

*Transcribed from the 1955 RSA Annual Report*

David Alison was born in Dysart in 1882 and at an early age showed signs of artistic talent. He was sent to a lithographic studio for his first training and later he went to the Glasgow School of Art, where he worked for four years. After a year in Italy, he attended the Painting School of the Royal Scottish Academy; then followed a period of study in Paris and also in Spain, where the work of Velasquez made a lasting impression on him—an impression which remained unweakened till the end of his life.

Alison had his first studio in Dysart and thereafter in Edinburgh. In 1913 he was appointed to the staff of the Edinburgh College of Art, He married in the same year and his portrait, "The Artist's Wife," was much admired when it was first exhibited.

He joined the Royal Scots in 1914, serving in Gallipoli, and was wounded. In 1916 he was elected an Associate of the Royal Scottish Academy, and after his return to civil life he was appointed head of the school of drawing and painting at the Edinburgh College of Art. He was also a Member of the Royal Society of Portrait Painters.

Between the two world wars, Alison carried out a series of distinguished portraits, among others, of the Duke of Roxburghe, the Earl of Mar and Kellie and the Earl of Strathmore. He also painted portrait groups and probably reached his fullest height as an artist in paintings of his family and his intimate friends.

Alison had a complete command of his technique and this was reflected in the high standard of his work. He was an artist of great integrity and perhaps his own most severe critic.

In 1944 he resigned his post at the Edinburgh College of Art and went to London, but he never felt at home there and suffered a serious breakdown in health. He returned to Edinburgh, where he died on January 14, 1955.

David Alison was a man of direct and forceful character, forthright in thought and expression, with a brusqueness which concealed an essentially shy and sensitive nature.