



# THE ILLUSTRATED BOOK IN ENGLAND

The Wood-Engraving Revival of the Early Twentieth Century

NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

12 MAY - 27 AUGUST 2004

Wood engraving in England attained maturity and a peak of accomplishment in the decades between the First and Second world wars. With only a few practitioners at the turn of the nineteenth century, by the mid-1920s it was firmly accepted by artists, dealers, and collectors as an autonomous medium for the making of fine prints, while in the realm of the private presses and commercial publishers, it had won success and stature as a technique for book illustration. This exhibition, drawing on selections from the Rare Book Collection of the National Gallery of Canada Library, presents examples of work by the major contributors to this achievement.

Wood engraving was used ubiquitously for book illustration in mid-nineteenth-century England as a means to reproduce graphic work. The artists' designs and drawings were transferred to wood blocks and the wood was then engraved by professional copyists. There was a strict division of labour between artist and engraver in the creation of reproductive wood engravings. By the last quarter of the century, however, the use of wood engravings for book illustration was being eclipsed by the introduction of photomechanical processes and by the imperatives of mechanization in the publishing industry, which would no longer support the time-consuming and costly practices of the engraving firms.

The Arts and Crafts Movement of the late nineteenth century, and the private presses that emerged within its sphere of influence, such as the Kelmscott, Vale and Eragny firms, were devoted to fine craftsmanship, partly in reaction to the Industrial Revolution's deleterious effects on the quality of manufactured goods. Artists such as William Morris, Charles Ricketts, and Lucien Pissarro played a singular role in the revival of handmade book production by encouraging the use of superior materials and exacting standards. Wood-engraved illustration survived in this climate of excellence, where it was seen not simply as a reproductive technique, but as the illustrative medium most sympathetically allied to the art of the book. Autographic wood engraving was passed on to the twentieth century by a few practitioners, for example, Thomas Sturge Moore, William Nicholson, and Edward Gordon Craig, whose direct experiments with the medium provided a bridge between the enthusiasts of the Arts and Crafts Movement and the revival of wood engraving that occurred in the early years of the new century.

A defining characteristic of the renewed interest in wood engraving was the exploration of the technique as an autonomous medium. The artists themselves now produced the engraving, whereas the nineteenth-century imitative process had isolated the artist from the wood. By eliminating the engraver and working directly with the material, the artists exploited the potential of the medium for immediacy and expressiveness, both when engaged in the production of individual prints and when engraving for the illustration of books. These practitioners of creative, autographic wood engraving acquired an understanding for the potential of wood engraving in the context of the printed page, and an interest in the other aspects of fine book production – paper, typeface, *mise en page*, and binding.

The wood-engraving revival emerged within the context of a concurrent typographical renaissance that also traced its roots to the Arts and Crafts Movement. Art schools, those in London in particular, took an interest in book design and typography, and by the early 1920s had introduced courses in the practice of wood engraving itself. The Society of Wood Engravers and the English Wood-Engraving Society were established in 1920 and 1925, respectively, and by the middle of this decade some London dealers were devoting themselves to the exhibition and sale of wood-engraved prints. The movement attracted the advocacy of curators, critics, and journalists, and publications such as *The Studio* followed its accomplishments closely. In 1928, the National Gallery of Canada presented an *Exhibition of Modern Woodcuts and Wood Engravings*, a sale exhibition of English prints featuring many of the artists whose book illustrations are presented in this display – Mabel Annesley, Eric Gill, Vivien Gribble, Gertrude Hermes, Blair Hughes-Stanton, Clare Leighton, John Nash, Paul Nash, Gwen Raverat, Eric Ravilious, Leon Underwood, Clifford Webb, and Ethelbert White. The prints were selected for the 1928 Canadian exhibition by the English editor, critic, and publisher Herbert Furst, one of the champions of the new wood engraving.

The private presses that emerged after the First World War were the first to support the new wood engraving by commissioning illustrations for their publications; within a decade, the medium had also found favour with adventurous commercial publishers. As well as combining the roles of artist and engraver, many of the practitioners were also the authors of these illustrated works, and they often collaborated closely with their printers and publishers with regard to typography, layout, decoration, and binding. The new wood engraving and the typographical renaissance had a profound influence on standards of twentieth-century book design in England. This influence on trade publishing lasted long after the revival itself had been sapped of energy by the Depression, the Second World War, and new developments in printing technology.

Although wood engraving was neither the only nor the most popular medium used for the illustration of books and journals at this time, the body of wood-engraved work produced, from the refined publications of the private presses to modest commercially produced titles, has a recognizable excellence and enduring appeal. Landscape and the figure are the predominate subject matter of these black and white illustrations, which speak to the literature they supported, as well as to the English taste for the pastoral and narrative traditions. Although stylistic aspects of Modernism are common, most of the work is representational and can be identified only in passing with contemporary influences such as Cubism, Vorticism, and Surrealism. Much of the wood-engraved illustration of the period reflects a conservative taste; nevertheless, it embraces individual styles that are distinctive and innovative, and which exploit the intimate relationship that can exist between wood engraving and the page.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

James Hamilton. *Wood Engraving & the Woodcut in Britain, c. 1890–1990*. London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1994.

