

Finding Frances Hodgkins

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Introduction

In 2013, as Senior Curator, Mackelvie Collection, International Art at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, I took on the task of updating an unpublished catalogue raisonné of the works of New Zealand expatriate artist Frances Hodgkins begun by former Auckland Art Gallery director Rodney Wilson. A book (or website, as in Hodgkins' case) that hopes to capture all the works of an artist with up-to-date information is a challenge at any time. With this one, it became apparent early on that there were a number of works without titles, or of unnamed places; it was also striking just how different from each other so many of Hodgkins' paintings are, in part because she was constantly on the move. Faced with trying to sort out just how her painting style and subject matter evolved as a result of her gypsy lifestyle, I decided to follow in her footsteps.

Naïvely, I felt I was reasonably equipped to trace her journeys, having travelled on and off for 30 years and lived in a remote community far from the pressures of urban life. In the 1970s and 1980s I'd spent several summers living on a remote farm on the Greek island of Paros in the Cyclades with my husband, David, and young son, Marcus. We rented a dowry house, a small cluster of rooms around a courtyard traditionally given to each daughter of a family so that they would always maintain a link to the family land. Ours belonged to an elderly woman in the village of Naoussa, while the farm itself was some five kilometres away at Langari, where we shared the simple but deeply satisfying life of three generations of the family, with its seasonal cycles of hardship, harvest and ritual celebration.

We had a large bedroom furnished with rough wooden beds on which were rudimentary mattresses stuffed with straw, and across a courtyard was a primitive kitchen attached to a barn where the family's hard-working donkey and mule spent their nights, and where swarms of flies hovered and buzzed during the day. We drew water, made drinkable by the addition of a chunk of lime, from the nearby well. Another well down the rocky path to the bay was good only for washing ourselves and our clothes after a day swimming at 'our' beach, a small cove beneath a tiny whitewashed church, where the Madonna had taken over the role of a much more archaic goddess, guarding the nearby well in a walled orchard of figs.

As we were gathered more and more into the family, our Greek improving out of sheer necessity, we helped with various tasks on the farm, walking behind the mule pulling an iron plough and gathering potatoes from the newly turned earth. We loaded them into large olive-oil tins that had been turned into buckets with the aid of a rough piece of wood fixed across the top as a handle. Nothing was ever wasted. We spent one day planting a field of onions, bending until exhausted — long before our Greek family straightened their backs. David and a friend were also roped into the wheat harvest. We were paid with wedding wine (a rosé far more palatable than the everyday retsina), chunks of τυρό, a hard white goat's cheese that grated like Parmigiano, and, before our departure the second year, a platter of the roasted corpses of their beautiful white doves, which was the best they could give us. We wept silent tears after the family had left, as we had loved the doves' swooping flight to and from the white-plastered dovecot on one side of the barn.

One day Marcus endured an agonising three-hour donkey ride (sitting behind the saddle on the animal's rough rump) into the centre of the island, where we pushed our way through shoulder-high wheat to a tiny church, its whitewashed walls catching the late-afternoon sun. Its interior was simplicity itself: a barrel-vaulted roof; black-and-white tiles on the floor; and a primitive altar behind a simple curtain, standing in for the more ornate iconostasis in larger Greek churches, on which hung a picture of the



Virgin Mary. The cloth was covered with stamped tin and silver votives of breasts, including torsos of Victorian women in bustles with their upper bodies exposed, for the church is dedicated to breastfeeding mothers.

I assumed we were there with Leila and her two lovely daughters to give prayers of thanks, but instead we swept the church floor clear of dust, leaves and the odd dead spider, trimmed the wicks of the oil lamps and placed new candles in their holders before crossing ourselves silently and making the long trek home again. I came to love the simple rituals that interwove faith, community, land and sea, but in our time on the island we also saw how politics could divide a community. It was an early insight into what Frances Hodgkins found in some of the villages in Morocco, France and Spain during her constant journeying between 1901 and 1939.

