

A well-known painter

When Helen's father Charles Chalmers was knighted by King George V in 1918, Elizabeth became Lady Chalmers. After her husband's death in 1924, she herself took up painting, a vocation she first imagined for herself when being painted as a child; Frank Bramley had also encouraged her in this direction.

This photograph accompanied a 1928 newspaper notice that "Lady Chalmers, the well known flower and portrait painter, is at work in her Chelsea studio in preparation for her Bond Street exhibition."

Further glimpses from the Chalmers' women's lives emerge in a pair of society ball costume sketches, by Scottish painter Anna Zinkeisen.

These were the first part of an extraordinary gift of works of art from the adult Helen and her husband Donald Cameron, who married in Edinburgh in 1940 and immigrated to New Zealand in 1975. The portraits by (and of) Frank Bramley were generously gifted by bequest in 1990.

Ken Hall

Top left: 'Artist preparing London Exhibition' 1928. Planet News Archive/SSPL/Getty Images

Bottom left: Anna Katrina Zinkeisen *Lady Chalmers and Miss Helen Chalmers Costume Designs* c.1928. Gouache, pencil and watercolour. Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, presented by Mr D.M.R. and Mrs H. Cameron 1983



Take a closer look
at Frank Bramley's
**Helen Graham Chalmers
and Her Mother**

Cover:
Frank Bramley
Helen Graham Chalmers and Her Mother (detail) 1908
Oil on canvas
Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu,
Mr D.M.R. and Mrs H. Cameron Bequest 1990

**CHRISTCHURCH
ART GALLERY
TE PUNA O
WAIWHETU**

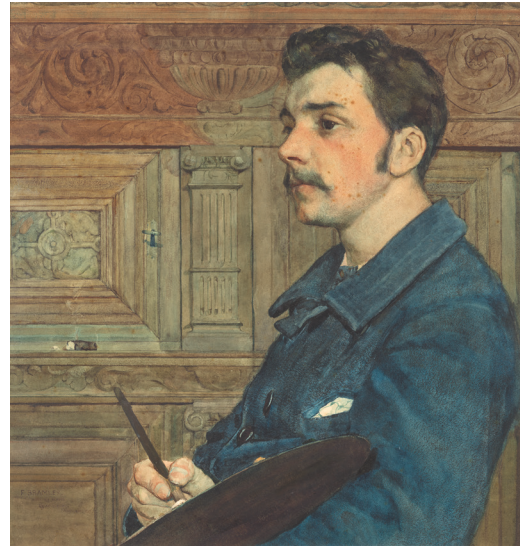
Exhibition copy. Please do not remove

Who was Frank Bramley?

Frank Bramley (1857–1915), a farmer’s son from Lincolnshire, England, first studied art from 1873–8 at the Lincoln School of Art, and then from 1879–82 in Belgium at Charles Verlat’s Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. William Wainwright, who painted Bramley’s portrait in 1881, was a close friend and fellow-student. Bramley spent two years in Venice from 1882, but after struggling against the cold and ill-health, returned to England in 1884 to settle in Newlyn, a traditional Cornish fishing village that had been recently “discovered” by a company of young British painters. Many of them had studied in Paris or Belgium, and several with Verlat in Antwerp, including Stanhope Forbes, the recognised founder of the Newlyn artist colony.

The Newlyn School

The fishing village of Newlyn offered the influx of young artists, who were mainly from the English Midlands, a generous supply of picturesque human subject-matter to apply to lessons gained in Belgium and France. Their output became so prodigious that each year they hired a train carriage to send their works back to London. The painting that first brought the Newlyn School to public attention, shown to great acclaim at the 1885 Academy exhibition, was Stanhope Forbes’s *A Fish Sale on a Cornish Beach*, painted out of doors and taking six months to complete. Frank Bramley’s reputation as a leader among the Newlyn artists was made in 1888 with *A Hopeless Dawn*, painted in his two-room studio in Newlyn with local models. Picturing two despairing women awaiting the fisherman whose boat has not returned, its melancholy tone reflected the often precarious way of life of Cornwall’s fishing community. Just as Forbes’s *A Fish Sale* brought the Newlyn artists to public attention, *A Hopeless Dawn* gave Bramley prominence and reinforced the group’s repute when it became the first Newlyn painting to be purchased for the British nation, through the Chantrey Bequest. Further reflecting his tendency towards melancholic themes, Bramley’s *For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven* (picturing a child’s funeral procession) further cemented his position as a leader in the Newlyn School during his eleven years in Cornwall.



