



Photograph of William Strutt (c1855)
Courtesy private collection.



Peace. 1896.

Reproduced from the autotype published by Franz Hanfstaengl, 1896. The original oil is in the collection of Brecon Cathedral, Wales.

Canterbury by Thomas Stothard (Tate Gallery). Strutt's version is very close to Stothard's picture, both in its anecdotal character and the distribution of the figures.

In 1869 or 1870, Strutt and his family moved back to Essex. The distance from London may have proved detrimental to his artistic advancement, for between 1869 and 1880 he exhibited only two paintings. The burden of supporting a large family also forced him to supplement his income by teaching, and throughout the 1870s he was giving drawing classes two or three days a week, both privately and at New Hall Convent.

FOREWORD

William Strutt was one of that handful of 19th century English artists who left their homeland to seek inspiration, and perhaps fortune, in this new country. Whatever his reasons for embarking upon such a journey he must have been an adventurer too, and like any adventurer who allows his instincts to guide him, William Strutt was amply rewarded. With his distinctly European traditions, embodying the fashionable preoccupations of the day — a combination of the humorous, the exotic and the biblical, Strutt was able to display his great natural talent for draughtsmanship. In the fresh, unfamiliar but inspiring environment of Australia and New Zealand that talent was to develop far beyond the confines imposed by established fashion and taste in England.

After his return to England Strutt continued to draw upon his Australian and New Zealand experiences and thus add yet further dimensions to his work as he viewed those adventures in retrospect. Perhaps the culmination of Strutt's achievements are best expressed in two major large works, *Bushrangers on St. Kilda Road* and *Black Thursday*, both of which were completed in England and both of which were inspired by his Australian experiences.

As with all exhibitions we are indebted to a number of contributing individuals and institutions. Firstly, thanks are due to Heather Curnow for making her considerable researches on this hitherto relatively unknown artist available as well as for her unstinting devotion to the project in the selection of works, provision of photographs and constant advice. To Brett Rogers, formerly of the A.G.D.C., who guided the exhibition from its inception and to Janet Parfenovics who shouldered the burden of exhibition co-ordination upon Brett Rogers' departure from the A.G.D.C., our thanks are also due. Renee Free, Senior Curator at the Art Gallery of New South Wales has been responsible for much of the curatorial work and supervision, and Christopher Wood in England provided invaluable assistance in arranging and assembling loans from overseas. To both we express our thanks. Our profound thanks to all those private collectors and museums and galleries in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand who have lent works to this exhibition. Finally, thanks to the Australian Gallery Directors Council for administering and managing this touring exhibition.

Edmund Capon

Director

Art Gallery of New South Wales.

INTRODUCTION

To the viewers of this exhibition, the neglect of such an interesting and accomplished artist as William Strutt might seem surprising. Of the group of Academy-trained English and European artists who reached Melbourne in the 1850s, Strutt was the first, arriving just before the separation of Port Phillip from New South Wales.

Of all these artists it was Strutt who illustrated in the greatest detail and with consummate skill the points of this colourful decade of Victoria's history: the Separation from New South Wales in 1850; the progress to the Ballarat gold fields; the meetings of Victoria's first Representative Governments; the departure of the Burke and Wills Exploring Expedition in 1860.

Ten albums of Strutt's drawings found their way to Australia and New Zealand during the artist's lifetime — five albums of Melbourne drawings and two containing material relating to the Burke and Wills expedition to the Dixson Library, Sydney; two albums of New Zealand drawings to the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington; and the most superb collection of all, both artistically and historically, in the album "Victoria the Golden", to the Victorian Parliamentary Library, Melbourne. Yet these albums, entering the collections of specialist libraries, remained virtually unknown.

After his death in 1915 Strutt's work fell into obscurity until 1938 when William Moore, in *The Story of Australian Art*, recognised him as "the first artist in Australia to paint large pictures of typical subjects." Strutt's important historical paintings, *Black Thursday* (1864), *Bushrangers* (1887), and *The Burial of Burke* (1911), were completed in England at various times after the events they depicted and it was not until the 1950s that they were located in public collections in Australia.

Until recently Strutt has been overshadowed by his contemporaries, the landscape artists, Eugen von Guérard, Nicholas Chevalier and Louis Buvelot, and by the subject painters of a later generation, Tom Roberts and Frederick McCubbin in particular. Von Guérard and Chevalier, staying a little longer in the developing colony, established their reputations; the former through his commissions to paint the homesteads of wealthy Victorian squatters, the latter achieving an early recognition in 1864 when his work, *The Buffalo Ranges*, was selected as the first Australian painting to enter the collections of the Melbourne Gallery. The paintings of both Buvelot and Chevalier were promoted by Marcus Clarke in 1875 as pictorial embodiments of desolate grandeur and weird melancholy.

Strutt's Australian historical paintings, though forming important links with the work of the Heidelberg group, are only a small part of his oeuvre. The acquisition since 1974 of six of Strutt's English subjects by State Galleries is a tribute to the versatility of this fine colonial and Victorian painter. It is also an indication, as I hope this exhibition will be, that Australians are prepared to extend their investigation and appreciation of nineteenth century artists beyond the boundaries of their brief colonial sojourns.

Heather Curnow

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION RE WILLIAM STRUTT

From an old British book on art:

The artistic climate in England in the 1860s favoured a variety of trends: the narrative paintings of Mulready and Egg; the work of the pre-Raphaelites Millais and Holman Hunt; the social panoramas of William Powell Frith; the eclectic classicism of Watts, Leighton, Poynter, and Alma-Tadema; the animal paintings of Landseer and his followers; indeed, the work of a multitude of painters in various genres. The range of subjects exhibited by Strutt in England shows his versatility in the exploitation of a number of these popular themes, especially in subjects drawn from the Scriptures, animal painting, genre, and exotic subjects.

