

C a n t e r b u r y V i g n e t t e



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NICOLL

1886 - 1953

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Cover - Archibald Nicoll painting in his studio 1931

archibald **NICOLL**

Neil Roberts



Robert McDougall Art Gallery
for Christchurch City Council, Christchurch, New Zealand.

It has been more than forty years since the last exhibition dedicated to the work of Archibald Nicoll was held. Similarly, very little has been written on him since his death, despite the fact that his work is represented in most major public and private collections throughout New Zealand. It is hoped that this publication will, in part, address this unfortunate omission. One of the reasons for this neglect is that, over the years, his work was perceived to have lost currency against more contemporary tendencies in New Zealand painting. When such a narrow focus is abandoned and he is measured in the context of his time, Nicoll's high profile is sustainable.

Nicoll was very much schooled in the late nineteenth century traditions of realism and naturalism, fostered in him early at Canterbury College School of Art by James Lawson Balfour and Sydney Lough Thompson. It is here that the roots of his stylistic direction can be found. Later, while in Edinburgh, this was modified when he came under the spell of the Velazquez tradition, then having much favour among Scottish figurative painters of the 1900s. He also greatly admired the 'Glasgow School' artists, particularly James Guthrie and Edward A. Walton. Nicoll met, and held in high regard, Frank Brangwyn and the American artist William Chase, whose work influenced him. But above all, observation of truth in both landscape painting and portraiture were fundamental to Nicoll. These were always firmly structured with much attention to tonal contrasts reinforced by his bold, sure, gestural brush marks.

In the 1947 Arts Year Book Nicoll described his purpose in painting thus; 'to set down selections of shapes and colours of objects seen in nature has for most of my life been a normal natural thing to do. One hopes always to be seeing (and feeling) more and better, and then getting something of it fixed in drawing or painting with what skill and cunning can be brought to the job. Some balance between the subjective and objective in terms of the means of expression (and quality of these) is what makes a good painting'¹



Looking Towards the Port Hills from Bryndwr. Oil on canvas board. Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery.

In the 1920s and 1930s Nicoll became Canterbury's most celebrated landscape painter and portraitist. His landscapes bore a simple, lyrical, naturalistic quality that gave a definition to the tones, colours and shapes special to Canterbury. From early in his career as an artist Nicoll preferred landscapes that gave him the greatest contrasts of light, such as at dusk, or the landscape under a mantle of winter snow. The latter had a special appeal and was repeated many times over the years, possibly also because of the unifying quality that could be achieved in the composition. Nicoll claimed that his concern with contrast began early. He stated 'I think that early training and inclination tended to an outlook based on contrast, while experience of life brings a realisation of the greater quality of unity'². Such unity he achieved equally well in portraiture in which, though mostly formal and slightly formularised, he was able to instil a simple, natural humanity in his sitters, whether they were a High Court Judge or a school caretaker.

By the late 1940s, although Nicoll's painting for some was, like many of his generation, beginning to be considered as conservative and even passé, he was still recognised as an honest, thorough painter of great integrity who had gained the admiration of a whole generation of artists and an enduring status in Canterbury art.

Neil Roberts

Curator



A F Nicoll

Early Years Christchurch 1886 - 1907

Archibald Frank Nicoll was born on 14 June 1886 at Lincoln, the youngest son of Alexander Nicoll, a farmer, and Eliza Pannett.³ Alexander (Alex) Nicoll had been born near Perth in Scotland in 1844 and Eliza Pannett in Sussex, England, in 1847. Both were from a farming background and they married at Lincoln in December 1877⁴. At the time of their marriage Alex Nicoll was running a small holding devoted to mixed farming. Over the years that followed Eliza gave birth to six children, of which Archibald was the fifth. Nicoll began his primary education at Springston District School in 1891⁵ and from an early age it was evident that he had an enthusiasm for drawing. He excelled in other subjects as well and in 1899, having reached the sixth standard, he was awarded a North Canterbury Education Board scholarship to attend Christchurch Boys' High School. This coincided with Alexander Nicoll's retirement to a smaller property at 48 Cobham Street, Spreydon. The Spreydon area was rural and made up of small farms. In later years Nicoll told of how he walked across paddocks on his daily journey to School.

During both 1900 and 1901 Nicoll attended Christchurch Boys' High School on a scholarship and was awarded a School Exhibition that enabled him to spend a year in 1902 in the fifth and lower sixth form.⁶ The proximity of the Christchurch Boys' High School to Canterbury College School of Art meant that art instruction was given by the Art School staff. In his first year at high school Nicoll had work selected for inclusion in the under 16 section of Home Industries at the Canterbury Jubilee Exhibition that opened in November 1900.

On leaving secondary school in 1902 he was obliged to seek employment and the following year he joined the staff of the Union Steamship Company Office at 116 Manchester Street as a junior clerk. His interest in art was strong and he continued to draw and paint in his spare time. Being keen to pursue this he enrolled in the evening class in the first term of 1905 at Canterbury College School of Art for one night each week.⁷ His tutor was James Lawson Balfour (1870 - 1964). In term two he did two nights with him and in term three one evening with Balfour and another with Sydney Lough Thompson (1877 - 1975). At the end of year examinations of 1905 Nicoll was awarded a Free Evening Scholarship and first prize for Head from Life in Monochrome⁸.

He became a working member of the Canterbury Society of Arts (CSA) in 1904 and had his first showing at a CSA Annual Exhibition in April of 1905 with 4 landscape paintings, mostly of the Sumner area. His painting, *Moonlight Sumner*, aroused much interest and gained for him the CSA Bronze Medal for a 'seascape in oils'. *The Lyttelton Times* described *Moonlight Sumner* as 'this clever little picture simply treated but full of feeling. The light hardly suggests diffusion enough but the picture is quite an impressive piece of work.'⁹ Nicoll also started showing his work beyond Christchurch and began exhibiting at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts (NZAFA) in Wellington in October of 1905. In February 1906 he resumed evening classes under a free scholarship for two nights in term one and two and three in the third term all with Sydney Lough Thompson. Among the 5 Canterbury landscapes that he exhibited at the CSA Annual Exhibition in April of 1906 the response in reviews was less enthusiastic and Nicoll came under criticism, particularly in *The Press*, for his treatment of colour. 'Mr A.F Nichol (sic) shows signs of considerable ability. His success however is marred somewhat by too violent colouring'¹⁰. This opinion was not generally supported and Nicoll received a better response for the work he exhibited at the New Zealand International Exhibition that opened in November of that year. In the Drawing and Painting section of Home Industries he was awarded a gold medal for Landscape in oils with his painting, *Tai Tapu*. Nicoll was similarly successful in his evening class studies at the School of Art and in the 1906 examinations was, for a second time, the recipient of the Evening Free Scholarship for Drawing from Life, which enabled him to continue his studies the following year¹¹. This was to be Nicoll's last and in 1907 he attended three nights each week, initially in term one with Sydney Thompson as tutor, and then in terms two and three with Robert Herdman Smith. His profile as a promising young Canterbury painter was growing and in June of 1907 *The Press*, in its review of the CSA Annual Exhibition, described Nicoll's painting *The Harbour Night* as; 'painted by a very promising young art student, and possessing plenty of atmosphere and depth of treatment'¹². The successful reception of his painting must have encouraged Nicoll that his career lay elsewhere, not with the Union Steamship Company. He had worked both in the Christchurch and Lyttelton offices and over time there would have been good prospects, but his natural inclination was to become a professional artist and in order to do that more advanced study was necessary. Toward the end of 1907 he was appointed to a teaching position at Elam School of Art and Design in Auckland. Before taking up this position he travelled to Australia and spent several weeks in Sydney and Melbourne sketching and painting during the summer of 1907/08. Several of the works from this trip were exhibited in 1908 at the CSA in March and many were among those exhibited with his first showing at the Auckland Society of Art in September.



Twilight Auckland Waterfront. Oil on canvas/board. Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery.

