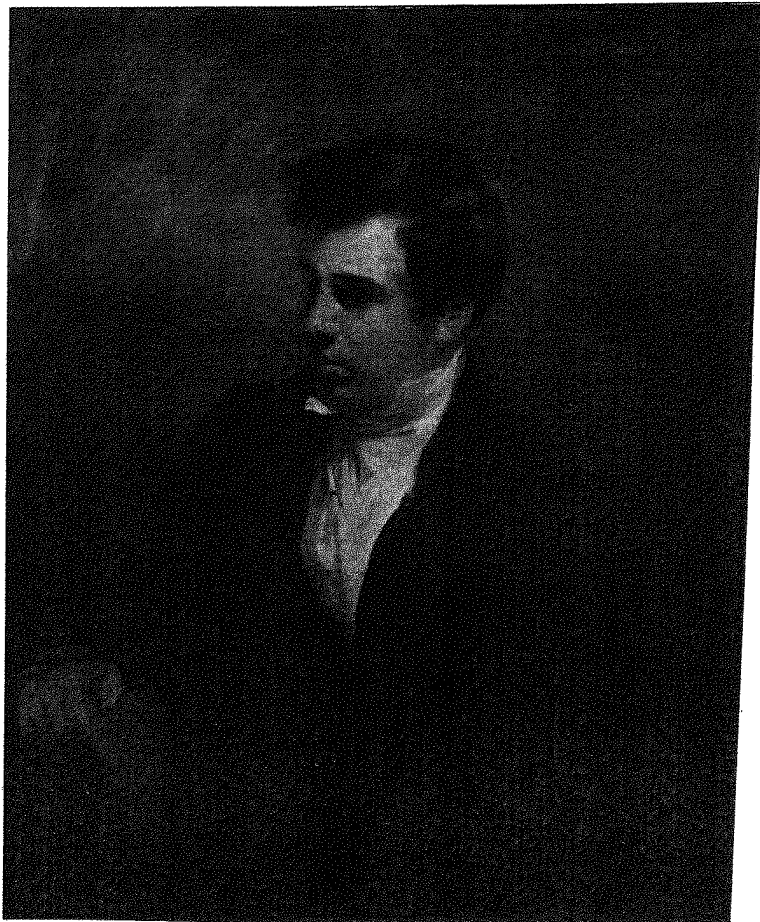


DAVID ROBERTS  
AND HIS INVOLVEMENT WITH THE ART  
INSTITUTIONS OF THE PERIOD  
ESPECIALLY  
THE ROYAL ACADEMY  
AS DESCRIBED IN HIS JOURNAL



DAVID ROBERTS AS A YOUNG MAN  
By R.S. LAUDER  
FAMILY COLLECTION

## SYNOPSIS

David Roberts was my great, great, great, great Grandfather and as such I have been brought up surrounded by good and varied examples of his work which have passed by descent from the artist and also from the Bicknell side of the family. Elhanon Bicknell, my great, great, great, great, great Grandfather had a great number of paintings by Roberts and he was one of the great art patrons of his day commissioning works from Turner, Etty, Landseer and others as well as his favourite artist, Roberts. Although most of his collection was sold in 1863 a great deal of the paintings by Roberts were bought back by his son, Henry. Although somewhat dilute in number many of these pictures are still scattered throughout the family.

As I grew up I learned to love these pictures more and more until a deep fascination of them grew upon me. What did not fascinate me however was the large collection of letters, books and journals in my Grandfather's library concerning David Roberts. It was not until his death that anyone realised the significance of this tatty and almost illegible journal mentioned by Ballantine in his Biography of David Roberts published in 1864. It was discovered by the leading authority on Roberts, Miss Helen Guiterman and identified as his 'lost' journal.

I have based my dissertation on this journal, none of which has been published before except for small articles on some of the references to Turner and Queen Victoria. The journal was written between 1850 and 1861 and can be divided into two categories - his upbringing and early

life written as memoires, and then as a diary of present day affairs. Clearly, judging by his writings, the events of the Royal Academy were very much on Roberts's mind as there are a great deal of references to it, along with the Royal Scottish Academy, Society of British Artists and others. It is this latter section which I have really limited my dissertation to as there is far too much in the journal to write about it all.

Roberts's life has been well documented in recent years and I feel there is no need to write about his dealings with the Academy that are not mentioned in the journal as that would simply be repetition of already published material. Practically everything in this dissertation is original and I hope it will help to shed further light on a painter of whom I have become very fond.

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## EARLY LIFE

David Roberts was born to a poor family. His Father was a cobbler and his mother took in washing to help make ends meet. However the young Roberts was soon recognised by his parents to be a 'natural genius' from his hours of sketching at night, close by his father's stool where he had the benefit of the lamp. In his journal Roberts recalls his early days when at

*"about eight years of age I was sent to a school in the town - my only recollection of which is that I was very cruelly used, and whipped, untill the skin was taken off my legs, as well as my fingers... this gave me no great liking for school - and on my expressing my determination to leave - it was resolved - I should learn a trade - having a 'soul above buttons' -for although my father gave me sundrie hints - about getting doon to the awls - as he expressed it - I somehow or other thought that I could do better"(1)*

