

# Valley of Vision

21 January to 19 March 2017  
Saturdays and Sundays 3 to 5pm



WOLFSON COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE

*Wolfson Fine Arts in collaboration with  
the University of South Wales*

[www.wolfson.cam.ac.uk/fine-arts](http://www.wolfson.cam.ac.uk/fine-arts)

## Foreword - Painting the Valleys

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For over two hundred years, the Valleys of South Wales have inspired painters and printmakers. J M W Turner, Richard Wilson and Julius Caesar Ibbetson were among the early visitors, drawn to the coalfield by the promise of extraordinary images – the visual combination of burgeoning heavy industry and dramatic landscapes.

They came to witness the fiery spectacle of iron furnaces giving birth to a new industrial age. Here was the cutting edge of Britain's pioneering technologies. Yet they discovered, within a stone's throw of the blast furnaces and pit shafts, a landscape of waterfalls, precipitous forests and wild, romantic moorland.

From beyond the hills, the mines and ironworks drew tens of thousands of men and women, seeking work. They came from everywhere to create towns and villages that thrived cheek by jowl with pits, factories, railways, roads and the steep, wild places where it was not possible to build.

Terraces of housing were carved into hillsides, served by roads with alpine gradients. Together with the sculptural steel headgear of collieries, soaring railway viaducts and vast industrial cathedrals, they provided the backdrop against which novelists, dramatists, poets, musicians, film-makers and artists set their observations of the lives of the people of the Valleys.

The whole business of coalmining, below and above ground, proved to be a subject that attracted artists like moths to a flame. It had so many dramatic elements: the ever-present threat of real disaster; the skill and strength required to survive in the black depths where methane, jagged rock, steel and timber could so easily rip, maim and kill; the shared hardship out of which grew unique communities.

And then, as inevitable as the seasons, there were the booms and busts of the coal markets: when fat times tapered to years of near starvation and deep melancholy, when the coalfield became a byword for poverty and decay, its communities stalked by despair and disease, the emotional and political scars of which remain to this day.

Yet through it all, the towns and villages survived. Time and again, the people of the Valleys proved themselves capable of change, determined to adapt to the new realities and demands of work and employment after the demise of coal mining. Our communities and heritage were not abandoned. We recognised the debt we owed to those who had created a unique, vibrant culture in which art mattered.

It continues to matter. I have yet to discover a village or a town in the coalfield where there are no painters or printmakers. I have detected no diminution in the desire to express visually the world seen from the Valleys. What has changed

*Cover: Slag Heap Railway, George Chapman (Owen & Jo Edwards)*

is the subject matter. Apart from a scattering of small mines and a few huge, opencast sites on the rim of the coalfield, there is no longer a coal industry. There are memories and ruins, books, photographs and articles, industrial museums and visitors' centres. And there are ghosts and paintings.

I know for certain that the ghosts are still out there, haunting abandoned mineshafts, winding-sheds and chapels where the physical evidence of an industry that once employed a quarter of a million miners in these Valleys has almost disappeared. Even the scarred hillsides have been blanketed in new forests as the Valleys continue to be greened.

Thankfully, the paintings have survived. Some of them are gathered here, at this exhibition. They tell of a different age, when coal was still king, when artists - Welsh, English, Polish, German – felt it vital to communicate through paint the dignity, hope and beauty they discovered in communities like Rhondda, Merthyr, Pontyberem, Aberdare, Pontypool and Blaenavon. They provide us, now, with a glimpse of a world that has been lost but one that deserves to be remembered.

*Kim Howells, Pontyprid*

## Inspiration for Valley of Vision

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The inspiration for this exhibition came from two sources: the first, when the late Dr Norma Bubier, to whose memory this show is dedicated, and her husband Dr Harry Bradshaw presented on loan to the College three paintings by Nicholas Evans – these powerful, dark, brooding images of miners made an abiding impression; the second, a BBC television programme on the art of South Wales screened in 2015 called 'Vision of the Valleys', which was presented by Kim Howells, and which showed the mining industrial culture through the eyes of artists living and working in the Valleys.

