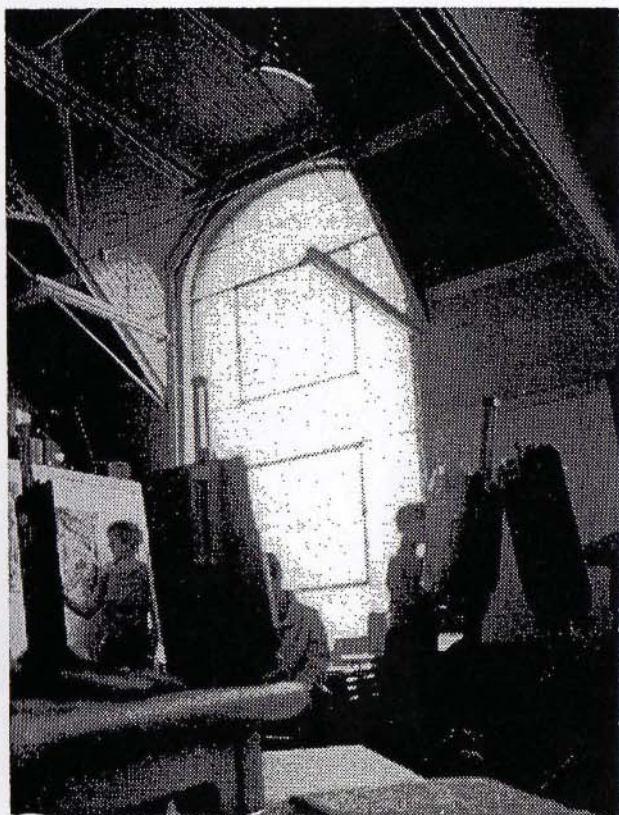
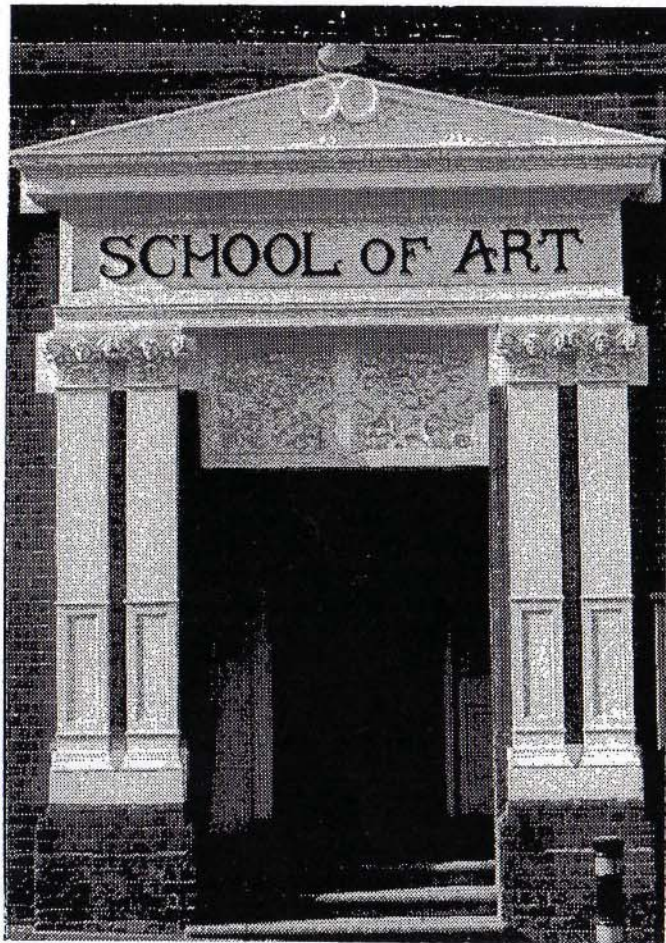


Putney School of Art And Design



A brief history by Michael Holmes

£1



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A BRIEF HISTORY OF PUTNEY SCHOOL OF ART AND DESIGN

Over one hundred years' ago a Putney churchwarden had a vision: embracing the entrepreneurial and educational aspirations of enlightened Victorians like himself he wanted to create an art school. It was a vision which was not solely inspired by the creative impulses of 'art for art's sake', though that was clearly a cause. Underlying the ambition which William Lancaster and other socially conscious Putney citizens wanted to pursue was a Victorian concern that the nation's competitiveness was being undermined by a failure to match other European countries in the provision of training in design.

