

EARLSDON ARTISTS

The following article was kindly supplied by local Earlsdon historian Mary Montes.

The recent publication of a book illustrating the art of Sidney Bunney reminded me what a gifted artist he was, but it also reminded me that he was one of the many artists, professional or amateur, who have lived, or indeed are living now, in Earlsdon.

The first one of these that I have been able to trace is John Piggott, son of William Piggott, a boot manufacturer who had his business at 4, Smithford Street on the corner of Broadgate. In the year 1861, according to the census return, John, aged 16 and his family were living at the top of Moor Street, on the corner of what was then Cromwell Street (now Berkeley Road South). In 1867, at the opening of the new Market Hall, celebrated by a Manufacturing, Industrial and Arts Exhibition, John exhibited two paintings, one entitled 'Jew's Harp, a Night Study' and the other 'The Sluggard'. According to the next census in 1871, he is described as a landscape painter, so was now making his art his profession. He left home in about 1874, moving to Brunswick Street, Leamington, possibly on his marriage. Before his early death there in 1882, he exhibited a landscape painting entitled 'Dread Winter' at the Royal Academy, and one at Birmingham Society of Arts which included rural scenes, still life and genre paintings. Although he is listed in a catalogue of Birmingham and West Midlands artists of the 19th century, unfortunately I have been unable to track down any of his paintings.

At least there is one picture extant of our next artist, Herbert

Rylance, one with which we are familiar - the Earlsdon Cross Roads in about 1886. It was acquired by the Waddington family and given by them to the Herbert Art Gallery, by whose permission we are able to reproduce it. Whether it was one of many paintings, or whether it was a 'one off' we don't know; it is the only example we have, and is such a delightful picture, showing considerable talent for a boy of 16 as he then was, that surely he went on to paint more.

Herbert was born in Providence Street in 1870, son of William Rylance, a watch motion polisher, to whom, when he was 14, Herbert was apprenticed. Possibly because of the failing watch making trade, the family left Providence Street in 1894 and we lose sight of him. It would be interesting to hear what happened to him subsequently - does anyone know?

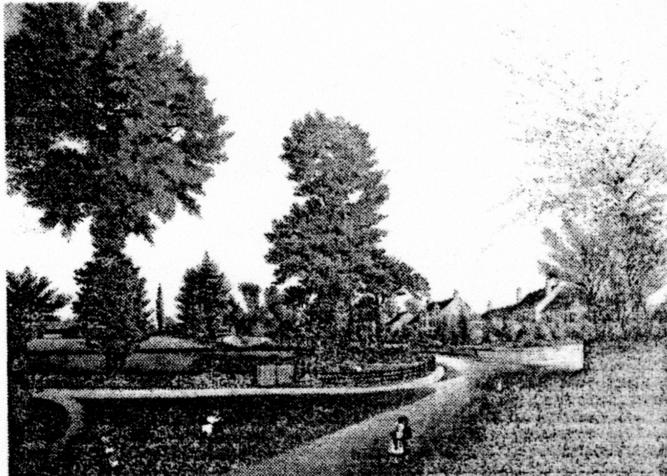
Now an artist, Mr Sidney Bunney, of whose output we have many examples, most of which are in the Herbert Art Gallery, donated by his son. A collection of his delightful watercolours of Coventry, including several of the Earlsdon area, has been published by the Evening Telegraph. The book is beautifully produced, and with a comprehensive text by Keith Draper, it is a must for every Coventrian. Most of the scenes are miniatures sketched by Mr Bunney as

he strolled round the city from the time that he was studying at the Coventry School of Art from 1892 until his death in 1928.

In the opinion of Ron Clarke of the Herbert Art Gallery, although his early work is "charming but naïve, his later work shows a surprising maturity and mastery that prove him to be a true artist". But I find that the main attraction of his paintings is a unique glimpse of the Coventry of a time long past, delightfully and sensitively portrayed.

Born in Coventry, Mr Bunney settled in Earlsdon on his marriage to a local girl, Eliza Monk in 1905 in Albany Road, No 154, which he named 'Newlyn', when the houses were newly built. It was there that his two children were born and where he died 23 years later in 1928.

Since Bunney's time of course, there have been many other local artists, one of my favourites, although thought to have been too stylistic by some critics, was Robert Overy, then living in Broadway. He was extremely gifted, not only as an artist, but as a singer - he sang in the Cathedral choir for many years - also a poet. He would deny that he was



particularly gifted, saying that his ability had little to do with talent, but a great deal to do with hard work! He died in 1989, his pleasant, cheery face and friendly manner sadly missed by all who knew him.

And today we have an abundance of gifted artists in the area, both amateur and professional; there is Nancy Upshall for instance, whose beautiful paintings we sadly rarely get the opportunity to see; there is Reg Farmer who, with his late wife May has regularly had exhibitions of work in the Architect's display building opposite the Council House and in Earlsdon Library. Their work, particularly May's, makes use of different media, although Reg is obviously happier with water colours.

It would be nice to see more of Maureen Seidl's work - it is some years since we saw an exhibition of her highly talented, imaginative and sensitive paintings, and I certainly look forward to seeing more of Cyril Hearn's work after his recent exhibition in St Barbara's Church.

These are just a few of the artists working away in Earlsdon. There must be many, many more. Would it be possible to hold an exhibition of work by local artists, and schoolchildren as well, to illustrate yet another facet of life, past, present and the promise for the future, in Earlsdon?