

In February 2025 Tony Mundell was fortunate to see the orchid paintings by Walter Pearce in the collection of Haslemere Museum and thoroughly recommends a visit to see the selection which is going on display. No biographical details on Walter Pearce are retained with the paintings but, after careful research, the Museum considers that the person most likely responsible for these fine works is a Walter Seward Pearce (1862-1941), born in Southampton and a life-long resident of Hampshire, later living in Romsey then Twyford. Remarkably he was deaf and dumb from birth, just like two of his three surviving siblings. His brother Richard Aslatt Pearce was the first deaf person to be ordained as an Anglican clergyman and fulfilled his duties for the rest of his life. Many of Walter's orchid paintings were done between 1933 and 1939, and he appears to have had a close affinity with the Isle of Wight, judging by the number of specimens he painted there. Most of the paintings are annotated with Latin names, sometimes also including locations, often just a county or country. From the note in the Museum records, it appears that Walter had many contacts who sent him specimens to paint.

The collection is remarkable in the number of different species, unusual varieties and even suggested hybrids that he painted. A few such as Ghost Orchids were from Switzerland and Germany, whereas Military Orchids were from Switzerland and France. The paintings include a Lady's-slipper labelled Yorkshire; a Lady Orchid from Kent; Summer Lady's-tresses from the New Forest; both Small-white Orchid and Dense-flowered Orchid from Ireland. A painting of Red Helleborine is especially interesting as it is labelled "Petersfield". Possibly this was from the well-known site near Hawkley discovered in 1986, but pre-dating it by about 50 years. The Bog Orchid and Musk Orchid are rather frustratingly also just labelled as found at Petersfield. A Lizard Orchid is labelled "Near Ryde, Isle of Wight".

All the commoner orchid species are well represented as are many varieties, e.g. many forms of Bee Orchid. The nomenclature of the Marsh Orchids was not fully settled during Walter's time, so it really needs an orchid expert to try to name those paintings as well as the unusual forms and hybrids (such as Loose-flowered Orchid x Green-winged Orchid) that he claims.