
The Caffieri Family of Cheltenham

by Richard Barton (Copyright)

St Gregory's Church, Cheltenham, contains a fine series of nineteenth century stained glass windows inserted by John Hardman of Birmingham between the years 1856 and 1900. The story of these windows has been traced by Lt. Col. J. S. Close in his series of articles for the parish magazine which form the basis of the current guide book of the church. One of the earliest batch of windows, installed in time for the opening of the building in 1857, was a two light window in the Lady Chapel, depicting St Philippe and St Marie. Within the window is the following inscription:

“Marie Le Feuvre wife of	Nicholas Philippe Constant.
Caffieri	
Born at Jersey, 14 th Aug.1777	Born at St Omer, France, 6 th
Died at Cheltenham	Sept. 1787. Died at Cheltenham
30 th Nov. 1855	25 th June 1854

They are both buried at Broadway, Worcestershire. R I P

Philippe Caffieri and his wife were living in Bath in 1816, for their son Hector St Cyr, was baptised by Father James Calderbank on the day of his birth, without ceremony. On the 19th April 1824 the same child was supplied with these ceremonies at the Cheltenham Chapel by Father John Birdsall. I have not found any other references to the family in Cheltenham until 1837 when there is a reference in a local directory to Philippe Caffieri teaching French. Three years later another directory carries an advertisement for “Hector Caffieri, Importer and Dealer of Foreign Wines and Spirits” of 3 Portland Place, Cheltenham. “The Cheltenham Looker-On” includes a notice in its edition of 13th January 1842, that Messrs Caffieri and Son had obtained a second depot at Montpellier Wine and Spirit Vaults, in addition to 3 Portland Place. Directories for that year include advertisements for “P Caffieri and Son, of Montpellier Wine and Spirit Vaults, also at 3Portland Place, opposite Trinity Church”. Further references to the Montpellier Vaults include an address of 13 Montpellier Street (next door to Mr Davies' Library) in 1847 and 24 Montpellier street in 1855. The Cheltenham and Gloucestershire Directory for 1868 gives the last reference to the Caffieri business, the address being 23 Montpellier Walk.

Hector St Cyr Caffieri was closely involved with the building of the present St Gregory's Church. At the first public meeting to discuss the project which took place in January 1853, he proposed that it be, “advisable to select from amongst our number the most energetic and

influential, whose office will be to act as a general committee to determine the site and plans of the building". His proposal was accepted and Caffieri became one of the five appointed to serve on the committee. Members of his family donated over £275 towards the new Church.

The 1851 Census reveals that Hector and his London born wife, Mary, were living at 3 Portland Place with four children, Hector, Pauline, Marian and Madeline. Hector Edward Philippe Caffieri, who later became a landscape painter and water colourist, was baptised at St Gregory's Church on 11th June 1847.

Having spent much of his early childhood and youth in England, the younger Hector studied in Paris under Bonnai and Lefebvre. Although he lived and worked mainly in France he is known to have lived in Cookham, Berks, in 1887 and between 1882 and 1901. London addresses included Hampstead Road and Russel Street.

In 1985 Richard Hagen of Cotswold House, Broadway, exhibited fourteen of the artist's paintings. The biographical details in the catalogue included the following:



Hector Caffieri, R.I., R.B.A., R.O.I. 1847-1932

"Caffieri painted in both watercolour and oil and specialised in landscape, marine and still life. He is best known for his scenes of French fisherfolk. Caffieri, like painters before him, most notably Paul Gauguin, was obviously inspired by the every day drama of these simple folk in the course of their often dangerous and hazardous occupation. He must have been equally inspired by the spectacle of their colourful costume and head-dress.

These impressionistic scenes often depicting Breton and Boulogne fisherfolk, either on beaches or putting out to sea, or waiting on cliff tops and quaysides were perennial favourites of the artist. The first to be exhibited at the Royal Academy was entitled Boulogne Woman looking out for Boats, in 1882, thereafter he exhibited at the Academy such titles as Mussel Gatherers, 1885, Toilers of the Sea and Sea Urchins in 1891, Off to the North Sea, 1892 and Boulogne Harbour, 1895.

His output was prolific exhibiting 203 paintings in London alone. Caffieri exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy where he showed over 45 works; at the Royal Institute, where he was made a member in 1885 and the Royal Society of British Artists where he was also made a member. He exhibited, too, at many other institutes and galleries up and down the country as well as at the Paris Salon and elsewhere on the Continent. The artist also seems to have covered the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-8."

Works by the artist can be seen in many private collections including the following museums; Cape Town, Sutherland, Sydney and Warrington. "Boulogne Harbour" is in the Cheltenham Art Gallery Collection. At least nine of his paintings have been reproduced as greetings cards.

Hector Caffieri died in January 1932 at Boulogne-sur-Mer where he had been living since 1903.

Inspired by Sheila Milner, a member of the Cheltenham Civic Society, it was decided to erect a plaque in memory of the Cheltenham artist and this was finally unveiled in February 1986 by Mr Michael Turner of Watford, the grandson of the artist, in the presence of the Mayor of Cheltenham. The plaque was sponsored by the Civic Society and by Mr and Mrs Meath-Baker of Hasfield Court who were associated with the Medici Society.

It seems sad that the Prestbury Road plaque, which claims to be on the site of the artist's birthplace, is actually in the wrong position. The house, 3 Portland Place, has now disappeared having been demolished to make way for Portland Street Car Park, "opposite Trinity Church".

Whilst the artist's father was closely associated with St Gregory's Church we cannot be sure when the family left Cheltenham or where they went. It is likely they left the town in 1868. Our only memorials beside the plaque is the window in St Gregory's Church and the remains of the artist's grandparents which lie in the Catholic cemetery at Broadway.

The author is indebted to Richard Hagen Ltd of Cotswold House Gallery, Broadway, for allowing the photograph of the artist to be reproduced in this journal and for the biographical details concerning the artist.

Richard Barton (1993)