

Money, Distinction and Liberality in the Making of
Middle Class Culture in Victorian Brighton: A Study
of Four Art Collections

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference had been made to the work of others.

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ABSTRACT

The Graphic wrote in 1870 'The politics of Brighton are a puzzle. The most intensely aristocratic city in the kingdom, after the capital, is intensely Radical'. This political 'puzzle' is also relevant to the outlooks of the five rich and upwardly mobile Victorians whose collections are the focus of this thesis. Their private and public involvements including their art collections reflected a paradoxical amalgam of both liberal and patrician views, of radical rhetoric and aristocratic aspiration. This is an analysis of art collecting and culture in Britain's largest seaside resort in the nineteenth century, the local government and civil society of which reflected the growing influence of the urban middle class as much as in the classic industrial revolution cities of the north and midlands. The four collections were assembled by William Coningham (1815-1884), Henry Hill (1813-1882), Henry Willett (1823-1905) and Harriet Trist (1816-1896) and her husband John Hamilton Trist (1812-1891).

The main purpose of the thesis is to explore the relationship between the wealth of five aspiring members of the Brighton bourgeoisie and the social and political meanings of their art collections paid for out of fortunes made from sugar, tailoring, beer and wine. Coningham and Willett accumulated mainly old masters including niche collections of early Renaissance paintings. Hill is notable for his contemporary collection of realist and impressionist art including the works of Frank Holl and Edgar Degas. The main part of the Trist collection included Pre-Raphaelite and aestheticist works, particularly the paintings of Arthur Hughes.

There is no previous dedicated scholarly work on art collecting in nineteenth century Brighton. More generally the thesis in its emphasis on the 'liberal paternalist' outlook of upper middle class elite collectors and its focus on a town dedicated to pleasure and consumption rather than industry and production, provides an alternative interpretation to middle class art collecting to that offered by Dianne Macleod in *Art and the Victorian Middle Class, Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (1996).

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INTRODUCTION

Setting the Scene with a Concert in the Royal Pavilion 1867

On Saturday 16th and Monday 18th February 1867 two concerts were held in the Music Room of the Royal Pavilion organised by Messrs Hannington and Sons, the largest department store in Brighton created in 1862.¹ The programme for both nights consisted of selections from Handel oratorios in the first half and a miscellany of military band, vocal and instrumental pieces in the second half including excerpts from the works of the early nineteenth century Italian composer Vincenzo Bellini.² The Hanningtons concert on 18th February 1867 was the only occasion when the four wealthy men who owned the art collections which are the basis for this thesis came together at the same public event in Brighton. William Coningham (1815-1884), Henry Hill (1813-1882), Henry Willett (1823-1905) and John Hamilton Trist (1812-1891) were all listed as invitees. It appears that their interest in fine art was accompanied by an appreciation of fine music.³ The wives of these men are also listed as invitees, identified by their husbands' surnames. One of these, Harriet Trist (1816-1896), as Chapter 5 will explain more fully, was also an art collector, working in partnership with her husband John to assemble a family art collection. Focusing on the four men, there is no doubt that they all knew each other and there is direct evidence of one-to-one dealings among them in relation to specific artistic or political matters, with a likelihood that the four families encountered each other at private social events.⁴ The physical and social circumstances of the Hanningtons

¹ Report entitled 'Messrs Hannington and Sons' Annual Amateur Concerts' in *Brighton Gazette*, Thursday 21st Feb., 1867, p. 8. For the establishment of Hanningtons as a department store, see Sidonie Bond, *Hanningtons, A Brief History 1808-2001* (Seaford: S. B. Publications, 2002), p. 21.

² 'Messrs Hannington and Sons' Annual Amateur Concerts', *Brighton Gazette*, 21st Feb., 1867, p. 8.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ For instance, in 1875 Hill sold Philip Morris *A Squally Day* to Trist, see no. 75, *John Hamilton Trist's Pictures At 22, Vernon Terrace, Brighton, 11, Compton Terrace and at 13 Goldsmid Roads, Brighton October 1876, 15th Dec. 1886 Revised List*, Tate Gallery Archive, 8524.31 (TGA). Willett was a major force in the local Brighton Liberal Party in the late 1850s and 1860s at the time when Coningham was a Liberal MP for Brighton. They would have been well acquainted. For instance, they shared a Liberal Party platform at which candidates for members of parliament were selected, see 'Brighton Election, The Nomination', *Brighton Gazette*, 5th May 1859, p. 6. Hill and Willett were members of the

concert provide the opportunity to illustrate some of the key themes and the mode of discourse of this thesis.

The Royal Pavilion, where the concert took place, was a former royal palace situated in what had become the heart of the town (fig. 1). First commissioned by George, Prince of Wales in 1787 and radically redesigned between 1815 and 1822,⁵ its exotic and opulent visual identity helped give Brighton a focal point and a distinctive edge in competition with other south coast resorts in Victorian Britain.⁶ It was George's patronage and frequent residence in Brighton from the 1780s onwards, as Prince Regent and then as King George IV 1820-1830, which helped establish the town as a fast-growing retreat for the landed gentry and well-heeled bourgeoisie in the early 1800s.⁷ Indeed, between 1811 and 1821, at a time of intense industrial change, Brighton was Britain's fastest-growing town, exceeding the growth rate of cities such as Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool.⁸ By the middle of the nineteenth century it was the largest seaside resort in the country.⁹ For Brighton, the Palace was and continues to be a powerful symbol. It signified the aristocratic cachet and respectability which comes from royal patronage. But at the same time in the 'otherness' of its incongruous mix of *ersatz* oriental styles associated with colonial power and linked to George's own dissolute reputation, it also connoted decadence and the pursuit of pleasure. What is less appreciated about the Pavilion is that it was the first royal palace in Britain to be nationalised. This was done under the auspices of the Brighton Town Commissioners, who purchased the palace from the Crown in 1850 for

Corporation Fine Arts Sub-Committee 1872-74, see minutes of Fine Arts Sub-Committee (FASC) for these years, in *Royal Pavilion, Fine Arts Sub-Committee Minutes Books*, Brighton Museum office, BMO.

⁵ Jessica Rutherford, *A Prince's Passion, The Life of the Royal Pavilion* (Brighton: The Royal Pavilion, Libraries & Museums, 2003), p. 12.

⁶ Clifford Musgrave, *Life in Brighton, from the Earliest Times to the Present*, revised edition 1981 (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 151.

⁷ John K. Walton, *The English Seaside Resort: A Social History, 1750-1914* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983), p. 2.

⁸ S. Farrant, K. Fossey and A. N. Peasgood, *The Growth of Brighton and Hove 1840-1939* (Sussex: Centre for Continuing Education, University of Sussex, 1982), p. 13.

⁹ See 'Table 1. Seaside Resorts in England and Wales Ranked by Population Size, 1851', and Table 6. for 1911, in Walton, *The English Seaside Resort*, p. 53 and p. 65.

£53,000, ‘an early example of municipal initiative in the cultural field’.¹⁰ As such the Royal Pavilion and its pioneering purchase by Brighton’s town council, thus has a more general significance and symbolism for nineteenth century urban history, as the locus of power shifted from the landed gentry in the counties to the middle class in the new towns and cities.



Fig. 1. Aquatint engraving by George Hunt after artist Edward Fox, in *Select Views of Brighton* (Brighton: C & R Sickelmore, 1827)

The reason that the Pavilion came on the market at this time was that Brighton and its palace had fallen out of favour with Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.¹¹ As Edmund Gilbert writes they were ‘annoyed by the lack of privacy and by the pressing crowds of sightseers’, and the fact that their view of the sea was obscured by the Albion Hotel.¹² Their last stay in Brighton was in February 1845.¹³ The royal family resolved to sell its Brighton properties to developers to fund the expansion of Buckingham Palace, a scheme which in all likelihood would have resulted in the demolition of the Pavilion.¹⁴ The municipal leaders and ratepayers of Brighton’s middle class decided on balance that it was in the interests of the town to take the royal

¹⁰ Giles Waterfield, *The People’s Galleries, Art Museums and Exhibitions in Britain, 1800-1914* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 83.

¹¹ Edmund M. Gilbert, *Brighton, Old Ocean’s Bauble* (Hassocks, Sussex: Flare Books, 1954), p. 107.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁴ Walton, *The English Seaside Resort*, p. 141.

buildings and estate into public ownership notwithstanding the increase in local taxes which this entailed.¹⁵ The mystery and magic of the monarchy, which Walter Bagheot later identified as a key feature of the English constitution, was somehow absent in the hard-headed commercial dealings which were involved in the plan to sell off the Royal Pavilion for hard cash.¹⁶ By 1848 the palace had been stripped of all its fixtures and fittings which were relocated to other palaces.¹⁷ Its purchase by Brighton council made good business sense as the town acquired a glamorous tourist attraction, a leisure centre to host civic events and entertainments, an imperial icon to sustain the royal 'branding' of the town, and a valuable capital asset. Within months of its purchase in early 1850, the Town Commissioners had refurbished the Royal Pavilion rooms to something like their original style of furnishing and decoration.¹⁸ The monarchy would live on in Brighton as heritage managed by the municipal corporation in a marriage of art and money, of pomp and profit and, of aristocratic prestige and middle class enterprise. On the occasion of the inauguration ball in the Royal Pavilion in January 1851 to celebrate its acquisition and restoration, the *Brighton Gazette* reported on the characteristics of each room in detail.¹⁹ With regard to the Music Room, it described paintings of Chinese scenes, pillars wrapped with enormous serpents, painted dragons, a trellis work of 'pale blue and bamboo', an octagonal cornice in the style of a running canopy in scarlet and gold, and the 'freshness and beauty' of the domed ceiling in green gold.²⁰ The voluptuous appearance of the Music Room (see fig. 2) would have been much the same when it featured as the venue for the Hannington's department store concerts sixteen years later.

¹⁵ For an account of the heated debate between factions for and against the purchase of the Royal Pavilion see the report of a meeting of the vestry, 'Purchase of the Pavilion' in *Brighton Gazette*, 27th Dec. 1849, pp. 6-7. Following the meeting, the vestry, held a poll of ratepayers to decide the matter. Those in favour of the purchase won narrowly by 1343 votes to 1307 against.

¹⁶ Walter Bagheot, *The English Constitution* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867), p. 86.

¹⁷ Rutherford, *A Prince's Passion*, p. 159.

¹⁸ 'Fashionable Chronicle/ The Grand Ball at the Pavilion' in *Brighton Gazette*, 23rd Jan. 1851, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*



Fig. 2. Aaron Edwin Penley, *The Music Room, Royal Pavilion: The Grand Reopening Ball*, 1851, oil on canvas (64cm x 84cm), Brighton Museum

According to the *Brighton Guardian* report there were 123 performers the great majority of whom were employees at Hannington's department stores – shop managers, shop assistants, clerks and seamstresses, lower middle class workers in the main.²¹ Given that by the 1880s the department store had over 300 employees, we can assume that in February 1867 a surprisingly large proportion of Hannington's staff were involved as singers and instrumentalists in the concert.²² The *Brighton Gazette* wrote of the 'really astonishing manner in which this establishment is conducted, so as to be capable of affording such elevated recreations to their *employés*'.²³ The reporter went on to comment on not only the moral and improving effects of music in 'drawing the people from low and debasing pursuits', but the physical benefits of singing in defending against 'diseases of the lungs'.²⁴ The Hanningtons choir and orchestra was an example of what has been termed 'rational recreation',²⁵ although in this instance it was

²¹ 'Messrs Hannington's Invitation Concerts' in *Brighton Guardian*, 20th Feb. 1867, p. 5.

²² Rose Collis, *The New Encyclopaedia of Brighton* (Brighton: Brighton & Hove Libraries, 2010), p. 143.

²³ *Brighton Gazette*, Thurs. 21st Feb., 1867, p. 8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ The Leeds MP Edward Baines referred to the benefits of 'giving useful education and rational recreation to the working classes' in a House of Commons debate on the Public Libraries and Museums Bill, in *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: The Official Report* (7th March 1855, vol. 137, para. 210), <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1855-03-07/debates/8e4775d9-6413-409c-9b89-693554d75698/CommonsChamber>> [accessed 20th April 2021].

addressed as much to the lower middle class as it was to the excesses of ‘plebeian culture’ as analysed, for instance, by the historian Peter Bailey.²⁶

If the performers were from the lower ranks, the audience at the event consisted of members of the Brighton upper middle class and its leading citizens. As the *Brighton Guardian* report commented, ‘The Music Room was crowded on each occasion; the audience of Monday night very brilliant and fashionable’.²⁷ The *Brighton Gazette* listed the names of the 643 invitees to the Monday night concert.²⁸ Cross-referencing the names to information in town directories at the time and other sources, reveals that a significant section of what may be called the bourgeois establishment of Brighton were present at the Hannington’s concert including gentry, rich businessmen, town councillors, and representatives of the professional elite.²⁹ The social historian Simon Gunn writing of northern industrial cities states ‘As a spectacle the concert hall embodied and represented the city’s middle class *en masse* in a manner which no other cultural event or institution could match’.³⁰ The Hannington and Sons’ concert in Brighton exemplifies this same analysis, with its display of class solidarity, of property and privilege coming together to appreciate the sacred music of Handel *et al* – and in all likelihood to observe and appreciate each other appreciating this music, to exercise the ‘freedom to look and be looked at, the mobility of the gaze’.³¹ At the same time this exhibition of the unity and indissolubility of wealth and education was infused with older pre-capitalist assumptions confirming the continuing importance of hierarchical distinctions *within* social class. For instance, the *Brighton Gazette* list of 643 names is presented alphabetically, but each

²⁶ Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 3.

²⁷ *Brighton Guardian*, 20th Feb. 1867, p. 5.

²⁸ *Brighton Gazette*, 21st Feb., 1867, p. 8.

²⁹ *Pages (Late Folthorps’s) Court Guide & General Directory for Brighton, Hove, Cliftonville, Preston, October 1866*, (Brighton: Thomas Page, 1866), pp. 237-383.

³⁰ Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority and the English Industrial City, 1840-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p. 154.

³¹ Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye, A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 75.

alphabetical category is organised by rank with the names of the titled given priority over the non-titled, as for example '(B.) – Lady Boynton, Hon. Miss Barnewall, Lieut.-Colonel and Mrs Baines, Mr and Mrs St. John Bennett, Mr and Miss Baines [...]'.³² Similarly, the names of aldermen, doctors, clergymen, and men with professional responsibilities and qualifications, are listed ahead of 'commoners'. And, inevitably husbands precede wives who are appended to their husbands' surnames.³³ In addition, the spectacle of Brighton's business and political elite patronising Hannington's lower middle class employees in the Royal Pavilion Music Room is a further reminder that social distinctions *within* classes could be as important as conflicts between classes.

Importantly for this introduction, the attendance of the Coninghams, Hills, Willetts and Trists at the concert testifies to their active roles in the public sphere of Brighton as respectable members of a confident middle class supporting the efforts of the Hannington family and the department store choir and orchestra. But also, as I will contend, they were claiming or 'performing' membership of a more exclusive bourgeois elite in the town expressed in collective celebration at cultural events such as this and ownership of art collections. The fact that the concert was organised by one of Britain's new department stores is a reminder that industrialisation and urbanisation were accompanied by a revolution in consumption and retailing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁴ An increasingly affluent middle class had access to an ever-widening range of non-essential commodities and services on which to exercise the individual freedom to spend the surpluses generated by Britain's low-wage, low-tax, capitalist and colonial economy.

³² *Brighton Gazette*, Thurs. 21st Feb., 1867, p. 8.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption, New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2005), p. 26.

Defining the Scope and Themes of the Study

If Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham were the places in which industrialisation was forged resulting in the accumulation of great wealth in the hands of the middle class, then seaside towns such as Brighton, Blackpool and Skegness were places where the surplus was spent on new forms of leisure, entertainment and indulgence.³⁵ John Walton makes clear such towns were an intrinsic part of the story of the making of modern Britain in the nineteenth century.³⁶ F. M. L. Thompson reminds us that 'The mid-Victorian seaside was largely the preserve of the middle classes'.³⁷ This thesis provides a case study of art collecting and culture in Victorian Brighton in the south of England. Here local government and civil society reflected the growing influence of the urban middle class as much as in the classic industrial revolution cities. Its main purpose is to explore the relationship between the wealth of five aspiring members of the Brighton bourgeoisie and the social and political meanings of their art collections paid for out of fortunes made from sugar, tailoring, beer and wine.

There is no previous dedicated scholarly work on art collecting in nineteenth century Brighton or indeed on the town's middle class in the period. This is a multi-disciplinary study bringing together knowledge and insights generated by social history, art history, museology, local and family history, and statistical analysis. It meets John Seed and Janet Wolff's call in 1988 'for interdisciplinary approaches in the arts and social science' and the view that key areas cannot be understood from the point of view of a single discipline.³⁸ It responds to art historian Dianne Macleod's invitation in *Art and the Victorian Middle Class* (1996) for further scholarly

³⁵ Walton, *The English Seaside Resort*, p. 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁷ F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain 1830-1900* (London: Fontana Press, 1988), p. 290.

³⁸ John Seed and Janet Wolff in 'Introduction' in *The Culture of Capital: Art and Power and the Nineteenth Century Middle Class* ed. by Janet Wolff and John Seed (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 1-15 (p. 8).

‘interpretation of middle-class culture in the fine arts, humanities, and social sciences’.³⁹ It also takes its cue from Holger Hoock’s call for ‘historians of artistic culture to explore the intersections between the art world and politics’ issued in his important work on the Royal Academy (2003).⁴⁰

This thesis also bears some resemblance to H. L. Malchow’s *Gentleman Capitalists* which consists of the biographies of four successful Victorian businessmen who all became MPs and who were ‘exemplars of the commercial *haute bourgeoisie* of the period’.⁴¹ But, whereas the starting point of Malchow’s biographies is substantial personal testimonies of diaries and letters, what he calls ‘authorised versions’ of self, I have had to piece together the lives of these four Brighton businessmen and collectors from a disparate range of primary materials.⁴² The records interrogated include newspapers, trade directories, census, probate, municipal records, maps, catalogues and pamphlets. Fortunately, for Coningham, Willett and the Trists I have also been able to identify and make use of isolated caches of correspondence which have been hitherto unexamined. These include: letters from Coningham to his step brother in the National Maritime Museum and letters in *The Carlyle Letters Online*; correspondence between Willett and John Ruskin in the Ruskin Library in Lancaster and elsewhere; letters from Arthur Hughes to the Trist family in the keeping of John and Harriet’s great great grandson Richard Trist, and from John Trist to Ford Madox Brown unearthed unexpectedly in the National Art Library.⁴³

³⁹ Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class, Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 3.

⁴⁰ Holger Hoock, *The King’s Artists: The Royal Academy of Arts and the Politics of British Culture, 1760-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 306.

⁴¹ H. L. Malchow, *Gentlemen Capitalists, The Social and Political World of the Victorian Businessman* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 1.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Papers of Captain James Fitzjames and correspondence with the Coningham family, 1813-01-02 – 1849-12-31, MRF/89/1-2, National Maritime Museum (NMM/CJF); *The Carlyle Letters Online*, published by Duke University Press, University of South Carolina, <<https://carlyleletters.dukeupress.edu/>> (CLO/DUP); John Ruskin and Henry Willett correspondence, 1873 to 1886, 31 letters from Ruskin to Willett and two from Willett to Ruskin, in locations A4, B13, Ruskin Library, University of Lancaster

A number of themes inform this study. I argue that art collecting in Brighton and indeed elsewhere in the nineteenth century was a practice which only the richer members of the upper middle class could afford to indulge in. It was one of a number of forms of expenditure which enabled the monied to distinguish themselves from the ranks below them in the middle class hierarchy, and thus proclaim their identity as an elite. As part of this process, as we shall see, the cultural capital of private art collections was often deployed by owners to boost their reputations and political influence in the public sphere at both local and national levels. All of this was as much in response to aristocratic values as part of an attempt to establish a separate middle class identity. This is contrary to the view of Macleod who contends 'that art was a key element in the affirmation of a middle-class identity that was distinct from the leisured existence of the aristocracy'.⁴⁴ As an alternative, I propose that art collections, in Brighton and perhaps elsewhere, reflected what I term the 'liberal paternalist' outlook of the well-heeled middle class. They represented the outcome of accumulated capital and individual effort, but also signified taste with connotations of superior intelligence and moral entitlement. A private picture gallery of paintings was therefore the product of an uneasy amalgam of political economy and patricianism, of money and distinction, of the modern and the traditional.⁴⁵ In relation to the specific choices and configurations of paintings in the four collections I argue that they were, in part, the outcome of the supply-side effects of the art market and its competing agents. But also, that they were a function of expanding networks of museums, galleries, exhibitions and luxury homes which provided unprecedented opportunities and spaces for the display of cultural objects and, in effect, of the owners

(RL/UOL); correspondence and other records and artefacts in the private collection of Richard Trist (RT/MS); letters from John Hamilton Trist to Ford Madox Brown, July 1864 to Sept. 1868, in Special Collections, F. M. B. Box 23, MSL/1995/14/118/1-7, National Art Library, V&A (NAL/ FMB).

⁴⁴ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 1.

⁴⁵ The term 'liberality' in the title of the thesis is a shorthand for 'liberal paternalism'. Its connotations include older aristocratic notions of giving and spending freely, of benevolence and indulgence, of civic duty and luxurious display on the part of the elite. At the same time 'liberality' alludes to modern ideas of individual freedom, competition and opportunity in liberalism as the ideology of capitalism.

themselves. The emphasis here will be on consumption and performance in the cultural field, to use Bourdieu's term,⁴⁶ rather than the 'superior refinement' of the connoisseur.⁴⁷

If these are some of the themes and contentions that bind this thesis together, at the same time these five fortunate Victorians who invested in fine art in Brighton cannot be subsumed into a simple set of theory-generated identikits. Each was different in the particularities of the shifting private and public 'lives' that they inhabited reflected in the varying circumstances, characteristics and functions of their collections. As such, the stories I tell for each collection have their own specific assumptions and arguments which provide each of the dedicated chapters with a 'stand alone' quality. This includes the 'biography' of Brighton's library, museum and gallery in the Victorian era in Chapter 1, which, combined with the analysis of the Brighton middle class later in this chapter also provides important background information on issues relating to class politics and middle class culture in the town.⁴⁸ This chapter helps keep the analysis grounded in the social as much as the individual, the political as much as the personal, with the aim of outwitting what Donald Preziosi has called the 'secular theologism of the discipline of art history'.⁴⁹ The following summaries introduce the collectors and their collections and the main aims of each chapter.

Chapter 1 of the thesis explains the creation and development of a museum, gallery and library in Brighton whose sponsors wished to improve the education and civility of the people of the town and at the same time provide a symbol of progress and moral authority to define and unify the new municipality. New cultural institutions in towns and cities in Britain, whether

⁴⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. by Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

⁴⁷ William Hazlitt, *Criticisms on Art and Sketches of the Picture Galleries of England* (London: John Templeman, 1848), p. 233.

⁴⁸ See the essays in Kate Hill, ed., *Museums and Biographies: Stories, Objects, Identities* (Newcastle: Boydell Press, 2012). In the 'Introduction' Hill argues that both museums and biographies are about relationships between people, things and buildings, pp. 1-9 (p. 1).

⁴⁹ Donald Preziosi, 'Introduction', in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 1-6 (p. 5).

museums, galleries or libraries and often all three in the same spaces reflected the increasing power and self-confidence of the middle class in an increasingly urbanised and capitalist Britain. The chapter examines debates and divisions within the town's middle class over the value and affordability of culture. It touches on the roles of rich Brighton art collectors in this project to bring art and science to the 'people' of the town. At the same time the positioning of the chapter makes the point that it was public collections and exhibitions of specimens, artefacts, fine art and books which played a key role in defining middle class culture in Victorian Britain rather than private art collections of contemporary British art.

Chapter 2 examines William Coningham who came to prominence as a collector and public figure well before the other Brighton collectors. Coningham was born on the edges of both intellectual and landed elites, and had an uncertain social class position. In the early 1840s he inherited a fortune derived from family sugar plantations on the island of St. Vincent which until abolition in 1833 had been farmed by enslaved workers.⁵⁰ This wealth funded residences in Bayswater and Brighton, a luxury lifestyle, an art collection and a number of parliamentary campaigns culminating in his election as MP for Brighton in 1857.⁵¹ The art historian Francis Haskell in the only dedicated article on Coningham claimed that he 'was, despite some very violent prejudices, one of the most successful and discriminating of all English (and indeed European) collectors of Old Masters of the nineteenth century'.⁵² This chapter argues that his art collection and his 'prejudices' were in fact integral to each other. It focuses on the way in which the cultural capital of his short-lived old master collection, assembled in the 1840s, provided the collateral for his role as an ambitious Radical politician and campaigner for reform of national art institutions.

⁵⁰ Entry for 'Rev. Robert Coningham', William's father, in *Legacies of British Slave-ownership*, UCL website, (LBS/UCL) <<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/26679>> [accessed 12th Oct. 2020].

⁵¹ Francis Haskell, 'William Coningham and his Collection', in *Burlington Magazine*, 133.1063 (1991), 676-681 (p. 676).

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 676.

Chapter 3 focuses on Henry Hill who was the only one of the collectors here who did not inherit wealth and his circumstances contrasted sharply with those of Coningham in particular. He started out in life as an unemployed labourer but went on to build a highly successful bespoke tailoring business in the West End of London in the 1850s.⁵³ In 1865 he retired to fashionable Brighton to enjoy his money where he became a well-known benefactor, formed a notable collection of ‘avant-garde’ paintings, and promoted art in the town as a town councillor.⁵⁴ In 1963, the art historian Ronald Pickvance brought Hill as a pioneering collector of Edgar Degas (1834-1917) to our attention, writing, ‘Not only did Hill show remarkable vigour and taste for a man who began seriously collecting after his sixtieth year, but he was alone of his age and generation in coming to terms with some of the most *avant-garde* French painting of the period’.⁵⁵ In this chapter, rather than pursue the chimera which is the notion of Hill as a far-seeing collector of avant-garde French art, I want to examine how the ‘rags-to-riches’ narrative of his life intersects with his collecting interests in later middle age and latter day roles as local politician, philanthropist and gentleman.

Chapter 4 looks at Henry Willett as a collector of collections and owner of an ‘imaginary museum’. Willett moved to Brighton from the tiny village of Bishopstone near Newhaven in 1841 to help manage his father’s brewery and associated public houses and other enterprises in the town.⁵⁶ These businesses were very profitable and when Willett inherited Vallance and Catt including the West Street Brewery with one of his brothers in 1853, he became a very rich man indeed.⁵⁷ It should be pointed out that Henry Willett was originally Henry Catt but he changed his surname in 1863 to comply with the terms of his sister’s will.⁵⁸ Henry Willett, was

⁵³ Ronald Pickvance, ‘Henry Hill: An Untypical Collector’, in *Apollo*, 76 (1963), 789-791, p. 791.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Stella Beddoe, *A Potted History: Henry Willett’s Ceramic Chronicle of Britain* (Brighton: ACC Art Books Ltd, 2015), p. 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

not only a brewer and a local Liberal power-broker, but also a serial collector of an eclectic range of different objects including fossils, flints, ceramics, antiquities, curiosities, rare books, furniture as well as fine art.⁵⁹ He is notable as one of the founders of Brighton Museum.⁶⁰ In the only published essay on Willett's overall collection, Jessica Rutherford writes of 'the magnificence of his complete collection'.⁶¹ This chapter investigates Willett the brewer, who cultivated a startling range of alternative identities as serial collector, benefactor, politician, geologist, aesthete and would-be curator, and who mixed with members of intelligentsias in both Brighton and London.

Chapter 5 investigates Harriet Trist and her husband John Trist, a rich wine merchant, who collected art together as a recreational activity with no wider purpose, it seems, other than to decorate their home, enrich their family life and demonstrate their gentility as cultured members of the emerging Brighton bourgeoisie. There have been no previous publications on these two collectors, although Macleod references John Trist in *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*.⁶² John Trist was born in Lewes but lived most of his life in Brighton. He inherited a lucrative wine merchant business when his father died in 1849, importing wines from the Continent to retail to the gentry and bourgeoisie who patronised Brighton as residents and holiday-makers in the town.⁶³ Harriet Hardwick who John married in 1851 was born into a farming family just outside Brighton in the village of Poynings.⁶⁴ The chapter analyses their collection with its emphasis on poetic works and the paintings of Arthur Hughes (1832-1915),

⁵⁹ Jessica Rutherford, 'Henry Willett as a Collector', *Apollo* 115.241 (1982), 176-181.

⁶⁰ 'Willett's Popular Pottery', in *Brighton Museum Website*, <brightonmuseums.org.uk/brighton/exhibitions-displays/willetts-popular-pottery/> [accessed Dec. 2019].

⁶¹ Rutherford, *Henry Willett*, p. 176.

⁶² Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 481.

⁶³ Private written account by the great-great-grandson of John Trist, Richard Trist provided in July 2019, RT/MS.

⁶⁴ Harriet married John Trist in 1851 working back from the announcement of the birth of their son Herbert in 1852 in *Brighton Gazette*, 5th Aug. 1852. For birthplace of Harriet Hardwick see 1851 Census, Waterloo Place, Hove, *Findmypast* website, <<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC%2F1851%2F0006209091>> [accessed 14th Aug 2021].

as a function of domesticity and marriage rather than masculine aggrandisement. Whereas, the previous three collections functioned, in part, to boost the public standing and civic influence of the owners, this does not appear to have been the case with the Trist art collection.

Previous Research, Perspectives and Contexts

Connoisseurial Art History

To my knowledge there are only two publications which provide an overview of fine art collecting in Britain confined exclusively to the nineteenth century: Frank Davis' *Victorian Patrons of the Arts. Twelve Famous Collections and Their Owners*,⁶⁵ and Macleod's publication.⁶⁶ The historical focus, ideological outlook and methodological approaches underpinning these two works could not be more different. Davis's book, published in 1963, is an unreferenced work of popular art history written in an anecdotal style and published in the magazine *Country Life*, as Roy Strong has put it 'unashamedly the voice of a privileged class'.⁶⁷ It makes no claim to original scholarship. As Macleod points out only two out of the twelve collectors profiled by Davis in his book were middle-class patrons of modern art.⁶⁸ Macleod's work on the other hand spotlights the art collecting activities of the industrialists, manufacturers and merchants who were in the forefront of economic change in the nineteenth century, with a specific focus on the formation of a middle class identity.⁶⁹ Published in 1996, it is considered to be ground-breaking in the depth and extent of its empirical research informed by a dizzying range of theoretical perspectives. It is a work which can be categorised as a text in the social history of art rather than art history, although there is

⁶⁵ Frank Davis, *Victorian Patrons of the Arts, Twelve Famous Collections and their Owners* (London: Country Life, 1963).

⁶⁶ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*.

⁶⁷ Roy Strong, *Country Life, 1897-1997: The English Arcadia* (London: Boxtree Ltd., 1999), p. 219.

⁶⁸ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p.3.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

a sense in which it straddles both approaches, rather uneasily. These books define two polarities in researching and writing about art collectors and fine art collections in the nineteenth century.

Although there are only two publications examining art collecting in general in Britain centred predominantly on the nineteenth century, there are several histories of fine art collecting in Britain or Europe over longer time periods in which developments in fine art collecting in Britain in the nineteenth century are described as part of the wider narrative.⁷⁰ There is a common approach and outlook in these accounts which can usefully be discussed under the heading the 'connoisseurial' history of art. The 'connoisseurial' history of art accounts of collecting tend to focus on notable aristocratic and upper class collectors of fine art from the seventeenth century onwards. Broadly speaking, the connoisseurial approach concentrates on changes in taste and fashion over the centuries in terms of the artists, schools of art, and time periods which elite collectors favoured as reflected in their purchases and sales of works of art over the centuries. These works also highlight the roles that these collectors played in determining the configuration of works of art in new national galleries and public collections in the modern period. Issues of wealth, markets, class, gender, inequality, social conflict and

⁷⁰ See the following: John Steegman, *The Rule of Taste from George I to George IV* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1936); John Steegman, *Victorian Taste: A Study of the Arts and Architecture from 1830 to 1870*, 2nd edition (London: Century Hutchinson, 1987); Frank Davis, *Victorian Patrons of the Arts*; Frank Herrmann ed., *The English as Collectors, A Documentary Crestomathy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972); Frank Herrmann ed., *The English as Collectors, A Documentary Source Book* (New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 1999); Francis Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art: Some Aspects of Taste and Collection in France and Britain 1750-1900* (London: Phaidon Press, 1976); Denys Sutton, 'Aspects of British Collecting Parts 1-4', *Apollo*, 114.237, (1981), 283-339, *Apollo*, 116.250 (1982), 358-420, *Apollo*, 119.267 (1984), 312-372, *Apollo* 123.282 (1985), 84-129; Gervase Jackson-Stops, ed., *The Treasure Houses of Britain: Five Hundred Years of Private Patronage and Art Collecting* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1985); Arthur MacGregor, 'Collectors, Connoisseurs and Curators in the Victorian Age', in A.W. Franks, *Nineteenth Century Collecting and the British Museum*, ed. by Marjorie Caygill and John Cherry (London: British Museum Press, 1997), pp. 6-33; Arthur MacGregor, *Curiosity and Enlightenment: Collectors and Collections from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Jacqueline Yallop, *Magpies, Squirrels & Thieves, How the Victorians Collected the World* (London: Atlantic Books, 2011); James Stourton, and Charles Sebag-Montefiore, *The British as Art Collectors, From the Tudors to the Present* (London: Scala, 2012); Inge Reist, ed., *British Models of Art Collecting and the American Response: Reflections Across the Pond*, (Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014).

political power only occasionally and tangentially enter the stories of art collecting in ‘connoisseurial’ art history.

The three brief articles on Coningham, Hill and Willett previously referenced are all written from this perspective emphasising the unique qualities of the collections and the refined tastes of the collectors. One of my aims is to provide fully contextualised accounts of Brighton art collections and their owners from a social history point of view, which go beyond the narrowly connoisseurial. However, in as much as this thesis contributes to a ‘pantheon’ of nineteenth century British art collectors it hovers in the orbit of mainstream art history. In the case of the collecting couple Harriet and John Trist, this is the first scholarly investigation of their interest in Pre-Raphaelite art. The art history dimension in the collector narratives is supported with workbooks and spreadsheets which provide detailed statistical summaries of each collection including coverage of: artists, periods, styles, schools, size of paintings, prices, purchasers and other objects collected.⁷¹ This quantitative approach accords with ‘data-driven history of art’ advocated recently by Diana Greenwald.⁷²

Although there are few specialist general histories of British art collecting in the nineteenth century, there is a wide range of published work on individual art collectors and collections in the period, mainly in the form of essays and articles. The handful of book-length publications on individual Victorian collectors include works on Prince Albert, Queen Victoria, Sir George Beaumont, and Lord Lindsay.⁷³ There are popular histories of well-known public collections such as the Wallace Collection and the Bowes Museum formed in the latter years of the nineteenth

⁷¹ Appendix 3. William Coningham Collection Spreadsheets (WCCS); Appendix 4. Henry Hill Collection Spreadsheets (HHCS); Appendix 5. Henry Willett Collection Spreadsheets (HWCS); Appendix 6. Trist Art Collection Spreadsheets (TACS).

⁷² Diana Seave Greenwald, *Painting by Numbers, Data-Driven Histories of Nineteenth-Century Art* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2021), p. 4.

⁷³ See the following:- Winslow Ames, *Prince Albert and Victorian Taste* (New York: Viking Press, 1968); Leah Kharibian, *Passionate Patrons: Victoria & Albert and the Arts* (London: Royal Collection Trust, 2010); Felicity Owen and David Blayney Brown, *A Collector of Genius: a Life of Sir George Beaumont* (London: Yale University Press, 1988); Hugh Brigstock, *Lord Lindsay as a Collector*, (Manchester: John Rylands University Library of Manchester, 1982).

century which provide accounts of rich and elite owners who chose as part of their legacy to create new public galleries and museums on the basis of their private collections.⁷⁴ I have identified a small number of doctoral theses which have been produced in the UK in the last twenty-five years with a focus on nineteenth century collecting which include detailed studies of John Charles Robinson, Ferdinand Rothschild, and Thomas Holloway.⁷⁵ Of the 25 or so articles in the *Journal of the History of Collections* published since 1989 devoted to nineteenth century art collecting and collections in Britain, most focus on elite and established bourgeois collectors with the remainder summarising research on lesser known middle class collectors.⁷⁶

Aside from the literature specifically focused on British art patrons in the nineteenth century, collectors feature in the scholarship on other specialist areas of art and cultural history. For instance, they play a crucial role in biographies and accounts of artists. To give some notable examples among a multitude: Walter Hawkes and George O'Brien Wyndham, 3rd Earl of Egremont played important roles in the career of J. M. W. Turner; Frederick Leyland was an important patron of James Whistler; and, likewise, Charles Rickards in support of G.F. Watts.⁷⁷ Literature on Pre-Raphaelite artists often touches on the role of patrons in their development

⁷⁴ Examples of relevant publications on these galleries and museums and the collectors who founded them are: John Ingamells, *The Wallace Collection* (London: Scala Books, 1990); John Ingamells, *Dulwich Picture Gallery* (London: Unicorn Press, 2008); Charles E. Hardy, *John Bowes and the Bowes Museum* (Newcastle: Friends of the Bowes Museum, 1989).

⁷⁵ Helen Davies, 'The Life and Works of Sir John Charles Robinson, 1824-1913,' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1992) provides the most authoritative scholarship on the curator and collector Robinson and has been the basis for a number of subsequent journal articles. Philippa Bitcliffe, 'A Cultural Geography of Victorian Art Collecting: Identity, Acquisition and Display', (unpublished doctoral thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2007) compares Rothschild and Holloway from a social geography point of view. In the field of English Literature two theses look at the construction of ideas of collecting and collections in Victorian literature with reference to actual collectors:- Mary Elizabeth Addyman, "'All bundled together in endless confusion": Museums, Collecting and Material Practices in Late Victorian Culture' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2016); Jessica Lauren Allsop, 'Curious Objects and Victorian Collectors: Men, Markets, Museums' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2013).

⁷⁶ Index analysis, *Journal of the History of Collections*, in Oxford Academic <<https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/>> [accessed January 2019].

⁷⁷ James Hamilton, *Turner, A Life* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), pp. 94-7, p. 113-5; Stanley Weintraub, *Whistler, A Biography* (London: Collins, 1974), pp. 149-160, p. 169-181; Veronica Franklin Gould, *G. F. Watts* (New Haven and London: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British art by Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 80-83.

and success.⁷⁸ John Trist bought 22 paintings directly from the Pre-Raphaelite artist Arthur Hughes, by-passing dealers, and it is evident that he and his wife Harriet were important patrons of this artist.⁷⁹ It will be one of the aims of my research to explore this relationship in more detail in Chapter 5.

Collectors as patrons and their relationships with artists are sometimes analysed by art historians in relation to the commissioning and production of individual paintings. An example of this is Tim Barringer's discussion of the role of the Leeds stockbroker and collector Thomas Plint (1823-1861) in the genesis of Ford Madox Brown's painting 'Work'.⁸⁰ Another instance, relevant to my area of study, is the purchase of Degas's controversial *L'Absinthe* as it became known by the Brighton art collector Henry Hill in 1875, discussed first in an essay by Ronald Pickvance published in 1962.⁸¹ In these kinds of art history accounts the patron appears as an adjunct to the artist, often as a stable source of income, sometimes as a friend and mentor, and occasionally as a problematic figure in terms of the creative freedom of the artist, but not as the subject of enquiry in his or her own right. The collector in these accounts seems to share in the canonical reputation of the artist, the painter's latter-day aura rubs off on the patron. However, when the object of study is re-framed to focus on the art-buyer in his *habitus* rather than on the well-known artist whose work he collected, as in Chapter 3 on Hill, different perspectives on art and society come to light.⁸²

⁷⁸ Tim Barringer, 'Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893)', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. by Elizabeth Prettejohn (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), pp. 148-163 (pp. 159-160).

⁷⁹ Leonard Roberts, 'Catalogue of Works', in *Arthur Hughes: His Life and Works: A Catalogue Raisonné* compiled by Leonard Roberts with a biographical introduction by Stephen Wildman (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, 1997), pp. 121-282.

⁸⁰ Tim Barringer, *Men at Work, Art and Labour in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 63-66.

⁸¹ Ronald Pickvance, 'L'Absinthe in England', *Apollo*, 77.15 (1963), 395-398.

⁸² See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 165-7, where he defines 'habitus' in terms of the ethos and classifications which constitute lifestyles in the context of the overall social and economic structure.



Fig 3. Andrea Mantegna, *The Agony in the Garden*, 1455-6, egg tempera on wood (63cm x 80cm), National Gallery, London

By and large the ‘connoisseurial’ art historians that I have considered gather around a canon of ‘great men’ collectors, stretching from Charles 1st and the Earl of Arundel in the early seventeenth century to Richard Wallace and Ferdinand Rothschild in the nineteenth century, generally aristocrats, landed gentry and plutocrats. The criteria for inclusion in this elite club is the assumed intellectual and aesthetic quality of the art works in their galleries, allegedly reflecting the refined and discerning tastes of the purchasers. ‘Connoisseurial’ art historians often praise the discernment of privileged British collectors with what might be dubbed a ‘rhetoric of acclamation’. For instance, Steegman says of William Young Ottley that he was ‘one of the most perceptive connoisseurs of his day.’⁸³ Frank Davis says of the Marquess of Hertford, ‘His taste was, in general, impeccable’, he describes Sir Richard Wallace as a man of ‘such obvious refinement’, and Ralph Bernal as a ‘forward-looking collector’.⁸⁴ Francis Haskell references William Coningham, and ‘a masterpiece by Mantegna (fig. 3), acquired by a left-wing member of parliament for Brighton, who in the space of some seven or eight year builds up one of the finest collections in Europe’.⁸⁵ Stourton and Sebag-Montefiore write of the

⁸³ Steegman, *Victorian Taste*, p. 59.

⁸⁴ Davis, *Patrons of the Arts*, p. 42, p. 50, p.52.

⁸⁵ Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art*, p. 141. In fact, Coningham was not an MP in the 1840s when he built his art collection, but became an MP in 1857.

collectors William Beckford and Thomas Hope that they were ‘men of extraordinary discrimination, whose lives were devoted to the pursuit of art’.⁸⁶ As Krzysztof Pomian points out it is not ‘totally unknown for historians to set themselves up as arbiters of taste and to judge the collections under scrutiny according to their own preferences’.⁸⁷

This discussion leads on to a further significant feature of ‘connoisseurial’ history of art: the assumption that private art collecting over the centuries has been fundamentally in the public interest contributing to the welfare and reputation of the nation. In this view, luxury expenditure on art to fill the walls of mansions and palaces is seen as patriotic rather than a matter of personal gratification, social status or financial investment. Frank Herrmann writing in 1972 said, ‘Collecting is a part of our history during the last two hundred years of which England (and Scotland, for that matter) can be justifiably proud. Very often our taste was ahead of the rest of the world’.⁸⁸ He referred to ‘the emergence of permanent public galleries very often due to the generosity of the enlightened private collector’.⁸⁹ Denys Sutton in 1981 introducing his ‘Aspects of British Collecting’ series refers to ‘lovers of art who came from different social backgrounds...who in the aggregate, have helped to form the national heritage’.⁹⁰ MacGregor in 1997 wrote of museums which ‘benefited from generous benefactions made by private collectors’.⁹¹ In 2012, James Stourton and Charles Sebag-Montefiore writing of the nineteenth century as the ‘age of the museum’ argue that ‘collectors identified with the desirability of making art available to the public’.⁹² What is apparent in this strain of art history is, first, a certain circularity of argument in which the taste of rich collectors is sanctioned by the assumed canon of ‘great’ artists in national art collections

⁸⁶ Stourton and Sebag-Montefiore, *The British as Art Collectors*, p. 165.

⁸⁷ Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Polity Publishing, 1990), p. 4.

⁸⁸ Herrmann, *The English as Collectors, A Documentary Crestomathy*, p. 7.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 5.

⁹⁰ Denys Sutton, ‘Aspects of British Collecting Part 1’, *Apollo*, 114.237 (1981), 283-339, p. 283.

⁹¹ MacGregor, ‘Collectors, Connoisseurs and Curators in the Victorian Age’, in A.W. Franks, *Nineteenth Century Collecting*, pp. 6-33 (p. 26).

⁹² Stourton and Sebag-Montefiore, *The British as Art Collectors*, p.8 and p. 22.

largely constituted in the nineteenth century by pictures donated or sold to the state by these same rich collectors. And, second, the assumption that in the undemocratic oligarchy of nineteenth century imperial Britain, rich men providing pictures to national or municipal art galleries was generous and public-spirited rather than a matter of class interest or self-congratulation.

By way of a coda to this part of my review of the relevant literature, Frank Herrmann in an article in the *Journal of the History of Collections* (2009) argues in favour of the ‘generosity of spirit, particularly from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, with which collectors in England enriched the country’s museums’, while downplaying the role of ‘self-glorification’ as the main motivational factor.⁹³ In this article he takes issue in no uncertain terms with the then Professor of Art at the University of Manchester, Marcia Pointon. In the introduction to *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology across England and North America* (1994), Professor Pointon had written, ‘The authors of this book reject a history of art institutions as a history of the selfless generosity of a series of great men. But, in examining institutional structures they do not ignore individuals’.⁹⁴ Contesting this view and referencing this same quotation, Herrmann says, ‘there is always someone who carps: Marcia Pointon takes a contrarian view [...] She was aggressively involved in museology, a very academic approach to what most of us take for granted. This is a very fundamentalist outlook [...]’. This exchange highlights the different outlooks, ultimately rooted in political and ideological differences, between traditional ‘connoisseurial’ art history and a newer social history of art approach. Frank Herrmann’s own stance had already been made clear when he wrote in his updated introduction to *The English as Collectors* in 1999, ‘One can only ask whether this “other route”,

⁹³ Frank Herrmann, ‘Collecting Then and Now, The English and Some Other Collectors’, *Journal of the History of Collections*, 21.2 (2009), 263-269, p. 263, in Oxford Academic, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhp010>> [accessed 31st December 2018].

⁹⁴ Marcia Pointon, ‘Introduction’, in *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology*, ed. by Marcia Pointon (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 1-5 (p. 2).

this deviant path, this Marxist angle, is here to stay or if it is an aberration which the effluxion of time will nullify'.⁹⁵

The Social History of Art and Related Approaches

The 'other route', the social history of art approach, seeks to understand the art world from the point of view of the wider society rather than regarding the fine arts as an autonomous and exclusive circuit of aesthetic creation and appreciation. Two pioneers of the social history of art approach in the 1970s were the Marxist art historians T.J. Clark and Nicos Hadjinicolaou.⁹⁶ In 1973 Clark wrote 'there can be no art history apart from other kinds of history'.⁹⁷ Hadjinicolaou writing in 1978 lambasted traditional art history, 'Today art history is one of the last outposts of reactionary thought'.⁹⁸ He views the 'connoisseurial' approach and the heritage industries as explicitly ideological, 'Here lies the problem: since 1945 a vast market has opened up for the "art book" [...] which allows the values of the ruling classes to be transmitted'.⁹⁹ From a less forthright perspective, writing in 2006, Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, summarise the assumed weaknesses of the 'connoisseurial' history of art from the social history of art point of view as a tendency to downplay the social and cultural contexts in which art is produced,¹⁰⁰ an exaggerated focus on the genius of the artist or 'great master', and an emphasis on the role of high art in defining the culture of a nation.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Frank Herrmann ed., *The English as Collectors, A Documentary Source Book* (New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 1999), p. xxxvii.

⁹⁶ The two key works which staked out this alternative stance for the history of art were: T. J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, 3rd ed. (London: Kegan Paul, 1998) originally published in 1973, and Nicos Hadjinicolaou, *Art History and Class Struggle* (London: Pluto Press, 1978).

⁹⁷ Clark, p. 18.

⁹⁸ Hadjinicolau, p.4.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, *Art History, A Critical Introduction to its Methods* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 40.

¹⁰¹ Hatt and Klonk, p. 61.

From the late 1980s onwards a number of pioneering social histories of art were published focusing on art institutions, exhibitions and galleries in Britain in the nineteenth century in the context of industrial change, class, gender, and urbanisation rather than fixating on individual artists, schools of painting or privileged connoisseurs. A seminal work, in my view, and an influential text underpinning this thesis is *The Culture of Capital: Art and Power and the Nineteenth Century Middle Class* (1988) edited by John Seed and Janet Wolff. In the introduction the two editors write:

Now with the benefit of work in Marxist theory, in cultural studies, and in one or two other areas, it is increasingly clear that social formation and cultural production are closely integrated [...] ideological and cultural forms and practices are recognised as crucial elements in the production of the social structure itself.¹⁰²

They explicitly endorse the position taken in the 1970s by historians such as Hadjinicolaou and Clark and advocate a multi-disciplinary approach.¹⁰³ The book includes essays which highlight how the cultural activities of middle rank groupings including the formation of local cultural societies and exhibitions and galleries of art in three industrial cities in the nineteenth century helped to establish an emerging collective class identity against the background of rapid industrial change and urban expansion in Manchester, Sheffield, and Leeds.¹⁰⁴ The social history of art approach, 'new historicism' or 'new art history' as it was also termed, was also evident in a number of other works.¹⁰⁵ Macleod's *Art and the Victorian Middle Class* (1996)

¹⁰² John Seed and Janet Wolff in 'Introduction' in *The Culture of Capital*, pp. 1-15 (p. 8).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁴ The salient chapters 2, 3 and 4 in *The Culture of Capital* are: John Seed, 'Commerce and the Liberal Arts: the Political Economy of Art in Manchester, 1775-1860', pp. 45-81; Alan White, 'Class, Culture and Control: the Sheffield Athenaeum Movement and the Middle Class 1847-64', pp. 83-115; Caroline Arscott, "'Without Distinction of Party": the Polytechnic Exhibitions in Leeds 1839-45', pp. 135-157.

¹⁰⁵ Marcia Pointon, ed., *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology*; Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan, eds., *Art in Bourgeois Society, 1790-1850*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Paul Barlow and Colin Trodd, eds., *Governing Cultures: Art Institutions in Victorian London* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); Rafael Cardoso Denis and Colin Trodd, eds., *Art and the Academy in the Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 2000).

was clearly researched and written as a work in the social history of art as her title makes clear.¹⁰⁶

Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984) and *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (1993) provided a sustained theorisation which informed the social history of art approach.¹⁰⁷ As editor of the latter work, Randal Johnson, wrote, 'His work converges with and in many ways anticipates the renewed interest in the socio-historical ground of cultural production exemplified in different ways by "New Historicism"'.¹⁰⁸ Bourdieu argued that art and culture can only be understood in the context of a divided and unequal class society.¹⁰⁹ He deconstructs the idea of 'high' culture as an autonomous realm in which art and its canons reflect sacred values which can only be fully appreciated by a privileged elite gifted with special insight.¹¹⁰ The consumption of art and culture, he argues, fulfils the 'social function of legitimating differences'.¹¹¹ In advocating this view, he echoes an earlier work by Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, which also argues 'Through objects a stratified society speaks [...] in order to keep everyone in a certain place'.¹¹² Bourdieu contends that it is in the interests of the key players in the art world including art collectors, often from wealthy and privileged backgrounds, to promote 'The establishment of a canon of a universally valued cultural inheritance' which obscures 'the underlying power relations which serve, in part, to guarantee the continued reproduction of the legitimacy of those who produce or defend the canon'.¹¹³ The currency of art and cultural artefacts in the social system is reflected in the familiar concepts of 'social

¹⁰⁶ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*.

¹⁰⁷ As previously cited.

¹⁰⁸ Randal Johnson, 'Editor's Introduction, Pierre Bourdieu on Art Literature and Culture' in Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, pp. 1-25 (p. 1).

¹⁰⁹ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, pp. 165-167.

¹¹⁰ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. xxiv, p. 224, and *passim*.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. xxx.

¹¹² Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St. Louis, Missouri: Telos Press Ltd., 1981, first published in 1973), p. 38.

¹¹³ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 20.

capital’, ‘cultural capital’ and ‘symbolic capital’.¹¹⁴ At the same time – and what sets him apart from Hadjinicolaou for instance – Bourdieu believes that the artistic field functions as a semi-autonomous network of relationships and struggles which does not in a direct way reflect social relations of production, it is ‘a structured space with its own laws of functioning’.¹¹⁵ He explicitly offers his view of multi-dimensional social space as an alternative to the economism of Marxist thinking.¹¹⁶ As must be apparent by now, Bourdieu’s ideas combined with aspects of early Baudrillard’s semiotic slant, have percolated into my own way of thinking in this thesis.

It is perhaps in the area of museum history or museology that a social history of art or cultural studies approach has been most in evidence. The ‘contrarian’ views in Marcia Pointon’s book have already been touched on. The new discipline of museology was further developed by cultural historians such as Tony Bennett, Barbra Black, Carol Duncan, Kate Hill, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Nick Prior and Christopher Whitehead.¹¹⁷ The theoretical work of Michel Foucault and more recently Bruno Latour has been influential in shaping the ideas which inform the writings of these historians. Bennett’s *The Birth of the Museum* draws on both Bourdieu and Foucault to argue that museums and galleries have become symbolic sites for the performance of ‘distinction’ and the application of techniques of power for socialising people into class

¹¹⁴ A summary of his views on different types of capital can be found in Pierre Bourdieu ‘The Forms of Capital’ in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. by J. Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), pp. 241-258.

¹¹⁵ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 6.

¹¹⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*, ed. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 244-5.

¹¹⁷ See the following: Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London, New York: Routledge, 1992); Susan Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (London: Leicester University Press, 1992); Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Carol Duncan, *Civilising Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Barbara J. Black, *On Exhibit: Victorians and their Museums* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); Nick Prior, *Museums and Modernity: Art Galleries and the Making of Modern Culture* (Oxford, New York: Berg Publishers, 2002); Christopher Whitehead, *The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth-century Britain: The Development of the National Gallery* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005); Kate Hill, *Culture and Class in English Public Museums, 1850-1914* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005); Chris Gosden and Frances Larson, *Knowing Things: Exploring the Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum, 1884-1945* (Oxford: OUP, 2007); Christopher Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009); Amy Woodson-Boulton, *Transformative Beauty, Art Museums in Industrial Britain* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012).

society.¹¹⁸ Analysing collecting in the Pitt Rivers Museum, Chris Gosden and Frances Larson lean on Latour's actor-network theory in assigning physical objects equal billing with human actors in the development of collecting networks with an emphasis on the on-going accretion of small-scale connections eventuating in institutional knowledge.¹¹⁹ Chapters 1 and 4 in this thesis draw on the works of some of these historians of museums and theorists and in particular the work of Kate Hill.

However, sociological and structural approaches have not had things all their own way in the field of museum history. Jonathan Conlin in his history of the National Gallery produced in 2006 is scathing about museology, 'Others may miss the Foucauldian approach synonymous with "museology", a discipline that continues to serve as a retirement community for once-fashionable theories no longer able to support themselves in mainstream academia'.¹²⁰ Presumably, he would not have approved of Christopher Whitehead's analysis of the National Gallery published in the previous year, in which he depicts 'the early public museum as a key agent in a culture of "surveillance" and as an elitist, patriarchal, disciplinary mediator of art history intended to "improve" the morals of the lower classes'.¹²¹ Giles Waterfield in his authoritative history of municipal galleries and art museums, *The People's Galleries, Art Museums and Exhibitions in Britain, 1800-1914*, while less caustic than Conlin, is also keen to differentiate his approach from that taken by 'museologists' schooled in neo-Marxist and post-structural theory. Waterfield makes it clear that he does not see municipal galleries as

¹¹⁸ Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 11 and p. 22. The important works of Michael Foucault referenced by Tony Bennett include *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), and the essay 'Governmentality' in *The Foucault Effect, Studies in Governmentality*, ed. by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹¹⁹ Gosden and Larson, *Knowing Things*, p. 7. Actor-network theory ideas are best summarised in Bruno Latour's *Reassembling the Social, An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹²⁰ Jonathan Conlin, *The Nation's Mantelpiece, A History of the National Gallery* (London: Pallas Athene, 2006), p. 50.

¹²¹ Whitehead, *The Public Art Museum*, p. xvii.

'fundamentally oppressive institutions, any more than their creators are viewed as necessarily members or agents of a power-hungry ruling class'.¹²²

Rich upper and middle class men and their collections play a prominent role in narratives relating to the formation of national and public art galleries in the nineteenth century.¹²³ They also feature in histories of exhibitions and exhibiting institutions such as the Royal Academy, the British Institution, Art Unions and the 1857 Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition.¹²⁴

Waterfield surveys the erratic and piecemeal process in which provincial art galleries were formed on the basis of permanent rather than temporary collections.¹²⁵ This includes coverage of the roles of leading local dignitaries such as William Roscoe in Liverpool, Alexander McLellan in Glasgow, and the collector Henry Willett who played a significant role in the formation of the Brighton museum and gallery and who he views as a prime example of 'the connection between social ideals and the growth of municipal museums'.¹²⁶ Taking this observation as a starting point, Chapter 4 explores Willett's wealth, political and religious beliefs, his multiple collections, and his involvement in museum and exhibition networks in both Brighton and London.

What is evident is that the predominant focus of attention in art and cultural history, outside the metropolis, has been on art collecting in what are seen as the pioneering towns and regions in the north and the midlands which define the classic, but now highly qualified,

¹²² Waterfield, *The People's Galleries*, p. 4.

¹²³ For accounts of collectors who contributed to the making of national galleries, see: Conlin, *The Nation's Mantelpiece* on the National Gallery; Brandon Taylor, *Art for the Nation, Exhibitions and the London Public 1747-2001* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999), pp. 100-132, on the Tate Gallery; Lara Kriegel, *Grand Designs, Labour, Empire, and the Museum in Victorian Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007) on the South Kensington Museum.

¹²⁴ Holger Hock, *The King's Artists*; Ann Pullan, 'Public Goods or Private Interests? The British Institution in the Early Nineteenth Century', in *Art in Bourgeois Society, 1790-1850* ed. by Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 27-44. Lyndel Saunders King, *The Industrialisation of Taste, Victorian England and the Art Union of London* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985); Elizabeth A. Pergam, *The Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857: Entrepreneurs, Connoisseurs and the Public* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

¹²⁵ Waterfield, *The People's Galleries*, pp. 247-274.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 263-4.

narrative of the 'Industrial Revolution'. Wolff and Seed's work analyses the arts and civic culture in the northern cities of Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield.¹²⁷ Macleod's work on art collecting concentrates on Newcastle and the North East,¹²⁸ Manchester, Birmingham and London.¹²⁹ Amy Woodson-Boulton's analysis of Victorian art museums focuses on Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool.¹³⁰ Pat Starkey and Hill also provide detailed accounts of the art and museum scene in Liverpool and in addition Hill analyses the formation of the Harris Museum in Preston.¹³¹ Very little has been written on art collecting and museums in the South East in the nineteenth century, and in particular on Brighton, the country's largest seaside resort. This thesis aims to bridge this gap.

The economic context of collecting in terms of prices, markets, auctions, buying and selling is often given short shrift in 'connoisseurial' histories of collecting. Mark Westgarth comments that 'the idea that the persona of the dealer and the activities of dealing represent illegitimate practices persists in many areas of modern scholarship'.¹³² However, a number of historians have explored art collecting from the point of view of economics and the market including Gerald Reitlinger, B. S. Frey and W. W. Pommerehne and Guido Guerzoni.¹³³ Thomas Bayer and John Page treating art collectors as economic agents and paintings as pure commodities in *The*

¹²⁷ See chapters 2, 3 and 4, *The Culture of Capital*, previously referenced.

¹²⁸ Dianne Sachko Macleod, 'Private and Public Patronage in Victorian Newcastle', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 52 (1989), 188-208, in JSTOR, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/751544>> [accessed 23rd Jan. 2019]; Dianne Sachko Macleod, 'Avant-garde Patronage in the North East', in *Pre-Raphaelites, Painters and Patrons in the North East*, catalogue for an exhibition at Laing Art Gallery, curated by Jane Vickers (Newcastle on Tyne: Laing Art Gallery, 1990); Dianne Sachko Macleod, 'Armstrong the Collector' in *Cragside*, ed. Oliver Garnett (London: National Trust, 1992), pp. 35-42; Dianne Sachko Macleod, 'Mid-Victorian Patronage of the Arts: F.G. Stephen's "The Private Collections of England"', *The Burlington Magazine*, 128.1001 (1986) 597-607, in <<https://www.burlington.org.uk/archive/content/search/result>> [accessed 21st Jan. 2019].

¹²⁹ Chapters 1 and 2 in Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*.

¹³⁰ Amy Woodson-Boulton, *Transformative Beauty*.

¹³¹ Pat Starkey, *Riches into Art: Liverpool Collectors, 1770-1880* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993); Hill, *Culture and Class*.

¹³² Mark Westgarth, *A Biographical Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Antique and Curiosity Dealers* (Glasgow: The Regional Furniture Society, 2009), p. 18.

¹³³ Gerald Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste*, 3 vols. (London: Barrie and Rockliffe, 1963-70); B. S. Frey and W.W. Pommerehne, *Muses and Markets: Explorations in the Economics of the Arts* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 101-109; Guido Guerzoni, 'The British Painting Market 1789-1914', in *Economic History and the Arts*, ed. by Michael North, (Koln: Bohlau, 1996), pp. 97-132.

Development of the Art Market in England: Money as Muse, 1730-1900 (2011), remind us of the crucial role played by dealers and critics in the making of art markets in the nineteenth century.¹³⁴ They contend that shifts in taste across the century can be analysed in terms of commodity diversification and market segmentation, as much as changes in intellectual and aesthetic insight and understanding.¹³⁵ All five of the art collectors analysed here viewed, bought and sold, and exhibited fine art in London and were generally connected to London art networks. Of particular relevance then is *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850-1939* (2011) edited by Pamela Fletcher and Ann Helmreich. The essays in this book develop our understanding of art markets in the metropolis in relation to the rise of dealers in both primary and secondary markets, the expansion of the numbers of commercial art galleries and antiques businesses, the commercial activities of the art press, and the role of artists themselves in promoting and marketing their works.¹³⁶ More generally, what Westgarth calls the ‘art market turn’ in the scholarly literature on collecting is an important consideration in this thesis given that dealers, critics and artists themselves acting as agents and middle men, played important roles in influencing the purchases and shaping the configuration of works in all four Brighton collections.¹³⁷

Historiography of the Middle Class

Given the categorical reference to the ‘middle class’ in the title of this thesis and my evident commitment to a social history rather than a connoisseurial approach to Victorian art collecting, it is important to say something about the historiography of the middle class in Victorian Britain. Geoffrey Crossick writing about the lower middle class in 1977 pointed out

¹³⁴ Thomas M. Bayer and John R. Page, *The Development of the Art Market in England: Money as Muse, 1730-1900* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Pamela Fletcher and Ann Helmreich, eds., *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

¹³⁷ Mark Westgarth, *The Emergence of the Antique and Curiosity Dealer in Britain 1815-1850* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 5.

that at that time that there had been very little academic work done on the middle class.¹³⁸

Over thirty years later, in 2008 Gunn could still write of the nineteenth century middle class as 'a curiously underdeveloped area of historical research'.¹³⁹ The reason for this neglect, can be seen in part as a result of a preference among social historians of nineteenth century Britain to study working class history.¹⁴⁰ But it was also the outcome of the consensus view among both left-wing and liberal historians that by the middle of the nineteenth century the middle class had come to power in a fully realised industrial-capitalist Britain.¹⁴¹

In fact, there had been some debate among historians prior to the 1990s about the extent to which the industrial bourgeoisie had triumphed by the end of the century. The Marxist historian Perry Anderson writing in 1964 claimed that the middle class had failed to fulfil its class destiny in carrying out a proper bourgeois revolution, after 1832 capitulating to the aristocracy, who continued to lead the propertied classes.¹⁴² This view was roundly criticised by E. P. Thompson who argued that although aristocratic influence continued to be significant after 1832, fundamentally power was exercised by the industrial bourgeoisie and the wider middle class particularly at the local level.¹⁴³ On the other hand, Martin Wiener, writing in 1985 from a non-Marxist perspective also pointed to the 'gentrification of the Victorian middle classes', who, seduced by the patrician way of life, lost their entrepreneurial drive resulting

¹³⁸ Geoffrey Crossick, 'The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain: A Discussion', in Geoffrey Crossick, ed., *The Lower Middle Class in Britain 1870-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), pp. 11-60 (p. 11).

¹³⁹ Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰ Alan Kidd and David Nicholls, 'Introduction: The Making of the British Middle Class?' in *The Making of the British Middle Class?: Studies of Regional and Cultural Diversity Since the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Alan Kidd and David Nicholls (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1998), pp. xv-xxxix (p. xv).

¹⁴¹ Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class, the Political representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 413.

¹⁴² Perry Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', in *New Left Review*, 23 (1964), 26-54.

¹⁴³ E. P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English', in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: The Merlin Press, 1978), pp. 35-91.

in the relative decline of the British economy in the later nineteenth century.¹⁴⁴ Needless to say there are historians such as Gunn who dispute this view.¹⁴⁵

From the late 1980s to the 2000s and beyond, a number of important social history works were published not only exploring the middle class in greater detail but questioning or qualifying the viability of the concept of class itself.¹⁴⁶ Davidoff and Hall argued powerfully that gender was as important as class in understanding social development in nineteenth century Britain.¹⁴⁷ This was a view echoed by Griselda Pollock critiquing the social history of art approach and 'its unquestioned patriarchal bias'.¹⁴⁸ Patrick Joyce contended that 'class needs to be seen in cultural and political terms' rather than on the basis of classic Marxist categories.¹⁴⁹ Drohr Wahrman argued that the 'middle class' was a discourse generated by

¹⁴⁴ Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1985), p. 14.

¹⁴⁵ Simon Gunn, 'The "Failure" of the Victorian Middle Class', in *The Culture of Capital*, pp. 17-43.

¹⁴⁶ These include the following: Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987); R. J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party: The Making of the British Middle Class* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People, Industrial England and the Question of Class 1848-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); H. L. Malchow, *Gentlemen Capitalists*; James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class, the Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody's Angels, Middle-class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995); Alan Kidd and David Nicholls, eds., *The Making of the British Middle Class?: Studies of Regional and Cultural Diversity Since the Eighteenth Century*, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1998); K. Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846-1886* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Alan Kidd and David Nicholls, eds., *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle Class Identity in Britain, 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); John Tosh, *A Man's Place, Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007, first published 1999); Simon Gunn and Rachel Bell, *Middle Classes, Their Rise and Sprawl* (London: Phoenix, 2002); Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom, Liberalism and the Modern City* (London/New York: Verso, 2003); Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods, The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006); Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority and the English Industrial City, 1840-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); Simon Gunn and James Vernon, eds., *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain* (London: University of California Press, 2011).

¹⁴⁷ Davidoff and Hall, p. 13.

¹⁴⁸ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2003), p. 28.

¹⁴⁹ Joyce, *Visions of the People*, pp. 3-4. Subsequent work by Joyce downplays class language altogether in favour of conceptualisations linked to power structures in what he calls the 'material turn' in which bureaucracies, technology, and networks are the historical agents as much as individuals, classes or discourses. See for instance, Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom, A Social History of the British State Since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

specific political debates rather than the reflection of an essential identity defined by ownership of relations of production.¹⁵⁰ K. Theodore Hoppen in a chapter entitled 'The Middle Sort of People', conspicuously eschews the label 'middle class', and argues that this section of society was highly heterogeneous in terms of occupation, levels of wealth, regional character and beliefs, although he suggests that 'the middle sort of people still formed a recognizable force in society'.¹⁵¹ Alan Kidd and David Nicholls in their introduction to *The Making of the British Middle Class?: Studies of Regional and Cultural Diversity Since the Eighteenth Century* (1998) questioned whether class has 'any heuristic value in understanding social structure'.¹⁵²

In the following year Alan Kidd and David Nicholls in *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle Class Identity in Britain, 1800-1940* (1999), summarising the historiographical state of play, wrote that 'the place of "class" in historical writing, quite literally, has been "de-centred" as a result of feminist, new cultural, post-structuralist histories'.¹⁵³ However, in their introductions to both volumes, they argue that by and large *class* and therefore *middle class*, *working class* etc, are still meaningful concepts to explain the fundamental economic and political inequalities which shaped the development of nineteenth century Britain and the languages with which people made sense of their changing lives. In *The Making of the British Middle Class ?* they contend that 'objective' information on 'wealth, property, income occupation and so forth needs to be considered together with "'subjective" aspects of social life such as culture, ideology and politics'.¹⁵⁴ In *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism*, Kidd and Nicholls conclude that 'there is no need for historians to abandon notions of "class"'. Gunn writing ten years later takes a similar view arguing, 'In short, while "middle class" did not

¹⁵⁰ Dror Wahrman, 'Chapter 1. Imagining the 'Middle Class': An Introduction' in *Imagining the Middle Class*, pp. 1-18.

¹⁵¹ Theodore Hoppen, 'Chapter 2. The Middle Sort of People', pp. 31-55, and p. 32.

¹⁵² Kidd and Nicholls, 'Introduction: The Making of the British Middle Class ?' in *The Making of the British Middle Class ?*, pp. xv-xxxix (p. xxv).

¹⁵³ Kidd and Nicholls, 'Introduction: History, Culture and the Middle Classes' in *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism*, pp. 1-10 (p. 1).

¹⁵⁴ Kidd and Nicholls, 'Introduction: The Making of the British Middle Class ?' in *The Making of the British Middle Class ?*, pp. xv-xxxix (p. xxvii).

denote a clear-cut sociological constituency [...], it is only with some contextual wrenching that the political and moral attributes of the term can be divorced from the social and the economic'.¹⁵⁵

I share with Kidd, Nicholls, and Gunn, and theorists working in a materialist idiom such as Bourdieu and Baudrillard before he gave up his Marxist approach for unbridled postmodernism,¹⁵⁶ the view that a non-reductive class vocabulary alongside and linked to other vocabularies relating to gender and ethnicity are necessary analytical tools for understanding and making sense of development and change in capitalist societies including Britain in the nineteenth century. Indeed, without some kind of overarching framework of this kind (provisional and debatable, of course) to explain 'experience' it is hard to account for political and social changes in the nineteenth century and the mutating discourses which voiced and facilitated these changes. Furthermore, a class analysis approach which articulates the stark inequalities in the physical and mental lives of the middle class and the working class, the rich and poor, men and women, the propertied and the property-less, the empowered and the powerless and the tensions and conflicts which these inequalities engender is more than just an intellectual tool. It provides a vital way to encapsulate the *material realities* of life in modern capitalist societies in a terminology which thanks to Marxism has a continuing moral and political charge. I would add that some of the thinking of post-Foucauldian social historians, such as Patrick Joyce has infiltrated my vocabulary in terms of ideas associated with 'liberal governmentality', the 'liberal subject' and conceptualising society as 'process' and 'performance' rather than 'thing'.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 16-17.

¹⁵⁶ For a discussion of Baudrillard's critique of Marxism see Richard J. Lane, *Jean Baudrillard* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 77-82.

¹⁵⁷ Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, pp. 6-7.

The view here, then, is that the middle class was a complicated and stratified social formation. As H. L. Malchow writes 'However construed, the middle class was a multifarious, complex organism'.¹⁵⁸ It contained different layers and interest groups which were often in competition with each other as was manifested in conflicts between between Dissent and the Church of England, rate-payers and social reformers, Liberals and Tories, suffragists and social conservatives – to give a number of salient examples. On the other hand, this middle class whether manufacturers or bankers, doctors or engineers, shopkeepers or governesses, shared a common cause: to protect and assert the privileges of property in all its senses linked indelibly to the rights of employers and the possession of superior education. This was both with regard to a working class on whose manual labour and subordination the middle class depended for their wealth and power, and also in relation to the landed gentry whose social and political privileges they wished to somehow both emulate and diminish without upsetting fundamental rights of property.

Of particular relevance to the argument in this thesis is that fine art collecting was a phenomenon associated with the only section of the heterogenous middle class which could afford to buy fine art in significant quantities, the upper middle class. Indeed, the evidence suggests that it was really only an elite *within* the upper middle class, a fraction of a class fraction, who assembled notable art collections in the Victorian era.¹⁵⁹ Historians have identified the upper middle class as a layer within the middle class with distinct interests and values compared with the middling or lower middle classes (*petit bourgeoisie*). To give some examples, Perkin points to the growing inequality within the middle class in the second half of the nineteenth century and the emergence of the 'big businessman'.¹⁶⁰ In a chapter entitled 'Marriage' F. M. L. Thompson explains how the upper middle class elite 'distanced itself from

¹⁵⁸ Malchow, p. 9.

¹⁵⁹ See Appendix 2. Macleod Major Victorian Collectors (MMVC): *iii. Summary tables*.

