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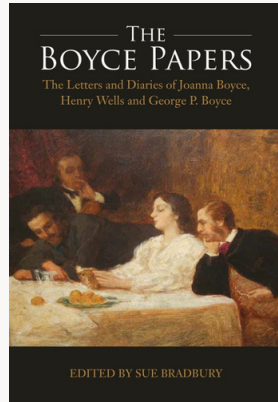
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Sue Bradbury, editor,

The Boyce Papers: The Letters and Diaries of Joanna Boyce, Henry Wells and George Price Boyce.

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In 1987 the Tate Gallery staged an exhibition of watercolors by the landscape and architectural artist G.P. Boyce, relying heavily on loans from the descendants of two of Boyce's siblings, Matthias and Joanna. One of the delights of working on the exhibition was to be directed from one cousin to another and thus to have the opportunity of seeing some of the rich material still in the family's possession that had filtered down through several generations. From time to time tantalizing mention was made by family members of a great accumulation of letters and diaries. It happened a few years later, on the occasion of a Boyce family gathering to which I was invited to talk about George, that a cardboard box full of documents was unceremoniously deposited on the green baize of a billiard table. The documents were carbon copies of transcripts that Alice Street, the second child of Joanna Wells (*née* Boyce) and Henry Tanworth Wells, had made in the 1930s. The original transcriptions burned in April 1942, when one of the infamous Baedeker raids destroyed Street's house in Somerset Place, Bath, and all of its contents. The carbon copies were in the safe-keeping of her younger sister Joanna Margaret, and it is this material which forms the basis of the new "Boyce Papers."

Editor Sue Bradbury has painstakingly assembled the diaries and letters of Joanna along with those of her husband H.T. Wells, to form the first volume (which runs to nearly nine hundred pages) of the present publication. Of interest to the art historian, and particularly to those concerned with the circumstances and opportunities allowed to women artists in the Victorian period, Joanna emerges as a most remarkable figure. In the discourse with her brother and husband-to-be (Joanna and Henry were married in December 1857) she occasionally adopts a certain diffidence about her own capability, but she nonetheless asserts a fierce sense of her own artistic independence.

Joanna was the youngest child of George John Boyce and Anne Boyce (*née* Price). G.J. Boyce was a prosperous London wine merchant, dealer in silver, and pawnbroker, living at Gray's Inn Terrace and with at least one of his pawnshops, in Theobald's Road. In 1840 the family moved into a spacious white stucco house in Park Place Villas, close to the Regent's Canal in Maida Hill. As a child, Joanna had been encouraged in her interest in art by her father, who took her to exhibitions and lectures. At the age of seventeen, she was allowed to enroll at Cary's art school. Her mother, Anne Boyce was not nearly as supportive of her daughter's ambitions as an artist, and there were occasions when Joanna was close to giving up painting. Furthermore, her suitor H.T. Wells, who gained early success as a portraitist and miniaturist, seems to have little understood the progressive and challenging character of Joanna's painting, and his point of view contrasts significantly with that of her brother, with whom Joanna clearly had a truer sympathy in artistic matters. In 1853 she transferred to Leigh's school and in 1854 attended classes at the Government School of Design. In the spring of 1854 she hoped to embark on a course of training in either Düsseldorf or Munich, but was prohibited from doing so (although she was allowed to travel in Belgium and Holland). During the early 1850s George introduced her to members of the London-based Pre-Raphaelite circle, of which he himself was becoming part as a result of his friendship with Rossetti.

In September 1855 Joanna Boyce returned to Paris, on this occasion in company with her mother and brother Bob. She hoped to be able to study painting under Rosa Bonheur, but, perhaps as a result of her mother's or Wells's influence, she instead attended life classes reserved for female students at the studio of Thomas Couture. In her two-part article "Remarks on some of the French Pictures at the Paris Exhibition, 1855," which appeared in the *Saturday Review* (December 1, and 29, 1855), Joanna deplored the influence of Ingres on contemporary French painting and praised works by Troyon and Couture. She was commissioned by the same periodical to write a three-part review of the 1856 Royal Academy exhibition (*Saturday Review*, May 10, 17, and 24, 1856). Here she praised Millais's *Autumn Leaves* (1855–56) and Holman Hunt's *Scapegoat* (1854), and also took the opportunity to lambaste the works of the academicians: "In truth, there are but three or four out of the whole number to whose works we annually look forward with anything like longing or curiosity" (vol. II, 940).

