

John Murray Thomson RSA

RSA Obituary by William H Kininmonth RSA

Transcribed from the 1974 RSA Annual Report

John Murray Thomson was born 17th December 1885 at Ayr, educated at Morrison's Academy, Crieff, and went to Edinburgh to study art. Later he worked in Paris at the Academie Julian. In the School of Painting of the Royal Scottish Academy he was awarded the Carnegie Travelling Scholarship, prizes for the best painting and drawing from the Life and for the best picture by a student in the R.S.A. Exhibition.

After years of study at home and abroad he returned to his first loves as subjects for his pictures-animals and birds in their natural settings. Humbler fellow creatures, both wild and tame had always been his interest and he had a kind of affinity with them. This sympathy and understanding also extended to children and young people with whom he was very popular.

Serious eye trouble prevented his doing any painting for five years but on their partial recovery (one eye was permanently affected) he produced much work and was well supported, particularly by the Scottish public. His work in oil and watercolour was exhibited in the leading Art Exhibitions of Britain.

The first picture he sent to the Royal Academy in London was hung on the line. He is represented in the permanent collections of the Scottish Modern Arts Association - Perth, Paisley and Aberdeen- an in many private collections at home and throughout the Commonwealth and also in North and South America.

For eleven years he taught Animal Drawing and Painting at Edinburgh College of Art until these classes were discontinued in 1944. He was an ex-President of the Society of Scottish Artists.

Murray Thomson's interests were many and varied - natural history, bird watching, rugby football, alpine gardening and collecting and identifying Scottish Provincial silver and their makers' marks.

In the latter connection he, in conjunction with his friend and the late George F. Mathers, W.S., formed a valuable and comprehensive collection which is now in the Scottish National Museum of Antiquities, Queen Street, Edinburgh. Some of these marks were previously unrecorded.

Scottish history and poetry were also a great interest and although a no party man in politics he favoured a Parliament for Scotland and was one of the first to sign the National Covenant.

A keen angler, nothing pleased him better than to play and land salmon (unaided) on flies which he himself dressed.

He contributed articles on nature subjects to various papers and periodicals and was the first to observe and record an instance of polygamy in hen harriers.

As well as domestic animals and birds Murray Thomson kept as pets rhesus monkey, falcon, owl and many smaller creatures down to toads, mice and small birds, all of which responded to an unusual and mutual attraction.

Painting, fishing and nature study took him to many different districts of Scotland, from the remote forests of Sutherland to the Cheviot Hills and many friends were made among country folks - stalkers, shepherds, farmers and gamekeepers.

He executed many commissions for animal portraits.

(Murray Thomson died in an Edinburgh nursing home on the 16th October 1974. He was in his eighty-eighth year and is survived by his wife and son.)

It is perhaps revealing - and for those who knew him well - characteristic of the man, that the above obituary notice was personally prepared and placed secretly within the Academy's files in anticipation of the event of his death. The Council thus honours and respects the wish of the deceased that his shall be the last word.