

FORMER DUDLEY SCHOOL OF ART AND FREE LIBRARY

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FORMER DUDLEY SCHOOL OF ART AND FREE LIBRARY

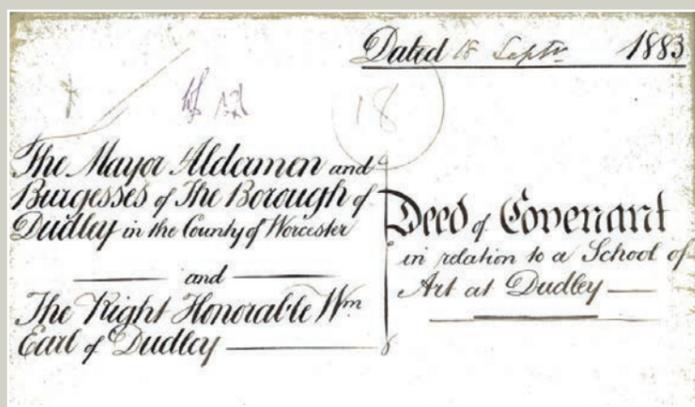
The locally listed red brick and terracotta building was constructed in 1883 by Bateman & Corser of Birmingham as the Dudley School of Art and Free Library. It was officially opened on 29 July 1884.

THE EARLY YEARS - BEFORE 1884

The School of Art

This was one of several institutions in the town which came about as the result of initiatives by the Vicar of Dudley, Reverent Doctor James Browne.

He, and other liberal-minded gentlemen, held a meeting where they took the decision to build an art school, which was subsequently opened in 1853. Due to the lack of availability of another suitable location, it was housed in the Girls' Room of St Thomas's School. This school was expanding, taking larger number of pupils, so it soon became necessary to make changes, including an extra storey being added for the use of the art school in 1860. This



extension work was paid for by the Earl of Dudley who used some of the money raised at the famous Dudley Castle Fetes to maintain the school.

Almost two decades later, in February 1879, the Earl of Dudley suggested that an effort should be made to obtain a more suitable building, when distributing the annual prizes to the students.

Left: 1883 Deed of Covenant for the School of Art at Dudley (Courtesy of Dudley Council corporate landlords)

The Free Library

Private circulating libraries and book clubs had existed in Dudley since the early part of the 18th century. These were supplemented in later years by the library and reading room of the Mechanics Institute and flourished greatly as reading became more accessible. The need of the ordinary working classes for educational and recreational reading was accentuated following the passing of the 1870 Education Act, making elementary education compulsory for all. It was not until eight years later, in 1878, that the borough adopted the Public Libraries Act, enabling it to provide a free library service from the rates.

Blockside notes that the home of the Free Library would have been in a building of much more modest proportions had not the Earl of Dudley suggested a more suitable building for the purposes of the School of Art:

"It occurred to the then Chairman of the Free Libraries Committee and others that a building could be erected to combine both institutions, each to have a separate entrance, and to be kept distinct from the other, but both to be under one roof. His Lordship cordially adopted this view, and hence has arisen the present structure - at once handsome and commodious, and an ornament to the town... The combination of these two distinct and yet kindred institutions is regarded as peculiarly appropriate, as, together, they form a great school for mental culture - the Free Library giving every facility for the acquisition of general knowledge and an acquaintance with passing events - the School of Art affording the requisite means for the cultivation of the taste and the correct appreciation of the beautiful."

