

DUKE STREET GALLERY  
INFORMATION SHEET



D'ARCY BACON (1858-1874)  
SETTERS IN LANDSCAPE

Oil on canvas, Signed with initials  
Dated 1870, 19.25" x 16"

# DUKE STREET GALLERY

## INFORMATION SHEET

### D'ARCY BACON

c.1823 - op 1875

An artist of undoubted skill, but with an output of surprisingly limited numbers, D Arcy Bacon presents something of an enigma to any biographer who attempts to recreate his life. The normal methods of research into his historical detail result in numerous dead ends, blind alleys and a total dearth of definitive information. One has to swap the researcher's hat for the detective's deer-stalker and go out sleuthing.

There are a few facts recorded which are enough to start a trail to discover who D Arcy was and where he came from. He exhibited, albeit infrequently, between 1855 and 1874 at the Royal Academy, the British Institute and the Royal Society and was resident in London. Most of his subjects were of animals; and subjects of hounds and dogs working in the field were a favourite theme.

The quality and professionalism of his paintings suggests that he was in the company of artists, probably from an early age. It can be assumed that this artistic background could even have been provided by his own family. Also, living in London then like now, was an expensive pastime requiring a not inconsiderable and constant income. However, the acquisition of a regular income does not seem to have been a priority, judging by the rarity of his paintings. It would appear that D Arcy showed his skills only when the mood took him, rather than when he was required or requested to perform.

So, we have a man of means, gifted and well tutored. In fact a true amateur in the exact and original meaning of the word: "for love and not for money" Who was this mystery man, then?

Assuming that D Arcy's background was artistic, we need to find a family who were themselves artists, were well provided for and who were based in London. They should be numerous enough to "lose" a member who may not have been of the same genre of artistic expression and as such was not so highly regarded by contemporary art writers and historians because he did not follow the same path as the rest of the family. Alexander Nasmyth (1758 - 1840), known as the "Father of Scottish Painting" had eight children, seven of whom became noteworthy artists in their own right. But who can remember the name of the eighth child who became an engineer and played an important part in the design and development of the first steam engine?

Taking our detective work further, it is logical that we should research into D Arcy's surname and thus look closely at John Bacon RA (1740 - 1793) A self-taught sculptor, descended from an old Somerset family, John Bacon snr. set up a studio in London, married twice, (his second wife Martha Holland had Irish connections), his two wives providing him with three boys and two girls between them. He quickly made a name for himself as a sculptor of no outstanding talent, but who was able to appreciate and provide exactly what collectors of the period wanted in the way of classical-styled marble. He filled their houses, gardens and Institutions with heroic pieces. So successful was he that his career was one of continual prosperity, with the result that when he died at the early age of fifty-three he was able to settle £60,000 on his children. That was a fortune in 1793; not far short of one million in buying power by today's standard. John Bacon Jnr. (1777 - 1859) was actually the second son, but he was chosen to take on his father's studio, working in his own right and completing many of Bacon snr's unfinished pieces and commissions for his clients. John jnr. seems to have been something of a boy genius; entering the RA School at the age of twelve and first exhibiting there at the age of 15. The eldest son, Thomas only exhibited there three times (1793 - 1795) and of the third son there is no reference in any Dictionary of Artists or National Biography.

John Bacon jnr therefore would seem to be the obvious parent of D Arcy Bacon; his Christian name given in honour of his grandmother's family and his father able to bless him with the artistic education that D Arcy looks to have enjoyed, probably in the same RA School that launched John jnr. himself. Perhaps, and most important of all, his father provided for him financially and seen that he lacked for nothing in his life. What a shame that such generosity born out of parental love should have resulted in such a scarcity of work able to be handed on and enjoyed by future generations. D Arcy Bacon was one of those rare and mercurial creatures, teasing and tempting us from the mists of the 19th century, minding us of the little people themselves who certainly were a part of his make up.