

Edward Lear's Landscape Drawings

How many were there ?

The project's objective is to make

- **an estimate of the number of original dated landscape drawings (as opposed to worked up watercolours) which Lear undertook in a career of over fifty years.**

No reliable estimate has previously been made of Lear's work output as a topographical artist. Hope Mayo of the Houghton Library, Harvard, acknowledges this in her paper *The Edward Lear Collection at Harvard University*, published in the *Harvard Library Bulletin*, Summer-Fall 2011, Volume 22: Number 2-3 (p.95).

The majority of Lear's drawings appeared on the London market in 1929, over forty years after his death. Three significant sales at auction took place that year, as well as a private sale of many drawings by Mildred Lushington to the Tunbridge Wells dealers, Craddock and Barnard. Two of the auction sales as well as the private sale derived from the drawings and diaries left by Lear with his executor Franklin Lushington, Mildred's father. The third auction sale, coincidentally in the same year, was of Lord Northbrook's collection of some 3,000 of Lear's drawings, primarily from his long visit to India and Ceylon from 1873 to 1875. These were contained in two cabinets, acquired by 1935 by W.B.O. Field, and are now at the Houghton Library (Mayo, p.87).

A detailed account of these transactions and their outcomes is given in Hope Mayo's paper referred to above, and the background to one significant transaction on Greek drawings is described in my own paper, *Edward Lear's Cretan Drawings*, in The Gennadius Library's *The New Griffon -12*, published in Athens 2011 (p.103ff).

Public holdings

The Houghton Library has by far the largest collection of Lear drawings, some 3,600 in all, principally as the result of gifts of their collections by two Americans, W.B.O. Field and Philip Hofer, who realised the potential soon after the 1929 outpouring of works onto the market. Other significant public collections are those of the Yale Centre for British Art (approximately 490), the Liverpool Libraries (300) and the Gennadius Library in Athens (200). But no other public collections to my knowledge hold more than 100 of his drawings. Only some nine other institutions in Britain, the United States and Greece hold more than 25 each. This research has been able to tabulate hopefully all of the more

significant such holdings and many of the much smaller ones, and incidentally to show which of Lear's many journeys are represented at each.

The methodology has been to search collection websites of over 200 art galleries and museums in the UK plus Oxford and Cambridge University Colleges, 40 in the United States and 30 in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, Greece, Turkey, France, Israel, and Malta. These searches have been followed up with email or personal enquiries where necessary.

Approximately 5,000 drawings are currently available for study, the large majority of them dated. Publication of the database has yet to be decided, but it is hoped it will be placed on the website of the *Edward Lear Society* and the *Blog of Bosh – Edward Lear Homepage* - <https://nonsenselit.wordpress.com/> as well as being made available more widely.

Private holdings

In 1967 Philip Hofer published *Edward Lear as a Landscape Draughtsman* (the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA). Unimaginable today, Chapter VIII of his book describes the then status of Lear collections, naming over 80 individuals or families in the United States, United Kingdom and Greece who held between one and fifty Lear drawings each ! Probably altogether these held at least four to five hundred drawings at the time, and he notes that a further 300 were destroyed in a fire in 1937.

No such information is readily available today, but through the *Louis Blouin Art Sales* website, I have established that almost 1,300 dated Lear landscape drawings were auctioned between 1958 and the end of 2014. (There will be a limited amount of duplication within that figure, because some works will have come to auction more than once over this period in excess of half a century and some will have been bought at auction by public collections and so already on record.) Most of the auction sales will have been of privately owned holdings transferring to other private hands. The number of sales of all Lear works on paper (including finished watercolours, undated landscapes, small figure drawings and nonsense verse drawings) in that period exceeds 2,000.

Numbered drawings

The aim of the research has been to put an estimated number on the total of Lear's dated topographical landscape drawings from his first travels in England and Ireland from 1834, until his very last travels in the 1880s.

For most artists with works on paper running into many thousands, this might seem a very difficult if not impossible task. Lear however helps us greatly because for some 37 journeys he not only dated (and often timed) his drawings but gave a consecutive numeric sequence to them. He kept his drawings once

penned out in cabinets in his London studio as source material for the oils and watercolours for which he hoped he would be commissioned for sale. From the mid 1840s onwards he usually, though not invariably, undertook this numbering, reflecting his methodical nature but probably also as a helpful reference source both for his paid for work and for his published books and those he hoped to write.

The numbered drawings did not cover all his output on such journeys. For example when he spent seven weeks in Crete in 1864, he completed 185 numbered and dated drawings but also 'a vast number of small bits' which were quick sketches of Cretans at work and rest, animals and bits of landscape often on very small scraps of paper. In my research on the Cretan drawings I have identified a further 52 'small bits' – see www.edwardlearandcrete.weebly.com

To compute the number of drawings Lear made on each 'numbered' journey, the attempt has been made to find the highest numeral on a drawing with a date close to the end of the journey. This will slightly underestimate the final number for the journey unless there is a known record of his very last drawing (as there is on the Cretan journey referred to above). Lear was also prone to occasionally adding an A and even a B and C to a digit to add in extra drawings, probably because he had already used the next consecutive numeral, forgetting he had one or two more drawings in time sequence to interpose. The Yale Center for British Art holds listings in Lear's own hand of the drawings he made on fifteen of his journeys. In these cases it has been possible to establish a firm number, including any As, Bs or Cs.

