

BETTY ELZEA
WAYSIDE, CANTERBURY ROAD, BRABOURNE LEES,
ASHFORD, KENT TN25 6QT TEL: 01303 812192
EMAIL: BELZEA@WAITROSE.COM

May 13, 2007

Dear Dr. Raraty:

After the Kent History Federation Conference at Bridge yesterday, I approached you to ask whether the Bridge Society knew that the distinguished artist William Townsend had lived there and, if not, whether you would like me to send you information about him. I admit that he has been neglected in recent years. However, there has been a recent exhibition of his work held at a fairly new gallery in the West End: James Hyman Fine Art Ltd. The gallery tends to specialise in English artists of the post-war period. I was an art student at that time and my teachers were of that generation.

I am enclosing a selection of copies from Hyman's catalogue which should give you an outline of his life and some idea of what his work looked like during the period 1930-1950.

A remarkable fact about Townsend is that he kept a daily journal throughout his life, which is now deposited in the Library of London University: nearly 50 volumes! In the 1970s, his friend Andrew Forge (1923-2002), also a Kentish artist, made a selection from these journals which was published as "The Townsend Journals, An artist's record of his times 1928-51", at the time of a major exhibition at Tate Britain in 1976. I also enclose copies of some pages from this.

Townsend seems to have been very attached to his father, Lewis W. Townsend, who was a dentist in Canterbury (Burgate?) who lived in Bridge. Where in Bridge, I don't know. He lived with his parents, or used their home as his base, I think until the mid-1940s. That's all I know!

Yours sincerely,



Mrs. Betty Elzea

William Townsend: landscape paintings 1930-1950

[exhibition held from 9 Nov. to 8 Dec. 2006]

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james hyman fine art ltd
6 mason's yard
duke street st. james's
london SW1Y 6BU
tel +44 (0)20 7839 3906
fax +44 (0)20 7839 3907
mail@jameshymanfineart.com
www.jameshymanfineart.com

'There is a decided swing back from the problems of abstraction, even from the orgies of Surrealism, to the possibility of making a new start from the Post-Impressionists. Bill Coldstream and Graham Bell have for instance renounced Picasso and all his works and in despair proclaim that there is nothing to do but sit down in front of a landscape and paint it.'

William Townsend, journal entry, December 1936

William Townsend's landscapes of the 1930s and 1940s hold a central place in the British art world of the period and in debates about the relationship between Modernism and tradition. Extremely widely exhibited during the mid twentieth century, they have in recent decades slipped from such prominence. Although well represented in public collections – the Tate Gallery has three major paintings and the Government Art Collection six works – the present exhibition is Townsend's first significant show in Britain since the Tate Gallery in 1976 and the touring retrospective of 1978–80.

The present publication and exhibition are, therefore, a major opportunity to appreciate the artist's development, reassess his achievements and reinstate his centrality to mid twentieth century debates in Britain regarding modernity, abstraction and representation.

Townsend's vivid journals, now accessible in the library of University College London, provide essential insights into this period and also into his achievements as a painter. These wide ranging journals reveal not just Townsend's acute political judgements but also his sensitivity to his surroundings. They record, too, his circles of artistic friendships, his regular gallery visits and his intimate understanding of such friends, contemporaries and colleagues as John and Paul Nash, Ivon Hitchens, Victor Pasmore, Rodrigo Moynihan and William Coldstream.

They are especially revealing given that Townsend, along with peers such as Paul Nash and Ivon Hitchens, played a vital part in reinvigorating British landscape painting in the 1930s and, with friends such as Victor Pasmore and William Coldstream, did much to revive rural and urban landscape in the 1940s and 1950s.

As a painter and a teacher at Camberwell and then the Slade School of Art, Townsend was a liberating presence who guided students such as Michael Andrews, Euan Uglow and Victor Willing, encouraging their engagement with a 'national tradition' of art based on life that gave particular emphasis to the closely observed figure or landscape. One of

his lectures, widely delivered in the late 1940s and early 1950s, was even entitled 'A Realist Tradition in British Painting'.

John Berger was quick to pick up on this. In February 1951, in one of his very first reviews, Berger used Townsend's *The Hop Garden*, a version of which had been recently purchased by the Arts Council, to champion the artist as an exemplar of the virtues of the 'matter-of-fact painting' that he advocated. For him, Townsend's controlled painting was an antidote to the expressionist, the romantic, the surrealist and the abstract. It was also quintessentially English, an art of observation and understatement: a realist painting with the essentially English characteristic of restraint.

But this is to underestimate Townsend's achievements. Placed side by side, as they are in the present exhibition, Townsend's landscapes of the pre- and post-war years reveal an enquiring mind ever in search of new stimuli, one that gave a particular role to the imaginative recreation of the subject. They emphasise, too, a sophisticated artfulness that went alongside the careful scrutiny. Indeed the varied responses to the landscape, explored through notions of a *genius loci*, or spirit of place, found in the paintings of his contemporaries is also evident in Townsend's own paintings of the mid 1930s. One of the earliest such paintings, *Bower of Trees* (1933) (cat. 2) is at once prosaic and mysterious, marrying solidity to suspense in a way that is also to be found in the paintings of Paul Nash. It looks back to Nash's *Wood on the Downs* (1930) (Aberdeen Art Gallery), whilst other paintings by Townsend look forward to Nash's Wittenham Clumps landscapes of the mid 1940s. Townsend's *Landscape (Bridge, Canterbury)* (1934) (cat. 14), for example, anticipates Nash's *Landscape of the Moon's Last Phase* (1944) (National Museums of Liverpool – The Walker).

Meanwhile in more limpid paintings of the following two or three years, in which forms are dissolved in light, it is hard not to be reminded of the work of Ivon Hitchens. Townsend's *The Nailborne* (1936) (cat. 15) may contain echoes of Hitchens's paintings of the preceding years, but works such as *The Pool at Well* (1936) (cat. 17), *Winter Landscape* (1935–6) (cat. 16) and *White Avenue at Sandwich* (1936) (cat. 18) anticipate Hitchens's work of the 1940s and even 1950s, although they often possess an ethereality that makes Hitchens's work seem heavier in comparison. In their combination of rootedness and dissolution, such paintings also enter into a dialogue with the Objective Abstraction of artists such as Rodrigo Moynihan, in which light is given weight and the perceptual basis all but disappears.

Townsend's paintings of the 1930s also show a translation of

2

Bower of Trees

Signed and dated lower right

Oil on canvas

1933

h 61 cm (24 in)

w 50.9 cm (20 in)

