



From Munich to Highbury: Walter Sickert and the Sickert family collection in Islington

Islington Council's Walter Sickert family collection contains the paintings, drawings and etchings found in Sickert's studio at the time of his death, along with an archive of his photographs and personal papers.

Most of this material was deposited with Islington Libraries by the Sickert Trust (1947-1950) in recognition of the significance of Islington in the artist's life. The collection reflects Sickert's enduring reputation as an artist, writer, teacher and eccentric.

Sickert's Islington works are featured in this exhibition, which also shows other trademark subjects, including figure studies, music halls and the streets and buildings of Dieppe and London.

For the most part, these artworks are not finished works but they show how Sickert recorded his visual impressions in preparatory sketches that were the very source and foundation of his art.

The collection also includes paintings by members of Sickert's family and by his wife, Thérèse Lessore, and these too are displayed here.



Walter Sickert in 1923.



Walter Sickert. *Cicely Hey*. Etching. 1922-1924 (circa). 20 x 17.5 cm.



Walter Sickert's palette.

Walter Richard Sickert (1860–1942)

The Sickert family

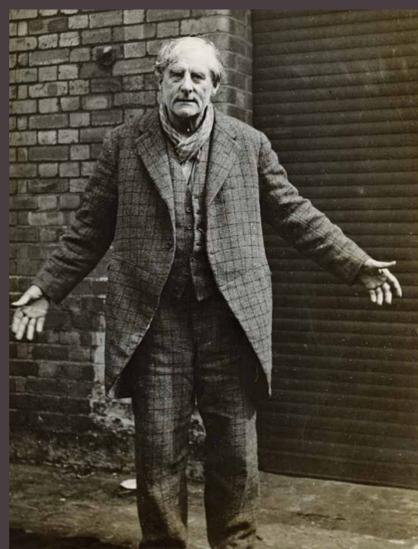
Walter Sickert was born in Munich on 31 May 1860. His father was Oswald Sickert, a Danish artist. His mother, Eleanor Henry, was the illegitimate daughter of an Irish dancer and an Englishman, Richard Sheepshanks, the Astronomer Royal.

Oswald and Eleanor Sickert married in 1859 and Walter Sickert was the first of their six children. The family moved to England in 1868.

From acting to art

Sickert initially pursued a career in acting and played several minor roles between 1879 and 1881. He gave up acting to join the Slade School of Fine Art in October 1881 but left after a few months to become an apprentice to the artist James McNeill Whistler.

As a late Victorian painter, Sickert first became known as an English Impressionist. However, his long career spanned many phases in British art and he is acknowledged as a major influence on the work of twentieth century artists.



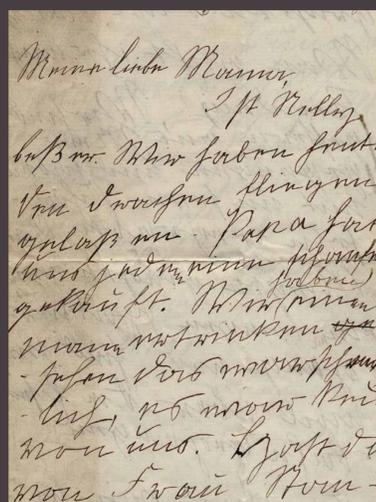
Walter Sickert outside his Camden Road studio, c1933.



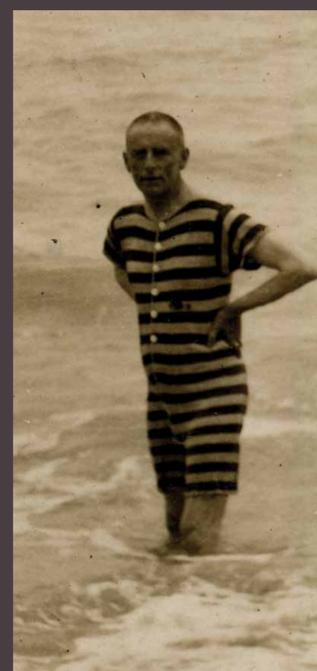
Walter Sickert and Thérèse Lessore, 1930s.



Sickert at the Bath School of Art, probably photographed during his final lectures in 1939.



Letter from Walter Sickert to his mother, c1870. His writing is difficult to decipher - his mother said that he wrote "such affectionate letters in such vile German".



Walter Sickert in Dieppe, August 1920.