When I finally went to university in the 1980s I wanted to study Greek, as I was still writing to our family on Paros, but the subject wasn't available so I chose Italian and art history instead. Since then I've been fortunate to spend a considerable time in Italy, but always doing Italian, Renaissance and baroque research, absorbed by the beauty of the art and architecture of Florence, Venice and Rome. I remain a social art historian, believing that art is inevitably linked to the society and locale in which it was created, if only we are able to understand it. I am equally curious about how and why artists create in the way they do, whether painting in a traditional manner on canvas or church wall, or playing the magician with the digital tools we have available today. But my journey in search of Frances Hodgkins and the places in which she worked was more than that. As a modernist she was committed to the quotidian rather than the grand statement, and I wanted to discover how she transformed 'the everyday' into something that was often lyrical, even rapturous, and ultimately timeless.

From early on in my work on updating the Hodgkins catalogue it became obvious that many of her paintings were specific to place. But the question was: where exactly? Many titles had been given to paintings long after they were done, by dealers and auctioneers, and I sensed that they weren't all correct. Accordingly, in 2015 I set off searching for

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Paros, Greece, in the 1970s: Marcus and me at Mycenae; the kitchen at Langari; our 'family' on the farm at Langari: from left, Panayiota, Stelliane, Eleni, Aristides and Leila; Aristides arriving with the news of the birth of his son.

Frances Hodgkins. Like her, I didn't always travel alone, and was grateful for the company of friends who volunteered to help: my ex-neighbour Mary Gee, who was with me for my first 10 days on the French Riviera; Chloe Steer, a long-time friend and selfless volunteer who has worked on the project from the start; and Catherine Hammond, senior librarian at Auckland Art Gallery. Catherine organised visits for the two of us to libraries and archives in Paris and London, and gamely allowed me to drive her around Pembrokeshire in Wales. Without them, and others I met on the way, this project would never have progressed.

I was unable to achieve everything I wanted on my first trip, so I led a tour back to France and Spain in 2016 in the hope of tidying up loose ends, and returned again in 2018. You never can discover everything, but you can die trying . . .

I have structured this book around the routes I took, rather than tracking each place Hodgkins stayed in or the exact chronology of her travels. She visited Martigues five times, for example, but I went there only twice, and while she sometimes stayed in one place for weeks or months, I might have had only a day or, as was the case in parts of England, several hours.

My journey began in Mantua in northern Italy with Mary, moved across the southern coast of France and into Spain, where I was accompanied in part by fellow Hodgkins aficionado Antoni Ribas Tur as well as Chloe, then on to Paris and England. There the journey stretched along the coast from St Ives as far as Brighton and up to London, where I said goodbye to Chloe and took up the search with Catherine. We spent a week in the archives of Tate Britain and other repositories like the British Council, then took the train to Cardiff — Catherine to attend a library conference and I to view the Hodgkins paintings in the city's public gallery. We travelled on to Pembrokeshire, then back to London, before I struck off for Wales, returning to London via Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool. And then we returned to Paris.

Brittany is the only region Hodgkins frequented that I have failed to

visit. I tried in both 2015 and 2016, but it would have taken an eight-hour journey to get there, whether by train or by flying from the south of France, and even the train from Paris can take six hours. With the likelihood of only an overnight stay, it proved impossible. Fortunately, Hodgkins was much keener on including the names of the Breton towns where she stayed in the titles of her works, and these along with information from websites, her own photographs and the invaluable postcards collated by Professor Roger Collins of the hotels and environs in which she lodged, have given me a sense of her responses to these places.

Apart from when she went to Paris, almost all Hodgkins' visits to France were for teaching purposes, and the coastal towns of Brittany were popular resorts for tourists and artists alike. There the mild summer weather made it easy to work en plein air, accommodation and restaurants were plentiful, and travel between towns and villages appears to have caused few difficulties. There was also the benefit of stormy skylines when the autumn months began to advance.

With images of all Hodgkins' known works stored on my iPad, my hope was to stand in the places Hodgkins stood, to look at the same views, to breathe the sea air and smell the wild herbs and resinous forests so as to greater understand the conscious decisions she made when translating these things onto paper or canvas. My travels have allowed me to comprehend more clearly the way villages, their inhabitants, their everyday objects — buildings, pottery, shrines, even tree stumps — became the motifs that linked her works to a specific time and place. The sketches created in each place became a visual memory bank on which Hodgkins could draw when an oil painting or gouache needed 'that special something' to tie a composition together. I have garnered a much wider appreciation of the richness and diversity of her work, which remained vital and everchanging until the end of her life.