In mid-Victorian England, pictures of Biblical subjects were immensely popular; Holman Hunt's early reputation rested on his religious paintings, such as "The Light of the World (1854) and "The Scapegoat" (1856). Strutt, in his search for inspiration, now turned to the Old Testament, frequently combining Biblical subjects with animal painting. His first exhibited picture of this type was "Peace: a little child shall lead them" (R.A., 1868), a literal pictorial interpretation of a quotation from Isaiah:

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them."

Of this early painting nothing is known, but Strutt painted a second version, "Peace", using his grand-daughter Madeleine as a model for the child. This was exhibited with the Royal Society of British Artists in 1897. Strutt has deliberately chosen a subject that allows him to paint a variety of animals, although the child -- surely a pre-figuration of Christ -- and the barren landscape with its ruins (symbolic of the transience of human endeavour) invest the scene with a certain religious significance. The flowering landscape to left and right of the central group seems to promise a regeneration of religious spirit, although the ram's skull lying on the ground to the left introduces a note of foreboding into the idyllic scene. This version of "Peace" was reproduced in photogravure by Franz Hanfstaengl in 1896, and according to Strutt "met with an appreciation and sale, by the public, exceeding that of any other published work". In his later years Strutt was commissioned to paint a replica of "Peace" for the Palace of Peace in The Hague. A new interpretation of the "Peace" theme was published by Louis Wolff in 1903. Entitled "A Reign of Love", it was described by the Westminster Gazette as follows:

"The artist has executed an allegorical group perhaps as pleasant and pictorial as was possible while following so strictly the lines laid down in the text taken as a motto for the picture ... The human element is very properly introduced as the central fact, in the persons of a young girl and two little children, one of whom is harmlessly playing with an adder near its cradle. The composition of the work and its execution are alike admirable..."

An even more decorative work is "The boy Samuel amid the offerings at the tabernacle", in which the boy's presence seems an excuse for the rich and colourful painting of animals and still-life elements, such as the fruit and vegetables that are piled round him with a Flemish luxuriance. In both "Peace" and "Samuel", Strutt has used a semi-circular grouping of animals with the figure of the child at the center.

In November 1912 the Windsor Magazine published a profusely illustrated article on Strutt which mentioned the exhibition of "The burial of Burke" in Melbourne. In May of that year, [quoted from his diaries] "a gentleman came to look over my work...and purchased one hundred and thirty pounds worth of drawings and 2 pictures. It was utterly unexpected. Thank God for this special providence."

This unnamed gentleman must have been an agent from Angus & Robertson, for the two pictures, "Mount Egmont" and "Maoris Beaching their Canoes", were handed over to him by Strutt at the Strand Hotel on 28 May, and these same pictures, together with the New Zealand drawings, were purchased by Alexander Turnbull, a New Zealand collector, from Angus & Robertson the following year. The Australian drawings too were offered to Turnbull, but he generously let these go to Australia; they now form part of the Dixson Collection in the State Library of New South Wales.

During 1912 Strutt received 50 pounds from Dean Kitchen for "Peace in Progress", and was elected to a Turner annuity of 50 pound which was awarded him by the Royal Academy of Arts. Between August and October a woman called Raynor, presumably the holder of the bill of sale on "The Angelus", seized six of Strutt's paintings to reimburse her for her losses.

The Daily Chronicle in 1913 ran an article on the occasion of Strutt's 88th birthday. Strutt was unable to do much this year (he was "not allowed to go into Studio because of the steps"), apart from a little work on his copy of "Peace" and another religious painting, "Hosannah", which was evidently intended as a companion picture. In May he wrote "The tradespeople have so completely lost confidence in us that they will not even serve us with bread", and in June "The brutal tradesmen are rushing on me like a pack of hounds." Other diary entries speak of the discomfort of 'The Angelus', which was bitterly cold in winter, and the studio, too hot in summer, and of the lack of family cohesion, in spite of the fact that Alfred had been advancing him money, and that Willie and Rosa had tried to help by purchasing "Jesus Wept" for 50 pounds in 1904:

"They know it is less than its value, but being a religious work was no doubt less saleable in public estimation."

There is no diary for 114. On 3 January 1915 William Strutt died at Wadhurst, in his ninetieth year, survived by his five children. At the time of his death Strutt was truly an artist whose reputation was divided between two worlds; Melbourne newspapers mentioned his paintings "Black Thursday" and "The Burial of Burke", while English obituaries cited "Peace" as his most famous work.

He is buried at Tunbridge Wells, where the inscription on a simple stone identifies him as "The Painter of Peace", so no doubt this is how he wished to be remembered.

Excerpt from "Our Animal Brothers", October 1906

But the work which has endeared Mr. William Strutt to us all, young and old alike, the picture which has charmed the whole world, is that called "Peace", or "A Little Child Shall Lead Them". Perhaps no other work of art ever captivated so large a number of people, of all sorts and sizes, of every nation and religion. The superb picture itself is the property of one man, who keeps it to himself, but by means of the camera, copies of it are to be seen in every shop-window where such matters are sold, and there is now hardly a home where it is unknown. The Emperor of Russia places it in his palace, the English working man hangs it on his cottage wall, it brings peace and joy wherever it goes."

Particulars

Peace (1896)

Oil on canvas

Signed lower left, William Strutt

Now resides: Brecon Cathedral, Wales

Purchased from the Royal Society of British Artists, 1897, by M. A. Gilbertson, for 80 pounds; presented to Brecon Cathedral in memory of C. F. Gilbertson

Exhibited: Royal Society of British Artists, 1897

Reproduced by Franz Hanfstaengl, 1896