panel of non-artists were invited to examine members' paintings and comment, and to say what they looked for when buying a picture. Apart from being entertaining, it was also enlightening, so diverse were their views. The panel consisted of well known local members of the community; the Rev. Kenneth Smart, Minister of the Hungate Church, Adrian Bell, author, Father Francis Little, priest at St. Benet's, and Miss Eileen Jackson, senior French mistress at the Sir John Leman School. Some members have also risked life and limb by commenting on their fellows' work, but this hazardous task has been much appreciated nevertheless, and enjoyed.

The countryside surrounding Beccles is a blessing to the Society. It is of such beauty, and so abundant in subjects for painting, that professional artists have been drawn to live there. They have been willing to share their knowledge by giving lectures and demonstrations. Many have become firm favourites, and have been asked repeatedly to return.

It is interesting to note that the artists' choice of medium has changed over the years. Oil paintings predominated at first, but gradually, during the 1970s, they were overtaken by watercolours. By 1983, oil paintings were in the minority, and remain so to this day. Likewise, there were few pastels in the early years, but pastel

specialists now occupy a well-stocked corner at the Society's exhibitions. As to acrylics, though this medium first came on the market in the 1950s, members did not begin to use it until much later. It was 1981 before the first acrylic appeared in the catalogue.

Membership of the Society grew rapidly, and so, as early as 1970, it was decided to give an added interest to meetings by holding a "Painting of the Month" competition, the winner to be chosen by popular vote.

The first, on February 4th, was won by Molly Mainman with a still life, which was exhibited in the Beccles Public Library. The library continued to show the paintings until major structural alterations were made, after which it was no longer able to show them to the Society's advantage. It was with deep regret that the Society severed its association with the library, and especially with its chief librarian, Miss Yvonne Stocks, who had been most helpful.

Other homes for the monthly winners were tried and discarded until Frank Foster, the outfitters, and Olivia, the dress shop, agreed to put them on prominent display in their windows, thus stimulating public interest and resulting in a number of sales. Pictures were occasionally chosen to hang in the Beccles Hospital reception rooms; but the hospital, like the library, underwent changes, and this practice ceased.

The popularity of the competition has fluctuated, and although various ways of rousing interest have been tried, it has never quite reached the enthusiasm of those early days. Still, nobody wants it to stop.

One or two small competitions have been held. The first was for a Christmas card design in December 1970. The selection was made by Robert White and the winner was Mary Conder. Nobody made a fortune: the first prize was one guinea, and the second half a guinea.

A contest to find a design to use on catalogues and stationery brought forth many attractive drawings in 1981. After much deliberation, Tom Parnell's design was chosen for its originality and humour.

When the Yarmouth Art Circle held a competition for the design of a Christmas card in December 1988, and invited five other societies to take part, the Beccles artists were delighted that the award was given to one of their fellow members, Mary Bannister.

Some members may recall enjoying a delightful evening at the opening of Frank Forward's newly erected studio at Reydon in 1973. The studio was very well equipped and decorated, and there were paintings in all media on show. Refreshments were provided.

This event gave the members a taste for social occasions, but nothing was planned until the Society's 10th anniversary, when a wine and buffet party was held at the home of Ken and Phyllis Markland. It was so successful that a party in June has become an annual event. Thanks to the generosity of those members who lend their homes for the purpose, which the Society deeply appreciates, it is always enjoyable. For the early parties all the food was provided by the members, and crockery had to be hired; as this became rather a burden the services of an outside caterer were enlisted, but the members continue to make the puddings which are always delicious.

A special party took place at Benstead Farm, the home of Joy Holloway, for the Society's 20th anniversary. Guests included the Mayor and Mayoress of Beccles, and others whom the Society wished to thank for their sustained interest. It was a resounding success, although an attendance of 70 made it somewhat of a squeeze.

In 1980 it was decided to cheer up the December meeting with wine and mince pies. Celebrating the approach of Christmas in this way has become an established custom.