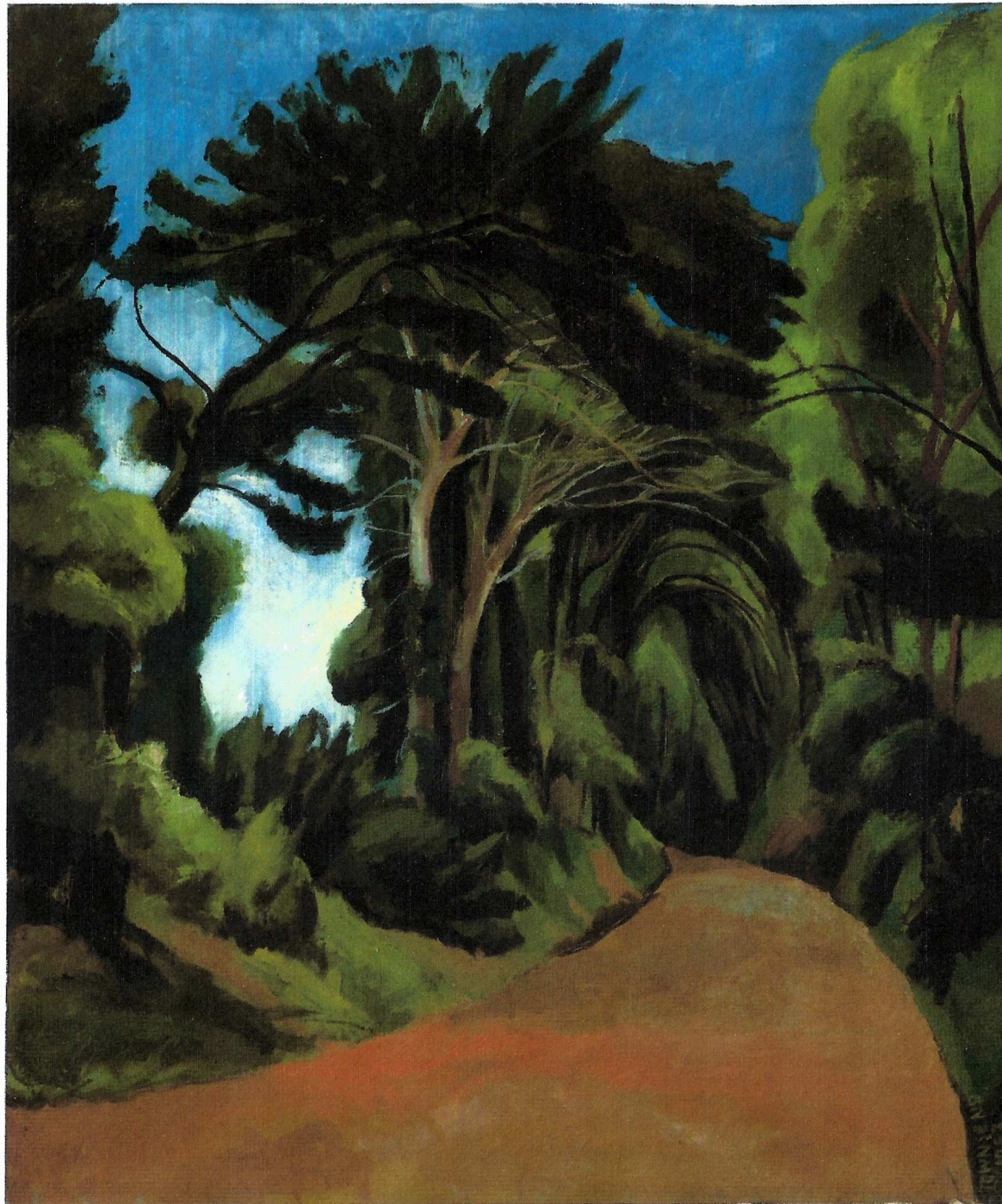
Literature

*William Townsend 1909–1973:
Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings
and Drawings*, Royal West of England
Academy, Bristol, 1978, cat. 4

Exhibitions

Paintings by William Townsend,
Wertheim Gallery, London, 1933
Sherbourne School for Girls, 1933

*William Townsend 1909–1973:
Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings
and Drawings*, Royal West of England
Academy, Bristol, (touring) 1978–80



Landscape
Watercolour on paper
1930s

h 25.5 cm (10 in)
w 35.5 cm (14 in)



4
Study for *Landscape beyond
the Garden Walls, Bridge*
Signed and dated lower left
Watercolour on paper
1936

h 25.1 cm (9 1/4 in)
w 35.3 cm (13 1/4 in)



landscape motifs into something more personal and even, at times, emotional in which there is surely an attempt to convey mood through colour. However, by the decade's end and through the changed priorities of the post-war years Townsend's painting became more measured and more tonal. The effect, however, is often rich, not spare. In two paintings of 1948, *Bayswater, Kildare Terrace* (cat. 29) and *Chiswick Reach I* (cat. 26), the subjects are bathed in the glow of the rising or falling sun. In contrast to the cool, lonely quality of Victor Pasmore's more silvered vision of the Thames at Hammersmith, these paintings have the warmth of nostalgia.

By 1950 Townsend had assumed a prominent place not just as the exemplary painter admired by critics, but as an art educator, alongside William Coldstream at Camberwell and then the Slade. But whereas Coldstream's production declined as the burden of bureaucracy grew,

Townsend continued actively to paint and draw, exhibiting regularly and widely, and it is intended that his paintings of the 1950s be presented in a subsequent exhibition at James Hyman Fine Art.

Today's art world is based on an infrastructure of critics, dealers, museums, curators and collectors who together shape a market and construct a place for the artist within it. Perhaps it has always been the case, but today it seems that without a dealer regularly putting the work before a public or facilitating museum displays and instigating press coverage it is all too easy for an artist to disappear from view. It is especially problematic when the artist only produced a small body of work or when few works remain in the Estate. In the case of William Townsend, as this exhibition demonstrates, the Artist's Estate does hold many of the artist's most important paintings, several of which are now for sale for the first time in thirty years. However, since Townsend's death in 1973, most of his work has been out of sight to a British audience, being with the artist's children in Canada and the United States.

It is, therefore, to be hoped that with the present exhibition and publication, with its illuminating essay by Frances Spalding, the first steps have been taken towards restoring Townsend to his place at the heart of the British art world of the mid twentieth century.

This is a timely moment as the arts of the mid twentieth century are being reassessed. With David Bomberg now valued alongside his students, such as Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff, the time is surely well over-due for Townsend, too, to be more fully appreciated not just for his role as a teacher but for his own achievements as a painter.

Biography

- 1909 Born 23 February in Wandsworth, London. Shortly after his birth the family moves to East Sussex. His mother is a keen supporter of Emaline Pankhurst. His father is a reluctant dentist by profession, but also a poet, man of letters, and author of a biography of Oliver Wendall. He encouraged his precocious son's passionate interest in the natural world and architecture, and fostered his capacity for objective observation and recording, qualities that served Townsend well throughout his life. While living in the village of Adversane, the family is visited by the writer Eleanor Farjeon, who recorded in an as yet unpublished memoir: 'I also found, among the tribe of children in Adversane, a ten-year-old schoolboy, young Will Townsend, who had inherited his father's frustrated artistry in another form. His fine pen produced not rhymes but feathery grasses, spiders-webs and dragonflies.'
- 1913 Starts school.
- 1919 In about 1919, his frequently kept notes and sketches coalesce into a daily journal which, except during the war years, he continued until a few days before his death. These journals are now in the library of University College London.
- 1926 Publication of *Joan's Door*, by Eleanor Farjeon (illustrated by Townsend). Enters the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London, then headed by Professor Henry Tonks. Contemporaries and close friends include Elinor Bellingham Smith, Tommy Carr, William Coldstream, Anthony Devas, Edgar Hubert, Gabriel Lopez, Nicolette Macnamara, Rodrigo Moynihan, Claude Rogers, and Geoffrey Tibble.
- 1930 Awarded the Orpen Bursary. Completes studies at the Slade, and wins the newly-inaugurated Wilson Steer Landscape Prize for *At Blashford* (now in the collection of the Slade School).
- 1931-3 Spends crucial nine months travelling, to Egypt, France, Italy and Tunisia. Makes paintings and drawings in Florence, Sienna, Rome, and various locations in Egypt and Tunisia.
- 1932 First solo exhibition, Bloomsbury Gallery, London.
- 1933 Makes first paintings of Canterbury Cathedral. Continues to live and work at his parents' home at Bridge, near Canterbury, whilst working as a book illustrator. Becomes infatuated with the ballet and attends first performances of plays, the symphonic repertoire, openings and similar cultural events, usually in London.
- 1935 Invited to contribute a work for an anti-fascist solidarity exhibition. Other artists include Duncan Grant, Paul Nash, Eric Gill, and Henry Moore.
- 1935-6 Increasingly involved in anti-fascist politics, initially in support of the Basques and Republicans in Spain, then against the rise of Nazism, and the activities of the British Union of Fascists.
- 1938 Invited to stand as Labour parliamentary candidate for Canterbury, but declines. Participates in anti-fascist rallies (including the Surrealist Demonstration in Trafalgar Square of 1 May 1938) until the outbreak of war.
- 1939 Townsend makes comparatively few figurative paintings during his career but at this time he shows people at work, perhaps influenced by fellow A.I.A. members.
- 1939-40 Completes sequence of A.R.P. (Air-Raid Precautions) drawings of Canterbury Cathedral (now in the collection of the Friends of Canterbury Cathedral).
- 1940 Makes prints for the A.I.A. 'Everyman Prints' series, intended to make affordable art for the public.
- 1941-6 War service as battery officer in Royal Artillery, later transferring to Army Education Corps, where he works with the musician Eric Fenby (formerly amanuensis to Frederick Delius), and paints his portrait.
- 1942 Marries Mary Baxter on July 4.
- 1945 Daughter Charlotte born on July 5. Teaches at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts on a part-time basis. Makes paintings of post-war London. In a letter to *The Times* (June, 1947), he and Coldstream call for the preservation of a number of Wren churches burnt out during the Blitz, including St Mary Aldermanbury and St Alban, Wood Street, which are the subjects of paintings by both. Occasional broadcasting and journalism on architecture and contemporary art.
- 1949 Family moves to Rolvenden, Kent and retains a small flat in London near the Slade. The landscape of the Weald of Kent will dominate his English painting for the rest of his life. Joins teaching staff at the Slade School of Fine Art upon William Coldstream's appointment as Slade Professor. Colleagues will include Stuart Brisley, Reg Butler, Bernard Cohen, Andrew Forge, Patrick George, Nikos Georgiadis, Robert Medley, Thomas Monnington, Claude Rogers, Ian Tregarthen Jenkin and Euan Uglow. Townsend will increasingly urge the recruitment of teachers active in media other than painting and sculpture, thus expanding the scope of the Slade offerings, which leads to the invitation for him to establish the post-graduate programme there in 1968. Begins a long series of drawings and paintings based on the different methods of stringing Kentish hop alleys.
- 1950 Elected to the London Group. First visit to Canada at the invitation of the Banff School of Fine Arts in Alberta (now the Banff Centre), in the Canadian Rockies, to teach the summer session. Returned to the school for eleven sessions until his death there in 1973. First paintings of Canadian landscapes and studies of mountains derived from sketches *en plein air* are made over the next two years in his studio in Kent. Son Nicholas born on 29 December.
- 1957 Appointed Senior Lecturer in Fine Arts, University College London. Death of his father. ← Lewis W. Townsend dentist
- 1962-3 Visiting professor in the Department of Fine Arts, University of Alberta, Edmonton. Lives in Edmonton for a year, teaching at the University of Alberta, and serves as consultant to the Canada Council and the National Gallery of Canada. Establishes the Leverhulme Canadian Painting Scholarship for five years with funds from the Leverhulme Trust in London to enable one graduate painting student each year to study in England (holders will include Toni Onley and Michael Morris).
- 1963 Invited to serve as co-selector of works for the first comprehensive exhibition of the works of William Coldstream, organised by the British Council.

river
Billingshurst

family moves
to Bridge?

