

# THE SEARCH CONTINUES

## ARTISTS OF 1912

by Richard Stanton

After my article on the Artists of 1912 appeared in the May-2001 JOH I received a surprise email from Mr. Peter Lovesey, one of our colleagues from England. His curiosity stricken by the uncertain identity of some of the British competitors in my article, Mr. Lovesey took up the challenge and went searching for additional information. In my original article, the only painter named Ernest Townsend I was able to locate was from New York and I inferred some reservation about his being the correct Townsend.

Mr. Lovesey located another painter by the name of Ernest Townsend listed in the book "Royal Academy Exhibitors, 1905-70." This Townsend however, was from Derby, the city given as residence by the 1912 entrant.

Armed with Mr. Lovesey's information, I contacted the Derby Local Studies Library. Their Senior Librarian, Mr. Michael Thornton, happily joined our hunt. Within a matter of days I received an email; "I am sure that the Ernest Townsend in your records is the one from Derby....I have sent by post a variety of information on Townsend that will answer the questions." After a brief eternity of seven days, the post finally arrived.

Ladies and Gentlemen, by courtesy of Mssrs. Lovesey and Thornton, allow me to introduce Mr. Ernest Townsend, competitor in the Olympic Art Competitions, Stockholm 1912.



ERNEST TOWNSEND  
(b-Derby, 1 Jan. 1880, d-Coxbench, 28 Jan. 1944)

According to an article published in the Derbyshire Life & Countryside, Dec. 1944, Townsend was a portrait painter, recorder of historic townscapes, patriotic contributor in World War II and much, much more.

Born in Derby, he was the youngest of five children and raised from the age of eight by his elder sister, Florence. At fourteen he was apprenticed to James Wright,

a local architect, whose junior partner recognized Townsend's latent talent with a paintbrush and encouraged him to pursue his natural gifts. By 1898, Ernest had already received a medal from the National Department of Arts and Sciences. Also in 1898 he was elected a member of the Derby Sketching Club. His continuing education in art finally led him to London. There he was tutored by such greats as Sargent, Sir George Clausen and Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema and was becoming quite successful. He also made the acquaintanceship of the artists Alfred Munnings and Laura

Knight among others while in London. Both Munnings and Knight were competitors in the Olympic Art Competitions in later years, Knight winning a Silver medal.

However, Townsend was a very private person, wanting only to paint. London's artistic and social life was somewhat distasteful and unsuitable to his quiet personality so he traveled for a few years and finally returned to Derby. In 1912 he not only submitted an entry to the Olympic Art Competitions in Stockholm, he also married Elsie Doris, who later bore him two sons. Until 1914 he maintained his studio at 22 Irongate, the address he gave on his entry in Stockholm. As of this time, his submission to the Olympic competitions is unknown.

Townsend mainly considered himself a portrait artist although many of his townscapes are the only remaining records of some buildings in Derby before World War II. He wrote of portraiture: "Humanity is the most absorbing subject under the sun and the portrait painter has endless opportunity of trying to fathom the mysterious depths of human nature." As a portrait painter he was consistently successful and constantly in demand.

Townsend painted right up until his death from a heart attack in January, 1944 leaving three commissions in progress. In a retrospective exhibition in 1989 of his work, a critic from a national newspaper remarked that had Townsend stayed in London as a young man, he would have become as famous as Opie or Sargent "instead of wasting his talents on provincial mayors and freemasons." I doubt Mr. Townsend would have considered a life and career devoted to the place one loves a waste. ?