Auckland 1908 - 1910

Nicoll's appointment to the staff of Elam School of Art and Design as a full-time assistant master came at a time when the performance of its teaching staff was being challenged, as was its curriculum, which did not include full life classes. This was fiercely defended by the then Director of the School, E. W. Payton. Since 1888 the School had occupied cramped quarters in the Wellesley Street building that also housed the Municipal Office, Auckland Public Library and Auckland Art Gallery. Nicoll's appointment addressed one of the omissions in the course structure - that of an adequate life class programme, which included working from the nude, head and costume. During the three years that he was on the Elam staff he also taught Drawing and Painting from Antique, Still Life, Light and Shade, Free-hand and Model Drawing. While teaching at the School Nicoll continued his own art studies submitting work and taking the Board of Education art examinations of the Art and Science Department of South Kensington, London. He successfully gained an Art Class Teacher's Certificate in 1909 and in 1910 began studies in preparation for an Art Master's certificate. Nicoll was a popular teacher and among the students he taught and influenced were; Robert Johnson, Francis McCracken, Gerard K. Webber, Ivy Copeland, Ida Eise and John Weeks. Of these it was perhaps Weeks who had the most regard for Nicoll. At just 22 years Nicoll was a contemporary of most of his students and in 1909, when he was elected to the committee of the Auckland Society of Arts he was its youngest member.

Nicoll was also painting at every opportunity, having a studio in commercial buildings at 216 - 218 Karangahape Road above the premises of Herman B. Fisher, a jeweller. In 1908 and 1909 he continued to maintain his exhibiting profile in Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland. Among the works that he exhibited at the Auckland Society of Arts in 1908 was a study in oil of James Lawson Balfour, his former teacher in Christchurch. This was the first of many portraits that he was to exhibit over the years that followed. In 1909 he included his portrait of the Director of Elam, E W Payton. As with other landscape painters, Auckland Harbour with its changing weather, seasons and varying light conditions interested Nicoll, thus continuing his interest in the landscape. Twilight and sunset as subjects resulted in a number of paintings of Auckland Harbour at dusk, including *Twilight Auckland Harbour* (cat no 1).

In November 1910 Nicoll began exhibiting at the Otago Society of Arts Society's (OSA) Annual Exhibition with six works. Of the four landscapes of the environs of Auckland or paintings made on a recent visit to the Waikato, two were watercolours. The position that Nicoll had in Auckland made him acutely aware that he needed to gain more experience, and study overseas was necessary to achieve this. During 1910 his relationship with Payton deteriorated. Payton claimed that Nicoll's influence on the students was not to his liking. Of Nicoll, Payton stated in a report that



Edinburgh from Carlton Hill looking down Princess Street. Oil on board. Collection: Waikato Museum of Art and History.

'while his own work is very good, his strong mannerisms make him rather dangerous as a teacher of young students'¹³. As a result of this lack of confidence Nicoll agreed to resign at the end of the third term. He had managed to save £140 and made a decision to travel overseas. He returned to Christchurch briefly before booking a steerage passage on a steamer bound for Britain via Sydney, Melbourne, the Suez Canal and Naples early in 1911. There is the possibility, based on the paintings exhibited the following year in New Zealand, that Nicoll may have travelled first to Australia, spending time sketching in Sydney and Melbourne, before embarking for London. Among the paintings shown at the Auckland Society of Arts in May of 1912 were two watercolours of Sydney and an oil of Port Melbourne.

1911 - 1914 England and Scotland

After his arrival in London, Nicoll enrolled at the London County Council's Westminster School of Art, taking classes in life drawing, painting and anatomy. In 1911 there were several other expatriate artists in London that Nicoll knew, including Raymond McIntyre and James Lawson Balfour. William Orpen and Frank Brangwyn were two prominent artists in London that interested him. Nicoll paid Brangwyn a visit at his home at Temple Lodge, Hammersmith, but their first encounter was less than cordial. Many years later he recalled: 'I knocked on the door whereupon a large head with a bushy red beard was poked out of an upstairs window and shouted, "what the bloody hell do you want!"'¹⁴ The regard that Nicoll had for Brangwyn, however, was considerable and is evident stylistically in his work at this time.

Toward the end of 1911 Nicoll moved north to Scotland and was keen to study in Edinburgh where there was a strong life and portrait tradition. In January of 1912 he enrolled in the second term of the 1911 - 1912 session of the Edinburgh College of Art as a mature student. During the 1912-1913 session Nicoll was appointed to teach drawing part-time at the Murchiston Castle Junior School and in the Edinburgh Education Authority's Continuation Classes. He relinquished this position in 1913 when he was offered a teaching post at Edinburgh College of Art teaching evening classes. At this time the College had a policy of employing overseas artists as visiting tutors. In the 1913-14 session Nicoll began taking classes at the Royal Scottish Academy Life School, which had become part of the Edinburgh College of Art in 1906. It was in the same building in Lauriston Place and only differed in that it retained its own examiners. Through the time that Nicoll took classes at the Edinburgh College of Art and Royal Scottish Academy School his courses of study included Advanced Drawing, Painting, Anatomy, Elementary Modelling, and Etching. He also attended lectures given by William Strang (Demonstration Life Drawing), Campbell Mitchell (Teaching Method), Ernest Jackson (Lithography) Joseph Pennell (Etching) and Professor Blythe Webster¹⁵. There was a strong interest through many British colleges of art that



Regent's Arch Edinburgh. Etching. Collection: Nicoll Family.

students pursue some studies in graphic art, particularly etching, as it was perceived as being an important discipline in artist training. In 1912 Nicoll began making etchings developed from sketches made around Edinburgh, including *Regent's Arch Edinburgh* (cat no 2), many of which he later exhibited in New Zealand. Among the paintings that Nicoll made in 1912 were a number of landscapes of the environs of Edinburgh, Perth, and Inverness.

Nicoll's ability did not go unnoticed by the Royal Scottish Academy. In 1913 he was awarded the Chalmers Bursary, an award of £28. 00 for the best Painting from Life, and the Chalmers- Jervise Prize of £6.00 for Drawing from Life. The following year he was awarded the Maclaine-Watters medal given to the student with the best painting. In 1914 he was commended in the Chalmers Bursary and received the Keith prize of £9.00 awarded for the most meritorious student work with the painting, Spey Valley Inverness-shire. These awards must have relieved Nicoll's financial situation when his income from part-time teaching was small. It certainly took care of the College fees that were £6.00 per year and enabled him to travel. Nicoll began making trips to the continent during the summer of 1912, 1913 and 1914. He visited Brittany in France where his former teacher, Sydney Thompson, lived at Concarneau and also spent time sketching in Holland and Flanders as well as visiting many of the prominent galleries. He later developed studies made on these trips into paintings at his studio in Edinburgh. On his visit to Flanders in 1913 he spent some time in Bruges which he had visited the previous year. Bruges was then a favourite location for British students. Among the works



that Nicoll painted following this visit was *Marché aux Fruits, Bruges* (cat no 5), which he completed during 1913. It was one of the works he sent back to Christchurch for inclusion in the 1914 CSA Annual Exhibition. This painting clearly indicates something of Nicoll's experimentation. Nicoll's use of a mosaic technique of brush strokes, stylistically, closely followed certain members of the Glasgow School, particularly E.A Hornel and Arthur Melville. It was not, however, appreciated by the reviewer for *The Lyttelton Times*, whose response was; 'His market place suffers from want of a dominant interest. When looking at the painting there is a feeling of unrest, caused by a want of response in the arrangement of tone'¹⁶. *The Press* responded in a similar vein but *Triad* magazine was more positive and supported the decision of the CSA Council to purchase this work for its permanent collection. Nicoll also continued to maintain an exhibiting profile in both Auckland and Wellington with Scottish and continental works. In Scotland he was also building a profile. In September 1913 he was elected a member of the Society of Scottish Artists, a distinction not easily attained, and began exhibiting that year with the Society, the Royal Glasgow Institute and the Royal Scottish Academy. In addition Nicoll showed with the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Watercolours. He also exhibited in England with the Manchester Art Society and at the 1913 Royal Academy Annual Exhibition where he exhibited just one painting, *Winter*. Nicoll continued exhibiting in 1914 at the Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh. At the end of the second term of 1914, after four years away, Nicoll decided to make a holiday visit back to New Zealand. He booked his passage, gave up his studio at 29 York Place and travelled south to London before departing for New Zealand. Nicoll was still at sea on 4 August 1914 when the news of the declaration of war with Germany was announced.

