

Herbert Rollett RBA

Lincolnshire grocer to acclaimed artist

In 2002 a friend and collector of art introduced me to a small painting of a Lincolnshire landscape which on first impression seemed a cut above the average. My interest then began a journey of discovery into a forgotten artist who had died seventy years earlier and on visiting the public library in Grimsby I was pleasantly surprised and impressed by what I found. The librarian handed me a box of newspaper cuttings about the man, Herbert Rollett, who was born, lived, worked and died in my home county and yet, sadly, I had never heard of him.

My research continued at the Usher Gallery in Lincoln to whom the artist's youngest daughter had left a small collection of his paintings together with various other items, including a scrapbook charting his successes. From these sources I tried to piece together something of a man who although truly local managed to communicate to a wider audience through the universal language of painting. He often painted alone but he also shared his time with others and inspired many to paint the great skies over both the flat lands and the wolds of Lincolnshire as well as the creeks and estuaries along the coast and the sombre banks of the River Humber*.

Rollett achieved national recognition over a short period of time for the novelty of being the grocer who, self-taught, painted as a hobby for twenty years and then went on to exhibit for six successive years at the Royal Academy in London. However, within a few years of his death he would be lost and it took another fifty years before a Grimsby journalist rediscovered him - only to fade once more from our memories.

The Journey from Huckerby to Grimsby

The Rolletts have farmed in the county for generations and many of them, often from large families, have spent their lives in hamlets and villages around Gainsborough, such as Blyton, Clayworth, Heapham, Scotton, Northorpe and Southorpe. Typical of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries some of their life spans remain unknown and some of them, inevitably, died very young. Others were surrounded in mystery because of inaccurate records and misinformation due to discrepancies in spelling and because of feuds and breaks within families.

It is easy to see, therefore, how the Rolletts might have mistakenly confused their Richard 'Rolit,' or even his grandson, with the master sail maker who sailed around the world with Captain Cook. But an undoubted member of the family, Herbert Rollett, who came from the very same part of the county slowly emerges as a local celebrity in his own right - as a Grimsby artist.

The son of a Lincolnshire farmer and one of twelve children Rollett was born in Huckerby, near Gainsborough, on 3 June 1872. He spent

* The River Humber, once described as 'the meeting of many waters,' is technically part of the Trent - Ouse draining system. Alkborough, one of Rollett's favourite haunts, sits at a high point overlooking the confluence of the three rivers and is about forty miles away from Spurn Point where, opposite Grimsby, the Humber enters the North Sea. With its tributaries it drains nearly one fifth of England.

Although this northern part of Lincolnshire is well known for its remoteness, flat lands, mud banks and clay pits it is also of importance to walkers, wildlife enthusiasts and artists. Close to Alkborough is Trent Falls, Devil's Causeway and South Ferriby where the chalk cliffs echo those on the northern bank. It was here that the Romans on their way from Lincoln to York, via Ermine Street, crossed the Humber to Brough.

Other picturesque spots in the area include Burton Stather, Whitton and Winteringham.

The original school was given its charter by Queen Elizabeth 1 in 1589 and was last used as a school at the outbreak of the Second World War. It is now the Hickman Hill Hotel - named after one of Gainsborough's most famous families.

In addition to a 'Herbert Rollett' the 1891 Census also lists a teenager called 'Bertie' who resided in Wraby Street, Brigg - as a grocer's apprentice.

* The building is still there and was later modified by Pailthorp the jewellers during the thirties. It retained its Victorian charm and quality before being radically altered and ruined in 1988.

The lessons were run by two elderly ladies - one was called Miss Scoffin.

his early childhood in Southorpe but it seems that he may not have been up to the rigours of farming and of staying on the farm - despite his father's wishes. The youngster was alert and well equipped to pursue more academic challenges but his stubborn father, William, refused to let him take up a career in law.

After attending Gainsborough's Queen Elizabeth Grammar School he was apprenticed to a grocer in Brigg where he lived in rooms and worked very long hours. He spent his leisure time studying and walking by the River Ancholme as soon as it was light but otherwise seems to have hated this period - until he decided that if he was destined to be a grocer then he would be the best grocer. Meanwhile he taught himself shorthand and reached a speed high enough to qualify for a lawyer's clerk. He was even accepted for a post in London but was not allowed to break his apprenticeship. However, he settled to the work and, aged nineteen, became manager of a shop in Nottingham before marrying and moving to Grimsby five years later.

Rollett opened his first shop in 1898, called the Five O'Clock Tea Store,* at 72 Victoria Street although he may have been in partnership two years earlier at the same address under the name 'Mansell and Rollett.' In about 1910 he moved from his original premises to 7 Osborne Street, just round the corner, and attended to his growing business, working twelve to fourteen hours a day.

Alongside this commitment he also developed an interest in music, playing the piano and photography. But these would eventually give way to painting and to his passion for the Lincolnshire landscape.

A Late Starter

In 1902 several examples of his work were shown in the Sketching Club room at the Grimsby School of Art as part of their annual show and, at this early stage, two distinct styles seemed to emerge.

In a view of Waltham he took great pains with the detail but in another treatment he went to the opposite extreme and aimed more at atmospheric effects. It was the latter for which he would achieve most of his success.

Although nearly thirty when he started and discouraged by his initial results he persevered and, after several years of self-study on the principles of painting, he began to take it up seriously. His only art training had consisted of just a few drawing lessons at the art school. Then, in 1906, his absence was noticed from the club's show. It was suggested that this might be due to previous adverse criticism of his work but this was dismissed by those who thought Rollett would "... surely regard fair criticism as far more valuable than gushing admiration."

Six years later a local report on his work suggested that his paintings were getting better each year and that he was "... really excellent in his own particular class of subject." One of them, *Showery Afternoon*, sold for one guinea.

Mixing Business with Pleasure

In order to pursue his painting Rollett would be out by 5.30 am with his easel, brushes and wooden painting box before starting work behind the shop counter. In fact, he claimed to have initiated the

Thursday 'half-holiday' in Grimsby which in the early days was the only time he could spare, after 3.00 pm, to give to his new hobby.

Wearing a stout leather jacket to help protect himself from the cold, together with a battered trilby hat, he would often be found in all weathers in lanes and fields and along the coast. "If you can get out of the the wind," he said, "you can paint all the year round." According to his son-in-law B P Ingamells,* some forty years later, he would usually be "... accompanied by a gay and enthusiastic following - they sat under hedges, in the lee of woods and dunes, painting hard, with spurts of nonsensical conversations that puzzled onlookers over the hedge."

* *Lincolnshire Life*, 1964.

** He also had a studio at the family home in Lambert Road, Grimsby where his wife gave Christmas parties for his loyal and loving staff.

After painting in the open air he would then work on them back at his studio** over the shop in a little room scarcely big enough to swing his palette. Later on he would paint every weekend, giving up his lunch times while putting in an average of seven hours a day. Of his painting he felt "... unhampered by tradition, and my late start in life rather suggests that it is never too late to take up painting - if you have it in your blood."

To some, however, he was not just a painter of pictures but also a painter of words. His reading, even from early childhood, seems to have greatly influenced his painting and helped him to develop strong views and theories on the aims and objectives of art. Towards the end of his life he had articles and letters published in the press and was also regarded as a competent photographer.

Hull's old art gallery and museum was replaced in 1927 by the new Ferens Art Gallery.

