

2015

# Rex Whistler (1905-1944) Patronage and Artistic Identity

Frater, Nikki

<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/5140>

---

<http://dx.doi.org/10.24382/4205>

Plymouth University

---

*All content in PEARL is protected by copyright law. Author manuscripts are made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the details provided on the item record or document. In the absence of an open licence (e.g. Creative Commons), permissions for further reuse of content should be sought from the publisher or author.*

## **COPYRIGHT STATEMENT**

This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with its author and no quotation from the thesis and no information derived from it may be published without the author's prior consent.



**REX WHISTLER (1905 – 1944):  
PATRONAGE AND ARTISTIC IDENTITY**

by

**NIKKI FRATER**

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth in partial fulfilment  
for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

School of Humanities & Performing Arts

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

**September 2014**

**Nikki Frater**

**REX WHISTLER (1905-1944):**

**PATRONAGE AND ARTISTIC IDENTITY**

**Abstract**

This thesis explores the life and work of Rex Whistler, from his first commissions whilst at the Slade up until the time he enlisted for active service in World War Two. His death in that conflict meant that this was a career that lasted barely twenty years; however it comprised a large range of creative endeavours. Although all these facets of Whistler's career are touched upon, the main focus is on his work in murals and the fields of advertising and commercial design. The thesis goes beyond the remit of a purely biographical stance and places Whistler's career in context by looking at the contemporary art world in which he worked, and the private, commercial and public commissions he secured. In doing so, it aims to provide a more comprehensive account of Whistler's achievement than has been afforded in any of the existing literature or biographies.

This deeper examination of the artist's practice has been made possible by considerable amounts of new factual information derived from the Whistler Archive and other archival sources. Thus the sources of his ideas and influences, the creative stimuli to which Whistler responded have been documented

extensively and mapped against the iconography to be found in his works, particularly the murals. Further consideration of the art, artists and culture of the time situates the artist amongst his contemporaries, drawing out the themes and inspirations that he shared with them and in so doing questions the idea of Whistler as an idiosyncratic artist working in a partially private 'bubble', cut off from wider currents of art practice. The artist's diaries and accounts books have provided invaluable fresh information on his working practices, social and professional connections and the remuneration he received for different projects.

This monographic concentration on Whistler's life and art practice is seen as the necessary foundation for further analysis of his career and what his career, in turn, tells us about the inter-war British art world. The thesis argues that Whistler's success as a muralist needs to be considered against the background of the English mural revival, the emergent enthusiasm for Baroque and Rococo style and the rediscovery of the Regency period. Equally, a case is made for Whistler's understanding of the new area of advertising and design that developed in the 1920s and 30s, in which he played a substantial part. The thesis also argues that Whistler was complicit in the managing of his image during his lifetime, and was particularly astute in his understanding of the power of the press and media.

With Whistler's work in many areas governed by the commissioning process, an attempt is made to understand and assess the implications of patronage in the twentieth century and the concomitant effects upon an artist's creative vision, voice and identity.

## Contents

Copyright statement	i
Title page	iii
Abstract	iv
List of contents	vi
List of illustrations	vii
List of appendices	xvii
Acknowledgements	xviii
Author's declaration	xix
Introduction	1
Chapter One: EARLY YEARS AND THE SLADE SCHOOL OF ART	22
Chapter Two: THE TATE GALLERY RESTAURANT MURAL 1926-27	58
Chapter Three: INFLUENCES & INSPIRATIONS	92
Chapter Four: MURALS	143
Chapter Five: A MODERN PATRONAGE	223
Chapter Six: PATRONAGE AND ARTISTIC IDENTITY	276
Conclusion	327
<b>Appendices:</b>	
Appendix I: REX WHISTLER CAREER CHRONOLOGY	336
Appendix II: REX WHISTLER MURAL SCHEMES	360
Appendix III: PRIOR RESEARCH AND PUBLIC LECTURES	368
Bibliography	369
Volume of Illustrations	408

## VOLUME OF ILLUSTRATIONS: List of illustrations

Fig. Image Details

[Please note that some images have been removed in the Volume itself due to Copyright restrictions.]

- 1.1 TOP: *Figure sketch for 'Tragedy'*, for proscenium panel Shadwell mural. 1924-5. dimensions unknown. RWA.  
  
BELOW: Possible sketch for putti, Shadwell mural. 1924-5. dimensions unknown. RWA.
- 1.2 Pages from '1925 Sketchbook', CR 290, dimensions 7 inches x 10.5 inches. RWA.
- 1.3 Pages from '1925 Sketchbook', CR 290, dimensions 7 inches x 10.5 inches. RWA.
- 1.4 Top of page of notes from 'Sketchbook 1923A' CR 286. RWA.
- 1.5 Mary Adshead *The Picnic* 1924, Oil on canvas 94 in. x 47.2 in. Manchester Art Gallery.
- 1.6 Female Figure Seated 1924, Oil on canvas, 2 ft. 6 in. x 1ft. 8 in. © UCL Art Museum, University College London.
- 1.7 Sketch of Wilsford Manor (annotated by Laurence Whistler), 'Sketchbook 1923B' CR. 287, 6.5 x 3.5 inches, RWA.
- 1.8 *Rustic Scene: Villagers Dancing* 1924, oil on canvas, 12 ft. x 7ft. 5 in. © UCL Art Museum, University College London.
- 1.9 *Picnic in the Country with Musicians and Dancers*, 1924, oil on canvas. 12 ft. x 7ft. 5 in. The Slade and UCL Art Collections, London. © UCL Art Museum, University College London.
- 1.10 Whistler's panel left and Mary Adshead's (title unknown) right. *The Times*, Sept 24 1924, p.7.
- 1.11 Mary Adshead *The Joys of the Country* 1924 (dimensions unknown). Mural panel for Highway Boys Club Shadwell. University of Liverpool Art Collections.
- 1.12 Contemporary photograph of the interior of Highway Boys Club Memorial Hall Shadwell, showing Whistler's two side panels (1924) and proscenium panels (1925), together with one of Mary Adshead's small panels (1924, unidentified) abutting the stage. RWA.
- 1.13 Sketch for headpiece of proscenium arch, Shadwell, 'Sketchbook 1925' 7 inches x 10.5 inches, RWA.



- 1.14 Proscenium decoration for Highways Memorial Club, Shadwell 1925  
 TOP: *Allegorical Composition: Comedy and Putti Driving away a Heraldic Unicorn*  
 Oil on canvas glued to millboard, 52.3 inches x 108.2 inches.  
 BELOW: *Allegorical Composition: Tragedy and Putti Driving away a Heraldic Lion*  
 Oil on canvas glued to millboard, 52.7 inches x 123.2 inches. © UCL Art Museum, University College London.
- 1.15 Left panel, adjacent to 'Comedy': *Rural Scene with Putto Conducting Two Men Playing the Lute and Saxophone and Figures Dancing*, 1925, oil on canvas glued to millboard, 129.1 inches x 74.8 inches.  
 Right panel, adjacent to 'Tragedy': *Allegorical Composition with Nun Holding a Child and a Skeleton Personifying Death Taking the Arm of a Boy Holding a Book* 1925, oil on canvas glued to millboard, 130.9 inches x 78.3 inches. © UCL Art Museum, University College London.
- 1.16 *Trial Scene from the Merchant of Venice* 1925, oil on canvas, 3 ft. x 4ft. 1in.  
 © UCL Art Museum, University College London.
- 1.17 Ink and watercolour sketch for *Trial Scene from the Merchant of Venice* 1925  
 6.5 inches x 10 inches. Private collection.
- 1.18 Ink and watercolour sketch for *Trial Scene from the Merchant of Venice* 1925  
 6.75 inches x 9 inches. RWA.
- 2.1 Preliminary sketches for the Tate Gallery Refreshment Room mural, c. April 1925, 7.5 inches x 10.5 inches, in 1925 Sketchbook, RWA.
- 2.2 Preliminary sketches for the Tate Gallery Refreshment Room mural, c. April 1925, 7.5 inches x 10.5 inches, in 1925 Sketchbook, RWA.
- 2.3 Scenes from the 'Tangeree' section of the Tate Gallery mural. This part of the mural is the most incomplete and the least reproduced of the scheme. Photographs author's own.
- 2.4 Sketch of original Chinoiserie design for the columns in the centre of the Refreshment Room (not adopted), 1926, RWA.
- 2.5 The unfinished figures returning to Epicurania in the final scene of the mural. Photograph author's own.
- 2.6 Panel on main wall of the Refreshment Room, showing the thin washes that Whistler employed over the white ground. The use of viridian is distinctive and used throughout the composition. Photograph author's

own.

- 2.7 Squared out sketch for the hunting party's departure from Epicurania, 1926, RWA.
- 2.8 The finished scene in the mural. Image © Tate Photography.
- 2.9 Another view of Epicurania, showing how Whistler fitted the departure scene into the corner of the room. Photograph author's own.
- 2.10 Caryatids at the entrance to the Refreshment Room. Image © Tate Photography.
- 2.11 The final panel of the mural with classical statuary, the Boycott Pavilion and the Corinthian Arch both based on those at Stowe. At the far right is the party returning to Epicurania. Image © Tate Photography.
- 2.12 Design for scene for main wall of Refreshment Room. RWA.  
Édouard Manet, *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 1863-1868, Oil on canvas, 35.2 x 45.8 in., Courtauld Gallery, London.
- 2.13 Nan West *Summer*, 1927, panel from the mural at the Royal National Orthopaedic Outpatients Hall.  
The murals in situ. Photograph from 2006 before the demolition of the Hospital. Image English Heritage.
- 2.14 Eric Ravilious and Edward Bawden, part of the mural scheme at Morley College, 1928-1930. Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Library Photographs Collection.
- 3.1 Illustration to Baudelaire's 'L'Horloge', 9 x 7 inches, ink and watercolour, 1924 Sketchbook, RWA.
- 3.2 View from the villa in Switzerland, 7 x 9 inches, ink and watercolour, 1924 Sketchbook, RWA.
- 3.3 Ink and watercolour sketches of the Colosseum and the Arch of Septimius, 7 x 9 inches, 1924 Sketchbook, RWA.
- 3.4 Lists of paintings seen, sketch plan of Bellini's *Sacred Conversation* (now called *Sacred Allegory* or *Holy Allegory*) lower right, 1924 Sketchbook RWA. Giovanni Bellini *Sacred Allegory* (1490-1500), Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
- 3.5 Overdoor decoration, possibly from San Remo, page 7 x 10.5 inches, pen and ink 1925 Sketchbook, RWA.  
A similar layout is used in the sketch for the central cartouche for the

Shadwell proscenium decoration, 7 x 10.5 inches, pen and ink, 1925  
Sketchbook, RWA.

- 3.6 Top: 'The Palladian Bridge Wilton' Below: 'The 'grotto' now called The Park School, at Wilton' Both 7 x 10.5 inches, pen and ink, 1925 Sketchbook, RWA.
- 3.7 Title page Rome Sketchbook 1928, 10.5 x 6.75 inches, pen and ink, RWA.
- 3.8 Top: page from Rome Sketchbook, 1928 showing list of paintings seen in the Borghese Gallery and pencil sketches of dolphin decorations, in the main salon, RWA. Below: painted dolphin decorations above the Venetian window, commissioned for Sir Philip Sassoon at Trent Park, 1935-36. RWA.
- 3.9 *Tivoli. Thursday April 26<sup>th</sup>*, Rome Sketchbook 1928, 10.5 x 6.75 inches, pen and ink, RWA.
- 3.10 *Bosco Sacro*, ink and watercolour, 6.75 x 10.25 inches, 1928. Private Collection.  
*Castel Gandolfo and Lake Albano*, ink and watercolour, 7 x 10.25 inches, 1928. Private collection.
- 3.11 Winifred Knights, *Figures in a boat, lake Piediluco*, 1924-30, oil on canvas, 26 3/16 x 26 3/16 inches. Private Collection.
- 3.12 Top: Francis Towne *Lake Albano with Castel Gandolfo*, 1781, ink and watercolour 12.5 x 27.5 inches, British Museum. Below: John Robert Cozens *The Lake of Albano and Castel Gandolfo*, c. 1778, watercolour, 14.3 x 20.7 inches, Art Gallery of Ontario.
- 3.13 *Peaches & Tapestry in the dining room, no. 3 Foro Romano* 1929, oil on canvas, 10 x 14 inches. Private collection.
- 3.14 *Tivoli from the Road*, 1929, oil on canvas, 10 x 14 inches. Private Collection.
- 3.15 Edward Irvine Halliday, *St Paul Meeting Lydia of Thyatira*, 1928 Oil on canvas, 41.7 x 57.8 inches, oil on canvas. Collection: University of Liverpool.
- 3.16 Sketch for *The Story of Jonah*, 1928, pencil and watercolour, 1ft. 3in. x 3ft. 2in., RWA.
- 3.17 *The Story of Jonah*, 1928, oil on canvas, 1ft. 3in. x 3ft. 2in. Private collection.
- 3.18 Royal Opera House. Royal Box decorated for Gala Performance in honour of French Presidential visit, March 1939.
- 3.19 Bookplate for Osbert Sitwell, 1928, collotype, 4 1/2 x 2 7/8 in., RWA.  
Thomas Johnson, design, 1758, Etching, ink on paper, Museum no. E.3780-1903. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

- 3.20 Above: plate by Göz from *Les Maîtres de l'Ornementation Le Style Louis XV*, 1925, held in RWA. Below: design for Clovelly *toile de Jouy*, 1932 shown on range of fabrics and household textiles printed by Clovelly Silks, Clovelly.
- 3.21 Illustration to *Gulliver's Travels*, 1930.  
Richard Bentley, Frontispiece for the illustrated 1753 edition of Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.
- 3.22 *Saturday Book Anthology*, cover by Philip Gough, 1955.
- 3.23 'Clump of trees on road to Bellegra July 8' 1928 Rome Sketchbook, 10.5 x 6.75 inches, pencil, RWA.
- 3.24 *Miss Penelope and Miss Angela Dudley-Ward*, 1933-34, oil on canvas, 3ft. 1.5 in x 4ft. Private Collection.
- 3.25 Section of mural showing capriccio, Dining Room at Plas Newydd, 1936-38, oil on canvas.
- 3.26 Section of mural showing capriccio, 19 Hill Street, oil on canvas, 1930-31. Another capriccio in one of the panels for 36 Hill Street, oil on canvas, 1936.
- 3.27 Trophy in panel of mural at Port Lympne, 1930-32, oil on canvas.  
Trophy in panel for interior (unknown scheme) oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in. Private Collection.
- 4.1 Design for cover, RIBA Centenary Conference Handbook, 1934. Pencil on paper, approx. 10 x 8 in. Image taken courtesy of the RIBA Library, Drawings and Archive Collection.
- 4.2 Photograph for 'Proposal for Grosvenor Square', c.1934, pen and ink, 3.5 x 4.5in, from *Country Life*, 17 January 1947. Image courtesy of *Country Life*.
- 4.3 Initial ink and watercolour sketch for the Dorneywood panel, 1928. Private Collection. Author's photo.  
Photograph showing installation of the mural panel at Dorneywood, 1928-29, oil on canvas. Author's photo. NB. Full details of all mural dimensions are in Appendix II.
- 4.4 Edward Halliday *Ulysses and Nausicaa*, 1935, Dining room of 27 Thurloe Square. Image © Tate Library and Archive.
- 4.5 John Piper, decoration at 22 Highpoint, London 1938-9. Image © Tate Library and Archive.
- 4.6 Contemporary photograph of the 76 Dean Street mural, artist unknown, 1732-35, under conservation.
- 4.7 Mural at 19 Hill Street, 1930-31, oil on canvas. Author's photo.

- 4.8 Mural as seen from the entrance to 19 Hill Street. Author's photo.
- 4.9 Proposal for the upper staircase hall, 11 x 1ft 21/2 in., ink and watercolour, image from Witt Library. Original now in private collection.
- 4.10 Felix Harbord, tribute to Rex Whistler, 1959, probably oil on plaster, 19 Hill Street. Author's photo.
- 4.11 Murals at 36 Hill Street in existing 18<sup>th</sup> century plaster-work frames, 1936. Photographs RWA.
- 4.12 Mural panel, 36 Hill Street, oil on canvas, 1936. Photograph RWA.  
Mural panel, 36 Hill Street, oil on canvas, 1936. Photograph RWA.
- 4.13 Mural panel, 1936, 36 Hill Street, oil on canvas. Photo RWA.
- 4.14 Frank Freeman and Joan Souter Robertson, Murals in staircase hall of Highfield, Birmingham, 1931. Photographs RIBA.
- 4.15 The scheme at 35 Gower Street, 1935, oil on plaster. Above: the 'pretence mezzotints' and the plaque with the Three Graces. Below: showing the Regency and Empire style of the furnishings, two more plaques on the end wall and the niche with 'antique jug' on the left. Photographs RWA.
- 4.16 The 'antique jug' in the trompe l'oeil niche. Photograph RWA.
- 4.17 Left: the eighteenth century Print Room at Blickling Hall. National Trust Images. Right: the eighteenth century Print Room at Castletown House, Ireland. Images [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)
- 4.18 Hans Feibusch, murals for house in Hampstead, 1937. Medium unknown. Image from RIBA.
- 4.19 The chimney piece mural in the Back Drawing Room of 5 Belgrave Square, 1935, oil on plaster, 9ft. x 5ft. Image courtesy of *Country Life*.
- 4.20 Right: closer image of the mural. Image courtesy of *Country Life*.  
Left: original watercolour sketch for the mural showing colour scheme. RWA.
- 4.21 *Trent Park, Middlesex: the Terrace*, 1934, oil on canvas, 10.5 in x 1ft. 2in., Private Collection.
- 4.22 Trophy above chimney piece, Blue Room, Trent Park, oil on wood, 1935-36. Image right Flickr.com, left RWA.
- 4.23 'Amazon Queens' in the Library, Trent Park, oil on wood, 1935-36. Photograph Flickr.com.

- 4.24 Decoration above the Venetian window, Trent Park, oil on wood, 1935-36. Image RWA.
- 4.25 Monogram of Sir Philip Sassoon gilded in gold leaf over door to one of the reception rooms, 1935-36. Photograph, Flickr.com.
- 4.26 Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, Room setting in the Lefevre Gallery, 1932. Plate from Patmore, D., *Colour Schemes & Modern Furnishing*, The Studio: London & New York, 1933
- 4.27 Duncan Grant, overmantel panel for Angus Davidson, 1930. Image RIBA.
- 4.28 Discarded proposal for Port Lympne mural, 1930, ink and watercolour, 11in. x 1ft.1in. Private collection.
- 4.29 Mural for the Dining Room at Port Lympne, 1930-32. Photograph *Country Life*.
- 4.30 Sections of the mural at Port Lympne. Top: Palladian Bridge and St Martin-in-the-Fields. Below: a fantasy garden scene. Photographs author's own.
- 4.31 Mural for the Dining Room at Plas Newydd, 1936-38, oil on canvas. Photograph © National Trust Images.  
View of the Dining Room showing the mirrors installed facing the mural. The right hand arch leading away from the viewer is a trompe l'oeil creation. © National Trust Images.  
Further view of the mural. © National Trust Images/ Andreas von Einsiedel.  
Section of the mural. Photograph author's own.
- 4.32 Section of mural showing trophy and grisaille decorations on the South wall and part of the coffered ceiling; these correspond to decorations on the North wall. Photograph private collection.
- 4.33 The artist's self-portrait in the return wall of the mural. Photograph RWA.
- 4.34 Left: The entrance hall of the Mountbatten penthouse at Brook House
- 4.35 Right: the enfilade of reception rooms. Both photographs from *Country Life*/A E Henson.
- 4.36 The murals at Brook House, 1937, oil on canvas. RWA.
- 4.37 The grisaille colour scheme of the Brook House murals. Photograph shows the murals after relocation to Britwell Salome, Oxfordshire. Image from Pinterest.
- 4.38 Designs for a Courtyard and Pavilion in a Gothic style at Plas Newydd, 1936, ink and watercolour with gold, 9in x 1ft. © National Trust/Simon

Harris.

- 4.39 Murals in the Drawing Room at Mottisfont Abbey, 1938-39, oil on plaster and wood. © National Trust Images/ Andreas von Einsiedel.
- 4.40 Sections of mural showing trompe l'oeil columns and trophy, © National Trust Images/ Andreas von Einsiedel, and the 'smoking urn'. Country Life /David Giles.
- 4.41 Detail showing the window treatment involving faux and real curtains. © National Trust Images/ Andreas von Einsiedel.
- 4.42 Mary Adshead, *A Tropical Fantasy*, 1926, oil on board, University of Liverpool Collections.
- 4.43 Mary Adshead, *An English Holiday*, oil on canvas, 1928. Photograph Estate of Mary Adshead.  
Panels from the mural, photographs from Liss Fine Art.
- 4.44 Glyn Philpot, murals at Mulberry House, 1931. Photograph *Country Life*/A E Henson. The bronze relief was by Charles Sergeant Jagger.
- 4.45 Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, murals for the dining room at Penns-in-the-Rocks, 1929-31. Photograph ©Tate Library and Archive.
- 5.1 Top: *London Museum*, 1928. Below: *The Tate Gallery*, 1928. Both posters for the London Passenger Transport Board. © TFL from the London Transport Museum Collection.
- 5.2 L to R: Austin Cooper *British Museum* 1928, Edward McKnight Kauffer *British Industries Fair* 1928, Edward Bawden *Natural History Museum* 1925. © TFL from the London Transport Museum Collection.
- 5.3 *The Four Georges* 1930 and *The Age of Walnut* 1932. Images from the Vintage Poster Forum.
- 5.4 Stephen Bone, mural at Piccadilly Circus underground station, 1928-9. London Transport Museum Collection.
- 5.5 *Bakerloo* 1930, design for C B Cochran review, RWA.
- 5.6 *The Vale of Aylesbury*, 1933. Private collection.  
Top: Graham Sutherland, *Brimham Rocks, Yorkshire*, 1937. Lower left: Ben Nicholson, *Guardsman outside Buckingham Palace*, 1938. Right: Lord Berners, *Faringdon Folly*, 1936. Copyright Shell Brands International AG. Courtesy the Shell Art Collection.
- 5.7 Paul Nash, *The Rye Marshes*, 1932. Copyright Shell Brands International AG. Courtesy the Shell Art Collection.

- 5.8 'That's Shell – that is' press adverts, 1929. Private collection.
- 5.9 Shell press advert, 1929. Private collection.
- 5.10 'Reversible Faces' series, 1931-32. Private Collection.
- 5.11 Top: Edward Bawden, 'Stow-on-the-Wold', 1933 and 'Bexhill-on-Sea' 1935 designs for Shell Press advertising. Images Flickr.com. Below: 'Summer Shell', 1935. Private collection.
- 5.12 Illustration to *The New Forget-Me-Not: A Calendar* 1929. Private collection.
- 5.13 Designs for Fortnum and Mason catalogue, 1935. Private collection.
- 5.14 'King George VI Coronation Poster', Imperial Airways, 1937. Image [www.Ebay.com](http://www.Ebay.com)
- 5.15 Right: Imperial Airways leaflet design, 1936. Private collection. Left: Edward McKnight Kauffer poster for Imperial Airways, 1935. Image <http://www.artvalue.com/>
- 5.16 Celebrations at the end of South African War', 1940-44, Design for Rothmans. Image Bonham Auctions.
- 5.17 Neptune carpet design, 1934. Private collection. The carpet now in situ at West Dean, contemporary photograph from Pinterest, source unknown.
- 5.18 *Clovelly* toile du Jouy, 1932. Image Clovelly Silks.
- 5.19 Top: the Clovelly design on Wedgwood china, 1933 onwards. Images EBay. Below: Eric Ravilious, Coronation mugs, 1937 and 1953. Images Bonhams.
- 5.20 Eric Ravilious, designs for Coronation mug 1936 and 1937. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
- 5.21 Design for the 1935 George V Jubilee Stamp, 1934, British Postal Museum and Archive. © Stamp Design Royal Mail Group Ltd (2015)
- 5.22 Barnett Freedman, successful design for the Jubilee Stamp, 1934, British Postal Museum and Archive. © Stamp Design Royal Mail Group Ltd (2015)
- 6.1 *Haddon Hall*, 1932, preliminary oil painting for the larger panel, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Private collection. Panel at Haddon Hall in situ, 1933, oil on wood, 6ft. x 8ft. 6 in.



- 6.2 *Weston Hall*, 1929, oil on canvas, 9in. x 1ft. Private collection.  
*Cranborne Manor*, 1935, oil on canvas, 1ft. 5.5in. x 1ft. 2in. Private Collection.
- 6.3 Rex Whistler photographed by Howard Coster, 1936. The equestrian portrait of Edward James is in the background. © National Portrait Gallery, London.
- 6.4 One of the pair of limewood urns in the Gallery at North Audley Street, 1932. Photograph *Country Life* / Alex Starkey.
- 6.5 Left: Design for Wall-paper for North Audley Street, 1932, ink and watercolour, 10in. x 1ft. 2in. Image from Victoria and Albert Museum.  
Right: the wall-paper in situ, oil on canvas, 6ft. x 5ft. 1in. Image English Heritage.
- 6.6 The panel at Belgrave Square in a photograph from *Vogue* magazine, date unknown.
- 6.7 *Conversation piece: The Royal Family*, 1937, pencil, 1ft.1in. x 10in. Royal Collection Trust/ ©HM Queen Elizabeth II 2015.
- 6.8 *Officers Mess Tent, Codford St Mary*, 1942, oil on canvas, 11.75 x 1ft. 6 in. Collection of the Welsh Guards.
- 6.9 “*Sonny Grant*”, 1936, oil on canvas, 1ft. 3.75 in x 11.5in. Private Collection.
- 6.10 Rex Whistler photographed by Howard Coster, 1936. ©National Portrait Gallery, London.
- 6.11 *Self-Portrait*, 1933, oil on canvas, 1ft. 3.5 in. x 1ft. 2in. Photo: ©Tate, London [2015].
- 6.12 Andrea Soldi, *James Gibbs, 1682 – 1754, Architect*, c.1750. National Galleries Scotland.
- 6.13 *Self-Portrait in Uniform*, 1940, oil on canvas, 2ft. 4in x 1ft. 11in. National Army Museum.
- 6.14 William Orpen *Ready to Start. Self-Portrait*, 1917. Imperial War Museum. © IWM (Art.IWM ART 2380)

## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix I:**      REX WHISTLER CAREER CHRONOLOGY

**Appendix II:**    REX WHISTLER MURAL SCHEMES

**Appendix III:**   PRIOR RESEARCH AND PUBLIC LECTURES

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go to my supervisor, Professor Sam Smiles, for his encouragement, insight and guidance. Thanks too to Professor Daniel Maudlin who has provided further valuable supervisory support.

The Whistler family have been unfailingly kind and cooperative. I would like to thank them for granting me access to the Whistler Archive and for their willingness to share knowledge about their uncle. I would particularly like to thank Robin Ravilious who has been so supportive throughout the project.

It was very useful to have a conversation with the 7<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Anglesey about his friendship with Rex Whistler at the beginning of this study. Many others connected with the National Trust at Plas Newydd have been extremely helpful, especially Peter Simpson.

I am grateful to the team at the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum where the Whistler Archive is now housed.

Lastly I would like to thank my family and all the many friends who have kept me going during this project for their advice, suggestions and support.

## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the Plymouth University has not formed part of any other degree either at Plymouth University or at another establishment.

Relevant seminars and conferences were attended at which work was presented (see Appendix III) External institutions were visited for consultation purposes.

Conferences Attended:

'New Approaches to British Art 1939 – 1969' Courtauld Institute, June 2010.

'Art Against the Wall' Courtauld Institute, November 2011.

'Revival: Utopia, Identity, Memory' Courtauld Institute, November 2012.

'Murals in Britain 1910-1970: Revisions, revelations and risks' Morley College, March 2013.

'Twentieth-century British Murals Developmental Seminar' Tate Britain, May 2014.

Word count of main body of thesis: 81890 February 2015

Signed .....

Date.....



## REX WHISTLER (1905 -1944): PATRONAGE AND ARTISTIC IDENTITY

### INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I will be examining two areas of art historical research that have been somewhat overlooked. Rex Whistler is an artist who is regarded as such an individualist, a lone maverick that he has never been written into the canon of English art. Here I am using 'canon' in the sense of an established and permanent list or register of works or artists that are regarded as being of indisputable merit and quality. But merit and quality themselves are relative values, judgements hinged upon formalism and connoisseurship, that are subject to the tastes and criteria of a particular time. The idea of the canon is laden with meaning(s) in art history, and in the twentieth century art historians have engaged with questions of its definition and relevance.<sup>1</sup> For example in Britain during the 1970s, advocates of the New Art History laid the foundations of the canon open to question. Its standards and orthodox narratives were subject to critiques and revisions as expressed by T J Clark, who advocated that the canon should be 'replaced by other, more intricate, more particular orders and relations.'<sup>2</sup> This opening up of the way works of art were judged would change 'the *ground* of valuation', introducing a new set of criteria for inclusion.<sup>3</sup> The implications of this suggest that an artist such as Rex Whistler, whose work spanned so many genres that were alien to the

---

<sup>1</sup> See Clark, T.J., 'Arguments about Modernism A Reply to Michael Fried' in Frascina, F. (ed.), *Pollock and After*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, pp.104-105.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Clark's comments were expressly to do with a 'critique of modernism' and thus he was referring to a 'modernist' canon but the sentiments are relevant to the canon in universal terms.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

canon such as commercial art and illustration, could thus be recognised. Over forty years have elapsed since Clark's thoughts but this has yet to be the case.<sup>4</sup> Yet it is Whistler's tensions with the hierarchies of the canon that actually warrant him greater attention and makes him such an interesting subject of study.

What the thesis will argue is that whatever the limitations of the canon itself Whistler has been incorrectly disregarded. He produced interesting work of high quality and originality across a wide range of disciplines, was successful and well-respected in his time and there is no reason why he should not now be worthy of inclusion in scholarship on twentieth-century art. Furthermore his career highlights another issue that has been overlooked, which is that the inter-war period in English art history has more complexity in terms of movements, the notion of patronage and the interplay of fine and decorative arts than has been adequately explained. Over six chapters the thesis will explore and assess his contribution to the art of that epoch.

Rex Whistler had one of the most diverse creative careers of any artist in the twentieth century. He painted murals for both public and private clients; illustrated books and periodicals; painted portraits of sitters and quite often their houses too; designed scenery and costumes for ballet, opera, plays, revues and films; and as a graphic artist he produced designs for press and poster advertising, corporate publicity, textiles and ceramics. Many of his contemporaries were also working in some of these areas and were commissioned, as he was, but for Whistler these commissions were his career. This type of career where, rather than working towards expression of a personal creativity, the artist continually works

---

<sup>4</sup> The quote used above was added by Clark as an 'Author's note' in 1984. Ibid., p.104.

within the constraints of a client's brief must have an impact on the creative process. The thesis will explore the effect of these constant commissions on Whistler's creative vision and, at a deeper level, his artistic identity.

There have been five exhibitions on Rex Whistler since his death in 1944 and four books published, including a catalogue raisonné and two exhibition catalogues.<sup>5</sup>

Three of these books have been written by his brother, the poet and glass engraver Laurence Whistler, and the key volume remains his biography *The Laughter and the Urn* (1985).<sup>6</sup> By definition this could not be an impartial account of Whistler's life and work and it is as much about Laurence Whistler as it is about his brother.

Often his own tastes and commentary run alongside the biographical writing, taking the reader off on tangents and byways and preventing this from being a dynamic chronological narrative. Laurence Whistler was a renowned poet and author, and this is evident in his writing style where the poetic cadences can lie uncomfortably with what needs to be factual. The end result is found by many to

---

<sup>5</sup> The exhibitions include: 'Rex Whistler, 1905-1944: a Memorial Exhibition' Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 12 October to 18 December 1960 and also shown at the Art Gallery, Brighton, 7 to 28 Jan. 1961; 'Rex Whistler's War, 1939 - July 1944, Artist into Tank Commander', National Army Museum, 18th May - 18th September 1994; 'Rex Whistler: The Triumph of Fancy', Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, 14 April - 3 September 2006, 'The Unseen Rex Whistler', Colefax & Fowler, London, 22 November - 14 December 2012; and 'Rex Whistler - A Talent Cut Short', Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum, 24 May - September 29 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Whistler, L. *Rex Whistler his life and his drawings*, London: Art & Technics, 1948, Whistler, L., *The Laughter and the Urn*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985, Whistler, L. and Fuller, R. (eds.) *The Work of Rex Whistler*, London: Batsford 1960, *Rex Whistler's War 1939-July 1944: Artist into Tank Commander*. Exhibition Catalogue by Jenny Spencer-Smith, London: National Army Museum Publishing. 1994, *Rex Whistler The Triumph of Fancy*. Exhibition catalogue by Stephen Calloway, Brighton: Royal Pavilion, Libraries & Museums, 2006, Cecil, H and Mirabel, *In Search of Rex Whistler His Life & His Work*, London: Frances Lincoln Limited, 2012. *The Work of Rex Whistler* also acts as a catalogue raisonné and will be referred to as such in this thesis. There was a small exhibition 'The Unseen Rex Whistler' at Colefax & Fowler accompanying the launch of the Cecils' book in 2012. The 2013 Salisbury exhibition had no catalogue.

Unpublished Post-graduate research on Rex Whistler includes: Lindsay, J., *The Mural at Plas Newydd and the question of a dichotomy in the wall-paintings of Rex Whistler*, unpublished MA dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1989, O'Leary, M., *Rex Whistler A Comparative Study of Three Decorative Schemes*, unpublished Post-Graduate research project for Courtauld Institute of Art, in collaboration with The National Trust, 2000 and by the author, *Rex Whistler Anamnesis and Modernity*, unpublished MA dissertation, University College Falmouth, 2002.



be obfuscatory. Over twenty-five years elapsed before the publication of *In Search of Rex Whistler His Life & His Work* by Hugh and Mirabel Cecil. This could have offered an opportunity for a different approach but the authors draw rather too heavily on the 1985 volume and keep a respectful distance from any comments that are too frank or direct. Their research is wide-ranging but, like Laurence Whistler, they make no attempt to place the artist in any kind of artistic context. They thus perpetuate the impression that he was outside any kind of contemporaneous movement when the reality is that there are many connections between his work and that of other artists of the time.

Whistler's work in advertising and design, in which he found considerable success, is a clear example of how our perception of his career has been skewed by the preferences of his biographers and it is worth outlining here. For instance, in the hierarchy of the *Catalogue Raisonné*, the sections on 'Advertisements' and 'Posters' come nearly at the end of the volume.<sup>7</sup> By this arrangement Laurence Whistler is making clear his feelings about the commercial side of his brother's work, which he regarded as less important than his more fine art commissions.<sup>8</sup> His advertising work for Shell is given more attention in the 1985 biography, mainly due to the Reversible Faces series which his brother perceived as being of great general interest, particularly to children.<sup>9</sup> However, the London Underground posters are not mentioned, and their listing in the *Catalogue Raisonné* has no reference to the

---

<sup>7</sup> They are followed only by four pages of '*Jeux d'Esprit*' and '*Caricatures*'.

<sup>8</sup> Conversation with Robin Ravilious, 24 August 2013. Laurence Whistler's first biography of his brother, *Rex Whistler His Life and Drawings* (1948), makes no mention of the artist's work in the commercial sphere, apart from book illustration and theatre design, which may be considered more traditional routes of employment for an artist.

<sup>9</sup> The books '*OHO*' and '*AHA*' were published in 1946 and 1978 respectively by John Murray, with a US edition by Houghton Mifflin, and the 1978 versions garnered much press attention. He also tried to persuade Wedgwood to create ceramic pieces using images from the Reversible Faces series, but the idea did not come to fruition. Letter from Wedgwood to LW 24 Jan 1978 and LW to Wedgwood 8 Feb 1978, 'Advertising' file, RWA.

client. This was surely a commission of some prestige for the artist, particularly as one of the posters advertised his own mural and all three would have been displayed prominently all over London. The most recent volume of biography by Hugh and Mirabel Cecil (2012) devotes a mere three pages of text to the chapter on the advertising and associated designs, reinforcing the idea that Whistler's work in advertising should be regarded as secondary to his other work.<sup>10</sup>

Evidently the direct literature on Whistler is scant, but even in the accounts of interwar art there is little or no mention of him. He is mentioned in the 1979 *Thirties* exhibition catalogue but that is more of a survey of the period rather than an in-depth examination of individual artists.<sup>11</sup> The catalogue to *The Sitwells* exhibition in 1994 gives a slightly more detailed study but obviously only in relation to the work Whistler did for the trio.<sup>12</sup> However in more comprehensive art historical studies of the period, such as those offered by Charles Harrison or David Peters Corbett, Whistler is singularly absent. *The Modernity of English Art* declared itself as a revisionist history but still found no place for a reference to Whistler's contribution apart from a footnote. Here in a section discussing the interest in the Baroque in the late 1920s and a description of Sacheverell Sitwell's influential book *Southern Baroque Art* (1922), a footnote mentions that *The Times* review of Whistler's mural at the Tate Gallery was 'reported through a tissue of

---

<sup>10</sup> 'From Guinness to Greetings Telegrams' pp.136-143, Cecil H & M, 2012. Unfortunately there are also several factual inaccuracies in the text. They state that Whistler retained copyrights in his work, p.137. In fact Shell insisted on retaining the copyright much to the annoyance of LW, correspondence in 'Advertising' file RWA. The 'That's Shell - That was' series is wrongly attributed to John Goodall, p.141.

<sup>11</sup> *Thirties - British Art and Design before the War*. Exhibition catalogue by Hawkins, J., Hollis, M. et al., London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979, pp. 38, 43, 79, 130, 161, 203, 204, 211, 214, 302.

<sup>12</sup> *The Sitwells and the Arts of the 1920s and 1930s*. Exhibition catalogue by Skipwith, J. et al. (ed.), London: National Portrait Gallery, 1994, pp. 98, 83, 99, 109, 210.

references to Sitwell's book'.<sup>13</sup> The fact that Whistler's work itself owes a great deal to his preoccupations with the Baroque is not discussed.<sup>14</sup>

Even in books that describe the period from a wider cultural viewpoint Whistler is barely mentioned. Martin Green's *Children of the Sun* describes many of those individuals with whom Whistler associated, in both a social sense and for commissioned work.<sup>15</sup> As has become clear these two relationships were often concomitant. Green's cast are from a more literary rather than artistic milieu, thus reflecting Whistler's predispositions – he did not particularly mix with other artists and had a keen interest in literature, demonstrated in the strong narrative and illustrative content of his work. However, he does not feature in this account.<sup>16</sup> Again this emphasises his outsider status. He was by birth part of the generation described, but by education and upbringing was not. Nonetheless further analysis of this group could provide other insights into his career and trajectory, and a putative cultural context, although this kind of study is not within the framework of the current research project.

One field of research that has opened up in recent years is an exploration of mural schemes of the twentieth century and this has allowed for some examination of Whistler's work in this genre. Arguably Whistler's murals are his greatest

---

<sup>13</sup> Peters Corbett, D., *The Modernity of English Art*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997, footnote 36, p.189.

<sup>14</sup> David Peters Corbett's later volume *The Geographies of Englishness* (2002) also had chapters dealing with interwar British art by Andrew Causey, Alan Powers et al but Whistler is only mentioned as the designer of *The Rake's Progress* ballet. Burt, R., 'Ideologies of Englishness and Internationalism in Modernist Ballet' in Peters Corbett, D., Holt, Y. and Russell, F. *The Geographies of Englishness*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002, p.327.

<sup>15</sup> Green, M., *Children of the Sun A narrative of 'decadence' in England after 1918*, London: Constable, 1977.

<sup>16</sup> He is listed in the 'Dramatis Personae' as a 'stage-designer', a reductive view of his practice, and only appears in the text in a section on Cecil Beaton where Beaton's reaction to his friend's death is described. Ibid, p.499 and p.377 respectively.

achievements and certainly the most visible. Clare Willsdon's comprehensive volume *Mural Painting in Britain 1840-1940* (2000) has been followed by *British Murals & Decorative Painting 1920-1960* (2013) published by Liss Fine Art. Although there is no section devoted to Whistler's mural schemes, references are made to his contribution to the genre in several of the essays.<sup>17</sup> More evidence of a changing perception has been through conferences on mural painting including the session at the Association of Art Historians conference in 2012, 'Walls with Stories: Mural Painting in Britain from the 1890s to the 1960s', 'Murals in Britain 1910-1970: Revisions, revelations and risks' at Morley College in 2013, culminating in the 'Twentieth-century British Murals Developmental Seminar' at Tate Britain in 2014.<sup>18</sup> The last event demonstrated a significant undertaking by the Tate to explore the possibility of a research project and exhibition, and such institutional backing would indicate that the importance of British mural painting is at last being acknowledged. It remains to be seen whether such endeavours may include any major reassessment of Whistler's contribution to the murals sphere.

There have been recent indications of a more specific interest in Rex Whistler. In 2013 the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum were awarded a £350,000 grant from the Heritage Memorial Lottery Fund to acquire the Whistler Archive.<sup>19</sup> This demonstrates both the Museum's and the HMLF's belief in the importance of this archive, and ensures that the material is conserved and made accessible to

---

<sup>17</sup> *British Murals & Decorative Painting 1920-1960 Rediscoveries and New Interpretations*, Bristol: Sansom & Co., 2013, pp. 9, 37, 40, 65, 67, 84, 91, 95, 99-100, 182, 185, 304.

<sup>18</sup> I gave a paper at the AAH conference, and also attended the other two conferences. For more details on contributions to Whistler scholarship by the author see Appendix III.

<sup>19</sup> Although the Archive had been for sale for a number of years no major arts institutions, such as the V&A or the Tate, were interested in its purchase. It had been temporarily housed at Salisbury Museum in 2011 and the Museum's Director was keen to ensure it had a permanent home at the museum. Whistler's death in action in WW2 meant that his archive, acting as his memorial, was a fitting case to benefit from The Heritage Memorial Lottery Fund. 'ABOUT THE NHMF' [Online] <http://www.nhmf.org.uk/ABOUTUS/Pages/default.aspx> [July 2 2014]

researchers. The Museum mounted a wide-ranging exhibition of his work in the summer of 2013 which received positive reviews from, amongst others, *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, the *International Herald Tribune* and *The New York Review of Books*, the latter two indicating the interest in Whistler in the United States.<sup>20</sup> Critical attention is not necessarily a marker of an artist's standing in the canon. Whistler can be classified as a minority interest and thus may attract only those critics who are already predisposed towards him. Equally germane are comments from those who are unconvinced of his status. Andrew Graham Dixon has suggested that Whistler was purely the servant of his patrons, and his preferred eighteenth-century style, described as a second-rate pastiche, was adopted because that was what they favoured – 'a warm bath of whimsical nostalgia for the styles of a distant, courtly past'.<sup>21</sup>

The title of this review, 'Bright Young Things', is typical of the unremitting attempts to link Whistler with this rather frivolous set, thus tainting his work with the same frivolity and lack of serious intent.<sup>22</sup> This connection needs unpicking particularly in light of a book to be published in 2015, the title of which hints at another attempt to claim Whistler as one of this group's own.<sup>23</sup> The interwar

---

<sup>20</sup> Kennedy, M., 'Quick on the draw: museum acquires dark and delightful archive of works by Rex Whistler', *The Guardian*, August 26 2013, p.12; Cumming, L., 'Between the wars, on the margins', *The Observer*, August 18 2013, p.30; Morris, Roderick Conway 'Rex Whistler, Remembered and Revisited ; A Prolific English Artist Who Died in World War II Gets an Impressive Show', *International Herald Tribune*, July 1 2013, p.9, The Charms of Rex Whistler, Wheatcroft, G., *The New York Review of Books*, January 9 2014, pp.30-31.

<sup>21</sup> 'Bright Young Things Andrew Graham Dixon reviews Rex Whistler', [Online] *Daily Telegraph*, April 23 2006, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3651808/Bright-young-things.html> [January 3 2013]. The term pastiche will be discussed later in the Introduction.

<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately the myth is even perpetuated by the publicity material for the Cecil's biography, rather diluting their intention to offer a serious account of his life. 'Amidst all this [work], he found time to sparkle as one of the wittiest and most elegant of the 'bright young things'', 'In Search of Rex Whistler His Life and His Work' [Online] <http://www.franceslincoln.com/art/in-search-of-rex-whistler> [July 3 2014]

<sup>23</sup> Thomasson, A., *A Curious Friendship: The Story of a Bluestocking and a Bright Young Thing*, to be published by Pan Macmillan March 2015.

period was a time when many of the younger members of the wealthy elite that comprised Society were heavily engaged in a very public social life, lived in a glare of publicity as the newspapers and magazines used their exploits to feed a ready audience for gossip and high-jinks. D. J. Taylor's account of the period differentiates between the term 'Bright Young Things' which he sees as a label used by the media as a sort of shorthand to describe the activities of a fairly unspecific group of hedonistic youth, and 'Bright Young People', whom he identifies as those particular individuals who were the initiators of the parties and crazes.<sup>24</sup> Whistler does not strictly belong to either of these factions, but there is no denying his connection to some of the latter group. If one takes the later 1920s as the apogee of the Bright Young People's hedonism one finds amongst its players many of Whistler's social circle such as Stephen Tennant, Cecil Beaton, the Jungman sisters, Sacheverell and Georgia Sitwell, Beverley Nichols and Brian Howard.<sup>25</sup> In fancy dress with powdered hair, Whistler is seen posed with some of these individuals in the well-known Beaton photograph on Wilsford Bridge of 1927. Favoured places of the set included the Gargoyle Club, of which Whistler was a member and the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel which he frequented well into the 1930s.<sup>26</sup> The press who were so ardently covering every movement of the Bright Young People were certainly aware of Whistler and he was mentioned in Court and Society columns.<sup>27</sup> This attention had sprung from the national media coverage of

---

<sup>24</sup> Taylor, D. J., *Bright Young People*, London: Vintage Books, 2008, pp.16-22. See also Jenkins, A., *The Twenties*, pp.29-31, although Jenkins makes less of a distinction.

<sup>25</sup> Equally, these and other 'Bright Young People' were part of the artistic circles entertained at Edith Olivier's home at Wilton, where Whistler was a regular guest and confidant of Olivier's.

<sup>26</sup> Taylor, 2008, pp. 63 and 66. The Gargoyle was founded by David Tennant, Stephen's brother. Regular payments to the club are listed from 1928 in 'Rex Whistler Account Book 1927-1934', RWA. Many visits to the Tour Eiffel are mentioned in Whistler, L., 1985 and in Whistler's calendar diaries, 'Diaries' RWA.

<sup>27</sup> The socialite label seems almost fitting in a report of the kind of fancy dress party so beloved of this group with Whistler described as being in the costume of a 'Planetary Acrobat'. This was the 'Galaxy Ball', hosted by Lady Cunard. 'Bright Young People as Sun & Stars', *Daily Chronicle*, November 1 1929, 'Social Events' file, RWA.

the Tate mural, which had latched onto the appealing story of such a young artist being awarded such a large and public commission, a typical reference was 'Mr. Rex Whistler of fresco fame'.<sup>28</sup> It would be fair to say that he was an enthusiastic participant in some of the revelries without being as dedicated to hedonism as some of his peers. This rather detached position is evidenced in his own comments a few years later in an article written with his brother Laurence. On the subject of 'the abstract' he remarks that it had been perceived by the Bright Young Things as being 'amusing' in the 1920s and observes that they are now 'no longer so bright or so very young.'<sup>29</sup>

Whistler's financial position dictated that work often took precedence over leisure activities. Beaton also had to work for a living but in fact shrewdly found a client base amongst this set which meant his social and working life were seamlessly intertwined.<sup>30</sup> If Beaton was shamelessly exploiting these opportunities to further his career, could the same be said about Whistler? Like Beaton he came from a much more modest background than many of the Society set but this did not hamper his associations or his appeal to them. It could have been the case that attending a few balls and wild parties gained him more acceptance and approval from existing and potential clients, as well as being the sort of entertainments that a young sociable man would enjoy. More thoughts on the duality of Whistler's

---

<sup>28</sup> *Daily Mirror*, July 23 1929, Press Cuttings folder, RWA.

<sup>29</sup> The reference was initially to theatre design but Whistler then ventures an opinion on abstraction in a more general artistic sense: 'But the day of the abstract seems to be over, and the Bright Young Things who found it so amusing are no longer so bright or so very young. As a serious form of art it has failed to displace "representationalism".' This gives a rare insight into Whistler's views on an aspect of contemporary art. Whistler, R., 'Problems of the Stage Designer' in Charques, R.D., (ed.) *Footnotes to the Theatre*, London: Peter Davies Ltd., 1938, p.122. This contribution was not formally written by Whistler; although there is no doubt that it is his voice. The MS of this piece of writing notes that it was 'put on paper by Laurence Whistler from his [Rex Whistler's] spoken thoughts.' Rex Crate 2 'Stage', RWA.

<sup>30</sup> '...while enjoying the amenities that smart Society had to offer, made no bones about exploiting it for his own advancement.' Taylor, 2008, p.60.

relationships with his clients in terms of class and status are considered in Chapter Six. The insistence on Whistler being seen as a lightweight socialite painter, as one of the set for whom he painted rather than as the professional operator he actually was, has rather blighted a considered understanding and appreciation of his work.

Dixon also makes comments in the *Daily Telegraph* review, almost as an implied criticism, regarding Whistler's lack of engagement with modernism. This, of course, could apply to many other artists of the period.<sup>31</sup> Seven years after this review it does feel as though the aperture through which this period in art history is seen has been considerably widened to include a more inclusive range of approaches. There certainly needs to be a different lens through which to view Whistler and appreciate his particular synthesis of influences and approaches, 'nostalgic revivalism with a modern twist' as a recent critic has proposed.<sup>32</sup>

The aim of this thesis is to offer a new lens, a corrective monograph on Rex Whistler in order to redress the balance in the way the artist's life and work has been previously presented, or misrepresented. The thesis is an empirical study drawing on primary material to provide a biographical narrative. This pure factual exposition is required in Rex Whistler's case because the existing writing on the artist provides such a limited view of his life and career. If he is to be given the kind of art historical reassessment that this thesis argues that he deserves, then this kind of narrative is essential to provide a firm foundation for further study and analysis.

---

<sup>31</sup> 'Whistler took no interest in the avant-garde art of his time...' Andrew Graham Dixon, *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Cumming, L., *The Observer*, *op cit*.



However this thesis has not been framed as a standard comprehensive monograph. Instead it deals largely with two important aspects of his career; his work in murals and advertising. One facet has been written about widely, the other much less so. These categories are not as disparate as may first appear and in fact represent both sides of the commissioning coin. The commissioning of murals has a long history going back to the earliest days of artists and patrons, whilst the commissioning of artists by the advertising and design industries is a much more modern twentieth-century practice. This means the thesis's central issue of patronage is addressed dialectically, looking at Whistler's career within both the traditional and the modern commissioning process. What could be perceived as a duality or mismatch for an artist working in both these genres is not evidenced in Whistler; his creative dynamic found expression in both areas. A good example of the relationship between these two main subject areas and how Whistler engaged with them is the poster for the Tate Gallery that he designed for the London Passenger Transport Board in 1928, a year after the unveiling of his mural for the Tate Gallery Refreshment Room. The key issue here is Whistler's understanding of his audience. The mural tells an entertaining tale around the walls of what was then a fairly straightforward tearoom, depicting characters in search of exotic foods through fantasy landscapes. Amusing vignettes and passages of romantic scenery provided an unthreatening and attractive backdrop for diners who may have had diverse levels of art appreciation and interest. In the London Transport poster [See Fig. 5.1] the diners and the mural have become one, merging art and life as the hunting party in full cry encounters the matron in bombazine and her timid companion taking tea. In the tearoom his audience were fixed in the room, for the poster his audience were on the move and needed to be caught by a lively visual dynamic. But in both cases the subject and the way it was portrayed were

accessible to the man or woman on the street or in the Tate tearoom.<sup>33</sup> This appreciation of what might appeal to an audience in the late 1920s who were being assailed by numerous new cultural forces, both from America and nearer home, is an important feature of Whistler's vision. He drew on classical influences for instance in his choice of architecture and landscape treatment in the Tate mural (and the poster) but the cast of characters are largely in contemporary dress and a modern bicycle is ridden alongside the old-fashioned cart. His audience could feel comfortable amongst the traditional references and identify with the modern aspects. Cosmopolitan is not a word one would associate with Whistler but it is entirely appropriate given this new reading of his work.<sup>34</sup> These two elements of Whistler's practice robustly reflected the times in which he lived and worked.

These two examples also serve to highlight the problems inherent in situating Whistler within the canon. With the canon's entrenched dichotomies between the acceptability of fine art – here represented by the Tate mural – and its disavowal of the commercial world of advertising, symbolising popular or mass culture – here demonstrated by the London Transport poster – Whistler's traversing of both genres both refuses and complicates his inclusion. The hierarchies of the canon are too limited to allow entry to an artist who embraces this diverse range of genres.

The thesis will offer a much more comprehensive account of Whistler's work using a sharper focus particularly on those areas that have been subordinated in the

---

<sup>33</sup> A further discussion of the mural can be found in Chapter Two and of the poster in Chapter Five.

<sup>34</sup> "There was a universal appeal in his work, a cosmopolitanism which time and success would have strengthened", Tennant, S., undated MS of 'Notes for article' p.7. This MS was given to the late Lord Anglesey and a copy given to the author by Peter Simpson.

past, such as his work in advertising and design. The thesis deals with those aspects of his career that represent him most effectively. Chief amongst these are his murals which occupy the longest chapter. However the pure scale of his oeuvre has meant some omissions. Whistler's works for the stage are deserving of a more lengthy approach than this account allows, whilst it is felt that his portraits, certainly those carried out pre-war, are a less distinguished area of his work.<sup>35</sup> The intention is to give a more objective view of Whistler, avoiding the overly-affectionate and familiar tone of some writers. The narrative is broadly chronological and moves from a factual biographical focus in the first two chapters to a more thoughtful and conceptual perspective in the subsequent chapters.

The major source of primary information for this thesis has been the Rex Whistler Archive. This collection was amassed by Laurence Whistler from the time of his brother's death in 1944 and is made up of sketchbooks, working drawings and finished pieces, juvenilia, diaries and letters, photographs and many other items relating to all aspects of the artist's practice. In addition the archive contains all the material, including correspondence and notes, used by Laurence Whistler to research his writings on his brother. The very personal nature of the archive, which acted as a sort of memorial to the artist, has been preserved by the family, and until 2011 it was closely stewarded by them.<sup>36</sup> I was granted access in order to research this project and it has largely informed the methodology of the thesis, enabling me to gather significant amounts of information on the motivations and

---

<sup>35</sup> However there will be a discussion of two of his self-portraits in Chapter Six, in relation to the ideas of the artist and self-fashioning. In terms of his work in stage design, I have carried out a great deal of research in this area and given papers on the subject at the Rex Whistler centenary day at Tate Britain, 2005, at 'The Triumph of Fancy' exhibition Brighton 2005, the National Trust at Plas Newydd in 2008, and at the conference 'European Painted Cloths 14<sup>th</sup> C – 21<sup>st</sup> C: Pageantry, Ceremony, Theatre and the Domestic Interior' at the Courtauld in 2012, see Appendix III.

<sup>36</sup> From 2011 it has been housed at the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum, see below.

background behind Whistler's creative career. The archive is not a fixed entity; new material on Whistler can appear and recently an 'Additional Catalogue' that Laurence Whistler was compiling from the 1960s has come to light.<sup>37</sup> There is a dual focus at work in this thesis which makes use of this archival data together with a new comparative and contextual approach which will result in a much more accurate appraisal of Whistler's career.

The first chapter concentrates on Whistler's years at the Slade School of Art between 1922 and 1926, which was dominated at the time by Professor Henry Tonks. The biographical accounts of Whistler's time at the Slade feature many of the well-worn tropes associated with the artist, in this case to do with his purportedly prodigious talents and his singling out by Tonks as 'the most remarkable student the Slade has ever seen'.<sup>38</sup> A tendency to take these at face value has resulted in a false construction of the artist's identity, one that is perpetuated throughout the biographies. Here a more objective reading of the source material has provided a clearer picture of Whistler at this point in his career, and this seeking for the truth behind the idealised narrative is a guiding precept of the thesis.

As Whistler's most widely seen work and the one which effectively launched him in his career the Tate Gallery Restaurant Mural (1926-27) has been accorded its own chapter in the thesis. This was a more uncertain, expensive, and complex project than has generally been understood and a thorough reading of the material in the

---

<sup>37</sup> 'Rex Whistler Additional Catalogue' contains updated information on the works in the Catalogue Raisonné and adds new works that have come to light since its publication. Much of this is in note form. It had been hoped that Batsford would republish the Catalogue with extra plates and updated information but this did not eventuate. Currently this material is being held by the Whistler family, and at this point (July 2014) has not been seen by any other party.

<sup>38</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.61.

Tate Archive has resulted in a more frank account of the commissioning and design process. Whilst he was working on the Tate mural several contemporaneous schemes were being painted and these offer the first real opportunities against which we can evaluate Whistler's work.<sup>39</sup> An important methodological choice in the thesis is the use of comparative material that places Whistler firmly amongst his fellow artists rather than occupying a lone stage. Thus much of the intellectual argument has been driven by a consideration of the art, artists and culture that Whistler worked amongst and how his work compares and contrasts with these.

Fundamental to an understanding of Whistler's practice is a study of his influences and inspirations. To enable a fuller interpretation of these they have been drawn together in a single chapter which tracks them over a geographical and historical framework. Whistler's biographers have given some account of his travels in Europe and their importance, but little about the work produced during these trips.<sup>40</sup> This chapter provides a comprehensive survey of these sojourns in Switzerland, Germany, France, and Italy – including his time at the British School at Rome - by an interrogation of all the contents of his sketchbooks and written notes, which have then been integrated with the corresponding letters and diary entries. All of this material is contained in the Whistler Archive.

With a considerable visual memory and a talent for reproducing or replicating what he had seen, Whistler has been often accused of producing work that is

---

<sup>39</sup> These include the murals cycle at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital by Nan West in 1926, the murals at the Palace of Westminster of 1924-27 and those by Ravilious, Bawden and Mahoney at Morley College in 1928-30.

<sup>40</sup> Hugh and Mirabel Cecil (2012) only mention the social side of the first trip to Switzerland and Italy and devote less than a page and a half to his studies at the British School at Rome. Laurence Whistler (1985) writes at much greater length but is more concerned with the negative aspects of the experience, e.g. the problems Whistler initially encountered in painting *en plein air* and the differences between him and the other students.

merely a pastiche or appropriation. The meaning or inference of the term pastiche in the way that it is understood and used by art historians has changed with the advent of post-modernist lines of enquiry. Up until this point, which we could posit as the 1970s, 'pastiche' was a derogatory term indicating a copy or a fake, a work which did not contain the canonical values of originality and authenticity. Whistler was criticised as a 'pasticheur' certainly in the years after his death, and possibly also in his lifetime. Laurence Whistler mentions in an undated article, probably from the 1980s, that his brother was 'much more than a 'pasticheur'', which indicates that he was referred to in that way.<sup>41</sup> Martin Battersby, writing about the 1920s in the 1960s says that Whistler was too often 'summarily dismissed as a pasticheur' again indicating that was a common perception at the time.<sup>42</sup> More recently the term pastiche with reference to Whistler can be found in the artist's description on the National Portrait Gallery website, a review of the 2012 Colefax and Fowler exhibition, and a gallery selling his graphic work.<sup>43</sup>

These comments demonstrate a derogative understanding of Whistler's work, and illustrate how easy it is to dismiss his unique approach. However a postmodern viewpoint valorises pastiche. Questions of provenance and authenticity become irrelevant when the whole question of what is truly original cannot be answered. Counter to these descriptions that dismiss Whistler's work as derivative I will offer

---

<sup>41</sup> Whistler, L., 'From Rex Whistler's Sketch-book', article in unknown publication, 'Illustrated Articles on Rex', RWA.

<sup>42</sup> Battersby, M, *The Decorative Twenties*, 1988 edition, London: The Herbert Press, 1969, p.203.

<sup>43</sup> 'Rex Whistler (1905-1944), Painter and designer', National Portrait Gallery [Online] <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp04795/reginald-john-rex-whistler>, [Accessed January 24 2015]; Sewell, B., 'The Unseen Rex Whistler, Colefax and Fowler, W1', *London Evening Standard*, 29 November 2012, pp.52-53.; and 'Rex Whistler 1905-1944' Chris Beetles Gallery[Online] <http://www.chrisbeetles.com/artists/whistler-rex-1905-1944.html#> [accessed January 23 2015].

a different interpretation, one that can celebrate the way he can appropriate past styles and forms, subject matter, and composition to create something entirely different and new and pertinent. He was skilfully employing the language of the past to create something that could only exist in the present.

Using this kind of reading means that the kinds of inferences that appear throughout the thesis regarding influence and appropriation cannot devalue Whistler's work in any way, and will enable more light to be shed on how it may have come about. It will destabilise the notion that Whistler was completely autonomous in his creativity, a type of genius who created things of complete originality. These criticisms will be explored further in this chapter and a more sophisticated interpretation will be offered.

The fourth chapter explores Whistler's murals, the works that are amongst his greatest achievements and thus most demanding of a fresh approach and a different consideration. His deep understanding of the architectural space in which the murals were to be created has not been fully understood both by his previous biographers and those writing about the history of murals. As this chapter will demonstrate, this specialist knowledge, gleaned from a lifetime's interest and study of architecture, set him apart from his contemporaries who in most cases were purely designing larger versions of their paintings. This chapter continues the use of a comparative model between Whistler's works and those of his contemporaries who were also involved in mural painting, including Edward Halliday, John Piper and Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, revealing some interesting differences and similarities between them. In addition, this genre of mural painting for private residences lacks the status of the more public variety,

and the corresponding impact this has had on the artist's reputation will be considered.

Chapter Five redresses the balance of Whistler's portrayal as an artist only interested in traditional forms of art. Here, his successful involvement with the burgeoning advertising industry of the period indicates a readiness to be part of something more 'modern', disproving the view of him as purely a retardataire figure. Again his work for the leading companies in this sphere such as London Transport and Shell offers opportunities to compare his interpretation of a given brief with his contemporaries. Many of these, such as Edward McKnight Kauffer and Edward Bawden, were using a more experimental style and Whistler a more traditional mode, but as the analysis will reveal, this commercial arena actively encouraged a wide variety of approaches. Whistler's projects carried out in applied design will also feature in this chapter, at much greater length than in the existing literature. His designs for the Clovelly *toile du Jouy* (1932) its subsequent use on Wedgwood china and his proposed design for the George V Silver Jubilee stamp (1934) provide the basis for a discussion of his place in the design world of the time as compared to artists such as Eric Ravilious.

In the final chapter, Patronage and Artistic Identity, Whistler's commissions and working experiences within a more traditional and elite form of patronage are investigated. Here we are presented with one of the contradictory aspects of the artist's career. The changing fortunes of the aristocracy post WW1 coupled with the economic downturn of the 1930s would surely have made this kind of patronage unlikely. Indeed, referring to Whistler's important mural for the Marquis of Anglesey in 1936, historian David Cannadine has claimed that it was 'a



very down beat conclusion' to what had been historically a thriving and rewarding area for artists amongst the landed elite. <sup>44</sup> In fact the reverse is true; Whistler's murals at Plas Newydd stand as a marker of continued aristocratic patronage in the 1930s and of an artist whose career refutes the assertion that this patronage was dead in the water. In turn these projects made Whistler a very well-paid artist. This chapter deals candidly with details of his income and the financial responsibilities he carried which made escaping from this life of commissions almost impossible. The important issues to do with Rex Whistler's artistic identity will be tackled here, offering new perspectives on the effects of the commissioning process on his creativity. It will question whether patronage was a gilded cage in which his originality was trapped by the tastes of his patrons, or a fertile space in which he found the freedom to produce works which satisfied both artist and client.

A more surprising twist on identity has been the discovery that Whistler himself was complicit in the managing of his image during his lifetime, and was particularly astute in his understanding of the power of the press and media. This kind of self-fashioning does not seem to fit with the impression promulgated by his biographers of a modest, unassuming man. But it is obvious from the sheer number of projects that Whistler was involved in that he had a great deal of confidence in his talents. This was a man who was untroubled by not being part of any kind of movement or artistic set and indeed had very few artist friends. This alone does not make him into a kind of maverick figure but indicates a serious determination

---

<sup>44</sup>Cannadine, D., *Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* 2005 edition, London: Penguin Books, p.103.

to paint in the style and using the inspiration he wished to, albeit usually within the constraints of a client's taste and wishes.

# CHAPTER ONE

## EARLY YEARS, AND THE SLADE SCHOOL OF ART

### Introduction

This chapter will give a brief outline of Rex Whistler's early life and education, before moving on to a more critical overview of his time at the Slade School of Art. There is sufficient literature available on Whistler to make an in-depth study of his childhood superfluous.

Reginald John Whistler (always known as Rex) was born in 1905 to a middle class family, in Eltham Kent. His father owned his own building contractors and was sufficiently skilled to design houses as well as build them.<sup>45</sup> On his mother's side were Paul Storr, the silversmith and Basil Champneys the architect. Their children's natural artistic abilities were encouraged at home, and at his prep school Rex Whistler was recognised as having exceptional talent.<sup>46</sup> His art teacher there enrolled him in the Royal Drawing Society at the age of seven where he won prizes and medals annually until the age of seventeen.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> This included a house in Eltham for the author Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler in 1914 which seems to have been of some architectural merit. Mentioned and illustrated in 'Eltham Palace Conservation Area Management Strategy report' [Online] [www.greenwich.gov.uk/.../](http://www.greenwich.gov.uk/.../) dated September 2007. [Accessed July 7 2009].

<sup>46</sup> Whistler L., 1985, p.21

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. Whistler states that his brother won a prize at the RDS every year for 12 years. However, his name is not amongst the list of prize-winners in *The Times* 14 August 1913 p.9. This may be an oversight or possibly an example of the inflation of Whistler's talents. Lists of winners are not available for all of the years Whistler entered, until 1924.

The intention of this chapter is to assess whether Whistler's studentship at the Slade did more than provide grounding in fine art techniques and if it, in fact, proved fundamental to his future career. He was singled out at his entrance interview (having been sent down from the Royal Academy Schools) by Professor Henry Tonks with the words 'we'll make something of him'.<sup>48</sup> The chapter will assert that it was highly unlikely that Whistler would have achieved prominence as a mural painter without the efforts of Tonks, who was determined to situate mural painting at the forefront of public art practice and to train the artists who would be commissioned to do it. Whistler was one of those chosen to participate in this endeavour, and it was due to the manoeuvring of Tonks that Whistler was given first the mural commission for the Highways Club, Shadwell (1924-5), and then the Tate Gallery Refreshment Room mural (1926-7).

The account of Whistler's studentship at the Slade will be largely chronological, using information from his sketchbooks, notes, and early drawings from the Archive as a narrative framework. Material from the Slade School of Art archives will also contribute to a much fuller picture. By using this methodology the impact of the Slade teaching on his work as he progressed through the School can be demonstrated most effectively. Within this, various themes will be explored to do with the Slade pedagogy and how it impacted on Whistler, such as the importance of draughtsmanship with particular emphasis on life drawing, how art history was taught, and his participation in the annual ritual of competitions and prizes. Two large scale works of the period; the 1924 and 1925 mural scheme at the Highways

---

<sup>48</sup> Whistler, L. *The Laughter and the Urn*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985 p.50, quote from George Charlton's account of the meeting, Slade Folder, Correspondence Files, RWA.

Club Shadwell, and the 1925 Summer Composition *The Trial Scene from the Merchant of Venice* will be subject to a more in depth analysis.

The account will demonstrate how the particular traits that defined Whistler in both personal and creative terms throughout his career were first in evidence at the Slade, and how his work developed during his studentship. Comparisons will be drawn between him and his contemporaries.

Particular connections that Whistler made at the Slade would be of lasting importance and influence. Chief amongst these were his relationship with Tonks, who became both tutor and mentor, and the friendship with the Honourable Stephen Tennant, aristocrat and aesthete, that opened doors to new social circles and spheres of influence.

Many myths and exaggerations regarding Whistler's talent and activities at the Slade have made their way into the histories. Returning to the source material for the Slade in the Whistler Archive has shed some light on how the phenomenon took hold, but of equal importance is to examine the reasons behind it. These writings on the early part of the artist's life are the initial elements in a construction of identity in which any objective account of Whistler is concealed by an idealised narrative. This process of illuminating the areas of Whistler's career that have been edited out or wrongly represented in the biographies begins in this chapter and will be continued throughout the thesis.

# Rex Whistler at the Slade

## Background to the Slade School of Art

After a brief and unpropitious probation at the Royal Academy Schools, Whistler was accepted into the Slade in the autumn of 1922 at the age of 17, and for a student whose skill was in draughtsmanship this was the place to be.<sup>49</sup> The Slade pedagogy was heavily weighted towards drawing, particularly from the life model.<sup>50</sup> Professor Henry Tonks (1862–1937) was an unusually qualified teacher for the particular demands of this syllabus, a doctor by training and demonstrator in anatomy.<sup>51</sup> It was said of him that he regarded drawing ‘as an almost scientific process of intense thought.’<sup>52</sup> Naturally Tonks valued draughtsmanship above all disciplines and Whistler’s skills were evident in the interview drawings he showed to him. Noteworthy ‘golden’ years of success for Tonks and his students in the years before and after the First World War meant that by the time Whistler joined in 1922, his authority was such that ‘Tonks was the Slade and the Slade was Tonks’.<sup>53</sup> The position of the School was ideal for Whistler, after his disappointing experience of the RA, being ‘non-academic and individual’ whilst offering ‘training... no less thorough and searching than the traditional and academic’.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Whistler was unhappy at the Schools, complained of the lack of teaching, and failed his first term exams – submitting an oil painting that was his first effort in the medium. Whistler, 1985, pp. 45 & 48.

<sup>50</sup> Information on the early days of the Slade from *A Centenary Exhibition The Slade 1871-1971*. Exhibition catalogue introduction by Bruce Laughton, London: University College London, 1971.

<sup>51</sup> Morris, L. “Tonks, Henry (1862–1937)”, [Online] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36535> [Accessed July 10 2009]

<sup>52</sup> Charlton, G., ‘The Slade School of Fine Art 1871 – 1946’, Reprinted from *The Studio*, October 1946. pp.1-8. Slade File, RWA.

<sup>53</sup> Nash, P., *Outline an Autobiography*, London: Columbus Books, 1988, p.89.

<sup>54</sup> John Fothergill, ed., *The Slade; a collection of drawings and some pictures done by past and present students of the London Slade School of Art, 1893-1907* [Online] London: Slade School of Fine Art, 1907, p.21.

## Starting at the Slade October 1922 – Drawing and Memory

Much has been made of Tonks's reaction to Whistler's work in his Slade interview.<sup>55</sup> The comment 'We will make something of him' is an ambitious statement of intent, but Tonks was an ambitious man in terms of wanting success for his pupils and in turn for the Slade.<sup>56</sup> Whistler's interview images would certainly not have contained anything remotely modernist and this would have found favour with the ever-traditional Tonks.<sup>57</sup> For him the real principles of drawing were those found in the art of Italy from the Quattrocento onwards. Although Tonks was a purist as far as the art and teaching of drawing was concerned, he knew the importance of commercial potential in his students. He could see in Whistler's drawings evidence of the sort of talent that could make an artist a 'money spinner'.<sup>58</sup> Unlike the more academic RA Schools he did not expect his students to necessarily be able to make a living from fine art per se. His efforts were focussed on the creation of opportunities for his students in the field of mural decoration but he was keenly aware of other prospective avenues for artists such as publicity and advertising. In the late 1920s he was to recommend both Mary Adshead and Whistler to Frank Pick of London Transport, and to propose Whistler to Jack Beddington the Publicity Manager at Shell with the oft-quoted line that he had 'the greatest facility for draughtsmanship since the Cinquecento.'<sup>59</sup> (See Chapter Five) These extravagant claims about Whistler's talent and predilections at the Slade will be examined as the chapter unfolds.

---

<http://www.archive.org/details/sladecollectiono00slad> [ 16 July 2009]

<sup>55</sup>The ink drawings presented were not serious and academic but humorous in content, which appealed to the latent cartoonist in Tonks, but they also showed talent in draughtsmanship. Whistler, L. 1985 p. 50 and Cecil, H. and M., *In Search of Rex Whistler*, London: Frances Lincoln, 2012, p.13.

<sup>56</sup> Whistler, L., 1985, p.50.

<sup>57</sup> See note 11.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Whistler, L., 1985, p.61.

The first real assessment of Whistler's ability came with his drawing from the Antique, the basic instruction with which every Slade student commenced their studentship. Whistler's initial studies are more than competently drawn, although Whistler's statues always have a lifelike quality rather than impassive stone.<sup>60</sup> To give volume to the figures Whistler used shading and tone to suggest the musculature and mass. However the principles of drawing as espoused by Tonks and his predecessors at the Slade were that in working from life 'one learned to draw with the point and by the character of the contour'.<sup>61</sup> Using this method involved intense concentration on the figure and putting the line in the correct place, rather than relying on shading, tone, stippling, or cross-hatching as a shortcut to representing the body. This was always going to be counter to Whistler's predilection for creating beautifully finished drawings, usually of figures, usually from his imagination, and clothed in costume from the past or in exotic finery suggested by literature such as the Arabian Nights. A line drawing would have been anathema to an artist who relied on intricate decoration to embellish his work.

The move from the antique to the live model took place when satisfactory and sufficient drawings had been completed. In Whistler's case it seems that this was accomplished much more quickly than was usual, with one witness recording that Whistler had claimed to have drawn everything in the Antiques room in one day.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> This is enhanced in the drawing by his addition, very faintly, of arms and heads to the figures.

<sup>61</sup> Lang, G. and Lang, K., 2001, p.123.

<sup>62</sup> Whistler, L., 1985, p.51. The source is Eileen Heenan who was a fellow student at the Slade, interviewed by LW, 14 May 1958. Slade file RWA.



Once Whistler started work in the Life Room his working methods came into conflict with Tonks, whose guiding principle was that drawing relied on constant close observation. In his mind this was vital to understanding the anatomy of the model, to the study of the landscape if working en plein air or the character and stance of the person if drawing in a 'real life' situation, such as a portrait. It was recorded that Whistler instead often used to draw with his back turned towards the model, having observed it for a few minutes and then completed the drawing 'blind'.<sup>63</sup> Whistler had an exceptional memory and was able to call on this ability throughout his artistic life. This unusually strong visual recall is referred to in the biographies, and becomes one of the elements used in the construction of Whistler's identity as a sort of superhuman artist.<sup>64</sup>

But was this skill a natural phenomenon or one that had been learned? There is good evidence that what may have been a naturally good memory was enhanced by the instruction he received from the Royal Drawing Society, from the age of six. The Society was founded in 1888 with the aim of teaching young children to draw, or more particularly, to observe the world around them in ways which would harness their youthful acuity in perception and visual memory, and then develop this through further specialist teaching. They should be encouraged 'to see, to remember, to reproduce, and to trust the eye for colour and form.'<sup>65</sup> Whistler was

---

<sup>63</sup> Whistler, L., 1985, p.53. The original source interviews by Laurence Whistler with contemporaries at the Slade. 14 May 1958. This story corroborated by Eileen Heenan and two others, and Tonks' reaction to it 'T. v. angry – said it was pointless.' Slade file RWA.

<sup>64</sup> See Cecil H & M., 2012, 'phenomenal gift' marvellous powers' p.12.

<sup>65</sup> The Society's courses and examinations were spread worldwide and by 1918 had over 1100 schools enrolled in the examinations with 78,000 candidates entering them, 'Teaching Children to See Royal Drawing Society's Exhibition', *The Times*, April 14 1917, p 3. in Clarke, G., *Evelyn Dunbar War and Country*, Bristol: Sansom & Co Ltd., 2006, p.10. The annual Guildhall exhibition of prize-winning entries, became known as the 'Children's Royal Academy'. Obituary of T. R. Ablett, *The Times*, Wednesday, Jun 06, 1945; pg. 7.

awarded prizes on a regular basis and was still entering paintings whilst he was at the Slade, submitting three in 1925.<sup>66</sup>

Annual examinations were held in drawing from objects, the use of foreshortening and, of most interest to this account of Whistler's abilities, 'Snap-Shot Drawing'.<sup>67</sup> This was literally using the eye like a camera, looking at the subject for perhaps five minutes, it then being removed, and the student drawing it from memory for twenty minutes.<sup>68</sup> This sort of exercise meant that over these ten years Whistler's visual recall would have developed enormously. Significantly, he won the President's Prize for Snap-Shot drawing in 1917.<sup>69</sup> It seems clear that Whistler's undoubted ability to draw from memory was more than an innate skill. The instruction of the Royal Drawing Society is acknowledged by his biographers but is treated as secondary to the much better story of a Whistler as a genius with extraordinary gifts.

Interestingly a frank letter by Tonks written in 1909 on the pitfalls of art education expresses his disapproval of some practices which sound very similar to those propounded by the RDS.<sup>70</sup> He condemns the complicated methods used by schools

---

<sup>66</sup> Notes on RDS entries and their owners, 'Add. Catalogue Crate 3' RWA.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. pp14-15 and 24.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. pp.10-11.

<sup>69</sup> *The Times*, April 14 1917, p 3. Whistler won annual awards and may have won the Snap-Shot prize more than once; The Times reports the exhibition every year but not always the recipients of prizes.

<sup>70</sup> Letter dated November 3 1909 Tonks to the Girl's Public Day School Trust, following a report compiled with Sir George Clausen. In *Henry Tonks and the 'Art of Pure Drawing'*, Exhibition Catalogue edited by Lynda Morris, Norwich: Norwich School of Art Gallery, 1985, pp.28-9. 'Snap-shot' also mentioned in Biernoff, S., 'Flesh Poems: Henry Tonks and the Art of Surgery', [Online] *Visual Culture in Britain* March 2010, pp.25 -47. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3158130/#FN91> [February 24 2013] which gives a useful account of Tonks's reluctance to write about his teaching methods.

to teach drawing to children. He instead recommends that they should be encouraged simply, with the minimum of technical terminology – he particularly dislikes the term ‘foreshortening’ - and certainly not forced into examinations. He is strongly opposed to the concept of ‘snap shot’...‘a hateful word only fit for a photographer’.<sup>71</sup>

Despite his unconventional modes of working and observing the model, the precepts of the Slade teaching - the importance of line, of making the correct mark rather than fudging a bad one with fussy shading - became gradually more apparent in Whistler’s work. His elaborate drawings, comic doodles, lurid illustrations and fantasies continue unabated in his sketchbooks but the work done specifically for an assignment shows a growing maturity, simplicity, and confidence of line. His figure studies for the proscenium panels for the Shadwell murals, e.g. ‘Right hand figs’ for ‘Tragedy’ and the youthful nude, which may be a sketch for one of the putti, show that by 1925 he has absorbed Tonks’s insistence on the primacy of the line.<sup>72</sup> [Fig. 1.1]

## **Art History and Architecture**

The majority of the students’ time at the Slade, certainly in the first terms, was spent in the Life Rooms. However, there was also instruction in Art History,

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p.29. It is strange that there are no comments recorded from Tonks on Whistler’s involvement with the RDS, particularly as Whistler was still engaged in their competitions and had even offered them a Slade prize-winning painting for their annual exhibition. Letter from Whistler to R D Ablett, undated 1923. ‘Rex Decorated Letters’ in ‘Additional Catalogue’ folder, RWA.

<sup>72</sup> Images of sketches on CD given to author by Whistler family. The sketch is extant in RWA, but the location is unknown. In addition, the depiction of the drapery on the reclining figure is further evidence of Whistler using close observation and experience in drawing from the draped model in what, for him, is a very classical drawing. This development was attested to by George Charlton a young tutor at the Slade: ‘no student was more avid with regard to the classical training... reflected in the steady change and improvement in his style...’ ‘George Charlton’s account of Rex at the Slade’, undated but c. 1947, Slade ‘Personal Accounts’, RWA.

lectures on perspective and anatomy, the opportunity to study Architecture at the Bartlett School of Architecture, and encouragement to view works of art directly at exhibitions and galleries.<sup>73</sup> The tradition of studying the Old Masters had not been influenced by any of the waves of modernism that were sweeping through the art world outside the Slade during the 1920s, and Holbein, Michelangelo, Rubens, Rembrandt and Velazquez were held in high regard.<sup>74</sup> Reproductions of Old Master drawings by Tintoretto, Michelangelo, Watteau and Ingres were certainly on display in the Women's Life Room.<sup>75</sup> Additionally the Slade had its own collection of old master prints and drawings that the students could study in the Library. Although students were taught to observe and understand the classical works, and perhaps copy them for research purposes, their own original eye and mode of expression was thought paramount; imitation was not encouraged. Whistler had had little or no exposure to original paintings.<sup>76</sup> His tastes and influences were formed from literature rather than visual means, particularly in the illustrations by Dulac and Rackham to favourite books.

Laurence Whistler expresses the opinion that Tonks 'educated R – pretty much on arrival' and that he 'put R onto Poussin (& Ingres)...'<sup>77</sup> However these thoughts were omitted from the finished biography, despite the interesting light they shine on Tonks's influence on Whistler. The statement was certainly true. 'Poussin-like' was used by more than one student to describe Whistler's first Summer Painting

---

<sup>73</sup> Morris, 1985, William Coldstream interview, p. 12.

<sup>74</sup> Hubert Wellington essay in John Fothergill, 1907, op. cit., p.22.

<sup>75</sup> Morris, 1985, interview with Helen Lessore, Slade Student 1924-28, p.9.

<sup>76</sup> There are no records of him being taken to exhibitions as a child, or there being original artworks at his parents' home, apart from a few reproductions in his own room. Whistler, 1985. p.35.

<sup>77</sup> Laurence Whistler, undated notes, possibly in the 1950s, in 'Rex: Slade', Correspondence Files, RWA.

Competition entry<sup>78</sup>, and he felt his own later portrait drawings owed their sensitive treatment to a study of Ingres.<sup>79</sup>

A list of paintings is recorded in one of Whistler's 1925 Sketchbooks which was evidently used for visits to the Tate Gallery and the National Gallery.<sup>80</sup> He annotated the list with sketches of figures and comments – a detailed sketch of Augustus John's *Woman Smiling* (1908-9) has notes on the colours and 'Best work of John – wonderful & most beautifully painted'. [Fig. 1.2] The detailed observations show that he was learning how to look at paintings, of all schools and types. There is also evidence of Whistler using inspiration from at least one painting; a sketch of the kneeling figure from *St Jerome in Penitence* (1535-45) by Sodoma has 'Fig in Summer Comp. of 1923' written under it. [Fig. 1.3] The list shows no partiality to particular artists or schools and ranges from Blake and Sickert at the Tate to Gauguin, Cézanne, and Titian at the National Gallery. Three works of Poussin are noted including a 'Nativity' (*The Adoration of the Shepherds* 1633-4). The classical ruins in which the scene is set would have appealed to Whistler's taste as would the cluster of putti hovering above.<sup>81</sup> Whistler's Sketchbooks from 1923 onwards were full of architectural notes, designs, plans and 'fantasies', including extravagant plans for private apartments and many designs for his tomb. With the family business in property building, design and renovation, some early interest in the subject was instilled in Whistler.

---

<sup>78</sup> Correspondence 1 Jan 1949 Nan West to LW and undated correspondence Peter Brucker to LW. Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Whistler 1985 p.135.

<sup>80</sup> Catalogued in CR as '290. Sketchbook 1925'. RWA. Lists of artists also appear in the 1924 Diary 'Diaries, Notebooks, Misc', RWA.

<sup>81</sup> Putti had begun to appear in his work previously, as illustrated by the title page of the 1924 'Book of sketches and Notes'. Sketchbooks, RWA.

During his first year at the Slade, Whistler voluntarily attended lectures at the Bartlett School of Architecture<sup>82</sup> where he was taught by the Professor of Architecture, Sir Albert Richardson (1880-1964), who was strongly influenced by the late Georgian era.<sup>83</sup> This is the period that Whistler would turn to again and again throughout his work and this taste for the Georgian period, already formed by the time he entered the Slade, was added to, and validated by Richardson. In common with his opposite number at the Slade, Richardson had distaste for both modern art and architecture and concentrated his teaching exclusively on the classical and Renaissance period.<sup>84</sup> These studies at the Bartlett informed both Whistler's extensive knowledge of architecture and his skill in architectural drawing, which were demonstrated throughout his career. The 1923 Sketchbook in the Archive has sixty pages of notes on these lectures, more than on any other aspect of Whistler's Slade education. With his usual humorous touch the title page is decorated with art deco lettering flanked by two suburban 1920 bungalows.<sup>85</sup> [Fig.1.4] The notes show that the architectural elements that Whistler used so frequently in his work were actually founded on solid knowledge, from Egyptian temples and Roman villas to column orders and types of roofs – despite the comic drawings that intersperse the text. Amongst the pages are also real life architectural drawings for improvements to the family's new house at Pinner Wood, drawn in accurate perspective and proportion.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.58.

<sup>83</sup> 'Richardson, A[lbert] E[dward]', Dictionary of Art Historians, [Online] <https://dictionaryofarthistorians.org/richardsona.htm> [Accessed December 1 2014]

<sup>84</sup> Henry Tonks's attitude towards Modernism was notoriously disparaging.

<sup>85</sup> '286. Sketchbook 1923 A' p.3-63, Sketchbooks, RWA.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid and also mentioned in Whistler, 1985, p. 57.

Art History was taught at the Slade by Professor Tancred Borenius (1885-1948).<sup>87</sup> Borenius was sympathetic to the traditional views of Tonks and Steer, and brought a wider European perspective to the Art History syllabus.<sup>88</sup> From the curriculum records his teaching covered 'Classical, Medieval, Renaissance and Modern Art', with a critique 'of Vasari's historical progression with addenda from modern specialist studies'.<sup>89</sup> A copy of Vasari was often in Whistler's hands during his time at the Slade, along with volumes by Palladio, Cellini and Ruskin.<sup>90</sup> Borenius' appreciation of the art of eighteenth-century Italy may well have struck a chord with Whistler. In the mid-1920s, when Whistler appeared to be influenced by the art of the Baroque period, Borenius was promoting the activities of the Magnasco Society, founded in 1924 to encourage appreciation of Italian art of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with Whistler's future patrons Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell.<sup>91</sup>

## Painting Tuition

No student at the Slade could progress to painting until they had mastered what Tonks saw as the foundation of all art, drawing from the model. The two practices of drawing and painting were seen as quite distinct, and the concept of sketching

---

<sup>87</sup> He was appointed to teach the subject after the departure of Roger Fry in 1914.

<sup>88</sup> Borenius was born in Finland, educated in Sweden, Berlin, and Rome. He was an Italian Renaissance scholar, a member of the Burlington Fine Arts Club and writer for the *Burlington Magazine*, was a founder of *Apollo* in 1925, published on English medieval art, was an adviser to Sotheby's, and catalogued many eminent and prestigious private collections,' Borenius, Tancred (Carl)' [Online] <http://www.dictionarofarthistorians.org/boreniust.htm> [July 19 2009]

<sup>89</sup> Chaplin, S., *A Slade School Reader: A Compendium of Documents 1868-1975*, UCL Library Special Collections London. Undated Ms Add 400, Slade calendar 1912-13, p.157.

<sup>90</sup> Whistler, L., 1985, p.87.

<sup>91</sup> Sutton, D. "La vie en rose", [Online] *Apollo*, May 1972, reprinted July 2004, p. unknown <http://www.articlearchives.com/> [March 13 2009]. Osbert also wrote the catalogue for the Burlington Fine Arts Club's pioneering Baroque Art exhibition in 1925, 'Catalogue of an exhibition of Italian art of the seventeenth century' [Online] <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/7450074> [July 20 2009]

and drawing with the subject of a painting always in mind was not encouraged. This would have fitted in with Whistler's practice where most of the sketchbook drawings are complete in themselves, with no sense that they are preparations for something bigger. The first steps in painting were taken using a life drawing that Tonks deemed good enough and then working initially with a very limited palette. This dull tonality would have seemed very restrictive to Whistler who had always worked in rather garish coloured inks rather than a paintbox, probably as a logical step from the drawing in pen and ink which he preferred.<sup>92</sup>

Tonks's own paintings are strongly narrative in construction rather than purely formalist, a preference he shared with Whistler, whose strong illustrative sense was evident in his work. He shared Tonks's zeal for draughtsmanship, and his ability to inject humour into cartoons and caricatures. Despite this, there is no evidence in Whistler's painting of any direct influence from Tonks or the other painting tutors. His tendency towards the more classical and traditional modes of expression was fairly established before his attendance at the Slade and there were certainly no teachers there to persuade him into a more modernist response.

## **Awards and Scholarships**

The tuition Whistler received in the craft and techniques of oil painting had borne fruit by the end of his first year at the Slade with an award of a second prize –

---

<sup>92</sup> Whistler, 1985, p31 and 36. He was still using this medium when first at the Slade as is evidenced from the brightly coloured images in the 1923 Sketchbooks.



albeit jointly with six other students – in the ‘Figure Painting’ award of July 1923.<sup>93</sup>

Prizes were an important part of the Slade curriculum and were awarded in the disciplines of Figure Painting, Head Painting and, most importantly, figure composition painting – the Summer Composition. Whistler won five or six awards in all disciplines over the next three years.<sup>94</sup>

Unlike the Royal Academy Schools, the Slade was a fee-paying institution, which meant that Whistler’s parents would have to find annual fees of £30.<sup>95</sup> However, after the success in the Figure Painting prize, Whistler was awarded a scholarship<sup>96</sup> for the next academic year, and again for his third year.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> Information on the competition entries from Public Catalogue Foundation *Oil Paintings in Public Ownership* London: *The Slade and UCL*, London: The Public Catalogue Foundation, 2005, pp. 98-102. The painting’s whereabouts are unknown. Only paintings awarded First prizes were kept by the Slade.

<sup>94</sup> The biographies and the Catalogue Raisonné do not agree on the number or type of prizes awarded. This chapter will use the ‘Slade School of Fine Art Prize Lists’ in the UCL Public Catalogue Foundation volume which records him having won five prizes during his studentship, more than any other student of that period.

<sup>95</sup> The Slade fees would be the equivalent in today’s value of c. £1400. All calculations are from Officer, L.H and Williamson, S., "Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present," MeasuringWorth, 2013 [Online] <http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/relativevalue.php> on a 2013 basis, [6 June 2014]. Note: The calculation of historical monetary value versus present day is inexact. These figures have been calculated using the Retail Price Index as an equivalent using There are other ways of calculating relative values, see The National Archive <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/disclaimer.htm>

However, Laurence Whistler corresponded with the Lloyds Bank Economics Dept. in 1983 to compute the relative income figures, who stated that they derived the amounts using the Retail Price Index, and these were used in the biography. This model has been followed in the thesis.

<sup>96</sup> There were only six scholarships available each year amongst the Slade’s 300 students; each was worth £35 a year for up to three years, covering the fees plus a small allowance for the student Lang & Lang, 2001, p.122.

<sup>97</sup> No information exists regarding the Whistler family income but if it was at the upper end of typical middle class earnings of the period it may have been around £400 a year, of which the fees and expenditure on materials etc. would have taken up a large percentage. Figures calculated from French, M. (2005) *Commercials, careers and culture: travelling salesmen in Britain 1890s-1930s*. [Online] *Economic History Review* 58(2):pp. 352-377, Research Publications by member of the University of Glasgow, <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/4535/> 5 August 2008. [Accessed February 6 2013].

The Summer Composition was the most significant prize in the academic calendar and was completed by the students during the summer vacation, i.e. with no input from the painting tutors, and judged in October when school resumed.<sup>98</sup> This was a traditional assignment with a subject or set title drawn from the Bible or literature and where the student had to devise a large scale figure composition in the manner of a 'history' painting, the most time-honoured and prestigious form of thematic painting practice.<sup>99</sup> The work needed to demonstrate the student's assimilation of figure painting, tone and colour, composition and perspective and would provide proof of their ability to use their powers of imagination to combine all these elements in a harmonious painting.<sup>100</sup>

Whistler won joint second prize with five other students in this competition in the autumn term of 1924. This was a sizeable work, described as 'a group of revellers with goblets singing to the music of a lute player'<sup>101</sup> which sounds reminiscent of the subjects of the 1924 Shadwell panels, depicting jolly scenes of dancing in the country.<sup>102</sup> Two fellow students describe the painting as being influenced by Poussin, but with the surprising addition of 'modern chorus girls faces' to the figures of nymphs.<sup>103</sup> The composition may have been inspired by Poussin's *The Triumph of Pan* (1636) or *A Bacchanalian Revel before a Term* (1632-3), which

---

<sup>98</sup> Laurence Whistler's notes to 'Rex: Slade' RWA.

<sup>99</sup> UCL Art Museum 'The Summer Composition Paintings' [Online] <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums/uclart/about/collections/painting-collections> [July 28 2014]

<sup>100</sup> Hubert Wellington, 'The Slade Summer Compositions since 1893' in *The Slade*, ed. John Fothergill London: Slade School, University College, 1907, p.21.

<sup>101</sup> Whistler & Fuller, 1960, p.15.

<sup>102</sup> The painting's title is uncertain. It is listed as *Summer* in the CR, p.15, *Summer Festival* in notes to George Charlton's Account' Slade File and *Midsummer Night's Dream* in undated notes from correspondence with Peter Brucker, both Slade Correspondence Files RWA. The painting's whereabouts are unknown.

<sup>103</sup> Letter Nan West to LW 1 Jan 1949 and notes from correspondence with Peter Brucker, *ibid*, RWA.

Whistler could have seen at the National Gallery. Both students comment on the competency and finish of the piece and the brightness, or luridness, of its palette in comparison to other paintings entered.<sup>104</sup> Whistler had tempered what should have been a serious academic piece with his usual humour and Tonks reacted with 'warnings & advice' about this propensity.<sup>105</sup>

Amongst the other students sharing the award was Mary Adshead, who was chosen by Tonks to share the Shadwell murals commission with Whistler the following year. Her work entitled *The Picnic* (1924) depicting young people, including a lute player, in a sylvan glade has similarities with Whistler's painting. Adshead's figures are more posed and reflective and it equally calls to mind both Poussin and a Watteau *fête galante*.<sup>106</sup> [Fig. 1.5]

Another important painting of Whistler's from this early Slade period is the *Female Figure Seated* which won equal first prize in the Painting from Life competition in 1924.<sup>107</sup> [Fig. 1.6] For anyone accustomed to the artist's lively and vibrant manner this piece is rather a shock. The tonal palette is sombre and the figure, though closely observed, has a rather lumpen quality. The angle he has chosen to paint the model from is an awkward one, although it was perhaps chosen more for the interesting play of light and shadow. The head is well-handled and the flesh tones are convincing, as is the mass of the figure, but the limbs seem to be very elongated. The almost monochrome range of brown, rather murky tones, are only

---

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> West, *ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Bone, S., 'How Mary Coped' in *Earthly Delights Mary Adshead 1904-1995*. Exhibition catalogue by Matthew Clough and Ann Compton, Liverpool: University of Liverpool Art Collections, 2004, p.23.

<sup>107</sup> This remains in the UCL Collections.

found in these early pre-1925 Slade paintings, with a similar treatment evidenced in the first two panels for Shadwell, painted in the same year, where the balance between light and dark is so heightened that half the painting seems to be in shadow. Works carried out by other students from the life model demonstrate similar limitations in tonal range. For example, the joint prize-winner in Painting from Life in 1924, William Dring's *Female Figure Seated* is equally sombre, as is Jesse Dale Cast's *Female Figure Seated* awarded the equal First Prize the following year.<sup>108</sup> The Life Room itself appears to have been a rather dark and colourless environment, which had to be recorded as accurately as the models themselves.<sup>109</sup>

This nude, despite its possible anatomical weaknesses, was a rare example of Whistler being content to paint exactly what was in front of him, without embellishment, as Tonks had instructed him.

