**Helen Georgina Tabor, 1864–1933 [Draft 2]**

Helen Tabor (née Leipner) was born in Clifton, Bristol, as youngest child of British-naturalised German parents, Professor (Frederick Julius) Adolph Leipner and his wife Henrietta (Sophia Helena). They both came from Saxony. Adolph (d. 1894) was both Professor of Botany and a Lecturer in German and Elementary Biology at (then) University College, Bristol: Henrietta, apparently called Helen, was later specifically stated to have been born in Dresden. Their first three children – sons Henry, Walther and William – were also born in Clifton (*c.*1860–62) and when Helen was baptised there at St Paul’s on 13 August 1864 the family address was given as 22 Upper Park Street. By 1871 they had moved out to Washington Villa, Westbury-on-Trym, where the household included a live-in governess.

Helen appears to have shown early though not exceptional artistic talent, with her later education being at the Bristol School of Art. In 1883 she won a prize for perspective drawing and achieved a full second-grade certificate. In February 1885, one of her watercolours was included in a major exhibition of ‘Women’s Industries’ at Clifton, including work by well-known contemporary and historical artists. In April 1888 an exhibition took place at the Merchant Venturers School of painting and sculpture produced under the adult-education supervision of its art master, John Fisher, before being sent for national adjudication by the Board of Education at South Kensington: it included ‘A pleasing and carefully worked study from the antique, in relief, …by Miss Helen Leipner, daughter of Professor Leipner’ (*Western Daily Press*, 6 April).

On 17 March 1894 Helen married George Hugo Tabor, an artist and art teacher, at St Mary’s, Tyndall’s Park, Clifton, though the occasion was overshadowed by the death of her father only two weeks later, on 1 April. Tabor (known as Hugo, 1857–1920) was already a widower, his first wife Sarah Ann (née Loosely, m. 1888) having apparently died in childbirth in 1891, with their infant daughter. Though he was born in Shoreditch, his parents had settled in Teddington. He and Helen were living nearby at Bromley Villa, Strawberry Hill Road, Twickenham, when the 1901 census was taken, three months after the birth of their only son, Hugo Leipner Tabor. Helen’s husband, who is recorded as working as an artist for Doulton ceramics of Lambeth, was then on the staff of Teddington School of Art in Church Road. While no occupation is given for her in 1901 she appears to have already developed some reputation as a portraitist. In 1897 she was commissioned to paint a posthumous portrait of George Frederick Schacht (1823–96) former Vice-President of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. Its competence suggests she must already have been an experience practitioner, despite the current lack of earlier examples.

Also as yet unexplained, save by her husband’s connection there, is her apparent return to further training at Teddington Art School between about 1902 and 1905. Press reports of its exhibitions from 1902 to 1907 in the *Surrey Comet*, make complimentary comments on her work as a draughtswoman and painter in both figure and landscape subjects. They also show she was continuing to succeed in local portrait commissions. In late summer 1905 an oil still-life by her was included in the Board of Education exhibition at South Kensington of prize works from the national art schools, and was awarded a bronze medal there (*Surrey Comet*, 2 September). Also in September 1905, by which time the Tabors appear to have moved to The Cottage, 31 Twickenham Road, Teddington, the Thames Valley Art Club was formed with Hugo as its honorary secretary, and Helen’s entries in its first spring exhibition at Teddington in 1906 were also praised by the *Comet*. A Cornish view and a portrait of an Etaples (Normandy) fisher-girl showed the geographical range of her work to that date, and she won first prize for a portrait of ‘Gundreda, daughter of Colonel D. Spiller’. Although the last was reported as for submission to the Royal Academy, it did not appear there but did so at the first London Salon of the Allied Artists Association in 1908, with portraits of the three daughters of S. Brounger Esq., and ‘Landing Fish, Etaples’. Johnson and Greutner note that Helen Tabor also exhibited five more works at the London Salon by 1915 but none were before 1911. *Surrey Comet* reports of the Thames Valley Arts Club exhibitions of 1907 and 1909 further show her gaining notice for seascape subjects.

The three paintings listed on Art UK demonstrate a marked difference between her portraits and her landscape style. Though competent and with strong sitter presence, the former are conventional: the single landscape (Royal West of England Academy), ‘A Study’ of a large, low-profile house backed by idiosyncratically painted pine trees and all set behind an unusual monumental stone gateway, is in a more colourfully fluent and modern style. While a very small sample, the difference suggests that her apparent return to training after her son was born in 1901 may have been to redevelop her manner, at least for non-portrait work, perhaps encouraged by her husband. In the 1911 census, by which time her widowed mother (then 86) was also living with them, she is listed as ‘artist’ but that is its first appearance as her formal occupation. By 1915, when her (now RWA) landscape ‘Study’ was one of a collection originally presented to its President, Dame Janet Stancomb-Wills, she was also an Associate of the RWA.

Helen’s husband died on 22 February 1920, aged 63. She remained at 31 Twickenham Road for the rest of her life but died on 1 June 1933 at Sunbury Place, French Street, Sunbury on Thames. This may have been the home of her son, Hugo, by then a poultry salesman. In August he was granted probate on her estate, listed as ‘Effects £1717–7s–6d.’

*Summarised from Art UK discussion on Helen Tabor’s undated ‘A Stone Gateway with a House and Trees Beyond’ (RWA, Bristol)*

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