While such opportunities to raise a festive glass are much to the members' taste, other forms of social activity have proved less popular. There was a time when one member was keen to start coach trips to art galleries, even as far afield as London, but the idea roused no enthusiasm. However, an invitation from the Winsor and Newton brush factory at Lowestoft met with a good response.

### EXHIBITIONS

The Society held its first Exhibition as early as 1970, in the Friends Meeting House in Smallgate, and fifty members managed to produce one hundred and fifty paintings between them, which were displayed around the walls in two rooms; on the ground floor crafts were also included. Special guests were invited to the preview and the Exhibition was opened by the Mayor of the Borough of Beccles, Councillor R.A. Goldsworthy, and sherry and soft drinks were provided for refreshment. A modest two hundred catalogues had been printed selling at sixpence each, but which soon sold out as six hundred visitors came to view the work on show. There is no record of the sales for that year, but judging by the Minutes there was a general feeling of satisfaction at this first attempt, and also a realization that the Meeting House was too small for further Exhibitions. The Secretary, Johnston Browne, who was a member of the Congregational Church in Hungate negotiated with the Church authorities for the Society's use of the Vestry both for meetings and Exhibitions. This was made available in 1971, in time for the second Annual Exhibition to be opened on the 31st July. With more room to spread its wings, preparation for this event was quite exciting. Paintings only were allowed this time, and Frank Forward was asked to help with the hanging. A submission fee of

ten pence per picture was charged, and 10% commission on sales. A small banner was made, hopefully to hang from the old bakery shop and across to the building on the other side of the road, but this was impossible, and it had to hang across the Church railings. Incidentally the Bakery, owned by one of the members, has long since gone; it sold delicious home-made bread and cakes, and was a considerable loss to the community when it closed.

Advertising for the Exhibition was well covered, as it always has been, and a list of paintings was typed and available in limited numbers, but unfortunately none of these were kept for future reference. The preview was opened by the Mayor of the Borough of Beccles, Councillor Douglas Marshall. Amongst the guests were Gerald Lawson, Editor of the Beccles and Bungay Journal, and the writer, Adrian Bell, both of whom took a keen interest in the Society. This was the only occasion when the opening took place in the afternoon, so tea was served! In those days the fun of exhibiting predominated over the sales which were just an added bonus, but even so twenty eight pictures were sold, and after all expenses had been paid, the Exhibition finally showed a balance of £25.

A letter had been received from the Rev. Kenneth Smart, the Minister of the Congregational Church, as follows: "Your Society will shortly be holding an Exhibition of your work in our Church. The Deacons of the Church invite your members to join us in worship on the morning of August 1st, and to take part in a Service of Thanksgiving to God for His gifts of Beauty and Art." The invitation was accepted with pleasure, and continues as part of the Exhibition to this day. One or two members were asked to show a painting in the Church during the Service but this was stopped on the principle that all members being equal, should not, unless of necessity, be subject to selection.

With ever increasing membership (in 1972) and therefore more and more paintings which the Vestry walls could not accommodate, stands for the centre of the room became an obvious necessity. Two of these were borrowed through the kind offices of Alice Welch, from the Lowestoft Art Circle; and in the same year Ken Markland and Maurice Dix made two stands for use in 1973, and onwards. These are the sloping stands which have been used up to 1990, and are now in the process of being replaced. Frank Forward painted a large and striking cartoon which stood outside Lloyds Bank, but as it persisted in blowing down was removed to the more sheltered position by the Church path.

The large banner which we use today was made that year (1972). Maurice Dix obtained the canvas and cordage from Jeckells of Lowestoft, and Tom Asquith's son, Marcus, painted it. The total cost was £22.68.; apart from the occasional cleaning it has needed little attention.