Very little was heard of Rollett again until local businessmen began to show an interest in his work and it was not until after the First World War that he achieved a much wider audience with one-man shows in several small provincial galleries. Then, in 1921, aged forty-eight, his work was exhibited at the Victoria Galleries in Hull and one report said "There is one picture painted with the palette knife in which light and movement have been obtained in a degree almost above that of mere paint."

Sir John Alfred Arnesby Brown RA was born in Nottingham in 1866, lived there for a time and exhibited eighteen pictures at the Nottingham Museum and Art Gallery. His work was accepted by the Royal Academy from 1890 and it seems likely that Rollett came across his work in Nottingham during that period when he worked as a shop manager. Arnesby Brown had one hundred and thirty-nine paintings hung at the Royal Academy throughout his long and illustrious career.

After living in St Ives he moved to Haddiscoe in Norfolk and spent his summer holidays painting in the Gorleston area with both Rollett and with Archibald Campbell Mellon (1876-1955).

Following encouragement and criticism from the painter John Alfred Arnesby Brown (who was later made a Royal Academician) Rollett continued to explore Lincolnshire, especially the north-east corner and the Humber bank. To him it was a painter's county - yet the one least exploited by artists. This was a period in which he began to study light, tone and design and the years of hard and often lonely work finally brought their reward as his paintings became bolder, stronger and more self assured.

By the early twenties he was showing his pictures in Leeds, Manchester and Nottingham as well as exhibiting at the Royal Scottish Academy, the Royal Institute of Oil Painters and the Walker Gallery, Liverpool, but the real breakthrough for Rollett came in 1924. At the Spring exhibition of the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists mention was made of *The Rising Tide*, a foreshore scene which conveyed a "pleasurable impression of space and the open air" and the same month he had his first success at the Paris Salon with *Killingholme Creek* which the local press thought brought "honour to Grimsby." Paris paid him a further compliment when he was asked if they could reproduce his work.

Success in Paris - and at the Royal Academy

The Royal Academy was founded in 1768 and the famous Summer Exhibition, which began the following year, has been an annual event ever since. Its first President was Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Having submitted several paintings to the Royal Academy in preceding years Rollett always hoped that it would be only a matter of time before his work was shown. Finally, this ultimate honour was achieved with a small landscape of Little Coates Church which was hung in the famous 'gem room' above a typical work of Mrs Annie Swynnerton - the only woman RA.

With successes in both Paris and London it was believed to have been many years since a Grimsby artist had received such recognition, probably not since T B Kennington and Sidney Wales White. (The former had painted the portraits of many local people). Grimsby Councillors tried to claim some credit for the School of Art, at least for Rollett's earlier association with it and the fact that he had been given a few drawing lessons, but in a later interview he claimed "I had no one to show me my faults, for I never had a real lesson in drawing and painting."

Nevertheless, he encouraged others to paint and passed onto them his hard-won knowledge and experience as well as his boundless pleasure and enthusiasm. Described by the *Daily Chronicle* as a middle aged man with a "round, rubicund, smiling face" whose eyes "sparkled with cheery optimism" Rollett would repeat his success at the Academy over the next five, consecutive years.

As a painter of the countryside he was particularly concerned with space, atmosphere and mood but he was also fond of the seashore. This covered the coast near Gorleston in Norfolk to the flats at Alkborough, close to where the Humber meets the Trent, as well as capturing a misty scene at Burton Stather near Scunthorpe. Although not typical of the subject matter that made him famous the latter was one of two submitted the following year to the Royal Academy but the one chosen, *After a Rainy Day*, was more representative of the beautiful sky effects which were establishing his reputation around the country.

The Academy too, it seems, preferred his broad, expansive treatment, his towering windy skies and heavy overhead clouds over the wolds and flats as well as the gloomy canvasses around the coastline. But despite all of his success in the art world he said he would still be happy to "...sell anybody the best butter and cheese, even if I have 20 pictures in the Academy."

1925 must have been a very busy year for Rollett. He exhibited forty paintings in Lincoln, had work in the Royal Cambrian Academy and three shown at the Royal Scottish Academy, including two of the Humber bank and one, *Sunny Fallows*, painted from Irby Hill top looking towards Grimsby. The Royal Birmingham Society of Artists also showed his broad impressionistic treatment with *A Lincolnshire Landscape* and *A Passing Shower* which, apparently, had the obvious stamp of having come from his brush. One comment said that "He seems to work furiously, and the airy quality of his trees or the watery nature of his April clouds appear, therefore, to be instantaneous effects."

The Society was founded in 1906 as the Lincoln Drawing Club.

William Tom Warrener was born in 1861, the second son of one of Lincoln's richest and most influential families. He attended Lincoln School of Art before winning a scholarship to the Slade in London in 1884. He then moved to Paris around the time of the Impressionist's last exhibition and showed his work at the Paris Salon - becoming part of Toulouse Lautrec's Bohemian Circle.

Warrener was the model for *The Englishman at the Moulin Rouge*, an oil and gouache on cardboard, which served as a preparatory study for one of Lautrec's famous lithographic posters. He is also thought to be the bowler-hatted figure in the poster *Jane Avril Dansant*.

In 1904 the coal merchant's son gave up his artistic career when his brother died, returning to Lincoln to take charge of the family business.

A Prodigious Worker

That same year he had an exhibition of eighty paintings at Grimsby's Masonic Hall, his second appearance there, and these included: *Across the Field to the Village; Woodland; Marshall's Mill from the Riverhead; Barnard Castle; The Humber at Goxhill and Doig's*. Also on show were *Winding out to Sea* and, from the Paris Salon, *The Quiet Grey Sunlight of the Afternoon*.

Meanwhile, at the fifteenth annual exhibition of the Lincolnshire Artists' Society three of his paintings were chosen, including *The Rising Tide*. This was his second year as a new member of the Society although one other important name missing from the show because of illness was its Chairman W T Warrener from Lincoln. He had been a regular contributor and had done a great deal to make the annual exhibition a success.

But one of Rollett's exhibitions, held at the Lincoln Public Library, did receive some criticism mainly because of its "lack of colour and glow" and because it was felt that the general tone of the seventy to eighty paintings was somewhat dull. This was probably due to the similarity of the subjects chosen by an artist whose "... speciality is a portrayal of cloud effects, and these are not to be obtained when the sun is shining. Grey and hovering skies are, after all, more common in Lincolnshire than bright ones, and those in search of glowing colours have to look elsewhere."

Lincolnshire has often been dismissed as an uninteresting and unpicturesque county but there have been those painters, particularly Peter de Wint, who found inspiration in its discovery. The *Grimsby News* said that what John Constable did for the farmlands and rural scenes of East Anglia and the south, Rollett, as a "delineator of Lincolnshire," did for his own county. He himself felt that "On the south side you have the Wolds and on the other side the Humber and flat lands. I have painted in Scotland and the Lake District, but have always returned with a feeling of relief to the scene of my old labour. One gets such wonderful sky-effects in Lincolnshire, and the absence of hills seems to accentuate their beauty."

A Gift to the Mayor

The following year the spring exhibition at Hull included his *Marshall's Mill, Grimsby; Rain Clouds* and *The Garden Hedge* (which some thought was reminiscent of Corot) and at this time Grimsby councillors were considering the purchase of a painting by Rollett. However, he decided to do better by giving to the Mayor, Ernest Harrison, one which had just returned from the Paris Salon. Entitled *When the Wind is in the East in Summer*, a view from Clark's Farm off Laceby Road, it had received considerable praise on its travels and was considered by the artist to be one of the best things he had ever done. He would make two more gifts to the Council.

