



Wood engraving by Robert Gibbings for *Samson and Delilah*, 1925.

The Golden Cockerel Press was founded in 1920 as a private press by Harold (Hal) Midgley Taylor (1893–1925) at Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire. Taylor's ambition was to produce limited fine press editions of modern and classic texts printed on handmade paper using hand-set type.

In early 1924, health issues forced Taylor to sell the press. The new owner, Robert Gibbings (1889–1958), was an Irish-born artist and author who had developed a passion for wood engraving while studying under Noel Rooke (1881–1953) at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London in 1912. Gibbings followed Taylor's commitment to fine hand-crafted books but also saw the press as a vehicle for publishing high-quality wood-engraved illustrations.

In contrast to the approach adopted by Taylor, who commissioned illustrations for only one of seventeen books published under his direction, *The Wedding Songs of Edmund Spenser*, [1] most of the seventy-one books issued during Gibbings' tenure were richly illustrated. His devotion to wood engraving was evident in the nineteen Golden Cockerel books that featured his own work, including *Samson and Delilah*, published in 1925, [2] as well as through his collaboration with fellow artists such as Eric Gill (1882–1940), [3, 10, 21] David Jones (1895–1974), [4] Eric Ravilious (1903–1942), [5, 8, 17, 18] Paul Nash (1889–1946), [6, 11] and Blair Hughes-Stanton (1902–1981). [9] All shared Gibbings' view that wood engraving was the medium that was most compatible with hand-set type and each participated in the design and layout of the books to which they contributed illustrations.

Gibbings' association with Eric Gill, which began in 1925 with books such as *Sonnets and Verses* by Enid Clay (Gill's sister) and the *The Songs of Songs*, [3] was particularly fruitful. Gill collaborated with Gibbings on thirteen books, culminating in the four-volume *The Canterbury Tales* (1929–1931) [28] and *The Four Gospels* (1931). [29] Both met with critical and financial success, and today are widely acknowledged as masterpieces of book design. The two books are presented in the current exhibition in facsimile editions published by the Folio Society (London).

Up until 1931, the press had exclusively used Caslon Open Face as a typeface for its publications. This changed when Gill, an accomplished typographer, introduced a new font called Golden Cockerel, which he believed would better harmonize with the engraved line. The Golden Cockerel typeface was first used in Coppard's *The Hundredth Story*, published in 1931, and regularly afterwards, including in the aforementioned *The Four Gospels* (1931). [29] In later years, the press steadily increased its use of Perpetua type (along with its related italic form, Felicity), which had been designed by Gill in the mid-1920s for the British Monotype Corporation.

Facing financial pressures brought by the Great Depression, Gibbings sold the press in 1933 to Christopher Sandford (1902–1983), who, in an attempt to save money, shifted from using hand-set type at Waltham Saint Lawrence to mechanical typesetting at a commercial press in London. Despite the change, Sandford continued to produce limited editions on handmade paper (as in earlier years, print runs were usually between 250 and 750 copies), and also remained committed to wood engraving as the preferred means of producing illustrations. Several new artists were introduced to the press under

Sandford's direction, including Clifford Webb (1895–1972), [24] John Buckland Wright (1897–1954), [25] and Gwenda Morgan (1908–1991). [26] Particularly noteworthy was Buckland Wright's contribution of more than two hundred engravings for seventeen books, including *Laus Veneris*. [25] Gwenda Morgan, one of the many women artists to work for the press, provided wood engravings for four books, including *Grimms' Other Tales* in 1957. [26]

As a private entity, the Golden Cockerel Press produced a steady flow of promotional material announcing new publications from 1922 on. As with the books produced by the press, this material was printed on handmade paper and featured wood-engraved illustrations. The announcements were generally of two types: catalogues listing multiple publications and prospectuses for single books. Prior to 1935, the press limited the number of announcements in the latter category but after typically issued a prospectus for most of its books. [10–16] These usually included a wood-engraved cover illustration as in the case of the prospectuses for *Flower and Faces* [11] and *Bligh's Voyage in the Resource*, [12] general information about the publication, and on occasion, one or more sample or "specimen" pages. [10] The catalogues listing multiple books provided similar information. [17–20] A catalogue issued in 1934, for example, provided detailed information on several recent titles published by the press along with a number of specimen pages, including one for *Glory of Life* by Llewelyn Powys, which featured wood engravings by Robert Gibbings. [20]

