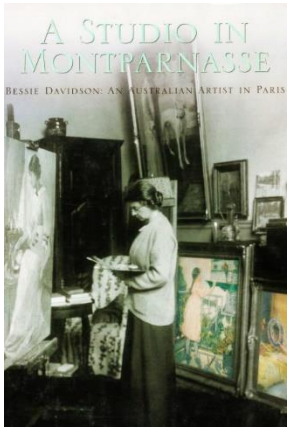
Bessie Ellen Davidson (1879-1965), Australian Artist

We have been aware of Bessie Davidson for many years. Her Davidson ancestors who stem from Maybole in Ayrshire continue to attract enquiries which we receive via our website. She first came to our attention after finding a copy of a biography of the artist *A Studio in Montparnasse: Bessie Davidson: An Australian Artist in Paris* by Penelope Litte was published in 2003.



Book Cover Photo
(Bessie in her studio in Paris c.1913)

Self Portrait c.1909
(Art Gallery of South Australia)

This year, Kiralynne Hill, the editor of the *Newsletter* of the Clan Davidson Society in Australia included a major illustrated article about Bessie in the March edition of the Australian Newsletter. This well researched article includes new background information about this Australian artist as well as details about her parents and her early life in North Adelaide, South Australia. A second instalment has been promised as a follow up in a future edition of the *Newsletter.*

In 1904, Bessie travelled to Europe with Rose McPherson (later known as Margaret Preston). This was the start of her life long career as an artist, eventually making France her home. Initially, she supported herself by painting portraits and interiors in the French manner and later with landscape, flower and still-life paintings in a post-impressionist style. Davidson achieved a number of firsts: she was the first Australian woman to be elected to the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts (1922); she was founding Vice-President of the Femmes Artistes Modernes (1930); and the first Australian woman to be awarded the Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur for her contributions to French art and life (1931). She exhibited in Paris, Australia, England, Scotland and the United States.

Bessie is now seen as one of the pioneering female artists from Australia. Her paintings are now much sought after by collectors when they appear on the market.

Mother and Child, 1914
(Art Gallery of South Australia)

Le Chateau
(Private Collection)

Anemenes, c.1942
(Private Collection)