

## Teesdale u3a – Monthly Meeting 28 July 2022

Do you have any commemorative tins or mugs featuring images of royalty from the early to mid 1900s? If so, the images are likely to have been taken from the paintings of Charles Willis who was an extremely successful commercial artist and illustrator at the time. Although he was an excellent artist, he never received the recognition he deserved from the art establishment.

Pete Norton, who was the speaker at the July meeting of u3a, presented a biography of the artist taken from the book which he had co-edited with Roger Stanyon, who was Charles Willis' grandson.

Charles Willis came from a poor background and was awarded a scholarship of £25 to attend the Nottingham School of Art where he studied and taught for 10 years. He graduated as a lithographer and started work with Barringer, Wallis and Manners, who made all kinds of decorative tins for companies and individuals. Charles was a brilliant artist, extremely accurate and who worked so quickly that, if necessary, he could complete a commission within a few days. By the age of 28, he was quite wealthy and owned a large house in Mansfield. Later, he began working with well-known newspapers and magazines and moved to London.

Pete Norton displayed a range of Charles' work including a portrait of Edward VIII in full regalia as future King, which was never needed, together with portraits of other royals and important people of the day. Some of his finest portraits are of his family including his wife Mabel and daughter Nita. There is a beautiful miniature (7cm x 6cm) of Nita which was probably painted using a single hair as a brush.



When painting royalty, Charles was usually allowed only a short face to face meeting of about 20 minutes. His work displays intricate details with great skill and amazing accuracy. He could sketch, use pen and ink, watercolours and oils. After WW2, he

concentrated on 'Conversation Pieces'. He continued to work until his death in 1963, when his wife, Mabel, packed his paintings into a wooden box, to be discovered later by Roger Stanyon.

His pictures are in demand today and appear regularly at auctions. Roger Stanyon said 'I am very proud of my grandfather and hope that our book on his life and achievements helps to secure him the recognition he deserves'.

The vote of thanks was given by Hazel Yeadon. The next meeting will be held on Thursday 25th August when Val Scully will be speaking on 'A people's history of Gibside'.

Ian Reid