His third successive year at the Royal Academy was for his painting, *The White Stones*, a seashore scene of the bank at Stallingborough with pebbles in the foreground. Sadly, the continuing success and recognition must have been tempered to some extent by the death of his father. Rollett's mother, Margaret Ana,* had married William in 1868 and she died in Skellingthorpe in May 1916, aged

* She was the daughter of a Scottish Presbyterian minister.

Although there had been early deaths in the family over the generations a few of Herbert's relatives did live beyond the age of seventy.

In fact one of his aunts who was born the same year as him lived until she was ninety-five. His own wife would live beyond the age of ninety and his youngest daughter lived until she was ninety-six.

* Frank Bramley was born in 1857 in Sibsey near Boston and began his art training at the Lincoln School of Art - where he later taught. When he was about twenty-five years old he went to live in Venice and two years later exhibited at the Royal Academy for the first time.

Around 1885 Bramley moved to Cornwall and became part of the 'Newlyn School.' He was elected to the Academy in 1911 but a crippling illness ended his painting and he died in 1915 - aged fifty-eight.

Lincoln School of Art was founded by the Rev John Somerville Gibney in 1863 and occupied a small room in the Corn Exchange. Because of its success and lack of space an extra room was then built by the Corporation over the Central National School in Silver Street.

Run on voluntary lines the art school was established through the joint efforts of the Church and local industry to improve standards of design and to provide recreational opportunities for Lincoln's citizens.

With further moves to promote 'technical instruction for mechanics' and with an increasing demand for evening classes, particularly in science, the decision was taken to create a new School of Science and Art on Monks Road. Completed in 1886 at a cost of £7,564.9s.8d the site would later include the Technical College and the City School - until all three elements went their separate ways.

sixty-eight. Her husband joined her in Lincoln's Canwick cemetery in November 1926 following his death in Manchester, aged eighty-four. She was registered as a Rollett - he as a Rollitt.

Towards the end of 1926 Rollett's work was again on show at the annual exhibition of the Lincolnshire Artists' Society and included: *The River Head at Grimsby; Over the Humber; On the Road to Brigg* and *Colour Notes on the Shore*. He did even better at the next Academy show when he had three accepted, two of them in the 'best room' alongside the best of British painters, and were again typical of his sky effects.

This particular honour had only been previously gained by one other Lincolnshire artist, Frank Bramley,* twenty-five years earlier. (A native of Boston, Bramley had taught art in Lincoln). The three subjects chosen were: the sea coast in Norfolk, near Blakeney; the Humber bank, near Immingham and Tennyson's Halt, Ferriby Lane, Scartho. Considering there were eight thousand rejections and of the eighteen hundred on display about one third of these belonged to academicians and associate members the chance for other artists was very restricted.

From Media Recognition - to 'RBA'

His work was, by now, being lauded in *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, *The Yorkshire Post* and the *Daily Mail*. The *Daily Herald* felt that Rollett was "... among the artists who bring us hope by their efforts to see things in a new way." His exhibit *Winter Ploughing* at the Royal Society of British Artists was described in *The Times* as "... a charming impression in misty lavender with a splash of gulls." Having become an associate member, another honour not easily attained, he was made a full member of the Society within two years and given the rank of Esquire. Being an RBA came second only to the Royal Academy and seldom went to anyone other than trained artists in London.

Two months later he exhibited at the Ruskin Gallery in Birmingham, his first show to be held in the Midlands, and of his fifty-seven paintings one critic felt that seen together "... one cannot escape an impression of limited range." The show included *Scum*, a large painting of a seclude pond partly covered by masses of 'duckweed,' plus: *Canal Bridge at Great Haywood; Evening on the Seashore; Valley of the Don; Winter Ploughing* and *The Garden Hedge*. But any adverse comments at Birmingham must have been compensated by a special article in *Studio* magazine containing a photogravure print of *Winding Out to Sea*.

In March 1928 an exhibition of his work, about seventy-five paintings, went on show at the Savoy Cafe in Victoria Street, Grimsby. There was some departure from his usual sombre greys to brighter scenes but it was still those produced around his beloved county and of his familiar skies which brought him most success. The *Grimsby News* referred to the show as 'Studies in Tones and Moods' and picked out: a study of sand and sky at Cleethorpes; a misty-early morning captured in *The Lake at Holbeck Manor* and *River Head*, which was a return to his bolder treatment. The same month he had fourteen paintings on display at the Rotherham Museum, including:

Trees in Winter; The Hatcliffe Valley; Summer; Sunshine and Shadows; Harvest Time and The Lincolnshire Coast.

* The Society, founded in 1823, was granted a Royal Charter in 1887 - the year after Walter Sickert's mentor, James McNeill Whistler, was given the honour of being elected its twenty-first President.

Sickert (1860-1942) briefly attended the Slade in 1881 and was then apprenticed to the studio of Whistler. After several years visiting Venice he returned to London and began his 'Camden Town period' which included nudes, bedrooms and working class scenes.

Famous also for painting music halls Sickert was thought, by some, to have known the identity of 'Jack the Ripper' - one American writer even believes he was the murderer. He became a Royal Academician in 1934 but resigned the following year.

The Usher Gallery was completed and opened in 1927 following a bequest from James Ward Usher - a wealthy jeweller and watchmaker, local Sheriff and devoted collector of decorative art. The building was designed in the classical style by Sir Reginald Blomfield RA.

More Exhibitions

Meanwhile, at the Royal Society of British Artists he exhibited: *Means of Communication*, which showed a line of prominent telegraph wires near Binbrook; *As the River Nears the Sea*, from Humberstone Fitties near Cleethorpes; *Tide Times*, a view from near Grimsby Docks and *Time to Go*, near Beelsby. The exhibition followed the elevation of Walter Richard Sickert as President of the Society.*

Twenty of Rollett's paintings were also shown at Hull and included: *Woodland Pool in the Early Spring; March Morning and Looking down the Canal*. The *Hull Evening News* described all of his work as worthy specimens by an eminent painter that were distinguished by his "... peculiar ability to discard unessentials, his intense seriousness of purpose, and a real feeling for composition and the use of tender, harmonious colour."

The *Yorkshire Post*, however, said his work was "... irregular in quality, and seems to be the product of the same palette, which gives an air of monotony to a one-man show." The *Welsh Border* and *The Lincolnshire Wold Lands* were given as his best two examples. This criticism was similar to that given to his show in Birmingham.

His one success at the Academy that year was for *February*, a view of a flooded field at Scartho, and he was joined by his second daughter, thirty year old Ivy Kathleen, who had her only showing with *Wold Lands*, a watercolour of a scene near Stainton.

More Criticism - and Some Controversy

At the end of 1928 someone wrote to the local press using the nom-de-plume of 'Nix' and criticised the annual exhibition of the Lincolnshire Artists' Society. This was held during October and November at the Usher Gallery in Lincoln and the writer, later revealed as an 'H Gill,' contested that many of the pictures were badly drawn, lacked depth and thought their "cash values were over-rated." He hoped the controversy would stimulate interest in art circles and "that any words I have used will be understood as from one who has been through the mill ..."

Not receiving an immediate response Nix wrote again and was supported by another "Lover of Art" who too had been disgusted with some of the exhibits for several years and thought that membership of the Society was based not on being a genius but on belonging to "a certain clique in Lincoln."

