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2003.11.1827

PERCY SHAKESPEARE

ROBIN SHAW



DUDLEY'S PAINTER OF THE THIRTIES

With love to
KATE
*who has shared my enthusiasm
for Percy Shakespeare's drawings
and helped me to appreciate his colours
and
to the memory of
IVO SHAW
who gave Percy Shakespeare his basic training
and helped and encouraged him*

Also by Robin Shaw

HOUSMAN'S PLACES
Published by The Housman Society

PERCY SHAKESPEARE

Dudley's Painter of the Thirties

written and published

by

ROBIN SHAW



62110000

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Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Black Country Origins	7
3	Dudley School of Arts and Crafts	10
4	Birmingham School of Art	16
5	A Serious Painter	23
6	The Man	32
7	The Thirties at Leisure Paintings	36
8	War and Death	47
9	Review	52

Appendix I: List of works

Appendix II: Works Exhibited

Indices

Note: The first time a picture is mentioned in a chapter a reference is given to the numbering used in the author's catalogue and to the page where the picture is illustrated, e.g. (PS7, p6).

Illustrations are also identified by the author's catalogue number for easy correlation with information in the Appendices.



PERCY SHAKESPEARE (PS78), Self-Portrait, probably in his twenties.

Introduction

The name Percy Shakespeare was known to me from my earliest days. My father, Ivo Shaw, was proud of the fact that he discovered and encouraged Percy's talent and even as a very small boy in 1943 I was aware of my father's dismay when by cruel chance Percy was killed, cutting short his extremely promising career. Now his work is known to only a few.

In the house where I grew up, always displayed, were a few framed pencil and watercolour studies (PS16, 17 and 22, p5) which Percy Shakespeare produced in the life class at Dudley School of Art. These were done when Percy was between eighteen and twenty and show that he was already a remarkable draughtsman. Draughtsman was a term Ivo Shaw used a great deal and it was draughtsmanship that he first identified in the small boy he first came across in Dudley Art Gallery.

The other work of Percy Shakespeare with which I grew up was *Girl in Green Ball Gown* (PS23, p6). As children, my sisters and I thought it was a gloomy picture, telling as it does the story of a girl who has been disappointed at a ball, and we wondered why my parents wanted it in a prominent place in the house. I do not know how my father acquired it - this is just one of the many questions I now wish I had asked him before he died in 1960 - but I like to think that it is an early work and my father bought it when Percy was struggling financially. The picture is still with the family and it attracts the attention of everyone who sees it. The drama of the colours brings emphasis to the story the painting tells. It shows Percy's feeling for colour, which would become such a feature of his work. His colours are vibrant and startlingly juxtaposed: often the colours of late summer and autumn; in this case, *Girl in Green Ball Gown*, the jade green of the dress and the pink lining against the black of the coat.

Dudley Museum and Art Gallery organised an exhibition of Percy's paintings in 1979 which I much admired and I promised myself that when I retired I would see whether I could find out more about him. It was in 1997 that I finally got round to thinking about the project and I was pleased to find that the staff of Dudley Museum

and Art Gallery were ready to think about another exhibition in 1999. They owned about a dozen paintings and a number of drawings but there was the problem of locating enough additional works for an exhibition. We knew that many of the works that were previously in the hands of Percy Shakespeare's family in 1979 had subsequently been sold to the Wolverhampton art dealer, Robert Price. Robert Price had done a great deal to help set up the 1979 exhibition and had researched and written the exhibition brochure (which incidentally is the only previously written biographical material). Price had recognised the quality of Percy Shakespeare's work and in the years following the exhibition his commercial interest came to the fore and he persuaded the family to part with many of the best works and sold them on. He died in 1990 having retained for his own collection *The Bird House*, (PS12, p42), and Dudley Museum & Art Gallery bought this at auction. It was good that they were able to do this because, portraying the Bird House at Dudley Zoo, it is a particularly appropriate picture to be retained in the town. As for the other pictures he had bought and sold on, there was no easy way of finding where they were.

So I began some detective work to assemble a catalogue of known works and find, where possible, who owned them. The results are summarised in Appendix I. I did not locate all the known works and of course there may be others that I have had no information about. I would still like to hear from anyone who has works which are either listed with owner 'unknown' or unlisted.

Beginning my researches I soon found that written sources of information about Percy Shakespeare were very limited. Dudley Libraries, Archives and Local History Services, had a book of newspaper cuttings kept by Dudley Art Circle covering their exhibitions from 1933 to 1938. There was little else. There was for instance very little in Naval records and we do not know what work he was doing for the Navy when he was killed. He left virtually no written records; only his signature and one letter. There is no statement of what he was trying to achieve; just his paintings to speak for themselves. I had some memories of what my parents had said about Percy but I had long missed the opportunity to ask any questions.

Early in my researches I was pleased to find Percy Shakespeare's sisters, Margery and Gwendoline, were still alive and well (Margery sadly died in 1999) and were still living in the same house close to the Wren's Nest, Dudley, where the family had lived from about 1930. They generously helped me and I would like to thank them, but as they said 'It was a long time ago and Percy was always a loner.' It appeared that he came and went and did not share with the family the details of his life.

I met several other people who had known Percy Shakespeare, three of them during the time he was at Dudley School of Art, and I am grateful to them all for sharing their memories with me. Reg Wakefield had spent his life as a commercial artist living in Hull and I am indebted to him for his memories of a year or so when as

a fifteen year old boy he was a fellow scholarship pupil at Dudley and was a friend to Percy.

Bill Homer, an architect who had become an important figure in local government, a Mayor of Dudley and was awarded an MBE, had attended Dudley Art School to learn drawing between 1920 and 1922. He shared his memories of Ivo Shaw and Percy Shakespeare.

Then there was Clendon Walters whom I went to see in 1998. Clendon was also a commercial artist who had trained at Dudley Art School. He was greatly influenced by Ivo Shaw not just in terms of art but in his whole attitude to life and had intermittently kept in touch with the Shaw family. After my father's death in 1960 he used to go to see my mother once every few years but I personally had lost touch with him in the last thirty years. Unfortunately he was very ill when I saw him and sadly he died shortly after.

For a long time I could not find anyone who had known Percy after he had gone to study, and then to teach, at Birmingham School of Art in Margaret Street but the 1999 exhibition led to several contacts. Firstly Mrs Anna Carter contacted Dudley Museum and Art Gallery on behalf of her mother, Mrs Margaret Cowern, who had been taught by Percy at Margaret Street in the late nineteen-twenties for a year or two when he was newly qualified. She was then Margaret Trotman and later she married a fellow student, R. T. Cowern who became an eminent etcher. I went to see Mrs Cowern and her memories were very vivid.

Also as a result of the 1999 exhibition Alan Young, a Dudley architect, contacted me. Alan knew Percy both as a student at Margaret Street and when they were both on the teaching staff. For some years Alan and Percy travelled together from Dudley Port station on the 8.03 a.m. train and met at lunchtime, when they could afford to have bread and cheese together at the White Swan. He owns a fine pencil and watercolour study of himself, (PS37, p20) by Percy and his memories are clear and interesting.

The contact with Mrs Cowern led to a visit to Mrs Lyn Fiddian-Green and her brother, Robin Goodman, whose late mother, Estelle Hough, had been a model for Percy in the late nineteen-thirties. I enlarge upon this in chapter seven.

In addition to those mentioned above, I am grateful to various people who have helped me. Firstly, Roger Dodsworth and Janine Parrish of Dudley Museum and Art Gallery. The exhibition, *Portrait of an Artist*, which they finally assembled in August 1999 and lasted until the end of October 1999 was a credit to them. We got together sufficient paintings to give a good insight into Percy Shakespeare's development over his seventeen years of painting. They were excellently displayed in Dudley Art Gallery. They just filled the very room where Percy spent many hours as a student when it was the life room of Dudley Art School. I am grateful to Dudley Museum and Art Gallery for allowing me to show in this publication many of the pictures which are

in their possession.

Secondly, Stephen Paisnel of Paisnel Gallery. He located and persuaded the owners of some of Percy Shakespeare's best paintings to lend them for the exhibition. Without his help the exhibition would have given a much less comprehensive impression, some of the best paintings would have been missing. He has also generously helped me to finance this publication and liaised with the owners of paintings who were happy to have them featured 'courtesy of Paisnel Gallery'.

Thirdly, Paul Lewis, art historian, formerly of the University of Wolverhampton, who helped with interpretation of the 1999 exhibition and has allowed me to quote from his writings.

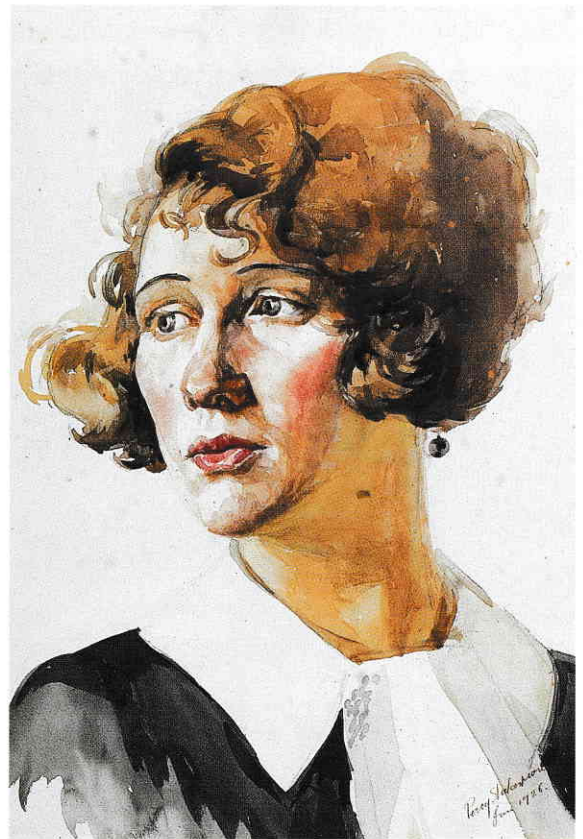
In addition may I thank the following people and organisations who helped in various ways such as lending their pictures, allowing them to be illustrated, or supplying information: Valerie Allen (Baggeridge Brick plc), Birmingham Libraries, Ray Burn, Rodney Castleden (Roedean School), Dudley Libraries, Nicole Farhi, Lt. Comdr. Miles Freeman, Mary Green, Paul Liss, Jennie McGregor-Smith, Hugh Miles, Diana Spencer Russell, Professor John Swift (Birmingham Institute of Art & Design), Gordon Thomas (RBSA), Peter Willetts. And Zöe Long for reading the manuscript.

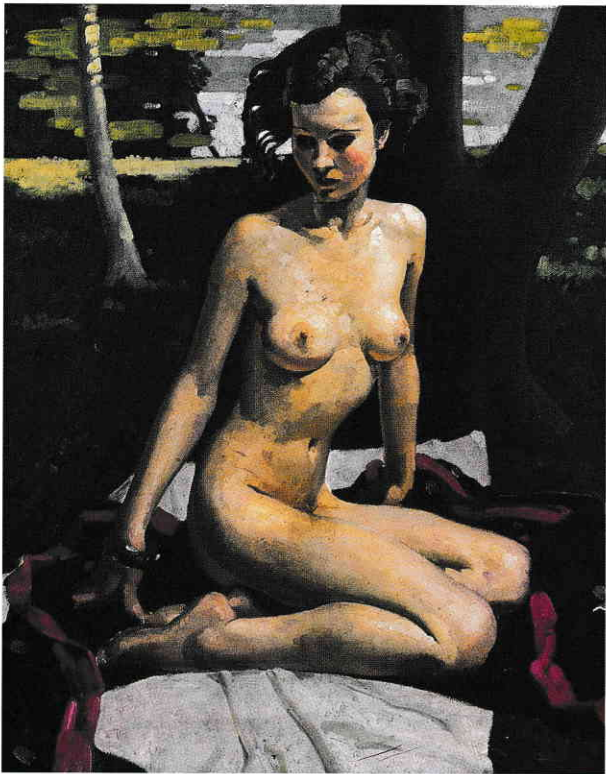
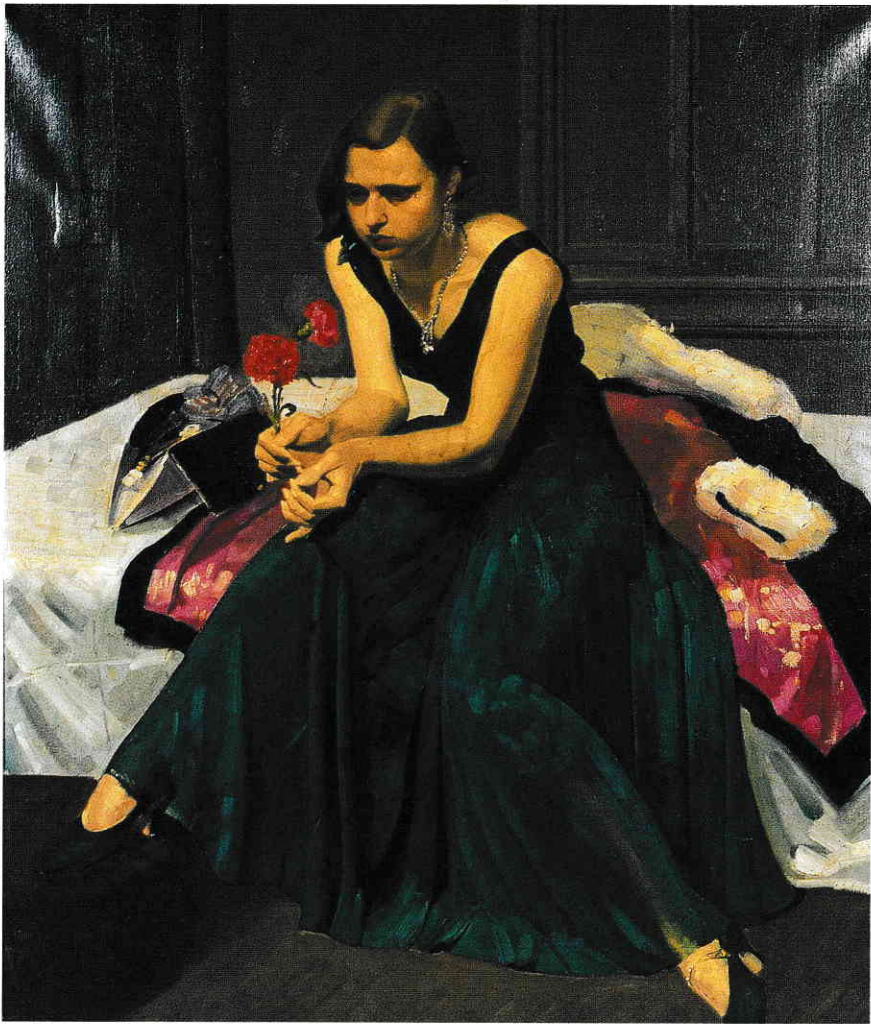
Finally I have to say a special thank you to Gwen Shakespeare who has given permission to reproduce Percy Shakespeare's works as they are all still in copyright.

This monograph sets out what I have found out about Percy Shakespeare over a period of three or four years. I am not an art historian nor indeed an art expert of any kind but I am the only biographer that Percy Shakespeare has had, or is likely to get in the short term, so I wanted to set down for posterity what I have found out. I have been fortunate to have been helped by some of the surviving people who knew Percy. I have done the research, written the text, set the type, designed the layout and published the book so any mistakes, judgments or opinions are entirely mine.

If I have done something to raise awareness of the considerable talent that Dudley lost in 1943 I will consider myself well rewarded.

Opposite:	LIFE CLASS STUDIES, 1926-27, drawn at Dudley School of Art.
Top left:	JESSAMINE I, (PS17)
Top right:	THE BOY HADLEY, (PS18)
Bottom left:	MAN IN RAINCOAT, (PS22)
Bottom right:	JESSAMINE II, (PS16)





Black Country Origins

Percy Shakespeare was born at 24 St John's Road, Kate's Hill on 28 February 1906 into the crowded terraced houses of Dudley's thriving but grimy scene. It was not the best place to be born with a talent to draw and a determination to use that talent to become a painter. It was a slum area and the expectation of most of those who lived there was a life of hard manual, or skilled, but still hard, labour in factories, workshops and mines. The brick houses, packed shoulder to shoulder, in rows each poured their own quota of smoke from their coal fires onto an already blackened scene. The people were poor, rough and tough, and the children playing in the streets were ragged.

