

Henry Victor Redman, known as “Harry” (1920 - 1994). A summary of his artistic career, with special reference to World War Two, written by his eldest son.

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Harry was born in 1920 and grew up near the Kent coast at St Peter's-in-Thanel, an area of Broadstairs. He attended Chatham House School, a grammar school at Ramsgate, Kent, from 1931 - 1937. He became interested in art at an early age and had the good fortune of getting to know the artist Walter Richard Sickert (1860 - 1942), who lived at St Peter's from 1934 - 1938. In the mid 1930's, Harry had the privilege of attending the “conversaciones” (as he referred to them) held on Saturday evenings at Sickert's house, Hauteville, which was very near his family house. Harry was also present at the series of lectures Sickert gave at Margate in 1934.¹ After Harry's death at age 73 in 1994, a colleague of Harry's at the Department of Fine Art at Reading University, Tom Barrett, wrote: *these occasions were treasured memories for Harry, bringing him into direct contact with a master working in the traditions of Degas and Whistler. Recounting these times Harry always mentioned “the wonderful aroma of cigars and turpentine” which permeated Sickert's rooms. Inevitably these experiences were deeply formative and he never lost his admiration for Sickert as man and artist.*

After leaving grammar school in 1937, Harry enrolled at the Thanet School of Art and Architecture, Margate, Kent. However, war was looming and by mid-January 1939, over seven months before Britain entered the war on 3 September, Harry had applied for a Short Service Commission in the Royal Air Force (RAF). His ambition was to be a Spitfire pilot. He was accepted for this route of entry into the RAF, provided he passed the medical tests for pilot training. A letter from the Air Ministry dated 17 Feb 1939 stated he had “failed to reach the required standard in the RAF special physical efficiency flying tests”, but he was invited for medical re-examination. He was eventually rejected for pilot training and flying crew because his medical tests revealed a heart abnormality. After this, he still wished to join the RAF, but had to wait until he was conscripted.

Harry witnessed the first year of World War Two as a young civilian based near the Kent coast, in relatively close proximity to France. While waiting for his conscription into the RAF, he continued with his studies at the Thanet School of Art and Architecture and passed the Board of Education Examination in Drawing in 1940. Harry witnessed survivors of torpedoed or mined shipping being brought ashore at Margate in 1940 and did some sketches from memory of these events. The survivors had been picked up out of the sea and been wrapped in blankets to keep them warm, and Harry said they looked to him “like Old Testament prophets” as they came ashore. He also sketched some “blitzed buildings” at Ramsgate, and said how the inside of buildings were often opened up to public gaze by a great slice being taken out of the side. He witnessed some aspects of the war that was going on in the air overhead during the “Battle of Britain” and sketched a crashed German fighter plane from memory, that he had seen do a “pancake landing” in a field.

War service with the RAF, 19.09.40 – 26.07.46. Harry's war service with the RAF did not begin until 19 September 1940, just over a year after Britain had entered the war on 3

September 1939. Harry was trained as a Wireless Operator for “Direction Finding” (signals for directing aircraft), and this was his RAF trade. He spent his first year with the RAF at various RAF bases in Britain and continued to sketch and paint in his spare time. After his first year in the RAF, he wanted more adventure and applied to go overseas.

Overseas service with the RAF in Sierra Leone, West Africa (03.12.41 – 15.05.43: 17

months). Towards the end of 1941, Harry was posted to Sierra Leone in West Africa, and was sent out on a troop ship called the Steam Ship Obosso, in a convoy. He told us how rabbit was part of their diet during the voyage. Harry continued with his sketching and painting in his spare time in the very different environment in Sierra Leone. He and his colleagues enjoyed swimming in the sea for recreation, and had the use of a dug-out canoe. He spent just over 17 months in Sierra Leone and sailed from Freetown on 16 May 1943, on a troop ship called the Maloga. It took three weeks for them to reach Britain, which included a one week stop-over at Gibraltar, according to his diary notes.