In 1936, the press issued the first of three detailed bibliographies, *Chanticleer: A Bibliography of the Golden Cockerel Press, April 1921–August 1936*. [22] The volume provided detailed information on each of the one hundred and twelve books that had been published by the press up until that time, including the title, author, illustrations, date of printing, typeface, number of pages, dimensions, type of binding and paper, edition size, and price. Several entries also included general notes. The second volume of the bibliography, *Pertelote, A Sequel to Chanticleer: Being a Bibliography of the Golden Cockerel Press, October 1936–April 1943*, listed forty-three titles. The third volume, *Cockalorum. A Sequel to Chanticleer and Pertelote: Being a Bibliography of the Golden Cockerel Press, June 1943–December 1948*, [23] listed twenty-five titles and was more elaborate than its predecessors, providing fuller descriptions of the books published during the period; short essays on several artists associated with the press, including Dorothea Braby (1909–1987), John Buckland Wright, and Clifford Webb; two essays honouring the life of Eric Ravilious, who had died in 1942 while serving as a war artist; and two texts on the craft of printing, "Printing for Love" and "Printing and Life," by Christopher Sandford. All three volumes of the bibliography included illustrations. The third volume, *Cockalorum*, featured eighty-two engravings by sixteen artists, including twenty by Buckland Wright. [23]

Sandford maintained the press until 1959, when financial pressures forced him to sell the business to Thomas Yoseloff (1913–2008), an American publisher who at the time was director of the University

of Pennsylvania Press. Yoseloff completed the publication of two titles in 1960, which had been previously commissioned by Sandford, including *In Defence of Woman*, written by the sixteenth-century Welsh poet William Cynwal and featuring engravings in colour by John Petts (1914–1991). [27] Two additional titles were produced by the press the following year before Yoseloff ceased operations after realizing that publishing the type of hand-crafted books for which the Golden Cockerel Press was renowned was no longer cost effective.

Despite numerous challenges, including four different owners, the Golden Cockerel Press maintained its commitment to producing hand-crafted books for more than four decades. As revealed in the sampling of Golden Cockerel publications presented in the current exhibition, a key feature of these books were the illustrations made from wood engravings, which, beginning with Robert Gibbings and continued by Christopher Sandford, was seen as the perfect medium for illustration. In remaining true to this ideal, the Golden Cockerel Press played a significant role in the revival of wood engraving in the first half of the twentieth century.

Philip Dombowsky, Archivist
National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives



Wood engraving by David Jones for *The Book of Jonah*, 1926.

Checklist

Unless otherwise noted, all items are from the National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives

1. *The Wedding Songs of Edmund Spenser*. Wood engravings in colour by Ethelbert White. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1923.
2. *Samson and Delilah*. Wood engravings by Robert Gibbings. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1925.
3. *The Song of Songs*. Wood engravings by Eric Gill. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1925.
4. *The Book of Jonah*. Wood engravings by David Jones. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1926.
5. Nicolas Breton. *The Twelve Months*. Wood engravings by Eric Ravilious. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1927.
6. Jules Tellier. *Abd-er-Rhaman in Paradise*. Wood engravings by Paul Nash. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1928.
7. Collard. Crotty Shinkwin: *A Tale of the Strange Adventure that Befell a Butcher of County Clare*. *The Beauty Spot: A Tale Concerning the Chilterns*. Wood engravings by Robert Gibbings. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1932.
8. William Shakespeare. *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*. Wood engravings by Eric Ravilious. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1932.
9. *Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher*. Wood engravings by Blair Hughes-Stanton. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1934.
10. Geoffrey Chaucer. *Troilus and Criseyde*. Prospectus. Specimen page. Wood engravings by Eric Gill. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire, The Golden Cockerel Press, 1927.
11. Bates. *Flowers and Faces*. Prospectus. Wood engravings by Paul Nash. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1935.
12. *Bligh's Voyage in the Resource*. Prospectus. Wood engravings by Peter Barker-Mill. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1937.
13. Christopher Whitfield. *Mr. Chambers and Persephone*. Prospectus. Wood engravings by Dorothea Braby. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1937.
14. Alexander Sergeyevitch Pushkin. *The Tale of the Golden Cockerel*. Prospectus. Wood engravings by Robert Gibbings. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1936.
15. Elisabeth Geddes. *Animal Antics*. Prospectus. Wood engravings by Elisabeth Geddes. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1937.
16. *Here's Flowers: An Anthology of Flower Poems*. Compiled by Joan Rutter. Prospectus. Wood engravings by John O'Connor. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1937.
17. *Season 1932: Mr. Robert Gibbings Presents His World Famous Golden Cockerel in its Eleventh Year in Six Completely New and Original Numbers*. Prospectus. Wood engraving for cover by Eric Ravilious. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1932.
18. *1933 GCP*. Prospectus. Wood engraving for cover by Eric Ravilious. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1933.
19. *The Golden Cockerel Press: The Golden Cockerel Press Begs to Announce His Discovery of Some Charming New Material for Autumn Publication*. Prospectus. Wood engraving for cover by Elizabeth Corsellis. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1936.
20. *1934 GCP*. Prospectus. Specimen page for *Glory of Life* by Llewelyn Powys, wood engravings by Roberts Gibbings; and publishing announcement for *The Journal of James Morrison, Boatswain Mate of the Bounty*. Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1934.
21. *Here is printed for the Exhibition a Biography of the Golden Cockerel Press to which is added a List of Books in Print*. Wood engravings by Eric Gill. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1935.
22. *Chanticleer: A Bibliography of the Golden Cockerel Press, April 1921–August 1936*. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1936.
23. *Cockalorum. A Sequel to Chanticleer and Pertelote: Being a Bibliography of the Golden Cockerel Press, June 1943–December 1948*. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1950.
24. Wells. *The Country of the Blind (1939)*. Wood engravings by Clifford Webb. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1939.
25. Algernon Charles Swinburne. *Laus Veneris*. Wood engravings by John Buckland Wright. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1948. Private collection.
26. *Grimms' Other Tales*. Wood engravings by Gwenda Morgan. London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1957. Private collection.
27. William Cynwal. *In Defence of Woman*. Wood engravings in colour by John Petts. London: Golden Cockerel Press, 1960. Private collection.
28. Geoffrey Chaucer. *The Canterbury Tales*. Wood engravings by Eric Gill. Facsimile of the original edition printed and published at the Golden Cockerel Press, Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire, 1929–1931. London: Folio Society, 2010.
29. *The Four Gospels of the Lord Jesus Christ*. Wood engravings by Eric Gill. Facsimile of the original edition printed and published at the The Golden Cockerel Press, Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire, 1931. London: Folio Society, 2007.