## **Trajectory of an artist: Formative years 1924 - 1925**

This painting also signals Whistler's growing sense of confidence in painting in oils, previously his weakest area. Also in that term he won equal First Prize in the Painting from Life (Head) competition. He had completed his first commissioned

---

<sup>108</sup> All First Prize winning paintings are illustrated in *Oil Paintings in Public Ownership London: The Slade School of Fine Art & University College London Art Collections*, London: The Public Catalogue Foundation, 2005: the three mentioned are pp. 8, 25 and 15.

<sup>109</sup> The murkiness of the walls was also due to generations of students scraping the excess of their palettes on to them. This odd array of graffiti-like marks can clearly be seen in the background of Whistler's seated figure. Morris, 1985, interview with Helen Lessore, Slade Student 1924-28, p.9.

portrait in the previous year<sup>110</sup> and his first self-portrait in January 1924. In the same year a lifetime's work in book illustration had commenced with a commission from Sir Frank Swettenham to design 35 illustrations for 'Arabella in Africa'. These events are amongst the growing indications of Whistler's transformation from student to professional artist during his last two years at the Slade.

The school had provided him with a strong foundation in draughtsmanship, painting, mural painting, and art history. The other, extra-curricular, feature to his life at the Slade which would also have a tremendous bearing on his future was his relationship with fellow students. He could not fail to be influenced by what was being created around him. The influence actually worked both ways, as in the case of Oliver Messel, a friend at the Slade, with whom Whistler experimented in fashioning masks out of papier maché. These masks later found Messel his first job in theatre design for C B Cochran, for whom Whistler also worked subsequently. His interest in architecture led to exploratory trips away from the Slade with Messel in search of the darker reaches of historic London - 'alleyways painted by Hogarth' – that were reflected in his own sketches of the time.<sup>111</sup>

There was also a social trajectory to this chapter in Whistler's life, which effectively removed him from his rather mundane roots and catapulted him into a different milieu. The main catalyst for this transformation was Stephen Tennant, who

---

<sup>110</sup> Portrait of 'Mrs Vlasto' (1923). Not recorded in CR, but later listed in 'Rex Whistler Additional Catalogue' currently (July 2014) held by the Whistler family. Image and details, Rex Whistler file, Witt Library, Courtauld Institute, London.

<sup>111</sup> Cecil, 2012, p.18.

became Whistler's closest friend at the Slade. He and Whistler established a close friendship based on a shared love of art, poetry, fantasy, and comics. They drew constantly together and Whistler became encouraged to use his sketchbooks to record what he was seeing in real life rather than his imagination. Thus his first visit to Wilsford at the end of that term resulted in a detailed sketch of Tennant's house.<sup>112</sup> [Fig. 1.7]Tennant's aristocratic background meant that Whistler became familiar with upper class life in grand houses, equipping him for the world of privilege in which he would find many of his future commissions. His trips to Europe with Tennant, which had an enormous impact on his work, will be analysed in Chapter Three.

Further evidence of the change from student to professional artist status can be found in the accounts book that Whistler started keeping during 1925.<sup>113</sup> In this he recorded, in addition to the scholarship funding, sales of 18 works during his third year at the Slade. These were mainly pen and ink and watercolour and sold to various clients for a total sum of just over £30 and at an average price of two guineas each. Amongst the buyers were Archie Balfour of the Highways Club in Shadwell who bought six works, and also T R Ablett of the Royal Drawing Society who purchased three. In addition, cash prizes were awarded for all the competition works, with Life Painting prizes of between £2 and £5 and the Summer Composition paying considerably more. An entry in Whistler's accounts for 1925 lists 'Summer Competition £30'.<sup>114</sup> In addition he was able to sell some of the

---

<sup>112</sup> Sketchbook 1923B, Sketchbooks, RWA.

<sup>113</sup> 1924 Diary (Accounts Book for 1925), Diaries, RWA

<sup>114</sup> Prize details Catalogue Raisonné, pages 15 and 36. Further information on prizes in Chamber, E., 'Redefining History Painting in the Academy: The Summer Composition Competition at the Slade School of Fine Art, 1898-1922', *Visual Culture in Britain*, Vol. 6, Issue 1, 2005, p.99.

prize-winning works.<sup>115</sup> A cartoon by Whistler shows a snooty figure boasting that 'I won £120 in prizes from the Slade'.<sup>116</sup>

The opportunity given by Tonks to Whistler to design a scheme for a large set of murals at a Memorial Boys' Club in Shadwell in the summer of 1924 signalled another shift in status. This was an actual commission, to be painted on real walls and which ultimately acted as a precursor to his future career.

## **Mural Painting at the Slade**

For Tonks, the epitome of fine art practice was mural painting. He had a strong belief that artists should participate in the wider world, outside their own easels and studios, and murals could be a way of providing that public service. Before Whistler's arrival there had been a strong nucleus of muralist talent at the Slade with students including Stanley Spencer, Colin Gill, Thomas Monnington, and Winifred Knights. There was a close relationship between the Slade and the British School at Rome, with students regularly competing for and winning the Rome Scholarships in Decorative Painting.<sup>117</sup>

However, there was no specialist teaching in the subject and, from records available, it appears that these students were being taught by Tonks in what was

---

<sup>115</sup> The 1924 summer entry going to Ablett and a Life painting bought by one of the Slade Staff, 1924 Diary op. cit and Whistler and Fuller, 1960, p. 36.

<sup>116</sup> Slade file, Correspondence Files, RWA.

<sup>117</sup> Chaplin, Chapter 7, p.177. Both Tonks and Wilson Steer were on the first Faculty of Painting at the British School at Rome in 1914 Reports of the Faculty of Painting in 'Reports of the Executive Committees and Faculties' March 1914, Nov 1920. P1.156.3, BSR Archive.

being referred to at the Slade School Committees as his 'School of Decorative Painting'.<sup>118</sup> If this is so then this was in addition to his close supervision of all students in Life drawing, and a significant proportion of the painting tuition. Tonks was thus undertaking a huge workload, with at this point over 300 students at the school. It would seem improbable that the teaching in an institution of this size was being carried out by Tonks, with Philip Wilson Steer in charge of painting and a small team of assistant tutors assisting them.<sup>119</sup> The evidence in the work of Mary Adshead, Nan West and Rex Whistler from this period indicates that they received a thorough grounding in mural painting, from the technique of squaring-up for a large scale drawing to the correct – in Tonks's view – medium for the job which was to mix the oil paint with a wax medium to give the work a durable surface.

Tonks continued his efforts alongside William Rothenstein at the Royal College of Art, and powerful individuals such as Charles Aitken, Director of the Tate and Augustus Daniel of the National Gallery, to find ways to encourage civic and private opportunities and investment in mural schemes that would give students the chance to create lasting, public works of art. In the previous year had come an opportunity to put these ideals into practice with the London County Council's decision to install murals in the new County Hall building<sup>120</sup> and offer the work to students from the four main London art schools, the Slade, the Royal Academy, the

---

<sup>118</sup> Chaplin, Chapter 7, p.173. There is a brief mention of 'Mawson's Syllabus in Decorative painting' in Chaplin's documentation but current research indicates that Sydney Mawson (1849-1941) was a lecturer in textiles and so this seems unlikely. 'Sydney G. Mawson' [Online] <http://www.richardfordmanuscripts.co.uk/catalogue/12655> [Accessed February 11 2013]

<sup>119</sup> Interview with William Coldstream, Morris, L., 1985, p.11.

<sup>120</sup> Willsdon, Clare A. P. *Mural Painting in Britain 1840 – 1940 Image and Meaning*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.201.



RCA, and Westminster.<sup>121</sup> However when the initial panels were hung at the end of 1922, the Committee regretted their decision to allow inexperienced students to carry out the work, found the images unsuitable in scale and content, and rejected them.<sup>122</sup> This was a disappointing outcome for the heads of all the organisations concerned and did not bode well for the chances of public funding for future mural painting by their students.

Whistler was certainly aware of the LCC scheme, and has the volume of the *Architectural Review* where the murals were illustrated in one of his 1924 Sketchbook lists.<sup>123</sup> In the same list is a reference to the volume featuring the Severini mural decorations at Sir George Sitwell's Italian castle at Montegufoni.<sup>124</sup> These indications of a wider interest in the art world are important for the fuller picture of Whistler being built up in this thesis; existing histories can give an impression of an artist who had little contemporary sensibility and who was absorbed in his own inner world of the past.

## **The Highways Club, Shadwell**

The quest for likely projects brought forth a location recommended by Charles Aitken that could certainly claim to be a worthy place for artists to do work for the

---

<sup>121</sup> All information on the LCC County Hall scheme from Hobhouse, M., (ed) 'Architectural sculpture and decorative treatment', Survey of London Monograph 17: County Hall (1991), pp. 57-69, British History Online. [Online] <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid+118182>, [Accessed February 11 2013].

<sup>122</sup> Willsdon, 2000, pp.201-2.

<sup>123</sup> Sketchbook 1924. RWA.

<sup>124</sup> Whistler had not met the Sitwells at this point, although he was aware of Edith Sitwell's poetry. See Whistler R., *An Anthology of Mine 1923*, London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1981.

public good; a Highway Boys' Club in Shadwell in the East End.<sup>125</sup> Its main room, which was to be used for entertainments, was gloomy and unprepossessing, an ideal vehicle for Tonks's plans.<sup>126</sup> He selected Whistler and Adshead to work on the project together.<sup>127</sup> The initial funding for the scheme was through a legacy left to Tonks by his predecessor, Fred Brown, specifically for endeavours in the revival of mural painting.<sup>128</sup>

It seems that Tonks saw the project as 'an experiment'.<sup>129</sup> Unlike the abortive LCC scheme, there was no risk of civic or public interference, the Clubs were an independent entity and extremely grateful for this charitable decorative donation. Tonks was free to test both his theories of mural painting and his students in a closed environment. Once he was sure of the project's success, various dignitaries and the press were invited to inspect the hall and *The Times* critic took up Tonks's terminology, describing it as a 'successful ... Slade experiment in Shadwell.'<sup>130</sup>

It may have been of some disappointment to Tonks that, certainly as far as Whistler was concerned, the 'experiment' of bringing the enjoyment of mural

---

<sup>125</sup> This was run by an Old Etonian, Archie Balfour a contact of Aitken's. There were many of these kinds of clubs in the poorer parts of London from the turn of the century, with a large number founded and run by a group of philanthropic Old Etonians, 'The Early Years – Eton Manor Boys' Club'[Online] <http://www.villierspark.org.uk/about-us/our-history/> [July 28 2014]

<sup>126</sup> Notes in 'Shadwell' folder, possibly from a conversation with Archie Balfour, Correspondence Files, RWA.

<sup>127</sup> Chambers, 2008, p.132.

<sup>128</sup> It is unclear how this sum of £200 was allocated: whether the room or walls required modifications for the fitting of the panels, what the costs of materials were and what, if anything, Whistler and Adshead were paid for the work. 'Journeyman's wages' are mentioned in a letter to Daniel early in 1924, as the plan is gaining momentum. Tonks to Daniel Feb 19 1924. 'Tate' folder, Correspondence Files, RWA. Cecil, 2012, states that the artists were 'poorly paid.... from a small fund at the Slade.' but no source is given, p.29.

<sup>129</sup> Tonks to Daniel Sept 22 1924 op. cit., RWA.

<sup>130</sup> 'Mural Decoration A Slade Experiment in Shadwell', *The Times*, Sept 24 1924, p.7, Issue 43765.

decoration to those who might have most need of it 'the poor and humble' was very short-lived.<sup>131</sup> Whistler's next commission for the Tate Gallery, also engineered by Tonks, was in the public realm but was hardly for such a worthy cause. His clients after the Tate launch of 1927 were wealthy, often aristocratic patrons and were employing him to create murals for their private enjoyment.

The two panels for the first phase of the decoration along the main wall completed in the summer of 1924 were on the subject of 'People enjoying themselves in the country' with Whistler being allocated two sections and Adshead three, perhaps to reflect her seniority.<sup>132</sup> The subject may have been related to the summer camps that the Highway Clubs ran in Pinner.<sup>133</sup> In his panels *Picnic in the Country with Musicians* and *Rustic Scene: Villagers Dancing* Whistler portrays groups of country folk making merry, reminiscent of Augustus John's bohemian figures complete with gypsy caravans, or even Breughel's peasant scenes.[Figs. 1.8 and 1.9] This latter influence was commented on by *The Times* critic who observed that it 'obviously derives from the Dutch and Flemings'.<sup>134</sup> This was countered by Laurence Whistler in the biography, who states that these were 'schools of painting that never meant anything' to his brother.<sup>135</sup> Interesting then to note that amongst

---

<sup>131</sup> Despite these principles it appears that Tonks did obtain a private mural commission to be completed by Whistler and Stephen Tennant, at an unknown date but certainly before 1924. Letter 10.Aug.1958 in response to Laurence Whistler's advert in *The Telegraph* for unknown works of his brother's. 'Other Murals' folder, Correspondence Files, RWA. The letter says that the mural was for an apartment at Lincoln's Inn, where Whistler completed two walls with 'lots of architectural details like gables, courtyards, and cobbles', and Tennant painted another. This would have been the artist's earliest mural design. It is not mentioned in any of the biographies.

<sup>132</sup> Adshead was a year older than Whistler and had started at the Slade a year earlier, in 1921. Bone S., in Clough and Compton, 2004, p.16.

<sup>133</sup> The camps are mentioned in *The Times* review. Sept 24 1924, op. cit. However Laurence Whistler stated they were based on 'a place like Hampstead Heath'. From this the Cecils take the Heath as definitive. P. 69 and 31 respectively.

<sup>134</sup> 'Mural Decoration A Slade Experiment In Shadwell'. *The Times*, op. cit.

<sup>135</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.71.

the paintings Whistler highlighted in his trip to the Uffizi in 1925 were several by Pieter Breughel, noted as 'wonderful' 'lovely' and 'delightful'.<sup>136</sup> The figures in the panels are sturdy, stolid, and rather swarthy and are unlike anything he painted subsequently. Tonks was critical of this facet, finding the figures 'dark and opaque'.<sup>137</sup> Even the buildings are uncharacteristic, with little architectural detail and a less than confident grasp of perspective.

From the images extant of Adshead's panels, they look to be more resolved in composition and more sophisticated and graceful than Whistler's. This is particularly evident in Adshead's panel over the arched door of the hall – photographed for the *Times* article – where maidens, trees, cherubs and animals are arranged to accommodate the shape of the architrave.<sup>138</sup> [Fig. 1.10] Here the tapestry-like quality of her design was remarked on by Tonks.<sup>139</sup> Her other large panel *The Joys of the Country*, uses a device that Whistler would employ in later murals, of a loggia with columns and arches looking out over countryside.<sup>140</sup> [Fig. 1.11] Tonks expressed satisfaction for both his students but reserved special praise for Adshead finding her work 'outstanding'.<sup>141</sup> Her work on this project displayed an intriguing combination of the contemporary and the mythological, and this fusion also appeared in Whistler's later designs for the proscenium. Of the two, she was the more experienced mural painter at the start of the Shadwell

---

<sup>136</sup> 1925 Sketchbook, RWA.

<sup>137</sup> Tonks to Daniel May 26 1924, op. cit., RWA.

<sup>138</sup> *The Times*, Wednesday, Sep 24, 1924, op. cit. col A.

<sup>139</sup> 'Miss Adshead... would be designing half the tapestries of England...' Tonks to Daniel May 8 1924, op. cit., RWA.

<sup>140</sup> Her third panel was much smaller and was directly abutting the proscenium panel completed by Whistler the following year. Visible in photograph of Shadwell scheme. Whistler family private collection.

<sup>141</sup> Tonks to Daniel May 26 1924, op. cit., RWA.

scheme<sup>142</sup> and some evidence suggests that Whistler was influenced by her.<sup>143</sup>

However Alan Powers has proposed that in her later murals she may have been influenced by Whistler.<sup>144</sup>

The two phases of the Shadwell project strongly demonstrate the change in Whistler's style and content before and after his first visit to Italy in 1925. (See Chapter Three.) In the proscenium and corresponding panels the setting, typically English in the earlier rural scenes, is now infused with a more elegant Classical essence.[Fig. 1.12] This is evident in the preparatory sketches for the headpiece of the proscenium arch in the 1925 Sketchbook. Working on the theme of 'Comedy and Tragedy', he designed a central cartouche for the arch containing a shield with 'relief scroll work' and 'St George and the Dragon' inscribed at its centre surrounded with the incised inscription 'Highway Clubs Incorporated'. On either side of the shield are the reclined figures of 'Comedy' and 'Tragedy', with theatrical masks, draped in Roman togas and linked with a garland of laurel leaves.[Fig. 1.13] The left proscenium panel was entitled *Allegorical Composition: Comedy and Putti Driving away a Heraldic Unicorn* and the right *Allegorical Composition: Tragedy and Putti Driving away a Heraldic Lion*. [Figs. 1.14 and 1.15] The titles demonstrate a greater awareness of the classical language of painting – possibly absorbed during his time in the Uffizi and other European galleries. The use of the heraldic beasts, the lion and unicorn, are extrapolated from ideas tried out in the 1925 Sketchbook,

---

<sup>142</sup> In the same year as Shadwell, Adshead was commissioned to create a large mural, *The Housing of the People* for the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley. Compton, 2005, p.26.

<sup>143</sup> See the 'Trial Scene...' sketches of 1925.

<sup>144</sup> Powers, A., 'Mary Adshead and English Mural Painting before the Second World War' in Clough and Compton, 2004. Powers points to themes shared by both the Tate Gallery scheme and the murals Adshead completed for the architect Charles Reilly in 1925 (discussed in Chapter Four), and the large scheme for Lord Beaverbrook of 1928, pp. 32-3. The date of the Reilly commission makes this first case unlikely but certainly the later Beaverbrook panels share the witty observational narrative of Whistler's at the Tate Gallery (1926-7).

where a scale plan of the stage area is surrounded by creatures that must have been copied from a heraldic bestiary. Whereas he set the two earlier Shadwell panels in a roughly contemporary setting, these later additions employ a more Roman or classical set of attributes. The contrast between these two sections could not be more marked: it is as though Rome has entered Whistler's visual lexicon.

### ***The Trial Scene from the Merchant of Venice (1925)***

Perhaps Whistler's most interesting and arresting painting from his time at the Slade was the *Trial Scene from the Merchant of Venice* painted in 1925 and winner of the Summer Composition Prize for that year.[Fig. 1.16] This was his last major painting of his studentship and in its complicated structure and rich content it seems to sum up Whistler's total experience at the Slade School of Art. In terms of architectural quality, use of scale and perspective, handling of diverse narrative elements, use of the figure, and referencing of art history, it shows the early stages of the artist that Whistler would become.

Two preliminary sketches provide a fuller picture of the artist's creative process. Both show Whistler's favoured Italianate landscape including the distinctive outline of a rocky bluff, described in more detail in Chapter Three. One uses a similar arched loggia as found in one of Adshead's panels for Shadwell, with views out to a landscape and chequered flooring on the interior. In fact this 'room', reversed so that the viewer looks into it, appears in the top right of the final painting. [Fig. 1.17 and 1.18]

These initial ideas for the paintings and murals in sketchbooks and in other forms are helpful indicators to Whistler's imagination and sources but become scarce from the late 1920s onwards. It may be that as his methods developed he could work from a very rough idea and work out the composition in real time actually on the canvas itself. The finished work was a large scale composition (3ft x 4ft) incorporating a multitude of figures in a Renaissance setting, with the scene depicted in a theatrical format. This painting can be read in terms of three major pictorial elements which informed the vast majority of Whistler's subsequent work. Firstly the architectural setting in which the action is taking place. This is an Italianate classical building with a colonnaded open portico above, acting as a gallery from where the audience looks down at the open air courtroom or stage.

Every brick of the building is delineated and the detailed handling extends to a coffered ceiling and a painting on the far wall. Architecture was very much at the forefront of Whistler's art practice and this is the first oil painting in which it is given prominence. The use of complex perspective, in this case to add a sense of heightened drama to the composition, is also characteristic.

The second element is the treatment of the figures. Although this is the first and last time that Whistler attempted such a multitude of figures in a painting, they are dealt with in a distinctive way; each is painted as an individual person, some are more caricatures, and there are many touches of humour and incident, amongst the audience particularly. A startled man looks directly at the viewer from the far

right, up in the balcony a youth leans over to kiss a maiden's hand, one of the jury in the front row appears to have fallen asleep over his transcript and so on. Whistler found the temptation to introduce humour into his work almost irresistible, even in this rather serious subject.

The third element is the landscape to the left of the composition. The delicacy of the trees and landscape and the evocation of a distant Italian townscape hark back to earlier works of the Quattrocento, where the eye is led away from the action at the front of the picture towards a faraway vista.<sup>145</sup> Whistler's often idealised view of nature owed much to early Italian painting, as well as the work of Claude and Poussin. To the left hand side of the scene the horses and their riders look to have come straight from a painting by Uccello. Certainly it complies with the Slade's admonitions to 'combine observation of nature with the study of the Old Masters'.<sup>146</sup> Up in the sky is the goddess Justitia with scales and sword accompanied by two putti. The painting is almost entirely influenced by Italy, both the country and its art, and shows clearly the effect of Whistler's sojourn there, particularly his trip to Rome, undertaken just before this painting was started. This same influence is also apparent in the second phase of the Shadwell murals and it is likely that both of these works were completed around the same time.<sup>147</sup> The lightness of touch, particularly in the more refined figures is in marked contrast to the dark heaviness of the earlier Shadwell panels.

---

<sup>145</sup> Laurence Whistler, undated notes in 'Rex: Slade', Correspondence Files, RWA.

<sup>146</sup> Chambers, E., 2005, p.90.

<sup>147</sup> There are no exact dates for either work, but Whistler returned to the Slade in May 1925. Shadwell needed finishing urgently and the Trial Scene would also have been completed in the summer.



This is the only one of his Slade prize-winning paintings that is signed. A plaque on the wall to the right bears the inscription 'This House was built by R. J. Whistler'. By incorporating his signature into the actual composition he places himself into the painting in an ambiguous role as both participant and artist. This becomes a characteristic device in much of his work, where the signature is introduced either as inscription or as self-portrait. He represented himself in profile on a plaque in the Dorneywood mural (1928-9), as the face of a stonework faun in the portrait of the Dudley-Ward sisters (1933-4), and took it to its ultimate conclusion at Plas Newydd (1936) where he is the figure of the gardener at the mural's edge.

The Trial Scene is by no means a perfect or entirely resolved painting. The central foreground of the composition is an empty space with the main action taking place towards the back of the 'stage'. One's eye is drawn all around the canvas and actually wants to linger on the rows of people on the right hand side who are colourfully dressed and full of incident. The focus of the work, Portia declaiming her speech as Shylock prepares to cut the pound of flesh, is lost amongst other distractions. The relationship between viewer and painting is compromised by the angles of the composition; one feels too close to the characters on the right and too far away from the important figures in the drama to the left. One reads it more as a series of events and scenes than as a unified whole. In fact Whistler rarely had a central point of focus in his paintings, unless he was painting landscape *en plein air* or portraiture. This tendency was advantageous in his mural painting where the content needed to be sustained over large areas and often several walls.

Despite its over-emphasis on incident rather than compositional unity this painting by Whistler bears the hallmarks of an artist confident in his abilities to handle space and scale, prerequisites for one who would find success in theatre and mural design.

## **Conclusions: The Construction of an Artistic Identity**

One of the pitfalls of biographical studies is that a balanced account can be sacrificed to the creation of a gripping narrative about the subject. The writing on Whistler's years at the Slade is a case in point. On reading the biographies, one has the impression that Whistler had a tremendously elevated and unique status at the school, both at the time and in the memories of contemporaries subsequently. In these accounts, the tales of Whistler's prodigious ability are legion. He won a multitude of prizes, so many that none of the authors agree on the amount.<sup>148</sup> He drew the entire contents of the Antique Room in a day (or a week, depending on the source.<sup>149</sup>) He completed life drawings with his back to the model, often very speedily, and would then draw cartoons or doodles on the cartridge paper.<sup>150</sup> He created designs on a huge roll of paper or canvas whilst telling stories to friends (one account even had him drawing with both hands but this did not make it into print.<sup>151</sup>) These anecdotes are all enjoyable but they provide a very limited view of Whistler's time at the Slade and inadequate coverage of what he actually learnt.

---

<sup>148</sup> See p.19.

<sup>149</sup> 'A day' is mentioned by Eileen Heenan, Laurence Whistler's Slade notes p.3 and Whistler, L., p.51. 'A week', Cecil, H and M, 2012, p.16.

<sup>150</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.61.

<sup>151</sup> See Whistler, L., 1985, p.88 and Cecil, H and M, 2012, p.16. Original source, undated letter from Horsburgh-Porter, fellow Slade student, p.4, 'Slade' folder, Correspondence files, RWA.

The biographies, including the Catalogue Raisonné, largely make use of information collected by Laurence Whistler in the late 1950s, from Slade staff members and fellow students. This was 36 years after the event, which may call into question the accuracy of some of the memories. At the same time, Laurence Whistler was also placing advertisements in the press, seeking information about his brother.<sup>152</sup> Rex Whistler's untimely, and implicitly heroic, death during WW2 may have led those recollecting him to eulogise his memory and present an embellished version of events. His fame at the time of his death would have been a contributory factor to this. Laurence Whistler was aware of the tendency to 'heighten and falsify' in these accounts, but it may have been difficult for him, at this distance, to discern between truth and exaggeration.<sup>153</sup> Unfortunately, Whistler did not keep diaries at this point, but his voice is not entirely absent from the Slade chapters of the biographies.<sup>154</sup> Quotes from his letters, mainly to Tennant and Olivier, are used, but again are subject to the authors' editing and positioning. Stephen Tennant, who was certainly a close confidante, contributed voluminous reminiscences and his rather florid accounts are drawn on heavily in the Cecils' volume.<sup>155</sup>

With such an emphasis on Whistler's artistic gifts, there is no real sense of comparison between him and his contemporaries at the Slade. These artists were largely of a similar age, with equally strong skills in draughtsmanship, many of

---

<sup>152</sup> There were several adverts placed in the Press around 1958/9. One in the *Sunday Times* is referred to in the Horsbrugh-Porter letter, op. cit. and a copy of one that appeared in the *Daily Express* November 2 1959 is in the Slade Folder, RWA.

<sup>153</sup> Handwritten notes to Horsbrugh-Porter letter, ibid, RWA.

<sup>154</sup> The 1924 diary, mentioned in the previous section, was used mainly as an address and accounts book.

<sup>155</sup> Letters between Tennant and Laurence Whistler, 'Letters' RWA. Cecil, H and M, 2012, pp. 16 and 19.

whom were also being trained to be the mural painters of the future. Those at the Slade in the early to mid-1920s included Thomas Monnington, William Coldstream, and Stephen Bone. Laurence Whistler mentions their names in passing but there is no attempt to compare their work with that of his brother.<sup>156</sup> Nan West and Mary Adshead, both successful artists, are described only in terms of the murals they worked on alongside Whistler, with scant attention given to their own creative output.

It is, of course, impossible to assess whether Whistler really was ‘the most remarkable student the Slade has ever seen’.<sup>157</sup> Many others such as Augustus John, William Orpen or Stanley Spencer could surely be equally worthy of such an honour. Although there are many flattering accounts from his fellow students and teachers it is the accolades from Tonks himself that have reinforced the picture of Whistler at the Slade. He praised his gifts, gave him enormous encouragement, and described him as one of only two or three ‘natural draughtsmen’ he had come across in his life.<sup>158</sup> The evidence to see Whistler as a particular favourite is persuasive. However, he was not unique. Nan West wrote that ‘every year he (Tonks) had to have a genius, one student of infinite promise to boast about and encourage’.<sup>159</sup> Further students praised in that period, included Burn, ‘an artist without alloy’, and Daphne Baring ‘Never have I had such a woman at the Slade and few men...’<sup>160</sup>

---

<sup>156</sup> Whistler, L., 1986, p.62.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p.61.

<sup>158</sup> Tonks to Osbert Sitwell. Ibid, p.61.

<sup>159</sup> West, N., *Against the Tide* unpublished autobiography MS, undated, RWA, p.5.

<sup>160</sup> Hone, J., 1939, p.187.

It was in Tonks's interests to amplify the achievements and skills of his students past and present both for his own standing within the Slade, but also to enhance its public reputation. The successes of the 1920s had affirmed the efficacy of his teaching methods and the strengths of his desire to find opportunities for his students.<sup>161</sup>

In many ways the mythology of Tonks is as compelling as that of Whistler. Anecdotes regarding his forbidding appearance, the sternness, and/or kindness to his students, the rigour of his teaching methods and his dedication to the cause of drawing are to be found in the majority of writings on the Slade, and over the years some of these may have become apocryphal. However the presence of Tonks's own voice, in his autobiographical writings, letters and articles, provides a sense of the real man behind the stories. In contrast the picture of Whistler can only ever remain partial; he wrote little himself, apart from correspondence and occasional diaries and thus his biographers find it necessary to 'fill in the gaps'.

There is a pressing need to provide a balanced and accurate account of Rex Whistler's life. As this thesis unfolds, the systematic insistence on the construction of a specific identity around Whistler will become increasingly apparent. As can be seen from this examination of his experiences at the Slade there is fertile ground for such an embellished narrative. It can be all too easy for a writer to let these three elements coalesce irresistibly into 'the most remarkable student the Slade

---

<sup>161</sup> His Professor's Reports to the Slade Sub-Committee list the Slade's successes in the British School at Rome Decorative Painting scholarships, the selection of Slade students for public mural projects at the Highways Club at Shadwell, Westminster and the Tate Gallery – a ringing endorsement for his championing of mural painting as a field the Slade should aim to excel in Reports during 1926. Chaplin, S. 1998 op. cit., Chapter 7, p.173, 177,178, UCL Special Collections.

has ever seen'<sup>162</sup>, at 'the best drawing school in the world'<sup>163</sup> under the 'most renowned and formidable teacher of his generation.'<sup>164</sup>

---

<sup>162</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.61.

<sup>163</sup> Report to committee from 1918. Chaplin, S. 1998 op. cit., Chapter 7, p.171.

<sup>164</sup> 'Tonks, Henry' The Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists, Ed. Ian Chilvers. Oxford: OUP Oxford Reference [Online] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/artists/henry-tonks>. [Accessed February 25 2013].

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE TATE GALLERY RESTAURANT MURAL 1926-27: 'The Pursuit of Rare Meats'**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter is largely devoted to one mural, painted by Rex Whistler for the Tate Gallery Refreshment Room in 1926-7. This focus is justified by the importance of this mural to Whistler's subsequent career. The huge acclaim given to this very successful and public project resulted in immediate commissions which then continued for the rest of his working life. Its unveiling generated a vast amount of publicity in the press and other media, both in London and nationwide. This could indicate the Tate Gallery's expertise in publicity and marketing, but one of the questions posed in this chapter will be why the paintings around the wall of a refurbished gallery café by an unknown artist garnered so much attention.

The aim of this chapter is not to argue that the Tate mural was Whistler's greatest achievement in the genre, but more that this was a defining moment in his working practice. It is also the piece of work that has been seen by the largest audience. Many of his other murals have come into the public domain – if the National Trust can be considered public – only within the last thirty years, compared to over eighty years on show at the Tate.

This chapter will explain how the Tate mural project came to fruition. Issues of private and public funding that affected the scheme from its inception will be examined, in particular Sir Joseph Duveen's sponsorship of both the mural scheme and the major new galleries extension and the negative stance of the public funding body for the Tate, H M Ministry of Works. The internal politics of this project will be fully illustrated and re-assessed using material from the Tate and the Whistler Archives.

Whistler's early sketches and diary entries and consideration of his artistic influences at the time, ranging from Claude and Poussin to architecture and the fashion for chinoiserie, will assist in constructing a visual analysis of the mural.

Following on from the preceding Slade chapter and the discussion of the murals at Shadwell, there will be further examination in this chapter of the emerging mural movement of the period, in which both Henry Tonks and William Rothenstein played such important roles in the encouragement of mural commissions for their students. Comparisons will be drawn with schemes that were contemporaneous with Whistler's at the Tate Gallery; including Nan West's for the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital (1926), the artists involved with the murals at the Palace of Westminster (1924-27), and the murals at Morley College by Ravilious, Bawden and Mahoney (1928-30).



## **‘The Pursuit of Rare Meats’**

### **The origins of the project and the commissioning process**

1926, the year Rex Whistler began painting the mural in the Refreshment Room, was an important one for the Tate Gallery. More than ten years of improvements and developments which had largely been paid for by its most prominent benefactor, Sir Joseph Duveen, were coming to fruition with the opening of the new galleries to house the modern foreign collections. The development costs to Duveen were in the region of £40,000-£50,000 or about £12.5 million in today's values.<sup>165</sup> This expansion would highlight the Gallery's role and identity as an independent institution, rather than an outpost of the National Gallery, which followed the recommendations of the 1917 Curzon report into the nation's art collections. The Millbank site was to focus on both British art and modern foreign art and the redevelopment resulted in five new galleries on the (lower) ground floor, a further four on the main level, and more space added to the Sargent galleries.<sup>166</sup>

Duveen was a major protagonist in the scheme for the Refreshment Room mural. The other players were Charles Aitken, the Director of the Tate, Sir Lionel Earle, senior civil servant in His Majesty's Office of Works and Henry Tonks of the Slade. The idea for the transformation of the Refreshment Room seems to have

---

<sup>165</sup> Letter Aitken to Earle, June 30 1925, TG 17/3/3/11. Tate Gallery Archive. Relative values for the economic cost of a project [Online] from

<http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/relativevalue.php> [February 14 2014]

<sup>166</sup> 'A Great Art Benefactor' H M Cundall (publication unknown) Tate Press Cuttings Scrapbook Blue Crate A. Rex Whistler Archive. Duveen's sponsorship of this project had continued the financial relationship with the Tate started by his father, J. J. Duveen, who had funded the Turner wing in 1910.

originated with Aitken, who lays out his justifications in a letter to Earle in October 1925.<sup>167</sup> The Office of Works was responsible for the upkeep of the Gallery building and all alterations had to be agreed with them. Aitken and Tonks had recently organised the mural decorations in the Boys' Club in Shadwell. Duveen had come to their aid when funds ran out halfway through the project, and was impressed enough on visiting the site and witnessing Whistler's work to offer the money immediately.<sup>168</sup> Both Tonks and Aitken were determined to source further public mural projects. Duveen was interested in initiatives that would help young artists, who may have been finding opportunities lessened by the 'general restriction of expenditure on modern art by private patrons' ...<sup>169</sup> Coupled with his own desire to improve the look of the Refreshment Room Aitken could see an opportunity that would engage the interests of the Tate's benefactor, help these artists, promote the use of murals and impress the Board of Trustees with improvements to the Gallery's facilities. With an offer from Duveen of £500 for the project, Aitken assembled a committee along with Tonks and Archie Balfour to organise the renovations and select an artist to carry out the mural. Archie Balfour was a nephew of the former Prime Minister Lord Balfour, a close associate of Charles Aitken and Henry Tonks and supporter of Whistler.

However the plan was beset by problems. The existing café, opened in 1909, was a fairly gloomy room at semi-basement level so that the 'prison-like' windows served

---

<sup>167</sup> Letter Aitken to Earle, 24 October 1925. TG/3/4/1. TGA.

<sup>168</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.71.

<sup>169</sup> Aitken to Earle. 24 October 1925 Op. cit.

to let in very little light.<sup>170</sup> In addition there were ugly heating pipes running along the walls and large metal pillars that ran the length of the room. The costs and difficulty of dealing with just these two factors put the project in jeopardy from the start, with Earle having no desire to spend government money on renovations for the sake of a mural in a dismal tearoom. Lionel Earle was no philistine and was a passionate supporter of the arts, but from a technical and financial point of view he could see no justification for the project.<sup>171</sup> Costings of £230 were estimated to improve the lighting, case the walls and columns, hiding the pipes behind studwork and battened screens, which then formed the support for the mural canvases.<sup>172</sup> Duveen, unsurprisingly, footed the bill.<sup>173</sup> By Christmas the scheme had been sanctioned by H M Office of Works<sup>174</sup> and Whistler had his first meeting with Aitken, Tonks and Pearson the architect to inspect the room on 12 January 1926.<sup>175</sup>

Duveen's offer to the Tate clearly stated that part of the committee's responsibilities was 'the selection of young artists'.<sup>176</sup> At this point Whistler was just one of the candidates under consideration. An 'older, trained Slade student' was mooted as the ideal, and both Tonks and Aitken must have had Whistler in

---

<sup>170</sup> Account of Restaurant history in 'Admin History Tate Public Records: Restaurant' [Online] in Tate Archive Catalogue <http://archive.tate.org.uk> [December 6 2012]. Description of original café from 'The Fine Arts' *The London Mercury* January 1928 p.317. TG3/4/1, TGA.

<sup>171</sup> Heathorn, S. 'The Civil Servant and Public Remembrance: Sir Lionel Earle and the Shaping of London's Commemorative Landscape 1918-33', *20<sup>th</sup> Century British History*, Vol 19, Issue 3, 2008, pp 259-287.

<sup>172</sup> Letter Earle to Aitken, 7 Nov 1925. TG 3/4/1, TGA.

<sup>173</sup> Letter Aitken to Earle, 28 November 1925. The amount was later amended to £116. Letter Aitken to Earle 31 March 1926, *ibid*, TGA.

<sup>174</sup> Letter Earle to Aitken, 24 Dec 1925, *Ibid*.

<sup>175</sup> Recorded in 1925 Diary, which was used for 1926. 'Diaries' Green Box File RWA.

<sup>176</sup> Trustee Board minute card index entries. TG 2/7/1

mind.<sup>177</sup> One of the Board of Trustees was Sir Philip Sassoon, who felt there should be a competition amongst Rome Scholars, whom he must have felt would lend the project suitable gravitas and produce a traditional result.<sup>178</sup> Sassoon was a powerful figure, a politician and wealthy connoisseur who was also connected to the School at Rome.<sup>179</sup> Ironically he was later to be a patron of Whistler. He also proposed - in a puzzling contrast to his Rome School recommendation - José María Sert, the renowned Catalan muralist who had painted extravagant schemes at his houses at Port Lympne in 1914-5 and in Park Lane in 1920.<sup>180</sup>

However in the light of further research this suggestion is not so surprising. There was a proposal earlier the same year for another mural scheme at the Tate, also to be funded by Duveen and for which Sert had been specifically selected, supported by Sassoon. This was for the walls of the new staircase in the Modern Foreign Galleries Wing, under construction.<sup>181</sup> Sert was vigorously championed by Sassoon<sup>182</sup> despite claims that young British artists should be given the opportunity.<sup>183</sup> In the event Duveen appeared to lose interest but the episode clearly left Sassoon wanting his voice to be heard and Duveen aware that a home-

---

<sup>177</sup> Aitken to Earle. 24 October 1925. Op. cit.

<sup>178</sup> Minutes of Board Meeting 21 October 1925. TG3/4/2, TGA.

<sup>179</sup> He was on the Executive Committee of the BSR by 1928 and possibly before. See Sharp, D. and Rendel S., *Connell Ward and Lucas: Modern Movement Architects in England 1929-1939*, London: Frances Lincoln, 2008. p28.

<sup>180</sup> Stansky, P., *Sassoon The Worlds of Philip and Sybil* Yale: New Haven & London 2003, p.46 and 146. Rex Whistler had certainly heard of Sert and had expressed a desire to visit his Paris studio whilst travelling in Europe with Tennant the previous year. Whistler, L. 1985, p.92.

<sup>181</sup> Minutes of 'Meeting of the National Gallery Millbank Board Weds June 24<sup>th</sup> 1925' the arrangement is termed as Duveen 'presenting a decoration by M. Sert for the staircase of the new Modern Foreign Gallery'. 'Duveen Drawings and Paintings Funds', Gallery Records TG 17/3/3/11, TGA.

<sup>182</sup> Sassoon to Aitken, 29 Jan 1925, *ibid*.

<sup>183</sup> 'doubt...as to the propriety of...a continental artist to paint the cartoons.' H L Bradshaw, Royal Fine Art Commission to Lionel Earle 14 Feb 1925. *Ibid*.

grown artist was going to be regarded as a more appropriate choice for any such scheme.<sup>184</sup>

In order to mollify Sassoon during the process for the Refreshment Room scheme several Rome Scholars were discussed as candidates, Tom Monnington, A K Lawrence and Glyn Jones.<sup>185</sup> Jones was a prospective Rome Scholar, experienced muralist and was in contention for a prestigious commission for Canterbury Cathedral.<sup>186</sup> Aitken assured Sassoon that he was 'too busy' to be interested in the Tate Gallery project.<sup>187</sup> Monnington, another Slade alumnus and Rome Scholar, could have been tempted by such a high profile commission. However another major murals project was coming to fruition at St Stephen's Hall at the Palace of Westminster and Monnington was amongst those selected.<sup>188</sup> A K Lawrence, the third potential candidate had completed a panel for the British Empire Exhibition in 1924, before taking up his Scholarship at Rome and carried out commissions whilst at the BSR.<sup>189</sup> Lawrence was also selected for the murals at St Stephen's Hall. Would it have been possible for artists like Monnington and Lawrence to work on both projects concurrently? Within a few years Whistler was able to juggle several private mural projects at the same time, but a very public project like the Tate or Westminster would perhaps demand the exclusive attention of their participants. Whistler certainly did little else whilst he was actually painting the mural.

---

<sup>184</sup> '...some hesitation as to the employment of a foreign artist...' for the scheme. Aitken to Duveen Feb 26 1925, *ibid*.

<sup>185</sup> Letter Tonks to Daniel 25 March 1926. 'Tate' folder, Correspondence Files, RWA.

<sup>186</sup> 'Glyn Owen Jones' Box 177 'BSR General Office Rome Scholars in Mural Painting'. British School at Rome Archive.

<sup>187</sup> Letter Aitken to Tonks March 16 1926 'Tate' Correspondence Files RWA.

<sup>188</sup> It is difficult to put an exact start date on the murals at St Stephen's Hall as all are given a blanket date of 1925 – 27.

<sup>189</sup> For the Laing Art Gallery & Museum in 1925. Letter Lawrence to Evelyn Shaw. Box 177 'BSR General Office Rome Scholars in Mural Painting' British School at Rome Archive.

Aitken's response to Sassoon's demands was that Monnington and Lawrence's status would give them financial expectations far above the budget of £500, and there were no other suitable Rome Scholars free to take up the challenge. Conversely those who would accept less would not be accomplished or mature enough to cope with a project of that scale. The impression gained from the correspondence between Aitken and Tonks is of a complete denial by Aitken to the Board of any other candidate's suitability, with no arguments brooked from any Trustee, especially Sassoon, against his and Tonks's preferred choice of Whistler.<sup>190</sup> Duveen was also 'adamant' that Whistler should be appointed, although it is not recorded as to whether he was aware of how all other possible competitors had been dispatched.<sup>191</sup> He was by any standards affluent, but he was not about to spend more than was necessary on the refreshment room decorations. His idea of supporting young artists was philanthropic but it also meant that the costs could be kept down. He knew there were less experienced artists out there, Whistler being the ideal example, who could fulfil both budgetary and artistic requirements.

Whistler was not kept in ignorance either about the risk to his selection, or who had vetoed him and entered in his diary for March 15 1926 that Tonks 'has told me about a difficulty that has arisen'.<sup>192</sup> The diary also records that he was working on several other projects at the time, including submitting prospective illustrations

---

<sup>190</sup> In insisting on more established candidates, Sassoon appeared not to appreciate the financial constraints imposed by Duveen. Minutes of Board Meeting 21 October 1925. TG3/4/2, TGA. This was perhaps indicative of the attitude of a wealthy man who could afford to have Sert create murals in both his houses – and then have one set painted over within ten years.

<sup>191</sup> Letter Archie Balfour to Laurence Whistler 22 August 1958. 'Tate' Correspondence Files. RWA.

<sup>192</sup> Hardback notebook '7 Mar – 17 May 1926' 'Diaries' Green Box File. RWA.

for the Irish novelist George Moore (a friend of Tonks), Edith Olivier and Lady Cynthia Asquith, posters for another client and painting entries for the various Slade competitions. Two of these entries sold immediately through the efforts of Tonks, who seemed to be constantly working on Whistler's behalf. One of the buyers was Augustus Daniel, an associate of Tonks and at the time a Trustee of the National Gallery.<sup>193</sup> A letter to Daniel suggests that Tonks was trying to obtain as much money as possible for Whistler before the project started so that he would not need to be distracted by other commissions.<sup>194</sup> Whistler was invited by Tonks and Daniel for tea at the Burlington Club and they 'discussed the Tate decoration a great deal.' He had now been confirmed as the artist for the commission and 'drew out the designs for the Tate' on 26<sup>th</sup> March.<sup>195</sup> Although Earle was now satisfied with the project, a letter to Aitken records that his director, Lord Peel, the First Commissioner of Works was not enthusiastic about the design 'but doesn't want to oppose it'.<sup>196</sup> Even at this late stage Whistler was not everyone's first choice of candidate.

Although not recorded in the material for the selection process, there must have been consideration given to the types of work that would be produced by the artists under discussion. Aitken's policy at the Tate Gallery was very much in tune with Tonks's opinions and he is described as not liking 'anything that was

---

<sup>193</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> March, *ibid.* Daniel became Director of the National Gallery in 1929. 'Sir Augustus Moore Daniel' Biography [Online] <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/history/directors/sir-augustus-moore-daniel> [Accessed December 1 2014].

<sup>194</sup> Letter Tonks to Daniel 25 March 1926. 'Tate' folder, Correspondence Files, RWA. These paintings sold for £5 and £12 respectively, in today's values about £800.

<sup>195</sup> Entry 22 April, 'Rex Whistler Diary 7 March – 17 May 1926', Diaries, RWA.

<sup>196</sup> Handwritten note on a letter from Earle to Aitken March 1926, Gallery Records, TG 3/4/2, TGA

contemporary or foreign'.<sup>197</sup> It may be assumed that prospective designs for the mural in the Refreshment Room would need to fit with the Tate's stance on modernism. Having seen Whistler's work at Shadwell, Aitken could rest assured that the mural was in the safe hands of an artist whose tastes were more towards Poussin and Claude, who respected classical subjects and techniques, and who would not shock the Committee with a radical design.

## **The designs for the mural**

The preliminary, very rough drawings for the mural, undated, are in the 1925 Sketchbook.<sup>198</sup> Using the training he had received at the Slade in preparing the groundwork for a mural, Whistler drew a measured plan of the room and the wall space available for painting. [Fig. 2.1] The room was nearly sixty feet long and over thirty feet wide, with three arched windows on the Embankment side, a plain wall facing, and with a doorway in the centre of each end wall – one the entrance to the restaurant and the other leading to the kitchens. In addition he drew out a perspective sketch of the room and an idea for the mural itself as it would appear on the plain wall. [Fig. 2.2] This broke the wall up into scenes, framed by stonework or trellising and punctuated by statuary in corresponding arched niches. The very roughly sketched scenes show figures in a landscape, with possibly a dancing group to one side. At this point the plan shows clearly that the mural was only going to be on one wall, the other walls are uniformly shaded, whereas the main wall has the dimensions and rough placement of the design. It is thus impossible to judge when the design developed into one covering all four

---

<sup>197</sup> Meadmore. W. S., 'The Crowing of the Cock: A Biography of James Bolivar Manson', unpublished MS, undated, TGA, p.101 in Taylor, B. *Art for the Nation*, Manchester: MUP, p.147. 1999.

<sup>198</sup> 'Sketchbooks' box. RWA.



walls. It also poses the question of whether Duveen was initially funding a mural for one wall of the Refreshment Room.<sup>199</sup>

All of the designs had been discussed with Tonks, who then described them to Aitken as ‘a party setting out in search of rare foods; melting as it was from one place to another...’ and, in the first mention of the design being inspired by Chinese wallpaper, ‘the whole to bear if possible the... appearance of a Chinese paper.’<sup>200</sup> This is further evidenced by the artist himself who wrote that the canvases had been covered or primed with a ‘deep creamy colour’ .... ‘a good foundation for this rather Chinese wall-paper like colour, that I hope to get.’<sup>201</sup>

The mural is an amalgam of many types of architectural styles and geographical features but one panel clearly demonstrates a Chinese inspiration. The tower that disguises the first restaurant window is described as being part of the Great Wall of Cathay.<sup>202</sup> The wall skirts a town, ‘Tangeree’, containing pagodas and an ornamental bridge and peopled with ‘mandarins’.<sup>203</sup> [Fig. 2.3] Unfortunately the incompleteness of this section makes it difficult to imagine Whistler’s full intentions in terms of a chinoiserie theme. It was not a style that he revisited in later work, apart from the faux ‘Chinese wallpaper’ painted for Samuel Courtauld in 1932.

---

<sup>199</sup> This fact is not mentioned in any of Laurence Whistler’s writings or in any documentation yet found in the Tate Archive.

<sup>200</sup> Tonks to Aitken March 19 1926. ‘Tate’ folder, Correspondence Files, RWA.

<sup>201</sup> Entry for April 26<sup>th</sup>, ‘Rex Whistler Diary 7 March – 17 May 1926’, Diaries.

<sup>202</sup> Whistler R. and Olivier O., *A Guide to the Duchy of Epicurania with some Account of the Famous Expedition in Pursuit of Rare Meats as described by Edith Olivier*, London: Tate Gallery Publishing 1954, p.21.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, p.21-2.

Apart from the evident inspiration for this section of the mural, what led Tonks, Laurence Whistler and the Tate itself to describe the entire design as resembling Chinese wallpaper?<sup>204</sup> The mural has a delicacy of technique and the decorative use of many natural elements of flora and fauna are reminiscent of these Eastern papers.<sup>205</sup> It has a much closer connection to the papers with an illustrative or narrative element, but an even greater connection to the *papiers panoramique* printed in France that became popular in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>206</sup> These scenic papers have a clear figurative content and a much stronger continuous narrative than their Chinese equivalents. There was a chinoiserie revival in the 1920s and 30s with interior decorators including Syrie Maugham and Elsie de Wolfe using wallpapers, furniture and décor with an Oriental theme in houses on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>207</sup>

Laurence Whistler finds the origins of the mural in an object nearer to home, the designs on a Willow pattern plate from which his brother would create stories. The artist's sketchbooks of the time, mirrors of his imagination, contained many stories and cartoon like action drawings. To continue the Chinese analogy the mural is also rather like an ancient Chinese scroll, where the action is continuous all along it and there is no fixed point of view. Whistler's later murals, particularly at Dorneywood (1928-29) and 19 Hill Street (1930-31), used a single fixed point of perspective judged from the position of the viewer. By the time Whistler painted

---

<sup>204</sup> '...on the lines of a Chinese wall-paper...', 'Decoration of the Refreshment Room with Mural Paintings by Mr Rex Whistler, 1927' Publicity material November 1927. TG/3/4/1. TGA.

<sup>205</sup> For images of many types of Chinoiserie wallpapers see de Emile de Bruijn (National Trust) [Online] Pinterest <http://www.pinterest.com/emiledebruijn/chinoiserie-wallpaper/> [Accessed December 10 2012].

<sup>206</sup> Barling, S. 'The Long View', *World of Interiors*, June 2011, pp. 88-89.

<sup>207</sup> Instances of interior designers mentioned in Emile de Bruijn (National Trust) [Online] <http://nttreasurehunt.wordpress.com/2012/09/06/writing-the-biography-of-a-chinese-wallpaper/> [December 10 2012]

the scheme at Plas Newydd his expertise was such that he could use multiple points of perspective along the canvas. But the Tate mural uses the Chinese 'principle of moving focus'.<sup>208</sup> Our focus shifts constantly as our eyes move around an object or scene. Due to the nature of the Refreshment Room, where people could be standing or seated at tables anywhere within it, the artist had to ensure that there was a continuous story, a series of events that unfolded around the walls.

The Chinese themes of the mural were echoed in the new interior design of the Refreshment Room. '12 small red lacquer tea tables, 48 chairs painted in red lacquer' were ordered to furnish the room, and some of the woodwork was painted in bright red to match.<sup>209</sup> The troublesome central pillars had been clad in wood and in an initial scheme for their decoration showed a delicate tracery of Oriental patterns painted over them. [Fig. 2.4] The final treatment involved covering them with gilded canvas topped with golden suns. The gold canvas was also used beneath the mural on the dado, set off by a black wood floor.<sup>210</sup> The Cecil's volume claims that Whistler had designed the room in keeping with the Oriental theme.<sup>211</sup> Certainly in later years Whistler was to design and recommend furniture and lighting schemes to complement his murals, e.g. Mottisfont (1938), but no evidence has been found in the archives to indicate that this was the case at the Tate.

---

<sup>208</sup> David Hockney on this subject in 'A Bigger Picture' in series 'Imagine', film by Bruno Wollheim, BBC 1, 30 June 2009.

<sup>209</sup> REFRESHMENT ROOM EXPENDITURE AND VARIOUS ACCOUNTS 1926-7 TG 3/4/4. TGA.

<sup>210</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.113.

<sup>211</sup> Cecil H and M, *In Search of Rex Whistler His Life and His Work*, London: Frances Lincoln, 2012, p.51.

## The painting of the Mural

At the time of the instigation of the Refreshment Room mural and the attendant renovations, building work was proceeding apace on the new galleries. When Whistler started painting in the restaurant there were less than two months to go before the Royal opening of the Modern Foreign and Sargent Galleries in June 1926.<sup>212</sup> Although the renovations of the galleries and the Refreshment Room are always treated completely separately, it is difficult to see how the two projects are not connected in terms of general improvements in the Tate Gallery as a whole. During this important year anyone commissioned for a decorative project would be assured of a high degree of visibility. It would surely also add to the pressure of such a commission for the artist, knowing they had to compete with or at least complement these expensive new exhibition spaces.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1926 Whistler wrote in his diary 'Began the "great work".'<sup>213</sup> The comment is self-deprecating but has the ring of truth; he did not underestimate the importance of this project. Expectations for this work were high. This was the most public mural he had been commissioned to create, on view to most of the Tate's visitors and, whilst not in competition with the works in the galleries surrounding it, it certainly had to meet certain professional criteria. He had had the backing of the most senior figures on the board of the Tate (apart from Sassoon) as well as the loyal support of Professor Tonks. Duveen was also not a man one would want to

---

<sup>212</sup> This took place on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1926. Accounts of the occasion do not record whether the Royal party visited the new galleries on the lower ground floors and where Whistler was busy painting the mural. Strangely for such a high profile event, it is not mentioned in any of the biographical accounts and his 1926 diary had been abandoned by this juncture.

<sup>213</sup> Whistler's diary for this initial period is unusually detailed, with long descriptive entries on his activities and meetings. Entry 22 April, 'Rex Whistler Diary 7 March – 17 May 1926' RWA.

disappoint. In the eyes of Aitken and Tonks this mural was to serve as an example to other companies as to what could be achieved with funding, bare walls and young artists keen to paint murals.<sup>214</sup> Whistler was to be paid £5 a week for the work, a figure of about £250 in today's value or £1000 a month.<sup>215</sup> For an artist at this early stage in his career this would seem to be a fairly respectable amount. In Tonks's eyes the Tate was getting Whistler too cheaply, once the work was underway he describes it as only 'a living wage'.<sup>216</sup>

The mural marked a transition point in Whistler's life. His funded studentship at the Slade ended on the same day that he took his designs to the Tate for approval by Tonks and Aitken.<sup>217</sup> His diary records feelings of sadness at leaving 'the beloved Slade... with a heavy heart.'<sup>218</sup> He was now in paid employment, for at least eighteen months, and had to learn how to manage his finances, relying solely on his income from the Tate commission and from any other works that happened to sell. Very few other commissions are recorded for this period, which indicates the restrictions imposed by this project. He left home and moved into a flat in Fitzroy Street, with £100 of rent paid by a benefactor found through Edith Olivier.<sup>219</sup> The Tate commission required the maturity to paint in a largely autonomous fashion; the creative content was not something prescribed by a committee. Whistler had an independence of mind and approach from a very early stage in his development but the scale of this project, both in size and time frame,

---

<sup>214</sup> 'Suggested draft for the Letter to Business Managers...'1927, TG3/4/3. TGA

<sup>215</sup> Relative values calculated from Officer, L. and Williamson, S., "Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present," MeasuringWorth, 2014[Online] [www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/](http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/) [July 23 2014]

<sup>216</sup> Tonks to Aitken, August 18 1927, 'Tate' folder, Correspondence Files, RWA.

<sup>217</sup> 27 March entry. 'Diary', *ibid*.

<sup>218</sup> 27 and 29 March. *Ibid*

<sup>219</sup> Lady Mary Morrison of Fonthill, Whistler, 1985, p.97.

put his powers of creativity to the test. He was, to a large extent, left to introduce elements and subjects much of his own choosing but had to learn how to justify these working practices when Tonks and Aitken came on regular visits of inspection. Suggestions or criticisms were made, but apparently politely ignored.<sup>220</sup>

Tonks decided that Whistler would need assistance with this size of scheme and Nan (Katharine Anne) West, a fellow student at the Slade was selected. Ironically he was later to comment that this had probably been unnecessary, given the speed at which Whistler was able to paint.<sup>221</sup> West was paid £3 a week and her duties were initially to square up the designs from Whistler's drawings and then transfer them to the canvas.<sup>222</sup> Once the painting had started she mixed paint, cleaned brushes, and also modelled for many of the women in the mural.<sup>223</sup> West's (unpublished) autobiography gives the fullest account of Whistler painting the mural and has been drawn on by both Whistler biographies.<sup>224</sup> Whistler's imprint on the Tate design is so strong that it is difficult to discern any input from West into the finished painting. She was drawing purely from Whistler's designs and it is not known whether she actually painted any of the surface. However, she was rather more experienced than this fairly menial position would indicate and was already working on the mural scheme for the new outpatient department of the

---

<sup>220</sup> Ibid. pp. 109-10.

<sup>221</sup> Letter Archie Balfour to Laurence Whistler 22 August 1958. 'Tate' Correspondence Files. RWA.

<sup>222</sup> Invoice from West 2.Dec.1927 for '19.5 days' work...', receipt from Aitken, and entries in 'Duveen Fund Mural Paintings 1926' account book. TG/3/4/3, TGA.

<sup>223</sup> Extracts from 'Against the Tide' unpublished auto-biography of Nan West. P.10. 'Tate' Correspondence Files, RWA.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid. However West's own commission at the RNOH is not mentioned in either book, presumably because it might detract from Whistler's central position in the narrative to have another muralist in the frame.

Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital.<sup>225</sup> Ultimately Tonks was eager to down play any part that she might have played in the Tate mural, saying ‘it would be unfair to Whistler’.<sup>226</sup> In fact *The Times* critic, whom Tonks considered the key journalist to attract, did mention Nan West in his review.<sup>227</sup>

The affixing technique Whistler employed for this mural was the same as he used at Shadwell and which became his preferred method. The surface to be painted was canvas which was then marouflaged onto millboard. On three walls of the Tate Refreshment Room the board was then attached to a timber stud wall – behind which was a large void that hid the ugly pipes and cabling that had presented such a problem at the initial stages of the process. On the external window wall the three openings made this method of affixed canvas impossible and so this section is painted directly onto the plaster.

Access to the mural during conservation work in 2013 has allowed for a more detailed examination of Whistler’s techniques and working practices. The mural is always described as unfinished and when it is viewed in isolation and bright light the extent of the incomplete areas is very marked. Of these, the most noticeable are the figures, many of which are just roughly sketched in pencil. For instance, the triumphant return to the ducal palace in the final section of the mural is missing most of the members of the hunting party. [Fig. 2.5] Yet the townscapes and

---

<sup>225</sup> Ibid. The department was opened in 1927.

<sup>226</sup> ‘There is no reason whatever that Miss West should be mentioned in your account of the Decoration’... Tonks to Aitken 23 October 1927. Tate Correspondence Files, RWA.

<sup>227</sup> ‘Tate Gallery’ *The Times* 21 November 1927 p.19.

individual buildings throughout the composition are carefully rendered, perhaps indicating Whistler's predilection for architecture.

With little natural light and a fairly rudimentary electric lighting scheme in the restaurant the artist had to make the work as visible as possible. He applied the paint in very diluted layers, almost like watercolour 'washes', over a white ground which reflected the available light.<sup>228</sup> The tonality is fairly pale, with few areas of opacity or impasto. The distinctive greens used to render the sea and landscape throughout the mural are indicative of the hues he uses in subsequent paintings. The base green is mainly viridian, a blue green, and many of the colours used are mixed with this in order to give continuity to the scheme.<sup>229</sup> [Fig 2.6] It has been suggested that Whistler was using viridian to achieve the more historical visual effect of malachite or azurite.<sup>230</sup>

## Composition and context

The setting for the party's departure and arrival is a typical Whistler conceit of a Palladian, Georgian and eighteenth-century townscape. In order to create a natural beginning and end to the narrative, Whistler has placed the town, 'Epicurania', in the corner of the room from where the party departs in a clockwise direction, eventually returning to the adjoining corner. [Figs. 2.7,8 & 9] The group of hunters travel through landscapes varying from English pastoral to Italian mountains,

---

<sup>228</sup> Details of underpainting from O'Leary, M Rex *Whistler A Comparative Study of Three Decorative Schemes*, unpublished Post-Graduate research project for Courtauld Institute of Art, in collaboration with the National Trust, 2000, p.7 -8.

<sup>229</sup> O'Leary, 2000, p.7-8.

<sup>230</sup> Discussion with Sam Hodge, freelance conservator working on the mural, September 2013.



across rivers and lakes, via English mills, classical follies and Palladian bridges. The Tate mural offers the first opportunity to see the motifs that Whistler employed in many of his subsequent murals: the amalgamation of diverse pieces of architecture into a townscape; the use of distant vistas to give a feeling of depth; landscape treatments that reveal a study of classical artists such as Claude and Poussin; and the use of statuary and heraldic figures in an almost cartoon- like fashion where they appear to become live forms. The giant caryatids that flank the restaurant's entrance are not quite the immobile statues that one would expect, and rather than the blank stare of a stone figure their faces seem to gaze out at the viewer with a quizzical expression. [Fig. 2.10]

Whistler's use of perspective and optical tricks in the mural were extremely sophisticated, particularly when one bears in mind that he was twenty years old and just completing his Slade studentship. The leap in style and content from his decorations at Shadwell is considerable and indicates an assimilation of influences and a growing confidence in his technique. It is difficult, and sometimes unfair to try and pin down how or why artists develop in a certain way, although the temptation is always to look at the external factors that could give rise to change. In Whistler's case the months since the completion of Shadwell had seen his deepening friendship with Edith Olivier through whom he had access to Wilton House and its grounds, including the Palladian Bridge whose image appears throughout his work. Another source of the architectural inspiration was Stowe, where his brother Laurence was at school. [Fig. 2.11] The grottoes and follies within the grounds, such as the Boycott Pavilion and Stowe's own Palladian bridge

were introduced frequently into the murals. More discussion of these influences will take place in Chapter Three.

The works from these collections of Modern European paintings that were hanging in such close proximity to the Refreshment Room would at first glance have had little apparent influence on the mural being painted within. However there is evidence in a preparatory sketch that shows Whistler was more directly influenced by contemporary French painting than would have been assumed. This is a design for a scene for the main wall where the party are travelling through a jungle in pursuit of game. In the foreground of the sketch are two men, both with rifles, and a woman seated on the ground. [Fig. 2.12] The three figures bear a marked resemblance to those in Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* (1863). One of the men is propped on one elbow and is in the unmistakeable pose of the main figure in Manet's painting. Whistler has reversed the composition, putting the reclining male on the left rather than the right. In this configuration the nude woman is now a man, looking away from the viewer, and the third figure is in the same place as the original but is a woman.

How had Whistler seen the painting to reference it in such a fashion? It is unlikely that he could have seen it in the flesh by 1926. Etchings were made of most well-known paintings and it is possible that Whistler could have seen it in reproduction. This in turn raises an interesting issue of an artist who is perceived as looking only to a classical past for his references 'borrowing' from a work that, even at that time, was regarded as resolutely modern. Of course, it is well-documented that

Manet may have used as his own inspiration the engraving of the Raphael drawing of the *Judgement of Paris* but it is unlikely that Whistler would have used this source. This sketch is about the three figures, as is Manet's painting, whereas the Raphael drawing/Raimondi engraving is a composition full of different figures.

This sketch, which was heavily annotated and planned out in terms of colour and composition, and squared up for transfer, was not in the end used in the mural. It was not replaced by anything else, and it seems as though Whistler felt the composition was more balanced without the prominence of the figure group in the foreground.<sup>231</sup>

This is the only mural of Rex Whistler's that has a title, presumably given by the artist although this is not certain. A detailed narrative was retro-fitted on to the mural shortly after its completion, largely written by Edith Olivier with the assistance of a sketch plan drawn and annotated by Whistler.<sup>232</sup> Captions were given to various scenes depicted and names assigned to places and characters. These names were made up of puns and topical references, for instance the 'Palace of Joisigonne' – Inigo Jones, and 'Woste, a magnificent park' is Stowe.<sup>233</sup> The young man on a bicycle who plays a leading role is 'Krol Dudziarz', Rex Whistler in Polish, who fittingly draws caricatures and sketches. Characters from Whistler's life appear such as Stephen Tennant 'the Crown Prince Etienne' and Henry Tonks

---

<sup>231</sup> An examination was carried out by the author with the conservators in September 2013 but no traces exist in drawing or underpainting in the finished mural.

<sup>232</sup> The sketch plan is in the Tate Folder, RWA. This eventually became Whistler R. and Olivier O., *A Guide to the Duchy of Epicurania with some Account of the Famous Expedition in Pursuit of Rare Meats as described by Edith Olivier*, London: Tate Gallery Publishing 1954.

<sup>233</sup> Olivier, 1954, pp. 18 and 23.

‘Professor Knots Master Professor of the Academy of Arts’.<sup>234</sup> Heinemann were approached to publish this account, which would have presumably capitalised on the popularity of the mural and its attendant publicity. However it was rejected in no uncertain terms as likely to harm the mural’s standing.<sup>235</sup> It was published eventually by the Tate, ten years after Whistler’s death.<sup>236</sup>

It is difficult to work out how much of the narrative contained in the account was in the artist’s mind when he created the work. From its inception it was described as a story about a “Search for Rare Foods” but whether Whistler had always intended to insert himself as a lead character is uncertain. A number of his murals, for instance Dorneywood and Plas Newydd, contain actual self-portraits and it thus seems likely that this was an early experiment. But here the large number of personal references alters the perception of the work from a piece of visual fiction into something more biographically related to the artist. Although he became practised in providing individual references to his clients in his commissioned works none of these subsequent murals contained such personal connotations.

## **Funding and costs**

In all accounts of the project where the cost is mentioned, the figure of £500 is given as the donation from Duveen.<sup>237</sup> The figure originally came from the

---

<sup>234</sup> Middelboe, P., 1989, p.67. The bust on the right hand side of the kitchen entrance panel bears the features of Tonks.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid, p.72.

<sup>236</sup> In 1953 a letter from the Tate to Laurence Whistler regarding a new folding card to be produced on the mural asks ‘if there is any story attached to these murals’ and perhaps the book was then suggested as an answer. Tate Correspondence Files, RWA.

<sup>237</sup> This figure is to be found in the media coverage of the time and has been used in all descriptions since, including Laurence Whistler’s biography and the catalogue raisonné.

information sent out by Aitken as the time of the mural's unveiling drew near, and thus it became widely disseminated through the press and media.<sup>238</sup> However this figure of £500 is misleading. Examination of the invoices and receipts in the archive has revealed that the total cost was over £725 plus another £100 requested by Aitken for furnishing the refreshment room, and £100 bonus to Whistler at the end of the project.<sup>239</sup> In July 1927, as costs were mounting, Aitken sought reassurance from Duveen that he would not object to a small overspend.<sup>240</sup> The final statement shows that the original figure of £500 had increased to over £1000, and was not quite the bargain that the Tate suggested.<sup>241</sup> It seems odd that the Tate persistently covered up the truth about the costs. The more Duveen gave the more generous he appeared so it seems unlikely that the denial was to protect him. More likely was that Aitken and his fellow directors and trustees did not want the public to think that the organisation was spending extravagantly, particularly with the recent opening of the new extensions.

---

Whistler, L. 1985, p.90. Birchall, H. 'The Most Amusing room in Europe', *British Art Journal* Vol VI, No.2, Autumn 2005, pp.58-65. , Birchall, H. *In Pursuit of Rare Meats: The Rex Whistler Mural Tate Britain Restaurant*, London: Tate Publishing, 2003, *The Times* 21 Nov 1927 p.19, *Morning Post* 1 Dec 1927, *The Daily Chronicle* 22 Nov 1927,

<sup>238</sup> 'Suggested Draft for the Letter to Business Managers' invite to Opening of Refreshment Room and other PR material, TG/3/4/1, TGA.

<sup>239</sup> 'Interim Statement of accounts for the Refreshment Room decorations' TG 3/4/3 TGA. Tonks was insistent that his protégé should receive an extra payment in reward for his hard work, having only 'been paid a living wage' for the project Tonks to Aitken August 18 1927 GALLERY RECORDS TG 3/4/2. TGA.

<sup>240</sup> Letter Aitken to Daniel, July 12 1927. *ibid*.

<sup>241</sup> Resume of Refreshment Room Expenditure Total £1084.16.11 undated, Refreshment Room Expenditure and Various Accounts 1926-7, TG 3/4/4.

## Murals in the 1920s

‘a movement on which is built much of our hopes for the future of art in England.’<sup>242</sup>

The commissioning of the Tate mural was proof positive that the efforts of Tonks, Rothenstein and Aitken towards establishing a mural movement in England and keeping the importance of mural painting in the public eye was bearing fruit. The types of commissions included works for national events such as the British Empire Exhibition in 1924, civic and parliamentary buildings such as Northampton City Hall (1925) and St Stephen’s Hall at the Palace of Westminster (1924-27), and educational establishments and hospitals such as Morley College (1928-30) and the previously mentioned Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital (1927).<sup>243</sup>

How do Whistler’s murals at the Tate Gallery compare with these? In contrast to the grandeur and formality of the murals by the Rome Scholars at St Stephen’s Hall who had to convey various historical scenes in the ‘Building of Britain’, the Tate murals were personal, on a human scale and were not didactic in any sense. Due to their location and purpose the Westminster artists were subject to stringent control and censorship whereas Whistler, having had his sketches approved by the Tate committee was able to pursue his inspiration relatively freely. H M Office of Works was closely involved in both projects.<sup>244</sup> The Westminster murals were in effect more like history paintings in their scale and subject and it was felt this

---

<sup>242</sup> ‘The Fine Arts’ *The London Mercury* January 1928 p.317. Tate Gallery Misc file TG3/4/3.TGA.

<sup>243</sup> Respectively A K Lawrence; Colin Gill; Glyn Philpot, Colin Gill, A K Lawrence, George Clausen, Thomas Monnington, William Rothenstein, Charles Sims and Vivian Forbes; Edward Bawden, Eric Ravilious and Charles Mahoney; Nan West.

<sup>244</sup> Reflecting the importance of the government scheme, Lord Peel, the First Commissioner, was on that committee whilst his deputy, Earle, supervised the Tate.

made them not only inaccessible but irrelevant to the viewer.<sup>245</sup> This idea that they were not just painting the past, but were living in it, led to a question in the House as to whether any of the artists had actually noticed the General Strike whilst they were working.<sup>246</sup> The event was certainly marked by Whistler whose diaries give a lively account of the experience of trying to travel and work in London during the Strike.<sup>247</sup>

Although *The Pursuit of Rare Meats* was not portraying an historical event, neither was it set in the present. The figures are an odd mix of Edwardian and Victorian, but of a recent enough past for the general public to be able to relate to them, whereas the St Stephen's panels represented a distant history lesson. Willsdon posits that their appeal was too 'rarefied' for a public in the 1920s that was seeking more modern forms of entertainment and visual culture<sup>248</sup>, which was closer to what was on offer on the walls of the Tate Refreshment Room.<sup>249</sup> Whistler's mural was perceived as contemporary and fashionable and many critics suggested that it strongly referenced characters and culture of the time, such as the Sitwells, who it was thought the troupe of travellers were based on<sup>250</sup>, and the 'spirit of the Russian Ballet'.<sup>251</sup> The review in the *London Mercury* compares the murals at the Tate, the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital and St Stephen's Hall, commenting that Whistler's and West's decorations benefit from not rendering their subjects

---

<sup>245</sup> Willsdon, C., 2000, p.141.

<sup>246</sup> Question from Mr Lawson to Captain Hacking *Parliamentary Debates* 17 December 1925, *ibid.*, p.141.

<sup>247</sup> Entries for 5 – 7 May 'Rex Whistler Diary 7 March – 17 May 1926'. RWA.

<sup>248</sup> Willsdon, C., 2000, p.141.

<sup>249</sup> Unfortunately Willsdon attempts to make tenuous connections between the Westminster murals and the Tate scheme, notably that the Crown Prince Etienne in the latter is a reference to St Stephen's Hall. Whistler's work is not really discussed on its own merits but is assumed to be a sort of homage to Gill, Lawrence and others at Westminster, *ibid.*, p.368.

<sup>250</sup> Tate Gallery' *The Times* 21 November 1927 p.19 issue 44744. *The Times* digital archive.

<sup>251</sup> 'The Fine Arts' *The London Mercury* January 1928 p.317. Tate Gallery Misc file TG3/4/3.TGA.

‘monumental or dramatic’ as opposed to the Westminster artists whose results are ‘stilted and unimaginative’.<sup>252</sup> It is interesting to compare the lack-lustre critical reception of the Westminster murals to the positive response of the press to the Tate scheme. The Westminster scheme was officially opened in June 1927 and the Tate in November the same year. J B Manson, Assistant Curator at the Tate, wrote of Whistler’s skill in creating a work that was both in harmony with its surroundings, and its potential audience, in contrast to the State scheme muralists who had applied a sort of flattened realism to their subjects and also failed to enhance the location.<sup>253</sup> The inference is that the young artist at the Tate had fully understood the function of murals and the more mature and experienced team at Westminster had not.

### **Nan West and the murals at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital (1927)**

The scheme that Nan West created at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital in Bolsover Street had many elements in common with the mural that she was working on with Whistler.<sup>254</sup> The outpatients’ hall was a vast triple height room from which twelve main doors opened leading to offices and clinic rooms. [Fig.2.13]The space available for West to decorate was ninety square metres in total, with murals above each door, a larger canvas at one end and seventeen

---

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Manson, J. B, ‘Mural Decorations at the Tate Gallery’, *Saturday Review* 17 December 1927. TG3/4/5 TGA.

<sup>254</sup> The RNOH scheme was Grade II listed in 1998.



smaller frieze paintings.<sup>255</sup> West's style is delicate and illustrative, with the light quality of watercolour despite being painted in oil. The murals have a very English flavour, the style informed by West's love of Wilson, Girtin and Cotman, and the seasonal theme took as its inspiration lines from Shelley, Marvell or Shakespeare.<sup>256</sup> Her figures are much more contemporary in clothing and appearance than the mix of period style in Whistler's figures.

### **Morley College (1928-30)**

Perhaps a more useful comparison to Whistler's work at the Tate, was the scheme at Morley College (1928-30) which happened as a direct result of the Tate. Duveen had asked to be informed of other similar opportunities, in the public realm, that could be brought to fruition with appropriate funding. He spoke of the 'excellent propaganda' created by the Tate mural, particularly in terms of providing employment to artists.<sup>257</sup> Duveen was astute in his use of publicity and, ever conscious that his role as an art dealer had connotations of unethical behaviour, needed his acts of philanthropy to be given maximum exposure. Having promoted Whistler in both the Shadwell and the Tate scheme Duveen suggested seeking 'another budding genius' for a subsequent project.<sup>258</sup> Aitken was then approached by the Principal of Morley College and Duveen agreed to fund mural decorations,

---

<sup>255</sup> International Fine Art Conservation Studios Ltd. 'Report and Estimate Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital' 27 May 1998. This and the DCMS Listing report courtesy of Stephanie Williamson, Deputy Project Director Head of Design & Healthcare Planning, RNOH.

<sup>94</sup> Details of Nan West's inspiration from information written by her niece, undated, displayed in the Waiting Room in 2009.

<sup>255</sup> Letter Duveen to Aitken 20 December 1927. TG/3/4/3. TGA.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

again for a refreshment room and also for a wall of the Concert Hall.<sup>259</sup> Six students who had recently graduated from the Royal College of Art submitted designs.<sup>260</sup> The successful candidates were Eric Ravilious and Edward Bawden for the Refreshment Room and Charles Mahoney for the stage wall. The rate was again £1 a day each for a two year period.<sup>261</sup>

The College's close links with the Old Vic Theatre suggested subjects related to theatrical pursuits and Bawden and Ravilious chose to portray scenes from Shakespeare, Miracle Plays and allegorical fancies. Like the Tate, the room was at basement level with various windows and doors to be incorporated into the design. In the event, the two artists worked together so closely that their individual walls were almost indistinguishable. The murals were intricate and compositionally complex. Whereas Whistler's mural showed the influence of Classical architecture, Claudian landscapes, and Chinoiserie, Bawden and Ravilious – influenced by a trip to Italy - were drawing on an Italian model, particularly Giotto's frescoes at Padua where the action, full of people and incident, takes place in canopied rooms and under columned porticoes.<sup>262</sup> The artists employed similar structures in the mural, creating multi-layered stage sets, on which were scenes from plays such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest*, or Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*.<sup>263</sup> These were placed against a stylised backdrop of undulating landscape or

---

<sup>259</sup> Rothenstein, W., *Since Fifty*, London: Faber & Faber, 1939. pp. 90-91.

<sup>260</sup> *Eric Ravilious Imagined Realities*. Exhibition catalogue by Alan Powers, London: Imperial War Museum Philip Wilson Publishers, 2004, p.11. It is not known why the RCA was awarded this commission, but Aitken perhaps felt it was only fair play to give this opportunity to Rothenstein.

<sup>261</sup> Rothenstein, like Tonks, felt his protégées were being underpaid, like 'dustmen and plumbers' but the artists presumably were glad of the work. *The Times* Monday, Feb 18, 1929; pg. 7; Issue 45130; col E. <http://infotrac.galegroup.com>.

<sup>262</sup> Yorke, M., *Edward Bawden and His Circle*, Suffolk: Antique Collector's Club, 2007, p.56 regarding Italian travel, and also in Powers, op. cit. p.14.

<sup>263</sup> Russell, J., "PM Praises 'things of no use'" [Online] Blog entry for October 5 2011 <http://jamesrussellontheweb.blogspot.co.uk/2011/10/> [2 January 2013]

seashore, above which were scudding clouds, and floating figures, many mythological in origin.<sup>264</sup> [Fig. 2.14] Mahoney's panel was entitled *The Pleasures of Life* and featured the seven muses of the arts.<sup>265</sup> Unlike the unusual composition of the Refectory wall, these panels appear to have followed a more conventional plan.

Alan Powers suggests that the power of the imagination was the strongest link between Whistler, Ravilious and Bawden's murals, stemming from the experience and aptitude the artists had in illustration.<sup>266</sup> In a rare (recorded) comment on contemporary works Rex Whistler found them 'quite enchanting'.<sup>267</sup> The types of worlds created at the Tate and Morley College were certainly dreamlike and designed to encourage contemplation and visual distraction.<sup>268</sup> The Morley College murals were well received, but did not generate the huge critical excitement that Whistler's scheme at the Tate had created three years earlier.<sup>269</sup> However Duveen was delighted with the outcome and instructed Rothenstein to approach him with another project.<sup>270</sup>

All of these mural schemes are indicative of the multiplicity of approaches that were being employed at this time. None of the Morley College muralists were

---

<sup>264</sup> Ravilious seems to look forward to future paintings in one of his panels, showing the Long Man of Wilmington in the background, featured in a 1939 painting.

<sup>265</sup> Unfortunately no photographs seem to exist of Mahoney's finished scheme in the Concert Hall, but a large compositional study survives. This can be seen on [Online] <http://www.lissfineart.com/search-display/2820>. [January 2 2013]

<sup>266</sup> Powers, 2004, p.12.

<sup>267</sup> Whistler, 1985, p. 111. It is not known when he saw them.

<sup>268</sup> To encourage the 'reading' of the Morley College mural a written explanation was available to the Refectory visitors, whereas the Tate mural narrative was not published until 25 years later Yorke, M., 2007, p.58.

<sup>269</sup> 'Morley College Paintings' *The Times*, Friday, Feb 07, 1930, pg. 16; Issue 45431.

<sup>270</sup> Rothenstein, 1939, p.91.

Rome Scholars. As with the schemes at the Tate and the RNOH these murals are not attempting to be monumental in scale or to portray heroic subjects. The State or civic schemes for government and institutions such as County Halls needed the gravitas and seriousness of the Rome approach, which often translated into a heavy-handed and lifeless historicism. Where the brief was less prescriptive, and the funding was usually private, the artists were free to create in a more expressive and personal manner.

Sadly all the schemes at Morley College were destroyed in the London blitz of 1940. Nan West's career was short-lived and hence her murals at the RNOH are not particularly well known.<sup>271</sup> However they are recognised as being of special interest and in the recent redevelopment of the Hospital were removed and restored for posterity.<sup>272</sup> Rex Whistler's mural at the Tate is still well-known and probably the work of his which most people are familiar with. If the Morley College murals had survived, they would surely have benefited from the renewed interest in Ravilious over the last decade. Very few large scale mural cycles of this period are still extant which makes those that have survived of particular significance.

---

<sup>271</sup> West suffered a mental breakdown in the later 1930s and later committed suicide, date unknown.

<sup>272</sup> With the relocation of the Hospital the old building is in private hands, and after refurbishment, including the murals, the old Outpatients Hall was to be marketed as a design office. Email Stephanie Williamson Deputy Project Director, Head of Design & Healthcare Planning, RNOH to author, July 18 2012.

## Conclusions

Whistler's career as a muralist was launched by the mural in the Tate Gallery Refreshment Room. He was already gaining some success as an illustrator and easel painter, and would have continued to do so, but this event catapulted him into the limelight. Through his friendships with Stephen Tennant and Edith Olivier he was already making the contacts that would provide his future commissions. However, the celebrity and general acclaim granted by the success of the Tate meant that he became a much more attractive and fashionable proposition to these clients, much more quickly. The circles of patronage that emanated from this will be further examined in Chapter Six. Whereas Tonks and Aitken were focused on inviting the sort of guests to the unveiling who could fund further opportunities for young British artists in general, in fact many commissions went to Whistler himself. Sir Courtauld Thomson was at the private view and commissioned him for a mural within a matter of weeks, as was C B Cochran, the theatre impresario, who engaged him for stage designs. Evelyn Shaw of the British School at Rome attended the opening and offered Whistler an Honorary Scholarship to the School the following year, an experience which was key to his artistic development.

One of the intentions of this chapter was to ascertain just what made this mural quite so popular. To establish why a particular work finds favour with both the general public and the critics is an inexact process. The question of how it gained such attention is more straightforward. Tonks and Aitken were tremendously well-connected in the art world. Tonks in particular knew how to work the press to his advantage. As the mural was being painted in a public location it was easy to invite

various experts and influential people to have a look at it as it progressed.<sup>273</sup> Aitken and Tonks were engaging in what today would be known as ‘hype’ to drive up interest in their protégé and the work itself. One way to get the opening on to as many newspaper pages as possible was to invite a celebrity to do the honours. The first choice had been Winston Churchill, who had expressed interest in the murals but was not available,<sup>274</sup> but the second choice George Bernard Shaw probably generated more column inches with a witty and topical speech which was widely reported.

A study of the reviews of the mural gives some clues as to its positive reception. The figurative nature of the mural was welcomed by many of the critics, especially those who were not enamoured of the abstract or overtly modernist works of the period. One writer welcomed Whistler’s designs as ‘a return to sanity... a rehabilitation of the...*subject* of the picture.’<sup>275</sup> Indeed Manson in his article ponders what would have happened if Edward Wadsworth had been invited to decorate the Refreshment Room.<sup>276</sup> The conclusion was that he would not have created an appropriate work for the location. This plaudit ‘appropriate’ appears in numerous of the reviews; Whistler had produced a very fitting work for the Refreshment Room in subject, composition, tone and technique. The story conveyed in the panels and the humorous references made it easy to follow and, most importantly, easy to write about. The fact that it was in one of the most famous galleries in England, but in the restaurant rather than on the walls meant

---

<sup>273</sup> In this way the architect and writer Patrick Abercrombie, and the art historian and critic R H Wilenski, to name but two of the visitors, had seen and publicly praised the mural before it was even complete. Whistler, 1985, p110.

<sup>274</sup> Letter from Viscount D’Abernon to Aitken, undated, Gallery Records TG 3/4/2, TGA.

<sup>275</sup> ‘Decorations at the Tate Gallery’, *The Architect & Building News*, 9 December 1927, *ibid.*, TGA.

<sup>276</sup> Manson, J. B, ‘Mural Decorations at the Tate Gallery’, *ibid.*, TGA.

that it could be written about by a news reporter, an architectural critic as well as an arts correspondent. The murals were enchanting, delightful, amusing. The artist was young, modest, and talented. It all made for good copy.

But the Tate equally benefited from the media attention, which must at the very least have reflected well on Aitken and his committee, as well as the philanthropy of Duveen. Rather than publicity for a precious work of art hanging in one of its galleries this was to do with a painting that had been commissioned to cover up some dreary walls. Furthermore, it was by an artist that until this point had been largely unknown.<sup>277</sup> The Refreshment Room became famous in its own right almost overnight with more words written about its mural than had been bestowed on any of the Tate's works acquired through normal means. It is not known whether visitor numbers increased as a result.

Since its unveiling the mural has not always enjoyed a privileged position within Tate Britain for reasons to do with fashion, the canonical status of both the artwork and the artist and its very location, all of which have placed it under threat. Significantly, it is not regarded as part of the Tate collection and it has never been accessioned. This decision was made by Aitken even as the project was in its planning stages in October 1925, stating that the work was to 'be of the nature of furniture' and this status was not helped by its location which set it 'quite apart

---

<sup>277</sup> Although the Shadwell murals were reviewed in *The Times*, 'A Slade Experiment at Shadwell' 24 September 1924 p.7, Issue 43765.

from the Exhibition galleries'.<sup>278</sup> The mural is now classified on the Tate website as one of the 'Works in the fabric of Tate buildings'.<sup>279</sup>

---

<sup>278</sup> The justifications appear in a letter to Lionel Earle, at H M Office of Works, and may thus have been to do with minimising any future expenses that might occur if the mural was treated as part of the art collections. Aitken to Earle 24 October 1925. TG 3/4/1, TGA.

<sup>279</sup> Which at Tate Britain also includes the Boris Anrep mosaic pavement in Gallery II (1923) and the Ervin Bossanyi stained glass window '*The Angel Blesses the Women Washing Clothes*' (1938-43) <http://www.tate.org.uk/about/our-work/collection/about-the-collection/works-in-the-fabric-of-tate-buildings/mosaic-pavement-gallery-two> accessed 2 Jan 2013.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **INFLUENCES AND INSPIRATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The function of this chapter is to explore the factors that influenced and inspired Rex Whistler throughout his creative life. The art and architecture of Rome has often been regarded as his inspirational muse, and this chapter will outline how Rome – and Italy – were instrumental to Whistler’s development as an artist. In addition, it will seek to identify the other cultural sources and inspirations that made a significant impact on his imagination and perception.

Whistler was at a particularly crucial stage of his artistic development when he made his first trip to Europe in 1924-25 aged nineteen. He was in his third year at the Slade and had just completed the initial phase of his first mural project, a large scheme at the Highways Boys’ Club in Shadwell. This tour of France, Switzerland, and Italy offered new visual and cultural stimuli and new ways to record them. From this first visit Rome had a deep hold on his psyche and this reached its culmination in his residency at the British School at Rome as an Honorary Scholar in 1928. The chapter will offer a detailed analysis of the diaries, sketchbooks and correspondence held in the Whistler Archive that the artist produced from both of these important experiences, showing how they impacted on his thinking, practice

and perception. This material has been further analysed to establish the actual locations referred to, what he might have seen there, what was in the galleries in the years he visited, and how these preliminary sketches found their way into finished works.

With its close allegiance to the 'monumental art' of decorative painting, the British School at Rome offers an opportunity to situate Whistler amongst his contemporaries in the murals field. Access to the BSR archive has shed considerable light on the School's ideals and expectations which were disseminated through the programme of study to be followed. The circumstances, requirements and objectives of his studentship were very different to those of the other Rome Scholars. His intense interest in classical, Renaissance and Baroque Rome was also at odds with the tastes of his contemporaries. These differences will be explored through comparisons, and some unexpected connections, between his work and that of his fellow students.

Whistler's experiences both in England and further afield were inextricably bound up with the individuals who expanded his artistic and social horizons, particularly Stephen Tennant, Edith Olivier and Lord Gerald Berners. These relationships will be explored more fully, looking at the ways in which they facilitated his travels both logistically and financially, introduced him to new cultural stimuli, and encouraged and supported his creativity.

The third section of this chapter will examine in more detail the influences and themes in Whistler's work. These include Baroque, both Italian and German; the eighteenth century, particularly in English design and architecture of both the Georgian period and the later Regency; and French painters of the seventeenth century, especially Claude and Poussin. This is to name the most obvious and recognised sources; there are many others to be identified. Associated with these influences are various leitmotifs or themes that Whistler used recurrently, particularly in his murals, and this chapter will provide a full examination of their sources and usage throughout his subsequent decorative schemes.

It is important to emphasise the distinction between mere pastiche and the sensitive interpretation or synthesis that Whistler employed. The term pastiche has been used, often in a derogatory fashion, to describe his approach but this chapter will argue that this is a reductive reading of his practice. It will also analyse the potentially awkward demarcation between this synthesis, and appropriation. Writing on Whistler tends to be reverential, but the more robust approach taken by this thesis can allow these issues to be debated. In the end result, recognising where an artist has found their sources gives a greater understanding of their working methods and tastes. For a rather reticent figure such as Whistler this is essential. Equally, the intense analysis of the motifs and themes that he employed throughout his work could also risk diminishing its artistic integrity by reducing its constituents to a sort of repetitive romantic miscellany. Again the intention has been to analyse his work in a way that has never been attempted before, and the results have provided valuable insights into his working practices.

## A 'Grand Tour' – Europe 1924-1925

By the twentieth century the idea of a Grand Tour undertaken by a wealthy young gentleman to explore the culture and experiences of the classical world was somewhat out-moded. However the European sojourn that Whistler enjoyed in 1924-5 had something of that model. He was invited to accompany Stephen Tennant on a trip abroad and was given extended leave from the Slade. The trip eventually lasted six months and was undertaken in some comfort and luxury with all expenses met by Tennant's wealthy family. It was certainly not a venture that Whistler's family could have subsidised. It was described in the social column of the *Daily Mirror* as 'Mr Tennant's Reading Interlude' where 'a party of two or three young men and a tutor' would 'study and indulge in winter sports' in Switzerland.<sup>280</sup>

En route in Paris, Whistler paid his first visit to the Louvre.<sup>281</sup> In Switzerland their education was kept up with private tutors, one of whom taught French language and literature, including poetry by Verlaine and Baudelaire.<sup>282</sup> Whistler drew a full page watercolour illustration of Baudelaire's 'L'Horloge' in the 1924 Sketchbook.<sup>283</sup> [Fig. 3.1] The two boys were well matched in artistic interest and ability<sup>284</sup> and painted regularly together, although Whistler was the more conscientious one, using his sketchbook and illustrated letters to his mother to

---

<sup>280</sup> *Daily Mirror* 20 October 1924 quoted in Hoare, P., *Serious Pleasures The Life of Stephen Tennant* London: Penguin, 1992, p.35. There were no other young men, but they were accompanied by Tennant's nanny.

<sup>281</sup> Here Whistler apparently admired Watteau's *Pierrot*. Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid, p.36. The choice of reading material was perhaps an example of Tennant's more outré tastes, developed by a privileged and sophisticated upbringing, but also reflecting his sexual precocity.

<sup>283</sup> 1924 Sketchbook numbered 289 in Catalogue Raisonné, 'Sketchbooks', RWA.

<sup>284</sup> The indulged Tennant had even been given a London gallery show at fourteen Ibid p.20.

record it all.<sup>285</sup> Unusually, he painted the view of the mountains from the chalet in the style of a Japanese print, a form not seen previously or subsequently in his work.<sup>286</sup> [Fig. 3.2] A close study of this kind of art form has obviously been made as his signature and title have been done (in English lettering) in Japanese-style inscription blocks and seals. The inspiration is a mystery but he may not have needed an actual image of a Japanese painting to hand to work from; his visual memory – trained by years of following the precepts of the Royal Drawing Society – was acute.

From Switzerland they travelled through Italy, stopping at Milan to see ‘La Traviata’ at the Opera House and Mass at the Cathedral, a visit to Santa Maria della Grazie to see Da Vinci’s *Last Supper* and other frescoes, and the Genoa Gallery in the Palazzo Bianco. Here Whistler recorded ‘lovely paintings and sculptures by Reubens (sic) Vandyk (sic) Murillo and Filippino Lippi amongst many others.’<sup>287</sup> Having completed his first large-scale works at Shadwell, and with the proscenium there to complete on his return, he must have studied the frescoes, particularly the Da Vinci, and the interior paintings at the Duomo with a keen eye. This would have been the first time he had seen actual mural or fresco painting and would have had a significant effect. The final destination was a villa at San Remo on the Italian Riviera, where they were joined by Lady Grey (Tennant’s mother), and other guests.

---

<sup>285</sup>Letter to his mother 10 Dec 1924 describing how he and Tennant are sharing a watercolour paintbox and using it ‘all day long’, ‘Rex Whistler Letters A’, 15 ‘R to Mother Italy 25’, RWA.

<sup>286</sup> 1924 Sketchbook, *ibid*.

<sup>287</sup> Whistler to his mother, March 4 1925. *Ibid*.

The trip signalled a shift into a world far removed from his background and a concomitant desire not to appear out of place.<sup>288</sup> He was acutely aware of the discrepancy between his financial situation and Tennant's. He took with him the Slade competition prize monies, the payment for the Swettenham book, and possibly some payment from the Shadwell murals, but these did not last long. Whistler was already realising the commercial implications of his talent and, short of funds, he submitted four drawings for sale to his old school, Haileybury<sup>289</sup>, and sent four to Archie Balfour 'to get rid of for me.'<sup>290</sup> From San Remo he also wrote to Thomas Ablett, the head of the Royal Drawing Society, apologetically admitting that 'I have not 'hawked' my drawings around like this before'.<sup>291</sup> Ablett bought all three for six guineas and they were then displayed in the RDS Exhibition that summer.<sup>292</sup> From the titles of the paintings – mostly ink and watercolour drawings – at least nine of them were based on subjects near San Remo,<sup>293</sup> particularly the old ruined town of Bussana Vecchia, which Whistler describes as having the 'most eerie and forlorn feeling about it.'<sup>294</sup> In these letters from Italy Whistler began to express his emotions about what he was seeing in a more considered and expansive way.

Prior to the Slade, Whistler's drawings were predominantly from his imagination. During his second year at the Slade there was a gradual increase in drawing from life, sketches of University College itself, Tennant's house at Wilsford, that balance

---

<sup>288</sup> He requested that his parents send him a 'Burberry mackintosh' as that is 'what Stephen has'. Letter November 10 1924. Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Letters November 27 1924 and 8 December 1924. Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Letter to Balfour April 1925, Misc. Biog. Used, Correspondence Files RWA.

<sup>291</sup> Whistler to Ablett undated letter March 1925, Royal Drawing Society file, Correspondence Files, RWA.

<sup>292</sup> Whistler to Ablett, March 27 1925, *ibid*.

<sup>293</sup> 1924 Diary used for 1925, 'Diaries, Notebooks, Misc.' RWA.

