

ERIC RAVILIOUS

ARTIST & DESIGNER



ALAN POWERS

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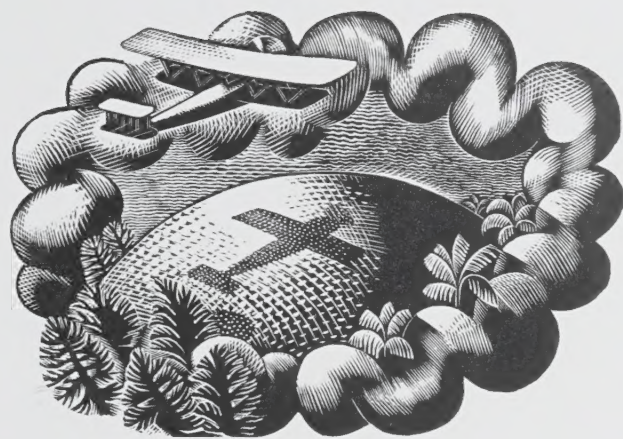
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WITHDRAWN

LUND HUMPHRIES

For Peter

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PREFACE

For the centenary of Eric Ravilious's birth in 2003, the Imperial War Museum organised a major retrospective of his work. I was fortunate to act as an external curator for what still remains the largest gathering of his work to date, and to write the relatively short book that accompanied the show. The attendance was higher than expected and confirmed the rise of Ravilious's reputation over the course of the previous three decades, during which a series of retrospective travelling exhibitions and books began the task of retrieving his work and presenting it afresh to new generations. Since 2003, interest has continued to grow, accompanied by a wider revival of a particular English strain of painting and illustration from the interwar period. Enterprising small publishers have contributed both to scholarship and popular appreciation, confident that there is a group of enthusiasts who will enable them to cover their costs. During these years, too, pictures have emerged on to the market from private collections and added to the body of known work.

At the same time that Ravilious has attracted such attention, a body of new paintings and graphics has grown up that reflects his aesthetic and subject matter, and seems to fulfil a similar role in providing images of an England of the imagination complemented by his presence in the work of poets and travel writers such as Peter Davidson, Sean O'Brien and Robert Macfarlane.

Recent writing on Ravilious has been primarily biographical, but although the life-story enters this text at many points, my primary aim here has been to analyse his work and go further in understanding it in relation to earlier traditions of art and design and the culture of his own time in Britain. It seemed best to divide the book according to the main areas in which he worked – murals, prints and watercolours – rather than work through a single narrative.

While more detailed acknowledgments are made elsewhere in the book, I would like to thank Anne Ullmann, Ravilious's daughter, for giving her support to my work, for her own research over many years, and for all that she has done to encourage other writers, researchers and publishers in passing on her father and mother's lives and achievements for the enjoyment of future generations.



CHAPTER ONE



THE FORMATION OF AN ARTIST 'SLIGHTLY SOMEWHERE ELSE'

Family and Education

Eric Ravilious was born on 22 July 1903 in Acton, West London, a developing suburb in the late Victorian and Edwardian period. He distanced himself from his family, and his wife Tirzah commented later that 'Events that were deeply embarrassing or shameful to him were so far removed from my smug middle class life that they seemed to me rather romantic or just funny and I was very interested to have insight to the unfamiliar and rather frightening working class world in which he had lived.'¹ While Ravilious was later able to marry a colonel's daughter and mix with country gentry and London artists and intellectuals, he retained a sense of identification with the farming and artisan class from which he came and was at ease with people of every kind.

Eric's father, Frank Ravilious (1858–1943), was apprenticed to a coach builder. Frank grew up at Cage Green, now a suburb of Tonbridge, Kent, where his father, having served in the Royal Marines as a young man and then been employed as an agricultural labourer, took on the additional role of coachman to the Carnell family. Helen Binyon, writing the first biographical study of Eric,

found similar surnames in the same geographical area, all of which suggest French Huguenot origins for his unusual name. The youngest of a family of 13, Frank found his first job as a pageboy at the fine Georgian coaching inn in Tonbridge, the Rose and Crown, before becoming apprenticed to his elder brother as a coach builder.

Not long after, during an illness that confined him to hospital, Frank became, in Tirzah's words, 'converted'. Through prayer, he and his brother Albert apparently brought about the miraculous cure of a woman suffering from an internal growth, and this unrepeatable act confirmed his belief. Eric's mother, Emma Ford (1863–1941), came from Devon and like many country girls moved away from home to go into domestic service. Both were physically attractive, Frank, 'a very nice looking young man with lovely blue eyes' and Emma 'with a small, neat, well-shaped head and fine dark eyes' (Plate 3).² Their early married life was peripatetic, including an unsuccessful attempt to emigrate to the United States. By the beginning of 1892, they had settled in Acton, where their elder son, also Frank, was born. A brother,

1. *Harlequin*, 1928
Study for Morley College Murals
Watercolour
45 × 49 cm (17¾ × 19¼ in)
Fry Art Gallery, Saffron Walden

James Ravilious, was already established there as a tailor, and with the upholstery and furniture shop that he set up in Churchfield Road in 1896, Frank began a new life.

Eric, the youngest of three surviving children (the second child was a girl, Evelyn), was born seven years later. By then both his parents were over 40 and the business had already reached its peak. Disaster struck in 1907, as Tirzah described it:

Dad bought too large a stock of something, mattresses I think, and instead of living on credit as he could have done until he had recovered enough money to put the business right, he got into a panic, declared himself bankrupt and sold up. He was always an apprehensive man and when in trouble would flap his very large hands and pray to God most earnestly and loudly, his gasps of 'Oh Lord, Oh Lord!' sounding like waves breaking and receding on a shingle beach.³

The crisis was not fatal, but in 1907 it accounted for the family's move to Eastbourne, the seaside town where they remained for the rest of their lives and where Eric's upbringing and education took place. Lying between Brighton and Hastings, Eastbourne has a sedate social scene. The town centre continues to be home to a public school, founded by the 7th Duke of Devonshire in 1867, and the resort has long been favoured as a retirement town by army officers. To the west rise the cliffs that terminate in Beachy Head, with its lighthouse, and to the east stretch the South Downs, the ridge of bare chalk hills and hidden valleys beloved of many twentieth-century artists and writers.

Frank's business and antiques business continued as before, with more and more flow of optimistic expansion and settlement. Frank was assisted by Eric's elder brother and a cousin, but the business was mainly induced by the fact that the business was a success.



2. The three Ravilious children, Frank, Eric and Evelyn, 1906

3. Frank and Emma Ravilious, with their pet canary



A photograph of the window of Frank's shop in Grand Hotel Buildings (Plate 4), where he occupied two addresses between 1918 and 1923, shows Georgian and oriental pieces typical of the taste of the time, and no doubt in demand among those setting up home or moving after the Great War. He also dealt in English watercolours and made copies of them, providing a link to Eric's later choice of medium and 'his keen eye for

4. Ravilious antique shop,
Grand Hotel Buildings,
Eastbourne, 1920s



discovering amusing or beautiful objects'.⁴ His mother's good sense and stability was a compensating strength, being, in Binyon's view, the source of Eric's 'integrity and his generosity', so that he was able to turn away from the difficulties of his home and eventually to make an independent life for himself.⁵

In contrast to the older worlds evoked by the furniture and porcelain of the family business, Eastbourne was notable for its early role in aviation, and during the First World War, the Royal Flying Corps ran a training school. Eric drew a 'Blackburn monoplane' taking off in a sketch book in October 1915 (Plate 5) and collected newspaper cuttings of planes, which appear in his scrapbooks. He also developed an interest in balloon flight and the Zeppelins that were sometimes seen over the town.⁶

There was certainly no intention in the family that Eric should become an artist. Having failed to persuade his brother Frank Jr to take a position with a steady wage in the Gas Office, his mother hoped for more success with Eric at the Post Office. However, Mr Millington, the art master at Eastbourne Secondary Municipal School for Boys (later Eastbourne Grammar School), had already

recognised talent in his pupil, which can be seen in some premonitory line drawings, such as an eggcup in outline at the age of 11.⁷ Art exercises at school included still life, pattern and a watercolour of the tower at Sissinghurst Castle, the destination of a group visit in 1916. In his sketchbook, the hard outline pencil drawings of boots and a teapot (Plate 6) stand out with finality and accuracy, delicately defining the object while achieving weight and solidity. The boots reappeared in 1941 in the design for a cotton handkerchief, one of his last pieces of decorative pattern making.

When Eric left the school at the end of 1919 he passed the Cambridge Senior Local School Certificate with 'distinction' for drawing, having also made his mark as a cricketer. His school had two scholarships to the Eastbourne School of Art to award, and Eric was able to take one of them. Life became brighter, even though the teaching by Mr Reeve-Fowkes, the head, was rather restricted and focused on achieving clever effects through drawing, with touches of art nouveau. Tirzah describes how, early in 1922, Ravilious went up to London for an interview at the Royal College of Art



5. Blackburn monoplane,
from a sketchbook, 1915
Pencil on paper
10 × 15 cm (4 × 6 in)

6. Teapot, from a sketchbook,
1915
Pencil on paper
10 × 15 cm (4 × 6 in)



7. Gilbert's Oak Tea Lounge,
c. 1920
Printed cover for menu
13.7 × 9 cm (5½ × 3½ in)



(RCA), finding the relatively new Principal, William Rothenstein, at work on a self-portrait in his room. The young provincial student's drawings 'showed no flicker of originality anywhere, and he must have thought them appalling'. Rothenstein's comment was 'Your quick sketches are better than your other work', and he advised him to wait for six months and then apply for the Design School.⁸ During this interval, he was able to benefit from a new ex-Slade School teacher at Eastbourne, Lilian Lanchester, who 'helped him to remove those clever tricks which are always so attractive to a young student'. She in turn remembered Eric as 'a very quiet and reserved, sensitive young man, medium height, good looking and by his drawings I was sure he would one day be a very good artist'.⁹ He was more outgoing with fellow students, one of whom recalled his original ideas for fancy dress as well as the way he 'always seemed to be

slightly somewhere else, as if he lived a private life which did not completely coincide with material existence'.¹⁰

The only example of Ravilious's work from this time is a colour printed menu for Gilbert's Oak Tea Lounge (Plate 7), showing a fashionably dressed lady of the early 1920s against a Tudor-style background. The flat colour areas and the geometry of the windows and panelling are perhaps the only clues that 'E W Ravilious', in the rather laboriously lettered inscription, was shortly to be transformed into an altogether different artist.

The Royal College of Art

The pathway from a local art school to the Royal College was a structure established in the previous century when the case was made for the state support of art training under certain constraints.¹¹ Better design of industrial products was the underlying motive for the Royal College's ancestor, the Government School of Design at Somerset House, founded in 1837, but there was very little sense of what to teach and few students enrolled. Seventy years before 1922, when Eric Ravilious entered the Royal College of Art as a student, the first 'Class for Training Masters for Schools of Art' was set up under the direction of Sir Henry Cole, who had been appointed to shake up the system after he had contributed to the success of the Great Exhibition in 1851. Cole's grand plan for investing the profits of the Crystal Palace centred on South Kensington, where the School of Design was relocated (together with the germ of what became the Victoria and Albert Museum). Renamed the Royal College of Art in 1896, the institution was burdened with conflicting aims involving teaching both fine art and design, as well as teacher training. Training designers remained an elusive goal, but there was no other central institution attempting it while training the pupils to become future art teachers was considered a distraction from the more dedicated desire to become a school for professional fine artists. Under the influence of the Arts and

Crafts Movement, a restructuring in 1901 created a new School of Design, alongside Architecture, Sculpture and 'Mural and Decorative Painting', with a teacher-training element added for third-year students. A School of Engraving came later

The controversial appointment of William Rothenstein as Principal in 1919 heralded further changes. Pushing aside the demands for the RCA to specialise in teacher training, Rothenstein pursued his 'special interest in the application of art to craft and industry', which was married to the college's historic mission towards design.¹² He wished to move design education forward 'to get the rather dreary imitations of Morris designs changed for a more alert spirit', having been disappointed that 'The arts of painting, decoration and sculpture have much more influence on French design than is the case here.'¹³ He wished to invigorate a new breed of designers for the future, but he was initially frustrated, complaining in a talk in 1921, 'I have had forty or fifty applications ... for teachers, and not one single application for a designer or craftsman.'¹⁴

Teachers who were not properly grounded in specific skills could only end up teaching each other, Rothenstein feared, while if too many students aspired to be high artists in the traditional manner, a role for which only a few would ever be fitted, there could only be failure and disappointment. Craft and design training, if properly organised, had the potential to resolve this institutional dilemma. Designers emerging from a reformed curriculum might acquire a broader range of skills and so become more effective in changing the visual culture of the country. While many of the basic industries of the nineteenth century, such as printed book and pottery, appeared to thrive in the early twentieth century, the RCA's exports would be limited. The school's set up their own design department, and British designers to



work at a higher level of quality for the English market, producing specialised and high-value products.

When this background is understood, it appears as if Ravilious, his good friend Edward Bawden (1903–89) and some of their contemporaries exactly fulfilled Rothenstein's intention for design students. Early on, they became established as painters and illustrators, with a quirky quality to their work that was far removed from 'dreary imitations of Morris designs', yet owed a recognisable debt to history and tradition, taken with a light touch. In 1928, after they graduated, Ravilious and Bawden were among three artists chosen for the most prestigious mural commission Rothenstein was able to offer. This helped to carry Ravilious – in a natural way with no stigma of social climbing – into the kind of influential social and political circles that the Principal considered appropriate for artists to inhabit.

When Ravilious and Bawden enrolled at the RCA in 1922, the course they entered was in a transitional state, still reflecting the Arts and Crafts ethos. Architecture was taught to first-year students across the school with the measured drawing of casts and building parts in the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) undertaken as a way of developing an understanding of scale and accuracy

8. Royal College of Art football team, 1924. Eric Ravilious is third from the left in the back row

9. *Temple, Trees and Ponds*, 1923
Wood engraving
6 × 9 cm (2 3/8 × 3 1/2 in)

when drawing objects in three dimensions. While Ravilious and Bawden, who became adept at depicting and inventing buildings in various media, might have developed this knowledge independently, *The Times* critic commented in 1928 that this 'breaking down of water-tight compartments between one form of art and another' resulted in 'a gain rather than a loss of specific character in each'.¹⁵ The course also included Edward Johnston's obligatory writing and lettering classes, which were considered fundamental to the College mission. While neither Ravilious nor Bawden were 'among the more zealous' of Johnston's students, they both remodelled the cursive scripts they had learnt at school in favour of crisply formed italic hands.

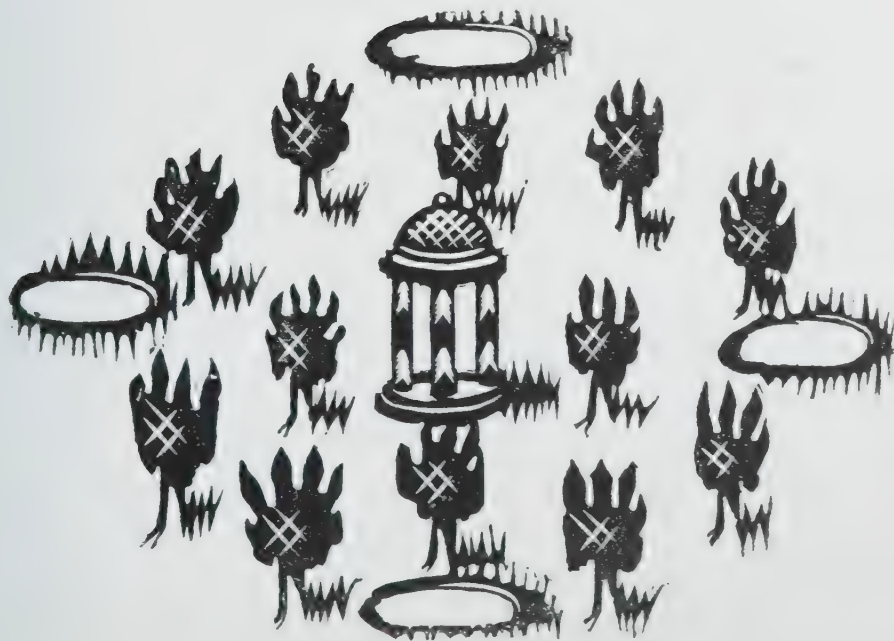
Meeting on their first day at the RCA, Bawden and Ravilious became a firmly linked if oddly assorted pair, separated in age by only five months. Bawden also came

from a retail background, in Braintree, Essex, where his family had moved from their roots in Cornwall and his father ran an ironmonger's shop. Bawden also had a chapel upbringing, intrusive and alienating in its way although its Puritan values stayed with him. In contrast to the gregarious and sporty Ravilious, he was solitary by nature and cultivated eccentricity. A third member of their group was Douglas Percy Bliss, a member of the Painting School, who joined Ravilious and Bawden in 'gravy-coloured bed-sitting rooms' in Kensington. Ravilious, preferring not to use his own name, acquired the nickname 'The Boy' or 'Rav'. Those who knew him at this time of his life remembered his charm and the impression he continued to give of occupying a parallel world in his own mind.

Other student friends included Cecilia Dunbar Kilburn, a sculpture student, who edited a one-off student magazine called *Mandrake* in 1926, and Barnett Freedman and Enid Marx, both painting students. Freedman became famous early on for his skill as a book illustrator and poster artist in lithography, while Marx established a reputation as a textile printer and pattern designer.

Robert Anning Bell, their Professor in the Design School, recognised the talent of Bawden and Ravilious, and proposed them for membership of the Junior Art Workers Guild in 1924. Bawden sent Ravilious a scathing report of a debate in April 1925 after Paul Nash had spoken on 'Rhythm and Design', at which 'the brethren rushed forward helter skelter to expose their folly + lay their silly souls bare'.¹⁶ Although they soon resigned, Ravilious and Bawden were represented in an exhibition of the Guild at Heal's Mansard Gallery in the summer of 1925, reviewed in *The Times* and praised for 'a remarkable absence of "sketchiness"'.¹⁷

Illustration and graphic art dominated the work of the Design School, and this was the field in which they flourished. Ravilious spent many hours in the Engraving



School, run until 1924 by the etcher Sir Frank Short, choosing the newly fashionable medium of wood engraving rather than Short's own specialism, etching. Bliss, who already had an English degree from Edinburgh University, was working on a history of wood engraving, published in 1928. In Bliss's scrapbook, what appears to be Ravilious's first surviving engraving, *Temple, Trees and Ponds* (1923, Plate 9), is captioned 'very early example of the puerile style', but it shows much that was to come. It is a unit of a potentially repeatable pattern (the future designer at work), whose subject has a sense of place, with the circular ponds representing the man-made hollows in the South Downs (called dew ponds), formed as exact circles within the rolling greenness of the hills. The temple in the centre completes the grid of the toy-like trees with a mandala-like resolution. These themes of locality, the object as emblem and other-worldliness associated with buildings recurred in Ravilious's work.

According to Bliss, Ravilious spent fruitful time in the V&A galleries, sifting 'with the skill of an anthologist the rare things that could help him with his work'.¹⁸ His scrapbooks, assembled in the 1930s, include drawings and cuttings from magazines and newspapers, not easily datable but indicative of his method. It was an inclusive and eclectic selection, suitable for a visual artist in search of historical material as a liberation from current fashions but not necessarily bound to English precedents. The Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, then popular in the revival of early music and on stage, offered a language of decorative design based on Mannerist architecture and more generally reflecting European high style in a primitive form that became their main inspiration in the 1920s and lingered thereafter. Martin Hardie, the V&A's Keeper of Painting, Engraving and Illustration, helped the students explore the prints and drawings collection, including newly acquired works by rediscovered artists from Francis Towne to Samuel Palmer. Ravilious made his

mark early as a painter, showing watercolour landscapes at the RCA's Sketch Club in 1923. Hardie bought *Wannock Dew Pond* (Plate 80) in that year, and Bliss noted that his work was 'exceptionally pure in style and certain in handling' when the majority of exhibits were 'all more or less in the Sargent tradition'.¹⁹

The RCA Diploma, the entry ticket to a career as an art teacher, was supposed to take three years' study, but Ravilious's annual £60 scholarship from Eastbourne lasted only for two years. Pragmatically, he chose Mural Decoration as his subject because it could be completed in the second year. Murals had been promoted by art schools since 1900, and Rothenstein was a leading advocate for them.²⁰ Since none of Ravilious's relevant work survives from this period, we must depend on Bawden's recollection that instead of following the prescribed route of egg tempera on gesso panels, ground earth colours and gilding, he 'bought gesso powder and ordinary colour'. When the work was revealed from behind the secrecy of screens after the examination, it was clear 'that he had slapped up a big gay painting that really had some pretensions to being a mural'.²¹

This achievement won him the Design School Travelling Scholarship in 1924. As Bawden described this experience:

he was now compelled somewhat reluctantly to go abroad for three or four months. Students always went to Italy so that perchance the painters of the Renaissance might be touched on the sleeve, reverently, of course, and with that in mind Eric settled in Florence, with a brief visit to Siena, Volterra and San Gimignano. But Italy seemed to have on him a listless effect. Instead of working like a beaver to copy a bit of Benozzo Gozzoli he seems to have kept fairly clear of the galleries and churches and to have walked about in the fresh air.²²

Ravilious's reluctance to travel was presumably based on inexperience and lack of confidence. Helen Binyon adds to this account Ravilious's walks along the Arno 'miles into the countryside'. Following Benito Mussolini's *coup d'état* in Italy, blackshirts were marching in Florence, but apparently Ravilious paid them little attention. In feeling unsettled by Italy, he was in accord with the Travelling Scholar from the Sculpture Department, Henry Moore, whom he met in Florence, together with other RCA students, Robert Lyon and his wife, and other painters, Edna Ginesi and Norman Dawson. Moore, Ravilious's elder by five years and one of Rothenstein's favourites, was already pushing hard against the conventions of the RCA and its neo-Renaissance assumptions, and enjoyed Ravilious's company, although they had little contact in later years.

Moore recalled an occasion when the group had a rather drunken meal together in a restaurant, at the end of which he shouted about being a carver, while Jacob Epstein was only a modeller.²³ This crucial distinction entered British sculpture in the Edwardian years, uniting Epstein, Eric Gill and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska in common cause; they were responding to the particularities of a single piece of stone and grappling with it physically to find form. Sculptural practice was profoundly influenced for decades afterwards and Ravilious, were he not already aware of this debate, would now have heard from one of its main exponents in the next generation. Carving, a continuation of the Arts and Crafts Movement's argument of truth to materials and the nobility of hard work, implied a whole aesthetic value system. As a wood engraver, Ravilious was already using carving tools and experiencing the sculptor's need for a firm mental picture of the shape of the final work, whereas materials such as plaster, clay, etching plate or oil paint could be endlessly corrected and altered. Ravilious could be said to have adopted a similar 'carving' conception of watercolour, as

one of a number of artists for whom Paul Cézanne showed the way with his scaffolding of strokes, each clearly identifiable, doing the work of representation but creating at the same time a parallel structure of design within the picture.

