

Alan White (local artist) 1893-1974

A report by Mark Temple

Local Watercolour artist, Alan White, was a familiar figure throughout Charnwood during a period from the 1920s up until to the 1960s. The White family were well known in Loughborough when Alan was born on 8th April 1893 under his given name of Frank Alan White. He chose to drop the 'Frank' to avoid confusion with his father. Father was Frank Robert White who, along with brother, William Edward, were running a successful textile and hosiery business (Paget & White) in Beehive Lane, Woodgate. The family must have been fairly wealthy at this time as in 1889 his grandfather (another Frank) had been able to fund the building of the *Philharmonic Hall* nearby off Southfields Road. Alan's grandmother was also someone of substance – being Sarah (nee Barton), daughter of the Governor of the Bank of Ireland.

The Whites lived at one time in Fairfield's House then Park House before moving to 4 Burton Place sometime in the 1890s, where both Alan and younger (surviving) brother, William Basil White (born 1900) spent their early years. By the time Kelly's directory (1928) records Capt. Frank Robert White retired and living at 38 Leicester Road, Alan and brother William are running an antique business from the same premises. Alan would often up-cycle tired items of furniture they had in their antique shop, even exhibiting some pieces at the County Show in 1930. *[In recent years this same house has been recognised, with the installation of a blue plaque, as the house owned by Lace-master John Heathcoat at the time of the 1816 Luddite attack on his factory].*

Antiques were not Alan's only interest as by this stage, he was already well established as a local artist. From 1902-09 Alan had attended Loughborough Grammar school before taking up a place at the Leicester School of Art on New Walk. The war then saw him joining the army, but he only served for a year before returning to civilian life. Officially he was 'declared medically unfit' because of his eyesight but years later it was revealed he was probably 'let go' because it had been discovered he was homosexual, something many of his family and friends had always known.

For a time in the early 20s Alan went onto the stage; appearing in the pantomime, "Jack and the Beanstalk at the Theatre Royal, Nottingham. He also featured in "Sinbad the Sailor" in Leicester as the 'left hind leg of an elephant' as well as operating the whale's mouth as it swallowed Mrs Sinbad. But it was painting that was his first love and he was lucky to briefly become a student of the Royal Academician, Stanhope Forbes; one of the founders of the Newlyn school of painting in Cornwall.

Alan visited and resided in Cornwall at various times over the years painting and selling small watercolours (usually miniatures) of local scenes to the visiting tourists. He made a living but never made much money by specialising (as he put it to a friend years later) "In churning out small pictures at small prices."

He was always regarded (and considered himself) as a rather flamboyant eccentric; often seen dressed in a velvet jacket and purple cravat wearing tweed knickerbockers to enable him to cycle to locations around the county where he could sketch. He was particularly drawn to Bradgate Park, Old John and the woods around Woodhouse Eaves leading from Beacon Hill.

He would take home his drawings to work them up into one normal size painting (roughly 10"x14"). He would then sketch a grid out onto a piece of art paper, creating a dozen rectangles which he would then proceed to fill with miniature versions of the larger work. Some would be (approx) 2"x 3" priced at 5/-, some 3"x 4" priced at 7/6d and the others 4"x 6" at 10/-. Many were put straight into black metal frames and taken to Arnolds (Baxter Gate, Loughborough) or Rebecca Dearmans (Leicester) to be sold on commission.

Later he started asking local carpenter, Claude Preston of Victoria Rd, to make him simple white, wooden frames to fit with the card mounts he had cut to present his pictures. Occasionally he hadn't got the *readies* to pay Claude for his work. When Claude's wife, Sue, heard this she suggested he might give them one of his larger paintings in lieu of cash. This he was glad to do.

Popular local scenes included Swithland Woods at bluebell time, the Outwoods, Anstey Packhorse Bridge, Quorn meadows, Mountsorrel Buttercross and Woodhouse Eaves' iconic windmill. Several pictures have also emerged showing that whenever Alan travelled further afield, he would take his painting bag with him. Cornwall, Scotland, the Lake District and Wales were favourite destinations, but he visited both urban and rural locations up and down the country as well as over in Ireland.

In 2005, an event to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the local history group, also recognised the art work of Alan White with a small retrospective exhibition. Jill Honisett (Society secretary for many years) coordinated the display of several works by Alan gathered from local people. Very few people had known Alan personally but those who had told us some intriguing tales.

At some point (possibly 1950s around the time of the coronation) a few of his miniatures had been accepted by the royal household for display inside Queen Mary's dolls house (although this claim has proved difficult to confirm). We were told that from an early age Alan was almost blind in one eye which makes his artwork seem all the more remarkable. Shortly after the war he occupied a small studio in Aumberry gap, Loughborough (on the site later part of the funeral parlour).

He paid his milk and butcher bills to local tradesmen with small paintings when times were hard. He lived in various houses around the area including 'digs' in Hunts Road (photo; now demolished) as well as a little cottage on Mill Road, Woodhouse Eaves (next to the old sweet shop, later Hughes the butchers).

Stevan Alcock, a great nephew of Alan, added some more details about the White family. They were not only related to the Pagets of Ibstock and Sutton Bonington but also to the Chamberlains of Birmingham, the Bartons of Dublin and several other wealthy families of the area. Swiss artist John Paschoud was another cousin of Alan White. Alan White's father was, apparently, the first president of Loughborough Rowing Club (1881-1908) and Master of the Quorn Hunt. His brother William Basil, who continued to work in the antiques trade, married a half-cousin Dorothy. She came to *visit* England from Canada to celebrate her 21st birthday. After meeting William she decided to marry him and stay on in Charnwood. Stevan also revealed at some point in the late 1920s that Alan had spent time in Paris sketching with his nephew Charles, recording the holiday in a 'visual diary'.

After leaving Whissendine in Rutland where he'd lodged in the 1960s, Alan settled in Melton. Interviewing him in 1970, only four years before his death, Alan revealed to the Melton Times that he was a great admirer of Pablo Picasso although he didn't feel he personally had the time "to experiment with modern art techniques" and make a living at the same time with affordable watercolours "which are my bread and butter." [A. White Melton Times 3-7-1970].

However, there are still several gaps in our knowledge regarding Alan. We would like to know when precisely he was working in a studio in Newlyn, the local artist community in Cornwall. (A report of the 2005 exhibition suggested Newlands, which I now suspect is an error). Recently I've read that, for a time during the 1960s, Alan lived at the Gernick Field Studios. But we also now know he spent time in Cornwall back before the war and that he was friendly with several artists including Charles Breaker and Eric Hiller.

Regarding Alan White's later life, it is thought he probably suffered a stroke sometime in the early 1970s whilst he was still living in Melton Mowbray (41 Burton Street in 1970). After this he moved to Oakham (11 New Street) where he was looked after, for a time, by his brother, William and sister-in-law, Dorothy, until his death on 3rd February 1974.