As he had an obvious love for drawing, Roberts's Parents decided the obvious trade for their son was that of a painter. Some of his drawings were shown to Graham, the master of the Trustees Academy for the purpose of procuring him a place there. But on hearing how unable Roberts's parents were to keep him at the classes(2), Graham's advice was

*"as his parents are poor let him learn a trade by which he can get a living - if he is apprenticed to a painter he can still practise drawing and he will as a matter of course learn the practical part of the art - when out of his apprenticeship should his love of art continue he may then attend the Academy when he will be better able to profit by it - but either way he will have got the means of supporting himself which as an artist might be doubtful."*(3)

Hence Roberts spent the next seven years working as an assistant to Gavin Buego, a house painter. (4) During this time, Roberts got to know many of his brother apprentices who were also interested in painting and with Wully Mitchell and William Kidd set up a life academy with a donkey for a model. In the journal, Roberts writes

*"At last a great event arose - in addition to the Academy it was resolved to have an exhibition to our works - and a most respectable muster we made, Mitchell and Kidd took the lead - I had a large sea piece of the Battle of Trafalgar - and which made such an impression that I was henceforth dubbed the 'Young Vanderveldt.' This exhibition continued for three or four successive years!"*(5)

In 1818 Roberts eventually applied for admission to commence as a student of the Trustees Academy with Andrew Wilson as the Master. He had been at the Academy for one week when he received an offer to be a scene painter at the Theatre Royal in Glasgow, an offer which he accepted with gratitude. However while he was at the Academy he learnt one useful piece of advice...

*"I could draw I think well, as far as an outline - remember he (Wilson) said that in nature there is no outline - I never forgot it."*(6)

In 1920, shortly after the beginning of his scene painting career, Roberts was introduced to Clarkson Stanfield who he felt indebted to

*"for commencing seriously to start painting pictures, he himself during his visit, time enough to paint several, three of which were exhibited at the exhibition then on Regent Bridge. The same year, I also sent my first picture, and if anything could add to my previous mortification, this was rejected."*(7)

The following year, 1821 Roberts sent in three pictures in the hope that at least one was accepted. Much to his surprise all three were warmly received and two of them sold for 50s. each at the private view to Baron Clerk Rattery and James Stewart of Dunearn. (8)

In 1823 Roberts became one of the first members of the Society of British Artists. He was by then married to the beautiful daughter of a wealthy Highland family and had a newborn child. (9) His career started to take off and after his tours abroad, especially to the Holy Land he became a very successful and wealthy artist. All this is well chronicled in some of his other journals and has been widely written about and so there is no need to reproduce them here.

In 1838 he was elected as an Associate member of the Royal Academy and by 1841 was a full Royal Academician. In 1851, shortly after commencing this journal, he was elected to the council of the Academy and it is this period onwards that the bulk of his journal is concerned with.

ROBERTS AND THE ACADEMY

The president of the Academy at this time was Sir Charles Eastlake who was elected in 1850 upon the death of the previous president, Sir Martin Archer Shee. However for the last five years of his life, from about 1845 onwards Sir Martin had been too ill to carry out his official duties and George Jones, the resident keeper had been acting as president - a most unsatisfactory state of affairs.

In 1841, Sir Francis Chantrey R.A. had died leaving, on his wife's death, practically his entire estate to the Royal Academy. From this there was to be a salary of £300 to the president and £50 to the secretary. The rest of his money was to be used by the council of the Academy to purchase sculpture and paintings to be placed in the National Gallery.

Because Shee, who was not a rich man, was too ill to work he was left in a rather impecunious position. The council of the R.A. decided to vote him the £300 immediately from the Chantrey bequest even though they were not yet in possession of the money but Sir Martin refused, stating that

*"Although comparatively poor, he was too proud of the high honour conferred upon him by his professional brethren, to do that which had never hitherto been done - by previous presidents - to be paid for his services."*(10)

The council however, without consulting him passed the resolution and placed the amount at his bankers. Sir Martin then retired to Brighton where he lived for the last five years of his life.

In the summer of 1850 Roberts reports that he visited Shee twice when on his way to stay with his friend Elhanon Bicknell;

*"His joy was great to see me but how sadly changed! Still his bearing was that of the accomplished gentleman & president of the Royal Academy: although the feeble old man - & his conversation exclusively confined to his early recollections, his reception and leave taking was that of a monarch - from his conversation he had evidently been long prepared for that final change - which is delightful to find in all men - it very soon followed... As a public speaker; no artist of our time equaled him - as chairman & president of the Academy - his discretion and tact was such, that whilst commanding the respect of all - he was as playful as a child, without loosing, for a moment, that dignity belonging to it."*(11)

Roberts has just one or two other things to say about Sir Martin in his journal which are worth quoting. Eighteen months before Shee's death, Roberts tells us that no longer did he attend Academy meetings

*"Where he used to inflict upon us long speeches, the one half inarticulate & the other half so mystified, that when he had finished and sat down - neither he himself (I judge) - or anyone present, knew what he meant."* (12)

Despite this Roberts was obviously fond of the man and gave him much respect. The final mention of Sir Martin in this journal is when Roberts mentions that he had written to him, stating how concerned everyone was about his non appearance at the Academy. Two weeks after this, Shee appeared at Roberts's house and they spoke about the Academy. The last time he visited, as he got up to leave and;

