

THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

– ARTISTS’ GARDENS PROJECT 2019

INTRODUCTION

The Artists’ Gardens project aims initially to identify artists that have lived in Buckinghamshire, primarily during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, where they were located and during what period they were working. It then attempts to relate these findings to gardens that they created or gardened, used as inspiration or actually featured in their work, whether just using plant material from the garden as a basis for designs, or creating paintings or images of their gardens and views from them as finished works.

This project was prompted by research previously undertaken by Sarah Gray (former manager and curator, Bucks County Museum) into the gardens of Clare Leighton, the wood engraver who lived at Whiteleaf (1930–1939), and John Nash, the acclaimed World War I artist, who lived nearby in Meadle during his early married life (1922–1939). Sarah’s research culminated in the ‘Clear Skies’ exhibition held at the County Museum in 2007, in which many of the paintings exhibited were held by Buckinghamshire County Museum.

Having identified over 25 such artists in Bucks (see table below) the BGT Research and Recording Project volunteers were given the challenge of researching the artists and the sites associated with them, and where possible gaining access to the gardens. This they did as far as they could, with their usual enthusiasm and as light relief from their ongoing research into the unregistered parks and gardens in Bucks (see update elsewhere in this volume by Dr Sarah Rutherford). Considerable further work needs to be undertaken, as we are still finding little-known artists and exciting material is coming to light about those already identified. During their research the volunteers have addressed the following points:

1 Was there a garden attached to the artist’s house and was it cultivated?

2 To what extent did the artist take inspiration from the garden and the surrounding countryside?
3 Was the artist a gardener? if so, what did they do and how much of this survives?

Research sources have included material from the Buckinghamshire County Museum, the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, the BAS Library and information on numerous websites, including ArtUK and Watercolourworld.

The geographic spread of the artists’ gardens covers most of the county, from Rex Whistler at Whitchurch (1933–1937) in the north and John Piper (1934–1992) on the Oxfordshire border at Fawley Bottom, near Henley. There were several artists’ colonies including those at Hillesden, near Winslow (1950–1957); Pigotts End, Speen: Eric Gill (1928–1940); and Hawridge Windmill, near Chesham: Gilbert Cannan, Mark Gertler (1913–1916).

It has recently come to our attention that an inspiring group of women artists was active in the first half of the twentieth century in Amersham. These included Louise Jopling (1918–1933), Car Richardson (1915–1959) and Marie Louise Von Motesiczky (1940–1955); these will be the subject of further research. Paul and John Nash lived in several places in the county. They grew up in Iver Heath (1901–1916) and carried out their war commissions at Chalfont St Peter (1918–1919). Later, John lived at Meadle near Princes Risborough (1922–1939).

Many of the artists were polymaths, lending their hand to different applied arts, including ceramics, textiles and book illustration. The nineteenth-century artists were predominantly watercolourists, while those that were active in the following century worked in a wider variety of media. Their work has a distinct connection with the styles that were predominant in twentieth-century art, such as the avant-garde and Modern movement in England.



FIGURE 1 The Windmill, Cholesbury. Home of Gilbert Cannan, 1913–16 (Photo: Mary Buckle)

Most of the gardens that belonged to these artists are on a modest scale. Only a few remain intact, for example Wood End, Iver Heath (P & J Nash), The White House, Turville (McKnight Kauffer), Hawridge Windmill (group) and Bolebec House, Whitchurch (Rex Whistler). None are owned by descendants of the artist; even Fawley Bottom, John Piper’s home for more than fifty years (1934–1992) was sold by his family following his wife’s death in 1997.