So this is a memoir of my own journeying, the wonderful friends and colleagues who have dipped in and out of particular places with me, and the adventures and misadventures we experienced on the way.

Wherever possible, I have also included in the text parts of Hodgkins' letters, which are remarkable in themselves for the way they show her ability to paint pictures in words. Hodgkins' spelling was notoriously erratic, so in some cases I have made small corrections to facilitate reading; otherwise her original spelling and creative use of punctuation remain. I see the text as a kind of partner with the catalogue that focuses on works included in the exhibition *Frances Hodgkins: European Journeys*, allowing me to take you, the reader, with me on my travels.

Frances Hodgkins was born in 1869 in Dunedin, a city built on the proceeds of gold and the wealthiest in New Zealand at the time. Her father, William Hodgkins, was a solicitor, but his work seems to have taken second place to his love of art. Growing up in England, he had been particularly drawn to the landscapes of John Constable and William Turner, the former famous for depictions of the bucolic rural landscapes of Suffolk, the latter for his remarkable capture of the effects of weather — mist, storms, brilliant skies — that spoke of the sublime and untamed natural world. William Hodgkins found both in Central Otago, and would spend his weekends with his daughters, Isabel and Frances, capturing these effects in watercolour. His wife, Rachel, had always believed that Frances had more talent musically and would make her living in this field, but she hadn't considered her younger daughter's independent streak. And what her family failed to see was patently apparent to others.

Two decades after Frances Hodgkins' death in Dorset, England, in 1947, a recording was made of those who remembered her in Dunedin. In her family's eyes, Isabel was both the beauty of the family and the inheritor of her father's talent. Yet according to a former neighbour, Elsie Royce (now Mrs Morah), Frances often had a pencil in her hand, sitting down one day at the Royces' long table to make a copy of a painting of a cat and kittens hanging over the mantelpiece. She asked if they had any paints in the house, and these were duly supplied. When Elsie's mother saw what Frances had

done, she said, 'Someday that girl will be an artist.' Elsie Royce went on: 'She wasn't dominated, but she was thought nothing much of by her own family . . . Frances was rather shortish and exactly like the photographs you see of her. I don't think you would have called her good-looking but she was a very bright talkative sort of person and I think in a way that she felt a bit of an inferiority complex when she was young . . . only because she didn't get much encouragement you see from her own family.'

After spending time in Australia, the Sienese painter Girolamo Nerli set himself up as a teacher in Dunedin in 1893, and Hodgkins joined his painting class. Nerli wasn't the most dedicated of teachers, preferring to spend his time in the hotel after setting his students the subject for the day, but he evidently provided them with stimulating descriptions of the changes that were taking place in the studios of Europe. He belonged to a group of painters known as the Macchiaioli or mark makers, whose deliberate avoidance of the smooth glazes and high finishes promoted by the traditional academies of Italy, France and England served as a precursor of impressionism. They did, however, retain some of the darker tones of the Academy, something Hodgkins would turn away from in her own work. Partly this may have stemmed from her preference for watercolour at the time, and the translucent effects that could be achieved by painting wet on wet — that is, saturating the paper first and then floating the pigments onto the damp surface. It took great control to get the effect needed, and already in some of her Otago watercolours she had started experimenting with shorter dabs of colour on dry paper as a contrast to her washes.

Hodgkins was 24 when she started in Nerli's classes, and the results proved very rewarding. Both her family and Dunedin society at large began to take her seriously, and in 1895 and 1896 she took the two courses that allowed her to sit the examinations set in South Kensington, England, that would qualify her to teach. She passed with excellent grades, and began to visualise a future in which she could make her living through art. But Nerli had done more than prepare her for a career — he had given her a sense that there was a bohemian society on the other side of the

world where she would be less constrained by the conservative mores of colonial New Zealand. This, however, would have to wait.

