

SIR ALFRED MUNNINGS

Mendham 1878 - 1959 Dedham

Ref: CD 185

*Hazel Mary Buxton on Blackie and Rose Buxton on Micky hunting with the Dunstan Harriers, autumn 1906*



Signed and dated lower right: *A.J. Munnings / 1907*  
 Inscribed on a label on the reverse: *Hazel Mary Buxton on / Blackie – Aged 13. Blackie age... / In front. Rose Buxton on / Micky. hunting with Dunston / Harriers. Autumn. 1906. / By A.J. Munnings . Painted at Swainsthorpe. Church Farm Studio.*  
 Watercolour: 15 x 19 ½ in / 38.1 x 49.5 cm  
 Frame size: 21 x 25 ½ in / 53.3 x 64.8 cm



# RICHARD GREEN

FINE PAINTINGS • ESTABLISHED 1955

*Provenance:*

By family descent to a private collector, UK

This vivid double portrait of Hazel and Rose Buxton was made when Alfred Munnings was living at Church Farm, Swainsthorpe, five miles south of Norwich. After completing a lithographic apprentice with Page Brothers in that city, he had returned to his home village of Mendham on the Norfolk-Suffolk border and struck out on his own as a painter. In 1903 he rented Church Farm from his aunt Polly, who had married a wealthy farmer of nearby Mulbarton. Munnings's themes from those years were drawn from the agricultural life around him: landscapes with horses, hunting subjects, occasional equestrian portraits of the gentry and other local worthies. Like John Constable – also a miller's son - a century before, he relied for commissions on his family's respectable social standing in a tight-knit rural community, while demonstrating his talent and ambition to a wider world by exhibiting at the Royal Academy.

This watercolour of 1907 shows Hazel (1893-1967) and Rose (1898-1989) Buxton out hunting with the Dunston Harriers, which were owned by their father Geoffrey Fowell Buxton of Dunston Hall, a mile from Swainsthorpe. Strong, autumnal colours with red highlights were favoured by Munnings at this date. The work reflects his skill as a watercolourist and strong sense of design, honed by years as a commercial artist for Page Bros. He sets down the information in a direct, vigorous way, placing the two riders to give forward impetus to the composition. Beautifully controlled watercolour washes convey the tense muscularity and glossy coats of the ponies. Hazel and Rose pause on a ridge above a panoramic, wooded landscape which Munnings describes with fluent vigour, using wet washes and stopping-out to describe the autumnal foliage.

Thirteen-year-old Hazel and eight-year-old Rose, the youngest of the nine Buxton siblings, are smartly attired in red and brown, their identical clothing emphasising their harmony. The painting pulses with the excitement of the two young girls poised for the thrill of the chase about to begin. A family memoir describes how Rose 'loved to ride, but was terrified of jumping the big hedges when out hunting. However, wanting to please her father, she never showed fear'<sup>1</sup>.

Geoffrey Fowell Buxton (1852-1929) was the great-grandson of the Quaker Thomas Fowell Buxton, friend of William Wilberforce and fellow campaigner for the abolition of slavery. Part of a Quaker banking dynasty which included the Gurneys, Barclays and Bevans, Geoffrey was on the board of Barclays & Company, which was founded from the amalgamation of twenty provincial banking companies in 1896. He was Mayor of Norwich in 1903. He lived at the neo-Elizabethan, redbrick Dunston Hall and in 1897 bought the Shottesham hounds of Colonel Unthank, renaming them the Dunston Harriers.

Munnings, although busy painting in his new Swainsthorpe studio, found time to ride out almost every day in this 'heart of agricultural Norfolk', recalling in his autobiography that 'I have looked across the fields and valley to Dunston Woods, and have satisfied myself

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<sup>1</sup> We are extremely grateful to family members for so kindly sharing these recollections of Rose Buxton.

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that the domestic landscape of our country is beautiful, romantic and restful<sup>2</sup>. It was unsurprising that the presence of the brilliant young artist came to the attention of the large and influential Buxton clan. In 1905 Munnings was commissioned to paint *Mr Thomas Osborn Springfield, Huntsman to the Dunston Harriers, on his favourite hunter Mangreen*<sup>3</sup>, to mark Springfield's retirement as Huntsman. The fee of £75 was contributed by the Hunt supporters. Springfield was a local landowner and 'one of the best known sportsmen in Norfolk and Suffolk'; Geoffrey Buxton, who owned *Mangreen*, presented the horse to him as a retirement present.

Munnings gave drawing and painting lessons to Hazel and Rose Buxton, who are shown painting a horse held by a groom in a Munnings watercolour dated 21<sup>st</sup> June 1907 (with Richard Green in 1997; private collection, USA)<sup>4</sup>. A charcoal drawing of *Rose Buxton sketching a horse*, 1906, with Rose wearing a similar outfit to that in the present work, was sold at Sotheby's New York on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2000<sup>5</sup>. Rose inherited her artistic abilities from her mother Mary and later made exquisite silk embroideries<sup>6</sup>.

This watercolour of 1907 is related to *Rose and Hazel Buxton meeting the Dunston Harriers* (with Richard Green in 2013; private collection, UK), an oil painting of a similar composition which Munnings probably made in the autumn of 1906<sup>7</sup>. At this stage in his career, he often developed watercolours from an initial idea in oils. The watercolour extends the landscape to the left and defines the trees and rolling terrain more clearly. Also in 1907, he made a rapid oil sketch of the Dunston Harriers by a wood, with a similarly dramatic sky<sup>8</sup>. The watercolour *Taking a fence*, 1906, depicts Alice Buxton of Catton Hall (another branch of the family) with her cousin<sup>9</sup>.

