

An artist in the family – George Williams 1910-1953

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In 2011 my sister inherited a still life of Roses in a bowl, painted by my father's first cousin George Williams. The particular painting was my mother's favourite and had been in her possession for 50 years. She in turn had inherited it from my grandmother Eva, nee Angove. Some years ago my sister asked me for more information on George Williams – some of his history and were there any other paintings.



George Williams was born in Daylesford in 1910. He was the third child of William Williams and Mary Angove, my grandmother's older sister. Though both George's parents were Australian born all his grandparents were Cornish. Little is known of his father's family other than he was born at Cornishtown, Adelong in 1880 and his grandparents William Williams and Mary Jane Daniel were married in Penzance in 1876. His mother's parents Sam Angove and Ann Roberts were married in Daylesford in 1870 but came from St Newlyn East and Wendron respectively. They were part of the strong Cornish mining connection in the Daylesford area whose family ties included Hockings, Eades, Goldsworthys, Lawrys, Tippetts amongst many others. It is of note that both his mother and grandmother signed the woman's suffrage petition in 1891.



It is assumed that George went to school in Daylesford and appears to have been an apprenticed signwriter. There is an intriguing black and white photo of a truck outside 4 Moore St South Yarra where the family had moved to in the late 1920s with the name 'PYRAMID ADS MELB.' on the side. I have been unable to find anything further about this business, whether George was an employee or whether it was his own business, more likely the former. About 1936 George was employed as a signwriter by Australian National Airlines at Essendon. It appears that he worked there through the war and into the late 1940s and it is not known when he started painting seriously but possibly about the time of his marriage to Ann Hatch in 1940. At some stage in his career he worked as a commercial artist doing illustrations for newspapers and magazines. For the last 2 or 3 years of his life he worked full time as an artist, financially supported by his wife, a seamstress, and living at my grandmother's house at 356 Burke Rd Camberwell in a bedroom studio. He died suddenly in 1953 and was cremated at Springvale when his occupation was listed as 'signwriter'.



Family memories indicated that there were far more paintings than my sister's roses. I personally remembered 3 or 4 large landscapes in the back of a sewing shop run by his widow in Malvern Rd Tooronga. So I set off in pursuit of the missing paintings. This involved correspondence with, and locating, first and second cousins, and relatives of Ann Williams, who died in 2000. I eventually discovered and obtained copies of 9 full canvases, plus a further 8 photos of images, one in colour, the others black and white. All the latter were landscapes. Of the framed paintings

there are 4 portraits, of his wife, of his nephew and niece, John and Barbara Williams as children, and a family favourite, the kelpie 'Rinty'. There was one 'maritime' painting of a windjammer done as a wedding present for his brother, and the rest were landscapes, all done variously in oil and watercolours.



Perhaps most intriguing are the missing works. We know that he was painting on a part-time basis whilst living at Moore St and the last 2 or three years of his life working full time. Missing works include a very large reclining nude of his wife painted whilst at Moore St and seen by his nephews Barry Cameron and John Williams as children. There is also supposed to be a companion work to the maritime picture – the same vessel in a storm, and another series depicting the seasons that were remembered by my older sister as being on display at Burke Rd.

George Williams does not get a mention in the McCulloch's *Encyclopedia of Australian Art*. He cannot be found on the Internet. Like some famous artists it is not known whether he actually sold a painting during his lifetime. However Arthur Rhodes suggests that the nude was sold after Ann's second husband didn't approve of it. But somewhere across the country there must be a number of works by him - landscapes, portraits and even a still life or two - decorating walls and treasured by their owners. These probably include a number of large framed canvases of landscapes including one of a gnarled old gum tree at Gawler in South Australia, similar to one held by Nikki Cameron but from a different perspective. And of course the missing nude.

*Written with help from Nikki Cameron, Barbara Williams, John Williams, Arthur Rhodes, Elizabeth Gardner, Judith Miller. Images E. Gardner, N. Cameron, A. Rhodes, B. Yeoman.