As one born in a mining valley I recall its landscape of collieries with their brick-built steam engine sheds, tall winding gear with 'the cage' plunging down several hundred feet to the pit bottom and the working coalfaces, and the enormous conical slagheaps – one of which, just fifty years ago, slid down a mountainside engulfing and killing a generation of children at Aberfan, whilst on level ground at the valley bottom lay great piles of pine pit props with the seemingly endless coal trains in their sidings waiting to be filled at the colliery head.

However my crystal childhood memory is of standing outside on a cold but clear New Year's Eve when, at midnight, the steam sirens of Caerau, Coegnant and Cwmddu collieries welcomed in the New Year.

Now the slag heaps are bulldozed flat, the pit-head buildings derelict, and the railway lines taken up, but the narrow terraced housing and the people remain. But in this exhibition one can see through artists' eyes what once was there.

*Owen Edwards, Curator*

## The Wolfson Connection

Joseph Shaw KC was a major industrialist in the South Wales coalfield and was Chairman of Powell Duffryn Steam Coal Company Limited.

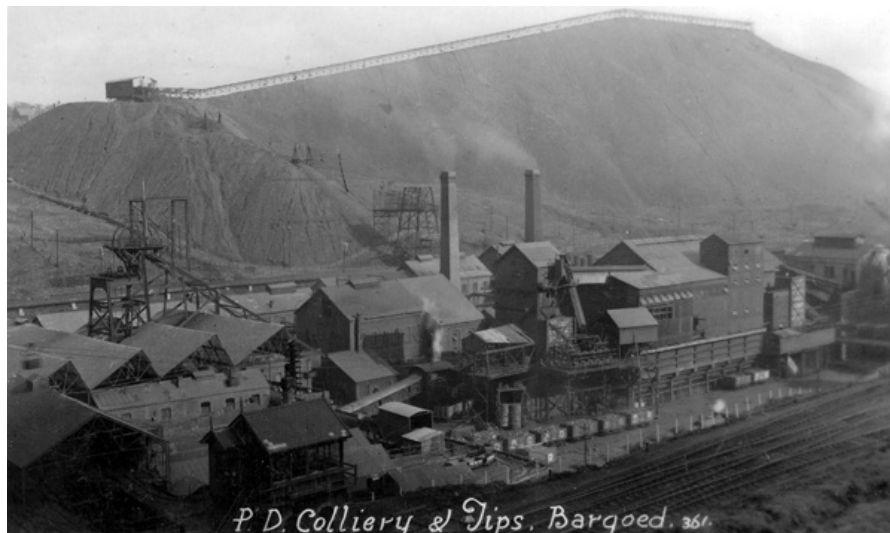
His wife, Charlotte Blanche Shaw was the grandmother of one of the College's Founding Fellows, John Shaw.

When John Shaw became a Founding Fellow of this College in 1965 the Shaw collection of silver-gilt was first on loan and then was offered to the College as a memorial to Joseph Shaw. It was also agreed that the portraits of his paternal grandparents would be hung in the College.

The portraits of Joseph Shaw KC (1856-1933) and Charlotte Blanche Shaw (1864-1897) are exhibited on the main staircase.

Powell Duffryn Steam Coal Company Limited dug its first coal mine in South Wales in 1840 and expanded to such a degree that its name was synonymous with the Welsh coal mining industry and, in the period leading to the first World War, was producing over four million tons a year.

Joseph Shaw's influence was such that on 26 August 1918, a letter from William Brace MP (Under Secretary of State in the Home Department) to the Prime Minister David Lloyd George, stated that 'Joseph Shaw, of Powell Duffryn Collieries, believes that unless at least 50,000 men are brought back from the Front there will be a very serious coal shortage in the winter!'



## Solomon Joseph Solomon RA (1860-1927)



*Portrait of Joseph Shaw KC, 1914 (Wolfson College) – another version of this portrait is in the National Museum of Wales in its 'Images of Industry' collection*

Solomon was a founding member of the New English Art Club in 1896 and a member of the Royal Academy from 1906. He became well-known as an innovative portrait artist, painting eminent people such as Mrs Patrick Campbell and later the royals King George V, Queen Mary and the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII). He also painted several prominent Welshmen including the Liberal politician Viscount Rhondda.

