

# Keys to the collection— Stories

## Stanhope Forbes

“It was part of our artistic creed to paint our pictures directly from Nature, and not merely rely upon sketches and studies ” which we could afterwards amplify in the comfort of a studio...

—Stanhope Forbes, for the *Cornish Magazine*, 1898.

Stanhope Forbes was born in Dublin in 1857. His father was an English railway manager and his mother was French. He attended the Royal Academy of Arts, London from 1876. In 1880 he studied in Paris under Leon Bonnat. During his time in France he was introduced to the new ‘plein air’ style of painting which he adopted for the rest of his life. Forbes moved first to Penzance and then Newlyn in Cornwall in 1884 where he became a leading figure in a growing colony of artists. In 1889, he married Elizabeth Armstrong who was also an accomplished artist. Together they set up a School of Painting in Newlyn. Forbes continued to paint *en plein air* well into the 1930’s, making use of the region’s astonishing light and picturesque scenery. He also exhibited at the Royal Academy, London. Forbes died in 1947 just before his 90th birthday.



### The pier head—

The little harbour seen in this painting was a busy place with brown-sailed luggers in the bay and fishermen eager to catch mackerel. Onlookers, fishermen, fishwives, salesmen and children were often seen looking down on the boats moored at the quay. People in the fishing village cooperated with the artist as models for many paintings of the area. They felt honoured to be a part of the artist’s endeavours. The fishermen in their working clothes and sea-going boots and the women in their everyday clothes of neat blouses and cotton aprons were ideal subjects for the Newlyn artists as they sketched and painted in the open air.

**Geelong  
Gallery**

AusVELS level 7 to VCE  
[geelonggallery.org.au/learn](http://geelonggallery.org.au/learn)

*Stanhope Forbes*  
*The pier head (detail)* 1910  
oil on canvas  
Collection: Geelong Gallery

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### Stanhope Forbes

born Ireland 1857;  
died United Kingdom 1947

*The pier head* 1910  
oil on canvas  
123.5 x 149.5 cm  
Collection: Geelong Gallery  
Purchased 1912

#### Question

Stanhope Forbes' painting, *The pier head* has been referred to as a destination picture. What is meant by this?

#### Research

Research *plein air* painting. Where was its origin? How did it manifest in Australia?

Forbes' artwork is an example of British Impressionism. Explain what this means. How does it compare to French and Australian Impressionism?

#### Activity

Imagine yourself standing on this pier as an onlooker. Write a letter to a friend who lives in a different country, describing this scene: what was happening; who was present and what it felt like being there. Look at the painting for symbols and techniques—How do the materials used affect the interpretation? Consider the light at this time of year and time of day; body language of the people depicted; activities; types of boats; gaze of viewers and anything else you observe.