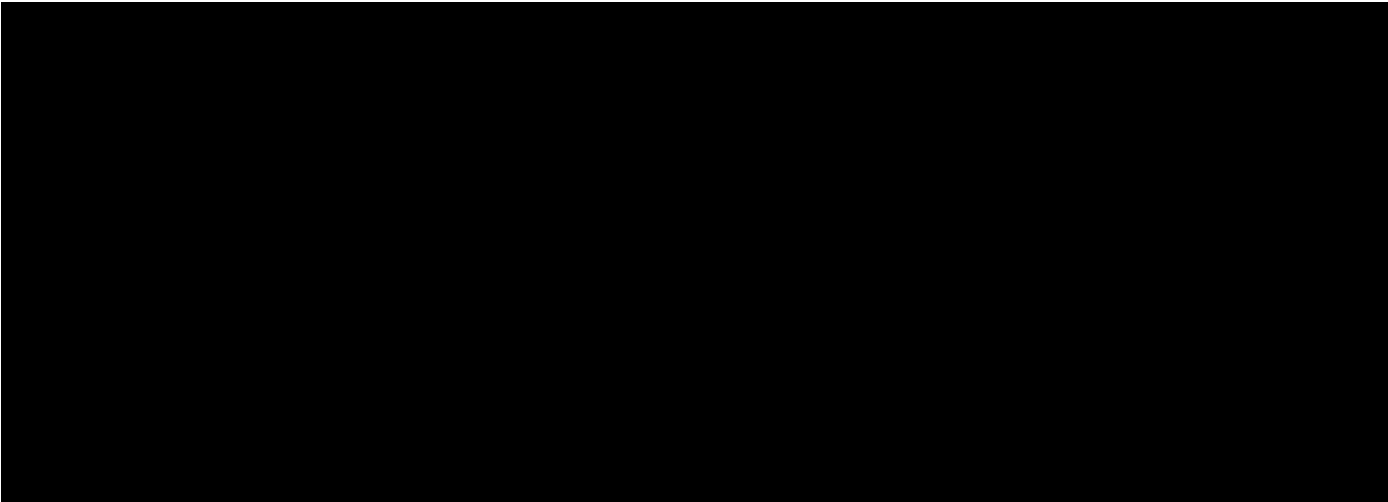




HERKOMER, Sir HUBERT von (1849 - 1914), painter, designer and film pioneer



Name: Sir Hubert Von Herkomer
Date of birth: 1849
Date of death: 1914
Spouse: Anna Caroline Ada Herkomer (née Weise)
Spouse: Eliza Louisa Herkomer (née Griffiths)
Spouse: Margaret Herkomer (née Griffiths)
Child: Siegfried Hubert Herkomer
Child: Elsa Anna Iole MacDonald (née Herkomer)
Child: Lorenz Hans Lawrence Herkomer
Child: Gwenddydd Herkomer
Parent: Josephine Herkomer (née Niggl)
Gender: Male
Occupation: painter, designer and film pioneer
Area of activity: Art and Architecture; Eisteddfod
Author: Rita Singer

Hubert von Herkomer was born on 26 May 1849 in Waal near Landsberg in the German kingdom of Bavaria. He was the only child of Lorenz Herkomer (1815-1888), a master-joiner, and Josephine Niggl (1822-1879). In 1851, the family emigrated to America, where Lorenz made a living from carpentry and Josephine by teaching music, even though she did not yet speak English at the time. Owing to the negative impact of the climate on Hubert and Josephine and Lorenz's struggle to find creative commissions, they returned to Europe and settled in Southampton in 1857.