The Society continued to have Exhibitions in the Vestry until 1975,

when a further change to larger premises was deemed necessary, and the obvious choice was the Public Hall. This was a daunting prospect in view of the costs involved; but as a result of careful financial analysis on the part of Tom Asquith the Hall was booked for the 1976 Exhibition. This was approached with trepidation, but fears were unfounded as the sales rocketed to ninety six, and remained a record until 1988 when one hundred and twelve pictures were sold.

By comparison with the Vestry, the Hall seemed to offer endless space; Therefore pottery, wood-carving and photography were permitted for the first two years, but strangely the public were the first to object to crafts being included with paintings, and so the subject matter was confined to the graphic arts; with emphasis on original work. Copies have never been acceptable. Initially hanging the pictures to the best advantage was the cause of many trials and errors, and, it has to be admitted, arguments, but with experience and a good 'hanging' team, (most of whom are still doing this yearly task), a satisfactory pattern was established. The problem was poor lighting. It was alleviated by the installation of a temporary extension cable; but as the lighting has not been improved the temporary cable has been in use for fourteen years. With the frightening spectre of financial disaster, members agreed, if necessary, to contribute one pound per head to costs, but fortunately this necessity never arose, but a strict economy was observed; this included the catalogue which continued to be typed until 1977 when the supplies ran out, and in this emergency Mike Renshaw kindly undertook to fill the gap by using his office machine while Phyllis Markland turned the handle; it was a muscle aching job, so after that episode it was decided to have the catalogues printed for the future.

From the first Exhibition (in the Hall) until the present day, Monday evening is handing in of paintings, and Tuesday hanging day; when between 9 and 9.30 a.m. the hangers arrive, and are faced with the fearsome prospect of filling empty walls and stands with the stacks of pictures lying in wait, and generally creating order out of apparent chaos. Gradually (with the aid of cups of coffee or tea, and the odd biscuit or two), the Hall is transformed, and by the end of the day all the pictures are in place and numbered. The long job of typing from the labels completed and ready to be handed in to the printers to be catalogued, and delivered in time for the Friday evening preview. As nobody envisaged, particularly in the first year at the Public Hall, that the preparation work could possibly be completed in one day, Wednesday was kept for any overflow, and has subsequently been left clear for emergencies. Thursday is set aside for selecting the awards which entails a morning's work. There have been amusing incidents on some occasions when the judges have not seen eye to eye with each other, and with no arbitrator on hand, have, somehow, had to sort out their own troubles, sometimes quite noisily. There was one occasion when the third judge, at the last moment, was unable to attend which

left two of strong character and completely opposing ideas; each chose a different set of pictures, and as neither would give way to the other, the Chairman, in desperation, had to double all the awards which meant eight shields, instead of four ! Fortunately these occurrences, when the artistic temperament raises its head, are fairly rare, and most judges are compatible and charming.

As an incentive and added interest to the Exhibitions awards are given as follows.

The first to be instituted was the Frank Delf Memorial in 1974 (any media), followed in 1975 by the Macdonald Miller (oils), which later became the MacFee award in 1984. The Bertha Babington Memorial (pastels), in 1975. Frank Forward Memorial (water colours) in 1978. Johnston Browne should be specially mentioned for all the good work he put into the Society; and now both he and his wife Gladys are commemorated in the Gladys and Johnston Browne Memorial award (mixed media) given by their daughter, Mrs. Askew. Three professional artists, being non-members, are asked to choose the pictures.

Friday morning is a bustle of activity in preparation for the evening preview, and the opening on Saturday morning. The tables have to be set out with tablecloths for food and wine; all the wine glasses have to be polished, and set out prettily with the accompanying bottles of wine ready at hand, not forgetting the corkscrew ! Winning paintings are transferred from the walls to easels on the stage with their appropriate cards, and in the midst of this the flower arrangers arrive with buckets of flowers, and containers, and there is the inevitable falling over each other, and jostling for position. After the first two or three years in the Public Hall, and when crafts were omitted, flowers, which are so complementary to paintings, played an important part of the Exhibition, and were provided and arranged by members until 1982 when the Beccles and District Flower Arrangers undertook to be responsible for the display, and continue to do so. This, by no means, small, contribution is very much appreciated by the Society and the visiting Public.

