

Francis (Fra) Henry Newbery

1855-1946

'Fra' Newbery, as he liked to be called, was a leading figure in British art and design in the twenty years around 1900. Director of Glasgow School of Art from 1885 to 1917, he made the school one of the major art training institutions in the world. He was an important figure in the Arts and Crafts movement in Scotland and in the later 1890s helped the group of designers around the architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh to achieve international fame.

The Glasgow School of Art building, which Mackintosh designed in close collaboration with Newbery, is acknowledged everywhere as one of the masterpieces of twentieth century architecture. Newbery, however, spent over half of his life in Dorset.

He was born in Devon in 1855, but he grew up in Bridport, where he lived from 1858 to 1875. Here he trained to be a teacher at the Bridport Boys' General School. He then attended the Bridport School of Art, on the first floor of the Literary and Scientific Institute, qualifying as an art master in 1875. He worked as an art master in London before becoming Director of the Glasgow School of Art in 1885, at the age of 30.

On his retirement, Newbery and his wife Jessie, a leading embroiderer, designer and artist in her own right, retired to live in Corfe Castle. Newbery had had a successful painting career from the 1890s, showing at leading exhibitions in London, Paris, Munich, the Venice Biennales, and the United States.

Newbery became increasingly interested in celebrating the history and culture of particular places in his art. Bridport Town Hall houses the largest collection of his



paintings for public places, which he gave to the town as thanks for the role it played in his early education and development.

In 1923, Newbery presented the town the painting, *A Romance of Bridport*, and was made a Freeman of the Borough. He later presented three more paintings, two historical scenes of Charles II and Joan of Navarre and a Dorset scene. In 1925, the Town Hall was redecorated to Newbery's design. As part of this process, he gave the town *Ship Building* and the mural of four panels. Together, these paintings offer a fascinating insight into the social, cultural and industrial history of the town.

Newbery died, aged 91, at Corfe Castle on 18 December 1946.

Escape from Bridport of Charles II after the Battle of Worcester *September 1651*

Charles was disguised as a servant when he travelled through Bridport in 1651.



1. Parliamentarian troops and their leader, Captain Macy, in pursuit of Charles II. The scene is set on the site of the current Town Hall. Newbery acquired a suit of armour and had himself photographed posing as the principle character.
2. Charles and his companions sneak away at the back of the painting.
3. St Andrews Chapel, although at the time, it was not known what it actually looked like.
4. The Old Guildhall.
5. The Shambles or butchers row.
6. Charles stayed briefly at the George Inn in East Street for a meal. If you look out of the main window at the end of the hall, you can see the original George Inn, now Cancer Research, across the road. The representation in the painting is a depiction of the famous old White Horse Inn at Maiden Newton which was chosen as "a typical Dorset Inn of the old days".
7. William Ellesdon hurriedly pays the bill at the door of the Inn. Ellesdon owned Charmouth Manor and was chosen to assist Charles in his escape.
8. Local people dressed in their Sunday best, on the way to church.

A Romance of Bridport

This picture is not, in any sense, the record of an historical event or of any ceremony that took place. It is a summing up of the life and history of Bridport.

1. Henry VIII is standing on the quay at Bridport Harbour. In the 16th century, Henry had ordered that all cordage for the English Navy should be made at Bridport, or within 5 miles of it, and nowhere else, the act of which was confirmed by almost every parliament for a further 60 years.
2. The Royal Standard.
3. The small boy and girl represent hemp and flax respectively. The King, in accordance with Royal Etiquette, is laying his hand upon, but not taking the bunch of flax flowers presented by the girl. Both children are dressed in Tudor costume; the colours of their clothes symbolize the plants that they represent. The boy wears a Dorset smock-frock, which had been seen in Dorset since Saxon times.
4. Frances Grey, Marchioness of Dorset. Her maternal grandfather was Henry VII and maternal uncle, Henry VIII. She had a strong claim to the throne of England but it was her eldest daughter, Jane Grey, who was declared Queen Regent for just nine days in 1553.
5. Sir John Russell, of Kingston Russell and