Dudley is now part of the West Midlands. In those days it belonged to Worcestershire; it was an island of territory separated from the rest of the county - a curious historical survival. But whatever the administrative boundaries, it was firmly in that conglomeration which is known as the Black Country. Dudley's topographical positioning is elevated so that it gives the sense of being an island. From various points you can view the sprawling Black Country conurbation that in Percy Shakespeare's time really was very black. North-west you look across Sedgley to Wolverhampton; north and north-east extends an unrelieved industrial plain that includes Tipton and West Bromwich and beyond to Bilston, Willenhall, Wednesbury, Darlaston, and Walsall; and west and south-west there are Oldbury, Blackheath, Smethwick and on to Birmingham. This was one continuous built-up sprawl which existed to manufacture, and manufacturing meant generating smoke and waste and employing people who lived in concentrated terraces of two-up two-down houses and worked in smoke-blackened, brick workshops, hot with bright glowing furnaces where metal sparks and

Opposite, top: GIRL IN GREEN BALL GOWN, probably late 1920s, (PS23)
Lower left: SUMMER, exhibited 1933, (PS7)
Lower right: ISOBEL, exhibited from 1932, (PS61)

white-hot metal contrasted with the grimness of the sooty environment.

Dudley, while all of it is high, is all ups and down. Even in those blackest days some green relief to its setting was given by the wooded hill crowned with the ruined Norman castle overlooking the town. Kate's Hill is across the other side of the town centre in relation to the castle. From outside the house where Percy was born, in the slums that have now gone, his front door would open onto the street where as a child he would play. There would always be a view of the castle keep, on the green slopes of the hill opposite - a strange contrast to the squalor all around. Between the castle and Kate's Hill lay the town. The High Street widened at the north-east end to make way for the central street market and from the south-west end, marked by the church, the Stourbridge Road tipped away, sloping to Brierley Hill and the fringes of the Black Country before coming to Worcestershire and the Severn Plain.

*

Percy's birth certificate tells us that his father, John Shakespeare, was a steam engine fitter. Percy's sisters told me he was a pattern maker. Either way, and perhaps at



SLUM HOUSING, Kate's Hill, early twentieth century.

different times he was both, he was a skilled worker. His mother was Ada, formerly Flavell. He was the fourth of eight children, three brothers and five sisters. A typically large family of the time and it must have been a struggle for the parents to bring them all up. When he was old enough he would have gone to a local council school, probably St John's adjacent to St John's church, on Kate's Hill. I say probably for the family moved at least once and by the time Percy came to his twenties their home was in Bond Street which has now completely gone. It was behind King Street, at the bottom of the hill and very close to the town centre. A move may have been precipitated by an active slum clearance programme on the part of Dudley council. Communities were moved out in waves as council houses were built and streets redeveloped.

By the time Percy was coming up to fourteen, school leaving age, his education would have been very basic. The family would be expecting him to look for work. There was absolutely nothing in his background to help him or give him hope that he might one day be a painter. To Percy Shakespeare, in the blackness of the Black Country a short walk across the town there was one bright light, the art school.



DUDLEY SCHOOL OF ART 1928 The entrance is on from St James's Road on the right hand of this picture. The turret has been dismantled because it was unsafe.

3

Dudley School of Art

Dudley School of Art (or Dudley School of Arts and Crafts to give it its full title) may have been metaphorically a bright light but not so physically. It was housed in the building on the corner of St James's Road which is now the Museum and Art Gallery. It is largely built of terra cotta brick and even when it opened in 1884 one of the speakers at the celebratory lunch disgraced himself by describing it as dull and cheerless. He was totally out of tune with the spirit of the day for its opening was an occasion of great civic pride. The building was designed originally to house a free library, an art school and a single room art gallery. The library was on the ground floor and the art school above. For both of these institutions, individuals had campaigned long and hard and they were both seen as giving badly needed educational opportunities to an underprivileged population.

There was an elaborate opening ceremony on 29 July 1884 with a parade which included a band, a detachment of cavalry, the volunteers, the police and a whole range of civic dignitaries. The route round the town was lined with cheering spectators and at a canopied dais Mrs Claughton, sister of the Earl of Dudley, was presented with a solid gold key to unlock the doors. Then there was a banquet for 250 people with toasts and speeches. The theme of the day was that now there was an opportunity for the working classes to rise up from the degraded position in which they had been for so long. Of course this enthusiasm was for both the library and the art school but nevertheless it is clear that art schools were relatively more prestigious than they are today. Art schools were coming into being all over the country as the British became nervous that sales of their manufactured goods would fall behind those of continental competitors if better design was not promoted.

*

By 1913 the Art School had established a firm place in Dudley and was seen as vital to the town's industry and commerce. A new library had been opened in 1900 and the art school had expanded into the space vacated. The room to the right of the

entrance was a permanent gallery and the principal of the school was also curator of the museum and gallery. The current principal was moving on to another post and the Education Committee was keen to find a replacement who could give appropriate training to students who would find their way into the town's businesses. Their advertisements drew an application from Ivo Shaw who was second master at Camberwell School of Art. He was very ambitious and had recently come very high among candidates for the chief art inspectorship of London. He had been advised to go into the provinces and get experience in an environment close to industry.

Ivo Shaw was a versatile artist and craftsman. He believed he should be able to make a reasonable showing at any of the arts and crafts that were taught in the school. He designed and produced many fine examples of ornamental brass and copper work, wrought iron, furniture, jewellery and bookbinding and he had an excellent grounding in drawing and painting. His father was a landscape painter from Huddersfield and he had been reared with a brush or a pencil always in his hand. Initially trained at Huddersfield College of Art, he had continued to develop his skills and qualifications while teaching at Lincoln School of Art, where the Principal, A. G. Webster, was a painter of some achievement, and then at Camberwell School of Art. He was an ideal candidate for Dudley. He got the job and started in 1913 with the personal intention of staying for only a few years; his friends and connections were in London and he intended to spend most of his weekends back there, (this was to benefit his better students for he was able to widen their perspectives). He threw himself energetically into the job and had completed his first year when World War 1 broke out. He was 32 and in a reserved occupation. The Education Committee was encouraging him to stay in the job but before long he felt compelled to volunteer. One weekend in London he joined the Honourable Artillery Company and served until 1918. So while Percy Shakespeare was spending his early days at elementary school Ivo Shaw was away at the war. He came back and threw himself into Dudley life with renewed vigour. Soon not only was the work of students making an impact but the school was the scene of an annual Arts Ball which was a big event in Dudley's social life and the art gallery was staging regular exhibitions bringing the work of top artists into the town.



IVO SHAW, Principal, Dudley School of Art

As a schoolboy, Percy Shakespeare, often found his way to the exhibitions in the gallery. One day, probably in early 1920 when he was 13 and coming up to school leaving age, he was looking at some pictures, conspicuous in his ragged clothes, the seat of his trousers hanging out. Ivo Shaw looked in on the gallery between lessons. He kept to his London standards; he was known as a smart dresser and always wore an immaculate three-piece suit, a stiff white collar and spats over his shoes: he spoke with authority, "What are you doing, boy? Are you interested in pictures?". He would be an intimidating figure to the small boy but Percy spoke up. He said he liked to draw and after talking for a time, Ivo Shaw took him to a classroom and gave him a pencil and some paper. The work he produced so amazed Ivo Shaw that he was soon suggesting that Percy should come to the art school full-time when he left school. There must have been difficult discussions in the Shakespeare household but Ivo Shaw agreed to waive the fees, a decision later formalised with a small grant by the Education Committee, and in the end Percy was allowed to start.

So began Percy Shakespeare's art education. He was to spend at least six years attending Dudley School of Art, either full or part-time, and even after that he kept a strong connection with the school. The problems of home poverty got worse rather than better. Somewhere around the time he started his course his father had an accident, falling off or being knocked off his bicycle and injuring his back. He never worked again and Percy's mother had to take in washing, and his brothers and sisters had to get what jobs they could, to keep the family going. Percy's mother must have been very strong willed to allow him to foster his talent.

Percy followed the broad curriculum of the introductory year but he was soon specialising in figure drawing which he learned in the life class, taught by the Principal. Ivo Shaw had systematically studied the skills of drawing and painting, as was required in the art school regimes of the day. He was particularly well versed in anatomy; the basis of all life drawing. He could draw the bones of the human body from all angles from memory and name their parts as well as any medical student. He could then add the muscles, name them and show how they contributed to the subtle lines of the human form. He liked to do this with chalk on a blackboard and, as a final touch, add clothes to show how they were shaped by the underlying figure. He taught students to see with X-ray eyes. He was dedicated to teaching. Bill Homer said he had a gift for conveying exactly what you had to do.

His teaching of drawing began with the basics. Firstly he taught students how to set up a drawing board and to sharpen a pencil, then he moved on to holding the pencil. Both Reg Wakefield and Bill Homer remembered how he insisted that they hold the pencil, not like a writing pen but like a brush so that they were free to draw with unrestricted movement of the arms to produce long sweeping lines that picked up the form of what they were drawing. You can see the results of this teaching in Percy Shakespeare's drawings; Percy was a natural master of line.

For those students who wanted to concentrate on drawing and painting, classes came under three headings, all taught by the Principal. 'Preliminary Figure Drawing', was, the prospectus said,

'for Students unacquainted with figure drawing who wish to become members of the Life Class, a progressive scheme of work has been arranged, beginning with details of the head, construction of the lower limbs, and the torso'.

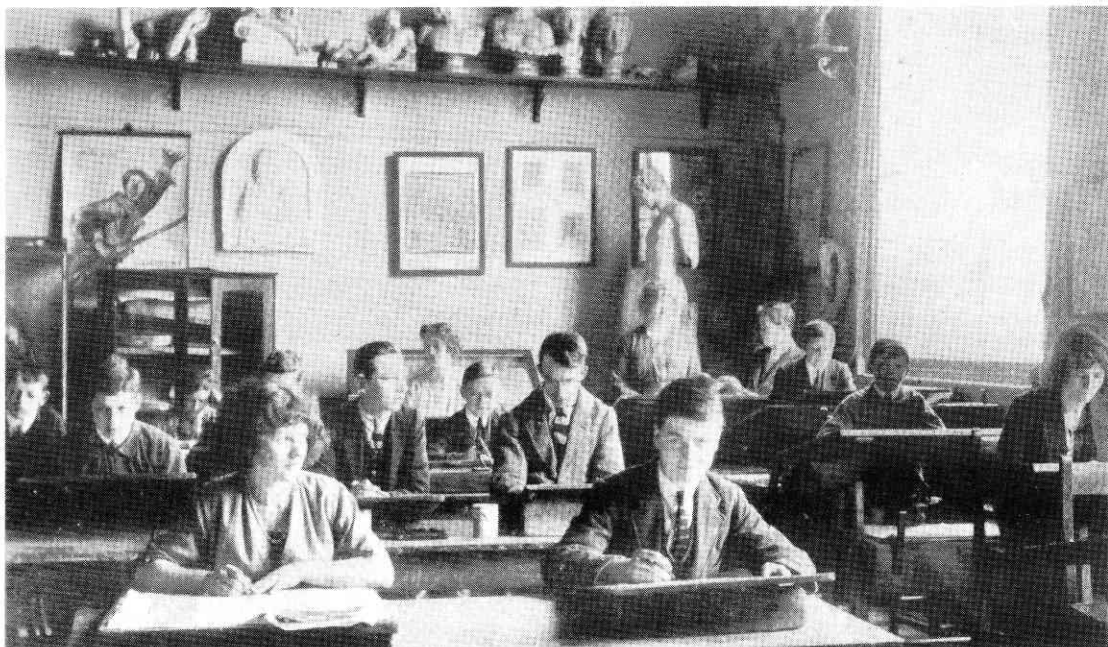
'Drawing and Painting from Life and Still Life' had separate sessions on 'Head and Costume', 'Nude', and 'Still Life'. In addition the prospectus said,

'Admission to the Life Classes will only be granted to those who, in the opinion of the Principal, are able to profit by the work and who are studying for professional purposes.'

Permission to observe the nude was not to be given lightly! Finally there were Anatomy Demonstrations.

'They should be attended by all students of Life Drawing and Modelling Life who do not possess a thorough knowledge of the subject.'

Percy was 16 in February 1922 and deeply immersed in this regime. His training



DESIGN CLASS, Dudley School of Art, c.1923. Percy Shakespeare is in the right hand rear corner; centre rear, Reg Wakefield; front left, Jessamine Sherratt; under the statue, teacher, Mrs M. Edwards.

in art was traditional. The forces of change, the avant garde, would be known in the school but Ivo Shaw would certainly believe that the hard disciplines of traditional life drawing should be mastered before a student launched into freer forms of expression.

The Life Room where Percy spent much of his time was the largest room in the school with a skylight to give the maximum illumination. It was a room full of easels and stools and large plaster casts of classical figures. There was a real skeleton in a tall cupboard in the corner. Percy made himself at home in this environment. He soon established himself as the outstanding student. He had a small grant and he would earn extra by working on commissions which came to the school for all kinds of artwork, such as cinema posters, and signs for shops. Reg Wakefield was his chum for a year or two when they were about sixteen, before Percy went to spend most of his time at Birmingham. Reg remembered working on cinema posters together, Reg doing the lettering and Percy the figures. He also remembered going round to the Council offices to collect their grants and regularly going to the pictures together on Saturday night. The student life in the school was good and Percy's confidence grew. In his last full-time year he was regarded as the head boy. The other students said he was the Principal's blue-eyed boy but they also recognised his ability as being quite exceptional.

In the autumn of 1922, when the school held its second exhibition of students' work since the War, Councillor James Smellie, chairman of Dudley Education Committee, was reported in the *Dudley Herald* as making special reference to 'the general designing work' of Percy Shakespeare, 'a boy in respect of whom arrangements had been made to send him to Birmingham Art School'.

Presumably this was on a part-time basis for he certainly continued at Dudley School of Art. In 1923 when the school's third annual exhibition was reported in *The Dudley Herald*, Percy Shakespeare was again picked out for reference, this time for his work on pictorial posters. 'This student displays marked ability, and it is interesting to note the local authority have granted him a scholarship to attend Birmingham School of Art for figure study'. I think he probably went full-time to Birmingham from the autumn of 1923 but continued with evening classes at Dudley for several years. Even after that there was always an open door for him at Dudley when he wanted somewhere to work.

At the evening classes from 1923, Ivo Shaw felt that he had little more to teach Percy Shakespeare and that he must work out his own artistic destiny. I remember him telling me that, in each class Percy came to, he encouraged him to do one complete study of a different live model; by practising his technique over and over again he would develop sureness of line and the ability to get the essence down very quickly. Ivo Shaw kept a number of these studies and had them framed, in thin black wooden frames from a local business, Crannage and Dentith. These studies are the ones

referred to in the introduction to this publication. The earliest is *Jessamine I* (PS17, p6) which is dated 1924 - a remarkably good drawing for an eighteen year old. The rest of the life class studies illustrated on page 6, including *Jessamine II*, were done in 1926. Jessamine Sherratt was a very pretty, fellow, full-time student whom Ivo Shaw married in 1927, causing many a raised eyebrow in Dudley.

When in 1998 I met Clendon Walters, shortly before his death, he took me into the attic of the remarkable 'Tudor' house he had built entirely with his own hands from genuine materials of demolished period houses. He dusted off a framed study by Percy Shakespeare, *The Boy Hadley* (PS18, p5), in just the same style of frame as the ones Ivo Shaw had kept. On the back, years before, Clendon had written, 'I was present at the same evening class at which this was drawn and painted. It took Percy Shakespeare about 50 minutes to complete from the start. Ivo Shaw was his mentor'.

Percy continued doing studies of this kind to keep his hand in, to demonstrate his skill, as examples for his students when he was teaching, as studies for larger compositions and one suspects for sheer joy of doing what he was very good at. He freely gave them away so there must be quite a number in existence that I have not traced.