- 1964 Effects the introduction of brother, Peter Townsend, to the publishers of *Studio*, which leads to Peter assuming the editorship of what will become *Studio International*.
- 1964-5 Tours Canada as sole juror to select the Sixth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting for the National Gallery of Canada, for which he writes the catalogue essay and notes.
- 1965 Selects works and writes catalogue introduction for International Exhibition of Paintings, Gibraltar Arts Festival.
- 1966 Appointed Head of Painting Division, Banff School of Fine Arts.
- 1967 Resigned from the London Group.
- 1968 Elected Fellow of University College London, and appointed Professor of Fine Art (personal chair), with responsibility for establishing and coordinating the post-graduate programme at the Slade School.
- 1970 Editor and co-author, 'Canadian Art Today' (*Studio International*, London and New York); first published a special issue of *Studio International*, then as stand-alone publication in hard-back.
- 1973 Dies on 4 July, in Banff, Alberta.
- Establishment of annual William Townsend Memorial Lecture at University College London (lecturers will include Norman Bryson, Reg Butler, Anthony Caro, Andrew Causey, Bernard Cohen, Richard Cork, Michael Craig-Martin, Thomas Crow, Richard Deacon, Robyn Denny, Andrew Forge, Anthony Gormley, Peter Greenaway, Richard Hamilton, Anthony Hill, Susan Hillier, Ivon Hitchens, Howard Hodgkin, Norbert Lynton, Kenneth Martin, Leslie Martin, Bruce McLean, Declan McGonagle, Cornelia Parker, Bridget Riley, Richard Rogers, Lawrence Weiner, Rachel Whiteread, and Richard Wollheim).
- Townsend Memorial Scholarship established at the Banff Centre.
- 1976 Extracts from the Journals published as *The Townsend Journals - An Artist's Record of his Times 1928-51*, edited by Andrew Forge (Tate Gallery, London, 1976).
- Retrospective exhibition at Tate Gallery, London.
- 2005 William Townsend Symposium, Clare Hall, Cambridge (chaired by Professor Dame Gillian Beer, participants include Professor David Cast, Professor Emeritus Bernard Cohen, Dr. James Hyman, and Dr. Frances Spalding).
- Alberta Art Foundation, Canada
Arts Council England
Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand
Banff Centre, Alberta, Canada
Benenden School, Kent
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
Bradford City Art Gallery
British Museum, London
Canterbury City Art Gallery
City Gallery, York
Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada
Friends of Canterbury Cathedral
Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Canada
Government Art Collection, U.K.
Government of Canada, Ottawa, Canada
The City Gallery, Leicester
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia
Nuffield Foundation
Red Deer Art Gallery, Alberta, Canada
Royal West of England Academy, Bristol
Salford Museum and Art Gallery
Simon Langton School, Canterbury
Tate Gallery, London
Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne
University College London
University of Alberta, Canada
University of Calgary, Canada
Victoria and Albert Museum, London
Yorkshire and Humber Regional Council
- Karyn Elizabeth Allen, Strata; and Charlotte Townsend-Gault, 'Getting it Right - William Townsend and Canada', catalogue essays in *William Townsend in Alberta*, Nickle Arts Museum, University of Calgary, 1982
- Alan Bowness, *William Townsend*, Tate Gallery, London, 1976
- Richard Calvocoressi, 'Sketches by the Way', *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 November 1976, p. 1465
- David Cast, 'Representing Reality: G.E. Moore, Tonks, Victor Pasmore and Others', *Word and Image Journal*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2000, pp. 290-310
- Andrew Forge, (introduction and editor), *The Townsend Journals: An Artist's Record of His Times 1928-51*, Tate Gallery, London, 1976 (very selectively edited extracts from four periods in the writer's life)
- Douglas Haynes, 'William Townsend', *Vanguard*, September 1983, pp. 50-51
- Christopher Neve, 'The Architecture of Hop Gardens', *Country Life*, 24 June 1976
- Christopher Neve, *William Townsend 1909-1973: Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings*, Royal West of England Academy, Bristol, 1978
- Christopher Neve, 'Seeing is Believing: William Townsend', *Unquiet Landscape*, London, 1990
- David Silcox, 'A Tribute to Will Townsend', *Arts Canada*, 1973
- Charlotte Townsend-Gault, 'Drawing on Canada', catalogue essay in *Drawing on Canada: William Townsend: Words and Works on Paper 1951-1973*, Strang Print Room, University College London, 1995

- 1952 Banff School of Fine Arts Gallery, Alberta
Dominion Gallery, Montreal, Québec
British Painting 1925-1950: Second Anthology, Arts Council of Great Britain
East Kent Art Society Annual Exhibition, Canterbury
Artists of Fame and Promise, Leicester Galleries, London
Bladon Gallery, Hampshire
Names to Remember, Roland Browse and Delbanco, London
- 1953 *East Kent Art Society Annual Exhibition*, Canterbury
Roland, Browse and Delbanco, London
Artists of Fame and Promise, Leicester Galleries, London
- 1954 *London Group 1954 Exhibition*, New Burlington Gallery, London
Russell Cotes Gallery, Bournemouth
- 1955 *Selections from London Group 1954*, Portsmouth
Arts Council Collection. A Selection from the Oil Paintings II, Arts Council of Great Britain
Slade Dinner Exhibition, Slade School, London
Artists of Fame and Promise, Leicester Galleries, London
London Group 1955 Exhibition, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London
Annual Exhibition, Royal West of England Academy, Bristol
- 1956 *New Year Exhibition*, Leicester Galleries, London
The Seasons, organised by the Contemporary Art Society, Tate Gallery, London
Artists of Fame and Promise, Leicester Galleries, London
London Group 1956 Exhibition, R. B. A. Galleries, London
Brighton Art Gallery
Annual Exhibition, Royal West of England Academy, Bristol
- 1957 *New Years Exhibition*, Leicester Galleries, London
John Moores Exhibition, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool
Group Exhibition of Kent Artists, Boulogne Roland, Browse and Delbanco, London
Artists of Fame and Promise II, Leicester Art Galleries, London
Midland Artists Group Gallery, Nottingham
Annual Exhibition, Royal West of England Academy, Bristol
- 1958 *New Years Exhibition*, Leicester Galleries, London
Artists of Fame and Promise Part I, Leicester Galleries, London
London Group 1958 Exhibition, R. B. A. Galleries, London
106th Annual Exhibition, Royal West of England Academy, Bristol
- 1959 *Spring Exhibition*, City Art Gallery, Bradford
Carlisle City Art Gallery
London Group Annual Exhibition, R. B. A. Galleries, London
- 1960 *Artists at Work*, Midland Group Gallery
Letchworth Museum and Art Gallery
Contemporary British Landscape, Arts Council of Great Britain, Cheltenham (touring exhibition)
- 1961 *Contemporary British Landscape*, Arts Council of Great Britain, (toured to Cheltenham Festival, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle on Tyne, Arts Council Gallery, Cambridge and Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester)
St. Pancras Arts Festival, St. Pancras Town Hall, London
- 1962 *British Painting 1930-1940*, Arts Council of Great Britain, Cardiff
Artists of Fame and Promise Part I, Leicester Galleries, London
Artists of Fame and Promise Part II, Leicester Galleries, London
- 1963 *East Kent Art Society*, Canterbury
- 1964 *Open Painting Exhibition*, Belfast
British Contemporary Artists, New Metropole Arts Centre, Folkestone
London Group 1964, Art Federation Galleries
London Group 1914-1964 Jubilee Exhibition, Tate Gallery
- 1964 *Open Painting Exhibition*, Arts Council of Northern Ireland
- 1965 *Pictures for Schools 1965*, South London Art Gallery, Camberwell
Focus on Drawings: Canada/Great Britain/Italy/Spain, Art Gallery of Toronto
- 1966 Bradford City Art Gallery
- 1970 *Twentieth Century Artists of Sussex and Kent*, Rye Art Gallery
- 1971 *Landscapes: A Personal Choice by Ian Tregarthen Jenkin*, Upper Grosvenor Galleries, London
Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by 21 Kent Artists, Maidstone Arts Festival, Maidstone Museum
- 1972 Kemp Town Gallery, Brighton
Annual Exhibition, Royal West of England Academy, Bristol
Painting, Sculpture and Drawing in Britain 1940-49, Arts Council of Great Britain, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (toured to City Art Gallery, Southampton, Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery, Carlisle, D.L.I. Museum and Arts Centre, Durham, City Art Gallery, Manchester, City Art Gallery, Bradford, Museum and Art Gallery, Aberdeen)
- 1977 *Painting In Britain 1952-77*, Royal Academy of Arts, London
- 1978 *Everything but the Kitchen Sink*, Campbell and Franks Gallery, London
- 2005 *A Picture of Britain*, Tate Britain, London
- 2006 *Drawings from the Slade*, shown at the Watercolours & Drawings Fair 2006, Royal Academy of Arts, London