William Hodgkins died in 1898, leaving his family far less well-off than they had expected, so Hodgkins set herself up as a teacher. She developed a love of painting people, as well as landscapes, and although she did some formal watercolour portraits when commissioned to do so, she preferred painting domestic scenes. She also spent time on the Otago Peninsula painting Māori women and children, whom she persuaded to sit for her in exchange for a few pennies. Although she would have been unaware of it, she was developing a practice that would remain with her for the rest of her career, and her painting became fresh and more individualistic as a result.

Hodgkins had her eyes on Europe, resisting expectations that she would take care of her mother. After visiting Wellington, she returned to Dunedin to teach for a year, then on 6 February 1901 boarded the *Moana*, bound for England via Australia.

Her intention was to stay in Europe for a couple of years to acquire further skills before returning to New Zealand permanently. In fact she only ever made two trips home to New Zealand, the first at the end of 1904, when she set up a studio in Bowen Street in Wellington. Her engagement to an English journalist and writer, Thomas Wilby, whom she and her friend and fellow New Zealand artist Dorothy Kate Richmond had met on the boat home, was announced in the newspapers at the end of the year. Wilby had disembarked in Cairo, but had sent Frances a scarab with a wittily illustrated letter describing its function within ancient Egyptian culture. Romance blossomed, and after the announcement of their engagement, he wrote a letter to Mrs Hodgkins from New York, laying out his intentions:

‘It is difficult to know exactly what to say in this preliminary letter. You of course know my intentions with regard to Frances. She has, in a weak moment, promised to make me the happiest of men in his wife and his mother-in-law. The business side of the matter I have already communicated in part to Frances & to Miss Richmond. I would have liked very much to come over to New Zealand this year, but the difficulty of



Frances Hodgkins photographed in 1904, Wellington, around the time of her engagement.

E. H. McCormick Papers, E. H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of Linda Gill, 2015. Photo by Langfrier Ltd, London.

getting away is insurmountable. Finally the obstacles were removed by Frances' proposal to meet me in Europe. Of course I fully realise that if the marriage is to take place it should be in New Zealand in your presence. But even if the marriage takes place in Europe, Frances would be desirous of returning to N.Z. for a short time as I understand, though I don't see how I could ever let her go from me once we were man & wife. I should feel the separation too keenly. But perhaps the difficulty could be overcome by my sailing for New Zealand with her in 1906.

'However this is anticipating things, is it not? I am endeavouring just now to make arrangements by which I can settle down in London or in Paris, as it is in one of these cities I should like to make my home with Frances.

'I feel that you must naturally be very anxious about Frances & that you imagine that she is taking me very much on trust in the absence of anything more tangible than my love for her. I have no relatives, so-called, only friends who have an intimate knowledge of me & to whom I could refer you, because I feel it is only right that Frances should know something about me from an outside source. But Frances & I know each other in a way that no relatives could add to. I know her whole life & nature through my own heart. Very sincerely yours, T W B Wilby.'

It's difficult to know what went wrong, but at some point in 1905 the engagement was broken off, and Hodgkins spent a very unhappy year in Wellington before her mother relieved her of her familial obligations and allowed her to return to Europe. Wilby went on to marry someone else, and came to world attention in 1911 as the first man (along with his driver Jack Haney) to cross Canada by motorcar. He published his account of the journey three years later. When, in later life, Hodgkins' friend Douglas Glass quizzed her about why she hadn't married, she refrained from explaining, saying that if she did she would be forced to lie. He didn't push her any further, so the real cause for the separation may never be known.

Hodgkins' last visit home at the end of 1912 allowed her to enjoy the Australasian summer, have sell-out shows in Melbourne and Sydney, and

catch up with family and friends before she arrived in Wellington in time for Christmas. This time there was never any doubt that she was there only temporarily and that her future lay on the other side of the world.