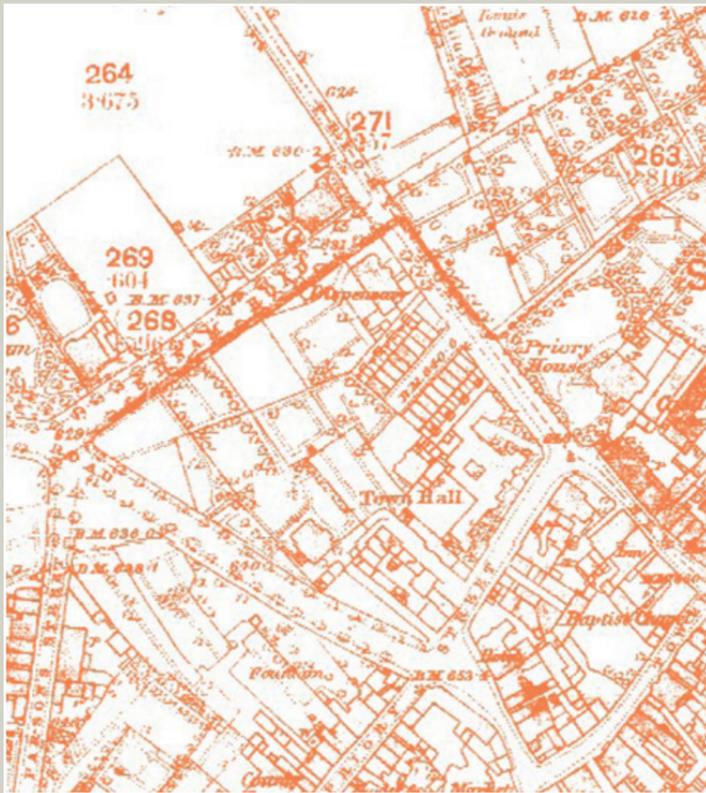
Ground Floor

MEMORIAL TOWER

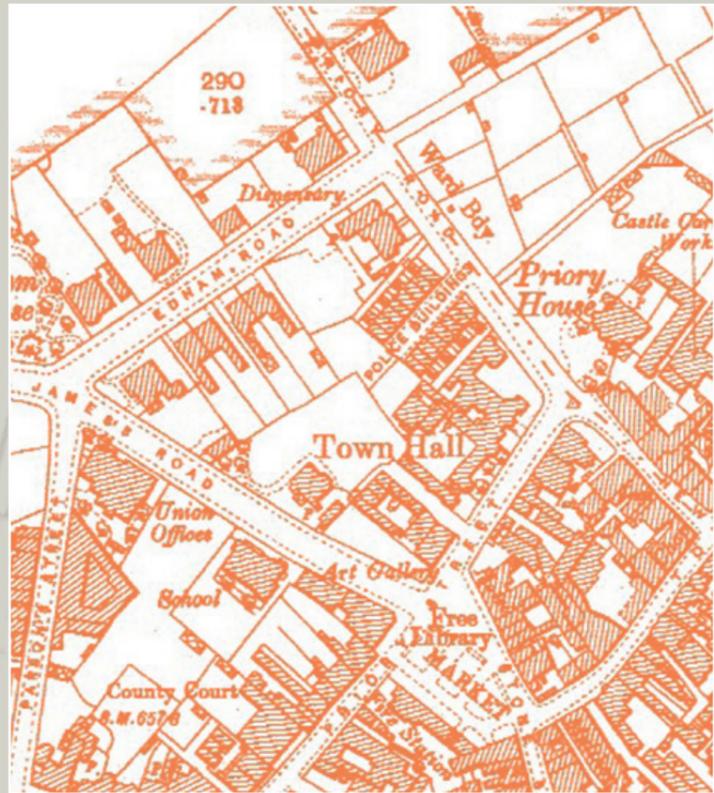
CONSTRUCTION AND OPENING OF THE BUILDING

‘A handsome and commodious structure’

The Earl of Dudley approved this idea and eventually a suitable site was found on the corner of Priory Street and St James’s Road, where Sir Horace St Paul owned a house he was willing to dispose of. This was acquired for £700 and the foundation stone of the new building was laid by The Right Honourable Earl Beauchamp on the 3 July 1883.



1881-1887 OS First Edition Map:
Showing site for new building



1903-1912 OS Second Edition Map:
Showing Art Gallery and Free Library

Messrs J. J. Bateman and Benjamin Corser of Birmingham won the competition to design the building and the works were carried out by the Dudley builders, Webb and Round, and was completed in one year at a cost of about £6,700.



Stone Street Square Vegetable Market, soon after the building was constructed
(Blockside, courtesy of Dudley Archives and Local History Service).

Ground Floor

MEMORIAL TOWER

EXTERIOR



"This structure is situated at the corner of Priory Street and St James's Road, and is of the plain Renaissance style. It is built of red bricks, with terra cotta strings, cornices, pediments, and doorways, the roof being covered with Westmorland green slates. At the corner, are two circular windows, with terra cotta column, surmounted by fluted and dental stone oriel, carrying a turret ornamented with full grained red and white stone, and a shield bearing the Corporation arms, which gives to this portion of the building an elegant appearance." (Blockside)



Two separate entrances are provided for the Free Library (later Museum) off Priory Street and the School of Art and Art Gallery from St James's Road.



A later addition of note is a set of meteorological instruments, on the impressive corner demi-bastion, which were donated by James Smellie to commemorate his wife, the Mayoress of Dudley, 1925-26. The instruments consist of an aneroid barometer, a dial thermometer and a dial wind-speed indicator, all of which were specially made, and *'of the most modern and accurate type'*. The unveiling ceremony was performed by the then Mayor, Alderman Bradford, on 4 October 1927.



The building also features windows with geological designs which can be seen from St James's Road. These were designed by Steve Field in 1992 and each one was individually sandblasted by a student at Dudley College's School of Glass.

The designs run through the history of evolution via various fossil references including Dudley's famous Crinoid. They include a quotation from Salvador Dali, whose art was partially inspired by geology: *"The Rocks of the Imagination still remain."*

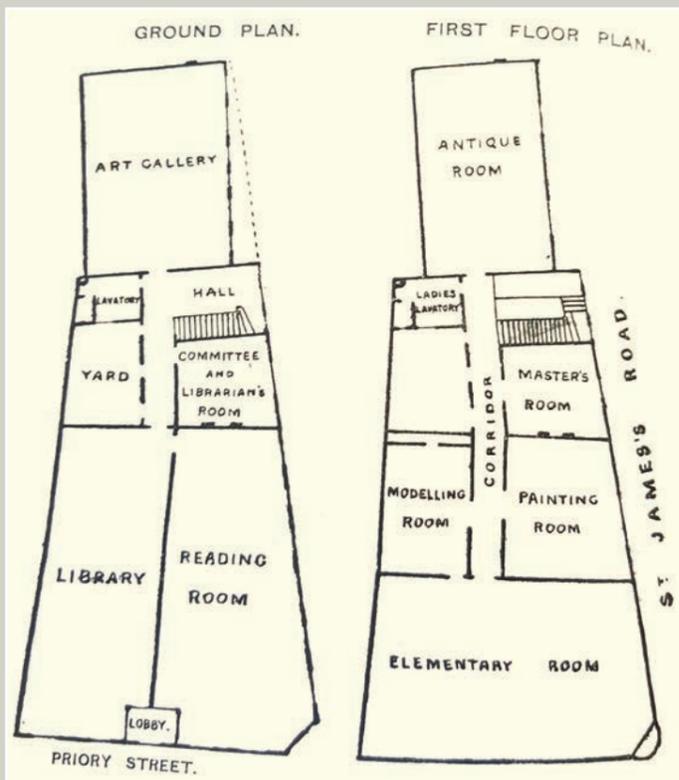
INTERIOR

The Ground Floor accommodated the Reading Room, opened for use of the public on 1 September 1884, and was *"well lighted with eight large windows, the top parts opening with patent fastenings, and filled with ornamental and coloured Cathedral glass of choice design"*. The Library was adjacent, to the left of the entrance, described as being *"fitted with beautiful oak counter, cupboards, shelving to hold about 5,000 volumes, and a patent indicator, fixed in the centre of the counter, fitted with 6,000 numbered divisions, or recesses, for borrowers' tickets"*.