As with paintings and flowers, food and wine, although it is usually said in reverse, are complementary. The 'pickeries' for the Preview have always been provided by generous members, (who may, but never have, claimed expenses) so the spread is varied and interesting. To quote a favourite saying of Ken Markland's, "all good stuff"; and an aid to a happy social occasion, and also promotion of sales.

The first opening day on that Saturday morning, 1976, was breathtaking, and almost unbelievable as the public poured in, and queued at the Stewards' desk to buy paintings, although it was hoped that the Exhibition would create an interest in the town, this was a revelation and caused a great deal of astonished excitement. It had

been estimated that between five and six hundred visitors might be expected in the course of the week, as at the Vestry, but in fact, fifteen hundred were recorded. Now that the Society has become established and its reputation known over a wider area - visitors, who come from all directions, including overseas, number, approximately two thousand. Complacency, however, has not set in, and each Annual Exhibition is approached with a certain amount of trepidation; even more so as 1986 was a nail biting year, saved from financial disaster by the introduction, for the first time, of raffle tickets for a painting provided by a member, but the margin was a narrow one, and a salutary lesson against taking success for granted. Since then the escalating cost of hiring the Public Hall has been alleviated by the artists who give a picture to be raffled.

One of the benefits of moving to the Public Hall is the ability to provide light refreshment for the visitors, and the members, particularly those on Stewards' duty. They say life revolves around the kitchen, and so this sideline plays an important part in the success of the Exhibition, and has to be organised with equal care. Although never intended to be a profit making concern, so far it has not been run at a loss, and there has been a margin of profit. Little has changed since that first year in the hall, except that over the years there have been, and are, many annual reunions with regular visitors, and a muddle over the cups. There was a remarkable occasion in 1988, when the Petit Couronne Chamber Orchestra, having taken part the previous week in a double celebration; the four hundredth anniversary of the granting of the Charter to Beccles, and the tenth anniversary of the town's twinning with Petit Couronne; offered to give the Society an impromptu farewell concert on Monday morning of the Exhibition, and enlivened a usually quiet day after the rush of the weekend. Those fortunate enough to be there will not forget the colourful personality of the Maestro, or his equally colourful orchestra, and the lovely music. At the interval there was a concerted rush by the orchestral players to the kitchen table for, mostly Cafe au lait, or noir, but not many for The. The servers did their best with some excruciating schoolgirl French, which somehow lingered throughout the day.

The stands are a very necessary adjunct to the Exhibition, particularly since moving to the Public Hall, but they are also the heaviest items, not to say problem children. Stored as they have been at the top of the Hungate Church, with very narrow stairs to negotiate, and where, with predictable obstinacy they invariably got wedged, much to the exasperation of the stalwarts trying to manoeuvre them, and from there these same stalwarts actually carried them, for the first few years of the Exhibition, from the Church to the Hall which was no light task. The Society was very grateful when Philippa Charlton was able to lend her car and trailer for transport, and subsequently, Cyril Bateman, his van. Permission has now been given by the Public Hall authorities to keep the stands in the vaults at the hall. In 1986 it was thought that a coat of paint on the stands would not come amiss, and a

volunteer party was quickly formed who set about the task with a will, and to good effect. Their work was aided by an excellent picnic lunch, with wine, provided by one of the party.

Three small table stands made by Fred Pidcock have also been invaluable, not only for exhibitions, but for the hospital fete, for displaying the Picture of the Month in shop windows, and for various other uses.