During World War I he was a pioneer of camouflage techniques, then used by the French. He made an important contribution to the development of camouflage, working in particular on armoured observation posts disguised as trees and arguing tirelessly for camouflage netting. In December 1916 he set up a camouflage school in Hyde Park.

## Herbert Arnould Olivier RI (1861-1952)



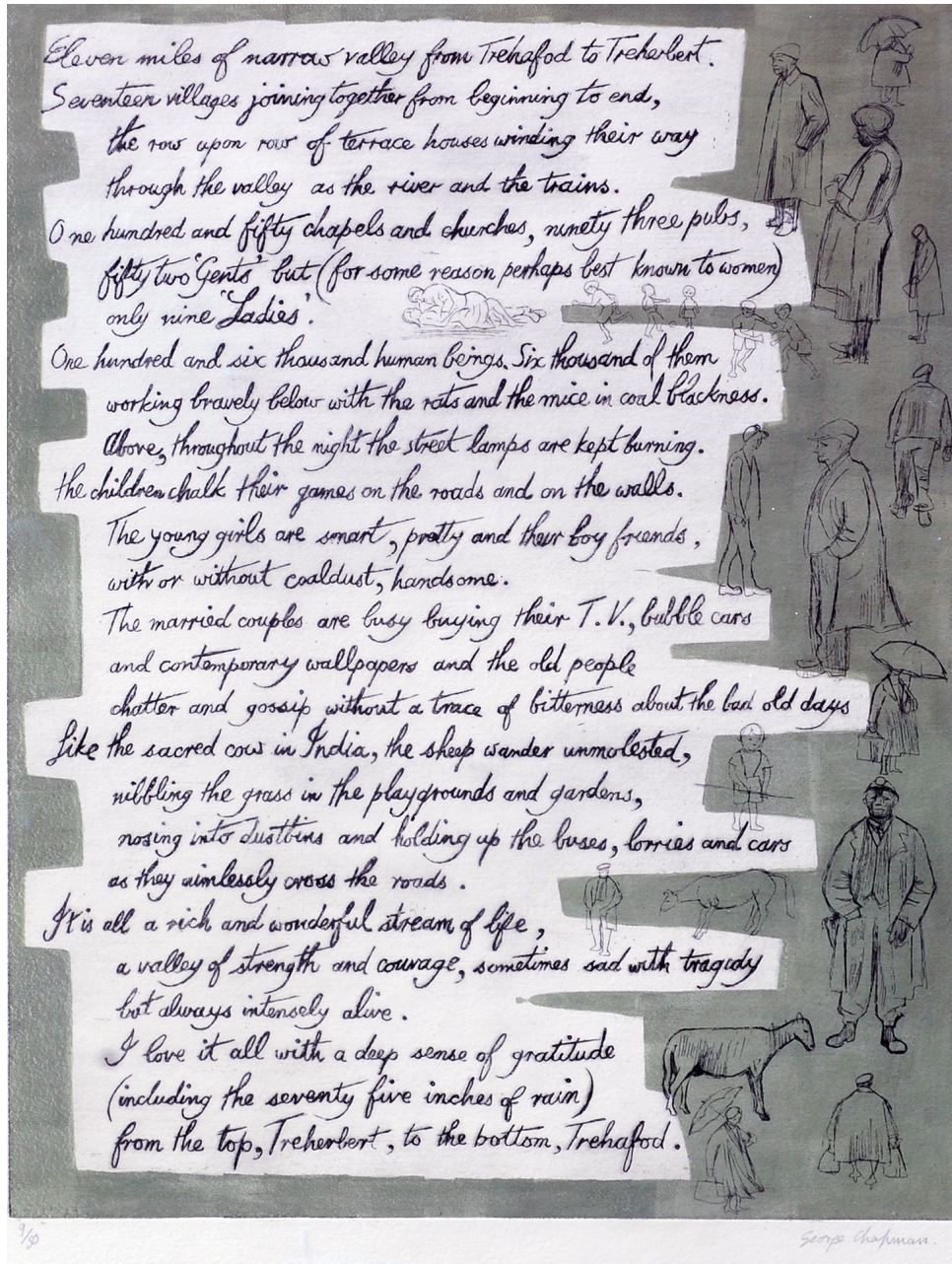
*Portrait of Charlotte Blanche Shaw (Wolfson College)*

Herbert Arnould Olivier RI (1861-1952) was a British artist, best known for his portrait and landscape paintings. He studied at the Royal Academy Schools and exhibited extensively, including at the Royal Academy, starting in 1883.

