

## 'Off to Skibbereen'



Stanhope Alexander Forbes (1857 - 1947) was a leading artist of the 'Newlyn School' of painters which flourished in Cornwall between 1880 and 1920. The longest lived and, probably, most widely exhibited of the artists at that time, Forbes was affectionately known as 'Father of the Newlyn School'. He was born in Dublin, where his father was manager of the Midland Great Western Railway of Ireland.

His most prolific period of painting was the early 1900s, and his canvas *Goodbye! - Off To Skibbereen* was produced around 1901. The original painting was exhibited for some time in the Penlee Gallery, Penzance, Cornwall - which has the most comprehensive collection of the work of the Newlyn Artists. In fact, the Penlee Gallery commissioned a series of greetings cards of works by the artists, published by Natura Designs, including one titled *Goodbye! - Off to Skibbereen*. However, this painting (which was presumably on loan at the time) is no longer in the Gallery, and no-one seems to know where it is now! Enquiries with art dealer David Messum of London, who is acknowledged on the greetings card, have proved fruitless.

In 2017, Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre acquired an engraved print of *Goodbye - Off To Skibbereen*, dated 1901 and is included in the exhibition of the work of contemporary Cornish artists, *West Meets West*, which opens on 3 June this year.

Uillinn's project aims to re-establish a firm link between the two westernmost peninsulas of Britain and Ireland - Cornwall and County Cork - through art and the work of artists in both locations. This builds on a number of historic links which began in the Bronze Age, when copper mined on Mount Gabriel in West Cork met with tin mined in Cornwall to create bronze - a highly advanced technology. It's salutary to think of the organisational skills which enabled these trade routes to be set up three and a half thousand years ago.

Generations of artists came to Cornwall from the 1880s onwards, and settled there. They were attracted by the quality of light which resulted from the geography of the peninsula and the constant presence of water vapour in the air. But their imaginations were also inspired by the apparent simplicity and back-to-nature way of life on the coasts and in the countryside, which they recorded. In fact, they pictured an idealism which perhaps overlooked the realities of hardships which had to be endured. Nevertheless, the presence of the artists in Newlyn added considerably to the local economy. Accommodation and food had to be paid for, and there were good fees to be made from 'sitting' for the artists by the more picturesque of the Cornish natives.

The title - *Off to Skibbereen* - has good resonances for this exhibition, and the longer term project. It would have been propitious to show the original canvas - or a high quality reproduction - in a *West Meets West* exhibition. If anyone can provide any news as to its whereabouts, please let us know at Uillinn. Meanwhile, the etching - rarely found on the market nowadays - is a 'good catch' - if the pun can be forgiven! The subject is fishing: the boats are setting out from Newlyn - Britain's largest fishing port - to follow the shoals of pilchard and herring to the south west coast of Ireland and, particularly, Roaringwater Bay.

Richard Harris, May 2017

For more articles on *West Meets West* and the links between West Cork and Cornwall, see Robert's and Finola Finlay's [Roaringwater Journal](#)