William Wainwright
Portrait of Frank Bramley
1881
Watercolour
Collection Of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, Mr D.M.R. and Mrs H. Cameron Bequest 1990



Artists of the Newlyn School, 1884
Standing: Frank Bodilly, Fred Millard, Frank Bramley, William Blandford Fletcher, William Breakspeare, Ralph Todd, Chevallier Taylor, Henry Scott Tuke. Seated: William Wainwright, Edwin Harris, Stanhope Forbes.



Frank Bramley
A Hopeless Dawn 1888
Oil on canvas
Tate Britain, presented by the Trustees of the Chantrey Bequest 1888



Frank Bramley
For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven 1891
Oil on canvas.
Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1913

Marriage and relocation

Bramley met his future wife Katherine Graham while both were painting in Newlyn. They married in 1891 and lived in Newlyn before moving to Droitwich in the Midlands in 1895. In 1900 they settled in Grasmere, Westmorland (now Cumbria), to live near her parents, John and Jane Graham. The Grahams lived at Huntingstile, a grand Victorian residence overlooking Lake Grasmere. Bramley’s many portraits of Katherine and her family included *Mrs Frank Bramley*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1896; a portrait of her father exhibited in 1897; *Mr and Mrs Chalmers* (Katherine’s sister Elizabeth with her husband Charles) in 1902; and the large *Helen Chalmers and Her Mother* in 1908.

Close family patrons

Elizabeth Graham (1870–1951) was married in 1900 to Charles Chalmers (1861–1924), a Linlithgow paper manufacturer; colonel in the Royal Scots (Lothian) Regiment; and sometimes President of the local Linlithgow and Stirlingshire Hunt Club. Living at Longcroft House, Linlithgowshire, Scotland, they commissioned a number of family portraits and became Bramley’s most important patrons.

A much favoured child

Painted in Bramley’s distinctive flat-brush technique, *Helen Graham Chalmers and Her Mother* represents a bright moment in his immediate family circle, being a lavish portrait of Katherine’s sister Elizabeth and niece Helen during an autumn visit south from Scotland. Bathed in sunlight, the child with vivid red hair is its focal point, in both composition and title; proud mother is given a subordinate role. Its white chrysanthemums and bunched violets indicate it was started in late autumn 1907, and it was completed for the Royal Academy’s opening in May 1908. As a reviewer dryly observed, Bramley “has trenchantly branded, both in treatment and in title, the unimportant position taken in a household by the parent when a child appears upon the scene...”

Helen Graham Chalmers was a treasured only child, and the childless Bramley evidently found her an engaging subject, painting her again aged three, presenting flowers to her devoted nurse. *Helen, daughter of Charles Chalmers Esq. (Flowers for Nanny)*, also in the Gallery’s collection, was exhibited in London in 1911 – the year Bramley was finally elected to the Royal Academy, where he had exhibited for twenty-seven years (his 1911 self-portrait, *The Beaver Hat*, echoes his justified satisfaction at this recognition). Bramley showed in his last annual Academy summer show in 1912, encumbered by serious health problems that led to his premature death three years later.



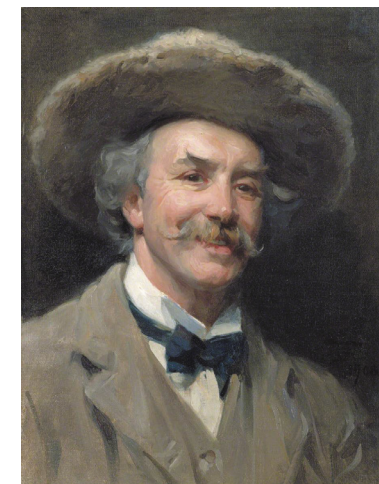
Frank Bramley
Mrs Frank Bramley [Katherine] 1896
From Royal Academy Pictures 1897



Frank Bramley
Mr and Mrs Chalmers 1902
From Royal Academy Pictures 1902



Frank Bramley
Helen, daughter of Charles Chalmers Esq. (Flowers for Nanny) 1910
Oil on canvas
Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, Mr D.M.R. and Mrs H. Cameron Bequest 1990



Frank Bramley
The Beaver Hat 1911
Oil on canvas.
Royal Academy of Arts