**William Pearn, 1855 – 1926**

A ship portraitist born in 1855 at Lanteglos-by-Fowey, Cornwall, where he was baptised on 28 August. At the 1881 census he was living at 30 Clarence Street, Plymouth, and was listed as a ‘painter’, in 1891 as a ‘decorator’ and in 1901 and 1911 as a ‘signwriter’. However one interprets the first of these, it is not that unusual to find such tradesmen who lived in seaports also working as ‘pierhead’ painters of ship portraits – usually broadside views of varied sophistication – for sale to seaman and shipowners. Enough Plymouth associations are clear among Pearn’s works to conclude he was the same man. He was a competent and colourful ‘recording’ hand – a good folk-artist rather than ‘naïve’ – often including elements of background such as other shipping, the Eddystone Lighthouse and decorative skies. The four in UK public collections are one of the ketch *Champion* (1879) in Jersey Museum and three in the National Maritime Museum, presented by the same donor in 1969: the schooners *Little Beauty* (dated 1875) and *Ocean Swell* (1878), and the brig *Martha Edmonds* (1880). Others regularly appear at sale, suggesting Pearn had a large output: most are oils but he also worked in watercolour. The enquiry prompting this note was one made to the NMM about a privately owned watercolour dated 1903 of the fast cutter *Vanduara*  (Plymouth registry no. PH119), built in 1880 but shown in her later rig as ketch, possibly off the end of Plymouth Breakwater. At time of writing the latest example found is a 1910 view of the yacht *Carina* off a coastline. Since Pearn died aged 70 at Plymouth, in the second quarter of 1926, later ones can be expected.

*Summarised from Art UK discussion linked to Pearn’s painting of the schooner* Little Beauty*, in the NMM, Greenwich*

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