"he stood by my table where I usually write, and putting his hand upon his breast, he said, "there is something wrong here, it is no use hiding it, but I feel here something is all wrong." I never saw him again - indeed I have every reason to believe this was the last time he was out - and that I was the last member of the Academy that ever saw him"(13)

"1851 May 19th. There are things of everyday occurrence that it may be as well to note down - as in connexion with the arts of this country. The Academy has and must take a very prominent lead & more particularly at the present time , things seem to be bearing upon some great changes in the reconstruction of this institution that has hitherto represented nearly the greater part of those most distinguished in art. From a veneration of its original founder some eighty years ago - there is, more than any other, desire not to change. It has very nearly remained the same from its first formation to the present time." (14)

Roberts goes on to explain about the workings of the Academy; that there are forty members who alone manage the entire affairs of the

Academy with twenty associate members who become R. A. on the decease of an Academician. There are also six associate engravers. Of the forty members there are always four sculptors and four architects, leaving thirty two painters. Ten form the council, the president and secretary being perpetual. (15)

The three newest members of the council have to act as hangers, with a fourth arranging the sculpture room. They are paid a guinea a day, have meals provided but it is a most arduous job and there is a lot of trust placed at the discretion of the hangers.

"Four days are generally allowed for what are called varnishing days, to the members, during these days breakfast and a most substantial lunch is provided, wines included. The cost of this I find amounts to some £120 - whither this is a fair or unfair advantage over non members, deponent sayeth not, But it affords an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the younger members which is essentially necessary, whilst at the same time it gives them the means of knowing the older and more experienced members which they might otherwise not so easily gain. The question remains Should this advantage be bought at such a price? The non member considers and justly the painting for four days on your picture is unfair - The query is were he a member would he not do the same. I am sorry to state of my own knowledge, most would, But my own experience, is this result - were it done away with, it would not only do away with a grievance, but it would be an advantage to the members themselves, as instead of trusting to the four days, at the Academy - They would send their works in a more

complete state, as the very painting upon their works in the exhibition is anything but satisfactory. I have reason to know that there is a strong feeling from the president downwards against it - not only from its injustice to others, but from the pernicious effects arising from it - Turner has ceased to exhibit - and with him it ought to cease, Callcotte was strongly opposed to it and if I remember right so was Wilkie."(16)

Later on in his journal, Roberts tells an interesting little tale to do with the hanging days at the Royal Academy. He was at a dinner party being given by a rather philanthropic old friend of his who was greatly interested in art and artists. This person was called General Phipps and dining with him that night, were amongst others, Turner and Constable.

"Constable, a conceited egotistic person, whatever Leslie may have written to the contrary - was loud in describing to all, the severe duties he had undergone in the hanging. According to his own account nothing could exceed his disinterestedness or anxiety to discharge that sacred duty. Most unfortunately for him, a picture of Turners had been displaced after the arrangement of the room in which it was placed. Turner opened upon him, like a ferret. It was evident to all present Turner detested him. Constable, like a culprit detected, wriggled, twisted & made it appear that in the removal of the picture he was only studying the best light or the best arrangement for Turner. The latter coming back invariably to the charge, yes, but why put your own there? Turner slew him without remorse. My own opinion of

*Constable may be mistaken, but he was not only an egotist in his own laudation, But what was far worse, he was abusive & not sparing of anyone else - a rare thing in a man of talent."*(17)

Roberts has more to say about Turner, especially to do with the contents of his will and the substantial impact of it on the Academy and the nation as well.

ROBERTS AND THE TURNER BEQUEST

"November 18th 1856

On Monday week, 20 of Turners pictures - out of the many bequeathed to the nation, was opened to public view and since then the public papers have teem'd with comments on these works & laudations of the great painter, But how utterly ignorant of the knowledge of the actual man... What were his intentions in bequeathing this property he had spent a life time acquiring? In consuls he left some £75,000 - a property at Twickenham, the House in Queen Ann Street, together with all pictures drawings and sketches together with 50 proof impressions of every engraving taken from his works - this he irrevocably made a condition, and few things gave him more anxiety than in an agreement entered into by my friend Mr. Bicknell (see Appendix) and himself - that the latter declined to comply with this exaction, first Mr. B. had purchased from him ten if not twelve pictures which form the features of his well known collection - what he gave for the whole I know not, but one I know, he has refused a very large sum for. He wished to add to these the Fighting Temeraire This he (Turner) would not part with. He (Bicknell) asked him to copy it - his reply was, he never made copies - would he allow it to be engraved? Yes, on conditions of £300 copyright. Once engraved Turner demanded his fifty impressions - ? It was not in the bond. Turner through me was most urgent that Mr. Bicknell would accent to it - the latter was stubborn & would not yield. I regretted it much as I was anxious for them to remain friends which with some difficulty on my part they did - with this exception I have every reason to believe that he has the impressions of every other engraving - but in what state time will show."(18)

Roberts then describes the contents of Turner's will which are very well known and there is no need to quote details. A quick summary reveals that all his works were to be left to the nation on the condition that within 10 years a fit and proper place be found for them. His cash was to go to building alms houses for impoverished oil painters, various other bequests and £50 annually for a dinner to his memory at the Royal Academy.