Throughout his time at Dudley Art School, and indeed afterwards, Percy was living with his family. He participated in family life. The whole family went to church together and Percy sometimes read the Lesson. His sister, Gwen, wondered whether the real attraction at church was the opportunity to play billiards. He was lucky to have encouragement from his mother for the family situation was desperate. Friends and family often said that Percy should get a job but his mother protected him and scraped together pennies for his expenses. Ivo Shaw would help him out too. Reg Wakefield thought that Ivo Shaw bought him his first suit.

There can be no doubt that Dudley Art School gave Percy Shakespeare a very good start in life as an artist and the chance to set his horizons beyond anything that might have been foretold from his origins. He needed, however to broaden out and Birmingham School of Art gave him that opportunity.

THE SARACEN'S HEAD (PS74)

This picture in watercolour and pastels was probably produced by Percy Shakespeare when he was at Dudley School of Art. It is a view from the corner of St James's Road by the school.



Birmingham School of Art

So in 1923 Percy Shakespeare's career took a big step forward when with his scholarship from Dudley Education Committee he travelled on the train from Dudley Port station to what was then called Birmingham Municipal School of Art in Margaret Street. It was to be the focal point of his life as student and then teacher until he joined the Navy in 1941. The name of the school was to change several times, in 1930 it became Birmingham Central School of Art, in 1937 Birmingham College of Arts and Crafts and eventually Birmingham College of Art (before being incorporated into the University of Central England as it is today). But when he started it was 'municipal' denoting that it was built and run by Birmingham, free from central government and representing the civic pride with which it had been established. The school had opened in its new building in 1885. It owed its origins to various strands. Drawing had been taught in Birmingham throughout the nineteenth century but in 1835 a Government Select Committee concluded that Britain was falling behind its industrial competitors and recommended the setting up of Schools of Design; Birmingham's opened in New Street in 1842. Alongside this was the growing influence of the Birmingham Society of Artists who wanted teaching of painting for aesthetic reasons. More powerful than either of these was the zeal of the large industrialists, including Joseph Chamberlain, who dominated city politics. As well as economic success for the city they wanted to change society, improve moral welfare, give opportunities for education of the citizens and create a cultural environment. Birmingham Municipal School of Art was part of a grander scheme in which it became part of a prestigious environment which included the Town Hall, the Museum and Art Gallery, the Birmingham and Midland Institute, Birmingham University and the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists - all in a newly developed great Victorian city.

The art school was an impressive building designed by John Henry Chamberlain,



Birmingham's famous architect (not related to the political family), though he died before it was built. It was in the Gothic revival style with much terra cotta and extravagant brickwork, fitting in with the rest of Birmingham's new developments.

There has always been some ambivalence as to whether art schools were there to foster fine art and pure creative expression or to promote design for industry as the Government wanted. In its forty-eight years of existence before Percy arrived Birmingham School of Art seems to have held a good balance. In the nineteenth century under the principal, Joseph Southall, it had built a strong reputation for painting, with the so called Birmingham Group and in the early part of the twentieth century it turned out Sir Henry Rushbury, Gerald Brockhurst and Bernard Fleetwood Walker. It would certainly have been an exciting step for Percy Shakespeare to be going there to a much larger school than Dudley, with a whole range of qualified staff, who were painting and exhibiting themselves. He may have found it intimidating at first but I suspect that he would have had confidence in his own abilities to sustain him.

As Percy began to travel by train from Dudley Port station he found himself with other pupils from the Black Country on scholarships going to the art school, as it fulfilled its function of training for industry, and to the university. His home remained in Dudley with the family, as it would for the rest of his life. The camaraderie of the journey would relieve a tedious and grimy route.

I have no details of his course of study, nor whom he studied under, nor how he was regarded. No doubt the course of study was rigorous and prescribed and repeated much of what he had learned at Dudley. However, at Margaret Street he would be exposed to a variety of influences and talents, as formative as any he could find anywhere outside London. Robert Price reports his getting his Art Master's Certificate in Anatomical Drawing. I think this would be in 1926, after three years, but it might have been 1927, and I know from the minute books of Birmingham Education Department's School of Art Sub-committee that in 1928 he was appointed as a Sessional Teacher at the School of Art.

That leaves a gap in time. It was a time of decision for Percy. He wanted to be a painter but he needed to earn a living and success was not going to come easily to him. His sister, Gwen, told me that lots of friends and relatives still thought he ought to give up the idea. The family were as poor as ever. She thought at one time he had a job as a draughtsman but he could not stand the discipline - that might have been in this gap. So might a spell of teaching at Kidderminster School of Art. Percy's obituary in *The Express and Star* reported him teaching there before going to Birmingham. Perhaps he was filling a temporary vacancy at Kidderminster - the school would only warrant a small staff. The principal, a very good painter, Cyril Lavenstein had studied at Margaret Street.

In considering this time we must remember that the economic depression was approaching and unemployment would be very high. Dudley particularly would be a



gloomy place with many people on the dole. Again not the best of times to aspire to being an artist and to have no resources and no connections.

But at least Percy got his job at Margaret Street, though only for two evenings a week, for five shillings and six pence an hour. To put that in some context, assuming two hour sessions of two hours he would earn 22 shillings a week: at that time a skilled workman would be paid 56 shillings a week, so Percy had only half a reasonable wage to survive on and buy his materials while he looked for commissions as a painter. Life was not going to be easy.

It is casting ahead of the story that these chapters are trying to tell but we can note that the basis of Percy's life was to remain like this for the rest of his time as a painter until he was called up. He continued as a part-time member of staff; he got some increases in the number of hours he taught. The hourly rate crept up to seven shillings and six pence: then it was reduced to six shillings and six pence in 1934 because his hours became more than half-time - one of those irritating anomalies that bureaucrats create. Then in 1938 he became salaried with £182 for 16 hours a week. Again to put it in context a good, experienced, full-time teacher would be paid about £400 a year.

When he started teaching Percy was assisting Mr W. S. Eggison with life drawing and anatomy. Eggison had studied at Birmingham and in Paris and was considered brilliant. Mrs Margaret Cowern, then Margaret Trotman, known as 'Trot' to her friends came to Margaret Street as a student and was taught by Percy in his early years. She remembered the very good atmosphere and thought Percy contributed a great deal to it. Coming from a sheltered environment, she joined a group of Black Country boys but she found she could fit in very well. Percy was one of the younger members of staff, nearer the age of the students. She told me how they were in a room packed with easels and there were the usual casts of classical statues. It was very hot in the room. Percy taught general life drawing, often from a moving model. Students watched for five minutes then drew. They were taught to draw with strong strokes following through the movement and picking up the convex features. There was not much formal lecturing. Percy Shakespeare was 'sober' but more 'immediate' than the others on the staff. I think she meant he was more ready to talk to students as individuals.

The time when Percy Shakespeare trained at Dudley and in Birmingham was in the post First World War years when artists in Europe felt a need to return to order and formal theory, after the experimentalism of the Post-Impressionists in pre-war days. How much Post-Impressionism had spilled into Birmingham I do not know but perhaps not a lot. If a return to traditional methods of representation and traditional subjects was the order of the day then Birmingham would be well equipped for it. The ethos of the school continued to be traditional when Percy began his teaching. Harold Holden was appointed principal at the same time. He had been principal at Leeds School of

Art. He personally headed the teaching of painting and drawing. Harold Holden's paintings have been said to be sombre and well constructed. Whether he was an influence on Percy Shakespeare I do not know. Perhaps an influential senior colleague was Bernard Fleetwood Walker who had trained at Margaret Street and came back to teach in 1929. He was 13 years older than Percy and had been a Member of the RBSA since 1924. He was to become a Royal Academician and a Silver Medalist at the Paris Salon. One imagines that aspiring colleagues would be a spur to Percy.

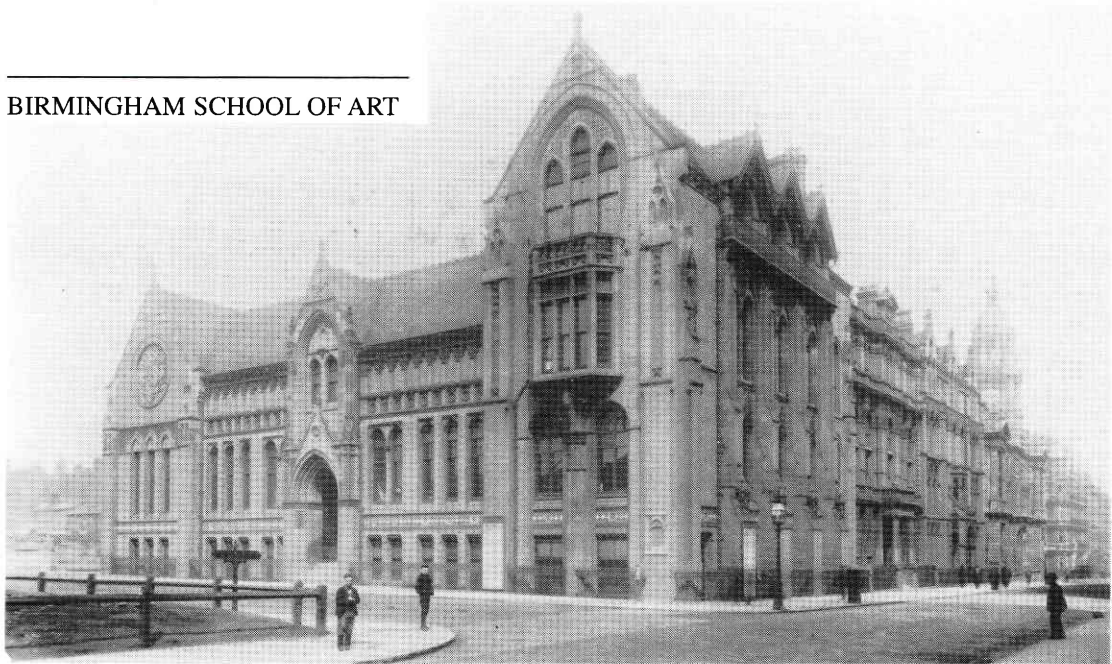
An insight into the teaching in the school can be drawn from a visit of Stanley Spencer to the School in April 1934. Harold Holden reported to the Education Subcommittee:

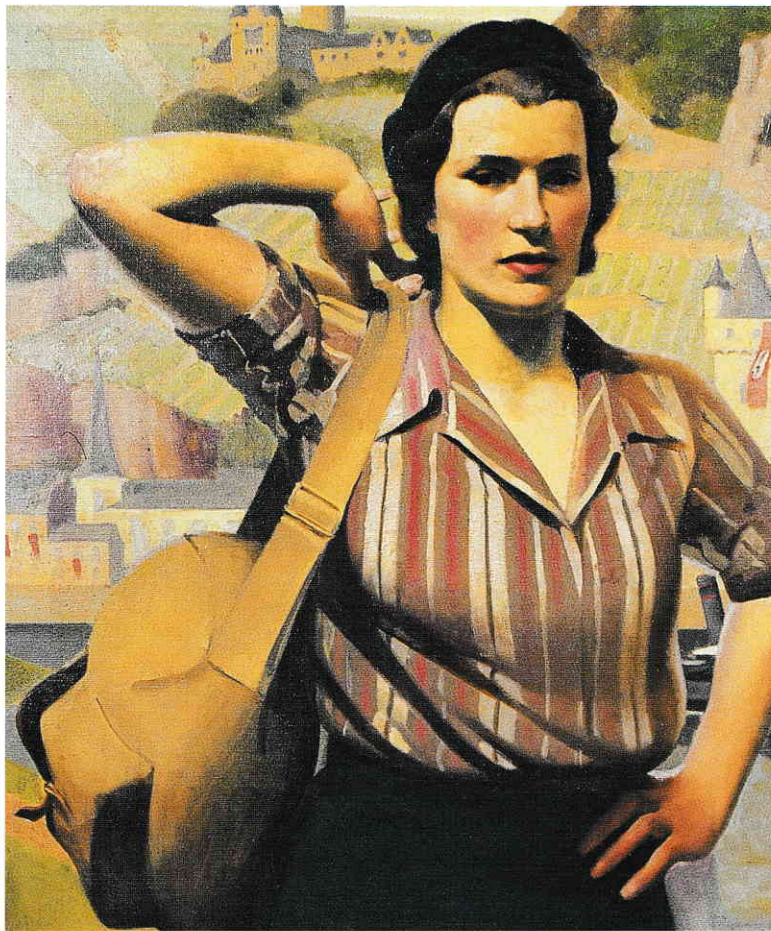
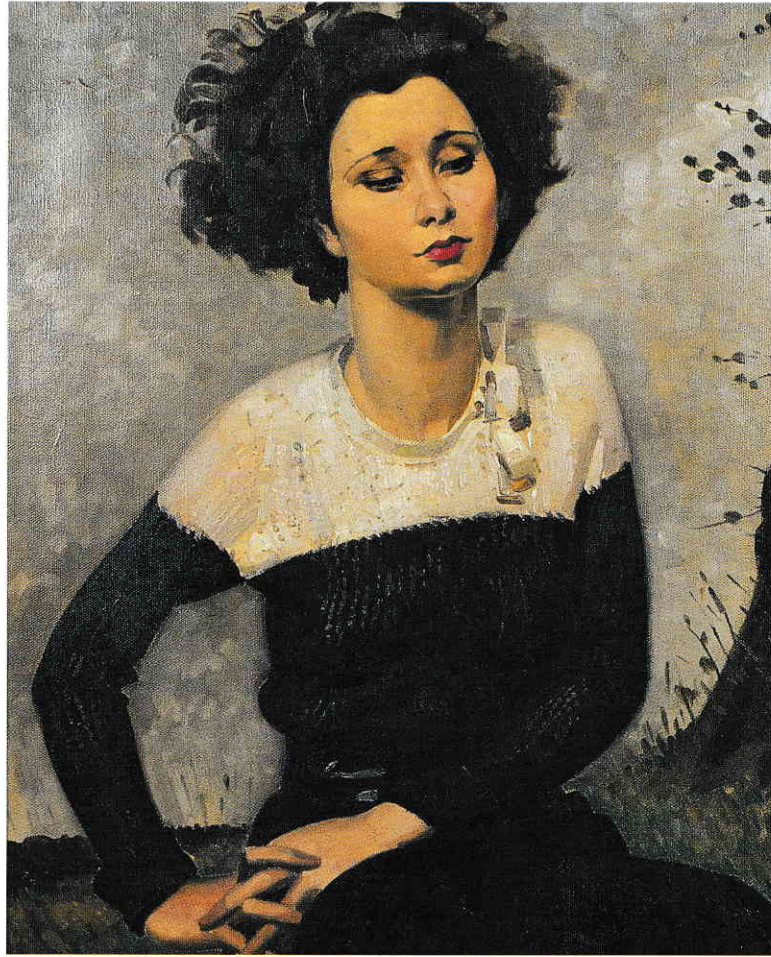
'Mr Spencer did not favour the academic style of painting and his views naturally differed from those of the teachers. The different points of view were fully discussed with Mr Spencer and the discussions were valuable to the teachers and students who took part in these. It was obvious that Mr Spencer was impressed by the work he saw, and he said he had never been in a school where there was so much alertness and the desire to get the right thoughts into painting'

In 1936 Professor Gilbert Spencer, Professor of Painting at the Royal College of Art, reported on an inspection:

'I am glad to note from the drawing that care is being taken not to impart any stylised form of expression but at the same time proper attention is being paid to the necessary qualities of construction.'

BIRMINGHAM SCHOOL OF ART







5

A Serious Painter

We have seen that, having finished his training at Birmingham School of Art, Percy Shakespeare chose to persist in trying to make a career as a painter. With the bare subsistence provided by part-time teaching he would have to seek commissions and paint for exhibitions.

As he began this way of life the nineteen-twenties were drawing to a close. At home in Dudley the town was changing. While economically the town was depressed, nevertheless a fine new town hall opened opposite the art school and from there the council managed a large slum clearance programme. On land on the slopes of the Wren's Nest, a wooded hill riddled with old limestone workings, geologically famous, the first council houses were built and the Shakespeare family were re-housed there, in Maple Road. This is where Percy lived for the rest of his life. He must have shared a room with his brothers until the family began to disperse. It was a much better environment than the old terraced area the family had left and it gave Percy the opportunity to take the long walks, which became his habit, in much better surroundings. Although, gradually, council houses spread around it, the Wren's Nest remained a green oasis in the Black Country.