The Italian trip did not in fact spell the end of Ravilious's time at the Royal College, since he was awarded a further £60 to complete a third year during 1924–5. In the autumn of 1924, his year group at the RCA came together in what Paul Nash, a visiting tutor in the School of Design, called 'an outbreak of talent'.²⁴ It was an inspired decision on Rothenstein's part to engage Nash, who had made his name as a war artist and by 1924 was engaged in promoting the idea of himself and other artists as designers, partly in order to raise the level of public awareness of Modernism, and partly as a solution to the difficulties of earning a living. He was closer in age to the students than any of their previous tutors.

Nash's appointment at the RCA was for a day-and-a-half per week during a single academic year.²⁵ Enid Marx, Ravilious's friend from the Painting School whom he smuggled into the Engraving School out of hours, described the studio Nash was allocated as a 'sort of cubby-hole, a sort of housemaid's cupboard ... but mostly he worked at the top of the stairs, greeting us as we came in. He had a very small, very enthusiastic coterie from the design and painting school and he really was an inspiration. He introduced us to all the "isms" that were coming into fashion in these years.'²⁶ Helen Binyon recalled his suave dress and manner, 'witty and jokey and often encouraging, or he might say "this is just what we want to get away from"'. In addition, 'he was particularly helpful with watercolours, demonstrating ways of using the medium, trying out colours with a starved as well as a full brush, or washing one transparent colour over a ground of another'.²⁷

Nash helped students with technique and judgement, and also with awareness of a wider world of Modernism and opportunities for artists to work as designers. He was generous in promoting younger artists whom he admired. In watercolours and engravings, Ravilious's work between 1925 and 1927 often shows Nash's direct influence, although he was later able to synthesise it with other sources. Nash's poetic cast of mind must also have struck Ravilious, giving support to his own ventures into symbolism and the strangeness of the real world, although he remained more rooted in observation and refused to follow Nash into overt surrealism.

As a third-year student, Bawden was getting his first paid commissions from London Underground and Poole Potteries. Ravilious was less precocious in this respect, but his wood engravings and tile designs were included in the student entries in the British section at the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris in 1925. Although as yet he had no commissions for murals, this aspect of his work was represented in an exhibition of British Decorative Art appropriate for buildings in 1926, with that of other young muralists, of whom *The Times* wrote, 'they are all rather sophisticated in style, but that, until we find out the decorative expression of our own times and circumstances, can hardly be avoided. The point is that all these artists know how to apply their work to the conditions of the wall.'²⁸

When his studentship ended, Ravilious started to teach at Eastbourne School of Art for two days a week, drawing an admiring group of mostly female students who were quickly weaned off a diet of art nouveau. In the words of one of them, he had 'the eager curiosity of a young boy, and a most refreshing cool judgement'.²⁹ He showed them photographs and prints of works by Duccio and Sassetta, evidence that his time in Italy had more influence than Bawden suspected. Perhaps emulating the example of reaching out to affect a student's whole

outlook on life, he also advised them on modern novels to read (Aldous Huxley and David Garnett) and shared his love of the nature writers W.H. Hudson, Richard Jefferies and Gilbert White.

Ravilious stayed with his parents for his teaching visits but kept a room in London, first with Bliss and his wife, Phyllis Dodd, also an artist, and later with Bawden at 52 Redcliffe Road. This 1860s terraced house, dignified by the name 'Holbein Studios', was located in a South Kensington street where many of his student friends had previously had lodgings. His meagre livelihood was divided between teaching and the proceeds of making wood engravings. In addition, Bliss, Bawden and Ravilious were given a joint exhibition of watercolours in 1927 at St George's Gallery, London.

One of the students in Ravilious's first class at Eastbourne was the 17-year-old Eileen Lucy Garwood, known as Tirzah. Tall and dark eyed, with a mass of black hair, Tirzah was something of a rebel against conventionality. She wrote about Eric, 'he had a smart double-breasted suit and shy, diffident manners not unlike those of a curate and with my family's training behind me, I quickly spotted that he wasn't quite a gentleman'.³⁰ He flirted with most of the students, but a bond developed between them, and he included her as one of the figures in a set of engravings of the signs of the zodiac. She became engaged to a family friend, Bob Church, but he went to Africa to begin his career as a civil servant, and despite parental disapproval, she developed a closer relationship with Ravilious, leading to their marriage in 1930.

As an artist, Tirzah specialised in wood engraving, with subjects from modern life, assembling well-drawn figures with compositional skill and filling her scenes with a mischievous sense of the absurd and sometimes the bizarre. Her series *The Relations* offers elements of satire but also sympathy for the plight of women in the society of the 1920s, and *The Train Journey* wood engraving

10. Tirzah Garwood
The Train Journey, 1929–30
 Wood engraving
 16.6 × 12.6 cm (6½ × 5 in)



(Plate 10), from which she looks out from the right-hand side, must surely have inspired one of Eric's best known paintings, *Train Landscape* of 1939 (Plate 142). It is a loss that she stopped working as an engraver after marriage, although she turned to making marbled paper during the 1930s, and in the years before her early death in 1951, she painted intense and slightly surreal scenes for children in oils, also making paper models of village buildings set in frames against painted backgrounds.

Mural Painting

Three years after their graduation from the RCA, Ravilious and Bawden were selected to work together on an important joint mural commission at Morley College close to Elephant and Castle, London. Founded in 1889 as an adult education centre by Emma Cons, Morley College began as an adjunct to her temperance music hall at the Royal Victoria Hall in Waterloo, better known as the Old Vic. Between the wars, Cons' niece Lilian Baylis turned the Old Vic into the leading London theatre for productions of Shakespeare and other serious drama at prices accessible to working people, so that the dual use of the building became impractical. Baylis raised funds to

buy a large, late Georgian building nearby and extended it, with the refectory and gymnasium housed in the basement and a concert and lecture hall on the first floor above.³¹

Late in 1927 murals by Rex Whistler (1905–44), one of Henry Tonks's favourite students at the Slade School, were unveiled at the restaurant at the Tate Gallery. Whistler's paintings brought a new quality of light-heartedness typical of the 'Bright Young Things' generation, but supported by a wistful imagination and talent for Georgian pastiche. As a sequel to the Tate murals, Charles Aitken, the Director of the Tate, was asked by Lord Duveen if he could help to organise a similar project for RCA students. The new building at Morley College had just been completed, and Aitken's proposal was welcomed by the Principal, Eva Hubback. She joined a working committee with William Rothenstein and the RCA Registrar, Hubert Wellington, to choose from designs submitted by six artists.³² The budget was set at £1,200 for the work of three artists.³³

Aitken reported to Duveen in February 1928, 'a very able student Borden [sic] with some friends who work with him would probably do the Refreshment Room with amusing scenes of London Life, while a clever student who works more like Poussin would treat the Lecture Hall in a rather severer style, selecting "Music and Dancing" as the theme as the hall is much used for displays of Folk Dancing'.³⁴ The 'clever student' was Charles Mahoney (1903–68) who duly painted a symbolic pastoral with allegorical figures of Arts and Letters, with dancers and harvesters on the wall at the back of the raised platform.³⁵ The refectory below was given to Ravilious and Bawden. The 'London Life' subject originally proposed was rejected by Rothenstein during the course of the year in favour of a theme of 'Fantasy', depicted through Elizabethan and Jacobean drama and inspired by the fame of the Old Vic performances. Aitken reported again to

Duveen in October 1928, 'their designs strike one as on as high a level as Whistler's, though quite different and original'.³⁶

Two pencil studies of girls' faces from this period by Ravilious show that he was able to draw effectively from a model, but the doll-like figures in the murals avoided conventional depiction and chose a deliberately comical and slightly primitive style.³⁷ The intention was clearly, as Ravilious's *Times* obituary stated, to subvert 'the solemnity associated with the word "mural"'.³⁸ In addition, the fact that Morley College was 'for Working Men and Women' was important. The philosophy of the place was that learning, undertaken voluntarily, must be a pleasant and rewarding experience. A printed notice describing the paintings explained, 'The activities of the College, with its throngs of workers seeking both knowledge and intellectual refreshment in their spare time, were exactly of the nature to arouse the sympathies of the promoters and of young artists.'³⁹

The murals must be described in the past tense, as they were destroyed by bombing in 1940.⁴⁰ Three of the walls provided the main painting surfaces. The north wall, mostly by Ravilious, began with clouds, in which floated, in Ravilious's words, 'a quartette of winds holding aloft weather vanes and conch shells; a group of Harlequinade figures [Plate 1] follow, circling a large Bacchante'.⁴¹ The central subject of this wall, a doll's house (Plates 11 and 12), may have been left over from the original 'London Life' theme. Ravilious wrote, 'it began as a section of Redcliffe Road, with more or less the kind of people who live opposite, but since then some of my friends have come into it, also quantities of furniture from home and elsewhere. I have imprisoned a mandrake in the yard under the green-house. A chicory root suggested the idea.'⁴² After this came more flying figures of Punch, Jack Ketch (a hangman) and 'one which began as Judy and ended as Polly Peachum'.⁴³



The frivolous disruption of conventional taste in the doll's house section (Plate 11) reflected the bohemian taste of their student rooms, seen perhaps through the pictorial construction of an Italian trecento altarpiece in which different scenes are enacted in open-fronted boxes.⁴⁴ Ravilious's portrait of Bawden at work at Redcliffe Road in 1929–30 (Plate 13) shows the cartoons for the murals standing in rolls, with the bust of Queen Alexandra at one end of the black mantelshelf (King Edward VII formed her pair), a gilded rococo Victorian mirror to match his easel, a tailor's bust and a guardsman's jacket lying on the floor. There was also a display of wax fruit with beads under a dome. Tirzah

OPPOSITE:

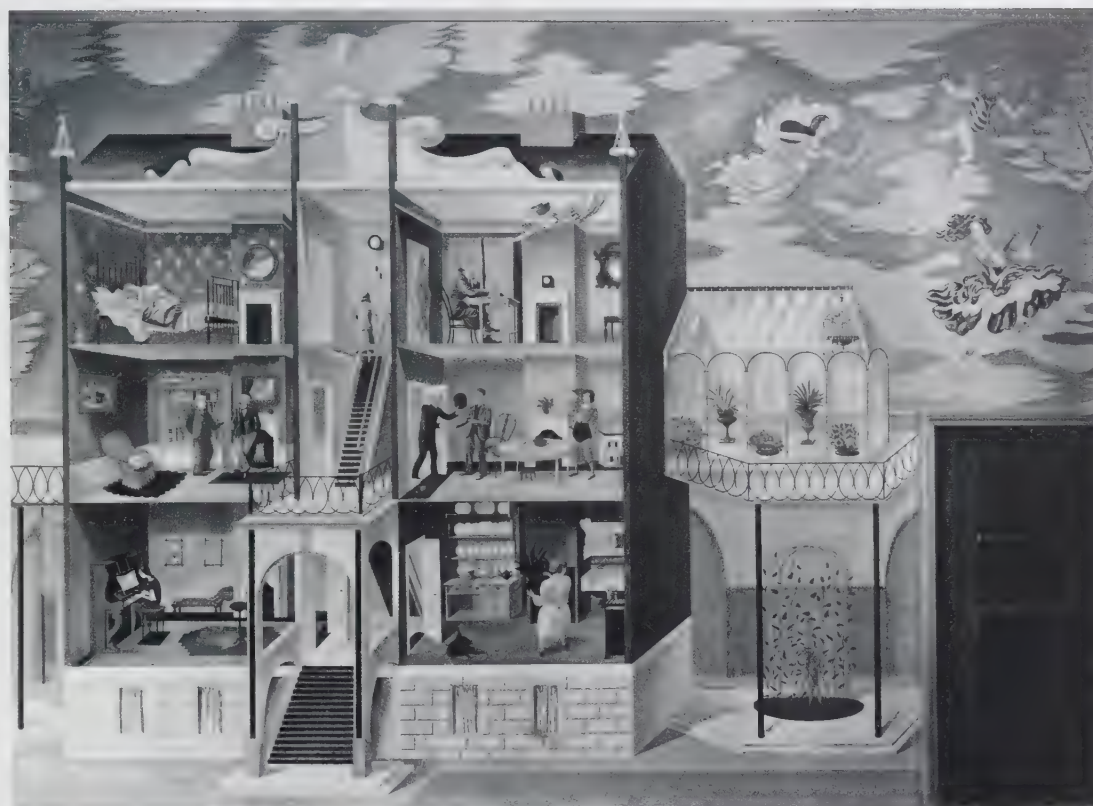
11. *A Lodging House*, 1928–30
 Photograph of section of Morley
 College murals, published in the
Graphic, 15 March 1930

RIGHT:

12. *A Lodging House*, 1928–30
 with figures of a Bacchante,
 Punch and Polly Penchum,
 Morley College murals

BELOW:

13. *Portrait of Edward Bawden*,
 1929–30
 Tempera on board
 80 × 91.4 cm (31½ × 36 in)
 Royal College of Art, London



commented that Bawden was 'one of the first people to fully appreciate such pieces at this period'.⁴⁵ A Victorian revival was visible in other places at the time for, as ever, artists made a virtue of poverty by collecting unfashionable objects and thus led the cycle of taste. This portrait is a unique survival from Ravilious's early career, and it is a mannered work in its highly polished finish. It is evident that a body of work from this period has been lost. Another artist, Thomas Hennell, referred in a wartime letter to 'a painting you were doing at Bardfield in 1928 of parachutes descending, in oil on balloon cloth' – no actual paintings or other records survive of works such as this, apparently linked to mural work.⁴⁶ When painting the watercolours by which he is known, he adopted a different style in which brushstrokes contribute strongly to the effect, reversing the usual assumption that oil is more tactile than watercolour.

Ravilious was much taken with the revival of John Gay's eighteenth-century ballad opera *The Beggar's Opera* at the Lyric Hammersmith in the early 1920s, featuring designs by Claud Lovat Fraser whose brightly coloured, toy-like reworking of the past is reflected in the murals.



Meanwhile, Bawden was noted as an avid reader of English literature with a large book collection, despite which he told William Rothenstein that he had never read Shakespeare.⁴⁷ Bawden shared the north wall with Ravilious's doll's house, showing the 'Brome' mystery play of the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, but his south wall of the room was entirely Shakespearean.⁴⁸ Ravilious's subjects on the long east wall were more recondite, the best known being from Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, which occupied a three-tier structure on the left. Of this, Ravilious wrote:

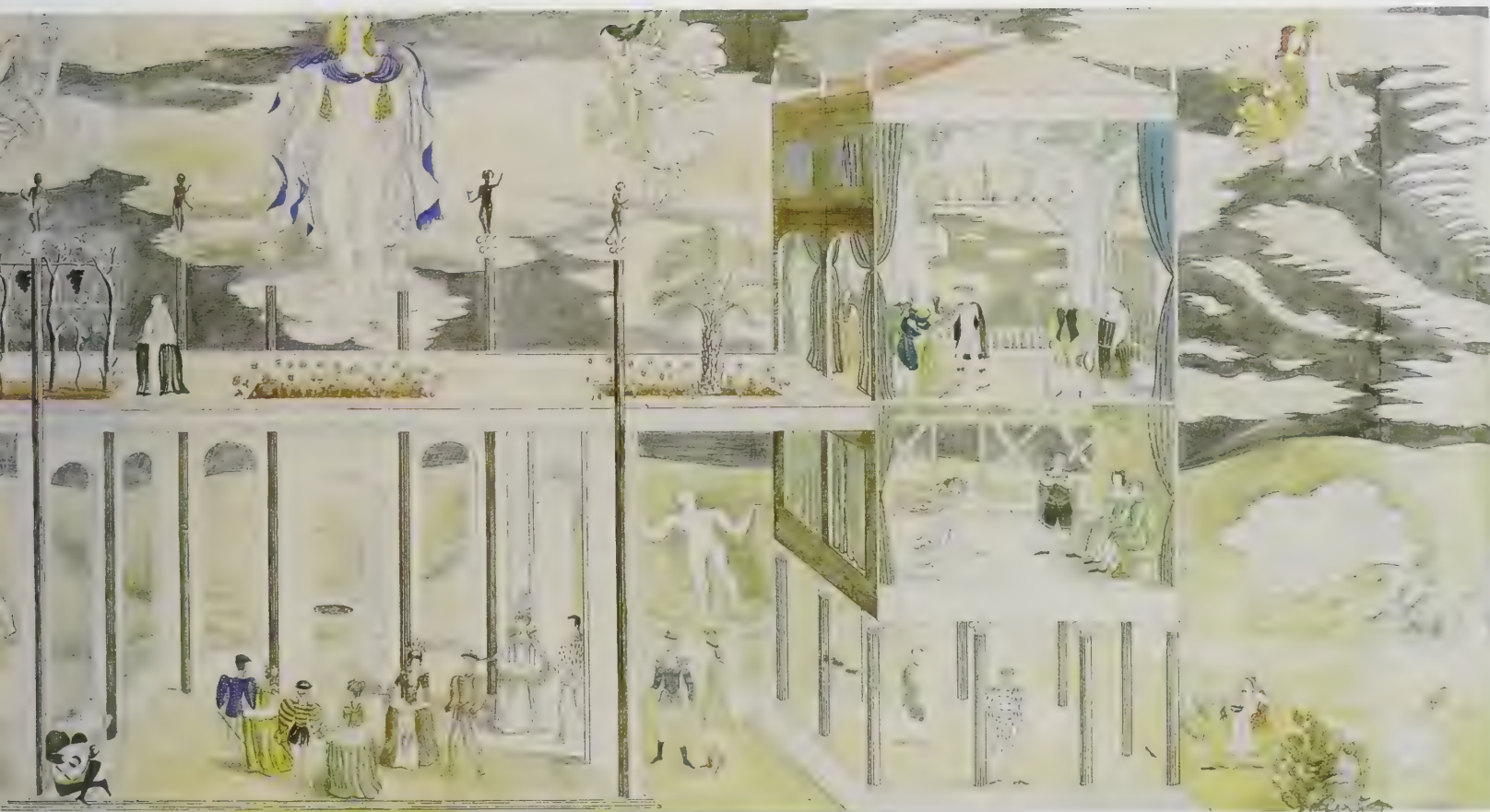
In the top stage, Faustus on his knees is conjuring Mephistophilis; good and evil spirits contend for the soul of the Doctor in the upper storey – the whole of the settings of this play I have tried to make as suggestive of a barn as possible – the idea seemed to suit the play. In the middle the Seven Sins are floating down through the beams: upon the ground stage the Devil conjures up for Faustus the

spirit of Helen. The old man who has reproached him for his sinful and luxurious life is looking on this scene from the surrounding garden.⁴⁹

While the murals were in progress, he made a wood engraving from the scene of *Faustus Conjuring Mephistopheles* (Plate 15), one of his most effective illustrations of Tudor drama.

In the murals, Pomona, the goddess of fruitful abundance, floats over the door and to the right. The next pavilion depicts scenes from the Elizabethan plays *The Arraignment of Paris* by George Peele and *Cynthia's Revels* by Ben Jonson. Ravilious described his representation of the latter: 'Cupid and Mercury discover Echo, whom I have tried to make as disembodied as I could, without painting her quite like a ghost. I suppose she really ought to appear a sexless person.'⁵⁰ A masque from the same subject extends to the right, where the Sussex Downs and the outline of the chalk hill-figure, the Long Man of Wilmington, provide the background. The right-hand

14. *Study for Morley College Murals*, c.1928
Watercolour in two pieces
left section 43.5 × 75.6 cm
(17½ × 29¾ in)
right section 46 × 80 cm
(18¼ × 31½ in)
Private collections



15. Faustus Conjuring
Mephistopheles, 1929
Wood engraving
18 × 12.5 cm (7 1/8 × 4 7/8 in)



pavilion is taken by scenes from Jonson's *Sad Shepherd*. As Ravilious commented, 'I chose this play because – although it is about Sherwood and Robin Hood, and there are witches and spirits, the people are really Arcadians – I didn't want to paint too many farthingales.'⁵¹

Paul Nash's claim in his talk to the Junior Art Workers Guild in 1925 that, 'the old masters ... had full knowledge of all the laws of design and perspective as we know them, but did not choose to use them, preferring to use rather a naive simplicity which renders their work so beautiful', seems relevant in explanation of the naive perspective that separates the Morley murals from Whistler's at the Tate.⁵² In 1925, Bawden in turn had travelled to Italy, and the early Renaissance inspiration behind the scheme is apparent, with a conventionalised perspective reflecting Italian 'primitives'. The booth-like structures on which the plays are enacted are reminiscent of open-air performances and their two levels solve the problem of how to use the height of the wall without large figures or receding perspective di

Architecturally, these structures resemble early European Modernist buildings in their tubular simplicity rather than anything yet built in England at the time.⁵³ A tilted upper level is fixed at the height of the doors and runs through the two long walls as a binding device, providing an extended surface on which the characters can be placed

When the murals were completed, the unveiling ceremony on 6 February 1930, performed by the former and future Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin (a nephew of the painter Edward Burne-Jones), was a national news event. The *Observer* critic wrote, 'the whole thing is treated in a spirit of irresponsibility and bizzarerie, as though the artists had been working with their tongue in their cheek. Yet all these incongruous scenes, enacted by dainty marionettes, are co-ordinated by strongly architectural elements and form a delightful harmonious ensemble in a scheme of predominating greens, reds and yellows.'⁵⁴

John Rothenstein, the son of William who later became the Director of the Tate, wrote that the many sources from which Bawden and Ravilious had drawn inspiration were no discredit to them, since they had been so perfectly blended. Without the actual work to judge from, it is harder to make distinctions, but Howard Hannay, writing in the literary monthly the *London Mercury*, observed of Ravilious that 'his imagination is always on the verge of creating either fantastic images or graceful movements: but Mr Bawden goes straight for the characteristic attitude, rigidifying it and making it look almost funny.'⁵⁵ This was a shrewd distinction, indicative of the fundamental difference in character between the two friends, as evident as much in their physical bearing as in their work. Hannay searched for the appropriate vocabulary, writing, 'I have read that the modern movement is a conception and linear in its expression. I am not sure whether this is intended to be a statement of fact. There will be no objection to a linear



design.' He decided that this applied more to Ravilious than to Bawden. While the fantastical element did recall Gothic painting and woodcuts, 'the whole spirit of the design belongs more to the post-war "cocktail" period than to the grotesque of Gothic religious art'.⁵⁶

It is interesting that Hannay dwelt so much on the idea of Gothic, which seems to stand as the antithesis of classical. It is not a literal version of Gothic or a reflection of Victorian revivalism, but a more subtle direction within the conventions of realism towards the non-literal depiction of space combined with fresh colours and clear outlines that might even be seen in the context of the early work at the Bauhaus.

