

The First Lady

During the summer of 2014 the staff at the RCA made me aware of a document from the 1980s which listed all the Academicians from 1881 up to 1981. Of particular interest to me were the lady members listed, because one of the lines of enquiry I had been following was to establish the name of the First Lady RCA academician.

After sorting the ladies listed on the 1981 Document into date order, it appeared that in early 1882 two months after the establishment of the Cambrian Academy, in the first intake of members Miss E Trevor became the First Lady member.

However, discovering this information contradicted other evidence that I had uncovered, so I revisited the various sources available to try and established the true history of lady academicians.

The minute book for the meeting on the 21.1.1882 does record an E Trevor being selected to become a member of the new Academy along with 30 other artists, however the members ledger for the period, has no record of E Trevor.

Another critical piece of relevant evidence is a minute dated 4.2.1892, where it is minuted in response to an application from Carrie Walker, that a motion was passed, that the response to any applications received from ladies including Carrie Walker, should be **'the committee have not yet come to any determination as to the admission of ladies'**.

Again at the 1888 AGM a motion was carried to the effect that **'Lady candidates be informed that the Academy had not yet decided as to the admission of lady candidates'**

Later, in 1891, at the pre AGM council meeting, it was resolved to put before the members **'that the Council of the RCA were unanimously of the opinion that it was not advisable to entertain applications from lady artists, and that they strongly recommend the members not to put forward the name of any lady to the ballot'**.

Clearly Miss E Trevor was not a member of the RCA.

The selection process for the first members was purely by application, and all the first group of 30 members along with their work were well known to each other, in fact three or four artists were asked to submit three examples of their work to the founding 'committee' because they were not familiar with their work. 'E Trevor' did not fall into this category so was well known to the group.

To try and resolve the apparent anomalies I resorted to the exhibition catalogues for the first four annual exhibitions of the Academy.

All four catalogues listed E Trevor as a member, however, the exhibiting artist particulars provided in the catalogues, at first site gave a contradictory story.

The 1885 Cardiff catalogue listed E Trevor as a member, but in the artist details included Miss Trevor without The letters RCA after her name.

The 1884 Cardiff catalogue included E Trevor as a member in the list of members.

The 1883 Rhyl catalogue had E Trevor as a member, but in the exhibitors details had Miss Elizabeth Trevor without RCA letters.

The 1882 inaugural exhibition in Llandudno had E Trevor as a member, but in the list of artists it had Edward Trevor.

On reading this the truth became clear, E Trevor RCA was in fact Edward Trevor, and the research for the Centenary in 1982 had inadvertently concluded that the E Trevor RCA was the Miss E Trevor and Elizabeth Trevor of the 1883 And 1885 exhibition catalogues.

A little further research on the internet established that Elizabeth Trevor and Edward Trevor were in fact brother and sister, at the time of the 1881 census they were living at the Bluebell Inn in Conwy where their father was the innkeeper, the census has them listed as seascape artists.

Edward Trevor was in poor health and died in 1885, but Elizabeth Trevor married another Academician, Lester Sutcliffe, and she died in 1944 aged 90.

It was not until 1920 that my research uncovered any change in the attitude of the RCA to the concept of female members.

In January 1920 it was proposed that Mrs Laura Knight and Miss Lucy Kemp Welch, be invited to become members, (Lucy Kemp Welch best known for her illustrations of Anna Sewell's ' Black Beauty', and Laura Knight eminent artist who later, in 1936, became first woman elected to Royal Academy). Laura Knight did not accept, but Lucy Kemp Welch did accept and is listed as a member from 1921, followed by Florence Fitzgerald as an associate in 1922 and Clara Knight as an associate in 1923 (upgraded to member in 1926).

Finally in 1925 the rules of the Academy were altered and new rules were put in place to allow up to 10 lady members and 10 associates.

Clara Knight was the first female artist to be elected by her peers.

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