Determined to make her name as a professional artist on the European stage, Hodgkins had embarked on an itinerant life that ceased only during the two world wars, when travel to her favourite places in France, North Africa, Holland and Spain was no longer possible. On average, she moved six times a year between 1901 and her death in 1947, often returning to locations she favoured, initially because the climate, accommodation and desired subject matter suited her students, but in later years because a familiar place was a kind of homecoming. After receiving a contract with St George's Gallery in London in 1929, she no longer needed students to make ends meet, but those who had become friends often travelled to whichever location she was in anyway.

Although described initially as an impressionist, Hodgkins' studies of colour and light transformed into colour and form — the landscape, the traditional cubic buildings, the pruned olive and cork trees simplified as if they were part of a child's drawing. These became the focus alongside the expanses of view and changes of light so key to the Mediterranean landscape. It was only in the late 1930s that she finally came to terms with the English countryside with its soft greens and dappled masses, though she preferred the bare branches of winter — forms and motifs that she transferred into sculptural objects in the landscape. And ultimately it was England itself that became her focus and her delight. Two years before she died, she wrote to her friend and dealer Eardley Knollys: 'My Muse has returned to me. I found her waiting for me on the doorstep faithful wench, which goes to show how futile it is to travel over Mountains in search of material when it lies at your own pavement, for the seeing. I am weary after quite a stupendous onset, but much less weary than if I had not achieved it.'

01

Caudebec-en-Caux

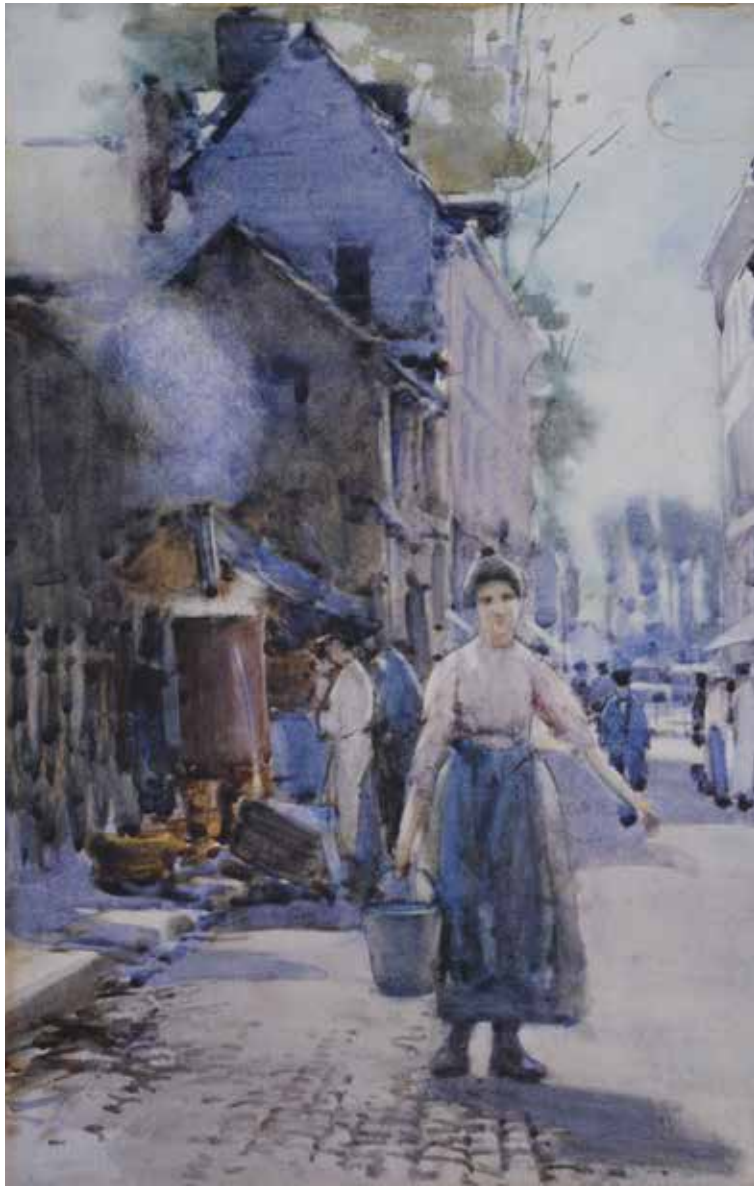
FRANCE

Hodgkins' first taste of the western communes of France was in Caudebec-en-Caux in 1901, when she joined Norman Garstin's art class at the end of June, staying on until early September. As arranged in London, Dorothy Kate Richmond was already there, Hodgkins noting in a letter to her mother how her friend was 'winning all hearts by her sweetness & beauty, it is a kind of link with Wellington having her here, we talk about our respective nieces . . .'.¹ They were to become seasoned, like-minded travelling companions, with an ability to tease or defend their own corner to balance out any excesses of enthusiasm.

