

Josephine Mary Richardson (1869–1945)

Caroline (Car) Beatrice Richardson (1873–1959)

Woodhouse and Ridge House, Quill Hall Lane Amersham HP6 6UL

Lavender Cottage, Chestnut Lane Amersham

Downash (now The Old School House), Bois Lane HP6 6BP

The Tithe Barn, Bois Lane Chesham Bois HP6 6BP

The artists

Josephine, Caroline (Car) and Mona were born into a military family stationed in South Africa and later India. Their grandfather Sir John Richardson had been a notable naval surgeon, naturalist and Arctic explorer. The girls' earliest memories were of an Indian garden in Charata, a hill station in the north-west Himalayas, to which they attributed their lifelong interest in flowers. Their father Willingham served in the Royal Engineers and sadly died in 1875, when their mother Elizabeth was pregnant with Mona; the family then returned to London.

Willingham's brother, Major-General John Richardson, was a watercolourist and renowned wood engraver who created a portfolio of over 80 watercolours on his travels. The girls undoubtedly inherited his sense of adventure and artistic talent: they were well-travelled and educated to a high standard. Car studied art in Paris and qualified as a teacher at the Royal Drawing Society of Great Britain and Ireland. Josephine lived with a family in Japan for three years, her job being to teach them English manners and customs, and she also studied Japanese art while in the country. She returned to England with a valuable collection of prints, some of which are now held by the British Museum (Amersham Museum).

As well as being exhibited locally, Car's work was regularly shown in London, including at the Royal Society of British Artists and the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours. She was also a talented illustrator, often using wood engraving to illustrate Christmas cards with detailed images of her garden and scenes in Chesham Bois (Amersham Museum).

Car continued to paint prolifically after moving to Amersham, inspired by the Buckinghamshire countryside and particularly by her own garden (Amersham Museum). Both Car and Josephine were active in village life and served as parish councillors. They were both early members of the Chilterns Art and Handicrafts Club, founded by the artist Louise Jopling in 1919. The inaugural meeting was held at the Tythe Barn, and Josephine later became president. Both women were involved with the Red Cross and worked in various nursing roles during both world wars. During World War I Car worked as a VAD nurse, during which time she made over 100 drawings of convalescent soldiers. The Tythe Barn was also used by VAD volunteers, preparing bandages and food parcels to be sent to serving soldiers (Bailey). While she was working in the hospitals Car sketched over 100 drawings of convalescent soldiers.

The houses

Josephine and Car first visited Amersham in 1906, where Jo, who was employed as a lecturer in literature, found the time to research and write. By 1910 Mona had married Edward Voss and they

built Ridge House, in Quill Hall Lane. It was not long before all three sisters were living in the town, Jo and Car at first staying at a chalet cottage opposite Ridge House, known as the Woodhouse (now a substantial property). Some of Josephine's friends and pupils followed her to the Amersham area, adding to a thriving artistic community.

They soon started investing in property, buying Lavender Cottage on Chestnut Lane where they were living in 1911 (Census) and Hedgerow on Quill Hall Lane. In 1915 Car purchased Downash (now The Old School House) in Bois Lane. She had seen the distinctive brick-and-flint property from the bus and had no idea it came with a substantial field which contained a dilapidated barn, which later became Car and Jo's home, the Tithe Barn. Car extended the barn and renovated it to provide living accommodation and a studio. She also owned Sloe Cottage which she bought in 1929; along with Rose Cottage, which the family also owned, these are situated either side of an alleyway from which access can be gained to the barn. There is also a drive to the well-concealed house from Chestnut Lane, adjacent to Downash (Amersham Museum).

The garden

An uncatalogued aerial photograph taken in the 1970s held by Amersham Museum shows the garden had changed little since the time of the Richardson sisters. Being still maintained as an orchard secluded by trees from the surrounding houses, around this time eight chalet-style houses (in Milton Lawns) were erected on the south boundary, possibly on a strip of land previously belonging to Leazefield House (see plan below). Other parcels of land may also have been sold, although the drive next to The Old School House (now in separate ownership) has been retained for vehicular access to the Barn. Google Earth (2020) shows the orchard has now gone and the garden is laid to lawn with a few mature trees. Bois Lane has been subject to infilling with houses being built behind the existing frontage of cottages; however the Tithe Barn has remained relatively unscathed, tucked away in its relatively large garden.