*In the meantime a person whose name I do not know I ever heard and I question even if the testator ever did? - put in a claim as the nearest of kin!! The executors handed it over to the Court of Chancery and after five years of litigation, the following compromise was proposed by the vice-chancellor & accepted on the part of the next of kin; all pictures, drawings & sketches to go to the nation, £20,000 towards the R. Academy, All other property to the next of kin. The alms houses are, like some of his works, a vision."*(19)

The pictures and drawings were placed with Sir Charles Eastlake who was by now also the president of the National Gallery. Eastlake placed about twenty or thirty of these pictures in the National Gallery, which was then Marlborough House. Roberts reports that most of these pictures were then varnished and regrets that some seriously deteriorated by so doing. This he decides is probably from Turner's use of painting with oil and watercolour together. One of their mutual patrons, Elhanon Bicknell had refused to purchase Turner's Whalers because he had used this method. Bicknell felt he was not getting value for money. When he was paying for an oil painting he wanted an

oil painting! Roberts's description of the state of two of the Turner's in the collection is quite interesting:

*"The Bay of Baie has lost all its silvery freshness - as also - the sharp crisp handling of the scroll ornaments on the fragments of marble scattered over the foreground. The Asphalt - which I believe he rarely used, now predominates to the destruction & harmony of the whole & what is worse, cracking in every part where it has been used. The Fall of Carthage is no longer the brilliant picture it was in his own gallery - the sky being heavy and brown, and intirely void of that luminous quality - which is the distinguishing character of his atmosphere. I have not examined it attentively enough to decide, but I also fear that parts of it may have been re-painted. (20)*

On January the 5th. 1857 Roberts received an official letter from Sir Charles Eastlake stating that owing to the illness of George Jones, would Roberts take his place and meet with Stanfield and Munro to examine the pictures that were in an unsatisfactory state. His reply was;

*"Command me any way that I can be useful, or show my regard for my old friend." (21)*

When Roberts met Stanfield and Munro, Munro seemed dissatisfied and informed Roberts that he was about to write to Sir Charles and decline accepting the honour offered. His reason was that as several of the principle pictures had already been varnished and placed in the

National Gallery and that he had been appointed as one of Turner's executives by the painter himself. All this considered, Munro felt that he should have been consulted much sooner before anything had been done to the works. Roberts replied that from what he knew of Eastlake, this step of Munro's would give him great pain and he begged Munro to reconsider, pointing out that he would serve Turner more by accepting the appointment than declining it.

Munro finally agreed, and so the three of them met with Eastlake, Vornum and Russell (22) at the beginning of December in the National Gallery. They decided that the four large watercolours and the thirty original drawings for his Liber Studiorum should be mounted and framed along with his drawings for Rivers in France. Once all this was decided they moved to the next room where the oils were being stored.

*"These certainly were in a very delapidated & filthy state. I do not remember at this time how many there were, but at least two-thirds were quite new to me; there were about thirty six large works - a portrait of the painter when a young man created much interest - on my expressing doubts as to the probability of some of his unfinished works being put in a state to be exhibited with the others, the cleaner Mr. Bentley was sent for. He took us up to his room to see how compleatly he revarnished up a magnificent work - Calais Pier - also a new work to me. Here we found in this room, The Napoleon & the Rock-Limpet together with two others which we all considered would be most injurious to his fame to place in a National Gallery with his other works." (23)*

However in the end of the day all the pictures were placed on display by the order of the Court of Chancery. After this insult to his opinion, Roberts refuses to have anything more to do with the hanging of the Turner pictures as do Stanfield and Munro. Roberts insists now that Eastlake must

*"go on as he has begun - on his own responsibility - and defend himself against Ruskin, Morris, More & Coningham, the usual assailers of the Directors of our National Gallery, as best he can. (24)*

Some years later (January 1859) the subject of Turners bequest comes up again at the Royal Academy and so Roberts asks Jones if he can read the will. Roberts's description of it makes interesting reading! ;

*"The will itself is dated 1831...there is afterwards added to it at different times three codicils, with sufficient blunders to raise fifty legal disputes. The first codicil materially alters the will itself - so does the second, and the third cancels the second...what he means by it would puzzle an Irish attorney! To write his own will is one of those absurdities that sometimes accompanies great minds - or he may have only intended this as an outline to be finished by the proper workmen at some future day. In the meantime - that ancient gentleman with the sythe and hourglass - overtakes -him - and before he can make up his mind shakes the last sand over him, as with many others, still putting off untill tomorrow that which ought to be done today - alas poor Turner, his statue for St. Pauls is now completed & in the clay by MacDowall - will the Dean Milman or Ruskin write his*

*epitaph? Ruskin calls Rembrandt a miser and a drunkard! What of this, his idol?(25)*

The final upshot of the bequest meant that the Royal Academy received the £20,000 specified. Although there was some internal disagreement as to how the money was to be spent, it was decided that it should be used to create £600 of interest pre annum. From this there should be six 'Turner gifts' of fifty pounds each to poor artists. The remaining £300 should be used to provide for the gold medal and other purposes not named. From the will, the Academy was also to receive £50 a year to have a dinner in his memory, to be held on Turner's birthday.

