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“An Ordnance Survey art society and its
members”

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The Society publishes a wide range of books and booklets on historic OS map series and its journal, *Sheetlines*, is recognised internationally for its specialist articles on Ordnance Survey-related topics.

An Ordnance Survey art society and its members

*Richard T Porter*¹

The Ordnance Survey Art Association was started by Henry George Thorn ‘in 1882, at the Ordnance Office, where there were some thorough artists and engravers, who had produced some marvellous works’.² Thorn recorded:³

It was in August 1882 that I proposed to Col: Cooke R.E. at the visit of the British Association to Southampton that the talent localized in the O.S.O. among its past & present members should be shewn to the members of the Br. Assⁿ. who were considerably impressed with the good work Exhibited. – Col: A C Cooke himself caused an official circular to be sent to us wherein he was pleased to say “The Exhibition of works of Art executed by those employed on the Ordnance Survey was very successful and cannot fail to impress those who witnessed it with a sense of the Ability of the employes of the Department.”

The London Times of that date also spoke of “the great artistic merit” &c of the Exhibition – and we were encouraged to ask Col: Stotherd R.E. the successor as Director General of the O.S. to Col: Cooke to show what we were capable of doing under more favourable conditions – an excellent Exⁿ was held and about 350 works were gathered together from those connected with the O.S.O.

The Times actually said: ‘Many of the members [of the BA] desire also to acknowledge the attention paid to them by Major-General Cooke and the staff at the Ordnance Survey Office, where everything was carefully explained and the fullest information afforded. The instruments and the processes are in themselves an interesting scientific exhibition. One large room was devoted to paintings, water-colours, and sketches produced by workers in the Survey Office in their leisure hours, and almost exclusively for the decoration of their own homes. There were among them pictures of great merit, and the collection testified to the artistic capacity of a considerable proportion of the working staff engaged in producing the survey maps.’⁴

H G Thorn⁵ was a member also of the Southampton Amateur Art Society, which had emerged from ‘the fading Pen & Pencil Club in 1885’. This society ‘attracted the attention of professionals in the ... Ordnance Survey Art Association who were much inclined to support local talents and mounted a huge exhibition (in 1886) of over 350 works.’ Later, (p [7]) in his memorandum, Thorn wrote: ‘The object & aim of the two societies were so identical that at a committee meeting of the “Ordnance S. Fine Art So^c” it was proposed “That a Sub-Com.,

¹ The basic reference is *Southampton Art Society 1887-1899* (hereafter *SAS*), a bound volume of ms. notes, cuttings, exhibition catalogues and reports, held by the Special Collections Library in Southampton Central Library, class HSm. Later catalogues etc. are also held at this reference.

² Maj.-Gen. W Lacy, in *Southampton Observer*, 14 October 1887, and reprinted in Southampton Art Society, *Report of annual exhibition 1887 ...* in *SAS*, which includes an original cutting. Lacy was not a Royal Engineer officer (*pace* Anne Anderson et al., *Southampton School and College of Art: a celebration ...*, Southampton, 2006, 21).

³ HGT [monogram on cover; i.e. Henry George Thorn], *Origin and aims of the South'ton Art Society*. In *SAS*. Ms., pp 3 bis [recte 4]-6, undated, but includes near end, p[15], a newspaper cutting of 19 October 1889. Quotations from HGT in the first edition (2000) of the *History* (see note 5) are attributed to Mrs Kears [i.e. Keary] but corrected in the second edition (2008) to Henry G Thorne [recte Thorn].

⁴ ‘The British Association’, *The Times*, Thursday August 31, 1882, 6.

⁵ Unattributed quotations in this and the following paragraph are from *Southampton Art Society: The history 1885-2000, 115 years of work in the community*, The Society, October 2000, (24pp), 3-5. Slightly rephrased versions appear in the second edition, *Southampton Art Society, founded 1885, a history*, The Society, 2008.

consisting of Mess^{rs} Baker, Palmer, and Masters should wait upon the Committee of the S. Fine Art Society, and ascertain their views in regard to a proposal for the amalgamation of the Two Societies”.’

