

# Harry Davis

Harry Davis was born in Worcester in 1885. His father, Alfred, was a china figure maker who worked for Royal Worcester and his grandfather Josiah Davis was one of the most talented gilders ever to work at the factory. Harry started out at St.Peter's School (where the museum is now housed) then at the age of 13, started work for Royal Worcester. Along with all the young boys he began doing very menial tasks and was formally apprenticed for seven years under the talented landscape artist, Ted Salter, on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1899.

Harry started work under the wing of his grandfather, who taught him to draw. He also learned an enormous amount from his tutor who taught the eager young boy to paint soft misty landscapes in the style of Corot. Harry was deeply shocked when Salter was killed, cycling over a level crossing, on his way to work in November 1902.



The Royal Worcester artists c.1900 with the young Harry Davis, front left and Ted Salter seated at right end of second row

Ted Salter had reinforced Harry's love of the countryside and of fishing. A keen fisherman, Harry was a follower of Isaac Walton, 17<sup>th</sup> century author of the most successful angling book of all time, 'The Compleat Angler'. He perfected the difficult art of painting fish with amazing accuracy, possible only to someone with a deep understanding of fish and their behaviour. Harry was an active member of the Royal Worcester Fishing Club and later in life painted two wonderful trophies for the club to present to competition winners each year.

Harry quickly proved that he had tremendous natural ability and striking individuality. He was always versatile and painted a large range of subjects with ease. Landscapes with sheep, cattle, pigs, fish, snow scenes, London Scenes, polar bears, palaces and gardens, but he was never a 'Jack of all trades' he would accept nothing less than perfection in everything he did.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1910 Harry married 'Cissie' (Ethel) Powell, a dressmaker, at St.Peter's church that stood next to the Severn Street factory. A fine watercolour of cattle drinking

from a stream, given to the couple as a wedding present by their friend Harry Stinton, is now in the museum collection.



Throughout the First World War there was still demand for Harry's work, but in 1916 he volunteered and joined the wireless section of the Royal Engineers. Harry's abilities were quickly utilised drawing diagrams for instruction purposes, but he also enjoyed painting postcards which he sent to his friends. On the card showing a mountain of equipment at St. Martin's Gate Parade Ground (just up the road from the porcelain factory) Harry was obviously tickled by the scene before him and

commented *"Not quite clear, But very near, Next year?"*. In 1919 all Royal Worcester employees who served for their country, including Harry Davis, were presented with an urn with their name, department and dates of service inscribed in gold.

In 1923 Royal Worcester received a prestigious £7,000 order from His Highness Shri Ranjitsinhji Vibhaji, Maharaja Jam Saheb of Nawanagar. The legendary Sussex and England cricketer owned palaces in both India and England and wanted a service to use in India illustrating his English estate and a set to use in England decorated with scenes of his Indian home. Harry Davis was given the challenge and designed and painted 24 of the most wonderful scenes. He worked from photographs, yet created views full of light and atmosphere with intricate architectural details that were widely admired.



Plate made for Ranjitsinghi in 1923

Harry succeeded William Hawkins as foreman of the 'Men Painters' department in 1928. He was responsible for training many young apprentices and in the early 1930s to help with his teaching, Harry produced several sets of etchings for decorative plates, 12 castles, 12 cottages and 12 cathedrals. The scenes were expertly etched onto copper plates and then printed as an outline onto the china. Many artists in the department 'filled in' the colours over the printed designs adding their signature to the finished work. Sometimes Harry himself did some of the filling in, signing himself H.SIVAD, Davis backwards! Later Harry also etched some wonderful coaching subjects and some of his favourite fish.