12

Walled Gardens at Bridge

Signed lower right

Oil on canvas

c.1934

h 63.5 cm (25 in)

w 76.3 cm (30 in)

Literature

*William Townsend 1909–1973:
Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings and
Drawings*, Royal West of England
Academy, Bristol, 1978, cat. 6

Exhibitions

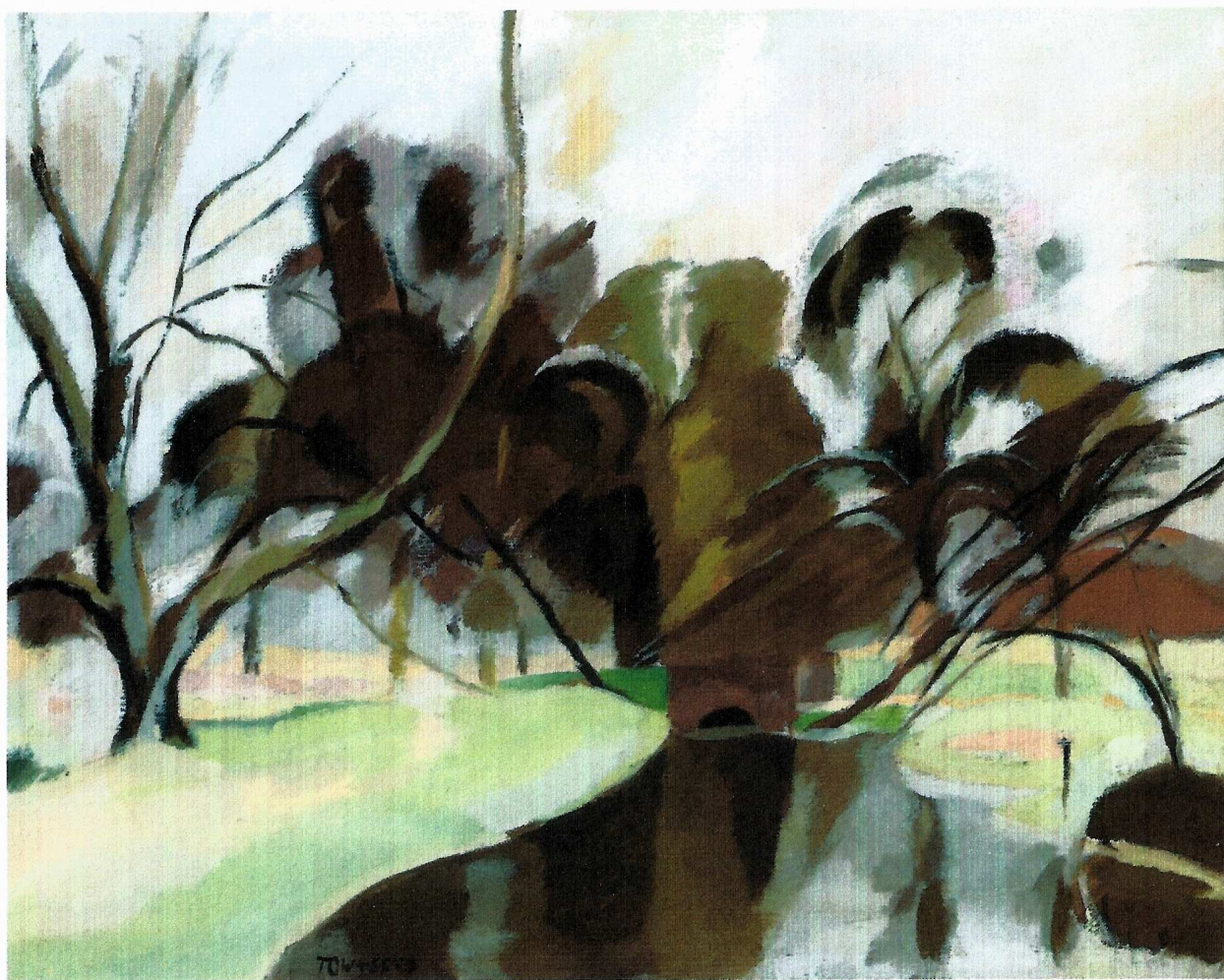
*William Townsend 1909–1973:
Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings and
Drawings*, Royal West of England
Academy, Bristol, 1978–80



13
*Landscape Beyond the Garden Walls,
Bridge*
Signed lower right
Oil on canvas
1936

Literature
*William Townsend 1909–1973:
Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings and
Drawings*, Royal West of England
Academy, Bristol, 1978, cat. 12

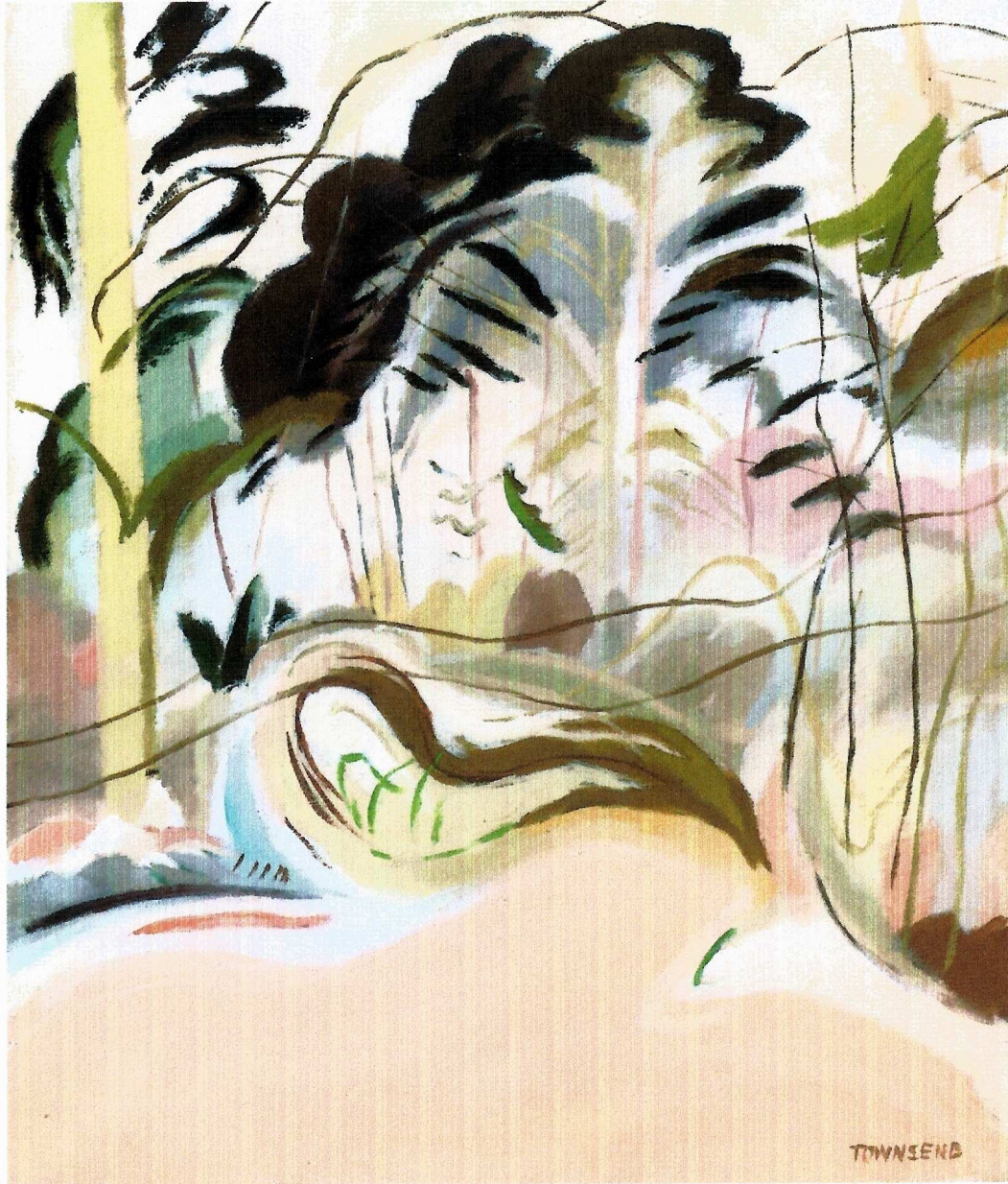
Exhibitions
*William Townsend 1909–1973:
Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings and
Drawings*, Royal West of England
Academy, Bristol, 1978–80