A minor commission arose directly out of the Morley College opening ceremony at which Ravilious met Sir Geoffrey Fry, Stanley Baldwin's Private Secretary, who was a wealthy man in his own right. For Fry's London flat in Portman Court, Ravilious painted three panels of tennis players in tempera (Plate 16), similar in their bright tonality to the Morley murals although this was a modern life subject in the

16. *Tennis panels*, 1930
Tempera on board
Each panel 82.5 × 49.5 cm
(32½ × 19½ in)
Shown in situ in Sir Geoffrey Fry's flat, Portman Court, London, in Derek Patmore, *Colour Schemes and Modern Furnishing*, Studio, London, 1945

17. *November 5th*, 1933
Watercolour
72.4 × 97.8 cm
(28½ × 38½ in)
Private collection



recognisable setting of the Manor Garden, Eastbourne. The balletic poses of the women in the game of mixed doubles were taken from newspaper photographs. The other figures provide an element of drama, perhaps extending the suppressed sexual tension of the game itself. The courting couple on the right have other things on their minds. A Tirzah-like girl in pink leaves the court on the left, while in the centre a red-haired girl, with her pink dress standing out against the grass, runs to an unseen destination with a self-absorbed physicality suggesting the work of the Polish-French artist, Balthus (1908–2001). A garden temple on a mound and a

thatched barn with open sides complete the scene, with a careful rendering of trees. If the setting for these paintings belonged to the cocktail age, the apparently anodyne content was placed on a plane of dreams.

In 1932, the decorator Ronald Fleming organised an exhibition of mural panels and studies at Carlisle House, Soho, including one by Ravilious described in a press report as a large watercolour of fireworks in back gardens.⁵⁷ A painting corresponding to this description (Plate 17), inscribed *November 5th* and dated 1933, was included in Ravilious's first one-man show, so despite the possibility of it being a second version, it is more



ABOVE:
18. *Flags*, 1933
Study for Midland Hotel murals,
Morecambe
Pencil and watercolour
31 × 81 cm (12¼ × 31⅞ in)
Private collection



LEFT:
19. *Day*, 1933
Mural at Midland Hotel,
Morecambe

OPPOSITE:
20. *Night*, 1933
Mural at Midland Hotel,
Morecambe

probably the same work with a later date added. It stands apart from the rest of Ravilious's paintings for its large size and imaginary content, thus linking it to mural painting. It is a typical example, based on the view from the back of a street fronted by a building, where Eric and I first began our mural work. It is a modern life version of the 19th-century murals with groups of people standing in front of a building on the occasion of

licensed disorder, with a fascinating intricacy of space seen from above, cleverly avoiding compositional confusion with the large area of blank wall in the centre.

Fleming recommended Ravilious to Oliver Hill, the larger-than-life architect of a new hotel at Morecambe, Lancashire, for the London Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS).⁵⁸ The Midland Hotel was an ambitious project conceived as a response to the economic depression of



the early 1930s by Sir Ralph Glyn MP, a director of the LMS who was also Ramsay MacDonald's Parliamentary Private Secretary in the National Government. A recent convert to Modern architecture, Hill was also an amateur topographical painter and liked to commission artists. Eric Gill contributed several works to the hotel in which Christian allegory is concealed beneath classical myth. Ravilious was commissioned to paint the tea room (Plates 18 to 20), a single-storey circular structure on the north end of the hotel, which was meant to cater to day-trippers, independently of the main hotel guests. As at Morley College, lightweight fictive architecture stands out against a background of sea, here matching the expanse of Morecambe Bay as seen from the panoramic window

facing the mural. A pair of flying trumpeters flank the central door behind the bar. In the Day section (Plate 19), the flags flying from masts and the flight of biplanes ascending were joined, in the preliminary study, by hot air balloons and swaying parachutes. The Night section (Plate 20) consists of a grand decorative firework display under a full moon, as rigid in its sharp edges as a baroque engraving. The subject suggested the mystery of the diurnal cycle in which the elements of water, air and fire play their part. No colour photograph of the original painting exists, but the two studies for it, from which some additional figures and incidental details were omitted in execution, show a range of blues and warm brown colouring (Plate 18).⁵⁹

Time came to help him paint in the spring of 1933. Effluence but damp and efflorescence in the wall, followed by cracks in the concrete, meant that the painting deteriorated quickly. They returned in March 1934 and spent a further month repairing the damage, but the paint started to decay again. It is likely that it was painted out as early as 1935, since no solution could be found to overcome the problem. A further commission for ceiling panels at the Merchant Taylors' School at Northwood, Middlesex, seems to have been executed in 1934, but was apparently short-lived. No related studies or photographs have been found.

In 1934, Ravilious painted his last mural, another seaside commission for the Victoria Pier Pavilion at Colwyn Bay on the north Wales coast, where the architect S.D. Adstead replaced an older structure destroyed by fire. His daughter Mary, a Slade contemporary of Rex Whistler, was gaining a reputation as mural painter and decorated the auditorium. Ravilious was given the tea room (Plate 100), a square space where he painted one wall with an underwater scene consisting of ruined arched structures such as the surrealist Giorgio di Chirico might have imagined. An official description reads:

Pink and green seaweeds float through the ruins of a sunken palace. A bright red anchor suggests a connection with the world above. The white and brown surfaces of the palace are in strong contrast with a golden background. This decorative scheme is in the manner of an eighteenth century scenic wallpaper. The curtains of the Tea Room are shell pink, and the doors and windows grey.⁶⁰

Some of Ravilious's most popular artistic motifs, echoed in Whistler's *Blue Room* and other murals.

Each of Ravilious's murals seems to have been painted with a view to being fabulous



detailed painting and thus time by incorporating larger forms and fewer figures, a reasonable response to a life of growing pressure and responsibility. Colwyn Bay was the last mural he painted and no rival to the one in Morecambe, although it is the only one now potentially recoverable.⁶¹

In 1935, Ravilious hoped for an opportunity to contribute to the De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill, designed by Eric Mendelsohn and Serge Chermayeff, one of the most outstanding Modernist buildings of the decade.⁶² The commission went instead to the English Vorticist



21. Eric and Tirzah Ravilious working on the Midland Hotel murals at Morecambe, 1933
Private collection

22. Design for mural at Colwyn Bay Pier Pavilion, 1934
Pencil and watercolour
Dimensions unknown
Private collection

Edward Wadsworth, who donated a cartoon of shells and maritime objects but paid a fee to a younger American artist, Charles Howard, to execute the painting.

Beyond this date, no prospects for murals emerged, although other artists contributed to a growing movement for decoration of this kind. Ravilious did, however, execute related works for temporary exhibition displays that can be considered here for the sake of convenience. In 1935, Maxwell Fry commissioned some designs for etched glass panels (Plate 23) for the *Exhibition of British Art and Industry* held at the Royal Academy by the Royal Society of Arts. These were similar in character to some of Ravilious's wood-engraved emblems, set in a vertical sequence framing a recessed display of glass tableware (including pieces he designed the previous year for the glassmakers Stuart's of Stourbridge) with a photomural overhead.

In 1936, Ravilious agreed to work again under Oliver Hill's direction for the Pavilion of the United Kingdom at

the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* of 1937, for which he also engraved the Royal Arms for the catalogue cover (Plate 60, see Chapter 2). He was commissioned to create the background, in three dimensions of painted and cut-out cardboard, for a display about sport, one of the leading themes of the exhibition. His careful study for a long panorama as a background for a display of sports clothes shows a tennis court and a football stadium with cricket nets between them. As the available space contracted, this attractive design was truncated to include only tennis, with dressed mannequins, rackets and balls in front (Plates 24, 25). The treatment had become more abstract than in earlier work, with the spectators treated as repeating silhouettes in the stands and the players similarly reduced to two dimensions. A fictive space is established by the sort of incorrect perspective that Ravilious was adept at creating, with attenuated rackets and a lawn-roller adding thematic detail. John O'Connor, an RCA student who went to stay

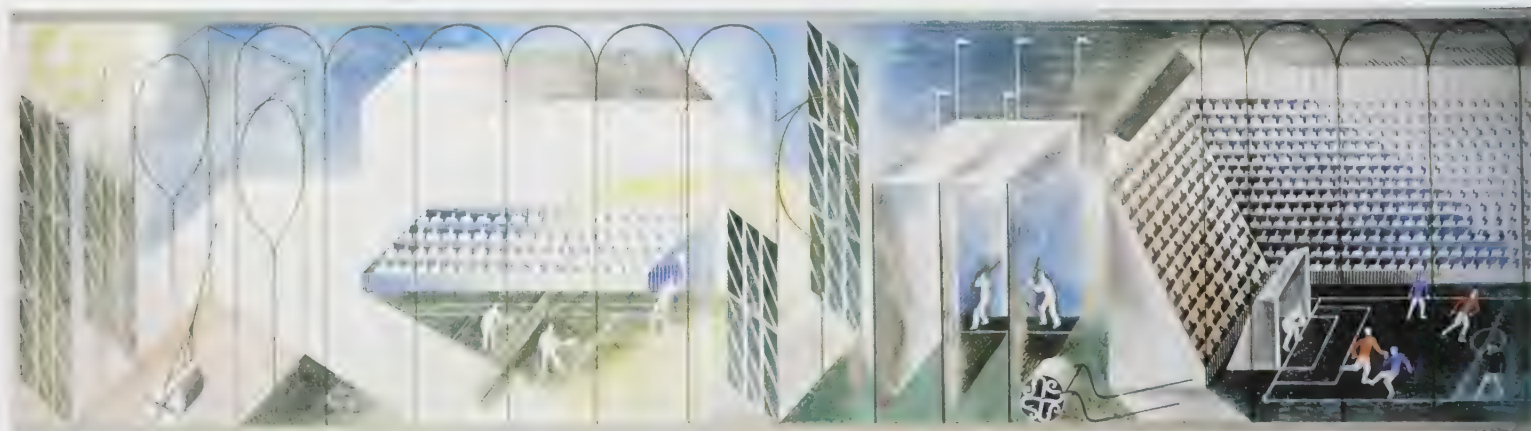
with the Ravilious family at Bank House in Castle Hedingham (where they had moved in 1934), helped to paint the boards with watercolour, the medium for the display.⁶³

The British Pavilion at the New York World's Fair in 1939 was the successor to Paris, although more conservative in approach. Here, Ravilious designed a set of cut-out figures in copper and enamel, to be mounted above the surface of a large map of the world on the floor of a large room, showing the impact of British mercantile shipping. His subjects represented different peoples of the world and their occupations, buildings, vegetation and other emblems, using tonal contrast with a new breadth and freedom.⁶⁴ These images were the basis for a proposed *Four Continents* bowl for Wedgwood (1939).

Within Ravilious's relatively short career, mural painting was a form of launching pad, making him a minor celebrity and bringing him into contact with architects and sculptors. Through it, he fulfilled the expectations of his student years, and quickly became familiar with the design of a picture at a scale that tested his ability. It is not hard to imagine his paintings being transformed into sets for the theatre or ballet, had he followed the path of Rex Whistler and other artists who



mixed murals and stage design.⁶⁵ When, after Colwyn Bay, the mural commissions fell away, he seems to have expressed no regrets, having decided by this time that he wished to concentrate more on watercolour painting and printmaking.



OPPOSITE TOP:

23. Engraved glass panels
(in vertical screen on
left of opening)

Part of Exhibition of British Art and
Industry, Royal Academy, 1935

OPPOSITE BOTTOM:

24. Study for Tennis Display, 1936
Designed for the Pavilion of the
United Kingdom at Exposition
Internationale des Arts et Techniques
dans la Vie Moderne, 1937

Watercolour

30 × 114 cm (11¾ × 44⅞ in)

Private collection

RIGHT:

25. Eric Ravilious with the Tennis
Display, 1937

Photograph by Norman
Parkinson

Private collection







BOOKS AND PRINTS

'A CLEAR MENTAL IMAGE'

Early Wood Engravings, 1923–33

Ravilious was a printmaker and illustrator first and a painter afterwards. He excelled in both fields, learning through the demanding medium of wood engraving how to manage the contrast of pure black and white as a coherent abstract design and as a representation of texture and surface. Book illustration was in a flourishing state in Europe and the United States, offering artists the freedom to treat texts in an individual and non-literal way, and among his many contemporaries in Britain, Ravilious acquired a secure position. In some ways, this is surprising for his illustrations rarely deal directly with the complexity of interaction between a story's characters, as do those of Barnett Freedman or Lynton Lamb. Instead, they can at times make an almost independent counterpart to a text, and when there is no text, they still succeed in conveying a sense of imminent action.

Wood engraving, his first medium, allowed for fine lines set against pure black and he adapted well to this way of working.⁶⁶ The Victorian trade of reproductive engraving 'died as a commercial possibility' in the years

between 1888 and 1894 with the arrival of photo-mechanical reproduction, as the artist and teacher Noel Rooke wrote, but before long 'while all so-called practical people looked upon engraving as finished for ever, a few artists decided to try to engrave their own blocks for book illustrations.'⁶⁷ The medium had one native prophet, Thomas Bewick (1753–1828), who was rediscovered not only as a great miniaturist in his medium but celebrated for his 'white line' style, seen in his famous finely worked pictures of birds, first published in 1797 (Plate 26). The images were accompanied by the even more famous tailpieces showing comic or pathetic scenes of contemporary country life, often making a moral or political point. Bewick inspired a new generation of pastoralists in the 1920s, Ravilious among them.

Another inspiration from the same period was William Blake (1757–1827), who in 1821 produced a set of eight images illustrating Ambrose Philips's *Imitation of Virgil's First Eclogue*. Lacking the accomplishment of Bewick and his imitators, these rough images gained proportionately in their power to convey emotion.

27. Toys, 1923
Wood engraving
5 x 10.2 cm (2 x 4 in)
Published in the RCA Students'
Magazine, December 1923



27. Toys, 1923
Wood engraving
5 x 10.2 cm (2 x 4 in)
Published in the RCA Students'
Magazine, December 1923

28. Anonymous
St Christopher on Horseback,
15th century
German metal engraving in the
manière ciblée
Dimensions unknown



Samuel Palmer (1805–81) famously called them 'visions of little dells and nooks and corners of Paradise; models of the exquisite pitch of intense poetry'. Palmer's work, together with that of his friend Edward Calvert, was well known by the 1920s. Their group known as 'The Ancients' acted as an inspiration for Graham Sutherland and his student friends as well as for Ravilious, who visited Shoreham, in Kent – where Palmer found his 'valley of vision' as a young artist – with Bawden and Bliss.

These precedents were largely ignored by engravers until around 1900 when artist Sydney Lee began to revive a white-line style for landscape subjects such as *The Limestone Rock*, 1904–5, in which the preciousness of 1890s illustrators is replaced by a cooler observation of light and texture. With wood-engraver Noel Rooke beginning to instruct students at the Central School in London, the idea of engraving as an alternative to the more established medium of etching began to take hold. After the First World War there was sufficient impulse among artists and a sufficient market among collectors for the formation of the Society of Wood Engravers in 1920, which Paul Nash recommended Ravilious for membership ten years later. Meanwhile, Claud Lovat Jones, the brilliant short-lived graphic artist and stage designer of *The Star of the Opera*, helped to establish the





29. *Sussex Church*, 1925
Wood engraving
11.3 × 12.8 cm (4½ × 5 in)



30. *Church Under a Hill*, 1927
Wood engraving
16.5 × 13.7 cm (6½ × 5⅝ in)

graphic style of the Curwen Press with simple black outline drawings enhanced with bright colours, reviving the style of illustrated ballads and 'chap books' – mostly crudely illustrated folk tales – from the early eighteenth century.⁶⁸ One of the Eastbourne tutors was also a wood engraver, and Ravilious came into the movement on the crest of a wave at the beginning of his career.⁶⁹

However, Ravilious soon found his own voice in the landscape subjects that are the only direct products of his Italian journey in the summer of 1924. Through Douglas Percy Bliss's researches, he discovered the fifteenth-century *manière ciblée* (Plate 26), a German renaissance style of metal engraving with small dots, which he adapted as a way of creating tone. *Sussex Church* (1925, Plate 29) made in his final year at the RCA, shows areas with these white pecking marks, an approach different to the normal linear cutting of most engravers of the era. The other engraver of the time who used similar marks was Claughton Pellew, a friend of Paul Nash, but it did not become a dominant mannerism. The tree trunks are textured to show off two different kinds of bark, cut vertically or horizontally. A later print, *Church Under a Hill* (1927, Plate 30) resembles *Sussex Church* although it is more polished in its execution. For the historian James Hamilton, this growing professional accomplishment represents a loss, 'all the rough edges are gone, and we have a picture as crisp and fresh as a buttermilk advertisement. What the later print gains in technical skill, it lacks in the intensity.'⁷⁰ As with his paintings in the period 1927–30, the technique tightens and moves away from any lingering Expressionist character he might have taken from Nash or other contemporaries, yet in the words of John Craig, in all his work 'the cutting is sharp and assured – the lines, dots, hatchings, no more than is necessary to produce the effect needed. The result is that Ravilious's engravings – thoroughly in the white-line mode – sit lightly on the page.'⁷¹

In 1933, Bliss looked back on Sussex Church as 'a remarkable achievement, and one which had in it the germ of all his later development. Boldly and gracefully conventionalised, it already showed that appreciation of textures which is so notable a feature of his work to-day.'⁷² He relates how, in order to develop a greater range of textures, Ravilious 'even fashioned tools from odd bits of metal to make incisions of various shapes', adding, 'there is no engraver working who has more completely exploited the potentialities of the medium for variety and opulence of texture'.⁷³ A few preparatory drawings for engravings have survived, but the real work was done on the block. 'schemed out, tool in hand, conceived of as a pattern far more intense in line, rich in colour, and varied in texture than anything made with a pencil'.⁷⁴ Bawden recalled how

he never made the slightest mistake or showed the faintest indecision. His cutting was superb. Usually he covered the block with a wash of white paint, then drew in pencil on it, often with a good deal of shading. Then with the graver he cut slowly and decisively. Eric must have had a remarkably clear mental image of what he intended to do.⁷⁵

He put in long hours of engraving, working with people around him. As a friend recalled, 'he sat by the window with his wood-cutting block of boxwood and a halfpenny graver in it – turning it this way and that as he went, muttering and whistling all the time, as beautifully as the most of us on the in-breath, never the out.'⁷⁶

Although his first book commission was to illustrate *Desert: A Legend* by Martin Armstrong (1926), a mystical poem according to the jacket blurb, involved 'the passion of earthly love and the love of the spirit in early Christian times'. With this strange text, he was able

TOP:
31. Sandstorm, 1926
For Martin Armstrong,
Desert: A Legend
Wood engraving
6.2 × 9 cm (2½ × 3 in)



BOTTOM:
32. 'Malchus was
surrounded by beasts', 1926
For Martin Armstrong,
Desert: A Legend
Wood engraving
12 × 9 cm (4¾ × 3½ in)



33. Bathroom, 1926
Wood engraving
9 × 10.4 cm (3½ × 4⅛ in)

34. Boy Birdnesting, 1927
Wood engraving
8.8 × 13 cm (3½ × 5⅛ in)



to try out a number of styles, from the comic grotesque to the mystical emblematic vignette, with experiments closer to Expressionism than any subsequent work (Plates 31, 32). The figures are, as usual in both Ravilious and Bawden's work, rather doll-like. More emotive are the scenes of rippling water by night, similar to the scenes of Creation in Paul Nash's *Genesis*, 1924. The tailpiece from *Desert*, showing 'the indestructible beauty of a diamond', was adapted in 1927 for a Curwen Press Pattern Paper (Plate 51), printed in blue with some added touches of a turquoise green, making it somewhat art deco in character. Although not designed to be a repeat, the white space between the units makes a satisfying counterpart negative pattern.⁷⁷

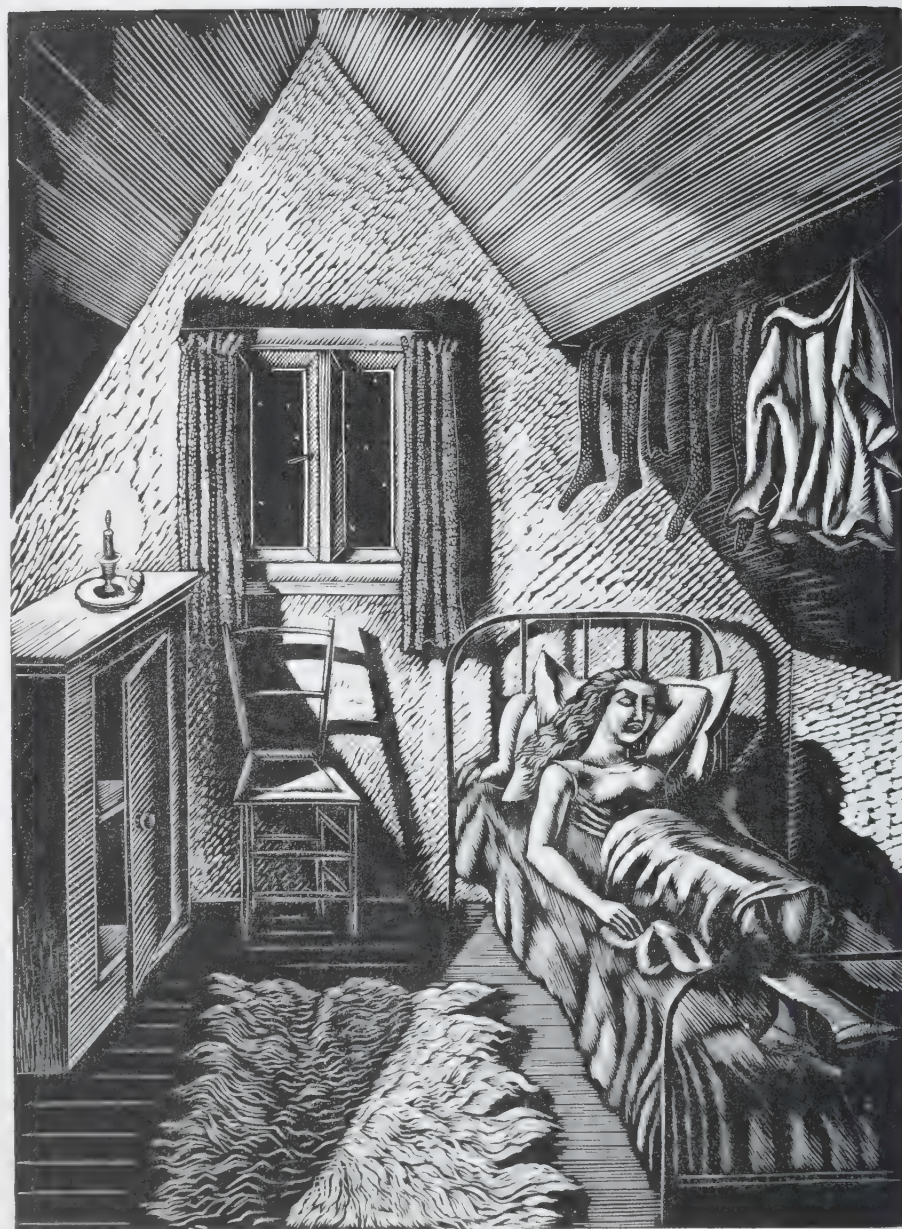
Bliss recounted how Ravilious was 'thrilled' by Gothic tapestries he saw at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris while passing through on his Italian trip in 1924, and equally by 'the cheap substitutes for tapestries, the painted cloths of the Elizabethans', at the Victoria and Albert Museum.⁷⁸ These textiles offered pre-Renaissance lessons in pictorial organisation without conventional perspective depth, and conventions for the monochrome simplification of foliage into larger-scale patterns. Tapestries, or at least wall decorations, are prominent in two engravings from 1926, both showing nude female figures in mysterious rooms. One is a bathroom (Plate 33), not unlike some 1920s extravaganza of marble and underwater murals; the other is a circular bedroom with over-scaled landscape tapestries with a giant snail and strawberries and a four-poster bed on which a female figure lies sleeping in the morning light.