Travel and marriage

Sickert travelled and moved frequently during his life. He spent time working amongst fellow artists in Dieppe and the English community in Venice. He also took various residences in England, especially London, and lived and worked in Islington during the 1920s and 1930s.

He married three times, firstly in 1885 to Ellen Cobden, daughter of the radical MP Richard Cobden. They divorced in 1899. His second marriage, to Christine Angus, an art pupil, lasted from 1911 until her death in 1920. He married his third wife, the painter Thérèse Lessore, in 1926.

Sickert and Lessore lived in Bathampton, near Bath, at the time of his death on 22 January 1942.

A sinister reputation

In recent years, Sickert has become notorious as a suspect for the 'Jack the Ripper' murders. These claims, however, have been widely discredited.

Sickert

The work of Walter Sickert

Early influences

As Whistler's apprentice, Sickert learned to paint from life but he was soon influenced by the work of Edgar Degas, who painted in the studio from rough sketches. Sickert learned from him the technique of using a grid to enlarge an image onto canvas.

He was also inspired by the dark, urban themes of Degas' work and began to paint scenes of bawdy music halls. As an early member of the New English Art Club – founded in 1886 to challenge the conservative Royal Academy of Arts – Sickert gained a reputation as one of the 'London impressionists'.

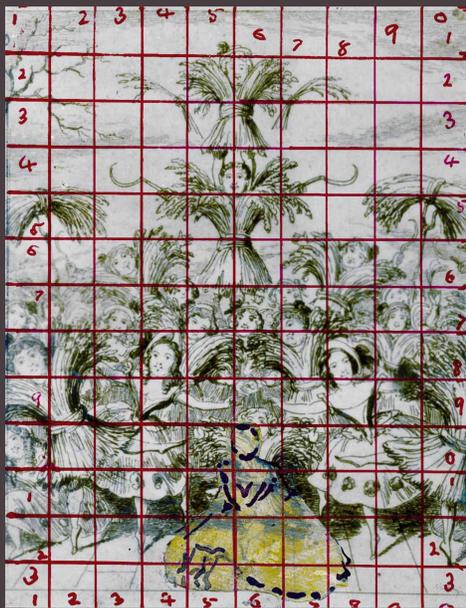
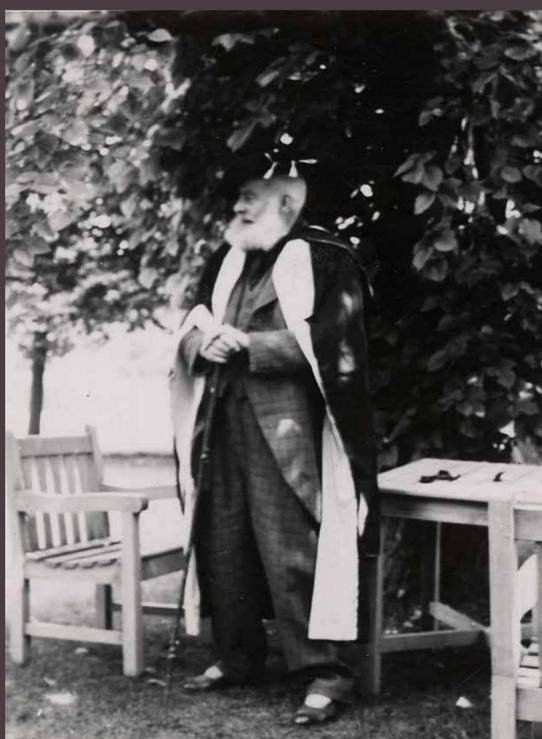


Illustration squared up by Sickert to be enlarged as a sketch or painting.



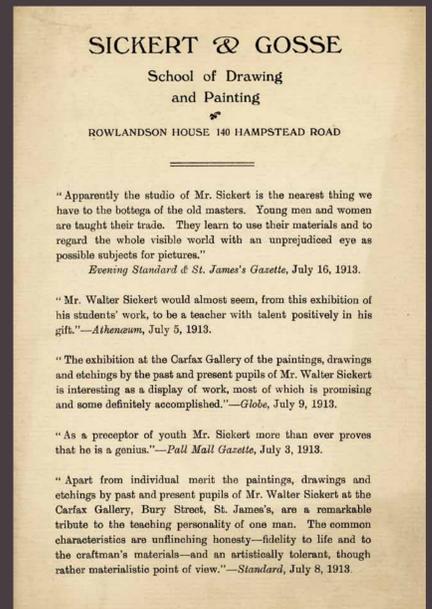
Walter Sickert. *Sally*. Etching. 1915 (circa). 17 x 11 cm.