Famed for their 'fabulous good looks and charm'<sup>10</sup>, the Buxton siblings were brought up to be sporty and independent. Geoffrey Buxton believed that girls and boys should be treated equally, so Hazel and Rose grew up hunting, shooting, fishing and playing cricket alongside their brothers. Hazel married Captain Winchester St George Clowes in 1914. Rose, tall, willowy, blue-eyed, 'quiet, strong...sweet-natured'<sup>11</sup>, drove ambulances in the First World War. Having lost 'many friends and relatives, and at least one fiancé'<sup>12</sup>, she wanted a fresh start at the War's end and in 1922 joined her brothers Geoffrey and Toby, who were pioneering settlers in British East Africa (today Kenya).

The following year Rose married Algernon Cartwright, who farmed at Naivasha. They had two children, Giles and Tobina, but the marriage proved unhappy. After her divorce, Rose – a superb and fearless shot – worked as an assistant huntress with the big-game

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<sup>2</sup> *An Artist's Life*, London 1950, p.192.

<sup>3</sup> Signed and dated lower left: *A.J. Munnings / 1905*. 29 ½ x 36 in / 75 x 91.5 cm. Christie's London, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2008, lot 73.

<sup>4</sup> 8 x 11 ½ in / 20.3 x 29.2 cm.

<sup>5</sup> Inscribed lower left: *Rose in the Barn Nov. 16 1906*. 18 x 23 ½ in / 45.7 x 59.7 cm.

<sup>6</sup> Examples are in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum.

<sup>7</sup> Oil on canvas: 20 x 24 in / 50.8 x 61 cm.

<sup>8</sup> Signed and dated 1907. 20 x 24 in / 51 x 61 cm. Sotheby's London, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1989, lot 34.

<sup>9</sup> 9 ½ x 13 in / 24 x 33 cm. Sotheby's London, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1986, lot 15.

<sup>10</sup> Sara Wheeler, *Too Close to the Sun: the Life and Times of Denys Finch Hatton*, London 2007, p.29.

<sup>11</sup> Fiona Capstick, *The Diana Files: the Huntress/Traveller Through History*, Johannesburg 2004, p.229.

<sup>12</sup> Family memoir.

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hunters Bror Blixen and with the legendary Denys Finch Hatton, an Eton friend of her brother Guy, who had often stayed at Dunston Hall. Finch Hatton was immortalised by his lover Karen Blixen, Bror's wife and also a close friend of Rose, in her memoir *Out of Africa* (1937).

Rose thought nothing of hunting Bongo antelope in the forests of the Aberdares, alone except for her Dorobo trackers. She hunted elephant for ivory to pay school fees and once walked right round Lake Turkana (then Lake Rudolf) on a three-month safari. Her granddaughter comments: 'She always maintained that she was a coward, but it seemed to me that she was very brave'. Another friend, the writer Elspeth Huxley, remembered the remarkable woman into which little girl in Munnings's portrait had grown: 'I can see her in her house at Gilgil scattering seed on the polished floor of the living room for the birds, those little finches which my mother called animated plums, the dogs paying no attention, and she perhaps getting on with that wonderful embroidery. She had a lovely, even, melodious voice. Simple tastes, yet appreciation of luxury. Calmness, no false attitudes, a twinkle in the eye'<sup>13</sup>.



The Buxton family at Dunston Hall, Norwich in 1894.



Sir Alfred Munnings, *The painting lesson: Hazel and Rose Buxton*, 1907.  
Private collection, USA.

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<sup>13</sup> CS Nicholls, *Elspeth Huxley: a Biography*, London 2003, pp.138-9.

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Denys Finch Hatton, Rose Buxton Cartwright and Karen Blixen in Kenya.

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## **SIR ALFRED MUNNINGS, PRA, RWS**

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Born in Mendham, Suffolk, Alfred Munnings was the son of a miller. He was apprenticed to a firm of lithographers from 1893 to 1898 and studied at the Norwich School of Art and in Paris. There he was impressed with *plein-air* naturalism; this, together with his introduction to the racecourse in 1899, influenced the themes for which he became famous.

While in Mendham, Munnings painted many scenes of country life, particularly horse fairs. He went to Cornwall in 1908, and for many years was an important addition to the Newlyn School of artists. When the First World War broke out, Munnings enlisted, despite having the use of only one eye owing to an accident in 1899. He became an army horse trainer near Reading and later went to France as an official war artist, attached to the Canadian Cavalry Brigade.

The year 1919 was a major turning-point in all aspects of Munnings's life; he painted his first racehorse, *Pothlyn*, the winner of the Grand National, and became an Associate of the Royal Academy. He met Violet McBride, whom he was to marry, and bought Castle House, Dedham, where the Munnings Memorial Trust maintains a permanent exhibition of his pictures. Munnings's prolific career, spanning over sixty years, brought him honour, with election to the Presidency of the Royal Academy in 1944, a Knighthood in 1945, and a personal award from the Sovereign in 1947, when he was created Knight of the Royal Victorian Order.

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