In *Boy Birdnesting* (1927, Plate 34), the depiction of the precarious hold of the boy's long limbs straddling the branch, combined with his flattened staring face against the mobbing birds of the upper sky, shares with much of his early work a subtle balance of the sinister and the comic. Like many youths of the time, Ravilious had once

pursued this quasi-scientific hobby, so it might count as a form of farewell to adolescence.⁸⁰ A female counterpart is *The Bedroom* (1930, Plate 35), which is similar to one of Tirzah's engravings of eloquent situations in modern life, in this case a domestic servant or lodger, frugally washing stockings overnight and dozing by candlelight. The end wall is a study in different types of cut denoting gradations of light.⁸⁰ Other prints of the time, such as *Manor Gardens*, correspond to Bliss's account of 'pallid, large-eyed girls and slim loose-limbed boys' who 'drift sleepily through his drawings, caress each other tenderly, or look blankly out into vacancy as the folk do in medieval tapestries' (Plate 221).⁸

Private presses, publishing fine limited editions for collectors, prospered in the 1920s and commissioned many wood engravings.⁸² Golden Cockerel Press began in a garden shed near Marlow in 1922 and was soon taken over by Robert Gibbings, himself an engraver, with his wife Moira. Eric Gill produced *The Four Gospels* and *The Canterbury Tales* for Golden Cockerel while their other artists included David Jones, John Nash, Lynton Lamb and Agnes Miller Parker.⁸³ In the tradition of William Morris and the Kelmscott Press, handmade papers were deemed necessary to give the correct aura to the books and justify their high price, but were too rough to take a satisfactory impression of finely cut lines, at least as the block began to clog with the heavy inking required.⁸⁴ The letters between Gibbings and Ravilious show the latter's increasing concern to make his engravings bold enough to overcome these problems.⁸

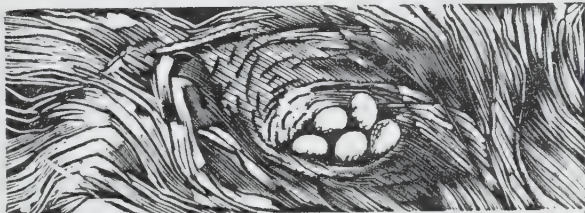
Elizabethan and Jacobean writing was in fashion in the 1920s. For Golden Cockerel, Ravilious first illustrated *A Ballad upon a Wedding* by Sir John Suckling (1927, Plate 36), but this was relatively conventional; it was only with *One Week in Moneths* (1927, Plate 37), illustrating a text by the 17th-century writer Nicholas Breton, that his own



OPPOSITE:
35. *The Boxroom*, 1930
Wood engraving
16.5 × 12.1 cm (7 × 4¾ in)

RIGHT:
36. *The Bride*, 1927
For Sir John Suckling,
A Ballad upon a Wedding
Wood engraving
5 × 6 cm (2 × 2¾ in)

BELOW:
37. *June*, 1927
For Nicholas Breton,
The Twelve Moneths
Wood engraving
Printed area 12.8 × 9.7 cm
(5 × 3¾ in)



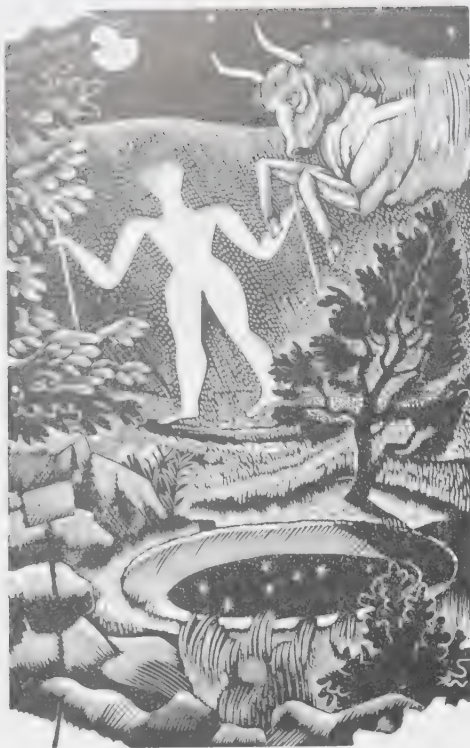
1933	1932	1937	1931	1930	1929	1928	JUNE				
1939	1938	1943	1936	1941	1935	1934					
1944	1949	1948	1942	1947	1940	1945					
1950	1955	1954	1953	1952	1946	1951					
Th.	W.	Tu.	M.	Sn.	Sat.	Fri.					
Fri.	Th.	W.	Tu.	M.	Sn.	Sat.	1	8	15	22	29
Sat.	Fri.	Th.	W.	Tu.	M.	Sn.	2	9	16	23	30
Sn.	Sat.	Fri.	Th.	W.	Tu.	M.	3	10	17	24	
M.	Sn.	Sat.	Fri.	Th.	W.	Tu.	4	11	18	25	
Tu.	M.	Sn.	Sat.	Fri.	Th.	W.	5	12	19	26	
W.	Tu.	M.	Sn.	Sat.	Fri.	Th.	6	13	20	27	
							7	14	21	28	



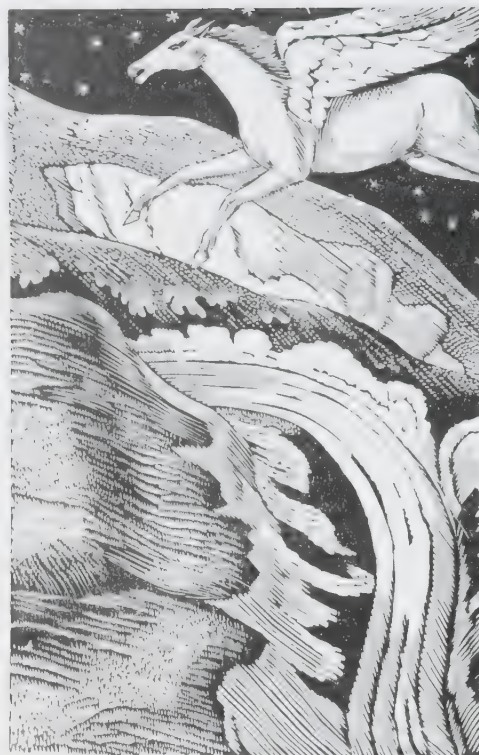
the text, Ravilious showed modern figures for the month-by-month pages. The second version of the birdnester for April and the June subject of a swimmer in a pond, seen in cross-section through the water, are especially memorable treatments.

The *Almanack* 1929 (Plates 38, 39), for the Lanston Monotype Corporation, was a commission from Stanley Morison, the remarkable self-taught expert on printing and its history. It was commissioned at the time that Ravilious was starting work on the Morley College murals. In these images, wrote Richard Morphet, 'vital though the verifiable world is in his art Ravilious often ... seems to use symbols and selected natural phenomena to draw our awareness beyond material reality'.⁸⁶ The *Almanack* prints introduce airborne emblems into rustic settings. In the 1920s literary imagination, the English countryside was often imbued with the supernatural. Zodiac figures hover amongst East Sussex locations such as the Long Man of Wilmington, a dew pond, a flint roadside wall and chalk pits, and architectural devices such as the church spire and the oast house. For Robert Harling, technique outran the constraints of design in the *Almanack* and he found some of the images too crowded in their attempt to 'combine divergent elements of realism and allegory'.⁸⁷ Yet the designs mark a further stage of technical and conceptual development in Ravilious's work, with pointillist dots threaded into chains for the hillside in Aquarius, and the long, waving strokes that make up the haystack.

Opinions diverge on whether Ravilious's use of symbolism holds some key to his inner world or represents a more casual absorption of imagery. The most useful clue is the 'Preface by the Engraver' in the *Almanack*, where he explores the iconography of the zodiac and explains why he has changed it.⁸⁸ For ancient people, he writes, the sun, 'inspired and controlled their activities, their influence on the earth, its crops, and upon man. The deities who became symbolised in the



38. May, 1928
For Almanack 1929
Wood engraving
10.2 x 6.5 cm (4 x 2 1/2 in)



39. September, 1928
For Almanack 1929
Wood engraving
10.2 x 6.5 cm (4 x 2 1/2 in)

planets were thought to govern the change of the seasons and thus the agricultural labours of each month, and to exercise an influence on every hour of the day.⁸⁹ On the subject of the chalk figures, to which he later returned as a painter, he felt the need to dissociate them from the zodiac signs, explaining 'they are decorations to the landscape, deriving from the "Long Man" displayed on the side of a hill at Wilmington, in Sussex; a gigantic drawing in line on the chalk, described as "a rude figure cut by monks of the Benedictine priory that flourished there." It is excellent heraldry, not by any means rudely cut: the design can be clearly seen at several miles distance.' Putting his Italian tour to use, he continues, 'There is a theory that the figure is British or Saxon and existed on the hill centuries before the monks built their priory below, and that he represents the sun god pushing aside the gates of darkness. In San Gimignano there a figure in the first of Bartolomeo's "scenes of the Creation" whose attitude attracted to me the Wilmington Giant.' In this illustration (pp. 44-67 in the Collegiata church, San Gimignano) to explain, there is a set of zodiac

is painted floating among a number of enormous attendant stars. She holds two staves in her hands as the Giant appears to do, also she possesses something of his rounded contours. Perhaps here may be the Giant's origin: in which case the sex of the "Long Man" is mistaken: he should be the Giantess – Virgo instead of Baldur. If there is no real evidence to support this, at least there is about his figure a sexless quality which would admit either interpretation: also he may as easily be seen to hold staves, as to push back with his outstretched hands the gates of darkness.⁹⁰

The figure for Taurus (May) is duly given a feminine outline, while in the Aries (April) figure that precedes it, the Long Man, now more distinctly masculine, is walking with a single staff. Perhaps too much could be read into this piece of writing, but it reveals Ravilious's playfully inventive attitude to his iconography and his willingness to explain it when asked. The dust jacket he engraved for Anthony Bertram's novel, *The Sword Falls*, (1929, Plate 40) continues the *Almanack* format, with a god of war materialising unseen to a conventional couple in their drab hallway.



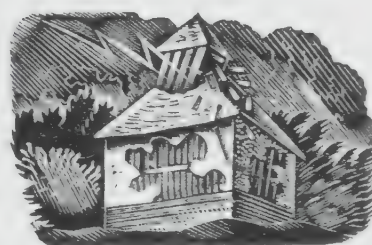
TOP LEFT:
40. *The Sword Falls*, 1928
Wood engraving
14.6 × 10.8 cm (5 7/8 × 4 1/4 in)

TOP CENTRE:
41. *Headpiece (May)*, 1932
For *Kynoch Press Note Book*, 1933
Wood engraving
3.1 × 5 cm (1 1/4 × 2 in)

TOP RIGHT:
42. *Headpiece (January and February)*, 1932
For *Kynoch Press Note Book*, 1933
Wood engraving
3.5 × 5 cm (1 1/4 × 2 in)

BOTTOM CENTRE:
43. *Headpiece (July)*, 1932
For *Kynoch Press Note Book*, 1933
Wood engraving
3.1 × 5 cm (1 1/4 × 2 in)

BOTTOM RIGHT:
44. *Headpiece (June)*, 1932
For *Kynoch Press Note Book*, 1933
Wood engraving
3.5 × 4.5 cm (1 3/8 × 1 7/8 in)

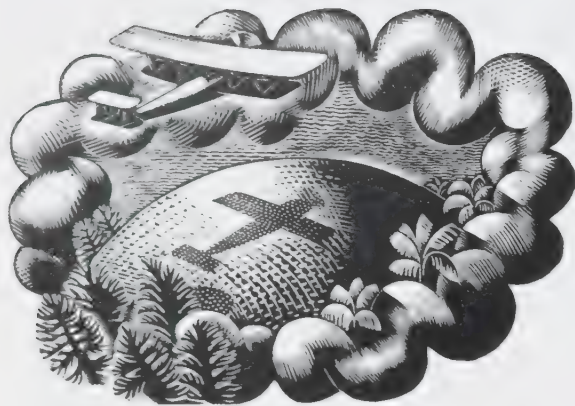


The *Kynoch Press Note Book* (1933, Plates 41 to 44) performs for the northwest Essex countryside the same sort of transfiguration that the 1929 *Almanack* did for Sussex; it is a more secular and domestic pastoral which suggests lines of narrative within a wide range of subjects, endlessly inventive and evocative. The quality of these works is also an abstract one, and John O'Connor, an engraver taught by Ravilious at the Royal College of Art, felt that his approach to tonal contrast was captured in his phrase, 'a white rabbit in front of a dark cabbage'.⁹¹ Robert Harling wrote of the 'rich and satisfying simplicity which wood-engraving had not had since the time of Bewick', bringing 'a sense of formal design which Bewick's engravings did not have'.⁹²

With 54 *Conceits* by Martin Armstrong (1933, Plates 45, 46), a trade book with the inconsequentiality of a private press one, form and content come closer together while often only loosely anchored to the text. The subjects are more consistently metaphysical in character than before and the funereal character is translated by Ravilious into something poetic, sometimes jocular and only occasionally grotesque. Humans metamorphose into birds or fish, and bare hills or the depths of the sea

are all consistent with the seventeenth-century mood of an emblem book. A particularly poignant one is *The Young Airman* (Plate 45), with a biplane casting its shadow on a domed hillside, for a poem prefiguring an Icarus-like early death.

With *Twelfth Night* (Plates 47, 48) for Golden Cockerel, begun in 1930 and issued in 1932, Ravilious undertook his most ambitious engraving project. With a design concept similar to Eric Gill's *Canterbury Tales*, published by Gibbins in 1929, the decorative borders relate the illustrations to the text in a more visually unified manner. Most of these borders were in fact discarded after trial paste-ups in the long gestation of the book. Bliss wrote, 'he has, in fact, simplified and slightly coarsened his style in the interests of textual harmony, and his *Twelfth Night* is certainly, in this respect, a great advance on his other books'. However, Shakespeare's play failed to draw from Ravilious the intensity he found in Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, a subject included at Morley College (Plate 15), for which one wood engraving was completed and published separately.⁹³ In 1933, after *Twelfth Night*, Ravilious illustrated Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (Plates 49, 50) for the Golden Hours



Press, a short-lived enterprise run by Christopher Sandford who bought *Golden Cockerel* with other partners a year later. The four full-page blocks all have an architectonic 'staging' that shows the continuing influence of the Morley College murals, and gives them an appropriately Tudor flavour. In one of them, the theme of the naked woman in the tapestried room recurs, while the final image, with Barabas plunging through a trapdoor into a flaming cauldron, is particularly effective (with the falling figure resembling one of the 54 *Conceits* subjects)

Twelfth Night was printed in *Golden Cockerel*'s proprietary type, designed by Eric Gill. The project began with the title page, prepared in advance for the 131 prospectus for the press. Gibbings considered this engraving 'far and away the best ... yet and I hope very much the volume is going to set a new standard for us and a standard for everybody else'.⁹⁴ This prospectus, one of a series of large engravings by Ravilious, shows a crowing rooster framed in a wreath of loose pages, tulips and ears of wheat. On the front, with the same bird on the back, is a small figure of Gibbings, who privately admitted to being overwhelmed by his responsibilities, as he was in the night sky with shooting stars.



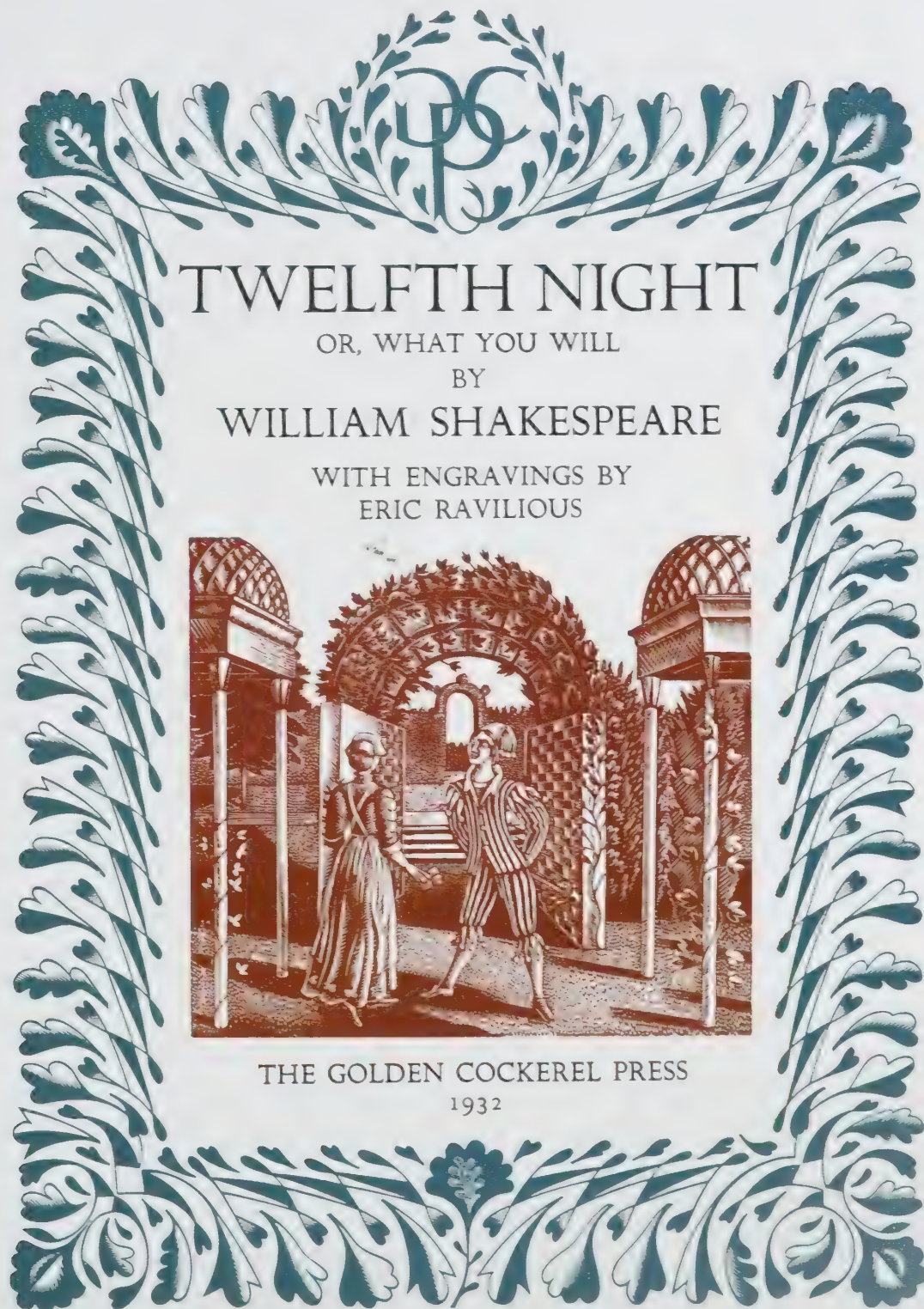
45. *A Young Airman*, 1933
For Martin Armstrong,
54 *Conceits*
Wood engraving
5.7 × 8.2 cm (2¼ × 3¼ in)

46. *A Suicide*, 1933
For Martin Armstrong,
54 *Conceits*
Wood engraving
5.2 × 6.8 cm (2 × 2½ in)

For *Twelfth Night*, Gibbings announced that it would be 'the largest volume yet attempted', and that 'the artist has been given a free hand and no expense will be spared on the production'. Private press books were luxury products and times were hard. Gibbings felt uncertain about selling an edition of 500 copies at five guineas and decided to reduce the page size and the print run, while Ravilious was asked to cut his fee, agreeing to payment in regular instalments, replying that 'the only thing that seems to matter in my hand-to-mouth existence just now is being sure of a little ready money at intervals'.⁹⁵ The main illustration blocks were completed by the end of the year, and Gibbings proposed printing them in colours, alternating blue-grey and rust brown.

It was not in Ravilious's repertory to develop the pathos of the story very far, and he responds best to the moments of comedy with his figures who rather resemble those from a Pollock's toy theatre, a genre of popular art print with which he and his group of friends were familiar. As always, the backgrounds add as much as the figures themselves, showing his easy assimilation of architectural and decorative detail; such detail is not literally copied from period sources, but conveys the general spirit of artifice in settings that are as much

47. Title Page (Maria and Clown),
1932
For William Shakespeare,
Twelfth Night
Wood engraving
Printed area 29 × 20.5 cm
(11 3/4 × 8 1/8 in)



believable theatre stages as potentially real places. A scene in which the cross-gartered Malvolio meets Olivia is depicted in front of a pair of arches that are derived from Sir John Vanbrugh's stable courtyard at Eastbury in Dorset (1738), of which there is a cutting from *Country Life* in Ravilious's scrapbook

Wood Engraving in the Wider World, 1931–9

With the slowdown in private press activity, Ravilious found more work in press advertising and other publishing commissions. Many of these came through the Curwen Press, which acted for clients such as the Westminster Bank, while there were various commissions from publishers for book jackets and ornaments, and a number of private ones for bookplates. In 1935, Oliver Simon's magazine *Signature* predicted that work in these categories would 'rank among his finest and most spontaneous achievements'.⁹⁶ The blocks, retained at the Curwen works at Plaistow in East London, were available for other uses, and some reappeared in the post-war years.