¹⁶⁰ Harold Perkin, *Origins of Modern English Society* (London: Routledge, 1969), p. 416.

the rest of the middle classes' in the late-Victorian period.¹⁶¹ H. L. Malchow also identifies a separation of the upper middle class from the less wealthy and successful middle classes at this time, evidenced in the scale of philanthropy, the size of business and domestic establishments.¹⁶² And Elizabeth Langland, analysing the distinct role of women in the making of the middle class argues that the distinction between the upper and lower middle classes is as important as that between the middle and working classes.¹⁶³ Kidd and Nicholls sum up the position as follows, 'The middle class, then, is stratified, with enormous differentials in power and influence, income and status, between the *haute bourgeoisie* at one extreme and the *petite bourgeoisie* at the other'.¹⁶⁴ It is apparent that any attempt to define an 'essence' of middle class-ness in its totality or with specific reference to the outlook of a bourgeois vanguard is problematic.

Theodore Hoppen states that in 1859-60 the proportion of adult males in England and Wales paying income tax which was levied on those earning £100 per annum and above, and who constituted the country's middle class, was 20.6%.¹⁶⁵ Theodore Hoppen also points out that there were huge income disparities within the middle class. Of the 21% of the population in 1867 who earned more than £100 p.a., in England and Wales, 95% had annual incomes between £100 and £300.¹⁶⁶ In 1872 the 525 lots in the art collection of Joseph Gillott, the Birmingham steel pen manufacturer, realised a total of £164,530 at auction at Christie's, and the average price of sale for each work was £313.¹⁶⁷ Assembling significant collections of fine art was unaffordable for the vast majority of the middle class at the time and, of course, utterly inconceivable for the working class. Analysing probate records and other relevant

¹⁶¹ F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, p. 105.

¹⁶² Malchow, p. 366.

¹⁶³ Langland, p. 17.

¹⁶⁴ Kidd and Nicholls, 'Introduction' in *The Making of the British Middle Class*?, p. xxv.

¹⁶⁵ Theodore Hoppen, pp. 35-36.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁶⁷ W. Roberts, *Memorials of Christie's, A Record of Art Sales From 1766 to 1896*, vol. 1 (London: George Bell and Sons, 1897), pp. 215-216.

sources for 1900-1, Rubinstein concludes that 'the distribution of wealth appears phenomenally unequal'.¹⁶⁸

Rubinstein is one of the leading historians associated with a fundamental reassessment of the depth, scope and timing of the industrial revolution in Britain and concomitantly of the extent to which the middle class had risen to dominance by the mid nineteenth century as claimed by historians such as E. P. Thompson and Harold Perkin. Rubinstein's research shows that commercial and financial wealth was more important than industrial wealth in defining the bourgeois elite and that the business income earned in London was far greater than that earned in all the northern industrial cities put together.¹⁶⁹ He says that 'the most sophisticated and relevant recent research appears to show clearly that Britain was never an industrialised economy'.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, most historians now accept that as well as constituting a significant part of the wealth structure right through to the end of the nineteenth century, landowners also retained their dominance as a ruling elite. David Cannadine demonstrates that until the 1880s the landed gentry retained both their social hegemony and political power and continued to function as the governing elite of the nation.¹⁷¹ It was in the 1880s, as the prices of European agricultural products collapsed, that the beginning of the 'gradual eclipse of the old order' became evident, signalled for instance by the 'progressive disposal of patrician art collections'.¹⁷² Rubinstein concurs, 'In the absence of a strong or united challenge from the middle classes during the period 1832-1886 (and beyond to 1905), this time in British history saw the apogee of the landed aristocracy as a governing class'.¹⁷³ Writing in 2011, Gunn and

¹⁶⁸ William D. Rubinstein, *Men of Property: The Very Wealthy in Britain Since the Industrial Revolution* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p. 30.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 110 and p. 61.

¹⁷⁰ W. D. Rubinstein, *Capitalism, Culture and Decline in Britain, 1750-1990* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 35.

¹⁷¹ David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 13.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 26 and p. 112.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

Vernon summed up, 'Britain is now seen less as the first modern nation than as an *ancien regime*'.¹⁷⁴

Given this revisionist perspective down-playing the industrial revolution and deferring the arrival of modernity, it is not surprising that the up-and-coming upper middle class in seeking to establish and legitimise their power and status both within the wider middle class and in society as a whole should be influenced by the style and attitudes of a landed establishment which remained dominant until the end of the century. In 1854, Marx wrote, 'The higher middle classes ape the aristocracy in their modes of life, and endeavour to connect themselves with it. The consequence is that the feudalism of England will not perish'.¹⁷⁵ Cannadine defines the ethos of the landed establishment in terms of a belief in hierarchy, voluntary service, liberality, taste and class entitlement.¹⁷⁶ I have already touched on the varying perspectives of Perry Anderson and Martin Wiener in relation to the gentrification of the bourgeoisie. David Roberts in *Paternalism in Early Victorian England* (1979) identified the continuation of the patrician ethos in the paternalism of municipal elites in the new cities and towns.¹⁷⁷ Joyce analysing the small scale, fragmented and sometimes collaborative nature of many businesses through to the end of the century suggests that 'incompatible modes – paternalism and individualism – were in fact in the mental constructions of nineteenth century employers perfectly compatible'.¹⁷⁸ More recently Jon Lawrence has identified the 'persistence of older more paternalist modes of thought and practice' in Victorian Britain.¹⁷⁹ F. M. L. Thompson

¹⁷⁴ Simon Gunn and James Vernon 'Introduction, What Was Liberal Modernity and Why Was It Peculiar in Imperial Britain?', in *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity*, pp. 1-18 (p. 5).

¹⁷⁵ See the article 'The English Middle Class', in *New York Daily Tribune*, 4145 (1854), in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Articles on Britain* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), p. 216.

¹⁷⁶ Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁷⁷ David Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1979).

¹⁷⁸ Patrick Joyce, 'Work' in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950, People and Their Environment*, Vol. 2, pp. 131-194 (p. 168).

¹⁷⁹ Jon Lawrence, 'Paternalism, Class and the British Path to Modernity', in *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity*, pp. 147-164 (p. 147).

argues the 'idea and practice of the aristocratic life' remained significant in expanding towns and cities especially among the upper middle class.¹⁸⁰

Given the length of time that aristocracy and landed gentry had monopolised power and privilege in Britain, it is not surprising that the richest members of the up-and-coming middle class in the nineteenth century assimilated behaviours and attitudes from the landed establishment which defined how an elite should perform in order to convince its audience of its fitness to rule. In her memoir of her husband Charles Eastlake in 1870, the writer and intellectual Elizabeth Rigby provided her own 'class analysis' of changes in the fine art market in the second half of the nineteenth century:

The patronage which had been almost exclusively the privilege of the nobility and higher gentry, was now shared [...] by a wealthy and intelligent class, chiefly enriched by commerce and trade; the notebook of the painter, while it exhibited lowlier names, showing henceforth higher prices.¹⁸¹

Spending money on fine art collections was one of the ways in which the richest members of the upper middle class, distinguished themselves from the middling and lower middle classes and exhibited their credentials as an aspiring elite. Hierarchy and rank were as important as class solidarity. Furthermore, the fine art collection, whether of old masters or contemporary works, also linked the owner with the aristocratic idea of taste as the expression of innate intelligence and aesthetic discernment available only to the privileged few.¹⁸² By functioning as a signifier of 'taste', the formal fine art collection, therefore, enabled men of money to portray their wealth as the legitimate outcome of talent and entitlement rather than the single-minded pursuit of profit or inherited wealth.

¹⁸⁰ F. M. L. Thompson, 'Town and City' in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950, Regions and Communities*, Vol. 3, ed. by F. M. L. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 1-86 (p. 43).

¹⁸¹ Sir Charles Lock Eastlake, *Contributions to the Literature of the Fine Arts, With A Memoir by Lady Eastlake* (London: John Murray, 1870), p. 147.

¹⁸² Cohen, p. xii.

The Middle and Upper Middle Class in Victorian Brighton

The middle class in Victorian Brighton, was as complicated and diverse in its composition as in any other town or city in Britain at the time and it was also bigger.¹⁸³ According to Theodore Hoppen, 23.1 % of men were income tax payers in Brighton in 1859-60 making its middle class significantly larger than in the industrial cities.¹⁸⁴ In Sheffield and Bolton only 10% were income taxpayers and in Manchester the figure was 15.3%.¹⁸⁵ My own analysis of the middle class based on scrutinising the 2,375 men and their occupations who voted in the 1841 election in Brighton shows that 22% of adult males over 21 were qualified to vote, commensurate with Theodore Hoppen's figure for the proportion of the middle class in the town.¹⁸⁶ Kelly's Directory for Brighton published in 1854 lists 4,724 people running businesses or providing professional services of some kind, and a further 1,608 people listed in the 'Court Directory' pages.¹⁸⁷ The following table summarising the occupational structure of the 6,370 names recorded in the directory is worth reproducing in full:

TABLE 1. BRIGHTON MIDDLE CLASS OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE IN 1854		
Craftworkers and artisans	1,577	33%
Leisure and hospitality trades	980	15%
Professionals	877	14%
Rentiers and annuitants	1,608	25%
Shopkeepers and tradespeople	1,290	20%
Totals	6,332	100%
Brighton Population Total from Census 1851: 65,573		

¹⁸³ Appendix 1. Brighton Middle Class Social Structure (BMCSS): *i. Summary tables, ii. 1841 Poll book, iii. 1854 Trade directory, iv. 1876 Trade directory, v. Leading citizens 1850-1880.*

¹⁸⁴ Theodore Hoppen, p. 36.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Appendix 1. BMCSS: *i. Summary tables, ii. 1841 Poll book.*

¹⁸⁷ Appendix 1. BMCSS: *iii. 1854 Trade directory.*

Craftworkers, artisans, shopkeepers, retailers, and people in the leisure and hospitality trades together accounted for 68% of the Brighton middle class.¹⁸⁸ Many of the craftworkers – tailors, shoemakers, milliners, builders and the like – were only middle class by dint of having marginally greater wealth and status as small employers than the skilled working class with similar occupations.¹⁸⁹ As F. M. L. Thompson points out it was men of lesser property who ‘formed the core of the middle classes’.¹⁹⁰ Industrialists, manufacturers, merchants, financiers and rich rentiers comprised a small minority of the total middle class in Brighton in the nineteenth century.¹⁹¹ In fact, this is also true of the middle class in cities in the North and Midlands which were at the forefront of industrialisation.¹⁹²

What is also apparent is that within the Brighton middle class there also existed a significant upper middle class a high proportion of whom appeared to be rentiers living on inherited wealth, according to the Court Directory pages of town directories.¹⁹³ Combined with wealthy businessmen and professionals such as solicitors, clergymen, doctors and wealthier tradespeople they constituted the upper strata of the town.¹⁹⁴ For local newspapers reporting on social events among the rich elite such as the Hannington’s concert in 1867, they were encapsulated in the frequently used catch-alls ‘fashionable’ and ‘nobility and gentry’. As John Walton makes clear, the term ‘gentry’ embraced the urban-gentry or pseudo-gentry of well-connected professional men, larger employers and rentiers as well as those with landed origins.¹⁹⁵ Theodore Hoppen identifies this fraction as the ‘exclusive’ middle class. He differentiates them from the ‘inclusive’ middle class, itself divided, as he sees it, between a

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Appendix 1. BMCSS: *i. Summary tables*, Table E.

¹⁹⁰ F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, p. 19.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Theodore Hoppen, pp. 37.

¹⁹³ Appendix 1. BMCSS, *i. Summary tables*.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Walton, *The English Seaside Resort*, p. 12.

more affluent professional and managerial element and the lower middle class of lower professionals, clerks, and shopkeepers.¹⁹⁶

The ground-breaking work of Thomas Piketty in *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2017) is useful in highlighting the importance of inheritance and rentier wealth in Britain and Europe in the nineteenth century, which was clearly prevalent in Brighton's social structure.¹⁹⁷ He talks of 'the hyper-concentration of wealth in Europe' up to the First World War and uses the term 'inheritance society' to characterise the period 1810 to 1910, which was defined by 'a very high concentration of wealth and a significant persistence of large fortunes from generation to generation' with the share of total wealth in the hands of the top decile actually increasing up to 1914.¹⁹⁸ The publication of Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* in 1899 was a response to this emergence of the hyper-concentration of wealth in Europe and America at the end of the century.¹⁹⁹ Veblen argued that conspicuous leisure and consumption, often facilitated by inherited wealth, was a means of demonstrating and sanctioning superior social position, and that it was feudal and aristocratic in its origins.²⁰⁰ It is evident from Veblen's thesis, that owning, and displaying fine art including formal collections was one of the forms of 'wasteful' expenditure which enabled top-end wealth earners in the upper middle class to exhibit their reputability and superiority as gentlemen of leisure.²⁰¹

All four of the owners of art collections in this work were members of the upper middle class, and three of them inherited significant sums of money. A key measure of wealth is the value of an individual's estate, their disposable wealth, at their death as recorded by the Probate

¹⁹⁶ Theodore Hoppen, pp. 34.

¹⁹⁷ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, transl. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), pp. 433-445.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 442-3 and p. 424.

¹⁹⁹ Veblen, Thorsten, *Theory of the Leisure Class, An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, first published 1899, repr. 1922).

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 96-7.

Registry.²⁰² The following table summarises the value of the estates of these four owners of Brighton art collections at their deaths and gives equivalent present-day values:²⁰³

TABLE 2. RELATIVE WEALTH OF BRIGHTON ART COLLECTORS			
Name	Date of death	Value of estate (nearest £)	Equivalent value in 2019
Henry Hill	1882	£259,559	£26,300,000
William Coningham	1884	£6,147	£645,000
John Trist	1891	£9,697	£1,070,000
Henry Willett	1905	£233,824	£25,300,000

On the basis of probate and other relevant records in *Men of Property: The Very Wealthy in Britain Since the Industrial Revolution* for 1900-1, William Rubinstein is confident that the 17% of the population who left any kind of estate at death at this time were more or less synonymous with the middle class in the United Kingdom categorised by ownership of property.²⁰⁴ Taking the distribution of the values of estates in 1900-1 as a guide, all four of these Brighton men were positioned in the top 20% of the middle class on the basis of Rubinstein's figures.²⁰⁵ However, Hill and Willett were considerably wealthier than Coningham and Trist. F. M. L. Thompson defines the 'top layer of the upper middle-class' as Victorians who left personalty upwards of £100,000, consisting of between 2,500 and 3,000 businessmen.²⁰⁶ Hill and Willett were clearly in this *haute bourgeois* category. In fact, as we shall see when

²⁰² Probate entries: Hill, 19th June 1882, folio 473; Coningham, 16th Feb. 1884, folio 104; Trist, 9th June 1891; Willett, 20th March 1905. All in *Probate Registry in England and Wales* in *Find a Will* in GOV.UK website, <<https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk/Calendar>> [accessed August 2019].

²⁰³ Calculations from *MeasuringWorth.com* website <<https://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ukcompare/>> [accessed 12th April 2021]. Throughout the text I consistently and deliberately convert nineteenth century values into 21st century equivalents using the Exeter University *MeasuringWorth.com* website combined with occasional references to average levels of wages at the time. By making these comparisons, the extent of the wealth of the Victorian elite who bought pictures and financed private galleries in a highly unequal society is brought sharply into focus.

²⁰⁴ 'Table 2.2: Number of United Kingdom Estates, 1900-1, by Size and Aggregate Amounts' in Rubinstein, *Men of Property*, pp. 30-31.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, p. 163.

Coningham formed his collection in the 1840s he was very much richer than he was at his death and he too can be viewed as a *haute bourgeois* collector.²⁰⁷ Given that Trist's estate at death placed him in the top 6% of wealth holders using the Rubinstein figures for 1900-1, all four art owners had a level of wealth positioning them in the top ranks of the upper middle class.



Fig. 4. View of Brighton from the Chain Pier, steel engraving by T. A. Prior after Thomas Allom (London: J & W Robins, c. 1845)

Brighton with an upper middle class or bourgeoisie accounting for roughly 25% of the overall middle class of the town including a high number of rentiers and annuitants, was one of the places where those with inherited wealth congregated in order to spend their money. They became concentrated in particular zones of the expanding town such as Kemp Town, the Brunswick estate and later the Cliftonville, Montpellier and Powis areas in the parish of Hove (fig. 4).²⁰⁸ John Walton points out that 'Seaside resorts were centres of wealth and conspicuous consumption, and had more than their fair share of comfortably-off residents', with Brighton at the forefront of this development.²⁰⁹ This was manifest at the time. John Bishop, proprietor of the *Brighton Herald* and local historian, wrote in 1892 of the expansion of Brighton up to the

²⁰⁷ 'Rev. Robert Coningham', LBS/UCL.

²⁰⁸ Gilbert, pp. 98-99, p-. 155, pp. 170-1.

²⁰⁹ Walton, *The English Seaside Resort*, p. 75.

1850s, ‘for several years large numbers of the wealthier middle class had resorted to it either for health or pleasure’.²¹⁰ In 1870, the magazine *The Graphic* in a panegyric dedicated to Brighton made it clear that the prevailing view of the time was of the seaside town as a resort for pleasure and indolence for the leisure classes:

It is difficult to imagine work ever being done in Brighton. Brighton is like London certainly, if west-end London only is meant – Park Lane or Piccadilly, with the sea in front instead of the parks, would give a very good idea of London-super-Mare. But then there is no “city”, and there are no slums. Brighton is essentially a place of pleasure; the shops many of them as handsome and as well furnished as any in Regent Street, show this – the people show it. The idea of a man over-working himself there seems preposterous.²¹¹

All four of the art collectors featured in this thesis were members of the upper or ‘exclusive’ middle class, constituting the top 6% of the middling orders in Victorian society as a whole in terms of wealth. Indeed, as we shall see in the next section, the great majority of the middle class collectors from Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle, Liverpool, and London who appear in Macleod’s *Art and the Victorian Middle Class* also belonged to this class fraction. The rapid growth of Brighton and other seaside resorts up to the 1860s, before the proletarian day-tripper arrived, was evidence of the increasingly large levels of surplus value accruing to the already wealthy, on the basis of commercial and industrial as well as landed capital, translated into new and diversified forms of luxury consumption. Aristocratic and bourgeois wealth sat comfortably side by side in Brighton – ‘London-super-Mare’ – reflecting the emergence of a new ruling class in which liberal and aristocratic ideas also cohabited albeit rather less comfortably.

²¹⁰ John George Bishop “A Peep into The Past”, *Brighton in the Olden Time with Glances at The Present* (Brighton: J. G. Bishop, 1892), p. 26.

²¹¹ Feature entitled ‘Brighton’ in *The Graphic*, 1.6 (1870), p. 136.

Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and The Victorian Middle Class, Money and The Making Of Cultural Identity*

In 1962, Frank Davis wrote dismissively of Victorian culture, 'One has the impression of a largely Philistine society [...] governed by a clique of very rich, lazy and unimaginative and quite remarkably incompetent persons'.²¹² In *Art and the Victorian Middle Class* published in 1996, Macleod sets out to refute this way of thinking. For a PhD student researching art collecting in the nineteenth century some twenty-five years later, Macleod's book remains an essential and compelling text. It is impressive and daunting both in the quantity and quality of empirical research on art collecting extending from Macleod's previous studies of patronage in Newcastle and the North East, and in the wide-ranging display of historical, theoretical and philosophical literature which informs her analysis throughout.²¹³

At the start of her book, Macleod says her research was triggered by her discovery of the 90-part series of articles on art collectors by F. G. Stephens in the *Athenaeum* published between 1873-1884,²¹⁴ 'which made me realize how little we knew about the people who bought Victorian paintings'.²¹⁵ The empirical foundations of her work are detailed biographies of 146 'Major Victorian Collectors' compiled using a wide range of primary and secondary sources.²¹⁶ On the basis of her research, Macleod argues that Victorian art can only be understood in the context of economic changes in the developing capitalist society, which produced an increasingly dominant middle class with its own ideology and culture distinct from the aristocracy and the working class.²¹⁷ Macleod not only examines the backgrounds and

²¹² Davis, *Patrons of the Arts*, p. 14.

²¹³ The outcomes of Macleod's earlier research on North East collecting can be accessed in: Dianne Sachko Macleod, 'Private and Public Patronage in Victorian Newcastle', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 188-208; Macleod, 'Avant-garde Patronage', in *Pre-Raphaelites, Painters and Patrons in the North East*, pp. 9-37.

²¹⁴ The series of articles from the *Athenaeum* is considered more fully in Macleod, 'Mid-Victorian Patronage of the Arts: F.G. Stephen's "The Private Collections of England"', p. 597.

²¹⁵ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. xvi.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 'Appendix: Major Victorian Collectors', pp. 381-489.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

motivations of middle class art collectors as art consumers and connoisseurs in the Victorian period from the 1830s to the 1890s, but she also aims at making a general contribution to an understanding of the nineteenth middle class, in the context of the ‘scholarly neglect of Britain’s middle class’ as she puts it.²¹⁸ She contends that the middle class did not simply appropriate art collecting and its related commercial and intellectual functions from the aristocracy, to demonstrate their power and fitness to govern, but that they reconstructed the very nature of art and culture itself to reflect their ideological outlook and secure their wider hegemony in industrial capitalist society, ‘these energetic businessmen recast the cultural system in their own image to create a stable social category for their class’.²¹⁹ Macleod’s argument has been accepted as orthodoxy in accounts of nineteenth century art history.²²⁰

However, given the ambition, reach and intellectually eclectic nature of Macleod’s text, inevitably there are areas of discussion which are less convincing than others. For instance, Macleod’s ‘canon’ of middle class collectors is excellent for exploring an elite Victorian art world but is less satisfactory for making broader judgements about the power, culture, and identity of the middle class as a whole. The painstakingly pieced together biographies and backgrounds of 146 ‘Major Victorian Collectors’ provide an extensive range of qualitative evidence as the empirical foundation for the book but there are issues relating to the representativeness of this grouping.²²¹ Macleod’s collection of collectors is determined by art history factors, such as who were the most notable and the most high profile patrons as

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²²⁰ See, for instance, Pamela Fletcher, ‘The Grand Tour on Bond Street: Cosmopolitanism and the Commercial Art Gallery in Victorian London’, *Visual Culture in Britain*, 12.2 (2011), 139–153 (p. 140), Amy Woodson-Boulton, *Transformative Beauty*, p. 10, and David Wayne Thomas, *Cultivating Victorians: Liberal Culture and the Aesthetic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2004), p. 141.

²²¹ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 23, p. 90, p. 215, p. 275. As the basis for her selection Macleod includes: galleries and collections which featured in the three volumes of Gustav Waagen’s *Treasures of Art in Britain 1854* and the same author’s *Galleries and Cabinets of Art in Great Britain 1857*; art patrons figuring in the *Art-Journal*, *Athenaeum*, and *Magazine of Art*; Macleod’s own selection of patrons who feature in artists’ biographies and memoirs, lists of donors to museums, sales catalogues and aestheticist patrons appearing in the archives of aestheticism.

recognised by art historians and critics, relevant arts journals, and artists themselves at the time. It is not a properly controlled statistical cross-section of middle class consumers of visual art and imagery across the country. This is what Greenwald calls 'sample bias'.²²² I have produced a systematic and quantified summary of Macleod's notable collectors and linked it with probate records showing the values of the estates at death of the 110 of the 146 collectors for whom figures are available.²²³ Treating the 110 men for whom probate information is available as typical of all 146 art collectors, and once again making use of data compiled by Rubinstein for 1900-1, a number of conclusions can be drawn.

Just over half the 110 notable Victorian collectors left estates of over £100,000 (£9.5m by today's standards) placing them in the top 0.5 % of the middle class in the United Kingdom and making them among the richest men in England.²²⁴ Macleod herself refers to social historian F. M. L. Thompson's claim that probably between 2,500 and 3,000 Victorian businessmen left fortunes worth at least £100,000 in the Victorian period, forming 'the top layer of the upper middle-class'.²²⁵ Given that by extrapolation half of the 146 Victorian art patrons, were in this wealth bracket, this figure represents a small fraction of the 2,500 or so richest businessmen which suggests that a large proportion of the richest industrialists, merchants and financiers did not collect art in any kind of systematic or knowledgeable way, or at least to make it into Macleod's canon of 'Major Victorian Collectors'. Rubinstein's table indicates that people leaving estates worth more than £10,000 in 1900-01 constituted the top 6% of the middle class in the country.²²⁶ On this basis, of the 110 art collectors, 100 of them left estates worth over £10,000 which means that 91% of these collectors, were in the top 6% of the middle class in terms of personal wealth.²²⁷ In other words, Macleod's art collectors were not just middle class

²²² Greenwald, p. 4.

²²³ Appendix 2. MMVC: *i. Alphabetical, ii. Probate, iii. Summary Tables.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, *ii. Probate.* For 2019 relative values see *Measuring.Worth.com.*

²²⁵ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 219. The work referred to is F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, p. 163.

²²⁶ Rubinstein, *Men of Property*, p. 31.

²²⁷ Appendix 2. MMVC, *iii. Summary tables*, Table C.

or even upper middle class, but were members of what might be termed the *haute bourgeoisie* of the middle class and almost all of them were men. Significantly, many of them came from two or three generations of inherited wealth and were not themselves the original architects of the businesses reflecting the classic capitalist virtues of hard work, thrift, and entrepreneurial energy, which paid for their collections.²²⁸

The analysis shows that this 'sample' of art collectors is skewed in two other ways. First, just 5 % of the 146 art patrons were located in the South and South East outside London, and the vast majority had their main residences in five regions: London, Manchester, Birmingham, the North East, and Merseyside.²²⁹ Second, the predominant backgrounds of the art collectors appear to be manufacturers, industrialists, financiers and merchants in the highest income brackets – in other words, rich business elites in these five regions.²³⁰ Middle class art collecting and cultural activity in all parts of the country and in relation to the full range of middle occupational groups such as the new professions, rentiers, tradesmen, retailers, owners of small businesses, shopkeepers, and lower middle class white collar workers are not systematically considered. What is clear is that these 146 art patrons were not typical or representative of the middle class as a whole, and neither were they necessarily typical even of the 'top layer of the upper middle class'.²³¹

Furthermore, Macleod deploys her 146 'Major Victorian Collectors' as the empirical platform for an overarching thesis the theoretical foundations of which now look distinctly shaky, particularly in the light of the economic and social histories focused on the middle class previously discussed. Her argument assumes three things. First, the linear rise of a middle class with an essential social, economic and cultural unity which had established its hegemony by

²²⁸ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 4.

²²⁹ Appendix 2. MMVC: *iii. Summary tables*, Table B.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, Table A.

²³¹ F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, p. 163.

the 1850s, 'England by the middle of the nineteenth century had become a middle-class nation [...] the middle class was now a common body with a common goal'.²³² This is a view which few historians would now subscribe to in any simple sense. Second, she assumes that the interests of this middle class as a whole were distilled in the outlook of its industrial and commercial elite. However, as Gunn points out structural fragmentation and competing interest groups in the middle class undermine the claim that the elite can be 'taken for the *ipso facto* middle class'.²³³ Third, she assumes throughout but without substantiation that her collection of 146 art patrons were representative of the business elite as a whole. This is undermined by her failure to account for the cultural interests of the 2,400 or so other top earners in the Victorian upper middle class elite who were either not art collectors at all or not to the extent that they received acclaim or recognition from learned journals and art writers at the time. The theory of middle class cultural identity proposed by Macleod takes its stand on the basis of these suppositions, none of which stand up to scrutiny when closely examined.²³⁴ Of course, it should be noted that at the time of writing in 1996 Macleod did not have access to the full range of scholarship conceptualising the complexity of the middle class in nineteenth century Britain. She was not, therefore, in a position to take into consideration revisionist accounts of industrialisation which emphasise continuity with the eighteenth century, irregular development and heterogeneity rather than the across-the-board radical change of the classic 'Industrial Revolution' and the arrival of the modern world and the middle class by mid-century.

Given the strength of the scholarship challenging the idea that Britain emerged by the middle of the nineteenth century as a fully industrialised and capitalist nation ruled by a cohesive middle class combined with the sociological limitations of Macleod's 'sample' of notable collectors, there have to be doubts about some of the claims she makes: 'art was a key

²³² Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 210.

²³³ Gunn, 'The "Failure" of the Victorian Middle Class', in *The Culture of Capital*, p. 31.

²³⁴ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 7.

element in the affirmation of middle-class identity', 'the motivations of middle-class art collectors lay at the very heart of the Victorian enterprise', and 'I am proposing a theory of middle class culture that stresses the individualism of art collectors as a constitutive force in their interactions with society'.²³⁵ Arguably, the phenomenon of serious art collecting by the upper middle class elite can equally be interpreted as evidence of energy-sapping gentrification and complacency which Perry Anderson or Martin Wiener have contended diluted the revolutionary or economic dynamism of the middle class rather than being a sign of increasing class dominance and cohesion. The traditional art history substance of her discussion is more convincing than the social history analysis. For instance her view that 'philanthropic gifts and bequests are representative of the altruistic strain that defined the highest evolution of the middle-class character' is more Frank Herrmann than Nicos Hadjinicolaou.²³⁶ What Macleod does show within more limited confines is that in the Victorian period the purchasing power, outlook and tastes of some members of a wealthy business elite were overshadowing upper class and landed connoisseurs, and shaping artistic fashions and trends in the fine art market for the first time. As such her work is an essential and insightful corrective of the narrowly-defined connoisseurial perspectives previously surveyed.

An alternative approach to understanding art and middle class identity in Victorian Britain is to tackle the issue from the point of the view of the totality of the markets and networks emerging at the time in new towns and cities. This was constituted by a complex range of businesses, groups, institutions, individuals and discourses among both the middle and upper ranks of society which played a role commensurate with that of art collectors in shaping class culture. Although this thesis focuses on five individual collectors in Brighton, it views the processes and practices of their collecting as a function of the dynamics of the broader civic

²³⁵ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p.1 and p. 2.

²³⁶ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 353-4.

and cultural field in which they operated. Bourdieu explains the field in terms of 'positions' and 'positions takings' forming a 'site of struggles' constrained by the wider hierarchies and power relations in society.²³⁷ The chapter that follows analyses the three main phases in the formation and development of a 'free library, museum and picture gallery' centred on the years 1861, 1872-3 and 1902 when new facilities were opened to the public. As such it helps define the wider historical economic, social and cultural contexts in Brighton – the 'field' – in which the collection and display of art by the bourgeois elite was situated.

²³⁷ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 34, p. 41, and p. 57.

CHAPTER 1. 'THE PALACE OF SCIENCE, ART and LITERATURE' AND THE MISSION TO CIVILISE

THE PEOPLE OF BRIGHTON 1850-1914

The British Association for the Advancement of Science Conference in Brighton, August 1872 and 'The Spirit of Human Good'

There was one week in the history of Victorian Brighton in which the country's largest seaside town presented itself not just as a holiday destination for leisure and light entertainment but as an enterprising municipality and business community at the forefront of progress and civilisation. On Saturday 10th August 1872, a new privately funded Brighton Aquarium was opened on the seafront. On Wednesday 14th August, the country's premier scientific organisation, the British Association for the Advancement of Science opened its annual conference in the town. In that same week new purpose-built library, museum and gallery spaces in the Royal Pavilion estate were opened to receive the delegates, and made available to the wider public in the following year. The previous facilities introduced by the town council in 1861 had proved inadequate, and had not included a public library. The *Brighton Gazette* waxed lyrical:

Our town has long been conspicuous for its enterprise, its public spirit; but we are much mistaken if any town in the kingdom can boast of two events within the space of one week so fraught with the spirit of human good, or calculated to exercise so beneficial an influence on the future prosperity of the county. The Aquarium was opened on Saturday, a fitting precursor of the advent of the British Association [...] To say the Art treasures brought together in the new Gallery are unique; that the Museum with its chalk fossils, its bronzes, its ceramic ware, its philosophical instruments, are all of the highest order, is a truism so instructive, yet so adapted to push on human progress, we are lost in wonder.²³⁸

Two other occurrences of national and newsworthy interest enhanced this sense of a special occasion in Brighton in August 1872. First, the recently deposed French Emperor Napoleon III, Empress Eugenie and their son arrived from Bognor Regis to stay at Brighton's Grand Hotel just

²³⁸ 'The British Association and Progress in Brighton' in *Brighton Gazette*, 15th Aug. 1872, p. 4.

as the British Association conference was opening.²³⁹ Second, at the conference itself Henry Stanley gave an exclusive account of his expedition into central Africa and his meeting with the hitherto ‘missing’ missionary and explorer David Livingstone at Ujiji in what is now Tanzania.²⁴⁰ These events taken together in many respects represented the coming of age of Brighton, the high watermark of urban Liberalism and the ‘mission to civilise’ in the town. Although the library, museum and gallery building was expanded in 1902, by this time the borough was represented by Conservative rather than Liberal MPs, the popularity of exhibitions and displays (although not the library) was declining, the working class were developing independent cultural and political interests, and the focus of the corporation was as much on electricity, water, trams, and parks as on art and science.



Fig. 5. Brighton Museum and Library Façade, Nov. 1902, photographed by Donovan and Son

This chapter examines the formation and development of Brighton’s ‘free library, museum and picture gallery’ which first opened for the British Association conference in August 1872 as a tripartite institution combining all three aforesaid functions in the same building (fig. 5).²⁴¹ This

²³⁹ ‘The British Association’, *Morning Post*, 16th Aug. 1872, p. 6.

²⁴⁰ ‘The British Association at Brighton. Mr Stanley’s Paper on Dr Livingstone’, in *London Evening Standard*, 17th Aug. 1872, p. 5.

²⁴¹ The tripartite approach was evident in other places such as Birmingham and Liverpool, see Woodson-Boulton, *Transformative Beauty*, p. 29 and p. 34.

tripartite approach to cultural amenity was influenced locally by private organisations such as the Brighton Royal Literary and Scientific Organisation (BRLSI) founded in 1841 or the Working Man's Institution (WMI) formed in 1848, and nationally by the work of relevant parliamentary select committees.²⁴² Reformers viewed literature, science, and art as integral elements in the same moral and patriotic totality designed to promote enlightenment and progress in towns and cities across the country. This was often described in terms of 'civilisation', later conceptualised as 'culture' by the social critic Matthew Arnold.²⁴³ From the early 1850s, Brighton campaigners worked to bring these three areas of intellectual and spiritual life together into a single public space, a 'Palace of Science, Art and Literature' as the *Brighton Gazette* later called it.²⁴⁴ The primary aim of this 'Palace' was to civilise the people of the town, to inform and elevate their lives with resources which collectively embodied the imperatives of Beauty and Truth, what Arnold referred to as 'sweetness and light', whether in the form of books, specimens, artefacts or pictures.²⁴⁵ At the same time, in the minds of leading citizens, the 'Palace of Science, Art and Literature' was also designed to demonstrate municipal and therefore middle class power and progress.²⁴⁶

As we will see in what follows, increasing activity and organisation relating to the arts and sciences in Brighton was a reflection of the growing authority of the middling orders of the town. By the 1850s the wider middle class were firmly in control of the governance of the town. This was the outcome in particular of the enfranchisement of the borough under the 1832 Reform Act and the establishment of a corporation in 1855 under the terms of the 1835

²⁴² Gilbert, p. 182, and 'Working Man's Institution' in *Brighton Gazette*, 26th Oct. 1848, p. 5. See, for instance, the reference to 'literature, art and science' in *Report from the Select Committee on Public Libraries Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Appendix* (London: House of Commons, 1849), p. xiii.

²⁴³ Raymond Williams, *Keywords, A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1976), p. 48 and p. 80. Williams explains that by the eighteenth century the term 'civilisation' described an organised and enlightened society and was closely related to the concept of 'culture' which by the nineteenth century could refer either to intellectual and spiritual activity or the wider way of life of a people.

²⁴⁴ 'The New Library', *Brighton Gazette*, 6th Nov. 1902, p. 8.

²⁴⁵ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Kindle Edition: 1869, repr. 2015), p. 54.

²⁴⁶ 'The New Library', *Brighton Gazette*, 6th Nov. 1902, p. 8.

Municipal Corporation Act.²⁴⁷ As R. J. Morris tells us British towns in the nineteenth century were the locations where ‘the middle class sought, extended, expressed and defended their power’.²⁴⁸ In its broader sense of ‘way of life’,²⁴⁹ middle class culture was strongly linked to the efflorescence of municipal life and the new public amenities, services, technologies, and voluntary activities associated with urban governance in which Radicals, Liberals and philanthropic reformers played seminal roles.²⁵⁰

In particular the rise of the civic was experienced and visualised in: permanent public installations such as the town hall, the School of Art and the library and museum; expanding networks of parks, gardens, streets and cemeteries with street names, statues, clocktowers and memorials celebrating local and national heroes and events; and more transient collective town events such as concerts, lectures, readings, exhibitions, soirées and dances. It was catalogued and articulated in local newspapers, guidebooks, town directories, and chronicles of Brighton life the main audience for which were the propertied and educated middle class themselves. And middle class culture could be found in the rituals, ceremonies and parades centred on the town council and its dignitaries in which ‘Brighton’ acted as the signifier of a singular community embodying the nation-state in microcosm defined by an ideological trinity of hierarchy, social harmony and progress.²⁵¹ Not least, the movement to establish middle class moral authority in the town was reflected in the apparent belief that artistic, scientific and historical things possessed sacerdotal powers, which, when made accessible in public facilities, had the capacity to enlighten and socialise the common people. As Deborah Cohen

²⁴⁷ For 1832 Reform Act see Gilbert, p. 207. On incorporation see A. Dale, *Brighton Town and Brighton People* (Chichester: Phillimore and Co Ltd, 1976), p. 163.

²⁴⁸ R. J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, p. 14.

²⁴⁹ Williams, *Keywords*, p. 80.

²⁵⁰ Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, pp. 26-7.

²⁵¹ See: Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London: Folio Society, 1996), p. 23; Hill, *Culture and Class*, p. 9; Gunn and Bell, *Middle Classes*, pp. 18-19.

writes in a related context 'secular things had to be made sacred' to reconcile middle class materialism and abundance with its moral mission.²⁵²

The Struggle for the First Brighton Museum and Gallery and its Inauguration in 1861: Public Versus Private

By 1849, when Brighton's ratepayers were considering the purchase of the Royal Pavilion, there was an emerging view on the part of the Westminster political elite that new towns and cities should provide educational and artistic institutions to improve the knowledge and morals of the lower orders.²⁵³ This was a response to growing concerns about the extent of poverty in the new conurbations, the working class challenges of Chartism and trades unions since the late 1830s, the noticeable decline in church attendance, and a general fear of social disorder and class conflict. The Museums Act of 1845, followed by the Public Libraries and Museums Acts of 1850 and 1855, reflected Parliament's commitment to the idea that culture was one of the solutions to these endemic problems.²⁵⁴ These acts encouraged local authorities to found public museums including art museums and libraries, for the purposes of improving taste, civilising the working class, and providing genteel entertainment.²⁵⁵ In the House of Commons debate in 1845 on the Museums Bill, Lord Manners spoke of doing more for people in the larger towns 'to work out the true civilisation of the country'.²⁵⁶ Mr Gore MP wishfully proclaimed that museums and galleries 'were calculated to improve the social system, and to render the artisan and the labourer sober and industrious, cheerful and intellectual'.²⁵⁷ MPs of

²⁵² Cohen, p. 13.

²⁵³ Hill, *Culture and Class*, p. 42.

²⁵⁴ Amy Woodson-Boulton, 'The City Art Museum and the Social Role of Art', (Nov. 2012) BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History, ed., Dino Franco Felluga. *Extension of Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, para. 4 <http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=amy-woodson-boulton-the-city-art-museum-movement-and-the-social-role-of-art> [accessed 3rd Jan. 2021].

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ Lord Manners in the debate on Museums of Art, House of Commons, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, The Official Report* (6th March 1845, vol. 78, para. 390) [online] <<https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t71.d76.cds3v0078p0-0006?accountid=14664>> [accessed 18th Dec 2020].

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Gore, para. 391.

all political persuasions seemed to believe that culture might 'step into religion's shoes as a guarantor of social order and moral conduct' as Terry Eagleton puts it in *Culture and the Death of God*.²⁵⁸ However, civilisation was not to be paid for by central government. These measures were permissive and unfunded and predicated on the altruism of property and a minimal level of local taxation. As Amy Woodson-Boulton says the museum acts provided for 'a system that explicitly, and from the outset, relied on private initiative and support'.²⁵⁹

Editorials published in July 1849 in the *Brighton Gazette* and *Brighton Herald*, both conservative newspapers appealing to the urban gentry, supported the purchase of the Royal Pavilion on the basis that a municipally-owned palace 'might be converted into a picture gallery, a museum, libraries, and other things of the kind'.²⁶⁰ However, it was another twelve years before this ambition was fulfilled and nine rooms on the upper floor of the Royal Pavilion were adapted and refurbished to provide specialist spaces for a small but permanent town museum and a picture gallery, which opened to the public in Autumn 1861.²⁶¹ Both Henry Catt (Willett from 1863) as a leading donor and William Coningham as town MP were involved in the project. In 1856 the *Brighton Gazette* came out strongly in favour of adopting the Public Museums and Libraries Act of the previous year. It argued that circulating libraries and literary institutions provided fashionable rather than useful books and asserted 'It has long been a lasting disgrace to the town of Brighton that it does not possess a local museum'.²⁶²

Another institution pressing for a library and museum was the BRLSI which passed a resolution submitted to the Corporation in 1856 'for the formation of a Free Library and Museum, which

²⁵⁸ Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 121.

²⁵⁹ Amy Woodson-Boulton, 'The City Art Museum and the Social Role of Art', para. 4.

²⁶⁰ 'Pavilion Sale Bill', *Brighton Gazette*, 19th July, 1849, p. 5. The *Brighton Herald* view referenced by a participant, Colbatch, in a vestry meeting on the sale reported in 'The Brighton Pavilion', *Brighton Gazette*, 2nd Aug. 1849, p. 6.

²⁶¹ John Ackerson Erredge, *History of Brighthelmston*, first published 1862 (Forest Row: Brambletye Books, 2005), p. 279.

²⁶² 'A Public Library and Museum for Brighton' in *Brighton Gazette*, 8th May 1856, in unnumbered supplementary page.

should do honour to the town and country'.²⁶³ This society which was a private proprietary organisation had been set up in 1841 by two professional men, John Cordy Burrows (1813-1876), a medical doctor, and Henry Turrell, a boarding school proprietor.²⁶⁴ It acquired a library and reading rooms in the Albion Hotel on the seafront and over the years assembled objects and specimens to form a museum of its own (fig. 6).²⁶⁵ In the 1850s it held annual soirées in the Pavilion rooms which included concerts, lectures, and exhibitions.²⁶⁶ Reporting on the second soirée in November 1851, the *Brighton Gazette* wrote, 'Art and science seemed to have taken holiday, and to have sought pleasure or rest in the gorgeous rooms of the Palace. Beauty, intellect, and fashion were gathered together; and amusement and instruction were provided for their enjoyment'.²⁶⁷ The ascendancy and cohesion of Brighton's bourgeoisie, were apparent in this display of possessions, opulence, and enlightenment as described by the newspaper. At a later BRLSI conversazione in 1853, there were illustrated talks on archaeology, art, photography, botany, optics and phrenology, and Henry Catt delivered a talk on geology.²⁶⁸ The evening concluded with the singing of the 'National Anthem, with full power of voice'.²⁶⁹

The problem for the town was that there was no consensus among the Brighton middle class and its councillors and ratepayers about the immediate necessity or affordability of municipal cultural facilities. For instance, comprehensive proposals for converting what were known as the Northern Buildings on the Royal Pavilion estate into an assembly room, music hall, free public library, museum and gallery at a cost of c.£10,000 were debated in January 1857.²⁷⁰ The establishment of substantial cultural facilities in the town seemed within reach. However,

²⁶³ 'Free Library and Museum', in *Brighton Gazette*, 24th April 1856, p. 6.

²⁶⁴ Musgrave, p. 331.

²⁶⁵ Bishop, "A Peep Into the Past", p. 156.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 157

²⁶⁷ 'Second Soirée of the Brighton Royal Literary and Scientific Institution', *Brighton Gazette*, 27th Nov. 1851, p. 5.

²⁶⁸ Report in *Brighton Gazette*, 27th Jan. 1853, p.5

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ 'The Pavilion Property' in *Brighton Gazette*, 8th Jan. 1857, p. 5.

while liberal and reforming councillors could ‘argue that this would be one of the greatest opportunities to elevate the lower classes’,²⁷¹ procedural, financial and practical objections from other members of the corporation resulted in the eventual failure of the project.²⁷² When less expensive and piecemeal proposals to convert rooms in the Pavilion were finally realised in 1861, the *Brighton Gazette* commented on the ‘discreditable fact that Brighton has been for such a length of time left without a Museum, notwithstanding the many opportunities which presented themselves’.²⁷³ The paper was critical of the penny-pinchers who had opposed the project, ‘every shilling expended upon this Museum has had to be fought for on the floor of the Council Chamber’.²⁷⁴



Fig. 6. Royal Albion Rooms and Marine Parade, Brighton, c. 1850, coloured lithograph by G. Graf, published by W. J. Taylor, London.

²⁷¹ Comment from Councillor Lamb at special meeting of town council to debate the Pavilion proposals, in report on the meeting in *Brighton Gazette*, 22nd Jan. 1857, p. 6.

²⁷² By the end of 1857 after 8 tendered plans for carrying out the major conversion had been received and adjudicated, there was no agreement among councillors on how to proceed or at what level of costs, see ‘Yesterday’s Town Council Meeting’, *Brighton Gazette*, 29th Oct. 1857, p. 5. By May 1858 the council was considering much cheaper plans for converting upper rooms in the Pavilion into a temporary museum as an interim solution at a cost of just £465; see minutes of the Pavilion Committee, 10th May, 1858, vol. 2, pp. 332-334, *Corporation of Brighton, Proceedings of the Pavilion Committee*, Royal Pavilion (PC/RP).

²⁷³ ‘Inauguration of the Brighton Town Museum’, *Brighton Gazette*, 7th Nov. 1861, p. 5.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

It is interesting that the *Brighton Gazette* and *Brighton Herald* newspapers should be on the same side as the town's intelligentsia in campaigning for a library and museum. Both these newspapers were Tory in their politics, consistently opposing political reform and free trade, and supporting the privileges of the Church of England such as compulsory church rates.²⁷⁵ Yet, on the issue of cultural amenity they saw eye to eye with men who were Radicals or Liberals. This alliance of interest between professionals and wealthy businessmen (including rentiers), or 'literati' and 'resident gentry' was also typical in northern cities.²⁷⁶ For instance, Caroline Arscott writes of the Leeds cultural scene in the 1840s, 'This rhetoric of the civilising virtues of art and science was the common ground on which churchman and dissenter, Tory and Liberal came together'.²⁷⁷ The main opposition to museums and libraries in the town came from shopkeepers, craftworkers and tradespeople, predominantly members of Brighton's lower middle class who as we saw in the introduction, formed nearly two-thirds of the middle class in the town.²⁷⁸ It was this class fraction who were the true political economists and Benthamites.²⁷⁹ These cultural disputes between the bourgeois elite and the lower middle classes in Brighton echo similar divisions in cities and towns in the midlands and the north.²⁸⁰

In this same period in the 1850s temporary exhibitions of pictures were held in rooms of the Royal Pavilion. Between 1851 and 1853 these were organised by resident artists with the purpose of displaying and selling their work and in the hope that the Brighton art scene would be boosted by attracting the interest of London artists exhibiting in the town.²⁸¹ There was no exhibition in 1854, and it became apparent that this venture had been unsuccessful in terms of

²⁷⁵ Collis, p. 212.

²⁷⁶ A short report 'The Pavilion Band', *Brighton Gazette*, 1st Jan. 1857, p. 5, refers to 'our resident gentry and *literati*' providing contributions. The participants included both Coningham and Cordy Burrows.

²⁷⁷ Arscott, "Without Distinction of Party": The Polytechnic Exhibitions in Leeds 1839-45', in *The Culture of Capital*, pp. 135-158 (p. 150).

²⁷⁸ Appendix 1. BMCSS: *i. Summary tables*, Table B.

²⁷⁹ Crossick, p. 46.

²⁸⁰ Hill, *Culture and Class*, p. 47.

²⁸¹ Account of request from Brighton Artists to be permitted to hold an exhibition in the Pavilion in 'The Pavilion', *Brighton Gazette*, 22nd May 1851, p. 5. This was granted and the first exhibition was held in Autumn 1851.

attendance, sales, and effective organisation.²⁸² In May 1855, a meeting of 'higher ranking' townsmen chaired by Cordy Burrows convened with the aim of reviving the annual exhibition of fine arts. The outcome of this meeting was a new voluntary organisation called the Brighton and Sussex Society of Arts which included Coningham on the committee.²⁸³ But the town luminaries were no more successful than the artists had been. In 1859 the society was dissolved and in 1860 the local artists resumed responsibility for annual art shows.²⁸⁴ A more successful venture was the establishment of the privately-funded Brighton School of Practical Art which opened in the former royal kitchen of the Pavilion in January 1859 with an enrolment of more than 70 students.²⁸⁵ Coningham, by this time a local MP, had been a member of the committee of local gentry and artists responsible for raising subscriptions and donations to establish the school.²⁸⁶

The leading reformer campaigning for a town museum and gallery and a public library was the energetic and indefatigable Burrows, not only a successful doctor and councillor but mayor of Brighton three times in 1858, 1859 and 1872.²⁸⁷ Burrows was a keen Liberal who seconded the nomination of Coningham as Liberal candidate for the borough at a meeting in March 1857.²⁸⁸ Burrows strongly believed that Brighton should adopt the 1855 Public Libraries and Museums Act, a permissive measure which empowered local authorities to raise a penny in the pound on the rates for providing for such facilities.²⁸⁹ Brighton was not lacking in private initiative and there were a number of collectors in the town who, in the spirit of the museums and libraries acts, were eager to loan or donate artworks or artefacts. One of these, was Henry Catt

²⁸² 'Yesterday's Commissioners' Meeting', *Brighton Gazette*, 15th Feb. 1855, p. 5.

²⁸³ Report on the meeting, *Brighton Gazette*, 21st June 1855, p. 5.

²⁸⁴ 'The Local Artists and the School of Art', *Brighton Gazette*, 8th March 1860, p. 5.

²⁸⁵ 'Opening of the Brighton and Sussex School of Practical Art', in *Brighton Gazette*, 20th Jan. 1859, p. 8.

²⁸⁶ Report of inaugural meeting at which Mr Bowler, the Government Inspector of Art spoke (Henry Cole was unable to attend) in *Brighton Gazette*, 2nd Sept, 1858, p. 8.

²⁸⁷ Collis, p. 45.

²⁸⁸ 'Meeting of Mr Coningham's Friends', in *Brighton Gazette*, 19th March 1857, p. 7.

²⁸⁹ 'Special Town Council Meeting/Public Library and Museum', *Brighton Guardian*, 28th May 1862, p. 6. At this meeting the council supported Burrows proposal to call a town meeting to determine whether to adopt the Public Libraries Act.

(Willett), who was a fellow Liberal and an ally of Burrows in the campaign for a town museum.²⁹⁰ Catt's offer to the town of his valuable collection of chalk fossils was an important consideration in eventually persuading the town council to agree to create a museum. At a special council meeting in December 1859 Burrows justified converting Pavilion rooms into museum spaces with reference to Henry Catt's offer and his own willingness to donate works of art 'if they had a place for them'.²⁹¹ Four months later, Councillor Nye in similar vein said 'the council were much indebted to Mr Catt for his very munificent offer. He was also informed, by persons who could have no interest in misleading him, that many other gentlemen were waiting to see how the council would receive this offer before they made large presents'.²⁹² By spring 1860, the council had reluctantly agreed that a new public museum should be established in unused rooms in the Pavilion and should include an art gallery.²⁹³

The two new gallery spaces on the first floor of the Pavilion to house the town's annual exhibition of paintings opened to the public in September 1861, just over a month before the museum was inaugurated.²⁹⁴ The exhibition was organised by Brighton's Society of Artists who selected 398 pictures to exhibit provided by 140 artists and significantly 81 of these were from London.²⁹⁵ At the collation which followed the opening of the galleries, Mayor William Alger, a clothier and hatter, talked of 'a new era in the history of the borough', and he apologised for the fact that in the past the council had been 'too parsimonious' in its reluctance to develop facilities in the Pavilion.²⁹⁶ He concluded his speech with missionary zeal by saying 'He believed

²⁹⁰ Henry Catt seconded Burrows proposal that the town should adopt the Public Libraries Act put forward at the town meeting to consider the matter in 1862. See report in *Brighton Guardian*, 1st Oct 1862, pp. 7-8.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² 'Special Meeting of Brighton Town Council. The Museum', *Brighton Guardian*, 24th April 1860, p. 6.

²⁹³ 'Brighton Museum', *Brighton Gazette*, 7th June 1860, p. 5.

²⁹⁴ 'Brighton Annual Exhibition of Paintings', *Brighton Guardian*, 4th Sept. 1861, p. 5.

²⁹⁵ 'Brighton Exhibition of Paintings', *Brighton Guardian*, 11th Sept. 1861, p. 5.

²⁹⁶ 'The Collation', *Brighton Gazette*, 5th Sept. 1861, p. 8.

the progress of the fine arts to be the progress of civilisation'.²⁹⁷ In fact, the main purpose of providing permanent exhibition rooms was commercial, as Burrows made clear in a speech to inaugurate an Art Union in the town associated with the new gallery, 'the object of this Society was to assist artists in the sale of their paintings'.²⁹⁸ It should be added that Burrows's efforts in securing permanent galleries for local artists was recognised in the display of his portrait in the exhibition.²⁹⁹ Civic improvement in the up-and-coming municipalities of Britain could not have been achieved without its local heroes.

The seven rooms in Pavilion which formed the new Brighton Museum were opened to the public on 5th November 1861. To mark the occasion, Professor Owen (1804-1892) of the British Museum delivered an afternoon lecture including a disquisition on the natural history of the gorilla.³⁰⁰ This was followed in the evening by a 'Grand, Scientific, Artistic, and Musical Soirée' which included access to the pictures in the new art gallery.³⁰¹ The *Brighton Gazette* listed the names of the company of middle class men and women who attended in the evening as identified by its reporters. The list included local MPs, clergy, aldermen, councillors, artists, school proprietors and judging from the number of names assigned the appellation 'Esq' a good number of gentlemen or gentry representing a cross-section of the business and professional community.³⁰² Mayor Alger, in yet another speech at the inaugural ceremony to open the museum highlighted the role of public facilities in 'the general spread of education', 'the education and the morality of the public generally' and the museum in particular as 'another link in the chain of advancement'.³⁰³ Coningham in his capacity as MP proposed a vote of thanks to Professor Owen and spoke of the establishment of a museum of natural history as 'a

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ 'An Art Union for Brighton', *Brighton Gazette*, 22nd Aug. 1861, p. 7.

²⁹⁹ 'The Brighton Art Exhibition of 1861', *Brighton Gazette*, 5th Sept. 1861, p. 6.

³⁰⁰ 'Inauguration of the Brighton and Sussex Museum', *Brighton Guardian*, 6th Nov. 1861, p. 5.

³⁰¹ 'Inauguration of the Brighton and Sussex Museum', *Brighton Gazette*, 17th Oct. 1861, p. 1.

³⁰² 'Inauguration of the Brighton Town Museum', *Brighton Gazette*, 7th Nov. 1861, p. 5.

³⁰³ *Brighton Guardian*, 6th Nov. 1861, p. 5.

necessity for this population’, and recommended the introduction of regular public lectures in the new building.³⁰⁴

The lecture was followed by ‘The Grand, Scientific, Artistic, and Musical Soirée’ at which once again the Brighton middle class were on display at an occasion which combined people and possessions, owners and cultural commodities, pleasure and erudition – testifying to the economic and intellectual riches of the town. Although, the ostensible aim of the new amenities might have been to civilise the lower orders and improve social harmony,³⁰⁵ the soirée was more an occasion for self-congratulation on the part of the middle class and its elite. This social event was a palpable demarcation of class differences. Hill points out that for the middle class the municipal museum could at one and the same time be perceived as ‘an “improver” of the working classes; or as adding to the reputation and civic pride of the town’.³⁰⁶ It was the latter which was reflected in the soirée which was very much a celebration of middle class municipal achievement. It should be borne in mind that in 1861 only a small number of towns and cities in Britain were able to boast of a public museum.³⁰⁷

Historians such as John Tosh might assert the centrality of the home and domesticity to the making of the middle class and masculinity, but the making of the middle class in Brighton seems as much a function of a culture of conviviality with an endless round of parties, balls, conversaciones, soirées, collations and social functions in which invariably both men and women participated.³⁰⁸ The ‘Grand, Scientific, Artistic, and Musical Soirée’ in 1861 was one such occasion. As Gunn says writing about bourgeois culture ‘the meanings of culture already extended from art and knowledge to way of life by the mid-Victorian period’.³⁰⁹ It should not be forgotten that the setting for this middle class festival of ‘sweetness and light’ was the

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ Waterfield, *The People’s Galleries*, pp. 39-40.

³⁰⁶ Hill, *Culture and Class*, p. 15.

³⁰⁷ Waterfield, *The People’s Galleries*, p. 77.

³⁰⁸ Tosh, p. 1.

³⁰⁹ Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 25.

oriental and exotic splendour of the refurbished interiors of the former royal palace, now a council cultural centre, signifying both the supersession but also the persistence of the aristocratic outlook. It should also be noted that the full title of the museum was the 'Brighton and Sussex Museum' which indicated the shift in power and wealth since 1830 from the countryside and the county ruled by the landed class to the urban concentration of the town where power was in the hands of the middle class and its municipal elite, 'Brighton' took precedence over 'Sussex'.

In its edition the week before the inauguration, on the basis of a private viewing, the *Brighton Gazette* featured a detailed account of objects and artefacts in the seven rooms and ancillary areas of the new Brighton Museum plus the temporary exhibitions.³¹⁰ The museum rooms included: antique busts, armour, weapons, Etruscan vases, coins, animal skins; collections of stuffed birds, South American butterflies, Brazilian moths, lava; and examples of corals, shells, seaweed, and choanite fossils from Brighton beach.³¹¹ The highlights of the new museum according to the *Gazette* were 'the superb geological collection' of Mr Henry Catt in Room 4. and specimens of comparative anatomy consisting of '300 or 400' crania in Room 7. donated by Alderman Burrows, which, according to the paper had already acquired the colloquial epithet of 'The Chamber of Horrors'.³¹² On display in the Saloon and Drawing Rooms were microscopes, photographs, chromolithographs, a selection of old master paintings, bronzes, plants, vases, and a model exhibited by 'Mr Funnell of East Street, of his patent, self-acting alarum for preventing collisions on railways'.³¹³

From a modern point of view, this first manifestation of a municipal museum in Brighton has in its totality, all the appearance of an emporium of disparate scientific and cultural items,

³¹⁰ 'The Brighton Museum', *Brighton Gazette*, 31st Oct. 1861, p. 8.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ *Ibid.*

although the vague outlines of nascent disciplines were discernible in rooms assigned to Archaeology, Geology and Natural History.³¹⁴ In fact, a museum committee of ‘experts’ had been created in 1859, to assist the Pavilion Committee in ‘arranging and classifying’ specimens for the new museum.³¹⁵ However, its membership was defined more by autodidactic enthusiasm than the authoritative academic knowledge or professional credentials which were eventually to emerge in a more modern world.³¹⁶ Many of these committee members were among the main benefactors of the museum, people such as Henry Catt, Mr Barclay Philips, Mr Wonfor, and Dr Turrell.³¹⁷ The haphazard albeit entertaining character of this first incarnation of Brighton Museum is no surprise.

In listing objects and collections, the *Brighton Gazette* also specifically named a total of 53 collectors and enthusiasts who had gifted or loaned artefacts to the various exhibitions for the inauguration events on 5th November 1861.³¹⁸ This act of naming the specific donors together with the items they had donated was a tacit acknowledgement on the part of the *Brighton Gazette* and other local newspapers to their middle class readers of the altruism and civic commitment of the citizens who had contributed to the museum. The naming of the collectors making donations to the new museum was of a piece with the listing of subscribers to hospitals, dispensaries, schools, soup kitchens, public monuments, disaster appeals and charities generally which appeared frequently in local newspapers. In Brighton at this time, as elsewhere, culture, as well as education and welfare for working people, was premised on the transfer of surplus wealth, time and know-how on a discretionary and charitable basis from the private to the emerging public sector, ‘the formidable voluntarism of the Victorians’.³¹⁹ As

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ Minutes of the Pavilion Committee, 12th Dec. 1859, vol. 3. p. 7, PC/RP.

³¹⁶ Christopher Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p. 9.

³¹⁷ Minutes of the Pavilion Committee, 12th Dec. 1859, vol. 3. p. 7, PC/RP.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

³¹⁹ Lauren M. E. Goodlad, *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State, Character and Governance in a Liberal Society* (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003), p. 7.

already noted private largesse was built into the museum and the libraries acts of 1845, 1850 and 1855 which were unfunded and permissive measures. In the case of cultural philanthropy, the public naming of donors served to indemnify the concentrated ownership of wealth by linking it with the qualities of enterprise, expertise and beneficence involved in collecting objects of artistic or scientific interest and loaning or gifting them to the wider populace. Materialism and morality went hand in hand.

The creation of the new gallery embodied different assumptions. Rather than private enterprise supporting public amenity as in the making of the museum, the new gallery was an example of public funding deployed to promote the business interests of local painters. As we have seen, the town council in paying for the refurbishment of two rooms in the Pavilion to form an attractive gallery hoped to improve the business prospects of Brighton artists.³²⁰ According to one calculation in 1851 Brighton had 72 professional painters and ranked seventh behind Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Bath, and Leeds.³²¹ The council and ratepayers were willing to invest in the market for artistic commodities in the belief that there would be a collective educational and moral dividend for the town from enhanced interest and improved taste in the fine arts. However, in general, in the establishment of both the museum and the gallery in Brighton in 1861, Ruskinian idealism was secondary to considerations of civic status and commercial gain on the part of the town's municipal leaders, in apparent contrast to elites in Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester as analysed by historians such as Woodson-Boulton.³²²

³²⁰ 'An Art Union for Brighton', *Brighton Gazette*, 22nd Aug. 1861, p. 7.

³²¹ John Seed, "Commerce and the liberal arts": The Political Economy of Art in Manchester, 1775-1860', in *The Culture of Capital*, pp. 45-81 (p. 56).

³²² See chapter one, 'Ruskin, Ruskinians, and City Art Galleries' in Amy Woodson-Boulton, *Transformative Beauty*, pp. 19-53 where the author discusses how social reformers in industrial cities, influenced by Ruskin, believed that popular exposure to art and beauty would somehow ameliorate the deficiencies of capitalism .

From the Makeshift to the Purpose-Built: A New Library, Museum and Gallery 1861-1873

In the minds of reformers and *literati* led by Cordy Burrows or the *Brighton Gazette*, the new museum and gallery spaces on the upper floor of the Pavilion which opened in 1861 represented temporary and piecemeal steps towards the more ambitious aim of building a substantial and prestigious cultural institution in the town.³²³ As early as May 1862, the Museum Committee reported that they were short of space having received an influx of donations of specimens and artefacts from local collectors.³²⁴ More to the point what was self-evidently missing from the amenities opened in 1861 was a public library. As the *Brighton Gazette* wrote on the occasion of the inauguration of the new museum and picture gallery on the upper floor of the Pavilion, 'We trust that the public-spirited gentlemen who have already done so much for the town, will take courage from past success, and not relax their labors till they have devoted some portion of the Pavilion to the even more valuable purpose of a Public Library'.³²⁵

At a special town council meeting in May 1862 Alderman Burrows proposed that the Public Libraries Act 1855 should be adopted enabling the borough to raise a one penny in the pound rate to finance new facilities 'for the express purpose of educating the people'.³²⁶ The corporation agreed to call a public meeting of ratepayers under the terms of the Act, to secure the two-thirds majority to authorise its implementation.³²⁷ A crowded and bad tempered open meeting of around 800-1000 people took place in the town hall in October 1862 at which the proposal was overwhelmingly defeated by advocates of cheap government.³²⁸ Burrows in

³²³ 'The Public Museum', *Brighton Gazette*, 15th Nov. 1860, p. 6. At a town council meeting Alderman Burrows commented 'at a future time the museum would be removed to some more commodious and convenient place'.

³²⁴ Report on discussion in the town council in response to a report from the Museum Committee, 'The Town Museum' in *Brighton Gazette*, 8th May 1862, p. 5.

³²⁵ *Brighton Gazette*, 7th Nov. 1861, p. 5.

³²⁶ 'Special Town Council Meeting/Public Library and Museum', *Brighton Guardian*, 28th May 1862, p. 6.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ 'Proposed Introduction of the Public Libraries and Museum Act/Meeting at the Town Hall and Negative Vote of the Burgesses', *Brighton Guardian*, 1st October, 1862, pp. 7-8.

putting the case in favour of adopting the Act was continually interrupted and heckled.³²⁹ In an attempt to win over ratepayers he proffered the utilitarian argument that the educational benefits of a public library would lead to reduced poverty and crime with concomitant cuts in local taxes, 'the larger portion of our local taxation is the result of ignorance and vice'.³³⁰ The detailed research which Burrows had carried out into successful libraries in nineteen cities and towns across the country based on studying relevant council annual reports, carried no weight with the meeting.³³¹ The main ally of Burrows was Henry Catt (Willett) who seconded the motion in a short and rather pusillanimous speech in which he singularly failed to back up the beleaguered Burrows, 'I have no personal feeling whatever as to the result of this evening'.³³²

We can infer that the opponents of the adoption of the Public Libraries Act came from the lower middle class of artisans, tradesmen, shopkeepers, and lodging-house proprietors and perhaps a number of working class men who qualified as ratepayers.³³³ Certainly, the conservative *Brighton Gazette*, lumping these social groups together, believed it was 'working men' who were responsible for the disorderly nature of the event, in what it saw as 'the triumph of ignorance, vulgar clamour, and personality'.³³⁴ It contended that the meeting demonstrated 'the want of the educational influence of a public library, for it showed that the working-men of Brighton relied more on strong lungs and foul language, than on argument and reason'.³³⁵ To my mind, however, the meeting was a manifestation of the divisions within the Brighton middle class between its bourgeoisie and its lower middle class elements, between gentlemen and tradesmen, a wide-spread feature of public library debates at the

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ Burrows's letter with his summary of the national position was published in full in *Brighton Gazette*, 25th Sept. 1862, p. 8.

³³² *Brighton Guardian*, 1st October, 1862, pp. 7-8.

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ Editorial, 'The Public Library Question', *Brighton Gazette*, 2nd Oct. 1862, p. 7.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

time.³³⁶ Gunn argues that for a disparate middle class, culture was ‘a sphere of consensus and reconciliation’, but in this instance it was a source of bitter division.³³⁷

It was almost ten years later in Spring 1871 that Brighton town council finally took the decision to convert the eastern court of the Northern Buildings on the Pavilion estate into ‘a free public library, museum and picture gallery’, as this cultural complex was commonly described, at an estimated cost of £6,000.³³⁸ This represented a revival of the plans for redevelopment previously considered in 1857 which had failed as a result of parsimony and indecision on the part of the councillors.³³⁹ Rather than adopting the controversial Public Library Act and instigating a special rate for the measure, the project was authorised in accordance with the local Pavilion Act of 1850 and funded out of the general town rate.³⁴⁰ This required the consent of the vestry convened as an open meeting of ‘burgesses’ under the chairmanship of the vicar of Brighton.³⁴¹ There was some danger that such a meeting would be a repeat of the fractious open meeting of 1862 enabling the advocates of *laissez faire* who viewed a library and museum as expensive luxuries best left to private enterprise, to reject the proposals. However, in 1871 the vestry meeting gave its almost unanimous approval to the proposed conversion of the eastern court buildings to construct a library and museum.³⁴² Although, the aim was to complete the alterations in time for the prestigious visit of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in August 1872, only the picture gallery was fully finished.³⁴³ In

³³⁶ Alistair Black, *A New History of the English Public Library: Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850-1914* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1996), p. 20. The fact that the *Brighton Gazette* viewed the anti-library factions as working-men reveals the prejudices of the newspaper which seems to have conflated lower middle and upper working class elements in the meeting to differentiate them from the ‘gentry’ representing the true interests of the town. In fact, none of the major speeches against adopting the Public Libraries Act were made by members of the working class.

³³⁷ Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 24.

³³⁸ ‘Yesterday’s Town Council Meeting’, *Brighton Gazette*, 18th May 1871, p. 5.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ The ‘burgesses’ were ratepayers with three years residence. See: ‘Part 1 The Brighton Vestry, 1810-1854’ in Dale, *Brighton Town*, pp. 18-81.

³⁴² ‘The Free Public Library and Museum’, *Brighton Gazette*, 22nd June 1871, p. 3. Out of c.100 attendees only 5 voted against the proposition according to the paper.

³⁴³ ‘The British Association Meeting’, *Brighton Gazette*, 8th Aug. 1872, p. 7.

recognition of the British Association visit, temporary museum displays were therefore installed in the Corn Exchange alongside a major art exhibition in the new central gallery at which Henry Hill, who had become a councillor in 1868, first displayed paintings from his collection.³⁴⁴ The first fully public art exhibition in the gallery took place in January 1873 without formal ceremonials.³⁴⁵ And in September 1873, at long last, the new institution was inaugurated marked by an address from Professor Carpenter, President of the British Association, and a soirée to which 2,000 of the leading citizens of the town were invited.³⁴⁶

Given the failure of the 1857 proposals and the clamorous opposition to adopting the Public Library Act in 1862, what had changed since then to allow the corporation to press ahead with the construction of a new library and museum with only minimal opposition in 1871? Or to put it another way, why did those sections of the middle class who believed in cheap government and private enterprise fail to prevent the public provision of cultural amenities from going ahead? There were a number of specific triggers which contributed to the achievement of a purpose-built 'free public library, museum and picture gallery'.

By 1869 the three main literary societies in Brighton which included libraries and museum collections had closed as a result of dwindling memberships which had rendered these organisations unviable.³⁴⁷ These were the Athenaeum, the Mechanics' Institute and the Brighton Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, each with a cultural and pedagogic mission.³⁴⁸ In other words, the major sources of private and voluntary sector provision of cultural services in the town were no longer available. The closure of the BRLSI in 1869 or the Albion Rooms

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ 'Opening of the New Picture Gallery', *Brighton Herald*, 25th Jan 1873, p. 3.

³⁴⁶ 'Inauguration of a Public Free Library, Museum, & Picture Gallery in Brighton' in *Brighton Herald*, 13th Sept. 1873, p. 3.

³⁴⁷ 'Suggestions for a Public Library in Brighton', *Brighton Gazette*, 29th Sept. 1864, p. 7. The article reports on a paper delivered to the Brighton Royal Literature and Scientific Institution by Cordy Burrows in which in restating his belief in the necessity of a town library he refers to defunct literary institutions including the Athenaeum and Mechanics' Institute. In 1869, the BRLSI itself closed down, see J. G. Bishop, "A Peep Into the Past", p. 157.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Institution as it was known resulted in its proprietors donating 7000 books to the town council.³⁴⁹ They also presented the contents of their museum.³⁵⁰ The *Brighton Gazette* in an editorial in November 1870 reflecting on the corporation's stock of books, once again pleaded for the adoption of the Public Library Act, and, in a reference back to the 1862 meeting, counselled ignoring the 'vulgar ravings of a few noisy ones'.³⁵¹ With further donations, by Spring 1871 the corporation had acquired a stock of 15,000 books lying unused and in storage.³⁵² The Museum Committee continued to lobby the council for additional space in the 1860s.³⁵³ Furthermore, Brighton's Society of Artists had failed to sustain annual art exhibitions in the cramped and makeshift spaces in the Pavilion rooms and there had been no public exhibition of this type since 1866.³⁵⁴

Joyce urges the need to follow the 'strange and complex history of objects and material processes'.³⁵⁵ The 'material' argument for constructing a new public library and increasing museum and gallery space was reinforced by the fact that there were empty spaces in the stables, coach-houses and ancillary buildings in the eastern court of the Pavilion estate which had been underused ever since the purchase of the Pavilion in 1850.³⁵⁶ In 1867 the Dome, formerly the royal stables, had been converted into a large assembly room for 2,500 people at a cost of £10,000.³⁵⁷ This represented the achievement of one element in town surveyor Philip Lockwood's comprehensive plans for developing public amenities previously considered in 1857. The success of the new assembly room conversion, put pressure on the authorities to do

³⁴⁹ 'Gift of the Albion Rooms Library to the Town', *Brighton Gazette*, 16th Mar. 1871, p. 5.

³⁵⁰ J. G. Bishop, "A Peep Into the Past", p. 157.

³⁵¹ Editorial, *Brighton Gazette*, 3rd Nov. 1870, p. 5.

³⁵² Figure quoted in speech by Alderman Lester at the vestry meeting proposing adoption of the Town Council's plans, in 'The Free Public Library and Museum', *Brighton Gazette*, 22nd June 1871, p. 3.

