

Henry Wallis

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Henry Wallis (1830 - 1916)

Henry Wallis made only a limited contribution to Pre-Raphaelitism through a few major oil paintings exhibited at the Royal Academy in the 1850s. He may otherwise be classified as a good genre and history painter and an occasional landscapist. Born in London in 1830, Wallis adopted the surname of a prosperous property owner whom his mother, Mary Anne Thomas, married in 1845. Having studied in France, Wallis entered the Royal Academy Schools in 1848 and first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1854. Friendly with Boyce, he also knew the poet George Meredith, who modelled for 'Chatterton', which caused a sensation at the Royal Academy in 1856 and received high praise from John Ruskin. In 1858, Wallis had a son by Meredith's wife Mary Ellen, who had left her husband. She died in 1861 and Wallis never subsequently married.

His masterpiece, 'The Stonebreaker', was exhibited at the Hogarth Club in 1858. In 1859 he became financially independent through inheritance and reverted to historical genre painting. From 1880, he was a Member of the Old Water Colour Society and his name appears many times in Boyce's diary in the company of Rossetti and Burne-Jones. Wallis made regular visits to Italy, the Mediterranean and Egypt, and from 1882 to 1890 he acted as honorary secretary to the committee for the preservation of St Mark's, Venice. His later life was dedicated to the collection and study of Italian and Near Eastern ceramics, on which he published some twenty monographs between 1885 and 1899. He died in 1916.