The whole of the upper floor was occupied by the School of Art and contained rooms devoted to elementary, antique, modelling, painting, and master's rooms - the rooms have a cove cornice, with plaster mouldings. Accommodation

Ground Floor

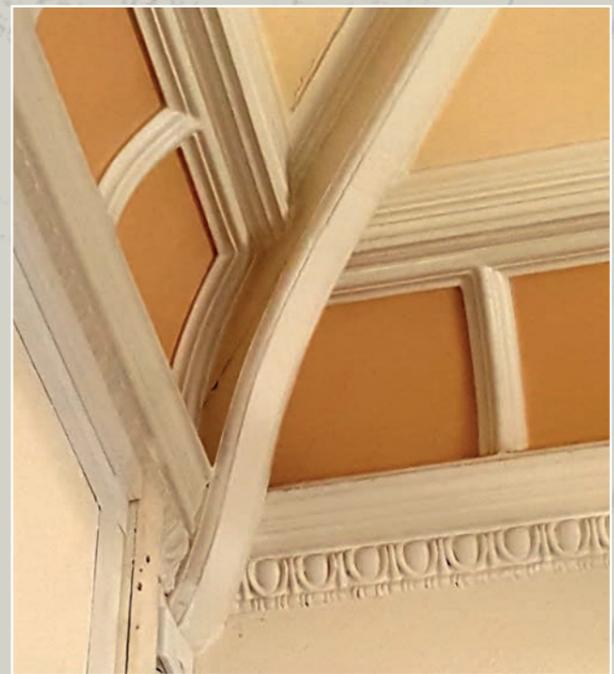
MEMORIAL TOWER



also included committee room, caretaker's rooms, store rooms, and lavatories (the walls of the lavatories were finished with white glazed tiles). Blocksidge notes that *"The whole of the building is well ventilated and warmed by hot-water pipes, the whole of the pipes on the upper floor being cased with ornamental castings with mahogany top, forming shelf. The heating apparatus was supplied and fixed by Mr H Hope, Lionel Street, Birmingham. The whole of the gas work was executed by Messrs H Wythes and Son of High Street, Dudley. The fittings are of polished brass, specially designed in the Queen Anne style"*.

Left: Plan of rooms from Blocksidge (courtesy of Dudley Archives and Local History Service).

Within the Art Gallery, accessed from St James's Road, the interior includes circular panelled moulded ribs, enriched with ornamental work, as seen in the ceiling.



As Blocksidge describes: *"The doorway to this room is very handsome, consisting of mahogany swing doors, with massive mahogany architrave, carved, fluted, and gilded, and surmounted with frame over door, containing an appropriate and artistic piece of carving representing artists' work."*

A stone staircase, with double twisted balusters and mahogany handrail, leads to the upper floor. The staircase is lighted with ten stained-glass windows of beautiful and elaborate design. The whole of the corridors and staircase are lined with cream-coloured octagon and red dot glazed tiles, with chocolate skirting and border 5ft high, imparting cheerfulness and cleanliness to the same."

Ground Floor

MEMORIAL TOWER

THE OPENING CEREMONY

The opening ceremony was performed on 29 July, 1884, by the Honourable Mrs Claughton, the Earl of Dudley's sister, and wife of the Bishop of St Albans. The Countess of Dudley was unavoidably absent due to the death of her brother-in-law, Sir Charles Forbes.

The opening procession started from the Priory Hall, and proceeded through Castle Drive, Castle Street, the Market Place, and Wolverhampton Street to Priory Street. The whole line of the route was crowded with spectators, who repeatedly cheered as the brilliant procession passed. Every vantage spot was occupied, including windows on the route.



Opening ceremony procession on way to new building through the Market Place, led by police and volunteers, followed by band, architects, builders, committee members, clergy and ministers, magistrates, borough officials, mace bearer, Mayor and Countess of Dudley (courtesy of Dudley Archives and Local History Service).

On arriving at the building, dignitaries ascended the canopied dais at the corner of the building and near the entrance to the Free Library. The Mayor and the Hon Mrs Claughton took up the principal positions, there were addresses from the Free Libraries' Committee and the School of Art Committee which the Hon Mrs Claughton accepted on behalf of Lady Dudley. The Mayor then presented a solid gold key to Mrs Claughton to complete the performance.

“Her Ladyship gracefully accepted the key, also in the name of Lady Dudley, and then leaning on the arm of His Worship, and followed by the Bishop and the Mayoress, unlocked the door of the Free Library and walked in, amid the loud and repeated cheers of the multitude, and the playing of the bands. The interior of the building was then inspected by the distinguished visitors, who expressed their delight with the general design and arrangements.”
(Blocksidge)



1884 ONWARDS

The Free Library 1884 - 1909

The library was supported by the proceeds of a 1d rate and this sum allowed Charles F Mackmain of Bilston to be appointed as librarian at a salary of £100 a year. After the formal opening, on 29 July, the books had to be classified, numbered, etc, and a draft catalogue prepared prior to general access. The library was opened for the issue of books on 1 October 1884. The new service proved to be very popular with 50,000 books being issued in 1889.