³⁵³ For example, see request from Museum Committee for additional rooms for an 'Economic Department', in minutes of the Pavilion Committee, 28th Oct. 1867, vol. 5, p. 236, PC/RP.

³⁵⁴ Account of the history of art exhibitions in Brighton since 1850 under the heading 'The Picture Gallery', *Brighton Herald*, 13th Sept. 1873, p. 3.

³⁵⁵ Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, p. 98.

³⁵⁶ Report on Town Council meeting in which the utilisation of the eastern court buildings on the Pavilion estate was discussed, *Brighton Gazette*, 7th July 1870, p. 5. Councillor Friend commented that the 'property had been empty for 15 years'.

³⁵⁷ Collis, p. 103.

something about the under-utilisation of the remaining premises in the northern part of the estate. For instance, in July 1870 the town council debated the merits of whether it was better to rent the spaces to Quiglieni's Circus from Dublin, or as warehousing and stabling facilities for businesses.³⁵⁸ Inevitably the option of converting the buildings into a library and museum complex was raised, and not untypically the meeting failed to make any firm decisions about what to do.³⁵⁹ If these were some of the practical considerations for which a public library and museum would provide the solution, there were more fundamental and irresistible social and economic factors at work in the realisation of a civic cultural centre: municipal prestige, economic prosperity and class conciliation.

With regard to municipal prestige, by the 1870s Britain's rapidly growing towns and cities, were becoming more populous and wealthy and extending the range and reach of local services and organisations, both public and private, to meet the challenges of urbanisation in terms of health, housing, education, property values and accountability.³⁶⁰ Town councillors and the elites responsible for these developments increasingly portrayed their municipalities in an evangelical light as transcendent communities – modern, enterprising, liberalising, and civilising in their influence – compared with the old aristocratic order centred on the county or the region.³⁶¹ Examining industrial cities, Gunn depicts the last third of the nineteenth century as 'the highpoint of a public bourgeois culture'.³⁶² What was true of industrial cities was also true of Brighton in this same period. The civic leaders campaigning for a 'free public library, museum and picture gallery' in key meetings in 1871, made their case on the basis of civic pride and municipal progress in emulation of similar advances in other parts of the country.

³⁵⁸ *Brighton Gazette*, 7th July 1870, p. 5.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁰ Robert J. Morris, 'Governance: Two Centuries of Urban Growth', in *Urban Governance, Britain and Beyond Since 1750*, ed. by Robert J. Morris and Richard H. Trainor (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2000), pp. 1-14 (pp. 4-5).

³⁶¹ Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 23.

³⁶² Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 28.

At the town council meeting in May 1871, Burrows spoke of cultural amenities adding to the ‘dignity and character’ of the town. He also argued on the basis of out-competing other South Coast resorts, ‘A large number of people who frequented Hastings and other places, would, if we had such a Library, prefer to make Brighton their place of residence’.³⁶³ Councillor Friend said that a library ‘would be an honor and credit to the town’.³⁶⁴ In proposing the town council resolution in his speech to the vestry in June, Alderman Lester gave a detailed account of libraries in other towns including Oxford, Sheffield, Norwich, Birmingham, and Manchester and asserted ‘If these large towns had their libraries, how very essential it was that Brighton should have one’.³⁶⁵ At this same meeting Mr Douglas Fox said ‘He was convinced if the Town Council had not adopted the measures they had, the town would have sunk into a second or third rate town’.³⁶⁶

As we have already seen, the British Association for the Advancement of Science held its week-long annual conference in Brighton in 1872.³⁶⁷ The local authority had been lobbying for such a visit since 1852.³⁶⁸ A visit from the renowned British Association was viewed by the local bourgeoisie as a vote of confidence in the efficacy of its local government and its commitment to science and education, as well as a major boost for business in the community.³⁶⁹ Asa Briggs comments, ‘Pilgrimages to the annual meetings of the British Association led from one great provincial centre to another’.³⁷⁰ The British Association’s formal acceptance of Brighton’s offer

³⁶³ ‘Yesterday’s Town Council Meeting’ in *Brighton Gazette*, 18th May 1871, p. 5.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ ‘The Free Public Library and Museum’, *Brighton Gazette*, 22nd June, 1871, p. 3.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ The Town Council were informed of the British Association’s decision to hold their general meeting in Brighton in 1872 in September 1870 according to the report of a council meeting in *Brighton Gazette*, 22nd Sept. 1870, p. 5.

³⁶⁸ ‘British Association for the Advancement of Science Proposed Visit to Brighton’, in *Brighton Gazette*, 6th May 1852, p. 4. This appears to be the first time that the British Association was invited to hold their meeting in the town.

³⁶⁹ A.D. Orange, ‘The Origins of the British Association for the Advancement of Science’, *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 6.2 (Dec. 1972), 152-176 (p. 170), published by Cambridge University on behalf of the British Society for the History of Science, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4025289>> [accessed 25th Nov. 2019].

³⁷⁰ Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 44.

to host their annual conference in September 1870 was a major factor in inducing the corporation to revisit the case for building a proper library and museum. Mr J. E. Mayall at the vestry meeting was explicit about this, 'If they decided not to have such an Institution merely for the sake of a paltry £6,000, he certainly thought that the British Association, who were coming to hold their annual meeting here next year would have no business in Brighton at all'.³⁷¹

The economic argument in favour of cultural amenity was also compelling. Brighton in the 1860s retained its status as the country's premier seaside resort and was becoming wealthier as a result of mass tourism stimulated by the railways combined with its attractions as a desirable residential town for commuters and retirees.³⁷² This prosperity was reflected in the building of the Grand Hotel which opened in 1864, the West Pier in 1866, the Aquarium the construction of which began in 1869, and in the sphere of social welfare with the erection of a new workhouse and infirmary completed in 1867.³⁷³ The Grand Hotel cost £100,000 to build, the West Pier £30,000, the Aquarium £105,000 and the new workhouse £41,000.³⁷⁴ The idea that Brighton's burgeoning middle class could not afford to spend £6,000 on a public library and museum was scarcely sustainable. Alderman Lester in justifying the proposed expenditure of £6,000 at the vestry meeting in June 1871 provided specific figures to demonstrate the affordability of the project..³⁷⁵ Other speakers at this meeting argued that a library and museum would make the town more attractive and would be good for profits.³⁷⁶ This did not cut any ice with a handful of residents. A Mr Sinnock, opposed the expenditure claiming that tax-payers were overburdened and stating that 'he did not believe the rate-payers cared for a

³⁷¹ *Brighton Gazette*, 22nd June, 1871, p. 3.

³⁷² Farrant et al, p. 14.

³⁷³ Collis, p. 10, p. 139, p. 242, and p. 375.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁵ He referred to the increase in the rateable value of properties in the town from £320,000 in 1855 to £408,000 in 1871, in 'The Free Public Library and Museum', *Brighton Gazette*, 22nd June 1871, p. 3.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Public Library' which was better provided by voluntary effort.³⁷⁷ But in general, the overwhelming and indignant opposition to a library which had manifested itself in the infamous 1862 town meeting had dissipated.

In the course of discussion in 1870-1, and in addition to the civic and economic arguments for a 'free public library, museum and picture gallery', there was a reprise of well-established notions that cultural amenities would advance intellectual progress and social harmony among all classes, and in particular civilise the working class. The rise of New Model Unions, the 1867 Reform Act, and Forster's impending Education Act 1871, had made the education of the working class a matter of continuing concern in the minds of the middle class worried about democracy and trade union power. Douglas Fox at the vestry meeting in June 1871 stated that he believed 'the Library would not only attract the rich and be estimated by the middle classes, but be of inestimable value to the working classes. They were progressing in intellect, and Brighton must keep pace with their requirements'.³⁷⁸ Alderman Lester, argued that 'In short, all classes would derive a benefit from it, and more especially the poorer classes, who by studying the work of the great masters in this Library, might rise to a professional eminence which they might not otherwise be able to attain'.³⁷⁹ Mr Lamb referenced the events of the Paris Commune taking place in 1871, 'Was it not better for the working men to amuse themselves at a Free Library and Museum, than the way they had been amusing themselves across the water'.³⁸⁰ At the same meeting, Mr Marriage Wallis said that 'he knew of nothing more elevating than for working-men to walk through such collections and galleries with their wives and children, looking at the wonders of nature and the beauties of works of art'.³⁸¹

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁸ *Brighton Gazette*, 22nd June 1871, p. 3.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

As we have identified the campaign for a purpose-built public library, museum and gallery had been led by the liberal intelligentsia combined with its richer business and rentier interests, what might be called the bourgeoisie of the town.³⁸² This included men such as William Coningham, Henry Willett and Henry Hill who played their parts in making Brighton a place of art and science as well as health and leisure and who combined liberal politics with great wealth. Although the business and professional elite constituted a minority of Brighton's middle class compared with the petit bourgeois elements, by the 1870s it was the most vocal and influential force in the town.³⁸³ Their 'civilising mission' was intended not so much to assuage the impact of unrestrained materialism and profit-seeking, but to assert the power and moral entitlement of the middle class.³⁸⁴ At the same time it aimed to reconcile social inequality and individual freedom – to resist or modify the universalist implications of liberalism – by conciliating disenfranchised and discontented social groups with the gift of culture.³⁸⁵ It is hard not to view Brighton's decision to build a brand new 'free library, museum, and picture gallery' in 1871 as a form of 'liberal paternalism' which retained the notion of *noblesse oblige* from the old order. It was an endowment from the privileged middle class to the 'people' wrapped up in the rhetoric of civic aggrandisement and municipal progress but premised on cultural philanthropy on the part of the wealthy and educated including super-rich collectors of fine art. It was an act of condescension.

In the affluent and enterprising Brighton of 1871, which at this time was the country's tenth wealthiest town, it seems even the majority of the town's petit bourgeoisie, those who had resisted the adoption of the Public Libraries Act in 1862, were reconciled to providing a town

³⁸² This was not untypical of other large towns and cities in Britain at the time. See F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, p. 17.

³⁸³ Appendix 1: BMCSS: *i. Summary tables*, Table D. For similar class relationships and alliances in industrial cities at the time, see Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 22.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁵ Gunn and Vernon, 'Introduction: What Was Liberal Modernity and Why Was It Peculiar in Imperial Britain?', in *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain*, pp. 1-18 (p. 9).

library and museum.³⁸⁶ For some of them no doubt there were more pressing concerns than art and science. For instance, from a business point of view the radical improvement of the sewage system was perhaps a more urgent consideration, a scheme that was eventually to be completed in 1874 at a cost of c.£100,000.³⁸⁷ But overall, what was striking about the decision to spend £6,000 on building the ‘free library, museum, and picture gallery’ is the level of cohesion across the middle class of the town in making and celebrating the decision. The politicians and individuals whose speeches and comments at the May 1871 corporation meeting and the June 1871 vestry meeting were reported by local newspapers formed a representative sample of occupations and levels of wealth from the lower middle classes to the *haute bourgeoisie*.³⁸⁸ This was also reflected in the composition of the attendees at the British Association soirées in August 1872,³⁸⁹ and the ceremony linked to the formal opening of the museum and library in September 1873.³⁹⁰ With members of the aristocracy and the feudal hierarchy of the county of Sussex also present in ceremonial roles, these social events presented a formidable display of the solidarity, wealth and power of the dominant classes in society in general with the middle class in the ascendant.

In August 1872 the *Morning Post* newspaper referred to Brighton as town which is no longer ‘merely a popular watering-place for recreation and pleasure’ but now ‘takes an interest in the cultivation of science and art’.³⁹¹ There was a sense in which the achievement of the library, museum and gallery represented the ascendancy of the serious and morally-minded middle class over the decadent and pleasure-seeking aristocracy symbolised by the Royal Pavilion

³⁸⁶ ‘Borough Rates and Borough Valuations in 1873’, in *Pall Mall Gazette*, 30th Oct. 1874, p. 11. The table extracted from official sources shows the 9 municipal boroughs ahead of Brighton in terms of rateable value in rank order as Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Bristol, Sheffield, Bradford, Salford, and Newcastle-on-Tyne. The rateable value of Liverpool in 1873 was £2,768,739.

³⁸⁷ ‘The Drainage of Brighton’ in *The Graphic*, 29th Aug. 1874, p. 198.

³⁸⁸ Appendix 1. BMCSS: v. *Leading Citizens 1850-1880*.

³⁸⁹ ‘The British Association’, *Illustrated London News*, 3rd August 1872, p. 18.

³⁹⁰ ‘Free Library and Museum/Inaugural Meeting’, *Brighton Gazette*, 13th Sept. 1873, p. 4. Appendix 1. BMCSS: v. *Leading citizens 1850-1880*.

³⁹¹ ‘The British Association’, *Morning Post*, 16th Aug. 1872, p. 6.

itself, the ancillary buildings of which had been converted to create the new municipal amenities. It also represented a pyrrhic victory over the lower middle class of the town now seemingly reconciled to culture-on-the-rates. The irony is that from a commercial point of view what Brighton was selling was decadence and pleasure not high culture. And in the wider scheme of things disposing of sewage three and half miles down the coast to produce a sweet-smelling and sanitised town was rather more important than art and science.

Finally, it should be added that what was also notable about the political meetings and social occasions surrounding the new library and museum was the absence of the working class for whose benefit the facilities were ostensibly designed.³⁹² The comments of one or two representatives of the working class who did speak up at the vestry meeting in June 1871 are pertinent in this regard. A Mr Watson, in opposing the project pointed out 'that this was not a meeting of the inhabitants, because, held in mid-day, the working classes could not attend and take part'.³⁹³ Another attendee pointed to the absence of working class councillors reminding the meeting that property qualifications kept 'working men out of the Council'.³⁹⁴ In August 1873, a Mr W. Saunders wrote of the Free Library, 'I looked forward with great pleasure to the opportunity it would afford to myself and fellow working-men, in common with the more wealthy classes, to peruse and study works of interest of a more costly character than the means of the working-man can command'.³⁹⁵ He then expressed his disappointment that the library was not open sufficiently late in the evening to allow a typical worker to access the books.³⁹⁶ Mr. Saunders went on to suggest that it would be for the 'greatest good' for the library to remain open until 10pm to allow working people better access 'to works that would morally and intellectually raise them to the status rational beings should occupy'.³⁹⁷ It seems

³⁹² Appendix 1. BMCS: v. *Leading Citizens 1850-1880*.

³⁹³ *Brighton Gazette*, 22nd June 1871, p. 3.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁵ Letter to the editor from W. Saunders in *Brighton Herald*, 2nd Aug. 1873, p. 4.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

that Mr Saunders's well-argued letter did not go in vain because by October 1873 the closing hours of the library had been raised to 10pm.³⁹⁸ Clearly there were teething problems in Brighton in 1873 with the emergence of the library and museum as agencies of individual freedom and universal access in the realm of liberal governmentality as analysed by Joyce and others.³⁹⁹

Paternalism, Professionalism, Public Apathy and the 'Palace of Science, Art and Literature'

1873-1914

The Eastern Court conversion to create the 'free library, museum and picture gallery', designed by the Borough Surveyor Philip Lockwood, in its internal and external style retained the original oriental features of the Royal Pavilion, although on a diluted basis to meet budgetary constraints.⁴⁰⁰ The entrance through a Moorish archway into the two-storey building was from Church Street into a large entrance hall and reception area leading into a sizable double-height gallery space for exhibitions, with rooms on each side and at either ends of the gallery on each of the two floors, including a lecture hall above the reception area.⁴⁰¹ The spaces were interconnected with two stone staircases extending from the entrance hall to the upper floors, and two cross galleries with views down into the central gallery below, allowing visitors to circulate freely throughout the length and breadth of the building (see fig. 7).⁴⁰² The internal architecture of interlocking spaces constituted a single civilising institution of knowledge, science and art, enabling an emergent public – liberal subjects, cultural consumers – to easily move between the library, museum, and picture gallery. Whether this was a cunningly arranged heterotopia of mutual surveillance is a moot point.⁴⁰³ As we shall see shortage of

³⁹⁸ Opening hours as stated in a brief report in *Brighton Gazette*, 4th Oct. 1873, p. 5.

³⁹⁹ Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁰ 'Brighton Free Library and Museum', *Brighton Gazette*, 16th Nov. 1871, p. 7.

⁴⁰¹ Surveyor's Report for the Pavilion Committee as published in the *Brighton Gazette*, 4th May 1871, p. 2.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*

⁴⁰³ Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 1 and pp. 6-7. Drawing on the ideas of Foucault, Bennett suggests that pioneering nineteenth century museums provided universal spaces in which rationally

funds, limited space and amateurism precluded the complex from functioning efficiently as an ‘economy of cultural power’ to use Tony Bennett’s phrase.⁴⁰⁴ However, the grand design of the building in the style of the Pavilion and its situation on the palace estate presented a compelling visual symbol of the power of the ruling elite, evoking both a sense of historical continuity and improvement as aristocratic patronage and splendour seemed to merge seamlessly with middle class money and civic self-confidence.



Fig. 7. Indicative design for new Picture Gallery by Philip Lockwood, Borough Surveyor, c. 1871, *Brighton Museums website*

Although the construction of the splendid new premises had been collectively paid for out of the public purse, almost every physical object in the building on display at the opening ceremony in September 1873 was individually provided from donations, bequests or loans from the local bourgeoisie. The thousands of books in the reference library, the specimens

ordered and exemplified narratives of human development were made freely available to the ‘people’ for self-education and improvement and helped secure and sanctify the power of the ruling class.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p. 23.

allotted to rooms labelled Geology, Mineralogy, Zoology, and Botany, the eclectic range of artefacts and antiquities in Archaeology and Ethnology, the multifarious collections of pottery, china, objects of vertu, domestic products and foodstuffs, and the two hundred or so pictures exhibited in the gallery and the lecture room – all were gifted or loaned from private households and were the product of the surplus capital of the bourgeoisie of the town.⁴⁰⁵

Henry Willett, whose fossil collection was an important contribution in the making of the first Brighton museum in 1861 was one of the leading benefactors in 1873 with further donations of fossils, ceramics, paintings, and antiquities including instruments of torture.⁴⁰⁶ Henry Hill had solicited the loan of over 130 pictures from his friend and Brighton resident the magnate William Webster which formed the main attraction in the picture gallery exhibition which had opened in January 1873.⁴⁰⁷ Willett and Hill were members of the town elite who had provided and organised the cornucopia of objects in the ‘free library, museum and picture gallery’ which in their totality within an imposing single building acted as markers of progress and enlightenment. The rise to power of the middle class in Brighton as elsewhere in Britain was presented not as the triumph of economics, profit, and self-interest, but as the victory of intellect, morality and collective class endeavour.

In Autumn 1872 prior to the official public opening in the following year, a system of governance for the new facilities was drawn up.⁴⁰⁸ The Pavilion Committee proposed that three separate sub-committees accountable to itself should be formed to manage the library, museum and picture gallery ‘departments’ as they were termed.⁴⁰⁹ Pavilion Committee members drew up a list of ‘gentlemen of public spirit’ with acknowledged expertise, interests

⁴⁰⁵ *Brighton Herald*, 13th Sept. 1873, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷ ‘Opening of the New Picture Gallery’ in *Brighton Herald*, Sat. 25th Jan. 1873, p. 3, and a full account of all the works exhibited is given in the catalogue entitled *Brighton Free Library and Museum, Picture Gallery, Royal Pavilion 1873* (Brighton: Curtis Bros. & Towner Printers, 1873), nos. 1-133.

⁴⁰⁸ Copy of the Report of the Pavilion Committee, 23rd Sept. 1872, approved by the Town Council 2nd Oct. 1872 in *Royal Pavilion Library Sub Committee Minutes, 1872-1880*, pp. 6-7, BMO.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

and free time who would be responsible for the acquisition and arrangement of 'works and objects'.⁴¹⁰ The Town Council approved these proposals and finalised the provisional membership of the sub-committees which included Willett and Hill.⁴¹¹ There were no female members of the sub-committees despite the fact that contributions of objects and voluntary support often came from women. And there appear to have been no members of the working class or even the lower middle class on any of the sub-committees.⁴¹² The stated universalist aspirations which the bourgeoisie had for culture and civic amenity in terms of free access and self-improvement for the 'people' or the 'public' were at odds with the exclusively middle class and male complexion of the governance structure for the library, museum and gallery. Joyce has argued that institutions such as the library developed new meanings of 'public' which 'were no longer linked to private effort or the market which had shaped previous notions'.⁴¹³ But this does not square with the patriarchal governance structure of Brighton's 'free library, museum, and picture gallery' in 1873 with its dependence on 'gentlemen of public spirit' and cultural donations from private individuals.

At a time when art history, curating and public sector administration were in their infancy as professional practices, the men who made up the membership of the three sub-committees up to 1914 were essentially unpaid and untrained amateurs. The majority had professional occupations or qualifications as teachers, artists, doctors, solicitors, clergymen and were accompanied by a minority of rich businessmen or rentiers.⁴¹⁴ Most of these men in their leisure time were antiquarians, amateur scientists, collectors, hobbyists and often members of local and national learned societies, what we might call gentleman scholars.⁴¹⁵ Their credentials were wealth, leisure-time, education and specialist enthusiasms. Henry Willett,

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 5.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 6-7.

⁴¹² Annual Reports of the Library, Museum and Fine Arts Sub-Committees, 1875-1914, in *Brighton Public Library and Royal Pavilion Annual Reports*, BHSB027.4BRI.

⁴¹³ Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, p. 129.

⁴¹⁴ Appendix 1. *BMCSS: v. Leading Citizens 1850-1880*.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the town's foremost collector was invited to join both the Museum and the Fine Arts Committee in 1872.⁴¹⁶ He remained a member of the Museum Sub-committee for at least 30 years before his passing in 1905, often acting as chairman of the committee.⁴¹⁷ Willett was also chair of the Fine Arts Sub-Committee (FASC) between 1872 and 1874. Henry Hill, who had become a town councillor in 1868, the owner of a recognised collection of modern British and continental art, was invited to join the FASC in 1872.⁴¹⁸ He was chairman of the committee from 1875 until his resignation in 1880.⁴¹⁹ In the chapters which follow Willett and Hill and their collections will be analysed in the context of the civic roles that these two men played as cultural philanthropists and as influential members of these new sub-committees charged with managing the new museum and gallery.

In the 1870s and 1880s there was only one full-time professional manager responsible for the whole institution who combined the role of curator and librarian with limited administrative assistance.⁴²⁰ It was only in 1888 in response to plans to expand the library to include a lending library alongside the reading room and reference library that a separate head librarian post was created to function alongside the curator, who continued to hold responsibilities for the museum and gallery.⁴²¹ Acquisitions policies for purchases were largely unknown in municipal museums in the nineteenth century, and purchases accounted for a smaller proportion of acquisitions than donations.⁴²² Brighton Museum depended entirely on gifts and loans from private individuals and occasionally from other public institutions, with the Council paying wages and on-costs.⁴²³ Tensions could arise between the full-time paid curator and his

⁴¹⁶ Report of the Pavilion Committee, 23rd Sept. 1872, BMO.

⁴¹⁷ Minutes of Museum Sub-Committee, 21st Feb. 1902, p. 41, in *Brighton Library, Museum and Fine Arts Sub-Committee Reports 1896-1912*, BH600075/76/77, show that Henry Willett was chairman of the meeting.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁹ Annual Reports for the FASC 1875-1880, BHSB027.4BRI.

⁴²⁰ Annual Reports for the Library, Museum and Fine Arts Sub-Committees 1875-1889, BHSB027.4BRI.

⁴²¹ Minutes of the Pavilion Committee, 14th May, 1888, vol. 16, p. 244, PC/RP.

⁴²² Hill, *Culture and Class*, pp. 83-4.

⁴²³ Annual Reports for the Library, Museum and Fine Arts Sub-Committees 1875-1914, BHSB027.4BRI.

administrative assistants, and sub-committee members. The *Brighton Gazette* reported that influential members of the Museum Sub-committee resigned in 1874 because of a lack of respect from a certain official 'who apparently regards them as subordinates'.⁴²⁴

In 1891 the Town Council took the decision to expand the 'free library, museum, and picture gallery' and also purchase the Booth Museums and its ornithological collections to become part of Brighton Museum.⁴²⁵ As ever there were debates and procrastinations in the corporation over the scope and costs of building a much larger amenity.⁴²⁶ But in November 1902, Mayor J. E. Stafford opened an expanded 'Palace of Science, Art and Literature'.⁴²⁷ The amount of space in the facility, which retained its oriental character, was increased from c. 15,000 to c. 49,000 square feet and included a new library, a second picture gallery for a permanent collection, and additional museum rooms, at a cost of £41,000.⁴²⁸ This was considerably more than the £6,000 spent by 1873 to carry out the original Eastern Court conversion of stables and coach-houses, and vastly more than the few hundred pounds spent to make good nine rooms on the upper floor of the Royal Pavilion for the first museum and gallery which had opened in 1861. What were the factors which forced the hand of the Town Council and persuaded them that a bigger and improved institution was needed in Brighton? With respect to the library, the answer is simple. The new Victoria Lending Library which opened in 1889 resulted in an increase in demand which soon outstripped the available space to accommodate books and readers.⁴²⁹ The success of the Free Library, however, was in marked contrast to the Museum and Picture Gallery, which experienced a decline in popular

⁴²⁴ 'The Brighton Museum' *Brighton Gazette*, 25th April, p. 5.

⁴²⁵ 'The Pavilion Committee and Their New Powers', *Brighton Gazette*, 31st Oct. 1831, p. 8.

⁴²⁶ 'The New library', *Brighton Gazette*, 6th Nov. 1902, p. 8. In this editorial the paper refers to the 'great effort to bring the Council to consent to some of the expenditure involved'.

⁴²⁷ 'The New Library', *Brighton Gazette*, 6th Nov. 1902, p. 8.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁹ Library Sub-Committee Annual Report, 1891, p. 8, BHSB027.4BRI.

interest in the 1880s and 1890s accompanied by sharp criticisms of the quality and rationale of these amenities, as the following explains.

Hill argues against a stark Foucauldian view that Victorian museums functioned ‘as disciplinary institutions which produced self-policing, improving citizens’.⁴³⁰ Brighton Museum in the period from the 1870s through to the 1900s bears out Hill’s analysis that local museums at this time were defined more by fragmentation, piece-meal management, and shortage of resources rather than disciplinary intent.⁴³¹ This was not surprising given that the invention of Brighton Museum was a trial-and-error project relying on donations and the energies and enthusiasm of educated and wealthy gentlemen (and occasionally women). It operated in the tradition of inspired amateurism rather than in accordance with the professional expertise of public officials, more *ancien regime* than ideological state apparatus. Through to the end of the nineteenth century Brighton Museum continued to run more on the lines of a literary or scientific society such as the Brighton Royal Literary and Scientific Association, the activities of which had been germinal in the formation of a public museum in the first place. Waterfield says that ‘These bodies played a crucial role in the development of museums in Britain’, but in Brighton, the antiquarian sensibility and gentleman’s club mode of organisation were influential through to the end of the century.⁴³²

One of the main features of the annual reports produced by the Museums Sub-committee was the publication of lists of benefactors with the objects that they had gifted the museum, accompanied by accounts of the on-going reorganisation of exhibits to accommodate an ever-increasing number of objects and things. For instance, the 1877 Annual Report lists 43 donors including an MP, the Secretary State for India, Henry Willett and his son Ernest, A. W. Franks of

⁴³⁰ Hill, *Culture and Class*, p. 103.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

⁴³² Waterfield, *The People’s Galleries*, p. 48.

the British Museum, and T. W. Wonfor the curator of the museum.⁴³³ Among the objects donated were Japanese swords, fir cones, foreign butterflies, African spears, an old harpsichord, the skull of an elephant, a Colorado beetle, specimens of telegraphic cables, fossils, and a single geological collection of over 2,000 species bequeathed by the late Rev. H. Cooke from Deal.⁴³⁴ The report describes the creation of a new 'India Room' to house the collection of raw products gifted by the Government of India and the re-occupation of the old museum rooms in the Royal Pavilion to create a 'supplementary Museum' to display a collection of Chinese and Japanese objects presented by the Venerable Archdeacon Gray of Canton.⁴³⁵ It notes that the Rev. H. Cooke collection 'has not been placed in the Museum partly from insufficient space in which it could be displayed'.⁴³⁶ In one sense, Brighton Museum was a mausoleum commemorating acts of middle class cultural generosity rather than an active educational resource for all classes in the community. As Adorno writes, 'Museums are like the family sepulchres of works of art'.⁴³⁷

The Annual Report for 1887 records that the Museum Sub-committee 'have been obliged to give much attention to the economising of space so as to make room, as far as possible, for the exhibition of the numerous presents to the Museum which regularly flow in'.⁴³⁸ The report describes the reorganisation of the Bird room to enable an extra table-case to be squeezed into the room and comments on the fact that Colonel Wilmer has had to abandon classifying the shell collection 'from want of time'.⁴³⁹ It is evident that there was a tension between, on the one hand, establishing a coherent and scholarly range of scientific collections, a kind of British Museum in miniature, and, on the other hand, rewarding the enthusiastic generosity of

⁴³³ Museum Sub-committee Annual Report, 13th Oct. 1877, pp. 15-17, BHSB027.4BRI.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14-15.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁷ Theodor Adorno, 'Valery Proust Museum' in *Prisms* (London: Neville Spearman, 1967), pp. 175-185 (p. 175).

⁴³⁸ Museum Sub-committee Annual Report, June 1887, p. 3, BHSB027.4BRI.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

donors by shoe-horning their gifts into the limited spaces available. Current thinking on scientific areas of knowledge and associated principles and methodologies seemed to influence the broad organisation of the Museum and its displays. This was especially evident, for example, in the systematic assembly and classification of geological specimens designed to provide an academically acceptable account of British geology.⁴⁴⁰ However, judging from the disparate nature of many of the collections and exhibits there was no consistent or coherent rationale defining the purpose and remit of Brighton museum. Whether its focus was international, national or local, scientific or educational, a place of scholarship or entertainment, or all these things at once, was not clear. For instance, in the new museum in 1873 displays badged as Archaeology and Ethnology were housed together without clear differentiation and included Roman urns, a revolver from Henry VII's time, contemporary carved paddles and war clubs from New Zealand, an Egyptian mummy, and Anglo-Saxon artefacts from a local dig in Hove.⁴⁴¹ These were a collection of curiosities reflecting the miscellaneous colonial and antiquarian appropriations of local dignitaries and enthusiasts rather than an authentic and systematic account of human and social evolution. Claire Wintle points out that in relation to ethnography the 'confused and inconsistent presentation of Brighton's holdings' continued right through to the 1920s.⁴⁴²

It is perhaps no surprise that the wealthy self-made publisher and campaigner for public libraries, Thomas Greenwood (1851-1908), in his book *Museums and Art Galleries* published in 1888, was scathing about the Brighton Museum and Library which he said lacked 'life and vitality', and the 'entire record of work at Brighton is perhaps as unsatisfactory as any town in

⁴⁴⁰ The Museums Sub-Committee Annual Report, Sept. 1875, p. 9, BHSB027.4BRI, describes the 'admirable manner in which the department of British Geology has been re-arranged, mainly by Mr and Miss Crane and Mr Shillingford, by whose labours every specimen has been re-mounted, and each formation denoted by a different coloured tablet./This plan [...] will thus enhance the value of the Museum, as an educational agent.'

⁴⁴¹ *Brighton Herald*, 13th Sept. 1873, p. 3.

⁴⁴² Claire Wintle, 'Visiting the Empire at the Provincial Museum, 1900-50', in *Curating Empire, Museums and the British Imperial Experience*, ed. by Sarah Longair and John McAleer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 37-55 (p. 44).

the country'.⁴⁴³ With 1,000 visitors a week Greenwood compared Brighton unfavourably with Blackburn which at the time had a similar population of c.100,000.⁴⁴⁴ He quotes the curator of Brighton Museum, Benjamin Lomax, as saying that 'public apathy is so difficult to overcome'.⁴⁴⁵ Greenwood criticised the quality of annual reports, the lack of practical progress in making 'constructive alterations', and declared that the museum was not achieving value for money.⁴⁴⁶ By way of conclusion he suggested that the only way that the museum will rise above 'its comatose condition' was through the adoption of the Public Libraries and Museums Acts enabling earmarked rate-funding and an accountable system of governance.⁴⁴⁷ The only positive comment Greenwood made was to say that the 'geology and archaeology of the neighbourhood are well represented (fig. 8).'⁴⁴⁸



Fig. 8. Geological Room, late 19th century or early 20th century, *My Brighton and Hove* website

If by the 1890s Brighton Museum was experiencing problems in terms of lack of space, coherence and interest, it is also true to say that fine arts in the town was in the doldrums

⁴⁴³ Thomas Greenwood, *Museums and Art Galleries* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1888), pp. 62-3.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12. Lomax's quote is taken from a survey which Greenwood had conducted to support the analysis in his book.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

following its renaissance in the 1870s. As we have seen initiatives from both artists and dignitaries to establish a flourishing arts scene in Brighton in the 1850s and 1860s had foundered by 1866. In April 1874 the *Brighton Gazette* responding to the opening of the Church Street complex, published a hard-hitting article posing the question ‘what shall we do with our picture gallery? It cannot be endured that we should have a picture gallery without pictures’.⁴⁴⁹ What was needed according to the editorial was to reinstate Fine Arts exhibitions of a high quality and to assemble a permanent collection ‘a Brighton Gallery, devoted to the exposition of Brighton Art’, thereby encouraging local art and ensuring that pictures were on display in the gallery all year round.⁴⁵⁰ The newspaper also looked forward to the construction of bigger and better premises for the School of Art which was still housed in rooms in the Pavilion at the time.⁴⁵¹

The following year, however, the *Brighton Gazette* was able to comment more approvingly on the fact that there had been exhibitions in the Picture Galleries (fig. 9) ‘for an entire year’ and that the loan exhibition in the Spring included ‘choice examples of some of the best foreign artists of the day’.⁴⁵² As we will discover, this improvement in the duration and quality of exhibitions was in part due to the initiative and energy of Henry Hill as chairman of the Fine Arts Sub-committee and the networks he was able to mobilise. Another sign of the rising profile of Brighton art exhibitions in the 1870s is that they were given more detailed coverage in the *Art Journal*, England’s premier arts periodical.⁴⁵³ For instance, in 1876 the *Art Journal* praised the quality of the town’s third annual exhibition of modern pictures and wrote ‘Through the kindness of Captain Henry Hill, whose fine collection of pictures is so well known, the exhibition committee obtained the loan of some of his finest possessions’.⁴⁵⁴ These

⁴⁴⁹ ‘Art in Brighton. The Town Picture Gallery’, *Brighton Gazette*, 11th April 1874, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵² ‘Exhibition of Paintings at the Pavilion’, *Brighton Gazette*, 3rd April 1875, p. 6.

⁴⁵³ For instance, a full column was dedicated to the new gallery’s first public show in ‘The Brighton Picture Gallery’, *Art Journal* (Nov. 1873), p. 350.

⁴⁵⁴ ‘Art Notes from the Provinces. Brighton’, *Art Journal* (Dec. 1876), p. 371.

included works by various Royal Academicians such as Frank Holl (1845-1888), Philip Morris (1833-1902), and P. F. Poole (1807-1879) and two paintings by the little known Degas.⁴⁵⁵ The success of art and design in the borough in this period was affirmed with the opening of a new building for the School of Art and Science in February 1877 in Grand Parade.⁴⁵⁶

The *Brighton Herald* reporting on the sale of Henry Hill's art collection at Christie's enacted on behalf of his widow in 1889 alluded to the problems which the art scene was facing by this time:

it was, indeed, largely, if not mainly, through his instrumentality that the Town Council were able in the earlier days of the Gallery to make the fine shows of pictures which marked a sort of high-tide in the affairs of Art in Brighton, and which has made the subsequent "declining ebb" the more noticeable.⁴⁵⁷

In the previous year, 1888, at the Town Council, Councillor William Hall actually proposed abolishing the Picture Gallery and fitting it up as a Reading and News Room for the library thus saving money in relation to the expansion of the premises to accommodate a Lending Library.⁴⁵⁸ He argued that 'the Picture Gallery was a gigantic failure.'⁴⁵⁹ Hall's proposal was overwhelmingly defeated, but there is no doubt that interest in the fine arts was declining in the 1880s and 1890s. In 1875 166,000 people attended the loan exhibition in the Spring and in the Autumn of the same year 198,000 people attended the Second Annual Exhibition of Modern Pictures which was a sale exhibition.⁴⁶⁰ This compares with an average of 38,000 people attending exhibitions in total in each of the years 1895 and 1896.⁴⁶¹ The 5th Annual Exhibition of Modern Pictures opening in September 1878 realised £1,057 in sales.⁴⁶² This

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶ 'The Royal Visit to Brighton, Inauguration of the New School of Art and Science by the Princess Louise and Marquis of Lorne', in the *Brighton Guardian*, Wed. 7th Feb. 1877, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁵⁷ 'Dispersal of Captain Hill's Collection of Pictures', *Brighton Herald*, 1st June 1889, p. 3.

⁴⁵⁸ Report on Town Council meeting, *Brighton Gazette*, 21st April 1888, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁰ Annual Reports of the FASC, Sept. 1875, p. 14, and Oct., 1876, p. 14, BHSB027.4BRI.

⁴⁶¹ Annual Reports of the FASC for the Years 1895 and 1896, p. 6, BHSB027.4BRI.

⁴⁶² Annual Report of the FASC, 1879, p. 19, BHSB027.4BRI.

compares with £66 of sales in the 1896 Spring Exhibition and £57 realised at the Spring Exhibition in 1901.⁴⁶³ It seemed that temporary exhibitions in the town were not the attraction they once were. And yet in 1900, Brighton still did not have a permanent gallery space in which to house a municipal collection, despite the fact that by this time the corporation had accumulated a large number of pictures mainly from donations, with a notable influx in the 1890s.⁴⁶⁴



Fig. 9. The Main Picture Gallery, c. 1890s, *My Brighton and Hove* website

The End of Civilisation in Brighton ?

Waterfield says that in the late Victorian period the new museums and galleries were ‘for the workers’, but in Brighton the evidence seems to suggest that after the 1870s there was dwindling interest and involvement in these institutions by the town’s proletariat.⁴⁶⁵ The new reconstructed ‘free library, museum and picture gallery’ opened by Mayor Strafford in 1902 with its threefold increase in size therefore represented in part an attempt to revitalise

⁴⁶³ Minutes of FASC Feb. 1897, p. 49, and Feb. 1902, p. 44, reporting on exhibitions in the previous years, BH600075/76/77.

⁴⁶⁴ Brighton Museum Stock Book of Pictures, BMO.

⁴⁶⁵ Waterfield, *The People’s Galleries*, p. 139.

Brighton's 'Palace of Science, Art and Literature' where since the 1870s only the Library had proved to be an unequivocal success.⁴⁶⁶ The reflections that the Mayor made in his opening ceremony speech recapitulated ideas which had been used by liberal reformers and municipal leaders for more than fifty years to justify publicly funded cultural institutions in terms of enlightenment, leisure, community, progress, and patriotism. He congratulated those who had 'laboured for years to make each section of the institution worthy of the town and a source of education and pleasure to the inhabitants'.⁴⁶⁷ He emphasised that the facility was for the whole community of Brighton, expressing the hope that 'the Library will be found easily accessible to all classes of readers', that the Museum will 'afford instruction and pleasure to students, and to all those who have leisure', and that the Picture Galleries 'will increase in all classes the love for everything that is beautiful'.⁴⁶⁸ He appealed to his audience's sense of local pride, 'Well, ladies and gentlemen, this valuable institution belongs in every sense to the people of Brighton – (applause); it has been purchased and is maintained by the people of Brighton through the rating authority of the borough'.⁴⁶⁹ Civic patriotism was linked in his speech to patriotic duty at the national and imperial levels, 'The foundation of libraries, museums, and art galleries is one among many features of the modern desire for progress. Upon every citizen of England there rests the great responsibility of maintaining our position in the world'.⁴⁷⁰

However, the ideological and class orientation of Mayor Strafford's rousing rhetoric for a predominantly middle class audience was revealed in the tenor of his references to libraries and museums as 'a power to improve very considerably the condition of our working population both mentally and physically [...] in competition with the public-houses of the

⁴⁶⁶ 'The New Library', *Brighton Gazette*, 6th Nov. 1902, p. 4.

⁴⁶⁷ 'Brighton's New Library/Opening Ceremony: Yesterday/A Brilliant Function', *Brighton Gazette*, 6th Nov. 1902, p. 8.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

country'.⁴⁷¹ These words betray the persistence of assumptions of hierarchal entitlement and moral superiority – 'liberal paternalism' – which underpinned universalist talk of 'the people of Brighton' or 'every citizen of England'. In this respect, it should be noted that Mayor Strafford in his speech paid tribute to Henry Willett who, not uncoincidentally in that same year, had donated his collection of English pottery and porcelain to Brighton Museum.⁴⁷² As part of this deference-laced tribute the Mayor read out in full the letter from Willett making the offer in which the Liberal brewing magnate claimed 'It is now many years since I was permitted to found the Brighton Museum by the gift of my collection of chalk fossils' rather overlooking the role of Cordy Burrows.⁴⁷³ In the following year, 1903, Willett donated a portion of his art collection to the town.⁴⁷⁴ Incidentally, at the special loan art exhibition which had been organised to coincide with the opening of the institution in 1902 not only were many of the pictures on display which Willett was later to gift to the council, but Herbert Trist, the only son of Harriet and John Trist, loaned out a number of pictures from the art collection he had inherited from his parents.⁴⁷⁵ The only other occasion when the Trists had loaned works to public exhibitions in the town was in 1884.⁴⁷⁶ This is a reminder that for some members of the wealthy upper middle class elite who bought into fine art collections, the satisfactions and meanings were more private and domestic than civic or political.

As evidence of the success of liberalism and its cultural engagement with the working class, Jordanna Bailkin points out that on 10th April 1876 20,000 workers and artisans in London marched to the British Museum and National Gallery to demonstrate in favour of Sunday

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁴ The minutes of FASC, 16th Sept. 1903, p. 2, BH600075/76/77, indicate that the donated collection was by then hung in the 'Willett Pottery Room'.

⁴⁷⁵ *County Borough of Brighton, Public Art Galleries, Catalogue (With Descriptive Notes and Indexes) of Loan Collection of Paintings in Oil and Water Colours* (Brighton: King, Thorne & Stace, 1902), nos. 7 and 93.

⁴⁷⁶ *The Brighton Art Loan Exhibition, 1884, Official Catalogue* (Towner and Curtis: Brighton, 1884)

opening of all art institutions.⁴⁷⁷ This was the decade in which, as already noted, in Brighton in 1875 more than 350,000 people attended the two art exhibitions organised by Henry Hill. There was clearly a moment when, galleries and museums captured the popular imagination. However, it is apparent that the expansion and refurbishment of the library, museum and gallery in 1902 did not arrest the continuing decline in numbers and interest which had been apparent since the 1880s. Visitor numbers in provincial museums and galleries across the country were in general decline in the Edwardian period, and Brighton was no exception this.⁴⁷⁸ The fact that the working class and the general public turned to football, cinema, music hall, home entertainments, and labour and trade union politics,⁴⁷⁹ or continued to inhabit the public houses suggests that the original moral mission to deploy culture ‘to improve the social system, and to render the artisan and the labourer sober and industrious, cheerful and intellectual’ had failed.⁴⁸⁰ Bailkin writes of ‘the exhaustion of Victorian ideals of art and moral redemption’ by the end of the century.⁴⁸¹

However, in Brighton there was always something of a hollow ring about the ameliorative claims which liberal reformers and dignitaries made about the social and moral benefits of culture for the working class as embodied in the ‘free library, museum and picture gallery’. As a close reading of Mayor Strafford’s speech in 1902 delivered to a middle class audience indicates, this amenity was never really about creating a democratic municipal community of educated and empowered citizens. Rather, the institution formed as it was out of acts of so-called generosity on the part of the educated and propertied few in Brighton, served to proclaim the moral and intellectual credentials of the middle class as the legitimate inheritors of power from the aristocracy. The reconstruction of the ‘Palace of Science, Art and Literature’

⁴⁷⁷ Jordanna Bailkin, *The Culture of Property, The Crisis of Liberalism in Modern Britain* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 10.

⁴⁷⁸ Waterfield, *The People’s Galleries*, p. 301.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁰ Mr. M. Gore MP, *Hansard*, 6th March 1845 para. 391, as previously cited.

⁴⁸¹ Bailkin, p. 20.

affirmed that the middle class was not just about money, markets and cheap government. As an ideological project the 'library, museum and gallery' gifted to the people of the town and accessible to all on a free-of-charge basis, conjured up the idea of 'Brighton' as a community of equal citizens. Yet as Piketty points out economic inequality at this time was at an extremely high level.⁴⁸² Political and social power remained heavily concentrated in the hands of the 'givers', the propertied male middle class and its elite, who, by the 1900s were facing increasingly fierce challenges from both the women's suffragette and labour movements.⁴⁸³ As Habermas has argued the liberal public sphere as a universal and shared space in the nineteenth century was a hoax.⁴⁸⁴

Finally, although the wider public might have turned their backs on Brighton's 'free library, museum and picture gallery' in the years up to and after the First World War, it remained as a recreational facility in which the middle class could exercise and enjoy cultural privilege and demonstrate their distinctiveness as a class. As Eagleton asserts 'Culture is more likely to reflect social divisions than to reconcile them'.⁴⁸⁵ And Hill sums it up when she argues that the provincial museum was not just about social improvement but 'was equally part of a reorganisation of urban cultural provision which allowed the middle class to demonstrate authority, stamp their own values onto culture, and provide suitable leisure for themselves'.⁴⁸⁶ The chapter which follows returns us to the 1840s, when William Coningham emerged as a Radical spokesman for middle class values campaigning for the public provision of modern cultural facilities for the people, bolstered, ironically, by a collection of old master paintings.

⁴⁸² Piketty, p. 10.

⁴⁸³ Gunn and Vernon, 'Introduction' in *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity*, pp. 1-18 (p. 10).

⁴⁸⁴ J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 144.

⁴⁸⁵ Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God*, p. 122.

⁴⁸⁶ Hill, *Culture and Class*, pp. 36-7.

**CHAPTER 2. WILLIAM CONINGHAM: CONNOISSEUR, RADICAL POLITICIAN AND A COLLECTOR
OF CONTRADICTIONS**

**The British Institution Exhibition of ‘Ancient Masters’ June 1844: Coningham Makes his
Debut**

The historian Nick Prior describes the British Institution founded in 1806, as ‘an exclusive gentlemen’s club of self-financing patrons and aristocratic collectors’.⁴⁸⁷ William Coningham first came to public prominence as an art collector in June 1844 when he exhibited four paintings at the British Institution exhibition of ‘ancient masters’ in Pall Mall.⁴⁸⁸ The *Morning Post* reported that 171 works were on display and that to ‘form this collection, the galleries of sixty-six of the nobility and gentry have contributed some of their choicest gems’.⁴⁸⁹ The four paintings which Coningham loaned the exhibition were listed in the catalogue as No. 5, *Our Saviour in the Garden of Gethsemane* by Raphael, No. 12 (fig. 10), *Cleopatra* by Sebastiano del Piombo, and Nos. 14 and 20 a pendant of pictures each entitled *Seapiece*, by Ruysdael.⁴⁹⁰ Among the other ‘Proprietors’ who loaned out their cultural properties to the British Institution and whose works were hung adjacent to those of Coningham were Viscount Palmerston M.P., the Earl of Derby, K.G., Earl of Dartmouth, The Lady Dover, Right Honourable Lord Francis Egerton, M. P., the Duke of Wellington, K. G., the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel, Bart., M. P., Baron Rothschild, and the Earl of Zetland.⁴⁹¹ The attributed artists whose canvases came from the collections of this exclusive company of collectors and were situated alongside those of Coningham included Titian, Tintoretto, Annibale Carracci, Rembrandt, Hobbema, and Poussin.⁴⁹² Bourdieu tells us that ‘the work of art is the

⁴⁸⁷ Prior, p. 77.

⁴⁸⁸ *British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom [...] Catalogue of Pictures by Italian, Spanish, Flemish, Dutch, French, and Deceased English Masters with which the Proprietors Have Favoured the Institution, June 1844* (London: William Nicol, 1844).

⁴⁸⁹ ‘The British Institution’ in the *Morning Post*, Tues. 11th June 1844, p. 5.

⁴⁹⁰ *British Institution, Catalogue of Pictures, June 1844*, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 7-15.

objectification of a relationship of distinction'.⁴⁹³ It appears that Coningham's purchases and their display at the British Institution had associated the young man, not yet 30 years of age, with the wealth, status, and tastes of an aristocratic elite whose authority was signified by their ownership of some of the most precious of cultural objects ascribing distinction to owners – old master paintings.



Fig. 10. Lo Spagna (probably) *The Agony in the Garden* 1500-5 (60cm x 67cm), National Gallery, London

Interestingly, *The Atlas* newspaper, while singling out Coningham's painting by Raphael struck a more ambivalent note:

The crack picture of the exhibition is an alleged Raphael, No. 5, "Our Saviour in the Garden of Gethsemane", the property of W. Coningham, Esq. To possess a genuine Raphael is to be illustrious for life. We hope that some antiquary will prove the genuineness of this one, so that its possessor may awake some morning, like Byron, and find himself famous. It is very hard, very staring, and very primitive, and looks like Beato Angelica or Perugino; but as the day was dull, we must take another look at it before pronouncing a decided opinion upon its merits.⁴⁹⁴

In fact, this painting is now in the National Gallery entitled *The Agony in the Garden* and is attributed on the basis of probability to the artist Lo Spagna who was an imitator of Perugino

⁴⁹³ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 224.

⁴⁹⁴ 'British Institution', in *The Atlas*, 29th June 1844, p. 12.

and Raphael.⁴⁹⁵ By 1847 Coningham's own *genuineness* as a putative member of the elite was in doubt as he threw himself into the role of anti-establishment agitator and champion of the people reflected both in fierce attacks on the management of the National Gallery and the privileges of the Royal Academy and in his unsuccessful candidature as a Radical MP for Brighton in that same year. In a letter to the *Times* in January 1847, Coningham wrote, 'Unless the government introduce a stringent reform, not only in the administration of the National Gallery, but in that also of the Royal Academy, the public will have just cause for complaint'.⁴⁹⁶ In July, the *Express* newspaper reporting the Brighton election hustings wrote, 'The crowd seemed almost frantic at the defeat of Mr. Coningham, and vented their rage by stoning Lord A. Hervey's band from the ground, destroying Capt. Pechell's banners, and even throwing stones at the gallant captain himself'.⁴⁹⁷

Some fifteen years later in January 1862, when Coningham was a Liberal MP for Brighton (fig. 11) with his art collection long since disposed of, Karl Marx (1818-1883) writing for the German newspaper *Die Presse*, gave an account of a working-class anti-war meeting in Brighton convened in response to tensions between the British and Federal government during the American Civil War.⁴⁹⁸ Marx quotes Coningham's speech at length in which the MP argued passionately against military reprisals against the North and giving official recognition to the slave states of the Confederate South, 'I appeal to the workers of England, who have the greatest interest in the preservation of peace, to raise their voices and, if necessary, their

⁴⁹⁵ Probably by Lo Spagna, *The Agony in the Garden*, online catalogue, National Gallery, <<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/probably-by-lo-spagna-the-agony-in-the-garden>> [accessed May 2021].

⁴⁹⁶ William Coningham (WC) to the Editor, *The Times*, 25th Jan 1847, iss. 19455, p. 5.

⁴⁹⁷ 'Brighton', *Express* (London), 31st July 1847, p. 2. Lord Hervey (Peelite) and Captain Pechell (Whig) were the successful candidates.

⁴⁹⁸ Karl Marx, 'A Pro American Meeting' in *Die Presse* No. 5, 5th Jan. 1862, in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Articles on Britain* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), pp. 322-324. In an event known as the Trent incident 1861-62 during the American Civil War two slave-supporting Confederate commissioners on their way to Britain, Mason and Slidell, were taken forcibly from the British steamer *Trent* by a Union warship, triggering demands for redress from sections of the British ruling class and associated newspapers, Chris Cook and John Stevenson, *The Longman Handbook of Modern British History 1714-1980* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1983), p. 18.

hands to prevent such a serious crime. (Loud applause)'.⁴⁹⁹ It is not at first glance easy to reconcile Coningham's radical and populist views in 1862, which were endorsed by Marx, with the would-be connoisseur of old masters exhibiting alongside earls, dukes, barons and right honourables at the British Institution in Pall Mall in 1844. There is also a certain irony in the fact that Coningham's own wealth which had financed his art collection and election campaigns had been amassed on the back of enslaved labour in the family sugar plantation on the island of St. Vincent in the West Indies before its formal abolition in 1833.⁵⁰⁰

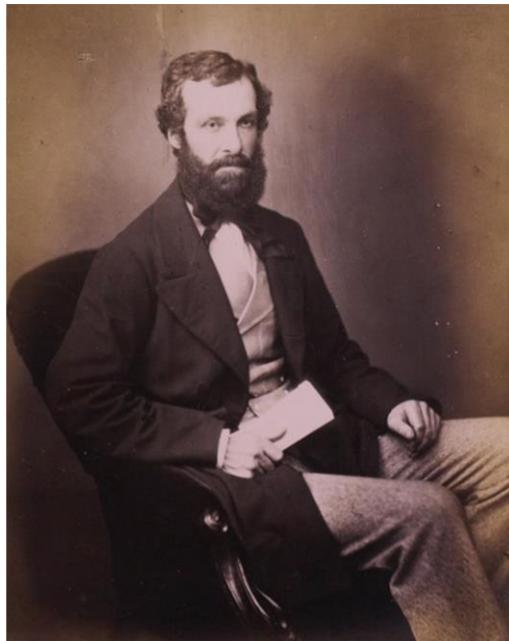


Fig. 11. William Coningham, MP, Parliamentary archives, PHO 3/3/165

This collection of events provides a glimpse of the contradictions reflected in the changing interests and involvements of Coningham across his lifetime, and the different identities he lived out in various phases of his public life. This chapter aims to analyse the art collecting interests of Coningham in the context of the totality of his wealth, domestic circumstances, and his political and civic involvements across the course of his lifetime, rather than simply

⁴⁹⁹ Marx, 'A Pro American Meeting', *Die Presse*, p. 323.

⁵⁰⁰ 'Rev. Robert Coningham', LBS/UCL.

focusing on his art collection as a hermetic practice located within the history of connoisseurship and the genesis of the history of art as a discipline. I will examine the various roles that he performed as rentier, head of household, connoisseur, art reformer, would-be intellectual and Radical politician with a view to understanding the social forces and relationships which shaped these differing but linked identities. The wider setting for this analysis is what can be viewed as a clash in modes and styles of leadership and governance on the part of competing elites in Britain. This was in the context of ‘the rise of a wealthy middle class challenging the aristocracy’ in which competition for the control and national deployment of fine art was one of several contested arenas.⁵⁰¹ Coningham’s exhibition of old master pictures at the British Institute in 1844 and his demand for ‘stringent reform’ of the National Gallery and the Royal Academy in 1847, are indicative of the two polarities, the patrician and the liberal, the gentleman aesthete vis-à-vis the bourgeois citizen, as Carol Dunan portrays it – in tension in one and the same individual.⁵⁰²

Lifestories: A Man Without an Occupation in an ‘Inheritance Society’

William’s father, Robert Coningham (1785-1836), was the son of an Ulster merchant who attended Peterhouse, Cambridge, where he was ordained a priest in 1810 and matriculated with an M.A. degree in 1811.⁵⁰³ Although he served briefly as a curate in Cambridgeshire, he did not become a working clergyman, presumably because he had inherited a sizeable personal income which obviated the need to earn a living.⁵⁰⁴ William’s mother, Louisa Capper (1776-1840) was born in Fort St George, Madras, India, the daughter of an army officer in the East India Company.⁵⁰⁵ She was highly educated and wrote two books, *A Poetical History of England* (1810), and *An Abridgement of Locke’s “Essay Concerning Human Understanding”*

⁵⁰¹ Duncan, p. 40.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵⁰³ ‘Rev. Robert Coningham’, LBS/UCL.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁵ Mary Anne Perkins, ‘Louisa Capper’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB), published by Oxford University Press (2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/4599>> [accessed 13th Oct. 2020].

(1811) published in the year in which she married Robert Coningham.⁵⁰⁶ William was born in 1815 after a previous child John had died in infancy, and shortly after this the Coninghams adopted a boy named James Fitzjames (1813-1848), the illegitimate son of a minor diplomat Sir James Gambier.⁵⁰⁷ William became very close to James.⁵⁰⁸ James Fitzjames was later one of the commanders in charge of the fateful Franklin Expedition which set off in May 1845 with the intention of forging a North West passage through the Arctic. By August of that year, the two ships with 129 men on board which attempted this dangerous journey through the wastelands of northern Canada had disappeared without trace. William Battersby describes this event in his biography of James Fitzjames as ‘the largest single disaster in British exploration history’.⁵⁰⁹

In the 1820s, Robert Coningham and his family settled down on a country estate called Rose Hill in Hertfordshire, where he led the life of an independent and educated country gentleman.⁵¹⁰ The Coninghams had associations with the writer and intellectual Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) who in 1835 had become a friend of William’s cousin John Sterling (1806-1844) a poet, novelist, and critic.⁵¹¹ In September 1835 Thomas Carlyle’s wife Jane Welsh Carlyle (1801-1866) visited Rose Hill and described it as ‘a perfect Paradise of a place, peopled as every Paradise ought to be with Angels. There I drank warm milk, and ate new eggs, and bathed in pure air, and rejoiced in cheerful countenances, and was as happy as the day was long’.⁵¹² Apart from spending two years away at Eton College, William was home tutored by his mother, alongside his foster brother James. In 1833 he attended Trinity College Cambridge but did not matriculate and in 1834 he joined the 1st Royal Dragoons but bought himself out in

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁷ William Battersby, *The Mystery Man of the Franklin Expedition* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010), p. 29.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁹ Battersby, pp. 15-17, and p. 14.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵¹¹ Thomas Carlyle to Margaret A. Carlyle, 4th June 1835, CLO/DUP, [accessed 13th Oct. 2020].

⁵¹² Jane Carlyle to Susan Hunter, 20th Sept. 1835, CLO/DUP, [accessed 13th Oct. 2020].

1836.⁵¹³ Battersby comments that William's 'health and morale were always fragile' resulting in recuperative visits to places like Cheltenham, Switzerland and Boulogne.⁵¹⁴

In a letter written in October 1839 Thomas Carlyle refers to Coningham for the first time in relation to a visit he was about to make to Brighton with Carlyle's brother Jack, commenting a little sourly that 'C. is rich enough'.⁵¹⁵ In 1840 William became an even richer man after his mother died and he came into his inheritance.⁵¹⁶ This meant that like his father he did not have to work to earn his living, something which proved to be a blessing and a burden. His wealth came from two main sources. As Coningham himself said in a speech to the electors of Westminster in 1852 where he was standing as a Radical candidate, 'A large portion of his property was in the Three per Cents; he was also a West Indian proprietor, but had always been for free trade'.⁵¹⁷ The figure of the West Indian proprietor would have been familiar to readers of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* published in 1813 in the character of Sir Thomas Bertram who owns a slave plantation in Antigua.⁵¹⁸ The economist Thomas Piketty points out that 'In the classic novels of the nineteenth century, wealth is everywhere, and no matter how large or small the capital, or who owns it, it generally takes two forms: land or government bonds'.⁵¹⁹

Both of Coningham's sources of funding were indirectly or directly derived from the family interest in the Colonarie Vale sugar plantation on the island of St Vincent in the West Indies, which until abolition in 1833 had been worked by enslaved workers.⁵²⁰ The other main inheritors of the sugar plantation wealth were his two cousins, John Sterling and his brother

⁵¹³ Haskell, *William Coningham*, p. 676.

⁵¹⁴ Battersby, p. 35.

⁵¹⁵ Thomas Carlyle to Margaret A. Carlyle, 24th Oct. 1839, CLO/DUP [accessed 14th Oct. 2020].

⁵¹⁶ 'Rev. Robert Coningham', LBS/UCL.

⁵¹⁷ Report on Coningham election speech, *Evening Mail* Fri 2nd July 1852, p. 5. 'Three per Cents' refer to the annual interest rates on investments in government bonds at the time.

⁵¹⁸ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. by G. B. Stern (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1972), p. 22.

⁵¹⁹ Piketty, p. 142.

⁵²⁰ 'St Vincent 459 (Colonarie Vale)', LBS/UCL, <<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/claim/view/26643>> [accessed 12th Oct. 2020].

Anthony.⁵²¹ Thomas Carlyle in his biography of John Sterling first published in 1851 speculated that the 'large property in the West Indies, - a valuable Sugar-estate' was 'worth some ten thousand pounds a year to the parties interested', these 'parties' being the aforesaid members of the Coningham family.⁵²² The sum of £10,000 per year in today's values would be equivalent to nearly £1 million per annum today.⁵²³ This amount, assuming Carlyle's estimate was correct, was divided three ways between William Coningham and his two cousins. An income of more than £3000 a year for each of the cousins compares with the average annual wage at the time of £40 to £50.⁵²⁴ In addition to the annual income, each of the three would have inherited their share of a lump sum of £8,151 19s 7d paid as compensation for the loss of the property of 305 enslaved workers as enumerated on 1st August 1834.⁵²⁵ Piketty's judgement that nineteenth century Britain was an 'inheritance society' with 'a very high concentration of wealth and a significant persistence of large fortunes from generation to generation' is reflected in the good fortune of the inheritors of the Colonarie Vale plantation.⁵²⁶

In 1840, the year in which his mother died, he inherited his fortune, William married Elizabeth Meyrick, the daughter of a vicar and by 1843 they had two children.⁵²⁷ Coningham's material wealth was reflected in a number of forms of 'conspicuous' or 'wasteful' expenditures to use Veblen's terms.⁵²⁸ By Autumn 1841 the Coninghams had acquired a large residence at 42 Porchester Terrace,⁵²⁹ in the expanding district of Bayswater in London which at the time edged on to open fields.⁵³⁰ Writing to his foster brother in the following year, Coningham

⁵²¹ 'Rev. Robert Coningham', LBS/UCL.

⁵²² Thomas Carlyle, *The Life of John Sterling*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1851), p. 99.

⁵²³ Retail price index calculation, *MeasuringWorth.com*.

⁵²⁴ Piketty, p. 134.

⁵²⁵ 'St Vincent 459 (Colonarie Vale)', LBS/UCL.

⁵²⁶ Piketty, p. 443.

⁵²⁷ Battersby, p. 151.

⁵²⁸ Veblen, p. 71.

⁵²⁹ Letter WC to James Fitzjames, 30th October 1841, from 42, Porchester Terrace, Bayswater, NMM/CJF, MRF/89.

⁵³⁰ T F T Baker, Diane K Bolton and Patricia E C Croot, 'Paddington: Bayswater', in *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 9, Hampstead, Paddington*, ed. C R Elrington (London, 1989), pp. 204-212. *British History Online* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol9/pp204-212>> [accessed 16 October 2020].

referred to Bayswater as ‘once a little village (suburban) but now quite connected with London by a long road of large houses built of stone [?] and in the newest fashion’.⁵³¹ By the end of 1846 he had acquired a second home at 26, Sussex Square in Kemp Town which also backed on to open countryside with views across the English Channel.⁵³² The seaside house included 13 bed and dressing rooms, two drawing rooms, a library, a dinner room, and a four-stall stable with spaces for carriages.⁵³³ It was situated in Brighton’s most exclusive residential location.⁵³⁴ The 1851 census records that there were 11 servants working at the house in Sussex Square including a French governess and a coachman.⁵³⁵ According to F. M. L. Thompson, the average number of servants in a wealthy upper middle class household at the time was around 3 or 4.⁵³⁶ William and Elizabeth spent significant periods of time in the 1840s travelling Europe on their own version of the Grand Tour. Coningham’s letters to the artist John Linnell (1792-1882) record visits to Paris, Florence, Rome, Dresden, Prague, Munich, and Vienna.⁵³⁷ Another outlet for an unemployed man with large amounts of cash to spare was to buy art and assemble his own collection. In the same letter to Fitzjames from Bayswater, he continues, ‘I have a world of things to show you, a picture gallery and numerous finds [?] which interest me and I think will amuse you when [you] are here’.⁵³⁸ He also displayed his pictures at 26, Sussex Square. He wrote to Linnell in December 1846, ‘The weather is cold but clear and beautiful and the sea as calm as a mill pond. My pictures, are just arrived, and in a few days we shall look like home again’.⁵³⁹ He was able to afford to hire pews in a local Anglican church in Kemp Town for the use of his wife, children and servants, although perhaps not for himself,

⁵³¹ Letter WC to Fitzjames, 8th Dec. 1842, NMM/CJF.

⁵³² Letter WC to John Linnell 15th Dec. 1846, written from 26, Sussex Square in Brighton, John Linnell Archive, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, MS 554-645 (FM/JLA).

⁵³³ Advert offering 26, Sussex Square to be let or sold on an unfurnished basis in *Brighton Gazette*, 29th Aug. 1844, p. 2.

⁵³⁴ Collis, p. 168.

⁵³⁵ 1851 Census, 26, Sussex Square, Brighton, <<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC%2F1851%2F0006156178>> [14th Aug 2021].

⁵³⁶ F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, p. 173.

⁵³⁷ Letters WC to Linnell: 2nd October 1843, 1st Dec. 1845, 12th Jan. 1846, FM/JLA.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁹ Letters WC to Linnell: 15th Dec. 1846, 26, Sussex Square, FM/JLA.

there was a suspicion that he had atheist sympathies.⁵⁴⁰ Finally, and not surprisingly he was able to afford to send his son William to Eton and Trinity Hall College, Cambridge where, unlike his father, he completed his degree in 1864.⁵⁴¹

William Coningham's entry in the occupation column in census returns, is given as 'Land and Fundholder' or just 'Fundholder', apart from 1861 when the entry reads 'MP for Brighton'.⁵⁴² In other words he was a rich rentier without a paid occupation. Macleod defines being a member of the middle class as someone of wealth whose father, 'was not born into the aristocracy or landed gentry and actively earned an income as opposed to living off the fruits of an inheritance.'⁵⁴³ On the basis of this definition and given his great wealth, we might designate Coningham as a member of the upper class. However, in the light of the fact that he was the son of a member of the clergy, that his money was mercantile rather than agricultural, that unlike Sir Thomas Bertram he did not own an English landed estate, and that his beliefs combined ideas from political economy and liberalism, he does not fit in any simple way into the landed or upper class categories. In a speech in Aberdeen in 1851 sharing a platform with the Chartist Feargus O'Connor, Coningham rejected the idea that the middle classes were the enemies of the working classes 'On behalf of the middle classes of Brighton he was there to deny that assertion'.⁵⁴⁴ It seems more appropriate to position him as a member of the middle class, albeit of the richest echelons of the upper middle class. To give a further example of his

⁵⁴⁰ 'Meeting of Mr Coningham and Friends' in *Brighton Gazette*, March 1857, p.7. At this meeting Coningham defended himself against accusations of irreligion by arguing that this was a private matter 'on which he considered himself responsible only to his Maker'.

⁵⁴¹ Entry for 'William John Capper Coningham' in *A Cambridge Alumni Database*, <venn.lib.cam.ac.uk>, [accessed 11th Oct. 2020].

⁵⁴² 1841 Census for Cumberland Terrace, St Pancras London, <<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC%2F1841%2F0007370116>>; 1851 Census, 26, Sussex Square, Brighton; 1861 Census, Brighton, <<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC%2F1861%2F0003843150>>; 1881 Census for 6, Lewes Crescent Brighton, <<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC%2F1881%2F0005211088>> [all accessed 14th Aug 2021].

⁵⁴³ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 1.

⁵⁴⁴ Coningham speech reported in 'Parliamentary and Financial Reform' in *Aberdeen Herald and General Advertiser*, 20th Oct. 1849, p. 3.

contradictory situation, in December 1847 he spoke at a local anti-church rate meeting in Brighton town hall identifying with the cause of middle class Nonconformism against the Tory Anglican establishment.⁵⁴⁵ The following month he attended one of the soirées of a pillar of this Tory Anglican establishment, the Duke of Devonshire.⁵⁴⁶

Thomas Carlyle commented on Coningham in a letter to his brother in July 1840, 'William Cunningham [sic] was here the other night, a man overflowing with annual cash: but not knowing what to make of himself or it'.⁵⁴⁷ There is evidence that Coningham himself viewed his unemployed status, the lack of a 'proper job' resulting from his wealthy rentier status, as a problem. In two separate letters to his foster-brother James he expresses dissatisfaction. In 1842 he writes, 'I do not see any chance of a more active and useful life than in reading, writing, and doing small services to my friends and fellow men, it is the only drawback to my perfect happiness to think how much more I might have done and ought to do'.⁵⁴⁸ In the following year writing from a residence in Brighton's Marine Parade, he wrote 'I am sorry to say I have no regular occupation, though I can't complain that time hangs on hand but I feel I ought to be a more useful member of society'.⁵⁴⁹ Veblen defines leisure as the 'non-productive consumption of time' through which a gentleman demonstrates good breeding and gentility.⁵⁵⁰ However, it seems that Coningham was not entirely happy with a life of leisure and this conception of the gentleman. A number of factors would almost certainly have contributed to the sense of *anomie* suggested in these two letters and noted by Carlyle. First, would have been the fact that the two men he was closest to at this time – his foster-brother James Fitzjames and his cousin John Sterling – did have relatively successful and useful occupations as naval officer and writer respectively. Second, was the fact that his wealth was the fortunate

⁵⁴⁵ 'Anti-Church Rate Meeting', in *Brighton Gazette*, Thurs 23rd Dec. 1847, p. 5.

⁵⁴⁶ 'Fashionable Parties', in *Brighton Gazette*, Thurs. 20th Jan. 1848, p. 5.

⁵⁴⁷ Letter, Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, Chelsea, 15th July 1840, CLO/DUP [accessed 14th Oct. 2020]. The original Irish family name had been Cunningham, see Battersby, p. 30.

⁵⁴⁸ WC to Fitzjames, sent in 1842 but without an identifiable address, NMM/CJF, MRF/89.

⁵⁴⁹ WC to Fitzjames, Marine Parade, Brighton, 1843, NMM/CJF, MRF/89.

⁵⁵⁰ Veblen, p. 38.

outcome of inheritance rather than the values of hardwork, frugality and individual enterprise described by Harold Perkin in relation to the 'triumph of the entrepreneurial ideal'.⁵⁵¹ Thirdly, his inherited income was based on accumulated surplus value acquired through the systematic exploitation of enslaved labourers on the Colonarie Vale estate in St Vincent. It is possible that Coningham's empathy with the working class and the deprived in Britain, the 'Condition of England Question' as his friend Thomas Carlyle put it,⁵⁵² was stimulated by a displaced sense of guilt about the source of his wealth. In an earlier letter to James in 1841, the year in which his inheritance came through, he wrote 'The poor are absolutely now ground down by taxation and tithes. There are thousands without work'.⁵⁵³

It is clear Coningham had his own intellectual pretensions perhaps fostered firstly by his mother and then by his relationship with his cousin John Sterling whose letters to William focusing on matters of religious belief, philosophy and education he published at his own expense in three separate editions.⁵⁵⁴ He may even have attended meetings of the Sterling Club, an intellectual circle which formed around John Sterling in 1838 and included such figures as Carlyle, Charles Eastlake, John Stuart Mill and Alfred Tennyson.⁵⁵⁵ Nicholas Draper examining the cultural legacies of absentee slave-owners points out that 'slave-owners participated in the formation of new cultural and social institutions of male sociability'.⁵⁵⁶ He explicitly references the Sterling Club.⁵⁵⁷ However, John Sterling was not entirely an absentee slave-owner. Between Spring 1831 and Summer 1832, he and his wife spent 15 months on the Colonarie Vale plantation taking direct responsibility for the management of enslaved workers

⁵⁵¹ Perkin, p. 271.

⁵⁵² Thomas Carlyle, 'Chartism', in *Thomas Carlyle: Selected Writings*, ed. by Alan Shelston (London: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 151-232 (p. 151).

⁵⁵³ WC to Fitzjames, 29th Sept. 1841, no address given, NMM/CJF.

⁵⁵⁴ Sterling, John, *Twelve Letters*, ed. by William Coningham, 2nd ed. (Brighton: Arthur Wallis, 1852). These were written mainly in the years 1840-41.

⁵⁵⁵ Carlyle, *The Life of John Sterling*, p. 208.

⁵⁵⁶ Nicholas Draper, 'Possessing People: Absentee Slave-owners within British Society,' in *Legacies of British Slave-ownership, Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain*, by Catherine Hall and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 34-77 (p. 53).

