

The Committee Room and John Le Capelain



John Le Capelain (1812-1848) was often compared to the artist J M W Turner and was sometimes referred to as 'the Jersey'. Like Turner, Le Capelain did not make a direct copy of the landscape, but rather tried to convey how the landscape made him feel. Churning seas and ominous skies, storm clouds, breaking sunshine and the vigorous painting of waves, all created a landscape that was moving and changing, but could also be calm and still.

John Le Capelain was born in Hill Street, St Helier in October 1812. His father, Samuel, was a printmaker, and it may indeed have been Samuel who encouraged and helped his son develop as an artist, as he had no formal art training. He received some praise locally and enjoyed an influential circle of wealthy, middle-class friends.

He exhibited in two London exhibitions, firstly in 1833 at the New Society of Painters in Watercolours in Bond Street, London and later in 1842 at the Royal Society of British Artists in Suffolk Street. During these exhibitions he was exhibiting alongside leading artists such as J M W Turner, John Constable, John Sell Cotman (1782-1842) and William Callow (1812-1908).

In need of a wider audience, and seeking more inspiration, Le Capelain travelled throughout France and Great Britain. In 1838 he was sketching in Southampton and Granville. In 1841 and 1843 he painted in Scotland. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert visited Jersey in September 1846 and Le Capelain was commissioned to paint a series of 26 watercolours which were later presented to Her Majesty. The portfolio consisted of a frontispiece, six representations of the Royal visits and 19 watercolours of local scenes. They so impressed the Queen that she commissioned Le Capelain to paint a series of views of the Isle of Wight. Whilst there he caught tuberculosis and died at the young age of 36. After his death it was decided to raise money to establish a national gallery for the Island. A number of his paintings were purchased, which now hang in this Committee Room of the Town Hall in St Helier.

Unfortunately, the economic depression of the time meant that insufficient funds were raised.

Le Capelain's landscapes and seascapes captured the spirit and feeling of the Island with a delicate sensitivity, conveying in a visual form the artist's emotional connection with his birthplace.

Here we have highlighted several of the paintings in the Committee Room that are worthy of special praise.