William Lancaster, an outstanding benefactor who was later to be knighted, and was the grandfather of the well-known cartoonist and writer, Sir Osbert Lancaster, joined with other Putney citizens, including Baron Pollock and Sir Arthur Jelf, to form a committee with the purpose of founding an art school. The year was 1883. The site, however, was not in the present position of the Putney School of Art and Design, which can proudly boast of being one of the last remaining Victorian purpose-built art school buildings in London, with the huge north-facing window of the first floor studio being a lasting tribute to the vision of its founders.

The beginnings were more humble, being in temporary rooms over the parish offices in Putney High Street lent by the Vestry

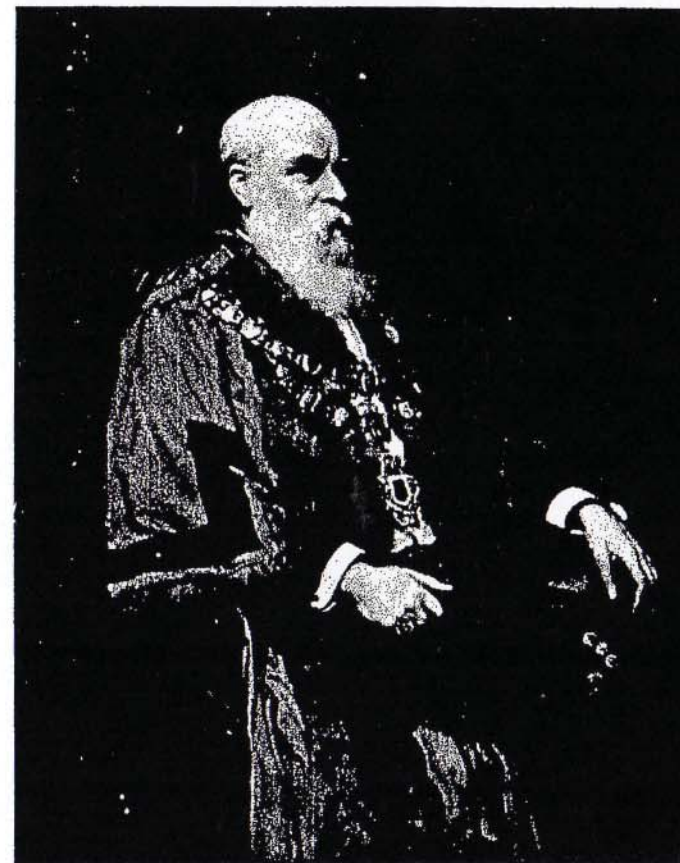
of Putney. The School's first headmaster, appointed in 1884, indeed its only teacher at the time, was F. Edward Hulme, himself an established water-colour painter and author of several textbooks on painting and draughtsmanship. He retired in 1890 and there were to be two subsequent masters in this initial period.

The rooms in the High Street were clearly not suitable but the enthusiasm engendered ensured their survival for the next 11 years. Such shortcomings, however, inevitably caught up with them for, despite the excellent work being produced, the Technical Education Board of the London County Council in 1884 declined to recognise the school as a technical art school until larger premises could be found. It was a view shared by the Science and Art Department of the LCC, and meant that diplomas and other qualifications could not be awarded to the Putney students.

The LCC effectively presented the school with an ultimatum: find properly equipped premises or discontinue. Securing such a building and being able to rent it, however, became an intractable problem. And it was at this moment in time, 1885, that William Lancaster demonstrated his outstanding civic consciousness and generosity by buying a freehold site and erecting a purpose built art school at his own expense.

William Lancaster was a substantial benefactor to Putney and Wandsworth. Not only was he a driving force in the creation of the art school but spread his munificence widely. He built the church hall in Putney Bridge Road in memory of his wife and endowed Tooting Library. He founded many prizes and scholarships and endowed many charities as well as a ward in Putney Hospital which, until recently, had a portrait of him on

view. Further afield, in King's Lynn, his birthplace, he completely re-built and re-equipped the grammar school which gave him his education. His generous gesture in ensuring that the Art School would continue in Putney was thus entirely in keeping with his attitude towards public education.