In 1917 he was appointed an official War Artist and presented to the nation a number of paintings including 'The Supreme War Council'. Many of these works form part of the collections of the Imperial War Museum.

He was a prolific portraitist painting, as one would expect, a number of high ranking military personages such as Field Marshall Douglas Haig, politicians such as David Lloyd George and Arthur Balfour and personalities such as Dame Freya Stark.

He was also the uncle of Sir Laurence Olivier.



Introduction to the Rhondda Suite, George Chapman (Owen & Jo Edwards)

## George Chapman (1908-1993)



Passing Storm, George Chapman  
 (Owen & Jo Edwards)

At the end of the road one sees the pit head with chimney and winding gear and beyond, the typical conical shapes of the slag heaps.

George Chapman was born in East Ham, the son of a railway superintendent. He attended Shebbears College in Devon, where profound deafness hindered his education; in 1924 he went to Gravesend School of Art. He joined Crawfords in 1926 to train as a commercial designer and

in the 1930s worked on numerous advertising campaigns alongside Graham Sutherland, John Nash, John Piper and John Betjeman. In 1937 he gave up a successful career to become a painter, first as a student at the Slade and then at the Royal College of Art, studying painting under Gilbert Spencer. His early influences included Walter Sickert and the Euston Road School with its emphasis on naturalism and an attempt to make art more relevant.

In 1951 he moved to Great Bardfield and joined the thriving artistic community that included Edward Bawden, Michael Rothenstein and John Aldridge, contributing to their famous 'Open House' exhibitions.

In 1953 Chapman made a journey through the coal-mining valleys of South Wales and discovered the Rhondda Valley, where, he said, 'I realised that here I could find the material that would make me a painter at last.' He returned to paint the valleys over the next ten years, renting a studio in the Rhondda, and there followed a period of considerable success. In 1957 he was awarded the Gold Medal for Fine Art at the Royal National Eisteddfod of Wales and in 1960 St George's Gallery Prints published the Rhondda Suite of etchings considered to be the most important prints ever to concern themselves with the industrial

As a committed socialist Chapman's sympathies remained with the working class.

In his formative years as a painter in the 1930s, he had witnessed large scale unemployment, poverty, and unrest. However he always insisted that the creative driving force was primarily visual and not driven by reaction to capitalist society, its destruction of the countryside and exploitation of the working class.'

My job as an artist is to make things as they are. Providing I do my job properly, the social comment, if such a thing is needed, will come over itself,' he wrote.

landscape of Wales. He staged more than 20 one-man exhibitions: his paintings and prints were purchased by public collections throughout Britain and abroad and met with widespread acclaim. Huw Weldon's 'Monitor' programme on Chapman was screened on the BBC in 1961 and later in the same year at the Venice International Film Biennial.

Forty years on, and with only a short hiatus during the 1970s, Chapman continued to paint the Rhondda. He had taken on the challenge to paint the 'new' Rhondda, which had lost none of its former appeal for him and continued until his death in 1993.

*Jo Edwards*

### Denys Short (b. 1927)



*Works, Trehafod, Denys Short*  
(University of South Wales)

Pit winding gear from where a cage would drop vertically several hundred feet to the mine workings and the coal face.

Denys Short was born in Bideford and is a senior figure on the Welsh art scene.

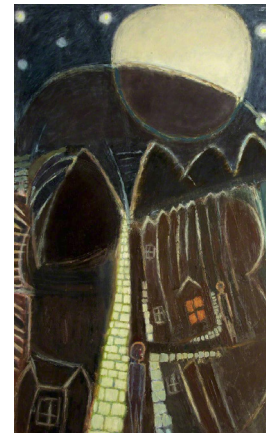
From 1948 to 1953, he studied at Goldsmiths College London where he met his future wife Eirian Short (b. 1924) who hails from Fishguard.

