

ULSTER HISTORY CIRCLE



ANNE CRAWFORD ACHESON (1882-1962)| Sculptor

Anne Crawford Acheson was born in Carrickblacker Avenue, Portadown, County Armagh on 5 August 1882, the second of the seven children of John and Harriet Acheson. She was educated at the Alexander School in Portadown and Victoria College in Belfast, where her mother had been a pupil and teacher. She studied in the Belfast School of Art from where she won a scholarship to the Royal College of Art in Kensington, London where she studied sculpture under Edouard Lanteri from 1906 to 1910.

Acheson began exhibiting her sculptures at the Royal Academy in 1913, when 'The Pixie' was accepted. From then until 1949 she exhibited 22 times, 30 works in all, with a mixture of statuettes, portrait heads and bronze or lead figurines for the garden. In the early years she worked in wood before turning to metal, stone and concrete. She also exhibited at the Royal Hibernian Academy Annual Exhibitions in 1910 and 1914, the Annual Exhibitions of the Belfast Arts Society in 1926, 1927 and 1930 and the Ulster Academy of Arts in 1934, 1936, 1948, 1949 and 1950 as well as in other arts venues throughout the UK. She exhibited at the Paris Salon and in Rome, Brussels, Stockholm and Toronto. She was one of the first women to become an Associate member of the Royal Society of British Sculptors, the first woman full member in 1938 and a member of its Council in 1944. She received Feodora Gleichen Memorial Award in 1938. Among other works she was responsible for the portrait bust in the Gertrude Bell Memorial (designed by JM Wilson ARIBA), the original of which is in the National Museum in Baghdad.

Acheson achieved fame in the 1920s and 1930's as a sculptor of children, which had become fashionable among the well-off who wanted to immortalise their young people. The great majority of her works exhibited were garden or fountain figures under such titles as *The Imp*, *Water Baby*, *Watersprite*, *Mischief* and *Boy with Puppy*. As these titles suggest, Acheson regarded playfulness as one of the requirements of garden sculpture. She never descended to the mere quaintness, which was produced so many monstrosities in terra-cotta for the adornment of suburban gardens and when her figures- of which *The Imp* and *Sally* were the most popular- were shown in a garden setting, as they were at the British Empire Exhibitions at Wembley in 1924 and 1925, they had a very pleasing effect.

In addition to her sculpture, Acheson occasionally worked as a highly regarded Arts Teacher, first in Putney and in a number of other schools from time to time supplementing her income with private tuition.

During the First World War Acheson, as a volunteer working for the Surgical Requisites Association at Mulberry Walk designed a papier maché splint made out of sugar bags that was anatomically correct and helped the limbs of injured servicemen heal better. She later substituted plaster of paris for papier maché in a process still in use today. For her work with the SRA she was appointed CBE on the 1st January 1919.

During the Second World War Acheson retrained as a precision engineer and draftsman so as to do voluntary work. She also worked for the Red Cross.

In the 1950s Acheson returned to live in Glebe House, Glenavy, Co Antrim where she remained for the rest of her life. She died in Lagan Valley Hospital, Lisburn, on 13 March 1962.

[The Ulster History Circle erects blue plaques in public places throughout the province to commemorate people who have made a significant contribution to the community locally, regionally or in the wider world. Not all are well known and many have been forgotten in the place where they were born or worked.]