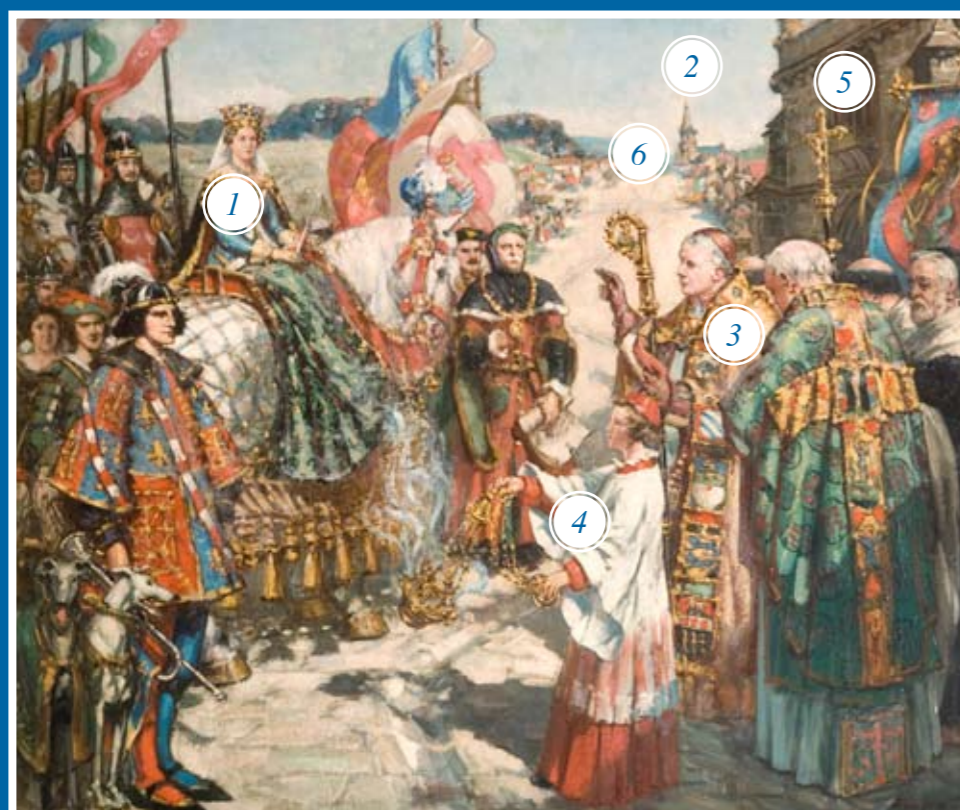
Berwick House in Burton Bradstock, Dorset. He was the Lord Privy Seal and founder of the Bedford family and this portrait was taken from a picture by Hans Holbein, which belonged to the Bedford family. In his hands, he holds the Charter granted by Henry VIII in 1592, which confirmed the right of Bridport's spinners and combers to work unhindered at their craft. The pendant hanging from the Charter is the Seal of the Realm.

6. A rope spinner carries a cast of rope on his shoulders and around his neck, a reference to the hangman's noose, known as the Bridport dagger.
7. A merchant carries a bolt of canvas, used for the sail of ships.
8. This sitting figure, dressed in peasant clothes, is symbolic of net and twine. In her right hand she holds a wooden netting needle, while the old spinning wheel in front of her was common in the spinning walks of Bridport.
9. This ecclesiastical figure is Giles de Bridport, Bishop of Salisbury AD 1256, who was a Bridport man. In his right hand, he holds a model of Salisbury Cathedral and in his left, the pastoral staff. The borders of his cape are embroidered with subjects relevant to Bridport.
10. Bridport town flag.
11. The ship 'The Town of Bridport', which was built at West Bay.
12. Yeoman of the guard.
13. Two burgesses of the community.
14. Two bailiffs of the town. The shorter bailiff on the left carries a silver mace in his right hand. A pendant ship hangs from his chain of office and he has an oar on his cap, to show his connection with the river and harbour. This bailiff is a portrait of Newbery's father. The second bailiff on the right, carries his sword of office and has the arms of the town on his cap badge. This bailiff is a portrait of John Beard; Newbery's much respected head teacher at Bridport Boys' General School in Kings Street.
15. The 'Great Harry', first ship of the Navy built by Henry VIII, fires a salute in honour of the occasion.

