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Alfred Herbert Palmer
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Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, Painter and Etcher

The work of Samuel Palmer (1805–1881) received mixed critical success during his lifetime, and his later life was overshadowed by the death of his elder son. Largely forgotten after his own death in 1881, Palmer began to attract renewed interest in the mid-twentieth century and he is now recognised as a key figure in English Romanticism. First published in 1892, this combination of a biography and a collection of Samuel Palmer's letters was written and compiled by his surviving son, A.H. Palmer, who later, in 1909, burned large quantities of his father's sketchbooks and notebooks. The letters published here, which date from 1829 to 1881, include correspondence with other members of 'the Ancients', such as John Linnell, George Richmond and Edward Calvert. The book also includes a range of sketches and etchings, as well as a catalogue of exhibited works.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00916-4 - Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, Painter and Etcher

Alfred Herbert Palmer

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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978-1-108-00916-4 - Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, Painter and Etcher
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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

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978-1-108-00916-4 - Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, Painter and Etcher

Alfred Herbert Palmer

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



*Samuel Palmer. Et. 63.
From a portrait by A.H. Palmer.*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00916-4 - Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, Painter and Etcher

Alfred Herbert Palmer

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE
Life and Letters
of
SAMUEL PALMER

Painter and Etcher

WRITTEN AND EDITED BY

A. H. Palmer

Illustrated

LONDON

Published by *Seeley & Co., Limited*

Essex Street, in the Strand, 1892

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-00916-4 - Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, Painter and Etcher
 Alfred Herbert Palmer
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	xi
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	xv
THE LIFE OF SAMUEL PALMER	i-170
THE LETTERS OF SAMUEL PALMER TO—	
BARLOW, MR. T. O., R.A.	CIII. September 30 1876 . 365
CALVERT, MR. E.	X. October 9 1838 . 194
„ „	XIII. July 25 1848 . 211
„ „	XXII. „ 11 1861 . 230
CLERGYMAN, A YOUNG	LXVI. February 1869 . 298
COPE, MR. C. W., R.A.	XXVII. June 1862 . 237
„ „	XXVIII. „ 21 „ . 239
„ „	XXXIV. February 1863 . 252
„ „	LXXXIII. September 1872 . 328
„ „	CXX. July 27 1880 . 388
GEORGE, MRS.	XXIII. November 2 1861 . 230
„ „	XXV. March 10 1862 . 232
„ „	LXX. October 1870 . 307
GILCHRIST, MRS. A.	XXIV. December 9 1861 . 231
„ „	XXIX. June 27 1862 . 240
„ „	XXX. „ 2 „ . 243
„ „	XXXI. September „ . 247
„ „	XXXIII. January 1863 . 251
GILES, MR. JOHN	LXIII. May 1868 . 294
„ MR. SAMUEL	XI. October 28 1838 . 201
HAMERTON, MR. P. G.	LXXIV. July 8 1871 . 314

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00916-4 - Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, Painter and Etcher

Alfred Herbert Palmer

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi

CONTENTS.