Joanna Boyce first exhibited in public at the National Institution in 1854 and in 1855 her painting *Elgiva* was shown at the Royal Academy. In a late edition of *Academy Notes*, Ruskin described the work as "so subtle, and so tenderly wrought," while Ford Madox Brown in his diary called it simply "the best Head in the rooms."^[1] She exhibited a further eight works at the Academy, including *The Departure – an Episode of the Child's Crusade* in 1860 and *The Veneziana*, and *Peep-bo!* in 1861. On at least two occasions works of hers were rejected by the Academy selection committees: in 1856 *Rowena Offering the Wassail Cup to Vortigern*, and in 1859 "No joy the blowing season brings". The latter was subsequently admired in Ernest Gambart's 1859 winter exhibition at the French Gallery.

It is not easy to characterize Joanna's work as a painter. It ranges from ambitious figurative compositions, generally quite somber in color and painted with a breadth that reveals her familiarity with French studio methods, to jewel-like miniature landscapes, in which she

seems to have taken a deliberate pleasure in making surprising conjunctions of perspective and scale. Her style of painting is quite different to that of either her husband or her brother, and reveals no obvious Pre-Raphaelite influence. Many of her works remained unfinished and few were sold in her lifetime. And yet, she was held in high regard by fellow artists, as emerged at the time of her untimely death in 1861, when friends were invited to see the works in her studio. D.G. Rossetti, Burne-Jones, F.M. Brown, and Watts were among those who expressed their admiration for her art. W.M. Rossetti recorded his feelings as an aside in his review of the 1861 Royal Academy in an article “The London Exhibitions of 1861” in *Frazer’s Magazine*, where he wrote that she was “the best painter that ever handled a brush with a female hand, and a truly deplorable loss in her early death.”^[2] The *Spectator’s* obituarist concluded that “no English-woman has ever set forth such mastery of style and such subtle qualities of painting as are impressed upon her works,” and drew a parallel between her early death and that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, which had occurred a month or so before.^[3] Joanna Boyce was represented in the Royal Academy summer exhibition in the year after her death, with a painting entitled *A Bird of God* (ca. 1861). Five of her paintings were also included in the International Exhibition of 1862. She was represented in the 1901 Royal Academy exhibition *Works by Deceased British Artists*, and in 1935 an exhibition of thirty-one paintings by her was held at the Tate Gallery.

If the story of Joanna’s career as an artist is illuminated by Sue Bradbury’s important work, almost equally interesting is the way in which mid-nineteenth-century families could within a generation become not just prosperous but also absurdly pretentious. Joanna’s diaries tell the story of a young woman grotesquely bullied by her shrewish mother, who sought to interfere and intervene in every aspect of her life seemingly because she felt that she (the daughter of a wine merchant and pawn-broker) should have aimed for and was entitled to a higher rung on the social ladder. At the same time, Joanna was patronized by her opinionated suitor and husband, who regarded himself as the single and unrivalled artist of repute in the family and who consciously or unconsciously resented the competition that his wife represented, and whose idiosyncratic and characterful talent he seems little to have understood. All of this notwithstanding the fact that from the time of her death and for the rest of his life he mourned her and made a cult of his adored lost soul-mate.

For a period of several years Joanna seems to have been reluctant to marry Henry, and perhaps only ever relented to do so for the sake of getting away from her mother. In a postscript to a letter she wrote to him in June 1855 she accepted that the “intense love of independence, which has often been a bane to me” (vol. I, 201) was gradually being overcome, but even on February 10, 1857 (less than a year before the time of their wedding) she still feared the loss of liberty that might go with marriage, for “I have talents or a talent and with it the constant impulse to enjoy it, —not for notoriety or fame, but for the love of it and the longing to work” (vol. I, 529). Late in 1857 Joanna and Henry travelled together in Italy and, according to a plan which had been previously divulged to Joanna’s siblings but not to their mother, were married on December 7 in Rome at the British Consulate. On their return to England in March 1858 they set up house in some style in Upper Phillimore Place, and later built a country house at Holmbury Hill in Surrey (establishments which may have been paid from Henry’s earnings as a mid-range society portraitist, from money derived from the Boyce pawn broking fortune, or a combination of both). They had three children —Sidney, Alice, and Joanna Margaret—personages who were the inspiration of several of their mother’s last paintings. It was following the birth of her third child, and as a result of

ensuing puerperal fever, that Joanna died, on July 15, 1861. She was buried in the Boyce family tomb at Kensal Green cemetery, and subsequently reinterred beside her husband in the same burial ground after his death in 1903.