The letters also provoked responses from the Head of Lincoln Art School, Austin Garland, from a professor at Chelsea Art School and from G A Boden, a local artist. Rollett too replied saying that to him it was the best exhibition to have been seen in the City for some years although he conceded that the hanging left a little to be desired in that the work could have been arranged "... with the idea of decorating the walls, instead of continuing lines."

In defining what he felt made a picture he added: "Picture making is primarily one of the forms of self-expression, akin to dancing and phraseology, and the work of the beginner, and even of the child at

school is full of interest if the worker is trying to express something that he feels about the subject. A painting must be rather an individualistic or personal matter than an imitative one ... However well the church or cottage may be painted, if it is simply the church or cottage, with nothing of the painter's personal feeling in it, it may as well have been photographed or coloured."

Rollett's own work on display at the Usher included: *After the Rain; Evening Light; Time to Go* and *Salt Marshes on the Norfolk Coast* and within three months he was again exhibiting there, this time as part of a celebration of Lincolnshire artists. It was hoped that their contributions would form the basis of a permanent collection of local work.

Just before the controversy he had written an article about the work of Boden which had been on show at the gallery and at the end of it he said, "I should also add a word about the Usher Gallery. It is a constant joy to see the way it is worked. Each time I come to Lincoln I see something new, always interesting, always educational ..."

The following spring Rollett again had several paintings on show at the newly opened Ferens Art Gallery in Hull, including *A Humberside Creek*, while *Near the End of the Day* was shown at the Royal Society of British Artists. He then worked on two paintings for the next Royal Academy exhibition but illness allowed him to complete just the one - *October Landscape*, a ploughing scene at Swallow Vale in autumn.

The *Yorkshire Observer* felt that in the opinion of many it was the best thing he had ever done. His success, in his sixth successive year at the Academy, was again recorded in newspapers across the country but it would finally end his run on the national stage.

A Life Saver

Rollett received further attention from the press - not for his art - but when he rescued a young girl from drowning. The seven year old had been trying to retrieve a lost ball from the 'lake' in People's Park in Grimsby and his prompt action saved her life. He commented, "As you know artists are seldom seen in a new suit. This experience will be a warning to me not to wear a new suit in future."

In that year, 1929, and at the height of his powers he abandoned his little studio over the shop, retired and went to live at 72 Woad Lane, Great Coates while his son Herbert Leslie, known to his friends as 'Bill,' continued to run the grocery business. By then this included another shop at 272-274 Heneage Road and one at Laceby.

Rollett, who was on the management committee of the Lincolnshire Artists' Society, again exhibited at its annual show with: *Harvest Time near Caistor, Lincolnshire; Scartho Church, Lincolnshire*;^{*} *Near the End of the Day* and *Unsettled Weather*. He continued to rest and paint and produced small boards of local scenes and a few bigger compositions but no large finished canvases. In 1930 he submitted work to the Royal Society of British Artists and to county exhibitions but, sadly, he no longer had the strength for any sustained effort.

However, one happy event in April that year was the marriage of

Of the Scartho Church oil the *Lincolnshire Echo* said it was a " ... truly great composition both as regards tone and atmosphere ... His sky effects can be most impressive."

Rollett sent only small paintings to the Lincolnshire Artists' Society in 1930: *Summer Landscape; After a Rainy Day* and *The End of the Day*.

(That same year the Usher Gallery also staged an exhibition of thirty-seven paintings by Stanhope Alexander Forbes. Several were for sale).

his eldest daughter Gladys Lucy to George H Ingamells at All Saints Church, Wyham, near Ludborough. The bridegroom's brother, Philip, was best man while the bride's two sisters, Kathleen and Amy, were bridesmaids. Within two years Kathleen too had become an Ingamells when she married Philip and would, much later, move to live in Saffron Walden.

Rollett's final appearance with the Society at the Usher was in 1931 with: *Morning Light*; *By the Humber* and *The Close of Day*.

With increasing ill-health Rollett began to deteriorate further although during 1931 he was still producing small sketches in nearby fields as well as studio work - when pain permitted. He even began lecturing at local art societies but then became seriously ill and bedridden and, having been looked after by his devoted family, died at home in his sleep on 8 December 1932, aged sixty. It is likely that through hard work he had overtaxed himself.

The coffin was carried on a farm wagon to the service at his local parish church where several of his artist friends paid their last respects, including Clive Browne and Edward Eaton Brannan (the father of Cleethorpes artist, Peter Brannan). Both of them owed much to the 'grocer-artist from Grimsby' for his encouragement and advice.

In fact until the time he gave up his grocery business Rollett had run a club where once a week art students, led by him, met to receive free instruction. He was able to communicate his pleasure and enthusiasm to others and inspired many to paint.

* In about 1950 Mrs Rollett returned to Grimsby and rented a house in Bargate where she lived with her son. Her maiden name was Henderson.

His wife, Susanna Lucy Margaret,* would outlive him by nearly thirty years until she died in 1961 - aged ninety-one. Their tombstone in St Nicolas' churchyard, Great Coates, is inscribed with the words 'The Dark Tarn Dry' and was probably taken from the poem, *The Scribe*, by Walter de la Mare.

** Carlyle was born in 1795, the son of a stonemason. His books and articles inspired social reformers such as Charles Dickens, William Morris and John Ruskin while his only novel, *Sartor Resartus*, was a key influence on *Moby Dick*. He died in 1881.

Rollett, fascinated by words, liked books that left something to the imagination while he smoked his pipe and sat thinking longer than he spent reading. Thomas Carlyle's** *Sartor Resartus* was like a bible to him.

Rollett also enjoyed reading Matthew Arnold's poem *Requiescat*, Justin McCarthy's *If I Were King* and *Circles* by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

In 1935 Kathleen wrote of her father's companionship and the happiness they found in painting and talking nonsense together although she felt that his strength lay in his power of isolating himself from everything that might distract him from his work. His concentration was intense and she never saw him rest - even his holidays were "orgies of painting."

*** She signed her watercolours 'I Kathleen Rollett' and like her father exhibited at the Paris Salon.

When she was with him the rule was to produce three sketches a day - with drawings extra. She found him utterly tireless. He left his meals if they were too long arriving, or were too hot, but he would return at teatime for his favourite cup of tea which had to be very hot, strong, milkless and sugared. It was like a tonic to him and he would soon be out again with his pencil and sketchbook until dark.

Kathleen, who continued to paint for the rest of her life, had just the one painting accepted by the Royal Academy, two by the Royal Scottish Academy, seven by the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists, five by the Walker Gallery, Liverpool and ten by the Nottingham Museum and Art Gallery. She had two daughters, Lynn and Katherine, and died in 1980.***

His memory fades

* Sir George Doughty was the son of a coal merchant and Grimsby's MP from 1896 - first as a Liberal and then as a Conservative. He founded the *Telegraph* which later became the *Grimsby Evening Telegraph*. His wealthy son, Wilfred Vere Doughty, bequeathed his collection to the Council in 1942 and this led to the opening of the museum in 1958.

** Peter Chapman had a military background before working for the *Daily Mirror*, the *Aldershot News* and as editor of *Lincolnshire Life*. He also worked for many years for the *Grimsby Telegraph* and is still columnist for 'Odd Man's Week.'

*** Amy married Alistair Mackay in 1946. A keen fisherman 'Mac' came from a farming background in Aberdeenshire and moved south to find more lucrative employment. He became an optician and Amy worked for him until she too trained and joined him in the business.