<sup>294</sup> Whistler to Ablett, undated, *op. cit*.

out the earlier purely imaginative images. Italy acted as a catalyst to this inclination and inspired him to paint actual locations. Some were still painted from memory, but there was an intention to evoke the feeling and sense of the place. However this was aided with the use of a camera in Bussana Vecchia, the only recorded use of a photograph as a reference in his work.<sup>295</sup>

### ***Rome Sketchbooks 1924-1925***

For Whistler, the highlight of these travels in Europe was a brief, solo excursion to Rome and Florence in April 1925. His reactions to Rome are expressed in a letter to his mother 'at the end of my first day in the eternal city, I feel speechless with wonder at the amazing beauty and romance...' <sup>296</sup> Whistler's desire to visit Rome is attested to by his brother but what lay behind this wish? <sup>297</sup> He was reading Vasari and Cellini at the Slade which would have heightened a nascent interest in the art of Italy, encouraged by his Architecture studies, and Art History lectures from Tancred Borenius. Rome would have been in the air due to the success of Slade students in winning Scholarships to the British School at Rome, of which Tonks was a powerful supporter. It was Tonks who counselled Whistler to take full advantage of the trip, and particularly to see Rome.<sup>298</sup>

---

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Whistler, 1985, p. 80

<sup>297</sup> Ibid, p.76.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, p.76 Tonks also wished his pupil to 'call on the British School at Rome' but Whistler would have been too shy to do this.

Whistler carried two sketchbooks with him on this first trip to Rome and Florence in which are recorded his experiences, both in written and drawn format.<sup>299</sup> In the 1924 Sketchbook he outlined an extensive list of galleries and sights, including the Colosseum, the Arch of Septimius Severis, and the Palatine, and noted the Uffizi Gallery and Cathedral in Florence.<sup>300</sup> His experiences of Rome and Florence were quite distinct. In Rome it was all visual. He walked around the city, often making ink and watercolour sketches on the spot, of the Colosseum, the Arch of Septimius and the Vatican guards at St Peters. [Fig. 3.3] In contrast, the time spent in Florence was, on the evidence of the sketchbook, much less visually inspiring, with just one pen and ink drawing of the Arno. However he makes an exhaustive list of paintings that he sees at the Uffizi Gallery. Some of these he annotates with a diagram of the composition or a single element, for instance he does a tiny drawing of the profile of *Cosimo de Medici the Elder* by Pontormo, the 'dreadful frame' of Michelangelo's *The Holy Family*, and a plan of Bellini's *Sacred Conversation* 'Perfect landscape and comp' (composition). [Fig. 3.4] This painting is now known as *Sacred Allegory* and one can see why it would appeal to Whistler, with its strong architectural elements, use of perspective and Italian landscape in the background. His favourite artists are underlined, particularly Claude (with triple underlinings), and Canaletto, Rubens, Nattier, Poussin and Veronese.<sup>301</sup>

---

<sup>299</sup> Notes on use of sketchbooks. Like most artists, Whistler did not use a sketchbook in a consistent or orderly manner. Pages are thus not chronological and a book can cover several years. As they are all of different sizes, he may have used a certain volume for a particular subject. Where pages are numbered it has been done by Laurence Whistler to aid the compilation of the Catalogue Raisonné and other material. Similarly he has titled and indexed all the sketchbooks.

<sup>300</sup> 1924 Sketchbook, *ibid* and 1925 Sketchbook numbered 290 in Catalogue Raisonné, 'Sketchbooks' RWA.

<sup>301</sup> Information on the artists Whistler saw at the Uffizi [Online] <http://www.virtualuffizi.com/uffizi1/artisti.asp> [Accessed May 13 2013]

<sup>301</sup> The first phase was completed by the end of August 1924. Letter from Whistler to Ronald Fuller 30 July 1924 noted in 'Rex: Chron', Laurence Whistler's notebook, RWA.



One of the intentions of this exercise is to look for any evidence of a change in style in Whistler's work after this exposure to European culture, particularly that of Italy/ Rome. The clearest signal of an alteration in Whistler's execution and inspiration was in the second phase of the Shadwell murals, which he began work on immediately after his return to the Slade from Italy in 1925.<sup>302</sup> The differences in style between the two phases of the project are discussed at length in Chapter One. For a deeper understanding of these, the 1925 Sketchbook is a key indicator. Amongst a page of studies of church towers and ornate entrances in San Remo is an elaborate overdoor decoration.<sup>303</sup> [Fig. 3.5] Elegant figures in classical drapery recline on each side of a large inscribed shield; a convincing source for the central cartouche in the proscenium panel at Shadwell and, a few pages later in the Sketchbook, a similar arrangement appears in the plan for the mural.

This page of drawings and those that follow it are more finely wrought than subjects in the previous Sketchbooks, conveying both volume and detail with a more confident use of line. Whistler was using a much finer nib pen in these and subsequent drawings. On this page, individual architectural features are shown together, as reference material where previously these would have been contrived into a complete imaginary composition with background, foreground, and possibly figures.

To credit the experience of Rome solely with these changes and developments in Whistler's art is tempting but misleading, particularly on such a brief introduction

---

<sup>303</sup> 1925 Sketchbook p.31. Laurence Whistler has noted 'possibly San Remo' and the buildings are clearly Italian.

to the city. There were a number of other factors to take into consideration. He was very interested to see the works of the Italian masters in the galleries of Milan, Florence, and Rome, but none of his subsequent work is obviously derivative. An artist gaining in maturity will take inspiration from many sources. A case in point would be the 'Trial Scene from the Merchant of Venice' done at the Slade soon after his return. As stated in Chapter One, this was possibly influenced by his Italian experiences and definitely by the artists of the Quattrocento. However an artist did not have to see Quattrocento painting in Italy. The dominant building on the right, facing the terrace on the left of Whistler's painting is reminiscent of Crivelli's 'The Annunciation with Saint Emidius' (1486) which the artist could have seen in the National Gallery. But equally the outdoor balcony or courtyard which acts as a stage for the 'Trial Scene' is very similar to the setting of Bellini's 'Sacred Conversation' so admired by Whistler in the Uffizi. It is clear that there are many variables to consider. A change of environment, a new range of stimuli, can propel an individual to new techniques, styles, and content in their creative work. At nineteen, this was Whistler's first time abroad and being away from home for an extended period was a formative experience, Free also from the Slade's prescriptive teachings for six months Whistler could more freely explore his own style and subjects. Mixing in Tennant's cultural milieu exposed him to a whole different range of stimuli in terms of landscape and architecture, literature, art, and music.

The other drawings in this 1925 sketchbook, undertaken after Whistler's return, also display a greater maturity and confidence of style and strength in draughtsmanship. Previous sketchbooks held a lot of drawings, and illustrations to

poems and books, carried out purely from his imagination. The illustrations are prevalent throughout and indicate the facility with which he could turn to this genre in his later career. Whilst abroad the drawings became more often based on life rather than from his imagination, and this continued on his return. The term 'based on life' is the most accurate way to describe this as Whistler was still often drawing from memory rather than direct observation.<sup>304</sup>

### **Edith Olivier**

Amongst the guests invited to spend time at the villa in San Remo was Edith Olivier, a friend of Lady Grey and who had known Stephen Tennant since childhood. As stated in Chapter One, she and Whistler immediately struck up a lifelong friendship. In her fifties, clever, convivial, and lively she liked to be surrounded by artists, composers, and literary figures. A writer herself, Olivier lived at the Daye House, on the Wilton Estate where she entertained rather in the manner of an artistic hostess. Whistler was a frequent visitor from May 1925 onwards and they corresponded regularly. Although she was not aristocratic or wealthy, she was socially very well-connected. These connections were useful in order to further her young creative friends' careers. Amongst those she was nurturing in the late 1920s, when she met Whistler, were William Walton, just embarked on his career in music and Cecil Beaton who was making a name for himself as a society photographer. She was interested in contemporary literature and poetry, and numbered amongst her friends Edith Sitwell and Siegfried Sassoon. Whistler was thus introduced to a circle where intellectual discussion and

---

<sup>304</sup> '31 May 1925 ...returned to find him drawing the Palladian Bridge from memory'. Middelboe, P. *Edith Olivier: From her Journals 1924-48* London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson. p21.

frank expression of ideas and opinions was de rigeur. Whistler's letters to Olivier and her own record of their conversations provide us with the clearest impression of Whistler's personality, feelings, and opinions.

As well as providing him with commissions herself for book illustration, she both conferred social acceptance and, like Tennant, facilitated an entrée into influential circles of society.<sup>305</sup> He met Olivier's neighbours and friends, the Earl and Countess of Pembroke, who were very interested in his talents and this began to open up the circles of patronage which will be examined in more detail in Chapter Six.

The immediate surroundings of the Daye House and the Wilton Estate provided Whistler with imagery that he would use throughout his creative life. His drawings are all of the favoured south front, with its distinctive Palladian features. The grounds lead down to the River Nadder and the Palladian Bridge. First sketched by Whistler in the 1924-1925 Sketchbook, the Bridge is one of his most recurrent motifs. The continuing refinement of his style can be seen in particular on page 25, '*The Palladian Bridge, Wilton*' and an un-numbered page with '*The Grotto now called the Park School, Wilton...*' [Fig.3.6] The highly finished nature of these two Wilton drawings may be due to the fact that they were going to be shown to

---

<sup>305</sup> Olivier, E.: *The Love Child*, London: Martin Secker, 1927; *As Far as Jane's Grandmother's*, London: Martin Secker, 1928; *The Triumphant Footman*, London: Martin Secker, 1930; *Dwarf's Blood*, London: Faber and Faber, 1931; *The Seraphim Room*, London: Faber and Faber, 1932; *The Eccentric Life of Alexander Cruden*, London: Faber and Faber, 1934; *Without Knowing Mr Walkley*, London: Faber and Faber, 1938; *Country Moods and Tenses*, London: Batsford, 1941; *Night Thoughts of a Country Landlady*, London: Batsford, 1943.

Olivier, who even at this early stage in their friendship was full of praise for his talents.<sup>306</sup>

Wilton, often referred to as one of the most beautiful of England's country houses was, by some margin, the grandest house that Whistler experienced, and the first house of major architectural importance that he had studied at such close quarters. Within the House were the famous Inigo Jones designed state rooms and at their centre the magnificent Double Cube Room, with the coffered and quadratura ceiling painting by de Critz (c.1653). Around the central painting is a deep painted frieze or cornice by Edward Pierce. This is a much more personal part of the scheme, with depictions of the Pembroke family crest, monograms, and other private references painted amongst swags and classical artefacts. This would have been Whistler's first sight of murals painted specifically for the residence of a private patron and indicated to him the type of treatment such individuals might require in their murals.<sup>307</sup> The walls of the Hunting Room, where Edward Pierce's painted panels are integral to the actual panelling of the wall rather than being framed and hung, also must have been of interest to Whistler.<sup>308</sup> His future treatment of schemes such as Dorneywood and 36 Hill Street employed a similar arrangement. The collection of paintings at Wilton includes works by Van Dyck,

---

<sup>306</sup> 'such exquisite fine work, such free design, such spirit and enjouement [sic]'. P.21. Ibid. However Whistler incorrectly notes in the titles of these drawings that the bridge and the School are 'by Chambers'. The bridge was by Roger Morris and his patron the 9<sup>th</sup> Earl of Pembroke, and the School – part of an earlier grotto -was designed by Wyatt as part of his revamp of the Estate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 'Park School House' [Online] <http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/resultsingle.aspx?uid=1200089> [Accessed August 5 2014] It seems odd that this error was not picked up by Laurence Whistler, who was a keen architectural historian.

<sup>307</sup> The Cecil's biography only mentions the de Critz which seems a careless omission. P.36.

<sup>308</sup> All information from 'Wilton House' [Online] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilton\\_House](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilton_House) [Accessed May 2013]. There is a dearth of online information on Wilton House, with even the website having no resources on the history of the house. The Wikipedia article is extensive, multi-authored, and referenced and was thus considered to be a reliable source.

Lely, Rubens, and Reynolds and another painted ceiling, by Luca Giordano, in the Corner Room. After seeing the collection for the first time, Olivier records him making a very close study of the Wilton catalogue.<sup>309</sup> With an eye already keenly interested in décor and architecture, the unbridled extravagance of these interiors must have made a lasting impression on him.

In Stephen Tennant, who was always prone to a fantasy existence, Whistler could explore a rich imaginary life, whereas Edith Olivier was a stable, worldly influence. She was both muse and mentor. She encouraged his tastes in literature, introducing him to the writings of Walter Pater on the Leonardo he had seen in Milan, and architecture.<sup>310</sup> His interest in Palladio was encouraged by a gift in 1930 of a 'lovely set of Palladian books, bindings enchantingly pretty...& the engravings are far better than I have seen before'.<sup>311</sup> This may have been a set of Palladio's *The Four Books of Architecture* (*I quattro libri dell'architettura*). In his letters to her are listed books that she lent him, amongst which were a book on Botticelli with coloured plates, Vitruvius and a Life of Poussin.<sup>312</sup> For Christmas 1928 Olivier gave him an impressive book *Les Maîtres de l'Ornementation Le Style Louis XV*, published in 1925 containing 200 plates by Watteau, Boucher and other 18<sup>th</sup>-century artists.<sup>313</sup> Whistler's use of this is discussed later in this chapter.

---

<sup>309</sup> Middelboe, 1989, p.25.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid p.79

<sup>311</sup> Letter Whistler to Olivier June 24 1930, Rex Whistler Letters B, RWA.

<sup>312</sup> Letter, April 16 1930, Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Laurence Whistler has written inside the book's cover.

## Whistler at the British School at Rome 1928

In April 1928 Whistler returned to Rome for the second time, in the privileged position of an Honorary Scholar at the British School at Rome. This was a longer and more extensive opportunity to explore Rome and its environs. Rather than the normal route of a Rome Scholarship, this was awarded purely on the strength of the mural he created for the Refreshment Room of the Tate Gallery. Amongst the grandees from the arts and corporate world invited to the mural's unveiling was Lord Esher, Chairman of the British School at Rome's Executive Committee.<sup>314</sup> At his behest the Council subsequently awarded Whistler an 'honorary' Scholarship, for as long as he wished and at a time of his choosing.<sup>315</sup>

The usual entry to the School was through competition for the Rome Prize which would give Whistler up to three years unfettered access to his muse. The strength of the relationship between the Slade and the British School at Rome, combined with Tonks's championing of Whistler as a muralist, would make it seem inevitable that Whistler would be entered for the prize. Tonks had counselled Whistler against entering in 1926 due to the bigger plan which was coming to fruition at the Tate Gallery – funding had been secured from Duveen for the restaurant mural, and Tonks was determined that Whistler would be awarded the commission.<sup>316</sup> At that point, having just finished his first mural project at Shadwell, Whistler may well have welcomed the opportunity to spend three years being steeped in the

---

<sup>314</sup> Lord Esher (1852-1930) historian and Liberal politician was the Chairman of the Executive Committee of BSR from 1912-1930. He had been an important figure at the BSR since the early days of its founding and was instrumental in the creation of the Rome Scholarships. Wallace-Hadrill, A., *The British School at Rome One Hundred Years*, London: The British School at Rome, 2001, p.38.

<sup>315</sup> Letter from BSR HQ in London to Whistler, dated 16 April 1928 signed by Evelyn Shaw, 'Rome' File RWA. Also Whistler, 1985, p.114

<sup>316</sup> Olivier, E., *Rome*, typewritten account, undated, in 'Rex: Rome' Correspondence Files, RWA, p.1.

study of mural painting but instead he learned his craft under the intense scrutiny of a public commission.

However, it might be interesting to consider whether he could have actually won the Prix de Rome whilst at the Slade, by comparing his work with his contemporaries who did become Rome Scholars in Decorative Painting. In 1925 it was awarded to Edward Halliday, a Royal College of Art student under William Rothenstein whose precepts of 'sculpturesqueness' and the interplay of contemporary elements with more classical modes are evidenced in his work *Christian and Hopeful arrive before the Celestial City*.<sup>317</sup> Glyn Jones, a fellow student at the Slade, won it in 1926. His style was neo-primitive in manner, with simplified forms using a limited palette. In 1927, Reginald Brill, another Slade Student, won with a painting on the theme of 'The Expulsion from Eden'.<sup>318</sup> In 1928 the Royal College of Art succeeded again with Alan Sorrell, whose entry *People seeking after wisdom* used the classic model of a frieze-like composition of figures, wearing contemporary dress as in Halliday's entry and set against a Renaissance-style landscape.<sup>319</sup>

---

<sup>317</sup> Information on these paintings and Rothenstein's teachings from *Edward Halliday Art for Life* Exhibition Catalogue by Compton, A., Liverpool: Liverpool University Art Collections, 1997, pp.15-16

<sup>318</sup> BSR 'Reports of the Executive Committee and Faculties' 31<sup>st</sup> January 1929 P1.156.3. BSR Archive. The only images available of this work are three figure studies on 'Reginald Brill' [Online] [http://www.lissfineart.com/1669q0\\_reginald+brill.htm](http://www.lissfineart.com/1669q0_reginald+brill.htm) [Accessed August 5 2014]

<sup>319</sup> Llewellyn, S., in 'The British School at Rome: The Stirring Up Process' in *Alan Sorrell The Life and Works of an English Neo-Romantic Artist*. Exhibition Catalogue edited by Sacha Llewellyn and Richard Sorrell, Bristol: Sansom & Co., 2013, pp. 71-77, and Powers, A 'The Rome Scholarship in 'Decorative Painting' 1912 – 1939' in *British artists in Italy 1920 – 1980*. Exhibition Catalogue. Kent: Kent County Council Education Committee 1985, p.21.



From these limited resources it is difficult to draw a comparison between these artists' work and what Whistler was painting at the same time – the murals at Shadwell, and the Tate Gallery. What is strongly evident is that these works of Halliday and Jones, and other Rome Scholars such as Monnington and Knights, are solemn, serious, and scholarly. These are not the first adjectives one would use to describe the work of Rex Whistler. Even in the 1925 proscenium panels for Shadwell, where Whistler was revealing some of the 'classical' influences he had witnessed in Rome, there is a light-hearted element in his work. The Tate mural is also presented as an amusing story that will entertain the clients of the tearoom. The word 'entertain' is salient. Unlike the students who were competing for the chance of a Rome scholarship with works that showed appropriate reverence for the disciplines of the mural painting tradition, Whistler was carrying out commissions that were for places of leisure and entertainment. This is not to say however, that Whistler could not paint to a more serious or scholarly brief, as was evidenced in the Summer Composition Competitions at the Slade.

As the Scholarship was awarded to Whistler on the strength of the Tate mural, one could assume that this example of Decorative Painting met some of the criteria that the Faculty would look for in a successful competition work. But the style and content of the Tate work bears very little resemblance to anything connected with the British School at Rome at this point. For a start its subject, 'The Pursuit of Rare Meats', is secular rather than sacred. The vast majority of work produced at the School, largely because of the nature of the murals and frescoes the students had to study and copy, was of a religious nature. This was also reflected in their competition entries. In a 'Rome' mural, the figures are paramount in the

composition. The narrative of the Tate decoration does rest on a group of figures that we follow around the walls, but they are small scale and very much secondary to the architectural features. They do not have any of the frieze-like qualities demonstrated in the work of Glyn Jones or Edward Halliday. Nor would the eclecticism of Whistler's composition fit the strictures of the Faculty of Painting. The gastronomic travels of the party take them through an architectural miscellany of Baroque townscape, Chinese pagodas and a jungle, via Palladian bridges and Corinthian arches and a mélange of landscapes, partly Italian in feel, the rocky outcrops and distant vistas reminiscent of the early cinquecento artists such as Giorgione and Bellini. But the complete effect is far removed from the work of a Rome Scholar.

Was it more the case that the award from Lord Esher was actually nothing to do with the content of the mural and everything to do with its reception? From the unveiling onwards the artist and the project had received tremendous critical acclaim, and perhaps Esher thought that the positive press attention gained by Whistler would in turn confer some celebrity cachet on the School. Ever mindful of the need for corporate and government funding and donations from individuals, it would do the School no harm to be connected with a young muralist with evident star quality. Sir Joseph Duveen was a member of the Council and an important supporter and donor to the institution.<sup>320</sup> He had of course provided the funding for the Tate Restaurant mural and had been so pleased with the venture that he awarded Whistler a bonus at the end of the project. There is no evidence to suggest

---

<sup>320</sup> Martin, Alec. "Duveen, Joseph Joel, Baron Duveen (1869–1939)." Rev. Helen Davies. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. [Online] <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32945> [Accessed 9 June 2013].

that Duveen was involved in the offering of the studentship to Whistler, but it was an act that would provide gratification to a staunch supporter of the School.

It may be useful to look more at the circumstances of this honorary studentship.

There are no records of this kind of award being offered to any other artist.

Temporary residencies for a few 'advanced students who had been specially commended' could be admitted for short stays.<sup>321</sup> Whistler is differentiated from these by being listed with his name in italics, as a Scholar's would be, and the comment that he was in receipt of the privilege 'at the instance of Lord Esher'.<sup>322</sup>

Other awards for temporary residence at the School were known as Travelling Scholarships and offered to students of the Royal Academy or the Royal College of Art who were 'anxious to spend a short time in Rome'.<sup>323</sup> Fellow Slade students Mary Adshead, who had also worked on the Shadwell scheme, and Nan West, who assisted Whistler with the Tate mural, were also at the School in April 1928 as 'casual students for residence'.<sup>324</sup> Whistler's award gave no time limit on his residency, nor was there any expectation of what he should do whilst he was there. All expenses would be paid, and he would have a studio and full board at the School for as long as he wished.<sup>325</sup>

---

<sup>321</sup> D Y Cameron, the Chairman of the Faculty of Painting, Account of 1928/9, 'Reports of the Executive Committee and Faculties 31<sup>st</sup> January 1929', , P1.156.3, BSR Archive, p.21.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid. 'List of Visitors to the School up to December 1972' Box 21, BSR Archive.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid. This was at their own expense, but presumably their applications had been accepted due to Tonks's recommendation and their mural experience at the Slade. Tonks suggested to West that the costs were split between her parents and herself. In West, N., *Against the Tide*, manuscript of unpublished auto- biography, RWA.

<sup>325</sup> He was given a cheque for £40 at the beginning of April before he travelled out, presumably to cover his expenses 'Evelyn Shaw £40 April 3' in 'Rex Whistler Account Book 1927-1934'. RWA.

## Whistler's experience of the British School at Rome

Thus if the granting of this honorary studentship was at least partly to the School's benefit in terms of status and publicity, what could Whistler hope to gain from the School?

In many respects he had already found his *métier* and visual language. His career and commissions had been launched as a result of the Tate mural. He had started the mural for Sir Courtauld Thomson at Dorneywood before his departure and had been given a commission for a large chimney piece panel for London clients recommended by Edith Olivier. What were his intentions for this time in Rome? He was already finding commissions a 'tiresome worry' and looked forward to the freedom to 'study any way I like'.<sup>326</sup> But this was not to be time spent in a study of mural painting. Whistler had a different focus: 'Chiefly I feel that Architecture will occupy me... I mean to make a big effort to go to Vicenza...'<sup>327</sup> Palladio had been a hero since his days studying at the Bartlett School of Architecture. A notebook entitled 'Brief Notes on Andrea Palladio' was compiled, possibly around 1927 and, if so, concurrently with the Tate Mural, and which he added to in the 1930s.<sup>328</sup>

Whistler's tastes and status as an Honorary Scholar marked him out from the rest of the students at the School. Although letters record that he found his contemporaries 'boisterous and bantering' and was disgusted at their 'absurd scorn for Rome' the other Scholars were, according to Laurence Whistler's later

---

<sup>326</sup> Olivier 'Rome', p. 2. RWA.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid. There is no evidence that Whistler ever went to Vicenza.

<sup>328</sup> This is numbered 295 in the Catalogue Raisonné. There is nothing to back up the date that Laurence Whistler has given. It could have been made from lectures at the Slade or later from the Palladio book given to him by Edith Olivier (see note) or indeed another book on Palladio.

research, much more tolerant of his divergent viewpoint.<sup>329</sup> His charm and wit are mentioned frequently and his 'ability to conjure up the spirit of the Baroque with a few sketches of the pen'.<sup>330</sup> He had two nicknames, 'Rexina' apparently due to some girlishness in manner and 'Plush' because he insisted on travelling first class on any student outings.<sup>331</sup>

Henry Tonks believed that this visit would be a defining moment for his ex-student. Having prevented him from competing for the Rome Prize in 1926, he felt that this interlude would provide an ideal opportunity for Whistler to concentrate on painting works for his first one-man exhibition on his return, 'the exhibition that would prove him to be serious'.<sup>332</sup> Success as a muralist was all well and good but there was also a need for recognition as a committed fine artist. Whistler was in agreement but yet again, he was being stage-managed by Tonks. In the event, letters between Whistler and Tonks indicate that the circumstances were not as conducive as he had hoped and he was having difficulty in starting to paint in the manner he thought necessary.<sup>333</sup> Several factors were at play here. Unlike the rest of the students, it was not incumbent upon Rex Whistler to follow the prescribed course of study laid down by the Faculty of Painting, which included a comprehensive list of works to be visited and studied in Rome and beyond.<sup>334</sup> However, it is clear from his comments that this freedom had a negative effect on

---

<sup>329</sup> Letter RW to Cecil Beaton from BSR 9 June 1928, Correspondence Files 'Rex: Rome' RWA and RW to Edith Olivier May 20 1928, in Whistler, 1985, p.118.

<sup>330</sup> Letter Amyas Connell to LW 16 Nov 1977, Correspondence Files 'Rex: Rome' RWA

<sup>331</sup> Ibid and letter Nan West to Laurence Whistler 1 Jan 1949, 'Rome' op cit.

<sup>332</sup> Whistler, 1985. p114

<sup>333</sup> 'I am distressed to find that I simply *can't* paint from nature at all', letter to Tonks, 1 July 1928, *ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>334</sup> From 1925 this was the 'Memorandum On the Course of Study for Rome Scholars in Painting' 'BSR Faculty of Painting Scholar's Course of Study Box 197' BSR Archives

Whistler's morale and concentration.<sup>335</sup> It may be that already his working tempo had become accustomed to the dictates of commissioned work and being left to his own devices was uncomfortable. Like many of the Scholars Whistler found the experience of Rome to be at first completely overwhelming; a fellow student lamented that 'a dozen interests demand one's whole attention and each demand a lifetime.'<sup>336</sup> His diaries and letters home record delight in his surroundings, and self-doubt and recrimination in equal measure.<sup>337</sup>

## Rome Sketchbook 1928

Correlating the 'Rome Sketchbook' with the 'Rex Whistler Diary at School of Rome 22<sup>nd</sup> April – 7<sup>th</sup> August 1928' helps to illustrate his activities during this time and the growing relationship with Rome and its environs.<sup>338</sup> The elaborate title page that he created for this sketchbook was indicative of his state of mind, and gives an indication of the artistic quandary he was finding himself in. [Fig. 3.7] It was his habit to design funerary monuments for himself and here he has placed a self-portrait bust and an ornate smoking urn – the symbol of immortal memory – on facing columns. This does not necessarily indicate an excess of morbidity but was purely for his own amusement. It is a strong yet rather odd statement about his arrival at the British School at Rome. The structures are cracked and overgrown, as though they had been found and reassembled from fragments in the Forum, just visible in the background. Crowns and laurel wreaths adorn the drapery and are

---

<sup>335</sup> '...I am *incurably* and hopelessly lazy...', letter to Edith Olivier, 10 June 1928, in Whistler, 1985, p.116.

<sup>336</sup> Letter Robert Lyon to Evelyn Shaw 24 June 1925. Archive Box 177 'BSR General Office Rome Scholars in Mural Painting', BSR Archive.

<sup>337</sup> 'How I *adore* Rome!', letter to Edith Olivier 22 July 1928, Middelboe, p.76, '...making very slow progress, if any.' 'REX WHISTLER DIARY AT SCHOOL OF ROME 22<sup>nd</sup> APRIL – 7<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 1928' 5A, 'Diaries, Notebooks, Misc.', RWA.

<sup>338</sup> Numbered in the Archive 296 and 5A respectively.

also being proffered by the putti below, the whole edifice being borne aloft on clouds. The design says much about what he envisaged Rome to be and what he hoped he would find there – a kind of fantasy of Classical antiquity.

Initially he sketched the statues and columns and ilex trees in the Borghese Gardens, near the School but, for an exhibition to be possible, he had to start actually painting Rome as a subject *en plein air*. Tonks had told him that he ‘*must* paint from nature in order to learn, and that if I continue to paint out of my head always I will never learn.’<sup>339</sup> This was the Slade approach, close observation followed by accurate rendering of what was seen. Given that there was little practical guidance in outdoor landscape work in the Slade’s curriculum, it is little wonder that Whistler felt daunted. For now he wished he ‘could paint sunlight like Sickert’ and ‘paint in that purely impressionist way.’<sup>340</sup> This is a rare reference to an even remotely contemporary artist and particular style.

He immersed himself in Rome, particularly the Rome of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, ‘treading the ground hallowed by Claude and Poussin [and] Piranesi’.<sup>341</sup> The Quattrocento painters favoured by the Rome Scholars in Decorative Painting were not for him. A visit to the Villa Borghese gallery saw him listing particular paintings in his sketchbook as he had done in Rome in 1925 – Botticelli, Albani, Domenichino ‘(chase of Diana)’ Grimaldi, ‘exquisite small landscape’, ‘2 enchanting Canalettos’ as well as copying sections of the wall

---

<sup>339</sup> Correspondence RW to Edith Olivier 17 June 1928 in Whistler, 1985, p.120.

<sup>340</sup> Letter July 3 1928 RW to EO in Olivier ‘Rome’, p.6.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

decorations.<sup>342</sup> Many of these elements found their way into future projects. A sketch of some cartoon like fish, probably dolphins, in the main salon of the Borghese appears in a mural decoration for Sassoon at Trent Park some years later.<sup>343</sup> [Fig.3.8] There is a page of detailed studies of ornate Rococo decorations from 'Villa di Caniparola Sarzana, Malaspina' about which he comments 'such decorations as I have never seen before!'<sup>344</sup> Gradually the pages of the sketchbook record trips further afield, to Tivoli, Spoleto, and Capri. The scenery of Tivoli had particular resonance for Whistler's painting and the problems he encountered describing real subjects with his brush.<sup>345</sup> However, the drawing of Tivoli in Whistler's sketchbook completed on April 26 is confident and well executed. Whatever tribulations Whistler was experiencing in paint did not seem to affect his skills as a draughtsman. [Fig.3.9]

The Rome Sketchbook of 1928 gives a comprehensive summary of those aspects of the city and its environs that most affected Whistler, and as an insight into his experiences it is invaluable. It was a fascinating compendium of impressions and material that he could use for future reference. However, it was lost on the train to Munich the following year and not found until after his death. With Whistler's powers of visual recall he would no doubt be able to draw many of the things he recorded from memory, but this loss must be taken into account when ascribing sources for related works.

---

<sup>342</sup> Rome Sketchbook 1928. RWA.

<sup>343</sup> The fish decorations at Villa Borghese were seen by the author and identified in the sketchbook and subsequent work. Also see Chapter Four.

<sup>344</sup> Letter quoted in Whistler, 1985, p.122. This is La Villa Malaspina di Caniparola with eighteenth century frescoes by Piacenza and Natali [Online] <http://www.terredilunigiana.com/ville/villacaniparola.php>. [Accessed September 12 2012].

<sup>345</sup> This was purportedly where Sandrart encouraged Claude to work *en plein air*, from life rather than the confines of the studio. Suggested in Whistler, 1985. p.121.



## Lord Gerald Berners

After a few weeks at the School, it was clear that Whistler was not going to lead the life of a typical Rome Scholar in Decorative Painting. He was given an introduction to the British Embassy which in turn introduced him to a different Roman society than that of the School's common room.<sup>346</sup> His diary records that 'the Wingfields' called at the School on April 29 and spent several days showing him the Rome that most could not access.<sup>347</sup> Consular privilege meant that this included the Spanish Embassy in the Barberini Palace with its 'exquisite ceiling painted by Pietro da Cortona' and a private tour of the Farnese Palace by the French Ambassador's wife where he was impressed by the 'painted ceiling and panels' in the ballroom.<sup>348</sup> For a man from a fairly ordinary background, Whistler had an unerring ability to gain entree to elevated social circles and those of Rome proved no exception.

Further auspicious opportunities were presented by a new friend in Rome, Lord Gerald Berners, who had an imposing house overlooking the Forum and the wealth to indulge his many interests.<sup>349</sup> Gerald Hugh Tyrwhitt Wilson, 14<sup>th</sup> Baron was a composer, novelist, painter, and undoubted eccentric. He was a far more European and cosmopolitan product than his pedigree would indicate, with somewhat avant-

---

<sup>346</sup> It is not known how the introduction was effected. The relationship between the British Embassy in Rome and the School was always very close, but this introduction may have been through one of Whistler's influential friends or because of his reputation as a result of the Tate Mural.

<sup>347</sup> Charles Wingfield, later Sir Charles, was Councillor at the Embassy.

<sup>348</sup> Letter to his mother, May 9 1928, Rex Whistler Letters A, RWA. It is unclear now which room was designated as the ballroom but it may well have been the magnificently frescoed Galleria del Carracci.

<sup>349</sup> Berners knew Edith Olivier and Stephen Tennant and he and Whistler had met in London before Whistler's departure. Diary entry 11 Jan 1928 'Lunch Lord Berners', 4 JAN – 24 APR 1928 'ENGAGEMENTS', Green box 'Diaries, Notebooks, Misc.', RWA.

garde tastes.<sup>350</sup> He knew Cocteau and Picasso, and had been involved with the Italian and Russian Futurists.<sup>351</sup> Although Berners had a taste for the avant-garde art of Balla and Dali he also appreciated the classical tradition, particularly in his own painting, favouring landscapes in a style reminiscent of Corot, of whom he had the largest collection outside the Louvre, and of

Sisley.<sup>352</sup> This would have been a welcome relief to Whistler who had found himself alienated from his fellow Scholars by his classical preferences. Berners loved the landscape of Italy, particularly around Rome and was a keen *plein air* painter.<sup>353</sup> His works are not paintings of the highest quality but are well-observed, technically proficient, and certainly the works from the later 1930s are highly competent.<sup>354</sup> He encouraged Whistler's painting, taking him to the quieter places to paint in the city and providing access to private villas and gardens, such as Aldobrandini. There was a chauffeur to drive them to interesting locations outside Rome.

This was a beneficial friendship for Whistler, who quickly gained assurance, producing works including *The Baths at Caracalla*, *Bosco Sacro* and *Castel Gandolfo*

---

<sup>350</sup> Osbert Sitwell said of Berners "in the years between the wars Berners did more to civilise the wealthy than anyone in England. Through London's darkest drawing rooms....he moved.. a sort of missionary of the arts." Quoted in Bryers, G., 'The Berners Case', *The Guardian* February 2003 [Online] <http://www.gavinbryars.com/work/writing/articles/berners-case> [Accessed August 5 2014]. This gives a rather different impression of Berners than that conveyed by Laurence Whistler.

<sup>351</sup> Musically he was a modernist, composing and publishing works that were admired by Stravinsky and Diaghilev, who later commissioned a ballet from Berners, *The Triumph of Neptune* in 1926.

<sup>352</sup> Bryers, G., 2003 Ibid. <http://www.gavinbryars.com/work/writing/articles/berners-case> [Accessed March 8 2010]

<sup>353</sup> Amory, M., *Lord Berners The Last Eccentric*, London: Faber & Faber, 2008, pp.104-7.

<sup>354</sup> Unlike Whistler, who never achieved the solo exhibition he (or Tonks) wished for, Berners had two successful exhibitions at the Lefevre Gallery in 1931 and 1936, *ibid.*, pp.116-7.

from *Lake Albano*.<sup>355</sup> [Fig.3.10] The latter two are rendered in a style very unlike anything seen from Whistler previously. They are in very light pen and ink and watercolour in golden and sepia tones. *Bosco Sacro* is the most unusual. The composition is very simple, scrub, and plants roughly depicted in the foreground, an ochre-coloured hill crested by a group of trees, in the far distance a line of cypresses. There is nothing ornate or over-worked and it has a very 'immediate' and contemporary feel. The painting of *Castel Gandolfo* is more detailed, and the large trees to the right – with crossed trunks, a feature he used often in his paintings of trees - and the buildings on the hill are more recognisable as Whistler's work. The treatment of the vegetation on the hillsides is untypical. There is something schematic about the way Whistler has handled this, and the distant trees in the *Bosco Sacro* that is reminiscent of the way an architect would suggest trees in a plan or drawing. Indeed, Whistler did assist two of the Architecture Scholars with these sorts of additions to their plans.<sup>356</sup> *Bosco Sacro* has something of the quattrocento simplicity and golden tones of Thomas Monnington's *Allegory* (c.1924) and, even more strongly, Winifred Knight's paintings of the countryside around Lake Piediluco such as *Figures in a boat, Lake Piediluco*, (1924-30) and *Santissima Trinita*, (1927-1930). [Fig.3.11] This painting provides some surprising evidence that Whistler did absorb at least some of the influences, even just in a simple interpretation of the Italian landscape, that so affected the Rome Scholars. However this contemporaneity of expression does not appear in *Castel Gandolfo*, despite it being painted just a few weeks later. This work is reminiscent of the newly-fashionable eighteenth-century watercolours of

---

<sup>355</sup> Photographs of *Castel Gandolfo from Lake Albano* and *Bosco Sacro* from Sotheby's Auction Catalogue for the sale on 20 Nov 1991 where the originals were sold. Witt Library, Green Box File 2668B 'Portraits and Miscellany'.

<sup>356</sup> Letter Amyas Connell to LW 16 Nov 1977, 'Rex: Rome', RWA.

Francis Towne or those of John Robert Cozens. [Fig.3.12] There is careful use of underlying washes and tonal control and use of a low-key palette with none of his preferred Claude-like blues in the water or sky.

Whistler was not the first youthful artist that Berners had chosen as a painting companion. Whilst staying in the South of France the previous year, Christopher Wood was being taken out in the Rolls Royce 'to beautiful parts and we paint together'.<sup>357</sup> Berners was a patron of Wood's, but it is interesting to note that he bought nothing by Whistler.<sup>358</sup> He found Whistler's painting style congenial but the art he wanted on his walls was more avant-garde. Whistler painted a portrait of his host in the salon at Foro Romano, but this remained in the artist's possession.<sup>359</sup> Another version shows both the artist and his host and is at Faringdon, Berners' country estate, although this is not listed in the Catalogue Raisonné.<sup>360</sup>

Berners invited Whistler back to Rome the following summer, announced in the Court and Society pages of the *Daily Mirror* as 'Britons in Rome'. Berners was styled as the 'Artist-Peer' ... [who has] 'frequently been out sketching with Mr Rex Whistler the gifted painter of the Tate frescoes' ... 'both these young men take art seriously'.<sup>361</sup> This was an even more productive trip during which Whistler completed at least eleven oil paintings and culminated in a leisurely tour back to

---

<sup>357</sup> Wood to his mother. Amory, 2008. p.108.

<sup>358</sup> Amongst paintings he bought from Wood were a large oil, *Winter*, perhaps bought in 1926, two paintings from the French trip and *Leaving Port* 1927. Amory, *ibid* and 'Christopher Wood' [online] <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/wood-boat-in-harbour-brittany-t00489/text-catalogue-entry> Accessed 20.05.13

<sup>359</sup> This is now at the National Portrait Gallery.

<sup>360</sup> The painting is described in *The Sitwells: And the Arts of the 1920s and 1930s*. Exhibition catalogue by Sarah Bradford *et al.*, London: National Portrait Gallery, 1994, p.109.

<sup>361</sup> *Daily Mirror* 23 July 1929 'Rex's Press Cuttings Social Events and Photos', RWA.

England through Italy and France, visiting the Cathedrals of Evreux, Bourges, Chartres – where they both painted - and Rouen. Berners was twenty years older than Whistler but the two men had more in common than might be supposed. Like Whistler, Berners's drew from childhood and had a habit of decorating letters with comic strips and pictures.<sup>362</sup> This sense of the comic continued into adulthood and Berners was well known for his wit, practical jokes, and rather surrealist humour. Whistler also enjoyed and practised this kind of absurdity. Both were interested in literature and poetry. Whistler made a note of books read during this visit, probably from Berners' collection, mainly contemporary and some of them controversial: Ronald Firbank's *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli* (1926)<sup>363</sup>, Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer Gantry* (1927), Walter Pater's *Imaginary Portraits*, Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* and Jane Austen.<sup>364</sup>

Whistler also painted still lifes within Berners' house, an almost unprecedented genre for the artist. *Peaches & Tapestry in the dining room, no. 3 Foro Romano* is particularly striking in the darkness of its tonality.<sup>365</sup> [Fig.3.13] In the richness of its colours and almost velvety finish it is reminiscent of Dutch seventeenth-century still lifes by Willem Kalf, or those of the Spanish painters Zurbarán or Meléndez. Compared to his usual palette it is almost sepulchral.

---

<sup>362</sup> Dickinson, P, *Lord Berners Composer, Writer, Painter*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008, p.17.

<sup>363</sup> Berners was close to Ronald Firbank, *ibid*, p.136. The novel begins with the Cardinal christening a dog in his cathedral ('And thus being cleansed and purified, I do call thee "Crack"!'). Berners' long-serving chauffeur was William Crack. [Online] The first page of the Project Gutenberg Canada E-book <http://www.gutenberg.ca/ebooks/firbankr-cardinalpirelli/firbankr-cardinalpirelli-00-h.html> It ends with His Eminence dying of a heart attack while chasing, naked, a choirboy around the aisles, a plot which must have appealed to Berners. Précis of the book on 'Ronald Firbank' [Online] [http://www.glbtc.com/literature/firbank\\_r.2.html](http://www.glbtc.com/literature/firbank_r.2.html) [Accessed 31 December 2014]

<sup>364</sup> Diary entry for 26 June 1929, in 'JUNE 23 – JULY 30<sup>TH</sup> 1929 ROME' diary, Green box 'Diaries, Notebooks, Misc.', RWA.

<sup>365</sup> This is entitled 'Still Life' in the CR. The full title is Whistler's own inscription on the back of the painting.

One of Whistler's most accomplished oils from this trip was *Tivoli from the Road*, painted alongside Berners.<sup>366</sup> [Fig.3.14] This is the classic view of Tivoli, where the outline of the town appears on the hillside above the ravine and the campagna stretches out beneath it, painted by amongst others, Richard Wilson, Turner and, of the most importance to Whistler, Claude.<sup>367</sup> The golden light that Whistler employs which makes the buildings and countryside appear to shimmer, and the timeless quality of the scene are certainly reminiscent of Claude. Berners' rendition is more heavy and static despite being a looser and more impressionistic treatment; Whistler's has more atmosphere and delicacy.<sup>368</sup>

In these paintings from life Whistler is demonstrating the ease with which he can move between different styles and interpretations, from the quattrocento simplicity of the *Bosco Sacro*, to the eighteenth-century watercolour technique of *Castel Gandolfo and Lake Albano* to the idealised Claudean treatment of *Tivoli from the Road*, to the dark Flemish or Spanish tones of the Foro Romano still life. In his drawings from his imagination, Whistler's style is immediately recognisable. In these paintings from the travelling years of 1924-5 and 1928-9 he has no fixed mode of representing what's in front of him.<sup>369</sup>

---

<sup>366</sup>Whistler, 1985, p.142-3.

<sup>367</sup> *A view of the Roman Campagna from Tivoli, evening 1644-5*, is tonally similar to Whistler's painting but it is not known whether he saw this apparently little-known work. Image [Online] <http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/404688/a-view-of-the-campagna-from-tivoli> [Accessed May 20 2013]

<sup>368</sup> Plate 43, Dickinson, 2008.

<sup>369</sup> Unfortunately these three unusual paintings were all sold by the Whistler Estate in Laurence Whistler's lifetime and the only – poor quality – photographs are from auction catalogues Images from catalogues in 'Rex Whistler Green Box File 2668B Portraits and Miscellany' Witt Library.

The friendship between the two men continued after they returned to England. When invited to Berners' country estate at Faringdon in the 1930s, Whistler painted several views of the house, one of which sold at exhibition and the others remained in his studio.<sup>370</sup> When Berners was writing his autobiography he asked Whistler to examine the manuscript.<sup>371</sup> After Whistler's death he offered to contribute to the 'Memorial Volume' that was planned by Edith Olivier.<sup>372</sup> Whistler painted Faringdon in the mural at Port Lympne together with a memorial urn, a mysterious veiled woman, and a small boy with a trunk with the initial B under a coronet.<sup>373</sup> Berners is slightly dismissed by Laurence Whistler as yet another of his brother's rich, usually older, usually gay, male friends who wined and dined him and occasionally took him on trips abroad<sup>374</sup> and describes him as a 'pleasant if rather childish companion'.<sup>375</sup> The suggestion made by both Whistler's and indeed Berners' biographers is that the boy in the Port Lympne mural represents Berners, seen by the artist as a perpetual child.<sup>376</sup> In reality there could be any number of coded meanings, comic or otherwise, understood only by the two individuals concerned. The evidence of their time spent together in Rome and beyond points to a more mutually beneficial and important relationship between Berners and Whistler than has been previously recognised.<sup>377</sup>

---

<sup>370</sup> Whistler, 1960, p.19.

<sup>371</sup> This was *First Childhood*, published 1934. Amory, 2008, p.121.

<sup>372</sup> Middelboe, 1989, p.296.

<sup>373</sup> The inclusion of Berners' house in this mural is odd; any personal material in murals usually related only to the client, but Sassoon had vetoed so many private references that perhaps Whistler was in need of content. Sassoon and Berners did know each other which gives some validity to the insertion.

<sup>374</sup> For instance Malcolm Bullock, Whistler, 1985, p. 132-3.

<sup>375</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.141.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid, p.160, Amory, 2008, p.113.

<sup>377</sup> Their friendship is not mentioned at all in Dickinson, P., *Lord Berners: Composer, Writer, Painter*, London: Boydell & Brewer Ltd., 2008. Mark Amory, 2008, gives a slightly fuller account, pp.73, 111-113.

## ***The Story of Jonah (1928)***

Whistler was obviously different in many ways to his fellow students and this could have also been due to his recognition and professional experience as a muralist. The British School at Rome Faculty were aware that talented students could already have embarked on a murals career and although all were expected to follow the Scholars 'Course of Study' and produce in their second year 'a decoration of not less than 30 square feet' and in their third and final year 'a picture of not less than 15 square feet', the latter could be 'executed as a commission.'<sup>378</sup> Edward Halliday was probably the most comparable student to Whistler in terms of his reputation, with clients keen to secure him for commissions and three murals were completed in 1928.<sup>379</sup> The two artists knew each other at the School.<sup>380</sup> *St Paul meeting with Lydia of Thyatira* (3ft 6 x 4ft 10 approx.) was Halliday's first private commission<sup>381</sup> and a useful comparison can be made between this and Whistler's large chimney-piece panel *The Story of Jonah* (1ft 3 x 3ft 2) also completed at the School in 1928.<sup>382</sup> [Fig.3.15]

Both murals are on biblical themes. *Lydia of Thyatira*, chosen by Halliday for his client, and the story of *Jonah and the Whale* depicted by Whistler.<sup>383</sup> Whistler was,

---

<sup>378</sup> 'Memorandum on the Course of Study for Rome Scholars in Painting 1925' BSR FACULTY OF PAINTING Scholar's Course of Study Box 197, BSR Archive.

<sup>379</sup> These were *Hypnos*, *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* and *St Paul meeting with Lydia of Thyatira*.

<sup>380</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.117.

<sup>381</sup> Compton, 1997, pp.18-20.

<sup>382</sup> This panel and sketch are in private hands and have never been exhibited or images published. The author has been given images by the Whistler family.

<sup>383</sup> Sir Benjamin Johnson owned a textile dyeing company, *Lydia of Thyatira* was the patron saint of dyers, see Compton, 1997, p.19. Unfortunately, there is no information available on why *Jonah* was selected by Whistler's clients, or whether it was his own choice of subject, which was so often the case.



from childhood, very familiar with and illustrated stories from the Bible.<sup>384</sup> A detailed preliminary sketch for the Jonah panel, squared up for transfer, was completed before his departure for Rome [Fig.3.16] but significant changes were made in the finished version, which was completed over five or six days in his studio at the School.<sup>385</sup> This was near the end of his residency and the influence of Rome was quite clear in the finished panel. [Fig.3.17] The buildings representing Nineveh became more elaborate and recognisable Roman, one being altered to the distinctive dome of S S Nome di Maria church, and a plain arched entrance becoming a much grander edifice with pediments and ornate stonework. A church tower (unidentified) was also added, very similar to ones painted into the 19 and 36 Hill Street schemes of 1931 and 1936. The final colour scheme became richer in tone and suffused in a golden light, which was certainly found in the painting of Tivoli the following year. The landscape is recognisably Italian in both versions. The story or action in the mural is very simply outlined, on the far left is Jonah, freshly expelled from the belly of the whale, and he is then depicted striding across the land, ignoring the allure of 'an unrecorded mermaid'<sup>386</sup> to Nineveh to warn its citizens of their imminent destruction. It is a fairly slight piece but witty and with considerable charm.

Although Halliday's mural is nearly twice the size of Whistler's, an initial smaller version was also completed as an overmantle piece for the client.<sup>387</sup> The central incident, the meeting of Lydia and St Paul, is set on an open terrace, with fragments

---

<sup>384</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.18.

<sup>385</sup> Entries for July and August, 'Diary at School of Rome April – August 1928', 'Diaries, Notebooks, Misc' RWA.

<sup>386</sup> Whistler's annotation to the initial sketch.

<sup>387</sup> Compton, 1997, p.44. No image of smaller version shown.

of columns and inscribed stones emphasising its classical setting. In the background a lake leads out to sienna-coloured mountains, reminiscent of those at Piediluco. The figures show great draughtsmanship, in which Halliday demonstrated his training from the Royal College of Art and his studies in Paris. However, the landscape elements are stylised and simplified, as is the stonework on which the scenes take place. Everything is portrayed with intense clarity, to the extent that it has a surreal appearance; the columns and stones gleam and shine and bear no patina of age. The over-riding impression is that this is classical Rome seen through the eyes of a modern painter. In contrast, in Whistler's panel one might be looking at painting from the seventeenth century, from Claude or even Breughel – the golden light over the turquoise sea, and the boat sailing in the distance rather reminiscent of *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (1658). In many ways Whistler's small mural of *The Story of Jonah* sums up the differences between the expectations of the British School at Rome towards Decorative Painting and the independent position that Whistler occupied.

However one could also question whether Halliday's *St Paul meeting with Lydia of Thyatira* adhered to the teachings of the School and reflected the traditional modes of large scale history painting using a Renaissance model.<sup>388</sup> Certainly the figures are the central feature of the composition. In addition his working practices and preparation - detailed and comprehensive studies from life and many preparatory sketches - and the classical references he incorporated followed the School guidelines. However, there is something too slick, too polished about Halliday's

---

<sup>388</sup> For instance, Monnington, A K Lawrence and Colin Gill at the Palace of Westminster 1924.

work that sets it apart from the Rome Style.<sup>389</sup> Whistler was thus not the only student demonstrating an independence from the BSR orthodoxy, although this was unusual. Halliday's subsequent commissions were, like Whistler's, for the private realms of patron and leisure locations rather than the publicly funded civic or government schemes where the Rome Style was considered to be in accord with the formality of the institutional surroundings/location.<sup>390</sup>

## Research in the BSR Library

Whistler found the Library at the School a useful sanctuary with 'endless delightful and interesting books... on painting, drawing, and architecture etc.' where he could concentrate on his own interests away from the divergent tastes of his fellow students.<sup>391</sup> He spent several days studying its holdings on Baroque art and architecture and diary entries record that he started a 'Baroque Note-book'.<sup>392</sup> However the more modern sympathies of his contemporaries, particularly amongst the architects, were reflected in his reading with some enthusiasm, the recently translated (1927) Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture*. He finds the book provocative but also writes to Olivier that it was 'interesting me curiously'.<sup>393</sup> Corbusier's exhortation 'Rome is the damnation of the half educated. To send architectural students to Rome is to cripple them for life' must have been included in the lively discussions he took part in amongst the Architecture Scholars.<sup>394</sup>

---

<sup>389</sup> Compton, 1997, p. 23.

<sup>390</sup> 'Edward Halliday Rome Scholar in Painting 1925' file in Box 177 'BSR General Office Rome Scholars in Mural Painting', BSR Archive.

<sup>391</sup> Letter RW to Mother, 9 May 1928, Rex Whistler Letters A, 11 'To Mother', RWA.

<sup>392</sup> Rome Diary July 19-21 and August 1, 1928, 'Baroque reading and notes'. Diaries, RWA. This Notebook mentioned in Whistler & Fuller, 1960, p.45, but unfortunately has not survived.

<sup>393</sup> Whistler to Olivier 20 May 1928 'REX WHISTLER LETTERS B', RWA.

<sup>394</sup> Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 1923, trans 1927 in Campbell. L., 'A Call to Order: The Rome Prize and Early Twentieth-Century British Architecture' *Architectural History* Vol. 32, (1989),

Laurence Whistler wrote to all his brother's contemporaries at the School whilst writing the biography and the architects confirmed that he 'preferred their company' and that they felt his predilections were towards architecture.<sup>395</sup> Geoffrey Scott's *The Architecture of Humanism* was also found in the Library and discussed with Olivier.<sup>396</sup> Although Whistler's interest in architecture may seem unusual, in engaging with the Architecture Scholars he was actually following the Memorandum of Study for the Decorative Painters where they 'were advised to devote time to collaborative work with students of Architecture' in order to understand more about how their murals should be situated within a built environment.<sup>397</sup> There will be further discussion of Whistler's particular interest in architecture and its use in his mural practice in Chapter Four.

Within the Rome Sketchbook are three pages of related architectural drawings, beneath one Whistler has written "Anto. Bibiena" and on another page "J. Bibiena. Architetti Teatrali. 1625 – 1780. Corrado Ricci. Alfieri & Lacroix. Milan."<sup>398</sup> The Galli-Bibiena family of artists, designers and architects were responsible for theatre design and ornate settings of Court and State functions for eighteenth-century European royalty, particularly the Habsburgs. They were innovators in the use of stage perspective. All their designs are notable for the use of a highly ornate

---

pp. 131-151. [Online] Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1568565> [Accessed June 6 2010].

<sup>395</sup> Letter Robert Cummings to Laurence Whistler Date unknown, possibly 1977. Correspondence Files, 'Rex: Rome', RWA.

<sup>396</sup> Whistler to Olivier 8 May 1928, 'REX WHISTLER LETTERS B', RWA. Scott, G., *The Architecture of Humanism A Study in the History of Taste*, 1980 edition, London: The Architectural Press, 1924.

<sup>397</sup> Memorandum on the Course of Study for Rome Scholars in Painting 1925' BSR FACULTY OF PAINTING Scholar's Course of Study Box 197, BSR Archive.

<sup>398</sup> Antonio Galli Bibiena (1700–1774) was the third generation of the Bibiena family and was an architect amongst whose designs was the Teatro Comunale di Bologna. 'Galli Bibiena', Oxford Art Online [Online] <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T030524> [Accessed December 1 2014]. Information on 'Margravial Opera House Bayreuth' [Online] <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1379/> [Accessed May 28 2013].

Baroque style, favoured by Whistler. It is difficult to establish the source of Whistler's sketches. The British School at Rome Library Catalogue of the period lists two illustrated volumes by Ferdinando Galli Bibiena on the use of perspective in architecture and theatre dating from 1711 and 1732.<sup>399</sup> The 1915 book by Corrado Ricci, an Italian archaeologist and a historian of Italian art, was not in the School's Library at the time, although it had substantial holdings of Ricci's writings. From his early drawings it is clear that Whistler had grasped the use of perspective, but these books, and the paintings he was looking at in Italy would have increased his knowledge. In his stage designs and murals of the next few years a more sophisticated treatment emerges, particularly noticeable in the designs for the *Rake's Progress* (1935 and 1942) and the mural at Plas Newydd with its multiple points of perspective that change according to the position of the viewer. It has also been suggested that he studied the works of Andrea Pozzo, whose treatise on perspective *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* (2 volumes, 1693, 1698) in the English version was held in the School's library.<sup>400</sup> Whistler would certainly have seen his breath-taking feats of illusory fresco painting in the church of Sant'Ignazio in Rome.

---

<sup>399</sup> *L'architettura civile, preparata su la geometria, e ridotta alle prospettive / Considerazioni pratiche di Ferdinando Galli Bibiena* Parma : P. Monti, MCDCCXI [i.e. 1711]. However there are no plates which exactly correspond to Whistler's sketches; it may be that he drew his own version.

Direzioni della prospettiva teorica corrispondenti a quelle dell'architettura :  
In Bologna : nella Stamperia di Lelio dalla Volpe, 1732.

<sup>400</sup> Email correspondence with Professor Peter Davidson, Chair of Renaissance Studies at Aberdeen University, 28 November 2011. Pozzo, A., *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* London: Printed by Benj. Mott, 1707.

## **(Analysis of) Influences and Themes in Whistler's Work**

In this section Whistler's work will be analysed in terms of the various influences and inspirations that he brought to bear on his projects. Whistler's style was distinctive and yet trying to unpick the differing elements that made up this style is a complex task. His work contains multiple references to the art and architecture of different historical periods, countries, and even other artists' work. He employed a repertoire of compositional devices, themes, and elements that are repeated and revisited throughout his career.

Whistler was particularly engaged with the Baroque and Rococo. There is a tendency amongst Whistler's biographers to make the influence of Rome, or more broadly, Italy pre-eminent in his work. There is no doubting the importance to him of its art and architecture, from the earliest classical ruins through to the lavishness of the high Baroque of Rome. However, a fuller picture would incorporate other places that made a lasting visual impression on him. One of these was Bavaria, visited in April 1929 with Edith Olivier, where he heard Mozart in the Residenz Theatre in Munich and visited the Amalienburg at Nymphenburg. He enthused about the Baroque and Rococo structures and decoration that he witnessed, describing the theatre in a letter to his mother as 'a mass of Rococo sensation'.<sup>401</sup> He was intrigued by the *trompe l'oeil* curtains draped over the edges of the boxes, which were actually made of painted and gilded wood. This was a device he later used for the windows at Mottisfont, where what appeared to be lavish ermine and velvet drapery was created out of paint, canvas, and wood. He

---

<sup>401</sup> RW to his mother, Apr 23 1929, Rex Whistler Letters A, RWA.

was particularly impressed with Cuvilliés' design for the Royal Box at the Residenz, praising its 'coats of arms... writhing gilt shields... vast Imperial crowns' and 'glittering gold palm trees...'<sup>402</sup>

Ten years later Whistler drew upon these elements for his most extravagant creation in three dimensions, the re-design of the Royal Box at the Royal Opera House for a Gala Performance in honour of the French Presidential visit in March 1939.[Fig.3.18] An elaborate version of the Royal Arms was flanked by garlanded shields containing the initials of the French Republic, with its symbols of the axe and fasces forming the sides of the box. Golden palm trees divided it into three bays, in which sat the Royal and Presidential parties and their retinues.<sup>403</sup>

To try to situate Whistler's interest in the Baroque and Rococo as part of the resurgence of interest in these styles during the 1920s is problematic. The evidence, as seen from his sketchbooks from 1924 onwards and his experiences in Italy and Bavaria, points to an independent appreciation. However it meant that his use of these elements in his work was timely and would be appreciated by those such as Saxe-Weimarer-Eisenach who led the re-examination of Italian art and culture in *Southern Baroque Art* (1924)<sup>404</sup> and his brother Osbert who the following year published *Discursions on Travel, Art and Life, focused on the Baroque cities of Sicily, Puglia and Campania* (1925). By 1928, the year of his Rome sojourn,

---

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> At this late juncture in pre-war diplomacy, the occasion had great political significance as a gesture of Anglo-French unity. There is considerable irony in the fact that the inspiration for the Royal Box decorations was of German origin.

<sup>404</sup> Sitwell, S. *Southern baroque art: a study of painting, architecture and music in Italy and Spain of the 17th & 18th centuries*. New York: A. A. Knopf. Also see the later Sitwell, S., *German baroque art*. London: Duckworth, 1927.

the Sitwells were patrons of Whistler. The following year he painted a portrait of Edith Sitwell, in a simple Renaissance-inspired pose and embroidered gown, seated in a Venetian rococo chair, created a bookplate for Osbert Sitwell, and a frontispiece for Sacheverell.<sup>405</sup> The whimsical bookplate for Osbert in 1928 was a characteristic Whistler amalgam of a classical ruined temple adorned with urns, putti, and an elegant balustraded staircase leading down to a cascading fountain, the recipient portrayed perched on a parapet. [Fig.3.19] A frontispiece for Sacheverell's book of poetry *Doctor Donne and Gargantua* in 1930 employs a similar mélange of classical motifs. The title in each case is in a cartouche formed by the stonework. In essence these designs are a mix of the Baroque and Rococo style favoured by Whistler but also reflecting the taste of his patrons.

The composition of the Osbert Sitwell bookplate is rather unusual. Stephen Calloway suggests that it is 'adapted' from a design for a girandole by Thomas Johnson (1714-1778), eighteenth-century woodcarver and furniture maker and important figure in English Rococo.<sup>406</sup> Comparison between the two designs suggests that Calloway's attribution is off the mark. Study of the book and the suggested images show some similarities in the elaborate scroll work forming a cartouche, delicate foliage, putti, and the playful incongruity of the design, but Johnson's style is far more intricate and 'fussy'.<sup>407</sup> It is nevertheless quite possible that Whistler had access to the designs of Johnson, and his interest was

---

<sup>405</sup> Chair described in *The Sitwells*, 1995, p99.

<sup>406</sup> Calloway, S., *Baroque Baroque*, London: Phaidon, 2000, .p.31.

<sup>407</sup> Hayward, H., *Thomas Johnson and English Rococo*, London: Alec Tiranti, 1964, Plates 137 to 148.



demonstrated in the pair of girandoles, used as candle holders in one of his London apartments.<sup>408</sup>

There is clear evidence in this chapter of various paintings, drawings and illustrations that inspired Whistler. The line between being inspired by another artist's work and outright copying is a very thin one. This is not to say that Whistler consciously copied others but his unusually retentive visual memory could have led to unconscious borrowing of images. A case in point is a plate from the large book of engravings bought for him by Olivier, *Les Maîtres de l'Ornementation Le Style Louis XV* (1925), where an image by Göz shows an ornate fountain with a large figure of a merman encircling it, one arm raised up and with a flowing ewer balanced in the other.<sup>409</sup> The design for the 'Clovelly' Toile de Jouy designed by Whistler in 1932 shows a mermaid in exactly the same pose. [Fig.3.20] The book of engravings, full of baroque and rococo plates by Boucher and Watteau and which must have been an expensive purchase, was given to Whistler by Edith Olivier late in 1928. Olivier's importance has already been stated and this is another example of how well she knew, anticipated, or influenced the tastes of her protégé and friend. These types of books containing collections of prints were used by designers of all disciplines as well as artists and illustrators in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and were invaluable sources of inspiration and information. Whistler obviously used the volume well, sufficiently so to make his own additions, like sophisticated doodles, to a couple of pages. The question of

---

<sup>408</sup> This was either 29 Fitzroy Street or 21 Fitzroy Square. Conversation with Robin Ravilious, 24 August 2013. Girandoles now owned by his great-niece.

<sup>409</sup> Guerinet, A., 1925, p. 120.

whether the Clovelly design was directly copied from the Göz original or merely assimilated into the artist's mind is impossible to answer.

The art and architecture of the eighteenth century, particularly of the Georgian & Regency periods was a prevalent influence in Whistler's work, again marked by his biographers, but also alluded to by writers of the time. 'Georgian of What Century?' is the title of an article in *The Bystander* of 1936, where the contrast is made between the '20<sup>th</sup> -century activities' Whistler is commissioned to work on and the historical perspective with which he treats them.<sup>410</sup> He designed posters for his patron Sir Philip Sassoon's collector's exhibition 'The Four Georges' in 1931 and in its *Times* review he was referred to as an artist 'who may be said to be born Georgian'.<sup>411</sup>

Whistler's regard for the work of the earlier English eighteenth century was exhibited in the source for his illustrations for *Gulliver's Travels* (1930). The idea for his treatment of the plates is noted by Laurence Whistler as being from the frontispiece by Richard Bentley for the 1753 edition of Gray's *Elegy*, seen by the artist as a plate in Kenneth Clark's recently published work on the Gothic Revival.<sup>412</sup> [Fig.3.21] This used an unusual framing device to contain the action in the illustration, and this inspired Whistler to use a similar mode for *Gulliver*. Bentley uses rustic features such as wheat sheaves, farm implements, and wicker baskets to create one side of the 'frame'. Whistler also uses these elements in a

---

<sup>410</sup> 'Rex Whistler – Georgian of What Century' *The Bystander*, April 29 1936. 'Press Cuttings' RWA.

<sup>411</sup> *The Times*, Feb 10 1931.

<sup>412</sup> Clark, K., *The Gothic Revival: An essay in the history of taste*, London: Constable & Co., 1928. in Whistler, L, op. cit., p.139.

complete border around the illustration for Gulliver being found by the Brobdingnag Farmer. However, beyond the inspiration noted by his brother, the artist also used elements from Bentley's other illustrations for Gray's book. The pedimented stonework frame and statues on either side of the plate accompanying the 'Ode on a distant Prospect of Eton College' bears more than a passing resemblance to the 'frame' illustrating Gulliver meeting the Yahoos.

These instances of inspiration versus appropriation may be better expressed as a sort of artistic synthesis. It as though elements from all kinds of sources, literary, visual, etc., were entered into his mind and were then processed and the appropriate ones selected for the job in hand. Whatever the source or reference used the end results were not pastiche or parody; there is a liveliness and equally a scholarliness to Whistler's work that lifts it above a mere copy. The work remains distinctively his. After Whistler's death, there were artists who copied him but in these cases the work does seem flat and superficial. In 1955 Philip Gough produced a cover for the *Saturday Book* that clearly borrows from Whistler's designs for the Sitwell pieces described earlier.<sup>413</sup> [Fig.3.22] It is pleasant but is no more than an assembly of tree, urns, putti, and columns. There is no integration of the disparate elements or deeper understanding of the way a rococo designer might employ them. Whistler was designing works that had their roots in the eighteenth century mode of expression that he happened to prefer, but that also appealed to the tastes of the twentieth century.

---

<sup>413</sup> Cook, O., and Edwin Smith, 'Collectors' Items from *The Saturday Book*', 1955, in Calloway, 1994, p.151.

Whistler's interest in the later eighteenth century coincided with a renewed interest in the Regency period in the 1920s and 30s. Happening concurrently with the tastes for the Baroque and rococo, this presented an interesting moment in architecture and design of the twentieth century, particularly in the midst of the manifestations of International Modernism - however distilled or diluted for English tastes. The architects finding inspiration in the Regency Revival such as Wellesley and Wills, Goodhart-Rendel (with whom Wellesley trained), and the designer Edward Knoblock, amongst others, were not merely slavishly copying Regency artefacts and décor. This was a fresh interpretation of an older style, where its inherently classical qualities were used in a way that could co-exist with more modern interiors. Regency was associated with sophistication and elegance and was thus sought after by certain architects and clients in this period.<sup>414</sup>

Whistler's 1935 mural for Sir Chips Channon, to be discussed in the next chapter, was created for a Regency-inspired interior designed by Wellesley and Wills for his London mansion.

These revivals of historical styles provide a more sympathetic context for Whistler, who has often been derided by his later critics as being hopelessly mired in the past and out of touch with the current tastes. Viewed alongside these shifts in style his tastes for the classical can be seen not as retardataire, but emphatically in touch with more contemporary movements. It is important to note that Whistler was not an individual who could only engage with the past and who lived in some kind of nostalgic world of his imagination. His sketchbooks, diaries, and correspondence demonstrate that he was equally interested in the cultural

---

<sup>414</sup> *Thirties British art and design before the War*. Exhibition catalogue, edited by Jennifer Hawkins and Marianne Hollis, London: Arts Council of Great Britain, p.83.

manifestations of the modern world, such as music, dancing films and cars and the aspects of American culture so prevalent in the 1920s.

## **Motifs and Themes**

Looking at the way Whistler used the inspiration of his preferred historical periods it is clear that he was not afraid of combining disparate elements in his designs. Amongst these were particular motifs and themes that made up a sort of visual lexicon that was assembled and utilised from the start of his career. Nor was he afraid of repeating these motifs, which could include the use of specific buildings, such as the Palladian Bridge at Wilton, both individually and as part of townscapes or *capriccios*, particular types and treatments of landscape and classical statuary, trophies, and inscriptions. To attempt a comprehensive survey of all of these elements across the whole of Whistler's oeuvre is beyond the scope of this thesis, and so this must be considered a partial analysis. This enquiry will concentrate mainly on the murals as their scale allows a large range of motifs to be examined.

## **Use of particular types of landscape and background**

The study of a 'Clump of trees on road to Bellegra July 8' in his 1928 Rome Sketchbook was an unusual subject for Whistler, who did not make studies of flora and fauna, but it is closely linked to his particular way of treating landscapes. A recurrent feature was a bluff or outcrop of land, with trees and roots and twiggy

branches growing from it, as in this drawing.<sup>415</sup> [Fig.3.23] It is a feature immediately recognisable from a number of Renaissance landscape paintings, obviously because, as this sketch shows, it is characteristic of the Italian landscape and country itself. A possible source of inspiration is Giorgione's *Homage to a Poet* that Whistler could have studied in the National Gallery, and he also notes the artist's name amongst those he saw on his first visit to Florence in 1925.<sup>416</sup> Once he had been to Italy early in 1925 he would have witnessed the distinctive landscape in reality. In fact this sort of landscape makes its first appearance in the preliminary sketch for the 'Trial Scene of the Merchant of Venice' in May or June of 1925 and then in the final painting, which the artist set in its correct literary location. [See Figs. 1.17 and 1.18] A similar rocky promontory set in an Italianate landscape appears in a section of the Tate mural the following year, in the 'Jonah' panel of 1928, forms the background of the 19 and 36 Hill Street murals of 1931 and 1936 respectively, in the portrait of the Dudley Ward sisters in 1934, and in many other works including one of the illustrations to Edward James's *The Next Volume* in 1932. [Fig.3.24]

## **Architectural elements and *capriccios***

In addition to the individual buildings that Whistler incorporated into his creative work was the more complex motif of the imaginary townscape, which appears in all his murals except the less figurative works of 90 Gower Street, Brook House, and Mottisfont. The town of Epicurania that appears at the beginning and end of

---

<sup>415</sup> Without any evidence to draw on, it is impossible to say whether Whistler just preferred to situate his paintings in the landscapes of his favourite country, or if there was a deeper meaning behind it.

<sup>416</sup> *Homage to a Poet* (early 16th century), listed as by a 'Follower of Giorgione' [Online] <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/follower-of-giorgione-homage-to-a-poet>.

the Tate 'story' is a good case in point. Comprised of buildings both real and imaginary from all over Europe in a mélange of architectural styles it is typical of his use of *capriccios*, the grandest manifestation being in the Plas Newydd mural. [Fig.3.25] The paintings of Claude, so admired by Whistler, often contained features of ancient Rome inserted into other surroundings. Thus Whistler's placing of, for instance, the Boycott Pavilion in the middle of a street in the Port Llympne mural has artistic precedent. The imaginary towns either placed in the distance as in the 19 and 36 Hill Street schemes, or near enough for the viewer to count the bricks in the buildings as in Plas Newydd, are a clever fusion of the identifiable and the invented. [Fig.3.26] In these, Whistler's taste for English eighteenth-century architecture, particularly that of James Gibbs, is demonstrated in the frequent use of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, the Radcliffe Camera and the Boycott Pavilion and Corinthian Arch from Stowe, albeit in slightly amended forms. From further afield come Trajan's Column and the Santissima Nome di Maria in Rome, alongside many other landmarks. In these townscapes his ability to produce a cohesive, and attractive, arrangement testify to a mental 'image bank' from which he could select, at will it seems, the most appropriate image for the design.

These architectural fantasies that Whistler created for his clients were unlike anything else that was being produced in this period, certainly in murals. However, a capriccio in three dimensions could be found at Portmeirion, around the coast from Plas Newydd, designed by Clough Williams-Ellis, where building commenced in 1925.<sup>417</sup> Like Whistler's caprices this was Italianate in inspiration, with English

---

<sup>417</sup> There is no record of Whistler visiting this site or that he and Williams-Ellis ever met, but the correlations between the two are interesting. Both men shared a penchant for the Baroque and the amalgamation of various architectural elements and periods.

eighteenth-century additions, and incorporated the kind of buildings – such as the Pantheon, Colonnade, and campanile - that singly could have appeared incongruous in the Welsh landscape, but collectively formed an integrated and charming whole.<sup>418</sup>

### **Use of Classical artefacts, statuary, and trophies**

Edith Olivier recorded in her journal Whistler's predilection for 'urns, columns, casinos, and temples'.<sup>419</sup> As witnessed in the Rome Sketchbook his imagination could provide any combination of these to fashion funerary monuments, book plates, and illustrations. The artefacts he came across whilst visiting the Roman Forum and other ancient sites merely added to his repertoire. These fragments from the classical world were a recurring feature in his murals from Shadwell onwards.

Whistler's use of columns, porticoes, and balustrading was usually employed to create a loggia, or terrace so that, inside the room, the viewer felt they were looking out onto gardens or a landscape. In this he followed the model of the early Roman murals, such as those at the Villa Livia where the effect is of opening onto a luxuriant garden, thereby bringing the outside in. These secular and decorative wall paintings of Pompeii, Herculaneum and the Villa Livia and Farnesina have the lightness of touch and subtle, observational humour that is found in Whistler's works.

---

<sup>418</sup> The 1760 Colonnade was relocated from Bristol, Williams-Ellis designed the Campanile or Bell Tower in 1928, the Pantheon in the 1950s. <http://www.portmeirion-village.com/en/visit/guidebook> accessed 4 June 2013.

<sup>419</sup> Middelboe, 1989, p.63.



Statuary and trophies were part of Whistler's repertoire. Trophies were incorporated into his designs from the Sassoon mural at Lympne in 1930-32. [Fig.3.27] These devices dating back to the ancient Greek *Tropaion* and its Roman equivalent came into decorative usage again in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, both in three dimensions on victory monuments or on walls in bas-relief.<sup>420</sup> These could be generic assemblies of for instance, scrolls, musical instruments and weaponry, or in a more personalised form could allow the artist to incorporate multiple references to his clients whilst still retaining the classical elegance of a composition. The trophy for Lord Anglesey contained nautical ephemera – anchor, fishing net, and triton, to indicate both his love of sailing and the coastal location of Plas Newydd and these were combined with a globe and other indications of a well-travelled man. Whistler could have seen examples of trophies in texts on classical artefacts and perhaps in Roman villas, but the nearest inspiration was in Thornhill's Painted Hall at Greenwich where the trophies and columns frame the great arch<sup>421</sup>, in subtle grisaille tones which Whistler favoured in his depictions.<sup>422</sup>

---

<sup>420</sup> Description of trophy in V&A Prints, Drawings and Paintings Collection [Online] <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O628268/omnis-generis-instrumenta-bellica-print-paul-birckenhultz/> [July 23 2014]

<sup>421</sup> Detailed analysis of Thornhill's work from Balakier A. and James Balakier, *The Spatial Infinite at Greenwich in Works by Christopher Wren, James Thornhill, and James Thomson: The Newton Connection*, Dyfed: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995, pp. 65-80. Again, there is no evidence that Whistler visited Greenwich but it was open to the public until 1936 as the National Gallery of Naval Art. Information on Greenwich [Online] <http://www.ornc.org/visit/attractions/painted-hall> [Accessed June 5 2013].

<sup>422</sup> There are evident similarities with Whistler's usage of subtle coloration, faux stonework and the trophies, particularly in the Lympne, Mottisfont, and Plas Newydd schemes.

## Conclusions

As a result of the fuller investigations carried out in this chapter into Whistler's travels in Europe a more complete account of their impact on his work and creative impetus has been offered. Using his sketchbooks as a tool for analysis it has been possible to map the places and the experiences that influenced him during these European sojourns. This process has been of particular importance in the evaluation of his time at the British School at Rome, and has shown what he gained from his time there in terms of his own practice as well as the opportunity to immerse himself in the art and architecture of the city he held in such high regard. The realisation that his tastes were so different to those of his contemporaries at the School does not appear to have come as any surprise, and may have become obvious at the Slade. An interesting facet of Whistler's character is that he seems to have had an innate confidence in his inclinations and opinions, and there is no evidence that he felt marginalised at the School – or anywhere else. But the works produced during his residency do highlight a much wider variety of styles and experimentation than has previously been acknowledged. Whether this was due to the freedom from the Slade and Tonks's teachings, the concentration of inspiring subjects, the diverse stimuli offered by the painting and architecture Scholars, or the effect of spending time with and painting alongside the cultivated Lord Gerald Berners is not certain – it is more likely to be a combination of all of these. The School also offered him time and resources to research his interests, particularly in architecture, in an academic environment.

With regard to other sources of influence, his relationship with Edith Olivier is undoubtedly important but the re-assessment of his friendship with Lord Berners has shown him playing a far more important role in the artist's life during this years than has been alluded to by the existing biographies.

Looking at the broader scope of influences and inspirations on Whistler's work has highlighted the difficulties encountered when trying to assess the sensitive issues of inspiration versus imitation. The difference between them is often, especially in Whistler's case, not easy to discern. But it is an important factor to take into consideration.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MURALS

#### Introduction

The contention of this chapter is that Rex Whistler was one of the foremost private mural painters of his generation, not only in the number of schemes he created but also the scale of these commissions. The justification for this statement is that there was simply no one else doing this kind of work on this scale or for this many clients. Looking at the eleven year period from his first private commission, for Courtauld Thomson at Dorneywood in 1928 to his last, for the Russells at Mottisfont in 1939, Whistler completed ten mural schemes – four of which were for complete rooms, including ceiling decorations. Many of these projects overlapped, but it must also be borne in mind that he was working on many other types of work concurrently.<sup>423</sup> Albeit that he had assistants to help him carry out some of the mural schemes, the creative impetus was his alone. It will be argued that Whistler deserves more recognition and acclaim from art history for this aspect of his work.

---

<sup>423</sup> For instance in 1935 he was working on the murals at 90 Gower Street, the large panel for the chimneypiece for Chips Channon and the decorations for Sassoon at Trent Park. In the same year he designed the entire productions of *The Rake's Progress* ballet and the play *Victoria Regina*, illustrated a new edition of Hans Andersen, painted five portraits, nine oil paintings for three exhibitions, produced illustrations for four magazines (usually monthly), and various commercial projects including the design for a Valentine's Day telegram and catalogues and promotional material for Fortnum & Mason. See Appendix I 'Career Chronology'.

Rex Whistler's mural schemes are probably the most well-documented part of his oeuvre. This chapter seeks to give a more complete picture of the reasons for Whistler's success as a muralist by examining the particular skills he brought to each project. This goes beyond his choice of subject or ability to create pleasing compositions; he had an instinctive understanding of both real and fictive space and how his designs could complement and interact with a room or building. This architectural knowledge enabled him to design particularly appropriate schemes for each commission. This appears to have been partly innate but was greatly added to by years of studying and drawing buildings from life and in reproduction. Whistler also carried out architectural schemes for several clients. In recognition of his expertise in this area he was made an honorary associate of the RIBA in 1938, an award that has inexplicably been left out of all the biographies.

The growing number of artists involved in mural painting makes it possible to link Whistler's murals with others being created at the same time, to build up a contextual picture of murals, muralists, and patrons in England during the interwar period. This chapter makes use of this opportunity to validate his position and make direct comparisons, showing the similarities and differences in approach between Whistler and his contemporaries. From these comparisons it becomes clear that Whistler's work in both the public and private sphere which exhibited such strong affiliations to the eighteenth century was not in evidence in any other muralist. Nor, it can be argued, were any showing Whistler's kind of technical proficiency in the use of perspective devices and *trompe l'oeil*.

However, these muralists do constitute a group in which to find Whistler an artistic context. One of the aims of this thesis is to re-situate Whistler as an artist who was an active participant in movements or trends of the period, refuting the common perception of him being a lone maverick, working outside the mainstream.

Whistler's murals were included in many of the exhibitions which celebrated the rise of mural painting during this period and, for an artist not widely exhibited, this provides a useful context for this side of his oeuvre. In a wider sense the reception of these exhibitions gives an insight into the status of private, and public, murals.

This chapter will question why there is a comparative lack of importance given to many twentieth-century schemes and their creators. Many of the artists working in this field have been written out of the art history canon and indeed many of their works lost or destroyed. In this chapter an attempt will be made to find some explanation for this exclusion and to explore issues of status to do with twentieth-century mural painting and indeed mural painters. Eighteenth-century decorations created on the walls and ceilings of stately homes and public buildings are justly celebrated. Like William Kent, Verrio, and Thornhill before him, Whistler had the luck or judgement or sufficient reputation to produce murals for the kinds of significant families and their houses that were likely to endure for generations. Admittedly tastes can change but it would take a brave descendant of the 6<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Anglesey to obliterate the mural at Plas Newydd. Additionally the timing of Whistler's career coincided with the National Trust's acquisition programme which encouraged the owners of country houses to donate their properties to the Trust in lieu of death duties.

Whistler embraced mural painting with enthusiasm and dedication, despite his imaginative visions occasionally being limited by his patrons. He regarded the murals as an important even the predominant feature of his career.<sup>424</sup> The design of murals played to his strengths in both pure composition and architectural vision. There is every indication that he was more proud of his murals than any other commissioned work. His death in 1944 at the age of 39, meant that his career was much shorter than most of his contemporaries in this field. In terms of mural painting there is a widely-held assumption that there would have been many fewer opportunities for such commissions after the war. Changes in taste towards a less decorative interior style and the continuing closure of many big houses due to economic constraints would surely have reduced the market. However there were artists who continued in this vein, such as Martin Battersby (1914-1982) and Felix Kelly (1914-1994) who found considerable success post-war designing murals for private clients. Even the most cursory research into post-war murals brings up many results, both in the public and private domain.<sup>425</sup> It is fairly obvious that had Whistler survived the war, this aspect of his career would have had every chance of success.

Appendix II gives a full listing of Whistler's mural schemes, from his first project at Shadwell Memorial Boys Club in 1924-5, to his final commission at Mottisfont in 1938, which finished just as war was declared.<sup>426</sup>

---

<sup>424</sup> In a letter to Edith Olivier in 1932 he complains of 'no painting job [i.e. mural] to do' that summer, Whistler, 1985, p.167.

<sup>425</sup> Photographs and information on post-war murals [Online] at <http://www.ribapix.com> and <http://www.lynnpearson.co.uk/pearson-studyday.pdf>

<sup>426</sup> The panel for Samuel Courtauld will not be dealt with here as it was purely trompe l'oeil wallpaper. Nor will Whistler's last works, at Brighton in 1944, 'Allegory' and 'George IV' be included as they were in the nature of a jeu d'esprit for his fellow officers, and not a serious commission.

## The Position of Private Murals in the Twentieth Century and Beyond

The issue of the status of 'private' versus 'public' murals is one that is rarely addressed in art historical literature. In comparison to public mural schemes, those for private dwellings are given very little critical or historical attention within the limited historiography on the subject. Rex Whistler's career included only one mural for the public sphere, the Tate Gallery Refreshment Room, with the vast majority being for private clients.<sup>427</sup> The objective of this chapter is to provide a fuller account of these private commissions of Whistler and his contemporaries, and assert their importance for a complete portrayal of interwar English art.

The main reference work on the subject of English murals is Clare Willsdon's *Mural Painting in Britain 1840-1940 Image and Meaning*, published in 2000. This provides an admirable survey of major schemes of the period but focuses almost exclusively on public/government sponsored projects with only a single chapter devoted to murals in private houses.<sup>428</sup> However if one takes as a measure the records of the exhibits at the Tate Gallery 1939 Mural Painting exhibition, where just under half of the exhibits were for the domestic sphere, it is evident that there was a great deal of private patronage for muralists.<sup>429</sup> A more relevant historiography for private murals in private houses are those by John Cornforth, e.g. *London Interiors*

---

<sup>427</sup> Although the Boys' Club in Shadwell was notionally a public space, the murals were only seen by the Club's members.

<sup>428</sup> This may be a reflection of the amount of work being done outside the public sphere or possibly the author's own preference.

<sup>429</sup> 40 exhibits were for the private home, details in 'Mural Painting in Great Britain 1919-1939 An Exhibition of Photographs Illustrated Catalogue' in MURAL PAINTING IN GREAT BRITAIN ORGANIZATION PART 1 TG92/42/5, TGA.



(2000, 2009) and *The Inspiration of the Past: Country House Taste in the Twentieth Century* (1985). These images of works that may be lost or in private hands are essential to an understanding of this art form. Although Cornforth also provides useful historical background and context and details of patrons, there is little critical or art historical analysis. They are more a paean to a world of 'vanished magnificence'.<sup>430</sup> A newer addition to the historiography is *British Murals & Decorative Painting 1920-1960*.<sup>431</sup> Although some of Whistler's schemes and contributions to mural painting are mentioned, the book is predominantly about public murals, rather proving the point that those schemes in private houses appear to be of limited interest to writers on art history.<sup>432</sup>

The fact that so many of these schemes have vanished presents another problem. Demolition and reconstruction has taken its toll on countless murals.<sup>433</sup> Many have perished due to their means of production. Mural painting in the twentieth century has been in a sense an experimental art form with artists employing various methods of applying different types of paint to wall. In some respects wall decoration has not been understood in this country as it would have been in say, Italy, and the damp English climate is not conducive to the correct drying and staying power of buon fresco or tempera. Those painted on canvas, which is then either fixed to battens on the wall or directly to its surface by *marouflage* tend to

---

<sup>430</sup> Cornforth, J., *London Interiors From the Archives of Country Life*, 2009 edition, London: Aurum Press Ltd., cover text.

<sup>431</sup> *British Murals & Decorative Painting 1920-1960 Rediscoveries and New Interpretations*, Bristol: Sansom & Co., 2013.

<sup>432</sup> Although the bigger intention of the book was to redress the balance between current histories of twentieth century British art which neglect to mention the contribution of murals and muralists. Conversation with Paul Liss, September 2012.

<sup>433</sup> One suggestion is that around 90% of British murals have been destroyed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. 'British Murals and Decorative Painting 1910-1970', exhibition catalogue, published by The Fine Art Society & Liss Fine Art, London: 2013 p.119. It is not clear whether this figure applies only to murals created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

survive longer than those in fresco, and canvas is the support Whistler usually employed.<sup>434</sup> Beyond these fates the mural may suffer at the whim of fashion or redecorating.<sup>435</sup> José María Sert's mural for Sassoon at Port Lympne, created in 1915, fell victim to Sassoon's change in taste in the 1930s.

An art form with this much missing from its history is one to which it is even more difficult to give serious consideration. In the main, of the twentieth-century schemes, the large civic schemes have fared better than the private ones.

Whistler's murals have survived more successfully than those of his contemporaries as many of the private houses for which his schemes were commissioned are now owned by the National Trust, which should ensure the conservation and care of the works in perpetuity.

## Exhibitions of Murals in the 1930s

An obvious difficulty in the critical appreciation of mural paintings is that unlike their framed counterparts they are impossible to exhibit. They can be difficult to access and hard to photograph. *British Murals & Decorative Painting 1920-1960* was launched in 2013 with an accompanying exhibition at the Fine Art Society.

---

<sup>434</sup>For instance Eric Ravilious' murals for the Midland Hotel Morecambe in 1933 quickly deteriorated due to the inherent dampness of the wall. Powers, A., *Eric Ravilious Imagined Realities*, London: Philip Wilson, 2012, pp. 16-17. And at the De La Warr Pavilion, Edward Wadsworth's 1935 'Shell and Cone' – painted directly onto the wall - fell victim to the strong light shining on the plaster. 'The De La Warr Study for a Mural' [Online] The Bookroom Art Press <http://news.bookroomartpress.co.uk/2010/04/the-de-la-warr-study-for-a-mural/> [Accessed August 6 2014]

<sup>435</sup> Edward Bawden's 1938 mural for the restaurant of the International Building Society Club, featured in the Tate 1939 Exhibition Catalogue and pictured in *The Studio's* piece on murals the same year, was completely painted over in the 1950s. 'Edward Bawden CBE, RA Mural Design for the International Building 1938' [Online] <http://www.fryartgallery.org/the-collection/search-viewer/612/artist/6/Edward-Bawden-CBE-RA> [Accessed August 6 2014]

Exhibitions of murals are now rare, for reasons of practicality and, presumably, a question mark over public and possibly critical, interest. In fact the FAS exhibition garnered much critical interest and praise.<sup>436</sup> In comparison, during the period in which Whistler was working, there were at least five such exhibitions, which is perhaps a marker of the increased attention and importance given to murals in the interwar years.<sup>437</sup>

Several of Rex Whistler's works were shown in the Goupil Gallery exhibition 'Decorative Work and Stage and Other Designs' in January 1930.<sup>438</sup> More examples were shown at another 'interior decorations and murals' exhibition held in 1932 at Carlisle House, Soho Square, organised by Ronald Fleming<sup>439</sup> and where fellow muralists Eric Ravilious, Edward Burra and Edward Halliday also showed works.<sup>440</sup> By 1935 Whistler's work in the mural sphere was well established and this was reflected in the quantity of exhibits he had on display at the 'Exhibition of Mural Decorative Paintings' at the Whitechapel Art Gallery that summer. Whistler had 22 listings in the catalogue, many of which contained multiple examples.<sup>441</sup> In a new development in display the Whitechapel used actual photographs of some of

---

<sup>436</sup> See pdf. file of Press cuttings at Liss Fine Art [Online] <http://www.lissfineart.com/pdf/viewer.php?file=Murals2013Press.pdf> [Accessed 16 Apr 2014]

<sup>437</sup> This section is concentrating on the exhibitions of mural painting in which Rex Whistler participated and is not an exhaustive list.

<sup>438</sup> All details on this exhibition from 'DECORATIVE WORK AND STAGE & OTHER DESIGNS' THE GOUPIL GALLERY LTD JANUARY 1930', 920/10/2/1, TGA. Exhibition referred to in letter RW to Eddie Marsh, sometime before Jan 1930, only available in notes made by Laurence, where Rex Whistler 'Thanks for E's invitation to exhibit in Goupil Theatrical Exhib....', Rex : Additional Letters, Rex Whistler Letters A, RWA.

<sup>439</sup> *Edward Halliday Art for Life 1925 – 1939* Exhibition catalogue by Ann Compton, Liverpool: University of Liverpool Art Collections, 1997, p.34. Whistler attended this exhibition with Edith Olivier 30 June 1932, Middelboe, 1989, p.138. Fleming was one of the directors of Fortnum and Mason's interior decoration department and the decorators Keebles were based at Carlisle House, Powers, 2013, p.100. The Soho town house showed the artists' murals in a setting that would attract clients to the possibility of commissioning murals for their own homes

<sup>440</sup> Compton, *ibid.*

<sup>441</sup> Whistler had a display of 'Various Drawings' in the Glass Case and had practically all of the 'Small Gallery' devoted to his work. Catalogue ITHELL COLQUHOUN, TG 929/10/2/1-14, TGA, p.7

the schemes, including four images of the Tate mural.<sup>442</sup> The exhibition was opened by the architect Sir Reginald Blomfield. Despite his Classical and neo-Georgian predilections he spoke encouragingly of the opportunities that modern architects offered to muralists in the provision of empty white walls. But he felt these spaces should be reserved for traditional subjects, rather than the ‘weird figures and ugly and unintelligible diagrams’ that contemporary abstract painters might choose for their surfaces.<sup>443</sup>

In May 1939 came the largest and most ambitious exhibition of the period, ‘Mural Painting in Great Britain 1919-1939 An Exhibition of Photographs’ held at the Tate Gallery.<sup>444</sup> Its purpose was to reflect both the importance of murals as an art form over this period but also to encourage those involved in the building and associated industries to create space and scope for mural paintings in all kinds of public, civic and leisure locations.<sup>445</sup> Eighty-six artists were selected to participate, Rex Whistler amongst them with photographs of his schemes at Brook House, Port Lymne, 36 Hill Street and Plas Newydd.<sup>446</sup>

Strangely this did not include the mural that was within the Tate Gallery itself, although this could be seen in the flesh by those exhibition visitors who stopped for refreshments in the café. As this had been his only public mural project

---

<sup>442</sup> Listed in catalogue, *ibid*.

<sup>443</sup> ‘New Subjects for Wall Painters’ *The Times* Thursday 6 June 1935, ‘Exhibition of Mural Decorative Paintings’ Press Cuttings, Whitechapel Art Gallery Archive. With artists such as Sir George Clausen, Mary Adshead, Frederic Cayley Robinson and, of course, Whistler exhibiting in this show his fears for the malign influence of abstract decorations were apparently unfounded.

<sup>444</sup> An exhibition of photographs of murals was also held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery from February to March 1939. Organised by the Artists International Association “Art for the People” an Exhibition of photographs of mural paintings” was billed as ‘a demonstration of unity of artists for Peace, Democracy and Cultural Development’. Whitechapel Art Gallery Archive WAG/EAR/4/63.

<sup>445</sup> Catalogue essay, unattributed but presumably by Sir John Rothenstein in ‘Mural Painting in Great Britain 1919-1939’ Illustrated Catalogue. London: Tate Gallery, 1939.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid*.

Whistler was thus purely represented by his work for private clients. In his essay John Rothenstein comments on the lack of private patronage, but rather contradicting this, the murals in the 'Private Homes' category made up just under half of the schemes exhibited.<sup>447</sup> The breakdown of categories in terms of the number of photographs shown were 40 for private homes, 19 for Civic and Government – 8 of these entries were for St Stephen's Hall, Westminster, reflecting its importance - 28 for places of leisure and entertainment, 11 for corporate buildings, 16 for churches, and 15 for schools and hospitals. Many of the artists participating such as Hans Feibusch, Glyn Philpot, Eric Ravilious, Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell are written about in this chapter, but there were many names that are now totally unfamiliar.

The exhibition consisted of about two hundred images, twenty of which were large scale photographs at c. three feet by four feet, and all were mounted in groups on panels according to types of location – hotels, private houses etc.<sup>448</sup> The only coloured images were those of the Palace of Westminster murals.<sup>449</sup> The 'Rome style' of this scheme was by no means ubiquitous and many other modes of mural expression were on display, reflecting the diversity of subjects and locations on offer. The exhibition generated a lot of press coverage, largely favourable, with the majority stating that Stanley Spencer's murals at Burghclere were its most important feature.<sup>450</sup> In fact Spencer's scheme was represented by eighteen images, by far the largest amount for a single artist, and perhaps indicating the esteem in which it was held. Despite the exhortation to architects and artists to

---

<sup>447</sup> Exhibition Catalogue, *ibid*, pp.7-20.

<sup>448</sup> 'Notes from Tate Gallery on Mural Painting Exhibition' undated. TG/92/42/4, TGA.