LAST YEARS

The next series of entries in the journal start at the beginning of May 1857, Roberts received a note from Sir Benjamin Hall, the chief Commissioner of Woods and Forests, requesting him to call in on him at Whitehall and that on doing so he was requested to sit on a committee to consider the 218 designs exhibiting in Westminster Hall and to award the various premiums. Roberts, wary as usual, replied that he would first need to know who his colleagues were going to be before he would say whether or not he would sit on the committee. He was given the following list; The Duke of Buccleuch was to represent the house of Lords, Mr. Sterling of Keir the Commons, William Burn on the part of the Architectural Institute, Brunel representing the Institute of Civil Engineers, The Earl of Stanhope and Lord Eversley, and Roberts was to represent the Royal Academy. One of these men, William Burn, Roberts knew as his deadly foe, after he exposed him publicly, in the Edinburgh papers for his gross ignorance of Gothic architecture when he restored the East window of Roslin Chapel. Burn had recreated this window four times the size that it should have been and in Roberts's opinion had destroyed the entire unity of the beautiful relic which he had painted so many times. The Prince consort was very keen that Roberts should serve on the committee, so against his better judgement Roberts accepted, knowing that Burn was going to cause trouble for him.

On the 12th. May they had their first meeting. Burns first move was to get his friend and patron, the Duke of Buccleuch appointed as chairman. This he did in the middle of Abingdon Street, before they had even managed to find the committee room. The next day an article appeared in the Leader, a rather influential paper, violently criticising the nomination of so many Scotsmen - four out of the seven including the chairman. Very nobley the Duke straight away tendered his resignation and went back to Scotland.

The first few meetings after this ran smoothly and they managed to choose around seventy of the paintings that were good and should be examined in more detail. However Burn soon became very troublesome to the whole committee and even refused to sign the report on a "frivolous pretext." In fact even though the committee was in the end after several resignations three-quarters made up of Scotsmen, out of the eighteen awards made, only one was to a Scot!

This is an example of how Roberts was plagued throughout his later life by people he had disagreements with and how carrying out his responsibilities became a grim duty.

After this there is a good deal of information on the removal of the Academy from Trafalgar Square. At this time they shared the same building with the National Gallery, however as the Gallery grew larger, the Academy had to move out as they had only 'borrowed' the rooms there. This must have placed Sir Charles Eastlake in a difficult position for he was the president of both institutions. However

Roberts does not imply that he did anything other than handle the situation well. Roberts reports some interesting details about the whole situation.

1858 Nov 12th. Lord Elcho carried out an enquirey into the affairs of the Academy, and by what rights they held possession of their present appartments, which were built at public expense to house a national gallery of pictures from those they held in Somerset house. By now the whole building was filled with the Angerstein, Vernon and soon the Sheepshanks collections. This left no room for the Academy itself. However, Roberts believed that if ordered out by the Government, they would make some arrangement for the maintainence of its schools and exhibitions;

*"For although the Academy are quite able to build, and many of its members wish we should do so, yet I confess I should regret to see it become a mere private society, instead of what it always, hitherto has been considered - a national institution, under the immediate control and guidance of the crown itself. With the single exception of these appartments we receive nothing from the Government. (26)"*

*"Nov 15th. For some time, perhaps more than twelve months, there has been sundry indications, of a very hostile feeling - on the part of certain members of the House of Commons, towards the Academy, more particularly towards the president..." (27)*

This was partly because many M.P.s regarded Eastlake's salary as excessive and partly because they thought that the Academy no longer fulfilled the purpose of its foundation and that it did not fairly represent the arts of the country.

Roberts then continues the ongoing argument against increasing the number of members but saying should they have increased premises then it would be a good idea to have a school for watercolourists. All this was pre-empted at a meeting of the General Assembly held in August when the president read a letter from the prime-minister, Lord Derby stating that the whole of the National Gallery would be required for the National Gallery. However he did consent that the Academy had a moral, if not legal right to replacement rooms.

When the fact that the Academy was in trouble reached public attention, they immediately received the offer of help from Copley's son, Lord Lyndhurst, who asked that the secretary should give him any documents relating to the Academy's claim so that he might be in full possession of the subject that he so wished to advocate. Roberts warns that;

*"Whatever occurs, we will have to make the public generally interested in our affairs - if only to stop the universal hostility of the public press - which influences & in a great measure - guides public opinion on the arts as in everything else - It will not do to fall back upon our dignity as we have hitherto done and ignore the Newspapers - by saying we know no such power - as I have heard again and again*

*repeated by old members...the mysterie by which we are surrounded, places us not only at a disadvantage - with the public generally - but with the whole of the press of this country...therefore a full and fair statement of its affairs, together with its means should be made public yearly."* (28)

1859 Feb 1st

Roberts tells us that *"last night a most important meeting was summoned together of the Academicians, to receive from the president, a statement of his interview with the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Dizzy) relating to the affairs of the Academy - Thirty members being present."* (29)

Eastlake tells the members that Disraeli told him;

*"it is the wish of H.M. Government, that you vacate the building you now hold, as early as possible; the whole of that building - being now required as was originally intended for the national pictures. But the Government, as an equivalent, for that you now hold - are redy to build for you on the site of Burlington House, one equally comodious - for your schools, exhibition room and Keepers appartments - you will have your choice, either the front facing Pall Mall or towards the back, called Burlington Gardens"* (30)

Eastlake then voices some doubts - would the Academy loose some of its freedom? would it be able to choose its own members and run its own

schools and exhibitions? Disraeli told Eastlake that yes, they would lose much of their freedom.

Eastlake informed the Chancellor that this would be unacceptable to his members. He proposes a plan - that the Academy should pay for the construction of a new building itself and therefore be free from any governmental ties.