So from 1928 Percy divided his time between Dudley and Birmingham. He had no studio and to paint he had to seek space at Margaret Street, or seek help from friends. Sometimes Ivo Shaw accommodated him at Dudley School of Art, or failing that he had to work in his small bedroom at home.

In the early years of trying to make his way, in addition to Ivo Shaw, he had another friend and supporter in his home town, C. V. Mackenzie. Mackenzie had come to Dudley in 1920 as an assistant at Dudley School of Art working for Ivo Shaw. Two years later he was appointed art master at Dudley Grammar School. He was a keen

Opposite top: THE BATHING PARTY (PS48), 1936
Opposite bottom: AFTERNOON AT THE ICE RINK (PS13), 1938

painter and so was his wife, Katherine. They were founder members of Dudley Art Circle which flourished from 1928 until after the Second World War. Percy was quickly drawn into the Circle and the other members were all proud of him. When they began to hold annual exhibitions from 1929 Percy was one of their key exhibitors. I have no details of what work he entered in the first three years; the press reports of the exhibitions do not mention individual works and catalogues have not survived. From 1932 Dudley Libraries have both catalogues and the reports from the local papers, *The Dudley Herald*, *The Express and Star* and *The County Express*. These are the prime sources for finding out what Percy was doing in the nineteen-thirties. Occasionally the Art Circle's exhibitions would be reported in *The Birmingham Post* but that was the full extent of Percy's fame.

In 1932 Dudley Art Circle held its fourth exhibition in Dudley Art Gallery and *The Dudley Herald* reported:

'Outstanding among the works of Dudley artists are the portraits of Percy Shakespeare who has this year surpassed any previous work. He has shown in former exhibitions an original grip of character, together with a splendid ability in design and of these qualities 'Isobel', 'Girl under Sycamore', 'The Rendezvous' and 'Miss Molly Betteridge' show a distinct advance. Dudley has reason to be proud of such work from so young a painter whose promise and ability should carry him a long way.'

That was encouraging for him. We do not know what happened to *The Rendezvous* (PS72) or *Miss Molly Betteridge* (PS73). Perhaps they were sold at the time. *Girl under Sycamore* (PS71) may be a study for, or the same painting, as *Summer* (PS7, p6) which was shown again in the following year. *Isobel* (PS61, p6), a three-quarter length portrait of a young woman was much admired and was singled out for comment by the local press. It is a fine portrait; the woman, in a red cardigan, looks proud, with hands tensely intertwined - there is almost a Spanish look about it.

*

At the end of 1932 Percy was working on a painting, *A Mulatto* (PS14, p21), of a young lady. Mulatto is a term, not used now, for a person of part black and part white parentage. It is however the term Percy Shakespeare used and clearly this portrait is a celebration of the beauty of the young woman. She was, thought Mrs Cowern, a model frequently employed at Birmingham School of Art. Percy Shakespeare put a great deal of effort into the portrait, doing a number of carefully executed pencil drawings (PS15, p25) as he would do with all his important paintings. The final portrait in oils shows the model seated, her left arm across her lap, again with fingers intertwined with those of the other hand. Percy liked drawing hands and knew he was good at them. A large proportion of his future portraits would include expressive hand arrangements.

In *A Mulatto* the girl tosses back her head, looking down pensively, her brown and unruly hair giving great vitality to the picture.

Together with *Isobel*, *A Mulatto*, was submitted to the Royal Academy for the Summer Exhibition in 1933 and much to Shakespeare's delight they were both accepted, although in the event only *A Mulatto* was hung.

Robert Price wrote in the 1979 exhibition catalogue:

'A *Mulatto* must have been well received for it was exhibited in the intimate No. 2 Gallery adjacent to works by notable and famous artists of the day - most of them Members of the Academy - Sir Arthur Stockdale Cope R.A. (A portrait of H.M. The King), Adrian Stokes R.A., C. M. Gere R.A., Gerald F. Kelly R.A., Oliver Hall R.A., and Algernon Talmage.'



STUDY FOR A MULATTO (PS15)

Neither *Isobel* nor *A Mulatto* sold but nevertheless it must have boosted Percy Shakespeare's confidence and encouraged him to think he might really make a career as a painter. His pleasure at having paintings accepted by the Royal Academy was shared by C. V. Mackenzie and his friends in Dudley Art Circle. Mackenzie had just taken over from Ivo Shaw as curator of Dudley Art Gallery and he wanted both to encourage Percy Shakespeare and to add one of his works to the permanent collection. He organised a successful public subscription to buy *A Mulatto*. Percy would surely have been very glad to receive a payment and he donated the best of the studies for the painting to the gallery to accompany the portrait.

In the autumn of 1933 at the Fifth Annual Exhibition of Dudley Art Circle *A Mulatto* was formally presented to the town. *The Dudley Herald* reported on the opening. The Mayor, Alderman J. H. Molyneux spoke of Percy Shakespeare as a product of the town, educated at one of its elementary schools and Dudley School of Art. Looking back, he said of the Education Committee:

'They knew there were some difficulties in the way but had no hesitation in making a grant that took him to Birmingham and his future career would be watched very closely by members of the Dudley Education Committee.'

And *The Dudley Herald* continued:

'Undoubtedly 'A Mulatto' is his finest achievement and it has a subtle grace and colour which will make it a valuable addition to the permanent collection. 'Isobel' is again included in this exhibition. It was much admired last year and has since being accepted by the Royal Academy. Mr. Shakespeare also shows two beautifully fresh figure studies and some excellent drawings.'

The Birmingham Post, Tuesday 24 October, said:

'He is evolving a style of portraiture that may lead him far. His Academy portrait, 'A *Mulatto*' needs perhaps a better quality of paint and the depiction of the hair is hardly confident enough but the easeful pose of the subject, the absence of anything in the nature of fussiness and the firm feeling for character make an arresting picture.'

It is hard to see what they mean by these comments except for the reference to feeling for character but it must have been gratifying to Percy Shakespeare to be noticed. *The County Express* reported on the speech given by C. V. Mackenzie and it chose to say that the Mayor had called Percy Shakespeare a hard and conscientious worker. It then gave Percy's response (a rare record of him speaking in public):

'Percy Shakespeare thanked them for the appreciation shown and thanked the townspeople who had purchased his first Academy exhibit and said many novices must envy what had been done for him. To Mr Mackenzie they owed a very great deal for work in the Art Circle and also for the Art Gallery.'

Commenting on Percy Shakespeare's work, the paper wrote of a definitive style of portraiture and a firm representation of character and a complete absence of fussy trivialities.

There were other paintings by Percy Shakespeare in Dudley Art Circle's 1933 exhibition. There was a portrait called *Queenie* (PS38), which I have not identified, and he offered *Isobel* for sale at 30 guineas. Then there was *Summer* (PS7, p6), a nude girl in a shady outdoor setting, also priced at 30 guineas. *The Birmingham Post* said:

'In '*Summer*' this artist treats his subject idealistically, capturing in the face of a nude girl, half recumbent beside the trunk of a tree, an air of sweet gravity that is entirely charming.'

Neither *Isobel* nor *Summer* sold. They were among the remaining pictures when Shakespeare died. In addition he exhibited in this exhibition, *The Model* (PS41), priced at £25, *A Study* (PS39), priced at £5 and *White Gloves* (PS40) priced at £5. Again these have not been identified but *The Birmingham Post* commented on, 'two beautifully fresh figure studies and some excellent drawings.'

Percy Shakespeare had certainly made an impact in his home town in 1933.

At this point we can note that most of Percy Shakespeare's early work was figure drawing and portraiture, mostly of women. It was figure drawing that he was teaching and he continued to hone his skills with pencil or pencil and wash drawings similar to the ones he was producing from the age of eighteen at Dudley School of Art. To earn a living he probably saw his best chance in portrait painting but commissions would be difficult to obtain for an unknown Midland artist.



Sometime in the 1930s one local commission was for the full-length Portrait of *Mrs Nell Jenkins* (PS5) a very competent though conventional work. It has serenity - she is alone with her thoughts. Mrs Jenkins and her husband were Dudley teachers. (The picture was eventually presented to Dudley Museum and Art Gallery in 1979).

Another painting, not a portrait, which was probably commissioned in the early 1930s is *The Rasp Grinders* (PS66). This is the largest of Percy's paintings, an oil colour, 1095 mm x 1680 mm, of a typical Black Country workshop. Sparks are flying

above right
Mrs NELL JENKINS (PS5)
1933.



THE RASP GRINDERS (PS66)
A commission in early 1930s.
Vaughan's factory.
A typical Black Country scene.

from a grindstone, in a brick, rafted building where three workmen are toiling. It is set in a factory, Vaughan's, which made horse-shoes and blacksmith's tools. It is interesting as a fore runner of the compositions he was to turn to later in the nineteen thirties.

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After his 1933 Royal Academy successes and the acclaim he had received in the local press in 1934, Percy Shakespeare would be pursuing his painting career with new determination. In the spring, probably for the first time, he submitted a painting, *Portrait of a Girl* (PS25), to The Royal Birmingham Society of Artists (RBSA) Spring Exhibition. It was accepted and he offered it for sale at £20. I have not found out where this picture is today. Not liking the exhibition, a press report picked it out as being gold amid the dross:

'The cause of modern art is almost irretrievably lost. Not entirely, because there are brilliant painters, such as Percy Shakespeare, whose bold talented methods flout the Society's conservative spirit. The young lady whom Mr. Shakespeare has perpetuated in his "Portrait of a Girl" looks at you with an arresting expression. She is a modern girl of the finest type. A narrow scarf of red and white stripes sets off her blue black hair, and the boulders of cloud, slanting across the sky, provide a fitting background for her frank and vivid personality. Mr Shakespeare handles his colours with astounding originality.'

Where is this picture now? Interestingly, his gift for colour was starting to be noticed and it is also worth noting that it was outdoors - he had discovered with *Summer* and *Mulatto* that natural light brought out the colours he liked best and many of his paintings would exploit this.

For 1934 Percy again had his sights set on the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition and his subject was a dramatic self-portrait, *Morning Exercise* (PS26). It is set indoors, in his bedroom but the natural light shines through the window to catch from the right-hand rear the near silhouette of his figure. Clad in singlet and shorts we see his three-quarter figure, stretching, knuckles to shoulders, arms bent, slender chest extended, full of tension. The bright light plays on his cheek bones and down his back. The panes



MORNING EXERCISE (PS26) Self-portrait 1934,
Accepted by the Paris Salon.

of the window break the light diagonally. Among the colours are brown and orangy-yellows and pink and reddish tinges. I think Percy Shakespeare must have put a great deal of effort into painting *Morning Exercise* and he must have been disappointed when it was accepted by the Royal Academy only to be crowded out in the hanging. In the autumn of 1934 the picture was shown in the Sixth Annual Exhibition of Dudley Art Circle. It was not priced: I do not think he would want to sell it at that stage, he had other plans. *The Express and Star* said:

'His best work.... a finely painted and lively portrait of a young man, in underclothes performing his daily dozen.'

The Birmingham Post said, enigmatically:

'... a confident draughtsman and his work is undisturbed by loss of unity.'

Along with *Morning Exercise*, he also showed *Girl with Camellia* (PS43), *The Lovers* (PS45), *Nude* (PS44), *Jane* (PS42), and a *Drawing* (PS46). I have not seen or identified any of these. *The Lovers* evoked the comment in *The County Express*, 'Wooden and might be from an entirely different hand.' and from *The Birmingham Post*, 'interest is diminished by the awkward placing of the figures'. *The Dudley Herald* commented on *Jane*, '... shows a new departure. It aims at portraying a fleeting expression and both in its technique and its drawing is very successful.' Intriguingly, on the *Drawing* it said, 'A portrait drawing will live in the memory of the visitor. It is a mysterious drawing, a few smudges and a few lines but a wonderful vision of beauty.' That would be interesting to find.

In 1934 Percy Shakespeare's horizons were widening. Until then, a Black Country lad, he had probably been no further than London to see the galleries and go to the Royal Academy but either in the autumn of 1934 or the spring of 1935 he took a holiday in the Rhineland. It may have been that he went with a party of young friends from Birmingham School of Art. Maybe the opportunity came when he had sold a picture and could afford it - I am guessing. It was a dramatic time to go to Germany for the Nazis were asserting themselves and out of that holiday came his very interesting portrait, *On the Rhine* (PS8, p21).

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On the Rhine was ready for the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition 1935 and this time it was accepted and hung. Paul Lewis described and commented on the portrait for Dudley Museum Art Galleries 1999 exhibition pointing out that it captures the celebration of youth and healthy exercise that was a feature of the nineteen-thirties.

Paul Lewis wrote in Dudley Museum and Art Gallery's 1999 brochure :

'It would be so neat to have a date of 1936 for Percy Shakespeare's *On the Rhine*. This remarkable picture presents us with a modern Rhinemaiden, probably from one of the many hiking and outdoor groups, often working class and espoused by both Left and Right. On the river a steamer passes and on the further bank vineyards rise steeply behind an old town to the church, perhaps a fortified monastery at the very top of the picture. The monastery is juxtaposed with a wooded crag. But all is dominated by the strong and serious young woman, shouldering her rucksack and about to move on. Nature, Youth and History come together. The colour is deployed to more than aesthetic purpose. There is a skilful play on red and green throughout. The canvas is punctured by small, intense red touches which resolve as flags and banners. They hang from houses, decorate the steamer, and one furls lazily from the ancient tower. They are Nazi banners. The picture's imagery takes its place with Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935) in which modernity and destiny are fused with tradition as the shadow of Hitler's planes sweeps over medieval Nuremberg. The town in Shakespeare's picture has yet to be identified. In March 1936 Hitler effectively annulled the Treaty of Versailles by his military reoccupation of the Rhineland, a move unopposed by Britain and France. But Shakespeare's picture was made in 1935. He gives us a rare view of the Rhineland already occupied by political spirit. It was in the spring of that year that Hitler had announced the creation of a German air force and introduced military conscription for a much enlarged army.'

We cannot necessarily assume the girl is a German. I think she is more likely to be one of the party or another tourist. Looking at this picture I wondered whether it was intended to be a celebration of Nazism or a warning and I asked Percy Shakespeare's sister, Gwendoline whether she remembered him going to Germany and what he thought. She certainly remembered him going and coming back saying that there would be war. She did not think he had any sympathy with Hitler. Perhaps he had simply gone for a holiday and reported the scene there.

I have not found any record of comment on the Royal Academy hanging. The picture did not sell and in the Autumn of 1935 it was shown in the Seventh Annual Exhibition of Dudley Art Circle. If there was an intention to convey any political messages with *On the Rhine* it was lost on *The Birmingham Post* which simply said that it was:

'a picture satisfying in composition and more restrained in colour than his other work'.

I do not know whether it was offered for sale; if it was it did not sell. It was entered and accepted for the RBSA Spring exhibition in 1936, this time unpriced, and in 1937 Dudley Art Gallery bought it and added it to its permanent collection. One wonders whether anyone ever saw the political prescience in the picture.

Percy Shakespeare had not finished with Germany for by the Autumn of 1936, perhaps after another visit to the Rhineland, he had produced another painting with the title *Mosel* (PS49). We do not know where this is, and I have not seen a photograph of it, so we do not know whether it gives any further insight into the rise of the Nazis.

Discussing Shakespeare's German paintings has taken us slightly ahead of our chronological narrative. To complete our view of 1935 it is important to note another key milestone in Percy Shakespeare's career; *Morning Exercise* was accepted by the Paris Salon. That was indeed a success.

And to complete our report on the Dudley Art Circle Exhibition of 1935, I should say that we know from the catalogue that Percy Shakespeare also included *Portrait Head Studies*, which I have not identified and *Cyclists* (PS47) the whereabouts of which is unknown and there is no record - not even a photograph.

I would certainly like to know what both *Cyclists* and *Mosel* looked like, for either or both of them may mark a tuning point in the development of Percy Shakespeare's work. Most of the pictures we know are those that he did not sell; for his sake I hope that these two were sold at the time.