					PAGE
HAMERTON, MR. P. G. <i>continued</i>	LXXV.	October	1871	.	316
" " 	LXXIX.	January	26 1872	.	322
" " 	LXXXII.	August	"	.	327
" " 	LXXXVIII.	November	"	.	333
" " 	LXXXIX.	November	9 "	.	334
" " 	XCII.	February	1874	.	343
" " 	C.	November	2 1875	.	360
" " 	CXI.	February	17 1879	.	375
" " 	CXII.	August	4 "	.	377
" " 	CXIII.	October	13 "	.	378
HOOKE, MR. B.	LXXIII.	June	1871	.	311
" " 	CXXVII.	March	26 1881	.	401
HOOKE, MR. J. C., R.A.	XXXV.	May	1863	.	253
" " 	CXXI.	August	13 1880	.	390
LINNELL, MR. JOHN	I.	December	21 1828	.	173
" " 	II.	May	17 1829	.	177
PALMER, A. H.	LIV.	October	14 1866	.	282
" " 	LV.	November	4 "	.	283
" " 	LVI.	"	"	.	286
" " 	LXI.	—	1867	.	292
" " 	LXXXI.	June	1872	.	326
PALMER, T. M.	XIX.	"	1859	.	223
REDGRAVE, MR. R., R.A.	XLVII.	July	14 1865	.	273
" " 	LIII.	October	1 1866	.	281
" " 	CII.	March	1876	.	363
REDGRAVE, MRS. R.	LXII.	November	16 1867	.	293
REDGRAVE, MISS FRANCES	L.	July	6 1866	.	277
" " 	LXVIII.	September	1869	.	305
" " 	CI.	January	1876	.	361
REED, MR. JOHN	XV.	"	26 1858	.	216
" " 	XXI.	—	1861	.	228

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00916-4 - Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, Painter and Etcher

Alfred Herbert Palmer

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

<i>C O N T E N T S.</i>				vii
				PAGE
RICHMOND, MR. G., R.A.	III.	September 21	1832	178
" " 	IV.	October 14	1834	180
" " 	V.	" 16	"	182
" " 	VII.	August 19	1835	188
" " 	VIII.	June	1838	190
" " 	LXIX.	December	1869	306
" " 	XCIII.	June 1	1874	347
RICHMOND, MR. & MRS. G.	VI.	———	1835	184
" " 	IX.	September 16	1838	193
RICHMOND, MR. JOHN	LXXXVIII.	November	1871	320
RICHMOND, MISS JULIA (<i>see</i> ROBINSON)	LII.	September	1866	279
RICHMOND, MISS LAURA	XXXII.	———	1862	248
RICHMOND, MESSRS. W. & J.	XLV.	April	1865	270
ROBINSON, MRS. (<i>see</i> RICH- MOND, MISS JULIA)	XCI.	December 9	1872	341
SEELEY, MR. R.	LXXXV.	November 2	"	329
" " 	LXXXVI.	" 6	"	330
STEPHENS, MR. F. G.	LXXX.	May 4	"	324
" " 	LXXXVII.	November 6	"	332
" " 	CVIII.	October 4	1877	371
TWINING, MISS LOUISA	XIV.	August	1856	213
" " 	XVIII.	October 28	1858	222
" " 	XX.	December	1860	225
" " 	XLII.	November 22	1864	264
" " 	CXVI.	" 18	1879	382
VALPY, MR. L. R.	XXXVI.	June	1864	254
" " 	XXXVII.	August	"	256
" " 	XXXVIII.	September	"	257
" " 	XXXIX.	" "	"	259
" " 	XL.	October	"	261

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-00916-4 - Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, Painter and Etcher
 Alfred Herbert Palmer
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

viii

CONTENTS.

					PAGE
VALPY, MR L. R.	<i>continued</i>	XLI.	November	1864	262
„	„	XLIII.	February	1865	267
„	„	XLIV.	„	„	268
„	„	XLVI.	June	3 „	272
„	„	XLVIII.	December	„	274
„	„	XLIX.	February	1866	275
„	„	LI.	August	27 „	278
„	„	LVII.	September	13 1867	289
„	„	LVIII.	„	„	289
„	„	LIX.	October	21 „	290
„	„	LX.	November	6 „	291
„	„	LXIV.	September	1868	296
„	„	LXVII.	March	16 1869	304
„	„	LXXI.	December	13 1870	309
„	„	LXXII.	January	1 1871	310
„	„	LXXVI.	November	„	318
„	„	LXXVII.	„	11 „	320
„	„	XC.	„	1872	340
„	„	XCIV.	February	1 1875	352
„	„	XCVIII.	May	„	356
„	„	XCIX.	„	„	358
„	„	CX.	September	8 1878	374
„	„	CXXV.	February	16 1881	395
„	„	Extracts from Letters to—			397
WILKINSON, MISS	„	XVI.	May	1858	218
„	„	XVII.	September	17 1858	219
„	„	XXVI.	May	29 1862	233
WILLIAMS, DR. W.	„	XII.	March	18 1839	209
WILLIAMS, MR. W.	„	CXVII.	December	26 1879	384
„	„	CXVIII.	—	„	385
„	„	CXIX.	July	20 1880	387

