

# Oxfordshire

## EMSLIE JOHN HORNIMAN (C.1865-C.1944)

### FAMILY AND CAREER<sup>1</sup>

Emslie John Horniman was the son of Frederick John Horniman and Rebekah Emslie. Frederick was a tea merchant with an interest in anthropology, who built up a collection of artefacts which he showed to the public in his house in Forest Hill in south London. Eventually the collection became so big that a purpose-built museum was needed, and in 1898 Charles Harrison Townsend was commissioned to build the [Horniman Museum](#).

Emslie was brought up with his elder sister Annie (1860–1937) at Surrey Mount, the family home in Forest Hill. He did not attend a school, but was taught by governesses and private tutors. He showed no interest in the business, trained as an artist, and became a member of the London County Council (LCC) and Liberal MP for Chelsea from 1906 to 1910.<sup>2</sup> He was also an amateur anthropologist and, like his father, travelled widely, particularly to the Far East. In 1928 he was a member of the committee of the British School of Archaeology in Egypt.<sup>3</sup> At some point he became a Commissioner for the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments (England).

He was concerned that his fortune should be used for good causes. He established a garden in what was then a deprived area of north London (now called the Emslie Horniman Pleasance),<sup>4</sup> gave money in 1911 for the library and lecture hall extensions to the Horniman Museum, set up a scholarship for students administered by the Royal

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the biographical material is from 'The Hornimans of Forest Hill' by Michael Horniman (Emslie's grandson), in *Horniman History* ([www.horniman.ac.uk](http://www.horniman.ac.uk)).

<sup>2</sup> *VCH Middlesex*, XII (2004), 233-5. A family portrait taken by John Fergus c.1870 is among the Annie Horniman Papers, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester (ref AEH/4/1/1/2/3). Annie attended the Slade School of Art 1882-86, but had no talent as an artist. Emslie may have attended, too; certainly they had been very close as children.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the introductory page to Flinders Petrie, *Gerar* (1928).

<sup>4</sup> Owned by the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea. The park, in Bosworth Road W10, is now a vital local asset, in an area where the ratio of open space to population is by far the lowest in London. A redesign in 1999 involved major improvements to the park and its environs, together with the restoration of its centrepiece: a listed walled garden by the eminent Arts and Crafts architect CFA Voysey. The redesign won an environmental award.

Anthropological Institute,<sup>5</sup> donated portraits to the National Portrait Gallery, and ‘preserved houses of architectural merit’.

## **HORNIMAN IN BURFORD**

In 1911 Horniman bought Burford Priory. Most of the required restoration work had already been carried out by the previous owner, Colonel de Sales La Terrière; however, Horniman restored the Great Chamber at the house’s southern end,<sup>6</sup> rebuilt the west wing in 1932, and in 1936-7 restored the chapel. He also built a sawmill and restored the boathouse. A pump-house by the river was presumably to provide water in case of fire, as he owned a ‘priceless’ collection of jade. Horniman also began to re-assemble the Lenthall art collection, before selling Burford Priory in 1937.

Horniman’s restoration work was not confined to the Priory. In 1928 he bought No. 162 The Hill (The Gabled House) and extended it to the rear. The builder was Groves of Milton-under-Wychwood, who had also worked at the Priory. Many features of the house show the influence of Arts and Crafts traditions: all the ironwork, for instance, (such as hinges and door catches) was made on the premises by skilled craftsmen. The house was sold a year later.<sup>7</sup> Horniman was also responsible for rebuilding 33 High Street (Staffordshire Pottery) and for remodelling the Highway Hotel (117 High Street).<sup>8</sup> In the 1920s he carried out a major rebuilding of the Burford House Hotel, whose High Street frontage is entirely of this date. Here traditional methods were not followed, however: the wall-plate is not a continuous or jointed timber, the studs are not pegged into it, and several iron bolts are visible.

Horniman’s architect at the Priory was Walter H Godfrey, who had worked there for the previous owner. Whether he employed an established architect for his other restorations is not known, but clearly he appreciated the skills of his builder, and it is likely that Groves was given a fairly free hand.

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<sup>5</sup> The Emslie Horniman Fund was established in 1944 to ‘promote the study of the growth of civilisations, habits and customs, religious and physical characteristics of the non-European peoples and of prehistoric and non-industrial man in Europe’. It therefore includes anthropological research in its widest sense, including ethnography and all branches of human and social science relating to the physical and natural development of ‘people in society’.

<sup>6</sup> Photograph of 1916 by Henry Taunt (English Heritage Viewfinder image CC57/00484).

<sup>7</sup> Information from the current owner (27.6.05).

<sup>8</sup> The Listed Buildings description suggests that he may have been responsible for rebuilding the second floor in 1922.

**Read more in the EPE book *Burford: Buildings and People in a Cotswold Town* by Antonia Catchpole, David Clark and Robert Peberdy (published 2008)**