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The second, slimmer volume of the publication under review is devoted to material related to George Price Boyce, Joanna's elder brother by five years. It consists of his diaries from 1848 to 1875, as published in the Old Water-Colour Society Annual Volume of 1941, as well as further texts omitted from this publication.^[4] G.P. Boyce attended a boarding school in Chipping Ongar, and later studied in Paris. In the summers of 1846 and 1847 he travelled in Europe, making careful drawings of buildings and architectural details. Upon his return, he went to work for the architects Wyatt & Brandon. He seems, however, to have become increasingly despondent about his prospects as a professional architect, and it was perhaps in the course of a visit to North Wales in 1848 in company with John Seddon, a fellow architectural student, and his brother the landscape painter Thomas Seddon, that Boyce himself began to contemplate a career devoted to art. The following season, when painting at Betws-y-Coed, Boyce met David Cox, who over a period of several years was to give him encouragement and advice. Boyce's early drawing style, with its careful attention to the forms of nature and strong color, may be judged from the watercolor *A Road near Betws-y-Coed* (1851, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven). A diary entry from August of that year recorded Cox's response to a drawing done in Wales: "Completed drawing from Church, which Mr. Cox said looked like a Pre-Raphaelite [*sic*] drawing" (vol. II, 987).

Back in London, Boyce attended the drawing classes that the Seddons organized in their house on Gray's Inn Road, and he also joined the Clipstone Street Artists' Association, where he had the opportunity to draw from the nude model and engage in discussion about art. In the early 1850s his drawings were on occasions refused by the Royal Academy selection committees, although in 1853 he was represented by two works, one a view of the East End of Edward the Confessor's Chapel at Westminster Abbey (now in the Victoria & Albert Museum). Early in 1854 he applied for election to the Old Water-Colour Society without success. The same year his *Babbacombe Bay* (Astley Cheetham Art Gallery, Stalybridge) was shown at the National Institution at the Portland Gallery.

Boyce was by this time a familiar figure on the Pre-Raphaelite fringe. He had first met Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown in about 1851, and in March 1852 (on the occasion of C.R. Leslie's Royal Academy lecture on landscape painting), he encountered Millais. In 1854 Boyce began a friendship with John Ruskin, who visited him at his chambers at 60 Great Russell Street to see the collection of drawings by Rossetti that Boyce had formed. When, later in the same year, Boyce set out on a journey to Italy, he painted a series of subjects in Venice and Verona that had been recommended by Ruskin, treating them with meticulous attention to detail and as records of architectural form. On one occasion Ruskin wrote to Boyce: "I congratulate myself, in the hope of at last seeing a piece of St Mark's done as it ought to be done: . . . it answers precisely to your wishes, as expressed in your note, 'near subject – good architecture – colour & light & shade.'"^[5] On other occasions, however, both in Venice and in London, Boyce adopted a looser and more atmospheric style, drawing city views at night.

In 1856 Boyce moved to 15 Buckingham Street, overlooking the Thames, which he shared with the architect William Burges. In 1862 he took over Rossetti's rooms in Chatham Place, and in 1869 he commissioned Philip Webb to build him a house called West House, in Glebe Place, Chelsea. Although Boyce was given to black moods and was frustrated by the limited appreciation that his work received, his landscapes were admired by fellow artists and competed for by a progressive circle of collectors. In 1857 two of his drawings were borrowed for the Russell Square Pre-Raphaelite exhibition, as he recorded in a diary entry for May 26, 1857: "Letter from Wells saying he and Rossetti had been to my studio and walked off with that sunset sketch, and the crypt of St Niccolo [*sic*] at Giornico, to exhibit with a collection of Pre-Raphaelite Painters' work at 4 Russell Place, Fitzroy Square. They will look ridiculously small and mindless by the side of Rossetti's and Millais' and Hunt's works" (vol. II, 1015). In the event, two works, entitled *Sketch in North Wales* and *At Venice*, were shown. In 1858 Boyce contributed four watercolors to the Philadelphia display of the American Exhibition of British Art, and three to Boston, where the exhibition had its third venue; each was described in the exhibition catalogues as having been "painted on the spot." Boyce was a founding member of the Hogarth Club, which operated as an exhibition space and convivial meeting place between 1858 and 1862. He was also a member of the Mediaeval Society, and later a founding member of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, known as "Anti-scrape."

Although Boyce lived principally in London, he made frequent long sojourns in the countryside and abroad. In 1853 he travelled with Thomas Seddon to Dinan in Brittany, and then on to the Pyrenees, returning when news of his father's imminent death reached him. In 1856 he spent the summer and autumn of the year in the Italian Alps, followed by a visit to Paris where he sought medical treatment for an injury to his hip. In 1861, following Joanna's death in July, he departed for Egypt, where he lived with the painters Frank Dillon and Egron Lundgren in an old house at Giza and remained there until February 1862. When in Britain during the summer and autumn seasons, he made for remote parts of the countryside, where he looked for timeworn and unspoilt buildings and hidden corners of the landscape to paint. Boyce was particularly attracted to the Thames Valley, favoring the villages of Pangbourne, Mapledurham, Whitchurch, and Streatley, upriver from Reading. The pattern of his life is indicated in a diary entry for May 8, 1860: "To Academy again. Brought away my two drawings [refused for the summer exhibition] . . . Left London by the 4.50 for Reading . . . back to Caversham, where I had left my boat, and pulled up thence to Mapledurham, where arrived about nine. Just as I was landing, I fell into the water up to my chest" (vol. II, 1040). Among his best works are the views of Thames-side mills and farm buildings, such as *Mill on the Thames at Mapledurham* (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge) and *Old Barn at Whitchurch* (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford). Other parts to which Boyce frequently repaired were the Welsh Marches, Surrey and Sussex, and Northumberland and the Borders.