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

in the production of sugar on behalf of the Coningham and Sterling families.⁵⁵⁸ Sterling wrote from St Vincent to his mentor, the cleric Julius Hare, 'So far as I see, the Slaves here are cunning, deceitful and idle [...] They are, as a body, decidedly unfit for freedom'.⁵⁵⁹ Sterling was on the island when a hurricane struck in August 1831.⁵⁶⁰ A study of the impact of the hurricane on St Vincent points out that Carlyle's biography of Sterling fails to mention the fact that in spring 1832 Sterling was prosecuted for the mistreatment of an enslaved worker, 'An enslaved adult man named December was punished on Sterling's orders for allegedly stealing lumber, a valuable commodity post-hurricane. The penalty exacted included confinement for three days and a brutal whipping.'⁵⁶¹ The prosecution was unsuccessful but it suggests that the scholarly Sterling was not cut out for plantation management.⁵⁶² In 1849 Carlyle wrote his infamous *Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question* using a third person alter ego character to question the abolition of slavery and to suggest that servitude was the natural condition of the 'Black man'.⁵⁶³ It is not unlikely that John Sterling's letters and testimony which were the basis of Carlyle's biography published two years later informed the illustrious writer's racist disquisition.

In his political views Coningham, almost certainly influenced by Sterling, was a self-confessed Radical and as early as 1841 he considered standing for election to parliament in Evesham in Worcester.⁵⁶⁴ Two years later, he writes to James, 'I am as bad a radical as ever and as little likely to come into Parliament but I am happy and contented'.⁵⁶⁵ His Radicalism was typified by

⁵⁵⁸ Carlyle, *The Life of John Sterling*, pp. 98-111, pp. 120-1.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁵⁶¹ S. D. Smith 'Storm Hazard and Slavery: The Impact of the 1831 Great Hurricane on St Vincent', *Environment and History*, 18.1 (2012), 97-123 (p. 115), published by White Horse Press, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23250894>> [accessed 10th Oct, 2020].

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*

⁵⁶³ Thomas Carlyle, *Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question* (London: Thomas Bosworth, 1853), pp. 41-2. This was a reprint of the pamphlet which first appeared in 1849 in *Fraser's Magazine*. The title used the other 'N' word rather than the term 'Negro'.

⁵⁶⁴ Letter WC to Fitzjames, July 1841, NMM/CJF.

⁵⁶⁵ Letter WC to Fitzjames, December 1843, NMM/CJF.

the espousal of a standard utilitarian programme of political reform, free trade, civil and religious liberty, cheap government, and reform of church rates.⁵⁶⁶ And as previously noted, in the arts he advocated professionalisation of the National Gallery and ending the monopoly of the Royal Academy. He consistently showed sympathy for the plight and poverty of the working classes and disdain for the landed gentry and the aristocracy. In a hustings speech, as a Radical candidate in Westminster in the 1852 general election, he said 'The question which I have raised is whether the people of England are to be governed by aristocratic authority, or whether the democrats of England are to assert their social rights'.⁵⁶⁷ In the early 1850s he was a strong advocate of cooperative associations.⁵⁶⁸ In 1852 he was vocal in backing Brighton railway engineers and their sympathetic action in support of workers in the Amalgamated Society of Engineers fighting a lock-out by employers.⁵⁶⁹ And yet at the same time his lifestyle reflected the practices and habits of an aristocratic gentleman including membership of London clubs, directorships of companies, hunting, shooting, a love of Beethoven, balls and soirées, playing billiards, smoking cigars and of course assembling an art collection.⁵⁷⁰

Coningham's social aspirations and his accompanying anxieties are reflected in the fact that in 1842 he asked John Linnell, a society portrait painter, to paint his portrait and that of his wife.

⁵⁶⁶ Speech by WC reported in 'Elections in Sussex, Brighton', *Brighton Gazette*, 5th Aug. 1847, p. 6.

⁵⁶⁷ WC speech in 'Westminster', *Morning Chronicle*, 10th July 1852, p. 5. In this speech he also denied being 'a communist as well as an anarchist', accusations made against him by opponents.

⁵⁶⁸ WC speech reported in *Brighton Gazette* 31st July 1851, p. 5, supporting cooperative associations. See also the subsequent pamphlet, William Coningham, *The Self-organised Cooperative Association in Paris and the French Republic* (London: Palmer and Clayton, 1851).

⁵⁶⁹ For WC speech supporting railway workers see *Sussex Advertiser* 2nd March 1852, p. 6.

⁵⁷⁰ Letter WC to *Evening Mail* 28th Dec. 1849, p. 7, addressed from the Oxford and Cambridge Club; his membership of the Reform Club is referred to in *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 10th July 1852, p. 5; Coningham was re-elected as a director of the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway board as reported in the *Sun*, 9th Jan, 1857, p. 6; a short news item in the *Morning Advertiser*, 19th Jan. 1854, p. 6, refers to Coningham breaking his leg in a hunting accident on the hills outside Lewes; in a letter WC to Thomas Uwins, 14th Oct, 1848, from an address in Glasgow Coningham refers to 'a shooting party waiting for me at this moment' in National Gallery Archive (NGA), NG5/75/9; a letter from John Sterling to WC, 2nd March 1841 comments on Coningham's love of Beethoven, in Sterling, *Twelve Letters*, p. 9; the Duke of Devonshire soiree in Kemp Town already cited in *Brighton Gazette*, Thurs. 20th Jan. 1848, p. 5 and many other examples; reference to sharing cigars and playing billiards with John Linnell can be found in WC to Linnell, undated, FM/JLA, MS 615.

Both were displayed at the Royal Academy in 1843 (fig. 12).⁵⁷¹ The portrait of Coningham depicts him in an archetypal statesmanlike pose as a wise and learned man of authority and status, the texts on the table signifying his intellectual interests. The picture bears out the novelist George Eliot's comments about Coningham in a letter written in 1851 just after they had met, 'He is a fine, handsome, tall fellow with an honest expression – and a gentleman. His earnest simple talk was quite refreshing...Mr Conyngham [sic] was rather aristocratic'.⁵⁷² What is incongruous about the portrait is that he had achieved little of consequence in worldly-terms at the time the painting was made. John Linnell by this time had an impressive portfolio having painted the portraits of the likes of Sir Robert Peel, the Marquis of Lansdowne, Sir Thomas Baring and various other nobles, ambassadors, archbishops, MPs, famous writers and fellow artists such as Turner.⁵⁷³ By having his portrait painted by Linnell, Coningham perhaps wished to identify in some way with his illustrious predecessors who had been immortalised by the artist and whose likenesses had also been displayed at the Royal Academy, an organisation which he later came to deride. Coningham was even able to play the role of patron to Linnell by arranging for him to paint the portrait of Thomas Carlyle.⁵⁷⁴ This undertaking was not it seems viewed entirely favourably by the Carlyles. Carlyle's wife Jane wrote in March 1843 to her cousin Jeannie Welsh:- 'Carlyle is tomorrow—*again* going to sit for his picture—to Linnell!!! at the request of William Cunningham [sic] who is a good sort of fellow that one does not like to disoblige—but it is really an unspeakable hardship !!!'⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷¹ Alfred T. Story, *The Life of John Linnell* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1892), p. 252.

⁵⁷² George Eliot to Mr and Mrs Charles Bray and Sara Sophia Hennell, 21 Nov 1851 in Haight, Gordon S. ed., *The George Eliot Letters Vol 1. 1836-51* (New Haven: the Yale University Press, 1954), p. 375.

⁵⁷³ Story, *John Linnell*, p.252.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 303-305.

⁵⁷⁵ Letter Jane Carlyle to Jeannie Welsh 12th Mar 1843, CLO/DUP [accessed 15th Oct. 2020].

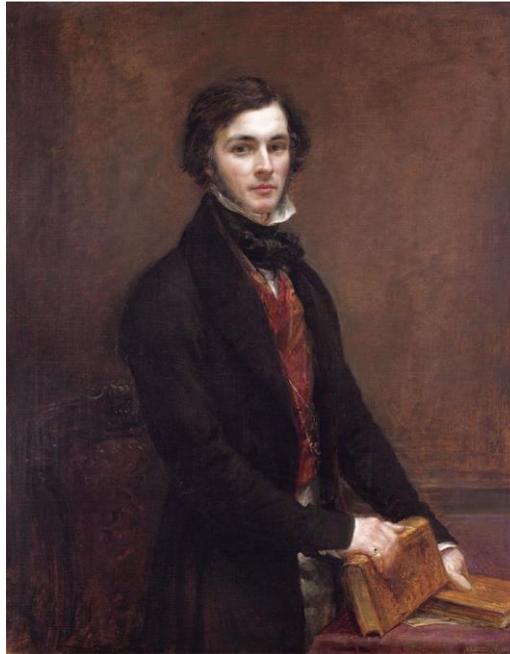


Fig. 12. John Linnell *Portrait of William Coningham* 1842 (128cm x 103cm), National Portrait Gallery, London

A Pioneering Old Master Collection in the Metropolitan Art World

When Coningham assembled his art collection in the 1840s, the middle class were becoming increasingly significant in terms of their wealth and spending power, and their political and civic influence, in rivalry with the landed establishment. This was reflected in the extraordinary expansion of art markets and the creative industries, particularly in London.⁵⁷⁶ Fletcher and Helmreich state that this burgeoning art market was ‘built on the mercantile networks of City and Empire and fuelled by a wealthy patronage class whose desire to possess art works was part of a larger culture of display’, a comment which strikes a chord in terms of the social and cultural positioning of Coningham.⁵⁷⁷ Radicals and utilitarians actively promoted the national, economic, and moral benefits of art in society, and their ‘manifesto’ for change can be found in the report of the 1835-6 Select Committee on Arts and their Connexion with

⁵⁷⁶ Mark Westgarth, “‘Florid-looking speculators in Art and Virtu’”: The London Picture Trade c.1850’, in *The Rise of the Modern Art Market*, pp. 26-42 (p. 28).

⁵⁷⁷ Pamela Fletcher and Ann Helmreich, ‘Introduction: The State of the Field’, in *The Rise of the Modern Art Market*, pp. 1-24 (p. 2).

Manufactures.⁵⁷⁸ This, among other things, prompted the formation of a government School of Design in 1837, anticipated the Museums Act 1845, paved the way for the Great Exhibition of 1851, and instituted the gradual reforms of the National Gallery and the Royal Academy which were accused of functioning as privileged, inefficient, and corrupt institutions failing in their services to art and the public.⁵⁷⁹ The fine and decorative arts played an increasingly ideological role, fashioning the myth of a shared national heritage culminating in the triumph of industrial and imperial Britain and linking the country with 'great' civilisations of the past.⁵⁸⁰ This cultural transformation was accompanied by keen debates within the political classes between reformers and conservatives over the relative functions and financial responsibilities of the state and the private sector in promoting the arts. Coningham was an outspoken figure in the radical reforming camp right through to the 1860s.

In the context of the commercialisation and politicization of visual culture at this time, Macleod devotes a chapter to an analysis of early-Victorian collectors in London in the 1830s and 1840s centred on 27 middle class collectors.⁵⁸¹ William Coningham is not included in her collection of London connoisseurs.⁵⁸² We have already seen that rentiers and annuitants such as Coningham by definition fail to meet her definition of membership of the middle class as people of property who actively worked to earn their living. However, it is not clear that the 27 London collectors meet this criterion either. For instance, she points out that 'Most early-Victorian collectors [...] were not first-generation Smilesian heroes, but the inheritors of some

⁵⁷⁸ Thomas Gretton, "'Art is cheaper and goes lower in France.'" The Language of the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Arts and Principles of Design of 1835-6', in *Art in Bourgeois Society, 1790-1850*, pp. 84-100 (pp. 85-6).

⁵⁷⁹ Prior, p. 84.

⁵⁸⁰ Duncan, p. 40.

⁵⁸¹ Macleod, '1. Nouveaux Riches or New Order ? Early-Victorian Collectors in London', in *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, pp. 20-87.

⁵⁸² In part this may have been because Coningham's collection was relatively short-lived, assembled from 1843 onwards with the bulk of it sold off in June 1849. It appears therefore that it did not exist long enough to be included in Waagen's *Treasures of Art* (1854) updated in the early 1850s, or in any of the series on private collections in the *Art Journal* which were the baseline sources for Macleod's London collectors.

family money'.⁵⁸³ And indeed as my probate analysis of Macleod's collectors suggests, many of these men therefore had both time and cash to spare to build up art collections indicating that their need to work was not imperative.⁵⁸⁴ A further criterion for Macleod to identify London collectors is that they lived in London or its immediate suburbs and had a 'social *habitus*' which was middle class.⁵⁸⁵ Coningham's association with members of the clergy, writers, naval officers and artists in Bayswater and Brighton and his progressive political views suggest that for the most part he inhabited a middle class milieu. However, the real reason why Coningham does not make it into the sample of 27 London impresarios is not that he was insufficiently middle class, but, that he did not collect the works of living English painters which Macleod gives as a further and necessary criterion for inclusion.⁵⁸⁶ And yet, Bayer and Page make the point that the old master market was four times the size of the market for contemporary works in the 1840s.⁵⁸⁷ It was only in the 1850s that the market for modern works overtook that for old masters, calculated at one and half times the size.⁵⁸⁸ On the basis of these figures, it is evident that Macleod's 27 London collectors who define middle class collecting in the 1830s and 1840s, were not *typical* in their purchase of contemporary British works compared with what was still the predominant interest in old master works among *both* rich middle class or landed gentry collectors at this time. As Samuel Carter Hall (1800-1899) commented in his autobiography when looking back at the establishment of the *Art-Union* in 1839, 'There was literally no "patronage" for British Art. Collectors – wealthy merchants and manufacturers – did indeed buy pictures as befitting household adornments, but they were "old masters" with familiar names'.⁵⁸⁹ Coningham's collection of old master paintings and drawings assembled in the 1840s was more representative of upper middle class and bourgeois collecting than, say,

⁵⁸³ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 28.

⁵⁸⁴ Appendix 2. MMVC: *ii probate*.

⁵⁸⁵ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 23.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁷ Bayer and Page, pp. 102-3.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁹ Samuel Carter Hall, *Retrospect of a Long Life from 1815 to 1883* (New York: D. Appleton and Company 1883), p. 197.

the 'new order' collections of Robert Vernon (1774-1849), John Sheepshanks (1787-1863), and Benjamin Windus (1790-1867) who feature in Macleod's chapter on early-Victorian London collectors.⁵⁹⁰

We know that by 1841 Coningham was developing an interest in art. He wrote to his foster brother in June of that year, 'I am quite sorry we did not take you to see Hampton Court. It is only the most beautiful spot I ever saw and the pictures some of the finest in the world with many interesting old paintings by Titian and Holbein and other Great Masters of the noble cast'.⁵⁹¹ In August 1843 correspondence between Coningham and Linnell shows the two men in negotiation over the authenticity and value of a work called 'dancing boys' attributed to Parmegiano.⁵⁹² A further letter the following day states 'the enclosed draft will pay for the Giorgione'.⁵⁹³ It is apparent then that by this time, Coningham's collecting was well underway. But after only six years of accumulation, he unexpectedly put his whole collection up for sale on 9th June 1849 at Christie's. The total amount realised at the sale of the 61 works, excluding the sculptures was £11,174, equivalent to over £1 million at present day values.⁵⁹⁴ The catalogue for the sale lists 61 paintings plus 4 bronzes, and two carvings.⁵⁹⁵ Apart from family paintings, it was these combined with two panels attributed to Taddeo Gaddi at the time and donated to the National Gallery in 1848,⁵⁹⁶ and a panel by Giotto which he chose not to sell,⁵⁹⁷ which formed his main collection.⁵⁹⁸ There is no doubt that the 64 paintings in his collection

⁵⁹⁰ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, pp. 40-60.

⁵⁹¹ WC to Fitzjames, June 1841, NMM/CJF.

⁵⁹² WC to Linnell, 29th Aug. 1843, FM/JLA. 'Parmigiano' is now better known as Parmigianino, the sixteenth century Mannerist artist.

⁵⁹³ WC to Linnell, 30th Aug. 1843, FM/JLA.

⁵⁹⁴ Appendix 3. WCCS: *ii Christie's+ price*. Retail price index calculation, *MeasuringWorth.com*.

⁵⁹⁵ *Catalogue of the Very Choice and Important Collection of Italian Pictures, Together with the Four Capital English Works. The Property of William Coningham, Esq* (Catalogue of sale for Christie and Manson auction Saturday June 9th 1849), plus the ledger accompanying the catalogue, *Christie's Archives*, Christie's King's Street, London.

⁵⁹⁶ The works are now attributed to Lorenzo Monaco. See Christopher Baker and Tom Henry, compilers, *The National Gallery, Complete Illustrated Catalogue* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 391.

⁵⁹⁷ Haskell, *William Coningham*, p. 680.

⁵⁹⁸ Appendix 3. WCCS: *i. Christie's+ summary, ii. Christie's+ price, iii. Christie's+ size, iv. Comparative tables, v. All paintings by artist, vi. Drawings sculptures*.

included works of art which art historians, curators, connoisseurs, and art critics today would consider significant and worthy of attention. For instance, 14 of the pictures are now owned by the National Gallery in London, of which 9 are generally on display.⁵⁹⁹ It is presumably the presence of these assumed masterpieces which justified Haskell's opinion that Coningham's collection was of 'extraordinary quality'.⁶⁰⁰



Fig. 13. Piero Pollaiuolo *Apollo and Daphne* 1470-80 (30cm x 20cm), National Gallery, London

A number of observations can be made about the Coningham collection in comparison with other private and public collections at the time based on contemporary accounts.⁶⁰¹ It was not large by the standards of other collections which were auctioned at Christie's at the time.⁶⁰² But the £183 average sale price of his masterpieces was higher than the average price of £159

⁵⁹⁹ Appendix 3. WCCS: *i. Christie's+ summary.*

⁶⁰⁰ Haskell, *William Coningham*, p.680.

⁶⁰¹ Appendix 3. WCCS: *iv. Comparative tables.*

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, Table A.

at Christie's auctions in the period.⁶⁰³ His taste was conventional in that he owned old master paintings attributed to those continental artists admired by elite collectors in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and celebrated by the likes of Sir Joshua Reynolds such as Raphael, Titian, Veronese, Annibale Carracci, Rembrandt, and Claude Lorrain.⁶⁰⁴

Where his collection was distinctive was in the number of fourteenth and fifteenth century and Florentine paintings in his possession (see for instance figs 13 and 14). 'The collection was unusually rich in early Italian art' as the *Brighton Gazette* put it on the occasion of the Christie's sale in 1849.⁶⁰⁵ Nearly a third of Coningham's paintings were from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries compared with 1% and 4% in the National Gallery and Samuel Roger's collections respectively, and just 4% of the 5,060 paintings recorded by Waagen.⁶⁰⁶ The conventional and dismissive view of early Renaissance works appears in the *Morning Post* report on the Coningham picture sale in 1849, 'Several of the pictures are curiosities which have nothing but antiquity to recommend them. They are curious as illustrations of the progress of art, but in no other light have they, in our eyes, any value'.⁶⁰⁷ John Steegman points out that well into the 1840s lack of knowledge and appreciation of fifteenth century art was common. He writes, 'Apart from a few collectors who were also *cognoscenti* of unusual perceptiveness, such unfamiliarity was almost universal'.⁶⁰⁸ It appears that from the connoisseurial perspective Coningham was one of those discerning collectors, ahead of his time in his understanding and appreciation of early Renaissance art.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*, Table B.

⁶⁰⁴ Appendix 3. WCCS: *i. Christie's+ summary*. For the tastes reflected in eighteenth and early nineteenth century elite collections, see James Stourton and Charles Sebag-Montefiore *The British as Art Collectors, From the Tudors to the Present* (London: Scala, 2012), pp. 10-11.

⁶⁰⁵ Report in *Brighton Gazette* 14th June 1849 on the sale of the Coningham art collection.

⁶⁰⁶ Appendix 3. WCCS: *iv. Comparative tables*, Table C.

⁶⁰⁷ Report on Coningham picture sale previously cited, in *Morning Post* Saturday June 9th 1849.

⁶⁰⁸ Steegman, *Victorian Taste*, p. 66.

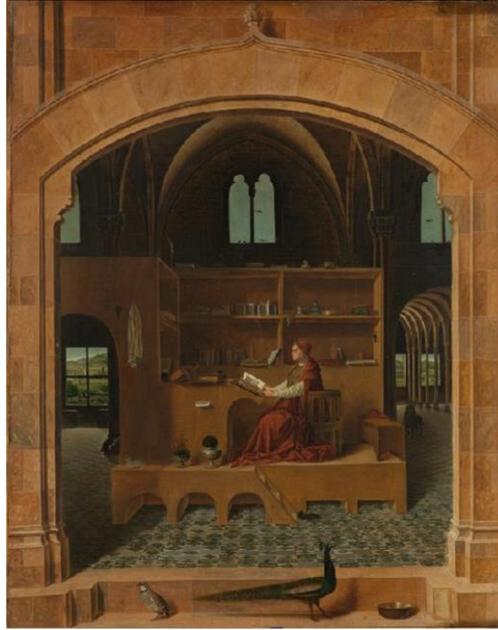


Fig. 14. Antonello da Messina, *St Jerome in his Study*, c.1475 (46cm x 36cm), National Gallery, London

Coningham purchased his paintings in a variety of methods, assisted by different advisers, friends and sources of expertise. He made direct purchases at Christie's auctions in London: in 1844 he bought a Hogarth now titled *Three Unknown Ladies in a Grand Interior*; in 1845 at the sale of Lord Powercourt's collection he bought a painting by Coneglia; in 1848 at the Baring sale he acquired *St Jerome in his Study*, then ascribed to Van Eyck.⁶⁰⁹ It is also apparent that Coningham was well-acquainted with a number of leading London art dealers with whom he did business. For instance he put together a short-lived collection of drawings and prints between 1844 and 1845 purchased from the dealer Samuel Woodburn (1783-1853).⁶¹⁰ By 1846 he had off-loaded these to the firms of P & D Colnaghi and the printseller William Smith, who then sold many of them on to the British Museum.⁶¹¹ He obtained Titian's *Tarquin and Lucretia*

⁶⁰⁹ Elizabeth Einberg, *William Hogarth, A Complete Catalogue of the Paintings* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 148; 'Picture Sales of the Month', in *Art Union*, issue. 80, May 1845, p. 139;

'Picture Sales', *Art Union*, July 1848, p. 229.

⁶¹⁰ Appendix 3. WCCS: *vi. Drawings sculptures*, items formerly owned by Coningham in the BM based on entries for 'William Coningham' in online catalogue on British Museum website, <<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG23431>> [accessed 10th Oct 2020].

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*

via the dealer Nieuwenhuys in 1845.⁶¹² He employed the picture dealer and cleaner Henry Farrer in the task of restoring a number of his canvases.⁶¹³ It is also apparent that he made purchases of pictures abroad. In a letter to Linnell from Paris in 1843 he writes 'not a single painting worth picking up except one Murillo portrait'.⁶¹⁴ In 1845 he bought three pictures from the collection of Cardinal Fesch in Rome.⁶¹⁵

Coningham clearly received advice in the art of connoisseurship from a number of figures. We have already seen that the artist John Linnell was not only commissioned to paint portraits of William and Elizabeth Coningham but was involved in transactions relating to the purchase of old master works of art by Parmigianino and Giorgione.⁶¹⁶ It also seems that he was advised by another painter with a penchant for collecting, John Morris Moore (1817-1875), who was Coningham's fellow *agent provocateur* in criticising the National Gallery in the mid-1840s.⁶¹⁷ In 1843 Coningham wrote to his friend and Peelite MP Monckton Milnes (1809-1885), 'Morris Moore with whom you are acquainted is in my opinion the best judge of Italian paintings in England'.⁶¹⁸ There were other established figures in the world of old master collecting and art history with whom Coningham was in contact in his collecting phase. In March 1847 the collector James Dennistoun wrote to Lord Lindsay that 'I wish you could see Mr William Coningham's pictures at Bayswater. He has a fine eye.'⁶¹⁹ In February 1849 he turned down a visit to Madrid with two pioneering connoisseurs of Spanish art, Richard Ford and William

⁶¹² A short report in *The Globe*, 6th Feb. 1847, p. 1, says Coningham bought the painting from Nieuwenhuys for 2000 guineas including an exchange of paintings.

⁶¹³ Evidence given by WC on 24th June 1853 in *Report from the Select Committee on The National Gallery; Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index*, (London: House of Commons, 1853), paras. 7023-7026.

⁶¹⁴ WC to Linnell, Paris, 2nd Oct 1843, FM/JLA.

⁶¹⁵ Haskell, *William Coningham*, p. 678.

⁶¹⁶ Previously referenced letters WC to Linnell, 29th Aug. 1843, and 30th Aug. 1843, FM/JLA.

⁶¹⁷ David Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake and the Victorian Art World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 91-99.

⁶¹⁸ WC to Monckton Milnes, Bayswater, 18th Nov. 1843, Trinity College Library, Cambridge. Papers of Monckton Milnes (TCL/MM), Houghton EM13.

⁶¹⁹ Quoted in Haskell, *William Coningham*, pp. 678-9, from L. Fleming, *Life of James Dennistoun* in National Library of Scotland, Acc. 5525 (3), p. 186.

Stirling.⁶²⁰ It is apparent that Coningham and his money had become connected to a wide-ranging network of dealers, collectors, and artists.

Perhaps the most important figure in Coningham's cultural education and acquisition of art, was the dealer, Samuel Woodburn, 'the most prestigious and successful English dealer of the day', as Simon Turner claims.⁶²¹ Susannah Avery-Quash says of Coningham, 'He built up a remarkable collection of masterpieces in only seven or eight years, apparently with the help of Woodburn'.⁶²² Coningham's interest in early Italian Renaissance paintings may well have been nurtured by Samuel Woodburn who would doubtless have been aware of the patron's great wealth. For instance, we know Woodburn was in Florence in December 1845 with Coningham to advise him on picture purchases.⁶²³ Francis Haskell argues 'What little we know of the formation of Coningham's collection makes it clear that the overwhelming majority of his purchases were made on his own initiative, without advice from dealers or other connoisseurs'.⁶²⁴ On the basis of the above analysis this assessment is open to question. There is certainly evidence the other way suggesting that collecting for Coningham was a rather haphazard process and that he *was* reliant on the advice and initiative of others.

⁶²⁰ Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art*, pp. 135-6 on Ford and Stirling. In David Howarth, *The Invention of Spain, Cultural relations between Britain and Spain 1770-1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 159, footnote 39, the author references a letter from Coningham to Stirling, 28th February 1849, 'Nothing could have given me so much pleasure as an expedition, with yourself and Ford, to Madrid. But alas ! I fear health and strength will be wanting to enable me to journey so far'.

⁶²¹ Simon Turner, 'Samuel Woodburn', in *Print Quarterly*, 20.2 (June 2003), 131-144 (131), in *JSTOR* <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41826412>> [accessed 14th Oct, 2020].

⁶²² Susannah Avery-Quash, 'The Growth of Interest in Early Italian Painting in Britain with Particular Reference to Pictures in the National Gallery', in *National Gallery Catalogues, The Fifteenth Century, Italian Painting*, vol.1, ed. by Gordon Dillian (London: National Gallery, 2003), pp. xxv-xliv (p. xxviii).

⁶²³ Hugh Brigstock, *Lord Lindsay as a Collector* (Manchester: John Rylands University Library of Manchester, 1982), footnote 2, p. 292.

⁶²⁴ Haskell, *William Coningham*, p. 680.

The Art Collection as Cachet and Credentials

The more obvious reasons and motives explaining Coningham's art collection should already be apparent. As much as anything, his collection was a function of money, of accumulated surplus value seeking outlets in the circuit of capital in the form of expenditure on luxury goods and services. We have seen that he spent money on houses, servants, trips abroad, a privileged education for his son, subscriptions to gentleman's clubs, parliamentary campaigns, and expensive hobbies such as shooting and hunting. An art collection was another expensive hobby which also happened to have investment potential as both financial and cultural capital. We know that by the end of 1843 Coningham had acquired a picture gallery in Bayswater. In January 1844, Thomas Carlyle's wife Jane, in a letter to her friend Jeannie Welsh, wrote a telling (and damning) account of Coningham's art collecting. I quote in full:

Speaking of pictures William Coningham has become an immense picture buyer—is said to have pictures the like of which are not to be found in England except in the collection of the Marquis of Stafford!! and so he may for he lays out sums of money on these which it is a perfect shame to hear tell of—a *thousand pounds* for a small crumpeled sketch by Raphael—*eight thousand* for a small assortment of rare engravings &c &c— What will this world come to in “*voluptuousness*” (as Mr Perry our house agent calls extravagance)! William has only three or four thousand a year of *visible* means—so that he must be investing great slaps out of his capital in this gratification to his vanity—for I am perfectly certain that he has no genuine *passion for Art*—only wants to be *known as the possessor of valuable pictures—the shortest cut* to that *notability* which his ambitious mind has always thirsted after—and so many people *starving* Babbie! forced to “*eat boiled dog*”! (or was it cat?)⁶²⁵

Jane Carlyle's reflections appear to reinforce the view that one of the mainsprings of art collecting for Coningham was spending money in ways which reflected the lifestyle and cultural interests of the rich elite in metropolitan and Brighton society.

The sale of Coningham's collection on 9th June 1849 was unexpected. Francis Haskell writes, 'No explanation can be given for this extraordinary decision for he does not seem to have

⁶²⁵ Letter Jane Carlyle to Jeannie Welsh, 27th Jan 1844, CLO/DUP [accessed 15th Oct. 2020].

needed the money, his public life had not yet begun and there are no records yet of his debilitating illness'.⁶²⁶ In fact, on the basis of two letters he wrote to the MP Monckton Milnes in 1849 there is clear evidence that Coningham *was* experiencing financial difficulties and these account for the sale of the collection. Monckton Milnes had asked Coningham to make a contribution to a collection to support the writer James Froude who had lost his job and fellowship at Oxford for publishing a novel, *Nemesis of Faith*, expressing religious scepticism.⁶²⁷ In the first letter Coningham says that 'I have no idea of giving the sums you mention, because I can't afford it'.⁶²⁸ In the second, he writes 'In the 1st place I do not sell my pictures for Mr Froude's benefit and in the second place I do sell them because the wise legislators of this land have ruined all West Indian Proprietors, by their folly and inconsistency – though 15 or 20 £ be no object to you, it is a large sum for me, who have a wife, child, governess etc'.⁶²⁹

The reason for Coningham's fall in income and the so-called ruin of the 'West Indian proprietors' was the Sugar Duties Act 1846 which, in line with the move to free trade following the repeal of the Corn Laws, reduced the differential duties on imports of sugar which had protected British producers and helped cushion them from the impact of the abolition of slavery in 1833.⁶³⁰ Estate values in some colonies collapsed and there were many bankruptcies.⁶³¹ Despite his own financial challenges, Coningham, as a committed Radical actually wrote an anti-protectionist letter in support of free trade and the reduction in sugar duties to the Editor of the *Sussex Advertiser and Surrey Gazette*, in March 1849.⁶³² The letters to Monckton Milnes, I think, solve the mystery of why Coningham unexpectedly sold off

⁶²⁶ Haskell, *William Coningham*, p.679.

⁶²⁷ Brady, Ciaran, *James Anthony Froude, An Intellectual Biography of a Victorian Prophet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.164.

⁶²⁸ Letter WC to Monckton Milnes, Bayswater, 1849, TCL/MM, Houghton DC 3/4.

⁶²⁹ Letter WC to Monckton Milnes, Brighton, 1849, TCL/MM, Houghton DC 3/4. This is subsequent to the previous letter and again undated except for the year.

⁶³⁰ Keith McClelland, 'Redefining the West India Interest: Politics and the Legacies of Slave-ownership', in *Legacies of British Slave Ownership*, Catherine Hall and others, pp. 127-162 (p. 143).

⁶³¹ William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation, The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment 1830-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 234-5.

⁶³² Letter, WC to the Editor of the *Sussex Advertiser and Surrey Gazette*, 31st March 1849.

almost his entire art collection just six years after he had started collecting. This episode also confirms that his collection whatever its benefits in terms of cultural and social capital also remained a valuable financial asset. Bourdieu writes 'economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital' and that cultural and social capital 'produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal (not least from their possessors) the fact that economic capital is at their root'.⁶³³ However, for Coningham and I think for other rich collectors the mutant character of capital was well-understood. Although he had been forced to give up his Bayswater house and London picture gallery, the fact that in 1851 he was still in his 13-bedroom Brighton home in Sussex Square with 11 servants, and contested an election at Westminster in the following year, is evidence that Coningham had weathered the storm financially, assisted no doubt by the conversion of his art collection back into cash.

If buying a collection for Coningham was partly about spending money on the kinds of things that people who had a lot of money spent it on, it was also about proclaiming the social status and the intellectual kudos which were associated with assembling an art collection of old masters which manifested the 'Rule of Taste'.⁶³⁴ Writing about the collection in the extract from the letter above, Jane Carlyle refers to this in terms of Coningham's pursuit of '*notability*', of distinction as Bourdieu would describe it. In fact, as we have seen, wealthy upper middle class collectors in Britain in the 1840s, contrary to Macleod's construction of the position, still bought old masters in preference to contemporary art. It was to be another decade or so before contemporary British art took over in terms of popularity among the art-loving bourgeoisie. And the fine art collection in itself whether it consisted of old or modern paintings, continued to signify the idea of the insight and moral superiority of its gentleman owner touched by the transcendental qualities of the pictures he had invested in.

⁶³³ Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital' in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. by J Richardson, (New York: Greenwood, 1986) pp. 15-29 (p. 24).

⁶³⁴ Steegman, *The Rule of Taste*, p. xi.

Coningham, put together an old master collection on traditional lines which reflected the revered canon of artists of the eighteenth century landed elite, an elite which as I have already noted continued to be politically and socially powerful right through to the late nineteenth century notwithstanding the advances made by industrial capitalism.⁶³⁵ In line with Sir Joshua Reynolds whose *Discourses* he referenced in public statements and communications, Coningham believed in the universal and timeless merits of old master paintings.⁶³⁶ Despite the presence of an untypical number of pre-1500 Italian paintings in his own collection he revered those same sixteenth and seventeenth century artists whose paintings lined the walls of aristocratic collections. In a letter to Linnell from Paris in 1843, he writes 'The Entombment by Titian strikes me as the finest picture in the gallery'.⁶³⁷ Writing from Florence in December 1845, he highlights works by Holbein, Raphael, and Titian, and takes a swipe at the Munich fresco artists, 'these modern illustrators of the lives of Romish saints & Martyrs'.⁶³⁸ His letter from Rome provides a detailed account of his visit to the Sistine Chapel and claims that Michelangelo's work 'make the fine frescoes round the walls look like the work of pigmies'.⁶³⁹ His appreciative comments to Linnell confirmed that he had joined the ranks of the discerning connoisseurs of taste who appreciated the Beauty and Truth inherent in the works of great artists. Despite being a committed Radical who was often vocal in his contempt for the aristocracy, Coningham was dismissive of modern middle class art and artists. His account of the visit to the Louvre in 1843 includes the following remark, 'The modern painters are worse than I could have supposed, Turner is clear and luminous compared to them'.⁶⁴⁰

In a chapter on 'Collectors and Connoisseurs', Steegman sums up 'art-loving aristocrats' and eighteenth-century connoisseurs as men who followed the 'dictates of established Taste', who

⁶³⁵ Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p. 13.

⁶³⁶ Coningham quotes Reynolds extensively in letter WC to Editor *Morning Post*, 31st December 1849.

⁶³⁷ WC to Linnell, 2nd Oct 1843, Paris, FM/JLA.

⁶³⁸ WC to Linnell, Florence, 1st Dec. 1845, FM/JLA.

⁶³⁹ WC to Linnell, Rome, 12th Jan. 1846, FM/JLA.

⁶⁴⁰ WC to Linnell, 2nd Oct 1843, Paris, FM/JLA.

'had the opportunity in youth of travelling and of forming a more or less critical taste for the approved Old Masters', and who were not likely to concern themselves with living artists.⁶⁴¹ This characterisation encapsulates William Coningham's approach to fine art collecting. In many respects he resembles the patron Sir George Beaumont (1753-1827) who also disliked Turner's paintings, took Reynold's *Discourses* as his bible, adored Old Masters, and donated paintings to the National Gallery which Coningham was to do on a much smaller scale in 1848.⁶⁴² Coningham actually referred sympathetically to Beaumont in a pamphlet he published in February 1847, saying, 'It is a melancholy fact, that in the year 1847, we appear to be further than ever from realising the sanguine expectations of Sir George Beaumont, who looked forward to the time when mediocrity in art would be neglected, and excellence never be passed over'.⁶⁴³ There were differences between the two however. Unlike Coningham, Beaumont was a Tory squire, a baronet, and a bona fide member of the landed classes, with all the natural confidence that this brings. He was also a major patron of contemporary artists as well as an old master collector.⁶⁴⁴ There is a sense in which Coningham collected art to manufacture the social cachet and poise which he manifestly did not possess in contrast to members of the gentry such as Beaumont. The other difference between the two men is Coningham's interest in the so-called Primitives. In this respect, he was out of line with both traditional aristocratic old school collectors and with the 'new order' middle-class collectors keen to patronise modern British artists and paintings which distilled bourgeois values.

If buying, selling, owning and displaying art gave Coningham a useful and profitable occupation in the six years between 1843 and 1849, it also gave him the credentials of an art expert at a time when the national purpose of the fine and decorative arts and the role of the state in their promotion and management was a matter of heated discussion and debate. When in

⁶⁴¹ Steegman, *Victorian Taste*, p.49.

⁶⁴² Owen and Brown, *A Collector of Genius*, pp. 1-2 and p. 11.

⁶⁴³ William Coningham *Strictures on the Minutes of the Trustees of the National Gallery* 4th February 1847 (Brighton: Arthur Wallis, 1847), p. 3.

⁶⁴⁴ Owen and Brown, *A Collector of Genius*, p. 2.

1848 he donated two fourteenth century paintings attributed to Taddeo Gaddi to the National Gallery he was described in the *Art-Union* journal as ‘a gentleman long distinguished as one of the most learned connoisseurs of works of paintings, executed in the ages preceding the Medicean epoch of its complete perfection’.⁶⁴⁵ In 1850, after he had sold his collection, he was one of only 10 witnesses called by the House of Commons Select Committee on the National Gallery to give evidence with special reference to the controversy over the alleged damage which cleaning works of art had caused in previous years.⁶⁴⁶ He was the only collector called on to give evidence despite the fact that he no longer owned an art collection. What he did have was cultural collateral and he was summoned once again to give testimony to a further Select Committee on the National Gallery in 1852-3 as one of a larger number of witnesses.⁶⁴⁷

In the House of Commons July 1857 after he had been elected as MP for Brighton earlier in the year Lord Elcho in a debate on the National Gallery referred to the fact that ‘no one had a finer collection than his honourable friend the Member for Brighton’.⁶⁴⁸ In 1860 the novelist William Thackeray as editor of the *Cornhill Magazine* in reflecting on reform of the National Gallery, named Coningham alongside Sir George Beaumont and the Rev. Holwell Carr, as men to whom ‘the nation is indebted for many fine pictures of the older masters’ donated to the gallery.⁶⁴⁹ What is apparent from these various references in the press and parliament is that Coningham’s art collection had furnished him with the reputation and the gravitas to intervene in debates on national art institutions and policies – on the side of the ‘credentialist attack on

⁶⁴⁵ ‘The National Gallery’, *Art-Union* 1st Nov. 1848, p. 340.

⁶⁴⁶ *Report from the Select Committee on The National Gallery Together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index*, (London: House of Commons, 1850), p. viii.

⁶⁴⁷ Lists of committee members and witnesses called in *Report from the SC on The National Gallery 1853*, pp. xix-xxiv. 47 witnesses appeared.

⁶⁴⁸ ‘Supply – Miscellaneous Estimates’, in *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates, The Official Report* (2nd July 1857, vol.146, para. 821)
<<https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t71.d76.cds3v0146p0-0010?accountid=14664>> [accessed 18th Aug. 2021].

⁶⁴⁹ ‘The National Gallery Difficulty Solved’, *The Cornhill Magazine*, 1.3 (1860), 346-355 (p. 348).

patronage' as Gordon Fyfe describes it.⁶⁵⁰ Although it was sold off in 1849, his art collection continued to deliver political and intellectual returns for Coningham for several years after the sale. Paradoxically, his investment of slavery money in an art collection and an identity as a connoisseur on aristocratic lines provided the social capital to attack the landed elite and its cultural power from a middle class and liberal point of view.

It was Coningham's old friend John Morris Moore who instigated the campaign against the management and governance of the National Gallery in two letters to *The Times* newspaper in October and November 1846.⁶⁵¹ Writing under the pseudonym "Verax" he accused the trustees and Sir Charles Eastlake (1793-1865), the Keeper of the gallery, of ruining masterpieces by cleaning them, ignorant purchasing policies, and poor management. Coningham entered the fray on the side of Morris Moore in a letter addressed to Eastlake but published in *The Times* in December 1846. Stentorian and righteous in his rhetoric, he wrote:

I call on the nation at large, I call on its representatives, I call on the trustees of the National Gallery, I call on you, Sir, to stand forward in defence of these noble monuments of art, which it is your bounden duty to protect. Surely, no one shall be allowed to clean, and as certainly to destroy, the awe-inspiring Piombo, the exquisite and glowing Correggios, the sunny Claudes, pictures which in their present state may indeed form a dangerous contrast to the chalky absurdities of Mr. Turner, or to the pictures in the Royal Academy, but which should be held sacred by all true lovers of the excellent and beautiful in art and in nature.⁶⁵²

Without the authority of his Bayswater and Brighton old master pictures which happened to include canonical works by Sebastiano del Piombo and Claude Lorrain, it is hard to imagine Coningham daring to launch such a ferocious public assault on the ruling elite's favourite artist and connoisseur. Coningham followed up with further letters and two pamphlets which

⁶⁵⁰ Gordon Fyfe, *Art, Power and Modernity, English Art Institutions, 1750-1950* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2000), p. 27.

⁶⁵¹ Letters to the editor of the Times dated 26th Oct. 1846, and 19th Nov. 1846 republished in Morris Moore, *The Abuses of the National Gallery with the Letters of 'A.G.' of 'the Oxford Graduate'; The Defence of Mr. Eastlake, in 'The Daily News,' etc etc and Remarks Upon Them By Verax* (London: William Pickering, 1847), pp. 7-8, pp. 9-14.

⁶⁵² Letter to Eastlake published in *The Times*, 8th Dec. 1846, iss. 19414, p. 7.

included copies of the key letters already published and a recapitulation of his allegations with additional comment.⁶⁵³ In addition to his criticism of the damage caused to pictures by inappropriate cleaning, he accused the gallery and its authorities of failing to purchase quality pictures worthy of a national collection, of paying over the odds for paintings,⁶⁵⁴ and the procurement of a Holbein painting which turned out, to all intents and purposes, to be a forgery.⁶⁵⁵ He also condemned the poor organisation of paintings, ‘a correct classification of the pictures is a thing of importance’,⁶⁵⁶ bemoaned the closure of the gallery to the public for two days a week, and asserted the need for the ‘thorough reform’ of the Royal Academy.⁶⁵⁷

Commenting on National Gallery reform, Nick Prior writes of the ‘wave of professionalisation and a spirit of reform as specialists serviced the cultural requirements of the state under the rubric of expertise’.⁶⁵⁸ It seems that Coningham was part of this wave. In particular, his niche collection of fourteenth and fifteenth century Italian pictures, provided him with further ammunition in his campaign against the governance and management of the National Gallery. In his pamphlet *Strictures on the Minutes of the Trustees of the National Gallery*, he criticised the National Gallery for its failure to build up a representative historical collection of pictures noting the absence of paintings by Giotto, and works by the Siennese, Roman, Venetian and German schools.⁶⁵⁹ He recommended studying ‘the genuine works of the early masters’.⁶⁶⁰ Coningham’s own collection, contained examples of the works in these schools which he accused the gallery of neglecting the purchase of.⁶⁶¹ As a witness to the Select Committee on

⁶⁵³ The two pamphlets by Coningham incorporating some of these letters and summarising his views are *Strictures on the Minutes of the Trustees of the National Gallery* (Brighton: Arthur Wallis, February 1847), and *The Picture Cleaning in the National Gallery with Some Observations on the Royal Academy* (London: Whittaker, 1847).

⁶⁵⁴ Coningham, *Strictures*, p. 9 and P. 11.

⁶⁵⁵ WC to the Editor, *The Times*, 16th Dec 1846, iss. 19421, p. 5.

⁶⁵⁶ Coningham, *Strictures*, p. 9-10.

⁶⁵⁷ Coningham, *The Picture Cleaning*, p. 6.

⁶⁵⁸ Prior, p. 87.

⁶⁵⁹ Coningham, *Strictures*, p. 11.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶¹ Appendix 3. CCS: iv *Comparative tables*.

the National Gallery in 1853, he argued 'I think it highly desirable that we should have a collection of the early works of the Italian school', while at the same time remaining categorical in his views on modern art, 'I would exclude the works of living painters.'⁶⁶² Significantly, the first ever pre-1400 Italian works of art which the National Gallery owned were the two panels, attributed to Taddeo Gaddi but in fact by the Siennese artist Lorenzo Monaco, donated by Coningham in July 1848 (fig. 15).⁶⁶³ At this time the gallery was under public pressure to provide a more representative historical collection of European art including paintings from before the sixteenth century.⁶⁶⁴ In making his offer of the Taddeo Gaddi panels, Coningham clearly demonstrated his scholarly interest in early Italian masters. But at the same time, his offer may have been designed to draw attention to the blinkered views of the trustees and their purchasing policies. Conlin describes the donation as 'a pointed, if generous gesture given the pamphlet he had published the previous year, lambasting the gallery'.⁶⁶⁵



Fig. 15. Lorenzo Monaco, *Adoring Saints*, left and right main tier panels 1407-9 (each 197cm x 102cm), National Gallery, London

⁶⁶² Evidence given by WC on 24th June 1853 in *Report on SC on National Gallery 1853*, paras. 6947 and 6991.

⁶⁶³ WC to Lord Lansdowne, Clifford Street, 11th July 1848, NGA, NG5/75/6. In this letter Coningham asks Lord Lansdowne to act on his behalf in making the offer of the two 'very fine pictures by Taddo Gaddi'. In Lord Lansdowne to Uwins, Berkley Square, 13th July, 1848, NGA, NG5/75/7, Lansdowne conveys this offer to the Keeper of the National Gallery. The pictures were accepted by the gallery.

⁶⁶⁴ Avery-Quash, 'The Growth of Interest in Early Italian Painting in Britain', p. xxvi.

⁶⁶⁵ Conlin, *The Nation's Mantelpiece*, p.277.

It is clear that there were real and inevitable problems with the organisation and management of the National Gallery in these early days of its development, reflecting a sectarian argument within the political and cultural elite between patricianism and utilitarianism, traditionalism and progress, gentlemanly intuition and emerging professionalised practice. Morris Moore and Coningham had touched a nerve in exposing the inadequacies of having a state-funded national collection of pictures managed on a make-shift and piece-meal basis as if it was a gentleman's private collection.⁶⁶⁶ With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that the board of trustees of grandees and statesman including the Prime Minister of the day and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, were essentially amateurs in the business of running a national art gallery.⁶⁶⁷ Charles Eastlake was compromised as Keeper of the National Gallery, trying to do his best to take the institution forward in the absence of any systematic and accountable governance and funding arrangements. It should be added, however, that at this juncture on the cusp of traditionalism and modernity, what constituted professionalism and expertise in the running of a national gallery was a matter of debate. The qualified cultural experts and dominant discourse which might have provided a blueprint for the way forward, by definition, did not yet exist. The 'discursive formation' was still under discussion.⁶⁶⁸ In a way this provided the space and opportunity in the metropolitan public sphere for men like Morris Moore and Coningham, as liberal activists, to come forward and assert their claim to know what was best in the management and organisation of a national gallery according to their particular notion of art history.

Whether or not the cleaning of pictures in 1846 had ruined them is a matter of conjecture, some at the time did not think so.⁶⁶⁹ And we can see that the pursuit of the idea of a correct

⁶⁶⁶ Colin Trodd, 'The Paths to the National Gallery', in *Governing Cultures*, pp. 29-43 (p. 32).

⁶⁶⁷ Whitehead, *The Public Art Museum*, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁶⁸ Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, transl. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: 1972), p. 41 and Part II, '2 Discursive Formations' pp. 34-44.

⁶⁶⁹ See copies of the *Minutes of the Trustees of the National Gallery* for January and February 1847 included in, Coningham, *Strictures*, 1847, pp. 17-18.

picture purchasing policy in terms of the authenticity, quality or ethos of a national collection was as much a matter of faith as it was of objective scholarship. But the scathing criticisms made by Moore, Coningham, Ruskin *et al* not only helped lead to the resignation of Eastlake in November 1847, but contributed to establishing a reforming momentum resulting in the three Select Committees on the Gallery in 1850, 1853 and 1857, which were stepping stones toward a better organised gallery of masterpieces reflecting liberal principles of free access, education, scholarship and the classic middle class preoccupation with the moral improvement of the masses.⁶⁷⁰ Giving evidence at these committees, Coningham demonstrated technical knowledge of picture-cleaning, familiarity with European galleries and their collections, the literature of art history as it was at the time, combined with a belief in a universal canon of sacred art that could be utilised to enlighten the masses.⁶⁷¹ The expertise – the intellectual and cultural capital – which his art collection had facilitated was manifest, bearing out the Chairman of the Select Committee Colonel Mure’s introduction of Coningham in 1853 as ‘a zealous and active *dilettante* in the matter of fine art’.⁶⁷²

Coningham’s appearances as an acknowledged art expert at the two National Gallery Select Committees in 1850 and 1853 did not, however, lure him into the comfort of establishment circles or soften his trenchantly held progressive views on cultural institutions. He continued to be a vociferous critic of the Royal Academy, informed by the modernising critique first set out in the report of the Select Committee of 1835-6.⁶⁷³ In a letter to the *Morning Post* in 1850 Coningham described it as ‘a private society trafficking for profit, which has always resisted every attempt to convert it into a responsible national institution’.⁶⁷⁴ As an MP for Brighton in

⁶⁷⁰ Whitehead, *The Public Art Museum*, pp. 130-144.

⁶⁷¹ See Coningham’s evidence in *Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery 25th July 1850*, paras. 705-785, and *Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery Together with the Minutes of Evidence and Index 1853*, 13th May 1853, paras. 3035-3145, and 24th June, paras. 6808-7026.

⁶⁷² In Coningham evidence in *Report of SC on National Gallery 1853*, 13th May, para. 3035. Colonel Mure’s use of the word *dilettante* may not be entirely complementary.

⁶⁷³ Hoock, *The King’s Artists*, pp. 303-4.

⁶⁷⁴ Letter WC to Editor, *Morning Post*, 25th March 1850. For further insights into Coningham’s views of the Royal Academy see the pamphlet William Coningham, *The Picture Cleaning in the National Gallery*

1857 he exhorted the government to compel the Royal Academy to vacate the National Gallery, to free up space for additional paintings and bring an end to one of the privileges of the RA long-resented on the part of critics, 'The Government ought to give the Royal Academy notice to quit'.⁶⁷⁵ He also commented on a number of other cultural issues in parliament including support for the opening of the British Museum to the working classes five or six days a week rather than three days,⁶⁷⁶ and opposition to the use of the Gothic style in new government buildings and the proposed Prince Albert Memorial.⁶⁷⁷ Also in this period, Coningham continued his attacks on the National Gallery for poor administration and injudicious purchases of paintings focusing his attention on the competence of Sir Charles Eastlake following his appointment to Director of the National Gallery in 1855, and against whom he seemed to have a personal vendetta.⁶⁷⁸

Coningham in Brighton, A Dignitary in Decline

Operating as a cultural agitator in the metropolis, was one outlet for Coningham's restless political energy and pursuit of purpose in his life. As an established resident of Brighton from 1846, he continued in his attempt to reconcile the roles of rich patrician, dutiful middle class citizen, and populist politician. I have already noted the presence of the Coninghams at a Duke

with Some Observations on the Royal Academy 1847, and letters WC to *The Times*, iss. 20673, 31st December 1849, p. 5, and WC to the Editor of the *Morning Post*, 12th April 1850, p. 4, and numerous other communications.

⁶⁷⁵ 'Supply – Miscellaneous Estimates', in *Hansard* (29th June 1857, vol. 146, para. 584)

<<https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t71.d76.cds3v0146p0-0010?accountid=14664>> [accessed 18th Aug. 2021].

⁶⁷⁶ 'Supply – Civil Service Estimates', *Hansard* (4th June 1858, vol. 150, para. 1582)

<<https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t71.d76.cds3v0145p0-0022?accountid=14664>> [accessed 18th Aug. 2021].

⁶⁷⁷ Debates on 'The New Government Offices', *Hansard*, (11th Feb. 1859, vol. 152, paras. 269-270)

<<https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t71.d76.cds3v0152p0-0007?accountid=14664>> [accessed 18th Aug. 2021], and 'Supply – Report (re. Memorial to the Late Prince Consort), *Hansard* (23th April, 1863, vol. 170, para. 760) <

<https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t71.d76.cds3v0170p0-0011?accountid=14664>> [accessed 18th Aug. 2021].

⁶⁷⁸ The paintings whose purchase Coningham was unhappy with and the reasons for his objections are summarised in, William Coningham, *The National Gallery in 1856, Sir C. L. Eastlake's Purchases* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1859).

of Devonshire soirée in 1848 and the Hannington's concert in 1867, and both William and Elizabeth Coningham were frequently listed in Brighton's newspapers as attendees at 'fashionable' events at which both the gentry and bourgeoisie came together in displays of elite wealth and taste.⁶⁷⁹ An examination of these same newspapers reveals that Coningham was conspicuous in his charitable contributions and civic participation. At his nomination to become Liberal MP for Brighton in April 1857 his proposer, a Mr Ricardo, said 'No one has ever appealed to Mr Coningham for assistance without its being most readily granted: he has been connected with most of the charities of the town, and his services have been available in every benevolent cause when they have been required'.⁶⁸⁰

Coningham was prominent in a range of progressive political causes in the town in the 1850s. His interest in the cooperative movement and his support for trades unions have already been cited. He was also vocal in his opposition to Church Rates, publishing a pamphlet addressed to the influential and wealthy Vicar of Brighton, the Reverend Wagner, with whom he had crossed swords.⁶⁸¹ Reports of the meetings at which he spoke provide testimony that he was popular among middle and working class people alike with a reputation for free-wheeling speeches.⁶⁸² At the same time, he became a figure of hate in conservative circles in Brighton. The Tory *Brighton Gazette* on his nomination as a Liberal candidate for parliament in 1857 accused Coningham of being a Chartist, 'a hot and full-blown Radical', a 'Democrat', and asked the question 'Is this the man for Brighton, the resort of the aristocracy and supported by fashionable residents and visitors?'⁶⁸³ The fact that Coningham was a man who had once

⁶⁷⁹ To give a further example, according to the *Brighton Gazette*, 6th Jan. 1853, p. 5, the Coninghams were present at a private subscription ball held in Jan. 1853 which 'was attended by upwards of 250 of the principal nobility and gentry now residing in, or visiting, Brighton'.

⁶⁸⁰ 'The Elections, Brighton' in *Brighton Gazette*, 2nd April 1857, p. 6.

⁶⁸¹ The pamphlet, William Coningham, *The Minority Church Rate. A Letter to the Vicar of Brighton* (Brighton: Wallis, 1851), was reviewed in the hostile *Brighton Gazette*, 13th Feb. 1851, p. 3.

⁶⁸² 'Election Intelligence. City of Westminster', *The Morning Chronicle*, 8th July 1852, p. 2. The reporter commenting on the Westminster election at which Coningham was an unsuccessful independent candidate, said, 'judging from the reception he met with from the noisiest part of the assemblage, Mr. Coningham seemed to be the favourite of the democracy and non-electors'.

⁶⁸³ 'Meeting of Mr Coningham's Friends' in *Brighton Gazette* 19th March 1857, p. 7.

owned paintings by Titian, Raphael and Rembrandt in a celebrated art collection did not cut much ice with the gentry and High Anglicans of the town.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Coningham was a dutiful Liberal in initiatives and organisations promoting art and culture in Brighton both as a leading citizen and MP in the town. But generally, his role was honorific rather than proactive and it seems he had little appetite for provincial cultural reform commensurate with his interventions in the metropolitan art world. Although Coningham's career as a radical politician and MP seemed to be at an end with his resignation as MP due to illness early in 1864, he continued to be active in local Liberal Party circles in Brighton for the remainder of the decade. This included an ill-advised and much criticised decision to stand once again as an independent candidate in the 1868 general election against the town's two sitting Liberal members.⁶⁸⁴ The newspaper record suggests that William and Elizabeth Coningham (1812-1881) remained prominent in bourgeois social events in Brighton up to 1869. But in 1870 they gave up 26 Sussex Square and thereafter appear to have led an itinerant and unsettled life for the next nine years. This is confirmed in a letter Elizabeth wrote to their friend and artist John Linnell in September 1879, 'Most likely you will have heard how entirely shattered his [Coningham] health and spirits have become; and how (to see if it would do him any good) we have wandered from one place to another, and with no cheering result'.⁶⁸⁵

The reason for this letter to Linnell and subsequent letters on the part of Elizabeth Coningham was to solicit Linnell's help in cleaning and re-framing the five family portraits painted by Linnell which were still in the Coninghams's possession.⁶⁸⁶ This was in the context of resettling permanently in Brighton in 1879 at Lewes Crescent and the retrieval of the portraits from a

⁶⁸⁴ 'Messrs White and Fawcett's First District Meeting', *Brighton Guardian*, 4th Nov. 1868, p. 6.

⁶⁸⁵ Elizabeth Coningham (EC) to Linnell, 3rd Sept. 1879, 124, Marine Parade, FM/JLA.

⁶⁸⁶ See entries for Linnell in Appendix 3. WCCS: v. *All paintings by artist*. These canvases along with another family-related portrait by Sir Thomas Lawrence and the Giotto *Pentecost* panel appear to be the only significant paintings which Coningham still owned at this time.

warehouse along with other effects which had been in storage since 1870.⁶⁸⁷ Linnell and his son James agreed to do the job at minimal charge, influenced by the knowledge of William's debilitating illness.⁶⁸⁸ We can infer from the fact that Coningham himself did not conduct this correspondence with Linnell that he was incapable of doing so. It would seem that his wife Elizabeth was now head of the household in Lewes Crescent. On receiving the refurbished pictures, Elizabeth commented how pleased she was with the work carried out on them, 'I hardly know how to thank you. It is as if I had suddenly become young again'.⁶⁸⁹ Clearly these paintings for Elizabeth, had a personal and nostalgic resonance which must have contrasted sharply with memories of the grand old master pictures once on display at 42 Porchester Terrace, Bayswater, and 26 Sussex Square, Brighton, in the 1840s in the early years of her married life with William surrounded by all his money, ambition and anxiety. In 1881 Elizabeth passed away followed by William himself in 1884.⁶⁹⁰ William and Elizabeth's son William who inherited the remaining pictures died in 1899.⁶⁹¹ In 1942 Geraldine Coningham, bequeathed the Giotto *Pentecost* to the National Gallery (fig. 16).⁶⁹² This painting had previously seen the light of day in a public exhibition in Brighton in 1867 when the Coninghams had loaned their Giotto to a fine arts exhibition in the Royal Pavilion.⁶⁹³

⁶⁸⁷ EC to Linnell, 3rd Sept. 1879, 124, Marine Parade, FM/JLA.

⁶⁸⁸ Linnell to EC, Oct. 1879, Redstone Wood, FM/JLA.

⁶⁸⁹ EC to Linnell, 9th Oct. 1879, 6, Lewes Crescent, FM/JLA.

⁶⁹⁰ Relevant entries in 'England & Wales Deaths 1837-2007' in

<<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=BMD%2FD%2F1881%2F2%2FAZ%2F000066%2F021>> and

<<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=BMD%2FD%2F1884%2F4%2FAZ%2F000073%2F161>>

[14th Aug. 2021].

⁶⁹¹ Entry for 'William John Capper Coningham' in *A Cambridge Alumni Database*.

⁶⁹² Details for Giotto and Workshop, *Pentecost*, 1310-18, in The National Gallery website, <<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/giotto-and-workshop-pentecost>> [accessed 6th Nov. 2020].

⁶⁹³ 'The Fine Arts Exhibition at the Pavilion', *Brighton Guardian* 3rd July 1867, p. 5.

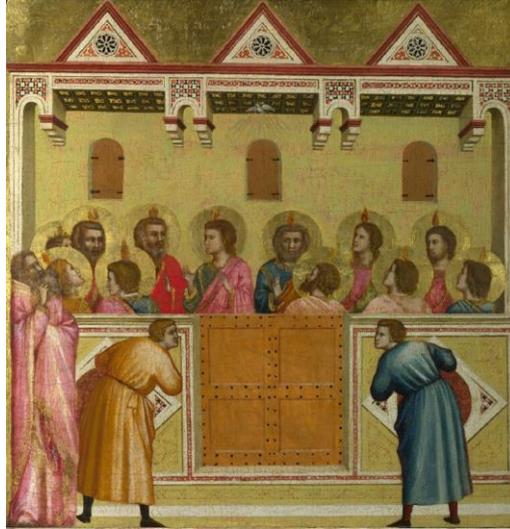


Fig. 16. Giotto and Workshop, *Pentecost* 1310-18 (46cm x 44cm), National Gallery, London

An Overview: A Man Confounded by Contradictions

In researching Coningham one gets the sense of the restless insecurity and frustrated ambition of a man beset by doubt and uncertainty both about the bigger questions of religious faith and social and political justice, and also more personal questions about social position and rank and what practically he might be doing with his life to give it meaning and purpose. In certain respects, he can be viewed as a 'victim' of his rentier capitalist wealth. By economic inheritance he became an extremely wealthy middle class man and yet lacked the status and pedigree of a member of the landed gentry. He did not need to work to earn a living and yet this very fact set him apart from the values of the businessman and the industry, frugality, and enterprise at the moral core of bourgeois individualism. As a radical politician he obviously relished the oratory of the public address and the adulation of the crowds, as the ill-advised return to politics in his abortive campaign for re-election as a Brighton MP in 1868 testifies. But at the same time, he was also a private and emotional family man. Witness his acute grief on his seventeen-year old daughter Elizabeth's death from diphtheria in November 1858. In a letter composed in December that year, Thomas Carlyle wrote to his brother, 'Poor Wm

Conyngham [sic] called yesterday; looking infinitely worse than any of us, indeed one of the miserablest of men. Has lost his only daughter lately; was like to go out of mind for grief'.⁶⁹⁴

The contradictions of his social and economic situation were reflected in the differences between the patrician values embodied in his private collection of old master paintings on the one hand and his role as a liberal art reformer determined to make public art institutions accountable, accessible and professional on Benthamite lines on the other. In a way his life can be read as a failed attempt to reconcile the clash between these two discourses, civic-humanist and liberal-professional, aristocratic and bourgeois, which informed the two positions of gentleman connoisseur and trained expert. However, essentially this was an argument within the male propertied classes and their richest and most articulate representatives about how to justify and secure their power in a grossly unequal society. The 'people' were onlookers, standing in the wings waiting to be blessed with the gift of culture. There were no working class witnesses giving testimony at the three Select Committees on the National Gallery in 1850, 1853-3, and 1857. Only a minority of men until the 1885 Reform Act and no women in the adult population which constituted the 'nation' in whose name the National Gallery was formed had the right to vote and actively participate in cultural discussion in the legislature. The accumulated surplus value, the vast profits and economic returns, which paid for private and therefore public art collections represented money which had not been paid in wages to workers or enslaved labourers or paid in taxation to the state for the welfare of the people as of right rather than as a matter of charitable discretion. With these thoughts in mind, Coningham as a champion of universal suffrage, cooperative associations, the power of trades unions and popular access to museums and galleries, must have had an inkling of the

⁶⁹⁴ Letter, Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 28th Dec. 1858, Chelsea, CLO/DUP [accessed 15th Oct. 2020].

anomalies of his own inherited wealth and privilege, the product of the profits of slavery, when set against his beliefs in freedom, liberty and the rights of the people.

In the 1840s Coningham was a more typical middle class fine art collector in his preference for old master paintings than the 'new order' middle class collectors who Macleod features in her chapter on London collectors in *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, specifically selected for their taste in British modern art.⁶⁹⁵ As we have seen the majority of fine art purchases in the 1840s were still of old master pictures. The campaign for middle class art in the *Art-Union* journal under the editorship of Samuel Carter Hall, the reach of the Art Union movement and the invisible hand of supply and demand in the marketplace, had not yet shifted the balance of consumer tastes among the richest members of the upper middle class from old to new art.⁶⁹⁶ However, in line with the collectors who Macleod features in her London chapter Coningham was an inheritor of family money. Like Samuel Carter Hall's 'hero' collector Robert Vernon he made his collections available to the public, and he was undoubtedly one of a collection of ambitious (and very rich) middle class men in the 1840s using private collections 'to colonise art and culture as domains of their improved status'.⁶⁹⁷ The difference was that Coningham formed an aristocratic collection of old master works, rather than an assemblage of mainly contemporary British paintings. This gave him the cultural credibility to campaign for the reform of the National Gallery and the Royal Academy from a middle class and utilitarian perspective. In addition, his specialist collection of *trecento* and *quattrocento* works demonstrated an intellectual understanding of emerging modern 'professional' ideas of historiographical organisation and classification of art collections incorporating works by

⁶⁹⁵ Macleod, '1. Nouveaux Riches or New Order ? Early-Victorian Collectors in London', in *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*.

⁶⁹⁶ The *Art-Union* was renamed the *Art Journal* in 1849 and claimed it had achieved a circulation of 25,000 according by 1851. See Julie F. Codell, 'The Art Press and the Art Market: The Artist as "Economic Man"', in *The Rise of the Modern Art Market*, pp. 128-150 (p. 129).

⁶⁹⁷ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 28, p. 49, and p. 21. For a reference to people visiting his collection in Brighton see 'Mr Coningham's Collection of Paintings', *Brighton Gazette*, 14th June 1849, p. 5.

previously unfavoured schools of art to illustrate an evolutionary process culminating in the 'genius' of High Renaissance art. By performing this role of progressive art historian, he thus aimed to distinguish himself from the dilettantism of the patrician collector, who in other respects he was more than happy to emulate. Unfortunately, there were others who fulfilled this new and emerging role of art historian more convincingly than Coningham, for instance Charles Eastlake, Gustave Waagen (1794-1868) and John Ruskin (1819-1900).

J. Mordaunt Crook writing about the nouveaux riches and Victorian and Edwardian architecture poses the question 'the embourgeoisement of the aristocracy or the feudalising of the bourgeoisie ? Just who was hegemonising whom ?'.⁶⁹⁸ And what the Coningham contradictions also show is that the aim of colonising art and culture for the middle class was as much a process of assimilation with the values of the landed establishment, as it was a means of asserting an alternative and distinct middle class paradigm. The cultural colonisers were colonised as much as colonising. Whether fine art collections in private and public galleries consisted of old masters or modern British paintings or a combination of the two, the fact is that ownership and display of fine art, continued to justify the power of the rich male elite by linking them with the universal and timeless values incarnated in high art, discernible, ultimately, only to the chosen few. As Eagleton writes critiquing the idea of aesthetic autonomy which lies at the heart of the idea of high art, it is 'an isolated enclave within which the dominant social order can find an idealized refuge from its own actual values of competitiveness, exploitation and material possessiveness'.⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁸ J. Mordaunt Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riches: Style and Status in Victorian and Edwardian Architecture* (London: John Murray, 1999), p. 9.

⁶⁹⁹ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1990), p. 9.

CHAPTER 3. HOW HENRY HILL, BESPOKE TAILOR TO THE RICH AND SELF-MADE MAN ALSO BECAME A GENTLEMAN OF TASTE

Introducing the Henry Hill Collection in ‘Philistine’ Brighton, as Featured in the *Magazine of Art*, January 1882

Unlike Coningham, the rentier capitalist who inherited a fortune, Henry Hill was a self-made man who fits the Samuel Smiles (1812-1904) template of a person who by ‘means of individual action, economy, and self-denial’ worked his way up through the social hierarchy, from unemployed labourer in the 1830s to successful businessman in the 1850s.⁷⁰⁰ Hill’s arrival in the upper middle class was signalled by his move into a large seafront house in fashionable Kemp Town in Brighton in 1865, round the corner from Coningham in Sussex Square. Like Coningham, he too acquired a nationally acknowledged art collection, albeit of modern rather than old master works. And although the processes by which Coningham and Hill accumulated wealth were very different, nevertheless they both arrived at a similar place in terms of levels of income invested in cultural capital to proclaim distinction and extend influence. However, whereas Coningham aspired to be a national figure, Hill as a man who had come from nowhere, wanted simply to be taken seriously as a ‘gentleman’ or at least avoid being mistaken for a philistine, as this chapter considers.

By the time Hill started collecting art, the market for contemporary pictures had well and truly taken off and there was a heightened public awareness of and widely improved access to fine art and the visual arts generally. As Bernard Denvir points out ‘interest in art had reached epidemic proportions’, and ‘Museums and art galleries proliferated’.⁷⁰¹ As previously described, the opening of new cultural amenities in Brighton in 1872-3, the popularity of art

⁷⁰⁰ Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help; With Illustrations of Character, Conduct, and Perseverance* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke, & Co. 1881), p. 22.

⁷⁰¹ Bernard Denvir, ed., *The Late Victorians: Art, Design and Society 1852-1910* (London and New York: Longman, 1986), p. 1.

exhibitions, and buoyant figures for the sale of art, were clear evidence in the town of the cultural boom evident across the country. The art writer George Redford in 1877 reflected ‘that the vast expansion of the taste for art and the formation of collections is a comparatively new and distinguishing feature in modern civilisation’, and pointed out ‘that the number of private and public collections of pictures and works of art of every kind [...] is astonishingly large’.⁷⁰² Redford’s view of the art collections of the new business and commercial classes was relatively benign, ‘It is remarkable of these modern collections that, although there may have been a sidelong glance at a possible good investment, they show a very striking feeling for all that is beautiful in nature’.⁷⁰³

In the marketplace of opinion, other art critics and commentators put forward the view that the money spent on art collections by the rich middle class or the *nouveau riche* was lowering the quality of contemporary art because their expenditure was based on fashion and the unscrupulous influence of art dealers, rather than on informed taste. Edward Poynter, an artist but also at various points in the late nineteenth century a Slade Professor and Director of the National Gallery, in a lecture delivered in 1872 made clear his disdain for modern art which ‘has developed itself in the direction which no genuine artist or man of taste would ever wish to see it pursue’⁷⁰⁴ He blamed money and art critics pandering to public opinion as the cause of this perceived decline.⁷⁰⁵ Lucy Crane, in a similar vein, in 1882 wrote dismissively of art bought by people to form part of the furniture of a room, ‘they are not worthy the name of pictures, and should be judged of by a different standard – that of the picture-dealer – and treated as articles of commerce’.⁷⁰⁶ Sheridan Ford writing about the American art market in

⁷⁰² George Redford, ‘Art Sales and Christie’s’, *The Nineteenth Century*, 22.125 (1887), 60-78 (p. 60).

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁴ Edward J. Poynter, in a transcript of a lecture delivered in May 1872 at the Royal Institution entitled ‘Lecture 2. Old and New Art’, in *Ten Lectures on Art* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd, 1880), p. 87. Alison Inglis, ‘Sir Edward Poynter’, *ODNB*, (2004), <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35600>> [accessed 15th Aug. 2021].

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁶ Lucy Crane, *Art and the Formation of Taste: Six Lectures* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1882), p. 280.

1888 was disdainful of the ethics of dealers and the ignorance of rich art collectors.⁷⁰⁷ C. J. Holmes in a book written to guide the would-be art collector published in 1910, wrote of ‘The indifferent and Philistine generation’, and asserted that ‘The principal danger of the rich collector is Fashion. Fashion, prompted no doubt by clever men of business’.⁷⁰⁸ Roger Fry in an article written in 1912 blamed money and plutocrats for a decline in taste which had given rise to ‘a race of pseudo-artists’ in the nineteenth century.⁷⁰⁹ Macleod asserts that the word ‘taste’ had lost its eighteenth century elitist connotations in the Victorian period, but it seems these connotations were very much alive at the end of the nineteenth century in the writings of art historians seeking to shore up the sanctity of high culture.⁷¹⁰

Henry Hill, a wealthy tradesman who started collecting art when he was in his fifties, was potentially the target of the kind of art critics quoted above. He must have been pleased to have been absolved of the charge of ‘philistinism’ when his collection of pictures in his Brighton seaside house at 53 Marine Parade was featured in the *Magazine of Art* in January 1882.⁷¹¹ Alice Meynell (1847-1922), the author of the three-part feature entitled ‘A Brighton Treasure House’ opens her account of Hill’s collection with a lofty dismissal of Brighton’s capacity for aesthetic appreciation,⁷¹² ‘Brighton is not suggestive of art. Philistinism in its most cheerful form reigns supreme on the King’s Road and Marine Parade [...] Brighton wears an air of determination to be braced which is distinctly opposed to the recollection and meditation of enthusiastic art’ (fig. 17).⁷¹³ Meynell depicts Hill’s collection as an exception to this general

⁷⁰⁷ Sheridan Ford, *Art, A Commodity* (New York: Rogers and Sherwood, 1888), pp. 11-17.