Thorn’s wording implies that the OS Art Association had changed its name, but there is no other trace of a similar change affecting the Southampton Amateur Art Society, so one assumes that, in the latter case at least, Thorn suffered a *lapsus calami*, since on the next page he recorded: ‘at the next meeting [i.e. after 25 February 1887] three of the Committee of the O.S.F.A.S. were added to the Committee of the S. Art Society: viz: Mr. R. McFadden,⁶ Mr. Henry Baker & Mr. W. D’Elboux.’

The Southampton Art Society thus formed from the merger of the OSAA and the SAAS was formally inaugurated by Maj.-Gen. W Lacy at an evening meeting at the opening of the 1887 Exhibition, on 11 October. The amalgamation ‘freed the O.S.O. artists from the constraints of the Director General’s Office and provided them with a shop window for their fine art work under the honourable name of the town of Southampton. Such a sudden and enormous increase in membership also secured the future of the Art Society as a permanent institution.’ In contrast to the 1882 practice of the OSAA, as reported in *The Times*, most of the pictures exhibited by the SAS in 1887 were ‘intended for sale’.

At the invitation of the chairman, Maj.-Gen. Lacy, Henry George Thorn had become Honorary Secretary of the SAAS, Lacy writing 13 February 1887 ‘from all I know of you I believe you to be fully capable of undertaking it’.⁷ Thorn then continued as Secretary of the SAS until 1890 (latterly sharing the duties with Miss Kate Leslie).



Thorn’s monogram from
‘Origin and aims of the
South’ton Art Society’ (×1.4)
– see note 3.

Thorn was born 1850 in Southampton⁸ and the Directories have him living at Dover Street in 1878-80 (his name followed by ‘O.S.O.’), later at Cranbury Avenue, and from 1886 at Lodge Road (30, later renumbered 36) – all less than 1km from the London Road offices of OS. An ‘ambitious and important’ oil, ‘Portrait of Mr. Henry G. Thorn’ by Frank McFadden (one of the sons of an OS printer), priced at £30, was exhibited by SAS in 1888; it is not in the Southampton Art Gallery.

Despite his leading administrative roles in the Association and subsequently in the combined Society – after his secretaryship he served on the Committee (dignified as ‘Council’ from 1891) of the SAS – Thorn does not seem to have contributed to the Society’s annual exhibitions, except by devising in 1887 an ingenious ‘Ready Picture Hanger’. Thorn’s strengths seem to have lain rather in the musical sphere: he played violoncello in trios from Boieldieu and Rossini, and performed songs and duets, as part of the musical entertainments that followed the addresses on the occasion of the annual exhibitions in 1887 and 1888. About this time, too, he was researching the lives of Charles Dibdin,⁹ the ‘great English song

⁶ Engraver and artist, age 35 in 1881, eldest brother of Frank (see below) and by 1901 a Superintendent at OS.

⁷ Original letter in *SAS*.

⁸ *Index to Births Oct-Nov-Dec 1850*. Age 30, unmarried, 8 Upper Dover Street (Census enumeration 4 April 1881). Married with two daughters by 1891 Census, when he was described as a Draughtsman at OS.

⁹ Henry G Thorn, *Charles Dibdin, one of Southampton’s sons; what he did for the nation, and what the nation has done for him*, Southampton: Geo. Buxey and London: Geo. Vickers. Price two-pence. 32pp. Preface is dated from 30 Lodge Road, 14 February 1888.

writer', and of John O'Keeffe,¹⁰ the Irish writer of farces and comic operas who 'added some of our finest English songs to the literature', praised Dibden's stage performances (DNB), and died in Southampton.

Thorn ceased to be listed as a subscriber to SAS by 1894, though surviving, with his wife, in the Southampton Directories until 1905.