The Tithe Barn and its large garden were the centre of many activities and social gatherings in Chesham Bois. The garden was at its best in spring with wonderful displays of snowdrops and daffodils – the sisters would put up a sign at the top of the drive inviting people to come down and view them. The garden was a former orchard and was full of cherry trees, which inspired many of Car's paintings when they were in blossom. A bell in the trees was rung regularly to scare off the birds, and when the black cherries ripened cherry-gathering parties were held at which everyone stuffed themselves with sweet ripe cherries. There was also a beautifully shaped old quince tree in the garden with branches propped up with poles, which Caroline also included in her paintings (Amersham Museum).

There was an apple store and a large shed in the garden, used to store trunks containing interesting souvenirs from the sisters' travels. The garden also had a well, now gone, which was used by the gardener to fill his water bowser; it features in several of the paintings/drawings. There was a large herb garden in front of the barn: Car enjoyed growing herbs, especially fennel; they used them in cooking and medicinally in tinctures. (Author's note – I wonder if she knew Maud Grieve, who was growing medicinal herbs in nearby Chalfont St Peter at the time (see de Carle, 2017)). The kitchen garden was very much the domain of their gardener, who was always known as 'Buttercup'. The Richardsons kept him in their employ even when he was too old to maintain the garden and the kitchen garden went into a steady decline (Amersham Museum).

Significance to Bucks

Among her other subjects Car painted London scenes including historic events, such as the 1919 Victory Parade. She travelled around Buckinghamshire and painted picturesque scenes, and in the run-up to World War II she was commissioned by Bucks Archaeological Society to draw buildings of historical interest threatened by destruction, 38 of which were donated by Car to the County Museum. These included watercolours of Old Amersham and Chesham. Another commission during World War I, possibly from the Ministry of Defence, was to draw windmills across the country; this enormous collection is still held by her family.

Car created a record of Buckinghamshire between the wars, of the countryside and towns which were soon to change beyond recognition. These watercolours include inns, churches, windmills and farm buildings as well as landscapes and scenes of village life in the Old Amersham (including the Charter Fair), Chenies, Chesham (including the Cherry Fair), Aylesbury, Great and Little Missenden, Ley Hill, Chalfont St Giles and others.

Josephine was not such a prolific artist as her sister and it has not been possible to find any examples of her work. However she was certainly interested in art, and as an academic may have been more of a collector and art historian. Her particular interests in the arts club were foreign languages, literature and art (obituary).

References

Bailey, Alison. *Women at War*. Amersham Museum 2018. pp. 43–44

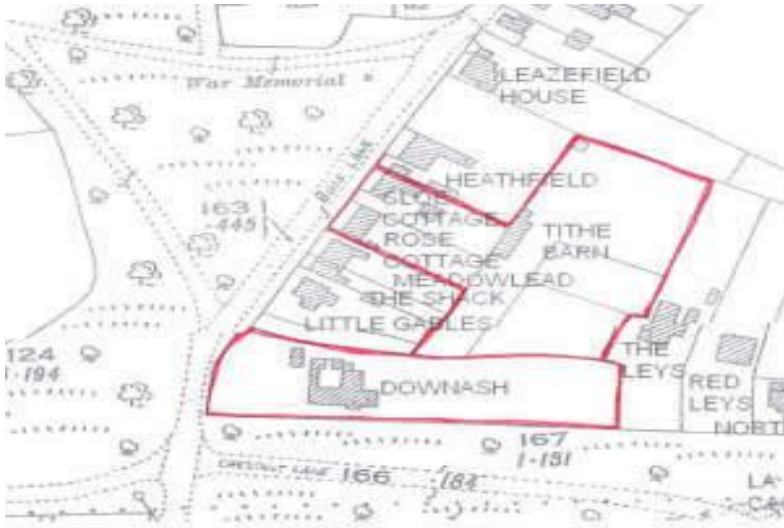
de Carle, Claire. *Now First Let Me Tell You About That Wonderful Plant* (2017)

<https://amershammuseum.org/history/people/19th-century/the-richardson-sisters/>

<https://paintings.antipole.co.uk/caroline-richardson/>

Obituary, Josephine Richardson. Cuttings Book for the Chiltern Arts Club. Amersham Museum ref. 847

See also report on Louise Jopling ('A' list).