The calculation will also omit the 'small bits', some of which do appear in the holdings of public institutions and which in the Cretan example above formed a significant but minor part of his output.

The database includes over 4,300 numbered Lear drawings with public institutions, for most of which it is now possible to reference images, numbers, dates and other details on museum websites. From this a fair assessment can be reached on the total of numbered and dated drawings he made on all such journeys. The total of all drawings using the method described on the 37 journeys where Lear appears to have consistently numbered drawings or left us a record of the numbers is a minimum of **7,295**. An unknown number of these may no longer exist.

Estimating the remainder

In order to arrive at a broad estimate of the total number of dated drawings Lear made on his travels, there remains the question of 62 journeys or places where he stayed for a period where at least one unnumbered drawing has been identified. We may have the date of the drawings but no number sequence and so no guide to the total number. Sixteen of these journeys were made early in

his career up to 1843, after which he frequently numbered his drawings. A further 35 were unnumbered in the next 30 years up to his final major travel to India and Ceylon in 1873-75 but 37 journeys including most of the major ones were numbered in that period. Late in his life he continued to draw on a further eleven journeys / places stayed without numbering them.

I consider below two approaches which will provide a clue to this lack of knowledge of the number of unnumbered but dated landscape drawings Lear made. Both of these are only guides and very broad estimates to the numbers involved. The fact that they provide different results demonstrates the caution which must be attached. One method draws on the known number of Lear drawings held in public collections. The other draws on the auction sale data over a more than 50 year period. The detailed calculations are in the **Appendix**. From these it seems probable that unnumbered drawings were less than 25% of his total output (and possibly as low as 15%).

Research to date indicates 4,358 dated drawings in public collections which are from 'numbered' journeys. We have established the total drawings in numbered series as a minimum of 7,295 (see above). Therefore some 60% of all numbered drawings are currently held publicly. There seems no inherent reason why the unnumbered Lear drawings held by public collections should not represent a roughly similar percentage of the total sum of unnumbered drawings as they do of numbered drawings. Thus given that we know that just under 600 drawings from 'unnumbered series' are held in public collections a simple calculation of the potential unnumbered drawings total can be made.

However this would ignore the fact that for a few journeys a particularly high percentage of the total output may have been acquired by one institution, for historic reasons. A good and major example is the very large number of drawings of India and Ceylon which were acquired possibly in Lear's lifetime by Lord Northbrook, and which were subsequently sold and passed into the collection of the Houghton Library at Harvard. 1999 numbered drawings (in two sequences, one labelled 'scraps') were made. The Houghton has 2012 India and Ceylon drawings, some of which will be unnumbered. Other public collections hold a mere 9, and only 38 are recorded as sold at auction between 1958 and 2014. These must clearly be excluded from the calculations.

There are three other cases of numbered drawings (Northern Greece and Albania September 1848 and May 1849 and Corsica 1868, all again with Houghton) and one case of unnumbered drawings (Abruzzi July 1843, with Liverpool Libraries) where there is a similar dominance (see Appendix, note 3). I have excluded these from all the calculations below, but retained a handful of other cases where one collection may have more than 50% of known drawings, but there are also good proportions of other public holdings and auction sales.

Taking these exclusions into account the proportion of numbered drawings held publicly to all numbered drawings reduces to 37.6%. If that percentage is applied to the number of unnumbered dated drawings in public collections (589 found to date, but 484 after the exclusion of the Abruzzi 1843 journey – see above), a total of unnumbered but probably dated drawings of **approximately 1,287** results.

A second method is to use auction results to make a similar calculation. In some cases auction records have also helped to establish a high/late number for a particular journey. The Blouin Art Sales website has been used to examine just under 1,300 dated landscape drawings, as described under *Private holdings* above.

By tabulating these by journey, there is an interesting comparison of the distribution for individual journeys of holdings by institutions and the frequency of auction sales over half a century. Where the bulk of the drawings, for example of Lear's India and Ceylon travels as mentioned above, remained together with the Earl of Northbrook and then ultimately with the Houghton Library, there are relatively very few auction sales because few drawings are in private hands. But there are examples where the reverse appears to be true and most works are probably with collectors.

By separately totalling the auction sales of dated drawings for the numbered journeys and those for journeys/places which Lear did not number, it becomes possible to make another broad estimate of the drawings made on these unnumbered journeys. The same exclusions are made for where there is a dominant public collection as in the first method above. Since 1958, approximately 18.1% of the numbered journey drawings were sold at auction (the same drawing might appear over this long period more than once at auction but this would probably account for only a small percentage of these sales).

381 of the adjusted auction sales however related to unnumbered journeys, and if these, as for the numbered journey sales, represented 18.1% of the total, the unnumbered drawings would amount to **approximately 2,105**.