Sickert in academic robes, to accept an honorary doctorate from Reading University, March 1938.



Caricature by Sickert of his friend, the writer Israel Zangwill (published in *Vanity Fair*, 25 February 1897).



Leaflet (c1913) advertising an art school run by Walter Sickert near Camden Town.

Themes

From the 1890s, Sickert worked mainly abroad and painted circuses and music halls, portraits and caricatures, landscapes, buildings and street scenes.

However, during his Camden Town period (1905–1914), he rented dingy studios in north London, where he produced many of the interior figure drawings for which he is most recognised. His work influenced younger artists, with whom he established the Camden Town Group in 1911. This later became the London Group, which survives today.

From the 1920s, Sickert used photographs and illustrations as the basis for his work, still using the 'squaring up' technique. He became known for producing full-scale portraits of royalty and other personalities from published photographs.

Author and teacher

Sickert's articles and letters appeared in major publications such as *The New York Herald*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Burlington Magazine*. He taught widely, lecturing at established schools of art and elsewhere, as well as setting up private studios in London to teach painting, drawing and etching.

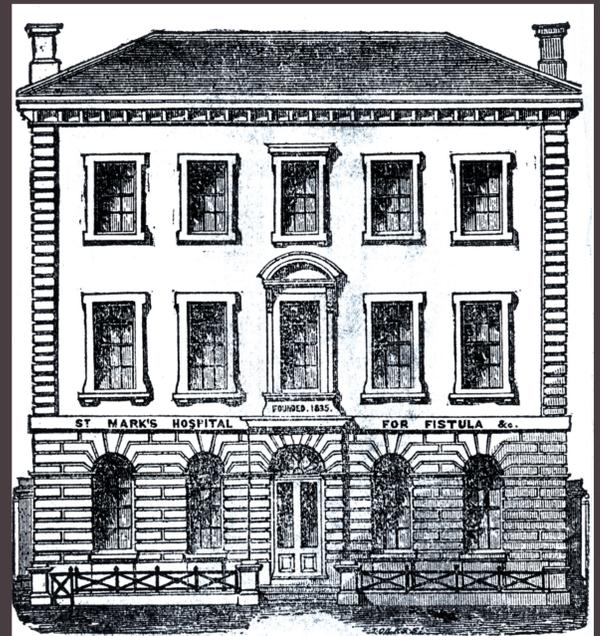
Sickert

Sickert's early years in Islington

Islington was a major presence at either end of Sickert's life, personally and professionally. The artist appeared to be genuinely fond of the district and remarked in 1932, "Islington has always been kind to me."

St Mark's Hospital and Duncan Terrace (1865)

It was under unfortunate personal circumstances that a five-year-old Walter Sickert first visited Islington. In 1865, he attended St Mark's, City Road, a specialist fistula hospital, to undergo a life-saving operation. Afterwards, he stayed with his maternal great-aunt, Anne Sheepshanks, who had rented rooms in nearby Duncan Terrace.



St Mark's Hospital, City Road. (*Illustrated London News*, 14 August 1852).



Sadler's Wells Theatre, c1900, where twenty years earlier Sickert trod the boards as an actor.

SADLER'S WELLS.

The production of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* for a couple of weeks by Mrs. Bateman, is a bold venture at this time of the year. It is, however, judging by its reception on Monday night, likely to be a successful one. To Mr. Edward Saker, of the Alexandra Theatre, Liverpool, must, however, be accorded the chief meed of praise, for the complete and careful manner the piece is put upon the stage, and to him also must be credited the novelty of substituting children for adults in the fairy scenes, and marvellously gifted children he has found too, or the eldest of them is only eleven. Miss Laura Lawson, as Oberon, spoke with a distinctness and acted with a dignified grace that earned for her the most unqualified commendation. Little Addie Blanche as Puck, (one of the children of Cicely Nott) was delicious. She entered thoroughly into the fun of the part, her merry laugh was quite infectious, and her dancing was most graceful. Miss Katie Barry and Miss Rosa Blanche as Titania and First Fairy gave evidence of much natural talent and careful training. Altogether the acting of the children is beyond cavil, and some of the adults on the stage who have been long before the public may take a lesson from them. Mr. E. Lyons played Bottom very creditably and very much to the satisfaction of the audience, with whom he seems a great favourite. Miss Rose Tennyson and Miss Ella Dietz seemed a little hard and stiff as the love-sick maidens, Hernia and Helena, and Mr. W. J. Brooks and Mr. Sigurd impersonated Lysander and Demetrius with fair effect. The music, under the direction of Mr. Stanislaus, was excellently played, and I must give a word of praise to the exquisite manner in which Miss Maud Irvine sang, behind the scenes, the various solos. Altogether the performance was most enjoyable and I am only sorry that I have not the time nor the space to do greater justice to it.