15
The Nailbourne
Signed lower centre
Oil on canvas
1936

Exhibitions
Landscapes by 20th Century Painters,
Renaissance Gallery, London, 1937

h 50.9 cm (20 in) × 17
w 31.5 cm (12 in)



20
Bifrons Plantation, In the Wood
Signed lower right
Oil on canvas
1936

h 61.1 cm (24 in)
w 50.9 cm (20 in)

Hop Garden, Spring
Signed lower right
Oil on canvas
1951

h 61 cm (24 in)
w 50.9 cm (20 in)

Literature

Andrew Forge, (introduction and editor),
*The Townsend Journals: An Artist's
Record of His Times 1928-51*, Tate
Gallery, London, 1976, illustrated p.91
(entitled 'Hop Alleys')

*William Townsend 1909-1973:
Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings and
Drawings*, Royal West of England
Academy, Bristol, 1978, cat. 37

Exhibitions

The English Scene - Paintings of 300 Years,
Roland, Browse and Delbanco, London,
1951

*London Group: Contemporary Painting,
Drawings and Sculpture*, New Burlington
Galleries, 1951

Banff School of Fine Arts Gallery,
Alberta, 1952

Dominion Gallery, Montreal, Quebec, 1952

*William Townsend 1909-1973:
Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings and
Drawings*, Royal West of England
Academy, Bristol, 1978-80



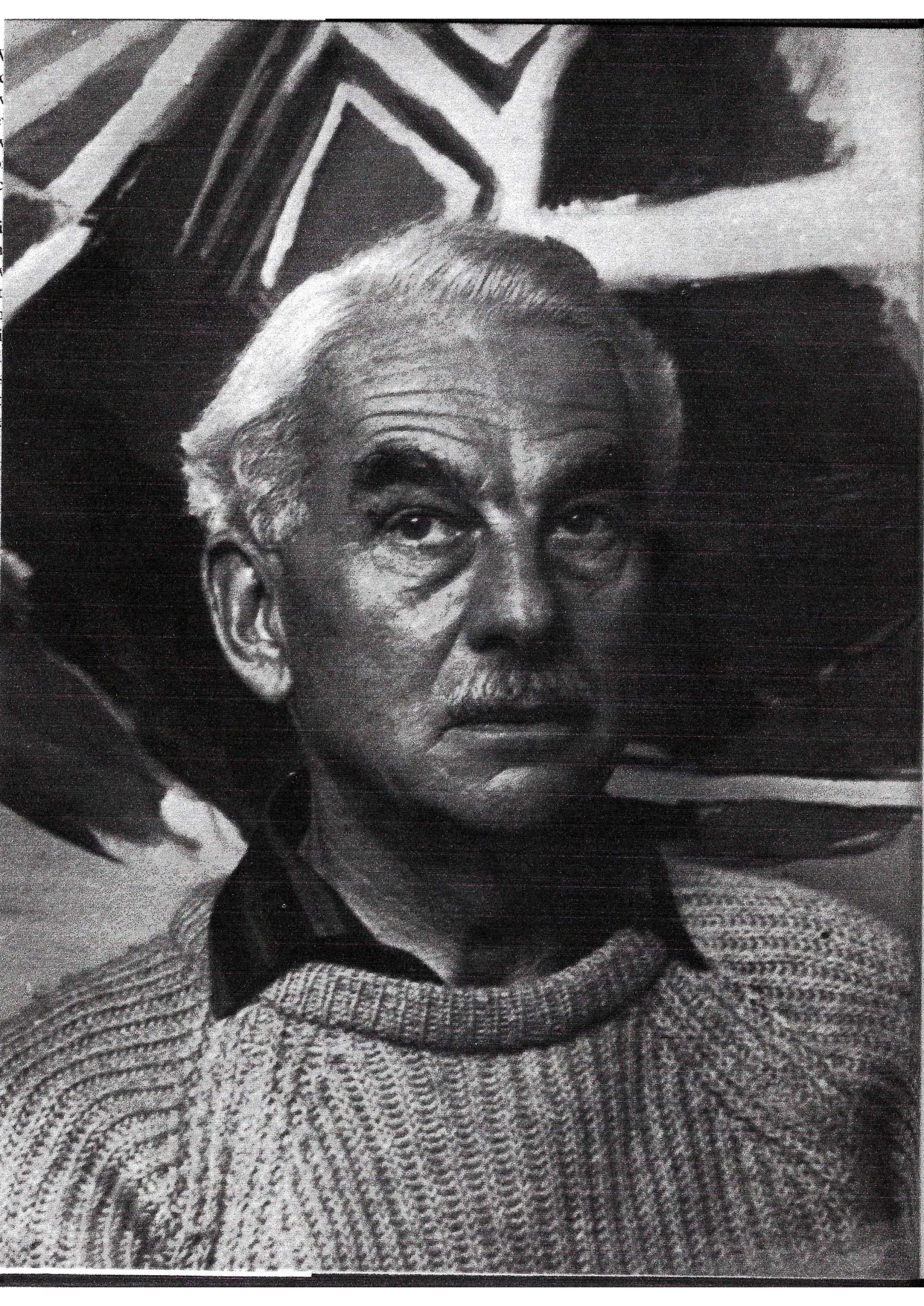
excerpts from :

Edited by Andrew Forge

THE TOWNSEND JOURNALS

An artist's record of his times 1928-51

Tate Gallery 1976



William Townsend 1909-1973

William Townsend died suddenly in Canada in the summer of 1973. Besides a considerable body of painting, he left behind him a vast quantity of writing, most of which had never been seen by anyone but himself.

An entry in one of his journals from the early fifties records how, while helping his parents move house, he had discovered boxes and boxes of old papers and notebooks from his childhood. Even he is astonished at their quantity and variety: illustrated descriptions of parish churches, notes on the geology of East Kent, notes on place names, on comparative philology, on Russian Grammar, on bird songs, painting-by-painting reviews of the Royal Academy Summer Show. 'What a diligent boy I was!' he exclaims. This diligent and omnivorous interest persisted remarkably, for the journal in which the discovery is recorded was part of a daily record that he kept with few interruptions from his school days until the end of his life. One can only wonder at the self-discipline and the inner pressure which took him to his desk night after night, whatever the exertions of the day, whether in the studio, or teaching or in a full social life. Some years ago he had realised that this journal was beginning to assume an historic character. He deposited the existing volumes in the Library of University College, London with instructions that it was not to be made generally available until twenty years after his death. At the same time he asked the present writer to be responsible for a first reading and to make recommendations to Charlotte Townsend, his daughter and heir, about publication from it. This was made possible by a generous grant from the Leverhulme Foundation.

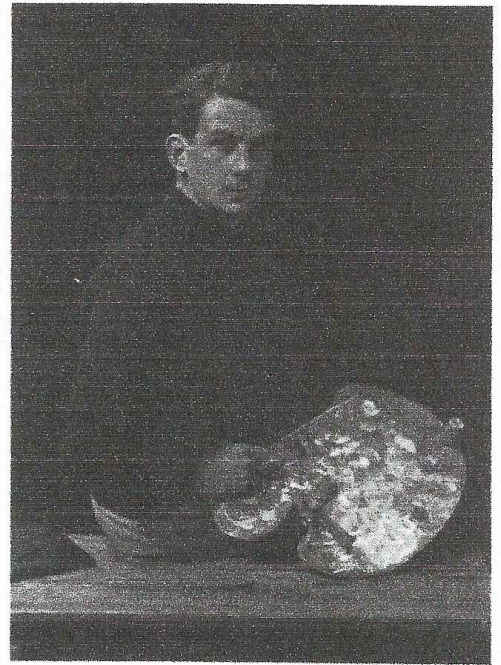
In total the journal runs to nearly fifty volumes of manuscript, mostly in hard-covered notebooks of 8 × 5 in. There must be well over two-and-a-half million words. The earliest entries tend to be a combination of boyish accounts of school life and achievement with highly detailed descriptions of things seen. His two passions are nature and architecture and in these he is evidently much encouraged by his father Lewis Townsend, a dentist and a man of letters *manqué*, a poet and the author of a successful biography of Oliver Wendell Holmes. In much of the early writing one has the sense of a task undertaken to gratify certain stringent parental demands.