New Zealand and Overseas 1914 - 1920

Nicoll arrived back in Christchurch in early September and returned to live at his parents' home in Spreydon, where he immediately began plans to mount an exhibition of his most recent work. Meanwhile he exhibited nine etchings, including *Regent's Arch, Edinburgh* (cat no 2) and a number of sketches and drawings at the Arts Craft and Sketch Exhibition that opened on 1 October 1914 at the CSA Gallery. The reviews of this exhibition drew attention to Nicoll's etchings which were described by *The Lyttelton Times* as having 'a daintiness of line and crispness of execution that mark them out for special attention', especially *Ussher Hall Building by Night* which was praised for its 'boldness and dramatic effect'¹⁷. Within the catalogue of the Arts Craft and Sketch Exhibition was a full-page advertisement for Nicoll's forthcoming one-man show. This opened on 19 October at W. E. Simes' auction rooms at 144 Hereford Street. Nicoll had mustered more than 200 works for this exhibition, mostly paintings, pastel drawings and etchings made during the previous four years with the hope of raising sufficient funds to return to Scotland. One painting, *St Walberg's Church, Bruges* was set aside for sale, with the proceeds to go to the British and Belgian Relief Fund. The responses in reviews of the exhibition were positive, particularly in *The Sun*, which remarked on Nicoll's advance since travelling overseas. 'Mr Nicoll's European training has broadened his innate capacity for expression - he has been spoken of as a promising New Zealand artist'¹⁸.

Nicoll, having recently returned from Britain, was perhaps more conscious than most of the situation with Germany, but like many at that time thought that it would be resolved relatively quickly. However, the war escalated and the call for more New Zealand volunteers went out. On 9 December Nicoll enlisted with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force and two days later officially commenced duty. He and his fiancée had plans to marry and before commencing training in the Field Artillery unit at Trentham Military camp they were married on 14 December at St Phillips Mission Hall, Beckenham¹⁹. Nicoll's wife, Ellen Ethel Fearn (1887 – 1967), was born in Blenheim, the only daughter of Mary (née Merson) and George Fearn, a stationmaster. At the time of the marriage Ellen lived with her widowed mother at 105 Colombo Street but travelled up to Wellington, staying with relatives, to be with Nicoll while he was in camp. Nicoll remained at Trentham Camp for the next six months and did not have a great deal of opportunity to paint new work other than sketch. Most of the paintings he exhibited at the CSA exhibition in March 1915 were Scottish landscapes and *The Sun* described him as 'a young artist who will go far. His work has a distinctive beauty of tone and atmosphere no matter what the subject may be'²⁰.

On 11 June 1915, after months at Trentham Camp, Nicoll, having been made corporal in the Howitzer Ammunition Column, embarked on a troop ship with others of the 4th Reinforcements of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force for service overseas. Initially during his overseas war service Nicoll spent nine months in Egypt in further training during which time he had the opportunity, while on leave in Cairo, to sketch and paint. A number of these were sent back to New Zealand for exhibition at the CSA but were not given much press attention as they were mostly watercolours. By early 1916 the demand for more troops on the western front had increased and the New Zealand Divisional Ammunition Column was mobilised to France. Nicoll embarked for France at Alexandria on HMT Haverford on 8 April 1916, bound for Marseilles²¹. Within a fortnight of disembarking there he developed pharyngitis and was hospitalised at the Number 2 Australian General Hospital at Mousset for eight days. He then returned to the ANZAC base. Over that next two months Nicoll was permitted to attend life classes at the Municipal School of Arts in Marseilles, but time was short, and on the 20 August he rejoined his unit in the field for the second offensive in the Battle of the Somme. By now Nicoll had, at his own request, reverted to the ranks.²² It was during the action of his division on 24 September 1916 that Nicoll received a severe wound that shattered the bones in his right leg. After treatment at a field dressing station he was transferred to a General hospital near Rouen where he was classified as seriously ill. On 11 October he was transferred to England on the hospital ship 'Asturias' and admitted to the NZ General Hospital at Brockenhurst where his leg was amputated at the thigh on 13 October 1916. Nicoll remained on the seriously ill list until 10 January 1917. Being declared unfit for any further military duty on 21st of January, he was then transferred to the New Zealand convalescent hospital at Hawkechurch, then on 2 May to the NZ General Hospital at Walton-on-Thames, followed by a transfer on the 11 June to Her Majesty the Queen Memorial Hospital at Rockhampton for the fitting of an artificial limb. He returned to the Hospital at Walton-on-Thames on 12 July

and two weeks later was discharged to go on sick leave furlough. On 6 September he returned to Walton-on-Thames hospital for a further month after which, on 12 October, he was sent to the Discharge Depot at Torquay to await transport home to New Zealand.

During the 12 months that he had been convalescing in the south of England he had maintained a steady output of drawings and paintings that he continued to send back to New Zealand. He also took the opportunity to visit as many exhibitions as he could in London. The works exhibited at the 1917 CSA Annual Exhibition in March did not include any of these. They were mostly watercolours of Egypt, which again aroused limited comment from the press. Later in 1917 some of Nicoll's English works were included among those shown at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts in Wellington and at the OSA in Dunedin. On 10 January 1918 Nicoll finally embarked for New Zealand from Plymouth on the 'Arawa'²⁵.

New Zealand 1918 - 1932

By early March Nicoll was back in New Zealand and was reunited with his wife who had spent the war living in Wellington with her relative George H Fearn at 121 Ohiro Road, Brooklyn and Nicoll joined her there. Soon after they moved to rent a house at 221 Happy Valley Road. The prospect of a permanent teaching employment was not good, but he did manage to secure a full-time relieving position, at Wellington Technical College formerly occupied by Vivian Smith who was on active service. Somewhat ironically, Nicoll's position at Edinburgh College of Art was being kept open and he was still being listed in their prospectus as staff 'on military service'. Although Nicoll had the inclination, he did not have the means to return with his wife to live in Scotland. It was necessary to firmly re-establish himself in New Zealand if he was to have any future serious prospects as a professional artist. Hence he set about establishing a studio in a Wellington commercial building and became more closely involved with the New Zealand Academy of Fine Art (NZAFA). Among the works that Nicoll exhibited at the NZAFA in 1918 the one that aroused the most interest was *The Citadel Cairo* (cat no 8) which the Academy Council selected and purchased for its collection. Following the opening of its annual exhibition he delivered a lecture on New Zealand artists living abroad²⁴.

Nicoll's skill as a portrait painter was quickly recognised and in 1918 he began receiving both private and corporate commissions. One of the first was for a portrait of James McDonald, then assistant Director of the Dominion Museum. McDonald, also an artist, was a sympathetic subject. When shown at the CSA Annual Exhibition in April 1919 it was praised by *The Press* reviewer as being 'full of character' and showing 'the artist's skill in brushwork'²⁵. Early in 1919 Nicoll was elected to the council of the Academy. Other members included artists Walter Bowring, Nugent Welch and Dorothy Kate Richmond. One of the principal topics of discussion at this time was about the establishment of a National Art Gallery Museum and War Memorial and it was one of Nicoll's first encounters with art politics.