Sir William Lancaster as Mayor of Wandsworth

William Lancaster was Mayor of Wandsworth in 1902 and

1903; he lived in a large house on Putney Hill (South Lynn) which was well-described by Osbert Lancaster, his grandson, in his autobiography 'All Done from Memory'.



The present pottery studio

The architect of the school was Thomas William Willis, a winner of the Architectural Association Tite Prize, who was still a young man in 1895. He had his own practice and designed a number of commercial buildings and private homes in the centre of London. It is to him we are indebted for the great North-facing studio windows, louvered so that the light remains the same on the model all day, and the classical portico as we enter the building. The former was used in the making of the television programme 'The Truth about Art' in 1998.

The chosen site was then, as now, conveniently placed, being close to both the Putney stations, already widely used at that time. The present rear extension of the Art School, housing the print room and rear painting studio had not been built when the school first opened, but the site extended as far as the railway at the rear, thus permitting later enlargement.

On the basis of the new premises, the LCC provided a grant of £500 for the equipment of the school (and the loan of certain art examples from another LCC institution, Bolt Court). In 1906, the LCC appears to have taken over the running of the school from the Committee, for it would seem that it leased the school from Sir William Lancaster for the generously low rent of £125 a year.

The new Art School was intended to serve a relatively wide area, namely Putney, Wandsworth, South Fulham and Barnes. Although other buildings have provided art courses in the same area, many have suffered over the years from the closures of art teaching establishments and it is notable that Putney School of Art and Design is one of the last remaining and probably draws on the same wide catchment area.

The new premises of the School were opened on 2 October 1895. The 'Mid Surrey Gazette' in reporting the occasion, noted :"*There was a good attendance, with ladies in the majority*". Sir Arthur Arnold, the chairman of the LCC, and not, on his own admission, a keen observer of the arts, told the gathering, to quote from the report:

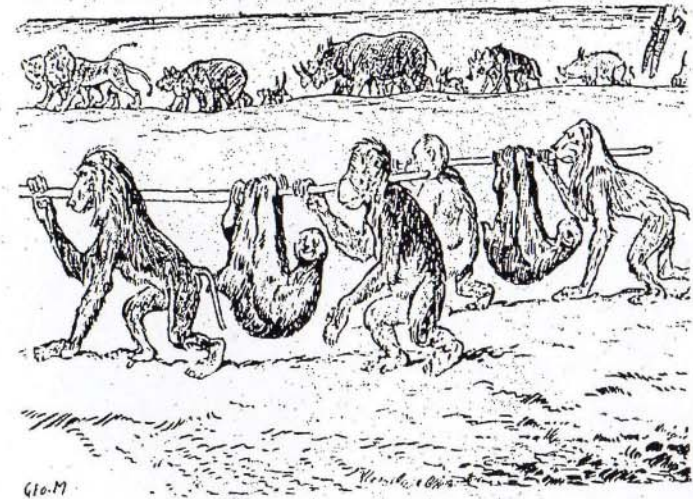
As a people, the English had been very slow to establish those sorts of institutions. In later days, art workmen in this country were generally found to be of foreign extraction, no doubt because of the absence of these schools. In times past it was said that the English workmen could not compete with foreign art because their wages were too high to admit it. But wages had increased and today he recognised that everyone had a better and clearer knowledge than they used to have of the trades in which they were engaged."

The report continued: "*Where in the past there was ignorance there was not brighter intelligence. It seemed that such institutions as these should be the means of idealising their lives. Today art entered into everything. There was no occupation into which it did not enter...*" Although the new school was equipped with the aid of an LCC grant, Sir Arthur expressed the typically Victorian hope that the Art School would eventually be self-supporting, even though they had for a time to rely on financial aid from the residents of Putney.

George Wooliscraft Rhead was an early master at the newly built art school, becoming tutor in design in 1896 and teaching throughout the first decade of the new century. He had trained

at the Minton pottery as a designer and illustrates the intended emphasis on teaching design in British art schools. He later turned to painting and executed frescoes and murals for buildings in London and Manchester. He exhibited at the Royal Academy for over forty years. He published many books on design and in 1910 produced a monumental 'History of the Fan' which led to his designing Queen Mary's Coronation fan

In the first decade of the century there seems to have been a flowering of an internationally recognised school of painters, mainly in water colours, centred on Putney School of Art. In 1907 George Martin, for example, who was later to be the official artist to the Shackleton expeditions in 1907-9 and 1914-16, studied drawing and painting at the School.