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00916-4 - Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, Painter and Etcher

Alfred Herbert Palmer

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS.

ix

					PAGE
WILLIAMS, MR. W. <i>continued</i>	CXXII.	August	1880	.	391
" " 	CXXVI.	March	14 1881	.	400
WRIGHT, REV. J. P.	LXV.	September	1868	.	296
" " 	CIV.	May	1877	.	366
" " 	CV.	June	2 ,,	.	367
" " 	CVI.	„	9 ,,	.	368
" " 	CVII.	July	17 ,,	.	370
" " 	CXIV.	October	17 1879	.	380
WRIGHT, MR. T. H.	LXXXIV.	„	1872	.	329
" " 	XCIV.	„	1874	.	350
" " 	XCVI.	April	15 1875	.	353
" " 	XCVII.	May	„	.	355
" " 	CIX.	March	4 1878	.	372
" " 	CXV.	October	1879	.	381
" " 	CXXIII.	November	17 1880	.	392
" " 	CXXIV.	December	21 ,,	.	394
A CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITED WORKS AND THE ETCHINGS OF SAMUEL					
PALMER					405

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00916-4 - Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, Painter and Etcher

Alfred Herbert Palmer

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

P R E F A C E

ABOUT ten years ago, when I was writing a short memoir of my father, it occurred to me that a companion volume of his letters might be published. I knew that many of these were preserved by his friends, and esteemed not only on account of regard for the writer, but for what was thought considerable originality. Yet I was not prepared for the extent of the collection which was most courteously placed at my disposal, carrying with it, by virtue of its very existence, the evidence of some merit. The publication of the volume was postponed; but the delay was by no means unfortunate, inasmuch as it gave me leisure to sift the material and reject that which was unsuitable, while applying myself, at the same time, to a closer and more unprejudiced study of my father's life.

There being an analogy between writing dashed off, for the most part, without the slightest thought of publicity, or of literary precision, and rapid sketches from nature done with a purpose and a will, I thought there would be as much danger in tampering in the one case as there always is in the other, and that it would be best to leave the selected letters to stand or fall on their own merits, without the manipulation such collections have sometimes received. Nevertheless I deemed it well to omit passages that were of no interest whatever except to my father's correspondents, the omissions being indicated in the usual way. A few explanatory comments were necessary; but I compressed these within the narrowest possible bounds. I was unable to fill up the gap between the years 1839 and 1848, having no letters of any interest at my disposal written within that period. Should any such exist I should be grateful for the loan of them.

As time went on, I became more and more impressed by the inadequacy and unworthiness of the memoir I have mentioned (a tyro's

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00916-4 - Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, Painter and Etcher

Alfred Herbert Palmer

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

work, superficial, and in some respects misleading), and I thought it would be well to accompany the letters with a new biography which should be more worthy of its subject, and which, above all things, should be true. I therefore began a careful study of all my father's memoranda, artistic and otherwise; of his numerous old pocket-books, his business papers, and particularly of what I will call (for want of a better term) his shorthand notes from nature. These consisted in innumerable little blots and scratches and hastily scribbled hints or impressions, which, slight as they were, bore a far more important part in the artist's professional career and in the growth of his best works than might be supposed.

Many of the rejected letters contained, like the memoranda, passages of biographical or artistic interest, and I decided to quote these passages freely, that, even at the risk of an appearance of patch-work, my father's story might be told as far as possible in his own words.