In the following year, a small reference library was opened to serve as 'a centre for information for the whole borough' and the bookstock housed in the building now totalled 6,400.

Problems with overcrowding began, especially in the reading room. At the request of Job Garratt, who had served as Chairman of the Public Libraries Committee since the opening, the Mayor wrote to Andrew Carnegie - the benefactor



of hundreds of libraries in this country and the United States. Eventually, a grant of £7,500 was received and a new library building in St James's Road was opened in 1909. A few years later, in December 1912, the vacated old Free Library became the new Geological Museum where the valuable collection of fossils would be housed and displayed. The new museum was opened by Professor Lapworth and a new era of geological conservation and promotion had begun.

Public Library, St James's Road, dating from 1909.

The School of Art 1884-1966

Enrolment in the classes had increased enormously with the move to new premises. The recommendation that drawing should be taught in elementary schools brought local teachers to take courses leading to the Art Class Teachers' Certificate.

In the 1890s an Act imposing additional duty on wines and spirits was passed which resulted in funds becoming available to local authorities to either reduce the rates or assist in providing technical education. These funds, popularly known as the 'whisky money' were used in Dudley to help meet the costs of running the Art School on condition that free instruction was provided for selected elementary school pupils and that a certificated art master was appointed to help the voluntary and Board schools in the area.

In 1901, the Art School was transferred to the direct management of the Borough Council. At this time the school was running classes in: freehand drawing, shading, geometry, perspective, architecture, clay modelling, ornamental design, historic styles of ornament, oil painting, watercolour painting, china painting, machine construction and drawing, building construction and also embroidery, jewellery, enamelling, silversmithing, lettering, woodcarving and illuminating.

Ground Floor

MEMORIAL TOWER

The school continued to flourish and the space left by the library was converted into a pottery room. Even with its success, questions about the future location of the school were being raised as early as 1935. In that year the Education Committee asked if the school could be accommodated with the new Technical College, but the intervention

of the war meant that no decisions were taken. In 1946 a special Art School sub-committee recommended that the school should cease to be a separate establishment and should become part of the college. This became effective in the autumn of 1947 but most of the classes continued to be held at St James's Road and the school continued to issue its own prospectus. However, as the space for the school became limited, plans were made to move to new premises and the Art School left the building in 1966.

Dudley Free Library and School of Art.



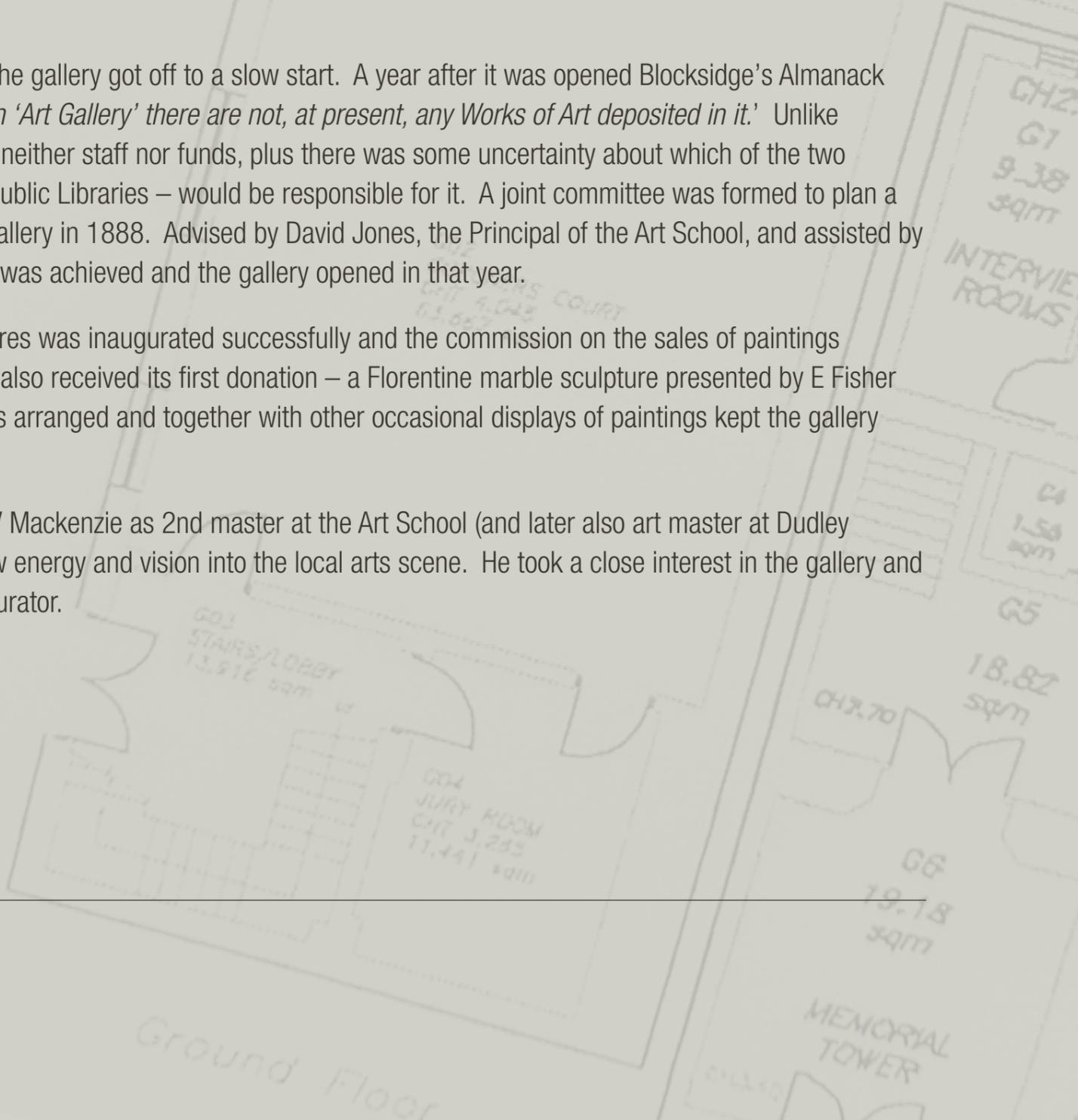
Blocksidge drawing of the Dudley Free Library and School of Art (courtesy of Dudley Archives and Local History Service).