⁷⁰⁸ C. J. Holmes, *Pictures and Picture Collecting*, 2nd edition (London: A. Treherne & Co. Ltd., 1910), p. 24 and p. 19.

⁷⁰⁹ Roger Fry, ‘Art and Socialism’ in *Vision and Design* (New York: Brentano’s, 1920), pp. 55-78, (p. 58). This essay was an edited version of an article first published in 1912.

⁷¹⁰ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 15.

⁷¹¹ Alice Meynell, ‘A Brighton Treasure House’ in *Magazine of Art*, vol. 5 (1882), pp. 1-7, pp. 80-5, pp. 116-121, published by Proquest, British Periodicals
<<https://www.proquest.com/britishperiodicals/docview/6963279/6FFA8E243F3E4658PQ/2?accountid=14664&imgSeq=1>> [accessed 5th Nov. 2019].

⁷¹² For an account of Alice Meynell as art critic, journalist, editor and poet, see Meaghan Clarke, *Critical Voices: Women and Art Criticism in Britain 1880-1905* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 45-80, including a specific discussion of Meynell’s article on impressionist works in the Hill collection, pp. 70-72.

⁷¹³ Meynell, *Magazine of Art*, p. 1.

observation saying ‘Captain Hill’s house – one of many on the Marine Parade, bright, white, and unsuggestive – discloses a very different taste [...] there is everywhere an impression of good, advanced, and interesting art, without monotony’.⁷¹⁴



Fig. 17. Marine Parade, Brighton. Illustration for English scenery by T. Nelson, 1889, a chromolithograph

Almost certainly it would have been the decision of the newly appointed editor of the *Magazine of Art*, William Henley to feature Henry Hill’s art collection. Henley’s mission as editor from 1881 to 1886 was to make the journal a more cosmopolitan and cultured publication and he had a particular interest in contemporary French realist painters of the Barbizon school as they eventually came to be labelled, a preference which he shared with Hill.⁷¹⁵ Meynell in the second instalment of her article discussed works by French artists in Marine Parade including ruminations on paintings by Degas concluding ‘we must not linger too long over works which assuredly have no charm of beauty wherewith to fascinate us’.⁷¹⁶ The main emphasis of her feature is on Hill as a significant collector of the works of Philip Morris and Frank Holl, and whose ‘chief possessions’ were paintings by George Mason (1818-1872)

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁵ Liela Rumbaugh Greiman, ‘William Ernest Henley & “The Magazine of Art”’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 16.2 (Summer, 1983), 53-64 (p. 53, p. 57), published by The John Hopkins University Press on behalf of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20082073>> [accessed 6th Dec. 2019]. Henley was appointed as editor in October 1881 just four months before the Hill feature and resigned in August 1886, after which the journal reverted to a more middle-of-the-road ethos under the new editor Marion Spielmann.

⁷¹⁶ Meynell, *Magazine of Art*, p. 82-83.

and Frederick Walker (1840-1875).⁷¹⁷ She is complementary about the collection, 'Captain Hill is master of a real treasure-house of art'.⁷¹⁸ However, a closer between-the-lines reading of the article discloses reservations which Meynell had about Henry Hill's taste, in line with the outlook of the critics previously mentioned. For instance, she makes a point of listing painters whose works would have improved the collection including the artists Delacroix, Courbet, Constable and Burne-Jones.⁷¹⁹ She refers to Hill as a 'buyer' rather than a 'connoisseur' or 'collector', she comments that in looking for art 'he has taken it wherever he found it', and, 'when he buys a picture, it is merely that the picture pleases him'.⁷²⁰ Meynell's remarks clearly infer deficiencies in Hill's aesthetic judgement, his 'taste'.

'Rags-to-Riches': From Cullompton, Devon to Marine Parade, Brighton via Bond Street,

London

Cohen informs us that 'rags-to-riches transformations remained exceptionally rare' in the nineteenth century.⁷²¹ The story of Henry Hill's elevation up the social ladder is therefore a remarkable one if the two extended obituaries in the Exeter-based Devon newspaper *Western Times* are taken at face-value.⁷²² The first obituary provides a somewhat melodramatic and didactic account of Hill overcoming adversity and poverty against all the odds to eventually make his fortune in London in the tailoring business. According to this account his father was a 'small schoolmaster at Cullompton', a village just outside Exeter in Devon. Having trained as a

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3, and p. 5.

⁷¹⁸ Meynell, *Magazine of Art* (Jan 1882), p. 121.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷²¹ Cohen, p. 85.

⁷²² 'The Late Mr Henry Hill' *Western Times*, 3rd April, 1882, p. 3, and 'Funeral of the Late Mr. Henry Hill', *Western Times*, 13th April, 1882, p. 3.

journeyman tailor Hill migrated to London in search of work.⁷²³ This was in 1834 according to the second obituary.⁷²⁴ The *Western Times* continues in Dickensian fashion:

A stranger and friendless in the great Metropolis, he was driven to the verge of starvation, and on Christmas-day, finding himself without friends, without means of paying his lodging, driven to desperation, he approached the Thames with feelings which many a victim of non-success in London has likewise experienced. A good Samaritan seeing his forlorn condition, that he was a young man evidently in the most painful state of depression, tried to get him into conversation, and ended by giving him half-a-crown. Recovering his spirits he got employment the next day, and being a thrifty, careful youth he kept it. In a short time he had saved five guineas.⁷²⁵

The *Western Times* obituary goes on to describe how Hill worked his way up from journeyman tailor to owning and managing his own tailoring business and ‘realised a large fortune’, and that ‘He lived in great style at Brighton where he was much respected, and had much influence, still retaining his interest in the business [...] He was a liberal patron of the Arts and of artists’.⁷²⁶ Earlier on Henry had married Charlotte in 1840 who was also from Devon and the small town of Sidmouth.⁷²⁷ For reasons unknown, Henry and Charlotte did not have any children. Probate records, as previously analysed, show that Hill died a very rich man and that in terms of wealth he belonged to the top layer of the upper middle class. The move to Brighton in 1865 and the acquisition of an art collection clearly reflected the surplus capital that he had amassed by then.

The second and lengthier obituary in the *Western Times*, 13th April, was written by someone who called themselves ‘“An Old Friend”’ of Henry’s.⁷²⁸ The writer talks of how he and Henry’s younger brother saw Henry off when he boarded the steamer at Topsham in Devon and ‘commenced his voyage to the great Metropolis’.⁷²⁹ This account states that Henry started his

⁷²³ *Western Times*, 3rd April, 1882, p. 3.

⁷²⁴ *Western Times*, 13th April, 1882, p. 3.

⁷²⁵ *Western Times*, 3rd April, 1882, p. 3.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁸ *Western Times*, 13th April, 1882, p. 3. This account will be cited regularly in the chapter and will be referred to as the ‘Old Friend’ account in the text.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*

tailoring business in 1847 in Bond Street having purchased the firm from his former employer and friend for whom he had worked in a senior position.⁷³⁰ Henry built the business up on the basis of loans from friends, and after his original business partner had died prematurely,⁷³¹ he brought in his brother Edward Mortimer Hill (1827-1892) and his half-brother Charles Hill (1818-1877) as partners to help manage the expanding enterprise.⁷³² By the late 1850s Messrs. Hill Brothers, 3, Old Bond Street advertised themselves as military or army tailors.⁷³³ However, evidence suggests that the Hill Brothers did not just specialise in making military uniforms but also provided garments and suits for Oxford and Cambridge Universities and members of the aristocracy.⁷³⁴ In addition the tailors were able to tap into an international market. The 'old friend' in the *Western Times* writes:

Orders came to the firm from Frenchmen and Russian residents in London, and it became such a valuable connexion that a branch was established at Paris, and the swells of the Empire eschewed the vulgar idea that Paris alone could "make up" a gentleman by freely admitting that for style and charges Bond Street would beat the Boulevards.⁷³⁵

The French connection is particularly interesting from the point of view of understanding the composition of Hill's art collection in the 1870s, half of which, as we shall, see consisted of the works of French and continental painters. In relation to the Hill Brothers' military market, it is

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*

⁷³² A direct reference to 'Mr. E. M. Hill, of the firm of Hill Brothers, navy and military tailors, Old Bond-street' can be found in a legal report titled 'His Grace the Duke of Newcastle' in *London Daily News*, 27th Oct. 1870, p. 2. In addition, the 1851 Census shows Edward Hill living in Charlotte Street, Marylebone, London which was the same street in which Henry Hill was living with his wife Charlotte and Edward and Henry's brother William. Edward's occupation is given as 'accountant'. It is apparent then from this information that Edward Hill worked for Hill at least from 1851 until 1870. Charles Hill referred to as a half-brother in the obituary in the *Western Times*, 3rd April 1882, p. 3, moved from Exeter in 1855 where he was secretary of the friendly society Western Provident Association which he had helped found in 1848 to go into partnership with 'Mr. Henry Hill, his respected brother' according to a report in the *Western Times, Exeter*, 22nd Dec. 1855, p. 6. A third brother, William Hill, was living with Henry and Charlotte Hill in 1851, see 1851 Census, Charlotte Street, Marylebone, London, <<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC%2F1851%2F0003290624>> [accessed 14th Aug 2021].

⁷³³ A report on a bankruptcy proceeding refers to 'Hill, military tailors' which gave sureties to the insolvent, in *Morning Post* 5th Feb. 1857, p. 6. The firm is named as 'Messrs. Hill Brothers, army tailors, Old Bond Street in relation to a court case in the 'Miscellaneous News' in the *Marylebone Mercury*, Sat. 19th July 1862.

⁷³⁴ *Western Times*, 13th April, 1882, p. 3.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*

perhaps no coincidence that Charles Hill joined the firm in January 1856 at the time of Britain's involvement in the Crimean War, although the conflict with Tsar Nicholas 1st's regime in Russia was in its final weeks.⁷³⁶ It is not unlikely that high demand from the British army for uniforms in the war years 1853 to 1856 helped account for the success of the business and the need to extend the management of the firm. In February 1856 Messrs. Hill Brothers made a contribution to the 'Nightingale Fund' in February 1856 to raise money to support the famous Crimean War nurse Florence Nightingale in the establishment of an institution for the training of nurses.⁷³⁷ In May 1859 partly because the Crimean War had exposed how thinly stretched British forces were across the Empire and within home territories, lord lieutenants were asked by the government of the day to raise volunteer forces on a county by county basis across the country.⁷³⁸ Membership of the Volunteer Force had reached 200,000 by the 1870s.⁷³⁹ This was a further boost for Hill Brothers as military tailors who in the 1860s had become the official supplier of uniforms to the South Middlesex Rifle Volunteer Corps, as numerous adverts in London newspapers testify.⁷⁴⁰ By 1868 Henry Hill's business employed around 100 workers.⁷⁴¹ The *Western Times* in its Hill obituary suggested that it was 'perhaps the largest business of its kind ever known'.⁷⁴²

The speed with which the Hill Brothers business expanded can be gauged by looking at changing living arrangements between 1841 and 1861. In 1841 Henry and Charlotte Hill were

⁷³⁶ David Cannadine, *Victorious Century* (London: Penguin Books, 2018), pp. 309-311.

⁷³⁷ *Morning Post*, 25th Feb. 1856, p. 1.

⁷³⁸ Hugh Cunningham, *The Volunteer Force: A Social and Political History, 1859-1908* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), p. 1.

⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷⁴⁰ For instance, a recruitment advert in the *Volunteer Service Gazette and Military Dispatch* Wed. 23rd Nov. 1859, p. 8, states, 'The uniform complete is £4 15s, and may be procured at Hill & Brothers, 3, Old Bond-street'.

⁷⁴¹ This figure is mentioned in a brief court report involving Hill Brothers entitled 'Revival of the Journeyman Tailors' Combination. – Charge of Assault' in *London Evening Standard*, Mon. 30th March 1868, p. 7.

⁷⁴² *Western Times*, 13th April, 1882, p. 3.

living in lodgings in Broad Street, London, without servants.⁷⁴³ In 1851 Henry and Charlotte were living in Charlotte Street in central London.⁷⁴⁴ Henry's brother William was lodging with them along with one further gentleman lodger, and they had one servant.⁷⁴⁵ In 1861 Henry and Charlotte had moved into a larger house in Hammersmith and were able to afford four servants, a clear sign of their greatly increased wealth and status by this time.⁷⁴⁶ In 1865 Henry Hill could afford to move to a ten-bedroom mansion in Brighton where he purchased 53, Marine Parade outright for the sum of £3,500.⁷⁴⁷ This was at a time when the great majority of the middle class rented their homes and could not afford to buy a house outright.⁷⁴⁸ As Tosh writes 'In Victorian England [...] moving house was one of the surest signs of moving "up"'.⁷⁴⁹ By the time the Marine Parade development between the Steine and Kemp Town was completed in 1850 it had become one of Brighton's most fashionable and sought-after addresses for the aristocracy and bourgeoisie alike.⁷⁵⁰ The move to Brighton clearly signified that work had been exchanged for pleasure, accumulation for consumption, hard graft for a life of leisure. Further expenditure was incurred by Hill to extend 53 Marine Parade to create galleries for his art collection, 'one by one he built places to receive his treasures'.⁷⁵¹ He also acquired and converted 2, Wyndham Street to create a coach house and stables for the household.⁷⁵²

⁷⁴³ 1841 Census, Broad Street, Westminster, London, <<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC/1841/0008168242&expand=true>> [accessed 14th Aug. 2021].

⁷⁴⁴ 1851 Census, Charlotte Street, Marylebone, London, *Findmypast*.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁶ 1861 Census, 53, Marine Parade, Brighton, <<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC%2F1861%2F0000153014>> [accessed 14th Aug 2021].

⁷⁴⁷ The amount which Hill paid for the house is stated in 'Brighton County Court' in *Brighton Guardian*, 15th Nov. 1865, p. 7.

⁷⁴⁸ F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, p. 168.

⁷⁴⁹ Tosh, p. 25.

⁷⁵⁰ Collis, p. 192.

⁷⁵¹ *Western Times*, 13th April, 1882, p. 3.

⁷⁵² Christopher Redknap, *Captain Henry Hill of Brighton, Collector Extraordinary*, (unpublished essay, Brighton Museum, 29th March, 2006), p. 1, BMO.

Hill continued to spend around two days a week commuting to London to attend to business and presumably also browsing and buying art, but in effect after 1865 he was semi-retired.⁷⁵³ In all likelihood his brothers Charles and Edward who continued to live in London stepped up to take greater control of the business. By the late 1870s the best days of the military tailoring business were behind them and by December 1879 Hill Brothers in the West End had been incorporated into Mayhew and MacDougall Tailors based in Upper Norwood,⁷⁵⁴ a distinct come down from the heady days of entrepreneurial and financial success of the 1850s and 1860s. But by this time each of the three Hill brothers had made considerable fortunes and were the nineteenth century equivalents of multi-millionaires.⁷⁵⁵ The move to Brighton in October 1865 was announced in the 'Fashionable Chronicle' section of the *Brighton Guardian* 'Mr Hill has arrived at 53 Marine Parade'.⁷⁵⁶ Henry Hill had arrived in more senses than one given his origins as an unemployed artisan when he disembarked in London from the steamer that had sailed from Topsham in Devon in 1834.

We know very little about Charlotte Hill (1814-1891) and, unlike Harriet Trist, there is no evidence of a close involvement of Henry's wife in the accumulation of the art collection which was one of the main outlets for spending their surplus cash. There is a revealing comment on Henry and Charlotte Hill however in the biography of Frank Holl, one of Hill's favoured artists, written by his daughter Ada who had become Mrs. Reynolds by the time of publication in 1912.⁷⁵⁷ Ada Holl (1868-1965) writes of a visit to the Hills at 53, Marine Parade in which 'most of the day was spent in the company of Captain Hill and his kindly wife – a comfortable cheery

⁷⁵³ 'The Sewers Board' in *Brighton Gazette*, 8th June 1871, p. 6, reports that Hill was invited to join the board but expressed some doubt, 'My only objection would be that I am frequently in London two days at a time'. Nevertheless, Hill did join the Sewers Board.

⁷⁵⁴ Advert in *Norwood News*, 20th Dec. 1879, p4. The title reads 'Mayhew and Macdougall, Tailors (From Messrs. Wilcox, Woodrow & Co., Princes Street, Hanover Square, and Messrs Hill Bros., Bond Street)'.

⁷⁵⁵ Entries in the *Probate Registry in England and Wales* show that Charles Hill left £160,000 in his will, 12th Feb. 1878, folio 129, and Edward Hill left the 're-sworn' amount of £162,634, 29th March, 1892, folio 306. This compares with the sum of £259,599 bequeathed by Henry Hill in 1882, <probatesearch.service.gov.uk/Calendar> [accessed 8th Nov. 2021].

⁷⁵⁶ *Brighton Guardian*, 18th Oct. 1865, p. 5.

⁷⁵⁷ Mrs. Ada M. Holl Reynolds, *The Life and Work of Frank Holl* (London: Methuen & Co, 1912), p. 124.

soul with just as much appreciation of luxurious living as her bluff and breezy Captain'.⁷⁵⁸ The 'Old Friend' obituary in the *Western Times* in April 1882, this time in Smilesean mode, in explaining the Henry Hill success story accredits the up-and-coming tailor with those archetypal values and qualities which were proclaimed by the middle class themselves as central to their rise to economic and social power in the nineteenth century, 'The principles which guided him in his business life were industry, thrift, and punctuality, and these, supplemented with enormous energy, soon produced a great success, which increased year by year'.⁷⁵⁹ Charlotte Hill is assigned a similar range of dispositions albeit as an ancillary to her husband 'She was one of the true Devon type, gifted with excellent common sense, thrifty and indefatigable in her duties, a thoroughly worthy helpmate for her husband'.⁷⁶⁰ It should be noted that this account does not quite tally with Ada Holl's description of the Hills' 'appreciation of luxurious living' in Brighton, but by this time one presumes they could afford to jettison thrift for decadence.

It was not long after the move to 53, Marine Parade in 1865 that Henry Hill became fully involved in the social, cultural and civic life of the town and established himself as a leading light in the municipal elite of Brighton. Hill was a prominent and frequent contributor to charitable and good causes such as Sussex County Hospital, the Soup Relief Committee, and the Hospital for Sick Children.⁷⁶¹ In London in 1866, Messrs Hill Brothers, in true paternalist fashion supported journeyman tailors with large contributions to their benevolent fund.⁷⁶² In September 1867, Captain Hill was invited to the 'Champagne Race Dinner' at the Old Ship which was held in the town on an annual basis before the start of the Brighton Races. This occasion brought together many of the leading lights and dignitaries in the town elite. There

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁹ *Western Times*, 13th April, 1882, p. 3.

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶¹ *Brighton Gazette*, 18th Jan. 1866, p. 5; *Brighton Guardian*, 15th Jan. 1868, p. 1; *Brighton Gazette*, 17th Sept, 1868, p.1.

⁷⁶² In April 1866 Messrs Hill Brothers had pledged £100 to the Institute for the Relief of Old and Infirm Journeymen Tailors, see *Illustrated London News*, 14th April 1866, p. 7.

was musical entertainment and speeches, and Cordy Burrows toasted the new visitors to the town including Captain Hill, 'who had recently come to reside among us. Hill responded, and expressed his desire to do all he could to promote the interests of Brighton'.⁷⁶³ From this point forward Hill's involvement with voluntary societies multiplied. The Victorian rich were often as good at conspicuous benevolence as they were at conspicuous consumption. He was at one time or another a steward for the Hurstpierpoint Choral Festival, Honorary Vice-President of Brighton Rowing Club, Honorary Vice-President of Brighton Sacred Harmonic Society, President of Brighton Athletic Club, where he paid for and presented prizes, a member of Brighton Philharmonic Choir and President of the Brighton Early Risers' Cricket Club.⁷⁶⁴

In May 1867, he was made Honorary Quartermaster with the title of Captain of the 1st Sussex (Volunteer) Rifles (fig. 18).⁷⁶⁵ Hill would have been very familiar with voluntary corps of this kind which as we have seen were initiated in 1859, given that Hill Brothers military tailors was the chief provider of uniforms to an equivalent unit, the South Middlesex Rifle Volunteers Corps. As Hugh Cunningham, the historian of the Volunteers comments, 'the Volunteer Force was the military expression of the spirit of self-help, Victorian capitalism in arms [...] Captains of Industry became captains of companies'.⁷⁶⁶ Henry Hill very much fits this description. But perhaps most significantly in November 1868 he was elected councillor for Park Ward in Brighton and continued in this office right through to his retirement at the start of 1881.⁷⁶⁷ At this point in the analysis it should be obvious from Hill's myriad contributions to a whole range of Brighton's organisations and activities, that his art collection was just one element – albeit an important one – in a wide-ranging set of interests and a commensurate public profile embracing involvement in local politics, philanthropy, sport and recreation, military defence

⁷⁶³ *Brighton Gazette*, 18th 1867, p. 5.

⁷⁶⁴ *Brighton Guardian*, 26th 1869, p. 4, *Brighton Gazette*, 7th April 1870, p. 4, *Brighton Gazette*, 11th June 1874, p. 3, *Brighton Gazette*, 30th Jan. 1875, p. 3, *Brighton Guardian*, 31st Jan. 1877, p. 4, *Brighton Guardian*, 5th Dec. 1877, p. 6.

⁷⁶⁵ *Brighton Guardian*, 15th May 1867, p. 7.

⁷⁶⁶ Cunningham, *The Volunteer Force*, p. 1.

⁷⁶⁷ *Brighton Guardian*, 4th Nov. 1868, p. 5.

and education, as well as fine art. Bourgeois individualism in London had transmuted in Brighton it seems into gentlemanly paternalism; the successful and driven profit-maximising West End entrepreneur had become genial lord-of-the-manor on the South Coast.



Fig. 18. Photograph of Captain Henry Hill, sometime after 1865, *ancestry* website

However, managing the business was not always straightforward. At the point at which Hill was settling into a life of leisure, civic service, and collecting art on the South Coast, London tailoring businesses faced serious challenges as a result of industrial action.⁷⁶⁸ In 1866 and again in 1867, London journeyman tailors took strike action against their employers in order to improve their wages and establish national rates of pay.⁷⁶⁹ The first strike in spring 1866 was moderately successful, but in the following year 2,800 operative tailors downed tools in the capital in a dispute which was more bitter and protracted.⁷⁷⁰ The strike lasted four months from April to October 1867, when the tailors were forced back to work on an unconditional

⁷⁶⁸ Anne J. Kershen, *Uniting the Tailors: Trade Unionism Among the Tailoring Workers of London and Leeds, 1870-1939* (Ilford, Essex: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 1995), pp. 17-18.

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁰ Report in *Morning Advertiser*, 6th Sept. 1867, p. 3, in which Matthew Lawrence, Secretary of the London Operative Tailors' Association alleges that 2,800 workers on strike in 89 shops.

basis.⁷⁷¹ Messrs Hill Brothers were fully active in the employers' campaign to defeat the strike. At a meeting of the Master Tailors' Association of the United Kingdom in the Hanover Square Rooms on 27th May 1867, Hill Brothers were represented.⁷⁷² One of the brothers, almost certainly Henry, was a key speaker:

He believed that the course of action they had adopted would go far to cripple trades unions throughout the country (hear, hear). He held that the prosperity of old England was actually threatened by the proceedings of these trades unions. To the members of these bodies the aphorism was very applicable – "A little learning is a dangerous thing." He took that every trade best knew its own resources; that masters and men knew best how to conduct their business, and that there ought to be no third party to interfere between them (cheers). The law of supply and demand was that which must govern the trade of this country.⁷⁷³

Henry Hill would have been no doubt aware that by June 1867 around 250 operative tailors in Brighton were also taking strike action in solidarity with the London operative tailors.⁷⁷⁴ In response to this sympathetic action the *Brighton Gazette* condemned the workers and confidently anticipated that the striking Brighton workers would be starved back to work, 'only when their little pecuniary store is gone, their cupboard empty [...] will they unmistakably find that they have been their own enemies and in the wrong'.⁷⁷⁵ 1867 was also the year, as previously related, in which Henry Hill became a Captain in the 1st Sussex (Volunteer) Rifles and attended his first Champagne Race Dinner pledging his commitment 'to do all he could to promote the interests of Brighton'.

From Couturier to Connoisseur: 'I Want To Have What I Ought to Like'

On the basis of research into relevant catalogues, journals and newspapers Henry Hill owned a grand total of 728 works of art plus 20 sculptures. Of the 728 pictures, as far as can be

⁷⁷¹ 'The Tailors' Strike', *Sun*, 10th Oct. 1867, p. 1.

⁷⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁴ 'The Tailors' Strike' in *Brighton Gazette*, 13th June 1867, p. 5.

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

ascertained there were 528 paintings in oil, 127 watercolours, 50 works identified as drawings and sketches and 20 engravings and etchings.⁷⁷⁶ The sheer scale of the collection in terms of numbers of works is striking compared for instance with the three other Brighton collectors, Coningham (c.64), Willet (c.300), and Trist (c.146).⁷⁷⁷ Works by 186 different artists and 11 different sculptors are represented in the collection.⁷⁷⁸ Judging from the quantity of works purchased and the wide range of artists that he patronised, it is clear that Hill's surplus wealth allowed him to buy art without budgetary constraint. Doubtless, Hill would have been familiar with the concept of 'stock' in managing the business of Messrs. Hill Brothers military tailors in Bond Street. There is a sense in which the ownership of such a large 'stock' of paintings was important to Hill as much as the quality of his acquisitions. After all he needed enough works to both fill the wall space in his new Brighton seafront mansion and at the same time to loan pictures out in bulk to municipal exhibitions. There is no precise evidence of how much Hill spent on fine art but the 'Old Friend' obituary in the *Western Times* in 1882 refers to a figure of £20,000 as the cost of his collection,⁷⁷⁹ equivalent to more than £1.9 million in today's money.⁷⁸⁰ The total sum realised from the three Christie's sales was £22,121.⁷⁸¹ So, although his economic circumstances and cultural aspirations suggest that he did not collect art as a financial investment, it appears that it had appreciated in value by the time of the collection's dispersal between 1889 and 1893.

Of course, there was not only the cost of the paintings but also the cost of extending and converting 53 Marine Parade to create galleries to accommodate his pictures and sculptures. As the *Western Times* said 'The formation of those galleries, for one by one he built places to

⁷⁷⁶ Appendix 4. HHCS: *i. Summary tables, ii. Artists, works, details, iii. Works per artist, iv. Price realised, v. Size, vi. Buyers, vii. Christie's catalogues, viii. Brighton catalogues.*

⁷⁷⁷ See Appendix 3. WCCS: Appendix 5. HWCS, and Appendix 6. TACS.

⁷⁷⁸ Appendix 4. HHCS: *iii. Works per artist.*

⁷⁷⁹ *Western Times*, 3rd April 1882, p. 3.

⁷⁸⁰ In terms of a 'real price' measure this is equivalent to £1.9m in current values, *MeasuringWorth.com*.

⁷⁸¹ Appendix 4. HHCS: *iv. Price realised.*

receive his treasures, was his chief delight'.⁷⁸² Ada Holl in her account of her 1874 Brighton visit states, 'His gallery, or rather galleries, for they were incessantly being added to, were rapidly acquiring a reputation as the home of some of the best art of the day'.⁷⁸³ Alice Meynell in the *Magazine of Art* described the spaces in which he hung his pictures in greater detail:

The collection is gathered in to a cluster of moderately-sized, well-lighted rooms, devoted entirely to the purposes of a gallery, except for the presence of a pianoforte *à queue* which suggests a very delightful combination of pleasures – Chopin with Corot, and other happy unions of suggestive art. But the whole house is flowing over with pictures, the drawing-room being hung with them, even the obscurer walls of an anteroom being covered. Nothing is hung positively too high for a good sight, and some of the more centrally-placed pictures are so advantageously lighted and look so brilliant they seem to be full of a fresh force.⁷⁸⁴

It seems, that a significant proportion of the pictures owned by the Hills were on display judging from this account. Apparently, anybody who wished to visit his galleries was able to do so if they applied in advance.⁷⁸⁵ This was very much in the tradition of elite owners of art providing limited public access to their private collections, a custom first established in the eighteenth century.⁷⁸⁶ According to an account based on local history research by a relatively recent resident of 53, Marine Parade, six top-lit picture galleries were created to house the growing art collection.⁷⁸⁷ It appears then that the galleries were designed to be an accessible and distinctive feature of the house, a clear social and cultural statement to visitors, guests, family and friends. The presence of the piano is significant, confirming that Hill's cultural interests embraced music as well as fine art. It is perhaps no surprise that in his retirement he was involved in performing in and helping organise various local musical societies and events in the 1860s and 1870s including, as previously cited.⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸² *Western Times*, 13th April 1882, p.3.

⁷⁸³ Ada M. Holl, *The Life and Work of Frank Holl*, p. 124.

⁷⁸⁴ *Magazine of Art* (Jan. 1882), p. 2.

⁷⁸⁵ *Western Times*, 13th April 1882, p. 3.

⁷⁸⁶ Brandon Taylor, p. 1.

⁷⁸⁷ Notes written by Mr and Mrs Wardle entitled *An Intriguing Story about A Brighton House* containing information on Henry Hill and 53, Marine Parade, BMO, [accessed March 2019].

⁷⁸⁸ See fn. 764.

The artist and arts writer Philip Hamerton in *Thoughts About Art* (1873) in providing advice to would-be connoisseurs building up art collections in private houses stated:

The supreme merit of any collection is UNITY. Every picture ought to illustrate and help the rest. And if the buyer keeps in view some great leading purpose, the unity will come of itself, but it cannot easily be reached otherwise. Mere miscellaneous buying, according to the caprice of the moment, leads to the raking together of unrelated objects, but not to that beautiful and helpful order, which multiplies the value of every particle.⁷⁸⁹

Henry Hill's large and heterogeneous collection of 728 pictures, would appear to have lacked the 'UNITY' which would-be art historians such as Hamerton argued differentiated the true connoisseur from the mere accumulator of fine art. However, the fact is that most collections of art at the time, public and private, national and provincial, were marked by what Woodson-Bouton calls a 'fantastic eclecticism' driven by the amoral dynamics of art markets.⁷⁹⁰ The ideologically correct collection was still work-in-progress in the mind's eye of pioneering curators and critics. Baudrillard writes of the buyer's freedom to select from a whole range of 'choices' as one of the fundamental features of industrial society.⁷⁹¹ 'This availability of the objects is the foundation of "personalization"', he argues.⁷⁹² Cohen writes of the 'age of individuality' and the invention of 'personality' in the late nineteenth century expressed in the formation of distinctive and artistic interiors in the home.⁷⁹³ One certainly gets the impression that Hill revelled in the freedom which his money gave him to shop for paintings, the ultimate in hand-crafted luxury goods, the unique configuration of which would testify to his wealth and individuality. It should not be forgotten that Messrs Hill Brothers not only made but also retailed outfits and suits for the bourgeoisie and gentry in Bond Street. They were a shop as

⁷⁸⁹ Philip Gilbert Hamerton, *Thoughts About Art* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1873), pp. 135-136.

⁷⁹⁰ Woodson-Boulton, *Transformative Beauty*, p. 111.

⁷⁹¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, transl. James Benedict (London; New York: Verso, 1996), p. 141.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*

⁷⁹³ Cohen, p. 125 and pp. 137-7.

well as a manufacturer. Hill was therefore familiar with the world of high-end consumption from the other side of the counter.

A closer examination of the collection reveals clear parameters to his purchases. First, the vast majority of the works were by contemporary artists who were alive in Henry Hill's lifetime. Hill's was a collection of modern art rather than a collection of old masters.⁷⁹⁴ Second, in terms of the standard genres of painting, over 400 (56%) of the works were landscapes of some description, and 222 were domestic, narrative and anecdotal works (31%) – that is they were in the category of 'genre' paintings.⁷⁹⁵ These proportions suggest a conventional collection, his predilection for landscapes perhaps harking back to his rural upbringing in Devon. Thirdly, and perhaps most notably half the paintings Hill owned were by contemporary French and European artists (see, for example, fig. 19).⁷⁹⁶ Ernest Gambart had been the first dealer to systematically market contemporary French art alongside British art in London when he took the lease of a gallery space in 121, Pall Mall in 1853.⁷⁹⁷ Nevertheless, even in the 1870s Hill's collection of British and French works in equal numbers would still have been untypical although not uncommon.⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹⁴ Appendix 4. HHCS: *ii. Artists, works, details.*

⁷⁹⁵ Appendix 4. HHCS: *i. Summary tables, Table C.*

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, *i. Summary tables, Table B.*

⁷⁹⁷ Jeremy Maas, *Gambart: Prince of the Victorian Art World* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1975), p. 63.

⁷⁹⁸ Appendix 2. MMVC: *v. Taste* shows that 24 out of Macleod's chosen 146 collectors bought nineteenth century French art.



Fig. 19. J. B. Corot *Fisherman Moored at A Bank*, c.1870, oil on canvas, (33cm x 48cm), National Museum Wales, Cardiff

There were two English artists in particular with whom Henry Hill had a special association: Philip Morris and Frank Holl. Significantly both of these artists attended Hill's funeral in Brighton in April 1882, along with the sculptor Edward Stephens (1815-1882), one of the executors of Hill's will.⁷⁹⁹ It is very likely that in the 1870s Hill was the leading collector of works by both of these artists and he can be viewed as their patron. J. M. Bourne, writing of patronage in the nineteenth century says, 'the exercise of patronage was an aspect of the general obligation of the privileged, wealthy, and powerful to "rule, guide and help" their social inferiors.'⁸⁰⁰ Not only did Hill own 53 works by Morris but he possessed 20 pictures by Holl. However, his relationship with both artists went beyond that of traditional patronage between sponsor and client. He appears to have established meaningful friendships with both painters who, much as Hill himself had done, were seeking to build businesses, boost their income and improve their social position. For Hill buying their paintings seemed to be as much about acting as a considerate patron and fulfilling the duties of friendship as it was about amassing a collection of works by acclaimed artists reflecting a coherent aesthetic vision, as

⁷⁹⁹ 'Funeral of Capt. Hill', *Brighton Gazette*, 6th April 1882, p. 8.

⁸⁰⁰ J. M. Bourne, *Patronage and Society in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), p. 57.

much about loyalty and companionship, as about artistic interest. As we will see all five Brighton collectors had personal and affective ties with artists or dealers or even particular galleries which provided an emotional as much as a connoisseurial impetus in determining purchases. We have already encountered a similar ‘homosocial’ connection, as Macleod puts it, between Coningham and the artist John Linnell who acted as friend and mentor to the Radical connoisseur.⁸⁰¹



Fig. 20. Philip Morris, *The Reaper and the Flowers*, 1876-78, oil on canvas (86cm x 100cm), Lancaster City Museum

The evidence of Hill’s relationship with Morris is patchy and circumstantial but it is clear that they had a close association, and not just because Morris attended Hill’s funeral or the fact that Hill owned a large number of paintings by the artist (see, for example, fig. 20).⁸⁰² On the occasion of the opening of the School of Art and Science in February 1877 Hill, who was hosting their tour of the Picture Gallery, made a point of introducing Princess Louise and her husband to Morris whose paintings featured in the exhibition.⁸⁰³ In the first part of the

⁸⁰¹ Dianne Sachko Macleod, ‘Homosociality and Middle-class Identity in Early Victorian Patronage of the Arts’, in Alan Kidd and David Nicholls, eds., *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle Class Identity in Britain, 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 65-80 (p. 65).

⁸⁰² *Brighton Guardian*, Wed. 7th Feb. 1877, p. 6. Philip Richard Morris (1836-1902) came from Devon where Henry Hill originated from. In London in the 1850s he was encouraged by Holman Hunt to become an artist rather than join the family business. Morris exhibited at the Royal Academy on a consistent basis from 1864 onwards and became an Associate of the Royal Academy in 1877. For this and further information on Morris, see P. G. Konody ‘Morris, Philip Richard 1836-1902’ in *ODNB* (2004), <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35116>>, [accessed 6th Nov. 2019].

⁸⁰³ *Brighton Guardian*, 7th Feb. 1877.

Magazine of Art article on the Hill collection, Meynell includes a substantial and appreciative paragraph on Philip Morris's work concluding 'Very rarely in the history of art has so constant a patron been found by any one artist, and rarely has patronage been so deservedly won'.⁸⁰⁴

Two of the lots in the second Christie's sale of the collection in 1892 were works by Morris each assigned the title *Seven Studies of Landscapes Near Brighton* and another Morris picture not on sale at Christie's but exhibited in Brighton in 1876 was titled *King's Road, Brighton, Storm of November 10th 1875*.⁸⁰⁵ It would seem likely that Morris stayed with Hill in Brighton to enable him to access the Sussex Downs countryside referred to in these works.

Finally, apropos of the Hill-Morris friendship, a letter from Morris appeared in the *Brighton Herald* at the end of July 1877 which was written in the context of the news that month that James Whistler (1834-1903) had instituted a law suit against John Ruskin for his libellous 'pot of paint' comments regarding Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* displayed at the Grosvenor Gallery in the spring of that year.⁸⁰⁶ Henry Hill had displayed a Whistler painting he owned at a Brighton Gallery exhibition in 1875.⁸⁰⁷ Morris writes:

as Captain Hill and myself first introduced Mr Whistler's pictures to the Brighton public, in the Exhibition of 1875, I must enter my protest against Mr Ruskin's criticism, which appears to my judgement as most unjust, evidently written in ignorance of how very earnest a worker Mr Whistler is, or how far from coxcombry is the man who sometimes destroys the labour of weeks to gain a higher excellence.⁸⁰⁸

What is interesting about this letter from Philip Morris apart from the light it sheds on how artists lined up on one side or the other in the Ruskin-Whistler debate in 1877, is the claim that Morris makes to be working in partnership with Captain Hill in bringing new art before the

⁸⁰⁴ *Magazine of Art* (Jan. 1882), p. 3.

⁸⁰⁵ Christie's Sales Catalogue for Feb. 19th and Feb. 20th 1892, nos. 87 and 88; *Royal Pavilion Gallery, Brighton, Catalogue of Pictures Lent by Professor Ruskin* and others including Captain Hill, Autumn 1876, no. 181.

⁸⁰⁶ Linda Merrill, *A Pot of Paint, Aesthetics on Trial in Whistler v Ruskin* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), pp. 57-60.

⁸⁰⁷ Catalogue for the *Second Annual Exhibition of Modern Pictures, 9th Sept. 1875*, no. 158.

⁸⁰⁸ Letter assigned the title 'Nocturnes in Silver and Gold' in *Brighton Herald*, 28th July 1877, p. 6.

Brighton public. In the 13th April 1882 'Old Friend' obituary, the writer says of Hill, 'he had the sagacity to get the aid of experienced artists to guide him, for as he naively remarked "It is little use buying merely what I like, but I want to have what I ought to like, and which when I know something of art, I shall find will be worth my liking"'.⁸⁰⁹ It is likely that one of these 'experienced artists' who guided Hill was Philip Morris. Whether there was a genuine affinity between Hill and Morris, the self-made millionaire and the painter of accomplished but formulaic genre and marine pictures, is unknown. But clearly a valuable exchange between economic capital and cultural capital was effected between the two to their mutual advantage.

In 1864 Henry's brother Edward, partner and accountant in the Bond Street tailoring business, married Ada Holl, the sister of Frank Holl who was at that time an up-and-coming young artist.⁸¹⁰ It was no doubt, in part, this family connection which drew Hill to buying the social realist works of Holl, influenced by his employment by the *Graphic* magazine in the 1870s.⁸¹¹ The artist's reputation and commercial success had improved after good reviews of *The Lord Gave and the Lord Hath Taken Away, Blessed Be The Name of the Lord* exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1869, followed by a commission from Queen Victoria.⁸¹² Hill bought his first work by Holl in 1869, *Once Upon a Time*,⁸¹³ which was later exhibited in the newly constructed Brighton gallery in 1872,⁸¹⁴ and he became one of Holl's major patrons along with Frederick Pawle, a Reigate stockbroker.⁸¹⁵ Hill and Holl went on to become close friends. Ada Holl (Mrs

⁸⁰⁹ *Western Times*, 13th April 1882, p.3

⁸¹⁰ The register for the district of Marylebone for 1864 shows that Ada Holl married Edward Mortimer Hill in that year, in 'England and Wales Marriages, 1837-2005', <<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=BMD%2FM%2F1864%2F1%2FAH%2F000904%2F033>> [accessed 14th August, 2021].

⁸¹¹ Peter Funnell, 'Frank Holl: Portraits and the "Modern Englishman"', in *Frank Holl: Emerging from the Shadows*, ed. by Mark Bills and others (London and New York: Philip Wilson Publishers in association with Watts Gallery, 2013) pp. 38-53 (p. 39).

⁸¹² Mark Bills, "'Death and Absence Differ But In Name": The Subject Paintings of Frank Holl', in *Frank Holl: Emerging from the Shadows*, pp. 14-37 (p. 20).

⁸¹³ Ada M. Holl, *The Life and Work of Frank Holl*, p. 79.

⁸¹⁴ *Catalogue of Pictures Exhibited on the Occasion of the Visit of the British Association at Brighton, Aug. 1872 in the New Museum and Library, Pavilion*, no. 148. Another painting by Frank Holl was also shown at this exhibition, *The Milkmaid*, no. 119.

⁸¹⁵ Bills, p. 20.

Reynolds) in her biography of her father dates the start of this friendship very precisely to the family visit to Brighton in April 1874, 'It was during this visit that the friendship with Captain Henry Hill, [...] rapidly developed, laying the foundations of an attachment almost amounting to kindredship.⁸¹⁶ Ada Holl goes on to say that Hill believed that Frank Holl was the "coming man".⁸¹⁷

This same account indicates that the artists John Pettie (1839-1893) and William Quiller Orchardson (1832-1910) and their wives joined the Holl family at 53, Marine Parade on the same visit in 1874.⁸¹⁸ Holl, Pettie, and Quiller Orchardson were members of an informal sketching club of North London artists convened for social purposes by Holl around this time which also included John McWhirter, John Burr, and C. E. Johnson.⁸¹⁹ The works of 'Our Sketching Club' featured in the Brighton Picture Gallery Spring exhibition in 1877 supervised by Hill which must have been a direct outcome of his friendship with Holl.⁸²⁰ Holl's Surrey connections brought the artist into 'a thriving community of fellow artists' including Paul Falconer Poole, E. W. Cooke, and James Clarke Hook.⁸²¹ Hill bought pictures from all eight of the aforementioned artists in Frank Holl's artistic circle suggesting that his relationship with the artist was a factor determining which other artists he chose to purchase from. Philip McEvansoneya in his doctoral thesis on social realist painters references Ada Holl's account of the London artists' visit to Brighton. He points out that Hill bought both Orchardson's *Hamlet and the King*, and Pettie's sketch for *Jacobites* in 1874 and comments, 'One cannot help feeling that the sales and the trip were connected'.⁸²² In 1879 Frank Holl developed a lucrative professional practice as a portrait painter and by the early 1880s had completely given up

⁸¹⁶ Ada M. Holl, *The Life and Work of Frank Holl*, p. 124.

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁸¹⁹ Barbara Bryant, 'The Private and Public Life of Frank Holl: The Journey from Camden Town to Hampstead and Surrey' in *Frank Holl: Emerging from the Shadows*, pp. 54-73 (p. 70).

⁸²⁰ 'Our Sketching Club' in *Royal Pavilion Gallery Catalogue of Exhibition April 1877*, pp. 8-9.

⁸²¹ Bryant, p. 57.

⁸²² McEvansoneya, Philip Daniel, "'Dismal Art' – or "Strong, realistic pictures" ? Luke Fildes, Frank Holl and "Social Realism"' (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 1992), p. 402.

producing works focusing on tragedy and privation.⁸²³ Painting the portraits of rich and eminent middle class men helped make Holl himself a wealthy man able to commission a large studio house in Hampstead and another designed by Norman Shaw in Shere in Surrey.⁸²⁴ Meanwhile, in 1880 Henry Hill commissioned Holl to produce his portrait which must have been one of the last paintings which Hill purchased for his collection (fig. 21).⁸²⁵

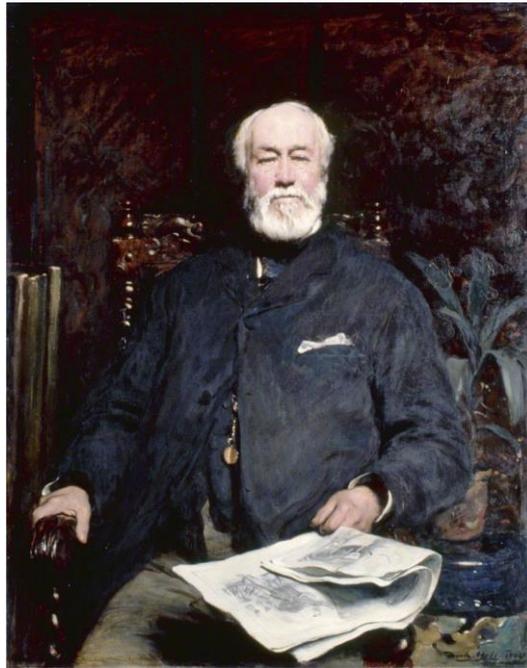


Fig. 21. Frank Holl, *Portrait of Henry Hill*, 1880, oil on canvas (128cm x 104cm), Brighton Museum

Henry Hill's collection contained paintings by over 50 French artists and more than 30 artists from other European countries.⁸²⁶ Ada Holl in her biography of her father said of Hill, 'He was a great connoisseur of the then new French school, and must have been one of the earliest buyers of Degas in this country'.⁸²⁷ We do not know the precise reasons why Henry Hill chose to purchase the works of French artists in equal numbers to those by British artists. It may be that the cosmopolitanism of continental art and its 'aura of exclusivity' promoted in new

⁸²³ Funnell, p. 39.

⁸²⁴ Bryant, pp. 61-2 and pp. 66-7.

⁸²⁵ Ada M. Holl, *The Life and Work of Frank Holl*, p. 182.

⁸²⁶ Appendix 4. HHCS: ii. Artists.

⁸²⁷ Ada M. Holl, *The Life and Work of Frank Holl*, p. 124.

London galleries is what appealed.⁸²⁸ But two rather more pragmatic factors are likely to have been instrumental. First, is the fact already noted that Messrs Hill Brothers tailors in Old Bond Street were patronised by French clients to the extent that the firm had opened a branch of the business in Paris.⁸²⁹ This must have meant that Henry Hill travelled to France to manage the shop in Paris with time to enjoy fashionable Parisian society and an incentive to learn the language. Cosmopolitanism for Hill and his business was an *actualité* rather than an aspiration. Second, private galleries and dealers showing and selling French art were located close to the Old Bond Street premises of the tailoring business. In particular Paul Durand-Ruel (1831-1922) had relocated his business and a large proportion of his stock to London in 1870, to escape the upheaval in Paris as a result of the Franco-Prussian War.⁸³⁰ He took over the lease of the German gallery at 168 New Bond Street and held his first exhibition here in December 1870 under the auspices of a fictitious committee of ten, the Society of French Artists, which included for marketing purposes the names of established figures such as Courbet, Corot, Millet, and Daubigny.⁸³¹ In all 11 exhibitions were held under the auspices of the Society of French Artists.⁸³² *The Examiner and London Review* reviewing the first exhibition commented on the 'the small but remarkably interesting collection of pictures now on view [...] French art of all kinds is always very acceptable here'.⁸³³

Pierre Assouline says of Durand-Ruel, 'The dealer was a tireless proselyte: now that he was in England, he was determined to convert the English to the French School'.⁸³⁴ Zarobell suggests

⁸²⁸ Fletcher, 'The Grand Tour on Bond Street', p. 140.

⁸²⁹ *Western Times*, 13th April 1882, p.3

⁸³⁰ Pierre Assouline, *Discovering Impressionism: The Life of Paul Durand-Ruel* (New York: Vendome, 2004), p. 99.

⁸³¹ *Ibid.*

⁸³² *Ibid.*

⁸³³ 'German Gallery, 168 New Bond Street. Society of French Artists', in *The Examiner and London Review*, iss. 3281 (1870), p. 809.

⁸³⁴ Assouline, p. 101.

his 'mission was to create value'.⁸³⁵ The German Gallery at 168, New Bond Street was 200 yards from Messrs Hill Brothers at 3, Old Bond Street. Of course, by this time as Fletcher points out there were a myriad of art dealers in London clustering in Bond Street and the West End.⁸³⁶ These included the French Gallery run by Henry Wallis who had bought the business from Gambart in 1867,⁸³⁷ and from 1875 the Goupil Gallery in Bedford Street both of which featured works by continental artists.⁸³⁸ Putting these factors together, Henry Hill's allegiance to French fine art made sense from both a business and locational point of view. He bought works from all three of these galleries but most especially from Durand-Ruel at 168, New Bond Street, just up the road. Westgarth makes the point that locations such as Bond Street 'allowed the dealers to draw on the caché as well as the clientele of trades associated with the social elites, such as fashionable tailoring and other high-class purveyors'.⁸³⁹

Hill bought his first work by Degas in 1874 from the Durand-Ruel gallery in New Bond Street.⁸⁴⁰ He bought the remaining 6 works at the 168, New Bond Street gallery after the management had transferred to Charles Deschamps (1848-1908), who continued to operate and exhibit partly on the basis of the extensive reserve of stock provided by Durand-Ruel.⁸⁴¹ The *Art Journal* reviewing the Deschamps exhibition in 1876 where several works by Degas bought by Hill were on display, wrote that the art of the "Impressionists" leave such a wide field for all manner of weakness and incompetence that we do not think, in the interests of art, the school ought to be encouraged.⁸⁴² Notwithstanding this kind of admonitory comment, an

⁸³⁵ J. Zarobell, 'Paul Durand-Ruel and the Market for Modern Art, 1870-1873' in *Inventing Impressionism: Paul Durand-Ruel and the Modern Art Market*, ed. Sylvie Patry (London: National Gallery Company, 2015), pp. 76-97 (p. 78).

⁸³⁶ Pamela Fletcher, 'Shopping for Art: The Rise of the Commercial Art Gallery, 1850s-1890s', in *The Rise of the Modern Art Market*, pp. 47-64 (p. 48).

⁸³⁷ Maas, pp. 200-1.

⁸³⁸ Anne Helmreich, 'The Goupil Gallery at the Intersection Between London, Continent, and Empire', in *The Rise of the Modern Art Market*, pp. 65-84 (p. 69).

⁸³⁹ Westgarth, *The Emergence of the Antique and Curiosity Dealer*, p. 119.

⁸⁴⁰ Ronald Pickvance, 'Degas's Dancers 1872-1876', in *The Burlington Magazine*, 105.723 (1963), 256-267 (p. 263).

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁸⁴² 'The Deschamps Galleries, Bond Street' in *The Art Journal* (July 1876), p. 211.

examination of contemporary British newspaper and journal accounts of the various Society of French Artists exhibitions indicate that Hill bought specific works displayed by the following artists between 1870 and 1876 from Durand-Ruel and Deschamps: Constant Artz, C. F. Daubigny, Georges Bellenger, Emil Breton, Jules Dupre, Degas, Fantin-Latour, L'Hermitte, L. Munthe, and H. Pille.⁸⁴³ It seems likely that he bought James Whistler's *Nocturne in Blue and Gold: Valparaiso* at this time in 1874-1875 from the same location given that Durand-Ruel regularly featured the artist in his gallery (fig. 22).⁸⁴⁴ In addition, Durand-Ruel's stock books in Paris show that on 26th December 1873, he sold "Captain Hill" a painting by Emile Barrassit for 750 francs, and in 1876, a work by Theodore Rousseau and three by Jean-Baptiste Corot.⁸⁴⁵ Intriguingly, this evidence implies that Hill made direct purchases from Paul Durand-Ruel in Paris, given that by 1876 Durand Ruel was no longer trading on his own account in London. In other words, it would appear that Hill's purchases of contemporary French and continental realist and impressionist art were determined by the range of stock available and on sale from the early 1870s to 1876 at the 168, New Bond Street gallery located very close to the Hill business premises at 3, Old Bond Street. The typical range of artists whose works were on sale in the old German Gallery corresponds with the profile of artists whose works Hill owned.

⁸⁴³ Appendix 4. HHCS: *ii Artists, works, details*.

⁸⁴⁴ Two other collectors were offered *Nocturne in Blue and Gold: Valparaiso Bay* in 1874 according to Note 3. for James Whistler letter to William Grapel, MS Whistler G160 in *The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler* website, published by the University of Glasgow, <
<https://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/>> [accessed 21st Oct. 2019]. Captain Hill must have bought it prior to Sept. 1875 when it was exhibited in Brighton according to the catalogue for the *Corporation of Brighton Second Annual Exhibition of Modern Pictures on 9th Set 1875*.

⁸⁴⁵ Email from Paul-Louis Durand-Ruel to David Adelman, Tues. 5th Nov. 2019, providing information from Paul Durand-Ruel stock books for the 1870s at Durand-Ruel & Cie, Paris, referencing Hill purchases.

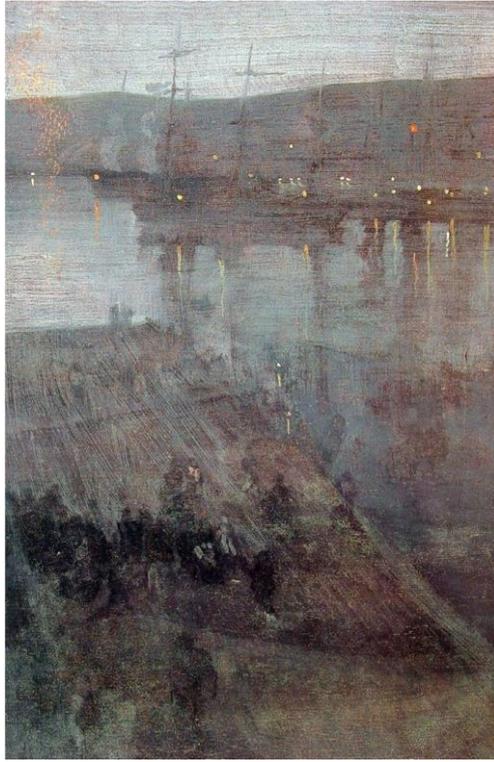


Fig. 22. J. M. Whistler, *Nocturne in Blue and Silver: Valparaiso*, 1866-1874, oil on canvas (76cm x 50cm), Freer Gallery of art, Washington DC

Ronald Pickvance proposes that Degas actually visited Henry Hill in Brighton in the mid-1870s and Hill may have purchased *L'Absinthe* directly from the artist.⁸⁴⁶ There is a certain romance to this notion of the 'celebrity' artist gracing the private galleries of the rich but culturally inexperienced tailor in Brighton. However, it is apparent that Hill had rather more meaningful associations with two other French artists, Marie Cazin (1845-1924) and Jules Lessore (1849-1892). Hill bought 98 works by Marie Cazin, who exhibited at the Durand-Ruel gallery in New Bond Street with some critical acclaim (fig. 23).⁸⁴⁷ On the other hand it seems likely that Hill bought the 73 Lessore paintings and drawings in his collection directly from the artist, who was living close to Brighton in Southwick in the 1870s.⁸⁴⁸ Lessore attended Hill's funeral on 5th April

⁸⁴⁶ Pickvance, 'Henry Hill: An Untypical Collector', 791.

⁸⁴⁷ Appendix 4. HHCS: *ii. Artists, works, details*. For appreciative comments of Cazin's work see the review of French art in the *Art Journal*, Feb. 1876, pp. 46-7.

⁸⁴⁸ Therese Lessore in Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Therese_Lessore> [accessed 21st Nov. 2019].

1882 and seems to have been another example of a young artist whose career was encouraged and supported by the rich Brighton patron.⁸⁴⁹



Fig. 23. Marie Cazin, *Stone Yard, Old Houses in Paris, France, 1864-1876*, oil on wood (45cm x 55cm), Russell-Cotes Art Gallery, Bournemouth

It is also clear that Hill bought into British artists who were receiving critical recognition and fashionable attention at the time. For instance, Hill purchased five works from the aestheticist John Melhuish Strudwick (1849-1935) two at least of which had been displayed at the 'aristocratic' Grosvenor Gallery situated very conveniently for Hill in New Bond Street.⁸⁵⁰ As noted earlier in the chapter Meynell highlighted works by the 'idyllic' artists Frederick Walker and George Mason as among his chief possessions.⁸⁵¹ There were 20 pieces of sculpture in the Hill collection, six of which were by Edward Stephens. Stephens was one of the executors of Henry Hill's will which suggests a close friendship between the two men.⁸⁵² This must surely have been linked to the fact that Stephens was also from Devon born just two years after Hill in 1815 in Exeter, not far from Cullompton.⁸⁵³ Stephens had migrated to London to train as a

⁸⁴⁹ 'Funeral of Capt. Hill' in *Brighton Gazette*, 6th April 1882, p. 8.

⁸⁵⁰ Appendix 4. HHCS: *ii Artist, works, details*, and Fletcher, 'Shopping for Art', p. 51.

⁸⁵¹ Meynell, *Magazine of Art* (Jan. 1882), p. 5; Donato Esposito, *Frederick Walker and the Idyllists* (London: Lund Humphries, 2017), p. 7.

⁸⁵² Entry for Henry Hill in the *Probate Registry in England and Wales*, 19th June 1882, folio 473.

⁸⁵³ R. E. Graves, 'Stephens, Edward Bowring' in *ODNB* (2004), <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/26381>> [accessed 21st Nov. 2019].

sculptor in 1835, the year after Hill had made the same journey from Devon to London.⁸⁵⁴

Perhaps Stephens who was elected an associate of the Royal Academy in 1864 (probably by mistake) was an influence in developing Hill's interest in art and the idea of forming a collection.⁸⁵⁵

Money and Art in the Making of a Brighton Patrician and Civic Benefactor

The cultural capital invested in his art collection enabled Henry Hill to announce himself as a patron of the arts when he loaned pictures to the special art exhibition in the new Picture Gallery to mark the visit of the British Association in August 1872. Given that his collection at this point in time was in the early stages of development, it appears that one of the main purposes of a private collection for Hill was the public exhibition of his paintings.⁸⁵⁶ His artworks had to perform to a wider audience to maximise their value. There were 63 contributors to the special art exhibition and Henry Hill loaned the second largest number of works, 28 pictures including paintings by Philip Morris, Frank Holl and Richard Beavis.⁸⁵⁷ This significant loan of works marked Hill out as rather more than a town councillor, he was now a benefactor and dignitary. The construction of the 'free library, museum, and picture gallery' on the Pavilion estate also provided the opportunity for Hill to become a municipal impresario with the task of promoting fine art in Brighton and making a success of the new gallery. In September 1872 he became a member of the Fine Arts Sub-Committee (FASC) which had responsibility for the overall management of the Picture Gallery. In 1875 Hill took over as

⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Graves comments on E. B. Stephens election to ARA that 'it was generally believed that his election was due to his having been confused with Alfred Stevens, the sculptor of the Wellington monument in St Paul's cathedral'.

⁸⁵⁶ Appendix 4. HHCS: *ii Artist, works, details*. Available dates of purchase suggest that he bought the majority of his pictures across the 1870s

⁸⁵⁷ *Catalogue of Pictures, Exhibited on the Occasion of the Visit of the British Association at Brighton, August 1872* (Brighton: John Farncombe, 1872).

Chairman of the FASC, a post which he retained until his resignation and retirement at the end of 1880.⁸⁵⁸

The evidence indicates that Hill was an energetic and resourceful Chairman of the FASC and played a leading role in establishing the new Picture Gallery as a popular public resource. Throughout his tenure Hill organised exhibitions at the gallery on a twice-yearly basis reflecting established practices in London commercial galleries by this time.⁸⁵⁹ In Autumn 1874 what became known as the 'Annual Exhibition of Modern Pictures' was inaugurated in which pictures for sale were displayed with prices set out in the catalogue.⁸⁶⁰ Hill was a member of the selection or hanging committee which determined which pictures would be included in these exhibitions.⁸⁶¹ Hill himself wrote in the Second FASC Report that this approach was based 'on a plan similar to that adopted with such success at Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Glasgow, and other large towns.'⁸⁶² Occasionally, loan pictures from Henry Hill himself or others were interspersed among the for-sale works, presumably to enhance the overall quality of the exhibition and arouse greater interest.⁸⁶³ Essentially, however, the winter annual exhibition was as much a shop-window and market for producers and consumers of contemporary fine art as it was an aesthetic show-case of the talents and skills of local Sussex and national artists. The body with the overall responsibility for the Annual Exhibitions was the Pavilion Committee and its subordinate the FASC. The names of the members of these committees were recorded on the first page of the exhibition catalogue.⁸⁶⁴ Also, listed are what were called 'Honorary Corresponding Members' who were artists who allowed their

⁸⁵⁸ FASC Minutes, 7th Aug. 1875, p. 74, BMO. This appears to be the first meeting chaired by Hill.

⁸⁵⁹ Fletcher, 'Shopping for Art', p. 52.

⁸⁶⁰ The catalogue titled *Corporation of Brighton, Second Annual Exhibition of Modern Pictures in Oil and Water Colours, Opened September 9th 1875* was the first to use the term 'Second Annual'.

⁸⁶¹ FASC Minutes, 24th Oct. 1874, p. 41, BMO.

⁸⁶² Second Annual Report of the FASC, Sept. 1875, p. 14, BHSB027.4BRI.

⁸⁶³ Appendix 4. HHCS: *viii Brighton catalogues*.

⁸⁶⁴ The first example of this convention is the opening page of the catalogue for the first annual exhibition titled, *Corporation of Brighton, Winter Exhibition of Modern Pictures, Opened December 4th, 1874, Royal Pavilion Gallery*.

names to be associated with the exhibition in Brighton, with the aim of helping to 'sell' the show. For the first Annual Exhibition opening in September 1874, 15 artists are listed.⁸⁶⁵ Henry Hill owned works by 13 of these artists including Philip Morris, Josef Israels and Frank Holl.⁸⁶⁶ It seems likely that it was Hill himself who had solicited these artists either directly or indirectly to lend their names and therefore their tacit endorsement to the works on sale at this and subsequent annual exhibitions.

The spring exhibitions tended to be loan exhibitions in which Hill or other members of his committee arranged for art collectors to loan a selection of their privately-owned works as the basis for the exhibition. The prime motivation for the spring exhibition appears to have been to provide the Brighton public and its holiday-maker visitors with a distinctive and contrasting range of pictures of presumed aesthetic quality, validated by the wealth and reputation of the men who loaned works from their private collections to the corporation gallery. William Webster (1819-1888), who provided 133 works for the January 1873 exhibition in the Picture Gallery to mark the formal opening of the gallery to the general public, had made his fortune as a builder and contractor.⁸⁶⁷ His firm had been responsible in the 1850s for renovating churches in Lincolnshire and lunatic asylums in Cambridgeshire, and in the 1860s sewers, pumping stations, and railway stations in London and most famously for the construction of the Albert and Chelsea Embankments and parts of the Victoria Embankment.⁸⁶⁸ Although Webster lived in Blackheath, Kent, he also owned a house in Brunswick Terrace Brighton.⁸⁶⁹ Like Hill himself, Webster had taken up art collecting later in life after having made his money. The other major contributor to the January 1873 exhibition who provided 61 works was the

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁶ Appendix 4. HHCS: *ii. Artists, works, details.*

⁸⁶⁷ Obituary for William Webster in 'Minutes of the Proceedings of the Institution of Civil engineers', 92.1888 (1888), pp. 410.411, published by the Institution of Civil Engineers, <<https://www.icevirtuallibrary.com/doi/abs/10.1680/jimotp.1888.20967>> [accessed 28th Nov. 2019].

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁹ The front page of the catalogue *Brighton Free Library and Museum, Picture Gallery, Royal Pavilion 1873* (Brighton: Curtis Bros. & Towner Printers, 1873) gives Webster's addresses as 'Blackheath and Brunswick Terrace, Brighton'.

rich Brighton brewer and leading light of the town, Henry Willett will be discussed in the chapter which follows. In the following year for the spring exhibition the engineer, railway magnate and President of the London, Chatham and Dover Railway, James S. Forbes (1823-1904) lent the Brighton picture gallery 79 works, all of which were painted by continental artists.⁸⁷⁰ The spring exhibition in 1876 was marketed on the basis that the foremost lender of pictures was Professor Ruskin, although when you examine the catalogue it turns out only loaned 4 of the 250 works on display.⁸⁷¹ The other works provided by a range of other collectors were obviously not the 'big name' draw that Ruskin was.⁸⁷²

But the leading patron of the arts who loaned pictures to Brighton's fine art exhibitions was of course Hill himself who had loan works on display in exhibitions every year from 1872 to 1878.⁸⁷³ For instance, in the spring 1874 exhibition Hill loaned 78 of the oil paintings on display with the other 109 provided by Brighton corporation and leading dignitaries of the town including the former mayor Cordy Burrows and Henry Willett.⁸⁷⁴ At the Third Annual Exhibition of Modern Pictures which opened in September 1876 Hill had 13 works on display although they were not for sale, unlike the vast majority of the other paintings shown.⁸⁷⁵ These included Degas's *L'Absinthe* titled at that time *A Sketch at a French Café* (fig. 24) which was hung next to *On the Coast, near Port Madoc, North Wales* by G. Pringle on one side and *Spring Flowers* by one E. G. H. Lucas on the other.⁸⁷⁶ The *Brighton Gazette* in its review of the exhibition said of the painting by G. Pringle, 'A quiet-toned pleasing sketch', and of the E. G. H. Lucas work, 'The

⁸⁷⁰ Catalogue titled *Royal Pavilion Gallery, Brighton, Exhibition of Modern Foreign Pictures, Lent by J. S. Forbes, Esq., Opened April 1st, 1875*, nos. 1-79. For biographical details of James Staat Forbes see his obituary 'Death of Mr. J. Staat Forbes, A Railway King', in *The Dover Express and East Kent News*, 18th April 1904, p. 3.

⁸⁷¹ Catalogue for Spring exhibition entitled *Royal Pavilion Gallery, Brighton, Catalogue of Pictures Lent by Professor Ruskin [and 9 others]* (Brighton: H. J. Infield, 1876).

⁸⁷² *Ibid.*

⁸⁷³ Appendix 4. HHCS: *viii Brighton catalogues*.

⁸⁷⁴ Catalogue, *Brighton Free Library and Museum, Picture Gallery. Royal Pavilion, 1874* (Brighton: H. J. Infield, 1874).

⁸⁷⁵ Catalogue, *Corporation of Brighton. Third Annual Exhibition of Modern Pictures, Opened September 7th, 1876. Royal Pavilion Gallery*.

⁸⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

flowers well drawn, but tumbled together in utmost confusion'. Of *A Sketch at a French Café* the reviewer wrote, 'The perfection of ugliness [...] the very disgusting novelty of the subject arrests attention.'⁸⁷⁷



Fig. 24. Edgar Degas, *L'Absinthe*, 1875-6, oil on canvas (92cm x 68cm), Musée d'Orsay, Paris

In Spring 1877 Hill loaned out 15 etchings by the French artists Meissonnier, Gerome, and Fortuny. In an exhibition opening in February 1878 in the Picture Gallery he provided 20 assorted oil paintings dominated by his favourite artists Philip Morris and Marie Cazin, 8 water colours by Jules Lessore, and 25 sketches by P. F. Poole. The only other Brighton art exhibition after 1878 which featured Henry Hill works, according to available records, was in 1884 after his death when his wife Charlotte Hill loaned out 21 works to an exhibition in that year.⁸⁷⁸ This exhibition was associated with a special appeal to raise money to pay off the debt of the loan

⁸⁷⁷ Exhibition review in 'The Brighton Annual Exhibition of Paintings', *Brighton Gazette*, 9th Sept., 1876, p.5

⁸⁷⁸ *The Brighton Art Loan Exhibition, 1884. Official Catalogue* (Brighton: Towner & Curtis, 1884).

raised to pay for the School of Art and Science which opened in 1877, a loan which originally had been advanced to the town council by Henry Hill himself.⁸⁷⁹

Obituaries: Gentleman or Self-made Man ?

On 1st April 1882 Henry Hill passed away. The *Brighton Gazette* in its account of the funeral of Captain Henry Hill which took place on 5th April, recalls only the final Brighton phase of Hill's life.⁸⁸⁰ No mention is made of his Devonshire childhood or his remarkable success as a tailor in the West End of London. The paper describes Hill as 'a former representative of the Park Ward in the Brighton Town Council, a distinguished patron of art in Brighton, and a gentleman formerly connected with the 1st Sussex Rifle Volunteers'.⁸⁸¹ The *Argus* newspaper focuses on Hill as 'an enthusiastic lover of art and the possessor of a large and valuable collection of pictures, many of which have been recently engraved in the *Magazine of Art*'.⁸⁸² At the funeral significant numbers of aldermen, councillors, and officers of Brighton corporation took part in the ceremony to pay their last respects. They took their place in the cortege and at the graveside in the Brighton Extra-Mural Cemetery alongside family members and the artists Frank Holl, Philip Morris, Edward Stephens and Jules Lessor.⁸⁸³

Davidoff and Hall suggest that by the mid-nineteenth century 'the claim to be a public man no longer rested as it had done in the eighteenth century, on the ideal of the "disinterested gentleman", removed from the base activity of making money'.⁸⁸⁴ But what is notable about the tributes to Captain Hill in local Brighton newspapers is the absence of any reference to his original trade as a tailor or as a successful London businessman or the vast financial surplus which Hill was able to accumulate as a result of his endeavours. It is Hill's record of community

⁸⁷⁹ 'Brighton Art Loan Exhibition' in *Brighton Gazette*, 30th Aug. 1884, p. 6.

⁸⁸⁰ 'Funeral of Captain Hill' in *Brighton Gazette*, 6th April 1882, p. 8.

⁸⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸² Obituary, 'Death of Captain Hill', *Argus*, April 1882, [n.p.].

⁸⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸⁴ Davidoff and Hall, p. 445.

service as a councillor, philanthropist, patron of the arts, connoisseur and military man which is highlighted rather than the profit-maximising entrepreneur who single-mindedly built up his business, helped defeat the London tailors' union strike in 1867, and amassed a fortune with which he was able to fund a life of luxury and a sinecure as municipal benefactor. Money does not get a mention. It is precisely the ideal of generous gentleman and paternalist rather than go-getting self-made man which is stressed in the tributes which Brighton's local newspapers paid to Hill. Pursuit of profit is alchemised into social good. As Briggs writes in an essay on Samuel Smiles 'In the battle between the self-made man and the gentleman, the self-made man won in England only if he became a gentleman himself'.⁸⁸⁵

We know that Hill retained contacts and sentimental ties with his home county Devon for much of his life.⁸⁸⁶ This is reflected in the much fuller *Western Times* obituaries of Hill, which, in contrast to the Brighton local press, drew on the tropes and rhetorical tricks of the parable in their narratives of an individual struggling against adversity and finally succeeding in life by dint of the classic middle class virtues of hard-work, frugality, and punctuality. The 'Old Friend' obituary, taking its cue almost certainly from the popular works of Smiles, describes in detail how Hill worked his way up from lowly tailor to successful London businessman.⁸⁸⁷ Coming to its conclusion 'The Old Friend' asks the question 'how did he enjoy the use of his wealth?'⁸⁸⁸ The answer is that he not only bought himself an art collection but with the advice of artists he bought himself taste and a knowledge of art which as 'his recreation' he used to cultivate art in

⁸⁸⁵ Asa Briggs, *Victorian People* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 138.

⁸⁸⁶ There are two examples of Henry Hill's continuing links with Devon. Firstly, after Henry's half-brother Charles resigned from the Western Provident Association in December 1855 to join the rapidly expanding military tailors business in London, Henry returned to Exeter to attend a testimonial dinner for his brother given by the Association. See 'Western Provident Association, Testimonial to Mr. Charles Hill' in *Western Times, Exeter*, 22nd Dec. 1855, p. 6. Secondly, Henry Hill made a generous contribution to the purchase of a stained-glass window in Cullompton parish church in 1875, see: *The Western Times*, Thurs. Nov. 25th 1875, p. 4.

⁸⁸⁷ Smiles's *Self-Help* first published in 1859 had sold 150,000 copies by 1889 according to Briggs, *Victorian People*, p. 118.

⁸⁸⁸ *Western Times*, 13th April 1882, p. 3.

