

Amberley landscape finds a new home at Worthing Museum and Art Gallery

On Friday 4th December 2015, Worthing Museum and Art Gallery gratefully received a new painting for their collection, *Amberley*, a charming West Sussex landscape painted by local artist Jack Merriott, gifted from the Science Museum.

Witnessed by Worthing Mayor Michael Donin and Mayoress Linda Williams, the Worthing Museum and Art Gallery curator Emma Walder accepted the painting from [Lord Faulkner of Worcester](#).

Lord Faulkner, Deputy Chairman of the Science Museum Group and Chair of Railway Heritage Designation Advisory Board who are responsible, under the Railway Heritage Act, for ensuring artefacts and records that are a significant part of the nation's railway history are preserved.

He adds "*Jack Merriott was a major railway artist who was commissioned by British Railways in the late 1940s and '50s to produce paintings which provided the artwork for posters and carriage prints promoting rail travel.*

It is particularly fitting that 'Amberley' has been found a home in Worthing, the town in which Merriott died in 1968. This painting was the inspiration for the British Railways poster "The South Downs." I am delighted to hand it over to Worthing Museum and Art Gallery, where it will be expertly restored to its former glory and available to view again in Spring 2016."

Councillor Daniel Humphreys, Leader of Worthing Borough Council says; "*This painting is a very welcome addition to the collection at Worthing Museum and Art Gallery and we are very grateful to The Science Museum and the Railway Heritage Designation Advisory board for gifting it to us for restoration and safe keeping. It is a vibrant picture, depicting one of many lovely landscapes we have here in West Sussex and I am sure this painting will continue to encourage visitors, as it did when it was originally commissioned by British Railways.*"

Amberley will be on display to the public in the main collection at the [Worthing Museum and Art Gallery](#) in Spring 2016. <http://www.worthingmuseum.co.uk/>

Jack Merriott (1901-1968) was a traditional painter of long standing and much experience. His free impressionistic style in oil, pastel and particularly watercolour is widely known. As a landscape and portrait painter in oil and watercolour, he was prolific and in the 1950s and 1960s he did much work for British Railways designing many posters, carriage prints and booklets.

Born in London in 1901 he was educated at Greenwich Central School and studied at Croydon School of Art and did his final training at St Martin's School of Art. He started as a shipping clerk in an office near London Bridge and during this period he spent all his leisure time painting and was often caught sketching the shipping on the Thames on the backs of old invoices during office hours.

At the age of twenty eight he became a professional painter and he was commissioned to do posters depicting the landscape of by both British Rail and the then General Post Office. These posters, together with his frequent illustrations for the Sphere magazine and many watercolours for a series of books called "Beautiful Britain" published by Blackie, brought him into prominence as a landscape painter.

It is suggested that Merriott painted Amberley around 1947 for a poster commissioned by British Railways, although it could have been painted as late as 1957. It depicts the western-facing cut into the chalk from the sleepy village of Houghton, long before the peace was shattered by the endless flow of cars and goods vehicles through the old village street. The elm tree depicted on the track to the left is emotive of a time when these beautiful trees shaded country lanes across Sussex.

Nonetheless, if you were to stand where Merriott stood in illustrating this work, very little has changed in the landscape in over half a century. The Arun Valley railway line runs along the base of the chalk cut and was integral to the development of the quarry in the 19th Century. The River Arun is partially visible in the painting, running through the Downs at this point before gliding in great loops through the valley to the sea.

Merriott's style convincingly demonstrates the verdant nature of the Sussex Downs in summertime, in addition to the grand nature of the Downs rising steadily up from the wildbrooks below. It is interesting to note that the painting represents a post-industrial landscape – the chalk pits were a busy working quarry just a few decades before but declined significantly by the 1950s. We already see the vegetation begin to reclaim the chalk, giving the impression of a timeless scene.