However, we can see from their paintings that their gardens were much loved, and some were beautifully planted, particularly those that adopted a cottage style or the naturalistic style of planting that was popularised by William Robinson at the end of the nineteenth century. Alexander Jamieson, who had trained at Glasgow School of Art and painted in an impressionist style, lived in the village of Weston Turville from 1919 until

his death in 1937. His work ‘The artists garden’ held by Bucks County Museum is an excellent example of a cottage garden. Many of the artists were transient, only staying for a couple of years, for example McKnight Kauffer (1937–1940), who returned to the United States with his wife Marion Dorn at the outbreak of World War I. There is evidence that some of the artists were involved in their gardens: for example, John and Myfanwy Piper were keen gardeners, as can be seen in the paintings of Fawley Bottom. Clare Leighton was probably the most influential: she was a plantswoman, garden chronicler, wood engraver and passionate gardener who was inspired to create a garden at Four Hedges (now gone). Those living through wartime shortages grew vegetables, such as McKnight Kauffer at The White House, and Eric Gill, who created ‘a cell of good living’ at Pigotts. John Nash was quoted as saying that his interests were gardening, fishing and painting in that order.

Below is a taste of the three time periods when artists were active in different media across the county: nineteenth-century watercolourists, twentieth-century wood engravers, and advertising poster art. The aim is to provide a few preliminary conclusions in advance of a more detailed publication, which will include previously unpublished works featuring gardens from the County Museum collection.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY WATERCOLOURISTS – William and Harriet Callow

During the eighteenth century, watercolour became popular as the preferred medium of artists creating mementos of sites visited on the ‘Grand Tour’. The three artists associated with popularising its use are Paul Sandby (1730–1809), Thomas Girtin (1775–1802) and JMW Turner (1775–1851). Its use was particularly fashionable among amateur artists and it was seen as a suitable hobby for middle-class women. This is reflected in our Bucks artists in the nineteenth century.

William and Harriet Callow lived near Great Missenden at Potters Row, South Heath between 1855 and 1882 in two different houses on the same site. They made an extensive record of their home in an album which contains eighty-two watercolours, forty-one by each of them, of their garden and views in the vicinity (BCM Reserve Collection). Their paintings show both the houses and the extensive



FIGURE 2 The Firs, Great Missenden. Harriet Callow, 1860–61 (From the Bucks County Museum collection)

garden. They employed a gardener to maintain the immaculate flower beds containing standard roses, an arbour with a wisteria, mature trees including conifers and the firs after which the house was named. They also had a glasshouse attached to the house where they would have grown tender plants such as orchids.

Other artists visited the county during the nineteenth century and there are numerous watercolours of the Buckinghamshire landscape in national collections. So far, we have been unable to identify where they stayed, for how long and whether they had access to gardens. Notable among these was Edmund John Niemann (1836–1876), who may have resided in High Wycombe, and painted Brill Hill (Bucks County Museum). There was also Mabel Lilian Bott (1871–1953), who visited Great Missenden and surrounding area (www.watercolourworld.org).

TWENTIETH-CENTURY WOOD ENGRAVERS – John Nash, Claire Leighton and Francis Unwin

A new wood-engraving technique had been developed by Thomas Bewick at the end of the eighteenth century, using a burin or graver rather than traditional woodcarving tools. Wood engraving was a popular method of illustration throughout the nineteenth century and continued in use until the mid-twentieth century. Eric Gill and Eric Ravilious both used it extensively. Between 1922 and 1939 there was a small enclave of artists using this technique in the vicinity of Princes Risborough.

John Nash and his wife Christine (nee Kuhlenthal), an artist and dancer who had grown up in Gerrard’s Cross, moved to Lane End, Meadle near Princes Risborough in 1922 where they stayed until 1939. John painted views of the garden and countryside. His friend Francis Unwin briefly lived nearby and while there he produced two woodblock pieces: ‘The Potting Shed’ (1919, BCM) and ‘Cottage Gardens, Whiteleaf’ (1923, BCM). Unwin had studied at the Slade art school and was an engraver and woodblock printer. John had also mastered the wood block technique and while he was living at Meadle in 1938 he produced twelve illustrations of flowers grown in his garden for the book *John Nash’s Garden* (Bucks County Museum). He also illustrated *Poisonous Plants: Deadly, Dangerous and Suspect* (Curwen Press 1927), which includes twenty full-page wood engravings.

Clare Leighton, who had also studied at the Slade, moved to Monks Risborough in in 1930. Wood engraving was her favourite medium and she had already produced over 250 illustrations before she embarked on her labour of love, *Four Hedges* (1935), which chronicles the garden that she created with her partner, Noel Brailsford, through the months of the year. In 1939 she moved to the US.

