

JOHN, AUGUSTUS EDWIN (1878 - 1961), artist

Name: Augustus Edwin John
Date of birth: 1878
Date of death: 1961
Spouse: Ida John (née Nettleship)
Partner: Dorothy McNeill
Child: Elizabeth Ann Jackson (née John)
Child: Edwin John
Child: David Anthony Nettleship John
Parent: Augusta John (née Smith)
Parent: Edwin William John
Gender: Male
Occupation: artist
Area of activity: Art and Architecture
Author: Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan

Born 4 January 1878, third child of Edwin William John and his wife Augusta (née Smith); younger brother of [Gwendolen Mary John](#). The family moved to Tenby from Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, after the death of their mother in 1884. After being educated locally and at Clifton, Augustus John went to London in 1894, where he studied art at the Slade School for four years under Henry Tonks and Frederick Brown. He quickly began to make his name both as an artist and as a bohemian. Through his sister [Gwen](#), who joined him at the Slade in 1895, he came to know a group of outstanding women students, including Ursula Tyrwhitt, with whom he fell briefly in love, and Ida Nettleship, whom he married in 1901. Shortly afterwards he was appointed to teach art at the University of Liverpool; here their first child, David, was born in 1902 and here too the artist met John Sampson, the University Librarian and expert on gypsies, who taught him Romany. Augustus John and his family subsequently spent periods travelling through Wales and England in gypsy caravans, and this inspired much of his work before World War I.

In the autumn of 1902 he met Dorothy McNeill, another friend of [Gwen John](#); he gave her the gypsy name, Dorelia, and she became his most important model and lifelong inspiration. Dorelia returned from travelling in France with [Gwen John](#) to make a brief attempt at a *ménage-à-trois* in Essex, but Ida and Dorelia finally left to live in Paris, with their respective children, being joined there periodically by Augustus. After Ida's death in 1907, following the birth of her fifth child, Dorelia became the artist's *de facto* wife. From 1911 the family lived at Alderney Manor, Dorset, but in 1927 they settled permanently at Fryern Court, Hampshire, Augustus nonetheless spending much of his time at his studio in London. He died at Fryern Court, 31 October 1961.

The early period of his work is characterised by his exceptional drawings, notably of contemporaries, including his wives and sisters, as well as portraits in oils influenced by the Old Masters, and an experimental series of etchings. His visits to north Wales with another Welsh artist, [James Dickson Innes](#), between 1910 and 1913, revealed a rich talent for landscape painting, and brought to the fore a more modern impressionistic idiom, also to be seen in his paintings of the south of France, where he spent long periods in the 1920s. After World War I, when he was briefly employed as a war artist in France by the Canadian government, Augustus John became increasingly successful as a portrait painter, so much so that his personal artistic interests could not develop fully. Hence many of his large figure compositions and imaginative pictures were left unfinished. He was made an R.A. in 1928, resigned in 1938, but was reinstated in 1940, and was awarded the O.M. in 1942 for services to art. Although he did not live permanently in Wales after 1894, he remained deeply attached to his native land, and supported the National Eisteddfod and Royal Cambrian Academy. A major collection of his pictures is held at the National Museum in Cardiff, and his personal papers at the National Library.

Author

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Sources

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Malcolm Easton and Michael Holroyd, *The art of Augustus John* (London 1974)

Augustus John, *Chiaroscuro fragments of autobiography* (New York 1952), and *Finishing touches* (1964)

Eric Rowan, *Some miraculous promised land* J. D. Innes, *Augustus John and Derwent Lees in north Wales, 1910-13*

(Llandudno 1982)

C. Lloyd-Morgan, *Augustus John papers at the National Library of Wales* (Aberystwyth 1996)

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Augustus John](#)

Works

ArtUK: [Augustus Edwin John](#)

Additional Links

NLW Archives: [Augustus John Papers](#)

VIAF: [209346688](#)

Wikidata: [Q562540](#)

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