Nicoll had always realised that his position at Wellington Technical College was temporary and on 28 August 1919 he was advised by the Wellington Technical Education Board that his employment would end on 30 September. There was no prospect of returning to Scotland, although his position at Edinburgh College of Art was being kept open. He had therefore to seek employment elsewhere. Nicoll was aware that the position of Director at Canterbury College School of Art, vacant since the departure of Robert Herdman Smith in 1917, was being advertised. He applied and was successful. The Canterbury College Board had previously only seriously considered overseas applicants for this position. Thus Nicoll's appointment was a major departure from this tradition and a considerable achievement for him, being the first New Zealand born artist to be appointed to head a New Zealand Art School.

As there had been no certainty that Nicoll would secure the position, he proceeded to line up as many 'bread and butter' portrait commissions as he could. It was his commitment to some of these that delayed him taking up his new position in Canterbury until 1 April 1920. One commission was from the New Zealand Government for a portrait of Lieutenant John Grant VC and there were also commissions from former students of the Otago Medical School to paint portraits of Doctors Daniel Colquhoun M.D., F.R.C.P. and William S. Roberts M.R.C.S. Nicoll travelled to Otago to carry these out.

The Art School in 1920 still had a number of staff from Nicoll's student days, among them Leonard Booth, Frederick Gurnsey and Cecil Kelly, but there were also more recent appointments like Richard Wallwork. As a painter Nicoll was keen to develop the Drawing and Painting Departments of the School and there is no question that under Nicoll's administration in the 1920s it grew, as did student numbers and its reputation. In March 1921 James Shelley, recently appointed Professor of Education at Canterbury College, wrote: 'Our hope for the future of art of the Dominion is justified by the thought that our students are being trained under so fine a brushman as A. F. Nicoll. Mr Nicoll's work demonstrates a capacity as a practising artist of a high order - a thing very necessary in a teacher who holds a post the purpose of which should be above all things inspirational'²⁶.

The demands on Nicoll at the School of Art were high and he was now a member of the CSA Council. He also established a studio in two of the rooms of Sydney Thompson's rambling house at 97 Cambridge Terrace that had a good south light in which to carry out the growing requests for portrait commissions. In the reviews of the 1922 CSA exhibition, in spite of the enthusiasm for Nicoll's recent work, there was comment on the time he had available to paint. The reviewer for *The Press* remarked; 'It is with Mr Nicoll we are afraid as with some other artist; he is so much engaged in teaching others to paint that he has little time for practice of his profession. That his time was not wasted is shown by the number of

young artists turned out by the School but one would like to see more work from his own brush'²⁷. Although he had limited time to paint there was no question that his regular exhibition presence in the art society exhibitions in the main centres had diminished, as he averaged between 8 and 10 works at each showing in the early 1920s with an average of 8 guineas for small landscapes. However, Nicoll was also including work done several years earlier. He was also developing paintings in the studio from sketches and studies made in Europe during 1913 and 1914. Of the eight paintings he exhibited at the 1923 CSA exhibition 4 were of Belgium or Concarneau in France, the most notable being *A Flemish Waterway* (cat no 10), which the CSA purchased for its permanent collection. Of this work the reviewer for *The Lyttelton Times*, Professor Shelley wrote; 'the prominent appeal in this picture, I think, is form, or form combined to constitute pattern. The tall shaft of the tree, its over arching mass of foliage, the lovely cloud form, the bridge, the canal, the suavely rolling meadow, each so beautiful, all are beautifully blended to form a composition firm, serene and supremely decorative. The human and the lyric appeal are not wanting – the sense of completeness and beauty make this picture one of the most remarkable that we have on our walls'²⁸.

Among the portraits that Nicoll was commissioned to do and completed in 1923 was one of C E Bevan- Brown (cat no 11), headmaster of Christchurch Boys' High School for forty years and its head when Nicoll was a pupil. When exhibited the following year at the CSA it attracted particular notice, even though the recent return of Sydney Thompson to Christchurch had eclipsed almost every other artist. Of this portrait Professor Shelley wrote in his review for *The Lyttelton Times*; 'one doubts whether it would be possible to find among portrait painters who rank in Great Britain corresponding with that of Mr Nicoll in New Zealand anyone who could paint with just that sympathy, that self suppression? Could Rothenstein for instance have painted that portrait? One doubts it'²⁹. In *The Press* the reviewer of the exhibition responded with; 'Mr Nicoll's striking portrait of Mr Bevan Brown is as fine a painting as we have ever welcomed to our walls'³⁰. Nicoll's landscape painting exhibited that year was mostly watercolour, likely because of pressure on his time, it was praised for its direct plein – air treatment. Among them were several done while on holiday in the summer of 1922/23 on the coast near Riverton, Southland.

During 1924 he completed several portraits including one of the art critic for *The Press*, Dr Lester, and Archbishop Churchill Julius (cat no 12). When these were first shown at the CSA Annual Exhibition in March 1925, Professor Shelley in his review waxed lyrical about both and of Nicoll he wrote; 'there are no tricks here- no advertising dodges about his painting - everything that comes from his brush is honestly seen and boldly set down, and behind it all there is a mind that is keen to weigh life's values, and withal a heart full of sympathy of man and nature. If these things are not so, the splendid portraits of his Grace the Archbishop and of Dr Lester could not have been painted'³¹. This ability that Nicoll had when painting formal portraits of men and women of high office, without any suggestion of pomposity or self importance, was a quality that he



achieved ahead of many of his contemporaries. Often it was the power of the personality of the sitter rather than the office that dominated. This was evidenced in the portraits of Justice Alpers, the politician Sir Francis Dillon Bell and Mr Harrington, caretaker at Canterbury College School of Art. When exhibited together they emerged as equals as studies of personality despite the difference in social status.

In the mid 1920s Nicoll's landscape work, though somewhat overshadowed by his portraiture, continued to be included in society exhibitions, and at the NZAFA. The landscape, *Winter*, was exhibited at the New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition in Dunedin 1925-26. In the summer of 1924-25 Nicoll had spent time at Timaru, painting around Caroline Bay, which began an association with the South Canterbury landscape that continued over the next 25 years. That same summer he began visiting Banks Peninsula, a locale that Nicoll painted in all its seasonal guises, perhaps more than any other Canterbury artist of his generation. After 1929 when he purchased his first car, he was able to visit more remote areas around Canterbury.

By 1926 Nicoll's profile as a New Zealand painter had risen considerably and, somewhat in recognition of this, in June of that year, the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts held a retrospective loan exhibition. The exhibition, comprising more than 100 works, included oil paintings, (landscapes and portraits), watercolours and etchings. Considered the most important exhibition of its kind to have been held in New Zealand up to that time, it was a rare gesture on the part of the Academy and a special tribute to Nicoll's achievements as an artist. The demands from portrait commissions for both male and female subjects increased in 1926 and 1927. Among the more distinctive female portraits that Nicoll worked on during visits to Wellington in 1927 was one of Lady Stout, wife of Sir Robert Stout, who he had painted some seven years earlier, and Miss Mary McLean, the recently retired headmistress of Wellington Girls' College. When Nicoll exhibited these and other works at the 1927 Art Society exhibitions around New Zealand there was a consistent disappointment that he was not showing landscape painting of more substantial size, but few would have fully understood the demands on Nicoll's time. Early in the third term of 1927 he made a decision to give up his position at the School of Art, even though he may have had some misgivings, to devote his time totally to painting.

On 18 October 1927 Nicoll tendered his resignation which was accepted at a meeting of the Board of Canterbury College early the following month. It became effective at the end of the first term of 1928. Over the eight years of Nicoll's directorship of Canterbury College School of Art it had moved from strength to strength building a reputation in art education that was second to none in New Zealand. A whole generation of artists that included; Rhona Haszard, James Cook, Ronald McKenzie, Cedric Savage and Ivy Fife had passed under Nicoll's influence. In 1926 the Board of Studies of the University of New Zealand had proposed a study course for a Diploma in Fine Arts. Although Canterbury University

College did not give approval for the award until 1929, the work done by Nicoll, and later Richard Wallwork, achieved success. His resignation raised expectations. In his remarks regarding Nicoll in *The Press*, Dr Lester reviewing the 1928 CSA Annual Exhibition, included an appeal for more landscape painting. 'It is to be hoped that now he is free from the responsibility of the Art School he will give us landscape on a much larger scale'³². By 1928 Nicoll was exhibiting widely at as many provincial art society exhibitions as possible including Wanganui, Nelson, South Canterbury plus in Australia with the New South Wales Society of Artists and as a member of the Australian Painter Etcher's Society.