Advertising the Annual Exhibition, always considered important, was modest at first, and tentative as the Society stepped into unknown waters, and was mostly confined to the town, but gradually over the years it has spread to a much wider area; and latterly includes a mention on Radio Norfolk, and Radio Broadland, for which the Society is grateful to John Baxter who instigated this event. One year car stickers were tried, but proved unpopular with members, and were not repeated; they were also quite expensive to produce. In 1976 roadside posters were introduced, and permission sought from landowners to put them on their land, and as this covers several square miles, it is a considerable asset. Only once was vandalism suspected when three of the posters were reported lying forlornly in a ditch; but as the ground at that particular site was like concrete they had probably blown down, and vandals were exonerated.

#### CHARITIES

Throughout the years assistance to local charities has figured fairly largely; the first in 1970 at the British Legion Hall for the Wangford Conservation Association, followed by the Mayor's Vehicle Fund which resulted in a contribution of £56. For many years the Friends of Beccles War Memorial Hospital have been instrumental in raising large sums of money by holding an annual Fete in the hospital grounds, the contributions of which have enabled the hospital to expand into its present form. Taking part in this fete began by having a stall in 1981, and this has continued, and with the generous support of members has raised a considerable amount of money for this worthwhile cause.

Twice Shadingfield Church invited the Society to show pictures during their Flower Festival at Easter for the restoration of the church roof and other repairs. They were happy occasions which benefitted both Church and Society, but unfortunately have not been repeated. The members donated over a hundred pounds from the sales of their paintings. Latterly contributions have been made to the respective Mayors' funds and to the James Paget Hospital.

.....

Built as the Society was, on a sixpence and through the initiative of the members who made, mended, and provided equipment; also the Treasurers who guarded the aforesaid sixpence, the Society has proved that artistry and impracticability are not synonymous.

Twenty one years later, the Society flourishes, and it might be said that the acorn is a sturdy sapling, and will one day grow into a well rooted oak.

### WAVENEY PAINTERS

Ever since Cotman painted Wheatacre church, and possibly before, distinguished artists have lived or worked within the catchment area of the Beccles Society of Artists. A glimpse of some of them, past and present, is given in the following article by IAN COLLINS, a journalist based in the London office of the Eastern Daily Press, and author of *A Broad Canvas: Art in East Anglia Since 1880* (Parke Sutton, £19.95.)

.....

Subtle, quiet spaces in and around the Waveney valley contain some of the most unmarred tracts of countryside still to be found in East Anglia. Thus they continue to act as a magnet to professional landscape painters, just as they did a century ago.

It has been noted that few of the celebrated artists whose work has evoked the atmosphere of the region in general, or the area where Norfolk and Suffolk meet in particular, were actually born here. But one exception to this rule, as in so much else, was a giant among Landscape artists and the best horse painter since Stubbs: Alfred Munnings (1878-1959.)

Munnings was born in Mendham, a miller's son, and much of his finest work -- with a fresh personal vision heightened by a Post-Impressionist palette -- was to celebrate the tapestry of fields, lanes, fairs and gypsy encampments around his childhood home.

Apparently unhindered by the youthful loss of an eye, in an accident while walking at Mulbarton, near Norwich, Munnings was later damaged by his own rumbustious personality, tactlessness, reactionary opinions and pressing need to make money -- a need that led, during latter years at Dedham, to far too many lacklustre commissions.

But his true and overriding worth as a painter, always acknowledged by the public, is long overdue for a critical review.

No less deserving of new admirers is the work of John Alfred Arnesby Brown (1866-1955), who spent the final decades of a long life at Haddiscoe, in a house with a commanding view across the Waveney valley. In scores of robust yet lyrical oils, dominated by golden suns rising and falling in vast, misty skies, and populated by cattle, he made the marshy landscape between Halvergate and Oulton Broad very much his own.

There is no trace of Arnesby Brown's shadow in the canvases of his wife, Mia Edwards, which were filled with the faces of wistful children.

But an influence can be noted in sturdy studies by Campbell Mellon (1876-1955), who, after settling in Gorleston in 1918, became the master's only known student and a steadfast friend. Best known for brilliant beach scenes between Yarmouth and Lowestoft, Mellon also painted assured landscapes of the Waveney valley.

