

Our knight on horseback!



Have you ever wondered about the striking picture of the knight on horseback which has lurked at the back of the stage of the Village Hall for many years? Different people have different opinions over its merits – some like it – some don't (I do!). Many people (myself included) have thought it was St. George, but a Google search of the artist's name, Maurice Greiffenhagen, reveals a different story.

Maurice Greiffenhagen (1862-1931) was born in England, but his parents had come from Denmark. He worked extensively as a book illustrator, including for Rider Haggard of "King Solomon's Mine" and "She" fame.

He was also a portrait painter (mainly of men), and painted a number of romantic/classical scenes – some of which showed the influence of Whistler. He became a Royal Academician (RA) in 1922, and received other distinctions and medals for his work from both Germany and the USA.

In the 1920's Greiffenhagen was commissioned by the London Midland & Scottish Railway to provide a number of travel posters. This was an attempt to marry "high art" with poster art. The most successful of the series showed a knight on horseback in front of a portcullis and was entitled "Carlisle: Gateway to Scotland". This is the picture we have in our Village Hall.

The coat of arms in the picture of a lion above a castle and river belongs to the City of Carlisle, although that in itself has a story to tell – the coat of arms appears to have been invented by the mapmaker John Speed in the 17th century and then became more popular than the official one! If you look at the horse's harness you can see the new coat of arms alternating with the original one.

So how did the picture come to hang in the Village Hall? Tim Hughes says that that he found the picture, with another, in the upper floor of the Little Theatre in Bath in the early 1970's when he was projectionist at the Cinema.

The semi-derelict rooms had been used as tea rooms when the building was a repertory theatre prior to conversion to a cinema. Also found were cases of tinned milk, very old and rusty and when opened seemed ok "but did not taste it!". They had been there since the 1920's.

It was decided to give the knight pride of place in the Village Hall, and it has been there ever since.

UPDATE: Alas, the knight is no longer with us, having been removed following an upgrade of the Village Hall stage area.