Father and eldest son, with or without the rest of the family, were inveterate walkers, birdwatchers, antiquarians, botanists, tireless at the highest reaches of sight-seeing. There were long weekend walks through the countryside of East Kent in which not a nest goes unidentified nor a cottage undated. There were also meticulously planned holidays in Nor-



left
Lewis W. Townsend, c. 1931

right
William Townsend, c. 1933



mandy, Wales, Ireland, Brighton, Bath, during which, it seems, every quarter of an hour is accounted for. The first volumes are almost entirely given to descriptions of places seen. The discipline of this kind of writing must have helped to shape his formidable visual memory. It is as though he can play the day over to himself like a film. The painter's immediacy of apprehension combines with the antiquarian's sense of a layered past. And at his best his descriptive writing is distinguished not only in its clarity and intelligence but by a certain dry vividness from which marvellous images suddenly flash out, as when he recalls his first impression of Milan Cathedral as 'a hillside of dead pines', or tells himself that provincial England is 'like a sleepy pear'.

He went to the Slade in the autumn of 1926, his time there coinciding with the last years of Professor Tonks' regime. It was here that he made the essential friendships of his life; with Claude Rogers, William Coldstream, Geoffrey Tibble, Edgar Hubert, Elinor Bellingham-Smith, Anthony Devas, Rodrigo Moynihan, Gabriel Lopez and many others. Two experiences occur during this time which were to have a lasting effect on him. One was nearly nine months of travel abroad, first in Egypt where he was the guest of a fellow Slade student called Yousef, and almost immediately afterwards in France, Italy and Tunisia in the company of a retired naval commander who was an amateur painter. His record of these travels stands as a whole and there seemed to be no point in breaking into it in making the present selection. The second crucial experience was the death by suicide of one of his closest friends, the Colombian Gabriel Lopez. Townsend profoundly admired his painting and his poetry, diametrically different from his own. He had been with him a great deal during the last months of his

WILLIAM TOWNSEND

life and his death affected him deeply. The diaries come to an abrupt stop a few days after Lopez's death. When they start again two years later, we find him back in Canterbury, helping his father keep the accounts for his practice.

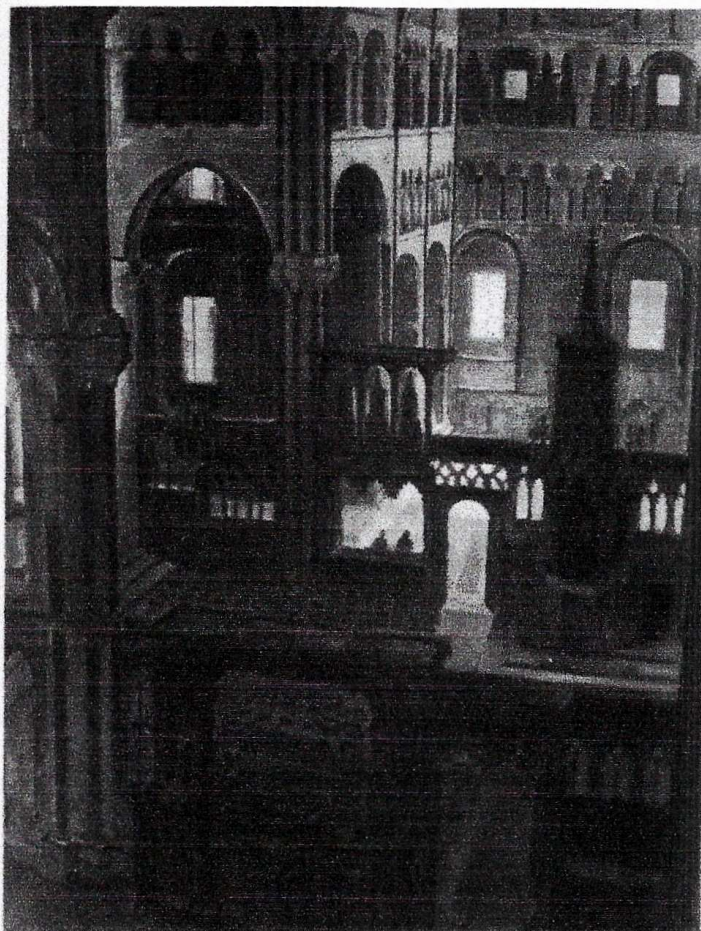
Through literary friends of his father's, particularly Eleanor Farjeon, Townsend had built up several connections with publishers and he had begun to find work illustrating books and designing jackets. He had hoped



Group at the Slade, Summer 1929. Left to right: Devas, Clough, Kitchener, Boxall, Shephard, Lopez, -, Scroggie, -, Hunt, Townsend, -



Fancy dress dance at the Yorkshire Grey February 1932. Back row: Nancy Sharp, William Coldstream, Rodrigo Moynihan, far right; Claude Rogers. Front: left side; Edgar Hubert, George Charlton, Caitlin Macnamara, right side; Vivien John, Geoffrey Tibble



left
William Townsend, 'Canterbury'
1946-7



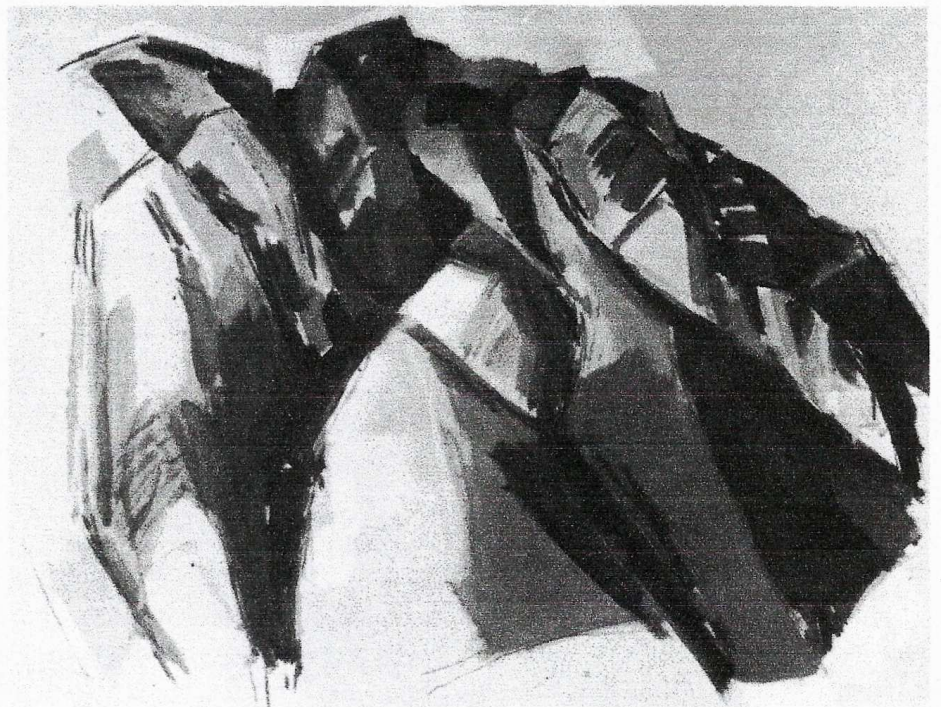
right
William Townsend, 'Hop Alleys'
1951-2. Tate Gallery

to be able to survive on this in London but it was never a regular living. His life in Canterbury has the qualities of an exile, broken only by occasional visits to London to chase publishers, see exhibitions and keep up with his friends. These are melancholy years. He sees himself being slowly brought down by provincial life, losing contact with the people that mean most to him, unable to free himself from the demands of his father, on whom he is, in any case, dependent. He develops a passion for the ballet, blowing his savings and paying a balletomane's court to Danilova and Toumanova in their prime. And as the decade advances, he becomes increasingly drawn into left wing politics, the local Labour Party, the League of Nations Union, the W.E.A., Arms For Spain. Both the Abyssinian conflict and the Spanish Civil War are recorded almost daily, as are the Munich Crisis and the events leading to September 1939. He watches his friends somewhat at a distance, recording with intense feeling each visit and each nuance of aesthetic and political opinion. He is a witness from the wings of their first successes: Devas' rise as a fashionable portrait painter, the short-lived and daring experiments in informal abstraction of Tibble and Moynihan, the founding of the Euston Road School by Rogers and Coldstream and their swift *reclâme* along with Pasmore and Graham Bell in

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the years immediately before the war.

He joins the army in 1941 and is demobilised five years later, having become a staff captain with the Army School of Education. This period is not recorded in the journals. When he picks up civilian life and returns to writing, he is married, Charlotte is born and he is a teacher at Camberwell School of Art, where William Johnstone was reassembling the people who had been connected with the Euston Road School before the war. From this point on his life is centred on art schools, at Camberwell and then at the Slade where he goes with Coldstream in the autumn of 1949. From 1951 onwards he makes regular visits to Canada where he also teaches.