During the week they lived at 2b Bargate Avenue, Grimsby - in a home full of Rolletts - and escaped at the weekends to a cottage in Alford.

The business, 'Mackay and Rollett,' still exists at 14 Dudley Street but is now under different ownership.

**** In *Victoria Mill* Rollett painted the old swing bridge near Alexandra Dock, Grimsby - replaced by a new one in 1928.

Little was mentioned of the 'Humber painter' for over thirty years until 1963 when the Grimsby Library Service mounted an exhibition of his work in the Doughty Museum.* So much interest was shown that it had to be extended by several weeks. Then, some years later, an article in the *Grimsby Evening Telegraph* requested its readers to submit any work by Rollett for a retrospective show. This took place at the Grimsby Library on 17 May 1971 and of the seventy-four paintings only nine were for sale. The work, which had already been shown at Scunthorpe, included three of his portraits and sixteen watercolours by his daughter. Eleven of his paintings were owned by his youngest daughter, Mrs Amy Mackay, and thirteen by a private collector. Scunthorpe Museum purchased one of his seascapes and two of Kathleen's watercolours.

In describing the "sombre aura" around Rollett's work one reviewer wrote "... entering a room full of his work is a slightly daunting experience: there is an air of gloom, even foreboding. All of which testifies to the undoubtedly powerful effect of his landscapes and seascapes, which so often seem to have been finished just before rather than immediately after a storm." The *Scunthorpe Telegraph* felt that many of the paintings had relied too much on the sky "while the rest of the canvas lacked any real depth."

Another fifteen years passed by until two articles by Grimsby journalist, Peter Chapman,** rediscovered Grimsby's forgotten son. He focused on the original painting presented to the Council by Rollett in 1926 but which seemed to have vanished. Together with the other two 'gifts' it could have been lost during the war but might equally have been stolen or destroyed by vandals many years later when a Council store was raided.

In 1986 Amy Mackay,*** Rollett's last remaining child, reflected gloomily in an article on 'The Treasures Grimsby Lost' that they had "mucked the job up." Fortunately she left a small collection of her father's oil paintings, together with sketchbooks and press cuttings - not to Grimsby - but to the Usher Gallery in Lincoln.

One known portrait of Rollett also disappeared without trace. Painted by Vincent Galloway, a celebrated artist from Hull, it was presented to the Council after the war and was sent for restoration in 1972. A former librarian even remembered taking it to the Ferens Art Gallery for a retrospective exhibition of Galloway's work but it too vanished - that is until 2003 when it was rediscovered at the Welholme Galleries in Grimsby. The large portrait clearly showed the monogram - 'VG.'

Three paintings by Rollett were also in the Gallery's collection including an excellent, and somewhat surprising, view of the old Victorian flour mills near Alexandra Dock.**** This was acquired in the mid-eighties through the generosity of Roger Bacon "to fill the gap left by the years of past carelessness." It shows a rare glimpse of the artist's figure work while possessing the confidence and palette of a Monet or a Sisley.

In 2001 his son's widow Myra Houldsworth, who retained her maiden name, died aged eighty-one. She had been in charge of the

Grimsby General Hospital's registration department and been a leading member of the Kendall Players. Following her death many of Rollett's paintings were given away, some were inherited by friends and ten landscapes were sold at auction in Leeds.

Although the majority of them went for slightly less than the asking price the top seller, *Little Coates*, fetched six hundred pounds. It is thought that this collection was last publicly seen in 1988 as part of an exhibition of his work, together with Kathleen's watercolours, at the Welholme Galleries. A spokesman for the auctioneers, Bonhams, in paying tribute to the quality of Herbert Rollett's work said they were "... full of life and vigour, which capture the landscape and architecture of the time."

Of course his work is not to everyone's taste and for some his paintings can be dull, gloomy and lack 'colour and glow' while some critics have even described them as being of 'limited range' and 'irregular in quality.' Like other artists he did produce small preliminary oil sketches on boards and some of them were painted using a 'restrained palette' - although they might still benefit from a clean after eighty years. But for many others much of his work remains lively, fresh and expressive.

Recent Recollections

Ninety-five year old Mrs Evelyn Mitchell vividly remembered the time Rollett painted her portrait when he was at the height of his success. She was then about eighteen, worked in the local library and was asked if she would pose for him. The short sessions, probably lasting about half an hour, were held over several weeks in a small, dark room over the shop. For most of their time together they talked about books, even though he was not very talkative, and to her, as a young woman, Rollett appeared intelligent, serious and reserved - and quite elderly compared with the images we now see of him.

At the end of the First World War a young Mary Ward was walking along the banks of the River Freshney, near Little Coates, when she stopped to watch the artist. Having complimented him on his painting he asked her if she would pose for him. After several sittings Rollett gave her both paintings.

Those who admire Herbert Rollett's work like it not only for the nature of his subject matter but for the way he applied the paint and made his marks both on canvas and on board. The hanging committee at the Royal Academy thought sufficiently of his paintings for six successive years by accepting eight of his landscapes for showing and the Royal Society of British Artists accepted thirty-three during his short career.

He has become increasingly collectable in recent years and one private collector during the nineties, who was not a relative, had over fifty paintings. One landscape fetched seventeen hundred in auction in 1997 and, several years later, a view of the former windmill at Binbrook was sold for seven hundred pounds while an internet sale reached over two thousand dollars.

The articles by Peter Chapman, together with newspaper cuttings charting Rollett's success, gave me the inspiration for making this

In 1982 Peter Chapman's father Frank Chapman, a Grimsby fish merchant and trawler owner, offered a Rollett painting to the borough council - for one thousand pounds. The Council's Policy Committee decided to pass both the fund (worth about four times the asking price) and the decision over to the Services and Amenities Committee.

The Council, following a valuation by Sotherby's, decided to take no further action.

journey - first in producing the book and now in creating a website. I have met some interesting people along the way and hope that with their help this tribute will bring his work to a wider audience.

In earlier praise of Grimsby's forgotten grocer-artist Chapman wrote "... his works neglected, his memory unremarked. But that he was and remains a genius there is no doubt ... His mentor was the river and the sky, the weather and the seasons guided his mind and his brush."

Allen Smith 2009

Programme details from the 1971 exhibition

Held at the Scunthorpe Museum & Art Gallery from 8 April - 11 May and at the Grimsby Public Library from 17 May - 12 June.

1. Louth Navigation; 2. Lake and Trees; 3. Woodland; 4. View across the Humber; 5. Newsham Bridge; 6. Cornfield, Barnoldby-le Beck; 7. Landscape; 8. Landscape; 9. Wold View; 10. Landscape; 11. Tree near Louth; 12. Humber View; 13. Dixon's Mill, Littlecoates; 14. Watermill; 15. Humber View; 16. Landscape; 17. Landscape; 18. Landscape; 19. Sunset; 20. Humber View near Healing (exhibited at the Paris Salon); 21. Humber View; 22. Windmill; 23. Landscape; 24. Winding out to Sea; 25. Lake and Trees. 26. Humber View; 27. Portrait; 28. Humber View from Killingholme; 29. Louth; 30. Newsham Bridge; 31. Humber View; 32. Lake and Trees; 33. Killingholme; 34. Newsham Lake; 35. Landscape; 36. Landscape; 37. Landscape; 38. Landscape; 39. Landscape and Trees; 40. Quay and boats; 41. Landscape from hill; 42. Lake with Trees; 43. Elsham Lake; 44. Binbrook; 45. Landscape; 46. Landscape; 47. Landscape; 48. Landscape; 49. Landscape; 50. Landscape; 51. Landscape; 52. Portrait; 53. Landscape; 54. Dock scene; 55. Landscape; 56. Seascape; 57. The white stones; 58. Alexandra Dock, Grimsby; 59. Knaresborough, Yorks; 60. Church; 61. Grimsby Docks; 62. Portrait of Doris Saunders; 63. Landscape; 64. Farm scene; 65. Seascape (purchased by Scunthorpe Museum).