Writing about what he referred to as the 'New Draughtsmen' in the same issue of *Signature*, Paul Nash distinguished between 'free' and 'applied' artists, the latter relating to work in commercial advertising, and the popularity against artists' involvement with it. There was a tension, he admitted, between the demands of clients for a popular recognisable performance, so that 'his signature is not enough: like a dance band, he must be recognisable by his signature tune'. Yet with the right artist and the right patron, the "applied" artist can be said to be more free than the "free" painter'.⁹⁷ Ravilious was included in the category, and very few of his commercial images could be accused of repetition or self-parody, nor was his work in this field formally signed or credited, although it was often signed with the abstract devices, usually with a rotational quality like a



TOP:
48. Malvolio with Olivia and Maria, 1932
For William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*
Wood engraving
Printed area 10 × 12.6 cm (3 7/8 × 5 in)



BOTTOM:
49. 'We will leave this paltry land', 1933
For Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*
Wood engraving
17.6 × 10.8 cm (6 7/8 × 4 1/4 in)

OPPOSITE:
50. 'A charge, the cable cut, a cauldron discovered', 1933
For Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*
Wood engraving
17.6 × 10.8 cm (6 7/8 × 4 1/4 in)



Catherine wheel firework or a bow tied with spotted ribbon, are among Ravilious's most brilliant formal inventions. They were no doubt derived from pattern ideas of the eighteenth century or earlier, but they were rendered in a completely individual way with a sure sense of the balance of black and white. Together with a sunset field of conical haystacks or a vignette originally cut for the Food and Wine Society, they fulfilled their 'stock block' function as surely as did the engravings or type-metal devices included in typefounders' catalogues from around 1800, with the same quality of being generic images rather than direct illustrations.

In 1935, the publisher J.M. Dent commissioned Ravilious to engrave stock blocks of exactly this kind for *Everyman's Library* (Plate 52) as part of a redesign of their popular series of cheap hardback classics. The redesign included Eric Gill's *Perpetua* type in place of the art nouveau designs with which the series was originally launched. Simple and abstract, with symbols for different categories of book, the *Everyman* decorations were probably Ravilious's most widely distributed designs, but the most enduring was the engraving for *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack* (Plate 53), first printed in 1938 as part of a redesign by Robert Harling, then working as art director with the advertising agency Everett Jones and Delamere. The standard buff cover of the earlier issues of this classic design was only subtly updated, using the *Playbill* type that Harling revived for the typefounders Stephenson Blake in the previous year. Harling wrote that this was one of a handful of traditional publications that 'seemed to have got their format right first time, however long ago'. Harling saw the revival of early Victorian character in graphic design as a counterbalance to the austerity of Modernism without becoming pastiche. The players with their top hats that Ravilious engraved fitted with this quality, and their virtue was that they never went out of date. Harling continued, 'Recalling that Ravilious had a special

enthusiasm for the game, I suggested to the then publishers, Whitaker's, that he should be commissioned to engrave a new design for the title page. His engraving of mid-nineteenth century batsman and wicket-keeper was immediately accepted ... and remains an ideal graphic introduction to one of England's most durable publications'.⁹⁸

The idea of representing England was implicit in nearly all Ravilious's work from an early point, but a series of wood-engraving commissions in the second part of the 1930s enabled him to develop this theme for a wider audience.⁹⁹ While Edward Bawden produced a variety of work for London Transport from the mid-1920s onwards, Ravilious started later, with tailpieces for Green Line coaches in 1935, suggesting the charms of outlying villages, and a further series in 1936 commissioned by Harling with village scenes conveying a vivid sense of a settled existence among gardens, secret pathways and hedges (Plates 54, 55). With subject matter so prone to sentimentality, it is partly the strong designs of these engravings, involving a light application of Modernist distortions of perspective and scale, combined with the inclusion of just the right amount of narrative information, that seem to strike the right note. This was the intention of the patrons, who complained that one design, representing the 'Suburban Home' (although a far from typical one) had 'a satiric quality', although they appear to have relented in asking for an alternative. The London Transport series continued with three pamphlets of *Country Walks*, on which engravings of the deeper countryside were matched with austere typography in Walbaum, the early nineteenth-century 'Modern' typeface much used by both Harling and the Curwen Press.

The Silver Jubilee of King George V in 1935, the first such national celebration since 1897, occasioned much decoration and printed celebration at a time of relative stability. Christopher Sandford and Owen



Rutter, the new owners of *Golden Cockerel*, celebrated the occasion by publishing a brief text called *The Hansom Cab and the Pigeons* by L.A.G. Strong, a popular thriller writer, who mused on the passage of time and the threat of Nazi ideology, writing, 'If men and women abrogate or lose the power to think, you may have material welfare, but you will have no life, no civilisation, no soul, nothing but an ant-heap.'¹⁰⁰ Ravilious's engravings for the book include a frontispiece that illustrates the title literally: pigeons roost under the hood of the cab, pursuing an unheeding new life in the dawn light (Plate 56). Writing to Rutter,

OPPOSITE:

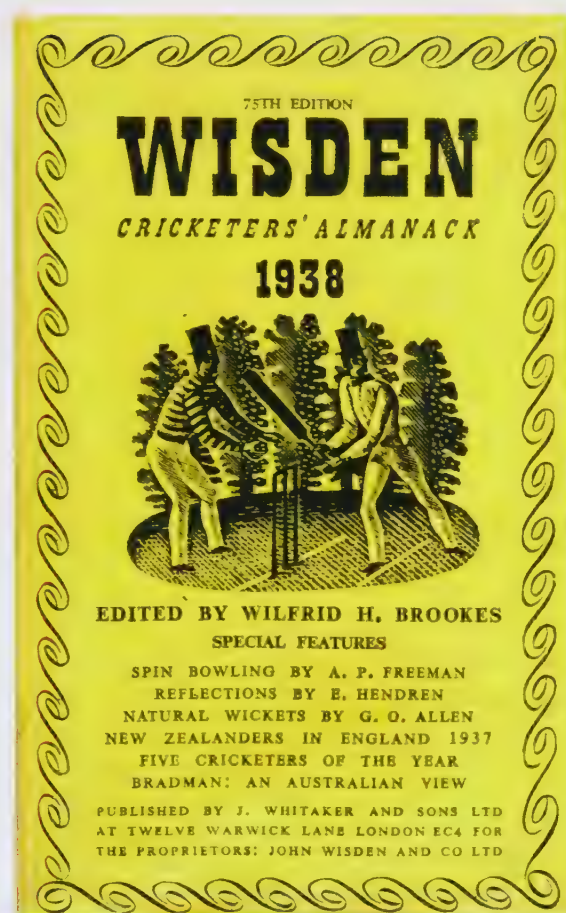
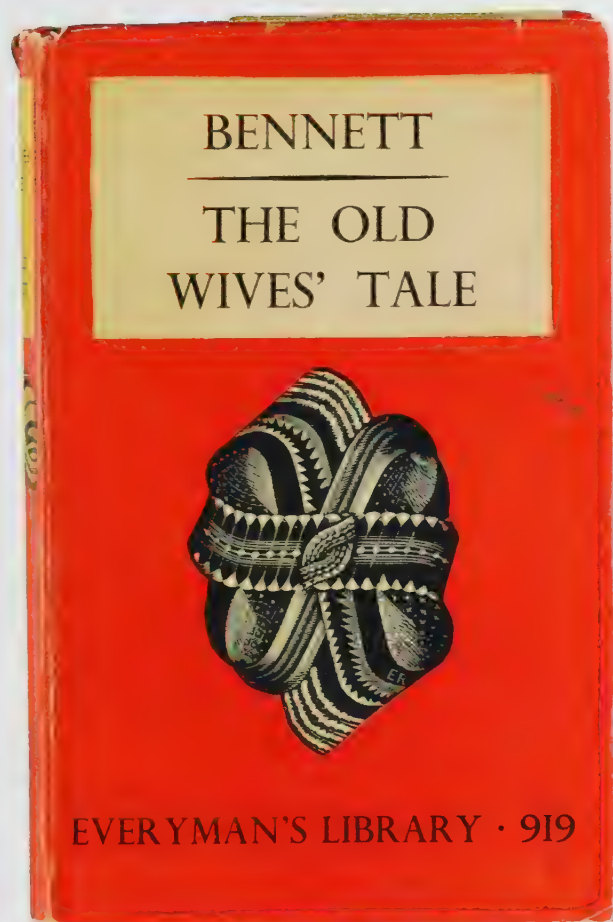
51. Curwen Pattern Paper
k.65092, 1927
Based on a wood engraving for
Desert by Martin Armstrong,
1926
Lithograph
Dimensions of pattern unit
3.5 × 3.5 cm (1 3/8 × 1 3/8 in)

RIGHT:

52. Jackets for Everyman's
Library, 1935
Wood engravings
17.5 × 11 cm (6 7/8 × 4 3/8 in)

FAR RIGHT:

53. Cover for Wisden
Cricketers' Almanack, 1938
Book size 16.4 × 10.1 cm
(6 1/2 × 4 in)

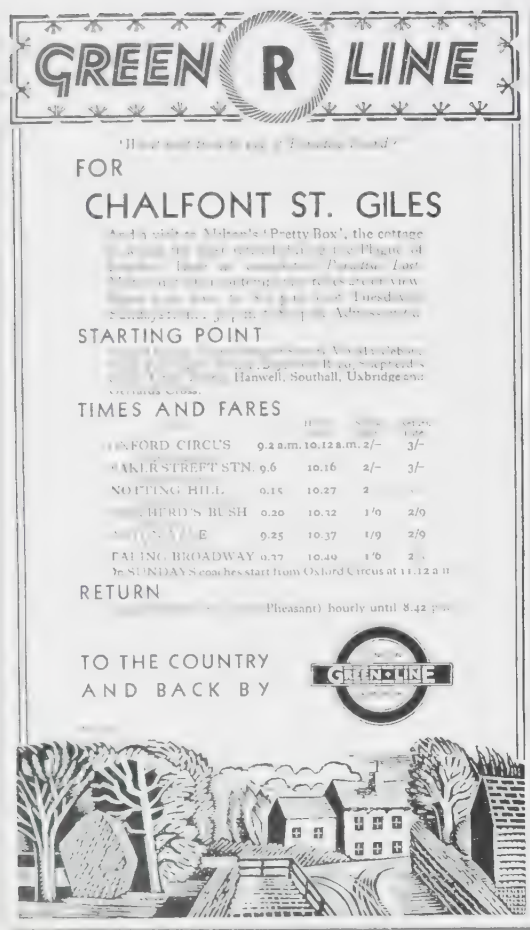


Ravilious contrasted this commission with earlier work, 'I do feel that this book is really alive and has a point and purpose. This Suckling's ballad of mine [Plate 36] is high jinks and a bit silly I think now, unjustifiable anyway.'¹⁰¹ The text was interspersed with four heraldic and celebratory headpieces (Plate 57).

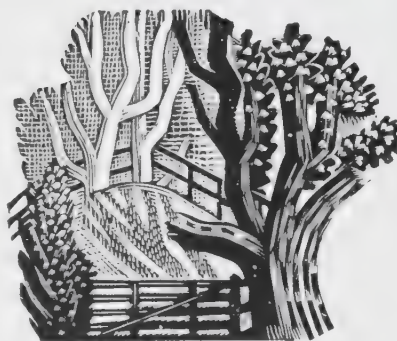
Thrice Welcome (1935, Plate 58) was a Jubilee booklet for the Southern Railway made memorable by its pattern paper cover, title page vignette of a lighthouse and three headpieces on aspects of Ravilious's native territory of Sussex that by this date had come to stand for English

values as a whole.¹⁰² Curwen, through whom it was commissioned, asked for a 'Rural and Regal note, maximum joyousness – without colour printing.'¹⁰³ The 'Social and Sporting Season' engraving puts objects in a non-realistic juxtaposition, skilfully dealing with the counterchange of black and white, and wrapping the action in a big wave form – a resolution of complexity on a miniature scale beyond anything Ravilious had previously attempted.

In 1936, Ravilious made three engravings (Plate 59) for a book of poems by his friend, the painter and writer



54. Designs for Green Line Coaches, London Transport, 1935
Press advertisement with wood engravings
28 × 11 cm (11 × 4¼ in)



55. Country Walks, 1-3, 1936
Wood engravings for London Transport
Each 4.5 × 5.5 cm (1¾ × 2¼ in)



Thomas Hennell, who had recently recovered from a mental breakdown. More lyrical in character than the Caricats (Plates 45, 46), one stands out, evoking a surrealism more surrealist than realist in depiction, with its focus on a strange bird and mysterious door to an unknown land. These elements seem to come from the work of Paul Nash, suggesting a bolder imagination than Ravilious was normally credited with. This persisted when the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Information commissioned catalogue covers for

British pavilions at two international exhibitions towards the end of the decade (Ravilious also contributed to the design of the displays). The Paris exhibition of 1937 was a major international event, at which the Soviet and German pavilions challenged each other with tall towers across the main axis from the Palais de Chaillot to the Eiffel Tower. The United Kingdom pavilion, designed by Oliver Hill, lay modestly along the Left Bank, a white box containing designs by many of Ravilious's friends, which marked the arrival of a moderately coherent style of British decoration, neither 'period' nor radically modern.

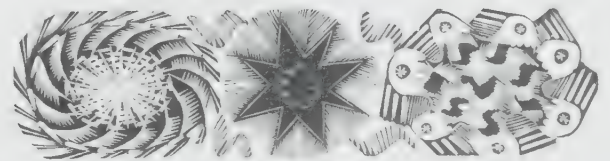
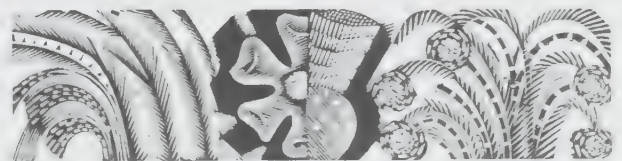


56. Frontispiece for L.A.G. Strong, *The Hansom Cab and the Pigeons*, 1935
Wood engraving
15.8 × 10.3 cm (6¼ × 4 in)

The themes of the exhibition, developed under the guidance of Frank Pick, the deputy chairman of London Transport famous for revolutionising its design culture since the First World War, were linked to pleasure – the country, sports and leisure. Anticipating criticism of this lightweight approach, Pick argued, 'It is certain that no civilised life is possible which does not, as part of its business and justification, aim at enjoyment'.¹⁰⁴

For the catalogue cover (Plate 60), Ravilious took the Royal Arms and, while altering nothing, simplified their design almost to a silhouette. He played up the background

57. Decorations for L.A.G. Strong, *The Hansom Cab and the Pigeons*, 1935
Wood engravings
2.6 × 10.3 cm each (1 × 4 in)

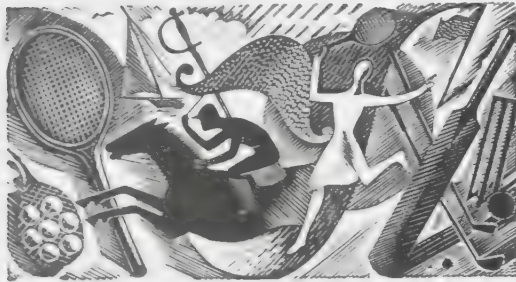
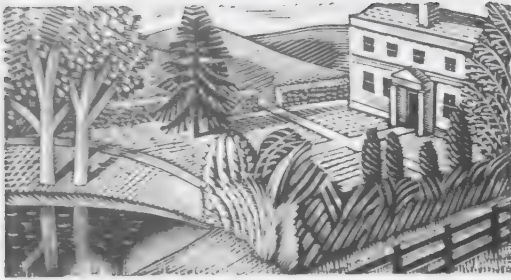


into something like a Punch and Judy booth with striped curtains below and a sort of Crystal Palace cresting above, into which the studded, fairground-like initials of the new King were tucked. Up the sides of the design spout ebullient lines, which can be read as fountains, fireworks or ears of corn. It is the reverse of pompous, with a childish gaiety that was still the preferred exhibition mood for *The Festival of Britain* 14 years later

Bands of alternating colour were also the basis for Ravilious's 1938 trade card (Plate 158) for Dunbar Hay Ltd, the shop started two years previously by C. Ollie

58. Decorations for S.P.B. Mais,
Thrice Welcome, 1935

Wood engraving
 18 x 8 cm (2 1/8 x 3 in)



assumed for this role, and, encouraged by the success of 1937, the committee reverted to a Royal Arms. The page size is smaller and the colours brighter, with a strong scarlet in place of the previous brown. The arms and their supporters themselves have become livelier, with curving tails against the plain background, thus the gaiety is renewed on similar terms, moving a few compass points away from Modernism, as the New York Pavilion did more generally.

Another series of occasional engravings was made in 1936–7 for the young publisher John Grey Murray, who entered his distinguished family firm and was given responsibility for reviving the *Cornhill*, a monthly magazine. These engravings (Plate 62) were not found in the actual magazines, but used for advertising and announcements, tracking the seasons with a bird in its nest, an autumn cornucopia and a sheaf of wheat with a pair of sickles. The theme of rural life also ran through *The Country Life Cookery Book* (1937, Plate 63), one of a series by the journalist Ambrose Heath, several of whose earlier books were decorated by Edward Bawden. Referring in a letter to 'a clever idea', Ravilious took a diagram of a bullock, whose hide is marked out with numbered butcher's cuts, from his own copy of *The Frugal Housewife; or Experienced Cook*, and applied this also to a pig and sheep. Each of the 11 engravings (representing the

59. *Garden*, 1936
 For Thomas Hennell, *Poems*
 Wood engraving
 18 x 8 cm (2 1/8 x 3 in)



bar Kilburn. Ravilious's RCA friend, and Athole Hay, the designer of the RCA. The idea of putting the roof and corners of a house on the portable cart was probably borrowed from a painting of a Georgian birdcage in the front of a doll's house, and in one of Ravilious's sketches.

By the time of *Myself* in 1939, Ravilious was again commissioned for the catalogue cover (Plate 61). In the early days of *Myself* had been considered, and the final design was a variation on the idea. His figure, which he described as 'a figure of the baroque character normally

60. Oliver, catalogue for the Pavilion of the United Kingdom, Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne, 1937
Wood engraving
30.2 x 24.7 cm (12 x 9 1/2 in.)



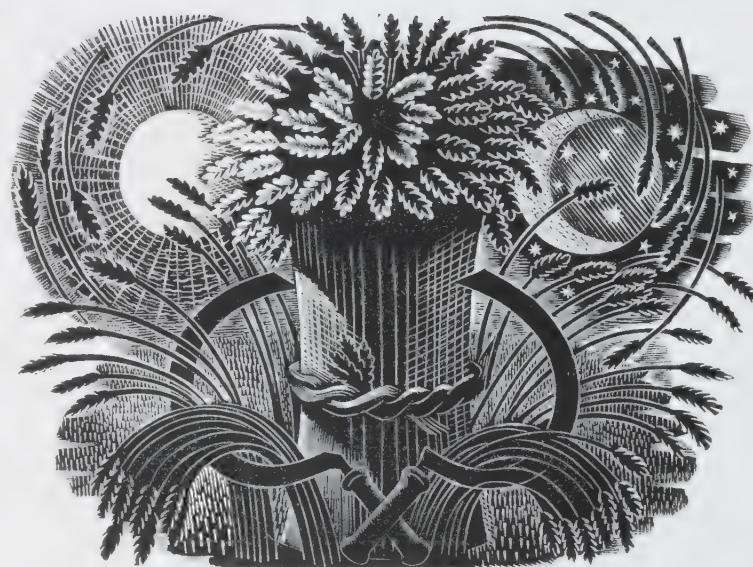
months with one repeat) is elliptical in shape, giving more unity to the series than most of his previous books possessed. The themes show his observation of country life, including a visit to a neighbour's well-stocked larder and a harvest festival display in Castle Hedingham church for the title page. He mixes the hen-coops in the poultry yard with more gracious scenes of melons ripening. There are references to places the artist knew, such as the harbour at Newhaven where the catch has been landed, and the trellis arbour at the back of Brick House, Great Bardfield, his wedding present to Edward and Charlotte Bawden.

61. Cover, catalogue for the British Pavilion, New York World's Fair, 1939
Wood engraving
21 x 33.5 cm (8 1/4 x 13 1/8 in.)

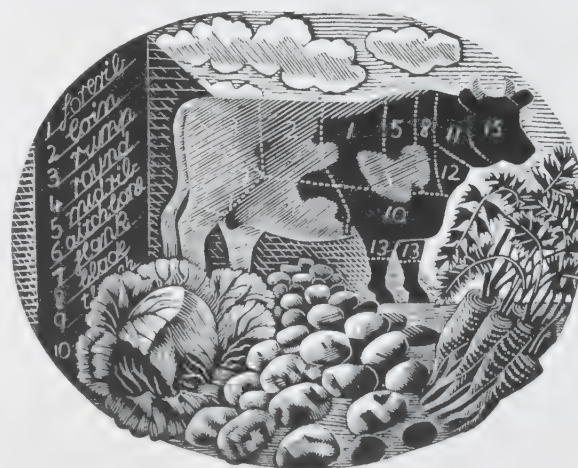


The pleasures of a quiet village life are the theme of *The Writings of Gilbert White of Selborne*, illustrated in 1938 (Plates 64 to 66) in two volumes for the Nonesuch Press, which had weathered the depression by selling out to the American publisher George Macy. Its founder, Francis Meynell, remained the designer, working with Harry Carter, who was directly responsible for managing the commission with Ravilious. The text was set in Times New Roman, which was designed by Stanley Morison in 1932 as a condensation of classical values for modern readability, but was not yet the generic typeface it has since become. Carter proposed that the subjects should be 'rural scenery rather than careful pictures of the birds and flowers that White mentions by name'.¹⁰⁵

It was a book Ravilious had known for many years; he recommended it to his Eastbourne students and quoted passages of text in his letters to Helen Binyon. It mirrored his own love of natural history and observation, with its particular sense of sympathy with creation. Equally, it offered a sense of the uncertainty of weather and accident, such as a spontaneous forest fire or (difficult to render in black and white) 'A Rust-coloured Ferruginous Light' (Plate 65) that signalled the 'amazing and portentous' summer of 1783. For this image, Ravilious catches a moment with the sun shining through the leaves of a tree, while a heron starts up above a pond. Birds take precedence throughout the series, and are depicted with an eye for detail and for character. One peculiarity of three of the headpieces, as they appear in the first volume, is their division virtually into two adjacent subjects, as if conceived to be two separate scenes, somehow, the surprise of this duality immediately present to inform the other. In the second volume, which contains more small decorations, some of the pictures are split up and appear singly, partly perhaps to diminish a sense of limited resources.