CALL BOY.

Impersonating Demetrius with 'fair effect': Sickert (Sigurd) at Sadler's Wells. (*Theatre magazine*, July 1880).

Claremont Square (1880-1881)

German-born Walter and his family emigrated to England in 1868, settling initially in Bedford. It was however not until around 1880 that he was to return to the Islington area. Now an actor, Sickert was assigned lodgings for a short time at Claremont Square, off Pentonville Road. He worked, on occasion, as a utility player at nearby Sadler's Wells Theatre. In June and July that year, and billed as 'Mr Sigurd', Sickert played the role of Demetrius in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In 1881 he abandoned 'the boards', deciding instead to pursue a career as an artist.

Collins' Music Hall

After leaving Claremont Square, Sickert returned to Islington as a frequent visitor to Collins' Music Hall, Islington Green. He was often seen at the theatre 'studying' the artistes, audience and atmosphere for future works.



Collins' Music Hall, 1906; a favourite haunt of Sickert's for five decades.

Sickert

An Islington resident

Sickert continued to be inspired by Islington and, between 1924 and 1934, he lived and worked at several addresses in the borough.

Noel Street (1924-1931)

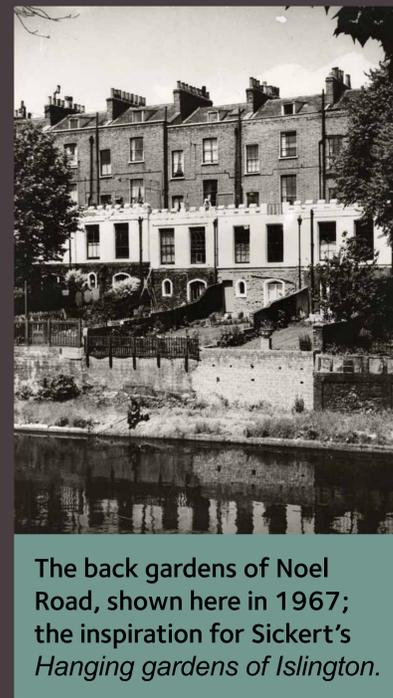
He rented a studio at 26 Noel Street (later 54 Noel Road) and began to paint and etch the neighbourhood, often from photographs. Islington locations featured in his work, from Collins' Music Hall to the Royal Agricultural Hall and from views of Canonbury Tower to the back gardens of Noel Street.

Quadrant Road (1927-1931)

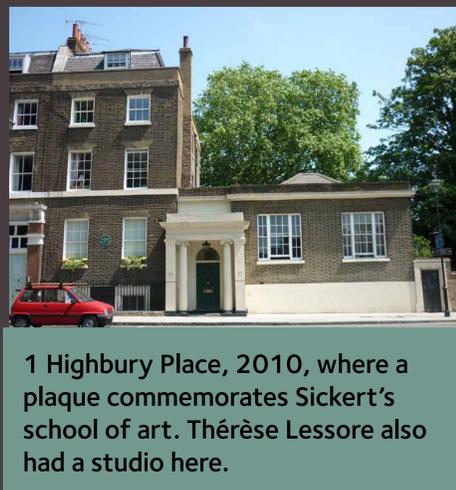
Sickert and his third wife, Thérèse Lessore, bought Southey Villa, 15 Quadrant Road. Here, his well-known eccentricity was demonstrated by replacing the conventional lavatories with French-style floor pans – he apparently wished to witness his visitors' reactions as they emerged!



