Harold Coop (1891-193): Artist and Soldier

Item of Interest 102

from The Garton Archive

by Lesley Church

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Harold Coop's somewhat tenuous connection with Lincoln School is that he taught woodwork on three afternoons a week at the school from April 1912-September 1914. His main job was as a teacher of arts and crafts at Lincoln School of Art. Harold Coop was born in York where he spent his early years. By 1901, the family were in Lincoln living on Tennyson Street. Harold was educated at the Higher Elementary School, the Municipal Technical College, and at Lincoln School of Art.

In 1911, he was living at home at 8 Tennyson Street, Lincoln, with his father, Frederick William, a linotype operator, his mother Frances, younger sisters Muriel and Frances, and brother Frederick. In 1912, he won a silver medal for a stained-glass design in a national competition, and at the seventh annual exhibition of Lincolnshire Drawing Club, also in 1912, he exhibited a series of his impressions of Veere in Holland. In 1913, he presented to Lincoln Public Library, an etching of Free School Lane showing the new library which was being built there (and which was opened in 1914) with the cathedral in the background *(Lincoln Leader and County Advertiser,* 12 July 1913*).*

The Lincoln School staff register, held in the Garton Archive, notes that Harold left to go to the War. He enlisted with the Sherwood Foresters and worked his way through the ranks to become Lieutenant Harold Coop. In 1915, the *Lincoln Leader and County Advertiser* (7 Aug 1915) printed a letter Harold had written to his father. Lance Corporal Harold Coop writes:

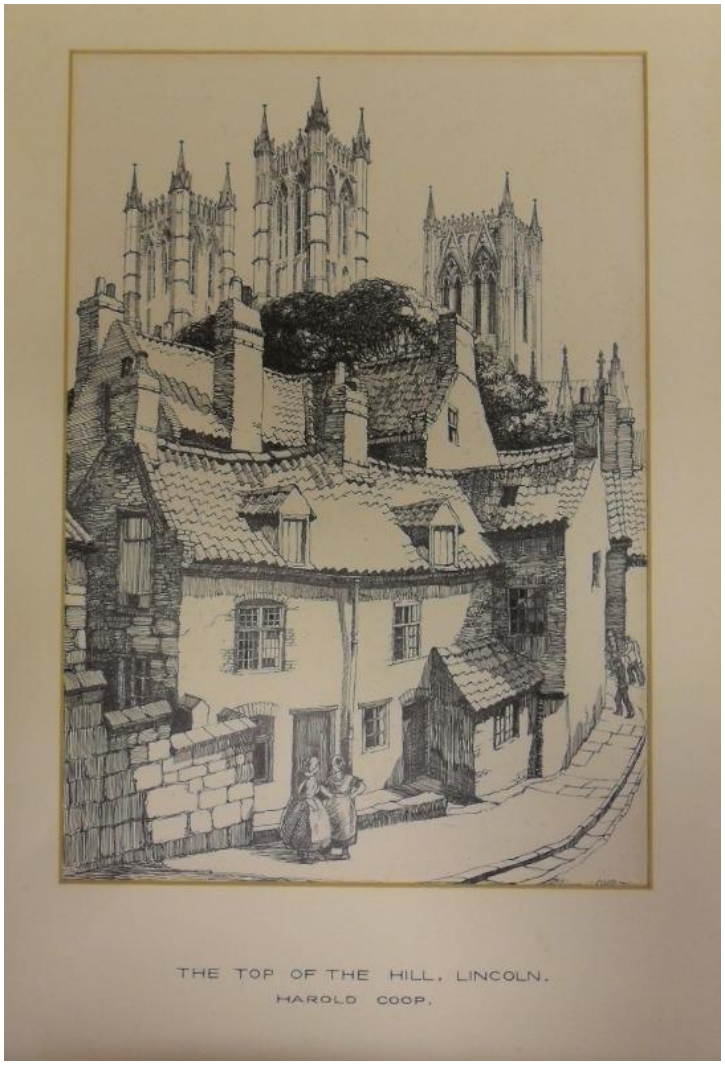
"*Everything will be peaceful and pleasant in Lincoln, whilst it is nothing but hell here. Days are just spaces of time, followed by nights wherein so many shells can be hurled across from one line to another. We are back in the wood again, and the last three days have been one continual fight, and the results are terrible. It is impossible to realise what war means until one has been through it, and already I have seen more than enough…"*