<sup>449</sup> 'Mural Painting' *The Times* June 1 1939, 'Publicity File Mural Painting' TG92/42/7. TGA

<sup>450</sup> *Sunday Times* 28 May 1939, 'Publicity File Mural Painting' TG92/42/7. TGA.

decorate new buildings with appropriately contemporary works, the elegiac quality of Spencer's memorial to the war, struck a deeper chord with the reviewers. Whistler was also mentioned by the *Sunday Times* critic with a reductive comment on his murals being in 'his own elaborate version of Regency style.'<sup>451</sup>

*The Studio* offered a more in-depth account of the exhibition over two illustrated articles written by the artist Percy Horton.<sup>452</sup> The second article, on 'Mural Painting in the Private House' was the only review of the exhibition that gave equal importance to this genre of muralism.<sup>453</sup> Horton comes out firmly behind the notion of murals for the home, making the point that hanging paintings on the wall was no longer a fashionable option and the ideal was a 'single mural painting which forms a focal point in the room'. Whistler received a more considered and favourable treatment here, with his Brook House and Plas Newydd murals singled out as exemplars of the genre. Whilst describing the debt that his work owes to the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Horton asserted that because Whistler so completely understands the period, his work is free of any pastiche or mere imitation and that his own artistic voice is always in evidence.<sup>454</sup> Although the article featured many of the large scale and prestigious schemes created for those who could afford them, it also promoted the possibilities of murals for all. A mural

---

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> Horton, P. 'Mural Painting in Great Britain' *The Studio* Vol. CXVIII, July 1939 p.4.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid. September 1939, pp.148-155.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

could provide an imaginary sense of space for those living in the cramped living space of a typical modern flat – as opposed to a palatial Mayfair penthouse.<sup>455</sup>

This was an important event for those artists involved in murals in the interwar period. Yet, in similar vein to the exhibitions described earlier, neither the event nor his participation in it warrants a mention in Whistler's biography, or the catalogue raisonné. When a painting or drawing had been exhibited in a gallery, this was listed in the catalogue. Nothing is listed underneath the exhibited murals. This may be an issue of status in Laurence Whistler's mind. Did he consider that the murals being exhibited in photographic form rather than in their original state made the event of lesser significance? The Dorneywood panel was shown in full, as far as can be ascertained, as part of an exhibition at the Claridge Gallery in 1928, but again this is not mentioned.<sup>456</sup> Once more it seems there is some evidence of prejudices and partialities at work in Laurence Whistler's version of his brother's life.

The exhibition at the Tate Gallery and the publicity it accrued had celebrated a 'new dawn' for the artists and murals which had enjoyed a huge rise in popularity since the end of the First World War, and plans were put in place to tour the exhibition around the country to maximise the regional interest.<sup>457</sup> When the

---

<sup>455</sup>The idea of murals for all was heralded in a new venture by the London County Council who were to provide inexpensive murals, designed by John Hutton in stencil form, in a new development of flats for working people, *ibid*, p.155.

<sup>456</sup> 'My panel for Sir C is going to be exhibited at the Claridge Galleries next week so I must try and get it done.... It will be in an exhibition of decorative Arts & other things used for decoration.' Rex Whistler to Edith Olivier, 28 November 1928, R. to E.O. 1928, Rex Whistler Letters B, RWA.

<sup>457</sup> In the event it was only shown in Portsmouth and Hove. Letter 8 Jan 1940 Chisman to Fincham. Press Cuttings Publicity File Mural Painting 1919-39 TG92/42/7 TGA. Whistler's name was also

exhibition was contemplated in late 1938, there can have been little expectation that Britain would be at war within three months of its closure. This fact now imbues the event with a sense of finality, the end of an era and that the long-vaunted murals revival would come to a premature close. However the post war period did herald a resurgence of interest in mural schemes, both in the public and private domain.<sup>458</sup> The 1951 Festival of Britain acted as a vast exhibition for mural artworks, with a large number of mural schemes featured throughout the site, by artists including Ben Nicholson, John Piper and Graham Sutherland.<sup>459</sup> However the work in murals during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not reflected in anything like the number of exhibitions held in the interwar period, signalling the beginnings of the critical neglect of murals as an art form. The Society of Mural Painters<sup>460</sup>, formed in 1939, held at least two events showcasing their members' works: in 1950 at the New Burlington Galleries and 'Mural Art Today' at the Victoria and Albert museum in 1960.<sup>461</sup> It may be hoped that the efforts commenced with the Liss Fine Art exhibition at the Fine Arts Society in 2013,

---

amongst the list of artists on the material sent out to attract these other 'Municipal Galleries', 'Mural Painting since the War' Mural Exhibition 1919-39 Correspondence. TG/92/42/4. TGA.

<sup>458</sup> See Pearson, L., 'Post-war Murals Database' [Online] [http://www.academia.edu/5211590/Postwar\\_murals\\_database](http://www.academia.edu/5211590/Postwar_murals_database) [8 May 2014]

<sup>459</sup> There were well over a hundred murals just at the South Bank site, 'C20 Society Murals Campaign' [Online], <http://www.c20society.org.uk/murals-campaign/>, [8 May 2014]

<sup>460</sup> Whistler's name was listed on the 'List of Committee Members and applications of The Society of Mural Painters' although there is no biographical or archive material to support this. Undated document attached to letter 12 May 1939 from Fennemore of Society of Mural Painters to McLaren Young, 'Mural Painting since the War' Mural Exhibition 1919-39 Correspondence. TG/92/42/4. TGA.

<sup>461</sup> Arts Council Travelling Exhibition. *Society of Mural Painters: First Exhibition*. The exhibition opened at the New Burlington Galleries, London, and later transferred to Brighton; Wednesbury; Plymouth; Hull; Sheffield; Newcastle; Lincoln; Manchester; Luton and elsewhere. Ithell Colquhoun 'Group Exhibitions' [Online] <http://www.ithellcolquhoun.co.uk/3004/> [10 May 2014]. 'Mural Art Today: A Loan Exhibition of Work by British Artists', Organized by the Society of Mural Painters, at the Victoria and Albert Museum information from James, E., *The Victoria and Albert Museum: A Bibliography and Exhibition Chronology, 1852-1996*, London: Taylor and Francis, 1998, p.446 [Online] [http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=NPGsTWqUYC4C&dq=mural+art+today+ victoria+and+albert+museum+1960&source=gbs\\_navlinks\\_s](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=NPGsTWqUYC4C&dq=mural+art+today+ victoria+and+albert+museum+1960&source=gbs_navlinks_s) [10 May 2014]



mentioned earlier in the chapter will go some way to correcting this deficit in the twenty-first century.

## **Painting with an Architect's Eye: Whistler's Approach to Mural Design and a Contextual Evaluation of his Schemes**

It is arguable that Whistler approached the design of mural commissions in a very different way from his contemporaries, due to his interest in and aptitude for architecture. It could be said that he painted these murals with an architect's eye.

In 1938 Rex Whistler was appointed an Honorary Associate of the RIBA. This could be awarded to: "any persons not professionally engaged in practice as architects who by reason of their position or of their eminence in art, science, literature or any other matter or of their interest in matters relating to architecture, the Council may consider eligible for that honour".<sup>462</sup> This indicates that this was not an honour bestowed lightly. Although taken literally this meant Whistler could have been eligible due to his prominence as an artist, it was surely conferred due to his interest in architecture, the depiction of it, his understanding of it and the architectural designs he worked on for clients. As demonstrated in these practices and described throughout this thesis, his knowledge of architectural history was extensive.<sup>463</sup>

---

<sup>462</sup> Confirmation of Whistler's appointment and terms of the award from the 1938 annual calendar of members, in email from Tricia Lawton RIBA Information Centre, 22 May 2013.

<sup>463</sup> His interest in architecture was firmly in evidence from his time at the Slade where he went voluntarily to Sir Albert Richardson's lectures at the School of Architecture. See Chapter One.

Whistler was commissioned to design the cover of the RIBA Centenary Conference Handbook in 1934, an important anniversary and one which also saw the organisation move to its new and very modern headquarters in Portland Place.<sup>464</sup> The design Whistler provided was a classical trophy comprised of drawing and mathematical equipment with a portrait in relief of 'Vitruvius Pater Architecture'. [Fig.4.1] As befitted a centenary this sought to celebrate the history of the organisation rather than looking forward to the future, and presumably this traditional imagery is what the RIBA knew they would get from Whistler. In contrast a more contemporary graphic approach was taken for the Reception Programme for the conference in a design by Raymond McGrath which juxtaposed the facades of the old and the new headquarters buildings.<sup>465</sup> The choice of Whistler was unusual in two respects. The majority of the programme and event artwork in the 1930s and beyond used reproductions of prints and engravings rather than original artwork, and where an original painting or drawing was used the creator was usually an architect.<sup>466</sup>

A later connection with the association was during Whistler's work on the Plas Newydd mural whilst the architect H Goodhart-Rendel was employed by Lord Anglesey to make alterations to the house. Whistler became involved with the plans for the house in 1936, particularly the architect's proposal for a separate front entrance court for vehicles. Here Whistler designed the archways and heavy

---

<sup>14</sup> Original drawing in Box 336, Centenary Committee minutes and papers 1933-1934, Box 8, RIBA Archive. This drawing is not listed in the CR and the family did not know of its existence when the author found it in 2014.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid.

<sup>466</sup> See McGrath's design in 1934, P D Hepworth in the 1948 Reception programme, Cyril Farey, 1955 Reception Programme, all Box 5.3.16, RIBA Reception Programmes 1934-56, RIBA Archive. It has not been possible at this stage to research the material for previous decades

doors at each end of the screen wall that divided the court from the pedestrian entrance to the house.<sup>467</sup> This seems to have been a beneficial cooperation as it was Goodhart-Rendel who signed the application form for Whistler's appointment as an Honorary Associate in 1938, whilst he was President of the RIBA.<sup>468</sup>

In the 1930s Whistler became involved with the new plans for Grosvenor Square and in 1934 drew a proposal sent to the Duke of Westminster which widened the roads in the original plan and allowed for a much bigger formal paved space in the middle of the square with radiating paths and a central baldachino with columns, urns and a statue.<sup>469</sup> [Fig.4.2] This may have been an independent proposal.

However two years earlier, the Square's architects, Detmar Blow and Fernand Billerey, commissioned him directly to make a perspective drawing for the north side of the Square to persuade the Duke of their plans.<sup>470</sup> When Sir Philip Sassoon was both being considered for and appointed to the office of First Commissioner of Works in 1936-37, Whistler wrote to him with plans for a new piazza in front of St Pauls and ideas for the new proposals for Trafalgar Square.<sup>471</sup>

---

<sup>467</sup> Whistler, L., 1985, p.205, Catalogue Raisonné, 1960, p.50, and the original documents - Goodhart-Rendel's plans dated 18.8.1936 altered by RW, and undated letters, in Plas Newydd archive.

<sup>468</sup> Information from records of Honorary Associates provided by the RIBA Archivist, Kurt Helfrich via Tricia Lawton, RIBA Information Centre in email to author, 2 April 2014.

<sup>469</sup> CR, pp.49-50, illustrated in *Country Life* January 17 1947, Vol. 2609 p.192.

<sup>470</sup> G.O., Solicitor's fee books, G41/239-41, 433; Estate Surveyor's letterbooks, 20/150 ref.648, F. H. W. Sheppard (General Editor), "Grosvenor Square: The Rebuilding of the Square from 1926." Survey of London: volume 40: The Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair, Part 2 (The Buildings) (1980): British History Online, 166-170. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42127> [Accessed March 17 2014] This is not mentioned in the biography and may not have been known by Laurence Whistler.

<sup>471</sup> Two undated letters to Sassoon, in the Archives at Houghton Hall, Norfolk reproduced in Stansky, 2003, pp. 232-3. Sassoon was keen to re-create Trafalgar Square as a Naval piazza, replacing the military statues with 'commemorative fountains', Ibid, p.234. The idea may have originated with Whistler, who wrote saying that he felt the Square would be improved by new fountains for which he 'would certainly submit thousands of designs', Ibid.

Many of Whistler's architectural designs were for the houses of friends and clients and, closer to home, for Bolebec the family house at Whitchurch in the 1930s.<sup>472</sup> Some were carried out, usually smaller scale such as those at Plas Newydd whilst others exist only on paper. He had an architect's eye for improvements to the exterior and interior of buildings, although some were perhaps rendered with too much of an artist's imagination to be successful and may have been produced as a *divertissement* or a talking point for friends and clients.

Despite some ambivalence expressed about these projects, Laurence Whistler does emphasise his brother's feeling for architecture in the biography.<sup>473</sup> More interesting and thoughtful observations are to be found in his preparatory notes to the volume. He describes him as 'the most architectural of all modern painters.'<sup>474</sup> Arguably John Piper had an equal interest in depicting architecture but the difference was that Piper painted actual buildings whereas so many of Whistler's were from his imagination, although often based on aspects of real structures. Historically Laurence Whistler places his brother, as a putative architect, in the English Baroque tradition and finds his closest model to be Thomas Archer.<sup>475</sup> Whistler certainly drew and admired many of Archer's buildings but it is suggested that the closest resemblance is in Archer's ability to design fantastical creations such as the Pavilion at Wrest, echoes of which are found in some of Whistler's own highly imaginative caprices.<sup>476</sup> Laurence Whistler finds that Archer as an architect

---

<sup>472</sup> He had funded the purchase of this family house purchased in 1932. (See Chapter Six), Whistler, 1985, p.175-6.

<sup>473</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.205.

<sup>474</sup> Sheets headed ARCHITECTURE, Folder 'Rex Misc. Notes and sketched fragments', Correspondence Files, RWA.

<sup>475</sup> Gibbs is also mentioned as a favourite. Ibid.

<sup>476</sup> Drawing made of Chettle, and possibly also of Wrest. Ibid. See also Catalogue Raisonné 322 'Design for a Garden Pavilion' 1928, p.48.

is 'an essentially English artist, under the Baroque influence' and that this is an equally accurate description of his brother.<sup>477</sup> These thoughts did not appear in the 1985 biography, but they would have given additional interesting and credible historical context to the account of Whistler's strong inclination towards architecture.

The rationale behind the commissioning of a mural for a private residence could involve several factors, all of which needed to be appreciated by the artist concerned in order to achieve a successful outcome. A mural could have multiple functions: it could serve to highlight or disguise the architecture of a room; in its pure form it was simply a decorative adornment to a wall; it could play with the spatial quality of the room through *trompe l'oeil*; it could have an independent function as a piece of furniture, such as a dividing panel or screen. These factors are all at play in Whistler's designs. Although his style and technique are recognisable in all of his schemes, each one is completely unique, specific to both the client and the space in which they are contained. He understood that there was always a transaction between the mural and its setting. It is tempting to see each scheme as part of a chronological development of Whistler's talent, with each successive project demonstrating greater expertise and with Plas Newydd as his crowning achievement. But with his every mural performing such a specialist task a qualitative judgement is harder to make.

---

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.

Whistler's ability to create a bespoke scheme for each assignment was in evidence from his first major project for the Tate Gallery Refreshment Room. The existing architectural challenges of the entrances and windows in the room are outlined in detail in Chapter Two. The particular issue of a restaurant mural is that there is no central viewing position, tables are set all around the room and diners may be facing in various directions. Whistler's solution was to design a narrative in chapters along each wall, each section containing the hunting party with the distinctive red carriage so that a viewer sitting anywhere in the room could experience part of the story. The use of perspective and depth of field give a sense of spaces that the viewer can enter. This was the first time Whistler had grappled with the problems of designing a scheme that had to work in complete harmony with its location. The earlier panels at Shadwell (1924), described in Chapter One, for two fixed locations on walls shared with Mary Adshead's works, had no real engagement with the room's shape or lighting conditions. There was some sense of distance and depth in the panels but the composition was so steeply angled that the viewer is placed in an awkward position and cannot feel part of the scene. The later proscenium panels (1925) demonstrated a much more realistic sense of recession in the landscapes behind the figures. He was obviously starting to think about the creation of space beyond a flat wall and in the Tate scheme, just a year later, there was a marked development in this spatial awareness.

## Techniques and the Use of Assistants

A description of this important part of Whistler's creative career would be incomplete without some background on the methods and techniques he used in these projects.

In terms of the support, Whistler employed the technique of *marouflage* for most of his schemes, painting onto canvases which were then attached to the wall with glue or fixing. Where schemes covered both walls and ceilings he painted directly onto plaster or wood with oil paint for ceilings, mouldings and those walls that were unsuitable for affixing canvas. In projects, such as Gower Street and Trent Park where the design was in separate sections, he used oil directly on the wall.

The prevailing orthodoxy is that the artist painted his murals with oil paint mixed with a waxy medium and turpentine that could then be cleaned or polished easily. This was the method that all Henry Tonks's students at the Slade were recommended to employ.<sup>478</sup> It is difficult to verify this use of wax in Whistler's murals, although it is mentioned in many accounts of the mural.<sup>479</sup> Whilst painting the Tate scheme Whistler's invoices from Cornelissen & Son, the artists suppliers, include mention of 'Virgin Wax (tablets)'.<sup>480</sup> Cleaning of the mural in 1977 revealed wax in the paint layers and 'a wax-like coating'.<sup>481</sup> It is noted that Whistler painted

---

<sup>478</sup> In addition, Tonks used 'oil colours mixed with white wax and turpentine' for his own mural in the dome of UCL. Hone, J., *The Life of Henry Tonks*, London: Heinemann, 1939, p.186.

<sup>479</sup> Whistler, L., 1985, p.113 and Spalding F., *The Tate A History*, London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998. p.54, An undated pamphlet on the mural, possibly written by Charles Aitken, describes 'paintings executed in oil colours mixed with wax and turpentine and they can be washed and are extremely durable', TG3/4/1, TGA.

<sup>480</sup> Invoice Cornelissen & Son dated 8 November 1927, 'REFRESHMENT ROOM EXPENDITURE AND VARIOUS ACCOUNTS 1926-7' TG3/4/3, TGA.

<sup>481</sup> Tate Gallery Conservation Department Treatment 'History of Previous Treatment' page. 6, notes 1.8.1977, conservator's own file of documents, no TGA reference.

in very thin layers 'applied with a dilute medium' but this would need to be turpentine not wax.<sup>482</sup> Ronald Horton, one of Whistler's assistants and thus more credible, describes his method as 'painting in oil using turps & possibly beeswax.'<sup>483</sup>

Many of the murals, including 19 Hill Street, have a yellowish cast over them, especially visible in the skies. It is now difficult to discern whether this was a deliberate technique to give the works a look of age and patina, or something that has happened due to material or paints, for instance the discoloration of a layer of varnish. However, there is no evidence that Whistler himself used varnish on any of his schemes, as the wax provided a protective coating, but the schemes may have been varnished at a later stage. Certainly the Dorneywood panel has a very glossy finish and the Tate mural has 'a coating which has discoloured and yellowed and appears uneven.'<sup>484</sup> But at Plas Newydd there was no varnish applied to the mural's surface,<sup>485</sup> whereas at Mottisfont inspection revealed 'a thick, now discoloured varnish' over the entire scheme, walls and ceiling.<sup>486</sup> It appears that this was carried out by Lenygon & Morant and done after his work was completed.<sup>487</sup> A comparison between Whistler's paints used for the Tate mural and that at Plas Newydd suggests that Whistler's colour range did not vary greatly during his mural painting career. An invoice from Cornelissen & Co. to Whistler

---

<sup>482</sup> O'Leary, 2000. p.14.

<sup>483</sup> Copies of letters sent to LW, 17 February 1983 from Ronald Horton's niece, Katharine Chaloner in 'Rex 3 NAM', Correspondence Files, RWA. Ronald Horton was the brother of Percy Horton, whose 1939 article for *The Studio* on murals is mentioned later in the chapter. Both were artists and art teachers.

<sup>484</sup> O'Leary, 2000, p.10

<sup>485</sup> Ibid. p.14.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid. p.19.

<sup>487</sup> Letters from Lenygon to Russell April and Nov 1939. Hampshire Record Office Ref 13M63/439 Ibid. p.19



gives a list of oil colours used.<sup>488</sup> Comparing this to the actual tubes of colour in Whistler's paint-box on display at Plas Newydd indicates a similar range of shades.<sup>489</sup>

In a letter to Baroness Porcelli at 36 Hill Street, no doubt intended to allay her fears regarding the progress of her murals, Whistler exaggerates the strength of his workforce: 'I have very good assistants ready to help with the grounding in'. In fact he only had one assistant on the project, Vic Bowen. One of the issues to be addressed in this chapter is the number of mural schemes that Whistler created in his career, largely carried out concurrently with other commissions. One of the reasons behind his productivity was the use of assistants on many of the larger mural projects.

Ronald Horton, who worked for Whistler on 19 Hill Street, recounted his experiences in letters, and yet neither he, nor any material from the letters, has been mentioned in the Whistler biographies.<sup>490</sup> He describes painting alongside Whistler but also being left to work on his own, painting part of the balustrade and urns at the front of the mural.<sup>491</sup> It would have been nearly impossible for Whistler to have worked on this scale without assistance. The staircase wall at 19 Hill St was 21 feet wide and 11 feet high. Painting a large area, such as the sky, had to be done in one go. Painting in oil, no matter how diluted with wax or turps, is a battle against the medium drying before the surface is covered uniformly. On this scale,

---

<sup>488</sup> Op. cit. TG3/4/3. TGA.

<sup>489</sup> Details in O'Leary, 2000, p. 40.

<sup>490</sup> Katharine Chaloner to Laurence Whistler, 17 February 1983 op cit.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid., 31 August 1930.

particularly when perched on scaffolding, it was not a one man job. Victor Bowen was his longest serving assistant who worked on the major schemes at Plas Newydd, Brook House and Mottisfont and assisted with his theatre designs and with the ceiling decoration for Sir Alfred Beit.<sup>492</sup> Bowen was mentioned in Laurence Whistler's biography and the catalogue raisonné.<sup>493</sup> Plas Newydd and Mottisfont also required a third man in the team. It would appear that none of these assistants ever produced original work for these projects but were working from Whistler's sketches. By using assistants to square up and draw out from his original plans Whistler could come in at a later stage to do the finer details. But he did trust them to paint areas of the murals on their own, Horton writes of 'modelling up' in paint the faux stonework columns.<sup>494</sup> Whistler also did not want to get caught up in the very repetitive decorative elements of Mottisfont, or the multiple elements of Brook House, or the intricately coffered ceiling of Plas Newydd, which involved painting 250 individual squares each containing a different decoration. Hence the murals were not all in Whistler's hand, although he maintained complete artistic control. This also highlights the correlation between mural painting and stage design. In a theatrical studio many hands carry out the designer's original idea, and yet the designer is the one credited. Where the project demanded it and the budget warranted it, Whistler treated mural painting in a similar way to his design work for the theatre. It is not known how many other muralists of the period used assistants in their schemes, but it is likely that it was a widespread practice for larger projects.

---

<sup>492</sup> 'Nos. 15 and 15B Kensington Palace Gardens', Sheppard, F.H. W. (Ed.). "The Crown estate in Kensington Palace Gardens: Individual buildings." Survey of London: volume 37: Northern Kensington (1973): 162-193. [Online] British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=49873&strquery=> [August 6 2014]

<sup>493</sup> Whistler, L., 1985, pp.208-9, 229-30, 235 and Whistler & Fuller, 1960, pp.2,8,9,10,12,21,50,53.

<sup>494</sup> Ronald Horton letters op. cit.

## **Fixed Mural Panel:**

### **Dorneywood (1928-29)**

Whistler's first private commission came in January 1928, two months after the Tate unveiling and was for Sir Courtauld Thomson's house, Dorneywood. It was for this type of client, rather than the public arena, that all his subsequent murals were created and the project gives a valuable insight into how he would handle these kinds of commissions throughout his career. The location of the mural was particularly awkward, to be painted on a wall which partitioned off a new entrance lobby on one side and abutted the staircase on the other. Rather than a traditional mural situated on a feature wall this was almost a standalone panel. The room was an entertaining hall and later became the main dining room, ensuring high visibility and decorative importance for the work. However Whistler had to solve the problem of integrating the wall into the room, visually if not physically. His first sketches turned the wall into a solid piece of *trompe l'oeil* stonework, with decorated entablature and Corinthian columns framing an archway which appeared to look out into countryside. The eventual treatment is more successful.

[Fig.4.3] The Corinthian pillars and columns remain, but serve to frame an imaginary portico and loggia leading out on to a large open vista, based partly on the gardens at Dorneywood. This kind of optical device brings the outside in or, equally, leads the viewer's eye out and deals with the spatial issues by dissolving the wall on which the scene is painted. Here Whistler has developed the use of *trompe l'oeil* from the moving focus of the Tate mural to the creation of a perfect perspective from a fixed point in front of the mural, which increases the sense of space and depth in the room. The views of the actual gardens were from the windows opposite the mural; hence the real vista was mirrored or doubled by its

‘reflection’, a technique Whistler used to even greater dramatic effect in the 1936-7 mural for the dining room at Plas Newydd.

Particularly in a commission for a private residence, the practical and decorative purposes of the mural were only part of the story. Whistler had an aptitude for creating work that had deep personal resonance for each individual client.

Whereas the Tate mural only contained references to himself, from Dorneywood onwards he incorporated personal motifs in each mural, incorporating portraits of clients and references to their lives and lifestyles, and this became emblematic of all his subsequent commissioned work. Here, on either side of the imaginary portico, are depictions of patron and artist. On the left, on an ornate bracket, Whistler has painted a bust of Courtauld Thomson. On the facing column, Whistler appears in profile within a medallion containing the signature for the work in a Latin inscription.

## **Comparisons**

A fixed panel has certain attributes and limitations in comparison to a complete painted wall or room and occupies a slightly awkward position between large painting and mural. Works by Edward Halliday<sup>495</sup> and John Piper on similar scale provide effective comparisons to the Dorneywood piece. Halliday was commissioned by Lord Simon to design a panel for his London dining room in

---

<sup>495</sup> As mentioned in Chapter Three, Halliday was a contemporary of Whistler at the British School at Rome and had a successful career as a muralist.

1935, a modern flat as opposed to the traditional setting of Dorneywood.<sup>496</sup>

Entitled 'Ulysses and Nausicaa' the mural portrayed the classical story in a contemporary style and setting.<sup>497</sup> [Fig. 4.4] Whistler personalised his mural to his patron with views of his estate and a portrait bust, Halliday depicted Lord Simon's adult children in his panel, as the naked nymphs who rescued Ulysses. There was text on this too, in what looked like Modern Greek in contrast to the historicism of the Latin inscription used by Whistler.<sup>498</sup> The perspective was quite flattened in the composition and it gave no sense of dissolving the wall or allowing the viewer to be led into the scene in the way achieved by the Dorneywood panel. In 1937 John Piper was commissioned by architect Francis Skinner to design what he termed an 'abstract decoration' for Skinner's apartment in Highpoint, Tecton & Lubetkin's International Style blocks of flats.<sup>499</sup> This eight foot square panel was placed, unusually, outside the apartment rather than decorating a room within.<sup>500</sup> [Fig.4.5] This was a bold, dramatic composition, with Cubist influences and a collaged appearance similar to Piper's paintings of the time.<sup>501</sup> This indicates that Piper perhaps saw the Highpoint panel as an enlarged painting rather than an entity in its own right. In contrast Whistler's paintings were completely separate creative endeavours to his murals, but as an artist working so much to commission his easel paintings were relatively few in number compared to Piper. This

---

<sup>496</sup> The size of the work is unrecorded, but it seems to be a similar width to the Dorneywood panel although smaller in height. Image 'Tate Gallery Exhibitions Exhibited Work: Mural Painting 1939' Cat. No. 51, TG92/42/2, TGA.

<sup>497</sup> Compton, A., 1997, p.34.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid.

<sup>499</sup> Letter Piper to McLaren Young, Jan 31 1939. 'I have just completed an abstract decoration, 8 feet square, in Mr Skinner's flat at Highpoint...' TG92/42/2 TATE GALLERY EXHIBITION OF PHOTOGRAPHS OF MURAL PAINTING IN GREAT BRITAIN (1919-39) CORRESPONDENCE ARTIST M-Z, TGA.

The client was actually a partner in Tecton, Powers, A., 'The Mural Problem', *Murals and Decorative Painting* op. cit., p.76.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid.

<sup>501</sup> Similar elements particularly the bottle and the stringed instrument appear in a large painting of the same year see 'Black Ground (Screen for the Sea)', 'John Piper' [Online] [http://www.nationalgalleries.org/object/GMA\\_1998](http://www.nationalgalleries.org/object/GMA_1998) [Accessed august 6 2014]

highlights the different positions of the two artists. Murals constituted a large part of Whistler's working life; Piper was an artist with more freedom to pursue the traditional artist's route.<sup>502</sup>

In both these cases Halliday and Piper were required to reflect the modernist aesthetic of both the client and the location. In 1938 Whistler was commissioned for an equally modern space at the Mountbattens' new Brook House penthouse (described later in the chapter), but delivered a scheme that played to the more traditional tastes that his clients preferred, despite the style that the architect and designers had created for their living spaces. Whistler's murals were in this case appropriate. It may be safe to assume that a client such as Francis Skinner or more so the architect Wells Coates, who was active in gaining commissions for artists to carry out murals in many of the contemporary buildings he designed, would choose an artist who showed more evidence of these kinds of sensibilities than Whistler.<sup>503</sup> It is obvious from Whistler's murals that he felt no draw towards modernist idioms in his designs, unlike many of his contemporaries in the field and examples of this disparity will be examined throughout this chapter. He demonstrated an affinity with the various historical revivalist styles that were current in the period, such as the Regency and Gothic Revivals, drawing as they did upon past models that appealed to his sense of art and architectural history.

---

<sup>502</sup> Although Piper painted a further mural, on an immense scale, 'The Englishman's Home', in 1950 for the Festival of Britain.

<sup>503</sup> Correspondence between Coates and the Tate regarding the 1939 Mural Painting exhibition gives details of these 'murals carried out under my direction in buildings to my designs' and also recommends works by Oliver Messel and Olga Lehmann. TG92/42/4 MURAL EXHIBITION 1919-1939 25 MAY – 30 JUNE 1939 CORRESPONDENCE. TGA.

## Staircase Murals

### 19 Hill Street (1930-31) and 36 Hill Street (1936)

There is much historical precedent for murals to decorate staircases from the Renaissance onwards. An example of the popularity of this type of mural in the artistic patronage of the seventeenth and eighteenth century would be William Kent's murals for the King's Staircase at Kensington Palace (c.1727). Examples of similar painted staircases, on a more domestic scale, would include those at 75 and 76 Dean Street, Soho.<sup>504</sup> Not many streets away from Hill Street both these houses contained eighteenth-century mural schemes that extended from the ground floor and up to the first floor landings.<sup>505</sup> The murals at 76 Dean Street are of particular interest in terms of their subject and treatment. The first floor is painted to resemble a loggia – as at 19 Hill Street – and seen through the columns is a Claudean seascape and harbour with similarities to Whistler's 1937 scheme at Plas Newydd.<sup>506</sup> [Fig.4.6] It is of course not known whether Whistler saw these murals, but the schemes demonstrate an historical interest in the decoration of these areas of a residence, which he continued at 19 and 36 Hill Street.

These were amongst the most challenging of Whistler's mural projects in terms of design and location. He was commissioned for the staircase hall of 19 Hill Street in 1930 and a few years later, for a similar space at 36 Hill Street, both in Mayfair, London. These were imposing Georgian town houses with a grand entrance hall

---

<sup>504</sup> I am grateful to Peter Simpson of the National Trust and Professor Peter Davidson of Aberdeen University who mentioned this scheme at 76 Dean Street. (2012)

<sup>505</sup> The painters of the staircase murals at both Dean Street properties are unknown. Those at 75 were originally thought to be by James Thornhill, although the subject is clearly related to the Kent scheme at Kensington Palace. This house was destroyed in the 1920s. Those at 76 are still extant although the building was badly damaged by fire in 2009. See 'The Pitt Estate in Dean Street: No. 76 Dean Street', Survey of London: volumes 33 and 34: St Anne Soho (1966), pp. 228-235 [Online] <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=41096> [Accessed March 7 2014]

<sup>506</sup> Ibid.

and open staircase leading up to a high-ceilinged first floor staircase hall. In both cases Whistler conceived a scheme that would surround the walls at the first floor level, and have visual impact for the viewer from the ground floor entrance. The architect Lutyens was instrumental in securing both of these commissions for Whistler, perhaps indicating that he regarded the artist as possessing the architectural expertise to deal with these types of spaces.<sup>507</sup> 19 Hill Street had been recently renovated by Lutyens and his son Robert (also an architect and designer) for his daughter Barbie and her husband Euan Wallace, MP. Lutyens was also involved in the re-design of 36 Hill Street five years later and suggested Whistler for the murals there. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, architects could be a driving force in the use of murals in buildings, both new and old, and for both private and public projects. Murals were rarely just added to an existing room scheme and were usually commissioned as a result of renovation, rebuilding or a new construction, and certainly Whistler's projects bear this out in every instance.

Whistler was known to the architect well before the 19 Hill Street project, his diary recording 'Tea with Lutyens' on August 16 1926 and working on drawings for him the following month.<sup>508</sup> In 1928 Lutyens discussed with Whistler the possibility that he be appointed to paint murals for the Viceroy's House at Delhi, and wrote to Lord Irwin to suggest this.<sup>509</sup> This is evidence of the high esteem Lutyens had for

---

<sup>507</sup> Lutyens was interested in the use of murals, the earliest collaboration probably one for Folly Farm where William Nicholson decorated the new dining room in 1916 in the wing designed by Lutyens.

<sup>508</sup> Drawing 'for Lutyens' on the 15<sup>th</sup> and sending the drawing to him on the 16<sup>th</sup>. It is not known what these drawings were. Sheet Diaries. (3) 21 JULY – 26 SEPT 1926, 'Diaries, Notebooks, Misc.', RWA.

<sup>509</sup> Correspondence Whistler and Edith Olivier 28 Nov 1928 'Sir Edwin & I had a good talk about Delhi that night. He is going to write to L [Lord?] Price? about it to see what the authorities think about my going out & also what they will provide.' R to E.O. 1928, Rex Whistler Letters B, RWA. Also Whistler, 1985, p.127.



the artist and it was certainly a project that would have altered the course of Whistler's career. However, there were no further references to this idea and from photographic evidence it would appear that a more vernacular approach was employed for the decorations.<sup>510</sup>

19 Hill Street is one of Whistler's lesser known schemes and will thus be explored here in more depth. It has been in an inaccessible private location and, more importantly, has only been seen in colour reproduction since it was photographed for the Cecil's book in 2012.<sup>511</sup> It then became clear that an answering decoration to Whistler's scheme had been created on the adjoining and facing walls. This was commissioned in 1959 by the then owner, Felix Fenston, and carried out by the artist and designer Felix Harbord.<sup>512</sup>

The main mural panel occupies the full 21 foot width of the staircase wall. Again Whistler used the device of a loggia with columns and architrave, which he made more realistic by having real columns built in the corners of the side walls.<sup>513</sup>

[Fig.4.7] The increased size of the project allowed for greater depth of field than in the Dorneywood mural and the eye is led through a balustraded terrace, to a

---

<sup>510</sup> Photograph of 'Viceroy's House, New Delhi: West Loggia' from *Illustrated London News* on Mary Evans Picture Library [Online] <http://www.prints-online.com/viceroy-s-house-new-delhi-west-loggia/print/4407981.html> [August 6 2014] There is a reference to Glyn Philpot receiving a commission for a mural in the Viceroy's house in *Glyn Philpot 1884-1937 Edwardian Aesthete to Thirties Modernist, Exhibition Catalogue*, by Robin Gibson, London: National Portrait Gallery, 1984, p.23, but no further information has been found at this point.

<sup>511</sup> 19 Hill Street was last visited by Laurence Whistler in 1982/3, 19 Hill Street Correspondence File, RWA. However it seems that colour photographs were not taken. Since then there has been no contact with the various owners until an approach was made by the Cecils in 2012. It was possible to view the mural whilst the property was undergoing renovation but it will then be inaccessible.

<sup>512</sup> The Harbord scheme is only mentioned briefly in the 'Sources and Notes' in the Cecil's biography, p.257.

<sup>513</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.157.

landscape and distant vistas beyond. Several characteristic features appear that can be traced back to the Tate mural and forward to subsequent works. In the distance is a fictional town with domes and steeples and mountains beyond.[See Fig. 3.26] The middle and foreground has his typically golden cast, and these warm tones draw attention to the mural from the ground floor, particularly against the surrounding pale stonework and décor. A hunting party with dogs gallops across the composition, which features old bridges, and buildings including one based on the Boycott Pavilion at Stowe. The trees are painted in a soft ‘feathery’ style, framing the central action. A large rocky outcrop emphasises the right-hand side of the mural. Ronald Horton, Whistler’s assistant on this project records a discussion of ‘the landscapes of Patinir’ whilst painting one morning.<sup>514</sup> Looking at Joachim Patinir’s *Landscape with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (c.1515-24), one is struck by the correspondences. The eye is led through a winding composition involving buildings, rugged landscape features, and soft foliated trees. Another correspondence is the use of a dark greeny turquoise hue similar to the viridian used by Whistler in which the furthest scenery has been painted. The artist had certainly seen Patinir’s work in Rome and may have also seen this painting in the National Gallery.<sup>515</sup>

One of the most distinctive features of the mural is the black servant in immaculate livery and haughty pose waiting expectantly on the terrace. Black servants appear in several of Whistler’s paintings, in the portrait of the Dudley-Ward sisters (1933-4) and in the background of the portrait of Lady Pamela Berry (1939). However

---

<sup>514</sup> ‘August 1930’ in copies of letters sent to LW, 17 February 1983 from Ronald Horton’s niece, Katharine Chaloner in ‘Rex 3 NAM’, Correspondence Files, RWA.

<sup>515</sup> ‘2 Ex. Patinirs’ in list of paintings seen in Rome Sketchbook 1928, RWA.

the Hill Street figure is much more dominant in this scene both in stance and depiction. In this Whistler is playing with and combining his deep interest in eighteenth-century tastes with a much more contemporary vogue. The insertion of this type of figure, a black servant in exotic garb, was prevalent in paintings of the mid to late 1700s although they would rarely be given such a central position or presence.<sup>516</sup> This kind of fascination in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century found its expression in the blackamoor, used in jewellery, furniture, porcelain and often full size carved figures in elaborate costumes made into torchères and chandeliers. The imperious servant on the Hill Street terrace, a living blackamoor who has little of the servile about him is perhaps an example of Whistler's rather subversive wit.<sup>517</sup> Indeed the artist is also referring to something much more vital and current which was the vogue for black culture in the 1920s and 30s, particularly in music and dance, from Josephine Baker to Leslie 'Hutch' Hutchinson.<sup>518</sup> Whistler's early interest in this was demonstrated in lively sketchbook drawings of black jazz bands and dancers.<sup>519</sup> Thus, whilst ostensibly creating a mural that gave the correct historicist message, Whistler subtly introduced undercurrents of something more contemporary and fashionable. Indeed an article on the mural in *Country Life* shortly after its completion describes it as epitomising 'completely what is meant by the term rococo'.<sup>520</sup> Rather than using the term to mean elaborately decorated, here it seems to refer to a perceived

---

<sup>516</sup> For instance the little boy servant in Hogarth's *The Harlot's Progress II*, 1732.

<sup>517</sup> Whistler also illustrated a popular book of the time, Constance Wright's *Silver Collar Boy*, London: Dent & Co. 1934, describing the odd relationship between a lady of noble birth and her young African slave.

<sup>518</sup> 'Hutch' would have been known to Whistler who was one of the designers on the Cochran revues of 1927 and 1930 in which he performed, Breese, C., *Hutch*, London: Bloomsbury, 1999, pp. 50-51, 88. Hutch famously had a long-standing affair with Edwina Mountbatten, a close friend of Whistler's. The two men both had affairs with Tallulah Bankhead, *ibid*, pp 35-6 and Whistler, 1985, pp.183-7.

<sup>519</sup> See the dance hall scene with band in 'Sick House' (Haileybury) sketchbook, dated 1921, 'Early Works Box 2', RWA.

<sup>520</sup> 'Examples of Recent Decoration No. 19 Hill Street', *Country Life*, December 12 1931, Volume 70, p.675.

delicacy of subject and treatment, with the romantic elements of the mural, such as the ruins, the unfinished painting, and the appearance of Cupid evoking a corresponding emotional response from the viewer.

In comparison with the Tate mural and later landscape murals such as Port Lympne and Plas Newydd, 19 Hill Street is busy with incident, with fewer of the quiet passages that characterise these works. Laurence Whistler finds this a weakness of the composition finding it 'not balanced... a poor one, random and unsettled.'<sup>521</sup> However the location of this mural demanded this different treatment. Rather than a scheme for a room, on the same level as the viewer who could see it as a complete entity, this was seen in partial views from the entrance hall upwards.[Fig.4.8] The viewer would be constantly seeing different parts of the composition as they went up and down the staircase, and walking along the first floor landing from which the main reception rooms opened and along to the further flights of stairs. By filling it with activity Whistler ensured that no matter how brief the glance the viewer had a vignette to entertain the eye. It is a shame that Laurence Whistler has deemed this work to be of such a low status, and that his comments were echoed in the Cecils' volume. The mural has tremendous impact and richness and must have lent considerable glamour to the Wallace's town house. It demonstrates an important stage in Whistler's development as a muralist, showing how he could compress the large narrative framework of the Tate scheme into a smaller, though admittedly grand, domestic setting. The personal references to the client introduced in the Dorneywood panel are still included but are more subtly indicated, and do not intrude on the overall effect. His

---

<sup>521</sup> These comments are also used in the Cecil's volume, Whistler, L., 1985, p.157 and Cecil, H and M, 2012, p.90.

favoured architectural and landscape elements, largely missing from that earlier scheme, are here much in evidence. Despite Laurence Whistler's reservations 19 Hill Street is clearly the more significant scheme of the two.

The original plans for this scheme, if they had been carried out, would have made this even more substantial. These comprised designs for the other three walls of the staircase hall and an entire coffered ceiling, perhaps similar to the one later created at Plas Newydd. The East Wall which faced the painted mural was in turn to be adorned with a design of four statues on pedestals and an elaborately carved over door surround to the doorway leading off the landing. [Fig.4.9] The statues were to be painted as though in light stone or marble and the other features in grisaille, to tone in with the wall and the door in imitation bronze, perhaps to complement the colours of the facing wall.<sup>522</sup> It is difficult to assess from the sketches whether the uncompleted aspects of the project would have perhaps overwhelmed the main mural, but they certainly evidence Whistler designing on a far grander scale than is at first apparent.

These more extensive proposals have greater relevance due to the recent discovery of the 1959 Felix Harbord scheme, which in fact did cover the other walls of the staircase hall.<sup>523</sup> This 'intervention' could have provided an interesting comparison between two muralists working in very different artistic periods. However Harbord chose to answer the fantasy landscape opposite with his own,

---

<sup>522</sup> 'Proposal for the Upper Staircase Hall' (2) and (3), Whistler and Fuller 1960, p. 4. This design is only known from the photograph in a Sotheby's catalogue when the drawing was sold at Auction. 'Rex Whistler' file, Witt Library, London.

<sup>523</sup> Harbord was commissioned by Felix Fenston who had recently purchased the house.

rather diluted, interpretation of Whistler's style - a faux-classical scheme set against trompe l'oeil stonework and pillars which cover all three walls. This of course closely echoes Whistler's initial designs for these areas and includes a decorated pediment over the main door and three arched openings on the facing wall, which Whistler had intended to fill with statues.<sup>524</sup> However, Harbord's use of trompe l'oeil lacks both the richness and depth and the sense of space that Whistler achieved and his stonework looks rather pallid and dull in tonality. Similarly his trophies, although well-drawn, have none of the real feeling of a design in stone. According to restorers the Harbord scheme has undergone several major restorations and possibly a total repainting so a true comparison is made more difficult.<sup>525</sup> However the difference in the quality of draughtsmanship between the two artists is clear despite this. The two schemes are not in harmony despite Harbord's evident attempts to complement the original. The extent of Harbord's homage is most apparent in the Roman statue which bears Whistler's features.<sup>526</sup> [Fig.4.10] This tribute alone would surely have interested Laurence Whistler, and a visit to Hill Street was made in 1982, but curiously he made no mention of the second scheme in his notes or in the 1985 biography.<sup>527</sup>

---

<sup>524</sup> Burbidge, J., *Examination of Painted decoration of the Staircase Hall - 29/30 June 2000, 19 Hill Street, Mayfair*. Granville & Burbidge, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2003. Unpublished report, p. 5.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>526</sup> The figure carries a brush and palette in place of a spear, and has a mock-Latin inscription on the plinth beneath. 'O Rex te cepit mors immaturus at usque ars tua perpetuo vere lepusque vicet'. Approximate translation: 'Rex you took an early death nevertheless your art flows perpetually'.

<sup>527</sup> Nor is the Harbord mentioned in any of his notes of the time. Correspondence from Roy A Perry the conservator dated 23 July 1982 and notes from LW, indicate that LW was in contact with 'Sheik Harawy' the new owner and inspected the scheme, RWA 'Rex crate 2 other murals'.

Felix Harbord (1906-1981) is an interesting foil to Rex Whistler as he is a direct contemporary who also attended Haileybury School and then the Slade.<sup>528</sup> One of his specialities was the creation of faux Palladian plasterwork, as seen at Oving House, also in the 1950s.<sup>529</sup> It could be said that what Whistler painted in trompe l'oeil, in terms of trophies and intricate detailed stonework, Harbord created in three dimensions. By the time of the Hill Street commission in 1959 Harbord had also created a velvet-walled drawing room for Cecil Beaton at Reddish House said to be 'a luxurious high camp evocation of Second Empire chic'.<sup>530</sup> Again Harbord was following in Whistler's footsteps; at Beaton's previous house, Ashcombe, Whistler designed alterations to the building, furniture and painted, with others, the circus mural. The original rather plain entrance to Ashcombe was given an elaborate stone pediment and pineapple, ornate brass pillars were added to Beaton's own four poster bed and the walls of the room were adorned with circus characters, Whistler's addition being the Fat Lady.<sup>531</sup>

These circumstances highlight the issue of differentiation between a decorator/interior designer and a muralist/artist. An interior designer, whilst primarily ordering the look of a room, might also be 'hands on' in terms of painting furniture or walls. For instance, Syrie Maugham created special paint effects on pieces for clients, and John Fowler painted mouldings and decorative effects on

---

<sup>528</sup> Cornforth J. *The Inspiration of the Past Country House Taste in the Twentieth Century*, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1985. P.77. Harbord has now been largely forgotten and references to his work are scant.

<sup>529</sup> Cornforth J., 1985, p.93.

<sup>530</sup> Owens, M., 'Antiques; Stylish Fakes That Attract Connoisseurs' [Online] March 19, 1999 *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/03/19/arts/antiques-stylish-fakes-that-attract-connoisseurs.html> [10 June 2013]

<sup>531</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.154. For the transformation of the front door in photographs, see Beaton, C., *Ashcombe The Story of a Fifteen-year Lease*, 1999 Edition, Wimborne: The Dovecote Press, after p.20, and design sketch, p.9.

walls.<sup>532</sup> Harbord was a sort of decorative facilitator who enriched his client's rooms by sourcing or creating the appropriate furniture, paintings, fireplaces, plasterwork mouldings and trophies. In contrast to Whistler, he was not an artist or muralist but more of a decorator and did not have that kind of creative imagination.<sup>533</sup>

Whistler's commission for 36 Hill Street five years later was a particularly complex proposal involving both the difficulty of a staircase location and a pre-existing series of eighteenth-century Rococo plaster-work surrounds, which were currently blank. Knowing the artist's predilection for this period Lutyens recommended that he design appropriate paintings to fill the stucco frames.<sup>534</sup> There were eight of these at an average size of seven feet by four feet arranged around the walls of the staircase landing. [Fig.4.11] At first glance the 'paintings' in their stucco frames look entirely separate. On closer inspection the scenes are in an approximately continuous flow, running clockwise, as though the frames were windows looking out on an imaginary landscape. As at Port Lympne and Mottisfont, the client, Baroness Porcelli, refused to allow the artist free rein and thus this is one of the least personal of Whistler's schemes. She was an American divorcee who married into what was perhaps minor Italian nobility.<sup>535</sup> The panels show Whistler's characteristic rolling countryside with men on horseback, a distant Italianate townscape - a possible reference to the client's Italian origins - hilltop castles on

---

<sup>532</sup> Fowler was also known as a stage designer, however it has to be said that these designs were very much 'room sets' rather than dramatic interpretations. For images of these designs see Cornforth, J.1985, p.155.

<sup>533</sup> No evidence yet has yet been found of any other original mural schemes created by Harbord.

<sup>534</sup> Lutyens' plans for No. 36 Hill Street showing the panels to be decorated are in Murals Folder 'Rex Whistler Murals', RWA.

<sup>535</sup> 'Porcelli Family' [Online] <http://www.thepeerage.com/p46247.htm>  
<http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/v/o/n/Christoph--A-Von-gleichen/WEBSITE-0001/UHP-0009.html> [accessed 12 July 2014]



promontories, bridges, and follies. [Fig.4.12] These murals are compromised by the format, and the separate episodes render Whistler's usual sweep and panoramic effect, and the sense of depth and illusionistic space much less evident.

The artist's sensitivity to historical appropriateness whilst avoiding a soulless pastiche is one of the factors under consideration in this chapter. The Hill Street houses were built by Benjamin Timbrell in c.1748-9, a period that constantly informed Whistler's work.<sup>536</sup> Certainly the mural at no. 19 contains elements that would not be out of place in an eighteenth-century painting, although these are amalgamated with many other disparate aspects of the artist's imagination. The murals at no. 36 are also an interesting combination. Christopher Hussey noted that 'a less scholarly artist['] solution to the eighteenth-century frames would be paintings in a style typical of that century, but in reality he points out that the tastes of the time were towards the artists of the seventeenth century, such as Poussin and Claude.<sup>537</sup> As these were two of Whistler's most favoured artists it is perhaps unsurprising that Hussey should find evidence of their influence in these works.

Alongside the golden Claude-like tones that Whistler employed, the dominant colour of the panels is the intense viridian green, first seen in the Tate mural and then in the distant townscape of 19 Hill Street. Whistler unites the individual sections by the use of the green in each of the foregrounds. The most interesting

---

<sup>536</sup> 'Benjamin Timbrell' ...one of the most noted master builders working in London in the first half of the eighteenth century' [Online] DNB, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/49444> [accessed 30 April 2012].

<sup>537</sup> Quoted in Cecil, H & M., 2013, p.145.

panel in terms of Whistler's architectural predilections depicts a grand country house, not immediately identifiable as an existing building and most probably from his imagination.<sup>538</sup> [Fig.4.13] English Baroque in style, John Cornforth writes of it in terms of a contemporary reference point, describing it as a '1930s ideal of an eighteenth-century country house in its setting'.<sup>539</sup> Thus we have Whistler seemingly re-inventing the past into a style fit for its time. Further to this is Laurence Whistler's suggestion that Whistler's ability to seamlessly blend pictorial elements from various sources and historical periods actually made his murals contemporary; '... there is no other period in which they could have been painted: the game they play with the past was a modern game in its time.'<sup>540</sup>

## Comparisons

The painting of staircase murals and those for grand entrances was a much rarer occurrence in the twentieth century and it is thus difficult to find comparisons for these schemes amongst Whistler's contemporaries. Certainly this type of location presents a major challenge to a muralist in terms of both complexity of design and the physical act of applying paint onto the walls. Additionally it could be considered that these types of formal schemes were only appropriate for large period properties and that the new blocks of apartments being built might not suit this type of decorative enhancement. However the exception to this was Wells Coates's modernist Embassy Court in Brighton, c.1936, for which the architect

---

<sup>538</sup> Laurence Whistler suggests that the house may have been based on one designed by Thomas Archer, an architect favoured by his brother. See his notes 'Rex Misc. Notes and sketched fragments', Correspondence Files, RWA. However although the main section of the house is reminiscent, none of Archer's extant buildings have the imposing curved wings at either side.

<sup>539</sup> He supports the comment with the point that the 'view of the country house is particularly evocative of the houses that were appearing in *Country Life* in the 1930s', Cornforth, 2009, p.95.

<sup>540</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.157.

commissioned Edward McKnight Kauffer to design a mural for the lobby and entrance hall. Although not for a staircase, it had some of the same considerations in terms of its location in an entrance, seen in transient fashion by large numbers of people and occupying a position between private and public. Using the techniques of photomontage McKnight Kauffer created a photomural that reflected the ultra-modern nature of the apartment block.<sup>541</sup> A more traditional location for a mural was Highfield in Birmingham, a substantial Victorian house with a grand entrance and staircase hall for which large scale murals were carried out in 1931.<sup>542</sup> [Fig.4.14] The house was owned by Philip Sargent Florence, son of the muralist Mary Sargent Florence, which may have influenced his preference for this particular form of decoration.<sup>543</sup> The scheme was created by Frank Freeman and Joan Souter-Robertson and its theatrical and literary themes reflected the artistic life of the house, which was something of a cultural hub for writers, artists and academics.<sup>544</sup> The scale of the figures, the rather flattened style in which they are rendered and the playful narrative quality of the mural are all reminiscent of the work of Mary Adshead. Sadly the house was demolished in 1984.

---

<sup>541</sup> Information on the mural [Online] from <http://www.embassycourt.org.uk/history/the-embassy-court-mural/> [Accessed April 9 2014]. Unfortunately this experimental mural is no longer extant.

<sup>542</sup> Images [Online] Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Library Photographs Collection <http://www.ribapix.com/image.php?i=104753&r=2&t=4&x=1&ref=RIBA51748>. Information on the house 'Highfield, Birmingham' [Online] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Highfield\\_\(Birmingham\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Highfield_(Birmingham)). [Accessed April 9 2014] Wikipedia is the only source found on the house itself, the RIBA gives very little detail.

<sup>543</sup> Information on the children of Mary Sargent Florence on 'Mary Sargent Florence' [Online] <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/florence-children-at-chess-n05960> [Accessed December 1 2014].

<sup>544</sup> 'Highfield', Wikipedia, op. cit. Little is known about Frank Freeman, but Joan Souter Robertson (1903-1994) was an artist and portraitist, furniture and fresco painter. 'Obituaries' [Online] <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituaries-joan-souterrobertson-1566639.html> [Accessed April 10 2014].

**Murals designed to integrate into an existing scheme of décor: Drawing Room at 90 Gower Street (1935), the decorated Chimney-piece at 5 Belgrave Square (1935) and Trent Park (1935-6).**

In these commissions Whistler had to design within a different set of requirements. Unlike many of his mural projects where he was freely working within a newly created or assigned space, a sort of blank canvas, here he had to produce designs to fit into an existing scheme of interior décor or one that was being created concurrently, as well as working appropriately within the architecture of the room. This meant limitations and compromises in terms of the actual design with less opportunity for the baroque flourishes and complex compositions of his larger works. At Gower Street he designed a series of decorative elements rather than an entire painted scheme; at Belgrave Square he was commissioned to design a single chimney piece panel for one of the reception rooms; and at Trent Park a series of decorative features for an enfilade of rooms.

At the Gower Street home of Duff and Lady Diana Cooper, Sibyl Colefax had carried out the interior décor of the house, and the drawing room for which Whistler was commissioned bore her signature effects of white damask sofas, close white carpeting, pale walls, and the use of understated fabrics, especially silks, in all furnishings. From the photographs available this was not a huge room on the scale of Mottisfont or Plas Newydd, and thus the scheme had to complement its dimensions. Additionally it was full of furniture and effects and was used for living as well as entertaining rather than the kind of formal location, such as the dining room at Port Lympne, which was just one of many reception rooms. Despite this,

the room would still have had to be seen as a whole, in which Whistler's designs were used to maximum effect. Through the Colefax scheme the room already bore the imprint of its owners', particularly Diana Cooper's, tastes and personality. The room had a strong feminine aesthetic, emphasising luxurious fabrics, elegant detailing found in the wall sconces and torchères, the many uses of the lyre shape in the piano area, and the romantic symbol of the swans – no doubt representing the Coopers' marriage - on the newly covered sofa. The furniture is a mix of Regency and Empire style, with some French and some original English Georgian pieces. The Empire style lends a sense of classical antiquity to the room which was highlighted by Whistler in his designs.

These comprised seven separate elements that were spaced around the four walls of the drawing room. Although the scheme is comparatively modest in comparison to his large murals, the trompe l'oeil effect is arguably greater. On first impression the room appeared to contain several works of art, and it would only be on closer inspection that the visual deception was revealed. The series comprised four circular plaques, two paintings, all of which appeared to be hanging on the walls, and a large jug in a niche.[Fig.4.15] They were all in grisaille and, unlike his usual method of marouflage, had to be painted directly onto the surface in oil. Here the references to Diana Cooper and a strong mythic femininity are even more compelling with the client encoded as the goddess Diana throughout the scheme. In the four faux marble classical plaques, suspended by tasselled cords and depicting classical figures in bas-relief, she is depicted with Mercury, with Mars, with Jupiter and as one of the Three Graces. Arranged on one wall were two paintings hung from golden arrows, and framed by gilded bars. These were

'pretence mezzotints' depicting scenes from the myth of Diana the goddess of the hunt, in styles reminiscent of Claude and Poussin.<sup>545</sup> The painted arched niche held an antique jug decorated with Greek figures. An instance here of Whistler's humour is that the jug, so carefully painted, appears to be broken at the neck and riveted. [Fig.4.16] A broken pitcher was a common symbol, historically, of lost innocence or virtue which may also have been part of a mischievous allusion.<sup>546</sup>

The plaques and particularly the faux mezzotints are reminiscent of one of the decorative practices of the eighteenth century where prints of favourite paintings were pasted on to a wall to make a 'print room'.<sup>547</sup> [Fig. 4.17] Each would be 'framed' with painted paper embellished with elaborate swags and hangings. These prints of course were in black and white, which echoed the grisaille effect conjured up by Whistler. The scheme at Gower Street was thus a kind of double illusion, where on one level the paintings appeared to be actually hanging on the wall and on another was a re-creation of a genuine eighteenth-century decorative effect.

Whistler's designs for the room are completely in keeping with its decorative style but, although Whistler and Colefax knew each other, there is no evidence that they

---

<sup>545</sup> Whistler & Fuller, 1960, p.6.

<sup>546</sup> For instance William-Adolphe Bouguereau *Broken Pitcher* (1891). Diana Cooper refers to Whistler designing gifts and mementos for her 'that held many and hidden meanings', Cooper, D., *The Light of Common Day* London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959, p.145.

<sup>547</sup> Information on The Print Room at Blickling Hall, Norfolk from de Bruijn, E. National Trust Collections 'The Backstory of Wallpaper' [Online] on <http://nttreasurehunt.wordpress.com/2013/10/15/the-backstory-of-wallpaper/> For similar Print Room see 'The Print Room', Castletown House [Online] <http://www.castletownhouse.ie/TouroftheHouse/ThePrintRoom/> and for wallpaper of the same effect see "'Print Room' style", Prints and Drawings, E.473-1914,[Online] <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O76994/print-room-style-wallpaper-unknown/> [Accessed March 7 2014].

collaborated. However, so closely does the artist reference the décor that the arrows attaching the 'mezzotints' to the wall are the same design as the curtain poles. The scheme is all about a balance and elegance, a suitable backdrop to the social life of a high profile couple.<sup>548</sup>

## Comparisons

A more contemporary style of murals was chosen for the house that architect Ernst Freud transformed in Hampstead in 1937 for the psychiatrist Dr David Matthew, where a large contemporary open plan reception room was created.<sup>549</sup> The murals by Hans Feibusch commissioned for the walls of the new space bear an interesting resemblance to the format Whistler chose for Gower Street. [Fig.4.18] Feibusch employed a 'vignette' technique which meant that the scheme was spaced at intervals around the walls in a similar, albeit less formal, way to Whistler's faux medallions and paintings. In Feibusch's characteristic vigorous and lively style, Diana the huntress and her maidens are depicted amongst deer and hunting dogs and sylvan surroundings that echoed the views of Hampstead Heath from the room's windows. However with no framing device or attempt to 'anchor' the images to the wall the end result had rather a flat cartoon like quality. The flatness

---

<sup>548</sup> An interesting coda to Whistler's scheme at Gower Street was provided by Martin Battersby when he was commissioned to create murals for Lady Diana Cooper at the Chateau de Saint Firmin, Chantilly in 1951, where the Coopers had retired. Equally personal in theme to the Whistler decorations these comprised panels of trophies to which Battersby added trompe l'oeil photographs, masks, playing cards and other objects pertaining to the couple. Information and photographs, Gaye Tapp, P., 'by Lady Diana Cooper, some rooms', 'Little Augury' blog, 2nd June 2010, [Online] <http://littleaugury.blogspot.com/2010/06/by-lady-diana-cooper-some-rooms.html>, [April 1 2014]

<sup>549</sup> Information on this house from Welter, Volker M., *Ernst L. Freud, Architect: The Case of the Modern Bourgeois Home* Berghahn Books: New York & Oxford, 2011, p. 127, [Online] [http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Ernst\\_L\\_Freud\\_Architect.html?id=j9HFNKIU44wC&redir\\_esc=y](http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Ernst_L_Freud_Architect.html?id=j9HFNKIU44wC&redir_esc=y) [Accessed May 10 2012]

of the surface was no doubt part of the desired effect, perhaps being thought of as more consciously modern than the more traditional form of trompe l'oeil that Whistler employed.

### **Decorated Chimney-piece at 5 Belgrave Square (1935)**

Also in 1935 Whistler painted a decorated chimney- piece for Sir Henry 'Chips' Channon. The American-born politician, diarist, and consummate society host had just purchased the large house at 5 Belgrave Square, and was renovating it in a selection of fashionable styles. The ground floor dining room was a recreation of the mirrored and rococo extravaganza of Cuvilliés at Amalienburg. In contrast, the first floor reception rooms were being designed in a more restrained Regency Revival style, under the direction of the architect Lord Gerald Wellesley. Wellesley and Whistler moved in the same circles and Whistler was also close to his estranged wife Dorothy. This style was not necessarily a constraint to the artist whose work often showed inspiration from this period. With his design partner, Trenwith Wills, Wellesley created a thoroughly Regency look to the Library at Belgrave Square with understated décor, pedimented bookcases, and neo-classical mural panels in faux-relief painted in black and gold by Michael Gibbon.<sup>550</sup> Behind this, in enfilade, was the back Drawing Room where Whistler was to paint a large chimney piece mural above a large white marble fireplace.

---

<sup>550</sup> As described in Hussey, C., 'Belgrave Square London The Residence of Mr Henry and Lady Honor Channon', *Country Life*, February 26 1938, Volume 83, pp.222-226.



This was a substantial painting, described as ‘astonishing’, at nine feet tall and from photographs would have had considerable impact in the room.<sup>551</sup> As at Gower Street, this design was elegant and restrained, with subtle decoration. Again he created a trompe l’oeil niche in the wall and, to marry the section of wall with the fireplace below, designed the frame to the arched niche and the plinth which were then attached to the overmantel to help the illusion.<sup>552</sup> [Fig.4.19] Within the arch he painted a statue of a goddess or muse in flowing robes in blue and gold hues which echoed the colours of the painted ceiling.<sup>553</sup> [Fig.4.20] In his choice of subject Whistler seems to have taken inspiration from the fireplace surround of the adjoining Library in which two small decorative niches each contained a draped female figure.<sup>554</sup> Gibbon’s use of circular wall plaques and rectangular mural panels in this room was in very similar vein to Whistler’s designs on Lady Diana Cooper’s walls of the same year, and it suggests that Whistler, Wellesley, and Michael Gibbon shared the same Regency inspiration for their designs.<sup>555</sup> As at Gower Street, Whistler’s painting was in complete harmony with the effects created by the architect and designers and is entirely in tune with these contemporary Regency revival tastes, challenging the notion that Whistler was working outside of a contemporary sensibility. This association also goes some

---

<sup>551</sup> Description from the text of Christies sale ‘Stephane Boudin at 5 Belgrave Square, Les Objets de l’Empire & Mount Kennedy, Ireland. Three Private Collections’, 16 March 2012, London, King Street Sale 6337 [Online] <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/prints-multiples/venetian-school-late-18th-century-eight-views-5537535-details.aspx> [July 25 2014] Painting also visible in Cornforth, J. 1985, image 61, p.64.

<sup>552</sup> Whistler & Fuller 1960, p.6.

<sup>553</sup> Hussey, C., *Country Life*, op. cit, p.226.

<sup>554</sup> Described as ‘exquisite little statuettes’, ibid. Also see photograph in Cornforth, 1985, p.160.

<sup>555</sup> Images of the sketches for these panels in Christies sale 6337, op. cit., [Online] <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/drawings-watercolors/michael-gibbon-eight-designs-for-the-classical-5537565-details.aspx?from=salesummary&intObjectID=5537565&sid=0fbaafe7-57b1-4236-8802-70a2160c9cb9> [July 25 2014]

way to disprove the idea of his being an individualist, with little interest or ability to work with others' ideas.<sup>556</sup>

### **Trent Park (1935-6)**

The decorations for Sir Philip Sassoon at Trent Park in 1935-6 were, like those for Lady Diana Cooper and Henry Channon, not full scale murals but decorative panels, trophies and insignias. Sassoon was a politician, art collector and had a reputation for being one of the greatest hosts in Britain. Trent Park consisted of a mansion and a thousand acre estate, and was his main weekend retreat, used for high profile entertaining. This estate was one of Sassoon's most complex renovation projects. He refaced the original Victorian edifice creating a new façade with stonework from the recently demolished Devonshire House, and entablature and pediments from Chesterfield House, creating a simulacrum of a Georgian country house.<sup>557</sup> Inside all traces of the original period were exhumed and elegant understated interiors installed.<sup>558</sup> The excesses of Sassoon's opulent style demonstrated in the early 1920s in his Park Lane townhouse underwent modifications and modulation during the 1930s, and this was exemplified at Trent Park.<sup>559</sup> A more restrained scheme of décor was also introduced at Port Lympne in the 1930s which will be discussed below.

Sassoon became a regular patron of Whistler's in the early 1930s when he commissioned the mural for the dining room at Port Lympne, and the artist

---

<sup>556</sup> This was obviously a successful collaboration as subsequently Wellesley commissioned him to create a specialised ceiling decoration as part of the renovations for Sir Alfred Beit at 15 Kensington Palace Gardens c.1936. See Chapter Three, 'Assistants'.

<sup>557</sup> Stansky, P. *Sassoon The Worlds of Philip and Sybil*, Yale: New Haven & London 2003, pp.163-166.

<sup>558</sup> Hussey, C. in Cornforth 1985, p.67 and 'Trent Park - I', *Country Life*, Jan 10<sup>th</sup> 1931, pp.40-46.

<sup>559</sup> Details of the décor at Park Lane, Stansky, 2003, pp.140-41, 144-148.

painted a house portrait of Trent Park in 1934.<sup>560</sup> [Fig.4.21] There are no details of the client's or artist's thoughts behind the Trent Park commission either in the Archive or in any biographies, and so the reason for the rather fragmented chosen format is unknown.<sup>561</sup> With the significance of this property to Sassoon's lifestyle it seems curious that the artist was not asked to create something with more impact. However, the alteration in Sassoon's tastes may have been the reason behind the commissioning of separate decorative effects by Whistler rather than a full scale mural. Photographs show enormous reception rooms, with interiors modelled on a neo-Palladian style, with elegant panelling, cornicing, columns and entablature throughout.<sup>562</sup> The main reception rooms, the Library, the Drawing Room and the Salon, opened up in enfilade across the ground floor. These vast open spaces may not have provided the ideal location for a large mural, although interestingly full height antique tapestries were hung on the walls of the Drawing Room and Salon.<sup>563</sup>

According to Trent Park Heritage, Whistler painted decorative elements in all five principal rooms on the ground floor.<sup>564</sup> The catalogue raisonn  mentions three locations, one of which is only identified by its usage (in 1960) as a 'Lecture Hall'.<sup>565</sup> In the Blue Room which apparently had a theme of patriotism, heightened

---

<sup>560</sup> *Trent Part with Philip and Sybil*, 1934 as stated in Stansky, 2003, p.165. Listed as *Trent Park, Middlesex: The Terrace* in Whistler and Fuller, 1960, catalogue 53, p.18. This is thought to be in the collection at Houghton Hall.

<sup>561</sup> Indeed, Laurence Whistler gives minimal detail on the scheme in the catalogue raisonn , and even the date seems uncertain with question marks at '1935-36', Whistler and Fuller, 1960, p. 7.

<sup>562</sup> Cornforth, J., 1985, p.68.

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>564</sup> Email from Oliver Leiva at Trent Park Heritage to Robin Ravilious August 23 2013. Unfortunately this organisation run by a former student at Trent Park, a Whistler and Sassoon enthusiast, seems to be no longer in existence.

<sup>565</sup> Trent Park was used by various educational establishments, lastly Middlesex University and from 2013 by AUCMS. The original use of the Lecture Hall is not known.

by its view of the Union Jack worked into the paving of the entrance, Whistler painted a chimney piece mural on a similar scale to the one at Belgrave Square. Rather than the statue in its elaborately painted surround, this purely depicted a trophy in the centre of the panel. [Fig.4.22] This was possibly a portrayal of Mars, the god of war, with an armoured breastplate, plumed helmet and a shield with the initials 'P. S.'<sup>566</sup> The trophy is in fact almost a painted version of the huge trophy depicted in stone over the entrance to Port Lympe, with similar placement of armour, weapons and standards.<sup>567</sup> Whistler painted the Blue Room trophy in red and gold, directly onto the blue wall panelling. Two tall vertical decorations, also in red and gold, continued the theme which would have complemented the collection of red lacquer furniture displayed in this room.<sup>568</sup> [See Fig 3.27] In the Library he painted two 'Amazon Queens'<sup>569</sup> which appear to repose on either side of a large arched bookcase capped with a trompe l'oeil stonework head.<sup>570</sup> [Fig. 4.23] The room referred to as the 'Lecture Hall' or 'an end room' has two dolphins painted on the sides of the arched Venetian window with a starfish painted on its central keystone.<sup>571</sup> [Fig. 4.24] The bookcase in the Library echoes the shape of this window, indicating that the rooms are interconnecting and a recent photograph

---

<sup>566</sup> The attribution of Mars is noted in Stansky p.168 but not in the Catalogue Raisonné. Stansky also mentions a small mural of Minerva which again is not noted. The paucity of the descriptions in the CR, many listed as 'dimensions unknown' indicates that LW may not have visited the location.

<sup>567</sup> Photograph of the entrance at National Portrait Gallery [Online]

<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portraitLarge/mw45912/Sir-Philip-Albert-Gustave-David-Sassoon-3rd-Bt?LinkID=mp56752&search=sas&sText=philip+sassoon&role=sit&rNo=10>

[Accessed March 10 2014] Visible in these photographs is another similar trophy which appears on the panelling in the Octagon Library at Lympe. The creators of the entrance and Library trophy are unknown.

<sup>568</sup> This collection was significant enough to be featured in *Country Life*, 'Japanned Furniture at Trent Park' October 18 1930, Volume LXIX, pp.497-500.

<sup>569</sup> A letter headed 'Trent Park New Barnet' where Whistler describes 'painting dolphins and Amazon Queens on the wall' gives a clue to their identity. Rebus letter to Miss Elizabeth Wellesley c.1935. 'Blue folder Add. Catalogue.' RWA.

<sup>570</sup> A photograph shows these figures wearing headdresses and carrying spears on Flickr.com in a photostream by S. Brunning [Online]

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/77831654@N02/7684653232/in/set-72157630843854190/> [29 July 2013].

<sup>571</sup> Whistler & Fuller, 1960, p.7.

indicates that it was one of the enfilade of reception rooms.<sup>572</sup> The dolphins are very similar to a pair drawn in Whistler's Rome Sketchbook, seen in the Villa Borghese in 1928, but equally were also found in English eighteenth-century material.<sup>573</sup>

Whistler created several sinuous and elegant versions of a gilded monogram for Sassoon, the largest of which is an over-door decoration to the Library entrance. This is echoed by many smaller versions and ciphers in the room itself and also the 'Lecture Hall'. [Fig.4.25] A large monogram on a mantelpiece is also mentioned in the Trent Park Heritage description.<sup>574</sup> Although affecting to dislike any personal references in the murals he commissioned (see Port Lympne description below) Sassoon had a marked predilection for the use of his initials in many locations throughout Lympne and Trent Park.<sup>575</sup> They can be clearly seen in the balustrading of the huge terrace Philip Tilden designed overlooking the swimming pool at Port Lympne.<sup>576</sup> The monograms that Whistler produced for Trent Park gave a subtle indication of the patron's identity, and acted as accents to the interiors that Sassoon had so carefully contrived. These insignias, which were also prevalent in the Port Lympne mural designs, and the use of the 'Mars' trophy, an echo of the

---

<sup>572</sup> Photograph on blog post dated May 27 2012, [Online] <http://diamondgeezer.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/trent-park.html> [Accessed March 15 2014].

<sup>573</sup> The date of the Villa Borghese decoration is probably eighteenth century. Page marked April 25<sup>th</sup>. 'Rome Sketchbook 1928', 'Sketchbooks', RWA. For an English example see Title page from 'New River Survey of 1775' exhibit at 'Water Water, Everywhere' Thames Water Exhibition, 26 April 2013 - 5 January 2014, [Online] pdf. [www.enfield.gov.uk/museum](http://www.enfield.gov.uk/museum) [Accessed March 12 2014].

<sup>574</sup> 'A partial gilded monogram survives on a marble mantel piece. There is also monogram designs on the drainpipes outside too ... [possibly] may have been drawn up for Sir Philip by Rex too, and later gilded at his suggestion.' Email from Oliver Leiva at Trent Park Heritage to Robin Ravillious August 23 2013.

<sup>575</sup> It is not known whether this was the case in his Park Lane house.

<sup>576</sup> Tilden, P., *True Remembrances*, London: Country Life Limited, 1954, p.44 and fig.11.

grand entrance at Lympe, made a strong visual connection between Sassoon's two country estates.

There are various question marks over this scheme. Whistler's ingenuity and ability to create visual murals on a grand scale were not utilised in this commission. One has to wonder whether a different artist, one less constrained by the commissioning process would have even wanted to accept the task. Certainly Laurence Whistler found the scheme of much lesser importance and found it difficult to even date it accurately.<sup>577</sup> The English Heritage listing for Trent Park House mentions only 'painted decorations said to be by Rex Whistler in the end rooms'.<sup>578</sup> There is no doubt that these are by Whistler, and it seems odd that Laurence Whistler, with his keen stewardship of his brother's legacy, did not amend this listing.

## Comparisons

Instances where smaller mural panels or decorative ensembles were used in interiors were fairly common in the 1930s. Eric Ravilious painted a set of 'Tennis' panels on the folding doors which acted as a room divider in the Portland Place apartment of Sir Geoffrey Fry in 1930.<sup>579</sup> The client perhaps did not want a complicated mural arrangement but desired a more decorative treatment of the doors. Ravilious painted a triptych like arrangement of people playing tennis on the top panels, balanced by floral motifs on the lower sections, a fairly minor but

---

<sup>577</sup> See footnote 76.

<sup>578</sup> 'List entry summary' Name: TRENT PARK HOUSE List entry Number: 1078931 [Online] <http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/resultsingle.aspx?uid=1078931> [March 19 2014]

<sup>579</sup> Powers, A., *Eric Ravilious Imagined Realities*, London: Philip Wilson, 2012, p.143.

effective design that dissolved the doors into windows looking out at a tennis court.<sup>580</sup> Decorated door panels were also part of the interior fashioned by Wells Coates for the actors Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester in Gordon Square in 1934.<sup>581</sup> These were designed by John Armstrong, whose schematic and simplified forms were in keeping with the rather minimalist contemporary interiors Coates designed.<sup>582</sup> Coates also refurbished the house of the politician George Russell Strauss in 1932 and here Armstrong created a frieze of simple dancing figures around the waiting room used by his constituents. Neither of these schemes had the impact of Whistler's overmantel panel at Belgrave Square nor the detailed treatment and intense personalisation of the Trent Park designs. But in the same way that Whistler's ideas were in harmony with the Regency surroundings of Channon's house and the neo-classical interiors of Sassoon's, these are appropriate to the needs of Coates's more austere and functional interiors.

Another approach was shown in a design by Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell which carried the idea of separate elements brought together in a unified whole to a typically decorative Omega Workshop and Bloomsbury conclusion.<sup>583</sup> [Fig.4.26] Here, as at Gower Street, there was a large floral painting or panel that appeared to hang on the wall, framed by swags of material and suspended by two gold cords. This was a dual deception. The painting and its surround were indeed a separate

---

<sup>580</sup> Calloway, S., *Twentieth-Century Decoration The Domestic Interior from 1900 to the Present Day*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988, p. 293 and Patmore, D., *Colour Schemes & Modern Furnishing*, The Studio: London & New York, 1933, plate 13.

<sup>581</sup> Darling, E., "'The scene in which the daily drama of personal life takes place': Towards the modern interior in early 1930s Britain", in Sparke, P. et al, (Eds) *Designing the Modern Interior*, Berg: Oxford & New York, 2009. p.103.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid, p.102 and Lambirth, A., *John Armstrong the Paintings*, London: Philip Wilson, 2009, p.42. Armstrong was also a close friend of Lanchester and Laughton

<sup>583</sup> This was intended for a music room and rather than being designed for an actual client was displayed at the Lefevre Gallery as a room setting in 1932.

panel but this was hung completely flush to the wall to confuse the eye.<sup>584</sup>

However this did not exhibit the sort of trompe l'oeil effect that Whistler had used with the Claude-like mezzotints. It was clearly a painted sham, but this was all part of the decorative effect. The design was all about creating obvious rather calligraphic embellishments on the surface of things – walls, furniture, fabrics, and tiles - rather than Whistler's manner which was in breaking or dissolving the surface and tricking the eye. The draped material around the painting was echoed in a patterned border on the upholstery fabric and elements of the pattern were carried on to the frame of the overmantel mirror, the fireplace tiles and even the cushions and ceramic ornaments. Rather than Whistler's cool and controlled designs for Gower Street, Belgrave Square and Trent Park this was a visually busy and self-consciously decorated interior.

Whistler's work was painted in such a way that it bore no evidence of brush marks or the maker's hand, all was smoothly and perfectly rendered. Grant and Bell in contrast emphasised the hand of the artist in in their designs, deliberately eschewing a perfect finish in what was known as 'écriture'.<sup>585</sup> Christopher Reed finds their work of the 1920s redolent of the 'Amusing' style, with écriture one of its characteristics, and their later schemes continued an engagement with tricks of scale and playing with the viewer.<sup>586</sup> These distinctive traits were seen to great effect in the large mural scheme at Penns in the Rocks which will be discussed further in the next section.

---

<sup>584</sup> An image of the detached panel can be found in Battersby, M., *The Decorative Thirties*, London: Studio Vista, 1974, p.139. There were in fact six of these flower panels around the room. 'Archive Journeys, Bloomsbury; House decoration: Bell and Grant' [Online] [http://www2.tate.org.uk/archivejourneys/bloomsburyhtml/art\\_together\\_house.htm](http://www2.tate.org.uk/archivejourneys/bloomsburyhtml/art_together_house.htm) [April 11 2014].

<sup>585</sup> Reed, C., 'Taking Amusement Seriously: Modern design in the twenties', in Sparke, P. et al, 2009, p.87.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid.



An overmantel panel by Grant provides an interesting comparison to that of Whistler's at Belgrave Square. [Fig.4.27] Dimensions are unknown but this was a sizeable work, with the decorative elements carried down into the fireplace surround to give unity.<sup>587</sup> A swirling composition of canna lilies in a jug decorated with baroque scrolls, this again displayed a loose gestural quality in its technique that would have been anathema to Whistler. Like the Piper panel at Highpoint this was essentially a painting but on a very large scale. It fitted the space because this is where traditionally a painting would be hung. Whistler's works were more bespoke and site specific, and played with the architectural space in which he worked in ways that were far from obvious.

### **Painted Rooms: mural schemes for entire rooms**

Four schemes at Port Lympne, Brook House, Plas Newydd and Mottisfont (and of course the Tate Gallery Restaurant) are considered to be the most important of Whistler's oeuvre.<sup>588</sup> For that reason they have been comprehensively described in the biographies and other sources and will thus receive less attention here.

However, the aspects of these murals in which Whistler's architectural skills were demonstrated will be explored more fully. Whistler's schemes for these rooms involved decorating every available surface including the ceiling; they were literally painted rooms. Very few, if any, other muralists of the time created schemes in this sort of entirety. To find similar approaches one would need to go

---

<sup>587</sup> Image [Online] at <http://www.ribapix.com/image.php?i=104620&r=2&t=4&x=1&ref=RIBA51696> [Accessed April 9 2014].

<sup>588</sup> For dimensions and further information see Appendix II.

back to the Baroque creations of artists such as Verrio and Thornhill, albeit in buildings of a much larger scale. Unlike the previous, rather fragmented schemes, Whistler was less constrained by an existing scheme of décor in the room which provided the setting for the mural. He still had to take into consideration both the style of the property in which he was working and the client's particular requirements for the commission.

During 1930, in the same year that he was working on the staircase mural for the Wallaces, Whistler was commissioned by Sir Philip Sassoon to decorate an entire dining-room for his other country estate, Port Lympne in Kent.<sup>589</sup> Sassoon was one of the most culturally aware of his patrons and this choice was a significant one, particularly as he had vetoed the appointment of Whistler to paint the Tate Gallery Mural only four years earlier.<sup>590</sup> Murals were very much part of Sassoon's interior style and were commissioned for all his houses. Thus, for the first time, Whistler had to design a scheme for a property in which there were already murals. In 1915 Sassoon employed the leading muralist of the day, José María Sert, to decorate a drawing room at Port Lympne with an elaborate African-inspired creation, and in 1921 Glyn Philpot created a frieze inspired by Greek or Assyrian figures around one of the dining rooms.<sup>591</sup> Both of these schemes were consonant with the type of extravagant décor Sassoon initially chose for Port Lympne. Like Chips Channon, Sassoon used his residences as social (and political) stages and each one of them was in a continual state of refurbishment and changes of décor. By 1930, whilst

---

<sup>589</sup> Trent Park, being nearer to London was used all year round whereas Lympne, near Sassoon's constituency in Hythe, was a summer entertaining space.

<sup>590</sup> As a trustee of the British School at Rome, Sassoon would also have been aware of Whistler's tenure there which may have added to his perceived suitability.

<sup>591</sup> Gibson, R., 1985, p.133.

transforming Trent Park from Victorian into elegant Georgian, he also instigated a more restrained decorative mode at Port Lympne. The Sert Room was white-washed and Whistler was commissioned to design a scheme for a dining room.<sup>592</sup> The mural that Whistler proposed was in fact a very different type of scheme than those by Sert and Philpot, neither of whom had been given the opportunity to paint an entire room. Sert's creation covered the ceiling down to cornice level and Philpot's was purely a frieze around the top of the walls of the dining room. Sassoon had perhaps not wanted to commit himself to the decoration of a complete room in the house in the 1920s but was ready to embrace this form by the early 1930s. It is interesting to note that a few years later Sassoon had reverted to this taste for limited schemes when he commissioned Whistler to provide what were essentially embellishments to the walls of the Trent Park reception rooms.

Architecturally this dining room at Port Lympne was the most awkward shaped 'canvas' Whistler ever had to work on. The room had a complicated barrel-vaulted ceiling and entrances at both ends which had to be incorporated into the scheme. An initial design for the walls was a characteristic treatment creating a view out into a romantic imaginary landscape broken up by twelve Baroque caryatids, but this was rejected.<sup>593</sup> [Fig.4.28] This design was closely related to the 36 Hill Street scheme, painted four years later, with its galloping horses, follies and rocky landscapes in his distinctive greeny-gold hues.<sup>594</sup> This indicates that Whistler was

---

<sup>592</sup> The actual function of the room is unclear. The Catalogue Raisonné refers to it as a dining room although in the photographs extant it is not furnished as such. There were other dining rooms at Lympne, see Stansky, 2003, p.148. It is often referred to as the Tent Room, *ibid*, p. 154.

<sup>593</sup> This was based on the statues, actually thirteen in number, that were placed around the entrance forecourt and were bought from Stowe in the 1920s, *ibid*, p.148.

<sup>594</sup> Scheme 1, (1) in CR, p.5. Image found in auction records in 'Rex Whistler 2668B Portraits and Miscellany', Witt Library.

not above 'recycling' designs, or certainly re-using themes from his lexicon on numerous occasions. The approved design involved turning the entire room into a *trompe l'oeil* Regency striped tent, incorporating the triple curve of the ceiling into simulated swags of fabric that appear to billow across it. [Fig.4.29] The difficult angles were thus camouflaged and the room given a much lighter feel. The visual deception was emphasised by the use of real materials, silk that exactly matched the painted version, gold tassels that hang from points where the 'tent' would drape. The treatment of the walls continued Whistler's predilection for dissolving the surfaces on which the murals were painted, creating a sense that one was inside a room looking out. Here the viewer appeared to be inside a marquee, looking out onto a vista of rivers, eighteenth-century townscapes, and gardens, echoing Sassoon's favourite architectural period. Again the artist employed characteristic elements from his mental library of Georgian architecture with motifs such as the Palladian Bridge at Wilton, St Martin-in-the-Fields, and the Boycott Pavilion at Stowe. [Fig.4.30] Obvious personal imagery was prohibited, but there were references to the client and his circle within the 'text' and one of the buildings shown was his Park Lane mansion. The centrepiece of the tented ceiling was a large gilded monogram of Sassoon's initials, set within an imperial wreath, garlanded with stars.

Whereas previous schemes reflected some kind of relationship between location and mural, the Tent Room at Port Lympne bore no resemblance to the rest of the house's décor. In fact none of the rooms were in harmony with each other, from the lapis lazuli walls and Egyptian frieze in one of the dining rooms, to the open Moorish courtyard, to the silver and gold woodwork of the Library. The unifying

factor was a level of opulence verging on the gaudy. Whistler's room, although the murals provided a rich visual and decorative experience, was in comparison elegantly understated. Sassoon created in these reception rooms a series of almost theatrical tableaux in which his guests were entertained.<sup>595</sup>

The theatrical element was in evidence, albeit in a less socially-orientated context, in the mural for the dining room at Plas Newydd in 1936. This was the mural that most obviously shows Whistler synthesising elements from his stage design and mural painting practice. This 47 feet long canvas, more the scale of a theatre backdrop than a domestic decoration, required the hire of a scenery painter's studio to allow Whistler to work on it. The commission was to create a mural for a newly-converted formal dining room to incorporate the very long main wall, the two adjoining side walls, and the ceiling. The room is rather narrow for its length and the artist needed to create a better balance in terms of dimensions. The main issue with the room was not so much architectural as visual, the dining room has a stupendous view over the Menai Straits and Snowdonia and the mural had to both compete with and complement this outlook. Whistler met the challenge with a double reflection. The mural is a sweeping panorama of seascapes and townscapes in which fantasy and reality are intermingled, the azure water and dramatic mountains echoing the actual scene beyond the windows.[Fig.4.31] He then placed large mirrors in between the windows on the facing wall, so that one sees both the real view and the reflection of his corresponding vista. With complete creative freedom from the client Whistler was able to give full rein to these kinds of illusory techniques. The perspectival treatment in a work of this length was complex, with

---

<sup>595</sup> This suggestion of the disconnected nature of the rooms being like 'scenes from a play' from Powers, A., *The Twentieth Century House in Britain*, London: Aurum Press, 2004, p.29.

the perspective needing to be true no matter where the viewer was situated in the room. This Whistler achieved by using twenty-two different vanishing points along the composition.<sup>596</sup>

The style at Plas Newydd was much more comfortable country house living rather than the high profile entertaining spaces of Belgrave Square, Trent Park and Port Lympne. Charles Anglesey, the sixth Marquess had carried out a major program of alterations in the 1930s to the fourteenth-century property, including the refurbishment of the interiors by Sibyl Colefax. The property was thus a combination of early original features, alterations in the Gothic Revival style by James Wyatt in the eighteenth century and the most recent renovations giving a more contemporary 1930s feel to the décor.<sup>597</sup> The mural in the dining room therefore had to complement or at least not sit awkwardly in these fairly diverse surroundings. The grisaille tones and faux stonework with which Whistler surrounded the mural, which covered the return walls, the fireplaces and the large trophies above them echoed the stone of the walls and classical features in the other ground floor rooms, albeit in a more complicated form. [Fig.4.32] These grisaille elements although secondary in visual impact provide an effective contrasting framework and balance to the main panorama of the mural.<sup>598</sup> Whistler also used this in his other schemes, most evidently at 19 Hill Street where the neutral tones of the faux stone entablature and columns balance the vivid tones of the mural panel. His proposals for the further grisaille decoration to the other

---

<sup>596</sup> Sketch diagram given to the author by National Trust volunteer at Plas Newydd in 2002.

<sup>597</sup> *Plas Newydd, Isle of Anglesey*. London: National Trust Publications 1999. P.71

<sup>598</sup> Information on Thornhill's use of grisaille in murals on 'Sherborne House mural, The Colour Scheme' [Online] <http://www.sherbornehouse.org.uk/the-sherborne-house-mural/> [Accessed April 1 2014].

walls would have heightened this effect. This use of grisaille elements to underpin and unify a mural scheme was much used by the muralists of the eighteenth century including Thornhill at Sherborne House and Kent at Houghton Hall. The intricate coffered ceiling at Plas Newydd, the first time he had undertaken such a design, was intended to give a classical, Roman touch to the scheme, rather than the panelled ceiling preferred by Lord Anglesey, condemned by Whistler as 'bogus cinquecento'.<sup>599</sup> It would also give the impression of both a deeper and wider ceiling to balance out the narrow room. This point illustrates very well the extent of Whistler's knowledge of architectural history and his acute sense of what would be appropriate for a particular space and purpose.

In truth the tremendous impact of the mural itself, which completely dominates the room, almost renders superfluous any of the other decorative effects that Whistler introduced. Its vast scale means that one has to view it by walking along its length, with a single viewpoint limited by the width of the room – probably one of the reasons why Whistler chose to employ multiple points of perspective. The room is a complete entity in itself, with each part of the scheme in harmony, and it would be churlish to criticise it for any lack of homogeneity with the rest of the house.

In several of his murals Whistler painted himself, or references to his persona, into the composition. In the Tate he is the young artist on the expedition, at Dorneywood his portrait faces his client's, at 19 Hill Street one could assume that it

---

<sup>599</sup> Letters Whistler to Lord Anglesey, probably 1937, Plas Newydd Archive.

is his easel and palette vacated on the terrace, and a shadowy figure on a bridge in the Port Lympne townscape bears a resemblance. At Plas Newydd the self-portrait is more evident and clearly recognisable, recalling Veronese's depiction of himself as a hunter in the murals at the Villa Barbaro (1560). Whistler did not paint himself as the creator of the mural but as an unassuming gardener. [Fig.4.33] The self-portrait may indicate his satisfaction with the work – he is certainly known to have had greater pleasure painting it than many other projects <sup>600</sup>

In this same year Whistler was also commissioned to create a mural scheme for Lady Louis Mountbatten at the couple's new duplex apartment at Brook House. This luxury penthouse, with roof terrace and panoramic views was the first of its kind in London.<sup>601</sup> The New York antecedents of the apartment were emphasised in the choice of the American decorators Mrs Joshua Cosden and Victor Proetz and Victor Proetz for the interiors.<sup>602</sup> Photographs show an imposing double height marble entrance hall with a look of a 1930s Hollywood film set. [Fig.4.34] There was an enfilade of vast reception rooms which could also be used as a cinema – again a unique concept for most English homes.<sup>603</sup> However aspects of these reception rooms failed to match the contemporary style of the interior construction and lacked impact. Rather than the sleek lines, recessed fireplaces and streamlined style that one would have expected in a modern apartment the rooms contained a mix of new furniture interspersed with antiques and paintings that had been inherited by Lady Mountbatten, all of which sat awkwardly in the

---

<sup>600</sup> Letter Whistler to Lord Anglesey (no date given) quoted in Whistler & Fuller, 1960, p. 9.

<sup>601</sup> Information from 'Victor Proetz Collection: Gift of Charles Thompson Proetz, Victor H., 1897-1966', St. Louis Art Museum Archives [Online] <http://beta.worldcat.org/archivegrid/collection/data/122561081> [Accessed December 1 2014]

<sup>602</sup> Cornforth J. 2009, p. 135.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid, pp.132-33.



rather sterile interiors. [Fig.4.35] This then was the rather compromised canvas that Whistler had to work on, and the first completely modern building that he had been involved in. However it is clear from the interiors that the Mountbattens were not passionate advocates of a truly modern style. They would have known of Whistler's work from the circles they mixed in and thus were not expecting a cutting edge outcome. In addition, the scheme he was to create was for Lady Mountbatten's boudoir or sitting room, a smaller and more private space than the public entertaining rooms.

With the size of the room being thought unsuitable for the sort of panoramic sweep or vista employed in larger spaces,<sup>604</sup> Whistler decided on a more ornamental treatment. He applied the kinds of techniques he used at Gower Street, where he had devised separate elements dense with personal references, but here he multiplied these into a composite design used throughout the entire room.

[Fig.4.36] In a similar manner to Mottisfont the following year, this scheme had a highly decorative quality that rarely broke the surface of the wall. The design divided the walls of the boudoir into about sixty sections, of varying sizes each of which contained a pictorial element, depicted in grisaille, relating to the life of the Mountbattens: family houses such as Broadlands and Asdean; Louis Mountbatten playing polo; trophies depicting the couple's various attributes and accomplishments. This was a complex scheme, almost like a coffered ceiling applied to a wall. At ceiling height Whistler designed an elaborate cornice picked out in silver with the initials E and M in alternating segments with an intricate cartouche on the ceiling itself. Although the complicated nature of the different

---

<sup>604</sup> Whistler L., 1985, p.218.

squares could have appeared convoluted and fussy with pattern, the restrained tones of the grisaille on a blue grey background gave the scheme a delicate unity. [Fig.4.37] Again, as at Gower Street, the grisaille paintings have the effect of mezzotints or prints and their repetition over the wall's surface gave an even more heightened effect of an eighteenth-century 'print room'.<sup>605</sup> Despite the twentieth-century surroundings of the penthouse, the boudoir had a cool Regency elegance.

This decorative aspect of Whistler's creative armoury was again in evidence at Mottisfont, his last major scheme. Here in the large drawing- room there was the space available to paint a completely scenic style of mural as at Port Lympne or Plas Newydd, and his preparatory sketches reflected the medieval history of the original Priory, involving his favoured themes of panels of scenery and statuary which would be in a sympathetic Gothic Revival style.<sup>606</sup> Whistler had previously shown an interest in this style demonstrated in the highly ornamental octagonal pavilion he had designed for Plas Newydd in 1936.<sup>607</sup> [Fig. 4.38] It has been suggested that his work at Mottisfont was evidence of the renewed appeal of the Gothic which grew in popularity especially in the following decade.<sup>608</sup> Indeed this room is referred to by some writers as the 'Gothick Drawing Room'.<sup>609</sup> However, the client, Maud Russell, insisted there was to be no landscape or architecture depicted and the figurative elements were limited to trophies and traceries but the

---

<sup>605</sup> For a print room where the walls are completely covered see the 'Print Room', c.1768, at Castletown House, Co. Kildare [Online] <http://www.castletownhouse.ie/TouroftheHouse/ThePrintRoom/> [Accessed March 10 2014].

<sup>606</sup> Apparently a trompe l'oeil spiral staircase leading to a dungeon was suggested, notes by Laurence Whistler dated August 1959, Mottisfont A, 'Rex Crate 2 Mottisfont' folder, Correspondence Files, RWA.

<sup>607</sup> Whistler & Fuller, 1960, No. 332, p.50. Not carried out,

<sup>608</sup> Hall, M., 'Shrill Music and Thistles', *Country Life*, April 21 1994, Volume CLXXXVIII pp.78-80.

<sup>609</sup> Cornforth, 1985, p.83 and Calloway, S. *Twentieth-century Decoration The Domestic Interior from 1900 to the Present Day*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988, p. 265.

Gothic theme was approved and Whistler then redesigned the room to fit this. The house had just been extensively re-furbished and decorated by the chic Mayfair firm of Lenygon & Morant, who were instructed by Whistler to create a coved and vaulted ceiling in the drawing room and paint the walls pink as a base for his designs.<sup>610</sup>

Despite his compromised vision, the room fascinates the viewer because of its illusionistic quality. With no opportunity to generate the visual excitement of a pictorial mural, he thus had to create the interest purely through decoration.