Now that he no longer had the security of a regular salary he seized as many opportunities as he could to sell his work. That Nicoll was considered by many in 1928 to be the leading portrait painter in New Zealand is evidenced among the works he exhibited the following year. He was also exploring new ways of presenting his sitters and experimenting, particularly in the use of colour. In his review of the 1929 CSA Annual Exhibition, Professor Shelley wrote: 'The Freedom which Mr Nicoll has enjoyed since he relinquished the Directorship of the School of Art is reflected in his pictures. There seemed a danger that owing to pressure of work, he might be robbed of that tendency to experiment which every artist needs if he is to keep his work alive, and his portraits, however skilful they always were, becoming somewhat tiring in their sameness'³³. But Shelley continued to express his disappointment at not seeing more landscapes from Nicoll. 'We must almost lament that the claims of portraiture should rob us of the great landscapes that Nicoll could be giving'³⁴.

As involved as Nicoll was with portraiture he knew that he had special proven ability with the landscape. When, in 1930, he submitted work to the Royal Academy London it was a landscape, *Akaroa Road* that was selected and hung. The shift to a landscape focus in Nicoll's work about this time was in evidence at local annual exhibitions. In October 1930 the exhibition of fewer portraits at the NZAFA Annual Exhibition was lamented by a reviewer of the exhibition who wrote: 'Mr Archibald F Nicoll may disappoint us by sending no carefully painted portrait this year but is well represented by his landscapes, which will be much admired'³⁵. Among the paintings that Nicoll had worked on during 1930 and included in the Academy exhibition was *Becordel AD 1916* (cat no 16), a work in which Nicoll progressed an idea he had explored in an etching made many years earlier, based around his experience of witnessing the destruction of the village of Becordel in the Somme Valley, where in 1916, thousands of New Zealand soldiers lost their lives. This was, in a sense, a memorial statement to a war that Nicoll, through his own personal loss, carried with him every day of his life. After showing at the Academy the painting was exhibited at the Otago Art Society in late 1930, but was not shown at the CSA until March of 1932.

That year he also included a portrait of Sir George Harper, commissioned to be part of a series of distinguished Christchurch identities that would grace the walls of the new Robert McDougall Art Gallery. As Harper was Chairman of the Domain Board, which had assisted in gaining the site for the Gallery, it was appropriate that his portrait should be alongside that of Robert McDougall. The Harper portrait proved to be rather frustrating for Nicoll, not so much from the point of view of its painting, but the irritation of the sitter, who constantly tried to entertain Nicoll with accounts of his numerous conquests. At the end of one sitting, in frustration and unknown to Harper, Nicoll painted a large erect pink phallus rising from the elderly gentleman's trousers. It was some weeks before Nicoll resumed painting the portrait and in the interim the paint had hardened and he merely painted over the appendage rather than scrapping it back. Unfortunately it was never totally erased and in certain lights is still discernible today.

Another work that was shown in the same exhibition was a landscape, *Ashley Downs*, which drew little attention in Christchurch, but when in June Nicoll exhibited it in Auckland, it received high praise and gained for him the Bledisloe Medal. He was the first recipient of this award that had been suggested and financed by the then Governor General Lord Bledisloe, for the best painting of a New Zealand landscape in the Auckland Society's Annual Exhibition. At the NZAFA exhibition later in the year, his landscape, *Peninsula Winter* (cat no 17) aroused much interest and was purchased for the Academy's permanent collection, lifting his representation in that collection to four works, the most that he had in any New Zealand public collection at that time.



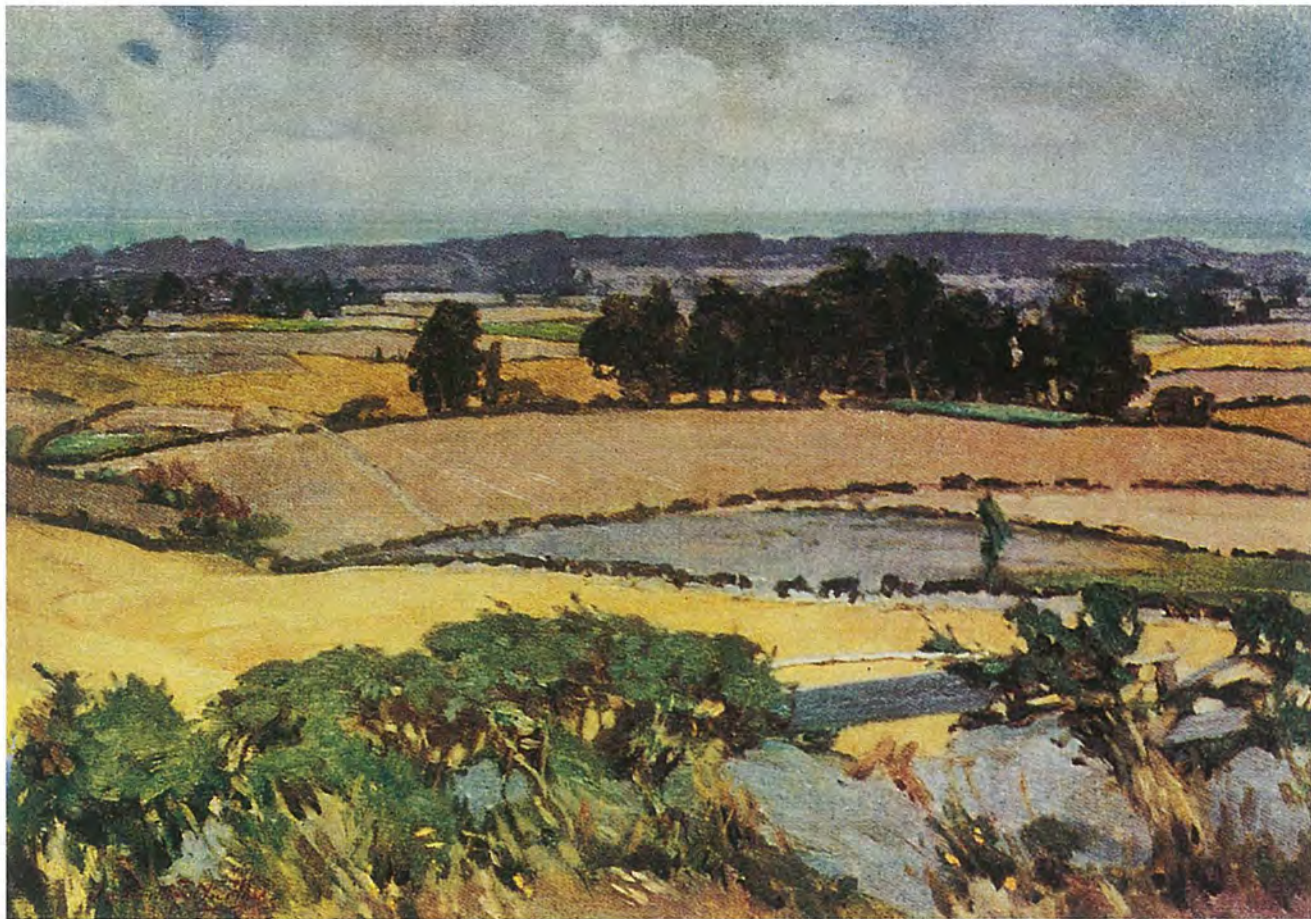
Sir George Harper, 1931. Oil on canvas. Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery.