The rest of the members unanimously agree to this and are left with the task of raising £120,000 (31) to pay for the construction of this new building. A committee is formed to carry out the task properly, consisting of Eastlake as president, Phillip Hardwick as treasurer, Charles Landseer as keeper, John Knight as secretary and Sir Charles Barry and C.R. Cockerell as architects.

In the meantime, as the Prince of Wales needed to take possession of Marlborough House where the Vernon and Turner collections were, the Academy was ordered to move into a temporary building at Kensington Gore which was being built for the Sheepshank collection.

*\*1859, Feb 10th.*

*Thus far all seems to go smooth, the next difficulty remaining with ourselves - which of the three R.A. are to build it (the new building)? The president says Hardwick expects it, my reply is - his state of health precludes it, he says it will give him renewed vigour; with his sons assistance, and that as treasurer he can cheque his own accounts which in another would be unpleasant - and finishes by*

stating you must ask Sir C. Barry to propose him, I say, had you not better do it yourself? as I know it will be opposed - we will soon see - This is far too serious a matter for friendship to stand in the way - on the other hand Barry made a great blunder in the lighting Bridgewater House and I cannot say architecturally speaking it is much to be admired. Cockerell is old and crutchety - but preferable to Hardwick; artistically the latter holds small place amongst his professional brethren. True he builds Goldsmiths Hall and Lincoln's Inn Hall, the former the less said about it the better and the latter; whatever is to be admired in it, owes to young Philips, a pupil of Blore, and a first rate man, as witness his Grand Entrance Hall to the Euston Square; N.W. Railway and his Great Western Hotel, Paddington: But it will not do - to set him over the head of Barry - an abler man - Much will be expected by the public at large and they have a right to expect it - as also from the architects themselves, as to what the new Academy is to be. At the same time a Government imbecile, Mr. Pennythorn is to have a hand in the pye - and were it to be designed by Paladio himself - supposing - he were alive, it will be riddled and shot at by every stickert architect and penny liner in the three kingdoms - Where honours are conferred on men as is the case with the R. Academicians. the new design should not only be a muddle of everything suitable, for the purposes of an academy of the Arts with its schools, lecture rooms and accomodation for its professors - but a standard of excellence in an architectural sense." (32)

It is Barry that is in fact chosen to build their new apartments, although he in fact died a year after starting the project

1860 Feb. 12th. Roberts reports that things at the Academy look unsettled since the Tories left office. Nothing more has been heard about the Academy having to move out, and they are just going to stay put and keep quiet in the hope that the new government will just forget about them.

*"1860 August 24th. I must state how vexed and disappointed I have been today at finding that a very pretty arraignment I had been concocting up all day - has been totally upset - I had just about finished my last picture for the season, and had looked out a canvas to paint the grand hall leading to the Academy - before its destruction when on my astonishment on going down, I found the Laocoon removed and Brancom's man in the act of sawing off the arm of the Great Hercules, whilst the entrance itself was blocked up with the prostrate figure of Flora."(33)*

The final realisation had come - they were being forced to move - and straightaway, before Roberts could even make his painting. There was a proposal in the Cornhill Magazine by Captain Foulk to add an additional story to the National Gallery so that the two organisations could continue to operate in the same building. This was a very ambitious plan and involved major reconstruction of the building. The Academy turned down this proposal because it felt that if more room was required by the National Gallery at a later date, then they would just be squeezeed out again.

In the long term, the move to Burlington House has obviously worked out well for the Academy but from what Roberts has to say there was obviously a great deal of harmful confusion at the time. Although one of the more forward thinking members of the Academy, he was fed up with all the bickering going on and wished that for the time being they could stay where they were. His wish was granted for he died suddenly, before any decision had been made!

FINAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE ACADEMY

*"Alas! Alas! - In all our desire to place at our head, the most learned of our body; the gentleman and scholar. We little thought that with this, we sold our birth right."*(34)

Roberts continues to talk about Eastlake; He stood well with the court, with Royalty and was the secretary to the Royal Commission. Roberts complains that he stripped poor Sir Martin Archer Shee of his £300 salary and took it himself when he had no need of the money as he received £700 a year for the decoration of the houses of parliament and £1000 p.a. as director of the National Gallery with a further £650 for travel expenses, making his total income £2,650 a year. (35)

*"How can he stand up for the ancient honour and dignity of the Academy?"* asks Roberts when he sticks by the ship that pays him the most - the National Gallery. He continues to tell us that the last two times he went to see the life classes at the Academy there were only four and two pupils respectively. Roberts proclaims *"the fact is the Academy is done as an institution for teaching art.* However he does confess that *"as an exhibition it never stood so high - as far as receipts go - this year being close upon £11,000 - the highest ever known."*(36)

Roberts must have been somewhat depressed when he wrote this for the next entry in the journal, a couple of months later he writes;

"In looking over the last page, This day Nov. 21st, I regret what I may have written at the moment, with regard to our president. for better or for worse he is by far the most suitable man in our body for the place, as a painter, he has done not much, but that little good, perhaps little originality - but exquisite refinement showing that he has studied the best and noblest standards of Arts - Still Eastlake has done and will be known by original works. His series of pictures, which I remember well being exhibited at the British Institution, of the adventures of an Italian Brigand, will ever hold him as an honour to the British school. But in all this woe's me for the R. Academy stands She where She did? I fear not, her schools are no longer what they were - are her members what they once were? It is no use disguising it, we are lookwarm and indifferent - there is no longer that fraternal brotherhood that formerly existed."(37)

