

ART APPRECIATION GROUP – Report by Tony Seward

Episode 2 of *The Story of Welsh Art* covered the period from the early 18th century to the end of the 19th. It began with Richard Wilson (1714-1782), who has been called ‘the father of British landscape painting’. He was one of the first to combine ideal classical composition in the manner of Claude with accurate topographical observation – in particular of the rugged mountain scenery of his native Wales. After training in London, he followed the well-trodden Grand Tour route to Italy and spent time with other artists in Rome, before becoming one of the founder-members of the Royal Academy.

Fellow Welsh artist Thomas Jones (1742-1803) followed a similar path, and his greatest paintings, much admired today, were a series of small oil studies on paper of the walls of rundown buildings that he studied closely from the window of his studio in Naples. These were nothing short of revolutionary, minutely observing their humble subjects in realistic detail and organising them into semi-abstract arrangements of shape and colour that have been compared to Mondrian. They were made entirely for his own pleasure and not rediscovered until nearly 200 years later.



A House in Naples, by Thomas Jones, 1782 (Amgueddfa Cymru/Museum Wales)

JMW Turner frequently toured in Wales in search of the Picturesque and in his usual fashion converted the scenery before him into visions of the sublime. The energy and power of his work could not be ignored by those who came after him.

We then turned to the impact of the Industrial Revolution in Wales and looked at Penry Williams’ (1800-1886) dramatic evocation of the steelworks at Merthyr Tydfil, with its smoke and fire, elegant architecture and toiling workers. William Jones Chapman (1808- c, 1870) was a pioneer in creating portraits of individual industrial and agricultural workers, and a uniquely Welsh tradition developed of self-taught artisan painters who travelled the country recording the appearance of ordinary people and their families.



Portrait of roller William James, by *William James Chapman*, 1835 (*The Crawshay Workers' Portrait Series*)

One of the most notable practitioners of the trade was Hugh Hughes (1790-1863). Sadly, the coming of photography killed off this honest and appealing artistic sub-genre.



David Morley, cabinet maker, by *Hugh Hughes* (*Carmarthenshire Museums*)

Lastly, we were introduced to high Victorianism in the shape of the artists' colony that developed at Betws-y-Coed. It was a harbinger of what was to come, attracting artists from all over Britain and Europe, and introducing a new cosmopolitanism to Welsh art. It inspired two masterpieces by English artists; 'The Welsh Funeral' by David Cox (1783-1859), reminiscent of Courbet's realistic treatment of rural people, and 'The Rainbow', reflecting the new awareness of deep geological time, by Henry Clarence Whaite (1828-1912).