In 1864 Boyce was elected as an associate member of the Old Water-Colour Society. He waited a further fourteen years to become a full member, having been repeatedly blocked, perhaps as a consequence of resentment of the financial independence that he had enjoyed since the time of his father's death or on some other grounds that made him personally exceptionable to the membership. In 1864 he exhibited his characteristic work *At Binsey, near Oxford* (Cecil Higgins Museum, Bedford), and the following year was shown *From the Windmill Hills, Gateshead-on-Tyne* (Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne). Both drawings include

buildings seen through screens of trees, and take viewpoints that cause the elements of the composition to overlap. It was this avoidance of the conventionally picturesque that was remarked on by perceptive critics. For example, in 1866 the *Art Journal* praised the works of one who, “only a few seasons ago entered this gallery [of the Old Water-Colour Society] as an anomaly,” on the grounds that “Mr Boyce is singular in the choice of his subjects, inasmuch as he loves to plant his sketching stool just where there is no subject. Yet does he manage to make out of the most unpromising of materials a picture which for the most part is clever and satisfactory.”^[6] Boyce was represented at the Old Water-Colour Society summer exhibitions from 1864 until 1890, and also sent to the winter exhibitions from 1864–65 to 1877–78.

G.P. Boyce is remembered both as an artist and as a collector of paintings by contemporaries. His collection, which included among many notable works, Rossetti’s 1859 portrait of Fanny Cornforth *Bocca Baciata* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) was sold at Christie’s on July 1–3, 1897. In 1875 he married a French woman called Augustine Caroline Soubeiran, and in the same year he apparently ceased to write diary entries (or, possibly, whatever he wrote in later years was deemed insufficiently interesting by Alice Street to be worth transcribing). From 1867 Boyce suffered repeated attacks of typhoid fever, contracted it was said when painting at Bridewell in east London. He died at West House on February 9, 1897, following a stroke. He was buried in the Boyce family tomb at Kensal Green Cemetery.

Alice Street presumably hoped that the archival material documenting the work and lives of these three members of the previous generation of her family would be published. She would be delighted to know, seventy-four years after her death, that her purpose had finally been accomplished. All the transcripts are now published, but invaluable as this is we must be aware that there was inevitably material that, for whatever reason, Alice chose to omit, and the full extent of which will never be known. In the case of Boyce himself, a comparison can be made between the diary texts that Randall Davies, the editor of the Old Water-Colour Society’s Club annual volume, presumably in collaboration with Alice Street, chose to publish and the somewhat fuller text of Alice Street’s transcription in the present publication. In the 1941 edition Boyce was regarded as being of particular interest as the friend of better-known artists, notably Rossetti, with the consequence that a certain amount of name-dropping occurs. In the present text more personal detail is offered, sometimes of a charmingly incidental character which gives a truer sense of Boyce’s quirky and independent personality. In the cases of Joanna and H.T. Wells no such comparison can be made as no part of their diaries or correspondence had previously been published.

The publishers have allowed Sue Bradbury to include closely related material beyond the transcripts, including various essays and memoirs by Alice Street, and transcripts of reviews of Joanna’s works shown in public exhibitions. A bibliography is included (with my own name misspelt twice and correctly twice, and with many other authors similarly treated). As an editor, Bradbury appears not entirely familiar with the milieu that formed around Ruskin, witness her confusion about which of the volumes of *Modern Painters* concludes with the famous exhortation to landscape artists “to go to Nature in all singleness of heart” (vol. I, 6) (it was the first, published in 1843). All said and done, however, she has performed a huge and invaluable service and produced a text which will be quarried and consulted for generations to come.

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Notes

- [1] E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds., *The Works of John Ruskin*, Library Edition, volume XIV, *Academy Notes* (London: George Allen; New York: Longmans, Green, 1903–12), 30.
- [2] Rossetti, W.M., “The London Exhibitions of 1861,” *Fraser’s Magazine* (November 1861), 580.
- [3] “The Life of Mrs. H.T. Wells,” *Spectator*, July 20, 1861, 19.
- [4] Randall Davies, ed., *The Old Water-Colour Society’s Club – Nineteenth Annual Volume* (London, 1941), 9–71.
- [5] Virginia Surtees, ed., *The Diaries of George Price Boyce* (Norwich: Real World, 1980), 119.
- [6] “The Society of Painters in Water Colours,” *Art Journal* (London, 1866), 174–5.