[Fig.4.39] The trompe l'oeil architectural features such as columns and pilasters and arches that he made out of the flat walls actually became the focal point and purpose of the mural itself.<sup>611</sup> The repeating patterns of tracery and trellis and delicate arches framing the trophies have a compelling symmetry that leads the eye around the walls. [Fig.4.40] As at Port Lympne he used both faux, i.e. painted, and real materials side by side for the ermine and velvet curtains at the imposing arched windows. [Fig.4.41]

This treatment of the room where the artificial is both combined with and celebrated over the genuine actually reflects many of the decorative choices made by Maud Russell at Mottisfont in the 1930s and the previous owner, Marianne Vaudrey Barker-Mill, thirty years earlier.<sup>612</sup> The renovations in 1900 added

---

<sup>610</sup> Notes made by Laurence Whistler, Mottisfont A, 'Rex Crate 2 Mottisfont' folder. RWA

<sup>611</sup> Powers, A., 'The Mural Problem' in *British Murals & Decorative Painting 1920 – 1960*, Bristol: Sansom & Co., 2013, p.66.

<sup>612</sup> Visitor information in entrance to Mottisfont, noted 23 June 2013. In an interesting continuation of fictive surfaces there is now a fake Aubusson rug painted on oilcloth on the floor in one of the reception rooms.

extensive faux marbling to the walls of the Long Gallery and up the main staircases.<sup>613</sup> This marbling was added to by Russell in other rooms.<sup>614</sup> The mode of decoration she commissioned Whistler to carry out continued this desire for imitation and pretence with nothing that could be construed as intrusive, restraining Whistler's creativity until it became perhaps merely an extension of the decorator's work. Russell was a tremendous patron of the arts and was painted by many of the most prominent artistic figures of the day. In the light of these relationships, her control over Whistler's artistic freedom looks even more anomalous.

It is worth noting the dates of this commission which was 'begun Dec 19<sup>th</sup> 1938 finished October 3 1939'.<sup>615</sup> A hidden message in the composition, now well-known, records that Whistler was painting it as Britain declared war on Germany.<sup>616</sup> His murals had provided a steady stream of income throughout the economic turmoil in the 1930s and here, even during the uncertainties of 1938, Maud Russell was keen to progress this project. Many artists had become unemployed or suffered the cancellation of commissions in the autumn of 1939, whilst Whistler was painting Mottisfont, with a survey indicating that 73% of the artists responding to it had lost their jobs or had had commissions cancelled since the beginning of September.<sup>617</sup>

---

<sup>613</sup> Ibid.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid.

<sup>615</sup> Whistler and Fuller 1960, p.12.

<sup>616</sup> "I was painting this ermine curtain when Britain declared war on the Nazi Tyrants Sunday September 3rd 1939. RW".

<sup>617</sup> Artists International Association survey in *AIA Bulletin*, no. 58 (December 1939), p.1, in Foss, Brian, *British Artists and the Second World War with Particular Reference to the War Artists' Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Information*, Ph.D. thesis, UCL, 1991, p.34, note 13.

## Comparisons

Another approach to dining room murals can be seen in those of Mary Adshead, *A Tropical Fantasy* for Professor Charles Reilly in 1926 and *An English Holiday* for Lord Beaverbrook in 1928.<sup>618</sup> [Fig.4.42] Adshead painted alongside Whistler at Shadwell and, as a fellow muralist, would have taken an interest in his scheme for the Tate Gallery. There were clear influences from Whistler in both these schemes although Adshead's style was already confident and assured. There was a strong narrative element to her works which, like the Tate, unfolded around the walls of the room. In similar fashion to Whistler she used all the available space on the walls for her designs, but created no architectural features to frame it or create fictive space. Indeed in the Reilly scheme the figures are so near the edge of the picture plane that they threaten to fall into the room. Unlike Whistler, Adshead was not so concerned with perspective or elaborate trompe l'oeil effects. Here, her style was characteristically light and informal, with a Rousseau-type treatment of the jungle and animals in her tale, and the panels conveyed a lively sense of adventure and incident.

Her next major scheme for Lord Beaverbrook introduced a much more sophisticated use of focal depth, perspective and composition. Adshead created a very personal narrative in these panels, creating stories and incidents that involved characters from Beaverbrook's social, political and business circles such as Countess Edwina Mountbatten, Winston Churchill and Lord and Lady

---

<sup>618</sup> However, the Beaverbrook commission was withdrawn after completion.

Birkenhead.<sup>619</sup> [Fig.4.43] This bears comparison with Whistler's use of personal references and mischievous allusions to his patrons in his murals. However his use of such material was subtle and often only to be understood by the clients themselves. Adshead had clearly identified the individuals in the Beaverbrook panels and put them in situations that could be construed as awkward or indiscreet. The reasons for the cancellation of the commission were unclear but it seems that Beaverbrook was advised that the panels could cause offence. This warning may have been given by Diana Cooper, and an interesting observation is that if the murals had been by her close friend Rex Whistler the outcome may have been quite different.<sup>620</sup>

Whistler's patrons required him to provide fairly traditional mural schemes no matter how modern their homes might be. If the Mountbattens had been more avant-garde in their tastes they would have chosen an equally modern practitioner in murals such as Glyn Philpot, whose scheme for the art collector Henry Mond and his wife at Mulberry House in Smith Square in 1930, formed part of a complete renovation of the house in an Art Deco style by the architect and designer Darcy Braddell. [Fig.4.44] The walls had been coated with silver foil and huge amounts of marble, including columns and a monumental fireplace, had been used throughout to emphasise the lightness of the room. The size of the room gave Philpot the opportunity to work on a larger scale than his previous mural at Port Lympne and in a starkly modern style, in harmony with Braddell's design. He turned to classical

---

<sup>619</sup> Compton, A., 'Mary Adshead *An English Holiday*' in *British Murals & Decorative Painting 1920-1960*, Bristol: Sansom & Co., 2013, pp. 177-179.

<sup>620</sup> Powers, A. 'Mary Adshead and Mural Painting before the Second World War', in *Earthly Delights Mary Adshead 1904-1995*. Exhibition catalogue by Matthew Clough and Ann Compton, Liverpool: University of Liverpool Art Collections, 2004, p. 33.

mythology for his subjects with huge stylised figures representing Leda and the Swan and Oedipus and the Sphinx, against a background of abstracted buildings that resemble the New York skyline.<sup>621</sup> A feature of the room was the bronze sculpture by Charles Sergeant Jagger on the fireplace, depicting two naked figures embracing. These represented the Monds, Lord and Lady Melchett, who had been involved in a controversial triangular relationship before their marriage. This frank exposition of a personal scandal, beyond even what Mary Adshead implied in the Beaverbrook panel again set a very different tone to the discretion Whistler had to apply to depictions of his clients', or his own, personal life. The humble gardener sweeping up rose petals at Plas Newydd seems very tame in comparison.<sup>622</sup>

In 1931, at the same time as Whistler was working at Port Lympne, Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell were completing a commission for the decoration of a dining room for Lady Dorothy Wellesley at her house, Penns-in-the-Rocks, Sussex. Whistler later painted a large portrait of the Wellesley's children in the grounds of the house in 1932. When the mural commission was begun in 1929, he may not have been known to Dorothy Wellesley or, alternatively, she may have desired a Bloomsbury styled design for the room, particularly as Virginia Woolf was amongst her circle.<sup>623</sup> The house is largely early eighteenth-century but it appears that the

---

<sup>621</sup> Delaney, J G P., Introduction, *Gerald Heard's Memoir of Glyn Philpot (c.1945)* [Online] <http://www.geraldheard.com/writings.htm>. [Accessed April 11 2014]

<sup>622</sup> This self-portrait is commonly seen as symbolic of Whistler's unhappy love affair with Caroline Paget, the rose petals standing for lost or wasted love.

<sup>623</sup> Sackville-West, V., "Wellesley, Dorothy Violet, duchess of Wellington (1889–1956)" rev. Clare L. Taylor 2003 [Online]. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36826> [Accessed April 11 2014].

dining room had little period character.<sup>624</sup> Whereas Whistler would have seen this as a challenge to inject historical detail and invent architectural features, Grant and Bell saw the opportunity to create something more contemporary. The main elements of the scheme were large wall panels in the form of arched niches in which groups of figures were placed, classical in inspiration but portrayed in a modern-day fashion. [Fig. 4.45] In contrast to Whistler's painted niche at Gower Street, here the trompe l'oeil effect was only suggested rather than accentuated. To artists such as Grant and Bell, who were concerned with interpreting the mural form in a more contemporary idiom, or at least one that was an extension of their modes of expression in painting, the idea of creating a convincing visual illusion may have seemed too traditional. In a similar approach to that of Whistler at Mottisfont, the scheme encompassed the whole room, including the ceiling cornice and the fireplace, and full length curtains.<sup>625</sup> But here the effect was taken further, in true Bloomsbury fashion, with an octagonal decorated table, echoing the shape of the mirrors that were placed around the walls and Omega designed chairs.<sup>626</sup> There was some attempt at restraint, with the colourful mural panels balanced with plain painted rectangles, mirrors and simple glass and chrome lights.

---

<sup>624</sup> Photograph [Online]

<http://www3.tate.org.uk/research/researchservices/archive/showcase/item.jsp?view=detail&item=3061> [Accessed April 11 2014], and article describing room as 'devoid of any character' in *The Studio*, n.d. 1930, quoted on Herbert, D., '...a little more, Dorothy Wellesley's dining room' blog entry dated Wednesday 15 June 2011 [Online]

<http://itstartedwithajug.blogspot.co.uk/2011/06/little-more-dorothy-wellesleys-dining.html>, [Accessed April 10 2014].

<sup>625</sup> However, these floor-length curtains with oversized applique abstract decorations look to have been rather a bold, slightly incongruous, incursion into the scheme.

<sup>626</sup> The chairs were made to the design of around 1913 by Roger Fry and each is marked with a painted Omega symbol. Op. cit., <http://itstartedwithajug.blogspot.co.uk/2011/06/little-more-dorothy-wellesleys-dining.html>, [Accessed April 10 2014].



To have compared so many of the murals of Whistler to those of Grant and Bell in this chapter may seem an unlikely juxtaposition. The artists' approaches could not be more different but this is in part the reason for the pairing. There were a multiplicity of styles in murals in this period and it is important to try and place Whistler in context with these. There were few artists who were working on the kind of scale and on the number of private commissions that Whistler was which makes comparisons difficult. Grant and Bell did work on a large number of schemes for a variety of rooms and types of locations and, like Whistler, their clients were often high profile. Their status as artists at the time meant that their work was documented, photographed and reviewed more than many of their peers, which means there is more information available to make an assessment. However, unlike Whistler, very few of their private schemes have survived in their original settings, apart from those at Charleston. The panels from Penns-in-the-Rocks, possibly their most accomplished scheme, are now in the Southampton Art Gallery.<sup>627</sup>

## **Whistler's Approach to Mural Painting**

This account has placed emphasis on the evaluation of Whistler's mural schemes placed in context with those of his contemporaries. This has proved invaluable in providing a fuller picture of muralism in the inter-war period, particularly in the private realm, but it has also served to highlight the distinctiveness of his approach. In the existing biographies this singularity has been emphasised but

---

<sup>627</sup> Southampton City Art Gallery [Online] [http://www.southampton.gov.uk/s-leisure/artsheritage/sotonartgallery/search/view-artwork.asp?acc\\_num=14/1972](http://www.southampton.gov.uk/s-leisure/artsheritage/sotonartgallery/search/view-artwork.asp?acc_num=14/1972) [Accessed April 14 2014]. The mural was featured in *The Studio*, 1930 (no date given), the 1939 Mural Painting in Great Britain exhibition at the Tate and in Percy Horton's review of this exhibition in *The Studio*, Vol. CXVIII, No. 558, September 1939, p.152.

without any attempt to compare Whistler's work with any other artists of the time. He is thus placed in splendid isolation with no real sense of what makes his style and technique and approach so individual. There is no mistaking a Whistler mural but what are the elements that render it so distinctive? Successful mural painting requires three main skills: a comprehensive understanding of the space where the mural is to be sited; the design skills to create a composition that will complement and enhance this space whilst standing as an artwork in its own right; and the technical ability to fulfil the scheme. Whistler possessed all of these attributes to a very high standard.

His innate understanding of architecture gave him an exceptional insight into the relationship between what he could create on a wall to answer its surroundings. He always took the dimensions, lighting and function of a room into account in his design. This is not to say that other muralists were unaware of the spaces for which they were painting but none handled the transaction between a mural and its setting so effectively.

His schemes were always in harmony with their surroundings and intrinsically balanced both tonally and compositionally. Perhaps the most telling example of this was Mottisfont where the restraints of a design that had little figurative content could have resulted in lifeless wallpaper. Despite the limitations the room has a subtle elegance and the complexities of the design are visually compelling. His murals were envisioned quite separately from his easel paintings and were works in their own right, correctly scaled and realised. He understood murals as murals unlike many of his contemporaries who were creating schemes for the private sphere that were really just enlarged versions of their paintings. They were

employing the same stylistic devices in both genres, whereas Whistler could adapt his technique to suit the context of both the location and the client's requirements. Indeed the Bloomsbury style of Grant and Bell was ubiquitous in their schemes, a sort of standard model to be used for all their mural commissions. Although his style was distinctive, Whistler possessed a much wider vision of the possibilities of mural painting.

It has been suggested in this chapter that these types of murals were like stage sets, a background in front of which the clients entertained and lived their lives, both public and private.<sup>628</sup> Certainly in Whistler's case both the scale and the production of the works resembled those for theatre or film sets. As with his theatre designs, or indeed his skills as an illustrator, he carefully designed each mural to reflect the lives, personalities and interests of his patrons. Each contains a strong narrative element, either implicit or explicit, which was a factor found in few other murals of the time.<sup>629</sup> This imbued the works with a theatrical quality, where the figures could appear to be characters acting in front of a backdrop, as in the negro servant at 19 Hill Street. To describe them as having a filmic quality would be more relevant for this period when the idea of Hollywood glamour was so prevalent and desirable.<sup>630</sup>

---

<sup>628</sup> See Sparke, 2009 .p.3 where she discusses the various purposes and meanings of the 'modern interior' which can be 'a "stage set" for its occupants.'

<sup>629</sup> Mary Adshead, particularly in the Beaverbrook panels also shared this quality.

<sup>630</sup> Comments in response to a conference paper given by the author at the AAH, April 2012, from Penelope Curtis, Director of Tate Britain, confirmed in an e-mail to author May 17 2012. Curtis sees the murals as so of their period that the major influence is the glamour of Hollywood.

He understood the technical demands of mural painting from his first experiences at Shadwell. One of the characteristics of a Whistler scheme is that the painted surface has a highly finished quality, with no marks of the artist's brush that are so evident in say a work by Grant and Bell. *Écriture* foregrounds the expressive hand of the artist in the work; Whistler was more concerned to conceal the evidence of his brush.<sup>631</sup> His *trompe l'oeil* effects depended on this even surface in order that the impression was not spoilt by an obvious brush stroke. His skill in creating illusions in paint was unmatched by any other muralist of the period. As has been previously noted, his contemporaries may have considered this kind of visual play was outmoded. Whistler employed it to its maximum effect and appeared to take great enjoyment in the witty deceptions he could realise. The use of convincing *trompe l'oeil* demands a deep understanding of form, tonality and sciagraphy, all of which are evident in Whistler's work from an early age. His language was one that would have been understood by the mural painters of the eighteenth century, particularly in terms of his use of columns and entablatures rendered in *grisaille* that framed his classically inspired scenes: but his fellow muralists were seeking to produce works that were of their time rather than celebrating the mural's traditions. This respect for the past could have made Whistler's work a shallow pastiche and yet it has a wit and vibrancy that saves it from historicism.

His murals make such use of illusion that the border between fantasy and reality is often blurred. This has led some to suggest that his work demonstrates a connection with Surrealism. Laurence Whistler proposes that the still, dream-like

---

<sup>631</sup>Thoughts on this were suggested by the description of Grant and Bell's techniques in painting in Reed, C., 'Taking Amusement Seriously: Modern design in the twenties', in Sparke, P. et al (eds), 2009, p.87.

quality of the mural at Dorneywood and in particular the repetition of the figures of Flora and Cupid shows a link with Surrealist artists, namely Delvaux.<sup>632</sup> He acknowledges that there is nothing of the tension or eerie atmosphere of Surrealist imagery in this work, but his observations are a rare attempt to connect his brother's work with any contemporary movement.<sup>633</sup> Another reference to the supposed Surrealist tendencies of Whistler's art appears in Richard Humphrey's 2001 edition of the *Tate Companion to British Art*, where he uses the mural as a device to introduce themes and thoughts about the Tate Collection. Early in this introduction he describes the mural, its cast of characters, fantasy landscapes, and trompe l'oeil creations disguising the windows and entranceways and comments that 'Whistler's dreamlike painted narrative nods very gently towards Surrealism'.<sup>634</sup> However, apart from describing it as 'dreamlike', he does not enlarge on the particular facets of the work that have suggested this comparison. Trompe l'oeil or something masquerading as another does not necessarily equate to a surrealist approach.<sup>635</sup>

---

<sup>632</sup> '...Rex was not far from the gentler productions of surrealism...' Whistler, 1985, p. 127-8. The paintings by Delvaux that he refers to may be 'The Lamps' of 1937 and 'The Echo' of 1943, both containing a female figure repeated throughout the composition. However, although loosely associated with the Belgian part of the movement and influenced by De Chirico and Magritte, Delvaux never considered himself an 'official Surrealist', 'Paul Delvaux' [Online] <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/delvaux-sleeping-venus-t00134> [Accessed August 6 2014]

<sup>633</sup> This retrospective association strikes a clumsy and somewhat puzzling; the dates of these works mean that they could never have been seen by Whistler. The movement was still in its fledgling stages in these years and nothing was shown in England until the 1936 London International Surrealist Exhibition. His friend Lord Berners became a patron of Dali's only from the mid-1930s. Berners had certainly been interested in Futurism during his time in Rome during the First World War but his own collection in the 1920s and early 1930s was more conventional. See Amory, M., *Lord Berners The Last Eccentric*, London: Faber & Faber, 2008, pp. 136, 175. Berners met Dali in 1932 but did not start buying from the artist until 1935, *ibid.*, pp.158, 162. However in later years Whistler showed sufficient understanding of the movement to create a pastiche - 'Surrealist landscape, after Dali' (1942). This was done whilst in the Welsh Guards, apparently 'painted in answer to a challenge', Whistler and Fuller, 1960, p.108.

<sup>634</sup> Humphreys, R., *Tate Companion to British Art*, 2001 edition, London: Tate Publishing, 2001, p.8.

<sup>635</sup> Later in the passage he connects the light-hearted mood of the mural with A. A. Milne, P. G. Wodehouse and the 'play-acting' of the Sitwells – none of which bring Surrealism to mind. *Ibid.*

A more recent comment comes from Alan Powers in his wide-ranging essay on 'The Mural Problem' in *British Murals & Decorative Painting 1920 – 1960* who also suggests a link between the 'hyperrealism' in Whistler's work and surrealism.<sup>636</sup> This notion of a hyperreal quality is certainly valid, but the term has implications that need clarifying. In its literal sense it can mean that the image is rendered in such a way as to make it exceptionally realistic, a sort of super accuracy. But hyperreal is more commonly used to describe a school of painting and sculpture that attempts to surpass even the reality of a photograph to produce an artwork that is so precise a rendition that the object can appear to be almost palpable.<sup>637</sup> A surrealist approach would be less concerned with attempting to depict the 'real' world. Whistler's visual trickery does not sit entirely comfortably with either the surreal or hyperreal and yet it embraces elements of both. He was concerned with achieving a heightened sense of reality, as in the convincingly broken neck of the Greek jug in the Gower Street scheme. He mixed both real and painted fabrics in the curtains at the windows of Mottisfont. But these are painted illusions in the spirit of trompe l'oeil rather than an attempt to create a simulacrum of reality. Some of the tenets of Surrealism such as unusual juxtapositions and dream-like imagery are found in the murals. Statues that come to life, as seen in Dorneywood and the Tate are certainly out of the ordinary; as is a unicorn roaming English woodland. There is an oneiric quality to many of the murals, for instance at 19 Hill Street, where there is a sense of a heightened reality as in a dream; every element is seen in sharp focus, regardless of its distance from the viewer. There is ambiguity between what might be real and what is imaginary but there is more of

---

<sup>636</sup>Powers, 2013, p.99.

<sup>637</sup> 'Photorealism [Hyper Realism; Super Realism]' Grove Art Online, [Online] <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T067235> [Accessed December 2 2014]

a sense of fantasy or make-believe rather than surrealism. The use of trompe l'oeil was essential to create the sense of depth and space that ensure his murals enhanced the space available, but it was equally importantly a tool with which Whistler could express his wit and humour.

## Conclusions

This chapter began with an examination of the status of the two main categories of mural painting, those for the private home and those for the public sphere. As has been demonstrated in this account of Whistler's career in murals, his primary focus was in the creation of schemes in the private realm. After the Tate Gallery project, there are no records to indicate whether the artist was ever a candidate for any more public schemes, either voluntarily or through selection. He was not painting in the 'Rome Style', demanded by so many of these types, using (British) historicist iconography within a quattrocento model. In some ways he was employing a style which originated in a more ancient classical ideal, particularly in his use of architectural features such as columns and statuary, elaborate trophies and Latin inscriptions; his favoured use of trompe l'oeil loggias and gardens that appear to bring the outside into a room originated in the murals of ancient Rome. Many of these facets were also to be found in the eighteenth-century murals which were such a source of inspiration to Whistler. In addition he could mix in elements of the Edwardian, Victorian, Baroque and Regency and Gothic revivals. The ability and freedom to work in this mélange of styles is in marked contrast to the artists working on civic projects, with their stringent censorship and stylistic guidelines

with the need to meet a board or committee's approval. This is not to say that Whistler enjoyed complete creative autonomy, many of his clients had specific desires regarding their murals, but he ensured that his own voice could be heard above these demands, for instance in the painting of the 'flaming urn' at Mottisfont which was a clear reference to his patron and emphatically not part of his brief. The fact that he worked on his own – apart from assistants - and was not subject to the difficulties of a group dynamic was also a factor in enjoying a less restrictive practice. However this idea of him as a solo performer may also have worked against a possible selection for a team working on a public, municipal or corporate project. When studying the Palace of Westminster or Bank of England murals they form a congruent whole, despite the number of artists' hands involved. Whistler's style was so distinctive that it is difficult to see how his work could have fitted into a group scheme. This characteristic manner was desirable for a private client, and part of the reason why they would select him, but not so suitable for a public commission. Additionally his financial commitments meant that it was imperative that he earned as much as possible for his works and private patronage may have been more lucrative than that of the civic purse.

Public mural schemes have received comparatively more critical attention than their private counterparts. One of the reasons for the lack of critical attention given to private murals is that their existence within the domestic sphere renders them unavailable for the eye of critic or reviewer to assess them as they would an easel painting in a gallery setting. Their critical position within art history is further complicated by the sometimes reductive terminology used to describe them. 'Decorative', 'ornamental', and 'painted rooms' were all terms used to describe



these murals in the period, and this chapter retains the prevailing terminology. The word 'decorative' now has rather detrimental connotations and in current usage there is a crucial separation between 'fine art' and 'decorative art', with the former being perceived as having a higher status. In the interwar period there was no such derogatory association. This hierarchy of practices will be examined further in the Design section of Chapter Five. The 'monumental arts' so central to the ethos of the British School at Rome and those involved in the mural movement, comprised architecture, sculpture and decorative painting. It seems that painting, i.e. fine art, became decorative painting when it was applied to a wall rather than on a canvas support, and could not be contained by a frame. There are also issues of scale. Mural painting involves working on a grand scale, in monumental dimensions. But it can be argued that their very size works against critical recognition. Once a large painting has gone beyond the frame, it is in a compromised position between decoration and architecture; 'murals, decorating the wall, owed their primary allegiance to it and were to subordinate themselves to their architectural surrounds...'<sup>638</sup> The foregrounding of civic mural projects, highly visible and demonstrating art in service to the public, would suggest that murals commissioned for the private sphere were of a lesser significance. An inescapable conclusion is that Rex Whistler's reputation and standing in the canon may have increased had he done more in the public milieu.

Whereas public murals are designed for both interior and exterior locations, private murals are usually designed for the interior or domestic sphere, usually an interior scheme of which the mural forms a part. As Design Historian Penny Sparke

---

<sup>638</sup> Nochlin, L., 'Size Matters' *Tate Magazine*, Issue 29, Summer 2002, p.49.

has written, the study of the modern interior has been marginalised by its falling between architectural history, where it is seen as a 'poor relation' to its exterior sibling, and the study of design, which is concerned more with the material objects found within it.<sup>639</sup> Here we have a similar state of affairs to that which affects the status of murals – an ambiguity to do with definition, in this case between fine art, decorative art and architecture. The term 'decorative' used so freely to describe murals in this period can also be allied with interior decoration and in this chapter the close relationship has been seen between the two practices. Using the case of Felix Harbord it has been argued earlier that a mural painter should not be categorised as an interior decorator and that there are significant differences between the two. A mural is an original work of art created by an artist for a specific location. Interior decoration is the transforming of an entire room or house, according to a particular theme, taste, colour or period. Murals can be, and often were in this period, commissioned as part of that renovation process, hence the confusion between the two terms. If the role of a public mural was didactic, or at the very least to have some kind of message and purpose, what was the function of a work done for the private realm? Certainly in terms of Whistler's commissions it was to beautify and complement a location and the only instructive message would be one that told the viewer more about the owner. Or more likely, even in coded form, reinforced the owner's self-image. Although they usually contained classical references they were never seriously didactic.

---

<sup>639</sup> Sparke, 2009, p.2.

To conclude, this confusion regarding the artist's role poses the question of whether Whistler's artistic integrity has been compromised by a career fulfilling these kinds of commissions. In a larger sense, mural painting's marginalisation by art history has also had a negative effect on an artist whose primary focus and achievements were in this sphere.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A MODERN PATRONAGE:

### WHISTLER'S ROLE IN COMMERCIAL ART OF THE INTERWAR PERIOD

#### Introduction

The term 'Modern Patronage' is used to describe the commissioning practices and new kinds of business relationships between clients and artists that developed in the 1920s and 30s. This period saw many companies using artists, not only to promote their products and services through advertising, but also to design textiles, ceramics, and other manufactured goods. Commercial patronage gained in strength and influence, with Jack Beddington of Shell pronouncing 'the day of the grand private patron of the arts is over.'<sup>640</sup> As this thesis demonstrates, this may not have been the case in Whistler's career but he was in the minority. With their traditional markets hit by the financial crises of the late 1920s, advertising agencies and corporate clients offered artists welcome opportunities in the emerging fields of graphic design and commercial art. From a vantage point in the twenty-first century fine art may be privileged over commercial art and an assumption made that artists at that time had no choice but to compromise and sell their services to these new patrons. But what if this was actually a career choice rather than simple necessity - modern artists engaging with contemporary commercial practices and forms of communication for a modern world?

---

<sup>640</sup> Beddington, J., 'Patronage in Art Today' in Lambert, R.S. (ed.), *Art in England*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1938, p. 82.

Whistler was very much part of this commercial arena and this chapter will look at his role as a designer during this period, an aspect of his career rather neglected by his biographers keen to emphasise his status within a fine art milieu. For an artist usually portrayed as working within traditional forms of patronage, his success in this sphere presents a very different picture. The true picture is that most of his work was commissioned, either by private patrons and clients for their own enjoyment, or by a corporate sponsor such as Duveen (the mural for the Tate Gallery Refreshment Room), or for clients in a more public and commercial arena such as advertising and marketing – a more modern form of patronage. As shown in Chapter Four, once he had completed the mural at the Tate Gallery in 1927, Whistler's career as a commissioned artist was launched and there was little time to devote to a personal easel painting practice.

Much of the work carried out for these clients in graphics and commercial art fell outside the realm of 'fine art' and into the area of design. Indeed it could be said that one of Whistler's greatest strengths was as a designer, for theatre and film, book jackets and illustration, and architectural schemes, with occasional forays into fabric and furniture. There could also be a case for murals to be considered as design objects rather than fine art, and certainly in the 1920s the term 'decorative painting' was interchangeable with 'mural painting'. In the case of Whistler's murals they were works designed to suit a particular location and patron. However the works themselves are, to all intents and purposes, paintings - albeit on a very large scale. Making this distinction between fine art and design is an admission that there is a difference in status between the two practices. The Whistler family do not like Rex Whistler to be referred to as a designer. If the intention of this

thesis is to restore his reputation as a serious artist how are the design elements of his career to be assimilated within that? One difficulty that arises when writing about this aspect of Rex Whistler's work is that it has never been fully evaluated or assessed. Unlike his murals, illustrations or even theatre designs none of his biographers or others writing more generally have paid it much attention. This chapter of the thesis is the first comprehensive attempt to encompass the breadth, content and context of this part of Whistler's oeuvre.

With many of his contemporaries also following serious career routes in these new applied arts, a comparison between their experiences will provide new contexts for Whistler within twentieth-century art. A similar argument could be made regarding these individuals' classification as artists or designers. This chapter will investigate the difference between these two disciplines and their perceived cultural status in the interwar period. Advertising and its allied practices were representative of a 'modern' form of communication and the chapter will investigate whether this was reflected in these artists' work, including that of Whistler, or if more traditional themes were also employed.

Financial considerations and responsibilities must always be taken into account in any examination of Whistler's career and there is some interesting data on the sort of figures he earned from his commercial work amongst the documents in the Rex Whistler Archive. The figures available in his Accounts Book indicate that Whistler earned £584 1s from Shell over the three years from 1929 to 1932, equivalent to over £32,000 in today's values.<sup>641</sup> The payments are identified as from Shell or

---

<sup>641</sup>'Rex Whistler Account Book 1927-1934', RWA. Further projects were carried out for Shell and BP during 1933, including 24 designs for the 'I am a Plain' series, but the payments for these are unrecorded. All relative monetary values are calculated from Officer, L., and Williamson S., "Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present," MeasuringWorth, 2014 [Online] [www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/](http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/) [July 25 2014]

Stuart's Advertising, indicating that Beddington arranged for some direct payments and the rest through Shell's advertising agency. These are substantial sums, particularly when one takes into account that they were just one project amongst many. Over that three year period he was also working on the large mural at Port Lympne for Philip Sassoon, the mural at 19 Hill Street, a wall decoration and two decorative urns for Samuel Courtauld, a design for a large panel for Haddon Hall, scenery and costumes for the ballet *The Infanta's Birthday* and two designs for a Revue, illustrations for *Country Life*, *Farrago* and *Radio Times*, illustrations for ten books (including 28 images for Edward James's *The Next Volume*) and covers for a further eight, the landscape painting for the Shell poster, catalogue designs for Fortnum & Mason, the Clovelly *toile du Jouy* fabric, six bookplates, as well as other paintings, cards and ephemera.

## Advertising

The most significant advertising and publicity campaigns of the interwar years were those for the Underground Group (later the London Passenger Transport Board) under Frank Pick (1878-1941), and for Shell-Mex and BP under Jack Beddington (1893-1959). Whistler produced work for both companies, Shell being his biggest client. These companies in particular provide a useful model for the way that art and advertising were being employed by British firms in the 1920s and 1930s.

Although it could be argued that the Underground Group was selling a service rather than a product like oil or petrol, both Pick and Beddington saw the importance of building a brand, of selling an idea or concept to a prospective consumer rather than obvious product references. Tube trains, buses or trams rarely figured in the Underground posters; similarly the cans of Shell petroleum spirit disappeared from posters in the 1930s and, in fact, cars were not in evidence in the vast majority of Shell advertising of the period. What both were 'selling' was more aspirational. Both focussed their advertising – particularly in posters - on destinations, both literal and imaginary, where consumers could be transported, either by public services or by private motor-car.

The majority of the artworks commissioned by these companies were for posters, to be displayed on indoor and outdoor sites and, in the case of Shell, on their vehicles. The list of artists commissioned by Pick and Beddington to create advertising posters reads like a roll call of the leading contemporary artists of the time including John Piper, Edward Bawden, Graham Sutherland, Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Paul Nash, Eric Ravilious, Edward Wadsworth - representing factions from Bloomsbury to the sort of (semi-) Cubism and Vorticism embraced by Edward McKnight Kauffer. Rex Whistler was amongst these of course and at that time would have been as well-known and his work as sought-after as any of the artists on this list.



## Frank Pick and London Transport

‘...no exhibition of modern painting, no lecturing, no school teaching can have had anything like so wide an effect on the educatable masses as the unceasing production and display of London Transport posters over the years 1930-40.’

So wrote Nikolaus Pevsner in an assessment of Frank Pick’s career with London Transport in the *Architectural Review* in 1942.<sup>642</sup> The judgement, made so soon after the actual events, could have been premature but in fact seventy years later Transport for London still finds the poster an effective form of communication, and its history is still being celebrated, showing that this art form is still of interest to the ‘educatable masses’.<sup>643</sup> As Publicity Manager, Frank Pick pioneered the use of artists and illustrators to change the public face of the London Transport<sup>644</sup> brand. This was not a restrictive patronage where a ‘house style’ was imposed on the commissioned artists. A multiplicity of styles was welcomed, with one caveat - that the message should always be clear to the consumer.<sup>645</sup>

In late 1927, as Whistler’s mural for the Tate Gallery Refreshment Room was nearing completion, Pick was actively involved with the compiling of the guest list

---

<sup>642</sup> Pevsner, N., ‘Patient Progress One: Frank Pick’ in *Studies in Art Architecture and Design Victorian and After*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1982 edition, p.191. Pick had died in 1941 and this article was in the nature of an obituary.

<sup>643</sup> See Edelstein, T., (ed.), *Art for All /British Posters for Transport*, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010 and the accompanying exhibition; London Transport Museum’s *Poster Art 150 – London Underground’s Greatest Designs* 2013 exhibition; ‘Posters with a Purpose: The London Transport Museum Sale’, Sale 6934, Christies London, 4 October 2012 [Online] <http://www.christies.com/posters-with-a-purpose-17238.aspx> [ July 16 2013]. The Sale total was £1,026,750.

<sup>644</sup> Initially Underground Electric Railways and became the London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB) in 1933, more commonly referred to as London Transport.

<sup>645</sup> Frank Pick, notes from a 1927 article, quoted in Green, O. ‘Railway Poster Display’ in T. Edelstein (ed.), 2010, p.76.

for the unveiling ceremony.<sup>646</sup> One of his suggestions to Aitken was C B Cochran the theatrical impresario, who subsequently commissioned Whistler.<sup>647</sup> Pick's recommendations showed that he was keenly aware of who was or could be interested in the use of 'decoration' in both private and public locations.<sup>648</sup>

Whistler's mural must have met with greater approval as he was commissioned to design two posters for the London Passenger Transport Board in 1928. These were both for cultural locations, the London Museum and the Tate Gallery. [Fig.5.1] The London Museum was based in Lancaster House at St James's Park, but had originally been founded in Kensington Palace.<sup>649</sup> Whistler played on the Royal connections, reconstructing the Royal coat of arms in his design, placing Britannia in a golden coach, on her way to visit the museum, which is being drawn by the unicorn, the lion astride the top driving it with a whip, and wheels fashioned out of the Union Jack. In the poster for the Tate Gallery, which must have been a gift to the artist, Whistler has taken elements from his mural and then blurred the boundaries between it and the Refreshment Room, creating the illusion that the characters from 'The Pursuit of Rare Meats' are attempting to rudely intrude on two oblivious matrons taking tea. There is evidence in both these artworks of Whistler's growing confidence in employing a more humorous style, no doubt attributable to the critical acclaim given to the Tate mural, and in introducing distinctive elements of personalisation. Several of Whistler's characteristic

---

<sup>646</sup> Letter from Frank Pick to Charles Aitken, 1 Nov 1927, Archive Number: TG/PR/260/2/42 'Archive Showcase Aitken, Charles' [Online] <http://www3.tate.org.uk/research/researchservices/archive/showcase/item.jsp?subject=232&view=detail&page=2&parent=1406&item=1224> [July 16 2013]

<sup>647</sup> Ibid. Cochran commissioned designs from Whistler for Revues in 1929, 1930, 1931, 1934 and 1942.

<sup>648</sup> However he comments unfavourably on Sir Philip Sassoon's London house which has been 'disfigured... with the aid of modern artists', referring to the Sert mural scheme, *ibid.*

<sup>649</sup> 'History of Lancaster House' [Online] <https://www.gov.uk/government/history/lancaster-house> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London\\_Museum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Museum). [December 2 2014]] It is now the Museum of London in the City of London.

buildings appear behind Britannia's coach including St Martin-in-the-Fields and Nelson's Column, whilst putti frolic around the scene. In the Tate poster there is a Latin inscription on the Boycott Pavilion from Stowe, 'Rex Whistler fecit', and the bust in the niche above bears his features, rather like the murals at Dorneywood, painted 1927-8. This whole design is a sort of fantastic self-indulgence – using his own artwork as the basis of a poster advertising the gallery in which it is housed, and then emphasising his authorship with individual references.

These images are distinctively Whistler's in style with the lively and humorous treatment of the subject matter, the architectural backgrounds and the overall skill in draughtsmanship, but how were other artists adapting their styles to suit this new arena? One of the aims of this chapter is to compare Whistler's work alongside other commercial artists of the time, to examine whether he was an effective communicator in advertising terms. Posters by Austin Cooper for the British Museum (1928), Edward Bawden for the Natural History Museum (1925) and Edward McKnight Kauffer for the British Industries Fair (1928) present a different way of expressing the message. [Fig.5.2] These each have some sort of design element that accepts and plays on the flatness of the poster plane – the vitrines of the Bawden especially. By leaving a great deal of white space around the central design feature the artist gives the theme greater impact. They evidence an emergent graphic language, used to reflect the subject of the poster in style and content, including typography. Cooper's British Museum poster uses a font that suggests the exoticism of the subject whilst remaining modern and sans-serif, and the McKnight Kauffer for the British Industries Fair echoes its subject and strips the message down to its bare mechanics using a bold aggressive typeface. No extraneous details are included. New processes in printing and lithography meant

that photographic elements could be juxtaposed within the composition as shown in Cooper's design.

In contrast Whistler is playing with a more conventional fine art heritage and using the space in a traditional three-dimensional way. The typography is in keeping, using an ornate classical typeface. Rather than demonstrating how little visual content one can get away with, every possible inch is filled with detail and the individual elements are highly decorative. His posters seem to be illustrating a story rather than delivering the uncomplicated message of his contemporaries'. All of these posters have to describe something about the destination they advertise or they will fail in their purpose. Whilst the others do this through images of what the customers might find when they get there, Whistler's fantastical creations for the Tate and the London Museum say nothing about the contents of either institution. Does this make them less successful? The Tate Gallery certainly has more to offer visitors visually than the mural in the Tearoom. However Whistler was perfectly aware that the mural had generated a huge amount of publicity for the Tate and thus might provide a more obvious link to the travelling public than a depiction of a Constable or a Turner. The London Museum poster said more about its founding than its collections, but conveys the impression that it might be a lively and amusing place to visit. Compared to those by Bawden, Cooper and Kauffer, there is nothing contemporary in the style of his designs, although each is completely in keeping with the subject. Pick's guidelines were that the design, whether abstracted or representational had to be strong enough to be seen from a distance, at a station for instance, but should also have 'meaning and form' to

tempt the viewer to look more closely.<sup>650</sup> Whistler's are not as bold and arresting as his counterparts', but their visual complexity and rich colour palette, in contrast to the minimal tones used by the other designs, do attract and beguile the eye. He is emphatically not using the kind of modern or experimental language utilised by his contemporaries but it can be argued that he is still communicating the client's message effectively, with content that both entertains and informs.

Whistler designed two posters for exhibitions curated and hosted by Sir Philip Sassoon at his Park Lane townhouse. 'The Four Georges' in 1930 and 'The Age of Walnut' in 1932 were charity events showing collections of paintings, furniture and silver. [Fig.5.3] Whistler's designs are ornate and sophisticated, using florid script for the details of the events and framing them with cartouches and flags. 'The Four Georges' has medallion portraits of the monarchs at each corner, and the 'Age of Walnut' a double portrait of William and Mary. Sassoon was by this time a patron of Whistler's and knew the artist's taste for these periods would ensure a satisfactory design. The 1930 poster is slightly anomalous as, although it was a private commission, it was also used as an Underground poster.<sup>651</sup>

Pick did not commission Whistler again after the Tate and London Museum posters. It was not unusual for an artist to be used once or twice and not again but it begs the question of whether Whistler's designs were too traditional for other subjects that Pick needed illustrating. However, looking at the diversity of designs

---

<sup>650</sup> Pick, 1927, quoted in Green, 2010, p.71.

<sup>651</sup> Image on the Vintage Poster Forum [Online] blog entry for Thursday 2 July 2009 'Rex Whistler Posters' <http://www.booksandthingscoulk.blogspot.co.uk/2009/07/rex-whistler-posters.html> [Accessed July 6 2013]. Sassoon wielded sufficient influence to be able to arrange for the production and display of this design as an Underground poster. Sassoon was known to Pick through protracted negotiations with the company over the land used for the new Piccadilly Line extension, which bordered his estate at Trent Park. Email correspondence with Oliver Green, Research Fellow and former Head Curator of the London Transport Museum, 15/16 July 2013. Green suggests that the poster may have been allowed as a 'sweetener' to Sassoon.

and styles on offer in the hundreds of posters produced during the 1920s and 1930s this seems unlikely. Although there are many in a modernist idiom with simplified forms, photomontage and a direct hard-hitting message, there were also artists such as Joseph Walter West, whose images such as 'End of the Day' (1931) were redolent of a dreamy romanticism and F C Herrick's humorous designs for 'Chislehurst Caves' (1931).<sup>652</sup> It may be that Pick regarded Whistler as an artist who could only produce in a rather ornate manner, whereas his graphic work for other clients demonstrates that he could adopt any number of graphic modes to suit the subject. Pick may have approached Whistler again and been turned down, although this seems unlikely – Whistler rarely refused work, sometimes to his detriment.

There is little material in the Archive to shed more light on Whistler's work for London Transport, and Laurence Whistler barely refers to it in his biography. According to payments entered by Whistler in his Account Book, he was paid £31 10s for each poster in 1928, the equivalent of c. £1500 in today's terms.<sup>653</sup> This fee would have been in guineas, hence 30 guineas. There was a distinction between payment to a 'Gentleman' or in this case a 'Fine Artist' which should be in guineas or a 'tradesman', paid in pounds.<sup>654</sup> Whistler's Account Book is not mentioned in the 1985 or 2012 biographies and yet its existence provides a personal and

---

<sup>652</sup> Herrick also demonstrated the versatility, essential in a poster artist, with images as minimal and strongly graphic as any by Kauffer, see 'London's Umbrella' (1925).

<sup>653</sup> 'Rex Whistler Account Book 1927-1934', RWA.

<sup>654</sup> Efforts made by the advertising management of LNER to pay their poster artists in pounds only, to reflect their positions as 'Commercial Artists...like ordinary business men' were firmly rebuffed 1929 LNER memo quoted in Edelstein, T. 'The Art of Posters: Strategies and Debates' in Edelstein, T. (ed.) *Art for All British Posters for Transport*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010, p. 23.

invaluable insight into what he earned in these years. Further investigations into his income will continue in the next chapter.

## Murals

One area that would have been entirely appropriate for Whistler's talents would have been in the design of the murals used in several London Underground stations in the late 1920s. The introduction of station concourses below street level demanded a different plan of lighting and decor to alleviate the gloomy surroundings.<sup>655</sup> However he was not amongst those chosen for these projects. Mary Adshead, who had worked alongside Whistler on the first phase of the Shadwell murals project in 1924<sup>656</sup>, and was making a name for herself as a muralist, was commissioned to produce large mural panels for the first of these new subsurface spaces in c.1925-6 at Bank Underground Station. For these, Adshead produced humorous street panoramas full of character and incident, with figures similar to those in 'A Tropical Fantasy' (1926) and 'An English Holiday' (1928).<sup>657</sup> The Bank murals were not advertising any of London Underground's services but were purely superior advertising hoardings, although she also designed posters for the Underground, two in 1927 and a series of seven in 1937. Stephen Bone was commissioned to create murals at Piccadilly Circus Station in 1928-9, the second of the Underground's new subterranean concourses and ticket halls, designed by Pick's architect, Charles Holden.<sup>658</sup> [Fig.5.4] This was a

---

<sup>655</sup> *Transits: The Nomadic Geographies of Anglo-American Modernism*, (eds.) Giovanni Cianci, Caroline Patey, Sara Sullam, Bern: Peter Lang Verlag, 2010, p.203.

<sup>656</sup> See Chapter One 'The Slade'.

<sup>657</sup> Also see Chapter Four 'Murals'.

<sup>658</sup> Confusingly, the Tate and London Transport websites report that Mary Adshead worked on these murals with Bone, see 'Mary Adshead, Artist biography' [Online]

prestigious and highly visible murals commission which marked the reconstruction and renovation of the station. The five large mural panels, the largest murals commissioned by London Underground in this period,<sup>659</sup> reflected not only the lives of the passengers, travelling, working, and at leisure but also celebrated London's place at the heart of the British Empire.<sup>660</sup> This celebration of Empire delivered a much more explicit nationalistic message than Pick's standard Underground posters, with their celebrations of suburban life and London's landmarks.<sup>661</sup>

Adshead, Bone and Whistler had all overlapped at the Slade, and had the benefit of Tonks's teaching on murals. By the time of the Piccadilly Circus mural commission, Pick was an obvious admirer of Whistler's mural work at the Tate, the artist was in high critical regard due to the project and had successfully embarked on a career in this genre, but he was not considered. Again it seems likely that Whistler's perceived fondness for creating in a past or bygone style went against him. These murals by Adshead and Bone showed contemporary figures in contemporary situations and described in a corresponding idiom. Each artist had a distinctive way of rendering their designs, Adshead with a slightly flattened perspective against which the figures were staged, Bone rather more animated and realistic,

---

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/mary-adshead-2608> where the date is given as 1928, and London Transport Museum 'Mary Adshead' [Online]

<http://www.ltmcollection.org/posters/artist/artist.html?IXartist=Mary+Adshead> [both accessed April 30 2014], although this is not backed up in her list of works, see Clough and Compton, 2004, p.94. The connection may have been because the two artists were married in 1929, *ibid.*

<sup>659</sup> Exploring 20<sup>th</sup> Century London 'Workers Erecting a Mural at Piccadilly Circus Station – Photograph' [Online] <http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/ltn-2005-8452>. [Accessed July 12 2013]

<sup>660</sup> Information from RIBA,

<http://www.architecture.com/LibraryDrawingsAndPhotographs/Exhibitionsandloans/VARIBAArchitecturePartnershipexhibitions/UndergroundJourneys/TheHeartofLondon>. [Accessed 15 July 2013].

<sup>661</sup> *Ibid.*



with use of strong compositional devices. Whistler was designing nothing comparably modern in this period. The cutting edge design of the stations demanded equally current fixtures, fittings and artwork. For Pick, needing to justify the amount spent on this new structure by celebrating its modernity, what would be the point of giving the job to an artist whose designs displayed such a big investment in the past? Nor did Pick risk giving the commission to an artist like McKnight Kauffer whose more abstracted designs could be contained within a poster, but on a large scale might have alienated part of the intended audience. Muralists like Adshead and Bone were the safe face of modern murals.

However, this perception of Whistler as an artist who could only create in a nostalgic style was incorrect. Of particular interest to this discussion of the portrayal of modernity on the Tube network is a set design the artist created for a Cochran theatre revue in 1930, the year after Bone's murals at Piccadilly Circus. [Fig.5.5] 'Bakerloo' is a dynamic pictorial rendition of the motion, speed, noise and pandemonium of the Underground. To convey this Whistler used a series of concentric circular forms, some representing the tube tunnels out of which a train hurtles towards the viewer, others show the rushing tide of commuters that flows from escalator to platform. The familiar Tube signage whirls across the surface like rays of light with 'Bakerloo' in a banner that seems to hurl itself diagonally at a similar speed to the Tube train below it. The circular forms are similar to those used in Robert Delaunay's Orphist paintings of the same period, but a closer resemblance in terms of London Underground poster art would be McKnight Kauffer's 'Winter Sales' of 1921 and 1922 which have similar feelings of velocity and vortex.

The encounter with the modern city was a key component in the modernist artistic response, here expressed in the works of Delaunay, Kauffer and to an extent, the murals of Adshead and Bone.<sup>662</sup> Whistler's reaction to these symptoms of urban modernity - the movement, speed, noise and even the dislocation and dehumanisation caused by a booming mass transport system - is a perfectly valid visual depiction. But does the fact that it is an illustration, a stage design rather than a painting in its own right mean that it cannot be termed a heartfelt response to modernity? If it was a purely technical exercise, completed for a commission with little emotional engagement from the artist then it may fall into the domain of pastiche. The intention behind the work is unknowable. Nevertheless it does demonstrate Whistler's ability to create a commissioned design that reflected a more contemporary mood, despite whatever personal preferences and affinities he may have had to the art of a past age. So much of Whistler's adult, public and commissioned work, did not depict aspects of modern life. This work is singular amongst Whistler's oeuvre in its attempt to reflect an experience of modern life in the city.

## **Jack Beddington and Shell**

'Painting easel pictures for one's own pleasure and executing commissions for men who know what they want are two very different things.'

Jack Beddington, 1938.<sup>663</sup>

The zeal demonstrated by Frank Pick for progressive patronage that married artistic endeavour with commercial instincts continued with Jack Beddington, the advertising manager for Shell from 1928. Like Pick, Beddington had the vision and

---

<sup>662</sup> Ideas on the connections 'between modernity, the city, and modernist art' in Peters Corbett, D., *The Modernity of English Art*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, pp. 100-104.

<sup>663</sup> Lambert (ed.), p.87.

the strength of personality necessary to completely redesign the corporation's advertising strategy. Shell had to present itself as a purveyor of a modern, technologically advanced experience and yet appear sufficiently enlightened to show respect for the enduring traditions of the countryside. This message needed to be reflected in the artworks chosen to represent the company both in terms of the modernity of the images and styles employed by the commissioned artists and the kind of landscape and vision of England they depicted.

## **Shell Posters**

Beddington's idea was to have a portfolio of artists and to give them creative freedom to interpret the Shell 'message', which would then be used in mass poster advertising both on the Shell delivery vehicles and on fixed sites throughout the country, creating a strong aesthetic association between art and product to shape the brand and give it a distinctive image amongst its consumers. Beddington was as interested in discovering new talent graduating from art schools as well as more established artists. One of his connections was Henry Tonks at the Slade who immediately recommended Rex Whistler. Two years after the Tate Gallery Restaurant mural, Tonks once again had been instrumental in gaining an important commission for Whistler. Advertising was a very different type of endeavour to the noble art of mural painting, particularly to a traditionalist like Tonks, and one wonders why he was so eager to recommend an artist who was making such a name for himself as a muralist of note. However he was constantly striving to find employment opportunities for his students, past and present, and

had perceived that this was a potentially lucrative area.<sup>664</sup> It must also be noted that the notion of commercial art being a second-rate use of an artist's talents may well be a more recent sensibility. On Beddington's instructions, Whistler was engaged through Stuart's, Shell's advertising agency, and his first designs followed in 1929.<sup>665</sup> Shell was by far his biggest client and he consequently became an important part of what has become recognised as one of the most successful advertising campaigns of the inter-war period.

Like London Transport, the Shell advertising campaigns concentrated on destinations and the company was predominantly concerned with depictions of the British countryside in its posters, reflecting the growth of motoring as a pleasurable activity. Posters were produced in series, with themes illustrating catchy slogans such as 'Everywhere You Go You Can Be Sure of Shell', 'See Britain First on Shell', 'To Visit Britain's Landmarks You Can Be Sure of Shell'. The implication of the slogans for these campaigns, was that the motorist was free to go wherever he chose, secure in the knowledge that Shell – via the petrol in the tank - could be relied on to protect and safeguard the journey.

Whistler's poster for the series 'You Can Be Sure of Shell' was *The Vale of Aylesbury* (1933), a bucolic depiction of a landscape in the English tradition, ancient oaks in the foreground, with a distant vista of the Chiltern Hills.[Fig.5.6] The artist was not noted for his pure landscape work, particularly not at this stage of his career, and this is singularly unadorned and painted as it was, rather than being embellished

---

<sup>664</sup> Copy of letter from Tonks to Mary Adshead, April 8 1928, 'Advertisements may become a very important part of the work of a painter that is why I wanted you to do the work for Mr Pick'. Rex Whistler Letters A, Rex : Additional Letters, RWA.

<sup>665</sup> Pencil notes by LW about Stuarts headed 'Adverts'. In later years Whistler and Beddington formed a direct working relationship, as evidenced by letters between them in the Archive 'Rex Crate 2 Adverts' RWA. In fact the meeting is recorded in Whistler's 'Diary for 1929' 10 April 'Lunch Menzies, Advertising Manager', 'Diaries, Notebooks, Misc.' RWA.

by the artist's imagination.<sup>666</sup> Unlike his work for London Transport, Rex Whistler's name is clearly printed underneath the image on the poster. Despite his reluctance to sign his advertising work, all the artists involved in creating paintings for the poster campaigns were plainly credited. The paintings' titles were also shown, whilst the Shell logo, slogan or catchphrase was kept distinct from the image itself, emphasising its integrity as a work of art, with provenance and status. The fact that the *Vale of Aylesbury* started life as an actual painting may have meant that Whistler was content to be identified.<sup>667</sup>

As with the London Underground campaign these posters also had the function of increasing the public's awareness of contemporary art, particularly as the artists were free to use their own style, rather than a uniform corporate design. The artists would be given a theme to interpret, for instance, 'Visit Britain's Landmarks' and would depict the subject in their individual style. [Fig.5.6]Graham Sutherland's *Brimham Rocks, Yorkshire* (1937) reflects the interest the artist was taking in Surrealism at this time.<sup>668</sup> Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant employed the Bloomsbury type of painterly impressionism in *Alfriston* (1931) and *St. Ives, Huntingdon* (1932) respectively. Complete abstraction was not deemed appropriate for this form of advertising, partly due to the need for recognisable imagery on the posters and Shell did not want to alienate any part of their audience of consumers with anything too radical.<sup>669</sup> Ben Nicholson's *Guardsman*

---

<sup>666</sup> It was actually the view from the artist's home at the time and the figure under the tree is his brother Laurence.

<sup>667</sup> The painting was also used in later years as a piece of rural propaganda when an airport was threatened at nearby Cublington. Placed in a prominent position where the commissioning committee were meeting it was described as being as 'potent as any of the evidence heard'. Whistler, L., 1985, p. 169-70. Full account Daily Telegraph 28 January 1971, 'Rex Advertising', RWA.

<sup>668</sup> Yorke, M., *The Spirit of Place Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and their times*, London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1988, p.115.

<sup>669</sup> Lambert, 1938, p.87.

*outside Buckingham Palace* (1938), betrays few of his constructivist principles of the time. These rather diluted forms of modernist painting were balanced out with the more traditional rendition of the subject matter such as Barnett Freedman's *Swaledale* (1932) and, most closely resembling Whistler in its accurate and painterly interpretation, his friend and erstwhile painting companion, Lord Berners' *Faringdon Folly* (1936).

There is also the question of what kind of England was being celebrated by Shell, or indeed the artists themselves, in these images. Writers of the time such as H V Morton and J B Priestley were investigating, usually by motor car, what was being seen as its changing landscape.<sup>670</sup> Particularly in Priestley's case this meant the sprawl of suburbanisation, where every house has a matching garage; in other words the nation of a new car-owning class, who were the growing market for Shell.<sup>671</sup> However, the advertising posters are representing 'Old England'. They may be depicted in contemporary visual language but Alfriston, Swanage, Cerne Abbas, the Vale of Aylesbury and the folly at Faringdon are places that are safely rooted in an English pastoral idyll.

This dichotomy between modernist and traditional imagery is shown to good effect by a comparison between two contrasting, possibly even oppositional, examples; Rex Whistler's *Vale of Aylesbury* and Paul Nash's *The Rye Marshes*, both painted in 1932. [Fig.5.7] Both Nash and Whistler were depicting personal and familiar landscapes – Nash lived near Romney Marsh from 1920 to 1933 – and rendered them in their individual styles, apparently unaffected by any commissioning constraints. Whistler's dreamy pastoral scene celebrates a lineage

---

<sup>670</sup> Morton, H. V., *In search of England*, 1960 edition, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1927, Priestley, J. B., *English Journey*, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1934.

<sup>671</sup> Priestley, *ibid.*, p.401.

of British landscape painters from Stubbs to Steer via Constable. It looks to the past and is yet typical of the traditionalist 1930s British Landscape school. The Nash is one of the most abstract designs amongst the Shell posters, the stark geometry of the composition negating any hackneyed romanticism of the subject. The typography corresponds, unadorned sans-serif for Nash and a Roman font for Whistler. Yet again, Whistler doesn't attempt to experiment with what the poster could be or integrate his painting into the format, whereas the linear elements of the Nash could be designed specifically to echo the flatness of the poster plane. This more experimental approach where the artist uses the idea of the poster to develop the more graphic qualities of their work is completely missing from Whistler's response to the brief. But in terms of the wider purpose of the campaign, which was to emphasise Shell's role as responsible custodians of a precious natural and aesthetic heritage, upholding what has been termed 'the euphoric virtues of nature and art', Whistler's accurate yet romantic rendition of a real landscape completely achieves its purpose.<sup>672</sup>

## Shell Press Advertising

Parallel to the poster advertising campaigns were widespread press campaigns and Rex Whistler was one of the main artists commissioned to produce these more graphic advertisements for Shell and BP.<sup>673</sup> Over the years 1929 to 1933 he designed over 80 advertisements which appeared in eight separate series in

---

<sup>672</sup> Hewitt, J., 'The 'Nature' and 'Art' of Shell Advertising in the Early 1930s', *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 5, No. 2, OUP, 1992, pp.126.

<sup>673</sup> Shell and BP merged their marketing operations in 1932. 'Administrative / Biographical History', Shell-Mex and BP Archive [Online] <http://archiveshub.ac.uk/data/gb1566-smbp> [July 25 2014]

His work for B.P. Ethyl was a series of press ads on the theme of 'I am a Plain....Games-Mistress, Stockbroker, Pugilist...' and so forth. Fourteen designs were used in 1933. His major contribution was to the Shell Advertising campaign and these designs will be analysed here.

various newspapers and magazines. Other celebrated illustrators and cartoonists such as Edward Bawden and John Reynolds were also involved in the creation of these rather comical press ads, whose purpose was to be entertaining, witty and inventive whilst keeping the all-important Shell message in the reader's mind. This was a very different style of advertising to the Shell posters, where artists were required to create beautiful images of rural idylls in a fine art idiom. It was a much more fast-paced and linear process for which Whistler's humour and illustration skills was ideally suited. Many of his contemporaries on the poster side may have been unable to switch to this highly graphic and comic form of commercial art.

His ads to illustrate the slogan 'That's Shell – That Is!' needed to convey the speed that could be achieved by the use of Shell oil and petrol. No vehicle is pictured, just the clouds of dust and the skid marks witnessed by shocked onlookers left in the car's wake.[Fig.5.8] These figures, reminiscent of *Punch* magazine cartoonists from the early twentieth century such as H M Bateman<sup>674</sup>, can be surprising to those more used to Whistler's more lyrical or fanciful work. In fact Whistler was an excellent comic draughtsman and caricaturist from an early age and his sketchbooks are full of this kind of material.

Whistler completed three designs for the 'That's Shell – That Is!' series in 1929 before it was decided that the artist John Reynolds should take over the campaign. The reasons given were that Whistler was 'not always available' and that he 'lacked the common touch'.<sup>675</sup> Certainly in 1929 Whistler's career was taking off, with multiple commissions for book and magazine illustrations, portraits, and theatre

---

<sup>674</sup> Bateman co-incidentally produced some of the early Shell posters in the 1920s, for instance 'Concentration' 1924.

<sup>675</sup> 'Recollections of Shell and BP Advertising By Vernon Nye', Copyright Shell Brands International AG. Courtesy the Shell Art Collection. page no. unknown.



designs.<sup>676</sup> His availability may also have been compromised by two trips abroad that year. The allegation of a lack of populist appeal in his work is more puzzling. Reynold's new version of the advert accompanied by a new slogan - 'That's Shell – that Was!' - comprised an image of a cloth-capped road workman carrying a shovel, with the visual device of two heads facing in different directions trying to spot the speeding car. In contrast to the 'navvy', Whistler's figures had been mainly bowler-hatted or suited or tail-coated gents, apart from one design containing a policeman and a sandwich-board man, perhaps to give some class balance. Although he had a propensity to use these more formally-attired figures, particularly in later advertisements for Fortnum's and Rothmans, where an aspirational middle to upper-class audience was reassured by this kind of imagery, he could also reproduce quite ordinary characters in, for instance, the Reversible Heads series. Whistler's policeman advert was destined for Punch, the others in the series for the quality press, and it could be assumed that Reynold's labourer was intended for the popular papers. Popular this ad certainly was, with the new by-line catching the public's imagination and becoming a catchphrase and leading to a whole series of comic creations including the 'Knockless Monster'.<sup>677</sup> But this was basically Whistler's idea, with a different slant given by Reynolds. In the Catalogue Raisonné an unused design for 1929 is described as 'back view of an ice-cream vendor, his head drawn facing both ways to indicate speed...'. It is not known whether Reynolds saw this as a submitted design and copied it, or whether synchronicity was at play.<sup>678</sup> The loss of this one series was no great disaster for

---

<sup>676</sup> See Appendix 1 'Biographical Timeline' for full outline of work for that year.

<sup>677</sup> Russell, T., *Fill 'er Up!: The Great American Gas Station*, Minnesota: Voyageur Press, 2007, p.35, [Online] <http://books.google.co.uk/books> .[August 5 2013].

<sup>678</sup> 628 (4), Whistler and Fuller, 1960, p.100. It is also said that a member of the public wrote in with the double-headed idea. Artmonsky, R., *Jack Beddington The Footnote Man*, London: Artmonsky Arts, 2006, p.32.

the artist; he completed ten advertisements for the 'Shell Petrol is Different' series in the same year, and many others over the next few years.

Apart from the one series on which he was replaced, Whistler was given a fairly free rein to express his own humour in these Press campaigns. One of his more bizarre creations was for the 'Shell Petrol is Different' series of 1929 showing a scene set in Trafalgar Square which shows a London bus, emblazoned with Shell ads, racing around the Square whilst an elderly lady on the top deck attempts to harpoon a whale swimming in one of the fountains. [Fig.5.9] Nelson has also left his column and is studying the mammal through a telescope.

Each copy of the advert held in the Whistler Archive carries an instruction regarding the media in which it was to be inserted.<sup>679</sup> With the amount of time and money the company devoted to advertising Shell had to calculate the most effective method of reaching their market.<sup>680</sup> Largely they were destined for 'General Newspapers', but this particular series was for 'Illustrated Magazines, Times, Morning Post, Daily Telegraph'. These were the 'quality' end of the newspapers spectrum with an obviously Conservative bias and a readership that could be assumed to have the kind of income to run a car, or be involved in a more corporate transport enterprise. 'General newspapers' must have included the popular papers such as the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*, and perhaps even the more left-wing *Daily Herald* and *Daily Mirror*. Although Whistler only produced

---

<sup>679</sup> Copies of advertisements in 'Rex Advertising' RWA.

<sup>680</sup> New advertisements would be launched in the 'Imperial and Foreign' section of *The Times*, where the higher echelons of society and business would be sure to see it, and their opinion would be canvassed as to its suitability before inserting it in other papers. 'Recollections of Shell and BP Advertising By Vernon Nye', Copyright Shell Brands International AG. Courtesy the Shell Art Collection. page no. unknown.

one Shell poster, it could be argued that many more people saw his adverts in the press than could possibly have seen them on the road. Most of these (apart from the Reversible Faces) were unsigned, but his style was very distinctive and it seems likely that they were recognised as his own. The popular press titles had circulations of well over 1.5 million each in the early 1930s and the qualities had several hundred thousand readers a piece.<sup>681</sup> The combination of visual humour and punning word-play was a winning combination and provided an effective contrast to the purely aesthetic appeal of the posters.

### **‘Reversible Faces’**

The most intriguing images Whistler created for Shell are the series which has become known as the Reversible Faces or Reversible Heads. The concept behind these creations is to have two faces within the frame of one head, each of which makes pictorial sense when inverted, whilst maintaining the creative integrity of the whole. Historically these sorts of pictorial ambiguity can be found in the works of Giuseppe Arcimboldo where a representation of *Vegetables in a Bowl* when inverted becomes *The Gardener* (c.1590). Whistler’s are more complex in that they represent the same element, a face, in each case, whereas Arcimboldo is portraying two separate entities. There are many other instances of this reversal, perhaps the earliest being a second-century Roman beaker that reveals a different version of a head when upright and inverted.<sup>682</sup> Laurence Whistler recounts that his brother’s inspiration was from seeing an illustration of a head, supposedly of the Pope and, inverted, the Devil, in a seventeenth -century book shown to him by his publishers,

---

<sup>681</sup> Day, G. (ed.), *Literature and Culture in Modern Britain Volume Two 1930-1955*, London and New York: Longman, p.108.

<sup>682</sup> Shown in Wade, N. J., and Nekes, W., ‘The two faces of Rex Whistler (1905-1944)’, *Perception*, 34, 2005, pp. 639 – 644.

<http://www.perceptionweb.com/perception/misc/p3201ed/p3201edc.pdf>

Secker's, in 1930.<sup>683</sup> Further examples could be found in comics of the period.<sup>684</sup> A series by Gustave Verbeek which ran in the New York Herald in the 1900s is particularly relevant and may have been syndicated in the UK at this point. 'The Upside Downs of Little Lady Lovekins and Old Man Muffaroo' was read first one way and the strip then continued by turning the page upside down.<sup>685</sup> Whistler had a lifetime love of comics and cartoons and it is quite possible that he would have been aware of these, particularly with his interest in trompe l'oeil and other visual trickery.

There is no doubt that these creations were clever and ingenious. But neither of Whistler's biographers question why they came into existence. Shell was experimenting with all sorts of visual puzzles and inversions in these years, as seen in a 'Topsy-Turvy' advertisement of 1933 where the text is surrounded by little cartoons depicting a horse riding a man, a bird free with a man in a cage, and text describing events such as the 'Upsydaisy fair'.<sup>686</sup> Other artists involved with Shell were experimenting with faces. Ruth Artmonsky mentions 'Barnett Freedman's hidden faces and Maurice Beck's distorted heads' alongside her description of Whistler's version.<sup>687</sup> It seems likely that Whistler, possibly via Stuart's Ad Agency, was following guidance from Shell's Publicity Department.

At least fifteen of these Reversible Faces were used in press advertisements from 1931-32, although Whistler designed many more, often for his own or friends'

---

<sup>683</sup> Whistler, L. & R., *AHA*, London: John Murray, 1978, Introduction, unpaginated.

<sup>684</sup> Suggestion made by Ruth Artmonsky in email correspondence with the author, 5 August 2013.

<sup>685</sup> Details on Verbeek's cartoons [Online]

[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/14/books/review/Wolk-t.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/14/books/review/Wolk-t.html?_r=0) and <http://www.24-7pressrelease.com/press-release/sunday-press-turns-comics-world-upside-down-with-new-book-on-gustave-verbeek-115466.php>, [accessed 6 August 2013].

<sup>686</sup> Artmonsky, 2006, p.33, image found on EBay, [Online] [http://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/Shell-Petrol-Topsy-Turvy-1933-old-art-advert-/380696243871?pt=UK\\_Collectables\\_Advertising\\_ET&hash=item58a343ae9f](http://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/Shell-Petrol-Topsy-Turvy-1933-old-art-advert-/380696243871?pt=UK_Collectables_Advertising_ET&hash=item58a343ae9f), [11 August 13].

<sup>687</sup> Artmonsky, *ibid.*

amusement. They were used as part of the 'You Can be Sure of Shell' campaign also being promoted by the artists' posters, and were designed for 'General Papers', probably indicating the popular press rather than the quality dailies. A typical example is 'Can I be sure of you Angelina? – As sure as Shell, dear Edwin!' (c.1932), where the duality of the image contains a duality of expression; one version cheerful (Angelina) and the inverse morose (Edwin). [Fig.5.10] As in most of the Reversibles, the eyes are shared by both versions, and their location and shape helps determine the mood. The heavy brow of the morose face becomes the smiling cheeks of the happy version. The part of the face where our perceptual gaze is concentrated is the area below the eyes, and this is where Whistler creates a focus.<sup>688</sup> The attention is thus diverted from the forehead area which is the one most compromised in the deception. The artist also half-inverted his signature to read either way up.

This aspect of Whistler's work has attracted more serious and scientific study than any of his other work with experts in psychology, cognitive science, and neurobiology including it in studies of visual perception and illusion.<sup>689</sup> Even E H Gombrich, who certainly did not give any attention to Whistler in his treatises on art, refers to the concept in an essay on the representation of images in art. In a discussion of the 'well-known graphic joke of the 'reversible face'' he outlines the physiognomic recognition processes that are at work when we look at one of these, and how the eye accepts the extraneous configurations of scarves, hats and odd wrinkles that are necessary to complete the upside-down effect and happily

---

<sup>688</sup> Wade J., Kovács, G., Vidnyánsky, Z. 'Guest Editorial', *Perception*, 2003, volume 32, pp.1-6, [Online] <http://www.perceptionweb.com/perception/perc0103/editorial.pdf> [August 8 2013]

<sup>689</sup> Ibid and 'Ambiguous Figures' in Block R and Yulker, H., *Can You Believe Your Eyes?*, London: Routledge, 1989, unpaginated [Online] <http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=sqChIE5zheUC&pg>, and Seckel, A. *Masters of Deception: Escher, Dalí & the Artists of Optical Illusion*, New York: Sterling, 2004, pp.305-312, [Online] <http://books.google.co.uk> [August 8 2013].

identifies them as a face.<sup>690</sup> He observes that in the most effective examples the artist's skill makes it nearly impossible to discern the two faces concurrently, and certainly Whistler's bear this out.

The Reversible Heads series of advertisements had an extended life, later being published in book form in two volumes, with text by Laurence Whistler. *!OHO!* was published posthumously in 1946 with all but one of the faces 'redrawn from printed advertisements, original drawings and sketches'. Subsequently more originals were found, including eight that had been done later in the 1930s, purely for fun, for friends' children and these were added to the later book *AHA* (1978).

This series of press adverts were the only such works to bear Whistler's signature, albeit only seven out of the series, indicating their significance to the artist, who must have felt that the inventiveness and complexity involved in their facture made them works that he wished to be identified with.<sup>691</sup> He also recognised their intrinsic value and in a rare incidence of financial negotiation - Whistler detested talking about money - in a letter referring to the 'very embarrassing subject of payment' he asks Beddington to increase the rate per head from eight guineas to a possibly 'exorbitant' twelve, a not insubstantial increase of 50 per cent. The letter is decorated with a little cartoon of a sack of coins at the top, and below the text a sketch of a reversible head with the 'sad' version entitled "Before being paid" and the inverted one "After". In a postscript Whistler even suggests a use for this one

---

<sup>690</sup> Gombrich, E. H. 'Meditations on a Hobby Horse or the Roots of Artistic Form' (1951) in Everett, S. (ed), *Art Theory and Criticism: An Anthology of Formalist, Avant-garde, Contextualist and Post-modernist Thought*, Jefferson North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 1991., p.48. [Online] <http://books.google.co.uk> [August 8 2013].

<sup>691</sup> Whistler rarely signed his advertising designs, which may have indicated a reluctance to associate himself with the work or a more practical consideration of not complicating the advertising image.

in the campaign, demonstrating both ingenuity and a keen sense of the commercial usefulness of his work.<sup>692</sup> The personalisation of this letter to Beddington is an indicator of the closeness of their working relationship. At twelve guineas the rate today would be about £700. Very few payments in his Accounts Book are itemised; the entry “Shell ‘Upside Down’ £136 10/-” in 1932, (c. £8000 in today’s value), is further proof of their importance.<sup>693</sup>

Unlike Frank Pick who, although powerful behind the scenes, was shy of direct personal publicity, Jack Beddington allowed himself to be portrayed in Shell and BP advertising. The strength of his identification with the advertising campaigns is demonstrated in a portrait of him by Whistler, in the style of those done for the ‘I am a Plain’ series for BP Ethyl. The caricature of a ‘Plain Ad man’ extolls his desire for ‘purity in publicity’ without recourse to the ‘vulgarity of salesmanship’, which is of course how Beddington would wish to be perceived. It is not known whether this interesting conceit was used in print. The Catalogue Raisonné describes it as a ‘private joke’, but a printed copy exists amongst the other copies of the advertisements in the Archive and the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography entry for Beddington lists it as a ‘portrait in advertisement’.<sup>694</sup> Sketches for the advert also appear in a letter from Whistler to Vernon Nye, indicating this was more than a private work by the artist.<sup>695</sup>

---

<sup>692</sup> Undated, RW to Beddington, RWA ‘Rex Crate 2 Adverts’.

<sup>693</sup> Relative value from Measuring Worth, [Online] op. cit.

<http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/relativevalue.php> [July 25 2014]

<sup>694</sup> Johnson, V.. “Beddington, John Louis (1893–1959).” In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., edited by Lawrence Goldman. Oxford: OUP, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47917>, accessed August 10 2013.

<sup>695</sup> Beddington also appeared, out of role but immediately identifiable, as the Farmer in the 1939 ‘These Men use Shell’ poster by John Armstrong.

## Edward Bawden

Whistler's main competitor on the Shell Press campaign was Edward Bawden who was commissioned to design thirty adverts from 1932. All were on a similar theme: a caricature or distinguishing feature of a town and a reference to Shell in a punning slogan, which for this series were written by John Betjeman. For instance, 'Bexhill-on-Sea but Shell on the Road', 'Stonehenge, Wilts but Shell Goes On for Ever'.

A comparison between two of Bawden's designs, 'Bexhill...' of 1935 and 'Stow...' of 1933, and a similar theme of seasonal activities depicted in Whistler's 'Summer Shell' of 1935, shows a marked difference in their treatment of the subject in terms of traditional versus modern graphic language - despite all being created at the same time, for the same client and product. [Fig.5.11] Bawden's page has a very clean and restrained feel, with a lot of white space surrounding the illustration contained in a relatively small cartouche; Whistler's is more expansive. But as with the Tate and London Museum posters the differences are in content and typography as much as layout. The cartoon-like figures of Bawden are much simpler in execution than Whistler's realistic figures. The swimmers on the beach at Bexhill are in modern dress whereas the folk in top hats, bonnets and tails around the maypole in 'Summer Shell' are at the latest, Edwardian. Whistler's flowing italicised script also has a period feel in comparison to the plain typeface of the Bawdens.

Beddington's commissioning process accommodated and positively welcomed both styles and genres. He separated the artists working on posters and press advertising into 'designers' and 'illustrators'. He singles out several artists in his



essay 'Patronage in Art Today', identifying McKnight Kauffer and John Armstrong as his top designers and Edward Bawden his leading illustrator.<sup>696</sup> Whistler is also praised as an illustrator, whose 'virtuosity seems ... unexcelled', although his poster design skills are not mentioned.<sup>697</sup> Bawden may have been Beddington's top draughtsman but it was Whistler who carried out the vast majority of Shell's press campaigns in the 1930s.<sup>698</sup>

## Exhibitions of Shell and London Transport Posters

To further emphasise the fine art status of their advertising posters both London Transport and Shell displayed them in exhibitions in prestigious art galleries, which were lent further credibility by reviews in the national press and periodicals. The first London Transport poster exhibition celebrating twenty years of its poster art was in October 1928.<sup>699</sup> This was held at the New Burlington Galleries at which it was reported that '8500 persons attended.'<sup>700</sup>

---

<sup>696</sup> Beddington, J. 'Patronage in Art Today' in Lambert R. S, (ed.) *Art in England*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1938, p.85.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid p.84-5.

<sup>698</sup> Proof of the estimation in which Rex Whistler was held by Shell was their significant contribution to the Catalogue Raisonné compiled by Laurence Whistler with Ronald Fuller in 1960. Ironically Laurence Whistler had to thank Vernon Nye at Shell for the 'most helpful contribution' to the volume, the man who had sacked Rex Whistler from one of the most famous Shell campaigns, CR, p.viii.

<sup>699</sup> It is not known whether Whistler's 1928 poster for the Tate Gallery was in this exhibition. It cannot be discerned in photographs of the exhibition on the London Transport Museum Photographic Collections website, [Online] <http://www.ltmcollection.org/photos/photo/photo.html?design=abc&IXsearch=exhibition&IXsummary=results/results&IXSR=vExT2d6Qrpp&IXMAXHITS=1&IXFIRST=25> Inventory nos: 1998/42720 – 42858, [accessed July 21 2013].

<sup>700</sup> Full article in "News in Brief", *The Times*, Oct 27 1928, p.9. The article states that it was at the New Burlington Galleries, on which Edelstein, 2010, bases its account, p.21 and note 37. However, according to the photographs on the London Transport Museum website, this was held at Burlington House, (the Royal Academy). There is obviously considerable difference between an exhibition at a prominent fine art institution such as the Royal Academy and a commercial gallery, albeit one of sizeable importance. Comparing contemporary photographs of the two institutions it

Shell did not exhibit their posters until 1931. Again the New Burlington Galleries were chosen and the 'Exhibition of Press and Pictorial Advertising' was opened by Clough Williams-Ellis, lending credibility to Shell's desire to associate itself with at least some of the conservation aims of the CPRE. A review in *The Spectator* urged the public to visit, stating it was of greater 'importance to English Art' than the Pissarro and Picasso exhibitions on nearby. Most reviews of the exhibitions concentrated on the posters in terms of artistic merit and suitability to the medium, but this critic also singles out the press campaigns, in particular 'Mr Rex Whistler's Portent in Trafalgar Square'<sup>701</sup> (described above). The next Shell exhibition in 1934 was opened by Sir Kenneth Clark, then Director of the National Gallery, emphasising the fine art attributes of the posters. Additionally, it was entitled 'Pictures [not 'Posters'] in Advertising' and with many examples of the artists' original artwork displayed alongside the finished posters there was a blurring of the boundaries between the unique and mass-produced. Rex Whistler's *The Vale of Aylesbury* was singled out for attention in at least two of the reviews of the 1934 exhibition.<sup>702</sup> His straightforward depiction of a rural idyll is compared to other artists' more abstract or graphic interpretation of the brief, but is not found wanting as a result. The article that appeared in the *Architectural Review* about this event is testament to the way in which Shell's advertising and, more widely, its patronage of the arts was perceived at the time.<sup>703</sup> *The Architectural*

---

would appear that the exhibition was held at the New Burlington Galleries see LTM image details in footnote 59.

<sup>701</sup> Fincham, D., 'Shell- Mex Posters: Picasso and other Exhibitions', *The Spectator* 19 June 1931, p. 13.

<sup>702</sup> ... 'charming paintings to which advertising matter is easily adjustable.' 'Exhibition of Shell-Mex and B.P. Advertisements', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 82, No. 4257 June 22nd, 1934, pp. 838-840. [Online], Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41360159>. [Accessed 19 Aug 2013].

<sup>703</sup> Connolly, C., 'The New Medici', *Architectural Review*, Vol.76, pp.2-5, 1936.

*Review* was (and still is) a seminal modernist publication and during the 1930s held a central position in the reporting of the modern movement in Britain. Cyril Connolly entitled this review 'The New Medici', emphasising the historical precedent of this new kind of patronage.<sup>704</sup> He portrayed Beddington as a Lorenzo the Magnificent figure, whose benevolent and responsible cultural patronage was enabling business and art to flourish in difficult times.<sup>705</sup> Interestingly the same comparison was used in a tribute to Frank Pick by Nikolaus Pevsner, also in the *Architectural Review* in 1942.<sup>706</sup> Connolly defends both sides of this new commercial creative arrangement, praising the vision and practice of the new corporate patrons and the standards of work produced by the commissioned artists.

Connolly comments favourably on both *The Vale of Aylesbury* and Nash's *Rye Marshes*. One might expect the *Architectural Review* to favour the abstracted vision of Nash but in fact Whistler is particularly commended for a rendition of the landscape that fulfils the 'most authentic approach to English scenery'.<sup>707</sup> However, the compliment is diminished by Connolly's remark that, generally, he finds Whistler's work 'meretricious'. This is an interesting term. Meretricious can mean garish, superficial, that which is appealing on the surface but has no depth or integrity. It can also mean glib. Did Connolly find Whistler to be an artist who produced attractive work with little substance, and insufficient thought behind its

---

<sup>704</sup> Ibid, p.2.

<sup>705</sup> Ibid.

<sup>706</sup> Pevsner quotes from Christian Barman's obituary of Pick where he is described as 'a modern counterpart of Lorenzo the Magnificent' but Pevsner argues that a great patron of the arts such as Pick saw art in service to both commerce and the good of all rather than in self-glorification., Pevsner, N. *Studies in Art, Architecture and Design, Victorian and After*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1968, p.209.

<sup>707</sup> Connolly, p.4.

creation? Previous comments about a publication that both he and Whistler had contributed to, *The New Forget-Me-Not: A Calendar* published by Kenneth Rae at Cobden Sanderson in 1929, indicate his poor opinion of the artist.<sup>708</sup> [Fig.5.12] Whistler designed the illustrations for the entire anthology to accompany the written pieces, one of which was an essay by Connolly. Some of the designs are fairly light and frivolous in a faux-classical or Regency vein as befitted an entertaining Christmas book. Connolly was scornful of the entire enterprise, despite benefiting from it and its later companion volume, declaring that Rae had conceived the project purely to provide employment to Whistler ‘and give pleasure to his fashionable friends.’<sup>709</sup> It is not clear whether he is referring to those friends who might read the book, or those who also wrote for it, which included Lord Berners and Siegfried Sassoon. It is a snide comment, although not excessively so by Connolly’s standards, indicating a view of Whistler as part of a privileged group in society, but also needing financial favours. Rae was a close friend, but Whistler did not require any charitable gestures; at this point he was firmly launched on his career, which that year had included the London Underground posters and his first works for Shell. Equally, Rae was also an Oxford friend of Connolly’s.<sup>710</sup> This perception of Whistler as part of the social elite, one which conflates him with the people he worked for, continues to dog his reputation. Implicit in this belief is that this circle bestowed favours on him, that either he didn’t need to work and carried out commissions for friendship or, alternatively, that he desperately needed their indulgences to survive. Both diminish his talent.

---

<sup>708</sup> Lewis, J., *Cyril Connolly A Life*, London: Pimlico, 1998, p. 183.

<sup>709</sup> Ibid.

<sup>710</sup> Ibid.

However, intimations of meretriciousness aside, here *The Vale of Aylesbury* draws from Connolly's pen comparisons with 'early Stubbs'.<sup>711</sup> This review was written in 1934, by which time the worst of the decade's financial crises had eased and there could be optimism for the future. Connolly sees this cheerfulness reflected in Whistler's painting, together with the other landscapes depicted for Shell, which to him seem a celebration of the everyday and familiar elements of the English countryside, 'the bracing glories of our clouds and the cold pastoral of the chalk'.<sup>712</sup> Certainly these two artworks and many of the others used in the Shell posters demonstrate a willingness to rejoice in the unremarkable. Shell thus became associated with an upbeat optimistic vision of England through the kind of posters it commissioned, which in turn encouraged its existing and potential customers to participate in this experience for themselves. The critical acclaim awarded to the London Transport and Shell exhibitions<sup>713</sup> and the specific attention paid to Whistler's designs serve to emphasize the success he enjoyed in this genre.<sup>714</sup>

## Further Advertising work

Whistler was involved in this area of commercial art for many other companies too, and this continued for the rest of his career. His relationship with Stuart's Advertising Agency, holders of the Shell account, resulted in work for two more of

---

<sup>711</sup> Connolly, op. cit., p.4

<sup>712</sup> Ibid.

<sup>713</sup> The 1934 Shell Exhibition was also reviewed in *The Times*, Tuesday, Jun 26, 1934; pg. 12; Issue 46790; col D.

<sup>714</sup> Photographs of two subsequent exhibitions, 'Art for All' at the Victoria and Albert Museum April-July 1949 and 'A Centenary Exhibition of London Transport Posters' in July 1963 at the Royal Institute Galleries, respectively show Whistler's 'London Museum' and 'Tate Gallery' posters prominently displayed. Photographic details of the 1949 exhibition [Online] LTM Photographic collections inventory numbers no: 2006/15992, and 1963 1998/40603 and 1963, 2007/3787 on <http://www.ltmcollection.org/photos/index.html> [accessed 30 July 2013]

their major clients, Fortnum & Mason and Imperial Airways.<sup>715</sup> The material he designed for Fortnum's, mainly pamphlets and booklets was traditional in its imagery, reflecting the established reputation of the store, but with touches of wit in the copy and design. [Fig.5.13] This was a combination Whistler could deliver with ease, and he provided illustrations for four catalogues and covers for five Christmas editions between 1932-6. A cover for 'Entertaining Made Easy' (1935) shows a humorous take on the Lion and Unicorn, with draped flags and standards above a giant laurel garland which contained the text, below tiny figures on horseback perform in front of a crowd – perhaps the Trooping of the Colour. These elements are found again in the Imperial Airways Coronation poster of 1937, where the royal standards frame the salient text above a procession of horseguards and crowds ranked at either side.<sup>716</sup> [Fig.5.14.] Unlike the more careful and considered London Underground and Sassoon posters and the posters and press advertising for Shell, these give the impression of ideas rapidly drawn and executed, with a sort of mix and match approach. The be-wigged and liveried servants, posing and posturing in the 1935 Fortnum's pamphlet are equally typical of Whistler's skill in caricature, with more evident relish in their depiction. The vignettes in the inner pages continue the light-hearted feel, with figures in Edwardian dress partaking of the Fortnum's experience, encouraging the viewer and potential customer to identify themselves with leisured upper class pursuits.

---

<sup>715</sup> Stuart Menzies founded Stuart's in 1922, and was joined by Marcus Brumwell in 1926 and both men were instrumental in engaging artists to work on the campaigns. Information on Stuart's from Brumwell, J., *Bright Ties, Bold Ideas*, Truro: The Tie Press, 2010, p.7. Brumwell later became a partner and then bought out Menzies.

<sup>716</sup> This poster was also used after the Coronation to announce that Imperial had carried more 'Empire Visitors' to the event than other airlines, and was also used to advertise flights to Le Touquet. Images from BA Archives sent to author by Peter Simpson, National Trust Volunteer at Plas Newydd.

Whistler was amongst several artists hired by Stuart's who could create this kind of period content for the store's account, such as Richard Taylor<sup>717</sup>, Milner Gray<sup>718</sup>, and W M Hendy, the original comic illustrator of the commentaries. In fact so sympathetic were the styles of Whistler and Hendy that the five Christmas catalogues had covers by the former and inner decorations by the latter. But there must have been something particularly distinctive about Whistler's designs because Stuart's sought another artist - Kendal - to create in Whistler's style the Coronation year publications in 1937.<sup>719</sup> Laurence Whistler pursued this subject of other artists imitating his brother during research for the Catalogue Raisonné in 1959. This was initially denied by Marcus Brumwell, conscious of Stuart's integrity, but it was then admitted that another artist had been asked to fill in for Whistler and 'to do something equally jolly'.<sup>720</sup> This was an apt description of the frivolous nature of much of this advertising work and an obvious cause of Whistler's predominant dissatisfaction with this area of his life. However he could churn these light-hearted decorations out to order for regular income without perhaps spending too long on their creation. Leaflets and travel documents for Imperial Airways (one of Stuart's largest and most prestigious accounts), the Coronation poster, and sets of humorous parodies of songs and comic verses for Guinness all carry his distinctive witty figures in funny scenarios. Laurence Whistler's investigations also led to contact with the artist John Strickland Goodall who verified that he was asked to imitate Whistler's 'Petrol Pump' series in four adverts for Shell in 1935, and later worked on the Rothmans campaign in a very

---

<sup>717</sup> Brumwell, 2010, p.48..

<sup>718</sup> Milner Gray is much better known as an influential design figure. One of his adverts for F&M is illustrated in Brumwell, 2010, p.60

<sup>719</sup> Whistler and Fuller, 1960, note to 639, p.102.

<sup>720</sup> Letter Brumwell to L Whistler 30 November 1959 'nobody associated with me would be allowed to "imitate"... 'Rex Crate 2 Adverts' RWA.

similar style to Whistler's.<sup>721</sup> He comments that Whistler had a multitude of 'imitators' and that he had been 'asked countless times to do something "in the manner of Rex Whistler"'.<sup>722</sup> A comment made by Beddington that despite Whistler's undoubted talent 'his imitators fill me with dismay' gives additional credence to this statement.<sup>723</sup> It would appear that Beddington may not have agreed with the use of Whistler clones. In fact much of Goodall's own work bears a strong resemblance to aspects of Whistler's in its fascination with Edwardian and Victorian themes and period detail, although Whistler's capabilities went far beyond the limitations of this kind of genre. Obviously by selecting those artists with affiliations to the Whistler style a simulation could be seamlessly created for the client.

These circumstances introduce some confusion into Whistler's standing as an commercial artist. Whilst being willingly identified as the artist behind the Reversible Faces for Shell, it seems that some of his other ideas for that company were then carried out by other hands. Furthermore clients such as Fortnum's and Rothmans requested the Advertising agencies to use artists who could specifically imitate his style. But if this style was so sought after, does that not increase his desirability and status, despite the imitators? And yet there are anomalies to this. The Imperial Airways poster, unsigned as so many of his were, is rarely attributed to him.<sup>724</sup>

---

<sup>721</sup> Letter Goodall to L Whistler Nov 27 1959, op. cit.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

<sup>723</sup> Beddington, J. 1938, p.84-5.

<sup>724</sup> Even on a specialist website dealing with Imperial Airways material the image is captioned 'Artist Unknown', [Online]. [http://imperial-airways.co.uk/Advertisements\\_coronation.html](http://imperial-airways.co.uk/Advertisements_coronation.html) [30 August 2013]. It is listed in the CR but with no mention that it was for a poster and press campaign that had both English and European distribution Whistler and Fuller, 1960, entry 643,



As with the range of stylistic approaches utilised by London Underground and Shell, clients like Fortnum's and Imperial Airways were also keen to reflect both a traditional and a more modern image. Edward McKnight Kauffer produced designs for the Fortnum's promotional leaflets with his trademark minimal yet dramatic imagery and the company name reduced to lower case initial letters only.<sup>725</sup> All his designs eschew the cartoonish content and catchphrases of the other artists' work, with simple direct text and reducing the decoration to simple geometric shapes. His work for Imperial Airways, like Whistler's, was for posters, timetables, leaflets, luggage tags and travel ephemera. [Fig.5.15] In fact one would assume that the spare futuristic style of Kauffer's work would be in harmony with this most modern mode of travel. Also in this camp was Ben Nicholson who produced several distinctive abstract posters for Imperial using a similar bold palette of red blue and white to his 'Red Blue Lilac' painting of 1933.<sup>726</sup> It is also probable that he devised the symbol, a black shape that variously resembles a bird in flight, a bolt of lightning or an airplane that subsequently became a trademark for IA.<sup>727</sup> Edward Bawden's designs for the company straddled the gap between this modern approach and a more formal one, producing material showing whimsical figures in comical situations similar to his BP press advertisements. Imperial Airways was

---

p.103. According to Oliver Green (author and lecturer on art in transport) 'BA Archives have a number of copies of the poster, each with different text information. It seems to have been commissioned, through Stuart's, to promote flying to London from France and British Empire countries to attend the Coronation of George V1 but as it is not signed BA had no idea who it was by and in a recent book about Imperial Airways it is attributed to another poster artist.' Email to author 24 Oct 2011.

<sup>725</sup> See illustration in Brumwell, 2010, p.59.

<sup>726</sup> Brumwell, J, 2010, pp. 80-82. The poster illustrated on p.82 was voted the most effective that year by employees of IA worldwide. Email JB to author 23 August 2013.

<sup>727</sup> Mentioned in conversation with Joe Brumwell, 21 August 2013. For further use see IA Summer 1939 timetable [Online] <http://www.flickrriver.com/photos/tags/airlineephemera/interesting/>. Ben Nicholson was an artist particularly favoured by Marcus Brumwell and they had a long-standing friendship.

one of the most profitable accounts held by Stuart's in the 1930s and the use of Whistler reflects the esteem in which he was held.<sup>728</sup>

Another significant client was Rothmans for whom Whistler designed 29 drawings for press and PR material during the war.<sup>729</sup> [Fig.5.16] This commission was through Everett's Advertising, whose creative director, Robert Harling, had previously worked at Stuart's.<sup>730</sup> Harling soon found commissions for his preferred artists, Rex Whistler, Eric Ravilious and Edward Bawden, whose predilections towards a 19<sup>th</sup> –century, particularly Victorian, sensibility echoed his own.<sup>731</sup> Whistler's 29 pen and ink drawings are largely set between 1850 and 1900, providing a series of vignettes of Victorian life, with the smoking of cigars, pipes and cigarettes the recurring theme.<sup>732</sup> He had perfected the depiction of Victorian costumes and interiors in the designs for the play *Victoria Regina* in 1934 and 1937 and this style of imagery was again called on in the designs for the film *A Room of One's Own* in 1944.<sup>733</sup>

---

<sup>728</sup> 'Analysis of Sales for Six Months to 30<sup>th</sup> September 1938' shows £23,773 from IA, only exceeded by £36,820 for British Electrical Development Association. All other clients spent under £10,000 with many under £1000. Brumwell, 2010, p.17.

<sup>729</sup> Normal magazine advertising was on hold. Possibly intended for display in the main window of the Rothmans building in Pall Mall. Spencer-Smith, J. 'Rex Whistler's War' exhibition catalogue, p.65.

<sup>730</sup> MacCarthy F, 'Harling, (Henry) Robert (1910–2008)', [Online] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Jan 2012 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/99/101099915/> [October 11 2013]

<sup>731</sup> Harling is credited with involvement in the surge of interest in Victoriana in the 1930s, writing books on the interiors of the period, designing books and even creating typefaces Ibid.

<sup>732</sup> The Rothmans drawings were retained by the company and a selection were reissued as a commemorative portfolio in 1950.

<sup>733</sup> Many of the originals have been auctioned in recent years, usually fetching up to £2000 each. See catalogue for 'Modern Pictures' auction Bonhams 13 May 2008 lots 226-229, [Online] <http://www.bonhams.com/auctions/15795> [October 11 2013]

## Whistler and Design

Many of the artists who had turned their skills to posters and press advertising in the 1920s and 30s also found commissions in more mass-produced designs, particularly for interiors, such as wallpapers, textiles, rugs and ranges of decorated ceramics for companies such as Wedgwood. With an unsteady economic situation affecting conventional gallery sales, these areas could provide more stable employment. Good quality design was highlighted and encouraged by bodies such as the Design and Industries Association which was interested in engaging artists for both domestic and industrial products. The interest in interiors, whether for the modern home or a more traditional focus, continued into the 1930s, with stores such as Heals and Liberty's involving designers to produce fashionable accoutrements for their customers. These forms of design and decoration were yet another step removed from easel painting. Posters, such as those for London Transport and Shell were variations on the artists' normal painting practice; the kinds of designs that could be translated onto lengths of fabric and wallpaper and transposed onto rugs demanded a different sensibility and technique. Amongst the artists designing rugs the best known was probably Marion Dorn, followed by her partner Edward McKnight Kauffer but even Frank Brangwyn designed two carpets in 1930.<sup>734</sup> Those turning to fabric design included Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell who designed for Allan Walton Textiles<sup>735</sup> and Edward Bawden who designed several ranges of fabrics, and also wallpapers for the Curwen Press and Cole and

---

<sup>734</sup> See examples on 'Allan Walton Textiles' [Online]

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/search/?slug=allan-walton-textiles&name=7998&limit=45&offset=0> [June 21 2014]

<sup>735</sup> 'Friday Gem from the Stoddard – Templeton Design Archive: Sir Frank William Brangwyn' [Online] <http://universityofglasgowlibrary.wordpress.com/2011/03/25/friday-gem-from-the-stoddard-%E2%80%93-templeton-design-archive-sir-frank-william-brangwyn/> [June 21 2014]

Son.<sup>736</sup> Graham Sutherland worked on ceramics, glassware and tapestries.<sup>737</sup> Eric Ravilious designed glass and furniture and is perhaps best known in a design sense for his work for Wedgwood china in the 1930s.<sup>738</sup> Whistler too became involved in these areas, designing a large carpet and two further rugs, and fabric based on the classic Toile du Jouy template, which was then translated onto wallpaper and china. However none of these were commissioned by companies but, in common with so much of his career, were done for private individuals.

