



Mill Hill Park  
Residents'  
Association  
Acton

## A Virtual “Unveiling” of the Plaque to Artist, Margaret Dovaston



*Fig 1. “George VI and Queen Elizabeth Inspecting Air Raid Damage at Perivale, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1940” by Margaret Dovaston*

Among other things, MHPRA seeks to celebrate the history of the Mill Hill Park Estate.

Originally identified by the (now former) Mill Hill Park resident, Nigel Middlemiss as someone of interest, the distinguished war artist and genre painter, Margaret Dovaston, lived and worked at 51 Avenue Gardens from 1925 until her death in 1954.

On Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2020, at 11.00 am, Rupa Huq, our local MP was due to unveil a plaque dedicated to Dovaston in Roman Close just off Avenue Gardens. This, after funding from Ealing Council had been secured, the plaque commissioned, made and fixed in place on the modern home of Paul Hill and Richard Zheng which stands on ground where her demolished house and studio once stood. Guests had agreed to come, all MHPRA Members were to be invited and publicity sent out to attract others who might be interested. Even the (recycled)



curtains and drawstrings were ready. A reception was to follow the formal speeches and unveiling, and an enjoyable, late spring event was envisaged, something along the lines of other such occasions when MHPRA plaques have been unveiled: one to William Willett (2006), the developer of the Mill Hill Park Estate and inventor of Daylight Saving; and one to Richard White (2011), who created the estate itself in the early nineteenth century.



*Fig 2. Plaques to William Willett and Richard White unveiled in 2006 and 2011 respectively, plus the gathering at that later event.*



That was the plan.

Then, quite suddenly all our worlds were turned upside down.

Alongside the more serious effects of the emergence of the Covid 19 Pandemic and in the fight to counter it, subsequent national policies of “Lockdown” and “Social Distancing”, the cancellation of this event was, inevitably, among countless other more minor casualties.

The day has arrived, even so. To mark it, we are “unveiling” materials about Dovaston here, on our website. All those invited to the original event and all MHPRA Members are being alerted to the presence of this material. The press release will be sent out. We hope everyone will enjoy looking at it.

So, here’s why we wanted a plaque to Margaret Dovaston in the first place:



*Fig 3. The Plaque to Margaret Dovaston now fixed in place in Roman Close*

### **Margaret Dovaston was a significant, successful and popular artist**

According to Wikipedia: “Margaret Isabel Dovaston (5 March 1884 – 24 December 1954) was a British artist who became particularly well known for her oil paintings of historical interior English genre scenes, often depicting groups of figures in Eighteenth Century dress. She spent her whole working life in the Ealing and Acton area of west London.”



*Fig 4. Students at the Royal Academy Schools, ca. 1906. Dovaston (circled) studied there from 1903 to 1908.*



Fig 5. "Setting the Boundary" by Margaret Dovaston



Fig 6. "Tea at The Vicarage" by Margaret Dovaston, 1950



As a young woman, she was instrumental in 1910 in helping establish Ealing Art Guild, whose successor, Ealing Arts Club still exists today. She was a versatile, commercial artist, capable of depicting scenes of great drama and violence conjured up from early history:



*Fig 7. "King Constantine I of Scotland being slain by the Danes in 877"*

Her work as a war artist (see *fig. 1.*) covered both World Wars:



*Fig 8. "Private H. J. Hastings D.C.M. of the 2nd Battalion, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry firing on the enemy ... October 23rd 1914"*

### **She produced much of her most distinctive work in her Mill Hill Park studio**

Wikipedia again: "In 1925, she moved to 51 Avenue Gardens, Acton, London where she had a studio built for herself. It was designed by her brother John. This address was where she worked, and later resided, until the end of her life [in 1954].<sup>[16]</sup> **It was here that she developed her style for which she became well known and popular.**

"Typically her oil paintings illustrated elaborate English architectural interiors used as settings for groups of finely-drawn Eighteenth, or early Nineteenth Century figures in detailed Georgian costume... Her...paintings were based on an accurate knowledge of costume, furniture and furnishings of the period. This was gained from many hours spent in London museums and art galleries, and a hobby enabling her to amass an extensive collection of antique clothing and period household items.<sup>[6]</sup> Her other hobbies included gardening and breeding budgerigars and other birds.<sup>[6]</sup> She also had a parrot that was seen in a few of her paintings. **During the Second World War she served as an air raid warden at the post in her garden.**<sup>[18]</sup> During the War she painted a picture depicting Mr Willoughby Garner, the Mayor of Ealing, showing King George VI and Queen Elizabeth the bomb damage inflicted locally on [Perivale](#) in 1940.<sup>[19]</sup> [see *fig. 1* ] In 1956 the Mayor's wife gifted the oil painting to the local council and it is now retained by Ealing Central Library."

[Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret\\_Dovaston](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Dovaston) emphases added]

The Tate Archive holds a letter from Margaret Dovaston regarding her life and work which was sent on 25 August 1938 from 51 Avenue Gardens. [Tate Archive. GB 70 TGA 724/86]

She lived “most of her life in London, but liked to visit the family home, The Nursery, in Twyford, Shropshire where she enjoyed driving a tractor round the grounds whilst chain-smoking.”

[Rowles Fine Art <http://www.rowlesfineart.co.uk/ArtistBiography.aspx?artistInc=3149>]

She never married.

### **There is interest in her and her work to this day**

Wikipedia notes: “The original oil paintings are still desirable and are regularly sold at the main London auction houses and around the world...<sup>[17]</sup>”

One dealer remarks of her: “Dovaston’s paintings appeared widely throughout major British exhibitions...including the Suffolk Street Galleries of London and the Walker Gallery in Liverpool...She was a fine portraitist and figure painter, paying great attention to detail, accuracy, settings and backgrounds of her paintings to provide an honest study. **Dovaston’s work belongs firmly amongst other great genre painters** such as Frank Moss Bennett (1874-1953) and Heywood Hardy (1843-1933).” [Barham Money Antiques <https://picclick.co.uk/Margaret-Dovaston-1884-1955-watercolour-girl-resting-c1910-352571282773.html> emphasis added]

So there you have it, an unusual woman and a successful artist who lived and worked in our neighbourhood, and who has left a significant and varied body of work which still commands attention.

Well worth a plaque.

### **A “REAL” Unveiling?**

Given how difficult it is at this point in May 2020 to predict what the future holds, it would be foolish to suggest a date when such a thing might happen, but the MHPRA Committee are committed in principle, and as circumstances permit, to carry out our original plan for an actual, rather than a virtual celebration of Dovaston and her place in our history with a real unveiling of the real plaque.

And in principle, should it occur, you are of course invited. Until then, we hope you will enjoy knowing a little more about her and about her work.

Dr Ray Batchelor  
On Behalf of the MHPRA Committee  
Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2020