The artistic talent in the Ordnance Survey, eulogised by Thorn in 1882,¹¹ was reiterated by the SAS president, Sir William Aitken F.R.S. The OS, he said, "may be regarded as a corps of artists. ... Many members of this Survey Corps, we know, are already distinguished as successful artists, and whose works have often adorned the walls of this gallery".¹² To exemplify this talent from an OS employee more artistically active than Thorn, I have chosen Henry Masters, who is of interest also as one of the few who had their names in the footnotes of an OS map.

Henry Masters was born at Sketty (Swansea) in 1835.¹³ He did not appear in the Southampton Directories until 1865, but he was in the 1861 Census, as unmarried and living with his older sister, at Alliance Place, Bevois Valley; his mother was the widow of a retired Commander R.N. Here, his occupation was given as a Draftsman, Ordnance Survey. In March 1863 he was one of eleven Hill Draftsmen, with 10 years 7 months service.¹⁴ He must have been well thought of, as, of the five draftsmen who had received an increase of salary within the last ten years, he was top of the figures at 4s. 6d. per day, though this will also reflect the low salary he would have had after only 7 months service – 2s. 6d. per day. He was still a Hill Draftsman, Ordnance Survey, in the 1871 and 1881 Censuses, but an engraver, O.S.O., in Cox's 1871 Directory: the skills could, no doubt, have much in common. He rose to Superintendent in the OS.¹⁵ His wife, whom he married in the early-mid 1860s, came from Sedbergh in the West Riding, a place we shall meet again, while his younger son, Sedgwick, had the name of a village only 15km away.

Masters's paintings were almost all water colours, and his subjects topographical; they ranged widely from Southampton and the New Forest, SE England generally, Derbyshire, North Wales, the West Riding, and the Lake District, to, after his retirement, Ireland. The 1978 Exhibition (see below) included a Southampton water colour of 1866, his earliest painting so far noted. In 1876-79 he exhibited five water colours at the Royal Society of British Artists in London;¹⁶ three others (only one is dated – 1879) were bought by the Southampton collector Robert Chipperfield and included in the 1911 Chipperfield Bequest

¹⁰ Henry G Thorn, *John O'Keeffe: a few particulars relating to one of the illustrious dead, in Southampton*. Reprinted (with additions) from the *Hampshire Independent* of January 26, 1889, Southampton: 'Hampshire Independent' Office. 11pp. Dated at end from 30, Lodge Road, 4 February, 1889. *Dibdin* and *O'Keeffe* are the only works by Thorn listed in the BM *General catalogue of printed books*.

¹¹ And a former Deputy Director in the OS commented to me a hundred years later: "There's a lot of hidden talent in the Ordnance Survey".