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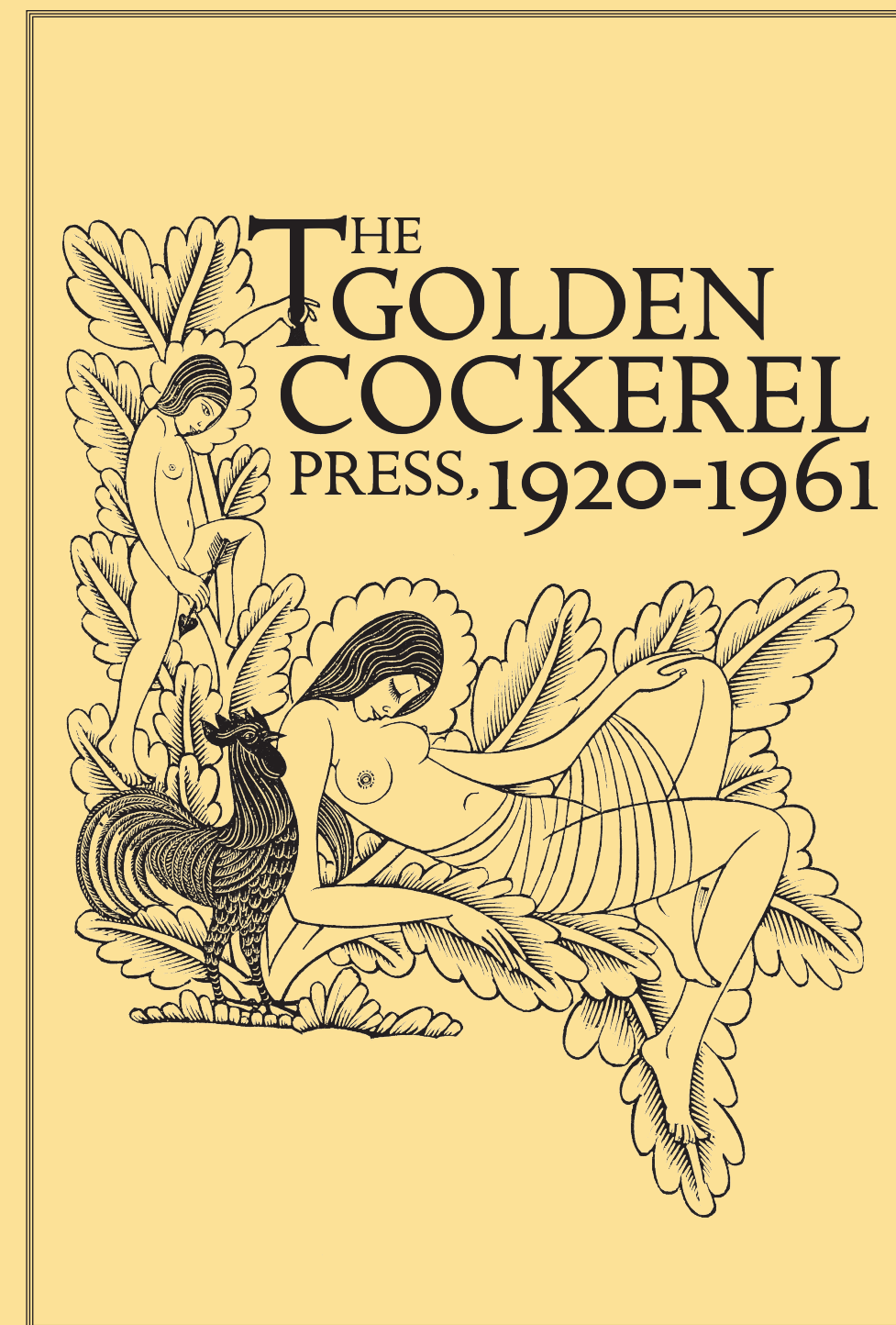
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