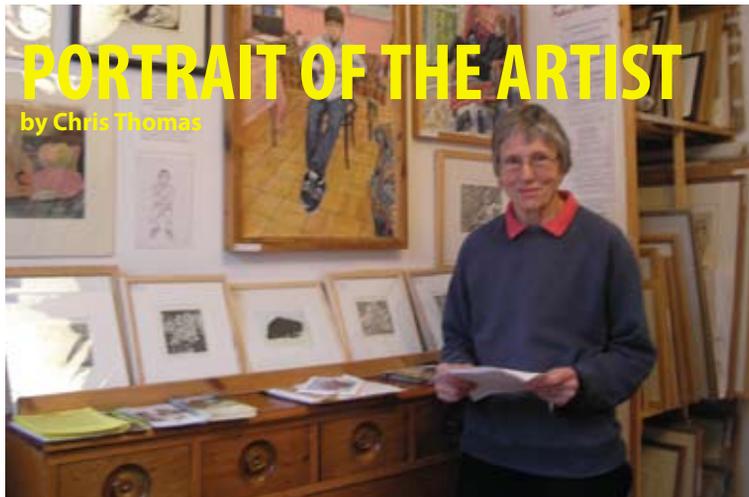


PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

by Chris Thomas



▲ Audrey Hammond with some of her family portraits at her November exhibition

Audrey Hammond was born in South London and studied Fine Art at Bromley College of Art. She has taught ceramics and art at Sydenham High School and has exhibited paintings and drawings in galleries all over England (including five times at the Royal Academy Summer Show) and many exhibitions locally. She now works entirely freelance. Audrey and her husband Martin have lived in Crystal Palace since 1956 and have brought up two sons and two daughters here. She is a founder member of the CPCA (formerly CPTCA) and has been its president since 1970.

How did the CPTCA come into being?

In the Summer of 1969 there were various rumours that the Triangle area was going to be redeveloped. I could not bear the thought of this victorian village and its community being destroyed. With my experience of teaching arts and crafts to all age groups, and the benefits this brought to people, I thought the whole Triangle could be constructively regenerated by building a family arts centre in the middle. At the time the centre of the Triangle was made up of the Paddock, the Laundry, the stables and cottages: approximately 14 acres of historically important land.

I took my ideas to the local newspaper and to the Norwood Society but things didn't really start to move until we thought about forming a community association.

So a meeting was arranged with local interested parties such as church groups, societies, activity groups, businesses and schools for a slide show on the special character of the area. Interest was so strong that it was not long after that the CPTCA was ready to be formally constituted in January 1970. So with 20 or so enthusiastic people we began organising events we would like to see going on in a proposed Arts centre such as drama, music, chess, dance and rambles. The membership soon increased and events were held in hired halls, people's houses or in the open - all without grants.

Who were you hoping to attract?

Everyone. So there were activities and events for children, grown-ups and old people and festivals including one a week long commemorating the 120th anniversary of the opening of the Crystal Palace here in 1854.

How did you move from essentially an Arts movement to local protectionist campaign?

At the time there were a number

of major development plans by the then Greater London Council (GLC). As we became more organised we could protest against unpopular plans such as their Road Plan and the threat of a Disneyland type theme park on the Crystal Palace site. We became a strong local voice asking for a more sympathetic approach from local planning authorities for the visual qualities and character of the Triangle area to be upheld.

With the growing tide of development in the area we got more involved in making continuing appeals to the councils to prevent the loss of an important shopfront, a house or open space. We had to quickly learn about 'Listed Buildings' and 'Conservation Areas' and how unless an historical area was 'designated' that there was no hope of protection.

Conservation areas did appear in Gipsy Hill, Belvedere Road/Fox Hill, Harold Road and Church Road but the Triangle was left out. The Department of the Environment refused to recognise it as an area of intrinsic historical and visual value worth designating. Thus many buildings of character were destroyed, spaces filled and shopfronts lost. And this was in the 70's and 80's!

It was in order to draw attention to the special character and beauty of the area that I began making pictures of views showing the character of the area. Pictures were turned into prints, cards and stationery and sold in aid of CPTCA funds.

Then Croydon's decision to sell the land contained inside the Triangle shocked me into a making a series of pictures in 1979 showing these places for the last time. The pictures were exhibited in the Upper Norwood Library in an exhibition called 'The Vanishing Triangle'. There was a lot of local interest but it was now too late as the bulldozers moved in and a housing estate was hastily built.

So how did your book 'Crystal Palace - Norwood Heights' come into being?

The making of the book is a story in itself. It was totally self-funded, everyone had their day time jobs. It took four years and many late nights of work by Brian Dann, Mike Conrad and myself - our partial record of the area with Brian's poetry, Mike's graphic design and my drawings and watercolours.

The idea was to bring to the public's attention the special character and historical importance of the area with the hope of the Triangle becoming a conservation area.

Initial dealings with a local publisher went awry due to concerns over costs although we had sponsorship contributions and advanced book sales from local people, businesses and associations. The then local MP Bernard Weatherill stepped in and introduced us to Robin Redsull of the Croydon Society. Robin really got things moving and with much voluntary effort and a very helpful printer, the long awaited book was published jointly by the CPTCA and the Croydon Society in 1988 amid great local festivities. The initial run of 3,500 copies sold out in 11 months and had to be reprinted.

The Triangle was finally declared Conservation Area by Croydon in 1989.

Why did you lose the 'T' in CPT-CA?

We had always considered the whole Crystal Palace area 'the area of interest' with the Triangle as the focal point therefore it seemed logical to drop the 'T'.

Why do you think recording Crystal Palace in drawings is important?

Making pictures is a very personal business; it is a means of expressing feelings about a subject. For the viewers there is the pleasure of seeing pic-



▲ One of Audrey's watercolours of Crystal Palace Park from Anerley Hill

tures which express their own feeling on a subject; or see truths; or see aspects they were unaware of.

When the artist and audience are held by the same ties of affection, such as with Crystal Palace then there is further rapport, a sort of mutual understanding. Even for people who do not have much of an interest in pictures there is still the delight of recognising their area and there is the reassurance too, that someone has cared enough to make pictures of what is part of their past or present.

What and how do you like to draw?

Apart from the Crystal Palace area my other favourite subjects include flowers, fruit, family, and friends, together with landscapes in France and elsewhere. I usually work in ink and watercolour, or watercolour alone, although I do enjoy working in oils and mixed media such as ink, gouache and acrylic.

With my portrait commissions, the medium is very much the choice of the customer.

What have you exhibited recently?

In February I had a watercolour accepted and hung in the Royal Watercolour Society's Open Exhibition at the Bankside gallery.

In the summer I showed work locally at the St Stephen's festival and with the Friends of the Horniman exhibition. Currently (until December 9th), I am exhibiting 'Paintings and Drawings of Musicians and Musical Instruments' in the Café Gallery at the Horniman Museum.

I also had seven portraits shown on the Dulwich Picture Gallery website in the 'Paint your Children/Grandchildren' competition.

What would you like to see happen with Crystal Palace Park?

I'd like to see something on the lines of the Horniman Gardens and Sydenham Wells Park- well tended gardens and beautifully restored terraces. Perhaps a small replica of the Palace in glass and a plant house.

What I don't want to see is a sell out to commercialism by having a hotel and conference centre as we will be back to the multiplex situation all over again.

Audrey Hammond gives talks of interest to amenity and art groups by arrangement, with slide illustrations, on various aspects of her work. Viewing by appointment only call 07947168138 'Crystal Palace -Norwood Heights' is available in Bookseller Crow; Kirkdale Bookshop and Dulwich Bookshop.