### Neptune Carpet (1934)

The carpet was commissioned by Edward James for the dining room of his London house, where his marriage to the actress and dancer Tilly Losch in 1931 had occasioned a lavish revamping of the interior.<sup>739</sup> The apogee of the décor was the extraordinary glass bathroom designed for Losch by Paul Nash in 1932.

Concurrently, in James's own bathroom, Geoffrey Houghton Brown was painting architecturally themed murals.<sup>740</sup> Whistler was known to James at this point as an illustrator for his volumes of poetry but evidently was not asked to do the mural.<sup>741</sup>

---

<sup>736</sup> Yorke, M., *Edward Bawden & His Circle*, Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 2007, p 105 and 108.

<sup>737</sup> Yorke, M., *The Spirit of Place Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and their times*, London Constable & Company Ltd., 1988, p.115.

<sup>738</sup> *Eric Ravilious Imagined Realities*. Exhibition catalogue by Powers, A., London: Philip Wilson, 2003, pp.22-33 and Powers, A., *Eric Ravilious Artist and Designer*, Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2013, pp.127-151.

<sup>739</sup> The carpet is now in the formal dining room of West Dean, image [Online] <http://www.westdean.org.uk/Conferences/ConferencesHomepage.aspx> having been bought back by the Estate from the auction of James's effects in 1986. Norman, G., *The Times*, June 7, 1986.

<sup>740</sup> 'Pompeian style bathroom designed and painted for Edward James', drawing dated 1931, Museum number: E.32-1987, Prints, Drawings and Paintings Collection, V&A, [Online] <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O43969/pompeian-style-bathroom-designed-and-drawing-brown-geoffrey-houghton/> [accessed May 20 2014]

<sup>741</sup> It seems that Whistler also designed elaborate overdoors, to be carved in fruitwood for West Dean. These are mentioned in *A Surreal Life: Edward James 1907-1984*, exhibition catalogue edited by Nicola Coleby, Brighton and Hove: The Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums, 1998, p.93 as being before 1931, and listed as seen at the house on two articles although they are not listed in the Catalogue Raisonné. [Online] <http://hermitagemuseum.wordpress.com/2010/07/05/everything-that-happens-began-in-the-past/> and <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/mason/mason9-13-06.asp> [Accessed October 7

However the large carpet he designed in 1934 which was woven at the Wilton carpet factory, was the textile equivalent of a wall painting, and is described as amongst 'James's single greatest decorative commissions'.<sup>742</sup> [Fig.5.17] Like a mural it was a site specific piece, the shape echoing the curves of the room and the colour palette reflecting the furnishings.<sup>743</sup> The room, one of the prime entertaining spaces of the house, was in the fashionable Regency style of the time, although this kind of stylistic restraint is not evidenced in the carpet's ornate design and 107 different coloured yarns.<sup>744</sup> Contained by an elaborate trompe l'oeil frame with personalised cartouches, the carpet's central feature depicts a classical grouping of Neptune, girdled by mermaids and dolphins, afloat in a shell chariot, emblazoned with a gold crest with the initials EJ, drawn by white horses (with webbed feet rather than hooves). The predominant colours are the rich blue greens of the sea, hues typically found in Whistler's paintings and murals. This was just one of three carpets and rugs commissioned by James both for the London house and West Dean. The textiles designer Marion Dorn created one to for a richly patterned drawing room and on a more Surrealist note was the famous carpet patterned with Tilly Losch's footprints, realised by James's interior designer.<sup>745</sup>

Edward James was a famous collector of Surrealist art and artefacts and the juxtaposition of these wildly differing interiors was in itself a sort of living exposition of surrealism. A suggested connection between surrealism and Whistler's art has been made in the previous chapter. This is not to suggest that the Neptune carpet shows any signs of a surrealist influence but the fact that James

---

2013], The artist's experience in designing for carved objects was exemplified in the pair of limewood urns for Samuel Courtauld designed in 1932 for the Long Room at 12 North Audley St.

<sup>742</sup> Calloway, S. 'Edward James's Interiors', in Coleby, 1998, p.98

<sup>743</sup> Ibid.

<sup>744</sup> Whistler and Fuller, 1960, p.54.

<sup>745</sup> Coleby, 1998, p.97. Losch was also known to Whistler who designed a costume for her for the Cochran Revue of 1934 and inscribed the sketch 'for Tilly', Whistler and Fuller, 1960, pp.66-67.

chose to display it as part of the flamboyant interior scheme shows that he perceived the artist's work to be in harmony.

### **Clovelly *toile du Jouy* 1932**

The 1932 fabric design was originally a commission for Christine Hamlyn, the owner of the Clovelly Estate, where Whistler often stayed. It has been suggested that it was dashed off as a favour, a sort of 'thank you' gesture<sup>746</sup> but this is not borne out by the description of Whistler working '9 days, *day and night*' on the designs.<sup>747</sup> The toile incorporates five characteristic views of Clovelly – one of which contains the mermaid mentioned in Chapter Three which was copied from the book *Les Maîtres de l'Ornementation Le Style Louis XV* (1925). These larger views, framed by stone archways or leafy garlands, are surrounded by dolphins, flowers, fishing pots and other marine ephemera. Whistler made a design which was both completely particular to Clovelly and faithful to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century traditions of the toile, with no attempt to modify the style for the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>748</sup> However, this traditional approach was in tune with the principles of the Clovelly Estate which was to keep the village in a historical vacuum, free from modern influences such as cars and new buildings. The chintz was launched in 1933, sold at Clovelly as a type of up-market souvenir and enthusiastically reviewed by *The Times*.<sup>749</sup>

---

<sup>746</sup> Conversation with Robin Ravilious, June 2010.

<sup>747</sup> Edith Olivier's diary quoted in Whistler & Fuller, 1960, p.53-4.

<sup>748</sup> Laurence Whistler writes that the artist 'may have studied examples [of the toile] at the V & A', *ibid*, p.53, but it is also possible that he saw the fabric when he visited Jouy with Lord Berners, diary entry for July 28 1929, diary for JUNE 23 – JULY 30<sup>TH</sup> 1929 ROME' in Diaries, Notebooks, Misc.', RWA.

<sup>749</sup> 'Clovelly Chintz The Perfect Souvenir', *The Times*, Jan 18, 1933. The fabric was revived in c.2001 and is once again sold at Clovelly and other locations associated with Whistler. The original copper print roller was melted down during the war and an ex-Liberty textile designer has re-scanned the

Eric Ravilious and Edward Bawden were also both designing for a range of products in this period, including fabrics, wallpaper and ceramics and again comparisons between their work and Whistler's yields some useful evaluations. All three artists produced work in variants of the same language in which they painted and produced graphics. Thus Whistler's taste for the Baroque was shown in the design for the Neptune carpet, Bawden's witty little figures as seen in the Shell adverts appear in his wallpaper designs such as 'Sahara' (1928) and his unusual vitrine design from the 1928 London Transport poster (Natural History Museum) appears in the 1933 'Node'. Ravilious found his design voice most strongly in his designs for Wedgwood from 1936 onwards, which were for both commemorative and domestic ranges. No doubt this was helped by his interest in eighteenth-century Queen's Ware, and several of his designs bear influences from these earlier patterns.<sup>750</sup> The commemorative Coronation mugs of 1936, 1937 and 1953 all carry the firework motif that Ravilious first employed in the Midland Hotel mural of 1933 and the painting 'November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1933' of the same year. The vignette quality of Whistler's Clovelly design meant that it was easily transferable and it appeared on a range of Wedgwood china soon after the fabric went into production.<sup>751</sup> However the artist was not personally involved with this process.

This means that a comparison between these two artists' designs for Wedgwood is difficult as it must be borne in mind that Ravilious actually designed the china and that Whistler's designs were adapted by another hand from a different form. Had he been commissioned to produce the designs the results may have been very

---

design for modern printing. 'Clovelly Silk' [Online] <http://www.clovellysilk.com/rex-whistler-toile-de-jouy/rex-whistler>. [September 27 2013].

<sup>750</sup> Powers, 2002, p.25.

<sup>751</sup> The Clovelly series was produced until the 1960s. The china is highly sought after at auction, particularly on EBay, although the number of pieces in circulation means that value is usually under £20 per item. A reissue may be dependent on the expiry of Whistler's copyright in 2014.

different. What is clear is that the Ravilious designs look 'modern' and the Clovelly rather 'safe' and traditional. Again this is partly due to the way the Clovelly design was used on this medium. In itself the toile du Jouy is an old-established pattern and although Whistler used his own motifs the material design was still in the conventional idiom. The subsequent isolated placement of the pattern and motifs on the vessels looked rather dated and lacked the vivacity of its flow on the fabric. In contrast, the original drawings for Ravilious' Coronation mug in 1936 indicate that he considered the mug in its entirety in his design, with the pictorial features covering the whole surface.<sup>752</sup> [Fig.5.20] There is no doubt that Whistler's keen eye for decoration, colour and composition would have enhanced the Clovelly design in a three dimensional application. Ravilious's work would always have a more graphic and perhaps contemporary flavour in comparison to Whistler's, but the continued demand for both these artists' Wedgwood pieces indicates that this is more a critical judgement than one applied by consumers.

Neither Whistler nor Ravilious can be regarded as entirely old-fashioned or completely modern; it is important to keep a more nuanced view of the stylistic possibilities of the 1930s in mind. It has been suggested that a more inclusive term is needed to appreciate the English design of this period and the national qualities, such as the monarchy, that it was concerned with.<sup>753</sup> As so many of these artistic groupings are named for the monarch in power at the time, a George VI style has been mooted.<sup>754</sup> Regardless of the nomenclature it is useful to be able to place Whistler amongst this group, some of whom, like him, reflected a more traditional

---

<sup>752</sup> Coronation mug for Edward VIII, V & A Collections no E.292-1937, 1936 [Online] <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1041808/coronation-mug-for-edward-viii-design-for-a-eric-william-ravilious/> [Accessed May 21 2014] This was intended for the Coronation of Edward VIII, the design was then altered for the 1937 Coronation and again for 1953.

<sup>753</sup> Powers, A., 'Was there a George VI style?', *Apollo*, October 2004, pp. 72-77.

<sup>754</sup> *Ibid*, p.77.



and historicist mode and some, like Ravilious who spoke a much more contemporary design language.<sup>755</sup>

## **George V Silver Jubilee stamp 1934**

An interesting comparison to the commemorative ceramics by Ravilious is the 1934 design that Whistler produced for the 1935 George V Silver Jubilee stamp. [Fig.5.21] Though obviously intended for very different destinations the fact that both designs can be seen in the flat provides the opportunity to assess two very distinct approaches. The stamp design is instantly recognisable as Whistler.<sup>756</sup> The level of detail and finish is characteristic, with each element carefully chosen and rendered to contribute to the event's symbolism. A garland of laurel leaves frames the composition, and acanthus leaves sit below the central Royal cartouche which is surrounded by flags and standards, in similar vein to the Imperial Airways poster. Again Neptune is featured, echoing the Edward James carpet of the previous year. In the background is Whistler's distinctive choppy sea, with distant ships. His choice of typeface is a more formal serif style, than Ravilious' bold sweep of script but softened with highlights and given emphatic punctuation by the central dots. It is evident that Whistler is playing to the traditional and classical interpretation of the subject whereas Ravilious is engaging with a more modern idiom. Whistler's has an unabashed romanticism and lyricism, Ravilious' a crisper more vigorous feel.

Crisp and bold would certainly describe the winning submission for the Jubilee stamp by Barnett Freedman, whose highly stylised and direct design made use of

---

<sup>755</sup> Ibid, p.75.

<sup>756</sup> Design for stamp on Catalogue British Postal Museum and Archive [Online] catalogue entry 1359, POST 150/GV/SJ/044 P/150/03/03/04/51 <http://catalogue.postalheritage.org.uk/> [Accessed 25 August 2014]

contemporary printing techniques, mainly a photogravure process,<sup>757</sup> that reversed tones and made the surface appear to shimmer. [Fig.5.22]The same basic elements of the King's 'Vandyk' portrait (common to all the stamps designed)<sup>758</sup> the crown, laurel leaves, the Jubilee announcement and dates and price of the stamp were all in place but treated in a much more defined and almost geometric manner in comparison to Whistler's pictorial rendition.

This would have been one of the most high-profile commercial commissions ever undertaken by Whistler, particularly for the 'philatelist king' George V <sup>759</sup> but, although his design at first seemed to Kenneth Clark to be 'incomparably better than the others', Freedman was selected.<sup>760</sup> This was not an open competition but selected artists were invited to submit, and their works judged by Kenneth Clark, at that time Director of the National Gallery, and Sir Stephen Tallents, the GPO Public Relations Officer.<sup>761</sup> Whistler had more success with his Valentine's Day Greeting Telegram, the first such issue by the GPO, of which nearly 50,000 were sold on 14 February 1936.<sup>762</sup>

---

<sup>757</sup> Anthony, S. 'Barnett Freedman, Stephen Tallents and the making of the Jubilee Stamp' Posted on 13/10/2009 for the British Postal Museum and Archive. [Online] <http://postalheritage.wordpress.com/2009/10/13/barnett-freedman-stephen-tallents-and-the-making-of-the-jubilee-stamp/> [Accessed October 11 2013].

<sup>758</sup> Design for stamp on British Postal Museum and Archive [Online] Ref No [P 150/03/03/04](http://catalogue.postalheritage.org.uk) <http://catalogue.postalheritage.org.uk>. [Accessed October 11 2013].

<sup>759</sup> 'Empire Mail: George V and the GPO' [Online], [www.postalheritage.org.uk/empiremail](http://www.postalheritage.org.uk/empiremail) [October 11 2013].

<sup>760</sup> Quote from Edith Olivier's unpublished Journal Oct 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> 1934, Whistler & Fuller (1960), p.54. The praise and indeed the initial invitation to Whistler are interesting in the light of the artist's later treatment by Clark, who passed him over several times for consideration as a War Artist.

<sup>761</sup> Anthony, S. 'Barnett Freedman, Stephen Tallents and the making of the Jubilee Stamp' op. cit.[Online] <http://postalheritage.wordpress.com/2009/10/13/barnett-freedman-stephen-tallents-and-the-making-of-the-jubilee-stamp/>. [October 11 2013]. Laurence Whistler records that his brother's entry was disqualified due to lateness but the original design, signed by Whistler (and presumably unknown at the time of the Catalogue's publication) held by Postal Heritage clearly states it was 'rejected after examination by Kenneth Clark'. [Online] Catalogue No. POST 150/GV/SJ/044 <http://catalogue.postalheritage.org.uk> [October 11 2013].

<sup>762</sup> Image [Online] <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O543693/first-british-st-valentines-day-print-whistler/> Both of Whistler's designs were shown at the *Empire Mail: George V and the GPO*

There is a sense in both Bawden's and Ravilious' work of a delight in pattern-making, whether in the repeating decorative quality of Bawden or the more illustrative style of Ravilious.<sup>763</sup> This same delight is not easy to discern in all of Whistler's design work, although to be fair there is much less to appraise in his case. The Neptune carpet design has a slightly wooden quality, lacking some of Whistler's usual verve; although he had to allow for the weaving process. However the Clovelly fabric has a much livelier and light-hearted feel, the pattern repetition successfully allows each element of the design to work with its neighbours. The use of single colour printing gives a much lighter and more contemporary effect, accentuating the hand drawn quality of the composition. The Jubilee Stamp design is an odd hybrid, more a work of fine art than an item for mass printing. It would have made a very beautiful stamp if beauty was the criterion but Freedman's image tells the viewer much more about what the item is going to be used for.

It is worth noting that both Bawden and Ravilious had been trained at the Royal College of Art under Paul Nash<sup>764</sup> who was keenly aware of the need for artists to think beyond the confines of easel paintings in galleries, and to embrace the opportunities offered by design in industry. This experience would have given students practical guidance regarding the different techniques needed to create designs for the wide range of surfaces to be found in the modern home. Nash, Bawden and Ravilious came from a background of etching, engraving and wood and linocuts where the end result was about playing with surfaces and mark-making. In any kind of printing, serendipity can play a role, not from a lack of

---

Exhibition held at the Guildhall Art Gallery in 2010. This demonstrates a limited but continuing interest in Whistler's commercial work, recently evidenced with the inclusion of his Tate Gallery poster at the London Transport Museum's 2013 exhibition, *Poster Art 150 – London Underground's Greatest Designs*.

<sup>764</sup> 'Paul Nash (1889 – 1946)' The Bookroom Art Press [Online]  
<http://www.bookroomartpress.co.uk/biographies/20.html> [October 13 2013]

control but as an integral part of the process. Whistler's fine art technique never allowed for anything less than total control, and there are no examples of any print-making amongst his works, even etchings. Unlike the RCA, the Slade was intent on its fine art teaching with little attention given to its possible applications in a wider design sense, particularly commercial design. It is worth considering what might have happened to Whistler had he been enrolled at the RCA in 1922.<sup>765</sup> The strong design ethos of the College would have suited his propensity towards illustration, and would have given him additional techniques such as woodcuts and engraving which would have enriched this practice.<sup>766</sup> His difficulties with the limitations of pure fine art practice, outlined in Chapters One and Three, could have found resolution in this more design-orientated environment. With Rothenstein at the helm, mural and decorative Painting was a firmly established part of the curriculum; although there is no doubt that Tonks was a more effective catalyst and champion for this aspect of Whistler's talent.

An insight into Nash's views on the changing relationships between artists and design is given in *Room and Book* (1932) where Nash calls on industry to utilise and recognise the talents of English artists and designers.<sup>767</sup> He names who he regards as the leading figures in their fields – Dorn and McKnight Kauffer in rugs, Grant and Bell's textile designs for Allan Walton, Edward Bawden's wallpapers, and several muralists including Ravilious, Bawden, Mary Adshead and John Armstrong.<sup>768</sup> Rex Whistler's name is singularly absent. Nash's rejection of historicist styles, particularly those of the Victorian era would perhaps have

---

<sup>765</sup> This would have been the same year as Bawden and Ravilious, Powers 2013, p.14.

<sup>766</sup> The nearest he got to these techniques was the use of a special white scraper board which produced a wood cut effect, a much quicker process. Whistler, 1985, p.192.

<sup>767</sup> Nash, P., *Room and Book*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932, p. xviii, and Causey A., *Paul Nash Writings on Art*, Oxford: OUP, 2001, pp.13-14.

<sup>768</sup> 'Modern English Furnishing' in Nash, 1932, pp.16-32. Confusingly this is referred to as 'Modern English Furniture' in the page headings.

occluded his judgement of Whistler's work which at this point, as we have seen, embraced some of the period's ornate decorative qualities and often used figures garbed in characteristic costume. Nash articulates a wish for a return to the classical forms of the Regency period, albeit expressed in a more modern idiom.<sup>769</sup> It was unlikely that the creator of the assertively modern glass and chrome bathroom for Tilly Losch in 1932 was ever going to find much common ground with the man who in the same year created the trompe l'oeil splendour of the swagged and tented room for Sassoon at Port Lympne.

## Conclusions

One important question to ask is whether a history of graphic and advertising design between the wars could be written without any mention of Whistler. Is he essential to that history? The answer would be a qualified yes. Few artists made the contribution of say Edward McKnight Kauffer, with his radical approach to visual communications and ability to constantly produce work of freshness and purpose. Many of the artists used the commercial milieu as a way of getting their work in front of a much larger audience, and to explore new technologies of print and reproduction but it equally provided a means of income when painting sales were hit by the difficult financial years of the 1930s. Their work, like Whistler's, did the job for which it was intended. But did they do it better? This is hard to judge. Advertising response is even these days difficult to quantify. Certain

---

<sup>769</sup> As outlined in Chapter Four, Whistler's work of the mid-thirties clearly reflects the influences of a Regency revival, but Nash's 'Modern English Furnishing' had originally been published in the *Architectural Review* in January 1930, Lambirth, A., *John Armstrong The Complete Paintings*, London: Philip Wilson, 2009, p.56.

advertisements created an excitement and attention beyond their actual purpose such as John Reynolds' 'That's Shell – That Was'.

In terms of Whistler's creations, his 'Reversible Faces' were popular in their day and have in the last twenty years been of considerable interest. With these he created something quite original, a sort of visual riddle or puzzle, intriguing, clever and humorous. But it has to be said that his posters for London Transport, Imperial Airways, the Neptune carpet and even the Jubilee Stamp design were comprised of a 'library' of elements that he used frequently across much of his work – the Royal standards, characters such as Britannia and Neptune, classical details such as garlands and trophies, architecture, a formal style of lettering, rather ornate decoration and a delight in detail and finish. In this way he did not radically change his style to suit the subject. Instead often he was chosen because his style did suit the subject, for instance in the case of Fortnum and Mason, where the company's desire to project an image of elite good living was well served by Whistler's images of liveried footmen and fancy banquets. His ability to reproduce Edwardian or Victorian scenes was ideal for Rothmans who in the uncertain days of the war wanted advertising to associate the brand with more certain and reassuring times. But these advertisements are not direct or hard-hitting. The messages are far more subtle. Whistler was always more opaque in what his images revealed, or not in many cases. This approach was invaluable in his murals, where hidden meanings for client or viewer could provide an entertaining visual conundrum, and the artist encouraged visual ambiguity in *trompe l'oeil*. But in advertising, commercial and graphic design it can be important to have a distinct message that alerts the viewer in a clear and direct fashion. If this was the essential requirement of the client,

Whistler would not have been the artist of choice and this is borne out by the selection of Freedman's bold design for the Jubilee Stamp.

Although a comment made by Whistler in 1932 indicates an aversion to being forced to make his living from design, particularly when there was no major mural painting project to absorb him, it does not reflect his position for most of this period, when commissions for murals, theatre design, portraiture and illustration were plentiful with commensurate income.<sup>770</sup> However, it is clear from the evidence in this chapter that certain aspects of his advertising and design work did fulfil him, certainly in a monetary sense. This put him in a very different financial position to many of his contemporaries. However these contemporaries such as John Armstrong, Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, and even Paul Nash were focussed on prioritising their own fine art practices alongside the need and enjoyment of diversification. As we shall consider in the next chapter Whistler was severely constricted in terms of pursuing his own, non-commissioned, work.

As stated in the Introduction, this aspect of Whistler's creative career has been treated very differently to the rest of his work by being side-lined or neglected completely. This omission has been rectified by the research and evaluation carried out in this chapter, which argues that the perceived notion, encouraged by his biographers, that Whistler operated outside the mainstream art world as some kind of maverick or retardataire figure is erroneous. A different picture has emerged that places Whistler alongside other artists in the new milieu of commercial patronage and producing work for many of the most significant advertising campaigns and design commissions of the period. His versatility,

---

<sup>770</sup> Made in a letter to Edith Olivier, 1 April 1932. The letter refers to having to work on 'revolting little decorations for this & that, & wrappers & advertisements' in order to earn any money. 'Rex Whistler Letters B' 'Letters EO', RWA.

sometimes used as a detrimental description of his talents, meant that he could work within the constraints of commissions whilst still exercising his individual approach. The work he carried out for these modern patrons is important and crucial to a contemporary understanding of his career.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PATRONAGE AND ARTISTIC IDENTITY**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter examined Rex Whistler's involvement with the modern forms of commercial patronage. This chapter turns to a much more conventional and traditional set of patrons or consumers, the aristocracy and landed gentry amongst whom Whistler made his living from an early stage of his career. The intention of this chapter is to present a fuller picture of this important side of his working life and to examine the impact of continual commissions on his creativity.

The chapter will begin with an exploration of what constitutes patronage in a twentieth- century context. It will present a survey of Whistler's patrons and their wealth and positions and give an in-depth examination of how the circles of patronage operated in which he found his commissions. The various ways in which these networks of contacts and connections interacted will serve to explain how the artist was introduced and recommended. The particular kind of bond between Whistler and his patrons will be examined and quantified. Patronage can be seen as a symbiotic relationship where both artist and patron need or gain something from the other. In Whistler's case the patrons wanted his creations on their walls and the attendant cachet of having such a well-known artist working for them. He needed their money, recommendations and the prestige of working for them.

The differing types and functions of the residences for which Whistler was commissioned and the various tastes of his patrons will be discussed in order to highlight the reasons why he was chosen for these projects. Through these, Whistler developed a reputation as an artist who had both the historical sensitivity to produce a more conservative scheme where necessary, and the ability to turn his classical language into something more fashionable for others. Artworks created by an artist for these private clients were a visual declaration of a life style and an embellishment to the client's property. Many of these schemes have been discussed in Chapter Four.

The private clients that Whistler worked for represent in microcosm the new make-up of society in the 1920s and 30s. Alongside the established aristocratic dynasties were the newer moneyed classes, from both sides of the Atlantic, who came from business and trade. Working amongst these were those like Whistler himself who had arrived from humbler origins. Issues of class both amongst the changing face of the aristocracy and for Whistler himself will be examined. It could be suggested that his success amongst these elites was due to the more porous nature of class divides that resulted from this fluidity. The case will be made that in fact these factors changed very little about the relationship between artist and patron and it followed a much more traditional model.

It could be thought that a creative life so bound up in commissioned work would affect the artist's freedom of expression. The chapter will assess whether Whistler did find artistic fulfilment in these projects. It will also explore the kinds of work that Whistler was able to create outside the needs and demands of his clients.

Although the artist never had a solo exhibition his work was shown in galleries far

more widely than has been acknowledged previously, and a fuller picture of this side of his practice will be given.

The chapter will demonstrate how this aspect of his career seems to refute many of the conventional narratives of how artists lived in this period. The aristocracy and their landed estates, the very core of his patronage, were alleged to be in terminal decline from the First World War onwards, and yet were the source of numerous commissions for Whistler. The worldwide depression of the late 1920s and 30s, in which many artists found it difficult to make a living, coincided with the launch of his career and he earned a great deal of money from 1929 onwards. Research carried out in the Whistler Archive will shed considerable light on the artist's actual earnings and present a more comprehensive account than has been shown hitherto. The importance of the financial commitments he made to his family will be examined and how these may have impacted on his career choices.

Further reflections on the construction of Whistler's identity will be encountered in this chapter, a theme that this thesis seeks to explore more fully. In terms of patronage Whistler was often conflated with his clients which masked his true origins. In this way he has often been termed a 'Society painter' and the ramifications of this will be discussed. In addition Whistler's reputation has suffered due to an over-enthusiastic tendency for many writers and critics to bracket him with the Bright Young Things of the period. Although this gives a handy box in which to place him the truth is quite different.

What has not generally been understood is the extent to which Whistler was aware of his own identity as an artist. An artist so reliant on commissions needs to carefully manage his image in order to maintain visibility and standing and Whistler's use of a press cuttings agency from early in his career indicates that he

was mindful of this point. The celebrated photographer Howard Coster took an interesting and in many ways revealing series of photographs of the artist in the 1930s that can also be read as an example of Whistler's handling of his persona.

## Patronage

Rex Whistler's first experience of private patronage was the mural at Dorneywood for Sir Courtauld Thomson in 1928, designed to enhance a recent renovation at the property. In many ways this became a model for the rest of his career, where a wealthy individual sought an improvement or decoration to a new or existing residence. Whistler also received commissions for portraiture and other art forms from these and other clients, but it was the murals which provided the majority of his income. It could be thought that patronage was an outmoded concept by the twentieth century but Whistler's experience contradicts this.

Other artists were of course working for private patrons, such as Grant and Bell for Wellesley at Penn's in the Rocks (1929-31) and John Piper for Osbert Sitwell at Renishaw (1942) but this would form only a small part of their practice; Whistler's commissions were central to his career. He worked for many patrons, in contrast to the patterns of patronage in previous centuries where an artist was taken up by a court or individual, usually living as part of their household, and producing many works specifically for them.<sup>771</sup> Here there was an inference of ownership or contractual obligation; in contrast Whistler was free to ply his trade amongst a wide circle.

---

<sup>771</sup> For instance, William Kent and Lord Burlington in the eighteenth century.

Patronage in a twentieth-century context was often about collectors buying the artist's works rather than actual sponsorship. An individual, such as Kenneth Clark or Dorothy Elmhirst with sufficient means at their disposal would support particular artists that they admired by the purchasing of works, either through galleries, dealers or from the artist directly. In some cases artist and collector might develop a closer link such as that between Clark and Graham Sutherland, where Sutherland benefited from Clark's position of influence and financial backing.<sup>772</sup> In similar vein the Sitwells were influential patrons, and as self-styled cultural arbiters their approval lent credibility to the artists they championed, such as the composer William Walton, who were in turn introduced to other prominent figures in the arts to further their careers. Whistler produced work for each of the Sitwells and was, loosely, part of that circle from his first meeting with them. But he was not funded or subsidised by individuals who saw him as a worthy cause and wanted to further his career. The relationship between Whistler and Edith Olivier is often thought of in this way and he certainly was a type of protégé in the early days of their friendship, but she was more mentor than patron. Whether this gentle mentoring or steering was as powerful a tool in terms of getting Whistler commissions than the more assertive patronage practices of a Clark or a Sitwell will be examined later in the chapter.

In many ways Whistler did not appear to need the financial subsidies and sponsorship that some artists enjoyed. He was earning money from his early years

---

<sup>772</sup> As well as buying his paintings, Clark at times financially subsidised Sutherland and certainly helped in other practical ways with accommodation and selection as a WAAC artist in the 1940s. Yorke M., *The Spirit of Place Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and their times*, London: Constable & Company Ltd., 1998, pp.121-2.

at the Slade and even more from the subsequent commission for the Tate Gallery Restaurant mural. The enormous publicity surrounding the project gave the artist immediate fame and credibility, lending him sufficient status on the strength of this one mural to attract the attention of many potential clients. Immediately busy with these commissions, Whistler certainly appear to be much more commercially established, despite his youth, than some of his contemporaries.

## **Circles of Patronage**

This section will track the patterns of Whistler's patronage, exploring the relationships and connections between them and from which a clearer picture can be constructed of how this aspect of his career operated. This is not an exhaustive list of Whistler's patrons but it seeks to shed light on the major sources of his commissions, how the patron relationship was formed and the nature of this relationship. The main commissions to be investigated in this chapter are Whistler's murals. They were the most lucrative of his works due to their scale, impact and the fact that they were carefully designed to be both site-specific to a client's home and also individually tailored to that client. It would appear from the artist's own comments that he regarded them as the most important part of his oeuvre.<sup>773</sup> In addition, Whistler also carried out portraits, both of his clients and their houses, created personalised bookplates for them and designed book covers and illustrations for those who were authors. Often those for whom he painted murals also wanted these other works, creating an overlap and continuity in the patronage structure. Regardless of the size of the commission undertaken, each

---

<sup>773</sup> The lack of '...major painting jobs' i.e. murals, which meant commercial work was having to take precedence. Letter to Edith Olivier, 1 April 1932. Rex Whistler Letters, 'Letters EO', RWA.

piece of work for patrons with a high public profile lent status to the artist by association.

If one constructs a diagram tracing the relationships between the clients for whom he created the majority of his commissions, at its centre would be two individuals, Stephen Tennant and Edith Olivier. Although his close friendship with Tennant had run its course by the early 1930s the people that he met through him remained in his life over a much longer period. As has been described in Chapters Two and Three, the visits to Wilsford and with Tennant in Europe gave Whistler the first real sense of how the aristocracy lived and entertained, and this exposure was key to his ability to mix with, and be accepted by, the types of patrons he was soon to encounter. The family provides an interesting model for the elite of the 1920s, and for many of Whistler's future clients, being a mixture of old money and landowners, intellectual and cultural interests, political power and the new wealth creators of industry and commerce. Stephen Tennant's father was politician Edward Tennant, Lord Glenconner, whose family's wealth came from a vast nineteenth-century chemical and industrial empire.<sup>774</sup> Tennant's mother, Lady Pamela Grey née Wyndham, had been a leading member of the Souls and was immortalised in Sargent's 1897 portrait of the Wyndham sisters.<sup>775</sup> At the time of Whistler's friendship with the family she was married to Viscount Grey of Falloden, elder Liberal statesman, and Foreign Secretary at the time of WW1.<sup>776</sup> No commissions came from the Tennants directly, although Whistler designed the monument to Lady Grey in Wilsford churchyard in 1928.<sup>777</sup> The introduction they

---

<sup>774</sup> Hoare, P., *Serious Pleasures The Life of Stephen Tennant*, London: Penguin Books, 1990, pp. 3-4.

<sup>775</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>776</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>777</sup> CR, p.36.

provided to Edith Olivier was far more powerful and far-reaching for Whistler. Her vast social circle coupled with her desire to find use for his talents meant that she could act as a unique conduit between prospective patrons and her protégé.

Olivier's social networks were based on firstly, geographical propinquity to her home on the Wilton Estate. Her father had been the Rector of Wilton and she thus had a very close relationship with the Pembroke family.<sup>778</sup> As described in Chapter Three both Wilton House and the grounds were important places of inspiration to Whistler and had a great influence on him. He painted a portrait of the Earl and Countess in 1943. Through Olivier's friend and neighbour the poet Henry Newbolt, Whistler met the Wedderburns who commissioned the panel he painted whilst at the British School at Rome. For Lady Juliet Duff, another neighbour and cousin of the Earl of Pembroke, he designed an extension to Bulbridge House. Cecil Beaton a friend of both Stephen Tennant and Edith Olivier and subsequently of Whistler's had his country house at nearby Ashcombe. Whistler carried out many decorative and architectural improvements to Ashcombe and this was also an intensely social space where artists, patrons, and the beau monde of the period were entertained.<sup>779</sup>

The possibilities of patronage grew secondly from the friendship and kinship circles of these families and individuals, also known to Edith Olivier. The Countess of Pembroke was the sister of Charles Anglesey, the 6<sup>th</sup> Marquess for whom Whistler painted his largest and most celebrated mural at Plas Newydd. Caroline Paget, one of the six children of the couple was Whistler's predominant love

---

<sup>778</sup> Middelboe, 1989, p.1.

<sup>779</sup> For more details on Whistler's designs for Ashcombe see Chapter Four.



interest. Her mother, Lady Marjorie Anglesey was the sister of Lady Diana Cooper who commissioned Whistler to provide mural decorations for the house in Gower Street where she and Duff Cooper had their London base. Diana Cooper was the youngest daughter of the 8<sup>th</sup> Duke of Rutland, and her brother the 9<sup>th</sup> Duke commissioned the artist to create a large mural panel at his family seat at Haddon Hall.<sup>780</sup> Duff Cooper was a family friend of Maud and Gilbert Russell and this may have been a contributory factor to Whistler being requested to paint the mural at Mottisfont Abbey. Returning to the Anglesey (or more correctly the Paget) family, Caroline's sister Rose married into the Aberconway family of nearby Bodnant and her mother-in-law Christabel, Lady Aberconway commissioned Whistler for portraits and illustrations. It may also have been through Christabel, who was a close friend of Samuel Courtauld, that he approached Whistler for projects at his house in North Audley Street. The Edith Olivier connection does not follow for all of Whistler's patrons, although there are very few that are not mentioned in the 'List of Characters' that accompanies her published journals.<sup>781</sup>

These outlines of patronage networks and how they may have impacted on Whistler's career cannot provide the definitive account of how the commissions happened. What is suggested is that these connections between people, through kinship, friendship, business association or spatial propinquity, provided an easy conduit through which the artist could obtain work.<sup>782</sup> Whistler's family were living at Farnham Royal near Dorneywood which may have influenced Courtauld Thomson to commission the artist. Whistler's next mural for Captain Euan Wallace

---

<sup>780</sup> It is widely known that Lady Diana Manners was the illegitimate daughter of Henry Cust, but brought up by the 8<sup>th</sup> Duke as his own.

<sup>781</sup> Middelboe, 1989, xi – xxii.

<sup>782</sup> Thoughts on patronage networks from Morgan, D., 'Cultural work and friendship work: the case of 'Bloomsbury' *Media Culture Society* 1982 4: 19-32, p.20, [Online] Sage Journals <http://mcs.sagepub.com/content/4/1/19.refs> [November 10 2013].

and his wife Barbie at 19 Hill Street in 1930-31, was probably through Edwin Lutyens, Barbie's father. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the advantages to a muralist from the endorsement of a famous architect are obvious. Lutyens then suggested Whistler for the mural panels at 36 Hill Street for Baroness Porcelli, who unfortunately is one of the least well-documented of his patrons. Sir Philip Sassoon of course knew of Whistler's work through his trusteeship of the Tate and the British School at Rome but social connections and recommendations would have played an equal part in his selecting the artist for work at Port Lympne and Trent Park. Further connections were Lord Berners and Osbert Sitwell, who were mutual friends of Whistler and Sassoon.<sup>783</sup> Another link was the garden designer Norah Lindsay who was a trusted friend of Sassoon's, transforming and maintaining his statement gardens at Lympne and Trent.<sup>784</sup> Whistler was a frequent guest at her home at Sutton Courtenay and they had many friends and clients in common. Lindsay may also have been instrumental in the Mottisfont commission as she was involved in the garden designs for the Russells.<sup>785</sup> The collector and arts patron Edward James was one of Whistler's more interesting clients, in terms of his own artistic pursuits and cultural reach. The closest link between James and Whistler was through Lord Berners, with whom James shared a mutual interest in Surrealism, and this seems the most likely introduction.<sup>786</sup> In 1935 Sir Henry "Chips" Channon commissioned Whistler to create an overmantel mural. Channon's diaries record meeting the artist at a lunch with Cecil Beaton.<sup>787</sup>

---

<sup>783</sup> Stansky, 2003, p.154.

<sup>784</sup> Ibid, p.152.

<sup>785</sup> Hayward, A., *Norah Lindsay The Life and Art of a Garden Designer*, London: Frances Lincoln, 2007, pp.198-9. The friendship between Lindsay and Whistler is not mentioned in the Laurence Whistler or the Cecils' biographies.

<sup>786</sup> The Cecils propose Brian Howard as the introduction p.94, but Whistler was never close to Howard and Berners was a much stronger friendship.

<sup>787</sup> Chips Channon diary entries, 18 Jan 1935 and Sept 9 of the same year, Rhodes James, R, *Chips - The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967, p.22 and 41.

Diana Cooper was a close friend of Channon's and his social circle also included Sassoon with whom he stayed at both Trent Park and Port Lympne. He would have seen Whistler's work in all three houses, Gower Street, Trent Park and Port Lympne.

These sorts of social networks are probably more indicative of how Whistler gained clients than a single introduction. In a sense his patrons are acting as agents, by displaying his work, either actively or passively, to others of the same social caste or taste. His work was seen in fashionable houses and those who also sought to be au courant could commission Whistler, secure in the knowledge that he would lend their homes the same stylistic cachet. The patronage relationship can therefore be seen as one of exchange. For the artist the benefits are predominantly monetary whilst for the patron they are to do with social standing, regard and the perception that they may be people of influence.<sup>788</sup> But this notion of prestige also benefits the artist, where his or her reputation is increased by association with clients in a powerful sector of society.

Another aspect of this world which his patrons occupied was its small scale. His patrons knew each other, in fact were related to each other in many cases, often shared similar interests in the arts, would meet at all sorts of occasions from the theatre to concerts to dinners to weekends at each other's houses. The upper classes were not a vast multitude of people and they were swimming in a very small sea.<sup>789</sup> Recommendations could travel fast amongst these individuals who

---

<sup>788</sup> As expressed in Morgan, 1982, p.21.

<sup>789</sup> Thoughts on this aspect were suggested by Sorley Walker, K., *The Camargo Society*, Dance Chronicle, Vol. 18, No. 1 1995, Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. pp. 1-114, [Online] Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1567830> [May 29 2012]

were constantly mingling and meeting. One must also remember that these were the elite, both socially and culturally and it is to an elite's advantage to unify and share resources, and have their choices sanctioned by the tastes of their perceived equals. This helped the artist as well. His contacts and status as a chosen artist gave him a sort of associate membership of society. Furthermore, the more he experienced first-hand in terms of the tastes and lifestyles of its members, the more apposite the decorative schemes he could design for them.

Perhaps the most high profile patrons that Whistler worked for in this period were Lord and Lady Louis Mountbatten, for whom he created the complete room of murals in their new penthouse apartment in Brook House, Park Lane. Duff and Diana Cooper were friends of the Mountbattens and it is likely that they recommended Whistler.<sup>790</sup> It is also worth noting that by this time in 1937 Whistler's career was in full flow and he had become very well-known not just as a mural painter but also as an illustrator and theatre designer. So whilst the aim of this mapping is to see how his circles of patronage overlapped, the fact is that he could have been chosen for commissions purely on reputation rather than personal recommendation.

---

<sup>790</sup> Additionally Lutyens designed the facades of the building in 1932 and his son Robert – who knew Whistler from his sister's house at 19 Hill Street - worked on the interior design of another apartment in the block with Syrie Maugham, who also knew Whistler. [Online] <http://www.lutyens-furniture.com/index.php?contentid=robert-lutyens> [November 22 2013]

## **‘Patricians and Parvenus’<sup>791</sup>**

### **The Houses and Tastes of Whistler’s Patrons**

With many of his clients being drawn from what could be seen as the sectors of society for whom continuity and convention protected and kept estates and fortunes intact, it may be assumed that an equally traditional form of decoration would be sought for their houses. If this was the case, would Whistler be seen as an artist who would deliver a scheme that fitted in to historical interiors rather than one who might create an awkward avant-garde juxtaposition?

The types of residences that Whistler was commissioned for reflected the changing social and geographical circumstances of the times. Land, estates and even their country houses were being sold by the landed gentry from the years before the First World War right up until the 1930s and beyond. Higher taxes, death duties, the losses of the War were then exacerbated by the economic crises of the Depression. This change in fortunes, and on such a scale, would seemingly hinder the career of any artist trying to make a living from commissions within these social strata. Whistler’s CV indicates this was not the case. Against this background of cutbacks and losses he found clients who were more than happy to pay for the privilege of having his work, literally, on their walls.

Two of these clients who commissioned him for their actual ancestral seats provide an interesting example of the change and, equally importantly, continuity to be found in the aristocracy of the 1930s. There were many exceptions who came

---

<sup>791</sup> Cannadine, D., *Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* 2005 edition, London: Penguin Books, 2005, p.102.

through the financial and other crises relatively unscathed.<sup>792</sup> The Angleseys had had to gradually sell off one of their estates, Beaudesert in Staffordshire, in the 1920s and 30s, although this was as much due to the excesses of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marquess as the economic situation.<sup>793</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> Marquess moved to Plas Newydd in 1920 and instigated a programme of interior and exterior modernisation of the fifteenth-century building where Whistler was commissioned to paint the large mural. The very act of refurbishment and change throughout the house meant that a new generation was keen to make their mark on the estate. Whistler gave the family a mural that reflected both the new vision of the Marquess and respected the history of the building. There were many elements of the composition that were classically inspired – the treatment of the seascape and landscape, the architecture, the very techniques that the artist employed particularly in trompe l’oeil – but the energy and humour and intensely personal content mark it as of its time and of those particular patrons rather than an ersatz homage to the past.

The other familial estate where Whistler was commissioned to create a significant artwork was at Haddon Hall, the seat of the Dukes of Rutland.<sup>794</sup> The entire house, neglected for many years in favour of the main estate at Belvoir, had been renovated and restored in keeping with its medieval origins by the 9<sup>th</sup> Duke and the painting was commissioned to mark the completion of the project.<sup>795</sup> In this instance Whistler had to produce a historically sympathetic work to replace and complement an existing artwork, a surviving fragment of what had been a large

---

<sup>792</sup> See Cannadine (2005)... ‘five centuries of aristocratic history and hegemony were irrevocably reversed in less than one hundred years.’, p.5.

<sup>793</sup> Ibid, p.113 and ‘Beaudesert (house)’ [Online] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beaudesert\\_\(house\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beaudesert_(house)), [June 4 2014].

<sup>794</sup> Traditionally the seat of the second son, the main estate being Belvoir Castle. The Rutlands had been forced to sell land and half the Belvoir Estate went in 1920 for the not inconsiderable sum of £1.5 million, Stevenson, J. *The Penguin Social History of Britain British Society 1914-45*, London: Penguin Books, 1984, p.332.

<sup>795</sup> Montgomery-Massingberd, H. and Christopher Simon Sykes, *Great Houses of England & Wales*, London: Laurence King Publishing, 1994, p.29.

sixteenth-century painted panel in the Long Gallery. This was a strip of the original showing a bare tree and the roof of a hunting shelter. Whistler painted portraits of the Duke and his heir, with their dogs, to one side of the shelter, beyond them stretching the huge vista of the Hall and its estate. [Fig.6.1] There is no attempt to make the painting look like a sixteenth century replica, but neither is there any hint of the modern about the treatment beyond the contemporary clothes of the figures. It is in style and palette completely and recognisably Whistler's work. It is elegant and classical, architecturally correct and conveys the romanticism of the castle's setting.

Haddon Hall was an important house and the Long Gallery itself has been described as 'one of the great English interiors'.<sup>796</sup> Whistler's panel sits above the huge marble fireplace, the centrepiece of the room. Massingberd makes the point that such restorations of these ancestral properties, although carried out with the attachment to and respect for this period of England's architectural history which he states was prevalent at this time, inevitably add a 'contemporary flavour to that of the past'.<sup>797</sup> He picks out Whistler's romanticised painting as indicative of this interaction between the present and an idealised past.

This painting follows in a long tradition from the seventeenth century of English landowners commissioning artists to portray their houses and estates as both architectural record and to parade their wealth and power. The artist would paint the house in its park from a real or imaginary elevated perspective, very much as Whistler has chosen to do at Haddon.

---

<sup>796</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

<sup>797</sup> Ibid, p.26.

He also carried out several smaller 'portraits' of his patron's houses or properties connected with them, such as *Weston Hall* for Sacheverell Sitwell (1929), *Trent Park: The Terrace* (1934) for Sir Philip Sassoon [see Fig. 4.21], *Godmersham Park, Kent* for Robert Tritton (1935), *Lavington Park*, the English country estate of Captain Euan Wallace (c.1941) and *Cranborne Manor*, one of the seats of the Earl of Salisbury (c.1935). [Fig.6.2] The last two, along with a smaller version of the Haddon panel were shown in the exhibition 'The Artist and the Country House from the Fifteenth Century to the Present Day' and featured in the accompanying book.<sup>798</sup> Comparing Whistler's view of Haddon Hall alongside these works of the seventeenth-century Dutch or Flemish painters who plied their trade amongst the English aristocracy, and the later English painters who followed them, places him firmly in this lineage. But Whistler resists such simple or singular categorisation; Haddon and in fact any of these other 'house paintings' were just a part of his diverse working portfolio. But the treatment of the painting for the Duke of Rutland indicated that he was well aware of the historical precedents attached to his twentieth-century response. The same version of the Haddon panel was also featured in another event celebrating the English country house and its interiors,<sup>799</sup> a major exhibition of British country house collections at the National Gallery of Art Washington.<sup>800</sup>

This idea of stability and continuity in the face of adversity was perhaps one of the very reasons why these families wanted Whistler to celebrate and adorn their

---

<sup>798</sup> *The Artist and the Country House from the Fifteenth Century to the Present Day*. Exhibition catalogue by John Harris, London: Sotheby's, 1995, p.116, 117, 118.

<sup>799</sup> *The Treasure Houses of Britain Five Hundred Years of Patronage and Art Collecting*. Exhibition catalogue by Gervase Jackson-Stops *et al*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, p.646.

<sup>800</sup> Again the catalogue entry for the painting suggests that it is emblematic of its period, offering a 'powerfully nostalgic vision of the continuity of English country house life' despite the dangers to this heritage posed by the economic and social issues of the time in which it was painted, *ibid*.



houses with paintings of the exterior or murals on the interior, to emphasise their endurance, resilience and strength. As much of the old order was, at best, regrouping and, at worst, disappearing a new class of buyer and patron emerged, a 'parvenu' rather than a 'patrician'.<sup>801</sup> These were those whose fortunes were more freshly made, had no hereditary titles or membership of the peerage and whose estates, though on a grand scale were more recently purchased, not ancient family seats. Amongst Whistler's clients were certainly some that fitted this description; Edward James, Sir Courtauld Thomson, Henry 'Chips' Channon, Samuel Courtauld and Maud Russell.

The ramifications from these changes in patronage amongst the upper classes also extended to other professions. An architect like Lutyens who had made his living amongst the old landed gentry found that his commissions were, in the interwar years, coming from the 'plutocracy'.<sup>802</sup> Cannadine's account of this period contains interesting thoughts on patronage, and he mentions Rex Whistler.<sup>803</sup> However he likens Whistler's relationship with the Angleseys to William Walton's with the Sitwells.<sup>804</sup> The circumstances were very different. Whistler was paid by the Marquess of Anglesey to carry out a specific commission and was at that point a mature successful artist; he was not in receipt of a subsidy or sinecure from the family. The term patronage can be applied to both situations but the differentiation is crucial. This kind of slippage could account for the common misapprehension that Whistler was some kind of plaything of the rich and famous, who retained his services and guaranteed him work – basically that he was owned by his patrons.

---

<sup>801</sup> Cannadine, 2005, p.102.

<sup>802</sup> Ibid., p.101.

<sup>803</sup> Ibid., p.103.

<sup>804</sup> Ibid.

What could Whistler give to this newer sector, the nouveau riches of the twentieth century, who had bought their place in society and who could not call on generations of ancient retainers and a family seat to give them a sense of belonging to an older and established class? Historically, commissioning an artist to adorn one's house was a practice enjoyed by a privileged elite. Thus this group were drawn to Whistler as an artist who could, by association, lend them a sense of this older English tradition (and, by inference, a higher social class), and translate their aspirations into paint. This could be a man like Sir Courtauld Thomson, with a family fortune that came from manufacturing or 'trade' as it would have been referred to then, and whose social standing was that of a modern businessman. The references Whistler incorporated in the mural indicated that it was for a man of some breeding and education who appreciated the cultural values of the past.

In the case of Sir Philip Sassoon his Rothschild and Sassoon heritage conferred both considerable cultural capital and social eminence. But the family background was as industrialists, merchants and traders from Baghdad and this 'exoticism' marked Sassoon out as an outsider. This was not ameliorated by his extravagant style of décor so different from the more staid demeanour of the landed gentry. Sassoon needed the new murals he commissioned from Whistler at Port Lympne and Trent Park to convey understated good taste, balancing the extravagant displays he had become known for. As Sassoon's political career, status and connections grew, he entertained lavishly at both Port Lympne and Trent Park,

with guests from the political sphere as well as Royalty, celebrities and influential people of the day.<sup>805</sup>

Henry 'Chips' Channon, MP, was amongst a group of powerful Americans that made England, and specifically London, their home in the 1920s and 30s and became prominent on the social scene. He brought his father's shipping fortune with him and then married into the Guinness brewing empire. Again his tastes were towards the showy with the Boudin-designed Amalienburg-inspired dining room, but this tendency was moderated by the choice of Whistler and the designers Wellesley and Wills to create a more tempered Regency Revival interior throughout the other areas of the house.

Meanwhile in the country, with no estate that had been in the family for generations of forebears, the newcomers to society had to buy one 'off the peg'. The purchase of Mottisfont by Maud and Gilbert Russell in the 1930s gave them a venue in which they could emulate the traditional society custom of country house parties where extravagant entertaining could take place. Maud Russell, a German émigré was a patron and collector who liked to surround herself with fashionable artistic and literary figures of the day. Gilbert Russell had made his wealth through the family business of merchant banking but his uncle was the 9th Duke of Bedford, which lent some aristocratic credibility.<sup>806</sup> Maud Russell was one of Whistler's more artistically literate patrons, and was the subject of portraits by Sir William Nicholson, Orpen, McEvoy and Matisse.<sup>807</sup> Whistler was the logical choice

---

<sup>805</sup> At Trent Park Robert Boothby described 'the Duke of York coming in from golf.... Winston Churchill arguing over the teacups with George Bernard Shaw, Lord Balfour dozing in an armchair, Rex Whistler absorbed in his painting...' quoted in Stansky, 2003, p.178.

<sup>806</sup> 'Martin Russell' (obituary of Maud and Gilbert Russell's son) [Online], <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1456344/Martin-Russell.html> [5 June 2014]

<sup>807</sup> Ibid.

to create a scheme that was in sympathy with the historical antecedents of the house but her selection must have owed as much to his status as a fashionable painter.<sup>808</sup> Style and image were paramount. Like so many of his clients Russell had revamped the interior of Mottisfont completely and the mural was to be one of the most visible manifestations.

In the same way that his circles of patrons were representative of the new make-up of society in the period, they also constituted a cross section of artistic taste and preferences. In fact very few of his clients were hidebound traditionalists and amongst them were those who, far from resisting advances in modern visual culture, were enthusiastically embracing more avant-garde movements in this inter-war period. As previously mentioned, both Edward James and Lord Gerald Berners were keen supporters of the surrealists. James commissioned Whistler to illustrate two volumes of his poetry in 1932 and 1933, the Neptune Carpet in 1936 and a grand equestrian portrait.<sup>809</sup> [Fig.6.3] The illustrations were a much more personal assignment than was usual for this type of work, because they were published through James' own publishing company, the James Press. Hence the author had complete control over the content of the books rather than a publisher appointing an artist to carry out the illustrations. The James Press had published

---

<sup>808</sup> Whistler was not the only artist commissioned at Mottisfont, Boris Anrep also created mosaics for the interior and exterior of the house, but his relationship with his hostess was rather closer.

<sup>809</sup> Date unknown. The portrait can be seen in the background of several of Howard Coster's 1936 photographs of Whistler. Laurence Whistler states in correspondence with Elizabeth Owen of the National Portrait Gallery (undated but probably 1980s) that the painting was scrapped in 1933, which is clearly wrong, although it may never have been completed. Correspondence in 'Howard Coster Photos of Rex at 20 Fitzroy', Multi-coloured Crate 2, RWA. In Olivier's diary for 21 May 1935 it is referred to as 'now sketched in', Middelboe, 1989, p.165. The portrait bears a resemblance to *Napoleon at the St. Bernard Pass* by Jacques-Louis David (1801). Edward James was also small in stature and requested that 'his own figure to be ridiculously tiny in relation to the horse? It is so already but he wants it *more so*.' Ibid.

John Betjeman's first book of poems in 1931 and Whistler had been invited to illustrate this but apparently turned the request down.<sup>810</sup>

Samuel Courtauld, who collected Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art and was a patron of Bloomsbury, commissioned Rex to design two large carved limewood urns in 1932 for his residence in North Audley Street. [Fig.6.4] The focal point of the house's fine neo-classical interiors was the coffered and domed Octagon Room and Gallery and the urns were to sit in two niches at either end of the latter.<sup>811</sup>

Each was personalised to Courtauld with one displaying the nine muses and the other eight notable Samuels from history such as Pepys, Johnson, etc. The interior decorators White Allom had used a Chinese theme for one of the bedrooms<sup>812</sup> and, in an interesting cultural juxtaposition, Courtauld had Whistler reproduce, in paint, a length of chinoiserie wall-paper which formed a panel to frame Picasso's *L'Enfant au Pigeon* (1901).<sup>813</sup> [Fig.6.5]

Life in these homes, and indeed all the houses for which Whistler created enhancements was lived on a very public social stage which meant that any decorative scheme was visible to an elite audience of guests. This raises issues of how the murals' location within these kinds of spaces impacted upon their artistic

---

<sup>810</sup>The reasons are unclear, and it was unusual for him to do so. Laurence Whistler feels the artist was not sympathetic to the poet's verse and tone but this seems unlikely; he undertook so many commissions for such a range of clients that he cannot have been in harmony with all of them. 'he never took to the sophisticated irony of Betjeman'... Whistler, L., 1985, p.168. But Whistler also notes that in fact, his brother did produce a sketch for the title page of the book, *Mount Zion*, which indicates that he was at least partly interested in the job, *ibid*. However a letter dated April 23 1931 from James to Whistler indicates that the artist had seen the poems and expressed interest but had then become too busy on other projects, probably the Port Lympne mural. 'Rex Whistler Letters B' RWA.

<sup>811</sup> Architectural details of 12 Nth Audley Street from English Heritage <http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/resultsingle.aspx?uid=1225300> accessed 29 Nov 2013.

<sup>812</sup> Tackett, John J., 'More of the Artistry of Rex Whistler' [Online] <http://tdclassicist.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/more-of-artistry-of-rex-whistler.html> [November 12 2013].

<sup>813</sup> Courtauld had bought the painting in 1928. *Impressionism for England Samuel Courtauld as Patron and Collector*. Exhibition catalogue by John House *et al.*, London: Courtauld Institute Galleries, 1994, p.40.

significance. In theory they were viewable by large numbers of people; in practice these people may have been so engrossed in the social activities of dining, drinking and discourse that they may not have noticed them. In that sense did they become a decorative backdrop rather than a serious artwork? It may be safe to assume that the guests enjoying the hospitality of Sassoon, the Russells or Chips Channon etc. would not have mistaken the wall paintings for wallpaper. There are, of course, no guarantees regarding the reception of artworks but one would assume that the majority of the murals' viewers were in possession of sufficient cultural capital to differentiate between the two. Those who frequented, or indeed lived in, historic houses which contained original murals would certainly have appreciated these newer schemes. Rex Whistler was at this time a high-profile artist whose name would have been familiar to this echelon of society. These murals may also have acted as conversation pieces, particularly to guests who may have been curious to know more about their distinguished hosts. Certainly as far as Channon was concerned, discussions of the lavish interiors of Belgrave Square, particularly those where guests were entertained, must have been as much part of the discourse around the dining table as any other subject.

McKibbin attempts to define the characteristics of the upper class in this period and posits that it was 'a class which defined itself and was defined by others, by its public display.'<sup>814</sup> This display could include behaviour, lifestyle, manner, dress, accoutrements, but for the purposes of this discussion is to do with their property and how that could demonstrate their importance and position in the social hierarchy and how they chose to live in it and present it. They chose Whistler to create murals and artworks for them as part of this display. The audiences for

---

<sup>814</sup> McKibbin, R., *Classes and Cultures England 1918-1951*, Oxford: OUP, 1998, p.2.

these murals extended to the readers of magazines where such homes were featured, such as *Country Life*, and Whistler's schemes at the Tate Gallery, Port Lympne, 36 Hill Street, and Brook House all appeared within its pages.<sup>815</sup> The glamour associated with Channon's home led to it being used for a fashion photograph for *Vogue* by Cecil Beaton, clearly showing Whistler's painted chimney piece as the backdrop for a sophisticated Hartnell gown.<sup>816</sup> [Fig.6.6]

## Royal Patronage

The apogee of patronage for any artist at any period of history would be a commission for Royalty. Whistler certainly had established royal connections, although this did not result in the sort of commission enjoyed by, for instance, John Piper, who carried out a substantial series of paintings of Windsor Castle for Queen Elizabeth from 1941. With his skill and experience in depicting architecture Whistler would surely have been a candidate for this important project. The Queen's advisor on the selection process was Sir Kenneth Clark at this point Surveyor of the King's Pictures.<sup>817</sup> Having repeatedly passed Whistler over for a post as a War Artist in these years, Clark was unlikely to consider him as a contender.<sup>818</sup> Queen Elizabeth was keenly interested in contemporary art, by

---

<sup>815</sup> These were the schemes that appeared in *Country Life* during Whistler's lifetime: the Tate Gallery Restaurant Mural 'Recent Mural Paintings', December 10 1927, Volume LXI, p.881; Port Lympne, Hill, O., 'Mr. Rex Whistler at Port Lympne', February 4 1933, Volume LXXIII, p.116-7; Hussey, C. 'Belgrave Square London The Residence of Mr Henry and Lady Honor Channon', February 26 1938, Volume LXXXIII, pp.222-226; on 36 Hill Street, article by Christopher Hussey, March 25 1939, Vol. LXXXV, pp.310-11; on Brook House, 24 June 1939, Vol. LXXXV, p.682.

<sup>816</sup> Undated photo from Beaton/ Condé Nast Archive, in Eerdmans, E. *Regency Redux* New York: Rizzoli, 2008, p.137.

<sup>817</sup> *Watercolours and Drawings from the Collection of Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother*. Exhibition Catalogue by Susan Owens, London: Royal Collection Enterprises Limited, 2005, p.27.

<sup>818</sup> By this time Whistler was well-established with the Welsh Guards but was still accepting painting commissions and was in touch with the Queen throughout the war.

'living painters'<sup>819</sup> particularly 'modern figurative pictures' and although influenced by Clark, kept her own counsel.<sup>820</sup> She may thus have been specifically seeking an artist with a more contemporary eye for the Windsor project and regarded Whistler's style as too traditional. Frances Spalding compares the approach of Piper who revelled in the frank portrayal of a building's decay and deterioration and Whistler's depiction of the same subject as 'timeless curiosities'.<sup>821</sup> Timelessness is certainly one of the qualities that imbued Whistler's work, and was a prerequisite for a patron seeking to celebrate the longevity of their estate, as in the panel for the Duke of Rutland. If these works had been painted with the intention of being 'curiosities', it is unlikely that the artist would have been taken seriously.

Whistler had known the Duke and Duchess of York before the accession, probably through Osbert Sitwell<sup>822</sup> and was a weekend guest at Balmoral in 1937. A detailed 'Conversation Piece' pencil drawing of the Royal Family was carried out by Whistler also in 1937. [Fig.6.7] This could have been a study for a more formal portrait, although it is not listed as such in the Catalogue Raisonné, where it is described as an illustration for an article on the Coronation published in *Vogue* in 1937.<sup>823</sup> The drawing, although a little sentimental and romanticised, portrays the King and Queen and their daughters as a relaxed family group, seated on an outdoor terrace surrounded by books, dogs and garden tools. Whistler's deliberate

---

<sup>819</sup>Spalding, F., *John Piper Myfanwy Piper Lives in Art*, Oxford: OUP. 2009, p.192.

<sup>820</sup> Owens, 2005, p.28.

<sup>821</sup> Spalding, 2009, p. 193.

<sup>822</sup> Owens, 2005, p.43.

<sup>823</sup> The idea of an 'unexecuted painting' comes from Powers, A., 'Was there a George VI style?', *Apollo*, October 2004, p.72. The drawing is listed twice in the CR, both in the 'Portraits' sections and 'Illustrations for Periodicals'. If there was a possibility of a Royal portrait it seems odd that it was not mentioned by Laurence Whistler. Only this drawing out of the three *Vogue* illustrations is in the Royal Collection, indicating that it was of greater importance to the Queen.



use of an informal pose emphasises the desire of the new Royals to be perceived as accessible and 'modern', and makes a feature of the secure unit at the centre of the monarchy, so important after the debacle of the abdication crisis. Queen Elizabeth also commissioned him to produce an elaborate Royal cipher containing the three sets of initials of the monarchs.<sup>824</sup>

## **The *mise en scène***

In many of his patrons' homes, Whistler was working within an entire decorative ensemble. The mural he designed was just a part of an entire *mise en scène* that a team of designers, decorators, gardeners and architects would work towards creating - a 'statement' home. Typical examples of these showcase residences so in vogue in the 1920s and 30s would include Eltham Palace for the Courtaulds, Mulberry House for the Monds as well as the palatial dwellings of Whistler's patrons described in this chapter. All those who contributed to these kinds of spaces could expect their reputations to be enhanced by association. The best known of those involved in this process of domestic transformation were the interior decorators, and amongst the most prominent exponents were Syrie Maugham, and her rival Lady Sibyl Colefax. Being well-born and well-connected meant they moved at ease in society circles. Both Maugham and Colefax overlapped with many of Whistler's clients. Maugham worked for Edward James and Stephen Tennant. Sibyl Colefax also advised Tennant at Wilsford and designed interiors for the Angleseys at Plas Newydd and the Coopers at 90 Gower Street.

---

<sup>824</sup> Owen, 2005, p.43 and fig.22. These are held in the Royal Collection.

The garden designer Norah Lindsay was also one of this well-connected circle<sup>825</sup> and her aristocratic address book gave her an entrée that other garden designers might have found impossible. Thus the upper classes felt comfortable engaging one of their own kind to carry out interior design schemes and alterations to their houses. They must have perceived – wrongly - a similar quality in Rex Whistler. At this point in his career his connections with the upper classes, through personal commissions and close acquaintance, had effectively disguised his middle class origins.

## **Insider/ Outsider: Whistler's own Class Issues**

As with many artists, past and present, commissioned by the aristocracy, Whistler was working in and for a social milieu far above his modest background. However he seemed to gain acceptance from many of these patrons far in excess of that normally bestowed on a 'decorative tradesman'. Many of his clients regarded him with genuine affection and respect and he was often treated as 'one of the family' rather than an outsider.<sup>826</sup> Was this due to his legendary charm and engaging personality or was it a symptom of a more elastic and porous social order that was blurring the boundaries between upper, middle and lower classes in Britain? Or

---

<sup>825</sup> She came from a fairly privileged background and continued this with her marriage to Harry Lindsay, son of the Earl of Crawford and Diana Cooper's uncle. As with Syrie Maugham, her career really started after her separation from her husband.

<sup>826</sup> For instance, Whistler became close friends with Euan and Barbie Wallace for whom he painted the mural at 19 Hill Street and was god-father to their two sons. Osborne, F., *The Bolter*, London: Virago, 2008, p.269.

are there other factors at play in this scenario to do with a more traditional view of artist and patron?

There were certainly changes in the composition of the social orders during the interwar period with new additions to the upper class and to the middle class, with growing numbers in the medical and legal and teaching professions.<sup>827</sup> Thus the middle classes where Whistler originated and the upper classes amongst whom he found his clients were re-configuring in terms of membership and structure, but did this really have any impact on how he was perceived by his patrons or the relations he experienced with them?

There is a stronger argument that in fact Whistler's relationship with his patrons was based on a more traditional model. Historically, artists, architects and landscape designers who carried out works for a patron's home or estate would need to have a close working relationship with that patron, who in turn would have appreciation of fine arts, antiques, heritage and so forth.<sup>828</sup> The aristocracy's *raison d'être* was to be the caretakers of their estates. Thus the patron usually came to the commissioning relationship well-informed, making the association one of mutual respect where each party acknowledged that the interests and learning of the other were of reciprocal benefit.<sup>829</sup> Patrons and artists would not be regarded as equal in status or class but neither would artists be regarded as ill-

---

<sup>827</sup> Cannadine, D., *Class in Britain* 2000 edition, London: Penguin Books, p.117. This is not to say of course that office work automatically made one a member of the middle class, but it was a factor.

<sup>828</sup> Typical of this relationship would be the work done by Robert Adam for the Duke of Northumberland, Antonio Verrio for the Earl of Exeter at Burghley House, and James Thornhill for the Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim. The nineteenth century saw a decline in this kind of patronage, although William Burges' projects for the Marquess of Bute at Cardiff Castle were in similar vein.

<sup>829</sup> Ideas on 18<sup>th</sup>-century patronage in relation to Rex Whistler from a discussion with Dr Adriano Aymonino, researcher and writer on the collections and patronage of the 1st Duke of Northumberland, 19 November 2011.

educated tradesmen. The stately home owners of the twentieth century were equally conscious of their precious and, in some cases, precarious inheritances. These patrons, like their forebears would have held an individual such as Rex Whistler, with his combined credentials of architectural knowledge and a deep understanding of historical accuracy and appropriateness in high esteem.<sup>830</sup> Like his predecessors, Whistler had the range of knowledge to advise his patrons on architectural improvements to a house or its grounds, could design furniture to suit and understood the spatial context of the mural scheme's location.

However this kind of relationship between commissioned worker and client could never be one of equals; it was not part of their function to be on a par with their patrons. By the same token they had to be able to conduct themselves accordingly in the patron's company and, equally importantly, be attuned to this society's mores. Whistler certainly fell into this category. A more strident or anti-establishment individual would perhaps not have been welcomed into the bosom of an old order family such as the Marquesses of Anglesey, but self-selection would probably dictate that they did not want to be.

The issue of class and how it impacted on the Whistler family is addressed frequently in Laurence Whistler's biography. Class divides were evident in the case of their own parents. Their mother was the daughter of a Cambridge-educated vicar, had been brought up in country society, taught by a governess, and had a lifelong love of literature and poetry.<sup>831</sup> She was thought to have married beneath her as their father was from a building background, although it should be stressed

---

<sup>830</sup> Ibid.

<sup>831</sup> Family history outlined in Whistler, 1985, pp.3-8.

that by the time of Rex Whistler's birth his father ran a thriving 'building and surveying' business that employed forty men and encompassed property design and construction, estate agency, and restoration.<sup>832</sup> Nonetheless he was not a particularly educated or literate man. The family always owned their own home and household staff were kept.<sup>833</sup> Whistler's upbringing was one in which traditional values were stressed and the importance of education, i.e. a public school, on one's social trajectory was recognised. Perhaps with a sense of irony, Laurence Whistler writes 'to be accepted by the ruling classes and share in its prodigious advantages a boy must talk with its accent and have been to one of its more elevated schools...'<sup>834</sup> Whilst not the upper class families' choice of Eton or Harrow, Haileybury provided the milieu to gain the accoutrements needed. One of the foundations of an English public school education is to inculcate in its pupils both an awareness of one's – elevated - position but also, generally, how to behave when one is placed in unfamiliar territory. Whistler's demeanour shows no evidence of the former but the latter ability would stand him in good stead especially at the beginning of his career. The English are attuned to identifying a person's class by their accent. Whistler's mother was fairly well-spoken; his father had a broad Hampshire accent.<sup>835</sup> Whistler would have adopted the 'King's English' at Haileybury and thus would probably have sounded very similar to many of his patrons. But his conversational style and that used for letters, particularly to friends is quite theatrical and here he was adopting the fashion for a mannered exaggeration in speech.<sup>836</sup>

---

<sup>832</sup> Copy of Letter from Helen Whistler to Jess Whistler (Rex's sister) Jan 20 1957, 'Misc. Biog. Used' RWA and Whistler, L., 1985, p.13

<sup>833</sup> Letter from Helen Whistler, *ibid.*

<sup>834</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.27. Laurence Whistler went to Stowe.

<sup>835</sup> Conversation with Robin Ravilious, Whistler's niece, July 2008.

<sup>836</sup> In letters there are many underlinings and emphasis on particular words, see Whistler, 1985, p.161. In this he would also have been influenced by Tennant, who continued this florid mode of

Edith Olivier provided a helpful model in how to negotiate high society without having a great deal of financial wherewithal or aristocratic birth and pedigree.<sup>837</sup> Although her home was a 'grace and favour' residence courtesy of the Pembrokes, she had no inherited wealth and depended on her own skills as a writer and lecturer to earn a living. She was generous with support and hospitality particularly to those starting out in a career, especially in the arts, and in return was subsidised or funded by close friends who could afford to, but this did not seem to diminish her status or appeal. Whistler, her closest protégé, never charged for the illustrations that he designed for her books, or the paintings that he did of her and the Daye House. Essentially Olivier was universally accepted on her own merits. This must have been instructive to Whistler, coming from a similarly financially moderate background and who also had to work for every penny that he earned. Like Olivier he benefited from, and had no hesitation in accepting, holidays and trips paid for by wealthy friends – indeed they met on one that had been paid for by the Tennants - and enjoyed hospitality at their country estates or town houses, which he could never return in kind. This parity in their circumstances may partly account for the unusual closeness in the relationship between the pair. They recognised in each other an individual who had to live by their wits and ingenuity and innate talents in order to survive in a more wealthy world.

---

expression throughout his life, both in discourse and in his correspondence. See many examples in 'Letters from Stephen Tennant' REX WHISTLER LETTERS A, RWA.

<sup>837</sup> However Olivier is hard to categorise in terms of class. As a Rector's daughter she had an elevated position as the Church was classed as a 'higher profession' but this was respectability not affluence. McKibbin 1998, p.46. She certainly have regarded herself as higher up the social scale than Whistler's parents whom she dismissed as 'a man really of the lower classes – a shopman kind of man' and his mother as 'really a kind pretty governess...', Whistler, 1985, p.125 and 127 respectively.

Whistler did make close relationships amongst his clients, and is recorded as a dear friend in many of their letters, diaries, biographies and autobiographies.<sup>838</sup> He had sufficient cultural and social capital from his upbringing and education, including the Slade, to operate within these groups. He was undoubtedly handsome, charming and personable which may have had some bearing, but the real entrée was provided by his talents and skill as an artist, in whatever discipline the patron required. The idea that the breakdown of class divides contributed to the ease in which Whistler found acceptance and moved amongst the upper echelons of the time seems to be erroneous. In fact it might be more accurate to say that class had very little to do with it.

## **The Commissioning Process and Artistic Freedom**

As has been shown in this thesis the vast majority of Whistler's career as an artist was spent producing work for specific commissions.<sup>839</sup> What does the commissioning process do to an artist's development? In terms of artistic freedom what effects might it have on an artist's creativity to have to constantly produce work to suit a client's taste? One consequence could be a lack of time or mental energy to devote to one's own practice. The working life of an artist is usually defined by periods of work in the studio or en plein air followed by an exhibition.

---

<sup>838</sup> For instance: correspondence Christabel Aberconway to Caroline Paget, 1 August 1944 'his death the great tragedy of the war... Dear, dear Rex.' Plas Newydd Archive.; Cooper, D., *The Light of Common Day* London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959, p. 79, Sitwell, O., *Noble Essences A Book of Characters*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1950 pp. 293-317.

<sup>839</sup> His work in the theatre is also included in this description, although this has not been covered in this study.

He or she might also be involved in other creative endeavours as a means of earning a living such as teaching, commercial design or fulfilling commissions, but considerable importance is given to developing one's individual artistic expression. Although Whistler's paintings were shown in several mixed exhibitions during his career, he never had a solo exhibition; by any standards this is unusual.

This could suggest that the commissions dominated his life to such an extent that there was no time to explore his own creative potential. Time was certainly an issue. Deadlines were constant and Whistler generally worked on several different projects concurrently. There is no record in his adult diaries or any of the biographies of the artist, of him spending time in his studio working on his own ideas, experimenting with techniques or subjects, purely painting for painting's sake. In contrast his youthful sketchbooks are full of drawings and paintings, demonstrating all sorts of different working methods. He painted en plein air during his travels in Europe. This mode of working from life did not happen again until he enlisted with the Welsh Guards where, although he was still involved in some commissions, he had the freedom to paint whatever he chose, whether it be an unprepossessing village near his army base, *Landscape at East Mersea* (1940) or his colleagues relaxing in *Officers' Mess Tent* (1942). [Fig.6.8] However the focus in this chapter is on his work in the later 1920s and 30s. As can be seen from the Career Chronology in Appendix I, the commissions started to proliferate during 1929 with *Gulliver's Travels* and Shell. In terms of large projects, from 1930 he was working on at least one mural a year (apart from 1934) until he enlisted in 1939. Alongside these, every year contains myriad other commissions, from bookplates to entire theatrical productions.



Recorded in Appendix I are paintings that appear to have been created with no client in mind such as *Sonny Grant*, a portrait of a child who was living near Whistler's studio or *The Buckingham Road in the Rain* (both 1936). [Fig.6.9] In fact both of these were exhibited in London galleries and this applies to many of the paintings which at first sight seem to be non-commissioned works.<sup>840</sup> In nine out of the thirteen years of his career from 1928 until 1940 Whistler's work was shown regularly – and sold – at group exhibitions in galleries, sometimes several in one year. In the early years, from 1928–1931, his work was shown in four exhibitions at the Imperial Gallery of Art.<sup>841</sup> Four or five paintings were shown of which four were sold.<sup>842</sup> Additionally in 1928 the Dorneywood panel was shown at the Claridge Gallery in an exhibition of Decorative Art.<sup>843</sup> The most prestigious display of the artist's work was the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition of 1934 in which the portrait of the Dudley Ward sisters was shown to critical acclaim.<sup>844</sup> Many of the 'house portraits' he carried out for friends and clients were shown at 'Paintings of Country Seats and Manor Houses by Contemporary Artists' held at the Leicester Galleries in 1935 and again in 1936.<sup>845</sup> Other examples of his oeuvre were shown in the 1930 Goupil Gallery exhibition 'Decorative Works and Stage and other Designs'<sup>846</sup>, 'Interior Decorations and Murals' at Carlisle House in 1932, the

---

<sup>840</sup> *Sonny Grant* shown in Leicester Galleries Summer Exhibition 1940, *Buckingham Road in the Rain* at the French Gallery in June 1936, Whistler and Fuller 1960 p. 26 and p.20 respectively.

<sup>841</sup> The Gallery was founded largely to show the works of the British School at Rome annual competitions and the Rome Scholars themselves. Reports of the Executive Committee, December 1926, p.3. P1.156.3, BSR Archive. Whistler's paintings shown were 'Samson destroying the Philistines in the Temple of Dagon', exhibited and sold in 1928, 'Rome' exhibited and sold in 1929, 'The Temple of Remus from the Palatine' exhibited and probably sold in 1930 along with 'Tivoli from the Road'.

<sup>842</sup> The discrepancy is due to a record of a payment in the Accounts book for 1931 from the Imperial Gallery but the CR does not list a painting shown in that year.

<sup>843</sup> Letter to EO 28 November 1928, 'R to E.O. 1928' REX WHISTLER LETTERS B, RWA.

<sup>844</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.80.

<sup>845</sup> It is not always clear in the Catalogue Raisonné which paintings were sold in from these galleries but for sales before 1935, the details were listed in Whistler's 'Accounts Book 1927-1934', RWA.

<sup>846</sup> This was at the invitation of Eddie Marsh, a letter sometime before Jan 1930 noted by Laurence Whistler 'Thanks for E's invitation to exhibit in Goupil Theatrical Exhib.' Rex: Additional Letters, REX WHISTLER LETTERS A, RWA.

'Exhibition of Mural Decorative Paintings' at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1935, the 'Art in Industry' exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1935 and 'Mural Painting in Great Britain 1919 -1939 An Exhibition of Photographs' at the Tate Gallery in 1939.

The Whistler biography<sup>847</sup> is distinctly unforthcoming about this gallery exhibition participation and only mentions one, the Royal Academy, which accorded the artist, certainly in his brother's eyes, the most prestige. The omission of these exhibitions from the biography is puzzling. His brother is concerned to emphasise the fact that Whistler was a fine artist, a painter of paintings, above and beyond his commissioned work but fails to mention the frequency with which his work was on exhibition to the public. He may not have accorded these galleries much significance but in fact the Leicester and Goupil Galleries were prominent and well-respected as was the dealer Arthur Tooth & Sons, who exhibited three Whistler paintings in 1935 and one in 1937.<sup>848</sup>

Henry Tonks had been the strongest advocate of a solo exhibition for his favoured student; commissioned work particularly in murals was a perfectly valid way for an artist to earn a living, but the individual's own painting practice was paramount. But the original hope of a Rome exhibition never materialised, Whistler disparaged

---

<sup>847</sup> The *Laughter and the Urn* is the source used; the *Cecil's* biography adds nothing to the Laurence Whistler material and continues the impression that Whistler never showed in a gallery.

<sup>848</sup> The 'Exhibition of Contemporary British Paintings' was reviewed in the *Sunday Times* 28 February 1937 by Frank Rutter and Whistler's painting, a portrait of Lady Caroline Paget, was mentioned as being of note. BLUE CRATE A PRESS CUTTINGS & PRINTED PROGRAMMES RWA. The Leicester Galleries in particular were a significant presence on the London art scene, showing a wide range of modern English and French painting, from the Camden Town Group to Van Gogh and showed several of Whistler's contemporaries such as John Armstrong and Glyn Philpot. Information from 'Ernest Brown & Phillips Ltd., The Leicester Galleries. An index of 1422 catalogues of exhibitions of European Modern Art and 20th Century British Art, held between 1902 and 1977' [Online] <http://www.ernestbrownandphillips.ltd.uk/Static/general.html> [14 December 2013]

his paintings as being too few and too poor to show in London.<sup>849</sup> Despite this diffidence, several of them were exhibited and sold at the Imperial Gallery after his return in 1928.<sup>850</sup> This idea of an exhibition must have continued to concern him. He wanted to be taken seriously as an artist, or to be seen as a 'serious' artist, the definition implying that this was one who concentrated on easel practice and had exhibitions.<sup>851</sup> Once 'the boom in Whistler'<sup>852</sup> had started both Edith Olivier and Laurence Whistler make much of the fact that Whistler was trapped by the continuous loop of commissions.<sup>853</sup> Olivier, ever mindful of her protégé's interests, realised that this creative treadmill and its financial implications made it more and more unlikely that he could achieve the prestige and credibility of a solo exhibition.<sup>854</sup> An occasion when he was meeting an exhibition deadline resulted in a weekend spent at the Daye House painting in 'growing frenzy and despair'.<sup>855</sup> It must be recorded that this kind of pressure was not an unusual occurrence even in his normal commissioned work. The situation in the 1940s when Whistler was more involved in painting for painting's sake led him to hope for an exhibition but it seems that either he could not make this happen or his service with the Welsh Guards intervened.<sup>856</sup> It would appear that Whistler was fairly diffident about exhibiting and did not push the prospect of a solo venture.

---

<sup>849</sup> '...nothing I would dare exhibit in London', letter RW to Tonks July 1 1928, Rex : Additional Letters A, RWA. One of the paintings was 'The Temple of Remus' dated June 1928. CR p.16.

<sup>850</sup> See footnote 66.

<sup>851</sup> Whistler 1985, p.114.

<sup>852</sup> Ibid, p. 110.

<sup>853</sup> Ibid, p.129.

<sup>854</sup> Offered £500 by Heinemann for a book illustration commission, Whistler and Olivier 'agree [it] would be more than he would earn by an Exhibition...' Edith Olivier Journal entry for 18 January 1932, Archive Catalogue no 982/62 Olivier Family of Wilton Salisbury Teffont Magna and Quidhampton, Wiltshire, Swindon & Wilts History Centre.

<sup>855</sup> Journal entry for 29<sup>th</sup> September 1935, Catalogue no 982/65, *ibid*. This was the first 'Country Seats and Manors' Exhibition at the Leicester Galleries.

<sup>856</sup> '...trying... to accumulate enough pictures for a small exhibition but it is difficult to get together enough tolerably good ones...' Letter to Dorothy Elliott (Aunt) May 25 1940, 'R's letters to Dorothy Elliott' Rex Whistler Letters A, RWA.

It may also be worth considering that he did actually feel creatively fulfilled by some of his commissioned work, particularly the murals. He felt that the mural at 19 Hill Street was his best achievement in murals up until that point<sup>857</sup> and this was surpassed by his enthusiasm for the mural at Plas Newydd where he writes to Lord Anglesey that he felt the project would be 'his happiest ever' and that he 'has been enjoying myself fantastically over the picture'.<sup>858</sup> As with any professional endeavours there were less enjoyable projects and clients that made life difficult, such as the unwelcome interference from Baroness Porcelli at 36 Hill Street and Maud Russell at Mottisfont . Creative fulfilment would indicate a certain amount of freedom of expression. Whistler generally painted what he wanted on the walls of his patrons' houses, albeit with elements negotiated during the process, as at Port Llympne. By far the greater part of the mural designs were from Whistler's imagination, not from any plan or proposal from the client and this was true from his first major scheme at the Tate Gallery. These private clients were buying a certain style or treatment that Whistler could deliver, which is best described as classical with a contemporary twist, but they were not all getting the same product. Each of his mural schemes were very different. They usually contained a lexicon of motifs that he used predominantly (discussed in Chapter Three) but these were part of his style from early in his career and are found often enough in his sketchbooks, doodles and decorated letters to indicate that he drew them as much for his own interest and enjoyment than that of his clients. It does not appear that what he created for his patrons was a compromised version of his vision but he may have been limited or affected by the process itself. The murals were time-consuming but the real problem was the amount of other commissions that he had

---

<sup>857</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.156.

<sup>858</sup> Whistler, 1985 p.206 and letter, date unknown, to Charley Anglesey in collection at Plas Newydd, Anglesey.

to undertake, many of which he found less satisfying, to keep himself financially viable.

## Financial Status

Whatever the constraints of his practice it is interesting to note that Whistler's earning power seemed undiminished by the financial crisis of the early 1930s. On March 26 1930 The *Daily News* reported that 'Recent financial crises have badly affected the sales of pictures and sculptures both in the galleries and the auction rooms....'<sup>859</sup> However, Whistler's output for that year tells a very different story. He painted the mural at Hill Street (£400 / present day equivalent £22,000), designed schemes for Cecil Beaton's new house at Ashcombe (£10.12.4d/£660), began the dining room mural at Port Lympne, designed two sets of scenery for Cochran (£263/£14,500), did advertisements for Shell (£110/£6000) and numerous other commissions earning in total that year £1012/£55,800).<sup>860</sup> In comparison Paul Nash earned £1191 from sales in 1929-30 but only £563 in 1931-32.<sup>861</sup> But of equal note in terms of the newspaper's comment on the paucity of gallery sales, as

---

<sup>859</sup> Stephenson, A., 'Strategies of Situation: British Modernism and the Slump, c.1929-1934', *Oxford Art Journal*, 14 February 1991, p.39.

<sup>860</sup> Income figures from 'Rex Whistler Account Book' RWA. For further details of Whistler's earnings see Appendix I, Career Chronology.

All monetary calculations from Measuring Worth [Online]

<http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/relativevalue.php>, on a 2013 basis, [6 June 2014].

Note: The calculation of historical monetary value versus present day is inexact. These figures have been calculated using the Retail Price Index as an equivalent using Officer, L. H. and Williamson, S. H., "Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present,"

MeasuringWorth, 2013 [Online] <http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/index.php> [ 18

December 2013] There are other ways of calculating relative values, see The National Archive

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/disclaimer.htm> . However, Laurence Whistler corresponded with the Lloyds Bank Economics Dept. in 1983 to compute the relative income figures, who stated that they derived the amounts using the Retail Price Index, and these were used in the 1985 biography. This model has been followed in the thesis.

<sup>861</sup> From Nash's notebooks in Tate Gallery Archive quoted in Foss, B., 'British Artists and the Second World War With Particular Reference to the War Artists' Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Information' unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University College London, 1991, endnote 111, p.81.

stated above Whistler showed in three exhibitions in 1930 and sold several paintings. In terms of the general market in painting sales at this time perhaps these are poor comparisons to make. His line of business was predominantly to do with producing specific work for specific clients, not painting from his own volition and inspiration, and then putting it out into the market. Whistler always got paid for his work; an artist may not sell any paintings from an exhibition they had worked all year towards. 1932 is given as the nadir for painting sales but again Whistler refutes this with his busiest year to date.<sup>862</sup> Stephenson gives this as the point at which many artists realise they cannot survive on painting alone and turn to the new commercial areas where Whistler was already established, having designed his first posters for London Underground in 1928.<sup>863</sup> This is obviously a simplification of the overall picture, the slump had started in the late 1920s and any sensible individual that needed to make money from their art would have thought laterally.

As with his work for a sector of society that was supposedly in decline, Whistler does not reflect the economic story played out by so many of his contemporaries and writers on this period.

When one studies the breakdown of Whistler's earnings, these projects for his patrons and his commercial work earned him a good living, but the perception throughout his life was that he was always struggling with money.<sup>864</sup> Laurence

---

<sup>862</sup> As an example not one of the 120 paintings forming the Autumn Salon show of Modern Art at the Goupil Gallery had sold and the Summer Salon that year had been cancelled. Stephenson, 1991 p.41.

<sup>863</sup> Ibid, p.44.

<sup>864</sup> 'his lack of means was widely recognised.' Whistler 1985, p.175.

Whistler quotes Edward James “He was very poor you know”.<sup>865</sup> Whistler himself often claimed to be overdrawn and worried about paying bills.<sup>866</sup> The truth about the scale of Whistler’s earnings, unknown even to his brother, only came to light during the research carried out for the 1985 biography.<sup>867</sup> This showed that the most prolific years of Whistler’s career were 1932 to 1939 and his average earnings for these seven years was the equivalent of £80,500 p.a. in today’s value.<sup>868</sup> The highest earnings were in 1936-7, where he earned £1967 (£109,000 in today’s values).<sup>869</sup> Also of interest are the income figures for the early years of his career, which have been calculated from entries in his ‘Accounts Book for 1927 – 1934’.<sup>870</sup> This indicates clearly that his earning capacity increased dramatically the year after the Tate mural, from £273 (£13,500) in 1928 to £1012 (£50,500) in 1929-30. At the age of 24, he was earning by any standards a respectable income, but in terms of parity with his clients or even the rich Society girls to whom he was romantically attracted, he could never be on an equal footing.<sup>871</sup> However even if it couldn’t buy him a pedigree, it put him in a different league to most working men. The average yearly pay in Britain in 1935 was £160, at £1650 Whistler was earning ten times this.<sup>872</sup> If middle class income in 1934 is posited at a maximum of

---

<sup>865</sup> Ibid. His appreciation of Whistler’s financial situation is evidenced in a letter enclosing part payment in advance ‘pour vous encourager’ for the commission for the illustrations for James’s *The Next Volume*. Letter September 30 1931, ‘Rex Whistler Letters B’ RWA.

<sup>866</sup> Ibid, p.176.

<sup>867</sup> Tax returns consulted by Laurence Whistler from 1932. ‘Income’ Misc. Biog. folder, RWA.

<sup>868</sup> See Appendix 1: ‘Biographical Timeline’. The figures were obtained by LW from HMRC records. ‘Income’ Misc. Biog. folder, RWA.

Calculated using ‘MeasuringWorth’, 2013 [Online]  
<http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/index.php> [December 18 2013]

<sup>869</sup> LW notes that these figures were gross (?) with ‘allowances for car, studio, etc. already deducted’. Whistler 1985, p.175.

<sup>870</sup> This information was not used in *Laughter and the Urn* except for some individual payments, although LW had some information on these early years from the tax office, ‘Rex’s Income’, Income, Misc. Biog., RWA.

<sup>871</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.175.

<sup>872</sup> Gazeley, I., ‘Manual Work and Pay’ in N. F. R. Crafts, Ian Gazeley, Andrew Newell (eds.) *Work and Pay in Twentieth-century Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p.68.

£520 p.a. then Whistler was earning at £1438 nearly three times this figure.<sup>873</sup> Of more interest may be a comparison between professional incomes and that of the artist. In 1935-7 a Barrister would earn an average annually of £1090 and a GP £1094,<sup>874</sup> Whistler's average was £1808. His highest earning year, 1936-7 was £1967, nearly double these salaries. Considering this income was nearly entirely dependent on commissions, and he was at the whim or mercy of his clients the amounts are impressive. Whistler had the accoutrements of a reasonably affluent lifestyle: a car (bought in the year after the Tate mural)<sup>875</sup>, London studio (albeit in bohemian Fitzrovia), meals in restaurants, theatre, concerts, membership to the Gargoyle Club, the correct clothes and so forth.

But much of what he was earning was not going on himself but on supporting his family. Laurence Whistler observes that he himself was in ignorance of this, as was Edith Olivier his brother's closest friend and one whom, as has been suggested earlier, he could be frank about financial situations.<sup>876</sup> In 1932 he was behind the family's move to a better house in the Buckinghamshire countryside, helping to fund the purchase and paying for all the household expenses and three staff<sup>877</sup> in return for some capital, selling the property in 1937 in favour of a lease on the Walton Canonry in the Cathedral Close in Salisbury. There is an inference here that Whistler wanted to improve the lot of his parents but also by reflection his own circumstances, to mask his relatively modest origins. His mother admits that they relied heavily on him and regular substantial payments to her are listed amongst

---

<sup>873</sup> Mowat, C. *Britain between the wars, 1918-1940*, London: Methuen, 1955, pp. 490-1.

<sup>874</sup> Stevenson, J., *Penguin Social History of Britain British Society 1914-45*, London: Penguin Books, 1990 edition, p.123.

<sup>875</sup> Diary for 1929, 'Diaries' RWA.

<sup>876</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.175-6.

<sup>877</sup> *Ibid.*, p.176.



his outgoings<sup>878</sup> 'so that I should have no financial worry'.<sup>879</sup> In addition Whistler supported his sister and her family in Africa, paid his brother's university fees at Balliol and funded him until he got a job.<sup>880</sup> All this indicates generosity on a large scale but perhaps an over-developed sense of responsibility for his family's well-being. This in turn trapped him on the conveyor belt of continuous major and minor commissions. He was doing it because he had no choice. Without his earnings, his brother couldn't continue at Oxford, and more importantly, his parents would have nowhere to live. His background thus looked far more affluent than it was but was this all part of Whistler's construction or manipulation of his identity?

The fees charged for these commissions, especially the murals, look very impressive, with Mottisfont (1938) charged at £1400 (£73,500) and Plas Newydd (1936) £1000 (£56,000).<sup>881</sup> But against the fees he could charge for a mural would need to be set costs of men, sometimes two, to assist in laying out and basic painting, sometimes the costs for the large canvasses used, materials and the hire of ladders and scaffolding to paint them<sup>882</sup>. The hire of the scenery painters studio needed due to the scale of the Plas Newydd canvas cost £391 and it is assumed that his price included these extra expenses.<sup>883</sup> He usually quoted a fixed price for the project, but was occasionally able to increase the budget.<sup>884</sup> At Mottisfont his initial

---

<sup>878</sup> Payments to H F Ward. £286 in 1931 and £291 in 1932 and again in 1934, 'Rex Whistler Account Book 1927-1934' Multi-coloured Crate, RWA.

<sup>879</sup> Copy of Letter from Helen Whistler to Jess Whistler (Rex's sister) Jan 20 1957, 'Misc. Biog. Used' RWA.

<sup>880</sup> Whistler, 1985, p.176.

<sup>881</sup> LW's list of outgoings in 'Income', Misc. Biog. Used. RWA.

<sup>882</sup> At Plas Newydd, Lord Anglesey met the costs of the huge canvasses, their carriage and fixing. Notes (undated) from talk given by the 7<sup>th</sup> Marquess, given to Laurence Whistler, loose in 'Rex Whistler Additional Catalogue', private collection.

<sup>883</sup> 1938-9 figures on 'R's balance sheet' compiled by LW, Misc. Biog. Used, RWA.

<sup>884</sup> For instance an extra £100 was paid for the decoration on the ceiling and facing walls at Plas Newydd. Letter, probably 1938, Whistler to Charles Anglesey, PN Archive.

designs were rejected and the subsequent scheme proved so labour intensive that he had to hire in extra help, extend the completion date and watch his profits drain away, until he was going to make less than £300 on it.<sup>885</sup>

His illustration work for *Gulliver's Travels* in 1929, judged to be the height of his achievement in this medium paid £195 (£9800) for the 26 illustrations with the publisher then offering £150 for the originals, which were then immediately sold on at a profit. Edward James paid him £200 three years later for 27 illustrations for his privately printed edition of *The Next Volume*. Paul Nash was possibly more financially savvy and negotiated a percentage on the books sold, so for 'Genesis' published in 1924 by the Nonesuch Press, for which he supplied eleven woodcuts Nash was paid just over £86 on sales of c.£400 for the limited edition.<sup>886</sup> The RA-exhibited Dudley-Ward portrait (1934) paid Whistler £200 (£11,500). To compare him to some artists of a slightly earlier generation, who were admittedly more established, William Orpen in 1921 was earning £2640 per annum and at the turn of the century Sargent was charging £1000 guineas a portrait.<sup>887</sup> In murals Glyn Philpot, nearly twenty years Whistler's senior, was paid £1200 in 1930 for the murals for the Monds at Mulberry House, Smith Square.<sup>888</sup> In the same year Whistler was paid £400 for the staircase mural at 19 Hill Street, but by 1938 in the commissions for Plas Newydd and Mottisfont, he was receiving a commensurate

---

<sup>885</sup> '1938-9 Prof assistance and materials £468 15s 3d', 'R's balance sheet' compiled by LW, Misc. Biog. Used, RWA.

<sup>886</sup> Details of payments and publisher's agreement 8313/2/2/1. TGA 8313/2/2/1-8 CONTRACTS AND CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING COMMISSIONED WORK BY PAUL NASH. TGA.