The Art Gallery

Despite promises of donations the gallery got off to a slow start. A year after it was opened Blocksidge's Almanack commented: *'Although called an 'Art Gallery' there are not, at present, any Works of Art deposited in it.'* Unlike the Free Library the gallery had neither staff nor funds, plus there was some uncertainty about which of the two committees – School of Art or Public Libraries – would be responsible for it. A joint committee was formed to plan a major exhibition to launch the gallery in 1888. Advised by David Jones, the Principal of the Art School, and assisted by the Birmingham Art Gallery this was achieved and the gallery opened in that year.

A subscription fund to buy pictures was inaugurated successfully and the commission on the sales of paintings supplemented this. The gallery also received its first donation – a Florentine marble sculpture presented by E Fisher Smith. An annual exhibition was arranged and together with other occasional displays of paintings kept the gallery occupied.

The appointment in 1920 of C V Mackenzie as 2nd master at the Art School (and later also art master at Dudley Grammar School) brought a new energy and vision into the local arts scene. He took a close interest in the gallery and in 1933 became its Honorary Curator.



In 1928, the Dudley Art Circle was founded and began to stage its own annual exhibitions. The Earl of Dudley, upon opening the sixth of these in 1934, commented on the need for a larger gallery to accommodate the now available travelling exhibitions.

Dudley Art Circle

The original Society, called 'The Dudley and District Art Circle', was formed in 1928. Its first meeting was held in Cranage's, the popular café in Dudley High Street, and from its beginning had around 70 members. It included a nucleus of distinguished 1930s artists, including F Smith, G Deeley and C V MacKenzie (who exhibited at the Royal Academy). At the same time, the young Percy Shakespeare was also exhibiting at the Royal Academy and The Salon.

Sadly, during the war, several members of the Art Circle were lost, or killed in action. Others returned and gave presentations of their experiences and showed sketches produced whilst on active service.

During the early years, as well as painting, the Art Circle promoted a wide range of arts and crafts, including woodcarving, glassware, bookbinding, weaving, pottery, heraldry and a host of associated activities. There were also the regular feature of practical demonstrations and what were known as 'Lantern Lectures' given by visiting speakers.

In 1948, C V MacKenzie, still chairman of the Art Circle after twenty years and also Curator of Dudley Art Gallery, died at the age of 55. He had been a much-respected teacher at Dudley Grammar School and Dudley Art School and was a considerable artist.

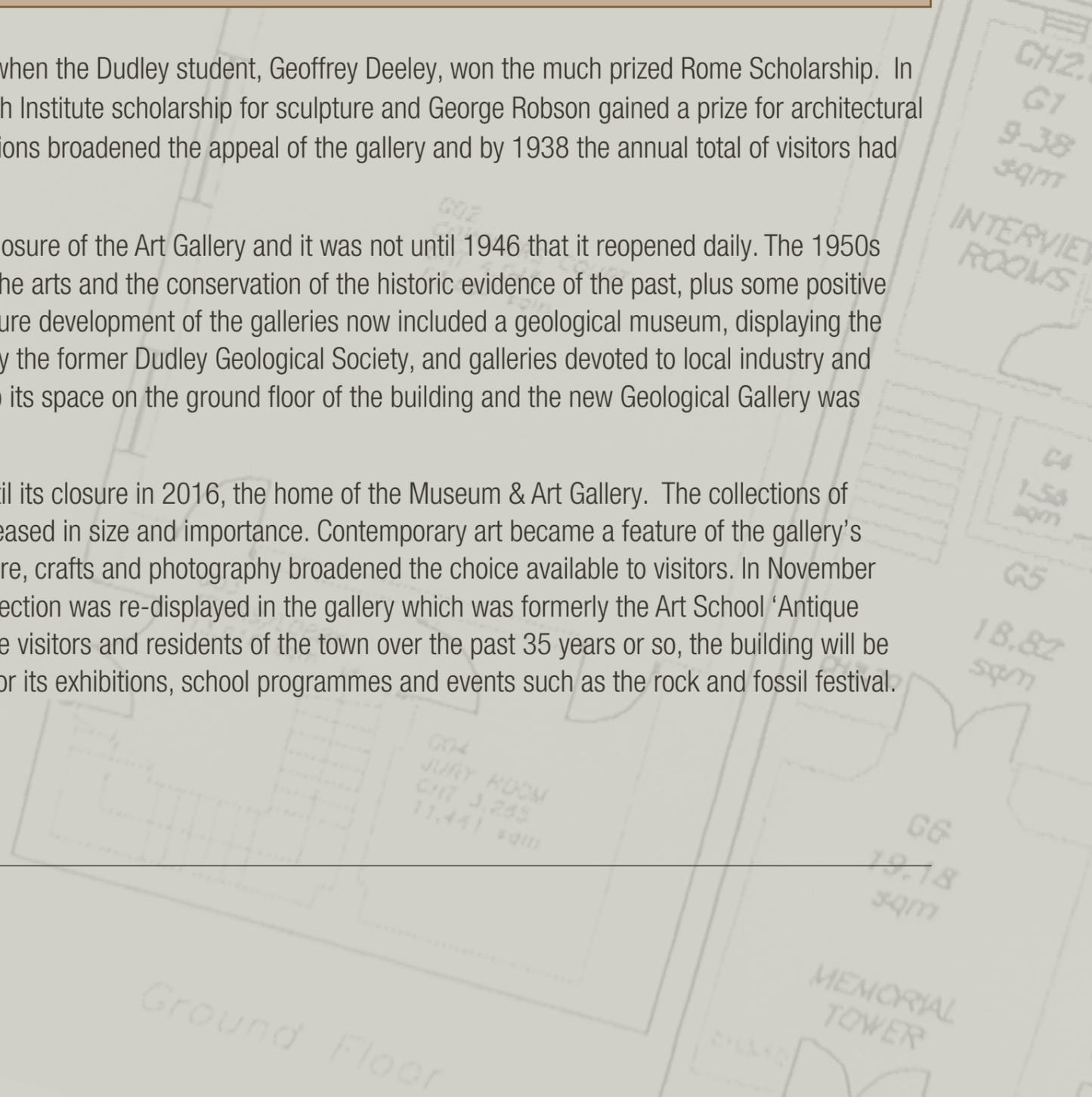
The Art Circle title lasted over 50 years, but now it is known as 'The Dudley Society of Artists'. Happily, the membership is still in the seventies.