54 Noel Road, 2010.



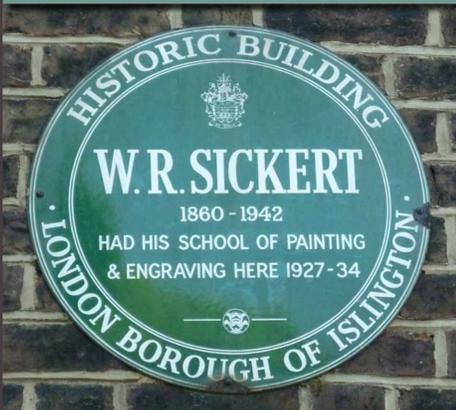
The back gardens of Noel Road, shown here in 1967; the inspiration for Sickert's *Hanging gardens of Islington*.



1 Highbury Place, 2010, where a plaque commemorates Sickert's school of art. Thérèse Lessore also had a studio here.



Sickert in chef's hat at Highbury Place, c1930. When first teaching, Sickert was known to wear a different hat each day!



Highbury Place (1927-1934)

Sickert opened the last of his ateliers at 1 Highbury Place, which also served as a school of painting. No models were employed and pupils were restricted to men only.

Here, Sickert painted *The raising of Lazarus*, an initial full-size sketch having been drawn on the studio's papered wall. In 1932, he gave the finished painting to be sold for the benefit of Sadler's Wells Company. Sickert said that it was "given in memory of my perpetual admiration of Sam Phelps and my gratitude to Isabel Bateman of whose Sadler's Well Company I was myself a utility member."

Barnsbury Park (1931-1934)

The Sickerts moved from Quadrant Road to 14 Barnsbury Park. Sickert found nearby Pentonville Prison a useful landmark for directing taxi drivers. He left Islington for St Peter's-in-Thanel, Broadstairs, Kent.



14 Barnsbury Place, 2010. The Sickerts' final residence in Islington.

Sickert abroad

Paris, France

In April 1883, carrying letters of introduction to Edgar Degas and Édouard Manet, Sickert took Whistler's painting, *Portrait of the Artist's Mother*, to Paris for exhibition. Although Manet was too ill to see him, Degas invited the young artist to visit his studio. The two later consolidated their friendship in Dieppe.

While living in Dieppe in the early 1900s, Sickert made frequent visits to the French capital, teaching with his friend Jacques-Émile Blanche and working. Sickert especially enjoyed painting and etching Parisian music halls, including La Gaieté Rochechouart.



Walter Sickert. *La Gaieté Rochechouart*. Etching. 1906. 10 x 14.5 cm. Sickert produced four oil paintings and numerous drawings of this music hall during an autumn visit to Paris in 1906.

Dieppe, France

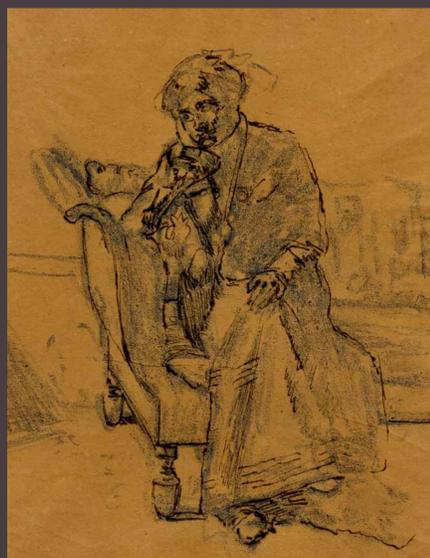
From 1885 until 1922, the northern French harbour town of Dieppe became a second home to Walter Sickert. Attracted to the town's artistic scene, he came here with his first wife just after their marriage in 1885.

Sickert went to Dieppe in 1898 and did not return to London until 1905. He continued to visit the French town and, from 1911, stayed in the nearby village of Envermeu.

In 1919, following confinement in England during the First World War, Sickert again spent much of his time in Envermeu. After the death of his second wife a year later, the artist moved to Dieppe until his return to London in 1922.

Venice, Italy

Sickert visited Venice several times from 1895 to 1904. On all but the last visit, he produced landscapes and occasional portraits. However, during the winter of 1903-1904, he escaped the city's bad weather by painting and etching intimate interior figure subjects, developing the themes for which he later became famous.



Walter Sickert. *Venetian woman seated at corner of sofa*. Pen and charcoal on toned paper. 1903. 31 x 22 cm.

One of many drawings and paintings showing the young Venetian prostitutes who posed for Sickert.



Edgar Degas in Dieppe in 1885.



Edgar Degas. *Six amis*. Pastel. 1885. 37 x 24 cm (Reproduction). Original: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design.