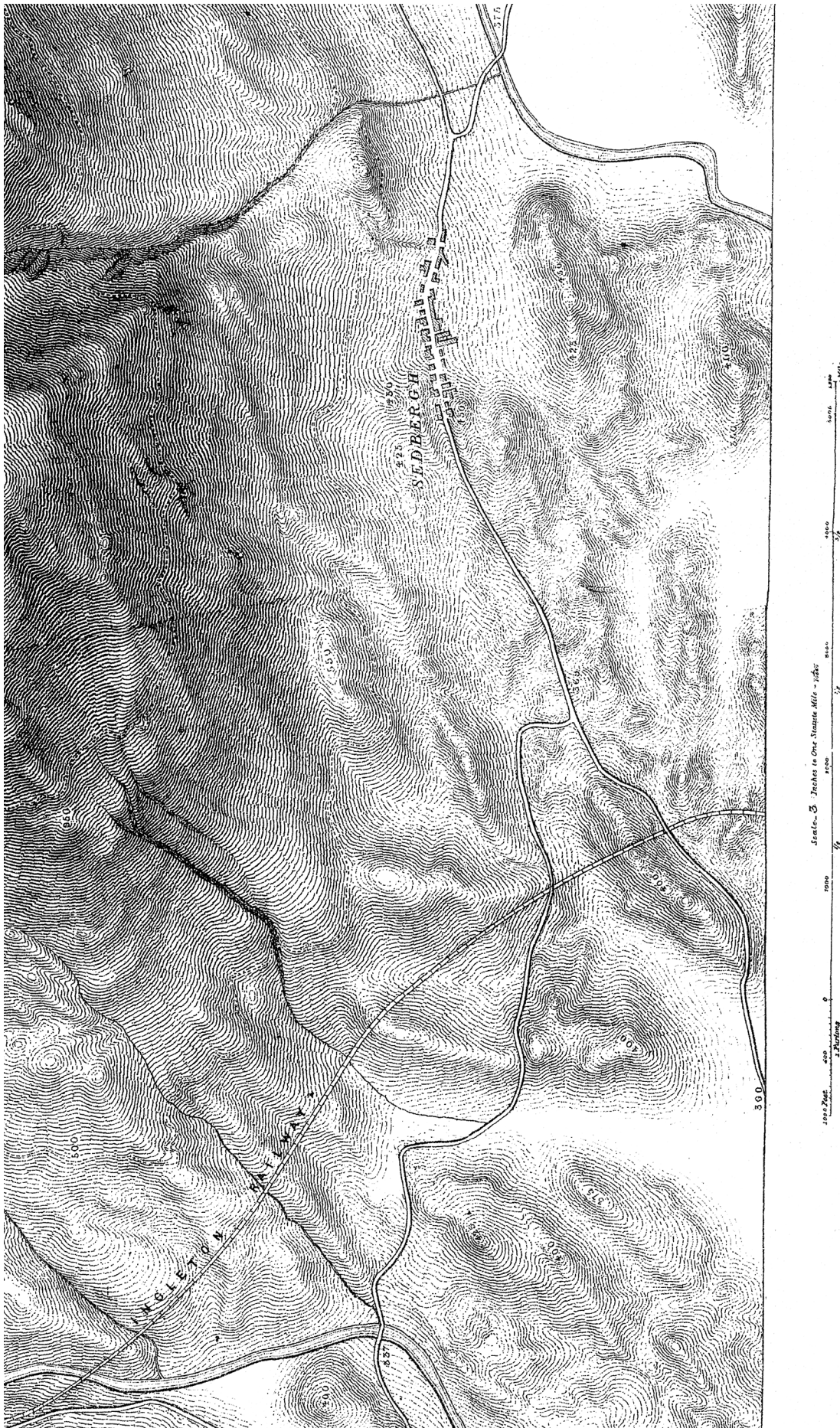
¹² Southampton Art Society, *Report of annual exhibition, 1890, and address by G. D. Leslie, Esq., R.A.*, reprinted from the 'Southampton Observer' of Saturday, 18 October 1890. In *SAS*: the passage quoted is on page 5.

¹³ As with most unreferenced genealogical information, this is derived from the Census Returns, on microfilm or microfiche, in Southampton Special Collections Library.

¹⁴ The full OS staff list in Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons 1863 (180) vol. XXXIII, 305ff, in Chadwyck-Healey microfiche 69.272. The return was signed by Henry James, 28 March 1863. There were nine civil and two R.E. Hill Draftsmen.

¹⁵ His dates, Superintendency at OS, and the 1978 Worthing exhibition (*infra*) are from 'Henry carefully labelled all his work', *Southampton Evening Echo*, 18 May 1978, 4.

¹⁶ Jane Johnson (compiler), *Works exhibited at the Royal Society of British Artists 1824-1893*, An Antique Collectors' Club Research Project, Vol. 1, 1975, 316.



Drawn by Henry Masters at the ORDNANCE SURVEY OFFICE, SOUTHAMPTON. Under the direction of Col. Sir Henry James R.E. F.R.S. M.A. & Superintendent. June 1864.