Later Years 1933 - 1953

In the early 1930s, with the New Zealand economy in severe depression, all artists found it difficult to sell work and Nicoll, in spite of his standing, was no exception. He received some formal commissions, among them portraits of John Howell, Dr C. Bradshaw, Mr Justice Adams and Robert McDougall, benefactor of the new Art Gallery on whose Art Advisory Committee Nicoll was a key member. Nicoll found it necessary to broaden his sights more and accepted more commissions for informal portraits of children. In 1933 Nicoll's wife was pregnant. With the prospect of an addition to the family, he began thinking that he may have to return to teaching. The possibility of securing a position at the School of Art in the immediate future did not seem likely but during June of 1933, when Leonard Booth suffered a breakdown, Nicoll was asked by the then Director, Richard Wallwork, if he would relieve by taking Booth's life classes. Booth's position was initially kept open for him in his absence but when weeks turned into months it was decided by the Board of Canterbury College to terminate his employment and advertise his position. On 24 May 1934 Nicoll made his application for the position of Senior Life Master and was successful, taking up his appointment on 1 July of that year.³⁶ He returned to the staff of the Art School and a whole new generation of young student artists. When Nicoll exhibited his work at the CSA Annual Exhibition in 1934 the strong shift to the landscape was obvious. Of the eight works shown only one was a portrait. This was in contrast to five years earlier when of eight works exhibited only two were landscapes. The notices concerning this exhibition in both *The Press* and *The Christchurch Times* were respectful, but less than enthusiastic. In the following year Nicoll's *Rakaia Gorge* was considered to be the best landscape shown in the 1935 CSA Annual Exhibition.

In the late 1930s Nicoll regularly exhibited landscapes of the environs of rural Christchurch or South Canterbury, but fewer portraits. He was held in high esteem in the New Zealand art world, featuring regularly in *Art in New Zealand* and other publications. Early in 1939 he was a guest, along with other artists, in a series of talks on New Zealand art given on 3ZB. That same year the IBM Corporation Gallery of Science and Art presented Nicoll with a medal, an honorary award in what it described as, 'for a notable contribution to the Art of the World'.

There were two exhibitions connected with the New Zealand centennial celebrations of 1939. In the Centennial Exhibition of International Art Nicoll was represented by 7 works including *Farm near Harewood* (cat no 22). This opened at the National Gallery in Buckle Street, Wellington on 10 November 1939. A second exhibition, the National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art, opened at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery on 19 February 1940 before beginning its national tour. Nicoll was represented by two works, *Peninsula Winter* (cat no 17) and the portrait *G Harper Esq.* (cat no 19).



Ashley Downs c1931. Oil on canvas. Location unknown.

As early as 1918, when Nicoll had been on the Council of the NZAFA, he had been a strong supporter of the idea of a National Art Gallery and would have been pleased at its eventual realisation in 1936. Less than six years after opening it was obliged to close its doors because of World War II. In 1940 Nicoll was elected to the Committee of Management of the National Gallery and after the Japanese invasion of Singapore in February of 1942, the committee had to deal with the problem of the building being requisitioned and more than 1000 paintings being relocated. Many meetings were held and Nicoll travelled by overnight ferry to attend these.

With the war in the Pacific the appointment of a suitable War Artist became an issue. Approaches had been made to the New Zealand Government with little result but in March 1943 the issue began to be discussed further and the NZAFA nominated W. A. Sutton. This was also Nicoll's choice but the Government decided on either Russell Clark or Alan B Barns-Graham. Requiring a more expressive than pure factual view of war, Nicoll, then President of the CSA, when asked for his opinion, disagreed with what the Government felt was necessary in a War Artist stating; 'good plain statements are desired recording the surroundings and activities of the division in the field. I would emphasise that an incomparably better result will be achieved if the job is done from the inside, that is to say by a member of the force who has necessary qualifications rather than by an outsider'³⁷. In a sense this issue was one of many that would pit Nicoll, a firm traditionalist, against the rise of contemporary thinking, much of which he could not accept.

Until 1943 the disruption caused by the war had not effected the CSA seriously, but that year the army requisitioned both the Armagh and Durham Street Art Galleries and one of the problems faced by Nicoll and the CSA Council during his first term as President was finding a venue, not only for Annual Exhibitions, but to store their collection. J Ballantyne and Co came to the rescue. Nicoll maintained a high profile as an exhibitor and continued fulfilling the demand for formal portraits when the occasion arose. With the end to hostilities in 1945 and the return of younger artists from active service, Nicoll, then almost 60, decided to retire. It is likely that this would have occurred earlier had it not been for the war. During the past 11 years Nicoll had nurtured the development of a new generation of Canterbury painters that included; William A. Sutton, Owen Lee, John Knight, Paul Olds, Colin Wheeler, and Roy J. Dickison. As he had done in 1928, Nicoll could devote more time to his painting and, apart from continuing to serve on the Committee of Management of the National Gallery and being re-elected to the Council of the CSA, distraction from his painting was lessened. Immediately following WWII as had been the case in 1919, there was an interest in portraits of war heroes and Nicoll found himself painting a new generation of soldiers who had been awarded the Victoria Cross among them Charles Upham and Alfred Clive Hume (cat no 25). There was also a steady demand for portraits acknowledging the service of various individuals to teaching, the church, law and business communities. Nicoll's own contribution to New Zealand had been considerable and in 1946 his name was put forward to be considered for official recognition. It was supported and in the announcement of the King's Birthday Honours for 1947 Nicoll received the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire for his services to New Zealand Art.³⁸



Peninsula Winter c1932. Oil on canvas. Collection: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (B.041797).

Archibald Nicoll



That same year Frances Hodgkins died in England and the CSA Council was keen to bring a selection of her work to New Zealand for exhibition. Nicoll had greatly admired Hodgkins' early works and respected her as an artist but found it difficult to come to terms with her more recent paintings. When a controversy erupted over the purchase of *The Pleasure Garden*, Nicoll placed himself firmly with those in opposition to its acquisition for the Robert McDougall Art Gallery collection. He was, however, keen that the CSA should own a work by Frances Hodgkins and was instrumental in sourcing a privately owned watercolour, *Barn Picardy*, which the Society eventually purchased in 1951. Nicoll continued to exhibit at all the Society exhibitions around New Zealand into the early 1950s. He was also represented in the 1949 touring Canterbury Artists' Westland Exhibition and the Canterbury Centennial Living Artists Loan Exhibition of 1951. During 1950 he was commissioned to paint a portrait of David Crozier (cat no 28), founder of David Crozier Motors in Worcester Street. At that time Nicoll was about to give up his rented studio of 25 years at 97 Cambridge Terrace as Thompson had decided to sell the property. David Crozier, who had taken over Larges Rental Car premises, offered Nicoll space on the first floor and declined to charge him rent. It was in this studio that Nicoll painted some of his last portraits, among them James L. Hay, Alan E. Caddock, Sir Bernard Dawson KBE, Sir Wilfred Sim and R.L. Macalister. Macalister was Mayor of Wellington and Nicoll was in the process of completing his portrait when he died on 1 February 1953.³⁰ Many years after, one of his favourite pupils, Ivy Fife, described the essence of what Nicoll was. She said he was, good-natured, straightforward in his painting and very conscientious³⁰. To that could have been added words such as integrity and enthusiasm for art, equally as apt for one of Canterbury's most remarkable painters.