His intervening period in Britain with the RAF, between his two overseas postings (about

14 months). Harry arrived back in Britain on 6 June 1943 and spent the next 14 months with the RAF in Britain. He arrived at RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire on 25 June 1943. During his leave periods, he was able to attend some part-time art classes at the Ruskin School of Drawing in Oxford, the Central School of Art in London, and the Slade School of Art in Oxford and London. On a CV Harry wrote in 1979, he stated that he also attended some part-time classes at the Central School of Art in 1951 and the Slade in 1953. On this CV, he lists some of his tutors at the above institutions, from 1943 onwards, as Professor R Schwabe, Anthony Gross, A Rutherford, W Roberts, and B Meninsky. His diary notes from autumn 1943 record classes with Roberts and Meninsky.

Overseas service with the RAF in India (21.08.44 – 24.03.46: 19 months). In August 1944, Harry was again posted overseas, this time to India, where he served with the RAF for 19 months until March 1946, after the war had ended. Towards the end of his time in India, Harry was stationed in Kashmir, which he referred to as “the foothills of the Himalayas.” The scenery, people, and culture there seem to have made a big impression on him, and he often reminisced to his family about his time in Kashmir, in favourable tones. He seemed to have enjoyed his time in India more than West Africa, partly because he found the climate was more to his liking. Again, he continued to sketch and paint in his spare time while in India.

Harry returned to Britain from India in a troop ship that came through the Suez Canal. On 24 April 1946 he departed from the RAF Dispersal Centre at Kirkham, Lancashire and was granted 93 days leave. His “effective date of release (i.e. last day of service)” with the RAF was 26 July 1946. He had spent almost six years in the RAF. After probably joining at the most junior rank, he was a corporal by December 1944 and left India with the rank of Sergeant. He said that towards the end of his time with the RAF, he had been offered a Commission, but declined as he felt he did not have enough of a technical or scientific background to understand in depth how the signals equipment worked. Perhaps partly due to his wartime experiences and in gratitude for his safe return to England, on 10 December

1947 Harry was confirmed at Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Broadstairs, Kent, near to where he grew up.

Post-war career. After the war, Harry returned to full time education, with the intention of becoming an art teacher. He attended the School of Fine Art at Reading University (RU) from 1948 to 1949. He was awarded the Ministry of Education Art Examinations Certificate in Painting in August 1948, and the Ministry of Education Art Teacher's Diploma in August 1949. Harry told me he had chosen RU because the artist Robert Gibbings taught there, whose wood engravings and book illustrations he admired, but when he arrived, he found Gibbings had left. However, what seems to have more than compensated for this disappointment was that the Head of Fine Art at RU at that time, Professor J Anthony Betts (1897 - 1980), was an enthusiast for Sickert's art. Betts had been involved with the awarding of an honorary doctorate degree by RU to Sickert in 1938. Harry's pre-war experiences with Sickert no doubt helped endear him to Betts, who gave Harry his first teaching post, which was as an Assistant Lecturer in Fine Art at RU, from 1949 until 1952. Harry was then placed on the permanent staff of the University, as Lecturer in Fine Art, from 30 September 1952, until his early retirement in September 1982. Following this he was appointed part-time Lecturer until September 1985, and achieved 36 years of service to the University.

During his career in the Fine Art Department at RU, Harry became increasingly involved with the teaching of printmaking. In 1954 he initiated and organised the Intaglio Print Workshop. His colleague Tom Barrett recalled that: *during the sixties when Claude Rogers was Professor, Harry worked mainly in the printmaking studios. Here his love of the skills and finesse of etching and engraving formed the basis of his teaching, and it was about this time that he had a period of sabbatical leave to study in the Paris atelier of the distinguished painter and etcher S W Hayter (1901 - 1988).* Harry's sabbatical with Hayter was for three months, beginning in April 1964.ⁱⁱ In 1975 Harry was asked by the Head of Department, Professor Martin Froy, to take charge of the new Print Workshops, sited in a building recently vacated by another department. The new workshops had the following facilities: Lithography, Silkscreen, Relief, and Intaglio, the latter now enlarged and incorporated with the others. Harry continued to oversee the Print Workshops until his retirement. He also initiated and organised the Picture Loan Scheme at the University in 1964, supplying pictures to the University at large, which was financially self-supporting. He continued to oversee the Picture Loan Scheme until his retirement, and it was still thriving at the time of his death in 1994.