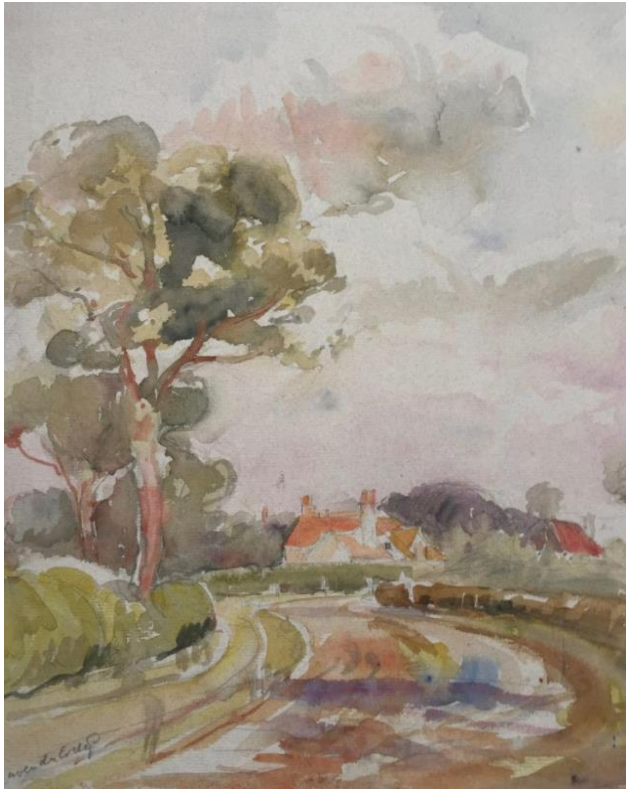
Plan showing the properties owned by the Richardson sisters in Bois Lane, Chesham Bois 1925 (Amersham Museum)



The Old School House, Bois Lane (2020)



The Richardson sisters: L to R Mona, Jo and Car



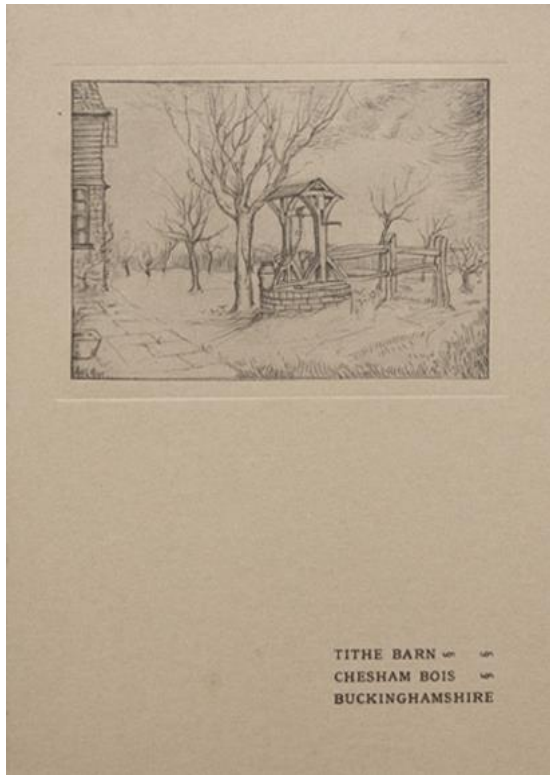
Lavender Cottage, Chestnut Lane, Car Richardson

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Photographs of the Tithe Barn and Car's painting of the cherry tree



Christmas card designs (wood engraving?)





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C. de Carle 16/12/20