Edward Hodnett. *Five Centuries of English Book Illustration*. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1988.

Joanna Selborne. *British Wood-Engraved Book Illustration, 1904–1940: A Break with Tradition* (Clarendon Studies in the History of Art). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

A.C. Sewter. *Modern British Woodcuts & Wood-Engravings in the Collection of the Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester: A Catalogue*. [s.l.] Whitworth Art Gallery, 1962.

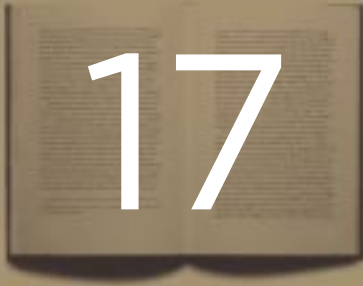
Cover: Clare Veronica Hope Leighton, decorative binding paper for *Wood-Engraving and Woodcuts* (1932)

# CHECKLIST

- 1. Arthur Eric Rowton Gill** 1882–1940  
Hilary Douglas Clark Pepler. *The Devil's Devices; or, Control Versus Service*. With Woodcuts by Eric Gill. London: Hampshire House Workshops, 1915.
- 2. R. John Beedham.** *Wood Engraving*. With Introduction and Appendix by Eric Gill. [Third Edition.] Ditchling Common, Hassocks, Sussex: St Dominic's Press, 1929.
- 3. Gwendolen Mary Raverat** 1885–1957  
Frances Cornford. *Spring Morning*. A New Edition. London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1923.
- 4. David Michael Jones** 1895–1974  
Hilary Douglas Pepler. *Libellus Lapidum . . . The First Part of a Collection of Verses and Wood-Engravings*. Made by H.P. and D.J. London: [St Dominic's Press] 1924.
- 5. Noel Rooke** 1881–1953  
*The Birth of Christ from the Gospel According to Saint Luke*. Arrangement of the Book and the Wood-Engravings Are by Noel Rooke. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: Golden Cockerel Press, 1925.
- 6. Lady Mabel Marguerite Annesley** 1881–1959  
Richard Rowley. *Apollo in Mourne: A Play in One Act*. With Woodcuts by Lady Mabel Annesley. London: Duckworth, 1926.
- 7. Paul Nash** 1889–1946  
Jules Tellier. *Abd-er-Rhaman in Paradise*. Translated by Brian Rhys, with Wood-Engravings by Paul Nash. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: Golden Cockerel Press, 1928.
- 8. Vivien Massie Gribble** 1888–1932  
*Sixte Idillia; that is, Sixte Small, or Petty Poems, or Aeglogves*. Chosen Out of the Right Famous Sicilian Poet Theocritus, and Translated into English Verse. With Decorations Designed and Cut on Wood by Vivien Gribble. London: Duckworth & Co., 1922.
- 9. John Farleigh** 1900–1965  
*Homer's Odyssees*. Translated According to the Greeke by Geo. Chapman. Books I–XII. [Wood Engravings by John Farleigh.] Oxford: Printed at the Shakespeare Head Press and Published for the Press by Basil Blackwell, 1931.
- 10. Ethelbert White** 1891–1972  
*The Apple (of Beauty and Discord)*. Third Quarter, 1920. [London: s.n.]
- 11. Decorative Binding Papers (left to right)**  
**Paul Nash** 1889–1946  
Robert Graves. *Welchman's Hose*. Wood Engravings by Paul Nash. London: The Fleuron, 1925.  
**Henry Carter**  
*The Woodcut: An Annual*. Edited by Herbert Furst. No. IV. London: The Fleuron Limited, 1930.  
**Enid Crystal Dorothy Marx** b. 1902  
*The Woodcut: An Annual*. Edited by Herbert Furst. No. I. London: The Fleuron Limited, 1927.  
**Eric William Ravilious** 1903–1942  
*The Woodcut: An Annual*. Edited by Herbert Furst. No. I. London: The Fleuron Limited, 1927.  
**Paul Nash** 1889–1946  
Richard Aldington. *Images of War: A Book of Poems*. Cover and Decorations Designed by Paul Nash. London: Beaumont Press, 1919.
- 12. Decorative Binding Papers (left to right)**  
**Clare Veronica Hope Leighton** 1899–1989  
*Wood-Engraving and Woodcuts ("How to Do It" Series, 2)*. London: The Studio Ltd.; New York: The Studio Publications Inc., 1932.  
**Althea Willoughby** fl. 1920–1940  
*The Woodcut: An Annual*. Edited by Herbert Furst. No. III. London: The Fleuron Limited, 1929.  
**Paul Nash** 1889–1946  
L. Archier Leroy. *Wagner's Music Drama of the Ring*. With Wood Engravings by Paul Nash. London: Noel Douglas [1925].  
**John Farleigh** 1900–1965  
George Bernard Shaw. *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God*. London: Constable & Company Limited, 1932.
- 13. Robert John Gibbings** 1889–1958  
Alfred Edgar Coppard. *Crotty Shinkwin: A Tale of the Strange Adventure that Befell a Butcher of County Clare*. *The Beauty Spot: A Tale Concerning the Chilterns*. Both Tales by A.E. Coppard; Engravings by Robert Gibbings. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: Golden Cockerel Press, 1932.

