

## Time Travel Tuesday: Top of the World Tuesday 7 April 2020

Welcome to Time Travel Tuesday: Top of the World – sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

Today's post looks at two rare, beautiful watercolour paintings from our collections – and reveals a connection between Muswell Hill and India....

This 'reveal' is based on the original research by John Hinshelwood – who wears many hats for Haringey as a local historian and author, a past volunteer at Bruce Castle, a [Friend of Bruce Castle](#) and member of [Hornsey Historical Society](#) and [Crouch End U3A](#), amongst many others. John has very kindly shared his findings about these two intriguing paintings from our collections at Bruce Castle.

Donning his art detective hat, he went about uncovering as much as he could to find out about who painted them.



© Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service) (watercolour on paper: 33.7cm high x 48.8cm wide)

The two watercolour views have been signed and dated by the artist in the lower right hand corner. They tell us that the artist 'W. Carpenter' was at Muswell Hill when he painted them in 1858.



From high on the hill at Muswell Hill, the artist looks out across the flat rural landscape stretching for miles below from this vantage point. The first view (above) is looking south towards Crouch End and Hornsey. Muswell Hill itself in 1858 would have been a village, with some large houses here and there, built as summer residences for wealthy Londoners. By the 1860s, the population for this area was around 1,000 people.

### Top of the World ...

These idyllic views are each framed by trees on one side of each painting, with the trees then leading your eyes down to the distant scenes. You can see very few houses dotted between the open fields and farmland. The second image (below) shows houses lining the steep road up to Muswell Hill. You can also spot in the middle distance, the distinctive tower of St Mary's Church, the parish church for Hornsey, situated at the end of Hornsey High Street (where it meets Church Lane). Only the church tower, dating from 1500, [survives today](#).



© Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)  
(watercolour on paper: 34cm high x 49cm wide)

As John wrote in 2016: “There is nothing on the watercolours to indicate any provenance or how they come to be in the Bruce Castle collection, but it seems reasonable to suppose they were by a professional artist. A preliminary search revealed that a considerable number of works by the artist William Carpenter, made in the nineteenth century, are held at the V&A Museum.”

So John carried on with his detective work with a visit to the V&A. Curators there were able to “confirm that the signature on the Bruce Castle landscapes was the

same as that on a watercolour made by [W Carpenter at Lahore, India \(now Pakistan\), in 1855.](#)”

John continues: “Details of the artist [William Carpenter \(1818-1899\)](#) are to be found in dictionaries of watercolour artists and online. He was the son of [William Hookham Carpenter \(1792 -1866\)](#), a Keeper at the British Museum, and his wife, [Margaret Carpenter \(born Geddes, 1793 -1872\)](#), a noted portrait artist at the time.

The young William entered the Royal Academy Schools for Art in 1835, initially painting with oils but quickly took to watercolour. He travelled to India in 1850 and spent some years painting scenes of India, making three annual trips to Kashmir in 1853, 1854 and 1855, before returning to England in 1857. After his return to England he was able to sell his paintings as the basis of stories to the *Illustrated London News*.

William travelled to Boston, America, during the 1860s, but by 1871 he was back in England. In 1881 he had a one-man exhibition in South Kensington Museum which included 275 of his watercolours of people and places in India. After the exhibition all of the paintings were purchased by the new Victoria and Albert Museum, where they still remain.”

To explore the delicate watercolours painted by William on his travels around India, including Peshawar, Mumbai and Kashmir, just follow the link [here](#). You will see street scenes of bazaars and traders selling their wares, as well as portraits of groups of children or wealthy individuals.

It would also appear that the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the USA also reference William Carpenter in their collections. The one highlighted [here](#) describes how the artist Tara – a master painter in the Udaipur tradition – adapted the European watercolour techniques to his portrait of Sarup Singh, having seen the work of William whilst he was in India.

As John also points out: “Not surprisingly, given his father’s role at the British Museum it has [several prints by William Carpenter](#), as does the National Portrait Gallery which are accessible via their online collections. The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford also has two examples listed in the *Dictionary of British Watercolour Artists*, namely an Indian watercolour and a chalk portrait.”

There is a portrait too in Southwark’s [Cuming Museum](#) which is said to be by William, but is quite possibly by his mother.

“Nothing, however, in this short biographical outline suggests any direct connection to Muswell Hill, or Hornsey, during the four years he was in England between returning from India and going to America.”

John concludes: “Whatever it was, it seems as if the two watercolours in Bruce Castle are the only known examples of English landscape scenes by William Carpenter.”

Both these paintings will be added in the coming months to join other paintings from our collections already listed on the [Watercolour World website](#) and also to the [Art UK website](#).

And if you would like to try your hand as an art detective yourself, there are opportunities to do this via [Art UK](#) – just take a look.

Alternatively, [here's a challenge](#) to exercise your research skills online. Below is another view of Muswell Hill. Some of you may recognise it as the front cover for *Muswell Hill: History & Guide* by local historian and Muswell Hill expert Ken Gay who, back in 2002, whilst researching at Bruce Castle, was delighted when he came across this watercolour from our collections for his - then - new book, showcasing the local history of that area.



© Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)  
(watercolour on paper: 37cm high x 51.5cm wide)

It shows another picturesque rural landscape with sheep. The clues on the painting tells us that it was painted in 'November 1826' – far earlier than the views above. But the artist is different. The signature reads 'H. Julsum'.

We don't currently have any further details for this artist – maybe you can help out and see what there might be out there, using online resources? Remember to think of different ways the surname could be spelt, as it is an unusual surname.

And, if you are inspired by the trees, why not thinking about researching trees – there are plenty of resources online. One good place to start looking at trees in the borough is via the [Tottenham Trees website](#).

If you are a [family and would like to explore trees](#) too, then have a go at our [Trees wordsearch \(PDF attached\)](#) - you might even spot the Great Oak of Bruce Castle on the sheet).

That's the end of today's post – where scenes from Muswell Hill have linked us to other parts of the world. Thank you to John Hinshelwood for helping us cast the spotlight on two special paintings in our collections. And also a thank you to David Cottridge for photographing these large paintings for us – he is another Friend of Bruce Castle and professional wildlife photographer, who heads the [Friends of Tottenham Marshes](#).

Have fun exploring and being an art detective.

Until tomorrow – keep safe, stay indoors.

Best wishes

From all at Bruce Castle

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