

Behind the Brush

Carole Cuneo - as told to David Bennett.

The thousands of works by Terence Cuneo will hopefully endure for many years to come, admired by many as they are now. But what fades is the memory of the artist himself, both as a professional and also a private man, and the family which surrounded him. To do something to address this, Terence Cuneo's daughter and President of the Cuneo Society, Carole Cuneo (*right*), has recorded her memories with the Journal's Editor, talking about her father and his family. We continue here, as the Cuneo Society celebrates it's 20th anniversary, Carole looks back at how it all started for her father - his inspirations, mentors, and family friends of note.



"As far as I can see his 'hero' was Sir Alfred Munnings who was so famous for his horse paintings. Daddy loved painting animals, horses in particular, and Munnings inspired him. Many people regard Daddy as 'the railway' artist - which is very limiting. But in the same way, Sir Alfred Munnings is referred to as 'the horse artist'.

Alfred Munnings would have known your Grandfather, Cyrus, first?

Of course, yes. Both Cyrus and Munnings were in the Langham Sketch Club. There was a family association.

What would your dad have said about Munnings' work?

Oh, he just thought it was wonderful. He loved it. The horses and everything, don't ask me why I think he felt such an affinity, I have always known that he was very much an admirer. I've no clear memory of them meeting, but it's probable they did several times, not least as they were both equestrian artists and belonged to the same societies, and exhibited in the same places. And of course they were both members of the Langham Sketch Club. (Sir Alfred Munnings died in 1959).

Another friend was Frank Wootton, who painted very similar subjects at the same time as your father.

Frank Wootton was a good friend of the family. I don't know how they first met because there were many societies that Daddy belonged to, and was head of. So was Frank Wootton. They would go and meet at an awful lot of events in London but I don't know quite what their conversations were about. Wootton also came to the house for lunch several times and they shared similar professional interests. But I was not around so I don't know the detail.

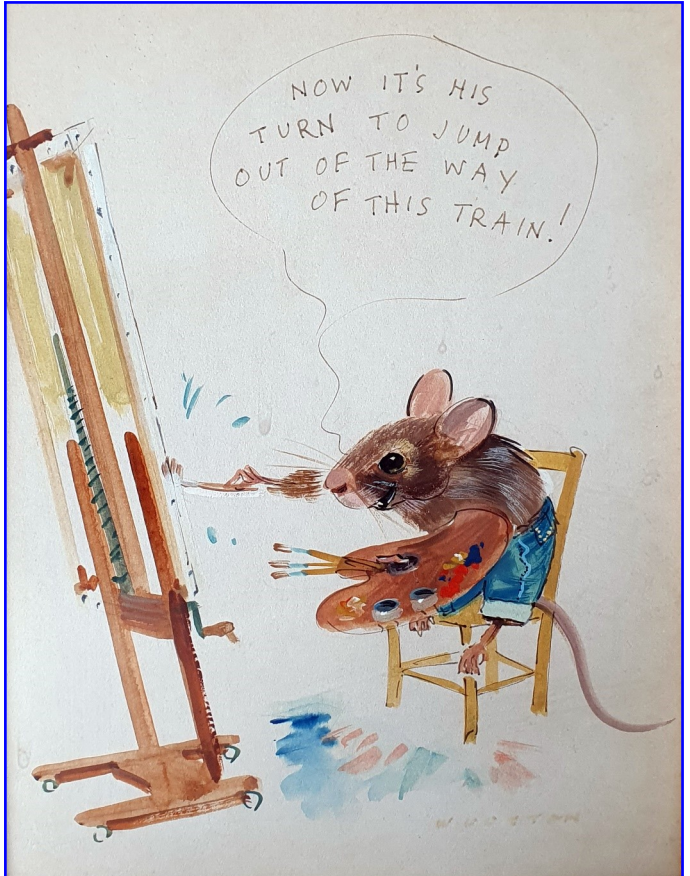
I'm sure however they discussed the difficulty of doing this or that. And could give each other ideas. They were certainly friends - in fact I've got a drawing that Frank Wootton did for Daddy with the mouse sitting, and taking my father's role as the artist!. (Pictured)

He painted in one area of your dad's work, particularly the aircraft, similar pictures, I am assuming as an artist it's quite lonely, you don't

have a muse. So between the two of them would they talk about what they were doing and spark off each other?

I think so. But I can also tell you something else I learnt about Frank Wootton and this will surprise many because most people think he was just an aviation specialist, and he was the founding President of the Guild of Aviation Artists. But in fact he was also a remarkable railway artist. I didn't know this for many years, but you only have a look at his archive in the Railway Museum and there is his work.

They were contemporaries in terms of age, almost exactly?



Fellow artist Frank Wootton's interpretation of Cuneo...as a mouse!

Yes, and they knew each other for many years.

Were they rivals, do you think? Do you think that was part of it, keeping an eye on each other?

No, not at all. No. I don't think my father was very competitive and certainly didn't see himself as a rival to anyone.



Terence Cuneo and fellow artist David Shepherd and a shared love of steam rail.

So your dad never felt threatened by other artists?

No, why should he? He was a genius, wasn't he? If you're an artist at the beginning of your career and you are having to sell pictures alongside everyone else's you are competitive. But if people are coming to you with commissions what is the point of being competitive because the work is coming to you?

Another friend and a remarkable artist who he got on with was David Shepherd. They shared a love for rail but also for Africa. I think Daddy was happiest sitting in the Serengeti painting wildlife, just like David Shepherd.

He loved, loved, loved animals of all description. So if you just said something about South Africa and animals that was his dream. That's probably at the top of the list, and that's something both artists shared.

You've mentioned societies and other professional groups. Presumably your father contributed to these not just learning from others, but supporting the newer artists?

Yes, we definitely went to the Guild of Aviation Artists where he was a Vice President, and the Society of

Equestrian Artists. He was the founding President of the Society of Equestrian Artists, and still each year their work is encouraged by the award of the Cuneo Medal. But I remember going to many exhibitions, ones he opened, and he'd always be lively and talking to other artists about their work.

What about other people he got on with and who inspired him?

Well, one was definitely Michael Bentine (*entertainer and original Goon Show cast member*). He was a very good friend of Daddy's. Many people think of him as a comedian but actually he was a brilliant engineer. Towards the end of his life, Mr Bentine visited Daddy in his nursing home, and gave him a shepherd's crook. He said, 'You do not go around with that dreadful walking stick, that's what you use boy'. I collared that and had it until I found someone who I knew would really appreciate it, and I gave it to them.

Bentine and Shepherd, and his wife Avril Shepherd, also Harry Secombe (*comedian, Goon and singer*) used to come to the nursing home where I put Daddy, with bottles of champagne. They'd get 'out of their tree' and then leave. Daddy would go into supper and be told to 'please go back to his bedroom' as he was not fit to be with the ladies, you know. They were close friends. This wasn't acquaintance; this was proper friendship of the family.



David Shepherd, Terence Cuneo, and Avril Shepherd at a Cuneo exhibition.

He enjoyed his friendships?

These were people he didn't get to know through his art, he got to know them through meeting them at events and they just become friends. Yes, they were all very good friends, all that sort of crowd."