In the same letter Hodgkins described how their group, which numbered 12 to start with, had to be 'spread over the town in detachments'. On a normal working day, 'We rise betimes and are out by 6.30, work till midday then back to dejeuner, a comprehensive meal consisting of many courses mostly vegetables & very under done meat, puddings never and copious libations of cider. This is a great cider district and the inhabitants get gloriously drunk, after dejeuner we rest till 3, when we all meet in a large room & have afternoon tea and criticise each other's work, then out again for evening effects & at 8.30 we have another huge meal which lasts till 10 o'clock & we end the evening with a stroll & so to bed.

'I wish you could see my room, very small room very large mahogany bedstead small table which serves as both dressing table & wash stand, a pie dish & milk jug to wash in and a looking glass whose face is cracked in three places. In my best French I asked for a chest of drawers or failing that for some pegs. The Landlord looked at me blankly, ruminated aloud with hand on brow then disappeared and after some time reappeared staggering with two other men under a huge side board, it now fills up all the available space in my room and is better than nothing.

'For all these luxuries we pay 5 frcs a day equal to 30/- a week in English money. Baths are unheard of and are looked upon as one of the many idiosyncrasies of the Britisher abroad. You can get them if you like to pay a franc each time but ones weekly washing bill would soon run up at that rate. Miss Richmond has a rubber bath and I manage to keep



fairly cleanly . . . Miss Richmond and I are never tired of congratulating ourselves on our good luck in coming abroad with such delightful people as the Garstins. She is such a nice woman, very practical and clever and manages her husband's business for him. She knows nothing at all about painting & never knows her husband's sketches from one of ours.'²

In *Making Cider, Caudebec, Normandy* (c.1901) (Fig. 1), Hodgkins depicted the large copper vat in which the apples were boiled in preparation for the cider, watched closely by the apple pickers at the edge of the road. The compositional structure of the work is similar to many from this time, with a close attention to buildings lining the street, leading the eye into deep space, while a young woman, bent slightly sideways by the weight of her bucket, walks towards us across the cobbles. Steam rises up from the chimney pipe above the copper, which Hodgkins depicted by sponging off the pigment after it had been applied. The pale-blue sky and the girl's deep shadow give a sense of the heat of the day.

At the beginning of September 1901 Hodgkins set off for Paris with Molly Sale, one of the students who had joined the group, which had grown to almost 40 by the end of August. Hodgkins planned to find some cheap rooms in the Latin quarter before Molly went back to London, while she went on a cycling tour with another student, and a friend of the Garstins, Maud Nickalls, while the good weather lasted. Once teaching was over they were to be joined en route by the Garstins and Dorothy Richmond, who had headed further south but who would organise her return trip so that they met up at some point.

Hodgkins was planning to stay in Normandy, but first she had to acquire a second-hand bicycle, a relatively easy task in Paris, where she hoped to pick one up for around £6. She had sold some of her sketches, so was better off than she had imagined; the £20 she'd earned would keep her for two months if she was frugal. One of her sales was to another student, the widowed Mrs Ashington, who was to accompany her to the Italian Riviera the following year. Hodgkins had a facility for friendship, and a number of women she met at this time remained friends for many

Fig. 1 *Making Cider, Caudebec, Normandy*, c.1901, watercolour on paper. Private collection.

years. But at times she was assailed by homesickness, for which Richmond insisted the only remedy was whisky and a hot bottle: '[T]he latter I have the moral courage to refuse. I have still the remains of Wilsons "very best" in my flask to this day, it is much better policy when travelling to drink other people's whisky, when available.'