Brighton.⁸⁸⁹ It claims ‘The School of Art and the annual exhibition of the Pavilion were mainly of his creation’.⁸⁹⁰ The spiritual power of his art collection is conjured up in the final sentence of this obituary, ‘He passed away at the ripe age of three score years and ten, in the galleries, surrounded by his beautiful pictures’.⁸⁹¹ This is in marked contrast with the final sentence of the earlier obituary in the *Western Times* which is more in alignment with the Davidoff and Hall view. Rather than the image of a man breathing his last amidst a heavenly host of paintings, instead the writer focuses full square on money and markets and what is assumed will be the impressive value of Henry Hill’s personal estate, ‘we may presume that the Will of the good man departed will be considered worthy of quotation in the annals of successful traders’.⁸⁹²

Taking the obituaries as a whole, the reporters’ different versions of ‘Hill’ reflect a fundamental uncertainty about whether to define a man by his beneficence or his individualism, his cultural cachet or his pursuit of profit. The man noted for his benevolence and philanthropy including loaning out the paintings of Degas and Whistler to the people of Brighton in municipal exhibitions, was also the man who helped break the 1867 tailors’ strike pledging his allegiance to *laissez-faire* and the laws of supply and demand. The contradictions of ‘liberal paternalism’ are apparent in Hill’s situation and inherent in the differing narratives in the local newspapers trying to make sense of his life. These same tensions reappear in the life and collections of Henry Willett investigated in the chapter which follows. But whereas Henry Hill chose not to bequeath his art collection to Brighton at his death in 1882, Willett donated not only paintings but also fossils and ceramics to the town council enabling him to make the claim in 1902 that he was ‘the founder of Brighton Museum’.⁸⁹³

⁸⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹² *Western Times*, 3rd April 1882, p. 3.

⁸⁹³ ‘Brighton’s New Library/Opening Ceremony: Yesterday/A Brilliant Function’, *Brighton Gazette*, 6th Nov. 1902, p. 8.

**CHAPTER 4. THE REINVENTION OF HENRY WILLETT, A COLLECTOR OF COLLECTIONS AND AN
“IMAGINARY MUSEUM”**

A Cabinet of Curiosity at The Brighton Young Men’s Christian Association Exhibition March

1859

Henry Willett (or Catt as he then was) came to prominence as an all-round collector in March 1859 at an exhibition that took place in the Pavilion to raise funds for the Brighton Young Men’s Christian Association (BYMCA), ‘attended, on both days, most numerous, by a highly satisfied and respectable company’.⁸⁹⁴ Willett was not only a founding member of the BYMCA five years previously and a member of the committee organising the exhibition, but he was also one of the major exhibitors.⁸⁹⁵ The *Brighton Gazette* report gives a full account of the items that Catt loaned:

Henry Catt, Esq., lent out of his collection:- The finding of Moses, a grand gallery picture, from Cortona, marble bust of Hebe, by Westmacott; the Bagpiper, the work of Bernard Palissy; Ancient Italian Cabinet, boxwood and ebony, finely ornamented with early paintings, out of H.R.H. the Duke of York’s collection; Dutch Tiles with Scripture Illustrations, by which Dr Doddridge, and the celebrated painter, Benjamin West, were taught Scripture history; fine Italian Bronze, “Christ brought before the Multitude by Pilate,” very early work; curious Ivory Casket of the 14th century, with carvings, descriptive of the Life of Christ, said to have been formerly in Glastonbury Abbey; early German Tiles, date 1550; Judas throwing down the 30 pieces of silver, by Rembrandt (exhibited by Henry Catt, Esq., at the late Manchester Exhibition); curious Treasure Chest, in wrought iron, said to have been taken out of one of the ships of the Spanish Armada; the first cradle (my mother’s arms) a statuette; a fine ancient carving of the Nativity; portrait of Luther; curious bed-curtain of printed linen, fine design and colouring, date 1761; cup and saucer of Jesuit china; Duchess of Marlboro’s high heeled shoe, time, Queen Ann; Samson and Lion of early Gubbio Pottery; Mary lamenting over the dead Christ, Italian work in statuary marble; Samuel anointing David to be King, a fine ancient placque, in Raffael ware. Mr Catt also furnished a collection of rare plants and flowers.⁸⁹⁶

⁸⁹⁴ ‘Brighton Young Men’s Christian Association’, *Brighton Gazette*, March 1859, p. 8.

⁸⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

At a meeting of the Association following the opening of the exhibition Catt spoke and explained the Christian purposes of the exhibition in the following Ruskinian terms, ‘the study of science and art was calculated to elevate the mind and inspire the soul with loftier thoughts of the greatness of our Creator’.⁸⁹⁷ The exhibition also announced Henry Catt’s credentials as an educated man of culture and morality, prepared to put his wealth and knowledge in the service of Christian ideals and the local community.

In a chapter entitled ‘The Irrational Cabinet’ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill defines the archetypal cabinet of curiosity in the Renaissance period as an apparently ‘disordered jumble of unconnected objects’, with the rationale of demonstrating by means of a cross-section of artefacts a knowledge of the world and presenting the owner of these objects as master of this knowledge.⁸⁹⁸ Willett/Catt’s loans to BYMCA including paintings, statues, furniture, clothing, pottery, textiles, plants and flowers, suggest the attributes of a Renaissance cabinet of curiosity rather than the modern museum, albeit with a suitably Christian theme. It is apparent that Willett collected everything. He was a serial collector.⁸⁹⁹ Whereas Coningham, Hill and the Trists specialised in the collection of fine art, Willett collected collections and an array of individual artefacts of which fine art was just one area. After 1859 his collections evolved to resemble a private museum, an ‘imaginary museum’, which in its scope and totality echoed many of the overlapping and unevenly developing disciplinary areas represented in London’s national museums at the time.⁹⁰⁰ But it never lost its idiosyncratic and makeshift qualities. Susan Crane describes the transition from personalised to professionalised knowledge at this time as ‘a shift from stories to histories, from fragments to totalities, from

⁸⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹⁸ Hooper-Greenhill, p.79 and p. 82.

⁸⁹⁹ The range of his collecting interests are conveyed in Appendix 5. HWCS: *i. Loans and donations, vii. Museum comparison.*

⁹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

cabinets to museums'.⁹⁰¹ Willett's 'imaginary museum' teetered at the edges of these conceptualisations.

Willett's extensive and heterogeneous collecting interests are a reminder that the Brighton art collectors featured in this thesis were members of wider middle class networks engaged in the new phenomena of Victorian collecting and cultural consumption. 'No other age collected with such a vengeance and to such spectacular proportions', Barbara Black points out.⁹⁰² Asa Briggs in *Victorian Things* describes the Victorians as great collectors 'not only of their own bric-a-brac but of old objects ransacked from different cultures'.⁹⁰³ He references the rise of small general museums, 'presenting stuffed birds, firearms, fossils, mummies and machines as well as "works of art"'.⁹⁰⁴ Francis Haskell, in the context of the more exclusive end of the collecting market, writes of the significant increase in the collecting of majolica, small bronzes, Venetian glasses, weapons and miniatures in the nineteenth century.⁹⁰⁵ Buying and displaying fine art may have been intended to differentiate Coningham, Hill, the Trists, and Willett from the generality of the less wealthy middle classes, but at the same time, their impulses and activities were similar to those of the wider collecting fraternity involved in collecting firearms, postcards or postage stamps. The main difference was in terms of the high prices and the concomitant prestige of fine art objects.

The collecting phenomenon can be traced in journal articles in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1855 *Punch* magazine published an article entitled 'The Collection

⁹⁰¹ Susan A. Crane, 'Story, History and the Passionate Collector', in *Producing the Past, Aspects of Antiquarian Culture and Practice 1700-1850*, ed. by Martin Myrone and Lucy Peltz (Abingdon: Routledge (formerly Ashgate), 1999), pp. 187-200 (p. 187).

⁹⁰² Black, *On Exhibit*, p. 17.

⁹⁰³ Asa Briggs, *Victorian Things* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 47.

⁹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁹⁰⁵ Francis Haskell, 'The British as Collectors' in *The Treasure Houses of Britain: Five Hundred Years of Private Patronage and Art Collecting*, ed. by Gervase Jackson-Stops (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 50-59 (p. 56).

Mania' satirising 'the sale of the BERNAL collection of old and middle-aged crockery'.⁹⁰⁶ *The*

Graphic in 1869 commented:

This is a "collecting" age. Never was the vocation of the gatherer of curiosities more followed than at present. Not only pictures, prints, coins, birds, insects, and fishes are collected, but there are amateurs who form cabinets of postage stamps, first numbers of periodicals, playbills, and street ballads. Some *bons vivants* "collect" raw ports and sherries; others collect cigars.⁹⁰⁷

The Saturday Review in 1874 in a semi humorous feature entitled 'Collections' wrote, 'To a real collector, the catalogue of a coming sale in his own particular department is more interesting than a new novel or a change in Ministry'.⁹⁰⁸ The article suggested that judicious collecting could be 'a safe and profitable method of investment' as well as providing 'the enjoyment of possession, which, by a man of taste, will be valued very highly'.⁹⁰⁹ The Reverend W. J. Loftie in a chapter entitled 'The Prudence of Collecting' in *A Plea for Art in the House* (1877), also argues 'that it is often profitable to collect judiciously'.⁹¹⁰ At the same time he tacitly acknowledges the commodity fetishism associated with collecting as a form of consumption when he wrote 'The man is singular who does not enjoy buying, just as the sportsman enjoys killing, for its own sake. We must buy, and there are few pleasures more to be enjoyed'.⁹¹¹ It is unlikely, however, that the Reverend Loftie was familiar with Marx's now famous deployment of the term 'Fetishism' to describe social relations in capitalist society which assume 'the fantastic form of a relation between things'.⁹¹² Charles Dickens satirised collecting, most famously in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and his description of the 'vast miscellany' of articles collected by Mr

⁹⁰⁶ 'The Collection Mania', *Punch*, vol. 28 (1855), p. 129.

⁹⁰⁷ 'Her Majesty the Queen', *The Graphic*, 1.1 (1869), p. 12.

⁹⁰⁸ 'Collections', *The Saturday Review* (25th July 1874), p. 110.

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹¹⁰ W. J. Loftie, *A Plea for Art in the House, With Special Reference to the Economy of Collecting Works of Art, and the Importance of Taste in Education and Morals*, 2nd ed., (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1877), p. 11.

⁹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁹¹² Karl Marx, *Capital, A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, vol. 1, first published 1887 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1954), p. 77.

Meagles in *Little Dorrit* recalls the litany of objects recited in the *Brighton Gazette* quoted at the start of the chapter.⁹¹³

When historians such as Asa Briggs write of Victorian collecting as if it were a nationwide phenomena, it is apparent that he is referring mainly to a middle class minority who had money, time and education to spend on such pastimes, and not the totality of the population who lived in Britain in the reign of Queen Victoria. Nineteenth century collecting in all its variety, whether private or public, needs to be understood as a manifestation of the growing spending power and intellectual and cultural confidence of the middle class. Collecting in general helped define middle class cultural identity rather than fine art collecting in particular as contended by Macleod. Of the five collectors featured in this thesis, it was Henry Willett the rich brewer who collected anything and everything who best epitomises the Victorian bourgeois desire to exchange cash for culture, accumulate knowledge and propagate civilisation, while drawing a veil over the deprivation and inequality underpinning this endeavour. Mayor Alderman Colbourne, in a speech at the unveiling of a memorial to Henry Willett in Brighton Museum on February 26th 1906 says of Willett's collecting, 'The name of Henry Willett was known in every museum in Europe, and the curios and other collections which were to be found in the adjoining rooms were the envy of every collector. Here his singular and rare character was fully displayed'.⁹¹⁴

From Catt to Willett, from Tradesman to Gentleman

Henry Willett was born Henry Catt in 1823 in Bishopstone just outside Newhaven in Sussex. He was the twelfth and last child of William Catt (1776-1853). His mother died giving birth to him and he was brought up by his elder sister, Elizabeth.⁹¹⁵ His father William was a highly

⁹¹³ Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (London: Odhams Press Limited, [n.d.]), first published 1855-57, p. 88.

⁹¹⁴ 'The Late Mr Henry Willett, Memorial at the Museum, Unveiling by the Mayor', *Brighton Gazette*, 1st March 1906, p. 8.

⁹¹⁵ Beddoe, *A Potted History*, p. 7.

successful farmer and miller who diversified his business into brewing and retailing beer and importing coal from the North East in the 1820s in partnership with the Vallance family.⁹¹⁶ By the late 1840s Vallance and Catt as the Brighton firm was called had expanded its operations into merchant shipping.⁹¹⁷ Henry received a grammar school education, possibly at Old Lewes Grammar School, just over 9 miles from Bishopstone.⁹¹⁸ Despite his father's wealth it is apparent that Henry did not go to university as in 1841 aged eighteen years he moved to Brighton to help manage the family business.⁹¹⁹ In 1851 Henry married Frances Coombe (1832-1917), the daughter of a Sussex landowner and they had six children together who lived into adulthood (fig. 25).⁹²⁰ The upward mobility of the Catt family is reflected in the fact that by 1858 they had moved from a house in West Street adjacent to the premises of the Vallance and Catt business,⁹²¹ and established themselves in a much larger house in the newly-built and discrete bourgeois enclave of the Montpellier area in the parish of Hove.⁹²² Their household included five or six servants and a private secretary who worked directly to Henry which was a further sign that they had ascended into the highest echelons of the middle class hierarchy.⁹²³ The Willetts could also afford an expensive education for their male children. For instance,

⁹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

⁹¹⁷ In 1850 William Catt, Henry's father, was involved in a court case with the commissioners of Shoreham harbour who were suing for damages against 'Vallance and Catt, brewers, coal merchants, and ship-owner' as a result of damage caused to a new jetty by 'a vessel called *John*' owned by the firm, *Sussex Advertiser*, 19th March 1850, p. 3.

⁹¹⁸ See letter from Willett referencing his education quoted in 'University Local Examinations – Distribution of Prizes', *Brighton Guardian*, 8th April 1868, p. 6.

⁹¹⁹ Preface, *Catalogue of the Cretaceous Fossils in the Brighton Museum, Presented by Henry Willett, Esq.* (Brighton: William J. Smith, 1871), p. iii.

⁹²⁰ Henry Catt Willett Trust, community website of Fulking West Sussex, <https://fulking.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Henry_Catt_Willett_Trust.pdf> [accessed 3rd Feb. 2020].

⁹²¹ 1851 Census, Brighton, <<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC%2F1851%2F0006190805>> [accessed 14th Aug. 2021]. This shows Henry Catt living in West Street in Brighton at this time supported by a cook and a house servant which was likely to be on or close to the premises of the brewery in the same street.

⁹²² Beddoe, *A Potted History*, p. 8.

⁹²³ 1891 Census, Arnold House, Montpellier Terrace, <<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC%2F1881%2F0005301727>> [accessed 14th Aug 2021]; a letter from Willett to the Chairman of the Sub-Wealden Committee in 1877 refers to 'My Secretary, Sergeant Menzies', *The Record of the Sub-Wealden Exploration* (Brighton: W. J. Smith, 1878).

their second son Edgar attended Wellington College and studied Natural Science at Oxford University, eventually becoming an anaesthetist.⁹²⁴

Henry's father William Catt died in 1853 and as Henry wrote in a short privately published biographical account of his father's life, he left behind 'not only the good name which an honourable life deserves, but a substantial fortune for his somewhat numerous descendants'.⁹²⁵ This included the bequest of a lump sum of £21,000 to Henry alone, worth more than £2m today on the basis of a simple retail price index calculation.⁹²⁶ The Vallance and Catt business, particularly the brewing side continued to expand and prosper from the 1840s onwards. Rubinstein points out that 'Brewing was one of the most significant and lucrative of all nineteenth century trades'.⁹²⁷ Vallance and Catt in its brewing operations increased the number of public houses which it owned or traded with from around 60 to 120 between the 1840s and 1870s.⁹²⁸ I have already established that Henry Willett's estate on death in 1905 worth £233,834 placed him in the elite of upper middle class non-landed wealth earners. In addition, in 1863 when his sister Elizabeth Catt died he received a share of £13,000 which she left to her siblings on condition that they changed their name to their mother's maiden name of Willett which Henry agreed to do.⁹²⁹ Like William Coningham, but unlike Henry Hill, Willett's inherited wealth, the surplus value accumulated by his enterprising family,

⁹²⁴ Entry for Edgar Willett, Royal College of Surgeons website

<[https://livesonline.rcseng.ac.uk/client/en_GB/lives/search/detailnonmodal/ent:\\$002f\\$002fSD_ASSET\\$002f0\\$002fSD_ASSET:375717/one?qu="rcs%3A+E003534"&rt=false%7C%7C%7CIDENTIFIER%7C%7C%7CResource+Identifier](https://livesonline.rcseng.ac.uk/client/en_GB/lives/search/detailnonmodal/ent:$002f$002fSD_ASSET$002f0$002fSD_ASSET:375717/one?qu=)> [accessed 30th Oct. 2021].

⁹²⁵ Letter from Willett to Ruskin quoted as an extended footnote in Letter 51, March 1875, in *Fors Clavigera, Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain*, vols. 27-29, in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, eds. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1907), pp. 293-5.

⁹²⁶ Will of William Catt, Merchant of Newhaven, Sussex, Prerogative Court of Canterbury and related Probate Jurisdictions, 1853, PROB 11/2170/35; £21,000 in 1853 is worth £2,140,000 in current values according to *MeasuringWorth.com*.

⁹²⁷ Rubinstein, *Men of Property*, p. 86.

⁹²⁸ Vallance and Catt held an annual outing for its publicans or 'licensed victuallers'. The numbers attending these occasions provide an approximate measure of the number of pubs linked to the brewery. In September 1847 70 people attended the annual dinner most of whom were landlords, *Brighton Gazette*, 16th Sept. 1847, p. 5. In September 1874 120 attended on the same annual occasion, *Brighton Gazette*, 3rd Sept 1874, p. 5. This particular measure suggests a 70% increase in business between 1847 and 1874.

⁹²⁹ Beddoe, *A Potted History*, p. 8.

enabled Henry to fund his philanthropic commitments and collecting interests from a relatively young age.

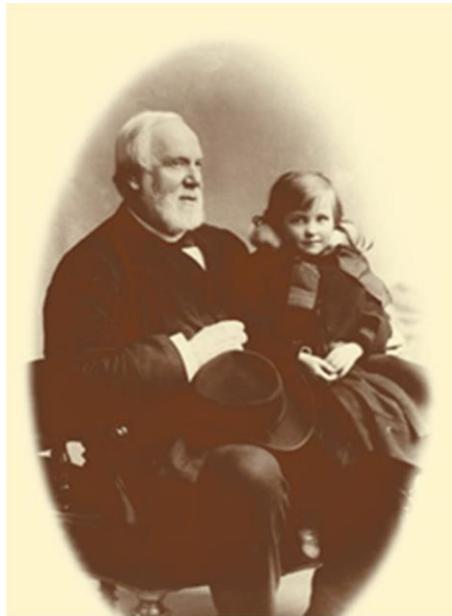


Fig. 25. Photograph of Henry Willett with his granddaughter, Joyce, 1890s, Arnold House, Brighton, *Brighton Museums* website

Subscription lists for charitable and worthy causes published in local newspapers provided an informal league table of the most to the least generous among those who subscribed and serve as a rough proxy for relative levels of wealth among the propertied classes in the Victorian era. Whether subscribing to a memorial for recently deceased Liberal MP Captain Pechell in 1855,⁹³⁰ or donating to a fund in September 1857 to support British subjects in India suffering as a result of the revolt in parts of that country,⁹³¹ Henry Willett always donated one of the largest sums of money to these causes. It was clear to all those who read the local newspapers from Willett's level of subscriptions that he was a rich man. By the late 1850s, he had also become a well-known and influential public figure in Brighton, a position which he sustained right through to his death in 1905. R.J. Morris writes 'The voluntary societies operating in civil society were the basis of class formation in public life. They were innovatory,

⁹³⁰ *Brighton Gazette*, 18th Oct. 1855, p. 1.

⁹³¹ *Brighton Gazette*, 24th Sept. 1857, p. 4.

assertive and compulsive'.⁹³² Willett was involved in an array of different municipal and voluntary organisations. These included membership of the old Town Commission before Brighton corporation was established in 1854,⁹³³ governor of the Sussex and Brighton Institute for Diseases of the Eye,⁹³⁴ a governor of the Sussex County Hospital,⁹³⁵ trustee of the Brighton and Sussex Mutual Provident Society,⁹³⁶ and a member of the Poor Law Board of Guardians.⁹³⁷ In 1859 he joined the Brighton Rifle Corps which became generally known as the Sussex Volunteers and which we as we have seen Henry Hill also signed up to in 1867.⁹³⁸ I have already noted Willett's involvement in the BRLSA.⁹³⁹ He was also an Honorary Vice President of the Mechanics' Institute in 1861 along with Coningham,⁹⁴⁰ and involved in the Brighton Athenaeum.⁹⁴¹ It is no wonder that one obituary of Willett in 1905 referred to his 'incessant public activities'.⁹⁴²

Alongside this plethora of civic and municipal commitments which helped establish him as a leading citizen in Brighton and a de facto member of the town elite, Willett also became a power broker in the Brighton Liberal Party. He first became active as a member of Sir George Brooke-Pechell's re-election committee, who was re-elected as a MP for Brighton alongside Coningham in 1857.⁹⁴³ After Coningham's retirement as MP due to ill-health in 1864, Willett supported Professor Henry Fawcett (1833-1884), an economist with radical views, as his replacement.⁹⁴⁴ Leslie Stephen in his biography of Henry Fawcett published in 1886 discussing Fawcett's candidature in 1864, described Willett as 'a gentleman well known in Brighton for his

⁹³² R.J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, p. 321.

⁹³³ 'Election of Commissioners' in *Brighton Gazette*, 27th Feb. 1851, p. 6.

⁹³⁴ 'Eye Infirmary', in *Brighton Gazette*, 6th Feb. 1851, p. 7.

⁹³⁵ 'Requisition to Mr Crawford', *Brighton Gazette*, 20th Jan. 1853, p. 5.

⁹³⁶ Notice in *Brighton Gazette*, 8th Oct. 1857, p. 8.

⁹³⁷ 'Election of Directors and Guardians for Brighton', *Brighton Gazette*, 29th March 1860, p. 1

⁹³⁸ 'The Brighton Rifle Corps', *Brighton Gazette*, 14th July 1859, p. 8.

⁹³⁹ 'Albion Rooms Literary and Scientific Institution', *Brighton Gazette*, 8th Sept. 1864, p. 5.

⁹⁴⁰ 'Annual Meeting of the Mechanics' Institute', *Brighton Gazette*, 25th April 1861, p. 6.

⁹⁴¹ 'Discussion of the Volunteer Movement', *Brighton Guardian*, 28th Nov. 1860, p. 6.

⁹⁴² Obituary in *Brighton Gazette*, 2nd March 1905, p. 3.

⁹⁴³ *Brighton Gazette*, 19th March, 1857, p. 1.

⁹⁴⁴ 'A Second Attempt at Compromise', *Brighton Guardian* Wed. 17th Feb. 1864, p. 7.

high character and public spirit'.⁹⁴⁵ Following a split in the Liberal vote, Fawcett failed in his attempt to become Brighton MP,⁹⁴⁶ but with Willett's backing he was elected to parliament in the following year, 1865.⁹⁴⁷ Willett remained a dominant figure in the Brighton Liberal Party until he fell out with Professor Fawcett in 1871 over the issue of the MP's republicanism which he did not approve of.⁹⁴⁸ Thereafter he was far less involved in politics.⁹⁴⁹

It is clear that Henry Willett's backing of Brooke-Pechell, White and Fawcett as Liberal candidates for parliament was not merely a matter of moral support or organisational talent. He actively used his personal wealth to fund campaigns. For instance, he paid the bulk of Fawcett's costs in his unsuccessful election campaign in 1864 and 'thus incurred a very considerable expense'.⁹⁵⁰ It may have been more than simply finances which Henry Willett provided. In that same 1864 election contest the rival Liberal candidate, Julian Goldsmid (1838-1896) alleged that 'Mr Willett's men from the brewery crowded the polling booths in such a manner that my voters could not come up. They used threats and intimidation to my supporters'.⁹⁵¹ Willett vehemently denied that this was the case.⁹⁵² Nevertheless the 'mud' seems to have stuck and this accusation enabled the Tory newspaper the *Brighton Gazette* to charge Willett with 'the political dictatorship of Brighton' in 1866.⁹⁵³ The volatile William

⁹⁴⁵ Leslie Stephen, *Life of Henry Fawcett* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1886), p. 208.

⁹⁴⁶ 'A Second Attempt at Compromise', *Brighton Guardian*, 17th Feb. 1864, p. 7.

⁹⁴⁷ Stephen, p. 214.

⁹⁴⁸ 'Mr Henry Willett and Professor Fawcett' in *Brighton Gazette*, 26th Jan. 1871, p. 6.

⁹⁴⁹ Willett's energies in the 1870s were focussed on his collecting, Brighton Museum and the Sub-Wealdon Exploration project. He briefly re-surfaced in politics in 1886 when he attempted to broker an agreement on a compromise Liberal general election candidate in Brighton against the background of the split in the Liberal Party following Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule for Ireland. Willett himself was against Home Rule and found himself in sympathy with the Liberal Unionist breakaway group who by the 1890s were aligned with the Conservative Party. See 'Brighton', *The Times*, 25th Nov. 1886, iss. 31926, p. 6.

⁹⁵⁰ Stephen, p. 211.

⁹⁵¹ 'Brighton Election', *Brighton Guardian*, 17th Feb. 1864, p. 8.

⁹⁵² See the letter to *The Times* published in the *Brighton Guardian*, 24th Feb. 1864, p. 6.

⁹⁵³ 'The Brighton Reform Meeting', *Brighton Gazette*, 28th June 1866, p. 4.

Coningham in his unsuccessful 1868 election campaign accused Willett of acting as ‘the real wire-puller’ in the Brighton Liberal Party.⁹⁵⁴

Willett was not merely interested in becoming a political power-broker in the Liberal Party, he seemed to have a genuine commitment to the cause of the middle class and principles of liberalism and social reform. As Willett baldly stated in a letter to the Earl of Sheffield in 1881, ‘I am a Radical’.⁹⁵⁵ In that same letter, he wrote ‘The office of hereditary legislator is on its trial before the country, and it is such specimens as you bring it into discredit’.⁹⁵⁶ Willett’s antipathy to the power of the aristocracy was reflected in speeches on a number of other occasions.⁹⁵⁷ Maybe it was these kinds of attacks on aristocratic privilege, the perceived enemy for many in both the rising middle classes and the politically-aware working class, which accounts for Henry Willett’s popularity in Brighton. His reception at public meetings in the late 1850s and 1860s according to local newspaper accounts was invariably little short of euphoric. To give just one example out of several instances, the *Brighton Guardian* on a meeting of Liberal electors in July 1865 at which Willett spoke reported, ‘Mr Henry Willett was then called by the Chairman, and on rising from his seat was the subject of a perfect ovation, the whole crowd cheering to the utmost power of their lungs, and hats, handkerchiefs, and umbrellas being waved overhead’.⁹⁵⁸ It may be that the fact that he was the brewer of the beer in many of the pubs and alehouses of Brighton also played a part in his popularity.

But if Henry Willett was a Liberal even a Radical in his politics, at the same time he displayed many of the attitudes and actions of an old-fashioned Anglican paternalist in his belief in the

⁹⁵⁴ ‘Mr Coningham’s Meeting. Last Night – Disorderly Proceedings’, *Brighton Guardian*, 4th Nov. 1868, p. 6.

⁹⁵⁵ Short report in *The Times*, 24th Feb. 1881, issue 30126, p. 10. Willett’s letter was cited as the basis of a libel action brought by the Earl of Sheffield against Willett in that same year.⁹⁵⁵

⁹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵⁷ See, for instance, Henry Catt speeches reported in: ‘Rape of Bramber Election’, *Sussex Express*, 4th April 1857, p. 2; an account of an election hustings meeting in *Brighton Guardian*, 18th July 1860, p. 6; ‘Public Meeting on the American Complication’, *Brighton Guardian*, 1st Jan. 1862, p. 7.

⁹⁵⁸ ‘Aggregate Meeting of the Liberal Electors’ in *Brighton Guardian*, 12th July 1865, p. 7.

privileges and duties of property, the fundamental hierarchical nature of society, and philanthropy. He was influenced in his outlook it appears as much by the views of Charles Dickens and Charles Kingsley as he was by those of Richard Cobden and John Stuart Mill.⁹⁵⁹ He was very much the 'liberal paternalist'. Speaking in 1865 at a prize distribution for the First Sussex Volunteer Artillery, Willett highlighted the idea of duty and the importance of 'those who are usually engaged in the acquisition of wealth' appreciating 'that there is something better worth living for than the gaining of riches – and that is duty'.⁹⁶⁰ An evangelical strand to paternalism had emerged by the 1840s which accepted charitable works so long as they were accompanied by moral education and religious conversion through schools, missions and Bible societies.⁹⁶¹ Willett was a member of the Church of England and a religious man who was just as active in religious societies in Brighton in his public life as he was in civic organisations, learned societies, and liberal politics.⁹⁶²

Willett's Christian devotion was one of the shared areas of commitment and comment between Willett and John Ruskin in their correspondence in the 1870s and 1880s. Willett's first letter to Ruskin in November 1873 commends Ruskin's writings which encourage good work on the part of men 'trusting to the guidance of the Living Spirit [...] and walking humbly with

⁹⁵⁹ There is an account of Henry Catt reading extracts from Dickens's *Christmas Carol* to around hundred poor people, followed by 'a comfortable tea', in *Brighton Guardian*, 9th Jan, 1861, p. 5. In a nostalgia piece reviewing Brighton in the past the *Brighton Gazette* records the fact that Willett used to read political novels to crowds of 500 or 600 people including Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, preceded by a hymn and a prayer, *Brighton Gazette*, 23rd July 1903, p. 6. There is an exchange of letters between Willett and Richard Cobden relating to the American Civil War in 1861, reported in *Brighton Guardian*, 18th Dec. 1861, p. 5. Willett was a supporter of the Land Tenure Reform Association founded by Mill, see 'Lord Henry Lennox and Mr Henry Willett', *Brighton Guardian*, 1st Dec. 1869, p. 5.

⁹⁶⁰ 'The Brighton Working Men's Union – Important Soiree, Last Night' *Brighton Guardian*, 11th Jan. 1865, p. 8.

⁹⁶¹ Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England*, p. 34, p. 35.

⁹⁶² Henry Catt is referred to as a member of the Church of England in 'Grimmett's Charity', *Brighton Gazette*, 7th May 1857, p. 7. There are two references to Henry Catt/Willett's contributions to the refurbishment of Trinity Chapel in Ship Street which was an Anglican Church: Willett was on a committee overseeing the installation of a new chancel in Trinity Chapel as reported in *Brighton Gazette*, 14th Oct. 1869, p. 5; he was also involved thirty years later in a committee overseeing the installation of a new memorial window in the chancel of the church, *Brighton Gazette*, 12th Oct. 1899, p. 29. Whether he worshipped at Trinity Chapel we don't know, but there seems every likelihood.

the God i.e. the Great Good One'.⁹⁶³ Willett's faith and business acumen combined is evidenced in the fact that by 1855 he was the treasurer of the Young Men's Christian Association,⁹⁶⁴ and at the same time on the committee of Brighton Town Missions established in 1849.⁹⁶⁵ His dedication to education is evident in his presence on school committees and boards and his regular appearances as a Brighton 'VIP' handing out awards at school prize-givings.⁹⁶⁶ There are other examples of Willett's paternalism – of the rich brewer fulfilling the duties of privileged property-owner and employer – with dinners, outings, or gifts for tenants, employees, workers and other dependents often at gatherings in which Willett himself presided on a personal face-to-face basis as chairman, guest of honour, or as acknowledged benefactor.⁹⁶⁷

Whether motivated by middle class radicalism or by Anglican paternalism, there is no doubt that among many of his colleagues and associates in the elite he had a reputation for generosity and public spiritedness. At a West Street Brewery fete in September 1853, one of the speakers spoke of Henry Catt's 'great kindness and charity by stealth'.⁹⁶⁸ The *Brighton Gazette* concluded its obituary of Henry Willett in March 1905 with the laudatory words, 'A more admirable citizen, a man of nobler patriotism, or more genuine benevolence never lived'.⁹⁶⁹ But there is also evidence that Willett in his civic and philanthropic activities in Brighton was not entirely altruistic. Julian Goldsmid, one of the rival Liberal candidates defeated in the February 1864 election, did not mince his words about Willett's backing of Fawcett who was also defeated, 'I say this is a mortal blow to Mr Willett's pride; a mortal blow to his ambition; and I am sure that you, the Liberals of Brighton will not any longer suffer one

⁹⁶³ Letter, Willett to Ruskin, 30th Nov. 1873, Arnold House, Brighton, RL/UOL.

⁹⁶⁴ 'Commissioner's Meetings' *Brighton Gazette*, 29th March 1855, p. 5.

⁹⁶⁵ 'Brighton Town Missions, Established 1849', *Brighton Gazette*, 20th Nov. 1856, p. 1.

⁹⁶⁶ For one example of Willett's involvement in both school governance and handing out educational prizes, see 'Brighton Proprietary School', *Brighton Guardian* 23rd Dec. 1863, p. 8.

⁹⁶⁷ For an account of one such annual works outing, see 'The West Street Brewery. The Licensed Victuallers of Brighton', *Brighton Gazette*, Aug. 30th 1866.

⁹⁶⁸ 'The West Street Brewery Fetes', *Brighton Gazette*, 1st Sept. 1853, p. 5.

⁹⁶⁹ 'Death of Mr Henry Willett', *Brighton Gazette*, 2nd March 1905, p. 3.

man to lord it over you'.⁹⁷⁰ The stipulation that his donation to the Brighton Museum of part of his art collection in 1903 should be conditional on it being kept together in one place and known as 'The Willett Collection' is another example of a man whose generosity was leavened with egotism and the desire to establish his legacy in the local history books of Brighton.⁹⁷¹ As Bourdieu suggests 'the most sincerely disinterested acts may be those best corresponding to objective interest'.⁹⁷²

A Plenitude of Collections

At the very same time as Willett in a whirlwind of energy embarked on establishing himself as a civic leader and patrician presence in Brighton in the mid-1850s and 1860s whilst continuing to expand the brewing business of Vallance and Catt, he was also engaged in the acquisition of scientific, historical, and artistic objects. And Henry Willett's collections were more than an expression of private interest or domestic display, they were an intrinsic part of this campaign *to be someone*, to be a significant public figure in the dynamic but highly-stratified world of middle class Brighton. The following table summarises the discrete object types that Willett collected and the sub-sets within these collection categories based on accounts of acquisitions, exhibitions, loans, sales, donations, references in catalogues, newspaper and journal reports, and letters.⁹⁷³ The list is given in alphabetical order to avoid a misleading hierarchy of importance:

⁹⁷⁰ *Brighton Guardian*, 17th Feb 1864, p. 7.

⁹⁷¹ Letter to the Mayor of Brighton published in *Brighton Gazette*, 18th April 1903, p. 5.

⁹⁷² Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', pp. 241-58 (p. 258).

⁹⁷³ Appendix 5. HWCS: *i. Loans and donations, ii. Object catalogues, vii. Museum comparison.*

No.	Object-type	Details
1	Archaeology	Neolithic artefacts, Iron Age coins, Anglo-Saxon relics
2	Books	Books, bindings, folio pages
3	Curiosities	Miscellaneous items of antiquarian, historical and local interest
4	Ethnography	Objects from Europe, India, Iran, Africa, China, Solomon Islands
5	Fine art	Portraits, religious paintings; sculpture including portrait busts and bronzes
6	Fossils	Cretaceous, Oxford clay, London clay
7	Furniture	Chairs, cabinets, tables including pieces by Sheraton, Chippendale and Hepplewhite
8	Minerals	Flints, chalk minerals generally, Auvergne minerals
9	Natural history	Birds, other zoological specimens, crustacea, rare plants, seeds and flowers
10	Objects of vertue	Silverware, rings, medals, crystals, boxes, enamels, clocks
11	Pottery and porcelain	English pottery inc. Staffordshire, Worcester; British history collection; Chinese and Japanese works

There is not the space here to explore Willett's individual collections in the detail which they deserve and what follows is a necessarily abbreviated account of key features of Willett's collections culminating in a more granular account of his fine art collection in keeping with the main focus of the thesis.

Lyn Barber tells us that 'Natural history was a national obsession' in the first half of the century.⁹⁷⁴ It is perhaps no surprise then that Henry Willett's first collection was of Sussex chalk fossils assembled by his own account over a period of ten years when he was a school boy.⁹⁷⁵ He collected from the chalk quarries around Lewes and Newhaven close to his home in Bishopstone.⁹⁷⁶ He tells us that he was inspired by Gideon Mantell (1790-1852), the medical doctor, better known for his work in geology and palaeontology,⁹⁷⁷ whose medical practice

⁹⁷⁴ Lynn Barber, *The Heyday of Natural History, 1820-1870* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980), p. 13.

⁹⁷⁵ Preface, *Catalogue of the Cretaceous Fossils*, p. iii.

⁹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷⁷ Dennis R. Dean, 'Mantell, Gideon Algernon', *ODNB*, (2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18004>> [accessed 17th April 2020].

was based in Lewes until 1833 when he moved to Brighton.⁹⁷⁸ This childhood collection was the basis of the one which formed the centrepiece of the first Brighton Museum which opened in 1861 in the Royal Pavilion. In 1871 he published a catalogue for the collection, a copy of which he donated to Oxford University in 1872.⁹⁷⁹ His interest in fossils also provided the platform for the development of his expertise as a self-taught scientist and geologist manifested in a range of detailed papers, reports and letters written across his lifetime.⁹⁸⁰ In 1873 he became a Fellow of the Geological Society.⁹⁸¹

By the 1870s Willett had assembled a significant collection of flints, as is apparent from the letters which John Ruskin wrote to him between 1875 and 1879.⁹⁸² The letters focus almost entirely on speculations on the formation and properties of flint. Ruskin had always had an interest in geology and by the end of his life he had accumulated a collection of over 3000 minerals.⁹⁸³ Like Willett he was also a member of the Geological Society.⁹⁸⁴ Ruskin writes in one letter to Willett, probably in 1875, ‘You are the only sensible person I’ve ever had a word from, about flints’.⁹⁸⁵ The outcome of their interchanges on flint was that ‘Chapter IX Fire and Water’ of Ruskin’s book on minerals, *Deucalion*, consists almost entirely of a series of five

⁹⁷⁸ Collis, p. 189.

⁹⁷⁹ Handwritten note in an original copy of the *Catalogue of the Cretaceous Fossils*.

⁹⁸⁰ In 1860 Catt wrote what proved to be an accurate analysis of the geological challenges involved in the construction of a well to provide the new Poor Law Board Industrial School in Brighton with water, see ‘Mr Henry Catt’s Paper on the Warren Farm Well’, *Brighton Gazette*, 17th April 1862, p. 6. In *The Record of the Sub-Wealden Exploration* (Brighton: W. J. Smith, 1878) Willett gives an account of a project for boring a hole into the Sussex Weald to establish a knowledge of its mineral layers. There is a report on the meeting of the Newhaven Local Board in *Brighton Herald*, 15th Oct. 1881, p. 3, at which a scheme devised by Willett for improving the town’s water supply was adopted. For one example of Willett’s geological correspondence with Ruskin, see John Ruskin, *Deucalion and Other Studies in Rocks and Stones*, vol. 26, *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, eds. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1907), pp. 205-218.

⁹⁸¹ In an email to myself, Mon. 20th April 2020, the Head of Library and Information Services of The Geological Society of London confirmed that Willett joined the Geological Society on 3rd Dec. 1873 and resigned on 8th Jan. 1896.

⁹⁸² Ruskin to Willett, 1873-1879, RL/UOL.

⁹⁸³ Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin, The Later Years*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 362.

⁹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

⁹⁸⁵ Letter 2, Ruskin to Willett, 17th May (no year given but likely to be either 1875 or 1876), Brantwood, RL/UOL.

letters on flint and chalk written by Willett.⁹⁸⁶ In his opening letter in *Deucalion*, Willett expresses self-doubt and uncertainty about his contributions. His comments are revealing and provide interesting insights into Willett as a collector in general. He writes:

I intended at first to collect only what was really beautiful in itself – ‘crystalline’ ! but how the subject widens, and how the arbitrary divisions do run into one another ! What a paltry shifting thing our classification is ! One is sometimes tempted to give it all up in disgust, and I have a shrewd suspicion that all scientific classification (except for mutual aid to students) is absurd and pedantic.⁹⁸⁷

These comments articulate a tension for Willett between the beauty of nature and the reductive impact of scientific classification. It is not unlikely that they were elicited in deference to Ruskin himself who campaigned against the materialist scientific outlook which had lost sight of the essential unity and beauty of nature.⁹⁸⁸ At the same time, Willett’s reflections remind us of the belief of many among the Victorian educated, knowledge-consuming middle classes in the moral unity and common purpose of *both* science and art taken together, each in their own sphere reflecting fundamental truths about God’s universe.⁹⁸⁹

Henry Willett is best known for his collections of pottery and ceramics which he acquired across his lifetime and which have received the greatest attention both in his lifetime and afterwards.⁹⁹⁰ The catalogue of the Art Treasures Exhibition in Manchester 1857 records that Henry Catt loaned pieces of Worcester and Lowestoft china to the Museum of Ornamental Art display,⁹⁹¹ confirming that by this time Willett was accumulating pottery in parallel with his

⁹⁸⁶ John Ruskin, *Deucalion*, pp. 205-218.

⁹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁹⁸⁸ Hilton, *John Ruskin, The Later Years*, p. 310.

⁹⁸⁹ Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines*, p. 78. In debates on the remit of the British Museum in the 1850s, Whitehead points out that there were some who were content for the museum to continue to hold art, natural history and history specimens under the same roof.

⁹⁹⁰ Stella Beddoe, ‘Henry Willett 1823-1905’, *ODNB* (2018)

<<https://doi.org/10.1093/odnb/9780198614128.013.101162>> [accessed 20th Aug. 2021].

⁹⁹¹ *Catalogue of the Art Treasures of the United Kingdom Collected at Manchester in 1857* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1857), p. 144.

other interests. In 1873 he loaned his 'valuable collection of modern British pottery and china' to Brighton Museum now in its new premises in Church Street.⁹⁹² At this stage the collection was organised partly with the aim of illustrating historical themes and partly according to the place, date or the form of the pottery item,⁹⁹³ 'an incomplete history of ceramics' as Rutherford describes it.⁹⁹⁴ By the end of 1902, when he converted his loan collection into an outright gift to the museum, it consisted of almost 2000 pieces entirely devoted to illuminating 23 different themes of British History including 'Royalty and Loyalty', 'Military Heroes', 'Philanthropy', 'Crime', and 'Pastimes and Amusements' (see, for example, fig. 26).⁹⁹⁵ As Willett himself wrote in his introduction to the catalogue, 'The classification, whilst confessedly arbitrary, has been made [...] entirely with regard to the greater *human interest* which each object presents'.⁹⁹⁶ Bennett writes of 'the emergence of a historicized framework' determining the structures of museum displays in the nineteenth century.⁹⁹⁷ However, Willett's personalised taxonomy confirmed his prerogative as the property-holder to organise his collection as he saw fit irrespective of the new professional emphasis on chronological displays in institutions such as the Museum of Practical Geology.⁹⁹⁸ It also reflected his belief in the educational and patriotic mission of the municipal museum to promote individual betterment and social unity.

⁹⁹² 'Inauguration of a Public Free Library, Museum & Picture Gallery' in *Brighton Herald*, 13th Sept. 1873, p. 3.

⁹⁹³ *Catalogue of the Collection of Pottery & Porcelain in the Brighton Museum, Lent by Henry Willett* (Brighton: South of England Printing Works, 1879).

⁹⁹⁴ Rutherford, 'Henry Willett', 179-181 (p. 179).

⁹⁹⁵ 'Introduction' and 'Contents' in *Department of Science and Art of the Committee of Council on Education. The Bethnal Green Branch of the South Kensington Museum. Catalogue of a Collection of Pottery and Porcelain Illustrating Popular British History, Lent By Henry Willett, Esq., of Brighton* (London: Wyman and Sons, 1899). The catalogue for this exhibition was substantially the same in 1903 when Brighton Town Council took possession of the collection.

⁹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹⁷ Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 75.

⁹⁹⁸ Willett was a significant contributor to the Museum of Practical Geology, see references in Sir Henry de la Beche, *Catalogue of Specimens in the Museum of Practical Geology, Illustrative of the Composition and Manufacture of British Pottery and Porcelain, From the Occupation of Britain by the Romans to the Present Time*, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1876).



Fig. 26. Staffordshire ceramic figure group, 1825, from the Willett 'Popular British History' collection. It shows a tiger mauling a man based on a true incident, Brighton Museum

Henry Willett was one of the founders of the Sussex Archaeological Society formed in 1846 and remained a member throughout his life.⁹⁹⁹ This was at a time when the definition and boundaries of the up-and-coming discipline of archaeology lacked clarity.¹⁰⁰⁰ It was in this transitional moment when demarcations between amateurs and academics in many areas of knowledge were still fuzzy, that Willett, and also his eldest son Ernest, were able to contribute to the new discipline of archaeology as it evolved from the more generalised category of 'antiquities'.¹⁰⁰¹ We know that by 1857 Henry Catt had in his possession Saxon relics which had been dug up in Kemp Town in the late 1830s.¹⁰⁰² However, Henry and Ernest Willett's specialist interest was in the collection and analysis of Iron Age coins.¹⁰⁰³ The British Museum first established a separate department for Coins and Medals in 1861.¹⁰⁰⁴ Its collection contains 38

⁹⁹⁹ 'Henry Catt' in list of original members in *Sussex Archaeological Collections, Illustrating the History and Antiquities of the County*, vol. 1 (London: John Russell Smith, 1848), p. xv.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 1.

¹⁰⁰¹ Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines*, p. 77.

¹⁰⁰² *Sussex Archaeological Collections, Relating to the History and Antiquities of the County*, vol. 37 (Lewes: South Counties Press Limited, 1890), p. 195.

¹⁰⁰³ See, for instance, Ernest H. Willett, *The Ancient British Coins of Sussex* (Lewes: Alex. Rivington, 1879).

¹⁰⁰⁴ Andrew Burnett, 'The British Museum and Numismatics Past and Present', in *The British Museum and the Future of UK Numismatics, Proceedings of a Conference Held to Mark the 150th Anniversary of the British Museum's Department of Coins and Medals, 2011*, ed. by Barrie Cook (London: The British Museum, 2011), pp. 2-11 (p. 5).

Iron Age coins donated by Willett in 1878 from the period 60 BC to 40 AD, acquired directly or indirectly from the seashores of Selsey and East Wittering.¹⁰⁰⁵ A further 61 similar coins originally owned by Willett and probably assembled around the same time were presented to the British Museum in 1983.¹⁰⁰⁶ Academic and numismatist Philip de Jersey commenting on iron age coins collected on the south coast around Selsey, informs us that the ‘bulk of the discoveries’ were made around 1873 by Henry Willett.¹⁰⁰⁷

In addition to archaeological artefacts Willett hoarded a miscellaneous range of historical objects from the medieval to the modern – ‘curiosities’ – which had some kind of social, cultural or novelty value, including objects which specifically related to the local history of Sussex. At the British Association conference in Brighton in August 1872, he provided a pillory and permitted the artist of the *Graphic* to sketch him imprisoned in this apparatus (fig. 27).¹⁰⁰⁸ At the Brighton Art Loan Exhibition in 1884 he loaned specimens of old Sussex ironwork, an old turnspit, a mantrap, an early map of Sussex, Surrey and Kent, and a life-size model of the interior of a Scottish Inn.¹⁰⁰⁹ ‘Objects of Art and Vertue’ listed in the catalogue for the first Christie’s sale of Willett’s collection in April 1905 included medal, rings, cutlery, boxes, an Elizabethan chalice and a Dutch silver-gilt beaker.¹⁰¹⁰ Willett’s collection of books and manuscripts in 41 lots was put up for sale in July 1905 at Christie’s.¹⁰¹¹ It included Caxton’s Book of Caton which sold for £1,350.¹⁰¹² And in 1928 Henry Willett’s grandson Major Kingsley Willett put 14 items of furniture from his grandfather’s collection up for auction at Sotheby & Co including items of Chippendale, Sheraton and Hepplewhite.¹⁰¹³

¹⁰⁰⁵ British Museum website, ‘Collection Online’, <<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG81377>> [accessed 26th April 2020].

¹⁰⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰⁷ Philip de Jersey, *Coin Hoards in Iron Age Britain* (London: Spink, 2014), p. 397.

¹⁰⁰⁸ ‘The British Association at Brighton’, *The Graphic*, 6.143 (1872), p. 166.

¹⁰⁰⁹ *The Brighton Art Loan Exhibition, 1884. Official Catalogue* (Townes & Curtis: Brighton, 1884).

¹⁰¹⁰ Appendix 5. HWCS: *ii Object catalogues*.

¹⁰¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹² *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹³ *Ibid.*



Fig. 27. 'In the Pillory' from 'Our Artist's Notes at Brighton During the Meeting of the British Association' in *The Graphic*, 6.143, 24th Aug. 1872, p. 166.

Another area of acquisition for Henry Willett was ethnographic objects from countries around the world, including as one might expect territories in the British Empire or British spheres of influence. Willett donated some of these artefacts to museums which were expanding their own ethnographic collections. For instance, Willett's gifts to the British Museum over the years included axes from Papua New Guinea, ornaments from the Solomon Islands, a Congolese sculpture, a Scandinavian drum, and a Chinese snuff bottle.¹⁰¹⁴ Similarly, Willett gifted ethnographic items to Brighton Museum which by 1885 had established an Ethnological department (fig. 28).¹⁰¹⁵ For example, in 1885 he presented the Museum with specimens of native carving from Abeokuta in Africa,¹⁰¹⁶ and in 1902 with Burmese objects of art and examples of Japanese joinery.¹⁰¹⁷ Finally, apart from fossil and flints, Willett accumulated and donated to Brighton Museum a miscellany of natural history specimens. In 1875, to give just

¹⁰¹⁴ Appendix 5. HWCS: *i Loans and donations*.

¹⁰¹⁵ Brighton Museum Sub-Committee Annual Report, 1885, p. 4, BHSB027.4BRI.

¹⁰¹⁶ Appendix 5. HWCS: *i Loans and donations*.

¹⁰¹⁷ *Ibid.*

one example, he presented the museum with a palate of a Port Jackson Shark, a humming bird and nest, the skull of a seal and various fossils.¹⁰¹⁸



Fig. 28. Salt-cellar made by Edo in Nigeria, 1525-1600, donated by Willett, British Museum

An Art Collection of Old Masters and Portraits

At the end of April 1886, a well-known and venerated American poet, physician and writer, Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894) arrived in Liverpool from Boston, New England to make a four-month tour of Britain, accompanied by his daughter Amelia.¹⁰¹⁹ For short sections of the journey they were entertained and escorted by Henry Willett and his wife Frances who acted as tour guides for Holmes.¹⁰²⁰ Wendell Holmes wrote a reflective and light-hearted account of his visit to Britain published some years later entitled *Our Hundred Days in Europe*, in which the Willetts make fleeting appearances. Holmes writes of his stay in Brighton in July 1886,

¹⁰¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹⁹ Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Our Hundred Days in Europe* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1892), p. 1.

¹⁰²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18, p. 47, p. 116. The Willetts accompanied Wendell Holmes and his daughter on visits to Oxford, Cambridge, Windsor, Salisbury, Stonehenge, and the Lake District. Holmes had previously visited England in 1835 and there is no evidence that Henry Willett had ever visited America. Early in his narrative Holmes refers to Henry Willett as 'our as yet unseen friend', and the tone of other references suggest that they had never met before 1886. It may be that a mutual friend or acquaintance arranged the liaison between the two men. Alternatively, it would have been in character for Willett to simply have written or telegraphed Dr Holmes to offer his services, including a stay in Brighton.

'Here we pass another delightful week, with everything around us to contribute to our quiet comfort and happiness. The most thoughtful of entertainers, a house filled with choice works of art, fine paintings, and wonderful pottery, pleasant walks and drives, a visitor now and then.'¹⁰²¹ 'The British penchant for 'the art of the home' is evident in this comment.¹⁰²²

Wendell Holmes's visit provided Willett with an opportunity to show off both his economic and cultural capital, in which a fine art collection with its elite connotations, was a key component.

Across his adult life Willett assembled a sizable collection consisting of 298 pictures and a number of sculptures in the form of portrait busts or relief sculptures.¹⁰²³ Jessica Rutherford writes of 'the magnificence of his complete collection'.¹⁰²⁴ Stella Beddoe states that he 'assembled an important collection of Old Master Paintings including major works from the Italian and Flemish Renaissance' which were sold in 1896.¹⁰²⁵ Willett's art collection was more complicated and diffuse than either of these two assessments suggest. Around 30% of the pictures were contemporary nineteenth century works, so the collection was not entirely one of old masters.¹⁰²⁶ But this was not a typical Victorian middle class businessman's collection consisting of modern works by British artists with an emphasis on narrative, anecdote, or landscape. Nearly half of the pictures purchased were painted before the eighteenth century mainly by continental artists.¹⁰²⁷ Buying old master works in the 1850s certainly flew in the face of the *Art Journal's* relentless campaign to expose the numbers of copies and forgeries in the old master market whilst flying the flag for British contemporary art whose authenticity was not in doubt.¹⁰²⁸ But at least prices for old master portraits and religious paintings were relatively low in the 1850s.¹⁰²⁹ By the 1870s when Willett continued to expand his collection

¹⁰²¹ *Ibid.* p. 132.

¹⁰²² Cohen, p. 65.

¹⁰²³ Appendix 5. HWCS: *iv. Artists alphabetical.*

¹⁰²⁴ Rutherford, *Henry Willett*, p. 176.

¹⁰²⁵ Beddoe, 'Henry Willett', *ODNB*.

¹⁰²⁶ Appendix 5. HWCS: *vi. Picture summaries.*

¹⁰²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰²⁸ Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art*, p. 98.

¹⁰²⁹ Bayer and Page, pp. 11-12.

the Winter Old Masters Exhibition was firmly established at the Royal Academy, modern British art was highly successful in the marketplace, and the antagonism between advocates of contemporary painting and connoisseurs favouring historical works had abated.¹⁰³⁰



Fig. 29. Dirk Bouts, *Moses and the Burning Bush*, oil on panel (44cm x 36cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art

Nearly half of Willett's paintings (132) were portraits and 24% were history paintings almost all of which were religious.¹⁰³¹ 90 pictures were Renaissance crafted in the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries.¹⁰³² There is a sense then in which Willett's collection of pictures looked back rather than forward, was more traditional than contemporary, more aristocratic in its ideological associations than bourgeois. The collection does not constitute a clear statement of middle class solidarity or define Willett as in the vanguard of modernity, notwithstanding his credentials as capitalist and Radical. For the most part the Willett art collection, gives the impression of a haphazardly acquired set of purchases of relatively low-priced works of cabinet

¹⁰³⁰ Francis Haskell, *The Ephemeral Museum: Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 77-9.

¹⁰³¹ Appendix 5. HWCS: vi. *Picture summaries*.

¹⁰³² *Ibid.*

size reflecting a disparate range of artists, periods, and nationalities, albeit with a predilection for portraits and religious works.¹⁰³³

Towards the end of his life in spring 1903 Willett donated around 60 paintings and sketches to the Brighton Museum where they were already on display in the first loan exhibition in the refurbished art gallery in the new library and museum complex which had opened to the public in November 1902.¹⁰³⁴ Willett produced a special catalogue of these works organised in the four themes of 'portraits', 'religion', 'costume' and 'landscape', echoing the thematic approach in the organisation of the ceramics collection gifted to Brighton.¹⁰³⁵ A much larger number of paintings, 147, were sold at Christie's following his death in February 1905 raising a sum of £3,725, equivalent to £403,000 at today's values.¹⁰³⁶ The pictures he presented to Brighton corporation were of a similar range of styles, periods and genres and in all likelihood the individual market value of each work was on average less than those put up for auction at Christie's in 1905.¹⁰³⁷ Clearly, Willett's civic generosity in gifting a portion of his art collection to the town, was tempered by the fact that a much larger stock of paintings had been retained as capital assets to benefit his legatees.

One interesting feature of his art-collecting is that Willett, within the confines of what in some ways can be viewed as a run-of-the-mill set of paintings, cultivated a specialist connoisseurial interest in the purchase of Italian and Flemish works from the early Renaissance – a collection within a collection within a collection. At one time or another in his lifetime he owned 20 to 25 works produced in the fourteenth, fifteenth, or early sixteenth centuries.¹⁰³⁸ For art dealers and art-buyers alike in the second half of the nineteenth century this was still an up-and-

¹⁰³³ Appendix 5. HWCS: *iii. Picture catalogues, iv. Artists alphabetical, v. Picture price size, vi. Picture summaries.*

¹⁰³⁴ 'Brighton Town Council', *Brighton Gazette*, Sat. 18th April 1903, p. 5.

¹⁰³⁵ *Catalogue (Imperfectly Descriptive) of a Collection of Pictures Lent to the Picture Gallery, Brighton*, (Brighton: W. T. Moulton, 1903).

¹⁰³⁶ Appendix 5. HWCS: *v Picture price size.* Retail price index comparison in *MeasuringWorth.com*.

¹⁰³⁷ Appendix 5. HWCS: *iv Artists alphabetical, vi Picture summaries.*

¹⁰³⁸ *Ibid.*

coming area of interest and expertise the scholarship on which was in its relative infancy.¹⁰³⁹ Of the early Renaissance paintings which Willett owned the provenance of which is assured are: a panel by Giotto called *Presentation in the Temple*, Roger van der Weyden's *Virgin and Child Surrounded by Angels*, Antonello di Messina's *Portrait of a Young Man*, Dirk Bout's *The Burning Bush*, Le Maitre de Moulin's *Virgin and Child Surrounded by Angels*, Giorgione's *Holy Family*, and perhaps most famously Ghirlandaio's *Portrait of Giovanna Tornabuoni* (see figs. 29 and 30).¹⁰⁴⁰ The most adventurous purchase that Willett made of early Renaissance works were 44 decorative portraits which had formed a frieze in the palace of San Martino Gusnago near Mantua, acquired in 1881-2.¹⁰⁴¹



Fig. 30. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Portrait of Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni*, 1489-1490, mixed media on panel (77cm x 49cm), Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

¹⁰³⁹ Denys Sutton, 'Aspects of British Collecting. Part 4', *Apollo*, 123.282 (1985), 84-129.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Appendix 5. HWCS: *iv. Artists alphabetical*.

¹⁰⁴¹ A. H. Church, 'The Master of San Martino' in *The Portfolio*, 15 (Jan. 1884), pp. 35-37. Henry Willett's friend Professor Church was responsible for cleaning the panels to reveal the portraits obscured underneath.

It seems likely that when Willett bought Ghirlandaio's *Portrait of Giovanna Tornabuoni* in 1876 for £600,¹⁰⁴² it was his first purchase of an early Renaissance painting produced before 1500 and his first purchase of any Italian Renaissance picture.¹⁰⁴³ The fact that since 1873 Willett had been a regular correspondent of John Ruskin who was a keen advocate of *trecento* and *quattrocento* works was a possible stimulus.¹⁰⁴⁴ Willett actually travelled to Paris to secure the painting accompanied by the art expert John Charles Robinson (1824-1913) who was there to advise him.¹⁰⁴⁵ The painting was loaned to the Winter Exhibition of Old Masters at the Royal Academy in 1878, catalogued as 'No. 210 The Portrait of a Lady' by Domenico Ghirlandaio.¹⁰⁴⁶ However, at the time there was a great deal of uncertainty over both the authorship and the identity of the woman in the portrait which gave rise to debate among the *cognoscenti*. The art critic Sydney Colvin (1845-1927) in an account of the debate reported that Robinson, Ruskin and Willett himself believed, on balance, that it was in fact a work by Sandro Botticelli.¹⁰⁴⁷ On the other hand, the art historian and collector Dr Jean Paul Richter (1847-1937) attributed the painting to Ridolfo Ghirlandaio, Domenico's brother.¹⁰⁴⁸ Sidney Colvin himself disagreed, contending that the painting was rightly attributed to Domenico Ghirlandaio and that the sitter was almost certainly Giovanna Tornabuoni.¹⁰⁴⁹ As it happens, around the end of 1877 Willett had consulted Ruskin about the provenance of the portrait in the light of his knowledge and championing of Botticelli.¹⁰⁵⁰ Ruskin in response admitted that he knew little about Ghirlandaio

¹⁰⁴² Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste*, p. 327. Reitlinger refers mistakenly to William Willett rather than Henry Willett as the buyer.

¹⁰⁴³ What suggests that the Ghirlandaio portrait marked the start of the formation of a small collection of early Renaissance paintings is the fact that out of 75 separate paintings which Willett loaned to three Brighton loan exhibitions between 1872 and 1874, only two of these were painted before 1600 and none before 1500, see Appendix 5. HWCS: *iii. Picture catalogues*.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Hilton, *John Ruskin, The Later Years*, p. 236 and p. 273.

¹⁰⁴⁵ A.C.R. Carter, *Let Me Tell You* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1940), p. 62.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Jean Paul Richter, 'The "Old Masters" Exhibition', *The Academy*, iss. 300 (1878), p. 100.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Sidney Colvin account of the debate over the identity of the painting, 'Ninth Winter Exhibition of Old Masters etc., At the Royal Academy', *The Academy*, issue 301, 9th Feb. 1878, p. 130.

¹⁰⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵⁰ Letter from Ruskin to Willett, 8th Jan. 1878, Corpus Christi College, Oxford, in *The Letters of John Ruskin (1827-1889)*, vol. 37, in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, Cook and Wedderburn, p. 237. The original letter from Willett to Ruskin canvassing Ruskin's opinion on *Portrait of a Lady* has not survived but its contents can be inferred from the reply.

suggesting that Willett should secure the opinion of his friend, copyist and connoisseur Charles Fairfax Murray.¹⁰⁵¹ We can conjecture that Murray came down on the side of Botticelli judging by the views of Ruskin two months later, as reported by Colvin.¹⁰⁵²

Such was the controversy, that the Society of Antiquaries devoted the whole of its meeting on the evening of 14th March 1878 'to the examination and discussion' of Willett's painting.¹⁰⁵³ Augustus Franks (1826-1897) of the British Museum presented the case for assigning the attribution to Domenico Ghirlandaio.¹⁰⁵⁴ The Director of the National Gallery, Frederic Burton, and the Director of the National Portrait Gallery, George Scharf concurred in this.¹⁰⁵⁵ The only dissenting voice was Robinson.¹⁰⁵⁶ The authorship and subject of the painting were only conclusively settled when Willett loaned it to the National Gallery in December 1887.¹⁰⁵⁷ For Willett, the provenance of his painting was perhaps less important than the access which the debate over attribution gave him to an elite circle of art experts and the confirmation of his own authenticity as a connoisseur in purchasing a painting which, whether by Ghirlandaio or Botticelli, demonstrated the advanced quality of his taste at a time when the *consecration* of Early Renaissance art was underway.¹⁰⁵⁸ Personal circumstances compelled Willett to sell some of his most valuable signature works to the Parisian dealer Charles Sedelmeyer in 1895 and 1896 including his Ghirlandaio portrait which fetched £1600.¹⁰⁵⁹ The Sedelmeyer sale illustrates that whatever the intellectual and social significance of his art collection might have been for Henry Willett alongside all his other collections and cultural properties, its value was financial as well as aesthetic. This very much reflected the view of the flagship of middle class

¹⁰⁵¹ *Ibid.* On Murray see Hilton, *John Ruskin, the Later Years*, p. 273.

¹⁰⁵² Colvin, *The Academy*, 9th Feb. 1878, p. 100.

¹⁰⁵³ 'Society of Antiquaries', *The Athenaeum*, iss. 2630 (March 1878), p. 385.

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵⁷ A.C.R. Carter, p. 62.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Adrian S. Hoch, 'The Art of Alessandro Botticelli Through the Eyes of Victorian Aesthetes', in *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, ed. by John E. Law and Lene Oestermark-Johansen, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), pp. 55-85 (p. 56-8).

¹⁰⁵⁹ Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste*, p. 327.

art, the *Art Journal*, which consistently emphasised that ‘refined taste’ and ‘speculation’ in fine art collecting were not a contradiction in terms.¹⁰⁶⁰

However, putting the investment value of the art collection to one side, a number of observations can be made on Willett’s collection. The predominance of portraits (and also portrait busts) affirms Willett’s interest in individual people and personalities of the past and to a lesser degree the heroes and ‘great men’ of history in the patriotic narrative of Britain’s rise to power and greatness. But fundamentally assembling an old masters collection was associated with the collecting practices of a member of the landed gentry in the eighteenth century described, for instance, in John Steegman’s *The Rule of Taste*, rather than a nineteenth century businessman.¹⁰⁶¹ Willett it appears wanted to perform as a rich patrician rather than a liberal capitalist in a desire to demonstrate the ‘civic humanist’ virtues of natural intelligence, cultural confidence and fitness to rule.¹⁰⁶² It should not be forgotten that devotion to money and materialism was disparaged by Willett’s favourite authors, Dickens and Kingsley. Art combined with philanthropy provided the means, at least in the imagination, by which he might absolve himself of the sins of inherited wealth.

The Drives and Delights of the Serial Collector

Willett’s lifetime accumulation of an extensive range of scientific, historical, and artistic goods and artefacts in the eleven separate areas that have been used here to classify his collections, established his reputation in cultivated circles in Brighton and London. The *Saturday Review* in 1888 called him ‘that indefatigable collector’,¹⁰⁶³ *The Bystander* in 1904 referred to him as the

¹⁰⁶⁰ ‘The Collection of Pictures of Thomas Williams, Esq. No. 1’, *Art Journal*, iss. 93 (1869), p. 279. This is one out of many articles and reports which explicitly make this point.

¹⁰⁶¹ Steegman, *The Rule of Taste*.

¹⁰⁶² For a discussion of the discourse of civic humanism and art as conceptualised by John Barrell, see Stephen Copley, ‘The Fine Arts in Eighteenth-Century Polite Culture’, in *Painting and the Politics of Culture, New Essays on British Art*, ed. by John Barrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 13-37 (p. 14).

¹⁰⁶³ ‘The Armada Relics at Drury Lane’, *The Saturday Review*, 66.1722 (1888), p. 491.

‘well-known Brighton connoisseur’,¹⁰⁶⁴ the *Pall Mall Gazette* in a brief obituary notice in 1905 spoke of him as a ‘great art collector’ which was the by-line used in local newspapers across the country in similar death notices, often referencing both his pottery and art collections.¹⁰⁶⁵ The *Brighton Gazette* obituary tells us that Willett collected all his life and ‘With a generosity which is not always evidenced by collectors, however, he desired that his treasures should be enjoyed by as large a number of people as possible’.¹⁰⁶⁶ As with Henry Hill, art collecting and municipal philanthropy is what Henry Willett was immediately remembered for, not his great wealth or his occupation as a brewer. It was his cultural and moral profile not his money which was commemorated in obituaries.

But as we have seen Willett as a ‘collector of collections’ was rather more than just a connoisseur of fine art. The wide-ranging and eclectic nature of his collecting habits present challenges in trying to analyse the meanings and motives which explain the pastime to which he was profoundly committed throughout his life. For instance, to use Susan Pearce’s terminology, some of his collections were ‘systematic’ providing examples of things in established areas of knowledge arranged according to clear principles of organisation, but others were ‘fetishistic’ accumulated on a more random and idiosyncratic basis.¹⁰⁶⁷ Examples of ‘systematic’ collections were his cretaceous fossils, his history of flint series, and his Sussex Iron Age coins. The ‘fetishistic’ character of his collections is apparent in the list of disparate objects for sale in the advert for the Wilkinson, Son and Welch auction of Willett effects in Brighton April 1905 which included: an Old English boxwood spinning wheel, iron fire-backs, Nankin porcelain, Sheraton tea caddies, a ‘curious XVth Century wax medallion “The Judgement of Paris”’, and ‘a large variety of bric-a-brac’.¹⁰⁶⁸ Russell Belk distinguishes between

¹⁰⁶⁴ *The Bystander*, 1.6 (1904), p. 467.

¹⁰⁶⁵ ‘Death of a Well-known Brightonian’, *Pall Mall Gazette* (Feb. 1905), p. 8.

¹⁰⁶⁶ ‘Death of Mr Henry Willett’, *Brighton Gazette*, 2nd March 1905, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Susan M. Pearce, ‘Collecting Reconsidered’, in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. by Susan Pearce (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 193-204 (p. 201).

¹⁰⁶⁸ *Brighton Gazette*, 27th April 1905, p. 1.

collecting as the acquisition of objects on a purposeful, rule-governed and knowledgeable basis and hoarding as indiscriminate, chaotic, compulsive acquisition.¹⁰⁶⁹ This fundamental distinction, is confounded it seems by Willett's practices which combined both collecting and hoarding, classification and plenitude, on a serial basis. But what is not in doubt is that he was a serious collector. Following his death in 1905 over 100 books and 100 pamphlets were donated by the Willett family to Brighton library.¹⁰⁷⁰ Over half of these were specialist catalogues, manuals, compendia and antiquarian publications relating to his varied collecting interests.¹⁰⁷¹ Willett's money had allowed him to assemble an extensive personal library giving him the means of production to manufacture the scholarship and expertise which the credible collector needed to function effectively in Victorian networks of knowledge.

There are intriguing snippets of evidence which provide an insight into Willett's diverse modes of acquisition. From the very start of his collecting career in the 1830s, he was resourceful in paying labourers in the quarries around Lewes to set aside fossils for his schoolboy collection.¹⁰⁷² This same resourcefulness was displayed many years later in 1876, when he travelled to Paris having secured the services of John Robinson to advise him in the purchase of what was eventually established as Ghirlandaio's *Portrait of Giovanni Tornabuoni*.¹⁰⁷³ The painting *Portrait of a Man* loaned out to exhibitions by Henry Willett on a number of occasions and attributed contentiously to Rembrandt, was 'found in a public-house in Sussex; the thick panel warped, and the face begrimed with dirt', according to the *Magazine of Art* in 1878.¹⁰⁷⁴ A preoccupation with the prices of collectibles is confirmed in a letter to fellow Brighton collector and plutocrat Constantine Ionides in 1884. In relation to roundels and medallions Willett writes 'I gave £34 for a set of 6. A friend gave 3s 6d for a set of 10. My son-in-law gave

¹⁰⁶⁹ Russell Belk, 'Ownership and Collecting', *The Oxford Handbook of Hoarding and Acquiring*, eds. Randy O. Frost and Gail Steketee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 33-39.

¹⁰⁷⁰ FASC Minutes, 22nd March, 1905, pp. 4-5, BH600075/76/77.

¹⁰⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷² Preface, *Catalogue of the Cretaceous Fossils*, p. iii.

¹⁰⁷³ A.C.R. Carter, p. 62.

¹⁰⁷⁴ 'Art Notes', *Magazine of Art* (1878), p. vii.

£4 for a very fine set of 12.¹⁰⁷⁵ He then goes on to offer to buy a lamp from Ionides, 'If you should feel disposed "Aladdin" like to change old lamps for new'.¹⁰⁷⁶ It would appear that Willett, on top of everything else, had side-lines in collecting roundels and lamps, but more to the point that he seemed to relish acquiring and disposing, buying and selling objects for their own sake. Willett also did business directly with other collectors. He obtained Le Maitre de Moulins' *Madonna and Child with Three Angels* on the basis of an exchange in 1894 with the rich businessman and connoisseur Robert Benson (1850-1929) who received Giorgione's *The Holy Family* in return (fig. 31).¹⁰⁷⁷ He bought directly from dealers as is exemplified by his purchase of Giotto's panel *Presentation in the Temple* from Colnaghi & Co before 1892.¹⁰⁷⁸ Two years later he sold it on to the art dealer and scholar Dr Richter.¹⁰⁷⁹ At the house sale of the furniture and fittings of 57, Brunswick Square, Hove, in 1893, Willett purchased a set of 12 china plates for £1 5s.¹⁰⁸⁰ It is hard to believe that at the age of seventy having been collecting all his life that he really needed these plates to enhance or complete his collection of ceramics.



Fig. 31. Giorgione, *The Holy Family*, oil on panel (37cm x 46cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington

¹⁰⁷⁵ Letter Henry Willett to Constantine Ionides, 30th Sept. 1884 letter, East Sussex Record Office, FRE 4206/78.

¹⁰⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷⁷ A.C.R. Carter, p. 62.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Catalogue entry accession number P30w9, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum website, <<https://www.gardnermuseum.org/experience/collection/12894#gref>> [accessed 10th May 2020].

¹⁰⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸⁰ 'Important Furniture Sale', *Brighton Gazette*, 21st Sept. 1893, p. 8.