In his early career he was a regular visitor to South Wales and produced paintings of the Valleys. In 1958 he was awarded the Gold Medal for Fine Art at the Royal National Eisteddfod of Wales, Ebbw Vale, with a painting entitled 'Terrace in Maesteg'

Following early retirement from teaching at Hornsey College of Art in 1985, he settled in Pembrokeshire. He is better known now as a sculptor, having begun to produce three-dimensional works in the 1970s such as 'Hafan', which is based on the front door of a typical terraced house in the Valleys. It is in the collection of Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales and was included in the museum's 2013 exhibition 'Pop and Abstract'.

*Ceri Thomas*

### Ernest Zobole (1927-1999)



*Rhondda street with moon and stars, Ernest Zobole*  
(University of South Wales)

Ernest Zobole was born in Ystrad Rhondda in the heart of the South Wales coalfield to Italian immigrant shopkeepers and is a major figure within the Welsh art scene since 1945.

In 1948, he won a scholarship to study at Cardiff Art School. That year saw the beginnings of what became known as the Rhondda Group which was cemented by the hour-long train journey to and from Cardiff during which Zobole and his art student friends commandeered a compartment to create their own café culture on wheels and develop their 'make it true, make it new' philosophy. It manifested itself as a love of place and an honest originality of vision.

In the early 1950s, Zobole met the German-Jewish refugee painter Heinz Koppel. It was a seminal encounter which contributed towards him progressively dismantling the conventions of linear perspective which were already strained by the physical experience of his mountainous Rhondda Valley, crammed to the brim with coal tips, strewn with terraced housing and tilting roads, and punctuated by riverside railway lines and yet more buildings competing for space along the length and up the sides of the valley floor.

By the 1960s he was exhibiting at the Piccadilly Gallery in London and from 1963 to 1984 he was a lecturer at Newport College of Art where he befriended the painter John Selway from Abertillery and was reunited with his Rhondda Group contemporary Tom Hughes from Ynyshir.

Apart from a brief period living at Llangefni, Zobole spent all his life in the 'warm bed' of Rhondda and it was that place which informed his vision throughout his fifty-year career.

He painted obsessively at all ages and has been exhibited continuously since 1950. *Ernest Zobole: a retrospective* toured Wales in 2004-05, a monograph was published in 2007 and some key examples of his work can be found in the University of South Wales Art Collection Museum.

His final fifteen years were particularly productive, his later, almost kinetic, map-like, nocturne paintings completing as it were a highly distinctive and increasingly imaginative set of imagings which, based on his industrial and post-industrial Wales environment, ultimately are comments upon the human condition.

*Ceri Thomas*

## Josef Herman RA (1911-2000)



*Three Seated Miners* (sketch) Josef Herman  
(Josef Herman Art Foundation Cymru)

Josef Herman was born and raised in Warsaw, the son of a Polish-Jewish shoe-maker; he became a significant figure within the British art scene since 1945.

In the early 1930s, he studied at the Warsaw Academy and, having left the city in 1938, he then studied at Brussels Academy of Fine Arts. In Belgium he met and was influenced by the painter Constant Permeke. With the Nazi invasion of mainland Europe, he became a refugee artist and fled to Britain in 1940, settling first in wartime Glasgow and London and then in the mining village of Ystradgynlais in South Wales, thanks to a chance meeting with local writer Dai Alexander.

Two weeks there became eleven years (1944-1955) following a near-visionary sighting of miners silhouetted against the setting sun as they crossed a bridge on their way home from work. He had found his subject and he developed his mature style in Wales: 'The miner is the man of Ystradgynlais' he wrote, adding that 'It would be true to say that the miner is the walking monument to labour'.

His rapidly executed sketches and increasingly expressionist paintings of people seated, standing or working became a template for his subsequent depictions of other workers and the dignity of manual labour. They were the living and (for him) archetypal subjects of his mural for the Minerals of the Island pavilion at the Festival of Britain.

Following the images of his subterranean workers the Welsh miners and their busy wives came those of workers on the land and the edge of the land in other countries – farmers, peasants and fisher folk. But all of these owed a debt to his Welsh period.