Epilogue. At least in his later years, Harry seems to have been very self-effacing about his own art and to have only exhibited it occasionally, for example as part of joint exhibitions at Reading University. He left behind a large amount of his own art, mostly sketches and prints, which have lain dormant until now. Shortly before he died, he said to me that if any of his colleagues wanted to put on a "retrospective" exhibition of his work after his death, he did not want that. However, since so long has passed now since his death in 1994, and his sons have to make some hard decisions about what to do with his artwork, we felt the preferred option is to put it into the public domain where possible, in order to try to preserve

something of our father's legacy as an artist, and in his memory. The alternative would be that it eventually disappeared without trace, which would seem a waste.

In his retirement, Harry gave some of his drawings, paintings and prints of the townscapes in Reading, that he had done in the late 1940's and 1950's, to Reading Museum. He felt they might be of historical interest, as the town had changed so much. Likewise, some of his remaining sketches of Reading from that early period of his time there have recently been donated by us to the Reading Guild of Artists (RGA), for their historical archive, and the RGA included a few in a recent exhibition they held. Some examples of Harry's art have also recently been passed to the RU Art Collection, and some to the Abbott and Holder Art Gallery at 30 Museum Street, London. All these outlets for "re-homing" his work seem to be very fitting. Harry loved to travel to London to visit museums, art galleries and art dealers such as Craddock and Barnard who were based at 32 Museum Street, London. He would occasionally buy items there and from other sources, for teaching aids, for his own collection, and for the Picture Loan Scheme.

Acknowledgements and thanks. Several people have recently helped us sort through Harry's collection, both of his own art and that of other artists. I wish to express our thanks to Martin Andrews, who was once a student of Harry's and who later became a Lecturer in the RU Department of Typography & Graphic Communication (now retired). Also, to Alan Hardie, who worked alongside Harry in the RU Fine Art Department as a Technician, after training at the Slade. Naomi Lebens, Curator of the RU Art Collection until mid-June 2022, has also been of great help, as has Tom Edwards, Managing Director of the Abbott and Holder Art Gallery in London.

ⁱ In May 1987, another Sickert enthusiast called Francis Farmer, who was organising an exhibition called "The Painters of Camden Town, 1905 - 1920", to be held at Christies in January 1988, contacted Harry for some information about a Sickert drawing. We have a draft of the letter Harry wrote in reply to Mr Farmer, in which he says: *When the Sickerts were living at St. Peter's-in-Thamet their house, Hauteville, was very near our family house. I was fortunate enough to be admitted to the conversaciones held on Saturday evenings. I was also present at the series of lectures which WRS gave at Margate in 1934. As you must know, these have been celebrated at Ramsgate recently. I have the catalogue though unfortunately I was unable to travel to see the show. I owe WRS & his wife, Therese Lessore, a great debt of gratitude for their many kindnesses & hospitality which they showed to a schoolboy. I mean, sometime, to write down what I remember of these remarkable artists.* Sadly, as far as I know, Harry never got around to writing a full and detailed account of his memories of Sickert and his wife. In 1948, Harry took some photos of the outside of Sickert's house, Hauteville, at St. Peter's-in-Thamet. I plan to transfer these to the RU Art Collection, to be placed with the Sickert palette that Harry donated to the collection in 1990. This palette was bequeathed to Harry by one of the other members of Sickert's circle at St Peter's in the pre-war period, Constance Louise Hodgskin (known also as "Connie Jane," and referred to as "Jane" by her husband Glyn, who passed the palette to Harry in 1970 after she died). When Harry donated the palette, his letter accompanying this gift, to Professor Kerry Downes of the RU Art History Department, says: *The mahogany palette, which I send you, was used by Walter Sickert in Paris. It was left to me by Constance Louise Hodgskin who was one of his assistants at St Peter's-in-Thamet (mid 30's). I was a very junior member of the circle there. Perhaps you would accept it for the Art Collection? The provenance is impeccable, you must take my word (however unreliable) for it.... WRS gave the palette to Constance. She left it to me in her will. Given in memory of Walter Sickert & Prof J Anthony Betts.*

ⁱⁱ By chance, the photo currently on Wikipedia of Hayter working in his studio, in profile facing right with a cigarette in his mouth, and in shirt sleeves and apron, appears to show Harry working in the background.