

FLORENCE BRISCOE

1883 - 1975



An illustration from The Idler magazine.

A water colour found after her death

Florence lived at 74 Fowlers Walk from 1932 to her death.

Florence was born in Battersea to Edward and Emma Briscoe. They had 4 children who all followed their father into the London print and publishing trade. Herbert as an engraver and fine etcher, Earnest, known as E.E. Briscoe; was a successful illustrator, Oliver a composer and Florence, who was described in the 1911 census as "artist, black and white". At that time the family were living at Fernlea Road Balham, a four-storey brick and stucco house that suggests the family made a comfortable living.

Like her brother Edward Florence attended Clapham Art School, then unusual for being co-educational. She did well as her work was exhibited in South Kensington. During this period, she started to work as an illustrator for THE IDLER, a magazine that provided an opportunity for illustrators to work with the popular writers of the day. Florence is now known for illustrating the CARNAKI stories by William Hope Hodgson. These feature an occult detective whose appearance in her stylish drawings appears to be modelled on the handsome and adventurous author who was killed at Ypres. It has been suggested that many of the female characters were modelled on herself as they all have the same dark eyed beauty. No photo exists but, as she is remembered in old age as having a rather exotic look, this is possible. William Hope Hodgson's work was largely forgotten except by those interested in horror and occult fiction. However, a recent revival has seen a story by the fantasy writer James Bojaciuk that features Florence Briscoe as a character in an alternative universe. (City of the Saved-Stranger Tales of the City edit. Liz Evershed)

We know little of Florence's life although it is tempting to conjecture adventures for a young woman who was active in the London artistic and publishing circles at of the turn of the century. In 1939 she was described as a commercial artist in the civil registration list, so it seems she was working during her years in Brentham. At the end of her life, she appeared poor, reclusive and a little eccentric. A neighbour described her picking flowers from near-by gardens which then appeared in a jam jar on her front window cill.

After her death the buyer of her house and the contents found a portfolio in the loft. Some of the beautiful etchings and water colours it contained were donated to raise funds for the Brentham book and are still in the estate today; so together with her appearance in fantasy fiction, Florence is not forgotten.

An account of Florence's personal life at <http://greydogtales.com/blog/the-woman-who-drew-william-hope-hodgson/> by James Bojaciuk is incorrect as it appears the illustrator has been confused with another Florence Briscoe who was not born in London. However, it does contain some of her illustrations and a lively account of her early work.