One Sunday she and Nickalls rode their bikes out to Jumièges to see the ruins of the abbey. Hodgkins loved the decayed walls of the church rising upwards, but was far less flattering about many of the local churches, whose structures, she felt, had been subsumed beneath far too much decoration. She was, however, much taken with the way religious festivals were celebrated: 'The R.C. churches are all so tawdry and the beauty of the buildings so spoilt by these fripperies, banners & hideous saints covered with ribbons & flowers. We had a great church fete here last week, the feast of the Assumption, one of the three great R.C. feast days of the year. For several days before there were great preparations all the saints in the church were taken down & cleaned & garnished with new ribbons & fresh flowers the night before. I saw a wheelbarrow with no less than 3 saints sitting bolt upright & looking very clean & frivolous so covered were they with flowers & ribbons. The next day commenced with much bell ringing and after High Mass there was a grand procession through the old town headed by the priests in their gorgeous vestments proceeded by acolytes and after them came a number of young girls in their snowy communion dresses looking so spotless & pure against the background of grim old houses. A quaint custom is that all persons who are called Marie should receive a gift from the Church, the gifts generally take the form of flowers and cakes with "Vive Marie" written on these in icing. It is certainly a most picturesque religion.

'You would love the Calvarys and the Pietas along the roads. The Pietas are generally little railed in monuments of a recumbent figure of the dead Christ rudely modelled and sometimes colored. It is very beautiful country all round this neighbourhood and the peasants are a real joy. I would like to buy a few and take them out with me as properties. Some of



ABOVE Frances Hodgkins' Cyclists' Touring Club Special Customs Ticket, 1902.
E.H. McCormick Papers,
E. H. McCormick
Research Library,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, gift of
Linda Gill, 2015.



RIGHT Frances Hodgkins (far right) with two of her pupils at St-Valery-sur-Somme, 1912.
E.H. McCormick Papers,
E. H. McCormick
Research Library,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, gift of
Linda Gill, 2015.

the old men wear such beautiful blue corduroy bags that make me ache to paint them, it is a great sight to see them on Market day (every Saturday) the whole town is covered with little canvas booths and with the different goods displayed and the babel of noise that goes on, each stallholder crying up their own particular wares.

‘It is useless trying to paint a market scene, we have all tried and then sadly turned our backs on its fascinations. We found we always come home so cross & irritable after a morning spent in the market that Mr Garstin mildly suggested that we should cease wrestling with it. I think French people are most charming, they are so smiling and gracious and wherever we go we always meet with the greatest civility and kindness, they are certainly very dirty and have many nasty little tricks, but for all that they are a very lovable people with the most charming manners in the world.’⁴

Hodgkins’ comments were prescient — as in life, so in art — for her future career as a modernist included the reduction of forms to their simplest structure, and during the 1920s she gradually moved away from indoor scenes and out into the landscape, taking her favoured pots and jars and flowers with her. Equally, she stayed away from churches, while continuing to be fascinated by the rituals that took people’s beliefs into the streets and to wayside shrines, or on church processions.

When Hodgkins and Sale got to Paris they found accommodation at 21 avenue de la Grande Armée, a couple of blocks from the Arc de Triomphe. The city was quiet and relatively empty for the summer vacation. Despite their best efforts to be frugal, she and Sale spent double what they had intended. Hodgkins described to her sister Isabel a visit they made to the opera: ‘Molly & I took seats in the 10th tier & at 7 o’clock found ourselves tucked away under the roof. Such a place, I never saw anything as gorgeous in all my life. It was Wagner’s Tannhauser with one of the leading orchestras in Europe. Nearly all the parts were taken by

musical celebrities, there was something so weird & uncanny sitting so high up and listening to this grand volume of sound coming from below and seeing little fore-shortened pinhead figures acting on the stage.