Joyce Holloway remembers Harry being so patient teaching the girls to paint;

*"When orders were scarce during the Depressions, and because if you were under 16 you couldn't claim the dole, workers were retained and little jobs were found for them. Harry Davis gave painting lessons to girls to fill in the time..... he was very patient and he showed me one or two little ways in drawing .....and he was a very nice person [his skills] they seemed to me incredible, they still do."*

Over the years Harry completed some very prestigious commissions for special customers. In 1928 he collaborated with his friend Harry Stinton to complete an important order for Mr. Kellogg the American Cornflake King. Harry Stinton painted a dinner service of 25 service plates with magical snow scenes, with rich raised gilding on a ruby ground, and Harry Davis painted a matching dessert service of 25 smaller plates and 25 coffee cups and saucers with delicate Corot style landscapes.

In 1937 Davis painted some exquisite panels on the silver-gilt casket presented to Charles William Dyson Perrins when he was given the Freedom of the City of Worcester. The following year Harry painted a stunning vase for the Australian cricketer, Sir Donald Bradman to commemorate his three double centuries on the New Road Ground at Worcester and in his book 'Farewell to Cricket' The Don wrote

*“ It showed the field of play, the spectators, the lovely trees along the river bank and dominating the whole scene the architectural masterpiece, Worcester Cathedral. This is one of my most treasured possessions.”*

In 1950 Harry teamed up with his friend Ivor Williams, the Master Gilder, to produce a jardinière to present to Sir Winston Churchill.



Harry talents did not end there. He was also responsible for the design of a number of very successful tableware patterns. The most luxurious 'Imperial' with its hand tipped raised gold, was produced for an incredible 76 years, between 1917 and 1993 in five different colours. The popular blackberry garland design, 'Lavinia' was made from 1940 to 1986, gold and silver 'Chantilly' made from 1958 and 1990 and the 'Worcester Hop' pattern, adapted by Harry in 1965 from a Flight & Barr original remained in production for 20 years.



During the years of the Second World War Harry was kept busy painting fine bone china, limited edition models that were made mainly for the American market, to earn precious dollars for the British economy. Harry painted many of the prototypes for Dorothy Doughty's series of American Bird models and Doris Lindner's horses. He was always a favourite of the Royal family and in 1949 he was asked to paint a wonderful model of Princess Elizabeth on her horse, Tommy. His niece Muriel recalled,

*“I well remember the time when uncle Harry had to go to Buckingham Palace in the 1940s before painting Doris Lindner's famous equestrian model of the Queen, then Princess Elizabeth. Uncle Harry was very nervous indeed about meeting the person*

*destined to be Queen. He was apparently shown into a room to wait , but before long the door opened and in came one of the Royal corgis followed by Princess Elizabeth, who shook his hand, said 'Hello' and swiftly put him at his ease. Uncle Harry said what a marvellous woman she was!"*

Princess Elizabeth personally asked to see Harry again when she visited Royal Worcester for the bicentenary celebrations in 1951 and in the very first honours list of the Queens reign in 1952, he was awarded the British Empire Medal for his contribution to British craftsmanship and design of new lines that helped the company develop its export business.

In 1954 Ben Simmonds took over as foreman of the Royal Worcester painting department, but Harry continued to paint in his studio at the factory for another 15 years. In 1958, to mark 60 years service for Royal Worcester, Managing Director, Joseph Gimson, presented Harry and Ethel with a television set and much to Harry's amazement and embarrassment he appeared on the television himself in 1968. StJohn Howell told Harry's story on the BBC Midlands Today programme. He explained how his first job at the factory was to wash the museum steps and he managed to tip up the bucket and soak everything. He was very proud of the first 10 shillings he earned, not a bit of paper, but a half gold sovereign. *"What do you think I did with it?"* said Harry *"Lost it through a hole in my trousers pocket!"*

Harry Davis' retirement 1969



Finally retiring with failing health in 1969, aged 83 Harry Davis always stated that during his whole time at the factory he had been extremely happy. Harry died in 1970. He was always astonished that anyone should want to collect his work, but Harry's signature guaranteed the very best quality and today Harry's name on any piece of porcelain guarantees a high price.

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