



COMMISSIONS

Throughout his career, Norman Corbridge undertook a variety of commissions.

Roll-on, Roll-off: In 1930, he was awarded a prestigious commission by the Port of Tyne - his picture is still their "Roll-on, Roll-off" logo at North Shields.

The River Pageant: In the same year, the Port of Tyne also commissioned The River Pageant, commemorating 100 years of Newcastle's history. Absolute accuracy was essential as this piece would be a historical record of the event.

Corbridge in Paris: In 1944, for Time News Television's programme "Come see Corbridge in Paris", the artist observed and sketched Parisian street life.

Although the war was productive, he felt his hometown had "all that an artist needs in order to depict humanity".

Portrait: He received several formal portrait commissions. The portrait of Sid Chaplin, the celebrated author and playwright, is a fine example.

British Doges: During the 1950s, British Doges commissioned him to depict industrial workers at its Birley site in County Durham.

"...what matters is that one man, by means of an art which is also an obsession, has enlarged and endowed it with such meaning that strangers can share it... an accident of birth and environment produced a pitman but what possesses him has made a painter."

Sid Chaplin, lifelong friend of the artist and renowned author/writer



George
The artist's first painting, depicting a man in a hat and coat, possibly a portrait of a friend or family member.

Roll on a Bridge
A scene of a man and a woman walking across a bridge, likely a reference to the 'Roll-on, Roll-off' logo.

Lady with Umbrella
A portrait of a woman holding an umbrella, possibly a friend or family member.

Man and Cart in Snow
A scene of a man walking with a horse-drawn cart in a snowy landscape.

Man and Cart in Snow
A scene of a man walking with a horse-drawn cart in a snowy landscape, similar to the larger painting above.

Man and Dog
A portrait of a man walking with a dog, possibly a friend or family member.

Man with Cane
A portrait of a man walking with a cane, possibly a friend or family member.

Man with Dog in Snow
A scene of a man walking with a dog in a snowy landscape.

Man and Dog
A portrait of a man walking with a dog, possibly a friend or family member.

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A portrait of a man walking with a dog, possibly a friend or family member.

NORMAN CORNISH: THE DEFINITIVE COLLECTION AT THE BOWES MUSEUM

Not only was Spennymoor's Norman Cornish one of the most renowned contemporary artists of the 20th century, but also his works depicting the mining community were sought-after and crowd-pleasing, rendering him a cherished figure for the North East and beyond. He took an immense shift in life when transitioning from a coal miner himself to follow his passion in the creative field, but ultimately, it was the correct one.

The majestic Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle recognises his importance and is presenting their retrospective exhibition: **Norman Cornish: The Definitive Collection** from 16 November 2019 - 17 January 2021. In honour of this, we spoke to his son John Cornish to learn more.

One might imagine living with an artist to be an especially exciting prospect. However, as a youngster, John didn't experience an upbringing any different to friends or recognise the popularity of Norman's work; the enormity of his father's creations came to him down the line. He begins,

"In my early childhood, my father went to work as a miner, like so many others of his generation, so life was no different for me, I guess. The fact that he was an artist with a developing reputation simply passed me by as a youngster. It was only many years later that I was able to look back and reflect on my formative years and realise how special it was."

Although art was always a part of his life, and he positively enjoyed art and drawing, he never followed this professionally as an adult.

"I had a certain flair for sketching as a child, but I never had the interest or passion to continue. My sister Ann became an art teacher, and still works enthusiastically on her artwork," he remarks.

Norman's work captured spirit and story and showed a snapshot of local life so clearly. His colour use added to the community atmosphere. His son thinks of what his dad was trying to represent and say in his practice.

“This is quite simple. My father had a deep, emotional attachment to his community, and so his artwork was simply a way of communicating how he felt about the world around him. He hoped his work would be important enough to make people look at themselves and reflect upon how they feel.”

It's obvious that Cornish's talent was so great that he could turn his hand to any medium and create something quite spectacular, yet John muses over whether his dad preferred any to work in.

“He was comfortable working in watercolour, pastel, and oils. However, he used his Flo-master pen on a daily basis, creating rapid sketches of life around him. He used to ‘snatch little pieces of life’ from his community, be it in the pub, at home, in the street, or going to and from work. Art academics have said that my father’s drawings could stand side by side with some of the greats like Rembrandt, Degas, and Lautrec.”

It is a big ask for John to recall the very first creation by the thoughtful painter that he witnessed as there were so many in his life to absorb and love. I also pose the question if he could decide on a favourite artwork by his father at all?

“My mother, sister, and I were always being sketched in and around the home, so I was used to

seeing my father’s work from a very early age. We lived in a tiny ‘two up – two down’ colliery house, so my parents’ bedroom doubled up as a studio. Art was all around! It is impossible to name a favourite picture really, but if I were to be pushed, I would say it is a small, intimate, charcoal sketch of my mother telling me a bedtime story.

Taking a trip to Bowes to see The Definitive Collection show will allow visitors to take their time and observe more than 60 of Norman's works, some of which haven't been shown publicly before. John continues,

“The exhibition at The Bowes Museum contains many wonderful examples of work that span many decades whilst highlighting the different themes that interested my father – street scenes, pub scenes, mining scenes, family life, portraits, and so much more.”

We end our chat with John telling me warmly that family members have retained some key pieces of Norman's art, mostly portraiture, and him proudly summing up his dad's achievements.

“My father has left an enduring legacy – one which I feel will stand the test of time, not just because it provides a window into a world that has long gone, but for the quality of the artwork itself.”



Gornik.

Sarah telling John a bedtime story