SKETCH OF GROUND From the FIELD SKETCHES of the ORDNANCE SURVEY OF YORKSHIRE & WESTMORLAND
Drawn by Henry Masters at the ORDNANCE SURVEY OFFICE, SOUTHAMPTON, ... June 1864.

that founded the Southampton Art Gallery: they are not on display.¹⁷ Masters was, as we have seen, a member of the OS Art Association, and thereafter a regular contributor – usually four paintings – to the SAS annual autumn exhibitions from at least the second in 1887 to 1911,¹⁸ his last exhibit, ‘Yorkshire Hills’, being shown posthumously in 1919. The prices of his paintings ranged from 2 guineas to £31 10s, with a median of £7 and only nine (out of 87) at 14 guineas or more.

These paintings earned fairly conventional comments such as ‘clean and effective’ (1887); ‘carefully painted’ (1888); ‘painstaking work, light and shade being one of the chief characteristics’ (1889); ‘accustomed careful treatment’ (1890); ‘execution is rather mechanical and they lack mystery’ (1892); ‘a trifle monotonous as to colour’ (1894). His skill at depicting water was praised several times. His one known oil painting, ‘On the Rawthey, Yorks.’ drew the judgment that his ‘oil paintings will, no doubt, with practice, equal his water colours’ (1891).¹⁹ An earlier water colour of the same title as this last was in the Chipperfield Collection,²⁰ but not in the Bequest.

Some of these remarks (the ‘light and shade’ has immediate resonances for the student of hachuring) are apposite too for the meticulous draftsman in 1864 of a model example of hill shading, entitled

SKETCH OF GROUND
From the FIELD SKETCHES of the
ORDNANCE SURVEY OF YORKSHIRE & WESTMORLAND
Drawn by Henry Masters at the ORDNANCE SURVEY OFFICE,
SOUTHAMPTON, ... June 1864.

Scale – Six Inches to One Statute Mile – $\frac{1}{10560}$

This employs horizontal hachures, through which the pecked 500ft contours thread their way, doubtless providing control for the alignment of the hachures. The overall effect is very close to that on the vertically-hachured Old Series sheet 98NE published the following October. The countryside is by no means as bleak as might be inferred from the sketch: field boundaries, and many roads and buildings, are omitted.

There is also a $\times \frac{1}{2}$ photographic reduction (which has been used for the accompanying extract) on which the scale statement reads

Scale – 3 Inches to One Statute Mile – $\frac{1}{10560}$

perhaps in the hope that the RF, only 2mm long, would be illegible. The *Sketch* covers an area about 4×5 miles – 23.8×30.8 inches on the full-scale version. A similar *Sketch of ground (Part of Barden Fell) W. Riding, Yorkshire*, Scale 6 Inches to a Mile, has no date or reference to OS or to the draftsman, and covers 2.4 sq. miles (8.15×10.62 inches).²¹ In so far

¹⁷ Southampton Art Gallery, *Southampton Art Gallery Collection: illustrated inventory of paintings, drawings and sculpture*, 1980. Accession nos. 390-392. They were not included in the Chipperfield *Catalogue* of c. 1885 (see n. 20).

¹⁸ Catalogues for 1886, 1910, 1912-18 not seen and, from the numeration, one of the war-time ones was not produced.

¹⁹ These comments are from Southampton Art Society, *Reports* of the annual exhibitions, reprinted from *Southampton Observer*, 14 October 1887, 2 November 1888, 19 & 26 October 1889, 18 October 1890; *Hampshire Advertiser*, 3 October 1891; and (not stated as reprinted) by Prof. J E Hodgson (1892), G D Leslie (1894). All at HSm, as note 1.