ADVERTISING POSTERS – John Piper, Edward Mcknight Kauffer, Rex Whistler and Paul Nash

By the end of the nineteenth century, poster art had become a respectable art form, largely due to the invention of large-scale colour lithography.



FIGURE 3 Cottage gardens at Whiteleaf. Francis Unwin 1923 (From the Bucks County Museum collection)

It was popularised in Europe by artists such as Alfons Mucha and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. By the 1920s it was the cornerstone of graphic art, and key companies and organisations were commissioning artwork from renowned artists including Nash, Whistler, McKnight Kauffer and Piper.

Most of the Bucks artists produced work for Shell and/or London Underground at some time between 1930 and 1960. Around 1934, while he was living at Bolebec House, Whistler produced the painting 'Vale of Aylesbury' for Shell's poster series. In the 1920s McKnight Kauffer, who initially worked in the geometric Vortocist style, came to the attention of Frank Pick, advertising manager for London Underground. He produced at least 130 posters and other publicity materials, some of which were inspired by the countryside and his garden in Buckinghamshire. Paul and John

Nash and John Piper were invited to produce the iconic *Shell County Guides*, started in 1934 and edited by John Betjeman. Piper and Paul Nash also designed posters for Shell.

NB: Dates in brackets for the local artists refer to the period they lived in the county, not the artists' dates of birth and death.

REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FIGURE 4. The White House, Turville. Home of Edward McKnight Kauffer, 1937–40 (Photo: Claire de Carle)

Sarah Gray, BAS Librarian and trustee
Alison Bailey, Curator, Amersham Museum

Examples of some of these artists’ works showing gardens and landscapes are held by Buckinghamshire County Museum in the reserve store; others can be viewed on www.artuk.org and www.watercolourworld.org.

Claire de Carle MA

Below is a table of the artists that we are currently researching. If you know of any others or have any information about the gardens we have listed, please get in touch at claire@decarle.plus.com

ARTISTS' GARDENS – TABLE

Artist	Site/garden	Dates	Notes & additional information	References
ANDERSON Stanley	1) Timbers, Towersey (formerly in Bucks) 2) Darobey, Church Lane, Long Crendon	1933–? ?–1966	Engraver famous for his Country Craft series	Recording Britain Series
BOTT Lilian Mabel	? Prestwood, Gt Missenden	Late C19	Watercolourist 1891 album incl. local views	www.watercolourworld.org
CALLOW William & Harriet	The Firs, Potter Row, South Heath, Gt Missenden	1855– 1908	Watercolourists and landscape artists.	BCM reserve
CANNAN Gilbert & Mary	Hawridge Windmill, nr Cholesbury	1913– 1916	Members of art/literary circle Gilbert was a novelist; Mary planted a garden. Visitors incl. artists Mark Gertler, Dora Carrington. Studio in mill used in 1930s	Ashmolean <i>A Crisis of Brilliance</i> , Boyd-Haycock
DAGLISH Eric Fitch	1) Brambledon, Whiteleaf 2) Old Farm House, Speen	1922? Not known	Engraver/author. Friend of Nash and Gill	Illustrated Gilbert White's <i>Natural History of Selborne</i>
FOSTER Anthony	Hilliers, Ellery Rise, Frieth	1947–57	Sculptor/wood carver, mainly religious works, apprenticed to Gill	Crucifix, Frieth churchyard
GILL Arthur Eric Rowton	Pigott's, nr West Dean, Speen, High Wycombe	1928–40	Leading British sculptor and designer of typefaces (notably Gill Sans)	<i>Eric Gill</i> , MacCarthy BCM Pencil sketch of the garden (David Jones)
JAMIESON Alexander	Burnside, Church Walk, Weston Turville	1919–37	Glasgow School of Art Painter of landscapes and gardens in UK, France & Europe	Art UK BCM The Artist's Garden
JOPLING Louise	1) Woodlands, Long Park, Chesham Bois 2) Manor Farm, North Road, Chesham Bois	1918–33	Notable portraitist and writer Suffragist Painted Rothschild family	Amersham Museum Alison Bailey
KUHLEN- THAL Christine	Forestholme, Woodlands, Gerrards Cross	1911– 1919	Artist and dancer. Studied at the Slade, wife of John Nash	<i>First Friends</i> , Blythe
LEIGHTON Clare	Four Hedges, Monks Risborough	1930–39	Woodcut engraver and illustrator. Created a garden	<i>Four Hedges</i> BCM: Sarah Gray
MEE Margaret	1) The Crest, White Hill, Chesham 2) Rosemead, nr Lye Green (Now Culwood House)	1909 1910	Botanical artist Lived in Brazil from where she made 15 botanical expeditions into the Amazon region	1988 Major exhibition of her work at Kew
MELLON Eric and partner Martina Thomas	The Old Vicarage, Hillesden	1950–57	The Hillesden Group Pottery and artistic community Also Derek Davis, John Clark and partners	BCM oil painting 'Snow'