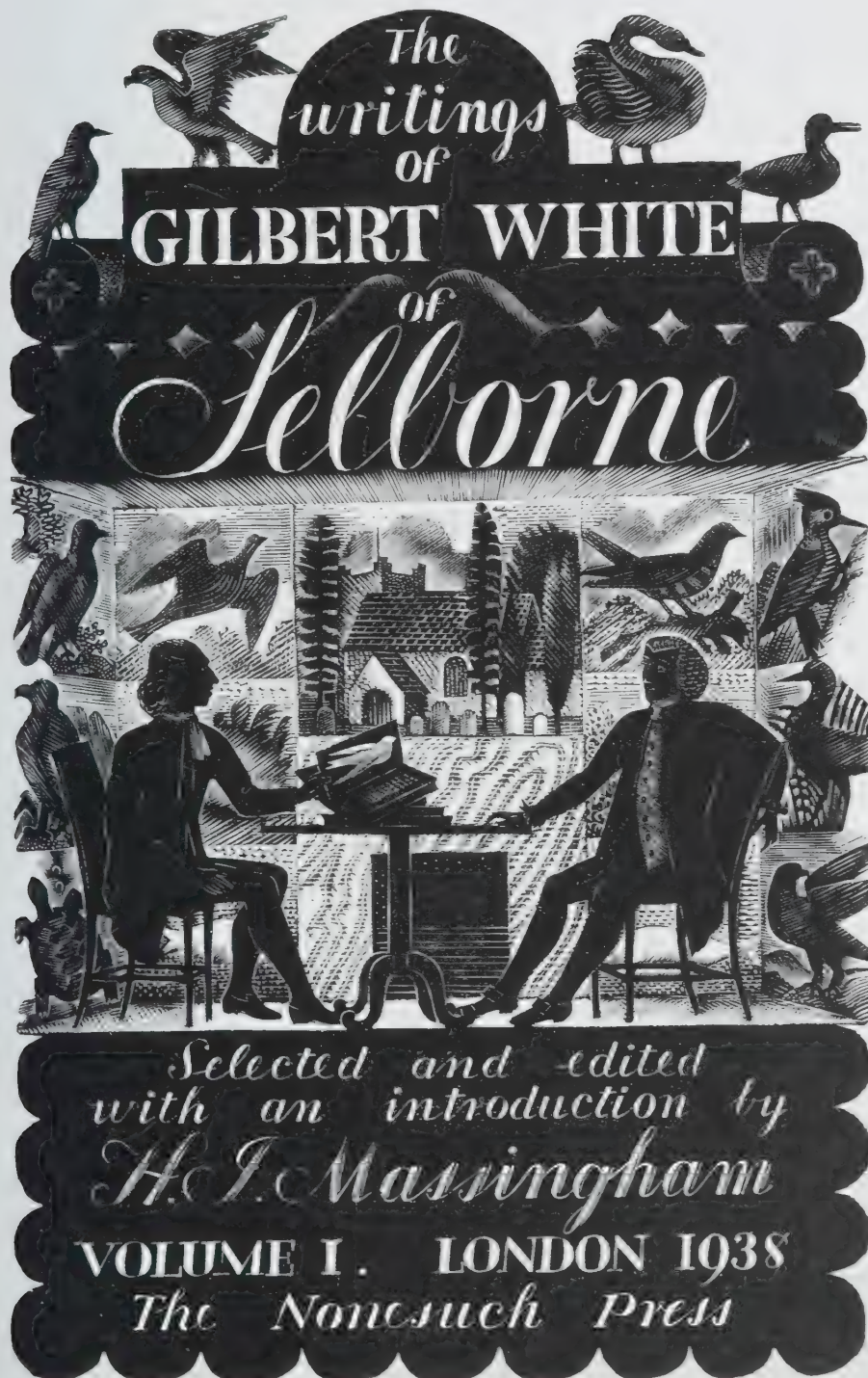
62. Decoration for publicity for the *Cornhill* magazine, 1933
Wood engraving
7.6 × 20 cm (3 × 7 7/8 in)



63. *January and December*, 1937
For Ambrose Heath, *The Country Life* Cookery Book
Wood engraving
6.2 × 9 cm (2 1/2 × 3 1/2 in)

The title pages (Plate 64) had a seventeenth-century emblematic quality, set up like theatre stages between the bands of lettering above and below. The first shows White and his friend, Thomas Pennant, in conversation in a room that echoes themes from the book in a series of

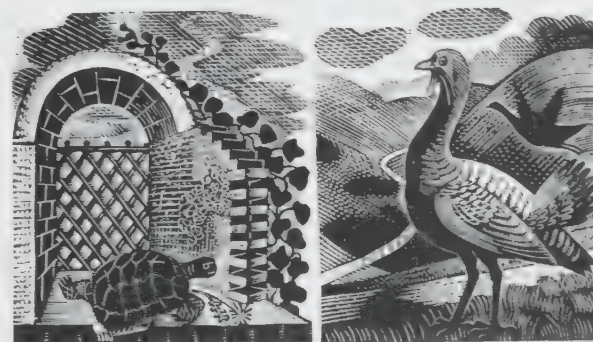
64. Title page for volume one of
The Writings of Gilbert White of
Selborne, 1938
Wood engraving
22 × 12.6 cm (8¾ × 5 in)



TOP:
65. 'A Rust-coloured Ferruginous
Light', 1938
Headpiece for The Writings of
Gilbert White of Selborne
Wood engraving
17.8 × 20.2 cm (7 × 8 in)



BOTTOM:
66. The Tortoise and The Pheasant
1938
Double headpiece for The
Writings of Gilbert White of Selborne
Wood engraving
14.8 × 20.6 cm (5 7/8 × 8 1/4 in)



panels. H.J. Massingham, the prolific author of nostalgic and sometimes monitory country books who wrote the introduction, told Harry Carter, who passed the message on to the artist, 'I have shown everybody who comes to see me the Ravilious wood engravings and they are unanimous in being enchanted with them.'¹⁰⁶ The publisher's prospectus spoke of a rare combination of imaginative artistry with great technical skill' with which Ravilious 'renders the Selborne landscape and interprets points in the text in a way that would have delighted Gilbert White'.¹⁰⁷ The artist himself was less certain, writing, 'It is a book I wouldn't care to write, but I must tell the truth — at least not any contemporary'.



The Revival of Lithography

High Street (Plates 69 to 72), Ravilious's next book, which featured images of shop-fronts, was in development at the same time as *The Writings of Gilbert White of Selborne*. The concept was developed between him and Helen Binyon and the text created to fit the pictures.¹⁰⁹ It is easy to imagine why he was attracted to shops, since they had been part of the background of his childhood, if sometimes a cause of family anxiety. In 1934, Binyon, one of his RCA contemporaries, met Ravilious again and they began a passionate affair, not his first, but it proved to be the most protracted and threatening to his marriage. They usually met in London when he came from Essex to teach at the RCA, and scouted for locations to include in the book, although a few were in Essex and Suffolk. The project was discussed with Christopher Sandford in terms

of a book of wood engravings that would be a speculative venture for both sides.

Drawings were made on the spot, including notes of objects as well as the details of the architecture. The initial idea of an alphabet of shops was discarded, perhaps proving too prescriptive. By November 1934, despite a further meeting with Sandford to explore ways of covering the costs with a cheap edition as well as a limited one, Ravilious had begun to think that he would prefer to use lithography as his medium in place of wood engraving. The Curwen Press had an active policy of helping artists to learn this medium, which required more technical knowledge and equipment than wood engraving or etching. Ravilious's college friend Barnett Freedman became a proselytiser for 'autolithography' (drawn directly on to stone or printing plates by the

67. Newhaven Harbour, 1937
Lithograph
50 × 75 cm (19½ × 29½ in)

artist rather than an intermediary) and wrote about it in *Signature* magazine.

While the book of shops was undergoing its slow gestation, Ravilious was invited as one of ten artists to make a large print for a new company called Contemporary Lithographs, set up by Robert Wellington of the Zwemmer Gallery and the artist John Piper. All the early prints were made at the Curwen Press. Launched in January 1937 and aimed at schools, the prints were promoted as original works of art, rather than reproductions.¹¹⁰ Piper was the same age as Ravilious but came late as a student to the RCA. In 1936, he was passing through a stage of abstraction, but soon afterwards returned to figuration. Ravilious's style was fully formed by the time they met, but apart from Paul Nash, Piper was the principal artist-intellectual in his circle, and with his future wife, Myfanwy Evans, he was making an impact on the direction of art criticism and theory.

Newhaven Harbour (Plate 67), Ravilious's contribution to the series, is on the scale of a poster.¹¹¹ Compared to the watercolour whose effects he was trying to recapture, the lithographic ink he had to use was a viscous medium and encouraged the use of small, dry brushstrokes. Other effects included a sponging or spattering in the sky and the foreground, and using gum or perhaps paper masks to stop out areas such as the clouds and railway tracks that needed to be protected from going over the edges. There are also many signs of scraping highlights away, a watercolour technique much practised by Freedman on lithographic stone, although more difficult to achieve on a zinc plate instead of stone. John Piper recalled his reservations about this work in a later interview that defined the difference between their approaches: 'it was a summery kind of picture, all in blues and greys and whites, quite gay, but at the same time it was very arid in an odd way – and almost conventionally pretty'.¹¹² Ravilious went back to Curwen in September 1936 to

produce a smaller print of a *Grape House* (1936, Plate 68), which he sent to Sandford as a sample for the book of shops, although its relevance to the theme is unclear. The work was put to use as a Christmas card at the end of the year for Sir Stephen Tallents, Ravilious's only direct link to this influential patron who commissioned artists such as E. McKnight Kauffer and Frank Newbould on behalf of the Empire Marketing Board.¹¹³

Lithography had the advantage over wood engraving in that it offered colour, and Ravilious's watercolours from this point begin to show some of the techniques used in printmaking. Owing to a shortage of lithographic stones, the drawings that became *High Street* (Plates 69 to 72) were made on zinc plates, although Ravilious complained, 'they aren't half as nice to work on and not nearly so much scratching and trickery is possible'.¹¹⁴ It did, however, mean that he could take the plates home to work on them and by the end of 1936 three trial illustrations had been completed in four colours and proofed, appearing in *Signature* in March 1937 with a short text by John Piper who emphasised their theatrical character.¹¹⁵

These three subjects, an old-fashioned grill room, a 'Furrier and Plumassier' with taxidermy and a maker of illuminated letters (Plate 72), were indicative of the far from normal nature of many of the shops. They perhaps may have been chosen originally to fill out different letters of the alphabet, but they appealed to Ravilious's love of the bizarre and incongruous. The last of the three subjects was enthusiastically recorded in a letter: 'It is a kind of large firework by night, all glowing and sparkling with reflectors like buttons'.¹¹⁶

When Sandford dropped out as the publisher of *High Street*, his place was taken by Noel Carrington, who had been responsible for commissioning *The Country Life Cookery Book* (1937, Plate 63) and who was also the brother of the artist Dora Carrington. From the beginning, there was ambiguity about whether it would

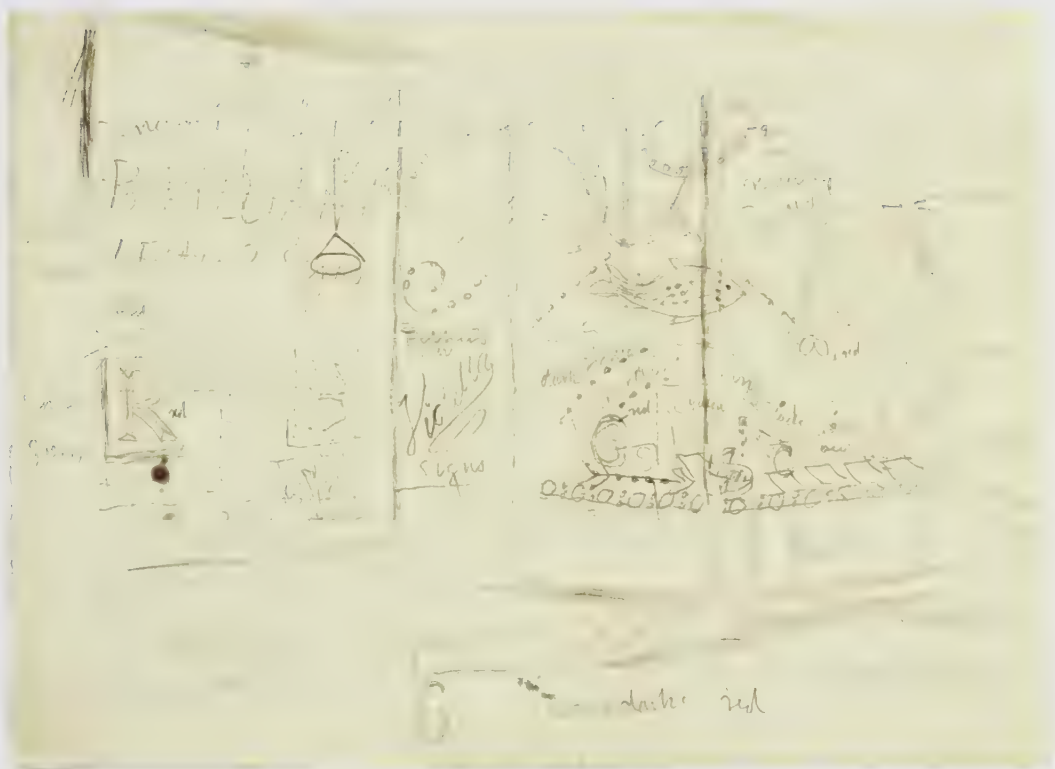
68. Grape House, 1936
Lithograph
17 × 12.2 cm (6 3/4 × 4 7/8 in)

...for children, but for Carrington, who was managing a children's list at Country Life and had a young family, this was a natural direction in which to steer the project whose genesis had been in almost inverse sequence to the normal procedure of a publisher conceiving a book, commissioning an author and then an illustrator. He and Ravilious, in common with other artists in their circle, were much impressed by the mass-produced lithographic books from the USSR – factual books about life in the modern world in a modern style of drawing, colour-printed in huge editions and given away at street corners. Ravilious's left-wing friend Peggy Angus brought examples back from Russia and he had a small collection of his own. The success of Carrington's lithographed children's books at Country Life formed the basis for the Puffin Picture Book series in 1940, with its long print runs and a simple production formula based on the Russian model.

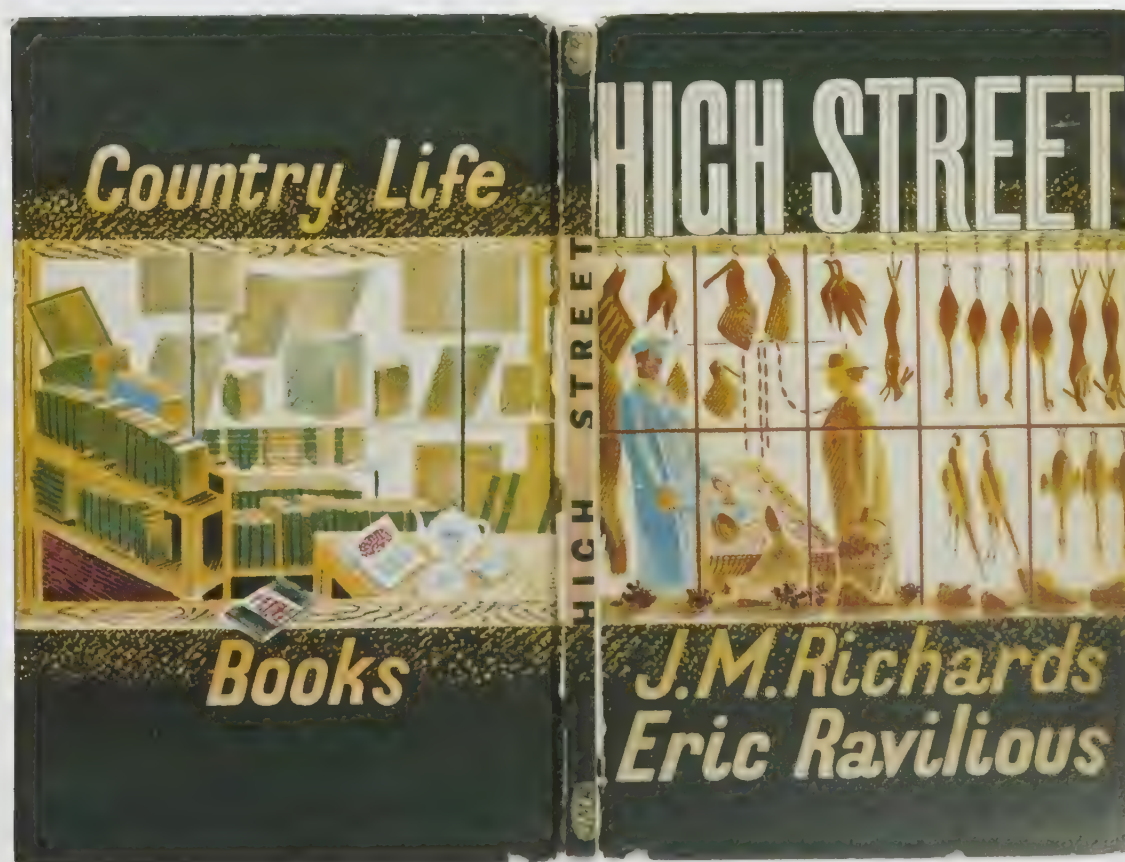
Carrington commissioned Hamish Miles to write a text for *High Street*, but Miles died relatively young before the end of the year and the task was undertaken by J.M. Richards. He had known Tirzah for a long time through family connections; he was also an old friend of Myfanwy Owen, sister-in-law of Peggy Angus. Richards fitted the researching and writing of *High Street* into a busy schedule as editor of the *Architectural Review*, writing letters of topology to some of the more specialised businesses, such as S. Gorman and Company, the makers of diving equipment who had a shop on Westminster Bridge Road (Plate 14). The window display had first attracted the attention of Richards and Bawden when they were en route to Marine Galleries back in 1929. Richards's text is composed of dry, rather deadpan, factual way of writing, suitable for a child or adult reader. Thus the book, which was first printed at Curwen, reached publication in 1936 and achieved a modest success, becoming a collector's item after collectors' item.



69. *Study for Letter Maker*
(204 City Road)
Pencil on paper
Dimensions unknown



70. *High Street*, 1938
Lithograph for case binding
Back board and front board
Each 33.5 × 15.5 cm
(1 3/4 × 6 1/4 in)



71. *Second-hand Furniture and Effects*, 1938
 From *High Street*
 Lithograph
 20 × 13.5 cm (7 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 5 $\frac{1}{8}$ in)

Although Ravilious expressed himself dissatisfied with some of the pictures, it was a considerable artistic achievement for what was virtually a first effort in the medium. The restriction in the number of colours (on grounds of cost) was a positive asset in strengthening the design quality of the pictures, and Ravilious used a subtle range of tones that gave the potential for cross-hatched overlays such as he used in watercolours. The cover is a lithograph pasted on to light boards with the front and back both designed as shop windows (Plate 70); the book title is like a fascia above a butcher's shop on the front, while there is an internal view of the window display of a bookshop on the back, with a copy of *High Street* itself on a shelf in the foreground. The style is more naive than the pictures inside. The title page carries a wood engraving of uncertain relevance but the surprising content of chefs about to tackle an enormous fish.

Book reviewers were mainly enthusiastic, with the literary editor of the *New Statesman*, G.W. Stonier, writing, 'If one wanted a single word for these impressions ... it would be "hilarious"; there is wit and elegance, as well as gaiety, in every line. How well he has caught the undertaker's window, with its urn, its listening cherub, its everlasting like forgotten birthday cakes; the empty blaze of a pin-table saloon; the rows of hams, yellow, brown and black, displayed at Christmas.'¹¹⁸

The review helps to position the book as part of a mildly subversive anti-Modernist counterculture, a continuation of the 'amusing style' associated with the mildly provocative taste for Victoriana that Ravilious and Bawden cultivated a decade earlier. By the later 1930s, this had become a more widely shared trend, with a burst of nostalgic publishing in 1937 for the centenary of Queen Victoria's coronation. The message behind much of this activity, as picked up by Raymond Mortimer writing on *High Street* in the *Architectural Review*, was that people should be taught to use their eyes critically, so that they



72. Letter Maker, 1938
 From High Street
 Lithograph
 15.4 × 13.5 cm (6 1/8 × 5 3/8 in)



might realise the banality of so much recent commercial architecture and decoration, as compared to the warmth and individuality of the remoter past.

Through *Country Life*, Noel Carrington commissioned a cover for the *Beautiful Britain* calendar for 1939 from Ravilious, printed as a lithograph of a South Downs subject in four colours (Plate 73). This was his only commercial application of the medium, and it is his only landscape lithograph that offers an indication of what might have become another book for children. In 1939,

extending into the first months of the war, Ravilious made a series of six watercolours of chalk figures, a project seemingly guided by the idea of a book that sadly only reached the stage of a rather tentative 'dummy' at the beginning of 1941 (Plate 74). To be called *White Horse*, it was intended for the Puffin Picture Book series that Noel Carrington launched in 1939 just as the war began. Long thought lost, the dummy book, drawn in pencil on a blank book of the standard format of 32 pages, has recently reappeared. It is a tantalising suggestion of what the completed work might have been like. The cover is based on Ravilious's *Train Landscape* (1939, Plate 142), and the first few pages show little more than rough squiggles depicting different horse figures ('arranged in a comparative display WHITE on a coloured ground', as his note says) and earthworks, laid out in squares on the pages almost like a sheet of postage stamps, divided by lines of white dots. Some areas of text are indicated, and there is a single line hump captioned 'Silbury', the Wiltshire mound that also fascinated Paul Nash. Black-and-white photographs of the chalk figure paintings are fixed to some of the pages with gummed paper from the edge of stamps, but the second half of the book remains blank.