<sup>887</sup> 'Painters I Should Have Known About (006) William Orpen: Part 4', blog entry September 8 2006 [Online] <http://www.articlesandtextiles.co.uk/2006/09/08/painters-i-should-have-known-about-006-william-orpen-part-4/> and Ament, D. 'Sargent at the Seattle Art Museum' [Online] <http://www.artguidenw.com/Sargent.htm>, [Accessed 20 Dec 2012].

<sup>888</sup> Heard, G. 'Memoir of Glyn Philpot' footnote 35, [Online] <http://www.geraldheard.com/writings.htm> [June 8 2014]

amount.<sup>889</sup> There were also those artists who were fortunate enough to have private incomes or allowances that made the exigencies of earning a living less critical. When John Piper had left the legal profession to make art his career, he was given an allowance by his mother from her investment income.<sup>890</sup>

Amongst the most minor and yet prolific of Whistler's commissions were those for book covers or wrappers, which paid between £18 (£1000) and £25 (£1500) each.<sup>891</sup> Their scale meant he could turn these designs around very quickly, about a day's work on each and they thus were an essential bread and butter part of his earnings. The inducement of this easy money, when he needed to find so much income to cover all his outgoings, meant that he was trapped in a very minor form of art purely for reward, rather than the creative freedom and artistic prestige offered by the bigger commission of murals and portraits which would take so much longer.<sup>892</sup>

## **Whistler's construction of his identity**

The large amount of press attention given to both artist and mural after the Refreshment Room mural unveiling ceremony at the Tate Gallery in November 1927 was undoubtedly a surprise to Whistler.<sup>893</sup> However, the experience of this level of publicity appeared to have a lasting effect and in 1930, the crucial point

---

<sup>889</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>890</sup> Spalding, 2012, p.154.

<sup>891</sup> Whistler 1985, p.175. Monetary equivalents calculated from <http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/relativevalue.php> op. cit. [July 28 2014]

<sup>892</sup> Ibid.

<sup>893</sup> Scrapbook and envelope of 'Press Cuttings Tate Refreshment Room', 'BLUE CRATE A PRESS CUTTINGS & PRINTED PROGRAMMES', RWA.

when his career took off, he engaged Romeike & Curtice, a press cuttings service.<sup>894</sup> He thus received notification of every occasion in which he was mentioned in the press throughout the UK. This appears to be very uncommon practice for anyone in his profession, and only one other instance, the artist C R W Nevinson who used Durrants, has been found so far.<sup>895</sup> It is not known how he came to use the service but it may have been on the recommendation of Edith Olivier, who was always conscious of business opportunities for her protégé. Cecil Beaton, a tireless self-publicist, may be a more likely candidate, and also used Romeike & Curtice.<sup>896</sup> Despite being busy with commissions in 1930 the economic downturn must have been on Whistler's mind. The timing of this would suggest he was considering how best to promote himself during a recession, and had awareness of how prospective clients would want to perceive him - busy and successful and worth investing in. The appointment of Romeike & Curtice is not mentioned in either of the biographies, but it is an important factor in the artist's awareness of his career and image and how he presented his identity to the world.

In 1936 Howard Coster, who styled himself as the 'Photographer of Men'<sup>897</sup> photographed Whistler in his Fitzroy Street studio. The artist is shown in casual working clothes at work in various 'real life' situations.<sup>898</sup> Coster may have stage-

---

<sup>894</sup> Romeike & Curtice was the first press clipping agency, founded in London in 1852. [Online] <http://www.cision.com/uk/about/history/> [31 December 2014]

<sup>895</sup> Martin, C., 'C R W Nevinson The Artist and his Name' in *Nevinson News* Issue 5 2000 p.4 and correspondence with Christopher Martin in September 2013, in which he stated that he 'did not know of any other artists of his [Nevinson's] generation, or later ones using an agency.'

<sup>896</sup> Letter to Beaton from his secretary Maud Nelson requesting him to 'ask Romeike to send his Press cuttings to him direct.' undated but possibly around 1940, , 'Papers of Sir Cecil Beaton' A1/387/48 St John's Library Cambridge, [Online] <http://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/> [ 10 September 2012].

<sup>897</sup> 'Howard Coster' Online] <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp01039/howard-coster?role=art> [December 21 2013]. The National Portrait Gallery hold 9300 portraits by Coster, although it is not known how many sitters this comprises.

<sup>898</sup> NPG12289 to 12304 [Online] <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait-list.php?search=sp&OOnly=true&sText=Rex+Whistler&wPage=0> He is not wearing a tie which is rare in any photograph of him. [20 December 2013]

managed these photographs but Whistler is very convincing in his role as the 'Artist in his Studio'. He appears relaxed, in every photograph there is a cigarette in his hand and in several a glass of wine. What was Coster saying about Whistler in these images and what was Whistler saying about himself? With an artist's experienced eye he would have known how these photographs would turn out. Predominantly he is portrayed with the expected props of brushes and palettes and in front of canvases. However in several images he is shown on the telephone, which seems incongruous.[Fig.6.10] But perhaps what is being expressed is the notion of a modern artist, using modern forms of communication to deal with the constant demands of his clientele.

Coster was interested in taking portraits of a wide range of well-known people of the day, not exclusively male, from writers to politicians. Many of Whistler's circle of patrons and clients were amongst them such as Sir Philip Sassoon, Beverley Nichols, Osbert Sitwell and C B Cochran. He photographed many of the successful artists of the time including William Orpen, Eric Kennington, Edward McKnight Kauffer and Eric Gill amongst many others.<sup>899</sup> The images of these men are in very similar mode to those of Whistler. Coster has shot them in their studio, in working costume of smock or overalls – Whistler is unusual in being in normal clothes - and often with the tools of their trade in hand. They are shown as working artists but Coster's images also emphasise their working environment. The artist is shown amidst the equally impressive surroundings of his studio, and also against a backdrop of canvases in the case of both Whistler and Orpen. Against these fairly traditional representations, Whistler is the only one who is shown using a

---

<sup>899</sup> All images [Online] shown on <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person.php?LinkID=mp01039&role=art&displayNo=60&wPage=0> [20 December 2013].

telephone.<sup>900</sup> He was younger than many of the artists Coster photographed and the more modern context and pose may have been to convey Whistler's youth, energy, and commercial success. Despite the paintbrushes and canvases there is a suggestion in this depiction of Whistler that he is not a traditional artist. It is interesting to consider whether the idea of the shots with the telephone came from the artist or the photographer. Another shot again shows him without any artistic accoutrements, silhouetted against a window, smoking a cigarette. Curiously this rather contemporary image was used in 1936 as the illustration to an article in *The Bystander* entitled 'Rex Whistler – Georgian of What Century?'<sup>901</sup>

The most traditional way for an artist to capture his own likeness for posterity is through self-portraiture, and Whistler painted several of these during his career.<sup>902</sup> Of the four completed paintings two offer more insight into how Whistler wanted to portray himself. The 1933 self-portrait has a distinct theatrical or staged quality with the artist silhouetted against a stormy sky, the low horizon line making the figure loom over the viewer.[Fig.6.11] To his right is one of the Boycott Pavilions from Stowe, a favoured architectural feature in many of his works. Whistler gazes into the distance with a knowing smile, his stance conveying a kind of hauteur, emphasised by the gloved hand tucked into his coat. By any standards it is an odd portrait, particularly as a self-portrait. If the ultimate meaning is hidden in a characteristically Whistlerian conceit, the references that it draws on may provide

---

<sup>900</sup> It has not been possible to study each of the over 9200 portraits at this point. The closest comparison is one of Reynolds Stone in front of a microphone, which is not really the same thing. Image reference [Online] NPG x2128, <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw164180/Christopher-Reynolds-Stone?LinkID=mp51044&search=sas&sText=reynolds+stone&OOnly=true&role=sit&rNo=0> [22 December 2014].

<sup>901</sup> *The Bystander*, April 29 1936, page unknown, 'Rex Press Cuttings, Social Events and Press Photos', RWA.

<sup>902</sup> The four completed self-portraits are from 1924, 1933, 1934 and 1940 and are listed in the Catalogue Raisonné on pages 24, 25, 26 and 27 respectively.

clues. A portrait of James Gibbs, the original architect of the Boycott Pavilions, has an image, albeit ghostly, of his Radcliffe Camera to the sitter's right.<sup>903</sup> [Fig.6.12] Gibbs was an architect admired by Whistler and his church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields also featured in many of the artist's works. Whistler's hand placed in his coat could reflect the eighteenth-century mode of portraiture where the gentleman would pose with his hand inside his waistcoat.<sup>904</sup> His tastes for the accoutrements of this century are well-documented in Chapter Three. This portrait may well have been humorous in intent, which would be more likely if it had been intended for a particular recipient. In the event it was exhibited at the French Gallery in December 1933 and bought by Edith Olivier, apparently at the private view.<sup>905</sup>

Whistler painted no self-portraits between 1934 and the *Self-Portrait in Uniform* of May 1940.<sup>906</sup> [Fig.6.13] In comparison to the mannered pose adopted for the 1933 painting, the 1940 self-portrait is a more straightforward rendition and also a more modern one, which may be a result of the rather unconventional way the artist was represented in the Coster photographs. Here Whistler juxtaposes the uniform, signalling the beginning of his military career in the Welsh Guards, with the accoutrements of an artist's creative life, namely the large roll of his paintbrushes in the forefront of the composition. He looks directly at the viewer but with none of the bravura of the 1933 portrait. His serious expression indicates

---

<sup>903</sup>Portrait of James Gibbs by Andrea Soldi, about 1750, [Online] [http://www.nationalgalleries.org/object/PG\\_1373](http://www.nationalgalleries.org/object/PG_1373). Gibbs' St. Martin-in-the-Fields also featured in many of Whistler's works.

<sup>904</sup> Meyer, A., 'Re-dressing Classical Statuary: The Eighteenth-Century "Hand-in-Waistcoat" Portrait', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 77, No. 1, Mar., 1995, pp. 45-63 [Online] <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3046079> [July 22 2014]. See for instance Thomas Gainsborough's self-portrait, circa 1758-1759, National Portrait Gallery, London. *Sir John Vanbrugh* by Thomas Murray, circa 1718, also at the NPG.

<sup>905</sup> Birchall, H., 'Rex Whistler *Self-Portrait* c.1933' [Online] <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/whistler-self-portrait-n05865/text-catalogue-entry> [July 21 2014] The exhibition is not mentioned in the painting's entry in the Catalogue Raisonné, p.25.

<sup>906</sup> There is an unfinished portrait in the archive dating from 1936.

the solemnity of the moment, albeit relieved by the tray of drinks and the glass in his hand. The relaxed elegance of his pose on the sunny balcony overlooking Regent's Park indicates that he has not yet mentally exchanged one kind of commissioned life for another. There is an honesty to this self-portrait that a viewer responds to and it is important to see it for what it is, as an insightful and accomplished work, rather than with the presentiments of his death in the war four years later. An interesting comparison to this painting is William Orpen's *Ready to Start. Self-Portrait* of 1917, painted just before he was to visit the front.<sup>907</sup> Orpen had made his living by portraiture, and had also produced many self-portraits and this, like Whistler's, has the sense of a man caught between two worlds. The bottles, glasses and soda siphon in Orpen's hotel bedroom echo the drinks tray on the terrace balcony, signs of a normal carefree civilian life. Of course it is not known whether Whistler had seen this painting by Orpen, but the similarities between the two are interesting.

Between his involvement in the visual documentation produced by Howard Coster of his working life as an artist and the concept of him using a press cuttings bureau to track his publicity, a different Rex Whistler emerges than the modest, self-effacing character often described by those who knew him. The signs are that this was an individual who was commercially savvy, who understood image management, and had a consciousness about how to promote himself. These are two very contrasting personality traits – a diffident shy man as opposed to a confident, business aware one. In the same sense there is the unfortunate Whistler who was so trapped by commissions that he was deprived of the chance to find his

---

<sup>907</sup> 'Art of the First World War' [Online] <http://www.memorial-caen.fr/10EVENT/EXPO1418/gb/texte/007text.html> [July 22 2014]



own artistic voice and freedom and conversely, the artist who had found his métier, revelled in his success with clients, reaped the rewards, worked hard and played hard, and found this meant he could also share his wealth with others.

The object of suggesting these contrasting views of the man is not to attempt to place him firmly in one category or another. It is more to allow for some different and possibly more contentious views of the artist to be considered. Laurence Whistler certainly allows that his brother found the lure of gracious living tempting and enjoyable and found some fulfilment in his mural painting.<sup>908</sup> But he does not mention the possibility that the artist had an active part to play in the construction and management of his own identity.

## Conclusions

The intention of this chapter has not been to depict Whistler as a workaholic trapped by his commissions. He was sociable, gregarious, enjoyed the 'high life' but could never forget that he was a working artist.<sup>909</sup> He was often working for the people with whom he was socialising. Nor was his working life in his studio any less solitary. He often entertained friends and clients there, and his calendar diaries are full of social engagements and activities, many of which involved those who were or might be commissioning him for work. The actual commissions then

---

<sup>908</sup> Whistler, 1985, pp.214-15.

<sup>909</sup> Thoughts on RW's attitude to money and 'high society' Whistler, 1985, p.214-15.

had to be fitted in around these arrangements.<sup>910</sup> At Plas Newydd it is recorded that he would join in the social activities during the day, sailing, picnics, lunches and dinners and then paint the mural late at night.<sup>911</sup> In this way he was concealing much of the effort that went into the projects which again helped to give the impression that the work was effortless, a kind of sprezzatura performance.

There is a sense in the way some of his patrons referred to Whistler that they felt a sort of ownership of him, as though he was 'our Rex' – and he is often referred to as 'Rex' in this familiar way, even by the authors of articles for, for instance, *Country Life*.<sup>912</sup> There is always an affectionate tone to the proprietorial inference and it is never apparently condescending, although the familiarity inevitably is reductive and makes him appear less serious. It may be an indicator of Whistler's charm, particularly as he was lost to this circle young and tragically, rather than a sign that they regarded him as their plaything. A similar familiarity is still found amongst his aficionados who all refer to him as 'Rex'.<sup>913</sup> Most artists are known by their surnames, e.g. Ravilious, Nash, and not referred to by their first names in this way.

The authors of the latest biography, Hugh and Mirabel Cecil, present an interesting contemporary postscript to this account of the relationship between Whistler and his patrons.<sup>914</sup> Hugh Cecil is the son of Whistler's great friend Lord David Cecil, the academic, historian and author. In turn David Cecil was the son of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marquess

---

<sup>910</sup> Letter Maud Russell to Laurence Whistler 24 February 1946, 'The idea... struck him one evening when he was in the big room and ... worked all through the night, 'Rex crate 2 Mottisfont', RWA.

<sup>911</sup> A large island in the Plas Newydd composition appeared overnight, where the artist painted over several of the ships he'd placed in the harbour. Described in draft of talk given by Lord Anglesey on 8 February 1988, Plas Newydd Archive. Traces of an original mast can still be seen in the sky.

<sup>912</sup> For instance '...a building after Rex's own heart, 'Mottisfont Abbey II' *Country Life*, May 6 1954, in. 'Rex crate 2 Mottisfont', RWA.

<sup>913</sup> The author's experience of speaking to numerous people who are interested in Whistler.

<sup>914</sup> Cecils, 2012. The authors use 'Rex' throughout the book.

of Salisbury and thus the Cecils, past and present, are part of the aristocratic circles that formed Whistler's patrons. In their research for the book the Cecils have utilised their social connections and have been given access to unpublished sources amongst this milieu that may have been more difficult for an outsider to access. This closeness to their subject has made an objective appraisal of the artist's life in this biography more doubtful. There is a real sense of a protective attitude towards the artist, a sort of continued trusteeship by the aristocracy who do not want their version of 'Rex' to be forgotten. It would seem that class, status, and privilege have as much a part to play in the story of Rex Whistler in the twenty-first century as they did in his lifetime.

## CONCLUSION

At the heart of this thesis and indeed all of my research into Rex Whistler has been the question of his omission or exclusion from the canon, and why Whistler, so celebrated in his lifetime, has been ignored by art history since his death. At the outset of the project it seemed important to invest Whistler with the particular qualities that might lead to his reassessment. However the close examination this thesis has afforded its subject has brought to light how inadequate the canon is to contain an artist such as Rex Whistler.

One reason for his absence may be found in the thesis title; his continual dependence on patronage stifled that part of his artistic practice or identity that could have earned him a bigger place in the canon. However this assumes a value judgement that places more credibility on an artist's personal practice than work done for a commission. As the thesis reveals, Whistler found satisfaction through his work for patrons, particularly in mural design, and there is little evidence that he was often frustrated by the lack of opportunity to create his own paintings or indeed exhibit them. The pluralistic nature of his practice and diversity of his commissions make him a difficult individual to categorise and has thus hindered recognition from the art establishment who may see this very diversity as the mark of a lightweight artist.

There is a perception in some quarters that he is indeed merely a 'lightweight curiosity of the twenties and thirties'.<sup>915</sup> However it is evident that he was very serious about his projects, particularly the murals, and did not stint on time or effort in their creation. Lightweight is an interesting term to describe Whistler. Much of his work was accessible, enjoyable, stylish and attractive and in that way could be called light. Perhaps light-hearted would be a better term, or in the parlance of the day 'amusing'. But it was not frivolous; there was too much learning and erudition –no matter how lightly displayed - contained within the work. However it is true that much of it was quite often humorous. This is a source of his appeal to many, but wit can be regarded adversely and even be a barrier to critical acceptance. Defining Whistler as purely an artist of the twenties and thirties brands him as something of a period piece, whose work could not have resonance into the twenty-first century. Much of his work does have one foot in the past, but this does not lessen its appeal and interest. Certainly in his later works there is a much stronger sense that he is painting 'in the moment'.

However one must remember that these later works were created in his late thirties and were Whistler's last. His death at 39 means that he is being judged on barely half a career; less than eighteen years elapsed between the commission for the Tate mural and his final works, created whilst on active service in 1944. This rather poignant set of circumstances has no doubt contributed to the idealised narrative that has grown up around him and which has been partly responsible for his critical neglect. Throughout the thesis this Whistler mythology has been subject to close examination and interrogation. Whistler was indeed an artist of

---

<sup>915</sup> Platzer, D., 'Hugh & Mirabel Cecil *In Search of Rex Whistler: His Life & His Work*', *The British Art Journal*, Vol. XIV No.1, Spring/Summer 2013, p.99.

exceptional ability, but a more truthful and rounded assessment of his career has been given. The rejection of the standard form of monograph for one that would highlight the very modern dichotomy of Whistler's career has helped refocus the lens with which to view him. His career presents us with an unusual combination of the two sides of the artistic coin, the commercial and the independently creative, and he negotiated both these areas seamlessly with knowledge and sophistication. Whistler can be seen as an enigmatic character and his biographers have played on this trope perhaps in the assumption that a sense of mystery makes the artist more of a romantic figure.<sup>916</sup> He certainly wrote very little about his work and the only limited insights into his practice are in the form of letters to friends. The methodology employed in this thesis has been to go back to the source material in the Whistler archive and analyse it systematically for clues it can provide to the artist's creative thinking. Using this to identify and track the various themes and motifs found throughout Whistler's work, particularly in his murals, has enabled a greater understanding and appreciation of the ideas that influenced and inspired him and contributed to his considerable visual vocabulary.

Beyond the traditional concentration on Whistler's professional practice as a muralist this thesis has attempted to 'open up' the story of British art of the period, not just in the creation of murals but in the role that artists played in the fields of advertising and design. There have been gaps in the way Whistler has been understood and this thesis has engaged with these and rectified them. This has centred largely on balancing his 'fine art' career with his work in this newer

---

<sup>916</sup> '...one of the most elusive and enigmatic artists of the inter-war years.' Cecil, H & M, 2012, p.7.

commercial area of advertising and design. By this inclusion a highly successful part of the artist's oeuvre, and one which is still celebrated, has been restituted.<sup>917</sup> The impression often given by his biographers is that Whistler was possessed of almost effortless genius, and seemed to produce works in a sprezzatura manner. The thesis shows the true picture of the sheer number of projects that he was involved in concurrently and, equally importantly, the financial responsibilities that meant he could not refuse them. Some have seen Whistler as a dilettante who could pick and choose projects and who was indulged by his rich clients. The reverse is true: Whistler was acutely aware of his position as a commissioned artist whose income depended on pleasing these patrons. The analysis of the circles of patronage in which he operated reveals a clearer picture of how vulnerable his position was; these circles were so closely linked that he could not afford to risk any displeasure or disappointment in his work and equally in his behaviour. There was no contingency of a private practice to fall back on. The evidence shown in the thesis demonstrates that he was acutely aware of his position and understood the importance of self-fashioning and the power of the media.

Although he is overlooked by the art establishment there is in fact an appreciative audience for Whistler's work. This extends to the virtual world where any basic internet search will bring up features, blogs and images demonstrating interest

---

<sup>917</sup> Both of Whistler's designs were shown at the *Empire Mail: George V and the GPO* Exhibition held at the Guildhall Art Gallery in 2010. This demonstrates a limited but continuing interest in Whistler's commercial work, recently evidenced with the inclusion of his Tate Gallery poster at the London Transport Museum's 2013 exhibition, *Poster Art 150 – London Underground's Greatest Designs*.

from the UK and further afield, including America.<sup>918</sup> The demographic of those who are interested in the artist has widened a little over the last few years, no doubt helped by the 2013 exhibition at Salisbury Museum and the Cecils' biography. This is essential, particularly if Whistler is to appeal to a new, younger contingent. The expiry of copyright in his works at the end of 2014 should also have a positive impact. After a hiatus of 27 years between biographies, five new books are to be published on Whistler over the next two years, four of them by Hugh and Mirabel Cecil.<sup>919</sup> These will bring more aspects of his oeuvre to the general public in an attractive accessible format, but they are unlikely to help his case with serious art historians.

The new information presented in this thesis regarding Whistler's income also sheds light onto the careers of other professional artists of the time. This repositioning of Whistler alongside and amongst a group of artists has highlighted the interconnectedness of his career with his contemporaries. Although these artists may not have embraced such a wide range of work or shared all his particular stylistic preferences, these connections mean that Whistler is not so far removed from the currents of twentieth-century art as the existing narratives

---

<sup>918</sup> Tackett, John J., 'More of the Artistry of Rex Whistler' [Online] <http://tdclassicist.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/more-of-artistry-of-rex-whistler.html> [Accessed November 12 2013]. P. Gaye Tapp, 'Rex Whistler & The MASQUE, Part 1 -3' [Online] <http://littleaugury.blogspot.co.uk/> [Accessed August 25 2014]

<sup>919</sup> Cecil, H & M, *Rex Whistler the illustrated letters* publication Autumn 2016; *Rex Whistler Inspiration* consisting of two volumes: Cecil, H., *Family, Friendships, Landscapes*, by Hugh Cecil, and Cecil, H & M., *Love and War*, publication Spring 2015, and Cecil, H & M., *Book Illustrations and Advertisements*, publication autumn 2015. All these are to be published by The Pimpernel Press, details of books [Online] [https://www.dropbox.com/s/54pphj1itemzlg0/Pimpernel\\_catalogue2014.pdf](https://www.dropbox.com/s/54pphj1itemzlg0/Pimpernel_catalogue2014.pdf) [August 11 2014]. Due for publication by Pan Macmillan in 2015 is Thomasson, A., *A Curious Friendship*, which tells the story of the friendship between Edith Olivier and Rex Whistler – 'the story of a Bluestocking and Bright Young Thing; a friendship that spanned the generations and was as vital to both as it was tragic in its ending.' Description [Online] Johnson & Alcock Literary Agency London Book Fair Rights List 2014 [Johnson & Alcock LBF 2014](#) [August 11 2014]



would have us believe. One of the main contributions to knowledge of this thesis is a constant comparative focus which removes Whistler from the solo position favoured by the biographies and places him firmly amongst his contemporaries. This focus is particularly significant with regard to his standing as a muralist and relocates him as one of an extensive group of artists working in this field in the interwar period. The position of this thesis is that Whistler's work in murals is integral to any account of mural painting, particularly for private clients, in this period. Many other artists working in this area, and indeed mural painting itself, have suffered from critical neglect and the story of British art of the twentieth century is incomplete without their inclusion.

If admission to the canon is dependent on quality, in itself a sensitive issue, then how is Whistler's work to be judged? He is indisputably an excellent draughtsman. His portraits, particularly the later ones, are sensitive and honest – his *Self-portrait in Uniform* (1940) being a prime example. His murals are often a tour de force and as shown particularly in the sweep and visual richness of Plas Newydd, can be quite overwhelming. His insistence on covering every surface of the appointed room could be equally overpowering but somehow the schemes are cohesive and elegant. These 'fine art' aspects of his oeuvre are those on which art historians will judge him. His work in advertising and design could perhaps be assessed by design historians but that has not happened thus far. This question of where Whistler would fit into a new narrative of British art is problematic. Despite this project establishing a closer relationship between Whistler and other artists of the time, the fact remains that he had a very distinctive, singular vision. None of his contemporaries were so heavily influenced by the art of the past specifically that of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and few shared his intense fascination

and expertise with *trompe l'oeil*.<sup>920</sup> Few, if any, were working in such a wide range of creative disciplines. But these characteristics should not exclude him from a revised narrative, and contribute greatly to his interest to future scholarship. Individuality can and should be celebrated. Unusually, despite a working practice that was complicated by a predominance of commissions Whistler's individuality was far from constrained and he largely succeeded in choosing his own style and subjects in his work for clients. Whistler does not conform to the standard criteria that are used by art history to judge artists and his contribution to twentieth-century art should be appraised and recognised in its multi-faceted entirety.

Whistler can be seen as a purely nostalgic artist, speaking in an out-moded voice but his work had a contemporary wit and appeal, much of which still resonates in the twenty-first century. This wit was clearly discernible in his work in advertising, its humour and lightness appealing to a broad section of the public. This of course made his work popular, another term that sits uncomfortably with the values of the canon. His artistic foundations were classical but, like many artists of the time he was traversing the boundaries between fine art and commercial art, defying the deeply entrenched canonical belief that these genres can only exist in opposition to each other. As has been stated earlier, humour was an integral part of Whistler's creative vision and it would be short-sighted not to acknowledge the role it played throughout his projects and how it added to his attraction. In his commercial work the humorous content never overwhelmed the rightness of the design; the advertiser's message was always in evidence. The murals created for private commissions could be seen as the antithesis of this commercial practice. However,

---

<sup>920</sup> Felix Harbord (1906- 1981), Martin Battersby (1914-1982) and Felix Kelly (1914-1994) who were all concerned with *trompe l'oeil* in their artistic practice would be the exceptions.

here too he employed his keen observational wit with a sophistication and subtlety that personalised the commission to the individual clients, creating murals in which the rich mix of meaning and the quality of design made them much more than mere decorative ensembles. But humour was and is just part of the appeal; Whistler intended his art to be enjoyed and had the gift of creating work that was engaging and accessible and which, in turn, delighted and charmed the viewer. It found popularity across all audiences, both private and public. The important thing to note is that he used a similar language in whatever genre he was working in and made no distinction or demarcation between them. This was in contrast to many of his contemporaries who were also working in both fields but employed a very different language in their fine art practice than in their commercial activities.<sup>921</sup> Whistler worked with an understanding of the popular that embraced both.

As Whistler's story demonstrates there is a richer history to be explored amongst many lesser known artists of the interwar period. The fact that he has been marginalised is very telling and demonstrates the deficiencies of the narratives that we currently have. If the driving force of twentieth-century art is constantly seen as avant-garde and modernist, then we lose sight of those, like Whistler, who do not conform to this model. There has been a gradual shift in taste or opinion within art history that has allowed for artists such as Eric Ravilious and Edward Bawden to have undergone re-evaluation and reassessment; could there be a similar realignment for Rex Whistler? But what is this shift of perception that can allow an artist previously disregarded to be brought back into the fold? What

---

<sup>921</sup> See Chapter Five for a contextual analysis of other artists working in these areas alongside Whistler.

criteria need to be met? Is it, as Hauser suggests more to do with certain artists of the past being perceived as reflecting certain preoccupations of the present and thus attaining contemporary relevance?<sup>922</sup> To follow this line of thinking means that for Whistler to be acknowledged his work suddenly needs to find some echo or resonance with current vagaries of taste, fashion and context. This seems a reductive viewpoint for an artist possessed of such originality. Due to the way Whistler has been perceived and categorised the significance of his contribution to twentieth-century art has failed to be recognised. The purpose of this thesis has been to acknowledge the deficiencies of that viewpoint and act as a corrective to it and ultimately to contribute to a broader project of enquiry and investigation into the unique talents of Rex Whistler.

---

<sup>922</sup> 'Each generation judges the artistic endeavours of former ages...with renewed interest and a fresh eye only when they are in line with its own objectives.' Hauser, A, 'The Sociological Approach: The Concept of Ideology in the History of Art' in Frascina, F. and Harrison, C. (ed.) *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, London: Harper and Row, 1982, p.237.

## **APPENDIX I**

### **REX WHISTLER CAREER CHRONOLOGY**

Important dates and career overview, with listings of works & commissions. This is mainly in note form as further details can be found in the thesis chapters.

Paintings listed may be in oil, watercolour or Indian ink and watercolour. 'C R' is Catalogue Raisonné. Only more significant works have been listed, where they can be identified as such.

**1905** born Eltham, Kent, 24<sup>th</sup> June.

**1912** (aged 7) first entry for Royal Drawing Society, wins award for next 12 years

**1919** Haileybury School. Meets Ronald Fuller and illustrates his poems.

**1922** (aged 17) Royal Academy Schools as probationer. Fails probation terms and leaves. Offered place at the Slade School of Art by Professor Tonks and starts in the Autumn term. Meets Stephen Tennant and Oliver Messel as fellow students.

**1923** At the Slade. Wins second prize in the Summer Composition Competition.

Visits Tennant's home; Wilsford Manor.

Portrait of Mrs Vlasto, Whistler's first commissioned portrait in oils.

Slade Scholarship awarded for his second and third years at Slade.

## 1924

At the Slade. Selected to paint murals at the Highway Boys' Club, Shadwell with Mary Adshead in Summer term. He paints three panels, Adshead two, which are all put up in August. Reviewed in *The Times* September 24 1924.

Paintings: Wins First Prize in the 'Painting from the Life' competition at the Slade for *Nude Female Study* and Second Prizes for *Painting from Life (Head)* and *Nude Male Study*. Additional paintings this year include *Henry Brocken Meets Annabel Lee* and *The Sleeping Beauty in Victorian Dress*.

35 illustrations for *Arabella in Africa* by Frank Swettenham (published 1925.)

Writes and illustrates a book of selected poems, *An Anthology of Mine*, for his own use (published posthumously.)

During summer parents move to Warren Lodge, Farnham Common, Bucks.

Leaves London in October for first trip abroad to travel with Stephen Tennant to Paris, Switzerland and eventually to San Remo, Italy for the winter.

## 1925

At the Slade but with leave of absence to continue Italian sojourn. In Italy, he meets Edith Olivier when she joins the party in March. Visits Florence, Pisa and

Rome for the first time around Easter. This was a five day solo visit by train: two days in Rome, a few hours in Pisa then two days in Florence.

Completes the proscenium arch wall at Shadwell, after funding has been found from Duveen. Inspiration from Italy evident. This is a solo endeavour, as stipulated by Tonks.

Returns to Slade in May.

Paintings : *The Trial Scene from the Merchant of Venice* [Slade Summer Composition Prize winner] *The Old City – San Remo* Bought by Archie Balfour and possibly also *Green Dusk for Dreams*. Slade Second Prize in Figure Drawing, which was bought by staff at Slade. [C R p.36]. Paints *Bussana Vecchia Destroyed by an Earthquake*; *Two Illustrations to Henry Brocken by Walter de la Mare*; *Medusa*.

Visits Edith Olivier at the Daye House and sees Wilton and draws the Palladian Bridge.

Bookplate for Ronald Fuller.

## **1926 (aged 21)**

Final year at the Slade, finishing in the Spring term.

First visits to Tate Gallery Refreshment Room in January with Tonks. Sees room with Aitken and Pearson. Submits sketches in March for mural decoration and is selected to carry it out. Starts work on the Tate mural on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. Nan West assists.

Visits Stowe, where Laurence is pupil.

Eight illustrations for *Mildred*, and for a collection of essays, one illustration for *The Treasure Ship* ed. Lady Cynthia Asquith and several for three editions of *English Life*.

*The Last Supper*, a Slade prize winner, bought by Sir Augustus Daniel.

General Strike. (see account in 1926 Diary)

Entries in blue are from 'Rex Whistler Account Book 1927-1934'.<sup>923</sup> This gives detailed income and expenditure for the first seven years of his career. Where contemporary monetary equivalents have been given the figures have been arrived at through the online service 'Measuring Worth'.<sup>924</sup>

## 1927

Leaves home and moves to 20 Fitzroy St., studio obtained by Edith Olivier.

Summer on Riviera with Tennant. Meets Cecil Beaton. At Wilsford that summer meets Osbert, Sacheverell & Edith Sitwell, William Walton, Zita Jungman etc [photo on Wilsford Bridge]. Meets Brian Howard, Siegfried Sassoon.

Continues painting Tate Gallery mural. [Sept four payments of £20 from Charles Aitken](#), [Oct £180 from Duveen \[£8380\]](#) Completed and opened November.

Reviewed in national and regional press and magazines.

---

<sup>923</sup> Held in the Rex Whistler Archive (RWA).

<sup>924</sup> The calculation of historical monetary value versus present day is inexact. Laurence Whistler corresponded with the Lloyds Bank Economics Dept in 1983 to compute the relative income figures. The Bank states that they derived the figures using the Retail Price Index. Laurence uses these amounts in the biography and so this method has been used in the thesis from the 'Measuring Worth website.' Reference: Lawrence H. Officer, "Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1830 to Present," MeasuringWorth, 2011.  
URL: [www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/](http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/) 07.09.2011



Cover and insets for *The Love Child* by Edith Olivier. Illustration (headpiece) for *The Sphere* and illustrations for *English Life* magazine. Possibly four designs for a mural for Lady Castlerosse at Culross St., LW unsure of date. [No payments recorded.](#)

There is a 'Palladio Notebook' which may date from around this time.

Paintings: *An Oriental Quayside Scene*; *The Honeymoon*.

There is scarcely any other work done this year, according to the C.R., apart from the Tate mural.

[Income for this year has been included in the following tax year.](#)

## 1928

January - Tate floods, damaging mural.

Commissioned to paint mural for Sir Courtauld Thomson at Dorneywood, meets him in January and starts sketching in Feb., also pencil portrait [unlisted in CR as unknown until 2009]- [Jan £60 & Oct £10](#). Bookplate for Osbert Sitwell. [£10/-/-](#)

*Samson destroying the Philistines in the Temple of Dagon*, exhibited at Imperial Gallery of Art.

[May £28 or £2/8/0 \(difficult to read figure\) from Imperial Gallery](#). Spends 15 weeks at British School at Rome from April to August. [£40 April - Evelyn Shaw \(BSR\), presumably the British School at Rome Honorary Scholarship funding. £1800 in current value](#). Sketches around Rome. Assists architectural Scholars with

drawings. Meets Lord Berners and paint together in Rome, Tivoli, Spoleto etc.

Paints *The Baths at Caracalla; The Temple of Remus from the Palatine; Caves at the Villa Brancaccio; From Lord Berners Window; Bosco Sacro; Castel Gandolfo and Lake Albano; View of Rocca di Cave; Drawn in Train to Aulla, Midnight; The Carraras from Bocca di Magra*. Two or more paintings untraced but mentioned in 1928 diary.

Visits painter Aubrey Waterfield at Fortezza della Brunella castle in Aulla.

Watercolour sketches.

Panel for chimney piece, *The Story of Jonah* for Cynthia and Alastair Wedderburn completed at BSR. £31/10/-. [about £1400].

£40 from Beaton [?]

Sketch portraits: Mark Bonham Carter, Miss Susan Lowndes, Self-Portrait. [Many of the 'Sketch Portraits' were in ink, pencil or watercolour and were given to the sitters.]

On return visits Renishaw (home of the Sitwells) for first time.

Cover and insets for *As Far as Jane's Grandmother's* by Edith Olivier.

Posters for the London Museum £31/10/- [see above] and The Tate Gallery (featuring the mural) £31/10/-. Rent April and October £30.

Designs monument/headstone to Lady Grey, Wilsford churchyard, Wilts.

Designs mural monument in stone to Vere Benett-Stanford, Norton Bavant church, Wilts.

Every few months £4 guineas paid out to Gargoyle Club – membership?

Associated work from Sir Courtauld Thomson's commission at Dorneywood exhibited at the Claridge Gallery in December.

**Earnings April 1927 – April 1928      approx. £250/ £11,000.**

## **1929**

Visits Bavaria, guest of Stephen Tennant. Sees the Amalienburg, and Residenz Theatre.

Commissioned by Cresset Press to illustrate a special edition of *Gulliver's Travels*, 26 illustrations. Published 1930. **£195, paid in 1930.**

Introduced to Edmund Blunden which leads to invitation from Kenneth Rae (Cobden Sanderson) to illustrate *The New Forget-Me-Not*. Cover etc for *Children of Hertha* by Laurence Whistler, cover and 4 plates for *The Poets on the Poets*, cover and ends for *The Third Route* by Philip Sassoon **May £25**, *An Angler's Paradise*, and *Harriet Hume* by Rebecca West.

**Cobden Sanderson June £116**

*Glaucus and Scylla*, large mantelpiece panel for clients in USA.

Paintings: *The Exodus*; *Faringdon House* [Berners estate]; *His Majesty's Bath Chair/Corridor in a Palace* [exhibited Goupil 1930]; *Weston Hall, Towcester, Northants*.

[Sacheverell Sitwell's house. Exhibited 1936]; *'Rome'*. **Imperial Gallery June**

**£31/10/-**. [This is c£1400 which seems very high]. C R p.16 Exhibited at the

Imperial Gallery of Art, April 1929. [His third visit to Rome was after this date so it must have been painted from sketch or memory.]

Portraits: *Dame Edith Sitwell*. Sketch portraits: *Edmund Blunden* and *William Walton* [NPG]; *Mrs G A Martinelli*; *An Old Lady, in Death*.

*Country Life* April £8/8/-.

Invited to Rome to paint as guest of Lord Berners for 5 weeks July, travelling back through France. Paintings from trip: *The Arch of Constantine and the Forum ;Tivoli from the Road* [exhibited 1930]; *Still Life*; *St Gregorio near Palatine*; *The Piazza of St. Peter's*; *An Urn with Flowers* ; *In the Salone, Aulla* ;*Chartres the North Porch and Old Bishop's Palace*; *Caudebec France* [see 1930]; *The Square at Caudebec*; portrait *Lord Berners*.

Meets Caroline Paget at Edith Olivier's house.

Designs for *Wake up and Dream* Cochran Revue. £40 March and £40 May.

Commissioned to do series of 19 advertising posters for Shell. Payment Jan £10/10/- . Stuart Advertising Co. March £21, Apr £65/1/-, Oct £154.

Illustrations for *The Epicurean*; *Vogue* £25; *The London Hospital Gazette* £12.

Christmas cards designed for Faber & Faber £6/6/-; the Editor of *Vogue* and Sir Philip Sassoon's Air Squadron.

**Earnings April 1928 – April 29     £273 = £12,000**

## **1930**

Painting mural at 19 Hill Street, Mayfair for Captain Euan Wallace and wife Barbara [daughter of Lutyens]. Aug £100, Dec £200, Nov £100. £400 total = £18000

Poster for the *Four Georges* exhibition at Sassoon's house in Park Lane.

[March Goupil Gallery £22/10/-](#). Work exhibited in 'Decorative Work and Stage & other Designs' The Goupil Gallery, 5 Regent St, January 1930. '*Design for permanent Curtain for Theatre*. £40'; '*Corridor in a Palace*. £36.'

[July Imperial Gallery £35](#). C R p.16 lists *The Temple of Remus from the Palatine*, 1928 [so painted during his BSR sojourn] as 'exhibited in the Imperial Gallery of Art March 1930', as was *Tivoli from the Road*, although that was probably unsold as remains in the family collection.

Commissioned by Sir Philip Sassoon to paint mural for dining room at Port Lympne, Kent. (£800 Ref LW. Completed 1932).

Sees Ashcombe with Cecil Beaton, who leases it later that year. Designs alterations, furniture and mural decoration for Ashcombe. [\[Dec. Cecil £10/12/4- unclear\]](#)

Paintings: *The Abated Flood*; *A Bunch of Flowers*; *The Elders*.

Sketch portraits: *Miss Peggy Morrison*; *Mrs Belloc Lowndes* (twice).

Laurence goes up to Balliol College, Oxford. [\[regular payments out, exam fees etc\]](#)

Designs for Milton's *Comus*, *Cochran's 1930 Revue*, and *Evergreen*. [Cochran April £175, Sept £40, Dec £40](#).

Illustrations for *Desert Islands* by Walter de la Mare; cover etc for *The Triumphant Footman* by Edith Olivier; frontispiece *Dr Donne and Gargantua* by Osbert Sitwell; cover for *Alexander Pope* by Edith Sitwell; *The Friend of Shelley* by H J Massingham; *Leigh Hunt* by Edmund Blunden and *Cannibal Coryton* by Robinson. [July & Sept Cresset Press £50 and £151 \[does not tally with LW\]. Payment 'Dick' Feb £65/15/-](#).

June Cobden Sanderson £10/10/-.

Advertisements for Shell. Stuarts Advtg Jan £84, Apr £26.

Illustration for *The Strand* magazine. Bookplate for Duchess of Westminster.

Envelope for National Trust. May £10/10/-.

Sept Payment from Lady Ancaster £40?

Victor Cazalet £6/6/- ? [Tory MP]

'Caudebec France' exhibited at Goupil Gallery, November.

Paying for Romeike & Curtice Press Cuttings service from c 1930.

**Earnings April 1929- April 1930      £1012 = £51,000**

## **1931**

Visits Switzerland. Visits Paris with Malcolm Bullock.

Illustrates *The New Keepsake* compendium, cover and 24 headpieces, May £50; Aug £100 cover and seven plates *The Traveller's Companion* by Bloomfield Oct £85/1/- ;cover and 13 plates for *Green Outside* by Elizabeth Godley June £15/15/- ;cover etc. *Dwarf's Blood* by Edith Olivier; cover etc *Broome Stages* by Clemence Dane June £25; *The Red King Dreams* by Crump.

Paintings: *The Last Supper*.

Sketch portrait: *Laurence Whistler*. [Very little painting this year, according to CR]

Continues to paint Port Lympne mural.

Designs for *Cochran's 1931 Revue*. March £95.

June Imperial Gallery £20. May Bumpus - London booksellers - £87/6/-; L notes in Acct Book possible sale of 'Forget-me-Not' originals.

Illustrations for *Farrago* and the *Radio Times*.

Sassoon Oct. £500.

Series of advertisements for Shell Oil – 'Reversible Faces' Feb £26. April Stuarts Advtg £40. Bookplates for John Wallace, Kenneth Rae, Duff and Lady Diana Cooper, and Lord Rothschild.

£286 paid to his mother = c. £15,000. Payments to Laurence at Oxford from 1930 - 34.

**Earnings 1930-31    £1025 approx./ £50,000**

## **1932**

Cover and 27 illustrations for *The Next Volume* for Edward James 25 copies on handmade paper published by the James Press Oct £200 ; cover and 12 headpieces *Armed October* for Laurence Whistler; cover and 5 plates *Down the Garden Path* by Beverley Nichols March £60 ; cover etc. *Four Fantastic Tales* by Hugh Walpole, and covers for 8 other books.

Painting: Large work *Ulysses' Farewell to Penelope*, for Sir Malcolm Bullock; *At the French Exhibition; Conversation Piece at Penns in the Rocks, Sussex* - large painting for Duchess of Wellington [also nine associated sketches].

Designs including eleven sketches for two very large decorative urns for Samuel Courtauld.

Wall decoration, replicating chinoiserie wallpaper, to frame Picasso's *L'Enfant au Pigeon*, also for Samuel Courtauld.

Studies for very large panel for Haddon Hall, Derbyshire, the Duke of Rutland.

Catalogue illustrations for Fortnum & Mason.

March Shell 'roughs' £10/10/-.

*The Vale of Aylesbury* painted for Shell as poster and advertising image.

Shell 'Upside Down' [RW's description] £136/10/-

Designs Clovelly Toile du Jouy fabric April Mrs Ruthven £50, designs also used by Wedgwood pottery.

Poster for the *Age of Walnut* exhibition at Park Lane (Sassoon's house). £30

Designs for *The Infanta's Birthday* ballet.

Illustrations for three editions of *Country Life*.

Completes mural for Sir Philip Sassoon at Port Lympne in Kent. £800 (c. £40,000)

Bookplate for Lord and Lady Aberconway. Bookplate for Dame Adelaide Livingstone. Christmas cards designed for Sir Philip Sassoon and others.

£291 paid to his mother = c. £15,000

**Earnings for 1931-32      £1403 (c. £80,000)**



## 1933

Restoration of part of ceiling in Double Cube room at Wilton for Lord Herbert.

Portraits: *Self-portrait* [now at Tate Gallery] and portraits of *Edith Olivier*; *Penelope Dudley Ward*; *Lady Blessington*. Begins portrait of *Penelope and Angela Dudley Ward*. [Falls in love with Penelope],

Paintings: completes *Ulysses* for Bullock. [Gift]

Sketch portraits: *David Horner*; *Marquis of Granby*; *Dorothy Wellesley*; *Cecil Beaton*; *Group with a Portrait – Penelope Dudley Ward*.

Completes panel for Duke of Rutland at Haddon Hall, Derbyshire to replace an older work in the Long Gallery.

Tercentenary pageant at Wilton, dresses up as Inigo Jones and constructs model church (now at PN).

Cover and eleven illustrations for *The Lord Fish* by Walter de la Mare; cover etc. and nine illustrations for *A Thatched Roof* by Beverley Nichols; cover etc. and nine decorations for *Your Name is Lamia* by Edward James; and cover etc. for six other books. [Book-wrappers £18-25](#) [L&U p.175]

Series of 24 advertising images for BP. Series of architectural advertising illustrations for Shell. Christmas catalogue Fortnum & Mason. Illustrations for *Nash's Magazine* and *The Financial News*.

One of five guests, including Edith Olivier and T E Lawrence at wedding of Siegfried Sassoon to Hester Gatty.

**Earnings for 1932-33    £1103 = £63,000.**

## 1934

Visits Rome with Kenneth Rae Mar - April. Visits Poussin's tomb.

Portraits: *Valerian Wellesley*; *Viscountess Hambleden*; *Mrs Gubbay* [Sassoon's cousin]; *Self-portrait* (Sold by Arthur Tooth 1935, now in NPG) .Completes portrait of Dudley Ward sisters, hung at Royal Academy Summer Exhibition and selected best in show by many critics. [March £200](#).

Paintings: Completes *Conversation Piece* for Duchess of Wellington. [June £200?](#)  
*Trent Park, Middlesex: The Terrace* [Sir Philip Sassoon's estate] [exhibited 1936];  
*Long Cross House, Chertsey* [commissioned]; *Girl's Head beside a Skull* [probably for Lady Elizabeth Clyde]; *Saint Toughie* (portrait of Angela Dudley Ward).

Sketch portraits: Angela Dudley Ward (two); Miss Penelope and Miss Angela Dudley Ward; Miss Judy Montagu.

Designs for *Fidelio* and the *Marriage of Figaro* at Sadlers Wells Opera, Covent Garden.

Designs for *Streamline*, a Cochran Revue [May £120](#); *Reunion in Vienna*; and costumes for *The Tempest* at Stratford.

Designs *Neptune Carpet* for Edward James, completed 1935.

Cover etc. and 5 plates for *A Village in a Valley* for Beverley Nichols; cover etc for *The Silver Collar Boy* by Constance Wright; cover etc. for nine other books including for Lord Berners and Isak Dinesen.

Catalogue and entertaining leaflets for Fortnum & Mason. Leaflets for Imperial Airways.

Illustrations for *The Financial News* and 3 editions of *Nash's Magazine*. Bookplate for Patrick Lawrence. Relationship starts with Caroline Paget.

Has an affair (and probably loses virginity, at age 29) with Tallulah Bankhead.

In September travels with Dorothy Wellesley, Duchess of Wellington to Aulla, Italy.

Parents move to Bolebec House, Whitchurch and he supports them financially from this time on. Designs alterations for house. £291 paid to his mother = c. £17,000.

End of Accts Book and thus the income figures for remaining years are from tax records obtained by Laurence Whistler.

**Earnings 1933-34   £1130 = £65,500**

## **1935**

Illustrations for new edition of Hans Andersen's *Fairy Tales and Legends*, including cover and c.60 illustrations. Covers for five other books.

Paintings: *Wilton House, Wilts and the Palladian Bridge* (painted specifically for the 'Country Seats and Manor Houses Exhibition' Leicester Galleries) ; *Cranborne Manor, Dorset*; *Faringdon House, Berks*; *Rushbrooke Hall, Suffolk*; *Creslow Hall, Bucks* (all shown at the above exhibition, dates of works uncertain); pair of paintings of Faringdon House; *The Foreign Bloke* (exhibited at Festival of Contemporary Arts, Bath then presented to Victoria Art Gallery); *Girl with a Red Rose* (exhibited at Tooth's Gallery and reproduced as limited edition print); *Hot Night* (also exhibited at Tooth's and sold in Jan, price unknown)

Portraits: *Mrs Henry Whistler; Lady Caroline Paget; Dorothy Wellesley (Duchess of Wellington); Viscount Wimborne; Cecil Beaton.*

Sketch portraits: *Osbert Sitwell; Lady Caroline Paget (two).*

Designed a St Valentine's Day Greetings Telegram for the Post Office. 40,000 were sold on the day.

Designs for *The Rake's Progress* for Ninette de Valois.

Designs for *Victoria Regina*, US production for Gilbert Miller (£1000 L's note).

Travels to US for opening in Washington and New York.

Mural for Duff and Diana Cooper at Gower Street.

Mural for Chips Channon at Belgrave Square.

Decorations at Trent Park, Middlesex – Sir Philip Sassoon's main estate.

Illustrations for *Nash's Magazine* (eleven monthly articles); *Harper's Bazaar*; *Vogue*; *The Tatler* and *Good Housekeeping*.

Christmas catalogue and leaflets for Fortnum & Mason.

Meets Virginia Woolf and Duncan Grant in London.

**Earnings 1934-35    £1438 = £82,000**

## **1936**

Requested by Lutyens to paint eight mural panels for staircase hall at 36 Hill Street for Baroness Porcelli.

First visit to Plas Newydd with Caroline to plan mural for Lord Anglesey's dining room. (c. £1000). Also carries out external alterations to the house.

Travels to Austria, Italy and France with Caroline.

Paintings: *West House, Aldwick* (Duff & Diana Cooper's country house), *Pilgrim's Hall, Essex*; *Quendon Hall, Essex*; *Ashcombe* (image later used as jacket of Beaton's book); *The Studio, Ashcombe*; *The Buckingham Road in the Rain* (exhibited French Gallery, W.1). Portraits: Self-Portrait unfinished; *Sonny Grant* (shown Leicester Galleries 1940); *Mrs Hamlyn* (Clovelly Court).

Designs for *Pride and Prejudice* for Gilbert Miller.

Cover etc. and eight illustrations for *The Emperor Heart* by Laurence Whistler; cover and eight illustrations for *Kingdoms for Horses* by James Agate; cover etc six other books.

Illustrations for *Vogue*; *Good Housekeeping*.

Booklet and advertising image for Arthur Guinness & Son. Three bookplates including one for the Book Society.

*Weston Hall, Towcester, Northants* (1929) and *Trent Park, Middlesex: The Terrace* (1934) exhibited at Leicester Galleries, October. Both these paintings are listed in the C R as being owned by the respective families so probably commissioned.

**Earnings 1935-36 £1650 = £94,000**

## 1937

Continues Plas Newydd mural.

Paintings: *Eros and Psyche; Nude; Flower Decoration*. Portraits: *Marquis of Anglesey; the Lady Patricia Douglas; Lady Caroline Paget* (sold by Tooth's gallery).

Designs for English production of *Victoria Regina* and *Old Music*.

Paints *Conversation Piece at the Daye House* for Edith Olivier.

*Conversation Piece: The Royal Family*. Portrait in pencil of King and Queen with princesses Elizabeth and Margaret [Royal Collections]

Sketch portraits: The Hon Anne McLaren; Miss Peggy Morrison; Nurse Eileen Kelly; Arthur Waley.

Illustrations for *Flowers in House and Garden* by Constance Spry.

Advertising images for Arthur Guinness.

Illustrations for *The Times; Nash's Magazine; Vogue; Harper's Bazaar; Radio Times ; Tatler*.

Mural at Brook House for Lord Louis & Lady Edwina Mountbatten.

Moves to 29 Fitzroy Square.

Triptych at Brompton Oratory (private commission for Chapel of the Martyrs).  
[Stolen in 1970s].

Presented to King George V at St James's Palace and visit to Balmoral. [Had known the Duke and Duchess of York before the accession] Designs royal ciphers and bookplate for Queen Elizabeth.

Moves parents to Walton Canonry in the Close at Salisbury. To Austria with Caroline for marriage of Elizabeth Paget to Raimund von Hofmannsthal, then to Venice to stay with Lady Juliet Duff.

**Earnings 1936-37      £1967 = £108,000**

**1938**

Finishes Plas Newydd mural September.

Furniture designed for Lady Diana Cooper.

Meets Winston Churchill for second time at Coopers. [Had painted with Churchill previously]

Commissioned to paint mural for drawing room at Mottisfont Abbey (£1100) [LW comments that this was unusual activity so soon after Munich crisis....p.224 L&U]

Completed Brompton Triptych altarpiece. (£300).

Paintings: *Hatley Park, Cambs.* (commission); *Knebworth, Herts.* ; *Godmersham Park, Kent*, commission for the Trittons; *The Lake at Trent Park*,

Portraits: *Hon. Rosanagh Crichton*; *Lady Caroline Paget*; *The Sixth Marquis of Anglesey*;

*Conversation Piece: The Family of the Sixth Marquis of Anglesey.*

Designs ceiling painting for Sir Alfred and Lady Beit [photo *Country Life* 1939]

Cover etc *Sir John Vanbrugh* by Laurence Whistler and two other books.

Illustration for the *Tatler*. Souvenir booklet for The Assembly Rooms Bath.

**Earnings 1937-38      £1874 = £101,000**

## 1939

Continues at Mottisfont.

Paints clavichord for Tom Goff [photo *Country Life* 1948]. [Now lost]

Paintings: *Plas Newydd, Isle of Anglesey from the North-West; In the Wilderness.*

Portraits: *Lady Pamela Berry; Edith Olivier; Elizabeth Maugham.*

Sketch portrait: *Miss Rosemary Salmond.*

War declared. Tries for Territorial Army. Meets with General at Southern Command through Duff Cooper. Kenneth Clark assembles body of War Artists.

Does not apply. Name appears on list in 1940 but not approved. Applies to Grenadier Guards, eventually accepted by Welsh Guards.

In May Designs for Royal Box at Covent Garden performance attended by King and Queen in honour of French President's visit. Last stages of pre War diplomacy.

Moves out of Fitzroy Square. Affair with Ursula Ridley [Lutyens' daughter].

Designs for *Luck of the Devil* at Players' Theatre and *The Sleeping Princess* for Vic-Wells Ballet.

Calendar for Wiggins Teape. Covers etc. for three books. Political illustration for *Illustrated*. Bookplate for Hon Mrs Pleydell Bouverie.

**Earnings 1938-39    £1221 = £64,000**



## 1940

Portraits: *Laura Ridley* (2); *Hon. Anne McLaren* (3) daughter of Lady Christabel Aberconway; *Viscountess Ridley*; *Lady Elizabeth von Hofmannsthal* (2); *the Hon. John McLaren* ;*Self Portrait in Uniform* ;*Portrait Group at Colchester* [Welsh Guards]; *Portrait Group at Sandown Park* [Welsh Guards]; *(Major)Jock Lewes* [Welsh Guards]; *David Vaughan* [Welsh Guards]; *Gilbert Ryle*.

Paintings: *Claremont, Surrey*; *The Park School, Wilton*; *Bierton Vicarage* ; *Bierton Church* ;*The Entrance Gates to the Daye House*. *Landscape target* for Welsh Guards.

Designs glass engraving for Robert Tritton, *The Godmersham Goblet*, and a bookplate for his wife.

Political illustration for *Illustrated*.

Lent studio overlooking Regent's Park by von Hofmannstahls.

Designs *Wise Virgins* for Sadler's Wells, music William Walton, Margot Fonteyn dances.

Welsh Guards training camps. Paints whilst training

Battle of Britain.

Father dies.

Sketch Portraits: *The Artist's Father*, *Henry Whistler, after Death*

Attends interview for a job in Camouflage Unit, but declines the job.

Selected for Tank Battalion of Welsh Guards, training in Wilts. Christmas card designed for the Welsh Guards.

## 1941

Paintings: *Burley Wood, Hants; Lavington Park Sussex ;Two Drawings for Soldiers' Kit Lay-Out* [Welsh Guards]

Portrait: *The Master Cook* [Welsh Guards].

Sketch portraits: Billy Wallace, Peter Wallace [Barbie Wallace's sons]; *George Sassoon*.

Ten illustrations for *Konigsmark* by A.E.W Mason and 23 illustrations for *The Last of Uptake* by Simon Harcourt-Smith.

Designs for *Les Sylphides*.

Bookplate. Cover etc. for *Country Moods and Tenses* by Edith Olivier and *A House That Was Loved* by Kenyon.

Christmas card for the Welsh Guards.

## 1942

Paintings: *The Palladian Bridge and River, Wilton; The Hall and Staircase, Mells; The Daye House, Wilton; Wilton Rectory (2);The Daye House, from the River Side*. The Wilton paintings all painted *en plein air*.

Decorations for Officer's Mess, including a Dali pastiche, a 'Poussin', a 'Titian' and ten other paintings, painted directly on the wall (saved by the Welsh Guards).

Portraits: *Hon Robert Cecil, Lt Richard Whiskard* [Welsh Guards], *Lady Studholme, Hon Alexander Thynne, Edith Olivier on a Day-bed, Portrait Group: Officer's Mess Tent* [Welsh Guards].

Sketch Portraits: *Brigadier Windsor Lewis, Lady Caroline Paget*.

Works on series of 29 advertising drawings (from 1940-1944) for Rothmans.

Designs for Cochran's Revue *Big Top* and the re-drawn drop cloth, scenery and costumes for *The Rake's Progress*. Two covers for books.

## 1943

Guards mobilized.

Paintings: *Landscape near Thetford* [en plein air with self-portrait]; *Heytesbury House, Wilts* [Sassoon's house]; *A Drawing on a Chart* [sketch on patrol].

Portraits: *The Fifteenth Earl and Countess of Pembroke; Juliet Henley*.

Sketch Portraits: *Richard Sawrey-Cookson*.

Designs for Congreve's *Love for Love* for John Gielgud; Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*; *Everyman* ballet.

Cover etc. and ten illustrations for Edith Olivier's *Night Thoughts of a Country Landlady* and covers for two other books.

Christmas card for the Guards Armoured Division.

**1944** (Aged 39)

Painting: *Binderton, Sussex* [Sir Anthony Eden's house – RW was guest there before embarking for Normandy]

Sketch Portrait: *Mrs Sacheverell Sitwell*.

Designs sets for film *A Place of One's Own*.

Designs for *Le Spectre de la Rose* for Sadler's Wells.

Discusses and sketches designs with Gielgud for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Stratford (not carried out).

Whilst stationed in Brighton awaiting orders for France paints, for amusement, a mural decoration, *Allegory. HRH the Prince Regent awakening the Spirit of Brighton* and on the night before embarkation for France a painting on the wall of the Old Ship Club, Bosham.

Killed in France on first day of active service in Operation 'Goodwood.'

Twelve books were published posthumously with illustrations by RW, including *The Story of Mr Korah* by Christabel Aberconway and *OHO* by Laurence Whistler.

## APPENDIX II    REX WHISTLER MURAL SCHEMES

All titles, dates, materials and dimensions are taken from the Catalogue

Raisonné.<sup>925</sup>

### **The Highways Club Shadwell, London. 1924-25**

Proscenium arch and panels in Memorial Hall.

*Picnic in the Country with Musicians and Dancers* 1924

*Oil on canvas.* 12ft x 7ft. 5.

*Rustic Scene: Villagers Dancing* 1924

*Oil on canvas.* 12ft x 7ft. 5.

*Rural Scene with Putto Conducting Two Men Playing the Lute and Saxophone and*

*Figures Dancing* 1925 10ft.10 x 6ft.5

*Oil on canvas glued to millboard. Allegorical Composition with Nun Holding a Child*

*and a Skeleton Personifying Death Taking the Arm of a Boy Holding a Book* 1925

*Oil on canvas glued to millboard.* 10ft.10 x 6ft.5

*Allegorical Composition: Tragedy and Putti Driving away a Heraldic Lion* 1925

*Oil on canvas glued to millboard.* 4ft.4 x 18ft.4

*Allegorical Composition: Comedy and Putti Driving away a Heraldic Unicorn* 1925

---

<sup>925</sup> Whistler, L. and Fuller, R. (eds) *The Work of Rex Whistler*, London: Batsford 1960, pp.1-13.

*Oil on canvas glued to millboard. 4ft.4 x 18ft.4*

Current status: all panels now held by University College London. *Rustic Scene: Villagers Dancing* on display in UCL, the other five panels held in storage awaiting conservation. No public access, although viewing can be arranged.

### **The Tate Gallery Restaurant, London. 1926-27**

Mural panels on all four walls.

*The Pursuit of Rare Meats*

Oil on canvas. Two panels 8ft x 54 ft, two panels 8ft x 32ft.

Assistant: Nan West.

Exhibited: photographs of mural exhibited at the *Exhibition of Mural Decorative Paintings* at the Whitechapel Art Gallery from May 9 to June 15 1935'.

Current status: extant as executed.

Public access.

### **Hall at Dorneywood, Bucks. 1928-29**

Single panel on wall of what was then the entrance hall, and is now the dining room.

Oil on canvas. 6ft 9in x 6ft 9in.

Commissioned by Sir Courtauld Thomson

Exhibited: mural panel exhibited at the Claridge Gallery in December 1928.<sup>926</sup>

Current status: extant as executed.

No public access.

### **Staircase Hall, 19 Hill Street, London. 1930-31**

Single panel on wall above staircase.

Oil on canvas. 11ft x 21 ft.

Commissioned by Captain Euan Wallace (M.P.) and his wife, Barbara, who was Edwin Lutyens' daughter.

Assistant: Ronald Horton

Exhibited: designs for the mural exhibited at the *Exhibition of Mural Decorative Paintings* at the Whitechapel Art Gallery from May 9 to June 15 1935'

Current status: extant as executed.

Private house, no public access.

---

<sup>926</sup> Extracts from Siegfried Sassoon's diary, provided by Rupert Hart-Davies to Laurence Whistler 21 Dec 1928 – 'Drove [S & RW] to Claridge Gallery (RW's picture there – done for Sir C. Thomson's house) Envelope 12, Rex Whistler Letters A. RWA. The Claridge Gallery was in Brook Street, London and was 'a venue especially launched to foster the work of young artists.' Castle, C. *Oliver Messel*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1986, p.41.

### **Dining Room at Port Lympne, Kent. 1930-32**

Mural panels on all four walls and decorated ceiling.

Oil on canvas and ceiling plaster. 22 ft. 1 in. length, 17 ft. 2 in width, 9 ft. height.

Commissioned by Sir Philip Sassoon.

Exhibited: photographs of mural exhibited at *Mural Painting in Great Britain 1919-1939 An Exhibition of Photographs* Tate Gallery 25 May to 30 June 1939.

Current status: extant as executed.

Public access limited. The House is now used as a corporate entertainment and wedding venue.

### **Wallpaper for 12 North Audley Street, London. 1932**

Oil on canvas. 6ft x 5ft 1. Painted to match existing chinoiserie wallpaper and to provide an ornate frame for Picasso's *L'Enfant au Pigeon*.

Commissioned by Samuel Courtauld.

Current status: unknown. Was owned by Christabel, Lady Aberconway, and is possibly now in the collection of the V & A.

NB. Although Laurence Whistler has catalogued this as a mural, it is more like a faux wall-covering.



### **Drawing Room at 90 Gower Street, London. 1935**

Oil on wall surface. Seven decorations including four circular plaques 2ft 2 diameter, two 'mezzotints' 2ft 8 x 2ft 5, one image of a jug in a niche 4ft 6 x 2ft 2..

Commissioned by Duff and Lady Diana Cooper.

Current status: extant. Scheme was removed from Gower Street before its demolition in 1958 and brought to UCL where they were installed in 1960. Several of the plaques needed restoration and one is still in conservation.

### **Decorated Chimney-piece at 5 Belgrave Square, London. 1935**

Oil on wall surface. 9ft x 5 ft.

Commissioned for Sir Henry (Chips) Channon. The chimney piece was in the music room on the first floor which also formed part of the library.

Current status: unknown. The piece was moved to 55 Chester Square, possibly in the 1950s, and was owned by Paul Channon until his death in 2007.

### **Decorations at Trent Park, Barnet. c.1935-36**

Commissioned by Sir Philip Sassoon.

Blue Room: Trophy 5ft x 4ft 6, two vertical decorations 9ft x 2ft and 6ft x 2ft.

Library: Female figures, dimensions unknown, several gilded ciphers of 'P' and 'S'.

Lecture Hall: Dolphins, dimensions unknown and further gilded ciphers.

All oil on wood.

Current status: extant as executed.

Trent Park is now part of Alliances University College of Medical Sciences.

### **Staircase at 36 Hill Street, London. 1936**

Oil on canvas. Eight mural panels: 8ft 4 x 3ft 1; 7ft 3 x 5 ft 7; 8ft 4 x 3ft 1; 4 ft 2 x 3ft 4; 7ft 2 x 5ft 3; 8ft 3 x 3ft 1; 4ft 2 x 3ft 4; 7ft 2 x 6ft.

Commissioned by Baroness Porcelli.

Exhibited: photographs of mural exhibited at 'Mural Painting in Great Britain 1919-1939 An Exhibition of Photographs' Tate Gallery 25 May to 30 June 1939. One of the panels was exhibited at *The Unseen Rex Whistler* at Colefax and Fowler, 39 Brook Street, W1 in 2012 and *Rex Whistler A Talent Cut Short* at Salisbury and South Wilts Museum in 2013.

Current status: Canvases removed from Hill Street during the war and now in a private residence, Parbold Hall, Lancs. No public access.

### **Dining Room at Plas Newydd, Anglesey. 1936-38**

Oil on canvas. Main wall 12ft 6 x 47ft. Two end walls, 12ft 6 x 17ft 8.

Oil direct onto plaster. Ceiling and part of end walls, dimensions unknown.

Commissioned by the Marquess of Anglesey.

Assistants: Vic Bowen and Mr Biretta (ceiling only).

Exhibited: photographs of mural exhibited at *Mural Painting in Great Britain 1919-1939 An Exhibition of Photographs* Tate Gallery 25 May to 30 June 1939"

Current status: extant as executed.

Public access (National Trust).

### **Sitting Room at Brook House, Park Lane, London. 1937**

Oil on canvas, wood and ceiling plaster. Three walls: 8ft 9 x 23ft 5; 8ft 9 x 14ft 7; 8ft 9 x 17ft 2.

Commissioned by Lord and Lady Louis Mountbatten for their penthouse apartment at the newly constructed Brook House.

Assistant: Vic Bowen.

Exhibited: photographs of mural exhibited at *Mural Painting in Great Britain 1919-1939 An Exhibition of Photographs* Tate Gallery 25 May to 30 June 1939.

Current status: The wall panels (the ceiling was immovable, and was badly damaged in the war) were removed at the outbreak of the war and re-erected at Britwell House, Britwell Salome, Oxford. After the sale of this house David Hicks [son in law of Mountbattens] moved them to his subsequent house on the estate, The Grove.

Private residence, no public access.

### **Drawing Room at Mottisfont Abbey, Hants. 1938-39**

Oil on wall surface and wood. 46ft x 24ft 9 x 15ft 6 height.

Commissioned by Mrs Gilbert Russell.

Assistants: Vic Bowen and P S Willatts. The latter only did Mottisfont and was possibly brought in from Lenygon & Morant who were doing the renovation.

Current status: extant as executed.

Public access (National Trust).

### **39 Preston Park, Brighton. 1944**

Oil on wallpaper. 'Allegory' 5ft 2 x 8ft 1 and 'George IV' 4ft 3 x 3ft 1.

Painted in three days whilst billeted with fellow officers before embarkation to France.

Current status: now in Royal Pavilion, Brighton. Public access.

NB Although Laurence Whistler catalogues these as murals, they could be considered as more of a *jeux d'esprit*. The room was not a commission and the decoration was done purely for the amusement of his military colleagues.

## APPENDIX III

### PRIOR RESEARCH AND PUBLIC LECTURES

*Rex Whistler Anamnesis and Modernity*, unpublished MA dissertation, University College Falmouth, 2002.

### Papers and Lectures 2008 – 2014

*An Expedition in Pursuit of the Rare Rex Whistler* for the National Trust at Plas Newydd Anglesey, June 2009.

*The Public, Private and Political: Rex Whistler's murals at Dorneywood and Port Lympne* in 'Walls with Stories: Mural Painting in Britain from the 1890s to the 1960s' at the Association of Art Historians Annual Conference, March 2012.

*Rex Whistler's Drop Curtain for 'The Rake's Progress' – 1935 and 1942* at 'European Painted Cloths C14th-C21st: Pageantry, Ceremony, Theatre and the Domestic Interior', Courtauld Institute of Art, June 2012.

*Rex Whistler: A Talent Cut Short* at The Summerleaze Gallery June 2013

*Rex Whistler: A Closer Look* as part of the Rex Whistler exhibition programme at Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum, April and September 2013.

*Rex Whistler: A Closer Look* for the Hampshire Art Fund at Mottisfont, June 2014.

Papers have also been given at the Art History seminars at the University of Plymouth in April 2009, November 2009 and May 2011.

## **SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Catalogue Raisonné: Whistler, L. and Fuller, R. (eds.) *The Work of Rex Whistler*,  
London: Batsford 1960. (CR)

## **ARCHIVAL SOURCES**

Tate Archive (TGA)

Rex Whistler Archive (RWA)

British School at Rome Archive (BSR)

Witt Library, Courtauld Institute

UCL Special Collections

Whitechapel Art Gallery Archive

RIBA Archive

Plas Newydd Archive

Wiltshire, Swindon & Wilts History Centre

'Papers of Sir Cecil Beaton' A1/387/48 St John's Library Cambridge, [Online]

<http://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/> [Accessed 10 September 2012].

## PRIMARY SOURCES

### Newspapers and Journals

Anon., 'Tate Gallery. "The Pursuit of Rare Meats" New Decorations.' *The Times*, 21 November 1927, p.19.

Anon., 'A World Tour in a Refectory. "The Most Amusing Room in Europe".' *The Daily Chronicle*, 22 November 1927.

Anon., 'Clovelly Chintz The Perfect Souvenir', *The Times*, Jan 18, 1933.

Anon., 'Decorations at the Tate Gallery', *The Architect and Building News*, 9 December 1927, pp 888 – 890.

Anon., 'Examples of Recent Decoration No. 19 Hill Street', *Country Life*, December 12 1931, Volume LXX, p.70.

Anon., 'Lady Louis Mountbatten's Boudoir at Brook House', *Country Life*, 24 June 1939, Vol. LXXXV, p.682.

Anon., 'Bright Young People as Sun & Stars', *Daily Chronicle*, November 1 1929.

Anon., 'Mr. Rex Whistler of fresco fame', *Daily Mirror*, July 23 1929.

Anon., 'Mural Decoration A Slade Experiment in Shadwell.' *The Times*, 24 September 1924, p.7.

Anon., 'Mural Painting' *The Times* June 1 1939.

Anon., 'News in Brief', *The Times*, Oct 27 1928, p.9.

Anon., 'Recent Mural Paintings', *Country Life*, 10 December 1927, Volume LXI, p.881.

Anon., 'Rex Whistler – Georgian of What Century?' *The Bystander*, April 29 1936.

Anon., 'Royal Drawing Society' *The Times*, April 14 1917, p 3.

Anon., 'Royal Drawing Society List of prize-winners', *The Times* 14 August 1913 p.9.

Anon., Shell Exhibition review *The Times*, Tuesday, June 26, 1934; pg. 12.

Anon., 'The Fine Arts. The Mural Paintings at the Restaurant of the National Gallery Millbank; at the Orthopaedic Hospital; and at St. Stephen's Hall, Westminster', *The London Mercury*, January 1928. p.317.

Anon., "The Pursuit of Rare Meats", *The Sphere*, 10 December 1927.

Anon., *The Times*, Wednesday, Mar 02, 1932; p. 13.

Anon., 'Trent Park – I', *Country Life*, 10 January 1931, pp.40-46.



Anon., 'Wall Paintings' [Rex Whistler at Tate Gallery and Nan West at Royal National

Orthopaedic Hospital], *Truth*, 3 November 1927.

'P.B.', 'Exhibition of Shell-Mex and B.P. Advertisements', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 82, No. 4257 June 22nd, 1934, pp. 838-840. [Online], Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41360159>. [Accessed 19 Aug 2013].

Bone, J. 'The Artist and the Public', *Home and Country*, May 1928, pp.218-220.

Connolly, C., 'The New Medici', *Architectural Review*, Vol.76, 1936, pp.2-5.

Fincham, D., 'Shell- Mex Posters: Picasso and other Exhibitions', *The Spectator* 19 June 1931, p.13.

H.F. 'Rex Whistler's Decoration of the Refreshment Room in the Tate Gallery', *Apollo*, February 1928, pp. 75-76.

Hill, O., 'Mr. Rex Whistler at Port Lympne', *Country Life*, February 4 1933, Volume LXXIII, pp. 116-7.

Horton, P., 'Mural Painting in Great Britain', *The Studio*, Vol. CXVIII, No. 556, July 1939, pp.2-13.

-- 'Mural Painting in the Private House', *The Studio*, Vol. CXVIII, No. 558, September 1939, pp. 148-155.

Hussey, C., Untitled article on mural decorations, *Country Life*, 22 June 1929.

-- 'Belgrave Square London The Residence of Mr Henry and Lady Honor Channon', *Country Life*, February 26 1938, Volume 83, pp.222-226.

-- '36 Hill Street', *Country Life*, March 25 1939, Vol. LXXXV, pp.310-11.

Jefferies, J. 'A Dream of a Tea Room', *The Daily Mail*, 1 December 1927.

Olivier, E., 'Rex Whistler's Book Illustrations and Decorations', *Typography* 8, Summer 1939.

Manson, J. B. 'Mural Decorations at the Tate Gallery', *Saturday Review*, 17 December 1927.

Rothenstein, W., 'Recollections of the Slade School', *Artwork*, Summer 1929, Vol. 5, No.18, pp.77-91.

Schwabe, R., 'Three Teachers: Brown, Tonks and Steer', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 82, No. 483 (Jun., 1943), The Burlington Magazine Publications, Ltd. pp. 141-146. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/868689> [accessed 11 February 2010]

Sitwell, O. 'This Strange Country. The Frescoes in the Refreshment Room at the Tate.' *The Architectural Review*, July 1928, pp. 11-13.

Tatlock, R., 'Tate Gallery. Refreshment Room Art.', *The Daily Telegraph*, 1 December 1927.

Tonks, Professor H., 'Fifty Years The Vicissitudes Of Art, New Words For Old Ideas', *The Times*, Wednesday, Mar 02, 1932; pg. 13.

Wortley, Hon. C. "The Pursuit of Rare Meats" at the Tate Gallery', *The Queen*, 7 December 1927, pp. 4-6.

## **Books**

Beddington J., 'Patronage in Art Today' in Lambert, R. S. (ed.) *Art In England*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1936.

Hone, J. *The Life of Henry Tonks*. London: Heinemann, 1939.

Nevinson, C R W., *Paint and Prejudice*, London: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1938.

Manson, J. B. *Hours in the Tate Gallery*, London: Duckworth, 1926.

Morton, H. V., *In search of England*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1927.

Nash, P., *Room and Book*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932.

Patmore, D., *Colour Schemes & Modern Furnishing*, The Studio: London & New York, 1933.

Priestley, J. B., *English Journey*, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1934.

Rothenstein, W. *Since Fifty Men and Memories 1922-1938*. London: Faber & Faber, 1939.

Sitwell, S. *Southern baroque art: a study of painting, architecture and music in Italy and Spain of the 17th & 18th centuries*. London: Duckworth, 1924.

Whistler, R., 'Problems of the Stage Designer' in Charques, R. D. (ed.) *Footnotes to the Theatre*, London: Peter Davies Ltd., 1938.<sup>927</sup>

## SECONDARY SOURCES

### Newspapers and Journals

Adams, Dr. S. 'Ornament: a modern perspective and Rethinking decoration: pleasure and ideology in the visual arts', *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 19, Spring (1), 2006, pp. 88-90.

Anon., 'Mottisfont Abbey II' *Country Life*, May 6 1954, Vol. CXV, p.1310.

Anon., 'Obituary of T. R. Ablett', *The Times*, Wednesday, Jun 06, 1945; pg. 7.

Barling, S. 'The Long View', *World of Interiors*, June 2011, pp. 88-89.

Bassett, D. 'Felix Kelly, Herbert Read and Neo-romanticism' *British Art Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Autumn 2007, pp. 26-33.

Biernoff, S., 'Flesh Poems: Henry Tonks and the Art of Surgery', [Online] *Visual Culture in Britain* March 2010, pp.25 -47.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3158130/#FN91> [February 24 2013]

---

<sup>927</sup> This was not entirely written by Whistler although there is no doubt that it is his voice. The MS of this piece of writing notes that it was 'put on paper by Laurence Whistler from his [Rex Whistler's] spoken thoughts.' Rex Crate 2 'Stage', RWA.

Birchall, H. 'The Most Amusing room in Europe' The mural by Rex Whistler in the Tate Restaurant', *The British Art Journal*, Vol. VI, No.2, Autumn 2005, pp. 58-65.

Bowdler, R., 'Babylonian Luxury Port Lympne, Kent' *Country Life*, January 11 2012, Vol. CCVI, No 2, pp. 34-39.

Bryers, G., 'The Berners Case', *The Guardian* February 2003 [Online] <http://www.gavinbryars.com/work/writing/articles/berners-case> [Accessed August 5 2014].

Campbell. L., 'A Call to Order: The Rome Prize and Early Twentieth-Century British Architecture' *Architectural History* Vol. 32, (1989), pp. 131-151. [Online] Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1568565> [Accessed June 6 2010].

Charlton, G., 'The Slade School of Fine Art 1871 – 1946', Reprinted from *The Studio*, October 1946.

Chambers, E. "'Redefining History Painting in the Academy: The Summer Composition Competition at the Slade School of Fine Art, 1898-1922'." *Visual Culture in Britain* (2005).

--'Slade School Influences on the Camden Town Group 1896-1910' in Helena Bonnett, Ysanne Holt, Jennifer Mundy (eds.) *The Camden Town Group in Context* May 2012, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group>.

'Correspondence' page, letter 'From the Duchess of Westminster: The Roosevelt Memorial' *Country Life*, Vol. 2609, Jan 17 1947, p.192.

Cumming, L., 'Between the wars, on the margins', *The Observer*, August 18 2013, p.30.

De Moubray, A., 'Contemporary Design; Michael Dillon, muralist' *Apollo*, 162 (523), Sept 2005, pp. 74-75.

Devonshire Jones, T., 'The March of Murals 2013' 'British Murals and Decorative Painting 1910-1970', *The British Art Journal*, Vol. XIV No.1, Spring/Summer 2013.

Dixon Graham, D., 'Bright Young Things Andrew Graham Dixon reviews Rex Whistler', [Online] *Daily Telegraph*, April 23 2006,  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3651808/Bright-young-things.html>  
[January 3 2013]

French, M. (2005) *Commercials, careers and culture: travelling salesmen in Britain 1890s-1930s*. [Online] *Economic History Review* 58(2):pp. 352-377, Research Publications by member of the University of Glasgow,  
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/4535/> 5 August 2008. [Accessed February 6 2013]

Giese, L. 'Mark Tobey's 1939 Murals for the John A. Baillargeons: A Transition' *Archives of American Art Journal*, Vol.23, No. 2, 1983, pp.3-12.

Gregory, B. 'Leger's United Nations Murals', *Art Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Autumn 1963, pp. 35-36. [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org) [accessed 03.09.2009]

Hall, M., 'Shrill Music and Thistles', *Country Life*, April 21 1994, Volume CLXXXVIII pp.78-80.

Heathorn, S. 'The Civil Servant and Public Remembrance: Sir Lionel Earle and the Shaping of London's Commemorative Landscape, 1918-1933' *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp 259-287. Source:

<http://tcbh.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/19/3/259>. [Accessed 18 January 2009]

Heller, M. 'Corporate Brand Building at Shell-Mex Ltd in the Interwar Period'  
Centre for Globalisation Research Working Paper 23, September 2008.

<http://webpace.qmul.ac.uk/pmartins/CGRWP23.pdf> [Accessed November 10 2011]

Hensick, T., Kate Olivier and Gianfranco Pocobene 'Puvis de Chavannes's Allegorical Murals in the Boston Public Library: History, Technique, and Conservation'. [Online] *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Spring, 1997), pp. 59-81. [http://cool.conservation-us.org/jaic/articles/jaic36-01-005\\_indx.html](http://cool.conservation-us.org/jaic/articles/jaic36-01-005_indx.html) [Accessed November 14 2012]

Hewitt, J. 'Posters of Distinction: Art, Advertising and the London, Midland, and Scottish Railways' *Design Issues*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring, 2000), pp. 16-35.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1511927> on 'Advertising's Exploitation of Art.'  
[Accessed November 11 2010]

--'The 'Nature' and 'Art' of Shell Advertising in the Early 1930s', *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1992), pp. 121-139

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1315823>

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1568565> [Accessed January 13 2010]

Kennedy, M., 'Quick on the draw: museum acquires dark and delightful archive of works by Rex Whistler', *The Guardian*, August 26 2013, p.12.

Martin, C., 'C R W Nevinson The Artist and his Name' in *Nevinson News* Issue 5 2000, p.4.

Meyer, A., 'Re-dressing Classical Statuary: The Eighteenth-Century "Hand-in-Waistcoat" Portrait', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 77, No. 1, Mar., 1995, pp. 45-63 [Online] <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3046079> [July 22 2014].

Monnington, T., 'Obituary of Sir Evelyn Campbell Shaw', *The Times*, January 30 1974.

Morgan, D., 'Cultural work and friendship work: the case of 'Bloomsbury' *Media Culture Society* 1982 4: 19-32, p.20, [Online] Sage Journals <http://mcs.sagepub.com/content/4/1/19.refs> [accessed November 9 2013]

Morris, Roderick Conway 'Rex Whistler, Remembered and Revisited ; A Prolific English Artist Who Died in World War II Gets an Impressive Show', *International Herald Tribune*, July 1 2013, p.9.



Muir Whitehill, W. 'The Making of an Architectural Masterpiece: The Boston Public Library' *American Art Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Autumn, 1970), pp. 13-35.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1593895>. [Accessed 26 Jan 2010]

Nochlin, L., 'Size Matters' *Tate Magazine*, Issue 29, Summer 2002.

Norman, G., 'Edward James Auction'. *The Times*, June 7, 1986.

Owens, M., 'Antiques; Stylish Fakes That Attract Connoisseurs' [Online] March 19, 1999 *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com> [Accessed 10 June 2013]

Platzer, D., 'Hugh & Mirabel Cecil *In Search of Rex Whistler: His Life & His Work*', *The British Art Journal*, Vol. XIV No.1, Spring/Summer 2013, pp.99-101.

Powers, A., 'Was there a George VI style?', *Apollo*, October 2004, pp.72-77.

Ravilious, R., 'A Very English Toile', *The World of Interiors*, 2001.

Russell Taylor, J. 'The art of the feast', *Art Quarterly*, no.24, Winter 1995, pp. 36-9.

Schott, G. D. 'Nan West's murals in the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital', *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 317, December 1998, p.1736.

Sewell, B., 'The Unseen Rex Whistler, Colefax and Fowler, W1', *London Evening Standard*, 29 November 2012, pp.52-53.

Skipwith, P., 'The Curwen Press's Illustrators: Rebels against commercial ugliness', *Apollo*, 7th January 2008 <http://www.apollo-magazine.com/> [Accessed 8 November 2010]

Sorley Walker, K., 'The Camargo Society', *Dance Chronicle*, Vol. 18, No. 1 1995,

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. pp. 1-114, [Online] Stable URL:

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1567830> [Accessed May 29 2012]

Stephenson, A., 'Strategies of Situation: British Modernism and the Slump, c.1929-1934', *Oxford Art Journal*, 14 February 1991, Vol.14, no.2, pp.30-51.

Sturgis, M., 'Rex Whistler Alone', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 5 June 2013

[Online] <http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/public/article1269163.ece> [Accessed August 17 2014]

Sutton, D. "La vie en rose", *Apollo*, May 1972, reprinted July 2004,

<http://www.articlearchives.com/> [Accessed March 13 2009]

Wade J., Kovačcs, G., Vidnyánsky, Z. 'Guest Editorial', *Perception*, 2003, volume 32, pp.1-6, [Online]

<http://www.perceptionweb.com/perception/perc0103/editorial.pdf> [Accessed August 8 2013]

Wade, N. J., and Nekes, W., 'The two faces of Rex Whistler (1905-1944)', *Perception*, 34, 2005pp. 639-644 , [Online]

<http://www.perceptionweb.com/perception/perc0605/editorial.pdf> [Accessed 4 August 2014]

Waugh, E., 'Dream World', *Time & Tide*, 6 December 1952, pp. 145-147.

Weaver, C., 'Enid Marx - Designing Fabrics for the London Passenger Transport Board in the 1930s', *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1989), pp.35-46.

Wheatcroft, G., 'The Charms of Rex Whistler', *The New York Review of Books*, January 9 2014, pp.30-31.

Woodham, J. 'On Decoration by David Brett', *Journal of Design History*, Vol.6, No.1, 1993, pp 65-67. [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org) [Accessed September 3 2009]

## Books

Amory, M., *Lord Berners The Last Eccentric*, London: Faber & Faber, 2008,

Artmonsky, R., *Jack Beddington The Footnote Man*, London: Artmonsky Arts, 2006.

Balakier A. and James Balakier, *The Spatial Infinite at Greenwich in Works by Christopher Wren, James Thornhill, and James Thomson: The Newton Connection*, Dyfed: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995.

Battersby, M, *The Decorative Twenties*, 1988 edition, London: The Herbert Press, 1969.

-- *The Decorative Thirties*, London: Studio Vista, 1971.

Beaton, C., *Ashcombe The Story of a Fifteen-year Lease*, 1999 Edition, Wimborne: The Dovecote Press, 1949.

Block R and Yunker, H., *Can You Believe Your Eyes?*, London: Routledge, 1989,

[Online] <http://books.google.co.uk/books> [Accessed 6 August 2013]

Boyd Haycock, D., *A Crisis of Brilliance Five Young British Artists and the Great War*.

Breese, C., *Hutch*, London: Bloomsbury, 1999.

*British Murals & Decorative Painting 1920-1960 Rediscoveries and New Interpretations*, Bristol: Sansom & Co., 2013.

Brumwell, J., *Bright Ties, Bold Ideas*, Truro: The Tie Press, 2010. Calloway,

S., *Twentieth-Century Decoration The Domestic Interior from 1900 to the Present Day*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988.

-- *Baroque Baroque*, London: Phaidon, 2000.

Cannadine, D., *Class in Britain* 2000 edition, London: Penguin Books.

Cannadine, D., *Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* 2005 edition, London: Penguin Books.

Castle, C., *Oliver Messel*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1986.

Causey A., *Paul Nash Writings on Art*, Oxford: OUP, 2001

Cecil, H and Mirabel, *In Search of Rex Whistler His Life & His Work*, London: Frances Lincoln Limited, 2012.

Chambers, E. (ed.) *UCL Art Collections An Introduction and Collections Guide*, London: UCL Art Collections, University College London, 2008.

Cianci, G., Patey, C. and Sullam, S. (eds.), *Transits: The Nomadic Geographies of Anglo-American Modernism*, Bern: Peter Lang Verlag, 2010.

Clarke, G. *Evelyn Dunbar War and Country*. Bristol: Sansom & Co Ltd., 2006.

Cooper, D., *The Light of Common Day* London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959.

Cornforth J. *The Inspiration of the Past Country House Taste in the Twentieth Century*, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1985.

-- *London Interiors from the Archives of Country Life*, London: Aurum Press, 2009 edition.

Crafts, N. F. R., Gazeley, I., Newell, A. (eds.), *Work and Pay in Twentieth-century Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Day, G. (ed.) *Literature and Culture in Modern Britain Volume Two: 1930-1955*, Essex: Pearson Education Ltd., 1997.

Dickinson, P, *Lord Berners Composer, Writer, Painter*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008

Edelstein, T., (ed.), *Art for All /British Posters for Transport'*, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

Eerdmans, E. *Regency Redux* New York: Rizzoli, 2008.

Frascina, F., (ed.) *Pollock and After*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

Frascina, F. and Harrison, C., (ed.) *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, London: Harper and Row, 1982

Golan, R., *Muralnomad: The Paradox of Wall Painting, Europe 1927-1957*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Gombrich, E. H. 'Meditations on a Hobby Horse or the Roots of Artistic Form' (1951) in Everett, S. (ed.), *Art Theory and Criticism: An Anthology of Formalist, Avant-garde, Contextualist and Post-modernist Thought*, Jefferson North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 1991, p.48. [Online] <http://books.google.co.uk> [August 8 2013].

Green, M., *Children of the Sun A narrative of 'decadence' in England after 1918*, London: Constable, 1977.

Harris, A., *Romantic Moderns*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2010.

Harrison, C., *English Art and Modernism 1900-1939*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981.

Hayward, A., *Norah Lindsay The Life and Art of a Garden Designer*, London: Frances Lincoln, 2007.

Hayward, H., *Thomas Johnson and English Rococo*, London: Alec Tiranti, 1964.

Hoare, P. *Serious Pleasures The Life of Stephen Tennant*. London: Penguin Books, 1992.

Hobhouse, H., *The Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition: art, science, and productive industry: a history of the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851*, London & New York: The Athlone Press, 2002.

House J. et al., *Impressionism for England Samuel Courtauld as Patron and Collector*, London: Courtauld Institute Galleries, 1994.

Humphreys, R. *The Tate Companion to British Art*, London: Tate Publishing, 2001.

James, E., *The Victoria and Albert Museum: A Bibliography and Exhibition Chronology, 1852-1996*, London: Taylor and Francis, 1998, p.446 [Online] <http://books.google.co.uk/books> [Accessed 10 May 2014]

Jenkins, A., *The Twenties*, London: Peerage Books, 1974.

Lambirth, A., *John Armstrong the Paintings*, London: Philip Wilson, 2009.

Lang, G. and Lang, K. *Etched in Memory: The Building and Survival of Artistic Reputation*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

Lewis, J., *Cyril Connolly A Life*, London: Pimlico, 1998.

Mark Girouard *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978.

McKibbin, R., *Classes and Cultures England 1918-1951*, Oxford: OUP, 1998.

Middelboe, P., *Edith Olivier: from her Journals 1924-48*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989.

Montgomery-Massingberd, H. and Christopher Simon Sykes, *Great Houses of England & Wales*, London: Laurence King Publishing, 1994.

Mowat, C. *Britain between the wars, 1918-1940*, London: Methuen, 1955.

Nash, P. *Outline An Autobiography*. London: Faber and Faber, 1988 edition.

Osborne, F., *The Bolter*, London: Virago, 2008.

Overy, R., *The Morbid Age Britain Between the Wars*, London: Allen Lane, 2009.

Pappalardo, U., *The Splendour of Roman Wall Painting*, Los Angeles: The J Paul Getty Museum 2009 edition.

Peters Corbett, D., *The Modernity of English Art*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.

Peters Corbett, D., Holt, Y. and Russell, F. *The Geographies of Englishness*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002.

Pevsner, N., *Studies in Art Architecture and Design Victorian and After*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1982 edition.

*Plas Newydd, Isle of Anglesey*. London: National Trust Publications 1999.

Powers, A., *The Twentieth Century House in Britain*, London: Aurum Press, 2004.

-- *Eric Ravilious Artist and Designer*, Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2013.

Rhodes James, R, *Chips - The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967.

Russell, T., *Fill 'er Up!: The Great American Gas Station* , Minnesota: Voyageur Press, 2007, [Online] <http://books.google.co.uk/books> [Accessed August 5 2013].

Saler, Michael T. *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England Medieval Modernism and the London Underground*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Seckel, A. *Masters of Deception: Escher, Dalí & the Artists of Optical Illusion*, New York: Sterling, 2004, pp.305-312,[Online] <http://books.google.co.uk>. [Accessed August 8 2013].



Secret, M., *Duveen A Life in Art*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005.

Sitwell, O., *Noble Essences A Book of Characters*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1950.

Spalding, F. *The Tate: a history*, London: Tate Gallery, 1997.

--John Piper *Myfanwy Piper Lives in Art*, Oxford: OUP. 2009.

Sparke, P. et al, (eds.) *Designing the Modern Interior*, Berg: Oxford & New York, 2009.

Stansky, P., *Sassoon The Worlds of Philip and Sybil*, Yale: New Haven & London 2003.

Stevenson, J., *The Penguin Social History of Britain British Society 1914-45*, London: Penguin Books, 1984.

Summerson, J., *The Architecture of the Eighteenth Century*, London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1986.

Taylor, B., *Art for the Nation Exhibitions and the National Public 1747- 2001*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.

Taylor, D.J., *Bright Young People The Rise and Fall of a Generation 1918-1940*, London: Vintage Books, 2008.

The Public Catalogue Foundation. *Oil Paintings in Public Ownership London: The Slade and UCL*. London: The Public Catalogue Foundation, 2005.

*The Shell Poster Book*, London: Profile Books, 1998.

Wallace-Hadrill, A., *The British School at Rome: One Hundred Years*, British School at Rome: Rome, 2001.

Waterson, M. *The Country house remembered: recollections of life between the wars*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985.

Welter, Volker M., *Ernst L. Freud, Architect: The Case of the Modern Bourgeois Home* Berghahn Books: New York & Oxford, 2011, p. <http://books.google.co.uk/books> [Accessed May 10 2012]

Whistler R., *An Anthology of Mine (1923)*, London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1981.

Whistler R. and Olivier O., *A Guide to the Duchy of Epicurania with some Account of the Famous Expedition in Pursuit of Rare Meats as described by Edith Olivier*, London: Tate Gallery Publishing 1954.

Whistler, L. and Fuller, R. (eds.) *The Work of Rex Whistler*, London: Batsford 1960.  
[*The Work of Rex Whistler* also acts as a catalogue raisonné and will be referred to as such in this thesis.]

Whistler, L. and Whistler, R., OHO, London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1946.

--*AHA*, London: John Murray Ltd., 1978.

Whistler, L. *Rex Whistler his life and his drawings*, London: Art & Technics, 1948.

--*The Laughter and the Urn*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985.

Willsdon, Clare A. P. *Mural Painting in Britain 1840 – 1940 Image and Meaning*, Oxford:Oxford University Press, 2000.

Wiseman, T. P., *A Short History of the British School at Rome*, London: British School at Rome, 1990.

Wollen, P., *Raiding the Icebox Reflections on Twentieth-Century Culture*, London, New York: Verso, 1993.

Wright, P. *On Living in an Old Country The National Past in Contemporary Britain*, London: Verso, 1985,

Yorke, M., *Edward Bawden & His Circle*, Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 2007.

--*The Spirit of Place Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and their times*, London: Constable and Company Ltd., 2001.

## **Unpublished Post-graduate research**

Foss, Brian, *British Artists and the Second World War with Particular Reference to the War Artists' Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Information*, Ph.D. thesis, UCL, 1991. (Now published as *War Paint: Art, War, State and Identity in Britain 1939-45*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007).