For more information about the society visit www.dudleysocietyofartists.com

The following year, 1935, was when the Dudley student, Geoffrey Deeley, won the much prized Rome Scholarship. In 1937 C V Harwood won a British Institute scholarship for sculpture and George Robson gained a prize for architectural drawings. New types of exhibitions broadened the appeal of the gallery and by 1938 the annual total of visitors had reached 18,888.

The war brought a temporary closure of the Art Gallery and it was not until 1946 that it reopened daily. The 1950s witnessed renewed interest in the arts and the conservation of the historic evidence of the past, plus some positive planning for the future. The future development of the galleries now included a geological museum, displaying the collection of fossils deposited by the former Dudley Geological Society, and galleries devoted to local industry and history. The Art School gave up its space on the ground floor of the building and the new Geological Gallery was opened in January 1965.

The building was thereafter, until its closure in 2016, the home of the Museum & Art Gallery. The collections of geology, fine art and glass increased in size and importance. Contemporary art became a feature of the gallery's exhibitions programme; sculpture, crafts and photography broadened the choice available to visitors. In November 1981 the Brooke Robinson Collection was re-displayed in the gallery which was formerly the Art School 'Antique Room' on the first floor. For the visitors and residents of the town over the past 35 years or so, the building will be remembered as the Museum, for its exhibitions, school programmes and events such as the rock and fossil festival.



ATTENDEES OF THE SCHOOL OF ART

Percy Shakespeare (1906 - 1942)

“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.”

The Dudley Herald, 1923. Reporting on Dudley School of Art's third annual exhibition.

Childhood

Percy was born in Kate's Hill, Dudley, on 28 February 1906. He was the fourth of eight children of John Thomas Shakespeare (a steam engine fitter) and his wife Ada. As a teenager, Percy often visited exhibitions at Dudley School of Art.



Self portrait (Courtesy of Dudley Museum & Art Gallery)

From 1928 Percy divided his time between Dudley and Birmingham. He was welcomed as a member of Dudley Art Circle and was one of their key exhibitors in their annual exhibitions.

At the end of 1932 Percy was working on a painting of a young lady, 'A Mulatto'. This painting, alongside 'Isobel', was submitted to the Royal Academy for the summer exhibition in 1933. Both pieces were accepted, but only 'A Mulatto' was hung. In the autumn of 1933, at the Fifth Annual Exhibition of Dudley Art Circle, 'A Mulatto' was formally presented to the town.

'A Mulatto' (Courtesy of Dudley Museum & Art Gallery)