A prodigiously hard worker, Herman exhibited from 1932 right up until his death. In 1962 he was awarded the Gold Medal for Fine Art at the Royal National Eisteddfod of Wales, Llanelli, and was elected to the Royal Academy in 1990. His work is to be found in the Tate who, in 2013-15, initiated *Mining Josef Herman*, a partnership with the Josef Herman Art Foundation Cymru. The Foundation was created in 2004 at the Miners Welfare Hall in Ystradgynlais, to promote and appreciate the work and life of Josef Herman. In order to further develop the work of the Foundation, Nini Herman generously donated a body of artwork a few years later to be permanently displayed at Ystradgynlais.

Ceri Thomas

## Chris Griffin (b.1945)



*Landscape with Canary*, Chris Griffin (Rhondda Heritage Park)

In this composition we see the massive presence of a coal transporter and a tram discharging coal.

Inserted is a caged canary reminding us that they were used to detect the presence of 'firedamp' a much feared cause of many mining disasters.

Chris Griffin was born in Maescywmmer, South Wales; he graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1975

Griffin is inspired by the urban and mining landscapes of the South Wales Valleys and in an interview said, 'I paint Wales because I know it so well. If you know a subject really well then it is easy to identify whether you have got it right or not.'

'The Valleys and houses suit my purpose well: most of my compositions haven't much sky; what you are looking at is hillside – a vertical surface. The Welsh Valleys in particular have all sorts of angles and interesting shapes and I feel a lot of excitement in those things.'

## Vincent Evans (1896-1976)



*Derailed Coal Train*, Vincent Evans  
(University of South Wales)

In this scene a coal train pulled by a pit pony has become derailed and the miners are attempting to get it back on the rails.

Pit ponies were stabled underground, rarely being taken to the surface and a great bond would often develop between miners and their pit ponies.

Born in Ystalafera in the Swansea valley, Vincent Evans worked in the local coal mines from the age of 13 until he was 23. However, he had a passion for art and attended Swansea College of Art. He then won a scholarship to the Royal College of Art, studying under William Rothenstein and Frank Short.

He was a fine and sensitive portraitist and known for his depiction of mine workers and mining scenes coloured by his own working experience as a miner.

## David Carpanini (b.1946)



*Tourists of our Own Past*, David Carpanini  
(Rhondda Heritage Park)

A Welsh artist whose works – drawings, paintings and etchings – are concerned with the industrial landscapes of South Wales.

David Carpanini was born in the Afan valley. He was educated in Port Talbot and then at Gloucestershire College of Art. He became Head of Art and Design at Wolverhampton Polytechnic and was then appointed a Professor when Wolverhampton achieved University status.

He has regularly exhibited at the Royal Academy and elsewhere.

Whilst he is not a Rhondda-based artist, but in the nearby Afan valley, his work reflects a community coming to terms with the closure of the coal mines following the 1984/85 Miners' Strike.

To quote from Kim Howells' interview with David Carpanini in the 2015 television programme, 'Visions of the Valleys', which was the inspiration for this exhibition:

'My inspiration lies in the contemplation of the familiar. It is in the valleys and farming communities of South Wales, scarred by industrialisation, but home to a resolute people, that I found the trigger to my creative imagination.'

In *Tourists of our Own Past* one can see figures set in an uncompromising urban valley landscape, but resolutely facing the future.

## Jack Crabtree (b.1938)



*Transfer Point Attendant*, Jack Crabtree  
(University of South Wales)

Lancashire-born Jack Crabtree trained at St Martin's and the Royal Academy Schools. He taught at Newport College of Art from 1966 to 1974.

Crabtree is a contemporary English figurative painter known for a series of paintings about the South Wales Mining Industry.

The two portraits of miners at their tasks, included in this exhibition, were commissioned by the National Coal Board.

To quote a stylistic note described in the *Tribune*:

'Crabtree is a social realist who works in a natural style that is neither didactic nor over-emphatic. Sometimes his imagery is exhilarating, full of energetic figures and sometimes sad and sensitive ...'

## Nicholas Evans (1907-2004)



*Pit Boys*, Nicholas Evans (Harry Bradshaw)

Norma and I were fortunate to meet Nicholas Evans at his home in Abernant, South Wales, which added much to our understanding of the relationship between the artist and his extraordinary oeuvre.