Ravilious's range of contents might have been difficult to reconcile with a consistent text, but he would have been the most eminent artist to contribute to the Puffin series in its early stages.¹¹⁹ His desire to make picture books without having to consider the text characterised his series of lithographs of sailors serving in submarines and training for them (Plates 75 to 77), which he began in the summer of 1940 as part of his work as an official war artist, having recently returned from an expedition to Norway aboard the destroyer HMS *Highlander*. He enjoyed going out in a submarine from Portsmouth, writing in August 1940 to the artist E.M.O'R. Dickey, who was his contact in the Ministry of Information:

Beautiful Britain



**Country Life
Calendar**

1939

73. *Beautiful Britain*, 1938
Cover for calendar
Lithograph
23.3 × 27.6 cm (9¹/₈ × 10⁷/₈ in)
Private collection

74. *White Horse*, 1939
Cover study for unpublished
book in the Puffin Picture
Book series
Pencil
18.2 × 22.6 cm (7¹/₈ × 8⁷/₈ in)
Wiltshire Heritage Museum,
Devizes



It is awfully hot below when they dive and every compartment small and full of people at work. However this is a change from destroyers and I enjoy the state of complete calm after the North Sea – there is no roll or movement at all in submarines, which is one condition in their favour, apart from the smell the heat and noise, the scene is extraordinarily good in a gloomy way. There are small coloured lights about the place and the complexity of a Swiss clock.¹²⁰

Writing to Helen Binyon on the same day, he shared his excitement about the challenge of the subject: 'a blue gloom with coloured lights and everyone in shirts and braces. People go to sleep in odd positions across tables'.¹²¹ 'Their gloomy interiors would be better lithographed and I may try later,' he wrote to John O'Connor, and thus began a project which, although it never became a book in the intended manner, left a series

of prints that were the culmination of Ravilious's brief engagement with lithography.¹²²

It is not hard to see why this seemed to be the best medium available, for the prints combine the precision of drawing and use of different textures appropriate to the subject with a looser approach to colour, in which the limitation of three or four 'workings' becomes an asset rather than a problem. As he had achieved earlier with wood engraving, Ravilious had seemingly begun to think in the medium directly without it being a translation of painting or drawing. The range of colours was limited in real life, and the viewer is more attuned to accepting a less realistic representation of colour than might be expected in a painting.

In addition, Ravilious's designer and illustrator's eye and his sense for invention were given more freedom, and he was able to address composite subjects such as the officer looking through the periscope linked with the enlargement of what he is actually seeing (Plate 75), as



75. *Commander of a Submarine
Looking through a Periscope*, 1941
Lithograph
28 × 32 cm (11 × 12½ in)

well as the grouping of different submarines (Plate 77). In the 'Introductory' print, the artist's hand adds shadow with a pencil to a drawing of miscellaneous items, including a diver's helmet, while the upper part of the sheet shows the submarine as it would appear beneath the sea.

The actual making of the prints was delayed, while the War Artists Committee and various printers and publishers considered what they could do with them. The solution was found late in the year, when W. & S. Cowell of Ipswich offered to print a small edition for £100 that could be sold through the Leicester Galleries, London. Ravilious expressed relief that he didn't have to consider a text or the burdens of it being a colouring book for children. Ipswich was within easy reach of Castle Hedingham where Eric and Tirzah were awaiting the birth of their third child, Anne, and he was off duty as a war artist. For the first time, Ravilious used ready-made 'lithographic tints' which allowed for fine textured work with an appropriately mechanical look, not unlike the frottage technique of the German surrealist, Max Ernst. He wrote 'it took us all a day or two but is clearly worth experimenting with ... it is fascinating rolling bits on here and there which you do with a brass roller.'¹²³

There was a conflict between richness and the kind of austerity that typified his taste. After a couple of months, Ravilious thought the prints 'too overworked and overdone compared with the first drawings which are much better. It is a pity, but lithography is a damned tricky medium'.¹²⁴ In another letter he thought 'perhaps lithography in five colours is too much and the result tends to be a chromo'.¹²⁵ The most readily comparable work is Barnett Freedman's 15 inch Gun Turret, HMS Repulse, August 1941, a larger lithograph in fewer colours, showing crew inspecting the mechanism of the gun from inside the cramped turret. As with Ravilious's submarine prints, there is a pleasure in depicting men and machines at close quarters, in the shell-like

enclosure with the attraction of its details, both for their technical interest and abstract form. Freedman's training as a painter at the RCA seems to show through, while Ravilious's background in engraving is apparent in the way that the applied tints are used instead of tonal drawing, a more interesting technical approach because it is experimental. His skill in making interesting areas in a watercolour or print at this time reached a kind of climax, with a variety of overlays and scratchings out becoming, in *Commander of a Submarine Looking through a Periscope* (1941, Plate 75), a form of abstraction independent of the pictorial content, helping him to manage the composite nature of the image.

His designer's eye fixes on the shape of the throw of light in many of the images to create a highlight within the gloom, as in the pair of ward-room images, where the domestic foreground details are subordinated to the strong illumination of the figures (Plate 76). These prints show more human figures than ever before, more carefully considered than those in *High Street*. Although some have the almost blank faces that he was able to use effectively on many occasions, and none entirely escape the criticism of being doll-like, the figures seem entirely right in this form, human and fragile, but committed to an unnatural lifestyle whether they are working at the controls, resting or Testing Davis Apparatus in a tank.

Illustration is usually considered a minor art compared to painting, but in Ravilious's case, he seems to have put more of his private self into it, especially his earlier wood engravings with their elusive symbolic content suggesting the imaginative world of the Renaissance that he grew out of during his years as a student. These engravings were widely distributed at an early point in his career, and had the benefit that anyone seeing them encountered the real work rather than a more or less inadequate reproduction, as was the case with murals or watercolours. As he developed, however, Ravilious spent



76. *Ward Room (1)*, 1941
Lithograph
28 × 32 cm (11 × 12½ in)

77. *Different Aspects of
Submarines*, 1941
Lithograph
28 × 32 cm (11 × 12½ in)



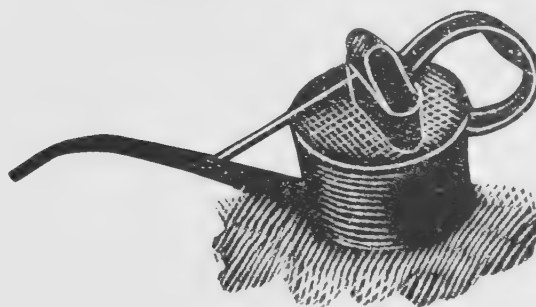
less time on engraving and more on watercolour, while his printmaking practice turned towards lithography. Ravilious seems to have taken a special interest in the specifics of printmaking and watercolour, for which the word 'technical' hardly seems adequate. He worked within a relatively narrow range of possibilities, but his sense of control was not so great as to prevent him from experimenting and developing in ways that were not quite the same as any other artist. In particular, the idea of working with a multiplicity of small strokes was a common factor between his paintings and many of his engravings, similarly replicated in lithography, despite that medium's offering the possibility of broader effects.

It was relatively common for artists to combine all these media between the wars – John Nash and Paul

Nash are obvious cases. The media they used all had a long history of which the artists would have been well aware owing to the revival of interest in them and publications surveying them (although lithography was to some extent a latecomer, both in the date of its invention and in developing a substantial twentieth-century artistic following that rescued it from the taint of commercialism). Wood engraving and watercolour were seen as being particularly English, their heyday having been in the period of late Georgian elegance with which people in the interwar decades identified so strongly. The result was a pleasing paradox in which emotion was controlled and compressed by the tightness of the design and the precision of execution, but perhaps more potent as a result of these constraints.



CHAPTER THREE



PAINTINGS IN WATERCOLOUR 'DISTILLED OUT OF THE ORDINARY EXPERIENCE'

A Revival of Watercolour

During Ravilious's lifetime, the practice of watercolour painting underwent a revival. The traditionalism endemic in English art was unexpectedly spliced into modern ways of seeing and painting; past and present were inextricably overlaid so that it is now almost impossible to prise them apart. With this regard for national tradition, watercolour became valued as a type of art that set England apart from France and other European countries where oil painting alone was considered a serious artistic medium. Watercolour was elevated as an art of moderation and feminine sensitivity, with its own alternative history and subject matter.

Ravilious was not the originator of the watercolour revival of the 1920s but a younger member of a group who favoured a graphic, linear approach to the medium, in which a particular strand of history intersected with a relatively mild Modernism. From ingredients that could easily have been formulaic, Ravilious created a new way of working that went beyond Mannerism to become a valid medium for the subjects he chose, unlike any previous painter's style.

His style developed gradually, but he seems always to have been devoted to this medium. Douglas Percy Bliss recalled that when they first met as students, Ravilious 'used to express an admiration for the sober and valuable book of Alfred Rich (1856–1921) on water-colour painting'.¹²⁶ *Water Colour Painting*, published in 1918, is essentially a technical book, advocating a natural approach without stylistic tricks, based on careful drawing.

Rich praised the Georgian artists Thomas Girtin, Peter De Wint, John Varley and John Robert Cozens for their directness and simplicity, but since their time 'a laboured and more or less mechanical manner' had developed that threatened to make the medium 'the laughing stock of all those who possessed that rare quality, the "seeing eye"'.¹²⁷ He defined a 'useable past' for the revival of watercolour in the twentieth century, represented by proto-Modern artists who stood apart from their time and had fallen out of view, especially Francis Towne (1739/40–1816) and John Sell Cotman (1782–1842), whose sense of abstraction and pattern were ripe for appreciation in the twentieth century.

Laurence Binyon, a deputy keeper in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum from 1895, was an early advocate of Towne, followed by the civil servant collector, A.P. Oppé. It was the latter who discovered his two paintings of the source of the Arviron, where a glacier formed a famous tourist attraction, a cave of ice seen by Towne when travelling through the Alps in 1781. One of the works was sold to the V&A in 1921, and was well known to Ravilious. In *Landscape Painting* (1924), C. Lewis Hind placed John Sell Cotman (1782–1842) second only to Turner, and wrote of seeing ‘elderly gentlemen and elderly ladies, going carefully round the walls, chuckling and purring with pleasure’ during a Cotman exhibition at the Tate Gallery.¹²⁸ In his most famous works, Cotman defined clear edges in his paintings and identified broad blocks of colour with a proto-Modernist eye. Laurence Binyon reached for superlatives in describing Cotman’s watercolours of 1805, painted in Yorkshire and Durham, that ‘seem conceived in a state of complete happiness; unlaboured mastery comes to the artist as if in a moment of illumination; hand and eye and brain and feeling are all in harmony’.¹²⁹ In 1902, the British Museum acquired an important holding of Cotman’s watercolours, including the earlier of two versions of *Greta Bridge*, a scene in County Durham. *Greta Bridge* was an often-reproduced work that Ravilious went back to look at on at least one occasion, as well as visiting the site.

Samuel Palmer was another artist rediscovered by Binyon in the early years of the century. In *The Followers of William Blake* (1925), Binyon found in Palmer’s drawings made at Shoreham, Kent, between 1826 and 1835, ‘an element of conflict; a desire to translate the thing seen into the imaginative language of design; to express the sense of glory in earth and air which he felt within him’.¹³⁰ Here in intensity of vision different from the equilibrium of Cotman, equally appealing to a twentieth-century eye. It is a lively force with a major

exhibition at the V&A in 1926, which influenced Graham Sutherland and several contemporaries. Ravilious did not try to imitate Palmer’s technique, but grasped his ability to transfigure observed reality by the intensification of the thing seen. Ravilious’s paintings can convey a Romantic quality of excitement in nature or objects, bordering at times on the magical. This side of his personality is balanced by coolness and emotional distance, sometimes expressed through humour and incongruity, occasionally through the depiction of bleak and empty places.

At the Royal College of Art, Ravilious not only discovered the art of Towne and Cotman, but also the Modernism to which it offered a comforting prelude. For Binyon, writing a survey of *English Water-Colours* in 1933, ‘there was no need to invoke Cézanne, for Cotman was there to show the way with his mastery of structural design’, while ‘the place of the ruined castle and tumble-down cottage has been taken by the steam crane and gasometer’.¹³¹ In Timothy Wilcox’s words, Towne, similarly fielded as a lost pioneer, was ‘delivered over, as a new-born infant, unsullied by any previous critical history, directly into the hands of the formalists; the watercolours were inserted forthwith into the discourse of modern art’.¹³² Ravilious approached Modernism with caution, and although he left records in letters of enjoying some artists of a less extreme nature such as André Derain, Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse get no mention. He was happy enough to aspire to the special quality produced by Cotman and Towne without the need to carry their abstraction to a further stage. The formal element of Modernism in his painting enters by stealth through an underlying abstraction of form, while his technique comes closer to the dream reality of surrealism, sometimes suggested by his choice of subject matter.

Ravilious made his choice of medium early. Had he been a student in the Painting School at the RCA, he would have had more formal tuition in oil, which he used

78. *Snowscape*, c. 1933–4
Oil
39 × 28 cm (15½ × 11 in)
Private collection



for all his murals. Tirzah recorded that some of his last efforts in oil were made in 1932, during the first year that they lived at Brick House. These included a portrait of their friend Beryl Bowker in the scullery and a painting of 'an airman coming down by parachute in a farm yard', both untraced.¹³³ *Snowscape* (Plate 78), dated 1933–4 and given to a family member rather than exhibited at the time, is the only other known example of an oil painting by him. While the tree forms are recognisable as Ravilious, it could pass for the work of John Nash, who moved between oil and watercolour, or even of another East Anglian artist, Cedric Morris.¹³⁴ According to Bawden, Ravilious considered oil 'was like using toothpaste' and it was clearly ill-adapted to his linear and graphic vision.¹³⁵ In 1942 we find him trying oil again, 'as a gesture against calamities' – without further explanation – but no work remains to show what he might have been trying to achieve.¹³⁶

Alfred Rich favoured washes applied with a full brush to obtain what he called the quality of 'bloom' on the paper. Ravilious's early painting *Warehouses by a River* (c. 1923, Plate 79), selected as the winner of an RCA sketching prize, could pass as a work by Rich with its soft light, full washes and clearly visible under-drawing. *Wannock Dew Pond* (c. 1924, Plate 80) begins to hint at what is to come, with its more defined distant contours, using an ink line, and scratching out to make highlights. Paul Nash's teaching and example soon pulled Ravilious out of these sedate beginnings, with a change evident in *Pond at East Dean* (c. 1925, Plate 81). Blades of grass are hatched as in a drawing or wood engraving, while under-painting modulates the shape of different areas and prevents the calligraphic strokes from breaking down into mere detail. A personal version of the Nash manner is emerging, with crowded compositions of the kind that Ravilious was making in wood engravings at the time, where the trees enclose a distant point in the centre of the subject



Creating a Modern English Watercolour Style

When Ravilious's work was analysed by the critic Jan Gordon in 1939, he mentioned Vincent van Gogh and Georges Seurat as influences, painters who were still newly discovered by British artists working in the 1920s. Ravilious's habit of painting while facing into the sun and exploring light fragmented into a spectrum offers an obvious parallel with Seurat, whom Tirzah mentioned as a influence on Bawden's oil composition of the beach at *in*.¹³⁷ Van Gogh was involved in a similar breaking down of uniformly uniform surfaces and their reassembly into red fragments. More than Cézanne's more fluid

watercolour technique, Ravilious and Bawden early on chose to emphasise lines made with paint, giving greater vitality. Although the effect differs from van Gogh, he might be the source. Charles Ginner, one of the Camden Town Group, whose surfaces show separate rather than blended colours, was another artist whom Ravilious admired.¹³⁸

Hampden Park (c. 1927) seems almost like a test piece for different ways of rendering foliage, either with an outline in the foreground foliage or the softer treatment of the bush in the centre of the picture. The looseness in such pictures reduces the effect of a highly designed



OPPOSITE:

79. Warehouses by a River, c.1923

Pencil and watercolour

18.5 × 25.2 cm

(7¼ × 9⅞ in)

Private collection

RIGHT:

80. Wannock Dew Pond, c.1924

Pencil, ink and watercolour

27.8 × 33.6 cm

(11 × 13¼ in)

British Museum

BOTTOM:

81. Pond at East Dean, c.1925

Pencil and watercolour

29 × 38.5 cm

(11⅜ × 15⅞ in)

Towner, Eastbourne





LEFT:

82. *Firle Beacon*, 1927
Pencil, pen and watercolour
40 × 49.5 cm (15¾ × 19½ in)
National Museum of Wales,
Cardiff

OPPOSITE:

83. John Sell Cotman
Drop Gate, Duncombe Park, 1806
Watercolour
33 × 23.1 cm (13 × 9⅞ in)
British Museum

composition. *Firle Beacon* (1927, Plate 82) is a Downs scene dominated by the detailed rendering of the foreground fence, effective as a compositional device in tying together a work that might otherwise have been rather diffuse. It is reminiscent of Cotman's simple but haunting *Drop Gate, Duncombe Park* (1806, Plate 83). The dry-brush manner of Paul Nash, in watercolours such as *Tench Pond in a Gale* (1924), an early accession to the Tate Gallery, is evident in the tree on the left, while the eye is encouraged to leap over the middle-distance cornfield towards the clearly defined ridge beyond, with its chalk pit. Most surprising are the clouds, brought into unity with the other brushwork with none of the softness of a typical English watercolour. At this point, the treatment is less

assured than it soon became, but it shows an intention to treat the whole of the painted surface in a consistent way.

Ravilious was pursuing similar aims in May 1927 when he exhibited with the Modern English Watercolour Society, a group of artists that included both the Nashes, at St George's Gallery.¹³⁹ The Society, which eschewed 'the easy triumphs obtained by swift and uncertain sketching', had been founded in 1923.¹⁴⁰ The term 'Modern' was a relative one, since the 1920s saw a general retreat from the true Modernism of the Vorticists before 1914. The mood was conservative, and a writer in 1921 noted that 'younger painters, with a full sense of the importance of design, are finding its elements in natural forms and colours instead of geometrical symbols'.¹⁴¹ Worries about



English art becoming over-influenced by France were laid to rest, and Charles Marriott, the critic of *The Times*, recognised a renewed interest in 'something like Pre-Raphaelitism; that is to say, pictures of everyday life, or even of "literary" subjects'.¹⁴²

For many painters, the country became an all-absorbing theme. Nature and modernity are usually seen in antithesis, so that for David Peters Corbett, nature and the countryside in Paul Nash's art in the 1920s was 'a displacement of the modern', an effect also found in the avoidance of the obviously pretty.¹⁴³ Frances Spalding has written that landscape in this period often became 'merely a tool in the making of art', lacking any specific meaning of its own.¹⁴⁴ In her view, Ravilious and Bawden retained 'a clinical distance: the scene excludes not only the viewer but also the artist'. Other artists of the period, including Paul Nash and the less well-known Harry Epworth Allen (1894–1958), achieved a similar effect in choice of subject and coolness of treatment, but this distancing may be less indifference and more an attempt to refresh over-familiar subject matter. Fiction of the period treated the countryside with a mixture of realism, sentimentality and mysticism, often finding it a source of virtue and authenticity threatened by modernity, but expressing other moods as well. There are no obvious messages about the meaning or destiny of country traditions in Ravilious's paintings, but this aspect of detachment does not mean that he was not attracted to certain landscapes at a deep emotional level, imagining that everyone had their own 'country' to find for themselves. Despite spending the decade 1923–33 living largely in London, Ravilious failed to find pictorial stimulus in the city and began the search for ideal places, whether on the Sussex Downs or on the Welsh borders, where he took himself off in 1938 in search of wilder country.

John Nash was the member of the Modern English Watercolour Society most closely allied to Ravilious in



LEFT:
84. John Nash
The Timber Stack, Chiltern Woods,
1920
Ink and watercolour
27.5 × 38.7 cm
(10⁷/₈ × 15¹/₄ in)
Leicestershire Museums
and Art Galleries

BELOW:
85. Cloughton Pellew
The Train, 1920
Ink, gouache, watercolour
and pastel
48 × 60 cm (18⁷/₈ × 23³/₈ in)
Hove Museum and Art Gallery

OPPOSITE:
86. *Red Cottage, Essex*, c.1927
Pencil, ink and watercolour
33.3 × 34 cm (13¹/₈ × 13³/₈ in)
British Museum

terms of technique, painting carefully with a dry brush and clear outlines (as Christopher Neve described it, 'a form of home-grown Post-Impressionism, dry, but sufficiently colloquial').¹⁴⁵ Nash's early watercolours such as *The Timber Stack, Chiltern Woods* (1920, Plate 84) are sometimes relatively loose, but, like Ravilious, he moved towards a more complete and intricate covering of the sheet with fine brushstrokes, a sort of recreation of traditional landscape art through a Modernist filter. Cloughton Pellew's watercolour *The Train* (1920, Plate 85) was an early example of such an overall, engraver-like treatment of accumulated small strokes. More than any other painting, this seems to map the direction Ravilious was to take in later years, both in the bonding of the ancient pastoral and modern machinery in the subject, and in the use of a dry technique to create a romantic effect. This painting was held in stock at St George's Gallery in the mid-1920s; it is quite probable that Cloughton Pellew's





Early Mornings in Essex

After the Downs, and the lanes and parks around Eastbourne, Ravilious discovered new painting country in joint expeditions from Braintree with Bawden, who wrote to Bliss, 'we have been biking about quite a lot together. The day the Boy arrived we biked out to a place five or six miles away, which I had been keeping in my eye for some time. It is a small village, with a fine church, in front of which stands a dark pond diapered over with ducks, and overshadowed by elms.'¹⁴⁶ They needed a stock of paintings for their exhibition with Bliss in September 1927 at St George's Gallery, and although many of the works mentioned in the catalogue remain untraced, *Red Cottage, Essex* (c. 1927, Plate 86) is a work of the period that shows Ravilious creating a layered space, framed with trees, that could have been a wood engraving. The carefully painted building seems to upstage its setting, rendered slightly toy-like with over-scaled bricks.

Bawden seems to have been the more experimental watercolour painter of the two, determined to avoid conventional technique and subject matter. Tirzah wrote of his 'quite personal technique' of 'superimposing bright colours swiftly on top of one another on lettering paper'. This smooth, coated paper would have been considered unsuitable for painting, but Bawden found that he could scratch highlights through it and also liked to rub over it with heel-ball, the hard cobbler's wax used for brass rubbing. In addition, 'his love of the squat flat-headed people and the black barns and neat Essex houses' showed how unpromising subjects could be turned into successful paintings.¹⁴⁷ Charles Marriott, *The Times* critic, praised Bawden as more 'painterlike' in style than Ravilious or Bliss. He described Ravilious's *Country House Garden* (untraced) as 'a scheme in green and gold' that he judged 'a particularly good drawing, the subject being taken for what it is worth pictorially, without any concern for the human associations which would have commended it to the older watercolourists'.¹⁴⁸

Sharing Brick House, Great Bardfield, with Edward Bawden from the end of 1931, Ravilious continued to work in Essex in close association with him, although he soon recognised that he did not share Bawden's identification with the character of the area. Tirzah described how:

they competed with one another in conditions of various hardships, such as ghastly weather, or working with the sun bang in their eyes. They painted several pictures very early in the morning from the roof of their house, and on one occasion had to come down, nearly overpowered by the smell of kippers cooking for breakfast. Bawden thought you ought to finish the painting on the spot, but Eric might do half his at home. They always worked very hard and got up very early in the morning.¹⁴⁹



87. Tilty, c.1932
Pencil and watercolour
30 × 47 cm (11¾ × 18½ in)
Private collection

Ravilious continued to favour subjects against the light, often showing the sun itself. This created a dramatic quality while helping to flatten the picture space, making it more abstract and enhancing the distancing effect noted by Frances Spalding. It allowed him to be inventive with skies, turning them into graphic inventions with radial or parallel lines, a form of treatment uniquely his own.

