

Eden Valley Museum

OBJECT OF THE MONTH - September 2023

‘The Little Owl’

A watercolour by Basil Ede, an English wildlife artist specialising in avian portraiture.

The Little Owl is not native to Britain, rather it was successfully introduced into the Eden Valley by Col. E.G.B. Meade-Waldo at Stonewall Park near Edenbridge in 1874. This little bird went on to rapidly colonise England and Wales and its success has been explained by there being an empty niche in our countryside at that time for a largely insectivorous small bird of prey.

The museum is fortunate to have been loaned a painting of a Little Owl by an acknowledged master of wild bird painting, Basil Ede (1931-2016). The painting, as well as being delightful, is also unusual in that it depicts a side view, whereas owls are most commonly depicted full face.



Little Owl by Basil Ede (1931-2016).
Image courtesy of Jane Higgs.

The little owl lives up to its name, standing at only 20cm. It has piercing yellow eyes and mottled brown and cream covering across its head and body; and it has a short tail. It remains the smallest owl in the UK. It favours holes in trees as nest sites, but also adopts nest boxes generally producing clutches of between two and five white eggs, laid late March or early April with incubation taking 7-28 days. Much of their hunting is done on foot, with the birds running actively to capture their prey.

The Little Owl remains a widespread species in Kent, despite themselves being the occasional prey of Tawny Owls, Goshawk and Buzzards. A very rare albino Little Owl was recorded in Hildenborough in July 1932.

The painting is on display in the ground floor gallery until mid-December.

Look out for a more comprehensive article about this delightful little bird and its connection to Greco-Roman mythology in the next issue of *Eden Valley Heritage*.