William Townsend, 'Hedley Mountain'
1963 *Hazel Strouts*

Read as a whole the journals yield an extraordinary picture of a life in both its private and its public dimensions. It is not possible yet to do complete justice to this picture in publication, for to do this would mean to observe a balance between the inner and the outer chronicle. Scores of people are mentioned in these pages and although I do not think that he would have minded the publication of his professional acidities, I know that he would not have wanted confidences abused nor feelings needlessly hurt. So any selection now can only give a partial impression of the scope of the journals and of their final importance – that importance stemming, as I have suggested, from their inclusiveness. The document as a whole is many things: a profoundly honest confession; an acute and sophisticated account of a professional career, with all the gossip and inside talk that implies; it is a succession of passionately detailed and feeling accounts of places and above all buildings seen; it is the critique of an intelligent and

humane man upon his times. In selecting these extracts, which amount to the merest tip of an iceberg, I have concentrated on three periods which seem to me to be of the greatest historical interest: his student years, the late thirties and the first year of the war, and the years 1946 to 1951. I have not included anything after these for a variety of reasons. Later entries tend increasingly to be about day-to-day matters at the Slade – conversations with students, college politics, the somewhat repetitive appointments of academic life. All this is fascinating to anyone involved in this world but of limited general interest. These are also the years of his Canadian visits.

He was first invited there to teach at the summer session of the Banff School of Fine Art. It was the first time that he had crossed the Atlantic and all his skills as an observer are brought out to the full. He is learning a new landscape with its own fauna and flora, all of which have to be worked up and recorded. He is learning a new culture, new kinds of cities, new styles of reference. And of course, he is meeting scores of new people and looking at a lot of unfamiliar art. As visit follows visit he begins to understand Canadian life in greater depth and finally even to become a part of it. All his life he had been fascinated by the special problems posed by the relationship of English art to the Continent. Now in Canada he was to encounter similar problems in new terms. He became something of a spokesman for Canadian art and culture and as the journals go on from the first visit to the end, a remarkably rounded picture emerges of a crucial period. But the effect stands as a whole. There seemed to be no point in extracting sections whose real interest lies in their contribution to an organic account, separate to a large extent, from his preoccupations at home.

Finally, during the last few years there is a change in the nature of the entries themselves. The style becomes more elliptical, less reflective, and private and public matters are more sharply intercut. When the time is right for more inclusive publication, such changes of style will fall meaningfully into place. I cannot see that they would here.

One strand which is never dropped in the entire text is his commentary upon his own painting. Whatever else he was involved in, however multifarious his interests, the central concern was always his studio. And yet, like so many artists in this country, there is something tentative in his relationship to it. Perhaps in the end, too much time was spent thinking about it at a distance from a productive *milieu*, his time broken by insecurity, war, too much teaching, his hold on it weakened by lack of recognition. He had committed himself early to a quiet position. Any form of extremism was foreign to his judicious observer's temperament, and he was not an innovator. However, the best of his painting reflects those qualities of balance, sensitivity, and acute economical observation which were essential to him, and in some of the Kentish hop garden series and the cityscapes of Edmonton, these qualities are refined to a pitch which approaches perfection.

me that Roland is the only one of us who has joined up – anti aircraft. Camouflage he says is hopeless. He himself is finding it very difficult to do nothing and impossible to paint . . .

Then I rang up Stephen Bone. He confirmed my general idea of the chances of artists at the moment. He also is in the know about the M. of Information and gave me the address; but that scheme is still only in embryo.

9 September 1939



Hop-pickers on their way to Kent,
Radio Times Hulton Picture Library

Most of the morning went in tracking down the Ministry of Information; from one government building I was sent to another, no one was sure where it was, or even knew sometimes that there was such a Ministry. However I did find it, after calling at the Home Office and learning that its location had changed overnight. It is now at the Senate House of the University, but they were no longer giving out posts, nor even considering applications . . .

Down to Canterbury in the afternoon. The train crowded, and the platforms at Tonbridge and other stations packed with hop-pickers starting the season. Two young soldiers opposite me; they were perfectly happy but had no idea of what was happening to them; for the last few days they had been moved about from place to place doing nothing, now on their way to Shorncliffe to guard the hospital; possibly going to Egypt. There was a pleasant friendly feeling among the people in the compartment; we chatted away without any violence of feeling or opinion. Concern for the Poles and hope that something will be done quickly to relieve the pressure on them is the general sentiment at the moment. People are troubled or bewildered by the slow start on the Western Front . . . even here papers that had no sympathy for Madrid's defenders are recalling the glorious memory of that city and splashing its slogan 'they shall not pass'. The slogans of the Spanish war are no doubt appropriate enough in Poland but it is curious to find them now so approved by the enemies of the Republic, just as it is curious to think of Ward Price leading the *Daily Mail* against German fascism when a few days ago his books were boosted by the B.U.F. in their bookshops, and the *Mail* and *Express* had no use for a peace front against aggression.

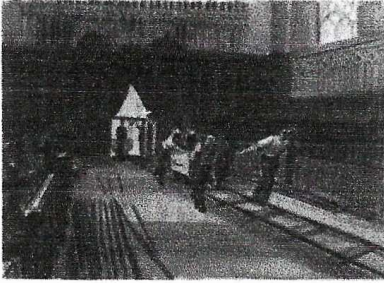
11 September 1939

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A telegram from Anthony asking me to meet him for lunch. Up to town by the morning train which was very crowded – the service is very reduced from to-day and the trains stop all over the place and are slower so I did not reach London until after twelve. Walked round Bedford St. and that quarter to see what publishers looked like staying in town and which had shut up. Most of them still there so far, but Gollancz closed down except for enquiries; the communist bookshop next door, displaying the *Daily*

* Devas, artist

THE WAR



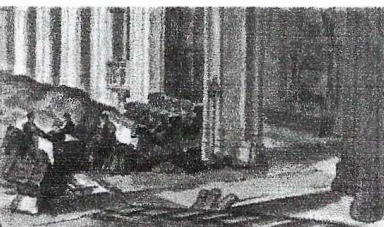
Worker in separate sheets, and various photographs and pronouncements, was the only window lively enough to attract a group of people. *Verve* and the lovely reproductions in Zwemmer's windows still spread out for us behind the gummed lattice... still plenty of people to hang round the second-hand shelves in Charing X road, and books ought to sell better than ever with no competition or distractions. Nothing else worth while is open in London - no theatres, cinemas, exhibitions, galleries, museums, no children and no friends left.



Met Anthony in Charlotte St, and went with him to Bertorelli's. Nicolette of course was there. Igor and his sister and two other girls and Leigh Ashton who is high up in the Ministry of Information and from whom Anthony was hoping much. But his hopes were drowned in a moment, for he told us there are hundreds of applicants at the Ministry; all are being turned away and that the personnel sufficient for present needs was carefully picked months ago. Leigh Ashton said he was certain the war was coming three months ago, never had any doubt afterwards, he is convinced that the ratification of the Russo-German pact - not the signing - precipitated the war, but I was astonished to hear him say that he thought Russia would come in against us in the end, against Poland at least, and take part of the Polish territory. I don't know where any evidence exists for such an expectation . . . But how pleasant it was to be there at lunch with old friends and others, people I liked and women charming to look at, talking calmly. One of the most depressing things to me is the de-centralisation from London, which will no longer be the place where it was always easy to meet many friends and pick up one's interests and news. Now scattered all over England and without the means of travelling easily from one to the other - with no art centre anywhere. Now co-operation is so badly needed to help anything of the arts to survive; in peace time such de-centralisation would be very welcome.



Anthony and Nicolette are very shattered; still suffering from the first horror and hating the world they live in; and people too, particularly those who have been stimulated by the excitement to feel alive almost for the first time.



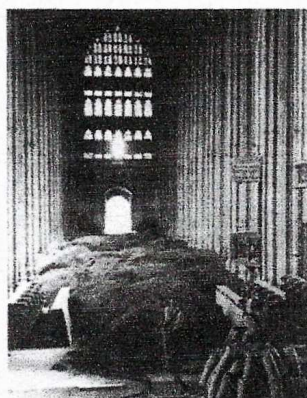
Anthony is going to register as a C.O. when called up if he is not able to get into a job before then. We both agreed in any case that it was a mistake to think of tying ourselves up in the army before we had to. At the moment all schemes for artists are only sketched out and there seems no place for us in the war system but I don't think this will last for ever. I think we should wait and really try to fit in instead of allowing the difficulties to pull us down and force us where we might not be doing the best job even from the military point of view . . .