To those who have read the old life I wish to commend the new, because the relations of the two may be compared to the relations of a somewhat inaccurate and meagre table of contents to any work and the work itself. Even my father's most intimate friends will find that there is something to be learned of his career which is new to them, for much that I have quoted no eyes but his own ever saw before, while of those struggles with adversity which did so much to shape and to ripen his character, few persons knew the full extent.

When the manuscript of the *Life and Letters* was finished I availed myself of the valuable help of Mr. Allan J. Hook, to whose just and pertinent criticisms I consider myself very greatly indebted.

The list of my father's exhibited works and etchings I believe to be fairly accurate and complete; and for this completeness I am much beholden to Mr. F. G. Stephens and Mr. Allan J. Hook, who kindly searched the Royal Academy and some other catalogues. For the list of the works exhibited by the Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours I am responsible myself.

The illustrations in this volume were chosen with some difficulty, and with the advantage of Mr. Seeley's advice, from a large mass of material. As much of my father's work is most difficult to render by any photographic method, we thought it well to choose such examples as could

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00916-4 - Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, Painter and Etcher
Alfred Herbert Palmer
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

P R E F A C E.

xiii

be dealt with with some prospect of success, and which at the same time should be fairly representative.

The portrait is a reproduction of a life-size stump drawing which, as the crude work of a student, will perhaps escape very harsh criticism. It is given as the only portrait in existence showing my father at that age—an age when, mentally, he was in the prime of life.

The device upon the cover is taken from the statue of Endymion in the British Museum. This beautiful figure is mentioned by my father (by the name of “The Sleeping Mercury”) as a test of taste and of the imaginative faculty. See the *Letters*, pages 183 and 261.

A. H. PALMER.

TILFORD, SURREY. *October, 1891.*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00916-4 - Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, Painter and Etcher

Alfred Herbert Palmer

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PORTRAIT OF SAMUEL PALMER, AGED 63. From a Chalk Drawing by A. H. Palmer	<i>Frontispiece</i>
THE WILLOW. An original Etching by Samuel Palmer, executed on his admission to the Etching Club, 1850	PAGE 2
IN LULLINGSTONE PARK, NEAR SHOREHAM. Pencil Sketch from Nature	44
RUTH RETURNED FROM GLEANING. Monochrome Design. Shoreham. Exhibited at the Royal Academy 1829	48
THE BRIGHT CLOUD. Monochrome Design. Shoreham	48
VILLA D'ESTE. A Water-colour Sketch from Nature	60
VESUVIUS 1838. One of a series of Water-colour Sketches of the Mountain as seen from Pompeii while in eruption	70
A STORM ON THE CORNISH COAST. A Water-colour Sketch, from which was taken the motive of <i>Wrecked at Home</i> , exhibited in 1862	70
THE WATER-MILL. Water-colour Drawing known to the Artist as <i>The Margate Mottle</i> . See <i>Life</i> , page 88	88
MOUTH MILL, NEAR CLOVELLY. Pencil Sketch from Nature	106
CLOVELLY PARK. " " " "	106
A CHURCHYARD YEW. Sketch from Nature	122
DESIGNS AT SHOREHAM. Sepia	172
TINTERN ABBEY. Water-colour Sketch from Nature	188
FLORENCE. " " " "	206
PELE POINT, LAND'S END. Pencil Sketch from Nature	212
A STUDY OF SEA. Cornwall. " " " "	212
A PIFFERARO. Water-colour Sketch from Life	234
CROSSING THE BROOK. A Water-colour Drawing. Unfinished	266
IN CLOVELLY PARK. A Sketch from Nature, in Chalk and Coloured Crayons . .	322
THE CAPITOL. Water-colour Sketch from Nature	344
A KENTISH HOP GARDEN. Shoreham. Pen and Ink. In the text	405
CRICKETS. A Study from Life. Chalk. " " " "	422