

## **The Life and Paintings of Bill Baily**

My father, William Arthur Baily (“Bill”), was born in Andover, Hampshire on 4 Apr 1913, the fourth child (two died in infancy) of Frederick James and Matilda. Frederick was a painter and decorator, Matilda a dressmaker and Bill’s grandfather, James, was a stonemason.



**Bill Baily, author’s photograph**

At the age of four years on the death of his parents Bill and his sister, Ivy Agnes, came to live in Ellesmere Road, Berkhamsted with their father’s sister, Edith, who had moved from Andover to marry Arthur Jones (a colleague of the local artist R F Knowles Drewe). Bill attended the Chapel Street School to begin with and later moved up to Victoria School. He joined the Boy Scouts, and was a member of the Congregational Chapel Sunday School.

In 1927 Bill commenced a printing apprenticeship to Cooper McDougall and Robertson’s Clunbury Press in Manor Street, paid for by his uncle Thomas Henry Nash of the brush factory in George Street.<sup>128</sup> Bill was a competent sportsman, playing football, hockey and athletics for the Cooper Recreation Club, and winning silver and bronze medals for cross country competitions. A keen swimmer, early in the morning before work he would climb over the fence of Berkhamsted open air swimming pool (as it was not officially open at that time) enjoy a swim and pay on his way out.

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<sup>128</sup> Franklin, J., ‘Thomas Henry Nash and the Brush Factory, *Chronicle*, vol.XVIII (Mar 2021)

In 1935 after serving his apprenticeship he secured a position at John Dickinson's in Apsley, but had to leave in 1938 due to lack of work. Bill then took a job in London with "Oyez", stationers to the Law Society.

Bill met Dorothy Evans (a cousin of Percy Birtchnell) at a garden party in the grounds of the now demolished Millfield House.<sup>129</sup> They married on 28 Oct 1939 at St Peter's Church, and bought a brand new house on the Dellfield Estate for the princely sum of £350!

At the outbreak of war my father joined the Army (8<sup>th</sup> Belfast Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment) and was posted initially to Wales, and then to Africa.



**Bill Baily's depiction of his regiment**

His uncle, William Thomas Baily, was living in Natal, having left England to fight in the Boer War, where he met Jessica a nurse from Guy's Hospital in London (she was the great-niece of the artist Sir Joshua Reynolds). They married and decided to make Africa their home. Bill carried their address with him in the hope of meeting up, but unfortunately he was never posted anywhere close enough. They did, however, send him much appreciated letters and cakes from time to time!

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<sup>129</sup> Percy Birtchnell (1910-1986), local historian and founder of BLH&MS, served a seven-year apprenticeship as compositor at Clunbury Press

From Africa Bill moved on to India, and eventually Burma. During this time he produced a large number of paintings of the landscapes, flowers, butterflies and everyday life he had witnessed. All he had was a small watercolour paint box and sheets of notepaper which, on his return home after the war, he glued together to create large murals. He also painted birthday and Christmas cards to send home to his wife and family, and drew black and white cartoons on Airgraph Letters (which were always censored). Bill remained in Burma until the end of the War, and his diaries record regular admissions to field hospitals with bouts of malaria.



**Birthday and Christmas cards by Bill Baily**

Once home from the War Bill worked again at John Dickinson's. In Jan 1947 my mother gave birth to a son, Peter William, at the Grange Nursing Home in Shrublands Road, but sadly he only lived for two weeks. I was born in 1949.

In 1954 Bill returned to Clunbury Press as a Lithographer. At this time a young Derek Fowlds was apprenticed there. He lived with his family in Ellesmere Road.

At Christmas time my father would decorate the house with his huge paintings depicting the "Bisto Kids" in snowy locations peering through the brightly lit windows of shops full of toys, and all of them sitting around a festive table laden with turkey and, of course, steaming jugs of Bisto Gravy! Bill was also a talented model maker. He constructed guns used in Burma, together with models of the soldiers, donkeys, elephants and bullocks he had encountered there. He built me a beautiful dolls'

house, and toy garages and model train layouts for family and friends. My father transformed a shed at the bottom of our garden into a spectacular Wendy house for me, fully equipped with a kitchen and everything I could wish for. We called it “Blackberry Cottage”.



In later years as his health deteriorated Bill spent his spare time recording in paintings the locations, people and industries of bygone Berkhamsted, including the printing machines and buildings at Clunbury Press. Bill took great pride in his work as a Lithographer at Clunbury Press. He was, however, looking forward to retirement and spending more time in the garden he loved (lawns and hedges were his passion), and of course his art work. Sadly he died of heart failure on 14 Mar 1980 aged 67.

My mother gave a collection of local paintings to his friend and colleague, Eric Holland, for the Museum Store.<sup>130</sup> Much of his work from India and Burma she donated to the Imperial War Museum.

My father was a quiet, modest man with a great sense of humour, and would be both surprised and delighted that people are still enjoying his paintings which were only really created for his own amusement.

**Jean Franklin**

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<sup>130</sup> Eric Holland (1928-2014), archivist and later President of the BLH&MS, served apprenticeship as compositor at Clunbury Press