Degas drew his 'six friends' – Walter Sickert, Jacques-Émile Blanche, Ludovic and Daniel Halévy, Henri Gervex and Albert Cavé – in Blanche's studio in Dieppe.



Walter Sickert. *St Jacques, Dieppe. The façade*. Pen and pencil on toned paper. 1914 (circa). 19 x 16 cm.



Sickert with Christine Angus, his second wife, who died in France in 1920.

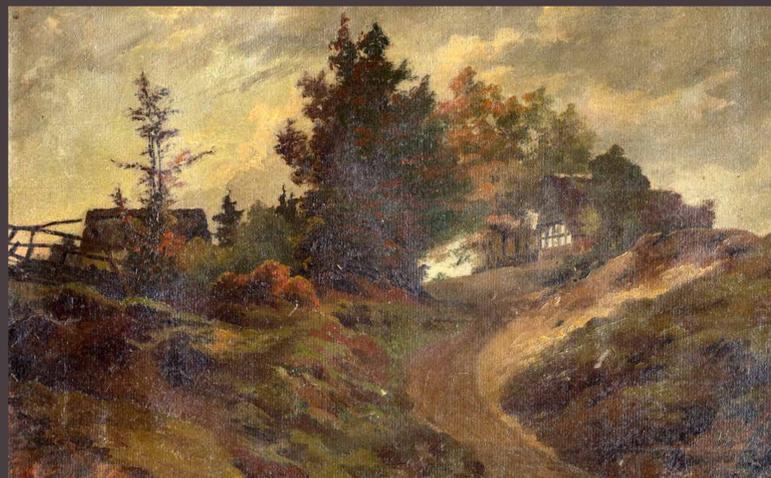
Sickert

The Sickert family

Walter Sickert came from an artistic background and Islington's Sickert collection includes works by several members of his family.

Johann Jürgen Sickert (1803–1864)

Walter Sickert's paternal grandfather was the head of a firm of decorators employed in royal palaces by King Christian VIII of Denmark, as well as an accomplished artist.



Johann Jürgen Sickert. *The road to the north*. Oil. No date. 27 x 40 cm.



Oswald Sickert. *Self-portrait*. Oil. 1844 (circa). 44.5 x 36 cm.



Oswald Sickert. *Portrait of Nellie Sickert*. Oil. No date. 34.5 x 25.5 cm.

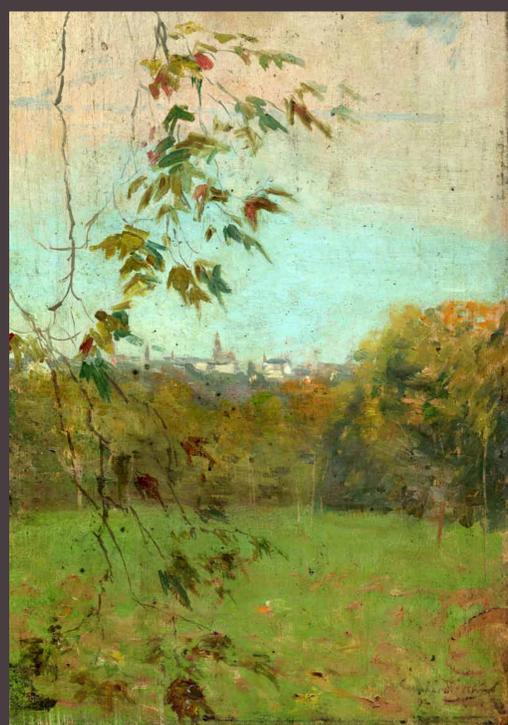
Eleanor Sickert (1830–1922), known as Nellie.

Oswald Adalbert Sickert (1828–1885)

Walter Sickert's father was born in Altona, Germany, and did much of his artistic training in Paris.

During the 1890s, Oswald worked in Munich as an illustrator for *Fliegende Blätter*, a humorous magazine. He fostered his son's appreciation for the work and techniques of German and English popular illustrators and Walter Sickert acknowledged that his father's tuition helped prepare him for the understanding of Whistler's painting.

After moving to England with his family, Oswald frequently exhibited work in London at the Dudley Gallery and occasionally at the Royal Academy.



Bernhard Sickert. *Distant Dinan*. Oil on panel. No date. 24 x 35.5 cm.

Bernhard [Bernard] Sickert (1863–1932)

Walter Sickert's brother was known as a landscape artist and he worked in oil and pastel. He too was a member of the New English Art Club and exhibited his work during the 1880s and 1890s.