Living in a modestly furnished house in Windsor Terrace, Josephine's work as music teacher formed the family's main source of income. Lorenz worked poorly paid odd jobs and took on Hubert's education, teaching him the principles of woodwork and drawing. It was only at this time that Hubert learnt English. In 1865, Lorenz took Hubert to Munich to study art while he, Lorenz, filled a commission for a set of carved figures. Hubert continued his formal studies in 1866 by enrolling in a South Kensington art class. He also began giving drawing and music lessons and organised his first public exhibition. A handful of commissioned illustrations in English papers soon followed, including the evangelical periodical *Good Words*. Herkomer's first commercial success came through illustrations for a new weekly illustrated newspaper, *The Graphic*.

During the summer of 1870, he exhibited at the Dudley Gallery and established himself as a new artist on the British scene. In 1871, Herkomer prepared more illustrations for *The Graphic*, thus securing himself and his parents a steady stream of income. This allowed him to travel to Bavaria for a longer period and work on a large oil painting, 'After the Toil of the Day', that he later submitted to the Royal Academy. On 10 January 1872, Hubert Herkomer became a naturalised British citizen.

In 1873, Herkomer sold a watercolour, 'Fairy Allegory', to Charles William Mansel Lewis (1845-1931) from Llanelli. This purchase laid the foundation for their lifelong friendship. Not only was Mansel Lewis a patron and art collector, but also an artist in his own right who shared many of Herkomer's aesthetic sensibilities. This friendship would attract Herkomer to Wales in subsequent years in more than one way.

With the earnings from the sale of the picture, Herkomer rented his parents a cottage in Bushey, Hertfordshire, to where they retired in 1873. Around the same time, he married Anna Caroline Ada Weise (1840-1883), a fellow German immigrant. They had two children, Siegfried Hubert (1874-1939) and Elsa Anna Iole (1876-1938), but their marriage was not a happy one. Anna lived with chronic illness and to assist with her care and that of the children, the Herkomers hired Eliza Louisa 'Lulu' Griffiths (1849-1885), a nurse from Ruthin, who moved in with the Herkomers together with her younger sister, Margaret 'Maggie' Griffiths (1854-1934).

Herkomer's break-through piece was 'The Last Muster' (1875), a painting which was exhibited to great acclaim at the Royal Academy, leading to his election as Associate of the Royal Academy (ARA), and established his international fame by winning him a gold medal at the 1878 Paris Exposition. In 1878 he bought his parents a house in Landsberg am Lech and they returned to Germany, while he relocated his family and the Griffiths sisters to Bushey. After his mother's death only a year later, his father returned and moved in with his son. As a monument to his mother's memory, Herkomer designed and commissioned the 'Mutterturm', a pseudo-medieval tower attached to the Landsberg house, which stands to this day.

During the summer of 1879, Herkomer and Mansel Lewis went on their first of several drawing and camping excursions to Snowdonia. In later years, Herkomer devised a portable hut to serve as their studio. These excursions introduced Herkomer to Welsh landscape painting and he produced several works in oil, watercolour and print, some of which he exhibited at the Royal Academy.

Coinciding with his annual journeys into Wales, Herkomer shifted his subject focus from genre and landscape painting towards portraiture. In total, he painted over two hundred portraits, most of them showing leading men in British society. Herkomer's most famous portrait, however, was that of a neighbour, Katherine Grant (1865-1952), which became colloquially known as 'The Lady in White' (1885). The painting travelled several times between Europe and North America to great public acclaim and won him several awards.

In 1881, the Herkomer family split up for health and work reasons. On doctor's advice, Anna and the children travelled to Germany and Austria accompanied by Maggie Griffiths, while Herkomer, his father and Lulu Griffiths went to the USA for work. It has been suggested the marriage had entirely broken down by that point and that Hubert was already in a committed relationship with Lulu. Herkomer received the news of Anna's death in Vienna on his return from America. Lulu and her sister took over the

organisation of the household.

In October 1883, Herkomer opened his own art school in Bushey to an initial class of twenty-five students. Until his retirement in 1904, he taught over 500 students, male and female. The combined successes of his prize-winning paintings, his ARA election and establishment of his own art school earned him the Slade Professorship of Fine Art at Oxford in 1885 which he held until 1894.