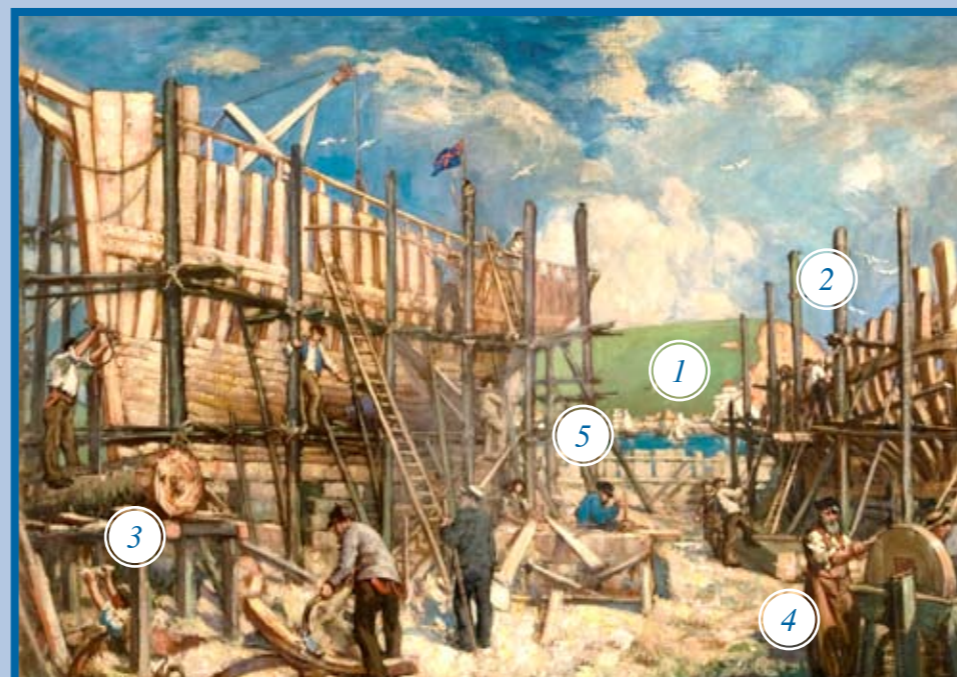


Entry into Bridport of Joan of Navarre, second wife of Henry IV *January 1403*

1. Joan of Navarre landed at Bridport Harbour in January 1403, having sailed from France with a number of refugee Bretons. Joan was on her way to Winchester, where she married Henry IV in the Cathedral on February 7th.
2. Church of St Andrew.
3. Joan is receiving a blessing from the Prior.
4. An altar boy purifies the air with incense.
5. Priory of St Michael, which was at the top of what is now St Michael's Lane.
6. West Street, supposedly as it was in 1924.



Ship Building



This picture represents the well known shipyard of Elias Cox, which covered 13 acres at Bridport Harbour. The shipyard opened in 1760 and continued to build ships until 1879. The view is from the front door of the house lived in by Elias Cox. Left and right, are two ships in process of construction.

1. The old crane house and lime kiln are visible on the quay, now the site of Pier Terrace.
2. East Cliff forms the backdrop of the picture.
3. The old sawpit with top and bottom sawyer.
4. The blacksmith, Eli Forsey of Eype, is shown at his grindstone.
5. The blue coated figure is the shipbuilder and master Elias Cox himself, with the plan of a ship in his hand.

Dorset

Newbery spent his youth in Dorset and later frequently visited the county before finally settling at Corfe Castle in his retirement. This painting draws on his love of the Dorset countryside and its people. The three figures in the foreground typify Dorset rural life at the beginning of the twentieth century.

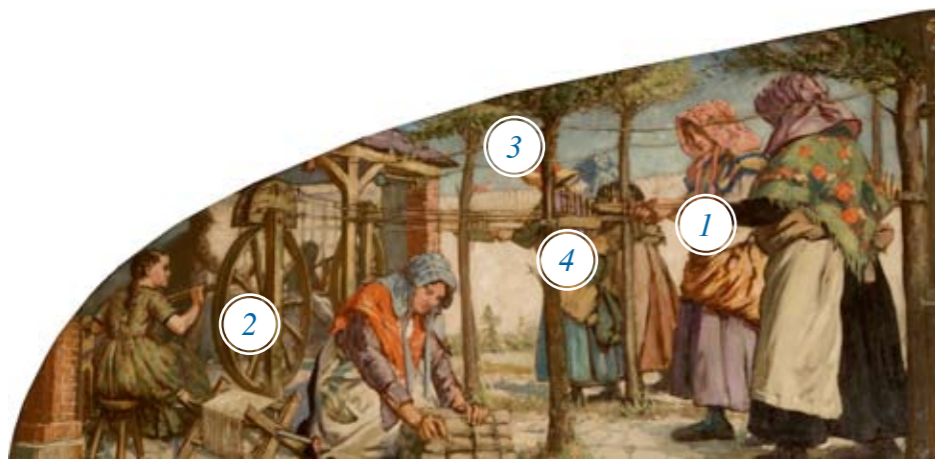
1. A farm worker with his scythe is returning from the fields.
2. The young woman is wearing a distinctive Dorset bonnet and has been gathering kindling wood in her apron.
3. The shepherd stands, crook in hand, with his sheep dog at his feet. He is wearing a traditional smock.
4. A road leads away through the countryside to Corfe Castle on the skyline.



The Weaving Shop

A composition of everyday life in Bridport in the late 1800's, when piecework weaving formed a staple of the trade, in the town and in the immediate neighbourhood. Three looms are represented, the mural painted from a reconstruction of the shop that belonged to Pike Stephens.

1. A woman with her wheel, fills bobbins for the shuttles. The period chosen is before the introduction of the fly shuttle and when the weft was made by throwing the shuttle from hand to hand.
2. William Rathbone, a Scotsman resident in Bridport and among the last of the old handloom weavers.