HOW THE SLOTHS WENT TO THE ARK

Oct. 14th, 1925

One of George Morrow's Punch cartoons © Punch Limited

George Morrow, a noted cartoonist for Punch magazine from 1907 to 1931, taught life drawing at the school. His style is very recognisable, although the humour is often superior to the drawing, perhaps because he had to draw cartoons from memory or the imagination.

Another prominent artist was George Ayling, who studied at Putney School of Art in the first decade of the century, while working as an apprentice in his family's well-known firm of boat builders in Putney. He specialised in river scenes and his first painting exhibited at the Royal Academy was of Putney Bridge. He continued in the family business during the First World War (making parts for Hanley Page and Sopwith aircraft) but after the war, qualified as an art teacher. He became Honorary secretary of the Society of Marine Painters. Many of his works are still the subject of cards by the Medici Society.



A river scene by George Ayling

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provided an intriguing description of life at the school at that time and recalls that the prizes were awarded one year by Harold Speed, whom Sir William had commissioned to paint his portrait as Mayor of Wandsworth.

Other Lancaster prizes were awarded for Figure composition, Design and Drawing from the Antique while other benefactors provided prizes for Modelling, Painting from Life and 'Architectural Notes'.

There was apparently a sketch club which also awarded prizes and in the same year as the award to Helen Stockwell' George Ayling and Roland Batchelor both received prizes.



Fishermen at Blois by Roland Batchelor

Among the other students in the 1930's were Arthur Lovegrove, who became a professional illustrator and also a playwright, and Joan Gee, who studied Design and embroidery and went on to the Royal College before becoming a well-known teacher.

The range of courses offered at that time is impressive. In 1929, the list included Anatomy, Architecture, Commercial Art, Design, Drawing and Painting (Life, Still Life and Landscape), Embroidery, Fashion Drawing, Figure Composition and Book Illustration, Modelling, Pottery and Woodcarving. These were taught by only ten tutors.

In 1924 the LCC and Sir William Lancaster came to an agreement in the form of a lien whereby the LCC would acquire the freehold of the art school for £4,000, the LCC having the right to delay completion (on payment of £125 per annum interest) up to the death of Sir William, which, in fact, took place in 1929. His interest in the school never wavered over the 40 years he was associated with it, during which time it had become an established part of the cultural life of Putney training an impressive number of artists and designers.

Unfortunately, in 1932, the depression years, the numbers of students in day classes were thought to be too low to justify their retention and only evening classes were continued, under an assistant teacher supervised by the Principal of Clapham School of Art.

In 1939, the premises of the Art School were taken over for war work and immediately after the war the school was used by a neighbouring school (Mayfield) and as a studio for a local artist named Hersch.

However, in 1956, the school became part of the LCC's South West London Literary Institute, re-opening on 23 September of that year as Putney Art Centre with a Principal (D.T.Adams, MA Oxon) and a Deputy, Roy Sackman, who later became Head. The aim of the school was stated to be: 'to provide an art centre for men and women to express themselves creatively through the Fine Arts'.

In 1959, the school became a branch of the Putney and Roehampton Institute, still under the LCC, and then the Putney Institution (ILEA) and by 1966 Roy Sackman was able to put into effect his plans for the extensions of the building to provide extra painting and printmaking studios.

When Roy Sackman retired in 1974 he was succeeded by Robin Hazlewood. At this time the school offered classes for part-time adult students in painting, drawing (including working from life), sculpture, ceramics, etching, weaving, art history, screen printing and calligraphy. There were as many as twenty six tutors at that time.

In 1990, following the dissolution of the GLC (successor of the LCC) and the ILEA, ownership of the building and management of the school was assumed by Wandsworth Borough Council. The Wandsworth Adult College was set up to run the courses under the Headship of Jack Edwards. In 1992, the Further Education Act required local authorities to relinquish responsibility for courses leading to qualifications (certificated courses) and in 1993, under a so-called Federation Agreement, the Adult College was absorbed into South Thames College, although the building was still owned by Wandsworth Borough Council. The Federation Agreement stipulated that a peppercorn rent should be charged for the use

of the building for the first five years.