In stepping over the threshold into a typical local terraced house, we were greeted warmly by our kind host, a sensitive man who firmly shook our hand before inviting us into the front room.

All around, large paintings leaned up against the walls and sideboard. Some were framed;

eight were works in progress. Nicholas' daughter, Rhoda, offered tea as the artist explained his depiction of 'Madonna and Child' while talking of his deep Pentecostal faith. He pointed to two wooden manikins (c.12-16 inches tall) beside five Bibles on top of the piano and explained how he needed another ten to paint Christ's disciples (though he also mentioned how he mostly painted from memory and imagination).

Over tea, the conversation had focused on the images we had seen:

- how the Davy lamp had transformed underground safety;
- how miners sometimes took to alcohol in the face of hardship resulting in a strong temperance movement;
- how someone called a 'sin eater' would eat a meal directly off a body to ritually cleanse 'sins' before burial;
- and how miners bought a bowler hat and cut off the brim because the mine owners did not provide a hard hat.

It goes without saying that we found our visits fascinating and we felt very privileged to have had the opportunity to talk.

He showed how he painted exclusively with his fingers using pieces of rag in monochrome colour reminiscent of coal dust. In another room artworks were so deeply stacked around the walls that only a small area remained for standing.

The complete lack of contrivance in Nicholas Evans' work lends an extraordinarily visceral quality that transcends specific context and speaks of human suffering particularly under the pressures of hard labour. Yet, in meeting the artist and connecting his life and work so directly, the paintings take on even greater power as one man's response to the twentieth century coal mining industry of the South Wales Valleys.

*Harry Bradshaw*

*This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of Dr Norma Bubier, who passed away in 2016, the beloved wife of Dr Harry Bradshaw.*

*An Ecologist and Senior Member of Wolfson College, Dr Bubier was Executive Director of Pro-Natura UK ([www.pronatura.org](http://www.pronatura.org)) and worked tirelessly for two decades with the Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon in Guyana, South America to develop training in natural resource management and community capacity building while providing job opportunities for local people. Norma was a woman of boundless energy and wide-ranging interests, which frequently inspired new projects and positive outcomes. Shortly before her passing she was appointed Programme and Scientific Advisor to the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs in the newly elected government of Guyana.*

## The Bradshaw-Bubier Collection: Pottery in the Leach Tradition



The ceramics exhibited in two cases in the Combination Room and in one case in the foyer of the Lee Seng Tee Hall are part of a collection generously donated to Wolfson College by Dr Harry Bradshaw and the late Dr Norma Bubier. All but one of the potters represented worked for a time at the Leach Pottery at St Ives, Cornwall, or with Bernard Leach's first pupil, Michael Cardew, at either Winchcombe in Somerset, or Wenford Bridge in Gloucestershire. The exception is Joe Finch, who was trained at Winchcombe by his father, Ray Finch. Their work embodies Leach's vision of pots that are handmade, functional and aesthetically satisfying, while illustrating various interpretations of Eastern and Western potting traditions.

Tea played an important role in the social life of the Welsh Valleys, so it seemed appropriate to select tea wares from the collection for exhibition in the Combination Room. One case is devoted to the work of Ray Finch (1914-2012) and Richard Batterham (b. 1936), who is renowned for his teapots and caddies. The other case displays pots by William Marshall (1923-2007), Alan Brough (1924-2012), Derek Emms (1929-2004), Trevor Corser (b. 1938), Clive Bowen (b. 1943), Joe Finch (b. 1947), Nic Harrison (b. 1949), and Joanna Wason (b. 1952). In the foyer of the Lee Hall, the case contains a miscellany of pots by Jeff Oestreich, (b. 1947), Trevor Corser (b. 1938), Joanna Wason (b. 1952), Nic Harrison (b. 1949), and Amanda Brier (b. 1978).



The Wolfson Fine Arts Committee acknowledges the support of:

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A companion exhibition titled *Coal Society* and curated by Dr Ceri Thomas is running concurrently at the University of South Wales until 13 April 2017. Containing imagery related to the coal industry and South Wales Valleys society, it includes works by a number of artists featured in *Valley of Vision* and several other artists.  
[gallery.southwales.ac.uk](http://gallery.southwales.ac.uk)



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