²⁰ RC [monogram at head of p.1; i.e. Robert Chipperfield], *Catalogue of original oil paintings & water colour drawings, at Redcliffe House, Southampton*, n.d. but pencil ‘Jan. 1885’ on first page, 3pp., University of Southampton Library, Cope Collection.

²¹ Lithographed copies of all three items are in the map library of the University of Southampton Geography Department. I am most grateful to the Curator, Mr John D Hurst, for access to these.

as these sketches were reproduced as guidelines for instructional purposes, as suggested by Richard Oliver, they do not apparently resemble the ‘Model of Hills’ of 1830, which seems to have been simply a scale of shading.²²

The 1864 extract does not portray the most accidented relief of the originals, as it has been selected to include the credit to H Masters, the town of Sedbergh, and the River Rawthey. The name ‘Sedbergh’ appears to be misaligned, but it is the neat line which is not parallel to the original county six-inch sheet lines.

The relationship between this *Sketch* and Masters’s private and artistic life provides scope for some speculations and possible future research. For example, was Masters strictly limited to office work, using original field sketches, or was the *Sketch* of such significance that it was felt he should gain personal knowledge of the area? If so, was it on such a field visit that he met his future wife, a native of Sedbergh? Or had he already visited the area and met his wife before 1864, and allowed this prior knowledge of the terrain to influence the selection of the area for his *Sketch of Ground*? Or was it after 1864 that he decided out of personal interest to visit the scene of his recent *Sketch*, and thus met his wife? We can be fairly sure, as hinted by the 1978 *Echo* article, that visits to his wife’s relatives were the occasion for paintings such as his early 1880s ‘On the Rawthey, Yorkshire’ and the similarly titled oil exhibited in 1891. (The rules of the SAS contained no requirement that works had to have been painted in the past year.)

His 1894 ‘The Rawthey at Marthwaite’ raises another point: Marthwaite is a vague area extending westwards from Sedbergh to the railway, and not named on the Old Series one-inch. However, Sheet 98 SE has a road bridge over the Rawthey, ‘Markthwaite [*sic*] New Br.’, a couple of miles downstream. This, although etymologically incorrect, sounds a more likely locale. (The bridge has changed its name twice – Rawthey Br on the One-inch Popular Edition, 1920, and Middleton Br on the Seventh Series at SD 630898.)

Masters’s last known painting of the area was ‘Salmon leap, Sedbergh’ 1905: there were four weirs near Sedbergh, but the most likely site is Lords’ Dub Loups,²³ where rocks outcrop in the river on the 275ft contour, 485m below the railway bridge, off the south edge of the *Sketch*. No paintings positively identifiable to the fells north of Sedbergh have been noted, but his titles are not always specific, and the record seen is incomplete.

An exhibition of 61 of Masters’s water colours was held in May 1978 by Martin Scadgell at his Crescent Galleries, Worthing. Many of these were presumably first exhibited by the SAS, but details are not known.

Masters moved house several times from the early 1860s, gradually upgrading from Bevois Town to (in 1890) a substantial house in Archers Road. Here, from about the time of his retirement from OS, he was listed in the Directories as ‘artist’ (1898). His sons were articled to a civil engineer and to a solicitor; the 1978 *Echo* report refers to a grandson, Stuart, of Burgess Road. Masters served the SAS on its Committee/Council from 1887, and as its chairman 1903-19, but he was also honorary secretary of Southampton Art Club, soon renamed Southampton Sketch Club, which continued until the Great War.²⁴ He died in 1919 at the age of 84, and is buried in Southampton.

²² J B Harley, introductory essay in *The Old Series Ordnance Survey maps of England and Wales*, vol IV, Lymington Castle: Harry Margary, 1986, xxviii.

²³ Six-inch Yorkshire, LXIII NE, 1910; SD 639911 on 1:25,000 OL19. Dub = a deep dark pool in river [immediately below the rocks]; loup is from Old Norse hlaup, ‘leap’.

²⁴ *Kelly’s Directories*, 1908-09 et seq.