He was, however, an alcoholic and his obituary in *The Times* (8 August 1932) said that he "had talent and taste, but [appeared] to have lacked the perseverance to make the best use of his powers".

Sickert

Thérèse Lessore and Jules Lessore

Thérèse Lessore (1884–1945)

“A rare talent happily employed”

Thérèse Lessore was a talented painter of landscapes, interiors and circus scenes. In both inspiration and technique, her work shows much in common with that of Walter Sickert. Thérèse also came from an artistic family of continental painters.

Beginnings

Born in Southwick, Sussex, in 1884, she studied at the Slade School of Art, London, where Sickert had also attended. She married fellow artist and leading member of the Bloomsbury Group, Bernard Adeney, in 1909 and they divorced in 1921.

Walter Sickert

Thérèse became a close friend of Sickert and studied at the Rowlandson House School, Camden Town, which he founded in 1910. She was elected to the London Group four years later at a meeting over which Sickert presided.

Sickert’s artistic influence on Thérèse was considerable and he also admired her work. Together, they indulged their love of circuses, theatre and music hall, both as entertainment and as subjects for painting.

Marriage

Thérèse married Sickert in Margate in June 1926 and the marriage survived until his death in 1942. She died three years later and is buried with Sickert in the churchyard of St Nicholas, Bathampton.



Thérèse Lessore and Walter Sickert during the 1920s.

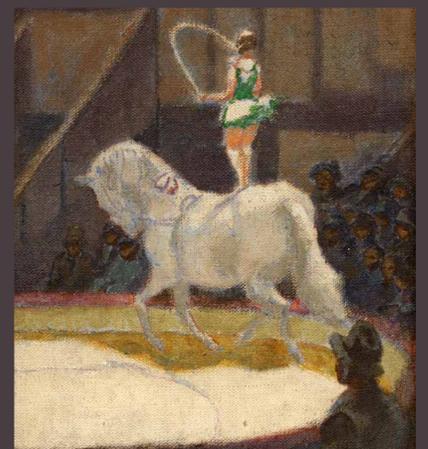
MISS THERESE LESSORE
There is a character in the water-colours by Miss Thérèse Lessore at Mr. R. E. A. Wilson’s new gallery, 24, Ryder-street, St. James’s, for which “serene” is the description that comes to mind. The subjects are various—children playing in London parks, people at the circus or theatre, Sussex fishermen, and a few pure landscapes—but they are all observed with friendly composure and set down in terms of the most delicate art. One thing that strikes one in this fresh acquaintance with the work of Miss Lessore is her commanding command of space. She makes no fuss about it, but the smallest of her drawings—the blue one of “Mending Nets” for instance—enlarges to the size of the whole day by the justness of values loosely stated. You never feel cramped in Miss Lessore’s pictures. “Brighton to Ovingdean,” the interior of a motor-bus with the back of the driver and one woman passenger, is a little masterpiece in the realization of dimensions in terms of water-colour, and the treatment of the woman’s profile in tone against the window is something to dwell on with delight. As a colourist Miss Lessore is extremely personal, using pale tints that escape from their names, and occasionally bringing off a combination, like the rose and gold of “Watching the Trapeze,” of exquisite beauty. Another thing that distinguishes her work is her easy command of what, for want of a better word, must be called “gesture”—like the movement of the trees in “Victoria Park.” A rare talent happily employed, is the impression left by this exhibition.

“A rare talent happily employed” concludes this sympathetic review of Thérèse Lessore’s work. (*The Times*, 20 April 1931).



BOVRIL
PREVENTS THAT “ILL” FEELING

Programme for the Royal Agricultural Hall World’s Fair Circus, 1929–1930. The circus provided inspiration for the Sickerts’ work.



Thérèse Lessore. *Swallow’s Circus, Royal Agricultural Hall*. Oil on canvas. 1930 (circa). 30 x 20.5 cm.



Jules Lessore. Self-portrait. Oil on board. No date. 32 x 34 cm.

Jules Frederick Lessore (1849–1892)

Jules Lessore, a Paris-born painter and etcher, was the father of Thérèse Lessore. His own father, Emile-Aubert Lessore (1805–1876), was a famous decorator for Wedgwood Potteries.

Jules Lessore settled in England in 1871, with his wife Ada Louisa Cooper. He died in Rotherfield, Sussex, and is buried in Woking Cemetery.

Sickert