Roberts continues to complain that the high prices being given for works of art makes the younger members saucy and pay little respect to their head. Eastlake is generally not popular and at a dinner of the Artists Benevolent Fund where he was president, none of the members rose with him to Toast the Royal Academy except Roberts. Eastlake is more of a reformer than any of the older members of his standing. Roberts feels that Eastlake would like to put the Academy on a broader and more lasting foundation, but as it is nothing happens and they are just delaying the evil day when they will be told that the whole of the present building will be required for the National Gallery

*That day is not far distant, or I am much mistaken. I believe that I am as much, if not more intimate with him than any other member - but at every attempt at advice he repels me, and to come to open enmity with one who is as the head of our body, the best would be foolish and so things go on, if nearly standing still may be termed so. (38)*

Compounded with his problems at work, earlier this year (1861), in June the one whom I dearly loved, one who has cost me sleepless nights and many a bitter tear" died. This was his wife, who as he says caused him a great deal of grief over the years but whom he obviously still deeply loved. Compounded with this his dearly beloved sister also died that year, just three months before. Some of this may explain why Roberts was feeling so depressed about the Academy.

*"In recording the deaths of the two, to whom I was morally and legally most bound - warns me that my own is fast approaching - I look around me and see those left of my contemporaries, not only sinking into the sere and yellow leaf - but by their infirmities fast hastening to that last and peaceful repose, to which all must come at last." (39)*

However my feeling is that Roberts, although preparing himself for death is not particularly looking forward to it! Much of his life was spent with a rather morbid outlook and latterly his wife's drinking problems had become extreme. The troubles at the Academy weighed heavily on his mind and he was not unhappy to leave the council, after giving it six years of his life. This is quite obvious from his description of his last time there:

*"On the last day of the old year, the old and new council of the Royal Academy, according to ancient custom, dined together, and I took my final leave of the R.A. with a lighter heart than I entered it. There are men who like to be in office and some who covet to be hangers - to me it is the most acute misery, to not only have to sit in judgement on my brethren - but to condemn - and send to perdition men of equally acute feelings as my own - some can do this without a pang, nay make a joke of it, yes laugh! It may seem strange but it is no less true, my connexion with the R.A. has ever been a source of pain and bitterness. The jack-in-office-pomposity of some of its functionaries - the selfishness of some - and the vanity of many - gives me little heart to be proud of our body."(40)*

Roberts continues in the same vein telling us that there are a few noble exceptions but they are getting few and far between as the older members die off. A new class of men has arisen - those who pride themselves in not being considered gentlemen.

A point in example is the secretary of the Academy and Roberts rightly feels that if you can't even trust him then the institution is fairly worthless. The incident occurred at a meeting of the council on 20th. April 1860. Roberts explains that once certain invitations to the annual dinner had been extended, every council member can invite a patron or someone else interested in art to dine with them. Roberts wished to nominate Mr. Duncan Dunbar the owner of a shipping line and someone who was wishing to form a gallery of modern art. Roberts

writes to inform Mr. Dunbar that he had been nominated and accepted by the council to attend the dinner but receives the following reply:

*"My Dear Sir,*

*I cannot express to you my thanks for your kind consideration in nominating me as your friend, at the dinner on the 5th. of May, at which I am justly proud.*

*The same post brought me a letter from our mutual friend Mr. Knight in which he says " I have nominated you for invitation to the Academy dinner a card for which will be forewarded to you this day." This has been done and I have accepted the invitation, as this last may be 'official' do you not think I had better leave your invite at your own disposal? Many of your friends will be glad of it and my feelings remain the same."(41)*

Roberts was rather taken aback by this as it made him appear to have stated an untruth when inviting Dunbar. Roberts wrote a rather stern letter to Knight stating that he was sure there must have been a mistake which he could no doubt explain so as to prevent the necessity of bringing the matter before council. Roberts showed this letter to Eastlake before sending it who thought it 'rather too strong' and suggested a toned down version which Roberts sent instead:

*"My Dear Knight,*

*I do not hesitate a moment in sending you the inclosed as I have no doubt that in the hurry of business there may have been some mistake*

*made which you can satisfactorily explain to Mr. Dunbar as well as to myself."*(42)

Knight took no notice of Roberts's letter and started to ridicule the whole matter. Roberts suffered in silence until he could take no more. At one council meeting he burst out:

*"It is well for you who have your whole eight pictures yearly placed in the very best positions, by your being constantly in the rooms, your nominating your friends yearly ( which no other member has ) to be asked to the dinner, and in fact to make the Academy as if it were your own - to chaf and make fun of everything and everyone, but very different with men like myself who come honestly to discharge a painful and most unpleasant duty."*(43)

Roberts confides in his journal, after this event they had an open, mutual dislike for each other and his consequent attendance at council meetings were now one of misery when they should have been otherwise. Knight in fact managed to then twist the whole affair round so that he made it look as if it was Roberts to blame by condemning himself. Roberts reports that Eastlake as usual tried to steer a middle course, delighted not to have to try and crush Knight himself. After Knight had admitted to Roberts that he had wronged, Roberts was the first to shake his hand and tell him that they should let bygones be bygones. He ponders over the fact that the Academy is a changing place and events like this would not have happened in the days of Howard,