McKNIGHT KAUFFER Edward DORN Marion	The White House, Northend, Turville	1937–40	Illustrator/graphic artist Best known for his poster designs (London Underground & Shell) Friend of TS Eliot Marion was a textile designer	London Transport Museum Graham Twemlow
NASH Paul & John	Wood Lane House, Iver Heath	1901– WWI	Both painted gardens Artists' Rifles End of WWI rented barn at The Whins, Chalfont St Peter, painted war commissions	<i>Crisis of Brilliance</i> , Boyd-Haycock <i>Outline</i> , Paul Nash <i>Maude Grieve</i> , de Carle Tate Britain, BCM
NASH John & Christine	Lane End, Meadle, Princes Risborough	1922–39	Painted views of garden and countryside Wood engravings	<i>John Nash at Meadle</i> , Venetia Lascelles Sarah Gray
NICHOLSON William and Ben	White Cottage, Denham Village	1894–?	William was a painter of portraits, landscapes and specialised in still lifes, especially flowers. Ben (son) was a Cubist painter who married the sculptor Barbara Hepworth	<i>William Nicholson</i> , Penguin <i>The Nicholsons</i> RA Exhibition
NIEMANN Edmund John	High Wycombe (whereabouts unknown)	1839–48	Prolific landscape artist, watercolour	BCM Painting of Brill Graham Twemlow
ORRAM Mary	Rignalls Lodge, Rignalls Road, Gt Missenden	Mid –late C20	Sculptor who used recycled materials	
PIPER John & Myfanwy	Fawley Bottom Farmhouse, nr Henley	1934–92	Renowned C20 artist Painted his own garden many times Friend of Ben Nicholson and John Betjeman	Piper Gallery, Henley Museum <i>John Piper, Myfanwy Piper, Lives in Art</i> , Spalding, BCM
RICHARD- SON Car And sisters	Tythe Barn, Bois Lane, Chesham Bois	1915–59	Prolific painter, incl. her own garden and local countryside	Amersham Museum Alison Bailey BCM Recording Britain
STEPHENS Thomas Edgar	Not known, Chalfont St Peter	?	Portraitist	Paintings: Dwight Eisenhower (Washington, Smithsonian), Duke of Windsor & Churchill
UNWIN Francis Edward	Meadle TBC, Princes Risborough	Inter-war	Engraver, printmaker, studied at the Slade, friend of John Nash	BCM 'The Potting Shed' 1919 'Cottage gardens, Whiteleaf' 1923
VON MOTE- SICZKY Marie-Louise	Cornerways, 86 Chestnut Lane, Amersham	1939–55	Artist born in Vienna 1906, portraitist, also local scenes Friend of Oskar Kokoschka	Amersham Museum Alison Bailey Tate Britain
WHISTLER Rex	1) Farnham Common? 2) Bolebec House, 7 Oving Road, Whitchurch	1933–37	Trained at the Slade Painting of 'Vale of Aylesbury' for Shell poster During the war his parents lived at The Vicarage in Bierton Rex made several paintings there on visits	BCM Bierton Paintings