- 14. John Buckland Wright** 1897–1954  
John Keats. *The Collected Sonnets*. Illustrated by John Buckland Wright. Maastricht: The Halcyon Press, 1930.
- 15. John Austen** 1886–1948  
Alfred B. Cooper. *Poets in Pinafores: Being Nursery Rhymes*. Rewritten by A.B. Cooper. Wood Engravings by John Avsten. London: Alston Rivers Ltd., 1931.
- 16. Eric William Ravillious** 1903–1942  
Nicholas Breton. *The Twelve Moneths*. Edited by Brian Rhys, with Wood Engravings by Eric Ravillious. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: Golden Cockerel Press, 1927.
- 17. Clifford Cyril Webb** 1895–1972  
Ventura García Calderón. *The White Llama: Being La Vengaza del Condor*. Now Translated into English for the First Time by Richard Phibbs. Engravings by Clifford Webb. London: Golden Cockerel Press, 1938. (Prospectus)
- 18. John Northcote Nash** 1893–1977  
Herbert Ernest Bates. *Flowers and Faces*. Engravings by John Nash. London: The Golden Cockerel Press [1935]. (Prospectus)
- 19. Douglas Percy Bliss** 1900–1984  
*The Devil in Scotland: Being Four Great Scottish Stories of Diablerie*. . . . With an Introductory Essay and Thirty-Nine Original Wood-Engravings by Douglas Percy Bliss. London: Alexander MacLehose, 1934.
- 20. Arthur Eric Rowton Gill** 1882–1949  
*Jean de Brébeuf. The Travels & Sufferings of Father Jean de Brébeuf among the Hurons of Canada, As Described by Himself*. Edited & Translated from the French and Latin by Theodore Besterman. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1938.
- 21. Leon Underwood** 1890–1975  
James Branch Cabell. *The Music from Behind the Moon: An Epitome*. With Eight Wood Engravings by Leon Underwood. New York: The John Day Company, 1926.
- 22. Gertrude Anna Bertha Hermes** 1901–1983  
Ralph Hale Mottram. *Strawberry Time; and, The Banquet*. Wood-Engravings by Gertrude Hermes. London: Golden Cockerel Press, 1934.
- 23. Gertrude Anna Bertha Hermes** 1901–1983  
Thomas Stearns Eliot. *Animula* (The Ariel Poems, no. 23). Wood-Engravings by Gertrude Hermes. London: Faber & Faber [1929].
- 24. Blair Rowlands Hughes-Stanton** 1902–1981  
David Herbert Lawrence. *Birds, Beasts and Flowers: Poems*. With Wood-Engravings by Blair Hughes-Stanton. London: The Cresset Press Ltd., 1930.
- 25. Hester Sainsbury** b. 1890?  
George Savile, 1<sup>st</sup> Marquis of Halifax. *The Lady's New-Years-Gift; or, Advice to a Daughter*. Reprinted with Several Wood-Engravings by Hester Sainsbury. Kensington: The Cayme Press, 1927.
- 26. Mary Dudley Short**  
Judith Florence Smith. *The Mary Calendar*. Engravings by M. Dudley Short. Ditchling: St Dominic's Press, 1930.
- 27. Agnes Miller Parker** 1895–1980  
Herbert Ernest Bates. *Through the Woods: The English Woodland, April to April*. With 73 Engravings on Wood by Agnes Miller Parker. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1936.
- 28. Clare Veronica Hope Leighton** 1899–1989  
*The Farmer's Year: A Calendar of English Husbandry*. Written and Engraved by Clare Leighton. London: Collins, 1933.
- 29. Anonymous**  
Decorative binding paper, originally used for mailing a copy of *Catalogue Raisonné of Books Printed at the Curwen Press, 1920–1923* (London: Medici Society, 1924).

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES EXHIBITION NO. 17



ISSN 1481-2061

© National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 2004



National Gallery of Canada Musée des beaux-arts du Canada

PRINTED IN CANADA

380 Sussex Drive, P.O. Box 427, Station A  
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 9N4

Canada