Head and shoulders from MORNING EXERCISE (PS26), 1934

6

The Man

At this point I will pause from the story of Percy Shakespeare's life as I try to put together what I learned about him as a person. All I have to go on is the testimony of half a dozen people who knew him a long time ago, four self-portraits and some tiny snapshots - nothing in writing by anyone. I am not at all certain I got near to knowing him for accounts were sometimes difficult to reconcile with one other. But it began to make more sense when I allowed for a mellowing as he became older and became more sure of himself.

The first thing some people noticed was that he was ugly. That was the word used, even by people who liked him. Certainly his features were combined without much harmony; large pouting lips, strong cheek bones, hollow cheeks, a large brow, dark wavy hair, which was receding rapidly as he went through his thirties. Compared with the snapshots, his self-portrait, *Morning Exercise* (PS26, p28 & 31) and his *Self-portrait in Pencil* (PS78, frontispiece) flatter him; he has softened some of the features but the eyes are striking - they seem to smoulder. The same is true of *Self Portrait in Oils* (PS88, p32) which is particularly charismatic.

While I was researching Percy's life his *Self Portrait in a Trilby* (PS56, p33) was an enigma which I puzzled over with several people. How did he come to paint himself looking grotesque and even sinister, the face wild and the teeth showing, (one owner of the picture noted how unusual that was in a portrait) and the hands contorted. But Mrs Cowern, who certainly knew and liked Percy Shakespeare saw it differently. 'It is exactly like him', she said - 'full of fun'. A clue came at a late stage when I saw the list of pictures from Dudley Museum and Art Gallery's 1979 exhibition. It was then called *Mephistopheles of 1933*. I do not know how he became interested in Mephistopheles, and came to paint this picture. He did not exhibit it. It was with all his unsold pictures when he died.

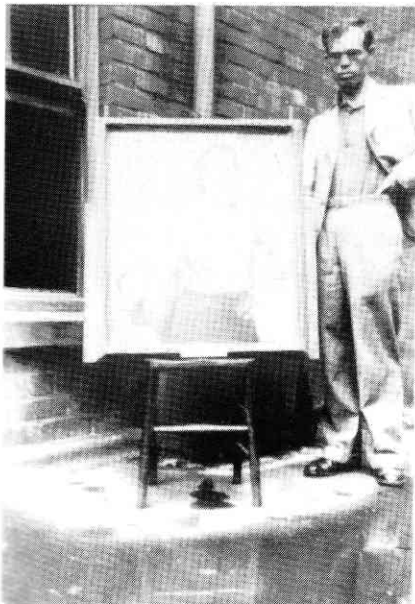
Physically, he was barely of medium height for the time and, as is clear in *Morning Exercise*, of slender build. Perhaps because of his strong features his head



SELF PORTRAIT IN OILS (PS88)
Probably in his early twenties.



SELF PORTRAIT WITH TRILBY (PS56)
Aged 27. Probably posing as Mephistopheles.



With ON THE RHINE (PS8)
1935, aged 29.



Painting WOMAN WITH DOG (PS65)
Date unknown.

gave the impression of being large. About his general appearance and the way he carried himself, two things stick in my mind. At the end of two hours talking to Mrs Cowern, she said in parting, 'jaunty, that's the word for him - and good natured.' She had already commented on his habitual gesture of raising his little finger in an arty (my word - not her's) mannerism. All of this she saw in the Trilby portrait (If he wanted to look sinister he was not totally successful). And Clendon Walters said 'He always walked like this' and Clendon swung his arms exaggeratedly and snapped the fingers of both hands. Both these impressions add up to an air of confidence and vitality. Alan Young said, 'He was full of life. He had a twinkle in his eye that could take over at any moment.' That is something that did not come through in the self-portraits, three of which are very serious.

Another enigma is how to reconcile the character of a man seen by his family as a loner with the popular teacher described by Mrs Cowern. Percy's sisters said he was always a loner. Gwen said, 'As a child his mother used to say to him, "I've been up and down looking for you"; he was always wandering off'. And when he was grown up and living in the same house, the council house on the Wren's Nest, Margery and Gwen agreed that he came and went, mostly keeping himself to himself.

Reg Wakefield was his friend at Dudley School of Art when Percy was sixteen. Reg spent a great deal of time with him. They were the only two scholarship boys and they worked in the school alongside each other and went to the pictures once or twice a week. Reg said with a laugh 'He was a horrible man'. He said he was obstinate and suggested that he didn't get on with anyone. Bill Homer, however, who knew Percy a little later but still when Percy was at Dudley School of Art said he was on good terms with other pupils, though he added 'a bit bolshie'. Clendon Walters used the word 'remote' to sum him up.

Reg Wakefield particularly remembered Percy's political feelings when he was sixteen, 'He didn't like people who had money. Talk about a Labourite he was ten times worse. He was very bigoted.' Apparently, as a lad from the Kate's Hill slums, Percy burned with a sense of social injustice. Perhaps he tempered his feelings later on but he remained a Labour supporter. Alan Young used to go to political meetings with him and testifies that he remained actively interested in the Labour party through his twenties. As for hating anyone, Alan could not envisage this at all but he recognised that Percy resented being held back by lack of resources, but he added, 'That did not stop him enjoying life'. I do not think he remained burned up by politics.

Mrs Cowern recalled when Percy was in his early twenties at Birmingham and in his first years as a qualified teacher. 'He was', she said, and I am distilling the adjectives she used, 'gentle, self-deprecatory and humorous'. She said he had a way of gathering everyone together (I think she meant working together in the same way); not apologetic, but inspirational. And when we spoke of the Trilby portrait being seen by some as sinister she was very firm, 'He wouldn't hurt a fly'.

About his sex life, I learned very little. My impression is that he was inhibited. I think his work shows that he admired women - all of his oil portraits are of women. He was popular with women students. Yet no one who knew him knew of any real girl friends. His sister, Gwen, said 'Only once did he bring a lady home: we were decorating and they helped'. Alan Young referred to a girl Percy was very fond of in his painting group at Birmingham. This was Marjorie Derricourt who exhibited in an RBSA exhibition in 1934. Her picture was compared in the press with Percy's *Portrait of a Girl* (PS25): 'Marjorie Derricourt's flesh tints are warmer than Mr. Shakespeare's and her 'Waking' (No 185) is nearly as praiseworthy'. Whether Percy's admiration for her was just professional we will never know.

Percy was dedicated to painting. When he was not painting, at home, he went long walks by himself and listened to the radio. When he was young, we have seen that he went frequently to the cinema. I do not know this but I believe he continued this interest; his later paintings seem to be a world seen through a cinematic eye.

While mentioning the cinema I will intrude a reference to James Whale, the cinema director of the thirties who, in Hollywood, directed *Journey's End*, *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein*. James Whale was born on Kate's Hill, Dudley, a few hundred yards from where Percy Shakespeare was born. He also went to Dudley School of Art and for one year was taught by Ivo Shaw before they both went off to the First World War. By the time Percy arrived at the school James Whale was directing *Journey's End* for the stage in London. I do not know whether they ever met but James Whale may, by example, have raised Percy's aspirations - showing what a boy from the same background could do.

I have already recounted how Percy at home on Sunday would go to church and play billiards after. I have the impression that he led another life when he was in Birmingham. That is where he saw the 'Thirties at Leisure', the main content of the next chapter.

When you are trying to find out about a man, you talk to one person who knew him and you get one impression, then when you have talked to six it changes and no doubt it would change again if you talked to more. So it was with Percy Shakespeare. At this point in my researches I have an impression of a ragged, rough, very basically educated, intolerant, Black Country boy who grew and developed into a man who was well liked; a man of energy with enthusiasm for life, who dressed well within his limited budget, who had lost the rough edge of his Black Country dialect, was articulate enough to teach others and mixed enthusiastically with students and staff from all walks of life, accepted by some and, admired by others.

Thirties at Leisure Paintings

Continuing our chronological narrative we come to the second half of the nineteen-thirties. In 1936 Percy was thirty and no less determined to make his way as a painter. He was still teaching part-time at Birmingham School of Art, Margaret Street. From this time on, while he continued to paint portraits he devoted most of his energy to producing a series of oil paintings showing scenes from contemporary life, with figures engaged in leisure pursuits, mostly, but not all, outdoors. I call them the Thirties at Leisure paintings - although he went on with the series as long as he was able, when the nineteen-thirties changed to the nineteen forties and war broke out.

As I tracked down paintings for Dudley Museum and Art Gallery's 1999 exhibition it became clear that there is a series of related paintings. It looks as though Percy Shakespeare was seeking a way of making an impact on the art world and finding some territory that he could make his own. There can have been no doubt that his work would be based on figure drawing and painting and already we have seen that with *A Mulatto* (PS14, p21), *Portrait of a Girl* (PS25) and *On the Rhine* (PS8, p21), he was showing a preference for setting his portraits out of doors. In grouping figures together he must have looked around for scenes which reflected life of the time and gathered people together. He called these compositions.

We have no direct record of what his intentions were - only the pictures to speak for themselves. It would be interesting to know whether he did conceive the series as a totality and where he intended to go with it. He did not talk to his contemporaries about it. I could be constructing a strategy when there was none. Maybe he was simply painting scenes of what he and his friends in Birmingham liked to do and one led to another. The only hint I have found on this is the press comment in *The County Express* on paintings in The Dudley Art Circle exhibition of 1938, '*Tennis Players* [sic - they mean *Tennis* (PS27)] and *The School Girl* indicate that he is making excellent progress in his endeavour to portray life of today'. He may have talked to the reporter about what he was attempting.

There are about thirteen of these compositions that we know of if we include the

unseen *Cyclists* and *Mosel*, referred to in chapter 5, and fifteen including his war pictures, *The Ante-room*, *HMS Vernon* (PS55, p48) and *December on the Downs* (PS54 p49), which are not leisure pictures but are otherwise similar. The pictures are all oil paintings, mostly of the same approximate size, about 700 X 900 millimetres. They are of landscape proportions (except *The Broads*) and are complex compositions in which the figures usually dominate the scene.

As I have already intimated *Cyclists* may have represented the departure point for the Thirties at Leisure paintings. It was exhibited in the Dudley Art Circle exhibition along with *On the Rhine* which had already been shown that year by the Royal Academy. *On the Rhine* got all the attention and was purchased by Dudley Art Gallery. *The Express and Star* simply said *Cyclists* was 'broadly treated' whatever that means. If it was a planned new departure no one noticed.

THIRTIES AT LEISURE PAINTINGS

1935	Cyclists	PS47
1936	Mosel	PS49
1936	Bathing party	PS48
1938	Afternoon at the Ice Rink	PS13
1939	Tennis	PS27
1939	Boat Shed	PS4
1939	Bird House	PS12
?	Tea Interval	PS68
?	Seaside Photographer	PS64
?	The Team Race	PS69
?	The Crooner	PS6
1940	The Broads	PS24
1941	Caravanners	PS34
1941/42	December on the Downs	PS54
1941/42	The Ante-room HMS Vernon	PS55

If these were intended as Percy Shakespeare's bid for recognition, they are a tribute to his persistence. Most of them were exhibited and offered for sale. Most were unsold when he died. Did he plan to build up the series, doggedly painting them, and storing them when they did not sell, to a point where he could exhibit them as a totality?

*

Looking specifically at 1936, we have already noted that *On the Rhine* was accepted by the RBSA for their spring exhibition and in this, his third year of success with them, Percy was proposed and seconded as an Associate and voted in at the Annual General Meeting. He never became a Full Member but it surely would have

been a matter of time before he was elected if the war had not intervened.

Percy Shakespeare was not represented in the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in 1936 but when it came to the autumn he had four paintings ready for The Dudley Art Circle Eighth Exhibition, *The Bathing Party* (PS48, p22) and *Mosel*, priced £20 and £40, two portraits priced at 10 guineas and £25 some drawings at £4 each. The fact that the whereabouts of *Mosel* is unknown was discussed in chapter five but *The Bathing Party*, now in private ownership, was lent for the 1999 exhibition. It is a very fine painting and it shows a group of young people camping and bathing with canoes. It is an interesting composition with two central figures forming a central X shape with the canoes and oars and all the other features crisscrossing the scene. The picture is painted as from a slightly raised view point. It is stylised, with detail abandoned to give an overall simplified effect with the background tending to come into the one plane of focus. The colours are softer, more pastel shades than in many of his paintings and the figure of a woman, in a long dark skirt of thirties length is thrown into prominence.

The Express and Star thought, ' "*Mosel*" a more satisfactory painting than "*A Bathing Party*' where the nude figure is not attractive'. Actually the man is wearing bathing trunks - the one piece suit with shoulder straps had gone out by the thirties. Percy valued *Mosel* the higher of the two paintings which makes it even more disappointing that we have not traced it. Neither pictures were exhibited again. *Mosel* might have been a rare sale but *The Bathing Party* was still unsold when Percy died.

Percy had put a lot effort into *The Bathing Party*. I had a fascinating insight into this when I visited Lyn Fiddian-Green. Lyn Fiddian-Green knew that her mother, Estelle, whose maiden name was Hough, had been the model for the central figure in *The Bathing Party* and she owned a pencil study of her mother in a bathing costume. While I was with her she recalled that her mother had said there was a letter from Percy about the drawing. She cut open the back of the frame, drew out the pins, removed the backing board and revealed a brown envelope. In it was the only letter I have seen in Percy's hand, it was undated and it read:

Dear Estelle,

I'm doing a comp. of bathing girls (enclosing a rough drawing) & want to make some studies, thought you might like to help me out.

Could you manage a day next week? I think I could have use of the life room or perhaps an evening then I might ask a friend to lend me his studio in that case I would meet you for tea, say 5.30 although I'd rather it be in the daytime but I know it is awkward for you.

If you can however manage it in the daytime you can arrange a time convenient to yourself and I'll meet you outside New Street Station.

As you know I'm now on holiday and any time suits me.

Hope you're having a nice holiday and all the best

Sincerely

Percy Shakespeare

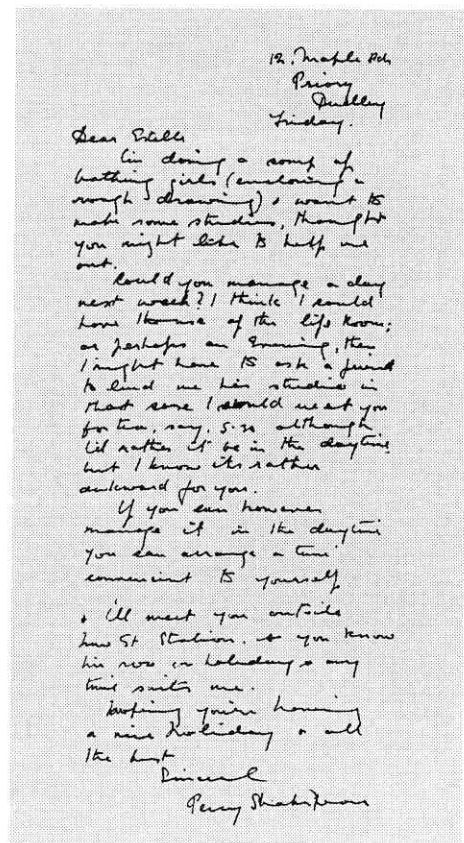
As well as showing that his handwriting was good (he was probably taught this by Ivo Shaw), Percy's letter gives an insight into the difficulties of operating without his own studio. It also indicates the trouble he went to to build up his compositions. He had to find models for the many studies he drew before commencing the painting. The sketch that accompanied the letter was not for *Bathing Party* - perhaps it was *Mosel*.

Estelle Hough was one of Percy's favourite models; he painted at least two portraits of her and I am fairly sure that one of these (PS52, p40) was one of the two unnamed portraits in Dudley Art Circle's 1936 exhibition. It is a typical Percy Shakespeare portrait, head and shoulders, outdoors with a hint of cloud in the sky. She is wearing green and *The Express and Star* reported:

'Of the two portraits the one of the girl pulling on her gloves is lively and without mannerisms but it is not so strong a piece of work as the girl in olive green, which is more typical of his style.'



PHOTOGRAPH OF ESTELLE HOUGH



Having seen both paintings, I remember them as fairly evenly matched and I am not sure which Percy priced at 10 guineas and which at £25. Maybe he was more anxious to sell one rather than the other. The girl with the gloves, which I call *White Gloves II* (PS50) to distinguish it from a painting called *White Gloves* (PS40) exhibited in 1933, which might or might not be the same, has a wistful beauty and the picture has a very elegant hand composition.