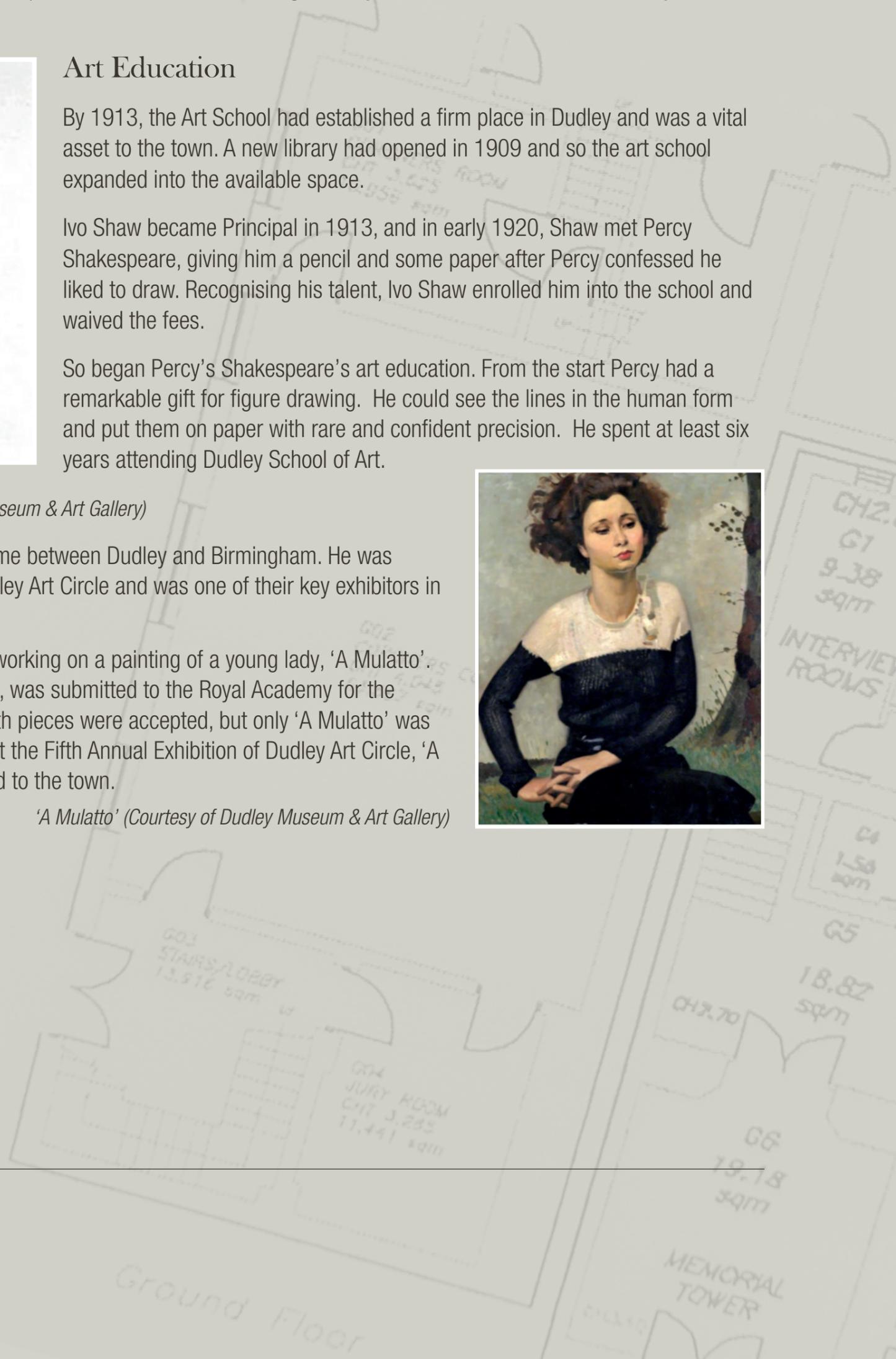


Art Education

By 1913, the Art School had established a firm place in Dudley and was a vital asset to the town. A new library had opened in 1909 and so the art school expanded into the available space.

Ivo Shaw became Principal in 1913, and in early 1920, Shaw met Percy Shakespeare, giving him a pencil and some paper after Percy confessed he liked to draw. Recognising his talent, Ivo Shaw enrolled him into the school and waived the fees.

So began Percy's Shakespeare's art education. From the start Percy had a remarkable gift for figure drawing. He could see the lines in the human form and put them on paper with rare and confident precision. He spent at least six years attending Dudley School of Art.



Leisure Paintings

Most of Percy's early work was figure drawing and portraiture, mainly of women, and figure drawing was what he taught. He continued to paint portraits but during the 1930s devoted his energy on a series of oil paintings showing groups of people at leisure. These compositions were the result of intense work with many preliminary drawings of the component figures. The drawings themselves are of considerable merit in their own right.

He painted one or two of these compositions each year and submitted them to the Royal Academy where they were often accepted. They are remarkable in their colour and figure arrangements and together they capture the spirit of the Thirties. He subsisted on a few hours teaching a week, had no studio and often painted in his small bedroom in the family council house on the Wren's Nest.



The Tropical Bird House, Dudley Zoo (Oil on canvas, 1939)

Dudley Zoo 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. The Bird House was one of the twelve Tecton buildings that formed the basis of the new Zoo.

Shakespeare's painting captures the varied experience of a family visit to the zoo in the 1930s.

Courtesy of Dudley Museum & Art Gallery. For more information, visit:

www.dudley.gov.uk/things-to-do/museums/dudley-museum-at-the-archives/fine-art/

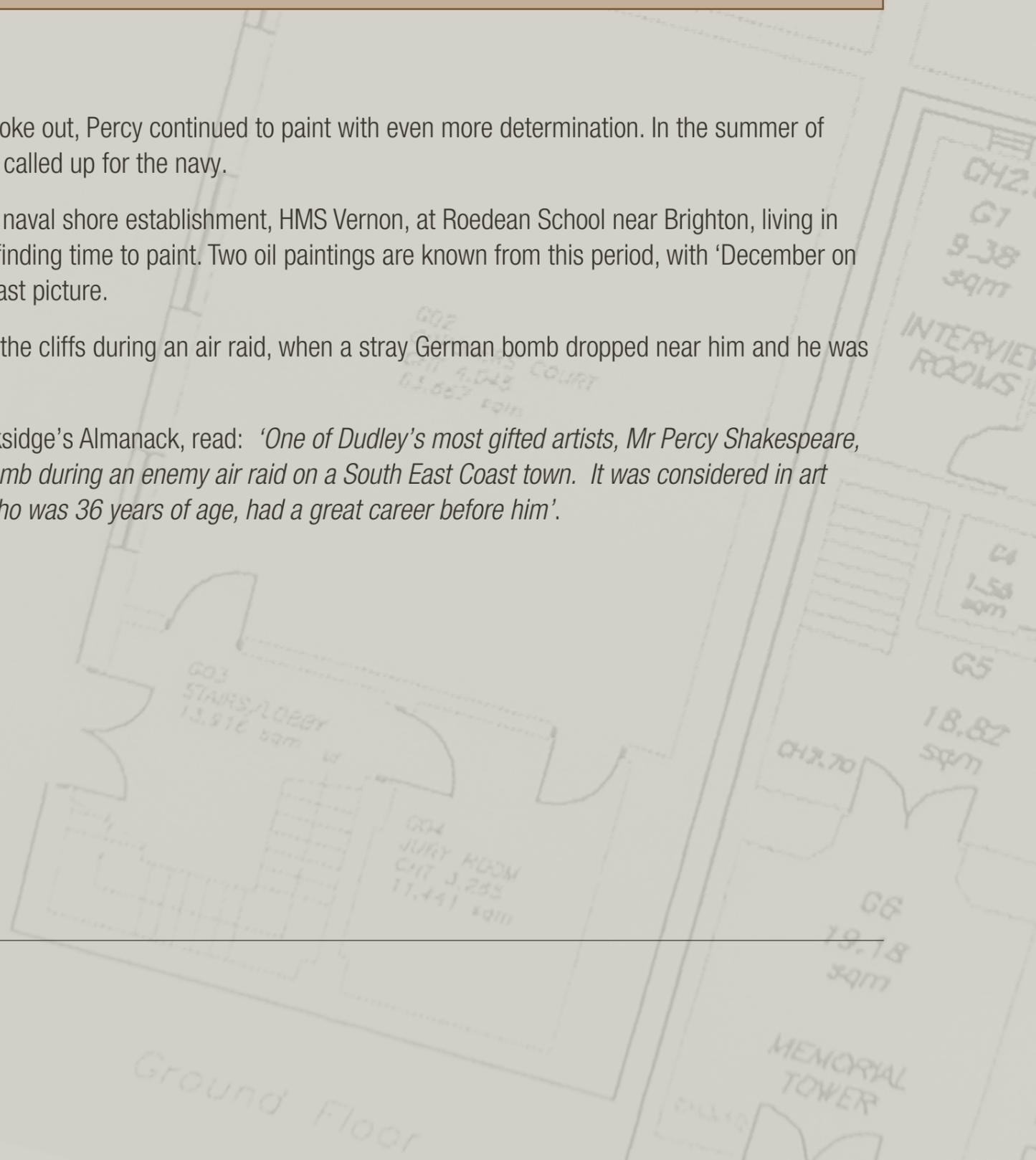
World War II

When the Second World War broke out, Percy continued to paint with even more determination. In the summer of 1941, at the age of 35, he was called up for the navy.

He was doing special work in a naval shore establishment, HMS Vernon, at Roedean School near Brighton, living in lodgings somewhere near, still finding time to paint. Two oil paintings are known from this period, with 'December on the Downs' perhaps being his last picture.

Percy went for a walk alone on the cliffs during an air raid, when a stray German bomb dropped near him and he was thrown into the sea and killed.

His obituary, appearing in Blocksidge's Almanack, read: *'One of Dudley's most gifted artists, Mr Percy Shakespeare, was killed on May 27th by a bomb during an enemy air raid on a South East Coast town. It was considered in art circles that Mr Shakespeare, who was 36 years of age, had a great career before him'*.



James Whale (1889-1957)

James Whale was born on 22 July 1889. He was a pupil at Kates Hill Board school, followed by Baylies's Charity School and finally Dudley Blue Coat School.

He discovered he had some artistic ability and earned additional money lettering signs and price tags for local shopkeepers, using this additional income to pay for evening classes at Dudley School of Art.

Whale volunteered to enlist in the army after the outbreak of World War I. He underwent officer training and in July 1916 was commissioned as second lieutenant into the Worcestershire Regiment. Just over a year later he was captured by Germans on the Western Front and held prisoner of war for two years. It was during his time in captivity that his love of telling stories and staging a show began to grow.

After the war, he returned to Dudley and joined Birmingham Repertory Theatre as an actor. He then became a set designer and an Assistant Director.

When the new position of 'Dialogue Director' was created to help established silent film directors, Whale was hired to assist Howard Hughes in the drama 'Hell's Angels' (1930). The same year Whale earned his first feature director credit with the adaptation of Journey's End (1930) with Colin Clive in the leading role. He was then signed by Universal Studios to direct wartime drama 'Waterloo Bridge', with the film coming in on time and under budget enabling Whale a future film choice with the studio - he chose Frankenstein.

Frankenstein marked the full-fledged emergence of horror as a commercially viable Hollywood genre, and Whale was elevated to the status of Universal's Premier Director. Within five years he became one of a handful of directors in the studio system to attain almost total control over his projects, as long as the box office responded favourably.

Universal Studios management changed, and in 1937, after protests and threats of a German boycott by the then ruling Nazi Party, drastic cuts were made to his WWI drama 'The Road Back' (1937). A disgusted Whale left the studio and became freelance. His last successful film was 'The Man in the Iron Mask' (1939) starring Louise Hayward as twins of royal lineage and Warren William as the Muskateer, D'Artagnan.

Acknowledgments:

Centenary of Dudley Art Gallery, School of Art & Free Library 1884-1984

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Blocksidge Almanack

Dudley Council - Museums Service