By the time of the second exhibition all the paintings had either been sold or were from private collections. A further nine from one collector were for sale and ranged from between ten and twenty-six pounds. Thirteen watercolours by his daughter Kathleen were also for sale and were in the same price range.

Programme details from the 1988 exhibition

Titled 'Father and Daughter' it was held at the Welholme Galleries, Grimsby and included forty-five oil paintings by Rollett (listed below), which were on loan, and one hundred and twenty-four watercolours by his daughter - many of which were for sale. There was also a portrait of Rollett and one his daughter by Jack Gibson together with the portrait of Kathleen by Vincent Galloway.

Rollett's granddaughter, Katherine Ingamells, organised the exhibition - assisted by her sister Lynn and Amy Mackay.

1. *The Watermill, Swinhope*; 2. *A Lincolnshire farmhouse*; 3. *On the Lincolnshire Wolds*; 4. *Sunshine after the storm*; 5. *Looking down on the Trent*; 6. *Grimsby*; 7. *Ploughing*; 8. *Sunset*; 9. *Sails on the Humber*; 10. *Grimsby Docks*; 11. *The Humber*; 12. *Landscape*; 13. *Newsham Lake*; 14. *Sheep grazing*; 15. *Trees*; 16. *Flixborough Stather*; 17. *Light after rain*; 18. *Sun on the Corn*; 19. *Stooks*; 20. *Near Grimsby*; 21. *Land and Sky*; 22. *Alexandra Dock*; 23. *Silver Birches*; 24. *Trees and Mist*; 25. *Picnic*; 26. *Little Coates* (First painting exhibited by Rollett at the Royal Academy); 27. *Scum*; 28. *In the cool grey morning light*; 29. *Morning Clouds*; 30. *Night Sail*; 31. *The Young Trees*; 32. *Ploughed Field*; 33. *Newsham Bridge*; 34. *Sky over Lincolnshire*; 35. *Sheep*; 36. *Lake and Trees*; 37. *Blue Sky!*; 38. *Humberstone Foreshore*; 39. *Newsham Bridge*; 40. *Louth*; 41. *Humber View near Healing*; 42. *Portrait of Doris Saunders*; 43. *Corporation Bridge*; 44. *Landscape*; 45. *On the Banks of the Freshney*.

Herbert Rollett RBA 1872 - 1932: A Chronology

1872

3 June: Herbert Rollett is born in Huckerby, near Gainsborough, the third of twelve children to farmer William and his wife Margaret Ana Sleightholme.

Spends his early childhood in Southorpe and attends Gainsborough Grammar School before being apprenticed to a business in Brigg.

1898

Opens his first shop called the 'Five O'Clock Tea Store' at 72 Victoria Street, Grimsby. He moves to 7 Osborne Street and later on has two other shops - one at 272-274 Heneage Road and one in Laceby.

1902

Has no formal art training except for a few drawing lessons at Grimsby School of Art and shows his work in the Sketching Club.

Alongside his grocery business he develops his interest in painting and begins to exhibit.

1916

His mother dies aged sixty-eight and is buried in Canwick cemetery, Lincoln.

After the First World War local businessmen begin to show an interest in his work and he achieves a wider audience - including one-man shows in several small provincial galleries.

1924

11 April: Rollett exhibits at the Royal Society of Artists in Birmingham with *The Rising Tide* and has his first painting *Killingholme Creek* accepted by the Paris Salon. It is the first he submits to the French judges and brings 'honour to Grimsby.' Has his first painting, *Little Coates*, accepted by the Royal Academy in London.

21 July - 2 August: Exhibits, together with his daughter Kathleen, at 'Ye Antique Shoppe' in Grimsby.

1925

Receives news that he has again been accepted at the Paris Salon with *Quiet Grey Sunlight of the Afternoon*.

April: the Royal Academy also accepts another of his paintings - *After a Rainy Day*.

Exhibits at the Royal Cambrian Society, the Royal Scottish Academy and the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists. Eighty paintings are shown at Grimsby's Masonic Hall and a similar amount go on display at the public library in Lincoln while three are accepted for the fifteenth annual exhibition of the Lincolnshire Artists' Society.

1926

Shows his work at the Spring Exhibition in Hull and donates a painting to the Grimsby Borough Council - direct from the Paris Salon. Again successful at the Royal Academy with *The White Stones* and exhibits at the annual exhibition of the Lincolnshire Artists' Society.

1 November: Rollett's father dies aged eighty-four and joins his mother in Lincoln's Canwick cemetery.

1927

Rollett does even better at this year's Royal Academy Show with three paintings - two of them in the 'best room.' Also exhibits at the Royal Society of British Artists and, in June, has fifty-seven paintings on show at the Ruskin Gallery in Birmingham. *Studio* magazine contains an article and photogravure print of *Winding out to Sea*.

27 October: Elected as an associate of the Royal Society of British Artists.

1928

3-7 March: Exhibits over seventy paintings at the Savoy Cafe in Grimsby together with his daughter's watercolours and follows this with fourteen paintings at Rotherham Museum and twenty at Ferens Art Gallery in Hull. Four of his paintings are accepted by the Royal Society of British Artists and one, *February*, by the Royal Academy - who also accept a watercolour by his daughter called *Wold Lands*.

Exhibits four paintings at the annual show of the Lincolnshire Artists' Society at the Usher Gallery in Lincoln

where controversy erupts following a critical letter by 'Nix' - provoking a response from Rollett and other supporters of the Society.

1929

January: Again on show at the Usher Gallery, together with Kathleen, as part of a permanent collection of Lincolnshire artists. April: has several paintings at the Spring exhibition in Hull, with his daughter, and shows *Near the End of the Day* at the Royal Society of British Artists.

Illness allows him to complete only one, *October Landscape*, for the Royal Academy and this, his sixth successive year, ends his run on the national stage.

October: Becomes a full member of the Royal Society of British Artists (RBA).

Saves a seven year old child from drowning, retires from his grocery business and moves to a bungalow at Great Coates, just outside Grimsby. Contributes to the annual show of the Lincolnshire Artists' Society where he is on the Management Committee.

1930

Rollett's ill-health increases although he continues to paint small boards of local scenes.

1931

Still producing small sketches in nearby fields as well as studio work, when pain permits, but no longer has the strength for any sustained effort. Makes his final contribution to the Lincolnshire Artists' Society.

1932

8 December: Herbert Rollett, having been seriously ill and bedridden dies, in his sleep, aged sixty and is buried in St Nicolas' churchyard, Great Coates. His tombstone is inscribed with the words *The Dark Tarn Dry*.

The Rollett Connection

It is generally accepted that the name Rollett(e) is French in nature and that Rollitt can be traced back to the Norman Conquest of England in 1066. The ancient French province of Normandy derives its name from the Viking Norsemen who sailed up the River Seine during the ninth century. As the Norman invaders settled they established their capital at Rouen.