- 1 Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand No 3 p41
- 2 *ibid*
- 3 Certificate of birth 14 June 1886
- 4 Glenice (Eliza) Pannett and Alexander Nicoll were married 24 December 1877.
- 5 According to a North Canterbury Education Board Certificate 1899
- 6 Register of Enrolments, Christchurch Boys' High School 1900-1902
- 7 Register of Evening Classes, Canterbury College School of Art 1903-1907
- 8 Register of Scholarships and Prizes, Canterbury College School of Art
- 9 *The Lyttelton Times* 6 April 1905 p9.
- 10 *The Press* 16 April 1906 p2.
- 11 Quoted by J. Daly-Peoples, *Elam 1890-1990*, Auckland 1990 p4
- 12 *The Press* 3 June 1907 p4
- 13 *The Sun* 19 October 1914 p11
- 14 Reminiscences of W.A. Sutton, Blue book (unpaged) 1985, RMDAGA
- 15 A. F. Nicoll Curriculum vitae, April 1934
- 16 *The Lyttelton Times* 20 March 1914 p5
- 17 *The Lyttelton Times* 2 October 1914 p5.
- 18 *The Sun*
- 19 Certificate of Marriage
- 20 *The Sun* 19 March 1915 p6
- 21 Military Records of A. F. Nicoll 1914-1918 held by HQ NZDF, Wellington.
- 22 *ibid*
- 23 *ibid*
- 24 *The Press* 16 November 1918 p6
- 25 *The Press* 8 April 1919 p8
- 26 Report of the Canterbury University College 1920 p18
- 27 *The Press* 24 March 1922 p2
- 28 *The Lyttelton Times* 19 March 1923 p4
- 29 *The Lyttelton Times* 27 March 1924 p12
- 30 *The Press* 28 March 1924 p11
- 31 *The Lyttelton Times* 26 March 1925 p11
- 32 *The Press* 16 March 1928 p11
- 33 *The Lyttelton Times* 18 March 1929 p10
- 34 *ibid*
- 35 *The Press* 2 October 1930 p9
- 36 Annual Report of the Canterbury University College 1934 p29
- 37 *Art in New Zealand* No 52 June 1941 p168
- 38 *The Press* 12 June 1947 p8
- 39 Obituary, *The Press* 2 February 1947
- 40 *Ivy Fife Retrospective Catalogue*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1977. p1

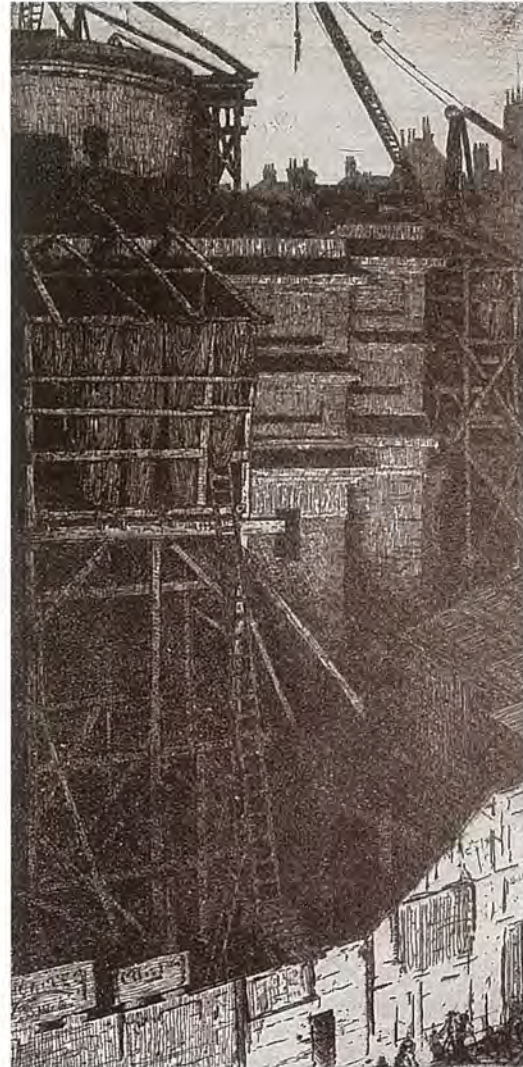
Archibald Nicoll



- 1 *Twilight Auckland Waterfront* 1909
Oil on canvas/board
219 x 302mm (sight)
Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 2 *Regent's Arch, Edinburgh* 1913
Etching (proof)
153 x 125mm
Collection: the Artist's family
- 3 *Edinburgh from Carlton Hill looking down Princess Street* 1913
Oil on board
193 x 275mm
Collection: Waikato Museum of Art and History Te Whare
Taonga o Waikato
- 4 *Breton Boy* 1913
Conté chalk
302 x 228mm
Collection: the Artist's family
- 5 *Fruit Market Bruges (Marché aux Fruits, Bruges)* 1913
Oil on canvas
798 x 980mm
Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 6 *Sailing craft (Concarneau)* c1913
Oil on board
191 x 280mm (sight)
Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 7 *In Cairo* 1918
Watercolour
218 x 288mm
Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 8 *The Citadel Cairo* 1918
Oil on canvas
812 x 997mm
Collection: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
Gift of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, 1936
- 9 *Sandhills* c 1919
Watercolour
542 x 706mm
Collection: Sarjeant Gallery Te Whare o Rehua Whanganui
- 10 *A Flemish Waterway* 1923
Oil on canvas
618 x 750mm (sight)
Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 11 *Portrait of C E Bevan Brown* 1923
Oil on canvas
700 x 720mm
Collection: Christchurch Boys' High School
- 12 *The Reverend Archbishop Julius* 1925
Oil on canvas
1160 x 970mm (framed)
The Anglican Diocese of Christchurch
- 13 *Steamer and Sunshades Caroline Bay* 1927
Oil on canvas/board
285 x 385mm
Collection: Dowse Art Museum
Gift of Mr & Mrs B. Webster
- 14 *Stanley's Field* c 1927
Oil on canvas
263 x 366mm
Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery

- 15 *Hilltop* c 1928
Oil on canvas
330 x 440mm
Collection: Christchurch Boy's High School
- 16 *Becordel AD 1916* 1930
Oil on canvas
675 x 893mm (sight)
Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 17 *Peninsula Winter* c 1932
Oil on canvas
642 x 824mm
Collection: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
- 18 *Portrait of William Menzies Gibb* 1932
Oil on canvas
904 x 704mm (sight)
Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 19 *Portrait of Sir George Harper* 1931
Oil on canvas
993 x 742mm (sight)
Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 20 *Portrait of Dr Bradshaw* c 1933
Oil on canvas
793 x 640mm (sight)
Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 21 *Wellington Harbour* 1936
Oil on canvas
880 x 1278mm
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
Gift of the Wellington Harbour Board, 1936
- 22 *Farm, near Harewood* 1939
Oil on canvas
292 x 393mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki collection
Purchased 1968
- 23 *Canterbury Winter* 1945
Oil on canvas
292 x 393mm
W.S. & Alison MacGibbon Collection, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury
- 24 *Akaroa* c1944
Pencil
237 x 350mm (sight)
Collection: the Artist's family
- 25 *Sergeant Alfred Clive Hulme VC* 1946
Oil on canvas
904 x 700mm (sight)
Collection: Suter Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatu
- 26 *Hawthornden Corner* 1949
Oil on canvas
450 x 599mm
Collection: Centre of Contemporary Art
- 27 *Portrait of a young man* 1950
Pastel
430 x 272mm
Collection: the Artist's family

- 28 *Portrait of David Crozier* 1950
 Oil on canvas
 619 x 509mm
 Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 29 *Looking towards the Port Hills from Bryndwr* c 1951
 Oil on canvas/board
 450 x 601mm (sight)
 Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 30 *Brooklands*
 Oil on board
 220 x 296mm (sight)
 Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 31 *Canterbury Farmland (Hay Stacks)*
 Oil on canvas
 350 x 520mm
 Collection: Christchurch Boys' High School
- 32 *Across the Valley*
 Watercolour
 251 x 346mm
 Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki collection.
 Purchased from Mrs Hilda O'Connor 1967



Building of Ussher Hall, 1913. Etching.