Lindsay, J., *The Mural at Plas Newydd and the question of a dichotomy in the wall-paintings of Rex Whistler*, unpublished MA dissertation, University of Edinburgh,

1989.

O'Leary, M., *Rex Whistler A Comparative Study of Three Decorative Schemes*.

Unpublished Post-Graduate research project for Courtauld Institute of Art, in collaboration with The National Trust, 2000.

Thomasson, A., *Shaping Fantasies The Friendship of Edith Olivier & Rex Whistler*.

Unpublished M Phil thesis, University of Buckingham, 2008.

## **Other Material**

Burbidge, J., *Examination of Painted decoration of the Staircase Hall - 29/30 June 2000, 19 Hill Street, Mayfair*. Granville & Burbidge, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2003. Unpublished report.

-- *19 Hill Street Mayfair Report on the Conservation of the Painted Decoration of the Staircase Hall (1st July – 13<sup>th</sup> August 2004)*, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2005.  
Unpublished report.

Chaplin, S., *A Slade School of Fine Art Archive Reader: A Compendium of Documents, 1868-1975, in University College London, Contextualised with an Historical and Critical Commentary, Augmented with Material from Diaries and Interviews*, 1998 ,  
Ms Add 400, UCL Library Special Collections London.

Nye, V., 'Recollections of Shell and BP Advertising By Vernon Nye', 1960. Copyright Shell Brands International AG. Courtesy the Shell Art Collection.

Reynolds, M. *The Slade, Story of an Art School, 1871-1971*, unpublished, 1974. Held at UCL Library Special Collections London.

Taylor Michael, *The Slade, Story of an Art School, 1871-1971*, typescript history of the University College London Slade School of Fine Art from 1871 to 1971. Unpublished. Held at UCL College Archives

West, N., *Against the Tide*, unpublished autobiography MS, undated, RWA.

## **Exhibition Catalogues**

*A Centenary Exhibition The Slade 1871-1971*. Exhibition catalogue by Bruce Laughton *et al.* London: University College London, 1971.

*A Surreal Life: Edward James 1907-1984*, exhibition catalogue edited by Nicola Coleby, Brighton and Hove: The Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums, 1998.

*Alan Sorrell The Life and Works of an English Neo-Romantic Artist*. Exhibition Catalogue edited by Sacha Llewellyn and Richard Sorrell, Bristol: Sansom & Co., 2013.

*British Artists in Italy 1920-1980*. A touring exhibition organised by Canterbury College of Art. Kent: Kent County Council Education Committee, 1985.

*British Murals and Decorative Painting 1910-1970*. Exhibition catalogue, The Fine Art Society & Liss Fine Art, London: 2013

*Drawings and paintings by Sir Thomas Monnington, 1902-1976.* Exhibition catalogue by Judy Egerton and Thomas Monnington, and Royal Academy of Arts (Great Britain), London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1977.

*Earthly Delights Mary Adshead 1904-1995.* Exhibition catalogue by Ann Compton *et al.*, Liverpool: University of Liverpool Art Collections, 2004.

*Edward Halliday Art for Life 1925 – 1939.* Exhibition catalogue by Ann Compton, Liverpool: University of Liverpool Art Collections, 1997.

*Eric Ravilious Imagined Realities,* Exhibition catalogue by Alan Powers, London: Imperial War Museum & Philip Wilson Publishers, 2003.

*Glyn Philpot 1884-1937 Edwardian Aesthete to Thirties Modernist.* Exhibition Catalogue, by Robin Gibson, London: National Portrait Gallery, 1984.

*Going Modern and Being British.* Exhibition catalogue by Sam Smiles *et al.*, Exeter: Intellect Books, 1998.

*Henry Tonks and the 'Art of Pure Drawing'.* Exhibition catalogue by Lynda Morris *et al.*, Norwich: Norwich School of Art Gallery, 1985.

*Henry Tonks: Art and Surgery.* Exhibition catalogue by Emma Chambers, London: The College Art Collections, University College London, 2002.

John Fothergill, ed., *The Slade; a collection of drawings and some pictures done by past and present students of the London Slade School of Art, 1893-1907* [Online]

London: Slade School of Fine Art, 1907, p.21.

<http://www.archive.org/details/sladecollectiono00slad> [Accessed 16 July 2009]

*Impressionism for England Samuel Courtauld as Patron and Collector*. Exhibition catalogue by John House *et al.*, London: Courtauld Institute Galleries, 1994.

*Mural Painting in Great Britain 1919-1939*. Illustrated Exhibition Catalogue. London: Tate Gallery, 1939.

*Rex Whistler The Triumph of Fancy*. Exhibition catalogue by Stephen Calloway, Brighton: Royal Pavilion, Libraries & Museums, 2006.

*Rex Whistler's War 1939-July 1944: Artist into Tank Commander*. Exhibition Catalogue by Jenny Spencer-Smith, London: National Army Museum Publishing. 1994.

*The Artist and the Country House from the Fifteenth Century to the Present Day*. Exhibition catalogue by John Harris, London: Sotheby's, 1995.

*The last romantics The romantic tradition in British art, Burne-Jones to Stanley Spencer*. Exhibition catalogue by Christian J, ed., London: Lund Humphries/Barbican Art Gallery 1989.

*The Sitwells and the Arts of the 1920s and 1930s*. Exhibition catalogue by Skipwith, J. et al., London: National Portrait Gallery, 1994.

*The Treasure Houses of Britain Five Hundred Years of Patronage and Art Collecting*. Exhibition catalogue by Gervase Jackson-Stops *et al*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

*Thirties – British Art and Design before the War*. Exhibition catalogue by Hawkins, J., Hollis, M. et al., London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979.

*Two-Way Traffic British & Italian Art 1880-1980*. Exhibition catalogue by Sam Smiles and Stephanie Pratt, Plymouth: University of Plymouth, 1996.

*Watercolours and Drawings from the Collection of Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother*. Exhibition Catalogue by Susan Owens, London: Royal Collection Enterprises Limited, 2005.

## **Online Sources**

### ***Oxford Dictionary of National Biography***

Belcher, V., 'Benjamin Timbrell' ...one of the most noted master builders working in London in the first half of the eighteenth century' [Online] DNB, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/49444> [accessed 30 April 2012].



Farr, D., 'Borenus, (Carl) Tancred (1885–1948)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/76085> [accessed 20 July 2009]

Hunter, S. "Adshead, (Sylvia) Mary (1904–1995)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., edited by Lawrence Goldman. Oxford: OUP,.

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/60100> (accessed 17 February 2013).

Johnson, V. "Beddington, John Louis (1893–1959)." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., edited by Lawrence Goldman. Oxford: OUP,

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47917>, [accessed August 10 2013].

MacCarthy F, 'Harling, (Henry) Robert (1910–2008)', [Online] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Jan 2012

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/99/101099915/> [October 11 2013]

Martin, Alec. "Duveen, Joseph Joel, Baron Duveen (1869–1939)." Rev. Helen Davies. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. [Online]

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32945> [Accessed 9 June 2013].

Morris, L. "Tonks, Henry (1862–1937)", [Online] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004.

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36535> [Accessed July 10 2009]

Sackville-West, V., "Wellesley, Dorothy Violet, duchess of Wellington (1889–1956)" rev. Clare L. Taylor 2003 [Online]. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C.

G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004.

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36826> [Accessed April 11 2014].

### ***British History Online***

English Heritage Publication, *Survey of London: volume 38: South Kensington*

*Museums Area* volume 38, Author F. H. W. Sheppard (General Editor) 1975, pp. 49-

73, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/source.aspx?pubid=364> [Accessed 18 August 2014].

G.O., Solicitor's fee books, G41/239–41, 433; Estate Surveyor's letterbooks, 20/150 ref.648, F. H. W. Sheppard (General Editor), "Grosvenor Square: The Rebuilding of the Square from 1926." *Survey of London: volume 40: The Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair, Part 2 (The Buildings)* (1980): British History Online, 166-170.

<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42127> [Accessed March 17 2014]

Hobhouse, M., (ed.) 'Architectural sculpture and decorative treatment', *Survey of London Monograph 17: County Hall* (1991), pp. 57-69, British History Online.

[Online] <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid+118182>,

[Accessed February 11 2013].

'Nos. 15 and 15B Kensington Palace Gardens', Sheppard, F.H. W. (Ed.). "The Crown estate in Kensington Palace Gardens: Individual buildings." *Survey of London: volume 37: Northern Kensington* (1973): 162-193. [Online] British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=49873&strquery=> [August 6 2014]

'The Pitt Estate in Dean Street: No. 76 Dean Street', Survey of London: volumes 33 and 34: St Anne Soho (1966), pp. 228-235 [Online] <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=41096> [Accessed March 7 2014]

### ***Other Websites***

Sorensen, Lee. "Thomas Ashby, Eugenie Sellers Strong, Rodolfo Lanciani." Dictionary of Art Historians. [www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org](http://www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org). [Accessed January 11 2010]

'Tonks, Henry' The Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists, Ed. Ian Chilvers. Oxford: OUP Oxford Reference Online. [Online] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/artists/henry-tonks>. [Accessed 25 Feb 2013].

Officer, L.H and Williamson, S., "Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present," MeasuringWorth, 2013 [Online] <http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/relativevalue.php> on a 2013 basis, [Accessed 6 June 2014].

The Heritage Memorial Lottery Fund. 'ABOUT THE NHMF' [Online] <http://www.nhmf.org.uk/ABOUTUS/Pages/default.aspx> [Accessed July 2 2014]

'Boston Public Library." The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. 2008. Retrieved January 26, 2010 from Encyclopedia.com:

<http://www.bpl.org/general/history.htm> [Accessed January 2010]

'Print Room' style', Prints and Drawings, E.473-1914,[Online]

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O76994/print-room-style-wallpaper-unknown/> [Accessed March 7 2014].

'Allan Walton Textiles' [Online] <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/search/?slug=allan-walton-textiles&name=7998&limit=45&offset=0> [Accessed June 21 2014]

'Augustus Daniel' [Online] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus\\_Daniel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus_Daniel) [Accessed December 7 2012]

'C20 Society Murals Campaign' [Online], <http://www.c20society.org.uk/murals-campaign/>, [Accessed 8 May 2014]

Chilvers, I., 'Steer, Philip Wilson', A Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Art. 1999. *Encyclopedia.com*. <http://www.encyclopedia.com> [Accessed 13 July 2009]

Chilvers, I., 'New English Art Club', A Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Art. 1999. *Encyclopedia.com*. <http://www.encyclopedia.com> [Accessed 13 July 2009]

'Clovelly Silk' [Online]<http://www.clovellysilk.com/rex-whistler-toile-de-jouy/rex-whistler>. [Accessed September 27 2013].

‘Edward Bawden CBE, RA Mural Design for the International Building 1938’

[Online] <http://www.fryartgallery.org/the-collection/search-viewer/612/artist/6/Edward-Bawden-CBE-RA> [Accessed August 6 2014]

‘Empire Mail: George V and the GPO’ [Online],

[www.postalheritage.org.uk/empiremail](http://www.postalheritage.org.uk/empiremail) [Accessed October 11 2013].

‘Jubilee Stamp ‘Ref No P 150/03/03/04 <http://catalogue.postalheritage.org.uk>.

[Accessed October 11 2013.]

‘Mary Adshead’ London Transport Museum [Online]

<http://www.ltmcollection.org/posters/artist/artist.html?IXartist=Mary+Adshead>

[accessed April 30 2014]

‘Modern Pictures’ auction, Bonhams, 13 May 2008 lots 226-229, [Online]

<http://www.bonhams.com/auctions/15795> [Accessed October 11 2013]

‘Paul Nash (1889 – 1946)’ The Bookroom Art Press [Online]

<http://www.bookroomartpress.co.uk/biographies/20.html> [Accessed October 13 2013]

‘Posters with a Purpose: The London Transport Museum Sale’, Sale 6934, Christies

London, 4 October 2012 [Online] <http://www.christies.com/posters-with-a-purpose-17238.aspx> [Accessed July 16 2013]

‘Reginald Brett, 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount Esher’ [Online] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>.

[Accessed 12 October 2009]

'Reginald Brill' [Online] [http://www.lissfineart.com/1669q0\\_reginald+brill.htm](http://www.lissfineart.com/1669q0_reginald+brill.htm)  
[Accessed August 5 2014]

'Sherborne House mural, The Colour Scheme' [Online]  
<http://www.sherbornehouse.org.uk/the-sherborne-house-mural/> [Accessed April  
1 2014].

'Slade School of Fine Art' [Online] <http://www.fineart.ac.uk/institutions> [Accessed  
12 July 2009].

'The De La Warr Study for a Mural' [Online] The Bookroom Art Press  
[http://news.bookroomartpress.co.uk/2010/04/the-de-la-warr-study-for-a-  
mural/](http://news.bookroomartpress.co.uk/2010/04/the-de-la-warr-study-for-a-mural/) [Accessed August 6 2014]

'The Early Years – Eton Manor Boys' Club'[Online]  
<http://www.villierspark.org.uk/about-us/our-history/> [Accessed July 28 2014]

'The Shell Art Collection' on  
[http://www.nationalmotormuseum.org.uk/?location\\_id=18](http://www.nationalmotormuseum.org.uk/?location_id=18) [Accessed 30 August  
2013]

'Victor Proetz' [Online] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor\\_Proetz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Proetz) [Accessed  
December 30 2013]

Boris Anrep mosaic pavement in Gallery II (1923) and the Ervin Bossanyi stained  
glass window '*The Angel Blesses the Women Washing Clothes*' (1938-43) [Online]

<http://www.tate.org.uk/about/our-work/collection/about-the-collection/works-in-the-fabric-of-tate-buildings/mosaic-pavement-gallery-two>

[Accessed 2 January 2013]

Castletown House, Co. Kildare [Online]

<http://www.castletownhouse.ie/TouroftheHouse/ThePrintRoom/> [Accessed March 10 2014].

Christopher Wood' [online] <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/wood-boat-in-harbour-brittany-t00489/text-catalogue-entry> [Accessed 2 May 2013]

Coronation mug for Edward VIII, V & A Collections no E.292-1937, 1936 [Online]  
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1041808/coronation-mug-for-edward-viii-design-for-a-eric-william-ravilious/> [Accessed May 21 2014]

Coronation Posters [Online]. [http://imperial-airways.co.uk/Advertisements\\_coronation.html](http://imperial-airways.co.uk/Advertisements_coronation.html) [Accessed May 19 2014]

Delaney, J G P., Introduction, *Gerald Heard's Memoir of Glyn Philpot (c.1945)*  
[Online]  
<http://www.geraldheard.com/writings.htm>. [Accessed April 11 2014]

Edward James overdoors by Whistler [Online]  
<http://hermitagemuseum.wordpress.com/2010/07/05/everything-that-happens-began-in-the-past/> and

<http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/mason/mason9-13-06.asp>

[Accessed October 7 2013]

Embassy Court mural [Online] from

<http://www.embassycourt.org.uk/history/the-embassy-court-mural/> [Accessed April 9 2014].

English Heritage 'List entry summary' Name: TRENT PARK HOUSE List entry Number: 1078931 [Online] <http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/resultsingle.aspx?uid=1078931> [Accessed March 19 2014]

Galli Bibiena family' [Online] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galli\\_da\\_Bibiena\\_family](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galli_da_Bibiena_family) information on 'Margravial Opera House Bayreuth' [Online] <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1379/> [Accessed May 28 2013].

Verbeek's cartoons [Online]

[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/14/books/review/Wolk-t.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/14/books/review/Wolk-t.html?_r=0) and <http://www.24-7pressrelease.com/press-release/sunday-press-turns-comics-world-upside-down-with-new-book-on-gustave-verbeek-115466.php>, [Accessed 6 August 2013]

Images [Online] Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Library Photographs Collection <http://www.ribapix.com/image.php?i=104753&r=2&t=4&x=1&ref=RIBA51748> [Accessed April 9 2014]



La Villa Malaspina di Caniparola with eighteenth century frescoes by Piacenza and Natali [Online] <http://www.terredilunigiana.com/ville/villacaniparola.php>.  
[Accessed September 12 2012].

London Transport Museum Photographic Collections website, [Online]  
[http://www.ltmcollection.org/photos/photo/photo.html?design=abc&IXsearch=exhibition&IXsummary=results/results&IXSR\\_=vExT2d6Qrpp&IXMAXHITS\\_=1&IXFIRST\\_=25](http://www.ltmcollection.org/photos/photo/photo.html?design=abc&IXsearch=exhibition&IXsummary=results/results&IXSR_=vExT2d6Qrpp&IXMAXHITS_=1&IXFIRST_=25) [Accessed July 21 2014].

1949 exhibition [Online] LTM Photographic collections  
<http://www.ltmcollection.org/photos/index.html> [Accessed 30 July 2013]

Pearson, L., 'Post-war Murals Database' [Online]  
[http://www.academia.edu/5211590/Postwar\\_murals\\_database](http://www.academia.edu/5211590/Postwar_murals_database) [Accessed 8 May 2014]

Photographs and information on post-war murals [Online] at RIBA,  
<http://www.ribapix.com> and <http://www.lynnpearson.co.uk/pearson-studyday.pdf> [Accessed 8 May 2014]

Press cuttings at Liss Fine Art [Online]  
<http://www.lissfineart.com/pdf/viewer.php?file=Murals2013Press.pdf> [Accessed 16 Apr 2014]

Prints, Drawings and Paintings Collection, V&A, [Online]

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/043969/pompeian-style-bathroom-designed-and-drawing-brown-geoffrey-houghton/> [Accessed May 20 2014]

Southampton City Art Gallery [Online] [http://www.southampton.gov.uk/s-leisure/artsheritage/sotonartgallery/search/view-artwork.asp?acc\\_num=14/1972](http://www.southampton.gov.uk/s-leisure/artsheritage/sotonartgallery/search/view-artwork.asp?acc_num=14/1972) [Accessed April 14 2014].

Tate Britain 'Archive Journeys, Bloomsbury; House decoration: Bell and Grant' [Online]  
[http://www2.tate.org.uk/archivejourneys/bloomsburyhtml/art\\_together\\_house.htm](http://www2.tate.org.uk/archivejourneys/bloomsburyhtml/art_together_house.htm) [Accessed April 11 2014].

Tate Britain 'Archive Showcase Aitken, Charles' [Online]  
<http://www3.tate.org.uk/research/researchservices/archive/showcase/item.jsp?subject=232&view=detail&page=2&parent=1406&item=1224> [Accessed July 16 2013]

Trophy in V&A Prints, Drawings and Paintings Collection [Online]  
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/0628268/omnis-generis-instrumenta-bellica-print-paul-birckenhultz/> [Accessed July 23 2014]

## ***Blogs***

Anthony, S. 'Barnett Freedman, Stephen Tallents and the making of the Jubilee Stamp'

[Online] <http://postalheritage.wordpress.com/2009/10/13/barnett-freedman-stephen-tallents-and-the-making-of-the-jubilee-stamp/> [Accessed October 11 2013.]

Emile de Bruijn, E. National Trust Collections 'The Backstory of Wallpaper' [Online] on <http://nttreasurehunt.wordpress.com/2013/10/15/the-backstory-of-wallpaper/> [20 April 2014]

Emile de Bruijn (National Trust) [Online] Pinterest <http://www.pinterest.com/emiledebruijn/chinoiserie-wallpaper/> [Accessed December 10 2012].

Gaye Tapp, P., 'by Lady Diana Cooper, some rooms', 'Little Augury' blog, 2nd June 2010, [Online] <http://littleaugury.blogspot.com/2010/06/by-lady-diana-cooper-some-rooms.html>, [April 1 2014]

Morley College murals on <http://jamesrussellontheweb.blogspot.co.uk/2011/10/> Accessed 7 Jan 2013

Tackett, John J., 'More of the Artistry of Rex Whistler' [Online] <http://tdclassicist.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/more-of-artistry-of-rex-whistler.html> [November 12 2013].

Vintage Poster Forum [Online] blog entry for Thursday 2 July 2009 'Rex Whistler Posters'

<http://www.booksandthingscouk.blogspot.co.uk/2009/07/rex-whistler-posters.html> [Accessed July 6 2013]

## **Broadcast Material**

'A Bigger Picture', film on David Hockney by Bruno Wollheim, BBC 1, 30 June 2009.

## VOLUME OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. Image Details

[Please note that some images have been removed in the Volume itself due to Copyright restrictions.]

- 1.1 TOP: *Figure sketch* for 'Tragedy', for proscenium panel Shadwell mural. 1924-5. dimensions unknown. RWA.  
  
BELOW: Possible sketch for putti, Shadwell mural. 1924-5. dimensions unknown. RWA.
- 1.2 Pages from '1925 Sketchbook', CR 290, dimensions 7 inches x 10.5 inches. RWA.
- 1.3 Pages from '1925 Sketchbook', CR 290, dimensions 7 inches x 10.5 inches. RWA.
- 1.4 Top of page of notes from 'Sketchbook 1923A' CR 286. RWA.
- 1.5 Mary Adshead *The Picnic* 1924, Oil on canvas 94 in. x 47.2 in. Manchester Art Gallery.
- 1.6 Female Figure Seated 1924, Oil on canvas, 2 ft. 6 in. x 1ft. 8 in. © UCL Art Museum, University College London.
- 1.7 Sketch of Wilsford Manor (annotated by Laurence Whistler), 'Sketchbook 1923B' CR. 287, 6.5 x 3.5 inches, RWA.
- 1.8 *Rustic Scene: Villagers Dancing* 1924, oil on canvas, 12 ft. x 7ft. 5 in. © UCL Art Museum, University College London.
- 1.9 *Picnic in the Country with Musicians and Dancers*, 1924, oil on canvas. 12 ft. x 7ft. 5 in. The Slade and UCL Art Collections, London. © UCL Art Museum, University College London.
- 1.10 Whistler's panel left and Mary Adshead's (title unknown) right. *The Times*, Sept 24 1924, p.7.
- 1.11 Mary Adshead *The Joys of the Country* 1924 (dimensions unknown). Mural panel for Highway Boys Club Shadwell. University of Liverpool Art Collections.
- 1.12 Contemporary photograph of the interior of Highway Boys Club Memorial Hall Shadwell, showing Whistler's two side panels (1924) and proscenium panels (1925), together with one of Mary Adshead's small panels (1924, unidentified) abutting the stage. RWA.
- 1.13 Sketch for headpiece of proscenium arch, Shadwell, 'Sketchbook 1925' 7 inches x 10.5 inches, RWA.

- 1.14 Proscenium decoration for Highways Memorial Club, Shadwell 1925  
 TOP: *Allegorical Composition: Comedy and Putti Driving away a Heraldic Unicorn*  
 Oil on canvas glued to millboard, 52.3 inches x 108.2 inches.  
 BELOW: *Allegorical Composition: Tragedy and Putti Driving away a Heraldic Lion*  
 Oil on canvas glued to millboard, 52.7 inches x 123.2 inches. © UCL Art Museum, University College London.
- 1.15 Left panel, adjacent to 'Comedy': *Rural Scene with Putto Conducting Two Men Playing the Lute and Saxophone and Figures Dancing*, 1925, oil on canvas glued to millboard, 129.1 inches x 74.8 inches.  
 Right panel, adjacent to 'Tragedy': *Allegorical Composition with Nun Holding a Child and a Skeleton Personifying Death Taking the Arm of a Boy Holding a Book* 1925, oil on canvas glued to millboard, 130.9 inches x 78.3 inches. © UCL Art Museum, University College London.
- 1.16 *Trial Scene from the Merchant of Venice* 1925, oil on canvas, 3 ft. x 4ft. 1in. © UCL Art Museum, University College London.
- 1.17 Ink and watercolour sketch for *Trial Scene from the Merchant of Venice* 1925  
 6.5 inches x 10 inches. Private collection.
- 1.18 Ink and watercolour sketch for *Trial Scene from the Merchant of Venice* 1925  
 6.75 inches x 9 inches. RWA.
- 2.1 Preliminary sketches for the Tate Gallery Refreshment Room mural, c. April 1925, 7.5 inches x 10.5 inches, in 1925 Sketchbook, RWA.
- 2.2 Preliminary sketches for the Tate Gallery Refreshment Room mural, c. April 1925, 7.5 inches x 10.5 inches, in 1925 Sketchbook, RWA.
- 2.3 Scenes from the 'Tangeree' section of the Tate Gallery mural. This part of the mural is the most incomplete and the least reproduced of the scheme. Photographs author's own.
- 2.4 Sketch of original Chinoiserie design for the columns in the centre of the Refreshment Room (not adopted), 1926, RWA.
- 2.5 The unfinished figures returning to Epicurania in the final scene of the mural. Photograph author's own.
- 2.6 Panel on main wall of the Refreshment Room, showing the thin washes that Whistler employed over the white ground. The use of viridian is distinctive and used throughout the composition. Photograph author's

own.

- 2.7 Squared out sketch for the hunting party's departure from Epicurania, 1926, RWA.
- 2.8 The finished scene in the mural. Image © Tate Photography.
- 2.9 Another view of Epicurania, showing how Whistler fitted the departure scene into the corner of the room. Photograph author's own.
- 2.10 Caryatids at the entrance to the Refreshment Room. Image © Tate Photography.
- 2.11 The final panel of the mural with classical statuary, the Boycott Pavilion and the Corinthian Arch both based on those at Stowe. At the far right is the party returning to Epicurania. Image © Tate Photography.
- 2.12 Design for scene for main wall of Refreshment Room. RWA.  
Édouard Manet, *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 1863-1868, Oil on canvas, 35.2 x 45.8 in., Courtauld Gallery, London.
- 2.13 Nan West *Summer*, 1927, panel from the mural at the Royal National Orthopaedic Outpatients Hall.  
The murals in situ. Photograph from 2006 before the demolition of the Hospital. Image English Heritage.
- 2.14 Eric Ravilious and Edward Bawden, part of the mural scheme at Morley College, 1928-1930. Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Library Photographs Collection.
- 3.1 Illustration to Baudelaire's 'L'Horloge', 9 x 7 inches, ink and watercolour, 1924 Sketchbook, RWA.
- 3.2 View from the villa in Switzerland, 7 x 9 inches, ink and watercolour, 1924 Sketchbook, RWA.
- 3.3 Ink and watercolour sketches of the Colosseum and the Arch of Septimius, 7 x 9 inches, 1924 Sketchbook, RWA.
- 3.4 Lists of paintings seen, sketch plan of Bellini's *Sacred Conversation* (now called *Sacred Allegory* or *Holy Allegory*) lower right, 1924 Sketchbook RWA. Giovanni Bellini *Sacred Allegory* (1490-1500), Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
- 3.5 Overdoor decoration, possibly from San Remo, page 7 x 10.5 inches, pen and ink 1925 Sketchbook, RWA.  
A similar layout is used in the sketch for the central cartouche for the

- Shadwell proscenium decoration, 7 x 10.5 inches, pen and ink, 1925 Sketchbook, RWA.
- 3.6 Top: 'The Palladian Bridge Wilton' Below: 'The 'grotto' now called The Park School, at Wilton' Both 7 x 10.5 inches, pen and ink, 1925 Sketchbook, RWA.
  - 3.7 Title page Rome Sketchbook 1928, 10.5 x 6.75 inches, pen and ink, RWA.
  - 3.8 Top: page from Rome Sketchbook, 1928 showing list of paintings seen in the Borghese Gallery and pencil sketches of dolphin decorations, in the main salon, RWA. Below: painted dolphin decorations above the Venetian window, commissioned for Sir Philip Sassoon at Trent Park, 1935-36. RWA.
  - 3.9 *Tivoli. Thursday April 26<sup>th</sup>*, Rome Sketchbook 1928, 10.5 x 6.75 inches, pen and ink, RWA.
  - 3.10 *Bosco Sacro*, ink and watercolour, 6.75 x 10.25 inches, 1928. Private Collection.  
*Castel Gandolfo and Lake Albano*, ink and watercolour, 7 x 10.25 inches, 1928. Private collection.
  - 3.11 Winifred Knights, *Figures in a boat, lake Piediluco*, 1924-30, oil on canvas, 26 3/16 x 26 3/16 inches. Private Collection.
  - 3.12 Top: Francis Towne *Lake Albano with Castel Gandolfo*, 1781, ink and watercolour 12.5 x 27.5 inches, British Museum. Below: John Robert Cozens *The Lake of Albano and Castel Gandolfo*, c. 1778, watercolour, 14.3 x 20.7 inches, Art Gallery of Ontario.
  - 3.13 *Peaches & Tapestry in the dining room, no. 3 Foro Romano* 1929, oil on canvas, 10 x 14 inches. Private collection.
  - 3.14 *Tivoli from the Road*, 1929, oil on canvas, 10 x 14 inches. Private Collection.
  - 3.15 Edward Irvine Halliday, *St Paul Meeting Lydia of Thyatira*, 1928 Oil on canvas, 41.7 x 57.8 inches, oil on canvas. Collection: University of Liverpool.
  - 3.16 Sketch for *The Story of Jonah*, 1928, pencil and watercolour, 1ft. 3in. x 3ft. 2in., RWA.
  - 3.17 *The Story of Jonah*, 1928, oil on canvas, 1ft. 3in. x 3ft. 2in. Private collection.
  - 3.18 Royal Opera House. Royal Box decorated for Gala Performance in honour of French Presidential visit, March 1939.
  - 3.19 Bookplate for Osbert Sitwell, 1928, collotype, 4 1/2 x 2 7/8 in., RWA.  
Thomas Johnson, design, 1758, Etching, ink on paper, Museum no. E.3780-1903. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



- 3.20 Above: plate by Göz from *Les Maîtres de l'Ornementation Le Style Louis XV*, 1925, held in RWA. Below: design for Clovelly *toile de Jouy*, 1932 shown on range of fabrics and household textiles printed by Clovelly Silks, Clovelly.
- 3.21 Illustration to *Gulliver's Travels*, 1930.  
Richard Bentley, Frontispiece for the illustrated 1753 edition of Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.
- 3.22 *Saturday Book* Anthology, cover by Philip Gough, 1955.
- 3.23 'Clump of trees on road to Bellegra July 8' 1928 Rome Sketchbook, 10.5 x 6.75 inches, pencil, RWA.
- 3.24 *Miss Penelope and Miss Angela Dudley-Ward*, 1933-34, oil on canvas, 3ft. 1.5 in x 4ft. Private Collection.
- 3.25 Section of mural showing capriccio, Dining Room at Plas Newydd, 1936-38, oil on canvas.
- 3.26 Section of mural showing capriccio, 19 Hill Street, oil on canvas, 1930-31. Another capriccio in one of the panels for 36 Hill Street, oil on canvas, 1936.
- 3.27 Trophy in panel of mural at Port Lympne, 1930-32, oil on canvas.  
Trophy in panel for interior (unknown scheme) oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in. Private Collection.
- 4.1 Design for cover, RIBA Centenary Conference Handbook, 1934. Pencil on paper, approx. 10 x 8 in. Image taken courtesy of the RIBA Library, Drawings and Archive Collection.
- 4.2 Photograph for 'Proposal for Grosvenor Square', c.1934, pen and ink, 3.5 x 4.5in, from *Country Life*, 17 January 1947. Image courtesy of *Country Life*.
- 4.3 Initial ink and watercolour sketch for the Dorneywood panel, 1928. Private Collection. Author's photo.  
Photograph showing installation of the mural panel at Dorneywood, 1928-29, oil on canvas. Author's photo. NB. Full details of all mural dimensions are in Appendix II.
- 4.4 Edward Halliday *Ulysses and Nausicaa*, 1935, Dining room of 27 Thurloe Square. Image © Tate Library and Archive.
- 4.5 John Piper, decoration at 22 Highpoint, London 1938-9. Image © Tate Library and Archive.
- 4.6 Contemporary photograph of the 76 Dean Street mural, artist unknown, 1732-35, under conservation.
- 4.7 Mural at 19 Hill Street, 1930-31, oil on canvas. Author's photo.

- 4.8 Mural as seen from the entrance to 19 Hill Street. Author's photo.
- 4.9 Proposal for the upper staircase hall, 11 x 1ft 21/2 in., ink and watercolour, image from Witt Library. Original now in private collection.
- 4.10 Felix Harbord, tribute to Rex Whistler, 1959, probably oil on plaster, 19 Hill Street. Author's photo.
- 4.11 Murals at 36 Hill Street in existing 18<sup>th</sup> century plaster-work frames, 1936. Photographs RWA.
- 4.12 Mural panel, 36 Hill Street, oil on canvas, 1936. Photograph RWA.  
Mural panel, 36 Hill Street, oil on canvas, 1936. Photograph RWA.
- 4.13 Mural panel, 1936, 36 Hill Street, oil on canvas. Photo RWA.
- 4.14 Frank Freeman and Joan Souter Robertson, Murals in staircase hall of Highfield, Birmingham, 1931. Photographs RIBA.
- 4.15 The scheme at 35 Gower Street, 1935, oil on plaster. Above: the 'pretence mezzotints' and the plaque with the Three Graces. Below: showing the Regency and Empire style of the furnishings, two more plaques on the end wall and the niche with 'antique jug' on the left. Photographs RWA.
- 4.16 The 'antique jug' in the trompe l'oeil niche. Photograph RWA.
- 4.17 Left: the eighteenth century Print Room at Blickling Hall. National Trust Images. Right: the eighteenth century Print Room at Castletown House, Ireland. Images [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)
- 4.18 Hans Feibusch, murals for house in Hampstead, 1937. Medium unknown. Image from RIBA.
- 4.19 The chimney piece mural in the Back Drawing Room of 5 Belgrave Square, 1935, oil on plaster, 9ft. x 5ft. Image courtesy of *Country Life*.
- 4.20 Right: closer image of the mural. Image courtesy of *Country Life*.  
Left: original watercolour sketch for the mural showing colour scheme. RWA.
- 4.21 *Trent Park, Middlesex: the Terrace*, 1934, oil on canvas, 10.5 in x 1ft. 2in., Private Collection.
- 4.22 Trophy above chimney piece, Blue Room, Trent Park, oil on wood, 1935-36. Image right Flickr.com, left RWA.
- 4.23 'Amazon Queens' in the Library, Trent Park, oil on wood, 1935-36. Photograph Flickr.com.

- 4.24 Decoration above the Venetian window, Trent Park, oil on wood, 1935-36. Image RWA.
- 4.25 Monogram of Sir Philip Sassoon gilded in gold leaf over door to one of the reception rooms, 1935-36. Photograph, Flickr.com.
- 4.26 Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, Room setting in the Lefevre Gallery, 1932. Plate from Patmore, D., *Colour Schemes & Modern Furnishing*, The Studio: London & New York, 1933
- 4.27 Duncan Grant, overmantel panel for Angus Davidson, 1930. Image RIBA.
- 4.28 Discarded proposal for Port Lympne mural, 1930, ink and watercolour, 11in. x 1ft.1in. Private collection.
- 4.29 Mural for the Dining Room at Port Lympne, 1930-32. Photograph *Country Life*.
- 4.30 Sections of the mural at Port Lympne. Top: Palladian Bridge and St Martin-in-the-Fields. Below: a fantasy garden scene. Photographs author's own.
- 4.31 Mural for the Dining Room at Plas Newydd, 1936-38, oil on canvas. Photograph © National Trust Images.  
View of the Dining Room showing the mirrors installed facing the mural. The right hand arch leading away from the viewer is a trompe l'oeil creation. © National Trust Images.  
Further view of the mural. © National Trust Images/ Andreas von Einsiedel.  
Section of the mural. Photograph author's own.
- 4.32 Section of mural showing trophy and grisaille decorations on the South wall and part of the coffered ceiling; these correspond to decorations on the North wall. Photograph private collection.
- 4.33 The artist's self-portrait in the return wall of the mural. Photograph RWA.
- 4.34 Left: The entrance hall of the Mountbatten penthouse at Brook House
- 4.35 Right: the enfilade of reception rooms. Both photographs from *Country Life*/A E Henson.
- 4.36 The murals at Brook House, 1937, oil on canvas. RWA.
- 4.37 The grisaille colour scheme of the Brook House murals. Photograph shows the murals after relocation to Britwell Salome, Oxfordshire. Image from Pinterest.
- 4.38 Designs for a Courtyard and Pavilion in a Gothic style at Plas Newydd, 1936, ink and watercolour with gold, 9in x 1ft. © National Trust/Simon

Harris.

- 4.39 Murals in the Drawing Room at Mottisfont Abbey, 1938-39, oil on plaster and wood. © National Trust Images/ Andreas von Einsiedel.
- 4.40 Sections of mural showing trompe l'oeil columns and trophy, © National Trust Images/ Andreas von Einsiedel, and the 'smoking urn'. Country Life /David Giles.
- 4.41 Detail showing the window treatment involving faux and real curtains. © National Trust Images/ Andreas von Einsiedel.
- 4.42 Mary Adshead, *A Tropical Fantasy*, 1926, oil on board, University of Liverpool Collections.
- 4.43 Mary Adshead, *An English Holiday*, oil on canvas, 1928. Photograph Estate of Mary Adshead.  
Panels from the mural, photographs from Liss Fine Art.
- 4.44 Glyn Philpot, murals at Mulberry House, 1931. Photograph *Country Life*/A E Henson. The bronze relief was by Charles Sergeant Jagger.
- 4.45 Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, murals for the dining room at Penns-in-the-Rocks, 1929-31. Photograph ©Tate Library and Archive.
- 5.1 Top: *London Museum*, 1928. Below: *The Tate Gallery*, 1928. Both posters for the London Passenger Transport Board. © TFL from the London Transport Museum Collection.
- 5.2 L to R: Austin Cooper *British Museum* 1928, Edward McKnight Kauffer *British Industries Fair* 1928, Edward Bawden *Natural History Museum* 1925. © TFL from the London Transport Museum Collection.
- 5.3 *The Four Georges* 1930 and *The Age of Walnut* 1932. Images from the Vintage Poster Forum.
- 5.4 Stephen Bone, mural at Piccadilly Circus underground station, 1928-9. London Transport Museum Collection.
- 5.5 *Bakerloo* 1930, design for C B Cochran review, RWA.
- 5.6 *The Vale of Aylesbury*, 1933. Private collection.  
Top: Graham Sutherland, *Brimham Rocks, Yorkshire*, 1937. Lower left: Ben Nicholson, *Guardsman outside Buckingham Palace*, 1938. Right: Lord Berners, *Faringdon Folly*, 1936. Copyright Shell Brands International AG. Courtesy the Shell Art Collection.
- 5.7 Paul Nash, *The Rye Marshes*, 1932. Copyright Shell Brands International AG. Courtesy the Shell Art Collection.

- 5.8 'That's Shell – that is' press adverts, 1929. Private collection.
- 5.9 Shell press advert, 1929. Private collection.
- 5.10 'Reversible Faces' series, 1931-32. Private Collection.
- 5.11 Top: Edward Bawden, 'Stow-on-the-Wold', 1933 and 'Bexhill-on-Sea' 1935 designs for Shell Press advertising. Images Flickr.com. Below: 'Summer Shell', 1935. Private collection.
- 5.12 Illustration to *The New Forget-Me-Not: A Calendar* 1929. Private collection.
- 5.13 Designs for Fortnum and Mason catalogue, 1935. Private collection.
- 5.14 'King George VI Coronation Poster', Imperial Airways, 1937. Image [www.Ebay.com](http://www.Ebay.com)
- 5.15 Right: Imperial Airways leaflet design, 1936. Private collection. Left: Edward McKnight Kauffer poster for Imperial Airways, 1935. Image <http://www.artvalue.com/>
- 5.16 Celebrations at the end of South African War', 1940-44, Design for Rothmans. Image Bonham Auctions.
- 5.17 Neptune carpet design, 1934. Private collection.  
The carpet now in situ at West Dean, contemporary photograph from Pinterest, source unknown.
- 5.18 *Clovelly* toile du Jouy, 1932. Image Clovelly Silks.
- 5.19 Top: the Clovelly design on Wedgwood china, 1933 onwards. Images EBay. Below: Eric Ravilious, Coronation mugs, 1937 and 1953. Images Bonhams.
- 5.20 Eric Ravilious, designs for Coronation mug 1936 and 1937. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
- 5.21 Design for the 1935 George V Jubilee Stamp, 1934, British Postal Museum and Archive. © Stamp Design Royal Mail Group Ltd (2015)
- 5.22 Barnett Freedman, successful design for the Jubilee Stamp, 1934, British Postal Museum and Archive. © Stamp Design Royal Mail Group Ltd (2015)
- 6.1 *Haddon Hall*, 1932, preliminary oil painting for the larger panel, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Private collection.  
Panel at Haddon Hall in situ, 1933, oil on wood, 6ft. x 8ft. 6 in.

- 6.2 *Weston Hall*, 1929, oil on canvas, 9in. x 1ft. Private collection.  
*Cranborne Manor*, 1935, oil on canvas, 1ft. 5.5in. x 1ft. 2in. Private Collection.
- 6.3 Rex Whistler photographed by Howard Coster, 1936. The equestrian portrait of Edward James is in the background. © National Portrait Gallery, London.
- 6.4 One of the pair of limewood urns in the Gallery at North Audley Street, 1932. Photograph *Country Life* / Alex Starkey.
- 6.5 Left: Design for Wall-paper for North Audley Street, 1932, ink and watercolour, 10in. x 1ft. 2in. Image from Victoria and Albert Museum. Right: the wall-paper in situ, oil on canvas, 6ft. x 5ft. 1in. Image English Heritage.
- 6.6 The panel at Belgrave Square in a photograph from *Vogue* magazine, date unknown.
- 6.7 *Conversation piece: The Royal Family*, 1937, pencil, 1ft.1in. x 10in. Royal Collection Trust/ ©HM Queen Elizabeth II 2015.
- 6.8 *Officers Mess Tent, Codford St Mary*, 1942, oil on canvas, 11.75 x 1ft. 6 in. Collection of the Welsh Guards.
- 6.9 “*Sonny Grant*”, 1936, oil on canvas, 1ft. 3.75 in x 11.5in. Private Collection.
- 6.10 Rex Whistler photographed by Howard Coster, 1936. ©National Portrait Gallery, London.
- 6.11 *Self-Portrait*, 1933, oil on canvas, 1ft. 3.5 in. x 1ft. 2in. Photo: ©Tate, London [2015].
- 6.12 Andrea Soldi, *James Gibbs, 1682 – 1754, Architect*, c.1750. National Galleries Scotland.
- 6.13 *Self-Portrait in Uniform*, 1940, oil on canvas, 2ft. 4in x 1ft. 11in. National Army Museum.
- 6.14 William Orpen *Ready to Start. Self-Portrait*, 1917. Imperial War Museum. © IWM (Art.IWM ART 2380)

**Fig. 1.1**



TOP: *Figure sketch for 'Tragedy', for proscenium panel Shadwell mural. 1924-5. dimensions unknown. RWA.*

BELOW: *Possible sketch for putti, Shadwell mural. 1924-5. dimensions unknown. RWA.*

Fig. 1.2

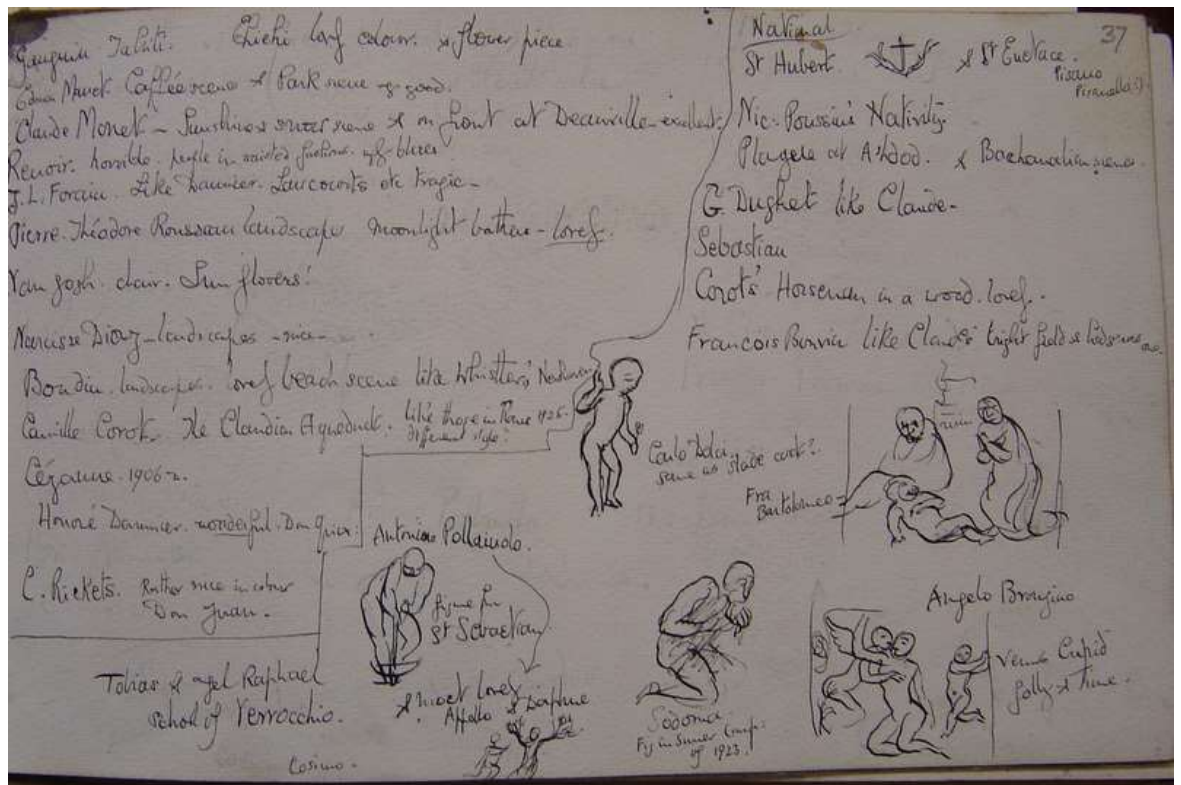


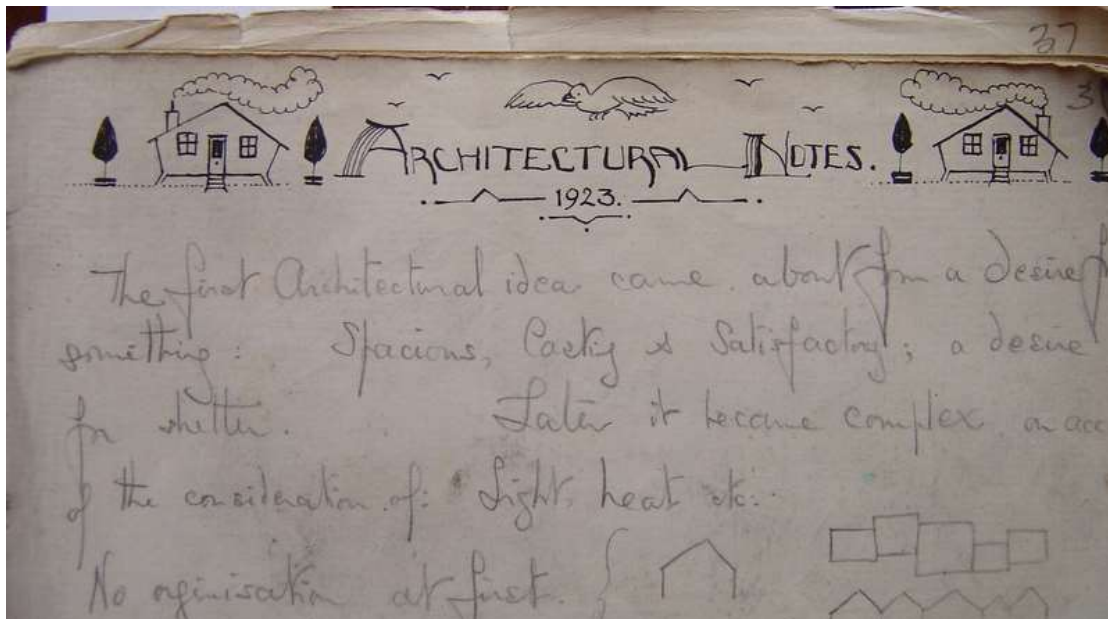
Fig. 1.3



Pages from '1925 Sketchbook', CR 290, dimensions 7 inches x 10.5 inches. RWA.



**Fig. 1.4**



Top of page of notes from 'Sketchbook 1923A' CR 286. RWA.

**Fig. 1.5**

Mary Adshead, *The Picnic*, 1924, Oil on canvas, 94 inches x 47.2 inches Manchester Art Gallery. Image has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 1.6**



*Female Figure Seated*, 1924, Oil on canvas, 2 ft. 6 in. x 1ft. 8 in. © UCL Art Museum, University College London.

**Fig. 1.7**

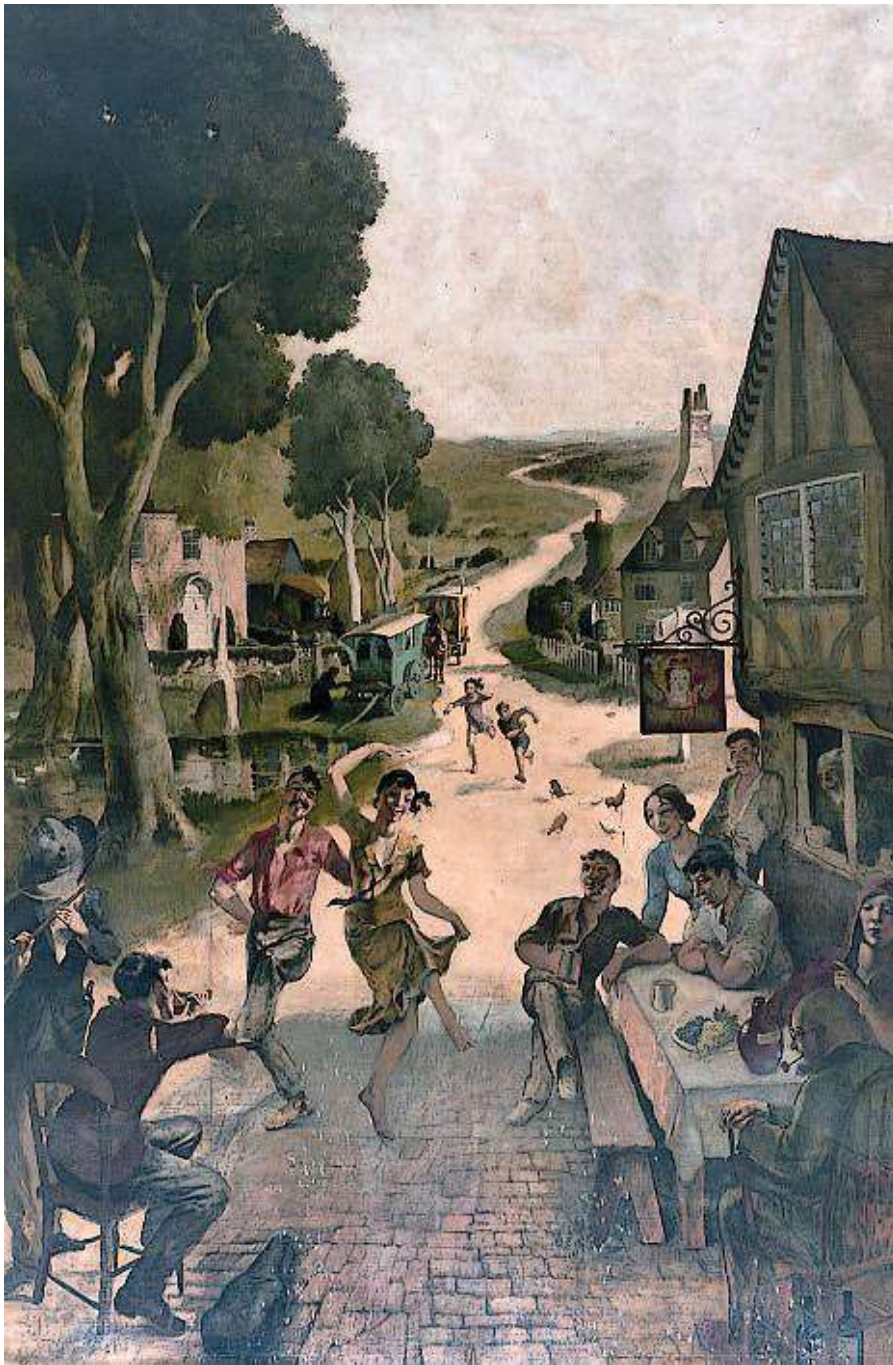


Sketch of Wilsford Manor (annotated by Laurence Whistler),

'Sketchbook 1923B' CR. 287, 6.5 x 3.5 inches, RWA.



**Fig.1.8**



*Rustic Scene: Villagers Dancing* 1924

Oil on canvas.

12 ft. x 7ft. 5 in.

© UCL Art Museum, University College London.

Fig. 1.9



*Picnic in the Country with Musicians and Dancers* 1924

*Oil on canvas.*

12 ft. x 7ft. 5 in. © UCL Art Museum, University College London.

**Fig. 1.10**

Whistler's panel left and Mary Adshead's (title unknown) right. Image *The Times*, Sept 24 1924, p.7. Image has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 1.11**

Mary Adshead *The Joys of the Country* 1924 (dimensions unknown)

Mural panel for Highway Boys Club Shadwell. University of Liverpool Art Collections. Image has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

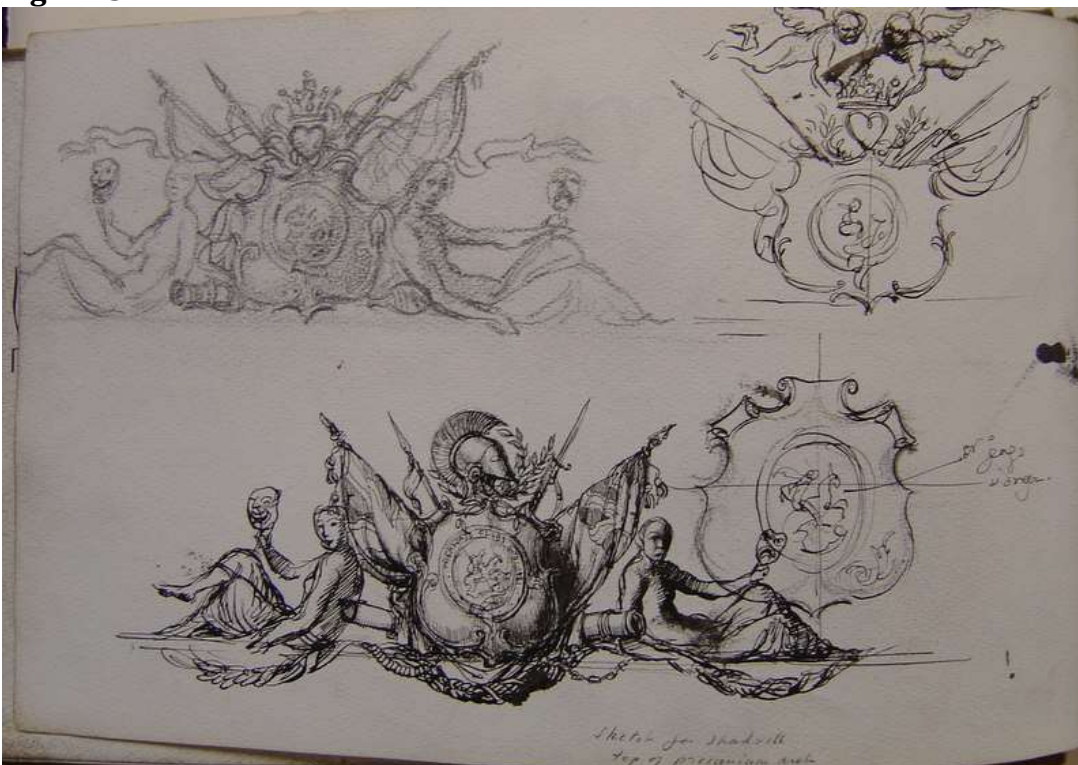


**Fig. 1.12**



Contemporary photograph of the interior of Highway Boys Club Memorial Hall Shadwell, showing Whistler's two side panels (1924) and proscenium panels (1925), together with one of Mary Adshead's small panels (1924, unidentified) abutting the stage. Image RWA.

**Fig. 1.13**



Sketch for headpiece of proscenium arch, Shadwell, 'Sketchbook 1925' 7 inches x 10.5 inches, RWA.

**Fig. 1.14**



Proscenium decoration for Highways Memorial Club, Shadwell 1925

TOP: *Allegorical Composition: Comedy and Putti Driving away a Heraldic Unicorn*  
Oil on canvas glued to millboard, 52.3 inches x 108.2 inches

BELOW: *Allegorical Composition: Tragedy and Putti Driving away a Heraldic Lion*  
Oil on canvas glued to millboard, 52.7 inches x 123.2 inches

© UCL Art Museum, University College London.



**Fig. 1.15**



Left panel, adjacent to 'Comedy': *Rural Scene with Putto Conducting Two Men Playing the Lute and Saxophone and Figures Dancing*, 1925

Oil on canvas glued to millboard

129.1 inches x 74.8 inches



Right panel, adjacent to 'Tragedy': *Allegorical Composition with Nun Holding a Child and a Skeleton Personifying Death Taking the Arm of a Boy Holding a Book*, 1925

Oil on canvas glued to millboard

130.9 inches x 78.3 inches © UCL Art Museum, University College London.

The boy is Stephen Tennant, and the book *Henry Brocken* by Walter de la Mare.



**Fig. 1.16**



*Trial Scene from the Merchant of Venice , 1925*

Oil on canvas, 3 ft. x 4ft. 1in.

© UCL Art Museum, University College London.

**Fig. 1.17**



Ink and watercolour sketch for *Trial Scene from the Merchant of Venice* 1925  
6.5 inches x 10 inches. Private collection.

**Fig. 1.18**



Ink and watercolour sketch for *Trial Scene from the Merchant of Venice* 1925  
6.75 inches x 9 inches. RWA.



A hand-drawn architectural plan of a rectangular building, likely a schoolhouse or church, with various dimensions and features. The plan is oriented with the long side horizontal. The overall dimensions are 59'-5" in length and 32' in width. The plan includes several rooms and features:

- Entrances:** There are two main entrances, one on the left and one on the right, each with a small porch area. The left entrance is 12'-6" wide, and the right entrance is 12'-6" wide. The right entrance is also labeled 11'-6" and 9'-2'-6".
- Windows:** There are several windows along the top and bottom walls. The top wall has a window 10' wide and 11'-6" high, and another window 11'-7" wide and 3'-6" high. The bottom wall has a window 11'-6" wide and 8' high.
- Interior Features:** The interior is divided into several rooms. There is a large central room (59'-5" x 32') and several smaller rooms. One room is labeled 8'-2" and 11'-7". Another room is labeled 11'-6" and 9'-2'-6".
- Dimensions:** The overall length is 59'-5" and the overall width is 32'. Other dimensions include 10', 11'-6", 11'-7", 3'-6", 12'-6", 11'-6", 9'-2'-6", 8', and 11'-6".
- Notes:** At the bottom right, there is a note: "V. early idea for Take probably the first of all".

7.10 inches x 10.15 inches, in 1925 SKETCHBOOK, RWVA.

**Fig.2.3**



Scenes from the 'Tangeree' section of the Tate Gallery mural. This part of the mural is the most incomplete and the least reproduced of the scheme. Photographs author's own.

**Fig. 2.4**



Sketch of original Chinoiserie design for the columns in the centre of the Refreshment Room (not adopted), 1926, RWA.

**Fig 2.5**



The unfinished figures returning to Epicurania in the final scene of the mural. Photograph author's own.



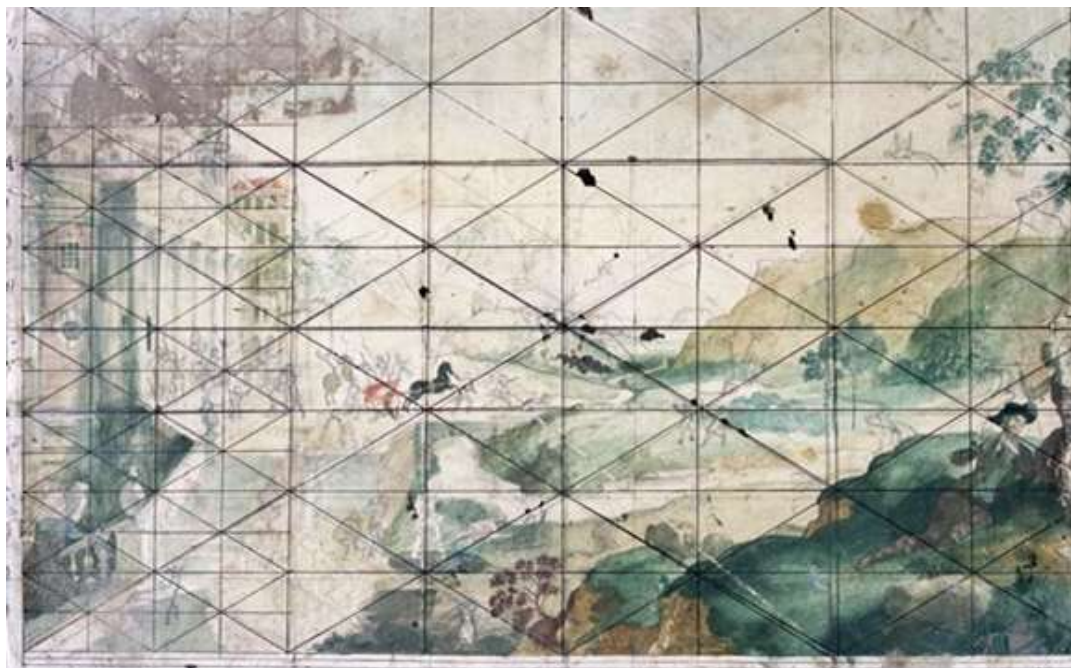
**Fig. 2.6**



Panel on main wall of the Refreshment Room, showing the thin washes that Whistler employed over the white ground. The use of viridian is distinctive and used throughout the composition. Photograph author's own.



**Fig. 2.7**



Squared out sketch for the hunting party's departure from Epicurania, 1926, RWA.

**Fig. 2.8**



The finished scene in the mural. Image © Tate Photography.

**Fig. 2.9**



Another view of Epicurania, showing how Whistler fitted the departure scene into the corner of the room. Photograph author's own.

**Fig 2.10**



Caryatids at the entrance to the Refreshment Room. Image© Tate Photography.



**Fig 2.11**



The final panel of the mural with classical statuary, the Boycott Pavilion and the Corinthian Arch both based on those at Stowe. At the far right is the party returning to Epicurania. Image ©Tate Photography.

**Fig. 2.12**



Design for scene for main wall of Refreshment Room. RWA.

Édouard Manet *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 1863-1868, Oil on canvas, 35.2 x 45.8 inches, Courtauld Gallery, London. Image has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig 2.13**



Nan West, *Summer*, panel from the mural at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital Outpatients Hall, 1927. Image RNOH collection,



The murals in situ. Photograph from 2006 before the demolition of the Hospital. Image, English Heritage.

**Fig. 2.14**

Eric Ravilious and Edward Bawden, part of the mural scheme at Morley College, 1928-1930. Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Library Photographs Collection.  
Image removed due to Copyright restrictions.



**Fig. 3.1**



Illustration to Baudelaire's 'L'Horloge',  
9 x 7 inches, ink and watercolour, 1924 Sketchbook, RWA.

**Fig. 3.2**



View from the villa in Switzerland,  
7 x 9 inches, ink and watercolour, 1924 Sketchbook, RWA.

**Fig. 3.3**



Ink and watercolour sketches of the Colosseum and the Arch of Septimius, 7 x 9 inches, 1924 Sketchbook, RWA.



Andrea del Sarto  
Ghirlandajo  
Piero di Cosimo "light & beautiful"  
Bottoelli - Minerva & Calisto  
Filippo Lippi - master of Bit  
Verrocchio. Tobias etc. most lovely little Pirosella &  
Uccello. long battles.  
Maestro Buon. by Piero della F.  
Cosimo di Medici, friend  
Filippino Lippi. lovely descent of  
Luca Signorelli  
Lorey portraits & Perugino  
Bramante  
Marco Palmezzano beautiful crucifix with trees.  
Piero di Cosimo. Endymion. always a masterpiece animal  
Ghirlandajo. unknown portraits of men  
Michael Al. holy family night  
dreadful scene  
Raphael  
Corregio sick & healthy.  
Sodoma. very marked Christ  
Salai Andrea del Sarto. (Virgin, Christ, St. Anne)  
Most lovely landscapes with figs & Giorgione.  
Titian beautiful battle of Cadore. smallish.  
Montagna.  
Giovanni Bellini. Perfect landscape & comp.  
Portraits of Benvenuto  
Softish. Palma Vecchio.  
Paul Veronese  
Mantegna portraits.  
Timoteo.

Spaccio di David  
long portraits etc. Hans Memling  
Dipa Trifoglio. Holy Ven. etc. etc.  
Nicola Ponceau. L'apoteose  
Triphile with a very strong expression  
Vandijk  
Candotto. 1521  
Tintoretto & Schiavone. 1521  
Recuerdo.  
Battle of Agincourt. after Gory.  
Nattier. Maria Adelaide  
Claude Lorraine. Corraire etc. 1640  
Pols & Champaigne. 1640  
Nicola Langillon  
Piero Niguard  
Alexis Goussier  
Ponsieu. Boncher.  
Antoine Watteau.

Peter Brueghel (Lyon)  
Lorey way to Calvary & Cornish Lane  
delightful scenes & color.

Durer. long portrait of Calvary.  
Adam & Eve  
Wonderful Inferno. Brueghel's grapes.  
Sacred Conversation.

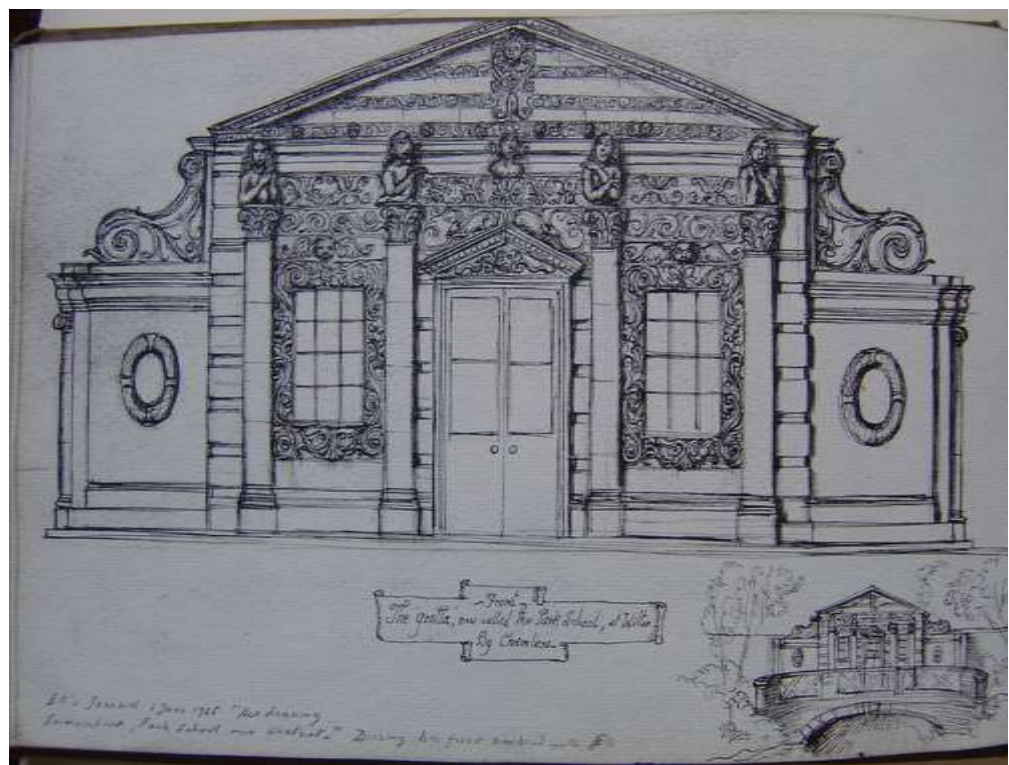
This is a reproduction of Raphael's fresco 'The School of Athens'. It depicts a group of ancient Greek philosophers gathered in a grand, vaulted hall. The figures are arranged in a semi-circular composition, with Plato and Aristotle at the center. The architecture features a checkered floor, a balustrade, and a series of arches leading to a distant landscape with a temple on a hill. The figures are dressed in classical robes, and the overall style is characteristic of the High Renaissance.

443



444

Fig. 3.6



Top: 'The Palladian Bridge Wilton'

Below: 'The 'grotto' now called The Park School, at Wilton'

Both 7 x 10.5 inches, pen and ink, 1925 Sketchbook, RWA.

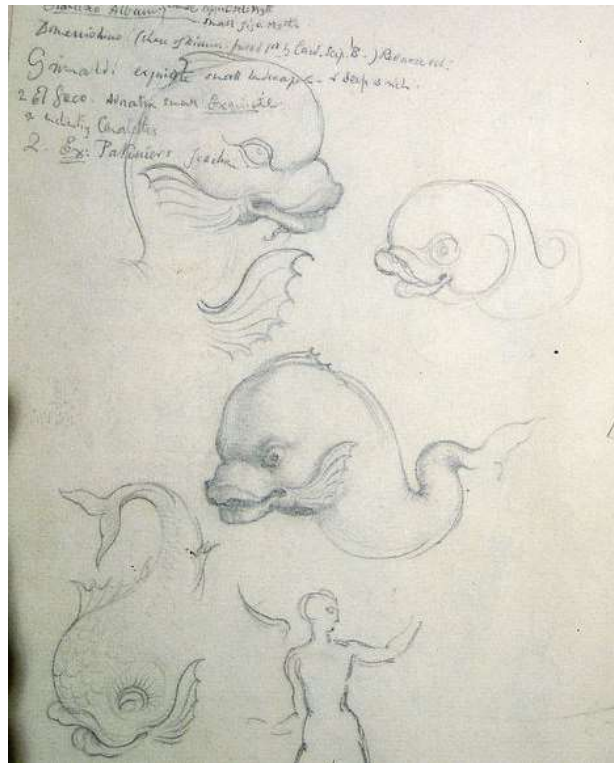
Fig. 3.7



Title page Rome Sketchbook 1928, 10.5 x 6.75 inches, pen and ink, RWA.



**Fig. 3.8**



Top: page from Rome Sketchbook, 1928 showing list of paintings seen in the Borghese Gallery and pencil sketches of dolphin decorations, in the main salon, RWA.

Below: painted dolphin decorations above the Venetian window, commissioned for Sir Philip Sassoon at Trent Park, 1935-36. RWA.

**Fig. 3.9**



*Tivoli. Thursday April 26<sup>th</sup>, Rome Sketchbook 1928, 10.5 x 6.75 inches, pen and ink, RWA.*

**Fig 3.10**



*Bosco Sacro*, ink and watercolour, 6.75 x 10.25 inches, 1928. Private Collection.



*Castel Gandolfo and Lake Albano*, ink and watercolour, 7 x 10.25 inches, 1928. Private collection.



**Fig. 3.11**

Winifred Knights, *Figures in a boat, lake Piediluco*, 1924-30, oil on canvas, 26 3/16 x 26 3/16 inches. Private Collection. Image has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 3.12**

Top: Francis Towne *Lake Albano with Castel Gandolfo*, 1781, ink and watercolour 12.5 x 27.5 inches, British Museum. Below: John Robert Cozens *The Lake of Albano and Castel Gandolfo*, c. 1778, watercolour, 14.3 x 20.7 inches, Art Gallery of Ontario.

Images have been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 3.13**



*Peaches & Tapestry in the dining room, no. 3 Foro Romano*, 1929, oil on canvas, 10 x 14 inches. Private collection.

**Fig. 3.14**



*Tivoli from the Road*, 1929, oil on canvas, 10 x 14 inches. Private Collection.



**Fig. 3.15**

Edward Irvine Halliday, *St Paul Meeting Lydia of Thyatira*, 1928 ,  
Oil on canvas, 41.7 x 57.8 inches, oil on canvas. Collection: University of  
Liverpool. Image has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 3.16**



Sketch for *The Story of Jonah*, 1928, pencil and watercolour,  
1ft. 3in. x 3ft. 2in., RWA.

**Fig. 3.17**



*The Story of Jonah*, 1928, oil on canvas, 1ft. 3in. x 3ft. 2in. Private collection.

**Fig. 3.18**



Royal Opera House. Royal Box decorated for Gala Performance in honour of French Presidential visit, March 1939. RWA.

**Fig. 3.19**



Bookplate for Osbert Sitwell, 1928, collotype, 41/2 x 2 7/8 in., RWA.



Thomas Johnson, design, 1758, Etching, ink on paper, Museum no. E.3780-1903, V&A. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



**Fig. 3.20**



Above: plate by Göz from *Les Maîtres de l'Ornementation Le Style Louis XV*, 1925, held in RWA. Below: design for Clovelly *toile de Jouy*, 1932 shown on range of fabrics and household textiles printed by Clovelly Silks, Clovelly.

**Fig. 3.21**

Illustration to *Gulliver's Travels*, 1930. Image has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Richard Bentley, frontispiece for the illustrated 1753 edition of Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. Image has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 3.22**

*Saturday Book Anthology*, cover by Philip Gough, 1955. Image has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 3.23**



'Clump of trees on road to Bellegra July 8' 1928 Rome Sketchbook, 10.5 x 6.75 inches, pencil, RWA.

**Fig. 3.24**



*Miss Penelope and Miss Angela Dudley-Ward, 1933-34, oil on canvas, 3ft. 1.5 in x 4ft.*  
Private Collection.

**Fig. 3.25**



Section of mural showing capriccio, Dining Room at Plas Newydd,  
1936-38, oil on canvas. RWA.



**Fig. 3.26**



Section of mural showing capriccio, 19 Hill Street, oil on canvas, 1930-31.  
Author's own photograph.



Another capriccio in one of the panels for 36 Hill Street, oil on canvas,  
1936. RWA.



**Fig. 3.27**



Trophy in panel of mural at Port L ympne, 1930-32, oil on canvas.  
Author's own photograph.



Trophy in panel for interior (unknown scheme) oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in.  
Private Collection.



**Fig. 4.1**

Design for cover, RIBA Centenary Conference Handbook, 1934. Pencil on paper, approx. 10 x 8 in. Image taken courtesy of the RIBA Library Drawings & Archives Collection.

**Fig. 4.2**



Photograph for 'Proposal for Grosvenor Square', c.1934, pen and ink, 3.5 x 4.5 in. from *Country Life*, 17 January 1947. Image courtesy of *Country Life*.

**Fig. 4.3**



Initial ink and watercolour sketch for the Dorneywood panel, 1928. Private Collection. Author's photo.



Photograph showing installation of the mural panel at Dorneywood, 1928-29, oil on canvas. Author's photo. NB. Full details of all mural dimensions are in Appendix II.



**Fig. 4.4**



Edward Halliday *Ulysses and Nausicaa*, 1935, Dining room of 27 Thurloe Square. Image © Tate Library and Archive.

**Fig. 4.5**



John Piper, decoration at 22 Highpoint, London 1938-9. Image © Tate Library and Archive.

**Fig. 4.6**



Contemporary photograph of the 76 Dean Street mural, artist unknown, 1732-35, under conservation.

<https://twitter.com/76DeanStreet/status/323772664516866049/photo>.

**Fig. 4.7**



Mural at 19 Hill Street, 1930-31, oil on canvas. Author's own photograph.

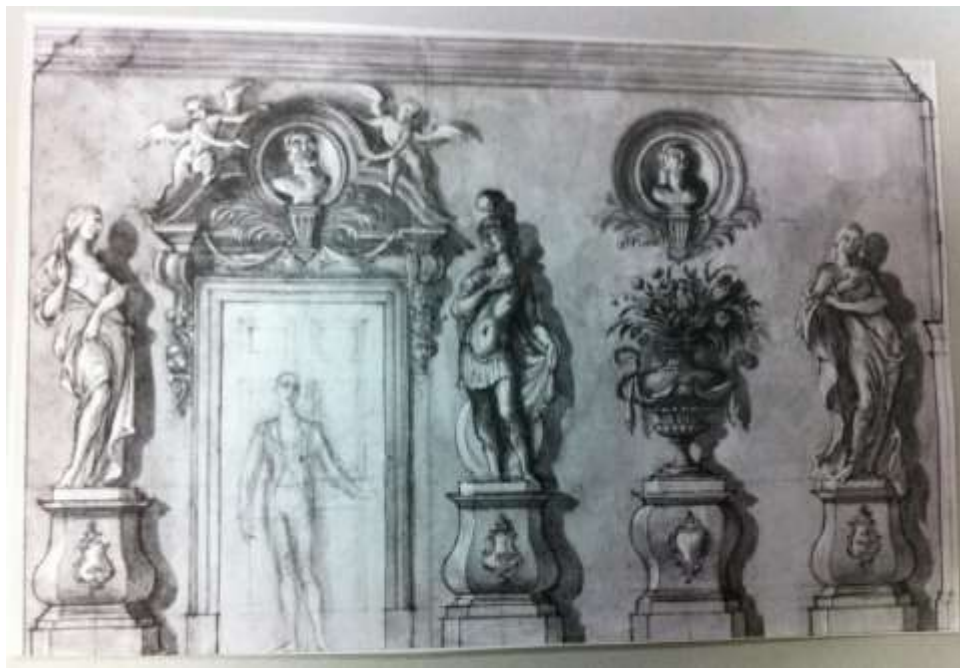


**Fig. 4.8**



Mural as seen from the entrance to 19 Hill Street. Author's own photograph.

**Fig. 4.9**



Proposal for the upper staircase hall, 11 x 1ft 21/2 in., ink and watercolour. Private collection.

**Fig. 4.10**



Felix Harbord, tribute to Rex Whistler, 1959, probably oil on plaster, 19 Hill Street. Author's own photograph.

**Fig 4.11**



Murals at 36 Hill Street in existing 18<sup>th</sup> century plaster-work frames, 1936.  
Photographs RWA.



**Fig. 4.12**



Mural panel, 36 Hill Street, oil on canvas, 1936. Photograph RWA.



Mural panel, 36 Hill Street, oil on canvas, 1936. Photograph RWA.

**Fig 4.13**



Mural panel, 1936, 36 Hill Street, oil on canvas. Photo RWA.

**Fig. 4.14**

Frank Freeman and Joan Souter Robertson, Murals in staircase hall of Highfield, Birmingham, 1931. Photographs RIBA. Images removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 4.15**



The scheme at 35 Gower Street, 1935, oil on plaster. Above: the 'pretence mezzotints' and the plaque with the Three Graces. Below: showing the Regency and Empire style of the furnishings, two more plaques on the end wall and the niche with 'antique jug' on the left. Photographs RWA.

**Fig. 4.16**



The 'antique jug' in the trompe l'oeil niche. Photograph RWA.

**Fig. 4.17**

Left: the eighteenth century Print Room at Blickling Hall. National Trust Images.  
Right: the eighteenth century Print Room at Castletown House, Ireland.  
[www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com). Images removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 4.18**

Hans Feibusch, murals for house in Hampstead, 1937. Medium unknown. Image from RIBA. Image removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 4.19**



The chimney piece mural in the Back Drawing Room of 5 Belgrave Square, 1935, oil on plaster, 9ft. x 5ft. Image courtesy of *Country Life*.



**Fig. 4.20**



Closer image of the mural, Image courtesy of *Country Life*.



Original watercolour sketch for the mural showing colour scheme. RWA.

**Fig. 4.21**

*Trent Park, Middlesex: the Terrace*, 1934, oil on canvas, 10.5 in x 1ft. 2in. Image Bridgeman Art Library. Image removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 4.22**



Trophy above chimney piece, Blue Room, Trent Park, oil on wood, 1935-36. Image right Flickr.com.

Left, another view of trophy. Image RWA.



**Fig. 4.23**

'Amazon Queens' in the Library, Trent Park, oil on wood, 1935-36. Photograph Flickr.com. Image removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig 4.24**



Decoration above the Venetian window, Trent Park, oil on wood, 1935-36. Image RWA.

**Fig. 4.25**

Monogram of Sir Philip Sassoon gilded in gold leaf over door to one of the reception rooms, 1935-36. Photograph, Flickr.com. Image removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 4.26**

Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, Room setting in the Lefevre Gallery, 1932. Plate from Patmore, D., *Colour Schemes & Modern Furnishing*, The Studio: London & New York, 1933. Image removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 4.27**

Duncan Grant, overmantel panel for Angus Davidson, 1930. Image RIBA. Image removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 4.28**



Discarded proposal for Port Lympe mural, 1930, ink and watercolour, 11in. x 1ft.1in. Private collection.

**Fig. 4.29**



Mural for the Dining Room at Port Lympne, 1930-32. Photograph *Country Life*/Photographer Will Pryce.

**Fig. 4.30**



Sections of the mural at Port Lympne. Top: Palladian Bridge and St Martin-in-the-Fields. Below: a fantasy garden scene. Photographs author's own.



**Fig. 4.31**



Mural for the Dining Room at Plas Newydd, 1936-38, oil on canvas. © National Trust Images.



View of the Dining Room showing the mirrors installed facing the mural. The right hand arch leading away from the viewer is a trompe l'oeil creation. © National Trust Images.



Further view of the mural. ©National Trust Images/Andreas von Einsiedel.



Section of the mural. Photograph author's own.



**Fig. 4.32**



Section of mural showing trophy and grisaille decorations on the South wall and part of the coffered ceiling; these correspond to decorations on the North wall. Photograph private collection.



**Fig. 4.33**



The artist's self-portrait in the return wall of the mural. Photograph RWA.

**Fig. 4.34**

**Fig 4.35**



Left: The entrance hall of the Mountbatten penthouse at Brook House

Right: the enfilade of reception rooms. Both photographs from *Country Life*, photographer A. E. Henson.

Fig. 4.36



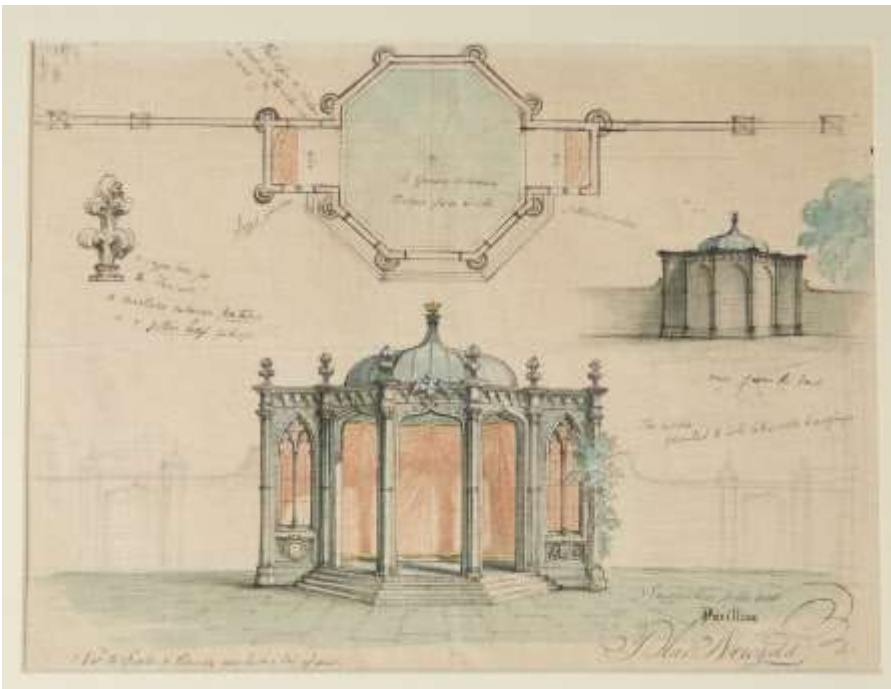
The murals at Brook House, 1937, oil on canvas. RWA.

**Fig. 4.37**



The grisaille colour scheme of the Brook House murals. Photograph shows the murals after relocation to Britwell Salome, Oxfordshire. Image from Pinterest, original source unknown.

**Fig. 4.38**



Designs for a Courtyard and Pavilion in a Gothic style at Plas Newydd, 1936, ink and watercolour with gold, 9in x 1ft. © National Trust / Simon Harris.



**Fig. 4.39**



Murals in the Drawing Room at Mottisfont Abbey, 1938-39, oil on plaster and wood. ©National Trust Images/Andreas von Einsiedel.

**Fig. 4.40**



Sections of mural showing trompe l'oeil columns and trophy, ©National Trust Images/Andreas von Einsiedel, and the 'smoking urn'. *Country Life* images, photographer David Giles.

**Fig. 4.41**



Detail showing the window treatment involving faux and real curtains. ©National Trust Images/Andreas von Einsiedel.

**Fig. 4.42**

Mary Adshead, *A Tropical Fantasy*, 1926, oil on board, University of Liverpool Collections. Image removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig 4.43**

Mary Adshead, *An English Holiday*, oil on canvas, 1928. Photograph Estate of Mary Adshead. Image removed due to Copyright restrictions.



Panels from the mural, photographs from Liss Fine Art.

**Fig. 4.44**



Glyn Philpot, murals at Mulberry House, 1931. Photograph *Country Life*, photographer A E Henson.. The bronze relief was by Charles Sargeant Jagger.

**Fig. 4.45**



Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, murals for the dining room at Penns-in-the-Rocks, 1929-31. Photograph © Tate Library and Archive.



Fig. 5.1





Top: *London Museum*, 1928. Below: *The Tate Gallery*, 1928. Both posters for the London Passenger Transport Board. © TfL from the London Transport Museum collection.

Fig. 5.2

L to R: Austin Cooper *British Museum* 1928, Edward McKnight Kauffer *British Industries Fair* 1928, Edward Bawden *Natural History Museum* 1925. London Transport Museum Collection. Images removed due to copyright restrictions.

Fig. 5.3



*The Four Georges* 1930, and *The Age of Walnut* 1932. Images from the Vintage Poster Forum. *The Four Georges* is a rare example of the image being used on a London Underground poster.

**Fig. 5.4**

Stephen Bone, mural at Piccadilly Circus underground station, 1928-9. London Transport Museum Collection. Image removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 5.5**



*Bakerloo 1930, design for C B Cochran review, RWA.*

Fig. 5.6



*The Vale of Aylesbury*, 1933. Private collection.



Top left: Ben Nicholson, *Guardsman outside Buckingham Palace*, 1938. Lower left: Graham Sutherland, *Brimham Rocks, Yorkshire*, 1937. Top right: Lord Berners, *Faringdon Folly*, 1936. Copyright Shell Brands International AG. Courtesy the Shell Art Collection



Fig. 5.7



Paul Nash, *The Rye Marshes*, 1932. Copyright Shell Brands International AG. Courtesy the Shell Art Collection

Fig. 5.8



'That's Shell - that is' press adverts, 1929. Private collection.

Fig.5.9



Shell press advert, 1929. Private collection.

Fig. 5.10



'Reversible Faces' series, 1931-32. Private Collection.

Fig. 5.11



Top: Edward Bawden, 'Stow-on-the-Wold', 1933 and 'Bexhill-on-Sea' 1935 designs for Shell Press advertising. Flickr.com. Images removed due to Copyright restrictions. Below: 'Summer Shell', 1935. Private collection.



Fig. 5.12



Illustration to *The New Forget-Me-Not: A Calendar* 1929. Private collection.

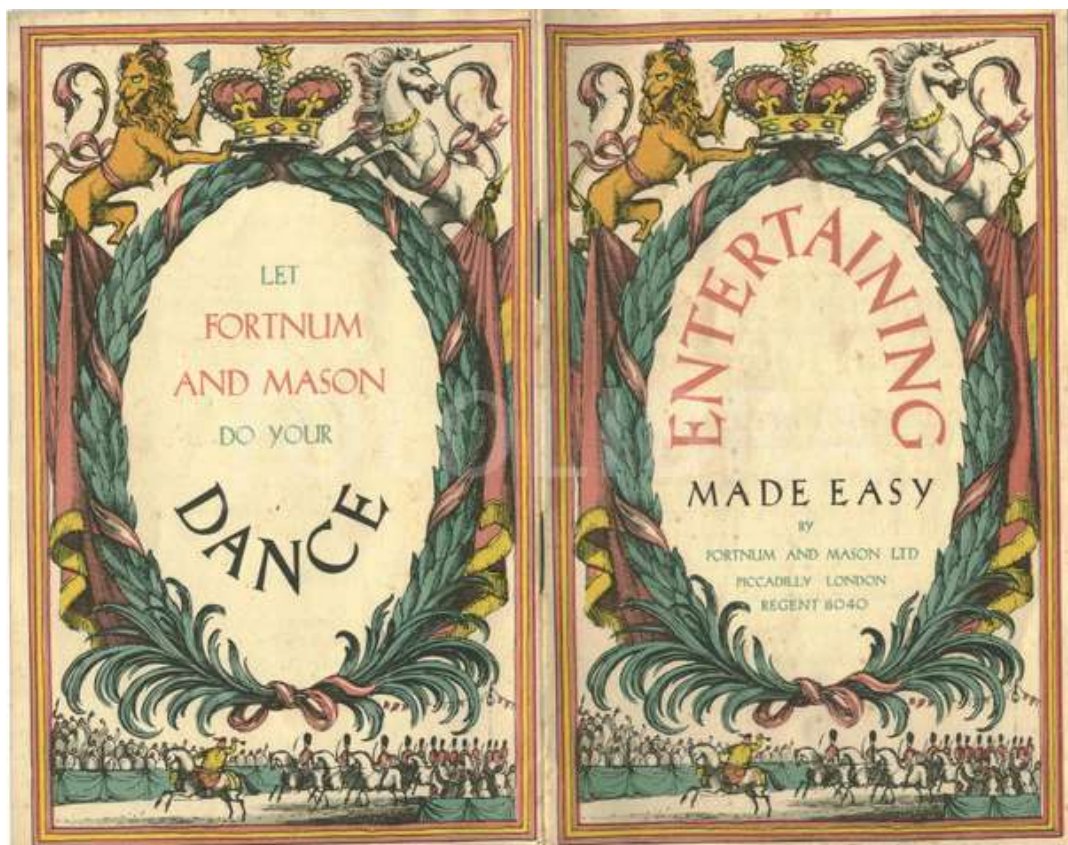


Fig. 5.13

Designs for Fortnum and Mason catalogue, 1935. Private collection.

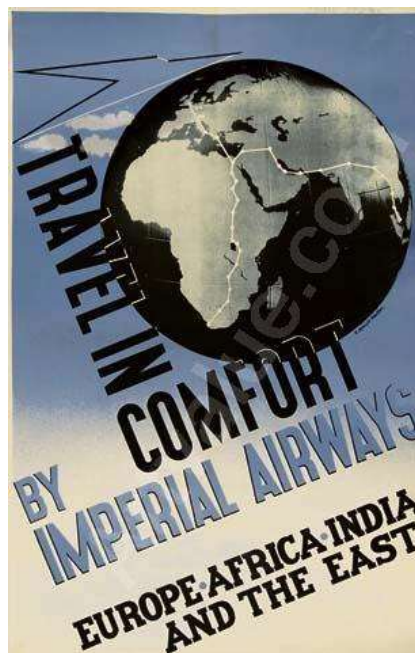
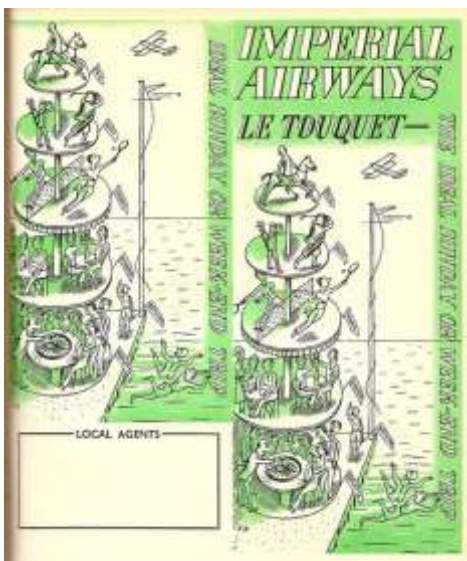


Fig 5.14



'King George VI Coronation Poster', Imperial Airways, 1937. Image from [www.Ebay.com](http://www.Ebay.com).

Fig. 5.15



Right: Imperial Airways leaflet design, 1936. Private collection. Left: Edward McKnight Kauffer poster for Imperial Airways, 1935. Image from <http://www.artvalue.com/>

**Fig. 5.16**

'Celebrations at the end of South African War', 1940-44, Design for Rothmans.  
Image from Bonham Auctions. Image removed due to Copyright restrictions.

Fig. 5.17



Neptune carpet design, 1934. Private collection.



The carpet now in situ at West Dean, contemporary photograph from Pinterest, source unknown.



**Fig. 5.18**



*Clovelly toile du Jouy, 1932. Image Clovelly Silks.*

**Fig. 5.19**



The Clovelly design on Wedgwood china, 1933 onwards. Images [www.EBay.com](http://www.EBay.com).

Eric Ravilious, Coronation mugs, 1937 and 1953. Images Bonhams. Image removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 5.20**



Eric Ravilious, designs for Coronation mug 1936 and 1937, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

**Fig. 5.21**



Design for the 1935 George V Jubilee Stamp, 1934, British Postal Museum and Archive. © Stamp Design Royal Mail Group Ltd (2015)

**Fig. 5.22**



Barnett Freedman, successful design for the Jubilee Stamp, 1934, British Postal Museum and Archive. © Stamp Design Royal Mail Group Ltd (2015)



**Fig. 6.1**



*Haddon Hall*, 1932, preliminary oil painting for the larger panel, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Private collection.

Panel at Haddon Hall in situ, 1933, oil on wood, 6ft. x 8ft. 6 in.  
<http://www.collectionspicturelibrary.co.uk/> . Image removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 6.2**



*Weston Hall*, 1929, oil on canvas, 9in. x 1ft. Private collection.



*Cranborne Manor*, 1935, oil on canvas, 1ft. 5.5in. x 1ft. 2in. Private Collection.



**Fig. 6.3**



Rex Whistler photographed by Howard Coster, 1936. The equestrian portrait of Edward James is in the background. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

**Fig. 6.4**



One of the pair of limewood urns in the Gallery at North Audley Street, 1932. Photograph from *Country Life*, photographer Alex Starkey.

**Fig. 6.5**



Left: Design for Wall-paper for North Audley Street, 1932, ink and watercolour, 10in. x 1ft. 2in. Image © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Right: the wall-paper in situ, oil on canvas, 6ft. x 5ft. 1in. Image [Online]  
<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol40/pt2/plate-26>

**Fig. 6.6**

The panel at Belgrave Square in a photograph from *Vogue* magazine, date unknown. Image removed due to Copyright restrictions.

**Fig. 6.7**



*Conversation piece: The Royal Family*, 1937, pencil, 1ft.1in. x 10in. Royal Collection Trust / © HM Queen Elizabeth II 2015

**Fig. 6.8**



*Officers Mess Tent, Codford St Mary*, 1942, oil on canvas, 11.75 x 1ft. 6 in. Collection of the Welsh Guards.

**Fig. 6.9**



*"Sonny Grant"*, 1936, oil on canvas, 1ft. 3.75 in x 11.5in. Private Collection.

**Fig. 6.10**



Rex Whistler photographed by Howard Coster, 1936. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

**Fig. 6.11**



*Self-Portrait, 1733, oil on canvas, 1ft. 3.5 in. x 1ft. 2in. Tate Collections. Photo: © Tate, London [2015]*

**Fig. 6.12**

Andrea Soldi, *James Gibbs, 1682 – 1754, Architect*, c.1750. National Galleries Scotland. Image removed due to Copyright restrictions.



**Fig. 6.13**



*Self-Portrait in Uniform*, 1940, oil on canvas, 2ft. 4in x 1ft. 11in. National Army Museum.

**Fig. 6.14**



William Orpen *Ready to Start. Self-Portrait*, 1917. Imperial War Museum, © IWM (Art.IWM ART 2380).

