

September 2021



Dear Club Members,

Few people have their name linked to a specific colour. In the nearly 7 year history of this club, we've only featured Scheele's Green. There are a few others that I know of, and maybe we will feature those in upcoming editions.

For now though, we are featuring another eponymous colour that will be very familiar to anyone who uses watercolours. Payne's Grey is a colour that is often suggested as an essential shade to be included on any palette, particularly if the artist is painting landscapes.

So who was Payne, and why has this colour stood the test of time?

The facts that we know for certain are thin on the ground. He was born sometime in the mid-late eighteenth century, and was a water colour painter who exhibited work with the Old Water-Colour Society from 1809-1812. More of his works survive than we have facts about the man himself. What is clear is that he had a gift for making himself popular in polite society, and he was much in demand as a tutor to the sons and daughters of fashionable families. For those with little to do other than socialise and spend money, being able to paint water colours whilst in the country was an ideal way to pass the time. His style was apparently easy to learn, and relatively simple to replicate and produce passable paintings.

One of the key things that helped with this was the creation of the shade that became known as Payne's Grey. This precise mixture of Prussian Blue, Yellow Ochre, and Crimson Ochre was ideal to use when making colours darker whilst painting landscapes. Previously black pigments tended to be used, but these were much trickier to handle to recreate exact shades as seen in nature.

The grey of Payne's Grey is very blue toned, this lets artists use it to recreate atmospheric perspective. If you stand and look at the British countryside you will see that the more distant hills and mountains appear paler and bluer. This is because the air is not clean, it's always filled with small amounts of dust, and water droplets. This scatters the light wavelengths, affecting the colours towards the longer wavelength end of the spectrum (red) more than those at the shorter end of the spectrum (blue). More blue light reaches our eye from those distant hills, and that makes the hills and mountains seem more blue.

Professional artists long recognised this phenomenon, and could mix accurately enough to recreate this effect, but by creating his special blue-grey mix Payne could simply advise his students to add a dash of Payne's Grey, and they could easily create the correct effect.

As time has gone on the exact colours used to make Paynes Grey has changed, with modern paint manufacturers creating the same shade by using blue and black, or blue and burnt sienna. As a dyer I often feel that my work shares a great deal of similarities with watercolour painting, and a blue toned grey is one of my essential dyes that I use all the time to darken shades.

As for Payne himself, we still have some of his drawings, paintings and etchings, they're pleasant enough, Joshua Reynolds was said to have admired them at the time, but he soon slipped in to obscurity. A pamphlet about the man and his life was produced in 1922, and the author spends the majority of the time hypothesising about Payne's life, and then apologising because there's no

evidence to back up his theories. It does contain some of Payne's paintings, and is worth looking at.

Because Payne's Grey is actually a mixture of other pigments, and because every paint manufacturer has their own recipes there's quite a bit of variation in the exact colour of Payne's Grey paint. Your fibre this month is another one of those tricky blends. . . lots of different colours all combined to give a single colour effect from a distance, but close up there are many subtleties. This neutral will work really well with lots of other colours.

Happy Spinning

Katie

Further Reading/ Watching-

Atmospheric Perspective-

<https://www.virtualartacademy.com/atmospheric-perspective/>

1922 Pamphlet on William Payne

<http://archive.org/details/williampaynewate00longuoft/page/n5/mode/2up?view=theater>

William Payne's works in museums-

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/william-payne-2225>

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/355605>

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/william-payne/>

Painting with Payne's Grey-

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_aD82FwsVo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0X3vaDDwpp8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7yxIMtr-Q4>

About Payne's Grey

<https://www.theawl.com/2018/01/paynes-gray-the-color-of-english-rain-and-henry-millers-paris/>

<https://www.sister-mag.com/en/magazine/sistermag-no-55-january-2020/paynes-grey-when-a-colour-is-a-feeling/>

Fibre Content- In case your parcel is missing the label

75% Shetland

25% Kid Mohair