WHITE GLOVES II (PS 50) 1936



GIRL IN OLIVE GREEN (PS52) 1936

* * *

In 1937 Percy Shakespeare's Thirties at Leisure painting for the year was *Tennis*, (PS27, p41) a composition from a raised viewing point, dominated by the rear view of a male spectator but with a variety of figures. In this series of paintings Percy is gradually losing some of the detail and building the overall effect. His figures become more stylised. *Tennis* was entered in the RBSA autumn exhibition priced £60. It did not sell and he did not put it in the Dudley Art Circle which followed soon after. He was saving it for another go at The Paris Salon.

Perhaps while he was working on *Tennis* Percy also did a portrait, *Tennis Player*, (PS10, p45). This is a three-quarter length portrait of a seated girl. Percy's sisters believed it was of Dorothy Round, the famous Dudley player who won the Women's Singles at Wimbledon in 1934. Unfortunately this has been disproved.

Opposite top: TENNIS (PS27) 1937
Opposite bottom: BOAT SHED (PS4) 1939





The paintings which Percy Shakespeare did enter in Dudley Art Circle's ninth exhibition in December 1937 were *Boy and Dog*, (PS51, below), a portrait of his nephew with the family dog, Rex, *A Portrait of Mrs Edwards*, (PS53), *Girl with Daffodils*, (PS1) and several drawings. *The Dudley Herald* ran a feature on the exhibition. It did not comment on any of these but it showed a photograph of one wall including *A Portrait of Mrs Edwards* (which is the only evidence I have of what the portrait looked like) and *Girl with Daffodils*. *The Express and Star* said:

'The portraits of Percy Shakespeare are the outstanding exhibits and in the 'Girl with Daffodils' in particular he discloses how much happier and certain he is in portrait painting than in problem themes. This picture will rank as his best, being perfect in colour and feeling. It is an excellent study.'

By 'problem themes', did they mean the Thirties at Leisure paintings? Perhaps they did not like the style that Percy was evolving as his figures became less representational and less detailed. Dudley Museum and Art Gallery now own *Girl with Daffodils*. They also have a very fine pencil drawing which preceded the oil painting. Unfortunately the paint is badly peeling from much of the painting but the face is intact and it could be restored. Percy priced it at £40 so he thought it was good but not as good as *Boy and Dog* for which he wanted £60. Neither *Girl with Daffodils* nor *Boy and Dog* sold. *A Portrait of Mrs Edwards* was not priced. It was probably commissioned. Perhaps it gave him some much needed money.



BOY AND DOG (PS51) 1937

Opposite top: THE BIRD HOUSE (PS12)



Study for
GIRL WITH DAFFODILS (PS2) 1937

Opposite bottom: CARAVANNERS (PS34)

Then it was 1938 and Percy was thoroughly engrossed with his Thirties at Leisure compositions. He kept up an output of at least one new composition a year. This year it was *Afternoon at the Ice Rink* (PS13, p22). It is an elaborate painting with strong figures in the foreground. Dudley Museum and Art Gallery has the evidence of the work he put in to get to the final painting - a batch of studies for each character and a pastel version of the whole scene. *Afternoon at the Ice Rink* was accepted by the Royal Academy. He had missed the previous two years. I do not know whether he had paintings rejected.



Drawing for AFTERNOON AT THE
THE ICE RINK (PS81) 1938

Also in 1938 *Tennis* was accepted by the Paris Salon so things seemed to be on the right track. At the RBSA in the spring he had shown two drawings and in the autumn he included a portrait which I have not identified. To close the year, for Dudley Art Circle he chose to show *Tennis*, back unsold from Paris. He priced it now at £100, up from £60 at the RBSA the previous autumn, which suggests he was getting more confident of the value of his work even if sales were few and far between. *Tennis* never sold in Percy's lifetime even though it was exhibited again in 1939 in a London exhibition 'Britain at Play'.

Also in Dudley Art Circle's exhibition he included *Schoolgirl* (PS11) a three-quarter picture of a girl, hand on hip in a slightly awkward pose, outdoors with a netball net in the background. On the back of this picture frame is a 1938 Royal Academy sticker. It may have been accepted but not hung (caution however - he sometimes swapped pictures in frames).

*

Now we come to 1939, while peace or war hung in the balance Percy was working with greater urgency on his compositions. He put several portrait drawings in the RBSA spring exhibition but his main thoughts were directed at the Royal Academy. He had two Thirties at Leisure pictures ready and they were both accepted, *The Boat Shed* (PS4, p41) and *The Bird House* (PS12, p42). *The Boat Shed* is a painting I admire; it is very much from the same hand as *The Bathing Party* with subtle colouring. It might be based on the boating lake in Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham. There are six figures in the painting but the empty rowing boats predominate, in a fan shape radiating from a point on the right hand side. Two women are coming in from the left to

disembark, the boatman prepares to pull them in and several other figures look on. The view-point is interesting; as with many of the other Thirties at Leisure paintings the scene is cleverly viewed from a high point. I say cleverly for among the few papers that Percy left was a camera snapshot which he took to help him. It shows that he saw the scene from a much lower angle and had to construct the composition from an imaginary point.

The Bird House is a painting of the bird house in Dudley Zoo. It tells us that although Percy's life was centred in Birmingham he was not leaving Dudley, where his home was, completely behind. Dudley Zoo had opened in the hillside grounds of Dudley Castle in 1937. It was an exciting development for the town and the buildings were very futuristic for the time, designed in reinforced concrete by Berthold Lubetkin and the Tecton Partnership.

Neither *The Boat Shed* nor *The Bird House* sold and with the outbreak of war I think that Dudley Art Circle cancelled its autumn exhibition.



TENNIS PLAYER (PS10)

*

Before we close this chapter on the thirties, there are four other Thirties at Leisure paintings to record. They are not known to have been exhibited and I have not managed to date them; *Tea Interval* (PS68, cover), *Seaside Photographer* (PS64, below), *The Team Race* (PS69, p46), *The Crooner* (PS6, p46).

Tea Interval, also known as *Pavillion*, is a cricketing picture with a uniformed waitress, pouring tea from an urn, occupying the foreground. Suited, hatted men drink tea and the match takes place well in the background. The setting has the look of somewhere near the sea, with bright light behind the darker pavillion, a white building and distant hills.

SEASIDE
PHOTOGRAPHER (PS64) Late 1930s

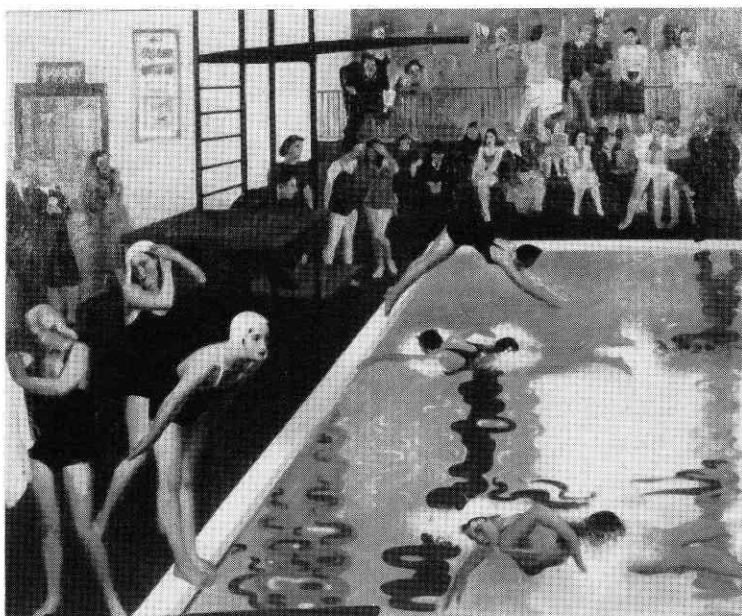


Seaside Photographer is a family scene on the sea front. The father and the photographer are again trilby-hatted and with macks and collar and ties. The mother wears a suit, a small hat and a tight hair style. All the people tell their own stories. Photographs are five for sixpence. The figures dominate the picture as they would in a scene from a cinema film. I think this is very late nineteen thirties, if not 1940.

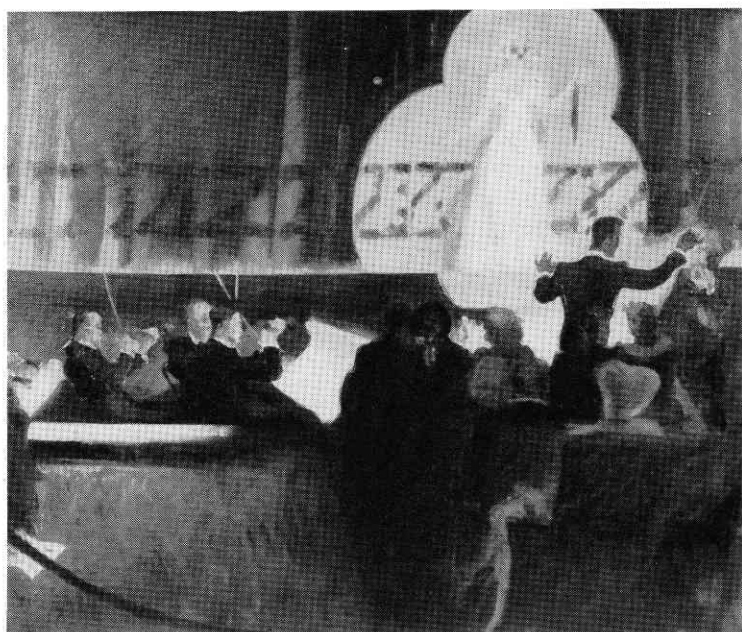
Crooner is quite different, a dark indoor picture with the lady singer spot-lit in a long cream dress, a band and a conductor. Dudley Museum and Art Gallery own this. It was found unframed. It is crudely painted and one wonders whether it was abandoned as not really achieving what Percy wanted.

Team Race is a swimming scene, vibrant with bright red floor and rippling blue water. When it was on display at Dudley's 1999 exhibition it stood out with its brasher colours as if from a different palette. So much so that some viewers wondered whether it had been retouched - or was it Percy in a different mood?

All these pictures give an impression of Percy Shakespeare increasing the intensity of his painting and becoming more obsessed with his compositions as the thirties changed to the forties.



THE TEAM RACE (PS69)
Late 1930s



THE CROONER (PS6)
Late 1930s

The War and Death

Who knows what Percy Shakespeare felt about the outbreak of war but from the perspective of his career it was disastrous. In 1939 both the *Boat Shed* and *The Bird House* had been accepted by the Royal Academy. Neither of them sold but he pressed on. As the nation geared up for war and blackout and rationing descended he carried on teaching and painting. He now had a salaried, though still part-time, post at Birmingham School of Art and he made his train journey from Dudley to a sand-bagged city. His salary in 1939 was increased by a scale increment to £189-15-0. Probably in the summer of 1939 he had a holiday on the Norfolk Broads and he would be working on *The Broads* (PS24) when war broke out. This picture was shown in Dudley Museum and Art Gallery's 1979 exhibition and, although I have not seen it, there is an illustration in Robert Price's exhibition brochure. *The Broads* was accepted by the Royal Academy in 1940. The RBSA continued its exhibitions and Percy chose to enter *Afternoon at the Ice Rink* in the spring exhibition. He ambitiously priced it at £100 but it did not sell. At Birmingham College of Art the staff had been thinning out as younger teachers were called up and there were fewer students. Percy was thirty-four and for him call-up was delayed. As Birmingham endured the worst of the Blitz through 1940 and into 1941 he painted on.

In 1941 he completed *Caravanners* (PS34, p42) for the RBSA and entered it with an unidentified portrait. *Caravanners* is sheer theatre; every figure has its own story to tell, the pipe-smoking father, the daughters, the younger one adjusting her straw hat, the older one entering the water. Mother throws the table cloth and the dog is about to bark. It is full of things to look at. The colours are bold, the shadows are dark. Everything is stylised.

In the summer of 1941 the forces were taking older men and at the age of 35 Percy Shakespeare's turn came. At Birmingham School of Art his call up was minuted by the Education Subcommittee and in the minutes he was described as Assistant Teacher of Life Drawing, 15 hours a week, 5/8ths of full time.

On 26 August 1942 he became Ordinary Seaman Shakespeare, JO 282699. The

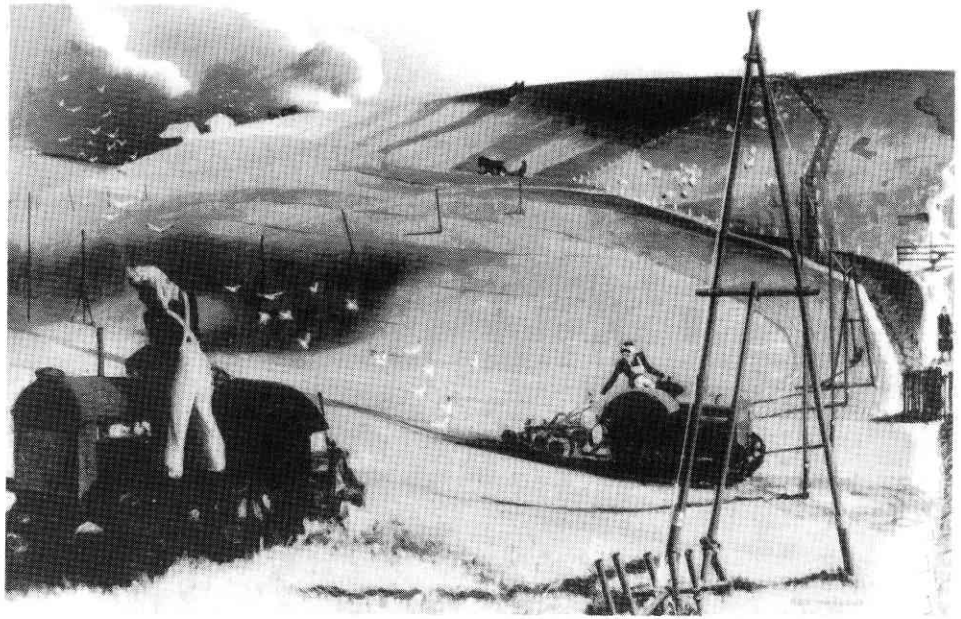
Naval Pay and Pensions Office have very little on its record file. His induction was at HMS Victory, probably a shore establishment at Portsmouth - (for the benefit of those not well versed in naval terminology, HMS does not necessarily mean a ship) and after a week he was posted (Naval Pay and Pensions told me) to HMS Vernon, Torpedo School, also at Portsmouth and promoted to Temporary Draughtsman. His character was assessed as 'Very Good'.

Some time in 1941 or 1942 he was released to the Reserve List and effectively became a civilian attached to the Navy. We have to assume he was given some job appropriate to his talents. There is no surviving record of what exactly his job was. I applied to the Ministry of Defence only to find that his records had been destroyed a few years before in line with their practice of destroying records 85 years after the date of birth of the subject. For the rest of his service he was with HMS Vernon. The primary purpose of HMS Vernon seems to have been training and it was the centre of naval expertise in mines and torpedoes. The Navy List also mentions book production and chemical and electrical activities. It would be interesting to know what Percy Shakespeare did. Draughtsman as a term could mean anything from routine work to a much more important contribution which really used his talents.

Between August 1940 and when Percy was posted to the establishment, HMS Vernon moved to Roedean. Roedean School, the girls' boarding school, stands high on the Downs near Brighton. Its premises were commandeered early on in the war and



THE ANTE-ROOM
HMS VERNON
c. 1942



DECEMBER ON
THE DOWNS (PS54)
c. 1942

the school was moved to the Keswick Hotel in the Lake District. In April 1941 the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were based there but the Navy took over in August 1941 and HMS Vernon moved in.

While with HMS Vernon, Percy Shakespeare lived in lodgings somewhere near and he found time and facilities to do some painting. I imagine that within the constraints of service life he was struggling to keep up the momentum of his career. The Navy may have allowed him to paint on their premises but it is more likely that he persuaded his landlady to let him paint in his lodgings. He had often worked from his council house room at home so he was used to making do without a studio. Percy's sister remembers he painted the landlady's dog so she must have been interested in his work - it is possible that the woman in *Woman with Dog* (PS65 p33) is his landlady.