‘There is something wicked about Wagner’s music I think which seemed heightened by the gorgeous staging & magnificent surroundings, it was not over till 12 o’clock and as we were too tired to wrestle with our bus we took a cab home and drove thro’ Paris at midnight which was as brilliantly lit up then as earlier in the evening. You can have no idea of the beauty of Paris. There is a white glamour about it which is dazzling, the wide open streets & the almost silent traffic on the wooden pavements. The buildings are truly magnificent & everything is built with a view to beautifying the city. There is not an ugly spot to be seen.’⁵

Yet, in spite of its charms, Hodgkins felt out of kilter with the city, perhaps because she felt her shabby clothes stood out amid so much elegance. It was also an awkward time to be there, with so many of the galleries and theatres closed for the holidays.

02

Les Andelys and Dinan FRANCE

Hodgkins' next destination was Les Andelys, a very pretty village beside the river Seine in Normandy in northern France, which is dominated by a remarkable twelfth-century castle sitting on the top of the precipitous mountain that overlooks the area. Hodgkins stayed for a few weeks, where unlike in Caudebec she managed to complete some rapid sketches in the market, including one of a group of men looking over a group of calves for sale. Markets were difficult subjects, because people were there to work, not to pose for itinerant artists, so she had to become adept in putting down her impressions with a few considered strokes, backed up by dabs and dashes, much in the Macchiaioli style of painting that she had learned from Nerli in Dunedin.

She had more success when she went to Dinan, in Brittany, in July 1902, possibly because she sketched in the architecture rapidly, leaving it to be finished later, and concentrated instead on the figures. *In the Meat Market, Dinan* (1902) (Fig. 2) depicts a boater-hatted meat vendor presumably weighing out the customer's purchase and wrapping it while the woman stands, hand on hips. She looks like a woman who knows her business, leaning slightly to one side in concentration as she oversees the process. In the foreground, a girl of around 10 is shown walking into the picture from the artist's right, a pose that became a favourite of the time. Balancing a flat basket on her hip, she is dressed in a simple white summer shift, with a plait that falls down her back.

From this time on, many of Hodgkins' market scenes focused on the interactions of a small number of people, whereas the white-capped women in the background, as seen here, are simply 'staffage' — there to fill the scene like the chorus in a play. A greater attention to human reaction is also seen in a work done in the fish market, with one woman furtively observing the quality of the purchase being made by the customer beside her, the old lady behind the trestle table merely sitting, hands in lap, rather than attempting to bargain with the buyer, as if she senses that the woman is merely passing the time of day.

The little town, its cobbled centre lined with half-timbered houses, was



Fig. 2 *In the Meat Market, Dinan, 1902*, watercolour on paper. Private collection.

charm itself. Hodgkins informed her mother after she had moved on to northern Italy: 'We have had a very happy fortnight in spite of struggling with pictures & elements — we were a jolly little party — Mr Garstin, the Col, & Mr Legge & we three — ours was the only sitting room & they spent their evening round our log fires. If it was fine & not too cold we used to walk on the Ramparts. The Prof. was always so gay & amusing & the other two men were travellers & had lots of tales. What a queer little world, getting to know people so well & then saying goodbye — it is the way of life but a sad way I think. Mr Garstin went off today — such a miserable depressing sort of a day & he will have a beastly crossing I am afraid. We saw him off at the station & saw him safely into the train with all his belongings. He is much too absent minded to be allowed to travel alone. I wish you could have known him, it has been a great privilege to have had his friendship. I think of Spenser's "very gentle parfect knight" he was so courteous & kindly to everyone, & so witty & charming.'¹

From early on Hodgkins had developed a preference for French food, although she was shocked by the amount people ate. She wrote to her mother from rue de l'Apport, Dinan, in the summer of 1902: 'I expect you get deadly weary of your own cooking — never mind wait till I get home & I shall make you wonderful French messes out of nothing at all & cook you vegetables a la Français. French cooking may make you very ill but at least it can never be dull. A good chef boasts he can create an appetite "under the ribs of death" he certainly is a man of many sauces — you may not like them all but you cannot help admiring his originality. French people are so fat & oily looking — they eat far too much. They have a huge gorge at midday which must reduce them to a state of torpor for the rest of the day. It certainly has that effect on us for at least an hour afterwards & we are only pulled together & primed for working again by afternoon tea at 3.30.'²