

William and FJ Widgery

The landscape painters, William and FJ Widgery, lived and worked in Devon throughout their careers. William Widgery (1826-1893) was entirely self-taught and developed an atmospheric style well suited to large-scale work. By contrast, his son, FJ (1861-1942), received formal art training at home and abroad. His more precise draughtsmanship was ideal for small-scale work and illustration.

Though high-spirited and sociable, William seems to have been totally dedicated to painting. FJ however, found time to be involved in Exeter politics and the running of the museum.

Both men drew life-long inspiration from the landscape of Devon and, above all, from Dartmoor.

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Tor Marsh

William Widgery (1826-1893)

Watercolour with traces of gouache on paper, 1860-1893

A self-taught artist, William was praised by critics for his handling of colour and the atmospheric quality of his work in both oil and watercolour. He often worked on a large scale.

Described as “a man of exuberant animal spirits, bright, witty, abounding in anecdote, a perfect master of merry quips and repartee”, he appears to have been as popular as his paintings.

One of William’s greatest patrons in Exeter was Kent Kingdon. Kingdon was a founder of RAMM and purchased many of William’s oils and watercolours. He bequeathed a number of them to the museum in 1892.

Etching plate

FJ Widgery (1861-1942)

Steel

Unlike his father, the young FJ enjoyed an extended period of training. Having attended Exeter Cathedral School, he studied at the local Art School, then housed here at RAMM.

In London, he became a student at the South Kensington School of Art (now the Royal College of Art).

Not widely known for his etchings, FJ continued his studies at the Academy in Antwerp. Here he made etchings as part of the art school curriculum.

Portrait of William Widgery

FJ Widgery (1861-1942)

Gouache and some watercolour on paper

William Widgery's painting tools

"Widgery had no instruction from any man...he painted what he saw with Nature his only master...It is impossible to say that 'Widgery is of the school of So- and So', although at the present time all the young painters in Exeter are copying him."

George Pycroft, *Art in Devonshire*, published in 1883

Hill Bridge on the Tavy

FJ Widgery (1861-1942)

Watercolour on paper 1890-1896

Two hunters on horseback take pause on Hill Bridge. It spans the river Tavy and is wide enough to carry the lane linking Willsworthy and Cudlipptown. Today, the weir just in front of the bridge has a salmon and trout pass to help migrating fish travel up stream to breed.

Sketchbooks

FJ Widgery (1861-1942)
1883-1885 and 1890-1931

Working from his studio at 20a Queen Street, FJ kept close contact with the museum. In 1931 he donated his entire collection of sketches and sketchbooks. Most were not intended as 'finished' work for public exhibition and therefore reflect the artist's personal interest and pleasure in the world around him.

Dewerstone, Dartmoor

FJ Widgery (1861-1942)
Watercolour with traces of charcoal on paper 1890-1896

Dewerstone is the site of an Iron Age Hill fort that overlooks the river Plym. Rocky crags, like the one depicted, make this area especially popular with climbers.