Two oil paintings are known from this period. I have not seen these and the owners are unknown to me, but I have photographs. *The Ante-room HMS Vernon*, (PS55) shows about a dozen officers. It mainly features the billiard table and a group of officers at play. One officer is reading a newspaper, others are talking and relaxing in chairs. It is about the same size as his Thirties at Leisure paintings and the style is similar. The room is not identifiable as a particular room in Roedean College. I do not know whether it was commissioned or was done to keep his hand in. One wonders whether Percy Shakespeare had achieved enough status to be admitted to the mess or whether he was just allowed in to paint it.

The second wartime painting is *December on the Downs* (PS54) which tells a story of its time. The sun shines on the Downland; land girls in dungarees operate ploughs in the wartime drive to extend the amount of arable land. Sheep graze, gulls

follow the furrow and large cumulus clouds cast ominous shadows across the curves of the hillside; they seem to be a metaphor for the threat of war. There are some trestles at the right of the picture which are probably something to do with defences. These again break the rural calm. Rodney Castleden of Roedean School told me:

'The landscape with land girls could well be the field immediately north-west of the school grounds, which has two diverging paths as shown. If so the Chapel stands just off picture, top right, and the present school gates are just off the picture, bottom right.'

My wife came across this picture in 1994 as a very apt illustration in a small book 'Virginia Woolf - An Illustrated Anthology' by Aurum Press. It was a very lucky find because it led me, via a photographic agency, to Paisnel Gallery and through Stephen Paisnel to the owners some of the best of the Thirties at Leisure paintings.

December on the Downs may have been Percy Shakespeare's last picture.

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Suddenly, his life came to an end in the last week of May in 1943. The exact circumstances are hard to confirm, as I said in the introduction, the Naval records do not help and reports are obscured by wartime secrecy. *The Express and Star* reported his death:

'Brilliant Midland Artist Blow From Cliffs Into Sea By Bomb, Killed

Percy Shakespeare, Dudley artist, portrait painter and teacher, was killed on Thursday when walking along the cliffs at a south-east coast town during an air raid. A bomb dropped near him and he was thrown into the sea. His body was never recovered.'

This was published on 1 June which implies it happened on 27 May. The details, including where it was, were subject to censorship. His contemporaries heard that in line with his life time habit he was taking a lone walk across the cliffs possibly at lunch time - one pictures a scene similar to *December on the Downs* - when a German bomber jettisoned its bomb or bombs. Some say the bomber was returning to Germany with an unused bomb, others that a bomber arrived at the coast at low level on its outbound journey. Another contemporary believed he was machine gunned, perhaps some were just guessing. Anyway, his life was unexpectedly and cruelly cut short.

His sister, Margery told me it was untrue that his body was blown into the sea and never recovered. She said he was cremated in Brighton and as a young girl she had to travel on the train to Brighton to collect the ashes - a big undertaking for a young person who had seldom been beyond Dudley.

A memorial service took place in King Street, Congregational Church Dudley.

In its report on Percy's death *The Express and Star* quoted "U.U.", their arts correspondent:

'Percy Shakespeare was a young artist who gave early promise of a brilliant career. His bold, direct style, using broad masses of colour, produced many striking compositions. He had outstanding exhibits in the Royal Academy in his early twenties and his paintings were for the past ten years always among the most prominent at the exhibition of the Birmingham Royal Society of Artists, the Wolverhampton Society and the Dudley Art Circle. Like his figure compositions, his portraits were bold and broad. Not all were successful, but when he did succeed he did so triumphantly.

His work will be much missed by his many friends in the Midlands and in the wider artistic circles in which he was firmly establishing himself.'

Ivo Shaw was also quoted as saying:

'He was the most promising student of a long succession the school has produced.'

After the memorial service took place in Dudley, sorrowful and shocked, Percy Shakespeare's family and friends carried on with coping with the war.

9

Review

After his sudden death in 1943 Percy Shakespeare might easily have been totally forgotten but for friends in Dudley. After the war in 1946 C. V. McKenzie, now coming up to retirement, organised an exhibition of Percy's work in Dudley Art Gallery. There were plenty of pictures to show. All the unsold pictures were in store, Percy's sisters believed, when I talked to them, at Dudley School of Art or Dudley Art Gallery. *The Dudley Herald* reported on the exhibition:

'He had several works exhibited in the Royal Academy and the Paris Salon but his drawings had not been discovered outside the Birmingham area and it is probable that had he lived he would have gained national recognition for them. In them he did not believe in sacrificing accuracy for vitality and spontaneity but he obtained a remarkable balance between these qualities. Time would have made him a master draughtsman of the first rank. He had already laid the only sure foundation for freedom, a fine accurate vision.'

After that it was left to Dudley Museum and Art Gallery to keep faith with Percy Shakespeare. The paintings which had been in store were sent to Percy's sisters, probably in the late 1940s when Ivo Shaw and C. V. Mackenzie retired. Percy's sisters had the problem of taking them into their small house but they looked after them. Dudley Museum and Art Gallery kept alive the memory of Percy Shakespeare by regular showings of *A Mulatto* and *On the Rhine* but it was 1979 before they organised another full exhibition showing a least thirty-six paintings for several weeks. This is the exhibition with which Robert Price helped. Percy's sisters lent many of the paintings and when the exhibition closed they gave a number of them to Dudley Museum and Art Gallery and others were purchased by Robert Price.

The next full exhibition was in 1999 but even after this Percy Shakespeare is little known outside Dudley except to a few art dealers who specialise in the twenties and thirties. Birmingham Art Gallery does not have any of Percy's works and knew nothing of him when I contacted them in 1998.

Only *The Express and Star* reported the exhibition. Even the Birmingham papers could not be lured out to Dudley. I had hoped that the exhibition might have attracted a little attention from the art world and that some critics or art historians, in addition to Paul Lewis, might have commented on his work and put it in context with other artists of the time but it seemed that it passed virtually unnoticed. Of course, the attention he gets is limited by the number of paintings he produced in his short life. I know of less than forty oil paintings.

Although I admire his work enormously I am not an art critic so I cannot, and will not try to evaluate Percy Shakespeare's work in any comprehensive way. I will just recapitulate some of the points covered earlier and review what he achieved. His work falls into three categories, his pencil and watercolour life studies, his portraits and his Thirties at Leisure compositions.

The line drawings of models and individuals which started as life class studies when he was in his teens at Dudley School of Art became habitual and he carried on with these as studies in their own right and as preparatory work for oil paintings. They are representational and based on a real knowledge of anatomy. He is without doubt a master draughtsman, drawing in long flowing lines which are placed with confidence, right first time. They tend to have a hard outline which is characteristic of the period as taught in art schools. There is no doubt that these are exceptional.

His portraits in oils which amount to about twenty-five are all of women. They show that he was a perceptive observer and a bold user of colours. His typical portrait is set out of doors. I think he found that this suited his colours best and he like to feature the hands as well as the face of his sitters - this led to some interesting poses. They are of friends, family and art school models. *A Mulatto* (PS14, p24) was a breakthrough. In it he found the way he wanted to paint. His commissions were few and certainly not of the famous or the wealthy so he never made a name as a portrait painter.

He moved on to his compositions which are very evocative of the thirties both because of the subject matter and the style of painting. An aspect of thirties life was the enjoyment of healthy outdoor pursuits and some his scenes capture this mood. Looking back there is a poignancy about a nation enjoying itself as it moves towards the inevitability of war. And as we look at it today the society seems half way between the free lifestyles of today and the strictly ritualised life of Victorian times. For instance the men were still wearing collars and ties for their leisure; bathing suits are more revealing than they were in the twenties. Percy's pictures are a fascinating record of the time. What a pity it stops short.

With regard to the style of painting, to quote Paul Lewis, 'He did not take the Modernist path, although the construction of his pictures shows awareness of formal aspects of Modernism.' His compositions are complex and stylised. He is not averse to jettisoning some of the hard disciplines of the life class and distorting figures for

dramatic effect. The leaning man in the foreground of *Tennis* (PS27, p41) for instance or the waitress in *Tea Interval* (PS68, cover). There are aspects of his compositions which recall the cinema and the way the camera picks out figures against a background, as in *Tea Interval* (PS 68, cover). They are snapshots. His viewing points are clever - like camera angles. Paul Lewis noticed the high view-point in *Boat Shed* which paradoxically was not the view as seen through the camera which he used to help him. His scenes are too worked upon to look spontaneous but we have seen that they are like theatre with each character playing a part. And he is deliberately dropping detail - some of the faces in *The Bird House* (PS12, p42) are mere smudges. This is calculated simplification.

He was very much of his time but with his draughtsmanship, his ability to create intriguing compositions, his sense of colour, and his observation of life, he was arguably one of the most extraordinary painters of the thirties. But there are only about thirty-five paintings - not all of them located - and a few more drawings than that. Not enough to make him famous but Dudley Museum and Art Gallery has a good selection of his works. Unfortunately it does not have the facilities to display them on a regular basis. Perhaps this can be rectified at some time in the future.

Appendix I:

List of Works

DATE	TITLE / DESCRIPTION	SIZE (mm) & MEDIUM	OWNERSHIP	NOTES	CATALOGUE NO.
Btw 1924 & 1926	6 Life Class studies Figures	Various sizes, from 340 x 240 to 525 x 275 Pencil and wash	Private	Executed at Dudley School of Art PS16, PS17, PS18, PS19, PS20, PS21, PS22	
Prob. pre 1927	<i>THE SACAREN'S HEAD</i>	510 x 742 Pencil, wash, and pastel	Private	Street scene from the Art School corner	PS74
1926	Seated woman in brown	540 x 370 Pencil & wash	Private		PS84
1926	Standing young man Thumbs in lapels	509 x 255 Pencil & wash	Private		PS85
Prob. c. 1926	Industrial scene Sieving gravel	320 x 420 Pencil & wash	DMAG		PS80
Prob. c. 1926	Tall trees and church Landscape	290 x 450 Watercolour	Private		PS59
Prob. c. 1926	Drawing of Woman Head, shoulders and hands	c 400 x 250 Pencil on paper	DMAG		PS77
Prob. c. 1926?	Wren's Nest Landscape	230 x 350 Oil	Private		PS57
1927	Woman, seated, 3/4 Head propped on arm	c 490 x 300 Pencil & Wash	DMAG		PS79
1927	Old man seated	540 x 360 Pencil	Private		PS83
1928	<i>PORTRAIT OF ALAN YOUNG</i>	480 x 350 Pencil and Wash	Private		PS37
c. 1929	<i>GWENDOLINE</i> PS's sister	400 x 300 Oil on canvas	DMAG		PS82
Prob. pre 1930	<i>GIRL IN GREEN BALL GOWN</i>	1110 x 960 Oil on canvas	Private	A story picture. A disappointed girl sits dejected with a rose.	PS23
c. 1930	<i>MARGERY AT THE PIANO 1</i> PS's sister	? Pencil	Unknown	Known from 1997 exhib. catalogue	PS67

LIST OF WORKS CONTINUED

DATE	TITLE / DESCRIPTION	SIZE (mm) & MEDIUM	OWNERSHIP	NOTES	CATALOGUE NO.
c.1930	MARGERY AT THE PIANO II PS's sister	470 x 330 Pencil	Private		PS58
Prob. c.1930	<i>SELF PORTRAIT IN PENCIL</i>	545 x 380 Pencil on paper	DMAG		PS78
Prob. c.1920	<i>SELF PORTRAIT IN OILS</i>	c 320 x 280 Oil on canvas	Private		PS88
Prob. btw 1931 & 1933	<i>RASP GRINDERS</i>	1095 x 1680 Oil on canvas	Private	Grinding rasps in a Black Country workshop. Prob. an early commission.	PS66
Exh. 1932	MISS MOLLY BETTERIDGE	?	Unknown	Exh. DAC 1932. Known only from press report	PS73
Exh. 1932	THE RENDEZVOUS	?	Unknown	Exh. DAC 1932. Known only from press report	PS72
Exh. 1932	ISOBEL	1010 x 540 Oil on canvas	Private	Exhibited DAC 1932 and 1933 [No 17] Accepted but not hung by RA 1933	PS61
Exh. 1933	SUMMER/GIRL UNDER SYCAMORE. A seated nude girl	755 x 603 Oil on canvas	DMAG	Exhibited DAC 1933 DMAG also has pencil study for this	PS7 PS3
1933	Mrs Nell JENKINS 3/4 length portrait	1010 x 550 Oil on canvas	DMAG	Mrs Nell Jenkins. A commission, later given to DAG.	PS5
Exh. 1933	A MULATTO 3/4 seated girl	740 x 615 Oil on canvas	DMAG	Exh. RA 1933 [No 104] and DAC 1933 [No 20]. PS's first RA success. Bought for DMAG by public subscription in 1933. DAG also has pencil studies for this	PS14 PS15
Exh. 1933	THE MODEL	?	Unknown	Exh. DAC 1933. Known from catalogue.	PS41
Exh. 1933	WHITE GLOVES I	?	Unknown	Exh. DAC 1933 [No 28] Known from catalogue and press comment Might be same as S50	PS40
Exh. 1933	QUEENIE	?	Unknown	Exh. DAC 1933 [No 23] Known from catalogue and press comment	PS38
Exh. 1934	PORTRAIT OF A GIRL Modern girl with red scarf	?	Unknown	Exh. RBSA Spring 1934 [No 186] Known from catalogue and press report	PS25

Exh. 1934	MORNING EXERCISE 3/4 self portrait	? Oil on canvas	Private	Exh. DAC 1934 [No 17], PSal 1935 [No 2071]	PS26
Exh. 1934	GIRL WITH CAMELLIA	?	Unknown	Exh. DAC 1934 [No 23] Known from catalogue	PS43
Exh. 1934	Nude	?	Unknown	Exh. DAC 1934 [No 30] Known from catalogue	PS44
Exh. 1934	JANE	?	Unknown	Exh. DAC 1934 [No 19] Known from catalogue and press comment	PS42
Exh. 1934	THE LOVERS	?	Unknown	Exh. DAC 1934 [No 48] Known from catalogue and press comment	PS45
Exh. 1934	A drawing	?	Unknown	Exh. DAC 1934 [No 58] Known from catalogue and press comment	PS46
Exh. 1935	CYCLISTS	?	Unknown	Exh. DAC 1935 Known from catalogue and press comment	PS47
Exh. 1934	Portrait Unidentified	?	Unknown	Exh. RBSA 1935 [No 241] Known only from catalogue	PS28
C. 1935	ON THE RHINE	760 x 635 Oil on canvas	DMAG	Exh. RA 1935 [No 661], DAC 1935, and RBSA Spring 1936 [No 136]	PS8
mid 1930s	Portrait of <i>ESTELLE HOUGH II</i>	350 x 260 Oil on wood	Private		PS60
Exh. 1936	THE BATHING PARTY	690 x 890 Oil on canvas	Private	Exh. DAC 1936 [No 30]	PS48
Exh. 1936	A Portrait - <i>WHITE GLOVES II</i>	385 x 610 Oil on canvas	Private	Exh. DAC 1936 [No 28 or 86] Described in press as lady with glove. Might be same as S40 above?	PS50
Exh. 1936	A Portrait - <i>ESTELLE HOUGH</i>	565 x 450 Oil on board	Private	Exh. DAC 1936 [No 28 or 86] Described in press as girl in olive green	PS52
Exh. 1936	THE MOSEL	?	Unknown	Exh. DAC 1936 [No 54] Known from catalogue & press comment	PS49
Exh. 1937	BOY & DOG	925 x 715 Oil on canvas	DMAG	Exh. DAC 1937. PS's nephew	PS51
Exh. 1937	GIRL WITH DAFFODILS	760 x 635 Oil on canvas	DMAG	Exh. DAC 1937 [No 40]	PS1