According to the *Elizabeth Journals* in 1591 the Earl of Essex on taking leave of his army in Normandy to return to England recorded delivery of a gate to the town to a "... Monsieur Rollitt, Governor of Pont de l' Arch."

A little later records show that in this country a Lambert Rollett died in 1602 at Swineshead and that a Robert Rollett died at Brotherstoft in 1612. This spelling of the surname seems to have increasingly become the preferred choice - particularly in Lincolnshire.

The master sailmaker

Some discrepancy surrounds the christian name of the Rollett who sailed round the world with Captain Cook between 1772-75. A monument in St Botolph's Church, Boston (the 'Stump') lists ten men who were "honoured in their generations and were the glory of their times."

Among the names were Joseph Banks and Matthew Flinders - and 'Robert Rollett'* who, according to one researcher on the Internet, came from Kings Lynn. However, most sources record that it was a Richard Rollett from Hull, master sailmaker on HMS Resolution, who sailed on the historic second voyage and who, on his return, married a Susanna Hart in 1777 in Boston. He died on 20 January 1824 and was buried in the grounds of All Saints Church in Gainsborough. When the authorities decided to convert the churchyard into a Garden of Rest his memorial stone was selected as the only one of any historical merit and it is now stored inside the main entrance to the church.

In a *A History of Gainsborough* the Rev C Moor refers to the 'old standards' and to some of the most conspicuous characters who made up the different classes of Gainsborough society in the first half of the nineteenth century. He says "Yonder is old Rollett, the sailmaker, who went round the world with Captain Cook, and has seen mermaids and sea-serpents innumerable."

Towards the end of the previous century Gainsborough directories refer to a 'J Rollett' and 'J Kollett,' both sailmakers, and they too could have been the same Richard Rollett. It is easy to see, therefore, how today's researchers and relatives of the Grimsby artist, because of inaccurate records, poor spelling etc might reasonably assume that one of their ancestors, 'Richard Rolit,' was the master sailmaker.

(An entry in the *Hull Advertiser and Exchange Gazette*, on 19 September 1823, mentions the marriage of a John Nettleship to Elizabeth, the fifth and youngest daughter of Richard Rollett, at St Philip's Church, Birmingham. They were both from Gainsborough).

Other references

Two further links with the same name worth mentioning relate to Grimsby and Hull. On 3 March 1815 The Lincoln and Standard Mercury mentions the launch from "... the shipyard of Mr Rollitt, of Grimsby, before a numerous concourse of spectators, a fine handsome brig called "The Angerstein", admeasuring 183 tons, which went off in the most majestic style, and is highly creditable to the Builder."

Sir Albert Kaye Rollitt, born in 1842, was for many years a solicitor in Hull and became mayor on several occasions before entering Parliament in 1886 as member of South Islington. He was also a lawyer and member of a firm of shipowners.

Listings from early local directories

1861: *G Rollett* of Blyton and *T Rollett* of Southorpe (Post Office Directory).

1872: *Thomas Rollett* of Southorpe - "A parish containing 48 souls." One of several farmers who attended Northorpe Church. (History Gazette and Directory).

1889: *Arthur Rollett* of Scotton, Kirton Lindsey and *William Rollett* of Southorpe (also 1892).

One interesting detail which came to light after the book was published relates to the name of Captain Cook's sailmaker and explains how the mistake was made. It seems that the then Subdean of Lincoln Cathedral in an absent minded moment wrote Robert instead of Richard. He was mortified when he realised his error but by then the name had already been carved in stone.

1892: *Albert Rollett* of Knaith, Gainsborough.

1896: *Herbert Rollett* of 72 Victoria Street, Grimsby and *Albert Rollett* of Huckerby.

1900: *W Rollitt* of North Kyne, Fen, Billingham, Lincoln. (Kellys).

Other references to Rolletts born during the Victorian period

Ada Alice Rollett - born at Southorpe, 15 May 1876 - died 29 May 1959.

Albert Rollett - born 1863/4 - died 20 April 1926.

Alfred Rollett - born 1871 - died 24 March 1872.

Anne/Annie Mary Rollett - born 3 November 1861 - died 1895.

Arthur Rollett - born at Southorpe 29 January 1860 - died 29 March 1935.

Bertrand Rollett - born at Scotton, 5 April 1886 - died 1968. Second son of Arthur and Ruth.

Charlotte Fanny Rollett - born at Southorpe, 10 November 1872 - died 1967. (Married a Wells).

Edward Arthur Rollett - born at Scotton, 28 January 1884 - died 3 May 1937. First son of Arthur and Ruth.

Elizabeth Jane Rollett - born 30 September 1865/6 - died 10 January 1893.

Frances Ruth Rollett - born at Scotton, 22 April 1888. Eldest daughter of Arthur and Ruth.

Frank Rollett - born 1874 - died 27 February 1890.

Gibson Rollett - born 1858 - died 12 December 1909.

Harry Rollett - born at Southorpe, 5 June 1869.

Ruth Rollett (Sleightholme) - married Arthur Rollett in 1881 - died 12 March 1943.

Stanley Rollett born 1893 - died 10 November 1970. Third son of Arthur and Ruth.

Susanna Lucy Margaret Rollett - born 23 June 1870. (Herbert Rollett's wife).

Walter Rollett - born at Southorpe, 7 August 1867 - died 4 August 1935.

Those listed after 1900

Albert Sydney Rollett - Sleaford House, Barrow Road, Barrow-on-Humber (1930).

B Rollett - 38 Hewson Road, Lincoln. (1930).

Cyril Wells Rollett - 11 Yarborough Crescent, Lincoln (1937).

Edward A Rollett - farmer - Brattleby, Lincoln (1930).

Herbert Rollett - H Rollett - 72 Victoria Street, Grimsby (1905); 7 Osbourne Street (1913/1926/1930); 272-274 Heneage Road (1926/1930); 2 Park Avenue, Grimsby (1930)* and Laceby (1930).

* Herbert's daughter also seems to have been living at this address the previous year.

Herbert Rollitt - Southorpe, Lambert Road, Grimsby (1905).

Howard Rollett - 42 Lee Road, Lincoln (1937).

John Rollitt - Navenby, Lincoln (1905).

R S Rollett (Mrs) - 13 Westfield Road, Barton-on-Humber (1937).

S A Rollitt (Mrs) - Navenby, Lincoln (1913).

S T Rollett - 1 Haffenden Road, Lincoln (1937).

William Rollitt - Allendale, Hykeham Road, Swallowbeck, Lincoln (1913); 5 Boutham Avenue, Lincoln (1913); grocer at Navenby (1926/1930?). (Herbert's brother was called William (1870-1958) and he too had a son called William.

(There is no mention of Herbert Rollett's grocery business in Kelly's 1937 directory).

Another artist with the name Rollett

I found two possibilities relating to the identity of an artist called George Rollett whose work began to surface recently - and which is not dissimilar to that of the grocer-artist. The first one was born in 1879, died in 1965 and was married twice to Lucy and then to Daisy. The second was born in 1905, died in 1983 and was married to Iona McKenzie. *The Dictionary of British Artists: 1880-1940* lists a George Rollett who exhibited between 1929 and 1939 and lived at 165 Heathfield Road, Handsworth, Birmingham.

(Following publication of the biography it was confirmed by Herbert Rollett's great nephew that the former was in fact a member of the family).

Herbert Rollett's close relations

During the late Victorian period several members of the family were registered in *White's Directory* and *Kelly's Directory*, mainly as farmers, and most of them could

be found in hamlet and villages around Lincolnshire.