Ludmilla Jordanova explores the theme of mastery in collecting where the possession, classification and display of historical, scientific or ethnographical objects in museums and individual collections is interpreted as a demonstration of mastery over time, nature, and other cultures.¹⁰⁸¹ Such collecting features the pursuit of ‘prized objects, of trophies, the spoils of war’.¹⁰⁸² There is no doubt that Willett pursued trophy objects. For instance, he was persistent in his quest for an original copy of the Wycliffe New Testament published in around 1380 which was a family heirloom owned by his friend the Reverend Thomas Rooper, who had inherited it by direct descent from Sir Thomas More.¹⁰⁸³ Willett offered to buy this book from Rooper but he declined to sell it. He then offered to purchase the Wycliffe bible from the estate after the priest’s death, but the executors found that the book had been stolen from Rooper’s library.¹⁰⁸⁴ Willett was relentless in his pursuit of the stolen volume which he finally took possession of having indemnified the various individuals involved in the theft and brokered a deal with Rooper’s executors.¹⁰⁸⁵ Willett put his ‘trophy’ – “The Newe Testamente” by John Wycliffe - on display in Brighton Museum in Autumn 1889 to local acclaim.¹⁰⁸⁶ One has the sense that the pursuit and display of the prize was as important to Willett, as the intrinsic cultural merits of the final acquisition which took its place in a rather motley array of old books, manuscripts, illustrations and papers. The art collector and mountaineer Martin Conway (1856-1937) who was a collecting acquaintance of Henry Willett wrote of him in his autobiographical *Episodes in a Variable Life* in 1932, that ‘He loved the fun of the hunt and joy of acquisition’.¹⁰⁸⁷ This is reflected in this account of the quest for the Wycliffe bible.

¹⁰⁸¹ Ludmilla Jordanova, ‘Objects of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective on Museums’, in *The New Museology*, ed. by Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1989), pp. 22-40 (p. 32).

¹⁰⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸³ *Catalogue of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Christie’s* July 5th 1905; ‘A Copy of Wycliffe’s New Testament’, *Brighton Herald*, 30th Nov. 1889, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸⁴ *Brighton Herald*, 30th Nov. 1889, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸⁷ Martin Conway, *Episodes in a Variable Life* (London: Country Life, 1932), p. 36.

What then was Willett's own sense of himself as a collector? What in his view were the personal satisfactions of collecting as opposed to the social and educational benefits of collections displayed in loan exhibitions or museums? Werner Muensterberger has written that 'Collectors themselves – dedicated, serious, infatuated, beset – cannot explain or understand this often all-consuming drive, nor can they call a halt to their habit'.¹⁰⁸⁸ The description 'dedicated, serious, infatuated, beset' certainly describes Willett as a collector, but on the other hand, he did try to explain his habit. In 1871 he wrote of the 'loving labour of the leisure hours of ten years', and that 'the pleasure of a Collector in meeting with a fossil fish in a chalk stone, is not surpassed by that of an angler who has hooked a living one'.¹⁰⁸⁹ The moral and evangelical dimensions of Willett's pursuits are apparent when he writes of redeeming objects of 'beauty and interest [...] from destruction', and 'the delight of discovering some new *relic* of Creative Power hitherto unknown to Science'.¹⁰⁹⁰ According to Willett, his fossil-hunting hobby inculcated the 'habit of early rising' and, more generally, encouraged young men to be '*humble and reverent*' and not waste their time 'in billiards or idleness'.¹⁰⁹¹ Yet, at the same time as extolling the virtues of fossil-hunting, Willett-the-businessman was conscious of his collection as a financial asset when he commented, 'I could have disposed of the Collection for a considerably larger sum of money than it had cost me; but I preferred to present it to the Museum of this Town'.¹⁰⁹²

In addition, accumulation combined with classification provided Willett with the opportunity to invent his own taxonomies. These are best exemplified by his 'homely pottery' collection illustrating the history of Britain in 'The Willett Room' in Brighton Museum in 1903,¹⁰⁹³ and the

¹⁰⁸⁸ Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 3.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Preface, *Catalogue of the Cretaceous Fossils*, p. iii, p. iv.

¹⁰⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. iii, p. iv.

¹⁰⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. v.

¹⁰⁹² *Ibid.*, p. iv.

¹⁰⁹³ Introduction to *Catalogue of a Collection of Pottery and Porcelain Illustrating Popular British History*, 1899.

thematic arrangement of the 60 or so pictures in the loan exhibition in the same year.¹⁰⁹⁴ His idiosyncratic classificatory systems disregarded the professional discourses taking root at the time emphasising aesthetic quality or historical progress in the development of the formal and technical qualities of fine art and decorative objects.¹⁰⁹⁵ He exercised his prerogative as the purchaser and possessor of cultural properties to present them in whatever way he chose according to his own personal preferences. Jean Baudrillard has written:

whatever the orientation of a collection, it will always embody an irreducible element of independence from the world. It is because he feels himself alienated or lost with a social discourse whose rules he cannot fathom that the collector is driven to construct an alternative discourse that is for him entirely amenable, in so far as he is the one who dictates its signifiers – the ultimate signified being, in the final analysis, none other than himself.¹⁰⁹⁶

It is not clear that Willett was somehow ‘alienated or lost’ but it is apparent that he took pleasure in fashioning alternative discourses for which the ultimate referent was himself. This was one of the privileges of the would-be patrician.

Willett As Exhibitor, Donor and Dispenser of Objects

In an analysis of luxury goods, Arjun Appadurai argues that their ‘principal use is *rhetorical* and *social*, goods that are simply incarnated signs’.¹⁰⁹⁷ Barbara Black comments on the ‘dual craze for collecting and exhibiting’ in the Victorian era.¹⁰⁹⁸ To fully understand Willett as a collector, and perhaps other Victorian collectors, we need to appreciate that he was as much an exhibitor and donor as a collector. The significance of his private storehouse of scientific, aesthetic and historical artefacts needs to be understood in the context of the significations

¹⁰⁹⁴ *Catalogue (Imperfectly Descriptive) of a Collection of Pictures Lent to the Picture Gallery, Brighton*, (Brighton: W. T. Moulton, 1903).

¹⁰⁹⁵ Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines*, p. 103.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, ‘The System of Collecting’, in *The Culture of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 7-24 (p. 24).

¹⁰⁹⁷ Arjun Appadurai, ‘Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value’, in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed., Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 3-63 (p. 39).

¹⁰⁹⁸ Black, *On Exhibit*, p. 68.

which these objects achieved when they were dispersed and displayed in the public sphere in the form of donations, loans, or sales to exhibitions, galleries, and museums. The private significance of these objects was realised in their public deployment, the meaningful possession of these objects was only achieved in their *dispossession*. As the chronological account of ‘loans and donations’ in the Willett spreadsheet shows, throughout his career as a collector he put as much energy and effort into the public display of his cultural properties, as into their private acquisition as cultural capital.¹⁰⁹⁹

The audience for Willett’s eclectic and extensive range of artefacts and *objets d’art* may in the first instance have been himself, his family and friends, and visitors such as Wendell Holmes. But it was also a public consisting of members of the middle class who he wished to influence or impress, the working class whose education or morality he wanted to improve, and I would also suggest an evolving ruling elite whose ranks he aspired to join. Willett himself wrote that the enjoyment of a collector ‘is always increased and multiplied, just in proportion as he finds that other people can share it’.¹¹⁰⁰ In addition to his major donations of fossils, flints, ceramics and paintings to Brighton town council and its museum there was hardly a year between 1873 and 1905 when Willett didn’t loan or donate objects to Brighton Museum, the Picture Gallery or the Library.¹¹⁰¹ He gifted artefacts and works of art from his collections to major exhibitions and museums in London on a regular basis, and to provincial museums in Manchester, Norfolk, and Salford.¹¹⁰² He also presented friends and acquaintances with objects and specimens from his collections, whether flints to John Ruskin, pottery to R. H. Soden Smith (1822-1890) Head of the South Kensington National Art Library, or Iron Age coins to the paper manufacturer and

¹⁰⁹⁹ Appendix 5. HWCS: *i. Loans and donations*.

¹¹⁰⁰ *Catalogue (Imperfectly Descriptive) of A Collection of Pictures by Old Masters of Scriptural Subjects, Lent to the Picture Gallery, Brighton, March 1901*, p. 1.

¹¹⁰¹ Appendix 5. HWCS: *i. Loans and donations*.

¹¹⁰² *Ibid.*

archaeologist John Evans (1823-1908) whose work shaped Ernest Willett's archaeological interests.¹¹⁰³

The Victorian upper middle class, while embracing market forces, individualism and greater freedom, was still acutely conscious of the inferences of various forms of social display relating to rank and hierarchy. For Willett, his stockpile of collectibles furnished the currency to reinforce his social credentials in the intellectual and elite circles of Brighton and London. As Pomian tells us 'collection pieces were emblematic of social rank'.¹¹⁰⁴ This was commensurate with the increased standing and influence achieved through munificent charitable donations or financing Liberal Party election campaigns. Not least, it should be remembered that the public exhibition included not merely the pictures or artefacts, the supporting text and material environment, but also the names and ranks of the owners of the objects which appeared in catalogues and captions, and often in the arts pages of the journals and newspapers reporting these events. The businessman collector in lending out a cultural object was also putting his name on display as a signifier in the semiotics of the exhibition. He (or she), while ostensibly and generously enhancing the quality or educational value of the cultural occasion, was at one and the same time involved in an act of self-promotion, proclaiming his own worth as a member of a propertied elite in possession of education and taste as well as money.

Collecting Objects to Collect People

I would suggest that Henry Willett's pursuits as a serial collector and owner of an 'imaginary museum' also helped him access scientific and cultural circles and learned societies within the middle class in both Brighton and London. It can be argued that collecting objects for Willett, not content with a level of wealth which placed him at the apex of Brighton's business elite, was actually a strategy for *collecting people*, and gaining access to the networks which

¹¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰⁴ Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities*, p. 39.

constituted the mainly male bourgeois intelligentsia at the time. Willett's fellow collector Martin Conway recollecting Willett in his biography in 1932 suggests that brewing was a trade that lacked prestige and by inference that status deprivation was an ingredient which accounted for Willett's passion for collecting.¹¹⁰⁵ Willett by dint of his father's legacy had the financial security, freedom and leisure time to reinvent himself with new interests and social circles different to those of his father William Catt. Macleod in analysing 146 notable middle class collectors, points out that two-thirds of them were second or third generation wealth-owners.¹¹⁰⁶ Willett was not untypical therefore in inheriting wealth, and using his comfortable situation to develop interests rather different from those of his father who had built up the business.

In the Preface to his *Catalogue of Cretaceous Fossils* published in 1871, Henry Willett himself said that an additional benefit of fossil-hunting was that 'it made me acquainted with men of culture and refinement, who, in many instances, have grown to be firm and fast friends'.¹¹⁰⁷ There were a number of scientists, academics and experts in the areas of geology and palaeontology who Willett had close relationships with across his lifetime and in whose circles he moved. In the same Preface Willett thanks his 'friend' William Boyd Dawkins (1837-1929), Professor of Owen's College, Manchester stating that 'Without his aid the Catalogue could not have attained its present form and accuracy'.¹¹⁰⁸ Boyd Dawkins was a geologist, palaeontologist, and a lecturer and then professor of geology at Owen's College from 1872.¹¹⁰⁹ It has already been noted that Professor Richard Owen, nationally renowned comparative anatomist and palaeontologist, opened the first dedicated Brighton Museum in November 1861, possibly at Willett's invitation.¹¹¹⁰ On that occasion in his speech he referred to Willett or

¹¹⁰⁵ Conway, *Episodes in a Variable Life*, p. 36.

¹¹⁰⁶ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 4.

¹¹⁰⁷ Preface, *Catalogue of the Cretaceous Fossils*, p. v.

¹¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. vi.

¹¹⁰⁹ Geoffrey Tweedale, 'Sir William Boyd Dawkins', *ODNB* (2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/32750>> [accessed 13th May 2020].

¹¹¹⁰ *Brighton Guardian*, 6th Nov. 1861, p. 5.

Henry Catt as he was then, as his ‘friend’.¹¹¹¹ Willett would also have known Dr Frederick Dixon, a pioneering palaeontologist and a fellow founding member of the Sussex Archaeological Society in 1846,¹¹¹² and the Sussex geologist Henry Woodward who in 1878 named a fossil after Willett, ‘Meyeria Willetti’.¹¹¹³

It was Willett’s idea to inaugurate the Sub-Wealden Exploration in 1872 to drill a deep hole to establish the character and thickness of the geological strata of the Kent and Sussex Weald.¹¹¹⁴ The occasion for the launching of the project was the visit of the British Association for the first time in August 1872 coinciding with the opening of the new Brighton Free Library and Museum with Picture Gallery.¹¹¹⁵ Scientific experiment was linked with municipal patriotism. Willett himself introduced the scheme to the Geological Section of the British Association in Brighton in August 1872. *Chamber’s Journal* in its account said of Willett, that he was ‘well known as a local geologist; and his energy and influence doubtless contributed greatly to enlist the sympathy of his scientific friends, and to secure the liberal assistance of the landowners of Sussex and others with a financial interest’.¹¹¹⁶ Not only was it Willett’s idea but he was also Honorary Secretary, Treasurer, fund raiser, major financial contributor, and in effect the project manager for the whole scheme.¹¹¹⁷ The Sub-Wealden Exploration received national coverage from the country’s press for the duration of its active existence from 1872 to 1876.¹¹¹⁸ Willett had ascended from schoolboy fossil hunter to become the mastermind of a pioneering geological investigation at the epicentre of his own network of explorers, scientists,

¹¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹² ‘Heritage Leaflet No. 8, Dr Frederick Dixon, FRCS, FGS’, The Worthing Society website, <www.worthingsociety.org.uk/WS_FD_Leaflet.pdf> [accessed 13th May 2020].

¹¹¹³ Henry Woodward, ‘VI. On Meyeria Willetti, a New Macrourous Crustacean from the Chalk of Sussex’ in *The Geological Magazine*, 5.11, (Nov. 1878), pp. 521-523, published online by Cambridge University Press, 1st May 2009, <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0016756800151246>> [accessed 13th May 2020].

¹¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹⁵ ‘Fourth Report on the Sub-Wealden Exploration Project’, *Brighton Guardian*, 24th April 1872, quoted in *The Record of the Sub-Wealden Exploration* (Brighton: W. J. Smith, 1878), p. 2.

¹¹¹⁶ ‘The Sub-Wealden Exploration’, in *Chamber’s Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts*, iss. 494 (1873), p. 375.

¹¹¹⁷ *The Record of the Sub-Wealden Exploration* (Brighton: W. J. Smith, 1878).

¹¹¹⁸ For instance, the article ‘The Sub-Wealden Exploration’, *The Times*, 24th Aug. 1872, issue. 27464, p. 6, and several other reports in the paper.

engineers, local councillors and officers, and private and public investors showcasing the Victorian middle class at its most enterprising.

At the same time as Willett, brewer and businessman, was consolidating his position in this network of geologists in the 1870s, he was also establishing himself as a part of a coterie of prominent 'china' collectors. At an exhibition of English pottery and porcelain at Alexandra Palace in 1873, Aileen Dawson tells us that the 'better-known names' exhibiting were J.E. Nightingale, William Edkins, Henry Willett, Lady Charlotte Schreiber and R. H. Soden Smith.¹¹¹⁹ Unfortunately, most of the exhibits were destroyed in a catastrophic fire and Willett lost 60 pieces.¹¹²⁰ Willett had friendships or close associations with three of these collectors. In her journal entry for September 1874, Lady Charlotte Schreiber (1812-1895) refers to Willett as 'the great china collector of Brighton'.¹¹²¹ Ten years later in September 1884 Schreiber writes, 'In the afternoon Mr. Willett of Brighton called to look at some of the china and paid me a long visit'.¹¹²² Wendell Holmes provides an account of Willett's uncontained enthusiasm for Nightingale's collection of china when they stopped off at his house to take tea after visiting Stonehenge on his British tour in 1886.¹¹²³ In the preface to his *Catalogue of Pottery and Porcelain in the Brighton Museum*, Willett dedicates his collection to Augustus Franks, Robert Soden Smith, Professor Herbert Church, and Dr Hugh Diamond, and writes 'For valuable information obtained; for helpful counsel given; and for numberless instances of good fellowship, and of pleasant intercourse, this Catalogue is dedicated by their attached and faithful friend'.¹¹²⁴ Robert Soden Smith, a curator at the South Kensington Museum and in charge of the art library from 1866, 'moved in a circle of antiquarian scholars' which included

¹¹¹⁹ Aileen Dawson, *The Art of Worcester Porcelain 1751-1788* (London: British Museum Press, 2007), p. 25.

¹¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹²¹ *Lady Schreiber's Journals*, ed. by Montague J. Guest, 2 vols. (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1911), vol. 1. p. 298.

¹¹²² *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 433.

¹¹²³ Wendell Holmes, *Our Hundred Days in Europe*, p. 116.

¹¹²⁴ *Catalogue of the Collection of Pottery & Porcelain in the Brighton Museum*, 1879.

Augustus Franks.¹¹²⁵ It almost certainly included Willett. Smith contributed a number of items of plate to the 1884 Brighton Art Loan Exhibition,¹¹²⁶ and also to a drawing room and garden sale in Brighton organised by the Willett family in the following year.¹¹²⁷ In the 1880s Willett provided the British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography department of the British Museum lead by Augustus Franks with important examples of English pottery to help build the national collection.¹¹²⁸

Willett's contacts and profile as a collector of early Renaissance art and ceramics London exhibitor and arts benefactor probably account for his appointment to the General Committee of the prestigious New Gallery founded in 1888 which included acquaintances of his such as Sidney Colvin, Robert Benson and Augustus Franks.¹¹²⁹ We have already noted Willett's links to art professionals regarding the provenance of his Ghirlandaio portrait. But he had associations with other leading figures in the London fine arts scene. These included: W.H. James Weale (1832-1917) art historian and critic who succeeded Soden Smith as Keeper of the National Art Library in South Kensington in 1890;¹¹³⁰ the art dealer and scholar Richter who purchased Giotto's *Presentation in the Temple* from Willett in 1894;¹¹³¹ and Martin Conway who had followed in Willett's footsteps to purchase one of the three remaining frieze portraits from the Gonzaga Castle of San Martino di Gusnaja.¹¹³²

¹¹²⁵ Anthony Burton, 'Robert Henry Soden Smith', *ODNB* (2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/25895>> [accessed 15th May 2020].

¹¹²⁶ *The Brighton Art Loan Exhibition, 1884. Official Catalogue.*

¹¹²⁷ 'Drawing Room and Garden Sale at Brighton', *Brighton Gazette*, 4th Oct. 1885, p. 8.

¹¹²⁸ F.G. Stephens, 'Art Chronicle' in *The Portfolio*, 19 (1888), pp. 82-85.

¹¹²⁹ Stacey J. Pierson, *Private Collecting, Exhibitions, and the Shaping of Art History in London, The Burlington Fine Arts Club* (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), p. 51.

¹¹³⁰ Letter from Willett to Weale, Arnold House, 10th May 1880 inquiring about 'books', National Art Library, V&A, 1008261568 – MSL/2003/2; Jenny Graham, 'William Henry James Weale', in *ODNB* (2004), <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/64604>> [accessed 15th May 2020].

¹¹³¹ Online catalogue entry for Giotto, *Presentation in the Temple*, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum website, <<https://www.gardnermuseum.org/experience/collection/12894#gref>> [accessed 15th May 2020].

¹¹³² Sir Martin Conway, *The Sport of Collecting* (London: Adelphi Terrace, 1914), p. 27.

Willett's hobbies and interests, combined it has to be said with his graciousness and liberal hospitality, provided the basis for *collecting* the friendship and acquaintanceship of other notable individuals.¹¹³³ As well as his relationships with Ruskin and Wendell Holmes, he also had friendships with Professor Herbert Church (1834-1915) who was one of the dedicatees in Willett's *Catalogue of Pottery and Porcelain*, 1879,¹¹³⁴ and George Druce (1850-1932), the naturalist who had been an officer of the Ashmolean Natural History Society since 1880.¹¹³⁵ In 1901 Willett 'made a strikingly interesting gift' to the Ashmolean Natural History Society, facilitated by Druce, which consisted of five acres of woodland and marsh near Abingdon to be kept in its natural state and to be dedicated to John Ruskin.¹¹³⁶ It is evident then that collecting objects and building up his cultural capital on a range of different fronts, enabled Henry Willett to collect people and form friendships in a number of scientific, cultural and intellectual circles in Brighton and London.

From Cultivating Pears to Collecting Civilisation in an 'Imaginary Museum'

In the account of his father's life which appeared as an extended footnote in John Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera*, Henry Willett wrote, 'To a man of Mr. Catt's experience in life, ordinary amusements would have few charms. His business was his pleasure, yet he delighted in his garden, and the culture of pears afforded him much recreation.'¹¹³⁷ There could scarcely be a greater contrast than that between the simple enjoyment that his yeoman farmer father William took in cultivating pears and his son Henry's covetous fascination with all things scientific, historical and artistic. The financial surplus which William had built up from his businesses, his son Henry converted into collections and connections which enabled him to reinvent himself as a

¹¹³³ Account of Willett's personal qualities in A.C.R. Carter, pp. 62-4.

¹¹³⁴ *Catalogue of the Collection of Pottery & Porcelain in the Brighton Museum*, 1879.

¹¹³⁵ David Elliston Allen, *The Naturalist in Britain, A Social History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p.224.

¹¹³⁶ *The Academy*, iss. 1538 (1901), p. 374.

¹¹³⁷ Account of William Catt's life in a letter from Willett to Ruskin quoted as an extended footnote in Letter 51, March 1875, in John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*, in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, Cook and Wedderburn, pp. 293-5.

cultivated gentleman of refined taste and understanding. The more educated and beneficent persona that Willett developed was as much associated with the aristocratic ideal which on occasions he professed to despise as it was with the bourgeois values of industry and determination reflected in his father's success.

Money combined with the kudos of his collections enabled Willett to move into exclusive cultural circles and mix with the likes of John Ruskin, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Lady Charlotte Schreiber. But this is not the whole story. Mieke Bal writes of 'collecting as a narrative' which can be understood by means of a blend of Freud and Marx's ideas of fetishism.¹¹³⁸ Susan Pearce says collections can be understood as texts working both metonymically and metaphorically to be decoded by semiologists and structuralists.¹¹³⁹ But it is difficult to 'read' Willett's overall collection as a single narrative or text given that as we have observed earlier it consisted of disparate assemblages of cultural goods relating to different phases in his 'lives'. However, there is a unifying idea which arguably shaped his collecting, namely this notion of the 'imaginary museum'. Foucault's account of heterotopias provides a clue. He suggests that one of the defining ideas of modernity in the nineteenth century was 'the idea of accumulating everything, [...] the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time'.¹¹⁴⁰ An analysis of the departments and the main types of object in the British Museum and the South Kensington Museum collections in the 1860s and 1870s, combined with the National Gallery and National Portrait Gallery demonstrate that Willett's collections replicated most of the main areas of acquisition and display in these London institutions.¹¹⁴¹ Willett's eclecticism as a serial collector can be viewed as a form of mimicry of the contents and themes of the

¹¹³⁸ Mieke Bal, 'Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting', in *The Culture of Collecting*, eds., Elsner and Cardinal, pp. 97-115 (p. 101).

¹¹³⁹ Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (London: Leicester University Press, 1992), p.38.

¹¹⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', in *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986), 22-27 (p. 26).

¹¹⁴¹ Appendix 5. HWCS: vii. *Museum comparison*.

national museums and galleries in London in his own private collections. It may be that he had unfulfilled ambitions to establish a house-museum which was an established phenomenon in the Victorian collecting scene, best represented by Sir John Soane's museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields.¹¹⁴²

Interestingly, as Christopher Whitehead explains, in the protracted debates on rationalising London museum remits and structures in the 1850s, one set of proposals advocated the establishment of a single overarching museum.¹¹⁴³ This would integrate the fine and decorative arts, antiquities, archaeology, natural history and science in one national institution illustrating the evolution and progress of man and nature as part of a single narrative.¹¹⁴⁴

These plans to merge the British Museum, the South Kensington Museum and the National Gallery and Portrait Gallery failed to come to fruition for various reasons.¹¹⁴⁵ But in Henry Willett's mind maybe what he was trying to do in building up a portfolio of collections which in outline mirrored those across the London museums, was to produce a facsimile version of this vision of a single compendious museum, an *imaginary museum*, 'a place of all times', embracing the totality of human knowledge in God's universe, stored but not displayed in Arnold House, in the up-market Montpellier district of Brighton.¹¹⁴⁶ Indeed, it appears that Willett's collection of collections mirrored the same tensions between science and curiosity, which informed the development of national museums. As Stephen Bann comments, in the nineteenth century there continued to be 'conflict between the "enlightened" motivations of

¹¹⁴² Black, *On Exhibit*, p. 67.

¹¹⁴³ Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines*, p. 90.

¹¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 121. Whitehead explains how both the curator Charles Newton and John Ruskin were advocates of the idea of a single overarching museum of art and archaeology with two divisions, Pagan and Christian. In fact, the one area in which Willett didn't collect to any substantial degree was Greek, Roman and Oriental antiquities, however the range of his collections would have mirrored the broad scope of the Christian division in relation to Britain embracing both art and archaeology.

the educator and the compulsive attachments of the collector' in the chequered emergence of institutions such as the South Kensington Museum.¹¹⁴⁷

At a more prosaic level, it is obvious that Willett genuinely enjoyed the scholarship and curatorial practices associated with accumulating, structuring and displaying objects in a wide range of artistic, historical and scientific areas. His longstanding involvement on the town council Museums Sub-Committee is testimony of this. The writing of three catalogues for his showpiece collections of fossils, ceramics, and fine art in the format of a museum catalogue does not appear to be commonplace in the practices of the private collector. At the same time, as we have seen, his thematic pottery and paintings catalogues gave Willett the opportunity to invent his own alternative classifications – to become the director of his own museum.

Willett's friend Ruskin in his evidence to the Royal Commission on the National Gallery in 1857 and in other writings distinguished between a 'collection solely for the purpose of education' and 'a noble Museum of the best art'.¹¹⁴⁸ This distinction may help explain the difference between Willett's 'Popular British History Pottery' collection and the more select pieces that he chose to hold back and which went on sale at Christie's in April 1905 following his death.¹¹⁴⁹

As a founder of Brighton Museum and a nationally known collector, Willett had the honour of delivering the opening address at the Congress of Curators at the Royal Pavilion on 4th July 1899.¹¹⁵⁰ Willett later paid for the speech to be published as a pamphlet.¹¹⁵¹ The speech, perhaps reflecting his age, was anecdotal, uneven and indulgent. He comments on various aspects of current thinking at the time about museums with respect to the role of the local museum, disciplinary areas, classification and labelling and the usefulness of museum

¹¹⁴⁷ Stephen Bann, 'Preface', in *Producing the Past*, pp. xvii-xxiii, (p. xxi).

¹¹⁴⁸ John Ruskin in 'Minutes of Evidence' in *Report of the National Gallery Site Commission Together with the Minutes, Evidence, Appendix and Index* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1857), paras. 2458 to 2481.

¹¹⁴⁹ Appendix 5. HWCS: ii. *Object catalogues*.

¹¹⁵⁰ 'Museum Authorities in Brighton/Interesting Doings', *Brighton Gazette*, 6th July 1899, p. 5.

¹¹⁵¹ Henry Willett, *Museums and Their Uses* (Brighton: J.G. Bishop, 1899).

committees to curators.¹¹⁵² He gives detailed accounts of a fossil of shark's teeth found in flint, and infestations of caterpillars metamorphosing into flies in Brighton. He references disingenuously the fact that Brighton Museum was 'founded by the presentation of the collection of chalk fossils' without naming himself.¹¹⁵³ This false modesty continues with his account of the importance of the Sub-Wealden Exploration, and a plug for the exhibition of the 'homely pottery' collection at Bethnal Green Museum.¹¹⁵⁴ Mixed up in all of this he conveys a sense of his own pleasure in objects when he discusses how important novelty is to a museum, 'Observe the delight of a child with a new toy. We are all children of more or less larger growth'.¹¹⁵⁵ And he reiterates his belief in the morality of collecting when he suggests that collecting makes people 'more humane and tender-hearted'.¹¹⁵⁶ As a final thought, Hill argues 'in municipal museums, individuals could use donation to demonstrate wealth, education and taste, just like a Renaissance prince'.¹¹⁵⁷ It is hard not to view Henry Willett in this light, a man of great enthusiasms and huge wealth, who saw Brighton Museum, at least at the end of his life, less as a vehicle for liberal enlightenment or a sign of civic success but as a personal fiefdom reflecting his own importance, erudition, and generosity – a refined gentleman rather than a rich brewer and publican. This is in distinct contrast to Harriet and John Trist, whose art collection, whilst confirming their elevation into the bourgeois elite of the Brighton middle class, was more domestic and personal in its implications, as the following chapter elucidates.

¹¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵⁷ Hill, *Culture and Class*, p. 72-3.

**CHAPTER 5. THE PRE-RAPHAELITE COLLECTION OF HARRIET AND JOHN TRIST: A COLLECTING
COUPLE IN A COMPANIONATE MARRIAGE**

A Pendant of Trist Family Portraits by Arthur Hughes



Fig. 32. Arthur Hughes, *Mrs Trist and Son*, 1863, oil on canvas (17ins x 13 ins), privately owned



Fig. 33. Arthur Hughes, *Mr. Trist and Mrs. Herbert Trist*, 1876, oil on canvas, (17ins x 13ins), privately owned

The Trists' great-great-grandson has in his possession hanging in his hallway in a large house in Southsea, two family portraits painted by the Pre-Raphaelite artist Arthur Hughes in 1863 and 1876 (figs. 32 and 33). Both paintings were given to the Trists as gifts by Hughes and subsequently have become part of a family archive or set of heirlooms passed down through the generations providing a sense of dynastic continuity or what McCracken has called 'patina significance'.¹¹⁵⁸ The earlier painting depicts Harriet and the Trists' only child Herbert aged 11. It is in a recognisable Pre-Raphaelite style with its attention to the details of foliage, foxgloves and the froth of running water, the intense purple colouring of Harriet's dress, the shine on

¹¹⁵⁸ *Trist catalogue*, nos. 99 and 100, TGA. McCracken, p. 43.

Herbert's boots. It was painted by Hughes in the year in which the Trists bought four paintings from the artist and began to establish themselves not only as his patrons but as friends of the Hughes family.¹¹⁵⁹ The second picture, produced in 1876 shows John Trist, as 'connoisseur', studiously ruminating on a small artwork in his hands with his daughter-in-law who, holding an *a la mode* peacock fan, is absorbed in what her father-in-law has to say. The setting is the landing in the Trist home at 22, Vernon Terrace in which paintings by George Mason are visible, a scene later referred to in Cosmo Monkhouse's article on the collection in 1883.¹¹⁶⁰ We can presume it must have been commissioned as a pendant to the first because it is of identical size at 17 by 13 inches.¹¹⁶¹ There is a surviving sketch for the picture which suggests that Hughes came to Brighton to make studies for the final piece.¹¹⁶² Both paintings were almost certainly presented as wedding gifts to their only son Herbert who married Louisa Rigden in the same year as the picture was painted.¹¹⁶³ The two Trist family pictures, alluding to 'nature' in 1863 and 'culture' in 1876, make no reference to the wine merchant business in urban Brighton which had paid for the art collection. The two portraits exemplify, perhaps, Cohen's view in *Household Gods* that in the Victorian era, 'the moral virtues of possessions served to reconcile spiritual good with material abundance'.¹¹⁶⁴

¹¹⁵⁹ Appendix 6. TACS: *ii Trist catalogue*, nos. 2, 3, 30, 65.

¹¹⁶⁰ Cosmo Monkhouse, 'A Pre-Raphaelite Collection' in the *Magazine of Art*, 6 (Jan 1883) 62-70, (p. 62), published by Proquest, British Periodicals <<https://search.proquest.com/britishperiodicals>> [accessed 4th Aug. 2019].

¹¹⁶¹ Appendix 6. TACS: *ii Trist catalogue*, nos. 99 and 100.

¹¹⁶² Image linked to entries for John Hamilton Trist on *ancestry* website, ≤ <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/categories/43/?name=John+Hamilton+Trist&event=Brighton&birth=1812>> [accessed 26th April 2021].

¹¹⁶³ This is an assumption based on the fact that the second portrait was commissioned in 1876, the year in which Herbert and Louisa got married. See the entry for Herbert Hardwick Trist in *A Cambridge Alumni Database*, <venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/Documents/acad/intro.htm> [accessed 4th August, 2019] The Trist catalogue records both pictures adjacent to each other in Herbert and Louisa's house at 13, Goldsmid Road.

¹¹⁶⁴ Cohen, p. 3.

Undoubtedly the greatest compliment paid to the Trist collection came when the *Magazine of Art* featured it in its January 1883 edition in an 8-page article written by Cosmo Monkhouse (1840-1901) entitled 'A Pre-Raphaelite Collection'.¹¹⁶⁵ By then Trist had been purchasing pictures for over twenty-five years and would have had some recognition in art circles in London and Brighton as a patron.¹¹⁶⁶ However, the key stimulus for the feature was probably the death of one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite movement Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) in April 1882. At the time when the *Magazine of Art* published its article in January 1883, two retrospective exhibitions of Rossetti's works at the Royal Academy and the Burlington Fine Arts Club opened in the same month.¹¹⁶⁷ The Trists loaned out Rossetti's *Michael Scott's Wooing* to the Royal Academy exhibition.¹¹⁶⁸ The Trist collection clearly provided the writer Monkhouse, with an opportunity not merely to appraise John Trist's overall collection but to look back sympathetically at the Pre-Raphaelite school of painting and take stock of its impact on British art in the light of Rossetti's death and the retrospective exhibitions of his works.¹¹⁶⁹

Leaving aside Monkhouse's assessment of Pre-Raphaelitism and his specific opinions on individual artists and paintings, it is worth quoting in full his introduction to John Trist's collection:

I shall best describe the collection got together by Mr. Trist at his house in Brighton by saying that it has been formed to live with. He has no gallery, unless the bright recess on the landing hung with his Masons and other pleasant works may so be called. His is not a large collection, but it includes few things which are not interesting and choice. It shows an individual but by no means a narrow taste,

¹¹⁶⁵ 'A Pre-Raphaelite Collection' in the *Magazine of Art*, vol. 6 (Jan 1883) pp. 62-70.

¹¹⁶⁶ Appendix 6. TACS: *i. Artist alphabetical, ii. Trist catalogue, iii. Chronological, iv. Taste*. The Trists loaned works to prestigious London exhibitions. See, for instance, *Burlington Fine Arts Club, Collected Works of the Late George Mason, ARA, Catalogue, 1873* (London: Spottiswode & Co. Printers, New Street Square, 1873).

¹¹⁶⁷ Brief news item in *The Athenaeum*, iss. 2877 (Dec. 1882), p. 281.

¹¹⁶⁸ Royal Academy catalogue, *Exhibition of Works by The Old Masters and By Deceased Masters of the British School; Including a Special Selection from the Works of John Linnell and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Winter Exhibition, Fourteenth Year, 1883* (London: W.M. Clowes and Sons Ltd, 1883), no. 336.

¹¹⁶⁹ *Magazine of Art* (Jan. 1883), pp. 62-70.

engaged for a quarter of a century in careful selection from the work of contemporary artists.¹¹⁷⁰

What Monkhouse does not acknowledge is that Harriet Trist was fully involved with her husband John in acquiring pictures and building up the distinctive collection of fine art celebrated in the *Magazine of Art* feature (fig. 34). While John was the legal owner of the works purchased and responsible for the financial transactions, Harriet participated in choosing and commissioning paintings directly from artists and on occasion in determining the final form of compositions. There are no documents in the archive authored by Harriet Trist herself, but correspondence between John Trist and artists from whom the works were procured make it apparent that Harriet and John were an art collecting couple. The individual taste which Monkhouse refers to was collective to both Harriet and John and not simply singular to the wine merchant alone.



Fig. 34. Photographic portrait of Harriet Trist with son Herbert c.1855-58, unknown origins and authorship, *ancestry website*

A number of references provide ample testimony of Harriet Trist's involvement in collecting. In March 1863, the artist Arthur Hughes in a letter to thank John Trist for payment for *The King's Orchard* wrote 'Thanks for the sailor boy – and to Mrs Trist for the leave to finish the little

¹¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

knight after the others'.¹¹⁷¹ This comment indicates that Harriet Trist had advised on the final composition of a painting finally entitled *Enid and Geraint*.¹¹⁷² In 1864 John Trist wrote to Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893) to acknowledge receipt of the painting *Elijah and the Widow's Son* and assures Brown that 'we are delighted with the picture' referring to both his and Harriet's reaction.¹¹⁷³ In another letter to Brown written in 1868 from their holiday cottage in Betwys-y-Coed giving an account of a visit to London, John Trist said 'Mrs Trist was in town with me in the morning, and called with me at Mr Legros'.¹¹⁷⁴ In April 1866, Dante Rossetti wrote to John Trist regarding two works commissioned in that year, designated in Trist's catalogue as *Portrait of Mrs Herbert* and *Queen of Hearts* (fig. 35).¹¹⁷⁵ The letter opens, 'I will finish & send the Miss Herbert almost immediately. The other picture has already progressed a little. I shall be truly pleased if they please Mrs Trist & you', and closes 'With kind remembrances to Mrs Trist'.¹¹⁷⁶ It is apparent from this that Harriet must have visited Rossetti's studio at Tudor House, Cheyne Walk along with her husband. John Trist refers to both himself and his wife when he writes to Brown in September 1868 regarding a proposed viewing of paintings by Marc Anthony, 'I have since got a letter from Anthony kindly inviting us to look at the pictures'.¹¹⁷⁷

¹¹⁷¹ Arthur Hughes to John Hamilton Trist (JHT), 28th March, 1863, 12, Oberstein Road, Wandsworth, RT/MS.

¹¹⁷² Roberts 'Catalogue of Works', *Arthur Hughes*, p. 153.

¹¹⁷³ JHT to Brown, 26th Aug. 1864, NAL/FMB.

¹¹⁷⁴ JHT to Brown, dated Wed. morning, 1868, Betws-y-Coed, Wales, NAL/FMB. On the French artist Alphonse Legros, see Timothy Wilcox, 'Legros, Alphonse', *ODNB* (2008), <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref.odnb/34480>> [accessed 22nd Aug. 2019].

¹¹⁷⁵ *Trist catalogue*, nos. 54 and 55, TGA.

¹¹⁷⁶ Rossetti to Trist, 66.84.1, 23rd April 1866, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, in William E. Fredeman, ed. *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 8 vols (Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester, New York: D.S. Brewer, 2002-9).

¹¹⁷⁷ JHT to Brown, 29th Sept 1868, Upper Rock Gardens, NAL/FMB.

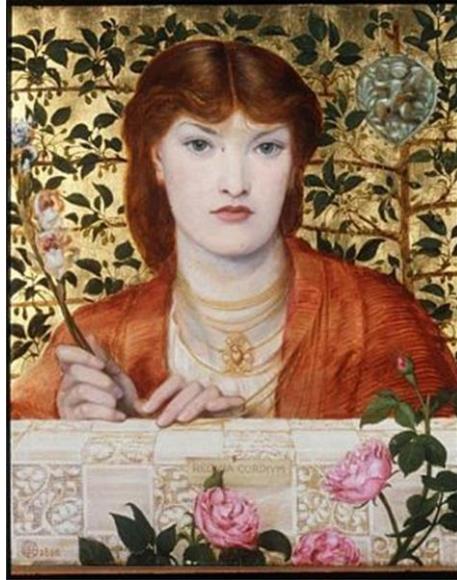


Fig. 35. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Regina Cordium* (*Queen of Hearts*), 1866, oil on canvas (60cm x 50cm), Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum

In writing about the aesthetic movement, Macleod reflects on shifting male and female roles and what she sees as the increasingly blurred relationship between public and private spheres in the lives of the upper middle class elite.¹¹⁷⁸ She suggests that rich women had the leisure time to not only play a significant role in beautifying the home but also to ‘make recommendations regarding the pictures which entered their private spheres’ with involvement in the actual act of collecting within the public sphere.¹¹⁷⁹ In this respect, Macleod references the wives of the northern collectors George Rae, William Graham and Alexander Stevenson and wealthy women who collected in their own right, such as Aglaia Coronio and Eustacia Smith.¹¹⁸⁰ Harriet Trist is another art collector, hitherto undetected, who would appear to bear out Macleod’s speculations on how home-making and art collecting provided the site of shifts in the social and cultural roles of men and women in affluent elite households in the latter years of the nineteenth century.

¹¹⁷⁸ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, pp. 289-295.

¹¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

¹¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 290-1.

However, the details of Harriet Trist's circumstances do not fit neatly into the template of the Macleod analysis. In the early 1860s when the Trists as wife and husband began to collect Pre-Raphaelite and aestheticist art, the sharp separation of spheres in relation to work and home and male and female roles, did not apply. In the early 1860s records show that the wine merchant business John Trist and Sons was located next door to the homes of both John and Harriet Trist and John's brother William Trist and his family on St James Street in Kemp Town.¹¹⁸¹ The 1861 census records an occupation for Harriet Trist as a clerk in her husband's firm.¹¹⁸² Untypically at this time, Harriet was a married middle class woman in employment in the family firm. F. M. L. Thompson tells us that 'Victorian middle-class culture was dedicated to separate spheres: separate single-family houses, separation of work from home, and separation of women from work.'¹¹⁸³ But, in the 1860s these three elements did not apply to the Trist families which were still living and working in circumstances which reflected integration and commonality in public and private functions. The segregated structures which Thompson outlines and Davidoff and Hall have explored in detail were not yet established for this particular household.¹¹⁸⁴ Circumstances changed in the following decade when the family moved to a suburban villa in Hove, distancing themselves from both the business premises and John's brother William's household. And Harriet, it seems, by then had given up working as a clerk in the family firm.¹¹⁸⁵

¹¹⁸¹ For the addresses of John Trist and Sons wine and spirits merchants at 59 and 60 St James Street, see *Folthorp's Brighton Directory*, 1862, p. 181. The 1861 Census shows John Trist next door at 1, Upper Rock Gardens, Brighton, *Ancestry* website, <https://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=8767&h=7623917&tid=&pid=&queryId=72984bdd71393651957d9433982f5ecb&usePUB=true&_phsrc=DkE105&_phstart=successSource>, and William Trist, who managed the business with John, lived at 58, St James Street, <<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC/1861/0003841143&expand=true>> [accessed 14th Aug 2021].

¹¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸³ F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, p. 197.

¹¹⁸⁴ Davidoff and Hall, p. 359.

¹¹⁸⁵ Entries for Harriet Trist in the 1871 and 1881 Censuses for 1, Upper Rock Gardens and then 22, Vernon Terrace, do not record an occupation, <<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC%2F1871%2F0015471599>>, <<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC%2F1881%2F0005305642>> [accessed 14th Aug. 2021].

John Tosh in *A Man's Place, Masculinity and the Middle-class Home in Victorian England*

argues that the domestic sphere was integral to the invention of masculinity in the nineteenth century.¹¹⁸⁶ His book provides significant qualifications to over-simplified accounts of separate spheres in the lives of middle class men and women in this era. This is a view substantiated by Cohen.¹¹⁸⁷ Tosh argues that 'Companionate marriage stood at the heart of the Victorian ideal of domesticity', and that probably 'the most reliable basis of companionate marriage – and the clearest rebuttal of the two-sex theory – was shared cultural interests'.¹¹⁸⁸ In this chapter I will analyse the cultural interests of Harriet and John Trist as an art collecting couple in a companionate marriage which went against the grain of separate spheres ideology. Their Pre-Raphaelite collection of paintings was not only the outcome of shared procurement activities and interest in art but in its transformation of the visual and aesthetic appearance of their homes, it can also be viewed as a celebration of marriage and the material and moral progress of the family as they gravitated towards the top ranks of the middle class. Companionship is evident in the marriages of the other Brighton collectors. But unlike the Trists, it was almost certainly the case that in these it was the man acting 'heroically' alone whose money, effort and taste determined the character of the collections. As we have seen, the collections of Coningham, Hill and Willett were more about political and civic credentials and social position in the public sphere rather than domestic comfort and aesthetic harmony in the home. The art collection of the Trists operating in tandem therefore provides a contrasting story of upper middle class art collecting compared to that of fellow collectors in Brighton.

¹¹⁸⁶ Tosh, p. 4.

¹¹⁸⁷ See Chapter 4 'In Possession, Men, Women and Decoration' in Cohen, pp. 89-121.

¹¹⁸⁸ Tosh, p. 27 and p. 66.

From St James Street to Vernon Terrace, from Brighton to Hove: The Trist Family Move Up in the World

Harriet and John Trist's 'companionate marriage' should not obscure the legal privileges of the men in the Trist family who were the property owners and made the financial and commercial decisions in their businesses with the women in subordinate and dependent economic positions.¹¹⁸⁹ John Hamilton Trist was born in Lewes in 1812, to John Trist and his wife Elizabeth.¹¹⁹⁰ He was one of six children, five of whom lived into adulthood. John's father had migrated from Dartmouth in Devon, to try to make a living for himself first in London and then Lewes, eventually settling in Brighton where he established a wine importing and retailing business in partnership with his brother William. By 1832, the business was based in St James Street, very close to the sea and at the edges of the curtilage of the town as it then was.¹¹⁹¹ From the upper windows of St James Street the Trist families would have had views north across open fields and rising downland up Race Hill towards the race-course itself, and south towards the new Chain Pier, which had opened in 1823.¹¹⁹² By the time John Hamilton's father died in 1849, J. Trist & Sons had expanded to occupy 58, 59 and 60 in St James Street and I, Upper Rock Gardens around the corner, immediately adjacent to 60 St James Street.¹¹⁹³ The two Devon-born brothers and their families lived on the premises as did John's sons John and William after their father's death in 1849, when they took over the family wine business.¹¹⁹⁴ In 1851, John Hamilton married Harriet Hardwick, the daughter of William Hardwick who had

¹¹⁸⁹ For a full discussion of issues relating to women's property rights, see: Ben Griffin, 'Class, Gender, and Liberalism in Parliament, 1868-1882: The Case of the Married Women's Property Acts, *The Historical Journal*, 46.1 (Mar. 2003), 59-87, published by Cambridge University Press, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3133595>> [accessed 6th July, 2021].

¹¹⁹⁰ Richard Trist's own written account July 2019, RT/MS.

¹¹⁹¹ *A New Directory of Brighton for 1832* (Brighton: C. Christopherson, 1832).

¹¹⁹² 'Plan of Brighton and Kemptown' in *Brighton as It Is, 1836, Exhibiting All The Latest Improvements in that Fashionable Watering Place* (Brighton, Wallis, 1836).

¹¹⁹³ 1851 Census, *Findmypast* website and also 1850 *Brighton trade directory, The Court Guide and General Directory for Brighton*, (Brighton: Robert Folthorp, 1850), p. 122 and p. 227.

¹¹⁹⁴ 1851 and 1861 Censuses, Brighton, *Findmypast*.

been a farmer in Poynings until he went bankrupt in 1820.¹¹⁹⁵ In the following year Harriet gave birth to her only child, Herbert Hardwick Trist.¹¹⁹⁶ By the standards of the time this was a late marriage: John was 39 years of age and Harriet was 35.¹¹⁹⁷

The great advantage of their St James Street location is that it gave J. Trist & Sons wine merchants access to the rich gentry and bourgeoisie in the fashionable seafront villas on Marine Parade and the lucrative Kemp Town area which was in a state of continual construction and expansion from the 1820s to the 1840s.¹¹⁹⁸ Wine and spirits were clearly essential commodities for a clientele for whom Brighton was a place in which to relax, refresh, and entertain. Their clients might well have included the Coninghams and the Hills. Whilst Trist had a level of wealth which undoubtedly placed him in the upper middle class, he did not appear to be as rich as Hill, Willett or Coningham in the earlier part of his life.¹¹⁹⁹ It is telling, that, whereas Coningham and Hill owned picture galleries to display their art collections, the Trists did not, 'other than the bright recess on the landing' referred to by Monkhouse in the *Magazine of Art*.¹²⁰⁰

The wine merchant business continued to prosper in the 1850s under the management of John and his brother. Harriet and John Trist's increasing income was accompanied by the adoption of a more gentrified and affluent lifestyle which signalled not just middle class success but aspirations to be members of that same elite to whom they had been selling wine for over 30 years. In 1851, shortly before his marriage, John Trist paid two servants to support his

¹¹⁹⁵ Harriet and John's son Herbert was born in August 1852 suggesting that the couple were married the previous year, 'Birth' *Brighton Gazette*, 5th Aug. 1852, p. 5. For the bankruptcy of Harriet's father William Hardwick see the notice in the *Sussex Advertiser*, 10th July 1820, p. 1.

¹¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹⁷ R. B. Outhwaite, 'Age at Marriage in England from the Late Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 23 (1973), 55-70, published by Cambridge University Press <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3678872>> [accessed 28th Sept. 2021].

¹¹⁹⁸ Gilbert, p. 99.

¹¹⁹⁹ See Introduction, p. 54.

¹²⁰⁰ *Magazine of Art*, (Jan 1883), p. 62.

household.¹²⁰¹ By 1861 the Trists were able to support not just two servants in 1 Upper Rock Gardens but a further two to serve Harriet's mother and unmarried sister in 27 Upper Rock Gardens where they had moved at some point after 1851 following Harriet's marriage.¹²⁰² As already noted, the employment of three or four servants was a sure sign of affluence at the top end of the middle class social structure.¹²⁰³ In 1856 the Trists purchased their first painting which was a depiction of the village where Harriet was born in Poynings.¹²⁰⁴ It cost £5. It seems likely that Harriet herself was responsible for this choice. A further eight more expensive works of art were purchased between 1858 and 1861, forming an incipient collection.¹²⁰⁵ We know from correspondence and 'souvenir' pictures in the Trist art collection that the family had the time and money for travel and holidays.¹²⁰⁶ One favourite destination was Betws-Y-Coed in North Wales.¹²⁰⁷ John Trist's own watercolours, catalogued as part of the household art collection, include scenes of Venice and Dresden.¹²⁰⁸ One imagines Harriet and John would have witnessed these cities at first hand as part of a grand cultural tour in Europe.

By the 1850s wealthier families in the middle class were sending their sons away to public schools.¹²⁰⁹ Brighton College, founded in 1845, was one of the earliest of the new Victorian public schools.¹²¹⁰ It was an Anglican institution with fees initially set at £25 per annum for day boys.¹²¹¹ The Trist's ambition for their son Herbert in providing him with what might be viewed as a 'gentleman's' education was reflected in the fact that by the 1860s he was a pupil at

¹²⁰¹ 1851 Census, Brighton, *Findmypast*.

¹²⁰² 1861 Census, Brighton, *Findmypast*.

¹²⁰³ F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, p. 173.

¹²⁰⁴ Appendix 6. TACS: *iii. Chronological*.

¹²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰⁶ See two letters JHT to Brown, 2nd July 1864 and 9th Sept 1868, NAL/FMB, and Appendix 6. TACS: *i. Artist alphabetical*, nos. 70, 71, 101, 133.

¹²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, nos. 128 and 129.

¹²⁰⁹ Leonore Davidoff, 'The Family in Britain', *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950, People and Their Environment*, Vol. 2, pp. 71-129 (p.79).

¹²¹⁰ Martin D. W. Jones, *A Short History of Brighton College* (Brighton: Brighton College Development Fund, 1986), p. 1.

¹²¹¹ *Ibid.*

Brighton College.¹²¹² He went on to study at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1872.¹²¹³ This is something which his father had anticipated as he explained in a letter to the Gateshead industrialist and art collector, James Leathart (1820-1895), written in 1868, 'my only son (now 15) is undecided in anything except in the intention of going to one of the universities in two or three years, therefore I must for the present keep a warm place for him in my counting house on the chance of his wanting it'.¹²¹⁴ Herbert did not complete his degree at Cambridge. His uncle William died suddenly in 1874 and he returned to Brighton to take up his place in the 'counting house' and assist his father in managing the wine business.¹²¹⁵ If Herbert or his parents were in any way torn between the cultural capital of a Cambridge degree and the business interests of the family firm, it is clear that trade and family won out.

The most obvious sign of the Trists's social advancement within the middle class was their move in the early 1870s to 22 Vernon Terrace, in the recently built bourgeois suburbs of Cliftonville in the parish of Hove.¹²¹⁶ The move out of St James Street to Vernon Terrace also signified for the first time the physical separation of business from home, of work from leisure, of money-making from consumption. The Trists' new house was on the brow of a hill looking over the expanding town of Brighton with glimpses of the English Channel. They had literally moved up in the world taking their art collection with them which by this time contained more than 80 pictures.¹²¹⁷ John Trist now found himself once again on the edges of the curtilage of Brighton, adjacent to farmland, in a similar liminal location to that which he would have

¹²¹² Herbert Trist is listed as a prize-winner in an article 'Brighton College – Distribution of Prizes', and *Brighton Guardian* 29th June 1864, p. 6.

¹²¹³ Entry for Herbert Hardwick Trist in *A Cambridge Alumni Database*, <<http://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/>> [accessed 29th Aug. 2019], which also confirms his attendance at Brighton College and his marriage to Louisa Mary Rigden on 19th April 1876.

¹²¹⁴ JHT to Leathart, 9th March 1868, RT/MS.

¹²¹⁵ RT account July 2019, RT/MS.

¹²¹⁶ The 1871 census shows John Trist and his family still living in 1, Upper Rock Gardens, but *Page's (late Folthorp's) Court Guide & Directory for Brighton, Hove, Cliftonville, Preston, and Withdene* for 1874 but officially published in November 1873 shows the Trists at 22, Vernon Terrace. His brother William remained in St. James's Street until his death in 1874.

¹²¹⁷ Appendix 6. TACS: *iii. Chronological*.

experienced as a child in the 1820s when his father was building up the wine merchant business, before Kemp Town had been fully built.¹²¹⁸ Similarly, Harriet Trist, brought up on a farm, must also have experienced a sense of homecoming.

The development of the Cliftonville estate on 16 acres of land in the parish of Hove had been planned in 1851-2.¹²¹⁹ This westwards development of Brighton was impelled by the development profits to be made by meeting the demand for houses from the increasing number of middle class residents. These were either new migrants into the town seeking a more leisurely environment close to the sea or existing residents such as the Trists who could afford to move away from the more over-crowded and socially mixed areas in the centre of town.¹²²⁰ As in many other towns and cities, there was increasing social polarisation in Brighton by the second half of the nineteenth century in terms of more clearly demarcated zones defined by class.¹²²¹ Rose Collis says that the Cliftonville and Montpelier areas were 'considered to be the most salubrious part of the town.'¹²²² Vernon Terrace was 'An impressive terrace of 37 houses, built in about 1850 in five distinct compositions, but all with ironwork balconies'.¹²²³ A journalist in the *Illustrated Times* wrote satirically of 'brilliant' Cliftonville in 1859 as a cut above traditionally superior Hove:

Now there is no Hove at all; – nothing so low or common ! Cliftonville, sir, if you please, the new suburb of Brighton; filled with neat little houses, very pretty and clean to look at, and awfully genteel; little houses, but not checked on that account in regard to porticos, which are enormous, supported on gigantic pillars, and casting their shadows all over the little tenements. Very brilliant, too, is Cliftonville in muslin blinds running on specially shiny brass rods; very brilliant in highly-polished doorsteps and scrapers of an intense blackness. Given to boarding-schools, too, is Cliftonville.¹²²⁴

¹²¹⁸ Ordnance Survey, 1880, surveyed 1873-5, Sussex LXVI, ID102347737, National Library of Scotland <<https://maps.nls.uk/view/102347737>> [Accessed 11th Dec. 2018]

¹²¹⁹ Gilbert, p. 171.

¹²²⁰ Farrant et al, p. 13.

¹²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹²²² Collis, p. 73.

¹²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹²²⁴ 'Brighton' in *Illustrated Times*, 26th Feb. 1859, p. 135.

Viewing 22, Vernon Terrace today, it does not seem at all a 'little house' although compared to the villas of Sussex Square, Lewes Crescent, Brunswick Square, and Adelaide Terrace it was not quite so aristocratic and grand. Most significantly, by moving to Cliftonville Harriet and John Trist left behind a street whose residents were mainly craftworkers and shopkeepers, very few of whom employed domestic servants.¹²²⁵ The roads immediately to the north of St James Street were entirely proletarian and by the 1840s had declined into slums.¹²²⁶ As Gilbert points out 'The slum areas built in Brighton were in all respects as bad as those in the industrial towns of the north'.¹²²⁷

Although John Trist was a member of the more affluent section of the Brighton middle class with bourgeois aspirations, reflected particularly in the move to Cliftonville, he did not take on any active civic role or municipal position in the Brighton community, unlike his fellow art collectors. Neither does he appear to have been a member of charitable committees or learned societies. However, John and his brother William made sure that their names and that of their business were visible in the lists published in local newspapers of subscribers contributing small amounts to philanthropic causes, voluntary organisations and one-off appeals.¹²²⁸ Likewise, on the basis of local newspaper searches, Harriet Trist does not appear to have been publicly involved in charitable work in the town. We have little direct insight into particular character traits of either Harriet or John. But their generosity and hospitality is evident in invitations to artists and collectors and their families to visit their home in Brighton. For example, in a letter to Ford Maddox Brown, John Trist writes 'Mrs Trist with her kind compliments says why may we not have the pleasure of seeing your younger daughter, and also your son [...] pray, come all, for we shall have you all to ourselves and we cannot so be too

¹²²⁵ 1861 Census, Brighton, *Findmypast*.

¹²²⁶ Farrant et al, p. 53.

¹²²⁷ Gilbert, p. 101.

¹²²⁸ There are several references to donations to the Soup Charity Committee including *Brighton Gazette* 29th Dec. 1853. Among many other donations they contributed to a subscription to fund a statue of the Duke of Wellington, *Brighton Gazette*, 4th Nov. 1852, p. 4 and a support fund following the Hartley Colliery Accident in Northumberland when 215 miners died, *Brighton Gazette*, 30th Jan. 1862, p. 1.

large a family'.¹²²⁹ It seems that the priorities for the Trists were family and home rather than public position and reputation.

Introducing the Trist Picture Gallery and Pre-Raphaelite Collection

Not only was the Trist art collection different to those of Coningham, Hill and Willett in that it was assembled by a husband and wife working in partnership but it was also different in that it was the most coherent and focused of the four collections in terms of a consistent emphasis on works in the Pre-Raphaelite idiom emphasising aesthetic appeal over narrative content. The critic F. G. Stephens, a founding member of the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, articulated this as the distinction between 'poems in painting' and illustrations.¹²³⁰ Well over half the pictures in the Trist collection were what Stephens would have called poetic rather than illustrative.¹²³¹ The acquisition of the cultural capital of a fine art collection on the part of Harriet and John Trist was doubtless designed to demonstrate wealth, taste and gentility and affirm their elevation into the upper echelons of the middle class. But it also reflected a genuine and shared interest in the Pre-Raphaelite style of art and artists and a presumed desire to engage with an exotic cultural milieu well removed from the trading and agricultural circles which had been customary in their lives in Brighton.

The primary data which provide the evidence of the Trist art collection come from the handwritten *Catalogue of Pictures and Drawings at 22, Vernon Terrace and 13, Goldsmid Road* assembled by John Trist in 1876 and updated in 1886, and the Christie's catalogue of sale for 9th April 1892 of the Trist collection of paintings following his death the previous year.¹²³²

¹²²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²³⁰ 'The Private Collections of England, No. 3 – Gosforth House – Tynemouth', in *The Athenaeum*, iss. 2395 (1873), 372-5 (p. 373).

¹²³¹ Appendix 6. TACS: *iv Taste*.

¹²³² *Trist catalogue, TGA, and Catalogue of The Valuable Collection of Modern Pictures and Water Colour Drawings Formed by John Hamilton Trist, Esq., Deceased, Late of Vernon Terrace, [...]Which Will be Sold by Auction by Messrs. Christie, Manson & Woods, At Their Great Rooms, 8, King Street, St James Square,*

Trist's own catalogue of pictures is a particularly valuable resource in that it provides not only standard information in terms of artists and titles of works, but also the vendor, cost, date of production, date of acquisition, cost of insurance, where exhibited, size, and in which room in 22, Vernon Terrace the paintings were displayed.¹²³³ There is a sense in which the catalogue is as much an inventory of stock as it is a summary of paintings, reflecting the discourse of a businessman. Art for the John Trist side of the collecting partnership was about business as well as pleasure. The first painting the Trists bought, the view of Poynings, was in 1856 and the last thirty years later in 1886, a portrait of John Trist by George Sephton.¹²³⁴ In total there were 144 works of art in the Trist collection at one time or another, of which 136 are listed in the catalogue, and 119 were put up for sale at Christie's auctions rooms in 1892.¹²³⁵

The total cost of the 126 works that were purchased over the thirty years summarised in the 1876 catalogue was £5,298,¹²³⁶ equivalent to more than £580,000 at today's values.¹²³⁷ John Trist was a wealthy man but not a plutocrat. In 1881 Thomas Holloway spent £6,000 on Landseer's *Man Proposes and God Disposes* alone, more than the whole of the Trist collection put together.¹²³⁸ At the Trist sale at Christie's in 1892 only £2,497 was realised, and of this amount John and Harriet's son Herbert had bought in paintings to the value of £1,131.¹²³⁹ In other words if the collection is viewed as a financial investment, and it certainly was insured by Trist to protect the value of the works of art against loss or damage, it was not successful. The most intense period of purchasing paintings and establishing the collection took place between 1860 and 1869 when the Trists bought 61 pictures costing £3,111, all acquired before

On Saturday, April 9th, 1892, At One O'Clock Precisely. This is the basis of the summaries and analysis in Appendix 6. TACS: *i. Artists alphabetical, ii. Trist catalogue, iii. Chronological, iv. Taste.*

¹²³³ *Trist catalogue*, TGA.

¹²³⁴ Appendix 6. TACS: *iii. Chronological.*

¹²³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²³⁶ Appendix 6. TACS: *i. Artists alphabetical.*

¹²³⁷ Retail price index calculation from *Measuring Worth.com*.

¹²³⁸ Bitcliffe, Philippa, 'A Cultural Geography of Victorian Art Collecting: Identity, Acquisition and Display', (unpublished doctoral thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2007), p. 132.

¹²³⁹ Receipt in the name of Herbert Trist issued by Christie's showing that Herbert paid £1131 6s for pictures bought in, accompanying *Trist catalogue*, TGA.

they moved to 22, Vernon Terrace. The Trists purchased mainly cabinet-size works,¹²⁴⁰ presumably to match the available financial surplus that they had set aside for art and to fit into a relatively modest sized house compared with many of the *haute bourgeois* collectors who feature in Macleod's *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*.¹²⁴¹

Macleod references John Trist as a Pre-Raphaelite collector in her essay 'The "Identity" of Pre-Raphaelite Patrons' published in 1996,¹²⁴² shortly before the publication of *Art and the Victorian Middle Class* in which she describes his taste as 'avant-garde mingled with standard efforts'.¹²⁴³ Of the 144 works, 35 are by artists who were members of either the inner or outer circles of the original Pre-Raphaelite movement as it developed in the late 1840s and 1850s including Rossetti (7), Ford Madox Brown (2), Burne-Jones (1), and most notably Arthur Hughes (22). From the early 1850s onwards, art journalists and writers used the term Pre-Raphaelite to describe a much wider range of artists than those who were members of the original Pre-Raphaelite inner circle.¹²⁴⁴ Although as Barringer points out there was never 'a single identifiable Pre-Raphaelite style',¹²⁴⁵ contemporary commentators tended to refer to any artist who painted in a detailed and naturalistic manner as Pre-Raphaelite.¹²⁴⁶ In the Trist collection, more than 30 paintings were painted by artists who were influenced to some degree by the pioneering new Pre-Raphaelite style and 13 works, excluding those of Rossetti, can be classified as aestheticist, a style and approach which evolved out of Pre-Raphaelitism.¹²⁴⁷

¹²⁴⁰ Appendix 6. TACS: *ii Trist catalogue*.

¹²⁴¹ Macleod, 'Appendix, Major Victorian Collectors', in *Art and the Middle Class*, pp. 381-489.

¹²⁴² Dianne Sachko Macleod in 'The Identity of "Pre-Raphaelite" Patrons', in *Re-framing the Pre-Raphaelites: Historical and Theoretical Essays*, ed., Ellen Harding (Aldershot and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 1996), pp. 7-26, p. 13.

¹²⁴³ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 481.

¹²⁴⁴ Julian Treuherz, *Victorian Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 82.

¹²⁴⁵ Tim Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 16.

¹²⁴⁶ For instance, in 'The Pre-Raphaelites', *The Leader and Saturday Analyst*, 2.71 (1851) the eponymous group is referred to as 'naturalists, professing to copy nature exactly [brought about] by a mistaken, a perverse, a super artificial dislike to "the ideal"', p. 734.

¹²⁴⁷ Appendix 6. TACS: *iv. Style and genre of works*

Although John Trist is acknowledged as a Pre-Raphaelite collector, it is evident that he does not fit neatly under the rubric which Macleod and other art historians use to analyse the movement and substantiate the point that somehow Pre-Raphaelite art in its supposed modernity was naturally the choice of pioneering northern industrialists.¹²⁴⁸ Not least John Trist, as I have argued, was in fact two people, Harriet and John Trist, a wife and husband collecting together. Furthermore, they were not from the north or even the midlands, but from a seaside resort on the south coast. John Trist was not a cutting-edge manufacturing capitalist or captain of industry in the elite of the industrial and mercantile classes like James Leathart, George Rae (1817-1902) and Thomas Plint.¹²⁴⁹ As an importer but also retailer of wine Trist was one of just 12 retailers who appear in Macleod's list of 146 notable art collectors.¹²⁵⁰ Furthermore, Trist was not a first wave or second wave Pre-Raphaelite collector in accordance with Macleod's schema given that he only consciously started to assemble a set of pictures in 1862 after the first two phases had supposedly concluded marked perhaps by the Plint sale in 1862.¹²⁵¹ In other words, Trist or, more pertinently the Trists, appear as outriders, as exceptions to Macleod's analytical categories. What they did have in common with Macleod's model Pre-Raphaelite collectors in the upper reaches of the middle class was that they were rich, aspirational, and with a desire to acquire a signature collection of fine art.

Monkhouse's *Magazine of Art* article, 'A Pre-Raphaelite Collection', provided the writer with an opportunity to reflect ruefully on thirty years of the Pre-Raphaelite School of painting, 'To those who cared for art thirty years ago especially those who then were young, the advent of the Pre-Raphaelities was a very "rose of dawn", full of fair promise, the like of which cannot be

¹²⁴⁸ Macleod, 'Avant-garde Patronage', in *Pre-Raphaelites, Painters and Patrons in the North East*, pp. 9-37, (p. 11). Barringer and Rosenfield link Pre-Raphaelite collecting with the 'more progressive outlook' of the 'confident industrial middle class' in the midlands and north, in Tim Barringer and Jason Rosenfield, 'Victorian Avant-Garde', in *Pre-Raphaelites, Victorian Avant-Garde*, ed. by Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfield, Alison Smith (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), pp. 9-17 (p. 14).

¹²⁴⁹ Barringer, 'Ford Madox Brown', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites*, pp. 159-160.

¹²⁵⁰ Appendix 2. MMVC: iii. Summary tables, Table A.

¹²⁵¹ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, pp. 163-4, p. 179.

expected twice in the same existence'.¹²⁵² Monkhouse writes as an advocate of Pre-Raphaelitism and he praises the collection, 'Mr Trist's Pre-Raphaelite pictures are a treat of no common order'.¹²⁵³ Monkhouse's warm appreciation contrasts sharply with 'the sustained barrage of critical abuse' directed against Pre-Raphaelitism by journals such as the *Art Journal* when their strange and deviant works first appeared in exhibitions in the period from the late 1840s to the 1850s.¹²⁵⁴

By the time the Trists started collecting Pre-Raphaelite art in earnest in 1862, 'the movement had lost its cohesion' as an avant-garde force.¹²⁵⁵ But as luxury commodities, paintings labelled Pre-Raphaelite and their makers were becoming increasingly well-known and marketable, they had achieved 'bourgeois consecration'.¹²⁵⁶ Elizabeth Prettejohn points out that Pre-Raphaelite was 'an effective brand name'.¹²⁵⁷ Macleod credits the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition in 1857 with playing an important role in promoting Pre-Raphaelitism.¹²⁵⁸ The 1857 Russell Place show and the Hogarth Club exhibitions in London between 1858 and 1861 also played their part in widening the audience for Pre-Raphaelite art.¹²⁵⁹ Jan Marsh, writing of the Hogarth Club exhibitions links the 'Pre-Raphaelite enterprise' with a societal shift 'towards visual pleasure, opulence, consumption, display for display's sake'.¹²⁶⁰ Networks of private patronage of Pre-Raphaelite artists had developed in the 1850s in important industrial and commercial centres such as Liverpool and Newcastle.¹²⁶¹

¹²⁵² *Magazine of Art* (Jan. 1883) 62-70 (p. 63).

¹²⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵⁴ Barringer and Rosenfield, 'Victorian Avant-Garde', in *Pre-Raphaelites, Victorian Avant-Garde*, p. 10.

¹²⁵⁵ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 173.

¹²⁵⁶ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 46.

¹²⁵⁷ Elizabeth Prettejohn, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites*, pp. 1-12 (p. 1).

¹²⁵⁸ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 139.

¹²⁵⁹ Jan Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), p. 196.

¹²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

¹²⁶¹ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, pp. 139-208.

In the context of the surge in mid-Victorian prosperity and a boom in the art world with greatly increased sales and numbers of collectors, in which novelty and originality were bound to have both cultural and economic premiums, it is not surprising that increasing numbers of artists were happy to be associated with the Pre-Raphaelite style, without ever subscribing to the cultish notions which motivated the original PRB members. In 1862 even the previously vituperative *Art-Journal* was beginning to calm down. It wrote in response to Pre-Raphaelite pictures at the International Exhibition in South Kensington that the 'Pre-Raffaelite movement has not been without benefit, and yet may work for itself a school of the future'.¹²⁶² In 1864 Philip Hamerton argued that Pre-Raphaelitism had become 'popularised art' and 'that the school had developed into its opposite'.¹²⁶³ From the point view of the Trists as collectors, what is evident is that at the point at which they started to buy the works of Arthur Hughes, Dante Rossetti, and Ford Madox Brown their tastes were not especially adventurous. Pre-Raphaelitism had gone mainstream providing an acceptable and relatively cheap niche market for upper middle class collectors.

One influential event which affirmed that Pre-Raphaelitism was now part of an accepted narrative of contemporary British painting of the previous one hundred years, was the International Exhibition in the summer 1862 in South Kensington in London. This was a reprise of the 1851 Great Exhibition, albeit on a much larger scale, and included for the first time galleries of 'Modern Fine Arts' which had not featured in the Great Exhibition.¹²⁶⁴ The 1862 International Exhibition combined display of state of the art manufactured products, such as machinery and tools, textiles and costume, household furnishings, food and wines, with the

¹²⁶² 'International Exhibition, 1862. Pictures of the British School', *Art Journal*, (1862), p. 151.

¹²⁶³ P. G. Hamerton, 'The Reaction from Pre-Raphaelitism', *The Fine Arts Quarterly Review*, 2 (1864), 255-263 (p. 259).

¹²⁶⁴ *Art-Journal Illustrated Catalogue of the International Exhibition, 1862* (London: James & Virtue, 1862). The introduction to this catalogue compares the 1862 exhibition with the 1851 Great Exhibition in terms of the square footage of exhibition space and numbers of exhibits to demonstrate just how much bigger the 1862 exhibition was.

best in the fine arts including architecture, painting, sculpture and engravings.¹²⁶⁵ Held in London, the epicentre of the British Empire, it was not only a trade fair but also an exercise in propaganda. It symbolised the unification of the material with the spiritual, the economic and the aesthetic, of the newly arrived capitalist order with the universal values of culture and of the bourgeoisie with the aristocracy in an assertion of national pride and power, aiming to transcend class division. The 'British Division' included 790 oil paintings and 1,317 watercolours.¹²⁶⁶ The oil paintings were selected to celebrate and illustrate the previous hundred years of British art. It defined an emerging canon of modern British art including artists such as Hogarth, Gainsborough, Wilkie, Turner, Constable and Mulready. It also contained over 20 works by Pre-Raphaelite or Pre-Raphaelite-influenced artists.¹²⁶⁷ On display, were works by Millais, Holman Hunt, Ford Madox Brown, Arthur Hughes and other artists associated with the approach such as John Brett, William Dyce, James Archer and Frederick Smallfield.¹²⁶⁸ Almost certainly, Harriet and John Trist, attended this exhibition, given that the Smallfield painting *Early Lovers*, a Pre-Raphaelite work which they bought in 1862 from the artist, was on display in South Kensington.¹²⁶⁹ It was perhaps at this exhibition that the Trists decided to begin collecting pictures more seriously and in particular Pre-Raphaelite art including identifying the lesser known Hughes as an artist whose works they would particularly like to acquire and presumably could afford.