LIST OF WORKS CONTINUED

DATE	TITLE / DESCRIPTION	SIZE (mm) & MEDIUM	OWNERSHIP	NOTES	CATALOGUE NO.
c. 1937	Study for Girl with Daffodils	525 x 365 Pencil	DMAG		PS2
Exh. 1937	TENNIS	Prob. 605 x 905 Oil on canvas	Private*	Exh. RBSA Aut. 1937 [No 49], DAC 1938 [No 26], PSal 1938 [No 1399]	PS27
Exh. 1937	Portrait of Mrs EDWARDS	?	Unknown	Exh. DAC 1937 [No 38] Known from catalogue and press photo	PS53
Exh. 1938	Drawings Unidentified	?	Unknown	Exh. RBSA Spring 1938 [Nos 54 & 83]	PS29 x 30
Exh. 1938	SCHOOL GIRL	760 x 628 Oil on canvas	DMAG	Exh. DAC 1938 [No 31]	PS11
Exh. 1938	Portrait - Unidentified	?	?	Known only from exhibition catalogue	PS31
Exh. 1938	AFTERNOON AT THE ICE RINK	Oil on canvas	DMAG	EXH. RA 1938 [NP 672] and RBSA spr. 1940	PS13
c. 1937/8	Study for above	535 x 735 Pastel	DMAG		PS9
c. 1937/8	Studies for above -10		DMAG		PS81 a to j
c. 1938/1939	Drawing of <i>ESTELLE</i>	550 x 367	Private		PS70
Exh. 1939	Portrait Drawings - 3	?	Unknown	Exh. RBSA Spr. 1939 [Nos 74, 85, 96] Known only from catalogue	PS32a b c
Exh. 1939	THE BOAT SHED Scene with punts	715 x 920 Oil on canvas	DMAG	Exh. RA 1939 [No 147]	PS4
Exh. 1939	THE BIRD HOUSE Dudley Zoo	750 x 905	DMAG	Exh. RA 1939 [No 414]	PS12
Prob. late 1930s	<i>TEA INTERVAL</i> also known as <i>PAVILLION</i>	710 x 915 Oil on canvas	Private*		PS68

Prob. late 1930s	THE CROONER A night club scene	640 X 760 Oil on canvas	DMAG		PS6
Prob. late 1930s	THE TEAM RACE Swimming scene	700 x 900 Oil on canvas	Private*		PS69
Exh. 1940	3 Drawings - unidentified	?	Unknown	Exh. RBSA Spr 1940 [Nos 36 & 38] Known only from catalogue	PS33a b
Exh. 1940	THE BROADS	c. 910 x 915 Oil	Private	Exh. RA 1940 [No 619]	PS24
Exh. 1941	CARAVANNERS	635 x 915 Oil on canvas	Private*	Exh. 1941 [No 9]	PS34
Exh. 1941	A Portrait - unidentified	?	Unknown	Exh. RBSA 1941 [No 17]	PS35
Prob. c. 1940	Model with hat Full length woman	530 x 330 Pencil on paper	Private*		PS75
Prob. c. 1940	WARTIME BEAUTY Upper half woman	510 x 355 Pencil on paper	Private		PS76
Prob. 1940s	Drawing of Woman	535 x 350 Pencil	Private		PS86
c. 1942	DECEMBER ON THE DOWNS Land girls ploughing	635 x 900 Oil on canvas	Private*	Painted near Roedean, Brighton	PS54
c. 1942	THE ANTE-ROOM, HMS VERNON	710 x 925 Oil on canvas	Private*	Naval personnel playing billiards	PS55
Late 1930s?	TENNIS PLAYER Seated woman with racquet	755 x 627 Oil on canvas	DMAG	Not Dorothy Round!	PS10
?	Profile Portrait H & S of woman	440 x 300 Oil on board	Private		PS63
?	Portrait, Woman, head	350 x 285 Oil on board	Private		PS62
Late 1930s or early 1940s	SEASIDE PHOTOGRAPHER	710 x 915 Oil on canvas	Private*		PS64
?	Woman with Dog	? Oil on canvas	Unknown	Known from photo of PS with painting and sitter	PS65

NOTES TO APPENDIX I

ABBREVIATIONS

DAC	Dudley Art Circle
DMAG	Dudley Museum & Art Gallery
Exh.	Exhibited
Prob.	Probably
PSal	Paris Salon
RA	Royal Academy
RBSA	Royal Birmingham Society of Artists

NOTES

This list of works has been compiled by the author from exhibition listings, the DMAG collection, and access to privately owned works. The numbers in the last column prefixed by the letters PS are the numbers allocated in the author's catalogue. There is no significance in the order of these numbers. The list has been simply added to as I have come across works. It is possible that some works are listed twice where I have not been able to link one which I have seen with an exhibition listing.

Where the name of a painting is in plain capitals this is the name given in exhibition catalogues or otherwise known to have been allocated by PS. A name in *italic capitals* is one which has been given later.

Sizes are in millimetres.

Private owners are not identified but the designation 'Private' means that at the time of publication the author has established direct or indirect contact. 'Private*' indicates contact by courtesy of the Paisnel Gallery.

Appendix II:

Exhibited Works

Authors Catalogue No.	Title	Dudley Art Circle	Royal Birmingham Society of Artists	Royal Academy	Paris Salon
	[several unidentified]	1931			
PS73	MISS MOLLY BETTERIDGE	1932			
PS72	THE RENDEZVOUS	1932			
PS71	GIRL UNDER SYCAMORE	1932			
PS7	SUMMER (may be same Girl under Sycamore)	1933, No. 14			
PS61	ISOBEL	1932 and 1933, No. 17		1933, accepted but not hung	
PS14	A MULATTO	1933, No. 20		1933, No. 104	
PS38	QUEENIE	1933, No. 23			
PS41	The Model	1933, No. 30			
PS39	A Study	1933, No. 83			
PS40 or 50	WHITE GLOVES I	1933, No. 87			
PS15	Studies for a Mulatto	1933, Nos. 111, 112			
PS25	PORTRAIT OF A GIRL		Spr. 1934, No. 186		
PS42	JANE	1934, No. 19			
PS43	GIRL WITH CAMELLIA	1934, No. 23			
PS44	Nude	1934, No. 30			
PS45	THE LOVERS	1934, No. 48			
PS46	A Drawing	1934, No. 58			
PS26	MORNING EXERCISE	1934, No. 17		1934, accepted by not hung	1935, No. 2071
PS28	Portrait		Spr. 1935, No. 241		
PS47	CYCLISTS	1935			
	Portrait Head Studies	1935			

Appendix B: Exhibited works (continued)

Authors	Title	Dudley Art Circle	Royal Birmingham Society of Artists	Royal Academy	Paris Salon
Catalogue No.					
PS8	ON THE RHINE	1935	Spr. 1936 No. 136	1935, No. 661	
PS52	Portrait, <i>GIRL IN OLIVE GREEN</i>	1936, No. 28 or 86			
PS48	THE BATHING PARTY	1936, No. 30			
PS49	THE MOSEL	1936, No. 54			
PS50	Portrait, <i>WHITE GLOVES</i>	1936, No. 86			
	Drawings	1936, Nos. 70, 72, 73			
PS37	BOY AND DOG	1937, No. 3			
	Drawings	1937, Nos. 8, 12, 24			
PS53	PORTRAIT OF MRS EDWARDS	1937, No. 38			
PS1	GIRL WITH DAFFODILS	1937			
PS27	TENNIS	1938, No. 26	Aut. 1937, No. 49		1938, No. 1399
	Drawings		Spr. 1938, Nos. 54, 83		
PS11	A SCHOOL GIRL	1938, No. 31			
	Portrait		Aut. 1938, No. 68		
	Portrait Drawings		Spr. 1939, Nos. 74, 85, 96		
PS13	AFTERNOON AT THE ICE RINK		Spr. 1940, No. 163	1938, No. 672	
PS4	THE BOAT SHED			1939, No. 147	
PS17	THE BIRD HOUSE			1939, No. 414	
	Drawings		Spr. 1940, Nos. 36, 38		
PS24	THE BROADS			1940, No. 619	
PS34	CARAVANNERS		1941, No. 9		
	A Portrait		1941, No. 17		

General Index

- Aurum Press, 50
Allen, Valerie, 4
Birmingham Art Gallery, 52
Birmingham Libraries, 4
Birmingham Post, 24, 26, 29, 30
Birmingham School of Art, 14, 15, 16 -
20, 23, 24, 29, 36, 47
Brockhurst, Gerald, 17,
Burn, Ray, 4
Camberwell School of Art, 11
Carter, Anna, 3
Castleden, Rodney, 4, 50
Claughton, Mrs, 10
County Express, 24, 26, 29, 36
Cowern, Margaret - see Trotman,
Margaret
Derricourt, Marjorie, 35
Dudley Art Circle, 24, 25, 26, 31, 36,
38, 39, 40, 43, 44, 45
Dudley Art Gallery - see Dudley
Museum and Art Gallery
Dudley - general, 7, 8, 9, 23
Dudley Herald, 14, 24, 25, 26, 29
Dudley Libraries, 2, 4
Dudley Zoo, 45
Dodsworth, Roger, 3
Dudley Museum and Art Gallery, 1,
2, 3, 10, 25, 27, 29, 30, 32,
36, 43, 44, 46, 47, 52, 54
Dudley School of Art, 1, 2, 3, 9, 10-15,
25, 34, 52, 53
Dudley Zoo, 45
Eggison W. S., 18
Express and Star, 24, 29, 37, 38, 39, 43,
50, 51, 53
Farhi, Nicole, 4
Fiddian-Green, Lyn, 3, 38
Fleetwood-Walker, Bernard, 17
Freeman, Lt. Comdr Miles, 4
Gere, C. M., 25
Green, Mary, 4
Hall, Oliver, 25
Holden, Harold, 18
Homer, Bill, 3, 12, 34
Hough, Estelle, 3, 38, 39, 40
Huddersfield School of Art, 11
Kelly, Gerald F., 25
Kidderminster School of Art, 17
Lavenstein, Cyril, 17
Lewis, Paul, 4, 29, 30, 53
Liss, Paul, 4
Long, Zöe, 4
Mackenzie, C. V., 23, 25, 26, 52
McGregor-Smith, Jennie, 4
Miles, Hugh, 4
Molyneux, Ald. J. H., 25
Naval service, 2, 47-50,
Nazis, 29
Paisnel Gallery, 4, 50
Paisnel, Stephen, 4, 50
Paris Salon, 31, 44
Parrish, Janine, 3
Price, Robert, 2, 17, 25, 47
Rhineland, 29, 30
Roedean School, 4, 48-50
Round Dorothy, 40
Royal Academy, 25, 28, 29, 30, 38, 44,
47
RBSA - see Royal Birmingham Society of
Artists
Royal Birmingham Society of Artists, 4,
16, 28, 30, 37, 40, 44, 47
Rushbury, Sir Henry, 17,
Shakespeare, Gwendoline, 2, 4, 15, 17
Shakespeare, Margery, 2
Shakespeare, Percy,
birth, 7, 8
death, 1, 50-51
discovery by Ivo Shaw, 12
draughtsmanship, 1
man, the, 32-35
Naval service, 2, 47-51
photographs, 13
salary, 18
teaching, 17-19
training at Dudley S. of A. 12-15
Shaw, Ivo, 1, 3, 11, 11, 23
Shaw, Jessamine - see Sherratt, Jessamine
Sherratt, Jessamine, 3, 5, 13, 15
Smellie, Cllr James, 14
Southall, Joseph, 17
Spencer-Russell, Diana, 4
Spencer, Stanley, 19
Spencer, Prof. Gilbert, 19
Stockdale Cope, Sir Arthur, 25
Stokes, Adrian, 25
Swift, Prof. John, 4
Talmage, Algernon, 25
Thomas, Gordon, 4
Trotman, Margaret, 3, 18, 32, 34
Vaughan's, 27, 28
Vernon, HMS, 49
Wakefield, Reg, 2, 12, 13, 14, 15, 34
Walters, Clendon, 3, 15, 34
Whale, James, 35
Willets Peter, 4
Woolf, Virginia, 50
Young, Alan, 3, 20

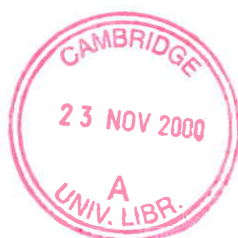
Index of Works

mentioned in the text

- AFTERNOON AT THE ICE RINK
(PS13), **22**, 37, 44, 47
ditto, Drawing for, 44, **44**
- ANTE-ROOM HMS VERNON (PS55),
37, **48**, 49
- BATHING PARTY (PS48), **22**, 37, 38,
39, 44
- BETTERIDGE, Miss MOLLY, 24
- BIRD HOUSE (PS12), 2, 37, **42**, 44, 45,
47, 54
- BOAT SHED (PS4), 37, **41**, 44, 45, 47, 54
- BOY AND DOG (PS51), 43, **43**
- BOY HADLEY - see Life class studies
- BROADS (PS24), 37, 47,
- CARAVANNERS (PS34), 37, **42**, 47,
- CROONER (PS6), 37, 45, 46, **46**
- CYCLISTS (PS47), 31, 37
- DECEMBER ON THE DOWNS (PS54),
37, 49, **49**, 50
- DRAWING, exh. 1934 (PS46), 29
Estelle - see Hough
- GIRL IN GREEN BALLGOWN* (PS23), 1, **6**
- GIRL IN OLIVE GREEN* (PS52), 39, **40**
- GIRL UNDER SYCAMORE (PS71), 24
- GIRL WITH CAMELLIA (PS43), 29
- GIRL WITH DAFFODILS (PS1), 43,
ditto STUDY FOR (PS1), **43**
- Hough, Estelle - see *GIRL IN OLIVE GREEN*
- ISOBEL (PS61), **6**, 24, 25, 26
- JENKINS, Mrs Nell, 27, **27**
- JANE (PS42), 29
- JESSAMINE I* - see Life Class Studies
- JESSAMINE II* - see Life Class Studies
- Life class studies (PS16, 17, & 22),
BOY HADLEY (PS18), **5**, 15
JESSAMINE I (PS17), 1, **5**, 15
JESSAMINE II (PS16), 1, **5**, 15
MAN IN RAINCOAT (PS22), **5**
- LOVERS (PS45), 29
- MEPHISTOPHELES OF 1933* - see *SELF PORTRAIT IN TRILBY*
- MODEL exh.1933(PS41), 26
- MORNING EXERCISE (PS26), 28, **28**,
29, 31, **31**, 32
- MOSEL (PS49), 30, 31, 37, 38, 39
- Mrs Edwards - see PORTRAIT OF MRS EDWARDS
- MULATTO (PS14), **21**, 24, **25**, 26, 28, 36,
52, 53
- NUDE, exh. 1934 (PS44), 29
- ON THE RHINE (PS8), **21**, 29, 30,
33, 36, 37, 52
- QUEENIE (PS38), 26
- PAVILLION - see TEA INTERVAL
- PORTRAIT OF A GIRL (PS25), exh.1932,
28, 35, 36
- PORTRAIT exh. 1936 (*WHITE GLOVES II*)
(PS 50), 39, 40, **40**
- PORTRAIT OF MRS EDWARDS (PS53),
43
- RASP GRINDERS* (PS66), 27, **27**
- RENDEZVOUS (PS72), 24
- SARACEN'S HEAD, 15, **15**
- SCHOOL GIRL (PS11), 36, 44
- SEASIDE PHOTOGRAPHER (PS64), 37,
45, **45**, 46
- SELF PORTRAIT IN TRILBY* (PS56), 32, **33**
- SELF PORTRAIT IN OILS* (PS88), 32, **33**
- SELF PORTRAIT IN PENCIL* (PS78),
Frontispiece, 32
- STUDY, exh. 1933 (PS39), 26
- SUMMER (PS7), **6**, 24, 26, 28
- TEA INTERVAL (PS68), **Cover**, 37, 45, 54
- TEAM RACE (PS69), 37, 45, **46**, 46
- TENNIS, (PS26), 36, 37, 40, **41**, 44, 54
- TENNIS PLAYER* (PS10), 40, **45**
- WHITE GLOVES , exh 1933 (PS40), 26,
WHITE GLOVES II see PORTRAIT
Exh.1936
- WOMAN WITH DOG (PS65), **33**, 49
- YOUNG, ALAN* (PS37), 3, **20**

NOTES:

- References to illustrations are in **bold type**.
Works as named by P.S. himself are in CAPITALS.
Names given later are in *ITALICS*.



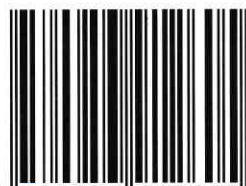
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