Although artists have worked and wandered in isolation across our region, a shifting summer colony was based in Walberswick even before Philip Wilson Steer's first visits and impressionistic images in the 1890s. Some of these coast-drawn artists travelled inland to draw and paint -- among them Bertram Priestman (1868-1951), tutor of another Waveney visitor, Edward Seago, who long toured the country lanes in a 1908 De Dion Bouton car.

Another colony, the pacifist painters and writers of the Bloomsbury Group, briefly took root at Wissett, to escape conscription into the First World War through farm labour. For most of 1916, Wissett Lodge became home to Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell and David Garnett, and a temporary resting-place for a gorgeous gaggle of visiting kin and kindred spirits.

Bell spent most days in a bedroom studio, Grant was free to paint only on Sundays: but both artists found time to cover every available wall in modernistic murals, which they were ordered to remove when they moved to Sussex.

Across the Blyth, Stanley Spencer (1891-1959) painted in Southwold and around Wangford, where he married his first wife, the painter Hilda Carline, in 1925. Much later, the local lad Munnings tried without success to sue him for obscenity.

The Royal Academician Jeffery Camp was born at Oulton Broad in 1923 and executed early windblown, sun-blasted Waveney landscapes and coastscapes a world away from his entwined Thames-side nudes of recent years.

Another frequent visitor to the area was the masterly draughtsman and watercolourist Leonard Squirrell (1893-1979), who lived for a time at Chippenhall Green, near Fressingfield, and who, working and residing for much of his life around Ipswich, proved himself a true son of Suffolk.

The Waveney valley was also touched by the austere spirit of the post-war Neo-Romantic movement. Prunella Clough had known the north Suffolk coastline from childhood, and returned in the six years from 1945 to execute a series of desolate, semi-Cubist oils of harbours, eel nets and beaches littered with bleached tree roots and blackened tank traps.

She continued to visit the Neo-Romantic painter David Carr, whose home at Starston Hall also welcomed L.S. Lowry. Another friend, the

writer and gardener Elizabeth Smart, who had in turn befriended "the two Roberts" as Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde were known, later settled at Flixton.

The secretive contours of the Waveney valley are rife with hidden gardens, which have proved major sources of inspiration to a gallery of artists. Based at Stoven, the painters John Morley and Diana Howard form a link with the Brotherhood of Ruralists who, grouped around Peter Blake, have declared an allegiance to the West Country. Mr. Morley is also continuing the East Anglian painter-plantsman tradition of John Aldridge, Cedric Morris and John Nash.

A fine recorder of still-life studies and interior views is Margaret Thomas of Ellingham Mill, while Margaret Mellis, who lived at Syleham for many years with her late husband, the collagist Francis Davison, continues to execute driftwood constructions and flower drawings on opened-out envelopes from her current home in Southwold.

Traditions of naive and rural folk art have been stalwartly continued, with a recognisably Waveney imprint, by Mary Newcomb, who has spent much of her married life on farms at Needham and Linstead Magna. Her daughter, Tessa, who is now based at Wenhamston, is among several local painters whom I would tip for a bright future.

In short, the area around Beccles has inspired good, even great art in abundant diversity. I have no doubt that it will continue to do so.

---

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Society acknowledges with gratitude the generous assistance given by:-

The late Gerald Lawson  
Tony Clarke, Chief Reporter of the Beccles and Bungay Journal  
The late Fred Pilgrim - caretaker of the Public Hall  
David Porter, the present caretaker, and his wife Linda  
The Beccles and District Flower Arrangement Club  
The local landowners who kindly let us put up our notices  
Frank Foster the Outfitters and Olivia Fashions for displaying "The  
Painting of the Month"  
Ian Collins for his Post Script

Logo by Tom Parnell

---

Originated & Printed by Michael Renshaw (Print Services), Beccles