



The Little Girl at the Door
(Canterbury Museums and Galleries collection)

At the Beaney in Canterbury, Kent, within the People and Places Room (Slater Gallery), is a tall, narrow oil painting.

Its subject is a small girl standing in front of a white door.

She is dressed all in black – her hat, coat and boots.

She wistfully looks out of the painting and her eyes follow the observer.

This painting is called 'The Little Girl at the Door'.

At the bottom, in capital letters, and written vertically down the canvas is the name HALHED.

This painting was executed by HARRIET HALHED.

Harriet Halhed was born at Tower Hill, Victoria, Australia on 20 July 1850. Her parents, William Duodecimus Halhed and Mary McVittie, had been married at St James, Sydney, on 15 May 1847. Her father had emigrated from England to Australia in the late 1830s. William and Mary had four children – Mary, Harriet, Champion and Ellen. Sadly in September 1856 Ellen's father died, followed a couple of months later by her mother. Her father's will named his brother, Francis Halhed, as the four children's guardian. Sometime between 1856 and 1861 the children travelled to England to live with their uncle, aunt and cousins at The Limes, Harbledown, just outside Canterbury.

Harriet suffered more sorrow, in 1872 her younger sister, Ellen, died of scarlatina and then in November 1874 her only brother, Champion, died.

Her obituary in The Times¹ states that whilst living at Harbledown she attended the Sydney Cooper School of Art, St Peter's Street, Canterbury, possibly during the time that Sydney Cooper was teaching, prior to him giving the school to Canterbury City Council in 1882. The obituary says she won a scholarship to the Royal College of Art, South Kensington. This was followed by study in the studio of Louis Deschamps in Paris for a period of time during the late 1880 and early 1890s. Harriet does not appear on the 1891 census so she may well have been in France at this time. On her return to England, in the mid-1890s, she lived at Lime Tree Studio, Sevenoaks², Kent, and gave art classes. By 1899 she had moved to London but also worked and exhibited in various other places around the country. She exhibited in Glasgow between the years 1894 and 1906 and a Dictionary of Exhibitors refers to some of her addresses in London³.

In 1898, she and a friend, Miss P E Bishopp, presented an exhibition of their work, both in oils and watercolours, at the St Georges Hall, Canterbury⁴. The titles indicate that she painted a mixture of life, nature and architecture (including a watercolour showing the interior of St Nicholas Church, Harbledown). Unfortunately only two paintings – 'The Little Girl at the Door' and 'David Samuel Margoliouth'⁵ - are listed on the BBC Your Paintings site which would indicate that many of her paintings are in private hands. A tantalizing reference to another painting, a watercolour, appears on the National Archives site when referring to a registration form for copyright of a photograph of a painting of Dr Payne Smith by Harriet Halhed. Unfortunately it states that no photograph of the painting is attached⁶.

Harriet died on 5 February 1933 in London and was buried at St Peter's Church, Yateley, Hampshire.

Her obituary describes her as a 'rare and delicate personality' who 'would have been more widely known had not a sensitive and somewhat elusive nature led her to shun all that savoured of self-assertion or advertisement'. It finishes with 'she leaves with all who knew her the radiant memory of a personality in which a delicately sympathetic understanding was united to an intense vitality, which took in, and gave out abundantly joy and beauty and life'.

Her painting 'The Little Girl at the Door' was subscribed for and bought by some of her pupils as a recognition of her work⁷.

Below is a list of other paintings attributed to Harriet Halhed but at present their whereabouts are unknown.

¹ The Times 17 February 1933

² 'The Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts 1861 - 1989 - Dictionary of Exhibitors'. Kindly supplied by Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts. Sevenoaks address appears in 1894 and 1895.

³ Carlyle Studios, Chelsea; 241 Kings Road London; 19a Edith Grove London; 239 Kings Road London. She lived at 6 Prince Arthur Road, Hampstead in 1933.

⁴ Whitstable Times 11 June 1898

⁵ Portrait of David Samuel Margoliouth, Laudian Professor of Arabic 1889-1937, (1858-1940) held at Oriental Institute, University of Oxford. Her name, including her special symbol of including one H within another H, is shown on the left of the portrait as if on the spine of a book.

⁶ National Archives COPY 1/378/196

⁷ Kentish Gazette and Canterbury Press June 14 1930 and July 19 1930 under Canterbury Beaney Institute Committee meeting, gifts to the museum are listed. 'Oil Painting 'The Little Girl at the Door', artist Miss Harriet Halhed, who began her art training at the Sidney Cooper School of Art, presented by Miss Beatrix Martin of Hampstead, on behalf of Miss Halhed's former pupils.'

A Lady in Red (portrait of Janet Ashbee) 1898
Climbing the Stairs 1887
Dreamland (placed in Paris salon)
Ernest Radford
Hebe
Heliotrope
In a Library
Magdalea
Monsieur Louis Deschamps
Mrs Deric Hardy 1909
Mrs Harrod (Frances Forbes Robertson) 1911
Portrait of a Boy Dressed for the Weather
Portrait of a Girl 1887
Portrait of a Young Girl with Blossoms 1877
Portrait of Francis Halhed
Ribbons (watercolour)
Sewing the welt
Silver hair
Springtime 1887
St Nicholas Church Harbledown (watercolour
of the interior)
Sunday Best 1887
The Boy with the Apple
The Brazier
The Hem of His Garment
The late M Louis Deschamps 1911
The Mermaid (watercolour)
The New Hat
A Portrait Sketch – Mrs Haynes (possibly her
sister)
The Sealskin Muff
The Spinster
The Tangle
The Tussock Hat
The Wood Maiden
To My Ladye 1891
Trix