

Canford Mill, painted by Anthony Eyton in his last year at Canford, shows astonishing maturity



A shared centenary

The school is being painted by OC Anthony Eyton (B41) as part of its centenary celebrations

ANTHONY Eyton RA is the last of the great Euston Road painters, a group founded in October 1937 by William Coldstream, Victor Pasmore and Claude Rogers which had its pre-war premises at 314-316 Euston Road and then re-emerged at the Camberwell School of Art after 1945. The group became synonymous with aesthetically pleasing paintings derived from close observation, careful measurement, subtle use of colours, structural composition and balance.

Anthony Eyton working on preparatory sketches for his painting to mark the school's centenary



Anthony began painting when he was a boarder at Canford in 1941. He was tutored by Ian Fleming Williams and William Coldstream, a friend of Rev. Clifford Canning, Canford's cultured and civilised Headmaster. The Cannings took a close interest in Anthony's emergence as a young artist of talent and promise and he describes Enid Canning as his earliest inspiration. Coldstream remained a defining influence on his work and was the main reason why Anthony joined Camberwell School of Art in 1947 after he was demobilised from the Army.

Anthony won the Abbey Major scholarship in 1951, which took him to paint in Rome for two years. Like many artists, he combined painting and exhibiting with teaching and amongst his many posts he taught at Camberwell and in the Royal Academy schools. He was elected a Royal Academician in 1976 and his paintings have won many accolades and prizes over the years, including a John Moores Prize in 1972 and the Charles Wollaston Award in 1989. He is widely travelled, painting in Brazil, Australia, China, Japan, India, France, Greece and the Sudan. He received Foreign Office commissions to paint in Hong Kong and Ethiopia and for two years was the Head of Painting at St Lawrence College, Kingston, Ontario.

Through direct observation and careful study of a particular place, he captures its appearance, history and intangible genius loci. He has developed his own pictorial language by welcoming the poetic realms of



The visit of such a distinguished artist created interest among pupils, to the benefit and enjoyment of both sides

the subject. For Anthony, a landscape is not just to be admired as a sunset, seascape or an attractive view over the mountains, but something to be climbed over, trodden on, lain in, discovered and experienced from every conceivable angle. He was strongly influenced by Constable, whose description of painting as 'another word for feeling' resonates strongly in his work. He says the proximity of the river and the mill at Canford drew him closer to the works of Constable. Anthony and his close friend at Canford, fellow-artist Sir Ninian Buchan-Hepburn (M41), could often be seen setting off on their bicycles to paint the local landscape.

When Augustus John, visiting Canford, presented Anthony with the landscape prize for his picture of Canford Mill, he described him as 'very promising, very promising indeed'.

From painting the ruins of classical antiquity in the Roman Campagna to documenting the stripping out of Gilbert Scott's Bankside and Battersea Power Stations, Anthony has always been fascinated by the decadent. He was also artist-in-residence for the Eden Project in the 1990s, where he chronicled the construction of the futuristic-looking biomes which emerged from the clay pits around St Austell.

Anthony's mother, Phyllis, was an accomplished artist herself and exhibited at the RA but was tragically killed in a hunting accident when he was just six. After 92 years it is surprising how strongly he still feels this loss, deprived as he was not only of a loving mother but of an early champion of his talent. Daily appreciation of her paintings on his walls gives him constant joy.

Anthony and fellow artist Mark Flawn-Thomas were commissioned by the Headmaster of Stowe School, Dr Anthony Wallersteiner, in 2015 to do a series of paintings to celebrate the upcoming centenary of the school. Wallersteiner, himself an art historian and a trustee of Tate St Ives, describes Anthony as 'one of the greatest living landscape artists'.

Canford was founded together with Stowe in 1923 by Rev. Percy Warrington as part of the evangelising mission of the Martyrs Memorial Trust to advance the Protestant principles of the Church of England. As it was started in the same year and the same month by the same man, it was thought appropriate that it should also receive the artistic attentions of Anthony to celebrate its centenary, especially as he is an OC. It is a happy coincidence that Anthony will also celebrate his hundredth year in 2023, on 17 May.

After hearing about the Stowe centenary art project, Ben Vessey approached Anthony and it was agreed that he would come and paint at Canford. After a year in which the logistics of travelling for a 98-year-old were something of a challenge, Anthony and Mark finally made it to Canford on 10 June this year. They spent two days painting the school, suitably socially distanced, and have both produced works worthy of reproduction. The project is ongoing but in the meantime, Anthony has generously offered to have one of his works auctioned to raise money for the Martin Marriott Foundation. Limited edition prints of his view of the school will be available for parents and alumni to buy, a share of which will also go towards the Martin Marriott Foundation.

Mark Flawn-Thomas, who has painted with Anthony over the past decade, describes him as 'ever youthful in spirit and treats every painting as a battle to inject feeling and freshness of vision into his subject matter'. Anthony himself likes to quote T S Eliot: 'Old men ought to be explorers, here and there does not matter, we must be still and still moving, into another intensity.' There is something of a resurgent energy in the man in this final furlong of his life and it is an honour to be witness to this.

A further detailed CV and chronology of Anthony Eyton's works and achievements can be found at www.markflawnthomas.com/AnthonyeytonRA.