The Artist Arthur Hughes: Beneficiary, Mentor and Friend of the Trists

The artist with whom Harriet and John Trist had the closest relationship on these collecting journeys was Arthur Hughes from whom they purchased 22 works of art, a mixture of original

¹²⁶⁵ 'Chapter X, The Exhibition of 1862 – Its Organization' in *The International Exhibition of 1862, The Illustrated Catalogue of the Industrial Department*, vol. 1 (London: Printed for Her Majesty's Government, Clay, Son and Taylor, 1862), pp. 47-66.

¹²⁶⁶ 'The British Division, Class XXXVIII', *International Exhibition 1862, Official Catalogue of the Fine Art Department* (London: Truscott & Simmons, 1862).

¹²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 779, p. 45.

oils, studies, sketches and drawings over a period of twenty-two years between 1862 and 1884.¹²⁷⁰ Stephen Wildman in the catalogue raisonné for Hughes describes John Trist in the year 1862 as ‘another vital patron’.¹²⁷¹ It is certainly true that the Trists were patrons of Hughes in the sense of becoming frequent purchasers of the works of Hughes over a long stretch of time.¹²⁷² But their association was much more than just a business relationship. As we shall see, their correspondence shows that the two men and their families established a friendship with each other which continued into the 1900s well after the wine merchant’s death in 1891 and Harriet’s death in 1896.¹²⁷³ What is apparent is, that if the Trists acted as Hughes’s patron with regard to buying art, Hughes was also a patron of the Trists acting as a kind of mentor to them in the development of their Brighton collection by connecting them to other artists whose works were Pre-Raphaelite or could be loosely defined as belonging to that style. The evidence suggests that Harriet and John Trist’s wider interest in Pre-Raphaelite art was in part promoted by Arthur Hughes and his contacts in London’s artistic networks linked to the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood artists.

Although Hughes was not a member of the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, in 1850 while still a student at the Royal Academy, influenced by the short-lived PRB journal *The Germ*, he became a convert to the Pre-Raphaelite ethos and ‘a second generation’ member of the Pre-Raphaelite circle of Holman Hunt, Millais, Rossetti, and Ford Madox Brown.¹²⁷⁴ In 1856 his painting *April Love* was exhibited at the Royal Academy, which John Ruskin in *Academy Notes* reviewed favourably, “‘Exquisite in every way’”.¹²⁷⁵ The twenty-two year-old William Morris bought the picture.¹²⁷⁶ Hughes’s credentials as an established artist in Pre-Raphaelite circles

¹²⁷⁰ Appendix 6. TACS: *i. Artist alphabetical*.

¹²⁷¹ Stephen Wildman, ‘Arthur Hughes 1832-1915’, in *Arthur Hughes*, pp. 11-47, p. 21.

¹²⁷² Roberts, ‘Catalogue of Works’, in *Arthur Hughes*, no. 33 *Home from Sea*, p. 139. The painting was probably reworked in 1862, the year in which it was sold to Trist.

¹²⁷³ See letter from Hughes to Herbert Trist, 1904 and four letters from Hughes to Herbert and Louisa Trist’s daughter Maud Trist in 1906, 1907 and 1913, RT/MS.

¹²⁷⁴ Wildman, p. 13.

¹²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15, quoted by Wildman.

¹²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

were affirmed when Rossetti invited him to participate in the painting of murals in the new Oxford Union Society building in 1857, alongside Burne-Jones, William Morris, and John Roddam Spencer Stanhope.¹²⁷⁷ As Stephen Wildman makes clear, despite Hughes's success in the mid-to-late 1850s, making a decent living for himself and his expanding family was always a struggle throughout his lifetime,¹²⁷⁸ and he came to depend on a limited circle of Pre-Raphaelite patrons.¹²⁷⁹

Trist bought his first Hughes's painting, *Home from the Sea*, in May 1862 (fig. 36), the year when it can be argued that John and Harriet first started collecting in a concerted fashion. Correspondence implies that Trist had written to Hughes in May 1862 about the availability of this painting and of studies of other paintings including *Home from Work* and *Woodman's Child*, owned by James Leathart.¹²⁸⁰ These paintings were exhibited at the International Exhibition in South Kensington in that year.¹²⁸¹ It is likely that the Trists became interested in Hughes' paintings on the basis of the Leathart-owned works of the artist on display in South Kensington. The exhibition opened in May 1862, the same month in which Trist secured the purchase of *Home from the Sea*. Hughes wrote back to Trist from Ivy Cottage, Staines with regard to this painting, that 'It will give me great pleasure to send you my picture to look at', and that 'I have parted with the study of "Home from Works" – and of the "Woodman's Child", I have nothing worth calling a study in my possession'.¹²⁸² With typical self-deprecation Hughes concludes, 'I shall not mind your sending me back my picture should its subject not be

¹²⁷⁷ Fiona MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite, Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), p. 79.

¹²⁷⁸ Wildman, p. 9.

¹²⁷⁹ Julian Treuherz, 'Arthur Hughes', in *Grove Art Online*, 2003, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T039317>> [accessed 19th Aug. 2019].

¹²⁸⁰ Hughes to JHT, 16th May 1862, from Ivy Cottage Staines, RT/MS.

¹²⁸¹ *International Exhibition 1862, Official Catalogue of the Fine Art Department*, no. 438, *Home from Work*, no. 743, *The Woodman's Child*, and also a third painting was on display, no. 466, *Ophelia*.

¹²⁸² Hughes to JHT, 16th May 1862, RT/MS.

agreeable'.¹²⁸³ Trist was able to persuade Hughes to sell him *Home from the Sea* at a price reduced from the 125 guineas which Hughes had originally asked for.¹²⁸⁴



Fig. 36. Arthur Hughes, *Home from the Sea*, 1862, oil on canvas (66cm x 56cm), Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology

In the following year, 1863, the Trists acquired a further five paintings by Arthur Hughes which were the only ones added that year to what was in the process of becoming a more formal art collection.¹²⁸⁵ Hughes's letters to Trist demonstrate the growing relationship between the Trist and Hughes families in 1863 suggesting that it was not what might be called a homosocial relationship between the two men, but involved significant roles for their wives. In the context of moving house from Staines to Wandsworth in February/March that year, Hughes wrote in February, 'Thanks to Mrs Trist for her kindness in the matter of moving our pictures', and refers to Mrs Hughes showing Trist around his studio.¹²⁸⁶ In the following month, Hughes

¹²⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸⁴ Roberts, 'Catalogue of Works', in *Arthur Hughes*, no. 33 *Home from Sea*, p. 139. The total cost of the painting was £116: £102 for the basic painting, an additional £10 which was a possible payment for adding an additional figure, and £4 for the frame.

¹²⁸⁵ *Trist catalogue*, no. 2, *The Font "Then By a Sunbeam"*; no. 3, *Silver and Gold*; no. 30, *Enid and Geraint*; no. 65, *The King's Orchard*; no. 99, *Mrs Trist and Son*, TGA.

¹²⁸⁶ Hughes to JHT, 24th Feb. 1863, from Ivy Cottage, Staines, RT/MS.

thanks John Trist for payment for *The King's Orchard* and writes 'You are really paving my way into this house with gold'.

Partly as a result of Trist's largesse as a patron, Hughes was able to afford in May 1863 a trip abroad accompanied by his sculptor friend Alexander Munro.¹²⁸⁷ The artist wrote a long letter to Trist commenting on his experiences, 'a dreadful stinky place is Venice'. Although, Hughes addresses Trist as 'My dear Sir', the length of the letter and its personal details testify to the growing relationship between the two.¹²⁸⁸ This is confirmed by the fact that in July 1863 Hughes painted a 'delightful personal portrait' of Harriet Trist and her son Herbert which he gave to the family as a gift, perhaps as a token of gratitude for the purchases made by Trist earlier in the year.¹²⁸⁹ The fact that in the same year Arthur Hughes was working on a family portrait for James Leathart commissioned for 250 guineas,¹²⁹⁰ suggests that he did not allow the lucrative Leathart commission to get in the way of sentiment and loyalty with regard to his personal connections with the Trists. It seems apparent that by the late 1860s the Hughes and Trist families had established a friendship which was close enough to enable the Trists to lodge with the Hughes at Putney when doing the round of London artists' houses which was reciprocated by Arthur Hughes holidaying with John and Harriet Trist in their cottage in North Wales.¹²⁹¹ Also, the correspondence indicates at least two visits by the Hughes to the Trists in Brighton, in February 1863 and February 1868.¹²⁹²

The friendship continued into the 1870s as is evidenced by correspondence relating to the Trists's intention to have one of their Hughes paintings engraved and the purchase of an Alma-Tadema work as recommended by the artist.¹²⁹³ In 1876 Arthur Hughes painted the portrait of

¹²⁸⁷ Wildman, p. 21.

¹²⁸⁸ Hughes to JHT, 18th May, 1863, from Venice, RT/MS.

¹²⁸⁹ Wildman, p. 22.

¹²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹¹ JHT to Brown, Thursday, Betwys-y-Coed, NAL/FMB

¹²⁹² Wildman, p. 48.

¹²⁹³ Hughes to JHT, 23rd Oct. 1872, and Hughes to JHT, 9th Dec. 1873, Fulham, RT/MS.

John Trist and his daughter-in-law Louisa.¹²⁹⁴ The final painting purchased by Trist from Hughes was in 1886. The archive contains no further letters from Arthur Hughes to the Trist family until after John and Harriet's deaths in the 1890s. In December 1904 Hughes wrote to Herbert Trist, now living in his father's old house in 22 Vernon Terrace asking if he could borrow back two of his own pictures for a Pre-Raphaelite retrospective show at the Whitechapel Gallery the following year. These were *Silver and Gold* and *Good Night*.¹²⁹⁵ Finally, in tracing the Hughes-Trist friendship there are four letters from Hughes to Maud Trist, who was Herbert and Louisa's daughter, and John and Harriet Trist's granddaughter, sent from Eastside House, Kew Green. In these kindly and considerate letters, Arthur offers reflections on a Tennyson poem *Phamartes*, advises Maud on how to improve her drawing and shares thoughts about a novel by George MacDonald, a copy of which Maude had sent him spurred presumably by the fact that Hughes had previously illustrated two works by the author.¹²⁹⁶

In embarking on the creation of an art collection, John and Harriet Trist had established a family friendship with Arthur and Tryphena Hughes which went beyond a transactional relationship between patron and artist. Focusing on the two men, Tosh writes of the importance of domesticity in the self-image of many middle class men.¹²⁹⁷ Both Trist and Hughes lived settled and conventional middle class family lives which appear to have been the basis for an affinity between the two men and their wives. There is little sense of cultural and social differences between the two as compared with the relationships between Rossetti and George Rae and Ford Madox Brown and Thomas Plint.¹²⁹⁸ Both Trist and Hughes, judging from the correspondence, were unprecocious home-centred men, happy to remain outside the cultural and civic elites of the bourgeoisie. Both were trying to make something of themselves

¹²⁹⁴ *Trist catalogue*, no. 100, *Mr Trist and Mrs Herbert Trist*, TGA.

¹²⁹⁵ Hughes to Herbert Trist, 13th June, 1904, Eastside House, Kew Green, RT/MS.

¹²⁹⁶ Hughes to Maud Trist, 13th June 1906, 23rd Dec. 1906, 8th Jan. 1907, 13th Jan, 1913, all from Eastside House, Kew Green, RT/MS.

¹²⁹⁷ Tosh, p. 1.

¹²⁹⁸ Marsh, pp. 289-294, and Barringer, *Men at Work*, p. 65.

in terms of financial success, domestic security and social credibility and in this they shared common cause with many other men in the middling and upper middle class.

Relationships with Other Artists and Collectors: More Collected Than Collecting

It is very possible that Hughes effected introductions for Trist to his Pre-Raphaelite friends Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown in 1863 or 1864. In 1862-3, when Trist first began to purchase his work, Hughes was employed by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co, along with Brown and Rossetti among others.¹²⁹⁹ They worked together on a domestic commission painting panels of the story of *Tristram and Iseult* for the home of Walter Dunlop (1857-1885), a Bradford woollen merchant.¹³⁰⁰ So, although Hughes who was still living in Staines in the period was not a regular member of London Pre-Raphaelite social and dining circles, he was nevertheless sufficiently involved with the group to act as the middleman for his new patron John Trist and his wife. Between 1864 and 1866, Trist bought four works by Rossetti and two by Brown, as well as two further paintings by Hughes.¹³⁰¹ These purchases suggest that in these years the Trists made a conscious decision to specialise in collecting Pre-Raphaelite art. It is evident that Arthur Hughes played an important role in shaping the Trist taste through his recommendations of particular artists, sharing his network of connections in London artistic circles, and perhaps simply talking 'art' with the Trists and providing them with a more confident vocabulary of appreciation.

There is evidence that Trist and his wife were not passive or unthinking consumers of art in their commissioning of two *King René Honeymoon* paintings from Brown and Rossetti in 1864 (figs. 37 and 38).¹³⁰² They commissioned the two artists to produce same-scale versions in oil of two of the panels which they had painted for a cabinet designed by John Seddon (1827-

¹²⁹⁹ Marsh, p. 238.

¹³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰¹ Appendix 6. TACS: *iii Chronological*.

¹³⁰² *Trist catalogue*, nos. 7 and 17, TGA.

1906) which had been manufactured in 1861.¹³⁰³ This piece of furniture was displayed at the International Exhibition in 1862 where it is very likely that the Trists first viewed it.¹³⁰⁴ Seddon had commissioned ten painted panels in total depicting the fine and applied arts from Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Company.¹³⁰⁵ Ford Madox Brown was responsible for the overall design which depicts scenes from the life of a fictional Sir Walter Scott character, King René of Anjou who was conceived as a notable patron of the arts.¹³⁰⁶ The two panels which John Trist commissioned were scenes depicting 'Architecture' designed by Brown himself, and 'Music' by Rossetti. The two paintings were eventually hung as pendants in the dining room at 22, Vernon Terrace.¹³⁰⁷ In commissioning these two oil versions of painted panels from a piece of luxury furniture, the Trists made a number of conscious decisions as consumers. They identified the visual appeal of the panels as stand-alone paintings, they actively chose to commission two panels rather than only a single panel or all four, and they agreed which two of the four major panels best suited them as a related pair. It is possible that their choice may have been influenced by the artist Myles Birkett Foster who in 1863 had already commissioned MMF & Co. to produce and install stained-glass versions of four of the Seddon panels, including 'Architecture' and 'Music', for his new house in Whitley, Surrey.¹³⁰⁸

¹³⁰³ *The International Exhibition of 1862, The Illustrated Catalogue of the Industrial Department, British Division, vol. 2*, (London: Printed for Her Majesty's Government, Clay, Son and Taylor, 1862), p. 34.

¹³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰⁵ 'King Rene's Honeymoon Cabinet', *V&A website*, <collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O78937/king-renes-honeymoon-cabinet-cabinet-seddon-john-pollard/> [accessed 20th Aug. 2019].

¹³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰⁷ *Trist catalogue*, room designation, TGA.

¹³⁰⁸ 'King Rene's Honeymoon Cabinet', *V&A website*.



Fig. 37. Ford Madox Brown, *King René's Honeymoon: Architecture*, 1864, oil on canvas (53cm x 36cm), National Museum Wales, Cardiff



Fig. 38. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *King René's Honeymoon: Music*, 1864, oil on canvas (53cm x 36cm), privately owned

Cohen reminds us that in middle class homes 'Most often husbands and wives made decorating decisions collaboratively'.¹³⁰⁹ And, Macleod in discussing patronage and the Aesthetic movement and aestheticized interiors suggests that 'the creation of an aesthetically pleasing environment was in itself a work of art'.¹³¹⁰ It seems in this light, that Harriet and John Trist in commissioning the *King René* works together were mutually engaged in the pleasurable creative process of designing 'an artistic home'.¹³¹¹ Barringer in discussing the stained glass versions of *King René's Honeymoon* says 'Brown and Rossetti emphasised the sexual in their depictions of the medieval honeymooners'.¹³¹² One can only speculate as to whether the romantic and symbolic inferences of the two works resonated with the Trists as wife and husband, depicting as they do a loving couple collaborating to design a house and share a musical moment, while at the same time finding themselves distracted by their evident

¹³⁰⁹ Cohen, p. 90.

¹³¹⁰ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 279.

¹³¹¹ Cohen, p. 84.

¹³¹² Tim Barringer, 'No. 60, Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., Four Stained-Glass Panels Depicting King René's Honeymoon c.1863', in Barringer et al, *Pre-Raphaelites, Victorian Avant-Garde*, p. 84.

passion for each other. It should be added that the mythical subject matter of the pictures was traditional and aristocratic rather than modern and middle class.

As to the relationships between Trist and each of the two artists Rossetti and Brown, it is true to say that the kind of long-term friendship which was established with Arthur Hughes was not repeated with either. Rossetti's correspondence with Brown in relation to the double commission of the *King René Honeymoon* paintings reveals an initial weary disdain not so much for Trist himself but for the nature of the work. He delegated his studio assistant Walter Knewstubb to commence the work.¹³¹³ In August 1864, in a letter to Brown, Rossetti says of the *King René* commission, 'It is disgusting to do such sloshy work at all'.¹³¹⁴ And then, on completing the work, 'I finished Trist's pot-boiler today'.¹³¹⁵ Two days later on 3rd September 1864 Rossetti writing again to Brown is more forgiving, 'Mr. Trist was here today & took his picture & liked it very much & paid for it. I have been at work on it exactly eight days, so it pays better than most things, though cheap [...] Trist is a jolly old chap, & I said we would go down together some day.'¹³¹⁶ By 'together', presumably Rossetti meant that he and Brown intended to visit the Trists in Brighton at some point, a visit which I suspect did not take place.

Jan Marsh explains that in the 1860s Rossetti looked increasingly to the market to solicit commissions from an increased number of patrons, which was reflected in rising prices for his works, 'With Knewstubb to assist, Rossetti's rate of production rose rapidly, especially as many works were replicas and copies in other media from earlier designs'.¹³¹⁷ John Trist was one of Rossetti's less affluent clients, at least in relative terms, compared with say James Leathart, George Rae, and Walter Dunlop.¹³¹⁸ Nevertheless, Rossetti needed to make ends meet to pay for his unorthodox lifestyle and in this context every collector counted for something. John

¹³¹³ Rossetti to Brown, 64.61, Tues. 10th May 1864, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, in Fredeman, p. 146.

¹³¹⁴ Rossetti to Brown, 64.117, 19th Aug. 1864, Fredeman, p. 184.

¹³¹⁵ Rossetti to Brown, 64.123, 1st Sept. 1864, Fredeman, p. 187.

¹³¹⁶ Rossetti to Brown, 64.125, 3rd Sept. 1864, Fredeman, p. 188.

¹³¹⁷ Marsh, p. 269-270.

¹³¹⁸ Appendix 2. MMVC: ii. *Probate*.

Trist bought his final three Rossetti pictures a long time later in 1882, prompted in all likelihood by the death of the artist in April 1882 and the *Magazine of Art's* interest in a feature on his Pre-Raphaelite collection.¹³¹⁹

The surviving seven letters from Trist to Brown as a whole signify a closer relationship between the collector and the artist than existed between Trist and Rossetti. Trist in these letters can be business-like and even hard-edged.¹³²⁰ However, the correspondence is more often than not characterised by good-natured comment and a light-hearted tone. In one letter to Brown, anticipating an imminent visit to Brighton, Trist writes with gentle irony, 'By the way don't forget please to bring down the promised photograph portrait of that great painter Ford Madox Brown'.¹³²¹ With the references to various visits of the Trists to the Browns in London and vice-versa in Brighton and to a separate exchange of notes between Harriet Trist and Emma Brown, there is even a suggestion that the ever-affable and accommodating Trist aspired to a closer relationship with Brown, which did not materialise as perhaps he and Harriet might have hoped.¹³²²

John Trist and his wife bought 75 paintings from the start of 1862 to the end of 1872, their most intense period of purchasing.¹³²³ For this period, there is both direct evidence in the correspondence already cited and convincing circumstantial evidence to suggest that the Trist pattern of buying was strongly influenced by recommendations of artists and paintings made not just by Hughes, but also by Brown or Rossetti. Many of the other artists that they bought from were associated with the loosely defined London Pre-Raphaelite circle. For instance, in the 1860s the Trists acquired 6 works by the Anglo-French artist Alphonse Legros.¹³²⁴ Legros

¹³¹⁹ *Trist catalogue*, no. 129, *Lilith*, no. 130, *Michael Scott's Wooing*, no. 131. *A Design for a Window*, TGA.

¹³²⁰ JHT to Brown, 15th Sept. and 29th Sept. 1868, I, Upper Rock Gardens and Trist to Brown, 29th Sept. 1868, I, Upper Rock Gardens, NAL/FMB.

¹³²¹ JHT to Brown, 26th Aug. 1864, NAL/FMB.

¹³²² See JHT to Brown, 2nd July 1864, and JHT to Brown, Summer 1868, Bettws y Coed, NAL/FMB.

¹³²³ Appendix 6. TACS: *iii Chronological*.

¹³²⁴ *Ibid.*, i. *Artists alphabetical*.

was an artist in the French realist tradition of Courbet, hardly Pre-Raphaelite, but after he settled in London in 1863 he was supported and promoted by Rossetti.¹³²⁵ If it was not Rossetti who pointed the Trists in the direction of Legros, it may have been Ford Madox Brown. Two of Trist's letters to Brown mention Legros.¹³²⁶ The Trists purchased paintings from Walter Knewstub and William Shakespeare Burton in 1866, both associated with the Pre-Raphaelite style.¹³²⁷ Rossetti acted as promoter and intermediary for both of these acquisitions.¹³²⁸ In 1865 the Trists bought two paintings from the up-and-coming artist Albert Moore, eventually associated with the aestheticist movement. It is likely that Brown had referred the collectors to this artist, who was intermittently living and working in London at the time.¹³²⁹ Moore worked for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co in the 1860s and secured commissions from a Pre-Raphaelite circle of patrons.¹³³⁰ In 1867, the Trists bought *Lamentation* by Edward Burne-Jones, when the artist was still painting mainly in watercolours and looking to build his reputation. It goes without saying that Burne-Jones mixed in the same London circles as Rossetti, Brown and Hughes.¹³³¹ In 1868 the Trists bought two paintings by the artist Mark Anthony.¹³³² Anthony was admired by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and he was a friend of Ford Madox Brown,¹³³³ who probably brokered these purchases.¹³³⁴

It is apparent then that to the extent that the Trist assemblage of pictures can be labelled 'A Pre-Raphaelite Collection' as it was in the *Magazine of Art*, it was the Pre-Raphaelite artists themselves – Hughes, Rossetti, Brown – who constructed the collection. They determined the

¹³²⁵ Wilcox, 'Legros, Alphonse'..

¹³²⁶ JHT to Brown, 10th June 1865, Upper Rock Gardens, and Summer, 1868, Bettws y Coed, NAL/FMB.

¹³²⁷ Wood, *Dictionary of Victorian Painters*, p. 80 and p. 19.

¹³²⁸ Rossetti to JHT, 66.84.1, 23rd April 1866, Fredeman, p. 426.

¹³²⁹ JHT to Brown 10th June 1865, NAL/FMB.

¹³³⁰ Hilary Morgan, 'Moore Family', *Grove Art Online* (2003)

<<https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T059412>> [accessed 22nd Aug. 2019].

¹³³¹ See MacCarthy, p.178 on Pre-Raphaelite dinner parties in 1865 including Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Brown, Hughes, Legros, William Bell Scott, and Alexander Munro.

¹³³² Appendix 6. TACS: *ii. Trist catalogue*, nos. 59 and 60.

¹³³³ 'Anthony, (Henry) Mark', *ODNB* (2012), <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/37119>> [accessed 22nd Aug. 2019].

¹³³⁴ JHT to Brown, 29th Sept 1868, Upper Rock Gardens, NAL/FMB.

artists from whom the Trists bought pictures and sometimes even specific works, with Arthur Hughes playing the lead role. Similarly, the purchases of aestheticist paintings by artists such as Giovanni Costa, George Mason, and William Blake Richmond appear to have been facilitated by Frederick Leighton, in whose orbit all three moved as up-and-coming painters.¹³³⁵ It seems that even avant-garde artists were happy to maximise profitable opportunities and manage the art market in which they themselves were the leading manufacturers. They may have been aesthetes but they were also ‘economic men’.¹³³⁶

There is one other figure who features as a ‘significant other’ influencing the formation of the Trist collection of pictures other than the artists Hughes, Brown, Rossetti, and Leighton. This is the Tyneside collector James Leathart. Macleod identifies Leathart, a lead manufacturer working for the firm Locke, Blackett and Company, as the leading collector of Pre-Raphaelite and aestheticist works in the north east region from the 1850s through to his death in 1896.¹³³⁷ In Newcastle and its surroundings she sees James Leathart as the linchpin in the promotion of Pre-Raphaelite and aestheticist artists and art with his fellow industrialists.¹³³⁸ Leathart’s ‘influence made an indelible mark on regional taste’, as Macleod puts it,¹³³⁹ and elsewhere she refers to him as ‘a very discerning patron’.¹³⁴⁰

In the first of two surviving letters from Trist to James Leathart written in March 1868, Trist also shows his admiration for the lead manufacturer’s collection referring to ‘a great collection

¹³³⁵ Appendix 6. TACS: *i. Artists alphabetical*. For connections to Leighton see: Costa, Giovanni’, *Grove Art Online* (2003), < <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T019744> > [accessed 22nd Aug. 2019]; Christopher Newall, ‘Mason, George Heming’, *ODNB* (2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18272>> [accessed 22nd Aug. 2019]; Simon Reynolds, ‘Richmond, Sir William Blake’, *ODNB* (2007), <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35745>> [accessed 22nd Aug. 2019].

¹³³⁶ Julie F. Codell, ‘The Art Press and the Art Market: The Artist as “Economic Man”’ in *The Rise of the Modern Art Market*, pp. 128-150.

¹³³⁷ Macleod, ‘Avant-garde Patronage’, in *Pre-Raphaelites, Painters and Patrons in the North East*, p. 9.

¹³³⁸ Dianne Sachko Macleod, ‘Private and Public Patronage in Victorian Newcastle’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 188-208 (205).

¹³³⁹ Macleod, ‘Avant-garde Patronage’ in *Pre-Raphaelites, Painters and Patrons in the North East*, p. 20.

¹³⁴⁰ Macleod, ‘Mid-Victorian Patronage of the Arts: F.G. Stephen’s “The Private Collections of England”’, p. 601.

[...] and yours I understand is one of the first in England'.¹³⁴¹ These two letters provide the main evidence supporting the idea that Trist was familiar with and admired the Leathart collection and that the two men and their wives probably met up with each other on occasions over the years, in Brighton or Gateshead or London. This makes sense in the light of the fact that we know that in the 1860s both men collected paintings not only by Hughes but also by Rossetti and Madox Brown. They would certainly have been aware of who was buying what with respect to these artists. The first letter to Leathart appears to have been prompted by Arthur Hughes. It opens, 'Dear Sir, When our friend Hughes was here he said you would have purchased Albert Moore's picture of "Elijah's Sacrifice" at the RA in 1865 (fig. 39), but you were too late; he also said you had since inquired if I was tired of it ?'¹³⁴² Trist's general purpose in the letter is in fact to offer Leathart the opportunity to buy Moore's painting for 150 guineas, which Leathart accepted. In the final sentences of the letter, Trist invites Leathart to come to Brighton, 'it will give me much pleasure to see you and you can then hand over the cash', and he also refers to 'your kind invitation to see your pictures'.¹³⁴³ Unfortunately, although Trist was travelling down from Scotland at the time, he could not call in at Gateshead because he had to return to Brighton 'hurriedly'.¹³⁴⁴ The Trist catalogue of pictures shows that in the following year, 1869, and perhaps by way of reciprocation, Leathart sold Trist a painting by an artist called James Archer, *How the Little Lady Stood to Velazquez*, for the sum of £42.¹³⁴⁵ This appears to confirm that by then a relationship defined by their mutual cultural interests had been forged.

¹³⁴¹ JHT to Leathart, 9th March 1868, copy of letter in RT/MS.

¹³⁴² *Ibid.*

¹³⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴⁵ Appendix 6. TACS: *i Artists alphabetical*.

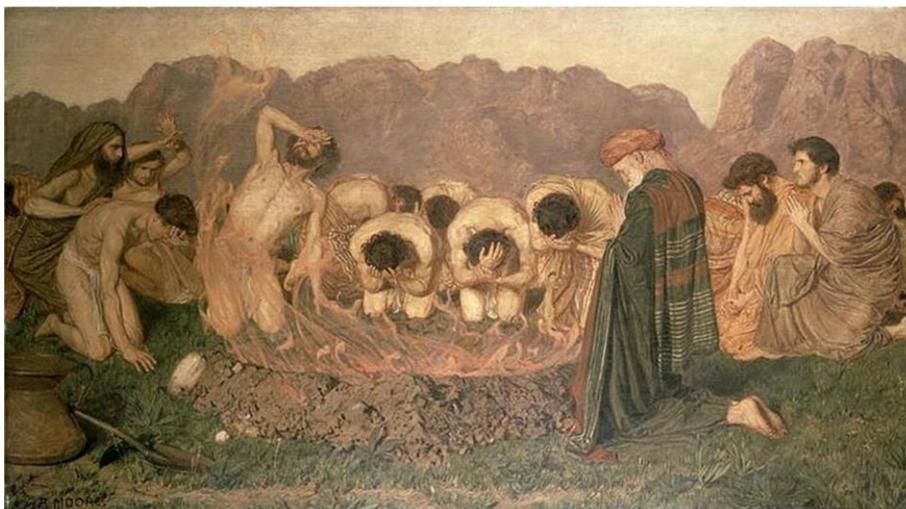


Fig. 39. Albert Moore, *Elijah's Sacrifice*, 1863, oil on canvas (98cm x 174cm), Bury Art Museum

Around fifteen years later in February 1883, Trist wrote to Leathart addressing him as 'My dear Leathart' which confirms that they had indeed formed a friendship by this time. This letter had two main purposes. First, it confirmed the dates of a visit by the Leatharts to Brighton, 'It will give us much pleasure to see Mrs Leathart and yourself about the time you name, ie 6th or 7th of next month'.¹³⁴⁶ Second, the letter gave an account of Trist's thoughts on the retrospective Rossetti exhibitions in London, apparently at Leathart's prior request.¹³⁴⁷ All the signs are of an on-going communication between the two men over the intervening years. But unfortunately, these two letters are all that remain in the archive. The same 1883 letter also refers to three other Pre-Raphaelite collectors George Rae, Frederick Leyland (1831-1892) and William Graham (1816-1885), who had loaned pictures to the Rossetti exhibitions that winter, as had Leathart and Trist himself.¹³⁴⁸ This indicates that John Trist was well aware of other patrons of this style of art. It suggests that notwithstanding the distances between Brighton, Liverpool, and Newcastle, this small group of rich businessmen whose names and purchases of pictures would have appeared in the arts press and who would have crossed paths at London

¹³⁴⁶ JHT to Leathart, 21st Feb. 1883, copy of letter in RT/MS.

¹³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 'Index No. 1, Names of the Contributors of Works' in the Royal Academy catalogue, *Exhibition of Works By...Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Winter Exhibition, 14th Year, 1883*, shows that Graham exhibited 14 pictures, Leathart 5, Rae 11, and Trist 1.

exhibitions, must have shared a sense of belonging to an unspoken cultural club defined by progressive collecting, and which transcended locality, occupation and annual income.

'A Collection Formed to Live With': The Blessings of Art in the Trist Family

We have no direct personal testimony of Harriet Trist's feelings and thoughts about art, but clearly her husband John enjoyed looking at and appreciating paintings. In one of his letters to Ford Madox Brown in July 1864, he reflects on the anticipated arrival of *Elijah and the Widow* and Rossetti's *King René's Honeymoon* to match Brown's matching scene, and commented, 'Perhaps about the time named I may also be fortunate to get your *Elijah* and [with] this, yours, Rossetti's and Hughes's pictures, I shall feel rich indeed in treasures'.¹³⁴⁹ This comment with its reference to feeling 'fortunate' and 'treasures' gives some grounds for believing he saw his and Harriet's nascent art collection as something out of the ordinary, a blessing. In the letter to Leathart in 1883 he performs as an art lover effusive in his comments in praise of the pictures he had viewed at the Royal Academy and the Burlington Fine Arts Club. 'I had no idea Rossetti had done so much great work', and 'Then Leyland's "Veronica Veronese", splendid! Mr Graham's "Ghirlandata", beautiful!' In the last paragraph of the letter he lists four Renaissance works which he 'cared for' by Tintoretto, Perugino, Titian and Bordone with Titian's *Queen of Cyprus* receiving an ecstatic six exclamation marks.¹³⁵⁰

In 1858 John Ruskin, speculating on the reasons why the rich bought paintings and collected, reflected 'But as for the real love of the picture, and joy of it when we have got it, I do not believe it is felt by one in a thousand'.¹³⁵¹ Even at the time, the notion of 'real love of the picture' would have been open to debate, in the same way that the concept of the

¹³⁴⁹ JHT to Brown, 2nd July 1864, NAL/FMB.

¹³⁵⁰ JHT to Leathart, 21st Feb. 1883, 22, Vernon Terrace, copy in RT/MS.

¹³⁵¹ John Ruskin, 'Inaugural Address at Cambridge School of Art' (1858), in *'A Joy for Ever' and The Two Paths with Letters on The Oxford Museum and Various Addresses 1856-1860'* in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, vol. 16, Cook and Wedderburn, p. 187.

‘connoisseur’ which once had promised access to true taste had become problematic in a capitalist society ruled by competitive markets in both commodities and opinions. It goes without saying that in part the pleasures which Harriet and John Trist experienced in owning a collection of paintings were connected with the affirmations of wealth and status which were signified by the ownership of art. But there would have been intrinsic pleasures for the companionate collectors in forming their collection, not least in exercising the freedom which their money gave them to assemble a group of art works unique to themselves. The desires and decisions involved in piecing together the collection, determined not by utility or immediate profit, but by what they liked, what looked good, what seemed visually suited to the décor of their home, which works spoke to them of higher things, and how to configure the works to display in each room of their house – were undoubtedly eye-opening and liberating experiences. And collecting as a couple, one might speculate, would have enhanced the intimacy and strength of their relationship. But cultural capital had a cost. The average price realised by the 119 Trist pictures at auction in 1892 was £48.¹³⁵² This figure was much greater than the annual wages of Emma Waghorn, Eliza Waldegrave and Eliza Masklyne who were respectively, parlour maid, cook and housemaid in the Trist household at the time.¹³⁵³

Tosh suggests that the middle class home was not only a place of continuity and protection but ‘the privileged site of subjectivity and fantasy’.¹³⁵⁴ But whatever the individual pleasures of forming an art collection might have been for Harriet and John Trist in terms of social status, aesthetic interest, personal reinvention, the evidence also suggests that art collecting was bound up with family and home and a new mode of domestic living commensurate with their wealth. I have already explored the emotional importance of the two double portraits painted

¹³⁵² Appendix 6. TACS: *i. Artists alphabetical*.

¹³⁵³ 1881 Census for 22, Vernon Terrace, Brighton, *Findmypast*. Writing in 1861 Mrs Beeton recommended that a cook should be paid between £14 and £30 per year and a housemaid between £12 and £20, see Mrs. Isabella Beeton, *The Book of Household Management* (London: S. O. Beeton, 1861), p. 8.

¹³⁵⁴ Tosh, p. 4.

by Arthur Hughes in 1863 and 1876 and passed down through the generations. The Trist's only son Herbert, depicted in the first of these, was also involved in art collecting in his own right often accompanying his parents on their trips to London to look at art and buy pictures. The catalogue raisonné for Arthur Hughes lists five sketches by the artist which were bought by Herbert between 1861 and around 1865 when he was aged between 9 and 13 years old, including a sketch of his mother.¹³⁵⁵ Presumably, his parents had provided him with a sum of money or an allowance to be able to select the pictures of his choice on family visits to Hughes's studio at that time. Herbert bought in half the pictures on sale at Christie's auction in 1892 following his father's death.¹³⁵⁶ This demonstrates Herbert's abiding commitment to a family art collection which continued to be maintained at 22 Vernon Terrace where Herbert and his wife Louisa moved following the death of John Hamilton and Harriet Trist in the 1890s.¹³⁵⁷

John Trist's brother George Trist (1816-1886), a successful surveyor and estate agent, also collected art and it is evident that John and his brother liaised with each other to develop their collections.¹³⁵⁸ For instance, George Trist bought nine Arthur Hughes paintings between c.1873 and 1883 having been introduced to the artist by his brother.¹³⁵⁹ The catalogue of the Christie's sale of George Trist's paintings in 1886 shows that 178 works were on sale including 102 watercolours and the sale realised £3,299 16s 6d. George Trist's artistic preferences were different in many respects to those of his brother.¹³⁶⁰ However, their tastes coincided not only

¹³⁵⁵ Roberts, 'Catalogue of Works', in *Arthur Hughes*, nos. 58.2, 58.4, 72.3, 77.2, 79.

¹³⁵⁶ Receipt with *Trist catalogue*, TGA.

¹³⁵⁷ 1881 Census shows Herbert Trist and his wife Louisa were living at 13, Goldsmid Road but in 1901 they were at 22, Vernon Terrace,
<<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC%2F1881%2F0005305812>>
<<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC%2F1901%2F0008581469>> [accessed 14th Aug. 2021].

¹³⁵⁸ 1881 Census, Eliot Lodge, Sydenham Hill Road, Lewisham,
<<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC%2F1881%2F0003712203>> [accessed 14th Aug. 2021].

¹³⁵⁹ Roberts, 'Catalogue of Works', in *Arthur Hughes*, nos. 71.4, 121, 131, 147, 148, 149, 150, 172, 191.

¹³⁶⁰ *Catalogue of the Valuable Collection of Modern pictures, and Water-colour Drawings, of George Trist, Esq., deceased late of Eliot Lodge, Sydenham Hill, and 62, Old Broad Street*, (London: Christie, Manson & Woods, 1886).

in their shared interest in Arthur Hughes but also they both collected works by J. M. Carrick and B. W. Leader. Whether or not the third Trist brother William, or their two sisters collected art in any serious way is not known. Nevertheless, the whole of the Brighton-born branch of the Trist family must have shared in the sense of social and cultural accomplishment reflected in the art collections owned by the two brothers John and George Trist.

The Magazine of Art article in 'A Pre-Raphaelite Collection' probably got it right when it wrote of the Trist collection, 'it has been formed to live with'.¹³⁶¹ The numbering of the pictures in John Trist's catalogue compiled in 1876 is organised according to which room in 22, Vernon Terrace they were displayed in.¹³⁶² From this we can see that the Trists had carefully considered where different types of painting should be displayed in relation to the function of the room. After 1876 the dining room contained 17 paintings, the majority of which were explicitly Pre-Raphaelite in style and in the broad category of historical works embracing literary, mythological and religious themes, including the pair of *King René Honeymoon* paintings.¹³⁶³ The most expensive and the largest paintings were on display in the dining room suggesting that it was here that the Trists showed off their most valued and prestigious artistic possessions. The hall space on the first floor landing also contained more expensive and larger works: 11 aestheticist-related pictures by Mason (see, for instance, fig. 40), Costa, Richmond and Alma Tadema.¹³⁶⁴ There were 33 smaller cabinet-sized pictures in the drawing room, half of which were landscapes and the remainder a mixture of genres.¹³⁶⁵ Significant Pre-Raphaelite works were hung in this room including Burne-Jones's *Lamentation* and Rossetti's *Queen of Hearts*.¹³⁶⁶ It is likely that the pictures in the drawing room were chosen to provide more of a decorative background and a less obtrusive aesthetic experience while still forming a

¹³⁶¹ *Magazine of Art* (Jan. 1883), p. 62.

¹³⁶² Appendix 6. TACS: ii. *Trist catalogue*

¹³⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

stimulating environment. The majority of the 16 paintings in the library had a landscape theme including four paintings by Hughes.¹³⁶⁷ The bedrooms contained 18 landscapes, mainly watercolours and sketches.¹³⁶⁸ Half of these were by John Trist himself and four by the marine artist Clarkson Stanfield. The bedroom pictures were predominantly small in size and low in price.¹³⁶⁹ In the hall, one painting was on display which was the only significant old master owned by the Trists, a seventeenth century work, *Madonna and Child*, attributed to the French artist Lebrun.¹³⁷⁰ How prominent this painting was to family and friends in 22 Vernon Terrace and to what extent it constituted a statement of religious conviction, we do not know.¹³⁷¹



Fig. 40. George Hemming Mason, *A Staffordshire Landscape*, 1870, oil on canvas (25cm x 76cm), Art Gallery of New South Wales

The catalogue account of pictures and rooms demonstrates that Harriet and John Trist thought carefully about the arrangement of their artworks in each room according to its social function. In one of the letters written to Ford Maddox Brown, John Trist confirms this, 'We propose to leave home in about 10 days for our usual summer trip but before leaving I am going to have some alterations made in the Dining Room by lowering the mantelpiece, removing the bookcase from the side of the room to the end, [...] and this we think will improve the room, as also the light for pictures'.¹³⁷² Should they have read it, it seems that the Trists paid little attention to Philip Hamerton's *Thoughts About Art* advising on what types of

¹³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷² JHT to Brown, 10th June 1865, I, Upper Rock Gardens, NAL/FMB.

pictures should inhabit which rooms.¹³⁷³ Instead, the Trists anticipated the injunction by Mary Haweis, the artistic advisor, who, writing in the following decade, urged home decorators ‘to think for ourselves and do as we like in art matters [...] to give our own individual stamp to our own little *propriété* in the common heritage of the Beautiful’.¹³⁷⁴ But their collection did meet one of Hamerton’s key criteria with regard to ‘UNITY’ and the idea that ‘Every collection ought to have a character of its own’.¹³⁷⁵ There was a coherence in the Trist art collection which was reflected in their commitment to buying poetic paintings, whether Pre-Raphaelite, aestheticist or landscapes with a clear display strategy in beautifying and gentrifying their Hove home.

The Royal Academy catalogue for the 1883 Winter Exhibition to which John Trist had loaned D. G. Rossetti’s *Michael Scott’s Wooing*, listed Trist’s name on the left-hand side of the page before that of Rossetti himself and again in the index of 146 contributors.¹³⁷⁶ The Winter Exhibition also included exhibitions dedicated to the artist John Linnell and miscellaneous old masters. Both William Coningham and Henry Willett contributed paintings.¹³⁷⁷ The contributors embraced a cross-section of the British upper middle class and ruling elite including aristocrats, plutocrats, art institutions, MPs, clergymen, artists, art writers, dignitaries, businessmen and a handful of wealthy women including Queen Victoria.¹³⁷⁸ Until the second half of the nineteenth century it was still royalty, the aristocracy and landed gentry and nation states with their national galleries which dominated the ownership of art collections. For a Brighton wine merchant and his collecting wife to find themselves listed in such exalted company alongside some of the wealthiest bourgeoisie and landed gentry in Britain must indeed have been a source of satisfaction. It affirmed their bourgeois credentials

¹³⁷³ For instance, Hamerton advises that landscapes should hang in drawing rooms and literary works in libraries, see Hamerton, *Thoughts About Art*, p. 136.

¹³⁷⁴ Mrs. H. R. Haweis, *The Art of Decoration* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1881), p. 21.

¹³⁷⁵ Hamerton, *Thoughts About Art*, p. 132.

¹³⁷⁶ ‘Index No. 1, Names of the Contributors of Works’ in *Exhibition of Works By...Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Winter Exhibition, 14th Year, 1883*.

¹³⁷⁷ *Ibid.* The paintings were no. 92 John Linnell *Children of Robert Clutterbuck, Esq.* loaned by Coningham, and no. 175 Bernadino Lanini, *Virgin and Child*, from Willett.

¹³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

and aspirations to gentility, reflected also in sending Herbert to Brighton College and then to Trinity College Cambridge, family holidays in North Wales and on the continent, and an increasing number of servants. And, above all in the move to 22 Vernon Terrace up the hill distancing themselves from the petit bourgeois and proletarian circumstances of the wine merchant premises in 'down-town' St James Street.

In this chapter I have tried as far as possible to reference both Harriet and John Trist as the collectors of the 22 Vallance Terrace collection. I am convinced that in the acquisition, appreciation and display of the paintings in their homes, Harriet should be considered an art collector in her own right alongside her husband. Elizabeth Langland emphasises women's 'critical role in consolidating the genteel middle class' and their control of 'discursive practices' in hierarchical households which played a central role in ensuring middle class hegemony in Victorian Britain.¹³⁷⁹ It may be that Harriet Trist's role as art collector is a manifestation of this in practice in her middle class household. On the other hand, it can be argued on the basis of the examples of many other rich male art collectors, including the other Brighton collectors in this thesis, that the art collections which filled their houses undermined the authority of the bourgeois wife in her inner sanctum of domesticity. On parallel lines, Barbara Black suggests house museums intruded on the relative autonomy of bourgeois women in the domestic sphere.¹³⁸⁰ In other words, the private art collection can be viewed as enabling men to take back control of 'discursive practices' in elite households in the assertion of intellectual superiority and moral entitlement of the male owner embodied in the expensive paintings which had taken over the wall space.

Self-evidently, this single story of Harriet and her husband John Trist as Brighton art collectors in a companionate marriage cannot come close to resolving debates in the conceptualisation

¹³⁷⁹ Langland, p. 11 and p. 9.

¹³⁸⁰ Black, *On Exhibit*, p. 78.

of class and gender and the making of modernity in the nineteenth century. I would like to think that Harriet Trist was discomfited by the attribution of paintings in the *Magazine of Art* or in the Royal Academy Rossetti exhibition in 1883 solely to their legal owner, her husband John. After all, these paintings were from *her* home and chosen by her with her husband. At the same time, John and Harriet's upward journey in the social structure, their mutual reinvention as art lovers and collectors, the creation of an artistic home worthy of the attention of the *Magazine of Art*, the cultural capital they were able to store up and confer on Louisa and Herbert Trist, represented for both of them an opening up of new worlds and freedoms. Money had enabled the couple to explore modes of self-expression previously undreamt of. The regular journeys to the metropolis to attend exhibitions in South Kensington or Burlington House and across the city to visit the Hughes family in Staines or Putney, Ford Madox Brown in Kentish Town or Fitzroy Place, and Dante Rossetti in Cheyne Walk, and the display of the works in their Cliftonville home but also in institutions in London, would have been exciting and empowering, transporting them outside the prosaic confines of trade and family routines, while proclaiming their elevated status in Brighton. Janet Wolff has argued that culture reinforced the role of the middle class woman in the private sphere, but for Harriet Trist, culture took her out of her domestic haven into a fashionable metropolitan scene of artists' studios and galleries.¹³⁸¹

¹³⁸¹ Jane Wolff, 'The Culture of Separate Spheres: The Role of Culture in Nineteenth-century Public and Private Life', *The Culture of Capital*, pp. 117-134 (p. 122).

CONCLUSION AND A ROYAL PARADE IN 1877

Samuel Smiles in *Thrift* in 1875 suggested that the quality of homelife in even the humblest home could be improved by the 'beauty of Art'. He wrote:

Ingenious methods have been discovered [...] for almost infinitely multiplying works of art, by mean of wood-engravings, lithographs, photographs, and autotypes, which render it possible for every person to furnish his rooms with beautiful pictures. Skill and science have thus brought Art within reach of the poorest.¹³⁸²

However, only the very richest members of the bourgeoisie could afford to assemble collections of fine art. Around the same time, Philip Hamerton commented ruefully on the 'prevalent idea that the purchasing of pictures is exclusively for the very rich people who can afford *collections*'.¹³⁸³ The five collectors analysed in this thesis were all members of the upper echelons of the middle class with a similar level of economic surplus to that of the wealthy businessmen who feature as art collectors in Macleod's work. To be an art collector in the second half of the nineteenth century one had to be the equivalent of a modern-day millionaire. The concept of 'middle class art collecting' is misleading, given that hardly more than 5% of the class could afford to collect fine art in a way which came close to resembling the patrician pioneers of art collecting whose practises and outlook defined the whole notion of the art collector.¹³⁸⁴ And within the *haute bourgeoisie* it is also apparent that surplus capital and social aspiration, not occupation and regional location, were the critical factors facilitating fine art collections. Coningham, Hill, Willett and Trist made their money from sugar, tailoring, beer and wine and lived in Brighton. You did not have to be a cutting-edge capitalist working in

¹³⁸² Samuel Smiles, *Thrift* (London: John Murray, 1875), pp. 375-6.

¹³⁸³ Hamerton, *Thoughts About Art*, p. 136.

¹³⁸⁴ Steegman, *The Rule of Taste*.

the industrial north, the midlands or London to be interested in fine art, whether this consisted of old master, contemporary or so-called 'avant-garde' paintings.

An analysis of contributors to loan exhibitions in Brighton in the halcyon years when Henry Hill was influential as town councillor and Chairman of the Fine Arts Sub-Committee gives an indication of the numbers who owned art and were willing to make their properties publicly available. In the picture exhibition mounted in the new Picture Gallery to coincide with the visit of the British Association in August 1872 there were 369 works of art on display provided by just 69 contributors.¹³⁸⁵ In the 1884 Brighton Art Loan Exhibition organised by Henry Willett to raise money to pay off the debts of the School of Art and Science there were 141 contributors of pictures and artefacts.¹³⁸⁶ In a middle class whose households numbered more than 8,000 at this time these figures suggest that art collecting was a distinctly minority pursuit.¹³⁸⁷ The fact that Hill turned to rich magnates such William Webster and James S. Forbes to provide paintings in sufficient numbers from their collections to populate loan exhibitions in the 1870s, alongside his own artworks or those of his fellow collector Henry Willett, is further evidence that the public art exhibition depended on the largesse of millionaires.¹³⁸⁸

As we have seen there were a number of forms of expenditure and consumption which functioned as signifiers in the semiotics of elite status and gentrification and contributed to 'the accumulation of symbolic capital'.¹³⁸⁹ These included numbers of servants, the education of sons at a public school and Oxbridge, philanthropic contributions, membership of voluntary societies, visibility at municipal celebrations and soirées, the purchase of church pews, foreign

¹³⁸⁵ *Catalogue of Pictures Exhibited on the Occasion of the Visit of the British Association at Brighton August 1872 in the New Museum and Library, Pavilion* (Brighton: J. Farncombe, 1872).

¹³⁸⁶ *Catalogue Brighton Art Loan Exhibition 1884 Official Catalogue* (Brighton: Towner and Curtis, 1884), p. iv and *passim*.

¹³⁸⁷ Appendix 1. BMCSS: *i. Summary tables*, Table D.

¹³⁸⁸ See Chapter 3. pp. 183-4.

¹³⁸⁹ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 75.

travel to well-known cities of art, and most notably changing residence with a move into a larger house or villa, expensively furnished, in a select part of town such as Kemp Town or Hove. The art collection was another means with which the very rich in the middle class could spend money in order to differentiate themselves from lower ranks *within* the middle class social hierarchy. Whereas the bourgeoisie owned original works by known artists, the petite bourgeoisie had to make do for the most part with engravings, lithographs, cheap water colours or copies.¹³⁹⁰ The fine art collection rather than contributing to middle class identity as Macleod contends, was one of the ways in which the upper middle class elite established a more exclusive identity, distinguishing them from the middling and lower middle classes.¹³⁹¹ It can be construed as one of the ‘signifying practices [...] to police the borders of polite society from the incursions of the vulgar middle class or the petite bourgeoisie’ as Langland describes it.¹³⁹² Indeed, it seems likely that the opposition to a library, museum and gallery among many ratepayers in Brighton in the 1850s and 1860s was not merely a question of expense but reflected rancour on the part of the lesser middle class at the presumption of the educated and monied elite in their mission to civilise the people. There is a sense in which art and culture fomented class conflict *within* the middle class rather than contributing to a unified class identity shared by its multiple layers of owners of capital. And, as noted in Chapter 1 intra-class struggles over the value and affordability of art were commonplace in towns and cities across the country, not just in Brighton.

The proliferation of art markets and creative industries of all kinds in the second half of the nineteenth century reflected increasing prosperity in general but in particular an upsurge in the wealth of the middle class. The growing prominence of bourgeois fine art collectors, linked to the rise of London commercial galleries and a ‘gallery culture of luxury and display’, was one

¹³⁹⁰ Theodore Hoppen, p. 409.

¹³⁹¹ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, pp. 1-2.

¹³⁹² Langland, p. 17.

of the manifestations of this transformation.¹³⁹³ But an art collection was not merely a marker of great wealth, it was also a sign of distinction. The new upper middle class owners of art collections were also laying claim to the possession of the civilised values associated with the aristocratic elite as articulated in a rhetoric centred on the concepts of correct taste, connoisseurship and great art. For apologists of the landed elite or the guardians of high art among the British intelligentsia, this was an existential challenge. In 1858 Ruskin wrote of ‘the game of wealth’ in which the rich competed with each other to buy pictures which added to their “gentility” in ‘a contest of ostentation’.¹³⁹⁴ The critic J. B. Atkinson wrote in 1869, ‘It is certainly an evil that in this country the patronage of art has passed from an aristocracy of birth to an aristocracy not even of talent and education, but of vulgar wealth’.¹³⁹⁵ He added ‘Levelling democracy in art has done its worst’.¹³⁹⁶ George Moore, art critic and admirer of Degas, expressed contempt for provincial galleries, ‘the alderman is the reef which for the last five-and-twenty years has done much to ruin and wreck every artistic movement’, he wrote in *Modern Painting* in 1893.¹³⁹⁷ Roger Fry, notable progenitor of modernism, writing in 1912 and comparing the art collections of the aristocracy with those of the plutocracy claimed ‘The aristocrat usually had taste, the plutocrat frequently has not’.¹³⁹⁸

The great defender of middle class art was the *Art Journal* under the editorship of Samuel Carter Hall. One of the constant refrains of the *Art Journal*, the campaigning magazine for middle class art and contemporary artists in the Victorian period, was its insistence that money and taste were perfectly compatible. The journal contended that art markets, dealers and

¹³⁹³ Fletcher, Pamela, ‘On the Rise of the Commercial Art Gallery in London’ *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, paras. 1-6, ed. Dino Franco Felluga. Extension of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* <https://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=pamela-fletcher-on-the-rise-of-the-commercial-art-gallery-in-london> [accessed 26th May 2021].

¹³⁹⁴ John Ruskin in ‘Lecture II The Accumulation and Distribution of Art’ (1857), in ‘A Joy for Ever’ and *The Two Paths* in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, vol. 16, Cook and Wedderburn, p. 86.

¹³⁹⁵ J. B. Atkinson, ‘The London Art Season’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 106.646 (1869), 220-230 (p. 223).

¹³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹⁷ George Moore, *Modern Painting* (London: Walter Scott Limited, 1893) p. 168.

¹³⁹⁸ Roger Fry, ‘Art and Socialism’, *Vision and Design*, pp. 55-78 (p. 57).

investing in paintings as financial assets were not detrimental to the quality of art and its proper appreciation. In only its second edition in 1839, the *Art Union* as it was then titled, reporting on the collection of Robert Vernon, clearly stated its position, 'Wealth would have been no avail if unaided by taste and judgement; and happily the rich and generous collector possesses both in an eminent degree'.¹³⁹⁹ Hall in his memoir in 1883 looking back at the progress of British Art among the business classes over forty years asserts that 'good taste is now the rule where it was formerly the exception' and claims that his journal had played a major role in securing this.¹⁴⁰⁰ What Hall and his writers could not afford to recognise is that the liberalisation and commodification of art markets were relativising elite ideas of taste, connoisseurship, and great art. Beauty and Truth were losing their capital letters; civilisation was whatever fancy things you could afford to buy. The patrician discourse of high art remained intact in the pages of the *Art Journal* even while it functioned as a trade journal promoting the sale of creative commodities and acted as a mouthpiece for middle class cultural consumption. Indeed, this elite discourse, pre-industrial in its origins, helped shape the discipline of art history itself in the twentieth century when it finally emerged on an institutionalised basis.¹⁴⁰¹ As Baudrillard writes, 'Everywhere prestige haunts our industrial societies, whose bourgeois culture is never more than the phantom of aristocratic values'.¹⁴⁰² In a sense it is not surprising that Hazlitt's notion of taste as 'the highest degree of sensibility', or Reynold's ideas of 'genius' and the 'grand style' remained intact given that the new middle class elite in seeking to manage the impact of democracy and the fall-out from market forces, retained the need to legitimise their power in transcendental terms, 'to give its ideas the form of universally valid ones' as Marx wrote in *German Ideology*.¹⁴⁰³

¹³⁹⁹ 'Visits to Private Galleries/The Mansion of Robert Vernon, Esq, in Pall Mall', *Art Union*, no. 2, 15th March 1839.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Carter Hall, *Retrospect of a Long Life*, p. 221.

¹⁴⁰¹ Preziosi, 'Art History: Making the Visible Legible', in *The Art of Art History*, pp. 7-11 (p. 7).

¹⁴⁰² Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, p. 119.

¹⁴⁰³ See: William Hazlitt, 'On the Fine Arts', in *Criticisms on Art and Sketches of the Picture Galleries of England*, (London: John Templeman, 1843), 155-239, p. 238; Joshua Reynold, Discourse No. 1, 2nd Jan.

There is no doubt that the collections examined in this thesis were in part outcomes of the desire to demonstrate affluence and secure position at the apex of society by displaying elite values, to proclaim the fact that tradesmen could also be gentlemen (or gentlewomen) and that profit-maximisation did not preclude gentility. The performance and affirmation of elite status was evident in: William Coningham's loan of *Our Saviour in the Garden at Gethsemane*, attributed to Raphael, to the British Institution in Pall Mall in June 1844; the Holl and Morris pictures owned by Henry Hill, which he presented personally to Princess Louise at the 1877 opening of the Brighton School of Art and Science; Henry Willett's loan of Ghirlandaio's *Portrait of Giovanni Tournabuoni* to the National Gallery in 1888; *Michael Scott's Wooing* loaned to the Royal Academy Rossetti retrospective by the Trists in 1883. The public display of privately owned cultural properties accompanied by the names of the owners listed in catalogues provided a simple technology of mutual acknowledgement enabling the upper middle class elite to publicise their wealth, taste and philanthropy, their *liberality*, alongside the landed establishment – both to each other and to the world at large.

However, the evidence in this thesis shows that collecting was not just about status and distinction. It is evident that that these Brighton traders and rentiers took as much pleasure in the *arts* of collecting as an entertaining pastime in its own right, as absorbing as communing with the resultant collection itself. They had the money to enter a high-stakes collecting world very different in kind from the provincial and economic environments in which they had been brought up and in which their families had prospered. This field, centred on the allure of London, as much as Brighton, gave wealthy cultural players the freedom to engage with people from different walks of bourgeois life. These included artists, connoisseurs, dealers,

1769, in *Sir Joshua Reynolds Discourses*, ed. by Edward Gilpin Johnson (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1891), 53-63, p. 55; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. by C. J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 2004), p. 66.

curators, critics, encountered in often unusual or glamorous physical and visual environments of exhibitions, artist studios, galleries, and museums. Coningham's relationship with John Linnell and his fellow campaigner and artistic adviser Morris Moore, Hill's patronage of Philip Morris and Frank Holl and his links to Paris, the Trist visit to the 1862 International Exhibition in South Kensington and their friendships with Arthur Hughes and James Leathart, Willett's connections with John Ruskin, Lady Charlotte Schreiber or his close relationship with the curators of Brighton Museum – all are evidence of the distinctive intellectual or aesthetic circles and settings to which collecting provided access.

It also involved the leisurely expenditure of time in shopping, bartering and sometimes gambling in 'priceless' commodities whose value was rather more abstract than comestibles such as sugar, military uniforms, beer or wine. Coningham's relationship with the dealers Samuel Woodburn and Henry Farrer, Hill's with Paul Durand Ruel and Charles Deschamps, or Willett with Sedelmeyer and Colnaghi, and all five collectors' involvement in negotiating deals with dealers, artists or fellow collectors, or bidding at auctions, are evidence of the entrepreneurial pleasures of collecting in the 'anti-economy of the art world' in which personal livelihood was not at stake.¹⁴⁰⁴ The end result of all this activity were villas in Hove or Kemp Town inhabited by a phantasmagoric spectacle of pictures and owners who had reinvented themselves with supplementary identities as aesthetes, cosmopolitans, connoisseurs, scholars or gentlemen and women of taste. The exploitation and poverty which were the precondition of the astonishing concentrations of wealth in the hands of the upper middle class elite had been magically erased in the acquisition of sacred objects which spoke of the intellectual and moral virtue of their owners.

For three out of the four male Brighton collectors, private art collecting was also about political power and civic influence in the context of Liberal politics. Coningham's collection of old

¹⁴⁰⁴ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 40.

masters including a unique selection of early Renaissance works helped secure his credibility as a Radical campaigner for the reform of national art institutions in the 1840s and 1850s. Hill's large and distinctive assemblage of both British and continental works coupled with his role as town councillor allowed him to act as a civic impresario for the fine arts in Brighton in the 1870s. And Willett's collection of collections, in a similar fashion, enabled him to become a founding father of Brighton museum and a cultural patriarch in the town supplementing his authority as an influential political figure and municipal benefactor stretching from the 1850s to the turn of the century. The lives of these three men suggest that domesticity was not central to their sense of themselves as *upper* middle class men, at odds with the view of Tosh that the 1830s to 1860s was the heyday of masculine domesticity.¹⁴⁰⁵ Furthermore, cultural credentials, conspicuous benevolence, and public acclaim seem to have been important in defining a 'masculinity' associated with a more traditional rather than entrepreneurial definition of the gentleman. This is contrary to the view taken by Davidoff and Hall that the eighteenth century ideal of the 'disinterested gentleman' was in decline by this time.¹⁴⁰⁶

With Harriet and John Trist who collected art together the evidence suggests that collecting, whilst also a means of demonstrating status, was at the same time a genuinely absorbing rather than instrumental pastime which enhanced their own personal relationship and provided a sense of domestic well-being and progress in their family life. It may be that Samuel Smiles's theological description of the benefits of art in the home have a greater truth for the Trists than for the other three collectors, 'It sweetens domestic life, and sheds a grace and beauty upon it. It draws the gazer away from mere considerations of self, and increases his store of delightful associations with the world without, as well as with the world within'.¹⁴⁰⁷ At any rate a different set of sensibilities and interests seem to have been in play with the Trists, influenced perhaps by the fact that their collection reflected the taste of Harriet Trist as much

¹⁴⁰⁵ Tosh, pp. 6-7.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Davidoff and Hall, p. 445.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Smiles, *Thrift*, p. 376.

as her husband, reflected in a gathering of pictures which had a greater aesthetic and thematic unity than those of the other three.

Focusing on the art itself, certain observations can be made. The five art collectors in this Brighton study is no sample at all but for what it is worth, two of these collected old master paintings reminding us that bourgeois art collecting was not exclusively defined by a focus on contemporary British anecdotal pictures or the works of Pre-Raphaelite and aestheticist artists. The old master collections of Coningham and Willett and their *trecento* and *quattrocento* works enabled them to identify with both the older traditional landed elite of gentleman collectors, and new self-proclaiming art historians whose scholarship testified to the academic legitimacy of the so-called Primitives.¹⁴⁰⁸ Across the four collections the most favoured art subjects were landscape followed by portraits and then history paintings.¹⁴⁰⁹ Genre works, that is anecdotal and narrative scenes of daily life, on average, accounted for only 14% of the works in the four collections.¹⁴¹⁰ Macleod's view that the middle class as 'represented' by its rich art collectors recast the 'cultural system in their own image' as testified for instance by the 'proliferation of idealised genre subjects produced for the mainstream market' is not borne out in the purchases of the Brighton collectors.¹⁴¹¹ Even on a national scale, Bayer and Page's figures whilst indicating a trend towards the purchase of genre works also demonstrate that across the whole period 1740-1909 the most favoured subject was landscape which accounted for 32% of all purchases compared with 20% for genre.¹⁴¹² The continuing popularity of proprietorial views of the countryside or coastal scenes suggest that many among the rich bourgeoisie 'recast the cultural system' in the image of the world of the landed gentleman and

¹⁴⁰⁸ Denys Sutton, 'Aspects of British Collecting Part 4', in *Apollo*, 123.282 (1985), pp. 96-110.

¹⁴⁰⁹ This assessment is based on averaging the percentages for the different genres of paintings in each of the four collections using the summary tables in Appendices 3 to 6 to produce overall averages as follows: landscape 36%, history 32%, portraits 16%, genre 14%, and still life 2%.

¹⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹¹ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 1, and p.245.

¹⁴¹² Percentages derived from 'Table 1.2: Statistics by Category' in Bayer and Page, p. 9.

myths of man in harmony with nature, rather than in terms of imagery associated with urban life and middle class morality.

For the Trists the merits of the small-scale Pe-Raphaelite and aestheticist paintings which they bought for their collection seemed to rest in the decorative, easy-on-the-eye qualities of vivid colour and romantic subject matter. Combined with their landscape paintings, many functioning as souvenirs of holiday scenes, their collection was escapism personified excluding the hustle-and-bustle and degradation of urban life which they would have witnessed in and around St James Street before their move to Cliftonville in the early 1870s. As for Henry Hill, he owned more than 700 paintings of startling variety and not just *L'Absinthe* by Edgar Degas. It is his patronage of the now little known artists Philip Morris, Frank Holl and Marie Cazin, which looms rather larger in his collecting life than Degas. In seeking out the 'modernity' of the collection, it does not lie in his prescient purchase of impressionist paintings but in the crazy delight that he must have taken as a millionaire art consumer who had started out in life with nothing, to purchase anything in the art market which caught his attention. An idiosyncratic assemblage of pictures in purpose-built picture galleries was a better way of proclaiming personal wealth, asserting individuality and acquiring pedigree than anonymous entries in a double-entry ledger book. Henry Hill's collection, even whilst it was motivated by a desire to authenticate gentlemanly status, was also a convincing argument for the demise of the Rule of Taste and the sovereignty of consumer spending.

The Graphic wrote in 1870 'The politics of Brighton are a puzzle. The most intensely aristocratic city in the kingdom, after the capital, is intensely Radical'.¹⁴¹³ But it was not so much of a puzzle. It was Radical and aristocratic at one and the same time. As we have seen throughout, middle class culture in Brighton was defined by a hybrid of utilitarian and patriarchal beliefs and values, what I have called 'liberal paternalism', particularly evident in the outlook of the

¹⁴¹³ Feature on Brighton in *The Graphic*, 1.6 (1870), p. 135.

upper middle class. It consisted of the uneasy combination of rampant money-making and philanthropic beneficence, of belief in market forces and yet a willingness to extend the benevolent hand of municipal government, of pride in individual freedom coupled with the assumption that societies were hierarchies led by elites. The image of the Royal Pavilion as both royal palace and council leisure centre has been used in the thesis to convey and symbolise this tension. Upper middle class art collecting as I have argued reflected this same tension between a desire to supersede the aristocracy coupled with a yearning to *be* the aristocracy. Coningham castigated the amateurism of the grandees running the National Gallery while piecing together a collection of old masters in the manner of an eighteenth-century grandee. Willett sold beer to the Brighton working class, socialised with publicans, and mixed with respected scientists and scholars while exhibiting pictures at Royal Academy Old Masters exhibitions. Henry Hill promoted municipal art exhibitions and art for the people while taking delight in entertaining royalty in a private view of an exhibition in which his own pictures were the star attraction. And the Trists, although their interest in art was more private and personal, were happy to have their taste and their art collection featured in the conservative *Magazine of Art* journal and to loan out paintings to the exclusive Burlington Fine Arts Society in Pall Mall alongside dukes, baronets, MPs and Queen Victoria.

By way of a coda to this conclusion, there is one event already referred to, which brings together the main themes of this study and which warrants a more detailed account. On Friday 2nd February 1877 the new building for the School of Art and Science in Grand Parade (fig. 41), designed in Romanesque style, was opened by Princess Louise, Queen Victoria's fourth daughter, and her husband the Marquis of Lorne, later to become the ninth Duke of Argyll.¹⁴¹⁴ Princess Louise was herself an artist and sculptor who wrote articles on art under the

¹⁴¹⁴ A detailed account of this event is given in an extensive article entitled 'The Royal Visit to Brighton, Inauguration of the New School of Art and Science by the Princess Louise and Marquis of Lorne', in the *Brighton Guardian*, Wed. 7th Feb. 1877, pp. 6-7.

pseudonym 'Myra Fontenoy'.¹⁴¹⁵ For the growing town of Brighton, with its close associations with royalty the opening ceremony was the occasion for an exercise in mass municipal patriotism. The royal visit consisted of a number of different events tightly scheduled into a single afternoon. These included: a special welcome at Brighton station at 12.40 pm, visits to the new School of Science and Art building and the Free Library and Museum including the Picture Gallery, the formal opening of the new School in a ceremony at the Dome, lunch in the Banqueting Room of the Royal Pavilion, further excursions to Brighton High School for Girls and the Aquarium with the return to London on the royal train scheduled for 4.50 pm, arriving back at Victoria at 6.10 pm.¹⁴¹⁶ In the evening there was a *grand soirée* at the Dome to celebrate the occasion at which the invited guests included the Hills, the Trists and the Willetts, but not the Coninghams who were still on their recuperative travels on the continent.¹⁴¹⁷



Fig. 41. Brighton School of Art and Science, 1877. Illustration from *The Builder*, 21st Oct. 1876.

¹⁴¹⁵ Denvir, *The Late Victorians*, p. 2.

¹⁴¹⁶ Account of preparations for royal visit in *Brighton Guardian*, 31st Jan. 1877, p. 5.

¹⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Henry Hill had a pivotal role in this event. Most notably, he had loaned £5,000 out of an estimated total of £7,000 to help meet the costs of the new building.¹⁴¹⁸ As Chair of the FASC and accompanied by the curator, Mr T. W. Wonfor, he hosted the visit of the royal couple to the Picture Gallery.¹⁴¹⁹ He was also responsible for lending 11 of his paintings to decorate a restroom in the Pavilion which was specially prepared for the Marquis of Lorne to retire to between the opening ceremony and lunch.¹⁴²⁰ This display included six pictures by Hill's friend Philip Morris and two by Edgar Degas. For Hill, the ex-journeyman tailor, his leading role in the visit of the Princess and the future Duke of Argyll to Brighton must have given him a sense of personal and social achievement. He was no longer a mere bystander or bit-player.

This was in marked contrast to the 'citizens' and working people of Brighton whose role was to provide a suitably clamorous but respectful chorus as the royals and the civic leaders of the town were transported from the railway station to Grand Parade in a cortege of seven carriages accompanied by a guard of honour from the 1st Sussex Artillery Volunteers and an escort of men from the 20th Hussars.¹⁴²¹ The streets were decorated with bunting, flags, illuminated stars, laurel wreaths, Venetian masts, and heraldic shields and resounded to the music of military bands.¹⁴²² One of the street displays included a triumphal arch with a Royal Standard and a banner with words in gilt-edged letters addressed to Princess Louise and the Marquis of Lorne; it read 'Welcome to the Lovers of Science and Art'.¹⁴²³ Later in the morning, Conservative MP Major-General Shute in giving a vote of thanks to Princess Louise said of the new School that he hoped that it will 'improve the taste and give an appreciation of art to the

¹⁴¹⁸ Jonathan M. Woodham, 'Brighton School of Art – the Victorian Age to the Twentieth Century', University of Brighton website, <rts.brighton.ac.uk/arts/alumni-and-associates/the-history-of-arts-education-in-brighton/brighton-school-of-art---the-victorian-age-to-the-twentieth-century>, [accessed 16th Sept. 2019].

¹⁴¹⁹ 'Inaugural Opening of the Brighton New School of Science and Art by HRH the Princess Louise', *Brighton Herald*, 3rd Feb. 1877, p. 3.

¹⁴²⁰ 'The Royal Visit', *Brighton Guardian*, 7th Feb. 1877, p. 7. It is unclear whether Princess Louise also had a restroom decorated with specially chosen paintings.

¹⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁴²² *Ibid.*

¹⁴²³ *Ibid.*

working classes, for I fear that hitherto the pleasure in art has been mostly confined to those in higher positions in society'.¹⁴²⁴ In addition to the 'free library, museum and picture gallery' opened in 1873, Brighton now possessed a bespoke art school, funded with donations and loans from its bourgeoisie and blessed by royalty. Hierarchy and capital, pageantry and social progress, philanthropy and popular education, high art and deference were somehow all intermingled in this single municipal event which witnessed the middle class and its elite facing backwards and forwards at one and the same time, with the people of Brighton cheering on the side-lines, few of whom would have been invited to the soirée in the evening.

¹⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*

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