He was awarded the Military Cross in 1917 for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. rallying his broken company after his company commander had been wounded, and holding on, under heavy enemy barrage, until the damaged line could be restored. When the *Lincoln Leader and County Advertiser* (22 Dec 1917) reported his award, Harold was in hospital in Manchester with a wound to his left hand.

Surviving the War, he returned to the family home, now 26 Richmond Road, and resumed his art career. In 1919 an exhibition was held at Lincoln Public Library of 60

of his art works – pen and ink drawings, watercolours and etchings, including, in addition to his city and cathedral views, sketches of France and Flanders, some drawn from memory while in hospital in Manchester and which, according to the *Lincoln Leader & County Advertiser* (15 Nov 1919) "*translate the effect which the maltreatment by high explosive of that much exploded country left upon a mind which was equipped and trained to discover and interpret the beauties of universal nature"*.

Two of Harold's pictures were exhibited at the Royal Academy in London in 1919 - black and white sketches of *The Brayford, Lincoln* and *The Ouse, York*. By 1922, Harold was boarding at 80 Harcourt Road, Sheffield and teaching at the Central School of Art in Sheffield. That year, at the Royal Academy, he exhibited a pen drawing of *Richmond, Yorkshire,* and, in 1923, *The Thames*. Over ensuing years, his works were exhibited at the Mappin Art Gallery, Sheffield; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool; and at Nottingham Museum and Art Gallery. Lincoln was a popular theme for his art works. The cathedral, Brayford Pool, Exchequergate, the Glory Hole, the Strait all feature, and titles include *Lincoln from the Pool, Black Horse Yard, Lincoln*, and *The Top of the Hill, Lincoln*.



The Top of the Hill, Lincoln. Harold Coop (With permission of Sheffield Museums)

The Top of the Hill, Lincoln, shows the view from Wordsworth Street towards Steep Hill, and the view is much the same now, in my own photograph, though there are some alterations to the houses and Harold's drawing must have been from a higher vantage point.



Harold also sketched and painted views of other parts of the country: The Mill, Grantchester, Clare College Bridge and The Backs in Cambridge, Ely Cathedral, London, and industrial Sheffield. At an exhibition of the Sheffield Society of Artists in 1923, he exhibited *An Old Street in Sussex* and *The Waterside, Lincoln*. In 1926, his pen and wash drawings exhibited at the Hallamshire Sketch Club exhibition were noted for "*their clearness and accuracy of detail"* (*Sheffield Independent*, 1 June 1926) and this seems a very fitting description of his work. Also in 1926, he exhibited, at the Sheffield League of Arts exhibition, a painting entitled *Is Sheffield Ugly?* This painting created much interest and was purchased for the Mappin Art Gallery in Sheffield. The painting, viewed from the School of Art, shows a warmly coloured street of huddled buildings, roofs and smoking chimneys leading up towards the Sale Memorial Church and, beyond the church, open countryside, a hill and clear sky.



Is Sheffield Ugly? Harold Coop (With permission of Sheffield Museums)

In 1930, Harold exhibited *Lincoln from the Pool* at the Royal Academy, but illness had struck and he had returned to Richmond Road where he died the same year, aged 39. An obituary in the *Sheffield Independent* (26 July 1930) noted that "*his brilliant artistic gifts had already received widespread recognition*" and that it had seemed *"he had the world at his feet",* adding that he had been a man of great charm. An exhibition of his work was held at the Usher Gallery in Lincoln in 1931. *"It would be difficult to predict the heights to which this young artist might have climbed"* (*Lincolnshire Echo* 15 Aug 1931).