John Bowyer drawn by Helen Stockwell, a student

One consequence of the centralisation of art teaching was that Putney School of Art no longer had a Principal working on site and looking after its interests and those of the students. The school was placed in a precarious position, especially, when, in 1998, Wandsworth Borough Council decided to levy a commercial rent, as was permitted by the Federation Agreement after the first five years. The response of South Thames College, which was under pressure by the government to reduce costs, was to propose moving the school to a site in Roehampton, Downshire House, which had space which it wanted to fill. This proposal would have meant that the building in Oxford Road would have ceased to exist as an art school and would, as a valuable site in the centre of Putney, have been ripe for redevelopment.

It was a proposal that evoked an immediate response from students and local residents who believed that Downshire House would be highly inconvenient, especially as it was on the periphery of Putney and, indeed, of the Wandsworth borough. In contrast, the existing building is situated between the two Putney stations and close to several bus routes, thus enabling students from all over the borough to readily attend courses, a fact which was cited in the opening speech when the School reopened after the Second World War.

A vigorous campaign was organised under the aegis of the Friends of the Putney School of Art under the chairmanship of Robert Dark, the then student representative to South Thames College. In the face of this public support for maintaining the School in its original building, Wandsworth Borough Council decided that such a school would be viable despite the potential competition from South Thames College at Downshire House.

It was a momentous decision and nearly brings this short history to a happy conclusion. But not quite. Having decided to keep the School open, Wandsworth Borough Council has refurbished the building to a high standard and a Principal, Ray Barker, has been appointed to further the interests of the school. There are more courses than previously and this will lead to far better utilisation of the facilities. For example, a link with schools is being explored with the aim of instituting courses for children in the school holidays. Moreover, to reflect this expanded activity, the school has become Putney School of Art and Design - a title which Sir William Lancaster undoubtedly would have approved for it reflects the purpose of his original vision.

Educational

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNTY OF LONDON
PUTNEY SCHOOL OF ART
 OXFORD ROAD, PUTNEY, S.W.15.
 Principal: J. BOWYER

Mr. IRVINE BAYLIS
 Mr. CHARLES DOMAN, R.P.N.
 Mrs. J. V. HILL

Mr. FRANCIS IDING, R.C.I.
 Mr. GEORGE BENNETT
 Mr. GEORGE BODKIN

Mr. EDWARD KEATHE, A.R.C.A., R.P.N.
 Mr. EDWARD L. ARNOLD
 Mr. H. W. TAY


Day and Evening Classes are held in—
 Anatomy, Architecture, Commercial Art, Design, Drawing and Painting (Life, Still Life and Landscapes), Embroidery,
 Fashion Drawing, Picture Composition and Book Illustration, Lettering, Modelling, Pottery, and Woodcutting.
 Prospective students may be obtained on application to the Principal at the School.

HOWARD H. COX,
 Clerk of the London County Council

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 Founder of "Work" Foundation since its First Day, 1902, and "The Year" 1905, taught by the French Government for the Honor of its teaching and also "Le Tour du Monde" published by France, 1906, for the City of Paris.
 Distinguished Instructor in the process of painting from the "States" to the "Fincham Forest".
 The School provides the most Master Instruction in all branches of Drawing and Painting, Stippling and Advanced Etching,
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An advertisement for the school in Studio in 1929



A recent photograph of the School

There is now an impressive list of courses including drawing and painting (life, portrait and abstract); watercolour painting; printmaking including etching, lithography, screenprinting, and blockprinting; pottery including sculpture in ceramics; and portfolio preparation.

The future of the School is now secure. The number of students has been increased to over six hundred. So-called twilight courses have been introduced providing A-level life drawing for schools and painting and pottery for parents, carers and children. There is now a continuous series of exhibitions of the work of students and tutors

The Friends of Putney School of Art, having successfully fought to keep the school open, are not resting on their laurels. They have established a popular Newsletter and organised lectures and social events. The library is gradually being replaced. Contacts have been made between the school and local commercial interests as part of a campaign to promote the school as a centre of excellence and a focus of artistic activity in Putney.



The present printmaking studio

