

One of the many joys of our Centennial Year in 2009 was its promotion of a widespread spark of interest from the past. Just one example was a query from Michael Checkley in England, asking if we had any information about his great-uncle Arthur Checkley, an artist who he knew had emigrated to Canada early in the last century. Indeed, we were able to let him know that Arthur Checkley had played a significant role in our Club’s history.

Born in Handsworth, Staffs in 1873, he was a product of the Birmingham School of Art and arrived in Canada in 1913. It was testament to a reputation as an artist in eastern and central Canada that in 1928 the Island Arts and Craft Society (IACS) arranged a special social event to welcome him and his wife as they came to make their home in Victoria. They were guests of honour for the occasion, and several Checkley paintings were put on show. He first exhibited at the Society’s Annual Show in that same year, and doing so frequently until 1940, and he was soon elected to the Executive Committee.



In 1929 he mounted a solo exhibition in Victoria depicting Vancouver Island, Canadian Rockies and Saskatchewan scenery, and drew the following comments from a critic in the Daily Colonist: “(his) art has a strong interpretative quality, giving distinction to each thing, the artist having the advantage of a style which is mobile, versatile and facile. His work is not photographic, it being more truthful in that it conveys the feeling of nature more than it emphasizes the absolute dimensions of nature. He uses whatever medium seems best suited to his subject, handling water colours or palette knife as occasion demands.”

Along with other artists, including fellow IACS members, he was signatory in 1932 to an agreement to boycott the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. The complaint was that the Gallery in its selection of paintings was favouring a chosen few artists at the expense of the great majority of Canadian practitioners.

He is remembered not only as a notable artist – he went on to annually exhibit at the Vancouver Art Gallery from 1933 to 1941 -- but as an art educator and organizer. For some years he directed the art section of the annual Willows Fair in Oak Bay, Victoria, and, in this capacity, he gave Emily Carr a whole section of the 1933 exhibition to herself. This proved to be the last year in which Emily exhibited at the Fair.



On his death in Victoria in 1964, it was reported that Checkley had “retired” from his profession of “Artist Painter” in 1940. His work currently features in the collections of the Art Gallery of Victoria, the BC Royal Museum Archives and the Maltwood Gallery of the University of Victoria.

*Illustrations*

1) Camosun College with Normal School and Tolmie Electric Traffic Shelter.AGGV DSCB124

2) Landscape

*.~John Lover*