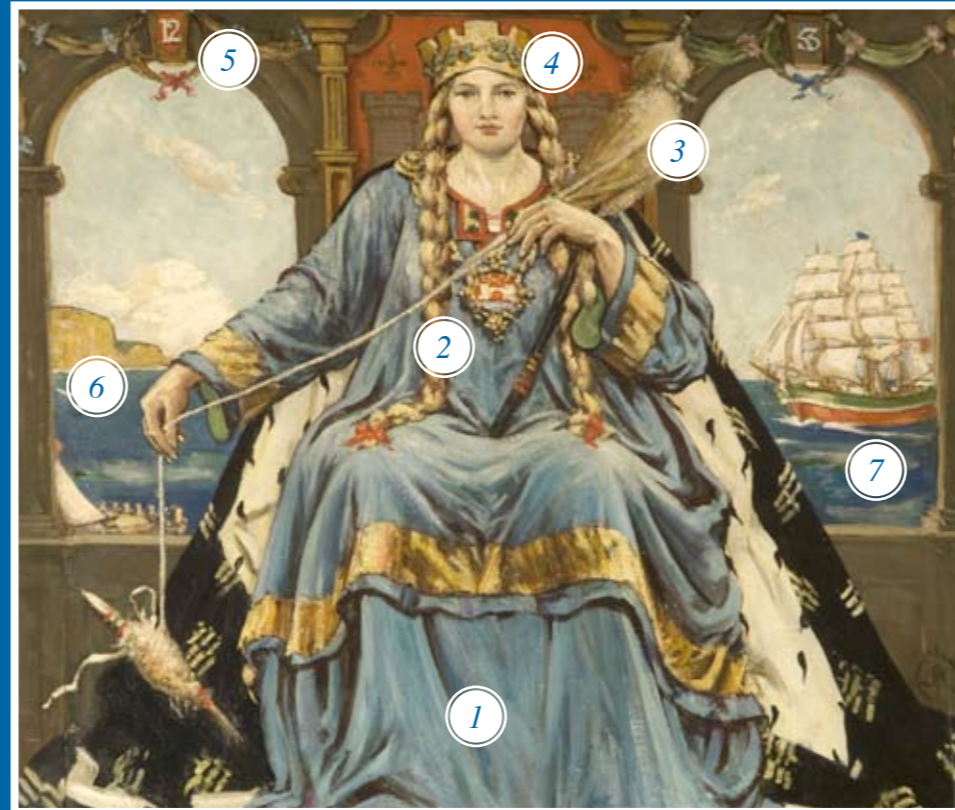
The Spinning Walk

To help the artist in his interpretation, a temporary spinning walk was set up at North Mills, where Mr White sat at the wheel while Mrs White, the last of the Bridport hand spinners, spun twine.

1. Four women in two pairs slowly walk backwards and pull out the yarn from raw fibre wrapped around their waists.
2. The twist is applied to the yarn by a machine known as a jack. The jack was often operated by children.
3. A canopy of withy trees offers some shade to workers.
4. Skirders are attached to the trees. These horizontal wooden brackets both supported and separated the yarn.

The Murals

The four pictures are illustrative of sail cloth weaving, twine spinning, yarn bleaching and net braiding. Newbery worked on the mural panels during 1924 and the mural was unveiled at the Town Hall in September 1925.



The Spirit of Bridport

1. Dressed in blue, the colour of the flax flower.
2. Bridport Town Crest.
3. A distaff – flax is wound onto this rod for spinning.
4. The figure representing the town, was modelled by Kathleen, a daughter of Newbery's friend and Bridport mayor, E. S. Reynolds.
5. Above the arches the dates 1253 refers to the year that Bridport was granted its Borough Charter by Henry III.
6. East Cliff at West Bay.
7. China Tea Clipper, possibly the Thermopylae or the Mary Hounsell is depicted. Typical of the kind of ship built at West Bay.

Net Braiding

The cottage interior is based upon notes made by the artist in the cottage of Mrs Bagg in Loders, who placed herself at Newbery's disposal and explained to him the process of net making.

Outworking was common practice in the net making industry and it was often the women who worked from home. The practice survived in Bridport far longer than in other industrial areas and even today outworking is still a small part of the net making industry.



Yarn Barton

This picture represents a yarn barton based in Folly Mill Lane, belonging to Stephen Whetham.

1. The yarn is washed in the bleaching pool.
2. Wet yarn is loaded on to a barrow, to transport it to be dried.
3. Three men handle the yarn on the poles.
4. Priory Mills, built and formerly owned by Stephen Whetham, a distinguished merchant and townsman and father of Austen Whetham, a former Town Clerk.
5. The tower of St Mary's Church.
6. The two chimneys, possibly of North Mills, which was a large water and steam powered complex.