- 1886 Born 14 June son of Alex Nicoll and Eliza Nicoll (née Pannett)
- 1891 Commences education at Springston School
- 1899 Completes Primary education
Nicoll family moves to live in Christchurch
- 1900 Begins attending Christchurch Boys' High School
Has work included in the Canterbury Jubilee Exhibition
- 1902 Completes secondary education
- 1903 Commences working for the Union Steamship Company Office
- 1905 Begins attending evening classes at Canterbury College School of Art
Elected a working member of Canterbury Society of Arts
Begins exhibiting at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts
Awarded CSA bronze medal for landscape
- 1906 Awarded first prize, Head from Life Evening Class and Free studentship
Receives gold medal for Painting from Nature New Zealand
- 1907 International Exhibition
Awarded Life Class Free Scholarship
Visits Australia
- 1908 Appointed a full-time assistant art master, Elam School of Art and Design, Auckland
Becomes a working member of the Auckland Society of Arts
Address: 216 - 218 Karangahape Road
- 1909 Elected to the committee of the Auckland Society of Arts
Completes examinations for an Art Class Teacher's Certificate
- 1910 Resigns from Elam School of Art
Begins exhibiting with the Otago Society of Arts
- 1911 Travels to London
Attends Westminster Art School, London
- 1912 Enrolled at Royal Scottish Academy of Painting Sculpture and Architecture
- 1913 Attends Edinburgh School of Art. Joins Teaching Staff
Elected a member of the Institute Society of Scottish Artists
Elected a member of the Royal Scottish Academy
Begins exhibiting at the Royal Academy London
Rents studio - 133a George Street, Edinburgh
Visits Holland Belgium and France

- 1914 Awarded the Maclaine- Watters Medal and Keith Prize
 Exhibits *Valley of the Spey, Badenoc* at the Royal Scottish Academy
 Elected an Associate Member of the Royal Scottish Academy
 Address: 34 York Place Edinburgh
 Returns to New Zealand
 Enlists NZ Field Artillery
 First Solo Exhibition in Christchurch in October
 14 December marries Ellen Ethel Fearn
- 1915 Stationed in Egypt until June
- 1916 Begins active service in France. Wounded at Second Battle of the Somme, August. Right leg amputated at the thigh
- 1917 Convalescing in England
- 1918 Returns to New Zealand and is demobilised
 Joins the staff of Wellington Technical College
 Establishes a studio begins doing commission portraits
- 1919 Elected to the Council of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts
 Appointed Director of Canterbury College School of Art
- 1920 Begins as Director, Canterbury College School of Art
 Commissioned by the New Zealand Government to paint a portrait of Lieutenant John Grant VC
- 1921 First child stillborn
- 1922 Elected to the Council of the Canterbury Society of Arts
 Visits Riverton, Southland painting
- 1923 Starts working from studio at 97 Cambridge Terrace
- 1924 Paints portrait of Archbishop Churchill Julius (cat no 12)
- 1925 Exhibits at the New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition, Dunedin
 Begins regular visits to South Canterbury
- 1926 Retrospective Loan Exhibition held at the NZAFA Wellington
 Address: 324 Barrington Street
- 1927 October resigns as Director of Canterbury College School of Art
 Paints *Steamer and Sunshades - Caroline Bay* (cat no 13)
 Address 97 Cambridge Terrace
- 1928 Begins exhibiting with the Society of Painters and Etchers and Society of Artists Sydney
 June leaves position of Director of Canterbury College School of Art
 Address: 34 Massey Street

- 1929 Purchases first motor vehicle
- 1930 Exhibits *Akaroa Road* at the Royal Academy London
August is included in the New Zealand Graphic Art exhibition at Auckland Art Gallery
- 1931 Paints portrait of Sir George Harper (cat no 19)
- 1932 Awarded the Bledisloe Medal for Landscape painting
Elected to the Advisory Committee of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 1933 Resumes relief teaching at Canterbury College School of Art
Son, Robin Nicoll, born
- 1934 Reappointed to the teaching staff of Canterbury College School Art
Moves to live in a new architect designed house at 126 Riccarton Road
- 1936 Commissioned by the Wellington Harbour Board to paint *Wellington Harbour* (cat no 21).
Included in opening exhibition of the National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum.
- 1938 Included in an exhibition in Lincoln Hall in aid of Lincoln School
- 1939 Receives IBM Corporation Honorary Award, Gallery of Science and Art
For a notable contribution to the art of the World
Exhibits in the NZ Centennial Exhibition of International Art
Included in the touring National Centennial Exhibition of NZ Art
- 1940 Elected to the Committee of Management of National Art Gallery Wellington
- 1943 Elected President of Canterbury Society of Arts
- 1945 Retires from Canterbury University College School of Art
- 1946 Paints portraits of Charles Upham VC and Clive Hume VC
Exhibits at the Fine Arts and Crafts Exhibition, Timaru
- 1947 Awarded OBE for services to Art
- 1949 Included in the exhibition of Canterbury Artists toured to Westland and South Canterbury
- 1950 Moves studio to 67 Worcester Street
Paints portrait of David Crozier (cat no 28)
- 1951 Included in the Canterbury Centennial Living Canterbury Artists Loan Exhibition
- 1953 Dies 1 February and is cremated at Bromley Crematorium

- | | | | |
|------|--|------|--|
| 1918 | Mrs A.F.Nicoll
James MacDonald | 1931 | George Harper
William Menzies Gibb
John Howell |
| 1919 | Dr Daniel Colquhoun
Dr William S Roberts
Sir Robert Stout | 1932 | Mrs J.D. Familton of Oamaru |
| 1920 | Lieutenant John Grant VC | 1933 | Robert E. Mc Dougall
Dr C. Bradshaw
Mr Justice Adams |
| 1922 | Mrs John Anderson | 1934 | Dr C.F. Morkane
Harry Anderson |
| 1923 | C.E.Bevan-Brown
G.H.N. Helmore | 1935 | Miss B.Watt MA
Dr D.E. Hansen |
| 1924 | Reverend Archbishop Churchill Julius
Dr G.M.L. Lester | 1938 | Hon Sir Robert Heaton Rhodes |
| 1925 | Mr Justice Alpers
Mr Harrington
Hon Sir Francis Dillon Bell | 1940 | Sir Hugh Acland |
| 1926 | Miss M. McLean
George Pain J P
Lady Stout
George Jameson | 1941 | Mr George Lancaster |
| 1927 | Hon W. H. Triggs MLC
Dr H. Hardwicke- Smith
William Izard
Dr Charles Chilton | 1943 | Mr H.F. Nicoll |
| 1928 | Mrs H. Hardwicke-Smith
Judith, Daughter of G.T. Weston
Robert Hamilton
Sir Henry Wigram
C.K. Sams
Sir Henry Buckelton | 1944 | Lieutenant Hugh Mowbray Howard Tripp |
| 1929 | Mrs Kenneth Ballantyne
Lavinia, daughter of Geoffrey Hamilton
Lady Alice Fergusson | 1946 | Captain Charles Upham VC
Mr B.E.H. Whitcombe |
| 1930 | John Anderson
Derek, son of Geoffrey Hamilton | 1947 | Most Reverend Campbell West Watson DD
Charles Ogilvie
H.T.Tidswell J P
Bishop Bennett |
| | | 1948 | Hon Sir Robert Kennedy
J.P. MacKay |
| | | 1949 | H.H.Tocker MA |
| | | 1950 | David Crozier |
| | | 1951 | J.L.Hay OBE
Mr A.E. Craddick OBE |
| | | 1952 | Sir Bernard Dawson
Sir Wilfred Sim |
| | | 1953 | Mr R.L. Macalister, Mayor of Wellington |

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A.F. Nicoll Military Personnel Records New Zealand Expeditionary Force 1914 - 1918 (Personnel Records N.Z. Defence Force, Wellington)

Canterbury Society of Arts Minute Book III 1897-1907

Canterbury Society of Arts Minute Book IV 1907 -1917

Canterbury Society of Arts Minute Book V 1918 - 1937

Canterbury Society of Arts Minute Book VI 1937 - 1958 (RMAGL)

Abbreviations

RMAGL Robert McDougall Art Gallery Library

UCSFAL University of Canterbury School of Fine Art Library



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