

460 words

Highgate Watercolour Group: A Conversation over Coffee
by Maureen Bocking

One morning recently a conversation sprang up between a few members of the Watercolour Group about our individual art backgrounds and how we came to be in this group. It occurred to me that most of us know little about each other beyond the environment of 10A on Thursday mornings. I offer a snippet of this interaction for those interested.

For instance, one member, Pam Meffan, told us about attending art school in the 1940's which incorporated general education and involved up to two years of drawing, both 'still life' and from 'the antique' at Byam Shaw. Pam thought that to draw in that way instilled a valuable training in observation but was otherwise 'useless' in getting a job! However, Pam persevered, attended night school at St Martins and Barnet College, eventually working at Aspreys, in Bond Street. Her art background proved useful after all.

Another member, Mary Williams, went to art school at the age of thirteen on a three year course. In the first year just one third of lessons were in art, progressing to a higher proportion of art to general study as time passed. Mary got a job in the studio of John Line and Sons Ltd. designing wallpaper, where she stayed for six years. Mary left to get married after which she travelled and taught art while living in Lagos.

I was accepted at Middlesex University on a Fine Art course as a mature student, aged 38. I then discovered that another of our group, Ruth Margolis, had also gone to the same college, previously Hornsey College of Art. We quickly got onto the subject of life drawing and the shock of having a naked man walk into the art room ready to pose, which for some of us young girls was startling! Ruth has fascinating stories about a number of now famous artists who were students along with her. (something for the next instalment?!)

I felt lucky to have been at the college when it was based in Ally Pally and my tutor was the well known and respected local artist, Richard Robbins. Both Ruth and I went on to teach art and I later trained and worked as an art therapist for over twenty years. I was left wondering how many art school graduates manage to find employment in the highly competitive world we now live in and how fortunate I was to qualify for a grant without which I could not have followed my chosen career. As for the time we spend painting together in the Highgate Watercolour Group, many of us are retired and from a wide range of professional lives but it is probably safe to say, all of us are passionate about art and love our group!

Maureen Bocking

