**Philip Homan Miller ARHA, 1845-1928**

Irish painter of mainly figure subjects and portraits who was born in Derry/ Londonderry, Northern Ireland. His later marriage announcement (1891) called him ‘fourth’ son of the Revd John Hamilton Miller (1807–1864), formerly headmaster of Foyle College, Derry, and Rector of Tamlacht O’Crilly in that county, but if so the identity of at least one of his brothers is elusive, as is Philip’s exact birth date. By the time of the 1871 census his 53-year-old widowed mother, Margaret (b. *c.*1818, Liss, Co. Donegal), noted as an ‘Annuitant’, was living at 67 Torrington Square, Bloomsbury, London, with sons Thomas (33), Philip (26) and Robert (17). Thomas was noted as a schoolmaster and already a widower with a 3-year-old son, Philip as ‘Artist’ and Robert as ‘Medical Student’, presumably in one of the London hospitals. Any others remain to be identified.

It is likely that the Millers were from minor but prosperous Protestant gentry. Philip’s grandfather, John Miller of Ross-y-Volen, Co. Donegal, married twice and had a son by his second marriage. This was Lt-Colonel Frederick Miller (1827–91), who entered Foyle College when his elder half-brother John was already headmaster and later served in Burma (1852/3) the Crimea (1855/6), the Indian Mutiny (1858/9) and Bhutan (1865). On retiring from the Army in 1882 he became Resident Magistrate for Co. Tipperary and from 1887 for Co. Wexford, and resident there. When he died unmarried in July 1891, his nephew Philip was named as principal executor.

According to a brief obituary in the *Londonderry Sentinel* (29 December 1928) Philip also originally trained in medicine at Queen’s College, Belfast, and the Royal College of Surgeons, Dublin, but gave it up to study painting and architecture instead. Whether he began to do so in Ireland is not clear but the change was probably after his father’s death in 1864. Although called an ‘Artist’ in the 1871 census this may have been before he joined the RA Schools aged about 30, since it was in December 1876 that he won a £10 premium for a ‘drawing executed in the Life School during the year’. He first exhibited at the Academy (‘A Punjaub water-bottle’ and ‘Oggi e festa’) from Torrington Square in 1879, followed by a portrait of his mother in 1883, which he also showed at the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, in 1885. His ‘Workmen and Workwomen: interior of a Salt works’, shown at the RA in 1885, appears to have been purchased and presented later that year to Salford Museum and Art Gallery ‘in memory of Mrs Ellis Lever’ (née Catherine Henshaw Orrell, b. *c.*1834, d. 29 October 1885) and ‘The Old Armchair’ won favourable mention in 1886. The last three were exhibited from 1 Colville Mansions, Powis Terrace, Bayswater, which was probably still his mother’s address. In 1880 he also began regular exhibition at the RHA and his exhibiting addresses from 1887 to 1891 were 124 St Stephen’s Green (to 1887) and then 20 Lincoln Place, Dublin, suggesting he was then also living there. In 1890 he was elected an Associate of the RHA and he continued regular annual submissions there – showing 98 works in all – up to the year of his death. After returning to London in 1891 he was also later reported to have founded a club for Irish artists of which he served as first secretary.

It was probably while in Dublin that Miller met (or re-met) his Irish-born wife. She was Marianne Sophia Holmes, youngest daughter of the Revd J.P. Holmes, Rector of Gallen, King’s Co., N.I, though her father was dead before they married in London at St Augustine’s, Kensington, on 15 August 1891. ‘Sophia Holmes’, subsequently ‘Mrs Sophia Miller’, was a specialist flower painter who seems to have already been known in Dublin for work shown there, though only at the RHA from 1892 to 1921 (29 works). She also exhibited at the Royal Academy (1892–94 and 1915–16), at the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours and the New Watercolour Society. From 1891/2 she and her husband lived at 8 Gloucester Mansions, Harrington Gardens, Kensington, before a couple of further local moves saw them settle at 1 Campden Hill Road, just above its corner with Kensington High Street, apparently late in 1901. (The site is now under 1930s Phillimore Court, fronting the High Street.)

From 1881 on, Miller is noted as ‘deaf’ or ‘totally deaf’ in census returns. Given this is not mentioned in 1871, and his early medical training, it may have been a condition that developed in his thirties but does not appear to have stopped sociable habits. An 1893 press report (*South Kensington Evening Herald*, 9 September) noted that he and his wife opened their studio to friends on Tuesday afternoons and that he was then finding much work as a portrait painter. In 1908 he exhibited five works with the London Salon of the Allied Artists Association at the Royal Albert Hall, and two in 1909. The 1911 census shows that by then they also had a country home at ‘Moyleen’, West End Gardens, Marlow, and when there took their live-in cook, ladies’ maid and housemaid with them. No. 1 Campden Hill Road none the less appears to have remained their London home and studio until Miller’s death. It was his exhibiting address for his final RA entries in 1915 (his only appearance after 1903) and his wife’s for her last two (1915–16), the only ones after 1894. It also continued as her RHA exhibiting address until 1921 and her husband’s to 1928. Miller died at Marlow aged 83 on 23 December 1928, leaving estate of £1555 – 13s at probate. Badly affected by his death, Sophia’s health then rapidly declined and she also died at Marlow, aged 78, early in November 1929 (*Bucks Herald*, 8 November).

There are only three paintings attributed to Miller in UK public holdings of which two are portraits (plus the salt-works painting at Salford). The Millers’ long maintenance of a series of large Kensington houses (probably leased) and latterly another at Marlow, with a late-life domestic staff of at least three, suggests they was prosperous, either professionally or from inheritance. They had no children and the relatively small estate he left perhaps indicates that they had no reason not to enjoy rather than pass on such resources.

*Summarised from Art UK discussion on the portrait of Lewis Evans (1853–1930) in the Apsley Paper Trail Archive*

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