I came home by the 5.15 train - there are only two evening trains to Canterbury now; from to-day half the service, and late journeys will be in the dark with only the most miserable mockery of a light from the ceiling of

William Townsend, A. R. P. drawings of Canterbury Cathedral

each compartment. No children who survive this war should ever be afraid of the dark again; but that is poor compensation for no bright streets and toy shops, circuses or fireworks or trains blazing by.

12 September 1939



Canterbury Cathedral

The cathedral nave is full of earth, lorries are rumbling in and shooting cartloads down on the floor and now there is a wilderness four or five feet deep between the pillars from the west door to the choir steps. Services are going to be held in the crypt which is also to serve as an air-raid shelter and the earth is destined to form a blanket in the choir above the crypt vaults. Down below the crypt is being strengthened with props and beams like a mine and between the columns there are set in position huge earth filled crates forming it into separate compartments darkly and solidly closed in. Back to the catacombs. The old glass has gone and the windows are boarded up, the Black Prince is hidden behind a barricade of sandbags; workmen are everywhere filling bags and carrying them, hammering beams and shifting earth. I heard a good many critics of the Dean for this preparation; from the old verger who thought it was witness to a lack of faith in God who could protect his own house (though he thoroughly approved the removal of the glass, which had happened also in the last war when popular old Dean Wace had ordered it), to the ladies of Canterbury shrieking 'why on earth don't they get rid of the Dean', glad of another opportunity of attacking him. I think he is quite right to do all he can to protect people, once he has decided and others have agreed that the crypt shall be an official shelter; and then God may protect his house of course, but the house belongs too to those without faith as well as those with faith; to those who remember Rheims and the German air force in the Spanish war which did not trouble to spare cathedrals if they were in the way.



Dean of Canterbury, photograph by Fisk-Moore Studios

Met John Austen at Beazley's. He is quite knocked off his feet, ready he says to sign a separate peace on any terms at any moment. Beazley is braver and I strongly supported the idea of holding a mixed exhibition in his gallery as soon as possible as a gesture of belief in the things we have always held to be important and which are certainly a part of what we are meaning to fight for, and so should go on as long as possible. Not much point in growing as spiritually dark as a fascist country in order to defeat one.

Started making some drawings of the goings-on in the Cathedral. It is going to be a long time before any of us get jobs where we shall be paid to do what we want to do and could do well.

26 October 1939

. . . At five I was in Piccadilly, and from there I walked to Mecklenburgh Square. It is the changes to notice, not the sights anyone would come to London to see, which are the interest to-day; the prostitutes in the turnings off Bond St. standing at the corners so much earlier, the usual pairs, now in

arrived at the house and who drove off the colonel and his men with indignity. However in the meantime the L.D.V. had rummaged through the house, had come across the transcription of Goya etchings with anti-fascist and Spanish slogans on them which Rodrigo^{*} had done for the Spanish war campaigns and made off with them, and they are now being summoned to apologize and return the pictures. If they will not do this Elinor says they may sue them for housebreaking and stealing pictures! Elinor says she has black looks from the villagers, baulked of their prey, which will not be lightened by the knowledge that the proposed victim has been entrusted by the air ministry with a confidential commission.

* Moxihan-artist

21 September 1940

A raid warning was given just as we left Tunbridge Wells, and we had reached Ashford before the all-clear. In the car we could hear nothing of the planes, nor see them but we could calculate very well their course from the direction of the upturned faces of the little groups of men and women standing in the village streets, by the roadside, or in knots about cottage gates. It was odd driving through this countryside which I know so well and having the impression that it had suddenly become more thickly peopled. I have never seen so many folk about on these roads, nobody can have taken shelter; but all had stepped outside to watch the planes. Mothers were holding up their babies even at the garden fences to point out the planes in the sky; we seemed to be the only ones indifferent to what was above. Goudhurst Street was a wonderful sight. The hill was crowded with folk, clusters of hop-pickers and groups of soldiers, and on the terrace outside the pub at the top the benches were black with rows of drinkers, and the pub at the bottom seemed even fuller, the drinkers jammed in the doorway and overflowing into the paved triangle in front of the house. It was a perfect Rowlandson village for the day: more packed with flirting girls and toppers than you could imagine anywhere but in his drawings: and for a mile of two beyond the village in both directions girls, in twos and threes, dressed in their smartest, were making their way in.

11 October 1940

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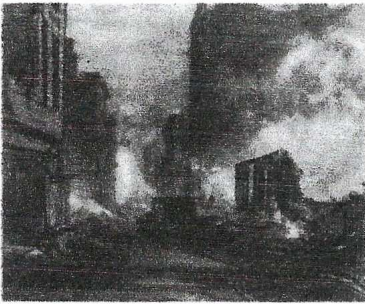
Father had promised to come home this afternoon for me to begin a portrait and I had just finished stretching the canvas and was at lunch when he suddenly appeared to tell us that there had been a bomb in Burgate St. half an hour before. He had been attending a patient and all his windows had blown in; the patient was still waiting there and he rushed across the road to catch the next bus to Canterbury. There was something very touching in the thought of this conscientiousness and energy kept up after a bad shock; I thought so as I watched him – a frail little man – running across the road to the bus. I said to Mother as we sat down again, 'It is hard luck to be worried all the time, with half his practice gone, and then to be nearly

* Bridge

THE WAR



Bombed Canterbury, photograph by Fisk-Moore Studios



Uden, 'Canterbury High Street the morning after the Blitz'

bombed out twice in a few weeks' and she burst into tears; and I found it difficult not to do so myself in the curious emotion and relief of survival. One feels saved oneself as well as the possible victim. I went into Canterbury. There was a rope across the street and beyond it a crowd of men in tin helmets busy over a pile of wreckage in the roadway, grey dusty beams and rubble; on one side, the side of father's surgery a huge gap where Williams the furriers proud new shop had stood and Carver and Staniforths' bookshop; both now heaps of spiky rubbish with men clambering over, prising up shards and timber, tossing them into the street with a clatter and a puff of plaster dust. Beyond the scarred side wall of Stephenson's, the tailors, and the stripped front and the jagged hole of the shop below; this side the gap a torn upper floor hanging into the street and a comb of rafters from the roof cocked above it, in that pile disappeared the bookshop which I never failed to visit when I was in the town, where I was the first customer, where I had bought my books and browsed over many unread, where only yesterday I went in to mention Edmond's poems, to get 'Horizon'; and in that pile Miss Carver had been killed, Miss Staniforth gravely injured, and there was not even a book to be seen. The furrier and his customers were dead too; a woman who had been stepping from her car on the opposite side of the street was killed too; old Mr Duker the watchmaker dragged covered with rubbish but only bruised from the ruin of his shop; all people our familiars for years, their business our daily interest and this group of buildings our centre in Canterbury. On the other side of the road was the tea shop where we lunched and took our friends to coffee, the Beazley's Gallery where I held my water colour shows, where three of my drawings for Jane were this day in the window; the second-hand book shop; the pub at the corner of the lane where Beazley slipped in for his drinks, and I sometimes too with Tim Jordan - all now with the fronts blown in and knocked awry, with scars and cuts all over and clumps of tiles jolted loose on the roofs. I was allowed past the rope when I had told my name and business; all Father's windows had been blown in, the glass had scattered everywhere about the rooms, on floors and furniture, followed by dust and plaster chips, so that it looked like a house left by its owners and abandoned for ten years to wind and weather. Father was restless and could think of nothing to do, so I started on to clearing up, sweeping first everything on to the floor, shaking the glass off the carpets and taking them out to the garden at the back to be swept, collecting the loose panes that might still fall from the windows; then men appeared to nail muslin and boards across the windows, we had a cup of tea sent in and looked a little more calmly about. Father had to go to see an old patient, and as we walked up to the garage to get into a taxi I saw Mr Beazley, of the gallery, across the road, being helped along by a young man. His clothes were indescribably creased and covered with white dust and pieces of wood and plaster, his face was flaccid, pale, like suet, and his eyes looked tiny, so pitifully weak

and watery. He used to be the very type of prosperous looking, stout, confident and comfortable bourgeois, pleased with his appearance, the world and his place in it. He had just been to take Miss Carver's body to the mortuary. 'I wish it had been me. I wish it had been me', he said in a strange, whimpering little voice as though it was all he had left in the world, a hopeless wish, and he was noticing nothing else. Then he shuffled on, leaning on his companion's arm. Miss C. had been his secretary in Paris, his companion for thirty years; once his mistress I always supposed.

It was a wonderful night; the moon almost full again, quite clear and still; the siren came clearly to us from Canterbury. After supper Father and I walked a little way up Bridge Hill as we usually do; and suddenly heard two clattering reports of bombs between us and Canterbury. Father started to run home and I with him, a thing neither of would have done yesterday – not for so distant a report, hard though it came through the stillness of the night . . .



Bombed Canterbury, *photograph by Fisk-Moore Studios*