The total of Lear's dated landscape drawings output therefore seems likely to have been a minimum of 7,295 numbered drawings plus perhaps between 1,287 and 2,105 unnumbered drawings. It may be reasonable to suggest that he made **between 8,500 and 9,400 dated drawings of landscapes** over his fifty years of constant travels.

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Appendix

Lear's Landscape Drawings – How many were there ?

Drawings identified as existing		In Public Collections	Auction sales 1958 – 2014
Journeys where Lear numbered drawings	37	4,358	900
Journeys or places where drawings are unnumbered (note 1)	62	589	389
Total	<u>99</u>	<u>4,947</u>	<u>1,289</u>

Number of drawings in numbered series, taking highest recorded numerals found or from Lear's own lists	7,790
• exclude journeys with seeming aberrant record of highest numeral (note 2)	<u>(495)</u>
Total number of drawings in numbered series	7,295

Estimates for total unnumbered drawings

Option 1 – by % in public collections

Exclude dominant collection - numbered journeys :	2,610	
holdings (note 3) - unnumbered :	105	
Numbered in public collections	(4,358 – 2,610) :	<u>1,748</u> = 37.6%
All in numbered journeys	(7,296 – 2,646) :	4,649
Based on unnumbered in public collections	$\frac{589 - 105}{0.376}$	= 1,287
Estimate of landscape drawings under option 1 :		7,295 + 1,287 = 8,582

Option 2 – by % through auction sales

Exclude auction sales where dominant - numbered journeys :	57	
collection holdings apply (note 3) - unnumbered :	8	
Auction sales of numbered journeys	(900 – 57) :	<u>843</u> = 18.1%
All in numbered journeys	(7,295 – 2,646) :	4,449
Based on unnumbered in auction sales	$\frac{389 - 8}{0.181}$	= 2,105
Estimate of landscape drawings under option 2 :		7,295 + 2,105 = 9,400

Average of options 1 and 2 for Lear landscape drawings $\frac{8,582 + 9,400}{2} = 8,991$

But say – 8,500 to 9,400

Note 1 – Unnumbered drawings

Early in his career and with the exception of his Lake District travels in 1836, Lear did not begin the practice of sequentially numbering drawings until 1844 despite travelling quite extensively in Italy during the previous six years. Later he numbered most journeys where he made substantial numbers of drawings, but in a few cases listed below this was not the case where for unknown reasons he failed to use a sequential numbering system. He also spent periods in or near particular places such as Corfu and St Remo where he made some drawings but did not number them.

63 places or journeys treated as unnumbered can be summarised as follows (by decade from 1840). One of these (Albania 1857) has been treated as a numbered journey in the statistics because we have a complete record in Lear’s hand of the drawings he made there.

- 1834 – 40 9 , for which 6 have 20 or more works known, all bar one in Italy, 1 has 10 to 19 works and 2 have under 10 works known.
- 1840 – 49 14, for which 4 have 20 or more works known, all in Italy, 4 have 10 to 19 works and 6 have under 10 works known.
Includes :
- Abruzzi 1843 – 113 works known
- 1850 – 59 15 unnumbered, of which 10 have under 10 works known.
Includes :
- Switzerland 1854 - only 21 auctioned works known (of which two appeared to have numbers but see note 2).
- Trieste/Corfu 1855 and Corfu 1866 – 54 works known
- Albania 1857 – 45 works known. The Yale Lear list notes a total of 102, so this has been treated as a numbered journey in the statistics in this paper.
- Egypt 1858 – 36 works known, but only in Egypt 8 days, and some of the auction records (31) may relate to next journey.
- 1860 – 69 9 unnumbered, of which 8 have under 10 works known.
Includes :
- Corfu 1863 – 23 works known
- 1870 – 79 10 unnumbered, of which 8 have under 10 works known.
Includes :
- Cannes 1870 – 23 works known
- Monte Generoso/Switzerland 1878 – 38 works known
- 1880 – 87 6 unnumbered, of which 5 have under 10 works known
Includes :
- Perugia, Florence, Pisa, Spezia, Genoa 1883 – 12 works known

Note 2

Four of Lear's journeys appear to have numbered works but there may have been aberrant recording since there are abnormally low numbers of works known in relation to the highest numeral recorded. These journeys are treated as unnumbered ones in the tables and the highest numeral is ignored..

Date and journey	Public collections	Auctions	Highest numeral
August 54 Switzerland	0	21	136
May 57 via Venice	2	0	217
April 65 Golf Juan	0	1	84
December 66 Egypt	1	0	58
	—	—	—
Totals	3	22	495
	—	—	—

Note 3 - Journeys with dominant collections excluded

Date and journey	Public collection	Auctions	Highest numeral
Unnumbered journey -			
July 43 Abruzzi	105	8	na
Liverpool Library (104)	—	—	—
Numbered journeys -			
Sept 48 N. Greece/Albania	151	9	218
Houghton (150)			
May 49 N. Greece/Albania	82	-	83
Houghton (82)			
April 68 Corsica	352	10	346
Houghton (348)			
Oct 73 – Jan 75 India/Ceylon	2,025	38	1,999
Houghton (2,012)	—	—	—
Total - numbered journeys	2,610	57	2,646
	—	—	—