One of the earliest key figures was Herbert's grandfather - *Thomas*. He was born on 8 July 1808 in South Kelsey and married his first wife *Margaret Sleightholme* in Scampton on 30 September 1837. He began as a farmer and publican in Ludford before settling at Southorpe around 1842.

When his wife died in 1856 the farm changed hands although he seems to have remained as the occupier. In 1860 he married a Sleightholme for the second time - *Ann Elizabeth* (1838-1914), Margaret's niece - and within a year he was a director of the Lincoln and Lindsey Bank. A father of nineteen children he died in 1879 in Southorpe and was buried in Northorpe. (Other sources show that in 1872, the year that Herbert was born, a Thomas Rollett farmed at Corringham but was living at Southorpe).

Thomas Rollett's father was *George* (1777-1862), from Owston Ferry, and he married in 1807 a *Mary Lamb* who was born in 1784 and died the same year as her husband. One of eight children, all boys, he descended from *Thomas Rollitt* from Clayworth/Heapham who, in 1766, married a *Frances Pearson* (1741-1828) - the same month that his parents, *Richard* and *Ann Rolit*, died.

Herbert Rollett's father, *William*, who also came from Owston Ferry, was born on 15 April 1841 and in 1868 married *Margaret Ana Sleightholme* (1848-1916). She was a younger sister of Ann Elizabeth. At the time of Herbert's birth he farmed at Huckerby Grange, Corringham (now demolished) but then seems to have moved to Southorpe - probably when his own father, Thomas, died.

William, also one of eight children, retired from farming and died in Manchester on 1 November 1926, aged eighty-four, just as his artistic son was achieving success on the national stage. There is no memorial grave in Canwick cemetery but records in Lincoln show that the burial rights were listed under *Arthur Rollett* - a 'vaccination officer' of 23 West Parade, Lincoln.

Two of Herbert's four children *Herbert Leslie (Bill)*, who died in 1975, and *Amy Marion* had no offspring. *Gladys Lucy*, who died in 1979, and *Ivy Kathleen* (born 30 August 1898 - died 1980) each had two children - *John* and *Margaret* and *Lynn* and *Katherine*, respectively. John, a former curator of the Wallace Collection, lives with his grandchildren in London while Margaret, a former nurse, lives with her two children in Castle Donington. Lynn, a former university lecturer, lives in Saffron Waldon and Katherine, a former principal of a college of occupational therapy, lives near Exeter. Rollett's youngest daughter Amy Mackay retired about ten years before her husband's death in 1984 and spent her latter days in a Grimsby nursing home. She died on 1 March 2003 - aged ninety-six.

Several distant relatives still live in and around Lincoln and perhaps one of the strongest links with the artist in the area is his great nephew, *Cedric Jennings*. His grandmother was Herbert's eldest sister - Ethel. Cedric was born the year before Herbert died and now lives in Hykeham.

The artist's work shown at the Royal Academy

- 1924 *A roadside church* (Little Coates)
- 1925 *After a rainy day*
- 1926 *The white stones*
- 1927 *Winter sunshine*
 - The moody tidal river*
 - Salt marshes on the Norfolk coast*
- 1928 *February*
- 1929 *October landscape*

Source: *Royal Academy Exhibitors 1905-1970, Volume V*.

Paintings exhibited at other major institutions

- Royal Birmingham Society of Artists (18)
- Royal Cambrian Academy (3)
- Royal Institute of Oil Painters (1)

Source: *The Dictionary of British Artists 1880-1940*.

Royal Society of British Artists (33).

Auction details of Herbert Rollett's work

Italicised type denotes description and/or title. Figures in parenthesis are estimated prices.

Spencers (Retford), 22 February 1993.

The Young Tree. On board, 20 x 24 cm, £130 ((£80/£120).

Wooded landscape with trees in the foreground. 29 x 39 cm, £160 (£150/£200).

Beach scene with two figures in the foreground. 17 x 25 cm, £90 (£50/£80).

Landscape with buildings in the middle distance and sunlight breaking through trees. 24 x 32 cm, £180 (£80/£120).

Extensive landscape with fields in the foreground and a cloudy summer sky above.

On board, 21 x 25 cm, £110 (£80/£100).

Extensive landscape with trees in the foreground and a cloudy sky above.

On board, 20 x 24 cm, £90 (£80/£100).

Ploughed Field. Signed. On board, 20 x 26 cm, £120 (£50/£80).

Extensive landscape sketch with trees in the foreground and a cloudy sky above.

Inscribed on reverse. On board, 24 x 30 cm, £100 (£50/£80).

Extensive landscape with a figure walking along a road in the foreground, trees and builds beyond. 29 x 44 cm, £140 (£100/£150).

A wooded glade with silver birch trees in the foreground. 49 x 60 cm, £300 (£300/£500).

Wooded landscape with trees in the foreground. 26 x 36 cm, £90 (£100/£150).

Coastal town with a beach in the foreground and buildings beyond. 28 x 34 cm, £140 (£150/£250).

Extensive view of farmland with fields in the foreground and a summer sky above.

Signed. 42 x 55 cm, £300 (£300/£400).

A British Auctioneer, 10 November 1995.

Fenland scene. Oil, 62 x 75 cm, £625.

Phillips, London 25 March 1997.

Distant clouds at low tide. Oil, 70 x 91.5 cm, £1700.

Keys, Aylsham, 4 December 1998.

Verdant summer landscape. Oil, 25 x 28 cm, £250.

Bonhams (Phillips), Leeds, 20 November 2001.

"Scum," on a Lake with Woodland Nearby. Oil on canvas, 41 x 51 cm, £290.

Little Coates. Oil on canvas, 26 x 36 cm, £600.

A Woodland Scene. Oil on canvas, 30.5 x 35.5 cm, £270.

A Landscape at Dusk. Oil on panel, 22 x 27 cm, £110.

A Study of Trees in Mist. Oil on panel, 21 x 26 cm, £190.

Land and Sky. Oil on board, 20 x 26 cm, £180.

A Study of Sunlit Woodland with a Path in the Foreground. Oil on board, 24 x 33 cm, £230.

Alexandra Dock, Grimsby. Oil on board, 24.5 x 29 cm, £330.

A Study of Corn Stooks. Oil on canvas, 25 x 35 cm, £360.

Great Coates, Grimsby. Oil on canvas, 51 x 61 cm, £560.

John Taylors, Louth, 29 January, 2002.

A view of the former windmill at Binbrook - including Binbrook church and rooftops. Oil on canvas, 62 x 75 cm, Approximately £700.

John Taylors, Louth, 26 February, 2002.

St Peters Church, Ashby-cum-Fenby. Oil on board. 30 x 39 cm.

Clars Auction Gallery (USA - Internet), 11 January, 2004.

Over the Fields to the Village. Signed lower right. Oil on canvas, 91.5 x 71 cm, \$2250.

Beyond the Aqueduct. Signed lower right. Oil on board, 25 x 28 cm, \$325.

DDM Auction Rooms, Brigg, 10 February, 2004.

Wooded landscape scene (possibly Weelsby Woods, near Grimsby). Signed. Oil on panel, 21 x 26 cm. \$270 (£80/£120).

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Every effort has been made to seek copyright clearance for images but I would be pleased to hear from copyright holders in the event of uncredited picture sources.

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Barry Thorpe.

Usher Gallery, Lincoln.

Welholme Galleries, North East Lincolnshire Museums.

Robin Wheeldon.

Tim Wheeldon.

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