Herkomer's rise to fame coincided with further happiness and tragedy in his private life in Bushey. On 12 August 1884, he married Lulu Griffiths in her hometown, Ruthin. Their marriage was a happy one but tragically cut short. In summer 1885, Lulu suffered a miscarriage and died suddenly of a heart attack on 24 November. To cope with the loss, Herkomer threw himself into excessive work for several years. Among other things, he started on the construction of his future grand family house and studio, Lululaund, named in memory of his second wife. It was built as a mixture of Arts and Crafts, Romanesque and German Gothic styles. At a later point, he also built a theatre on the site for his own musical dramas. He entrusted his children to the care of Maggie Griffiths, and in 1888, shortly before the death of his beloved father, Lorenz, he asked her to marry him. As marriage between siblings-in-law was against British law, Herkomer regained German citizenship and he and Maggie were married in Landsberg on 2 September 1889. They had two children, Lorenz Hans Lawrence (1889-1922) and Gwenddydd (1893-1927).

Following a stream of RA exhibitions and several international accolades, Herkomer was elected Royal Academician in 1890. In the following years, he experimented with printing techniques and invented his own reproduction method, 'Herkomergravure'. This was also the decade in which Herkomer left his visually most striking mark on the Eisteddfod and the Gorsedd of the Bards.

In 1895, he attended the National Eisteddfod in Llanelli as adjudicator in the art competition under the patronage of Mansel Lewis. On that occasion, he was also invested into the Gorsedd and received the name 'Gomer'. While he was not impressed by the quality of Welsh art and made some cutting remarks about its sorry state in his adjudication speech, he found the theatricality of the Gorsedd to his liking, producing a sketch of **Rowland Williams** ('**Hwfa Môn**') in his gown, golden chain and bishop-like mitre, and **Evan Jones** ('**Gurnos**'). Herkomer was so taken by the event, he enthusiastically offered his services and suggested a re-design of the Archdruid's regalia. The following year, he presided over the opening day proceedings and delivered the presidential address at the Llandudno Eisteddfod. Herkomer completed the new golden torque and crown of the Archdruid in time for the 1897 Newport Eisteddfod and once more took on the adjudication of the art competition. In subsequent years, he produced further drawings and paintings of Hwfa Môn in his new regalia. Herkomer's perhaps visually most striking contribution was his design for the new 6-foot Grand Sword with its ornate gold handle and large crystal first used in the 1899 Cardiff Eisteddfod. All three of these objects are still in use today.

In 1899, Herkomer saw the highest German honours bestowed on him as he was ennobled 'Ritter von Herkomer'. He also received the 'Verdienstorden der Bayerischen Krone' (Order of Merit of the Bavarian Crown) and Prussia's 'Pour le Mérite' of the civil class for extraordinary personal achievement. Despite a long decline in his health due to stomach ulcers, Herkomer continued with his characteristic enthusiasm for his art, teaching and travel. He also published several autobiographical works, most notably *My School and My Gospel* (1908) and *The Herkomers* (1910). In 1912, he underwent a major gastric operation. Shortly thereafter, Herkomer and his son, Siegfried, began making films together, and they converted the family theatre into a film studio. Within just under two years, they produced seven films, but none of the prints survive.

Hubert von Herkomer died suddenly at the sea spa Budleigh Salter on 31 March 1914. His funeral at Lululaund was attended by many British and German dignitaries. He was buried in the family tomb in St James's churchyard, Bushey, where his father, Lorenz, and second wife, Lulu, had already been laid to rest.

Herkomer's contemporaries described him as an egotistical talker with an overwhelming personality. Restless, obsessive and enthusiastic in every aspect of his artistic pursuits, he liked to impose his aesthetic opinions on others. However, he was also noted for his unwavering kindness, affection, humour and cordiality. Katherine Grant remembered how crushed with grief he was by Lulu's death, and suggested that his intense personality was most likely explained by his longing for sympathy and love.

Author

Rita Singer

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