Chantrey, Calcott and Wilkie. However after the event, Roberts is still not happy:

*"Finding myself as a member of the council in this very unpleasant position, knowing as I do that I had made myself a formidable enemy in the secretary, who would not be slow to take his revenge - I made my mind up to withdraw and at once tender my resignation, but before doing so consulted with Sir Charles. He begged I would not take such a step in our present state of our affairs as it would lead to its being brought before the general assembly of the the R.A. and if exposed might lead to his resignation - which at this time would be extremely embarrassing. In the meantime he would see him, and I promised to attend the council as usual.... At eight o' clock I took my place at the board - The moment I came in the secretary came round and embraced me stating - he wished our reconcilliation should be cordial and he did not wish to loose one of his oldest friends - after this what could be said? The business of the evening went on - and from the happy manner of the secretary , possibly he thinks here it all ends, But it gets noised abroad and that confidence that should exist between members - and one in so responsible a position of Mr. J.P.K. is shaken for ever."*(44)

Roberts finishes his journal, with the exception of a few family notes for his daughter with the following words;

*"Although proud of my title as Academician, I cannot add that I am proud of the Academy itself - We are behind our times - and in painter phraseology - not in keeping. (45)*

CONCLUSION

David Roberts was a very successful artist in his own right. Although Ruskin regarded his art as dangerous, second only to MacIise, Roberts did not take this to heart

*"as he is rather capricious in his likings and dislikings - some might take this as a compliment."*(46)

He attributes his success to a number of factors;

*"a certain amount of ability - that with fairplay, I feared no rival, this coupled with an unaccountable run of good luck, and I may add, I do not think that I ever gave a chance away - is all the secret of my being where I am - the same self-reliance, in any other man, would have made him what I am - an R.A."*(47)

Roberts felt duty bound to serve his fellow artists and that is when all the grief appears in his life. Although strong-willed, he was a sensitive man and would rather take the suffering himself than inflict it upon others. He did however often stand up for himself. A good example of this is when he was asked to exhibit at the Royal Scottish Academy and refused. He had his allies in this, as is clearly shown in a letter to him from D.R. Hay;

*"I met Lane the other day who was grumbling sadly that you had not contributed to the forthcoming exhibition at the R.S.A. But you are right not to make yourself too cheap here. The R.S.A. have seldom given your pictures the places they deserve, so the R.S.A. does not deserve to have them."*(48)

I regret that he led such a painful life, something which he stresses in his journal far more than any of his biographers do. Having said this, had he not, he probably would not have reached the status that he has.

In his journal he writes;

*"All this belongs to the sketch of a rather curious life - which someday may have an interest, if only to my descendents."*(49)

Indeed it has!

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 13
- 2 As his father aged he became little more than a shoe mender rather than maker, and Roberts was brought up in very poor surroundings
- 3 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 16
- 4 A job that he hated. Buego was cruel and tyrannical and Roberts longed for his apprenticeship to end.
- 5 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 22
- 6 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 32
- 7 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 40
- 8 He regarded these two as his first patrons
- 9 His wife was Margaret Maclauchlen, their daughter was Christen
- 10 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 51
- 11 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 52
- 12 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 96
- 13 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 97
- 14 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 49
- 15 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 64
- 16 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 65
- 17 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 99
- 18 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 67
- 19 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 94
- 20 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 102
- 21 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 103
- 22 The other members of the committee.
- 23 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 104
- 24 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 106

- 25 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 106
- 26 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 145
- 27 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 147
- 28 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 151
- 29 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 175
- 30 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 175
- 31 An enormous sum of money but the Academy was quite easily able to raise it from its vast profits
- 32 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 177
- 33 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 247
- 34 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 250
- 35 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 251
- 36 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 252
- 37 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 252
- 38 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 254
- 39 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 259
- 40 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 263
- 41 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 236
- 42 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 238
- 43 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 239
- 44 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 239
- 45 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 263
- 46 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 200
- 47 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 201
- 48 Letter from D. R. Hay to Roberts, Edinburgh 5th. Feb 1847  
In the family collection.
- 49 David Roberts' journal, 1850 - 1861, unpublished. page 201

APPENDIX

Elhanou Bicknell was one of Roberts' largest patrons. He had a good deal of pictures by many other contemporary artists. Recorded below is a list of some of his paintings sold by Christies in 1863 along with the price he paid for them and the price sold for.

PAINTING	BOUGHT gs.	SOLD gs.
Roberts - A street in Cairo	50	530
Roberts - The ruins of Baalbec	250	787
Turner - Wreckers	288	1984
Landseer - The Highland Shepherd	350	2341
Stanfield - Pic du midi D'osso	735	2677
Turner - Palestrina	1050	1995
Roberts - The interior of St. Gomar, Lierre	300	1438
Roberts - Interior of St. Miguel	105	598

The whole collection sold for £ 98,000

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### Unpublished Sources

- David Roberts' journal kept between 1850 and 1861, family collection
- various letters to and from Roberts, family collection,
- Many Christie's catalogues, especially the 1863 sale of Elhanon Bicknell's collection with annotations of prices obtained, to whom they were sold and the price Bicknell originally paid for them.