In 1932, Bawden married Charlotte Epton, a potter and fellow RCA student, and she invited a former pupil, Diana Low, to visit Brick House, under whose influence Ravilious went through a phase of painting in a 'wetter' style, seen in *Tilty* (c.1932, Plate 87). He became bolder in laying complementary colours on one another, such as the blue and orange of the building on the left, with the wetter style leading initially to a loss of precision. For a few years, his work showed experiments in different directions, sometimes reducing colour and enhancing line, which seemed to be his natural inclination, until he succeeded in bringing these elements into balance.

Ravilious was building up a stock of work for his first show at the Zwemmer Gallery, London, in October 1933, with Bawden preceding him by a

month. The size of his pictures increased, averaging around 15 × 20 inches – on the large side for watercolour. Where the original frames made by Alfred Stiles and Sons Ltd in Hammersmith ('the king of framers' as Ravilious called him) survive, they present the work without a card mount, framed like an oil rather than a watercolour, with a simply profiled sycamore moulding and an off-white slip.¹⁵⁰

Rather than the paintings of fields and farms, it is the works from this period showing Brick House itself that seem to have enabled Ravilious to develop a personal identity as a painter. *Prospect from an Attic* (1932, Plate 88) shows the back of Brick House, rather as the larger *November 5th* (1933, Plate 17) showed the back of the London home of Eric and Tirzah in Stratford Road, Kensington, both from an elevated viewpoint – another form of distancing from the ground plane of everyday life. *Prospect from an Attic* has the same rather meticulous finish, still more like an illustration than a painting, in a manner that he did not continue. The delight comes from resolving the jumble of roof forms creating strong diagonal movement out towards the trees and the

88. *Prospect from an Attic*, 1932
Pencil, pen and watercolour
48.3 × 63.5 cm (19 × 25 in)
Scarborough Museums and
Art Gallery

horizon, with little enclosed spaces seen between them. It is in the genre of views from windows (or perhaps, in this case, the roof of the house) that was noted in *The Times* review of the May 1927 exhibition at St George's Gallery, and familiar from work of the period by David Jones and Ben Nicholson.¹⁵¹ It is a view of the everyday, heightened by the strong colours of the foreground and the red/green contrasts running through it, as well as the sole figure of Charlotte beating a carpet, which can be picked out of the shadows as the eye moves over the details.

The village of Great Bardfield remained Bawden's home until 1970, and partly by accident, partly by intention, a number of artists came to live there before and after the war. This led to a series of open studio weekends from 1951 onwards that made the house an attraction for visitors unused to seeing the domestic lives of such apparently exotic characters. Brick House had a large garden, in which Bawden worked energetically. *Two Women in a Garden* (c. 1933, Plate 89) captured a sense of a feminine *hortus conclusus* from the period when the two





LEFT:

89. *Two Women in a Garden*, c. 1933
Pencil and watercolour
44.4 × 55.5 cm (17½ × 21⅞ in)
On loan to Fry Art Gallery,
Saffron Walden

OPPOSITE:

90. *Strawberry Bed*, 1932
Pencil, ink and watercolour
35.6 × 45.7 cm (14 × 18 in)
Private collection

married couples shared the house. While the trestle table and benches suggest an earlier alfresco meal, the wives remain in the shade, contrasted in mood and occupation, in a moment of stillness.

As well as Essex paintings, the 1933 Zwemmer exhibition included works painted when Ravilious was a guest of Sir Geoffrey Fry, Parliamentary Private Secretary to Stanley Baldwin, a cultivated official of independent means whom Ravilious had met at the opening of the Morley College murals (Plates 1, 11, 12, 14). Fry 'took up' the young couple, inviting them to stay at his country house at Oare in Wiltshire as well as buying work from his 1933 exhibition and commissioning the 'Tennis' panels (1933, Plate 91). Two other panels of the Downs, Rainscombe and Hurst Gap (1932), show Ravilious's continuing interest in the landscape, which was soon to be developed much further in his later work, the latter coming closer to the abstract

presentation of moulded grass-covered shapes. The most interesting subject is *Strawberry Beds* (1932, Plate 90), where beneath a carefully delineated canopy of netting, four figures are at work picking fruit in the middle distance. The sense of a protected but limited enclosure, from which a wider world is glimpsed in the trees and horizon, gives a special strangeness to the scene with its many repeating and echoing forms.

The 1933 exhibition included *River Thames* (1933, Plate 91), a busy composition recording a frozen moment beneath a grey light, seen from an upper window, in which the diagonal lines structure the foreground space and objects, while the farther bank recedes in watery layers. *The Stork, Hammersmith* (c. 1933, Plate 92), showing a training ship moored in midstream, is taut and geometric. In the foreground, Ravilious shares some of the same pleasure that Paul Nash might have found in the



boats and the posts against which the pontoon rides the tide. Emptiness is a more pronounced theme here than in most previous works, with the large extent of the river and the balancing rectangle of the railed projection next to the slipway. Boats and their settings close to land continued to fascinate Ravilious, but never again in this setting where the hard edge of London suddenly dissolves into mist and fluidity, suggesting in its tonality as well as its potential meaning something close to the spirit of Chinese landscapes.

Passing the age of 30 in the summer of 1933 seems to have marked a moment of change for Ravilious. His

mural painting period was almost over, as was the bulk of his work for the private press publishers. He was excited by the success of his first solo exhibition and ready to devote more time to watercolours, with two days a week in London to teach in the Design School at the RCA and summers free to search for new subjects. The Zwemmer Gallery operated as a sideline to London's most renowned art bookshop in Charing Cross Road, representing a mixture of home-grown and European avant-garde art. It was run by the youthful Robert Wellington (1910–90), the son of the RCA Registrar, who proposed that Ravilious should exhibit every three years, leaving a number of



pictures for sale between shows, which would contribute to his income. 'There seems no reason why your drawings should not bring in a definite income each year,' Wellington wrote. 'Business can be combined with Pleasure. It may be small, but it means that the time spent on them is not entirely a luxury, as it has rather tended to be in the past.'¹⁵² Wellington asked 'must production stop through the winter, for example?' Ravilious went on to produce some of his best work amid snow or bare branches, despite the hardship involved. He was uncomfortable with the predominant summertime greens, and welcomed the austere colours and light of winter.

While the 1933 show appears not to have been reviewed at all, the 1932 one attracted favourable

comments in the Observer. At a time when form and content were held to be oppositional aspects of art, the paper's critic Jan Gordon recognised Ravilious's ability to create interest in both by developing a balance of antithetical qualities. His 'decorative wit combined with a curious aloofness' made the paintings 'at once placid descriptions and keen criticisms'. This 'criticism' took the form of realising the potential in 'common things of which most might take notice though few would perceive the artistic possibilities'.¹⁵³ It was an astute recognition of the peculiar quality that Ravilious brought to his work.

Ravilious was able to exhibit 37 pictures for his 1936 one-man show, the same number as in 1933. These included many that have since come to represent the

91. *River Thames*, 1933
Pencil, ink and watercolour
36 × 51.2 cm (14¼ × 20½ in)
Private collection on loan to
Towner, Eastbourne



92. *The Stork, Hammersmith*,
c.1933
Pencil and watercolour
37.5 × 57 cm (14¾ × 22½ in)
Towner, Eastbourne

central themes in his work, marking an advance in his confidence and interest in exploring new themes. They became more substantial and deliberate, in a shift that Bawden astutely characterised many years later:

The difference between the early and late work is not only a greater dexterity in the use of a difficult medium, that was inevitable, but something else seems to happen, a change of attitude to the medium as can be seen when a freely drawn and lightly coloured sketch is compared to a later painting which is more consciously designed and has colour and textural effects carefully calculated, everything being

carried out with intentional completeness. Design has permeated the whole painting and conditioned its treatment.¹⁵⁴

With this growing seriousness of approach came a greater self-criticism. The first requirement was the subject, but it was 'hard to find country that doesn't remind one of other people's painting, composition with all the ingredients'.¹⁵⁵ Suitable conditions of light and season were crucial. Then the work itself contained a high element of risk, and it was hard to determine success or failure, as he wrote on another occasion: 'I'm not sure whether it is good or very bad. I think I would have known at teatime but have sat over it too long.'¹⁵⁶



93. *Sandpits, Castle Hedingham*,
c. 1935 (unfinished)
Pencil and watercolour
45 × 53 cm (17¾ × 20⅞ in)
Private collection

As Tirzah recorded, 'Eric showed on average only one out of every four or five paintings he produced, tearing up the failures.'¹⁵⁷

A picture of the castle at Castle Hedingham, where the couple moved in September 1934, was rejected as 'all bits and pieces and nasty colour', but another of some sandpits was more promising, and a version of the subject, currently lost, made it to exhibition, leaving one false start, *Sandpits, Castle Hedingham* (c. 1935, Plate 93), that shows him working downwards from the sky and upwards from the foreground, leaving the central zone for later.

Ravilious's paintings often combine pathos and humour. His sense of wonder in the ordinary comes across with a new strength in *Attic Bedroom* (c. 1934, Plate 94), a *Brick House* subject in which the poignant potential of the objects, abandoned in a limbo between

seasons, outdoor pleasures or anticipated guests, is charged with nostalgia as well as absurdity. The high window suggests an exterior life to which the discarded trappings are an inner psychic counterpart, a desiccated place where the plants and canoe paddle are separated from their proper elements of earth and water. The limited colour range seems to have encouraged attention to different ways of putting on the paint, both wet and dry. There is the additional satisfaction, less evident in earlier paintings, of meticulously drawn objects in space, in this case the folding legs of the bed, the perspective of which provides a kind of space frame, an effect Ravilious repeated in a number of other subjects.

Garden Path (1934, Plate 95) shows the development of Ravilious's style in the two years since *Prospect from an Attic* (Plate 88). It is a close-up of part of the same view,



94. Attic Bedroom, c.1934
Pencil and watercolour
44.5 × 62.5 cm (17½ × 24¾
in)
Fry Art Gallery, Saffron Walden



95. Garden Path, 1934
Pencil and watercolour
42 × 59 cm (16½ × 23¼ in)
Towner, Eastbourne



96. *Talbot-Darracq*, 1934
Pencil, ink and watercolour
45.7 × 55.9 cm
(18 × 22 in)
Towner, Eastbourne

from a first-floor window at Brick House, less complex in content and more unified in colour range. As often happens in Ravilious paintings, there is an actor at the centre, and while before this was Charlotte's distant figure, it has now become inanimate in the form of the trelliswork gazebo that Ravilious designed and gave to the Bawdens as a wedding present. It featured in paintings by both artists.

Next to Brick House, Ravilious had found a yard full of old steam engines waiting to be repaired or simply abandoned, and he created a series of paintings that were included in his first one-man show in 1933. In his own notes on this conscious grouping of subject matter, Ravilious described the engines as 'the discarded machinery of Essex', and similar subjects were available close to his new home.¹⁵⁸ Other painters had picked on similar subjects, but few with the intensity that Ravilious brought to them, with an engineer's eye for working

parts. The subdued colours and meticulous line work continue the dreamlike incongruity of *Attic Bedroom*, in which observed reality is heightened by the way it is presented. Old wooden farm carts had provided artists with subject matter since the time of Palmer, but reversing the Futurist dream of speed with decayed elegance amid a tangle of discarded hardware, as in *Talbot-Darracq* (1934, Plate 96), was a novel updating of the theme. The *29 Bus* (1934, Plate 97) stands against the sun and backlit clouds but cannot move towards it, while *Cab* (1935, Plate 98) completes the series, its elegant curves withstanding decay in 'a hitherto unexplored backyard – an area wholly given up to every sort of junk, beds and bicycles and cartwheels with ducks and hens and black faced enormous sheep to liven the scene – these brutes run about the place jumping pans and corrugated iron with beautiful agility'.¹⁵⁹



97. 29 Bus, 1934
Pencil and watercolour
45 × 55 cm
(17¾ × 21⅝ in)
Towner, Eastbourne

98. Cab, 1935
Pencil and watercolour
43.8 × 58.2 cm
(17¼ × 22⅞ in)
Private collection



Return to the Downs

As the selection of works at the Zwemmer exhibition in 1936 revealed, Ravilious had started to paint the landscape of the Sussex Downs and coast during the previous two years. He was helped in this by an RCA friend, Peggy Angus, who wanted a place of escape to call her own while teaching in a school in Eastbourne. She found a remote and primitive shepherd's cottage called Furlongs on the Downs near Firle, alongside which she virtually squatted until permitted to rent it. Passionate about art and socialism, Angus was a generous, energetic and sometimes slightly childlike character who enjoyed the bustle of a house party where the guests were expected to paint or write. Furlongs became a legendary place of hospitality, where electricity and mains water never penetrated. Guests were expected to be busy during the day, followed by lamplit evenings with music and singing round a harmonium.



As Helen Binyon, recalled:

Eric was enchanted by it all and saw subjects for his paintings everywhere. The spaciousness and breadth of views of land and of skies excited him after the more domestic scenes he had been painting in Essex, and he felt he had come to his [unclear], though he had never before been [unclear] particular stretch of the South Downs.¹⁶⁰

At Furlongs they could be out of view of most of their friends while enjoying the uncluttered landscape. In 1939, Ravilious wrote to Angus that he could 'never paint the Essex scene with much enjoyment. Furlongs altered my whole outlook and way of painting, I think because the colour of the landscape was so lovely and the design so beautifully obvious (only because Essex is walking country to me and a place to play ball games) that I simply had to abandon my tinted drawings: and high time too.'¹⁶¹

OPPOSITE:

99. *Waterwheel*, 1934
Pencil and watercolour
44.5 × 56.6 cm
(17½ × 22¼ in)
Private collection

RIGHT:

100. *Downs in Winter*, c.1934
Pencil and watercolour
44.5 × 55.5 cm
(17½ × 21¾ in)
Towner, Eastbourne

A new sense of open space entered the paintings and he relied less on the detail or oddity of his subject matter. In *Waterwheel* (1934, Plate 99) the land folds and creases towards the horizon, its parti-coloured divisions stitched like patchwork. Comparisons to the surfaces of Henry Moore's figures have been suggested in relation to the contours of turf-covered chalk. The wind-vane pump, a familiar object for Furlongs visitors, has the unsettling effect of a watchtower, yet the scene is entirely believable,

down to the posts and barbed wire. *Downs in Winter* (c.1934, Plate 100, exhibited in 1936 as *Winter Landscape, Sussex*) is a companion piece, bleaker in its emptiness but relieved by the personality of the field-roller commanding the foreground, where Ravilious's rapid development in painting technique is apparent. The furrows made by the roller have the quality of a textile print, yet the repeated lines and dabs of watercolour are subtly modulated to read as a three-dimensional surface, changing towards the





LEFT:

101. *Furlongs*, 1934
Pencil and watercolour
43.2 × 50.8 cm (17 × 20 in)
Private collection, on loan to
Towner, Eastbourne

OPPOSITE:

102. *Caravans*, c.1935
Pencil and watercolour
45 × 56 cm (17¼ × 22 in)
Fry Art Gallery, Saffron Walden

distance until the steep hillside becomes almost a blur of wet washes. By this time, he has developed a sure sense of how the eye reads such a picture, moving in and out of detail, bathed in the effect of winter light.

He continued to paint the Downs up to and into the Second World War, an outpouring of affinity with the landscape background of his early life, rising above the small lives of Eastbourne and connecting with ancient times and imagined people of the past. There was plenty of literature to feed such ideas, from Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906), with its opening episodes of past history in a single place, to the writings of Alfred Watkins on old roads, trackways and ley lines, and H.J. Massingham's pessimistic retreat from modernity to the safety of high places and the mythologising of the Downs as the cradle of English culture and identity. We know that

Ravilious read Watkins and Massingham, and Kipling is a reasonable assumption. Most of his paintings are unpeopled, and when activity such as bringing in straw after harvest in *Furlongs* (1934, Plate 101) and field-rolling in *Mount Caburn* (1935) is depicted, it involves horses rather than machinery. Awkwardness usually accompanies his attempts to add human interest.

The theme of objects in a landscape is continuous, and only occasionally does the landscape appear with no principal actor on the stage. *Caravans* (c.1935, Plate 102) shows a pair of army fever wagons bought by Eric and Tirzah from the cement works to be used as a studio and an extra bedroom for *Furlongs*; *Lombardy Poplars* (1935, Plate 103), a *Castle Hedingham* subject, and *Cuckmere Valley* (1939, Plate 104) rely on the patterns made by the plantation in one case, and the meandering river and its



outlying channels in the other. Often paths and roads serve to construct the space and to offer an imaginative way in. *Chalk Paths* (1935, Plate 105) takes its viewpoint near the crest of the Downs, suggesting a brighter world just out of reach to the south. Roads, paths and chalk pits are engraved through the turf to the whiteness beneath, their lines helping to structure the depiction of contours, with a wire fence and occasional bushes for counterpoint. This is one of many paintings in which Ravilious makes the most of barbed wire, that agriculturally and militarily transformative invention dating from 1867, which other



ABOVE:

103. *Lombardy Poplars*, 1935

Pencil and watercolour

44.6 × 53.5 cm

(17½ × 21¼ in)

Private collection

LEFT:

104. *Cuckmere Valley*, 1939

Pencil and watercolour

40.6 × 57.2 cm

(16 × 22½ in)

Private collection, on loan
to Towner, Eastbourne

OPPOSITE:

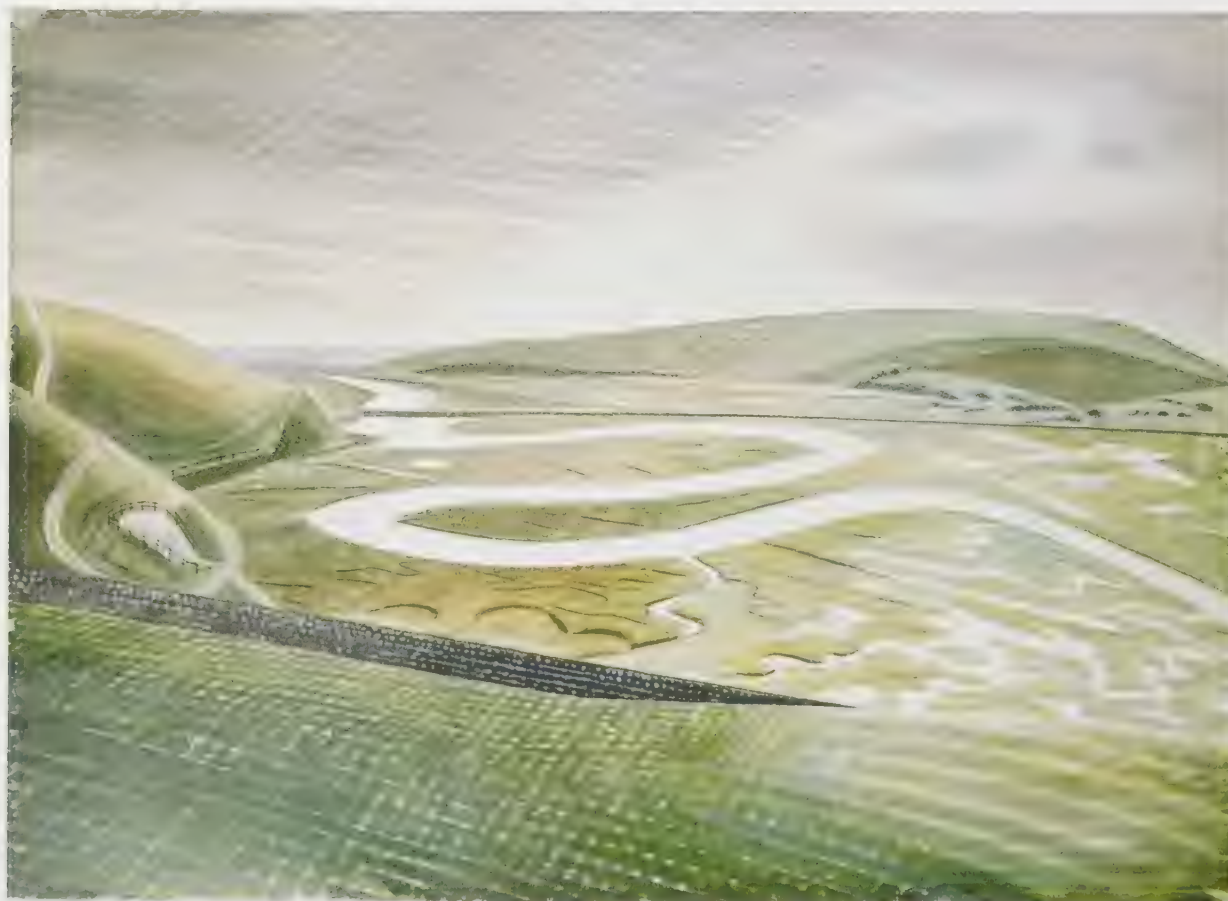
105. *Chalk Paths*, 1935

Pencil and watercolour

47 × 56.5 cm

(18½ × 22¼ in)

Private collection





painters might have simply omitted as being an intrusion on nature. Its rhythmic dots were a gift for his pattern making, and are among the details that help to anchor his work in his own time.

Ravilious and Angus discovered the Asham Cement Works over the crest of the Downs, surrounding Asham House, the home of Virginia and Leonard Woolf from 1912 to 1919. Small engines ran on tracks to carry chalk to the kilns and Binyon records how:

they could look down on the whiteness of the exposed chalk walls, of the whitened buildings and engines and the nearby trees and hedges all covered with a fine white powder. Eric was excited by the strangeness of it all – a moon landscape – and they went again up the hill to see it at night, when work went on by the light of flares and arc lamps.¹⁶²



LEFT:

106. *The Cement Pit*, 1934
Pencil and watercolour
45.2 × 56 cm (17¾ × 22 in)
Devonshire Collection,
Chatsworth

OPPOSITE:

107. *Cyclamen and Tomatoes*, 1935
Pencil and watercolour
47 × 59.7 cm (18½ × 23½ in)
Tate

In a series of five paintings (Plate 106), the industrial vernacular of the cement shed structures and track lines slicing into the natural beauty of the trees and chalk hillsides play up their intrusion in the natural scene. Rather than reading as a protest, the paintings seem to relish the oddity of the situation. (Today the house and the cement works have vanished with landfill and the hillsides are restored as if nothing had happened.) There is some affinity with paintings of industrial extraction sites by Edward Wadsworth, or Tristram Hillier's *Pylons* (1933), which was illustrated in *Unit One*, the book of the avant-garde exhibition by a group of painters, sculptors and architects assembled in 1933 by Paul Nash. Hillier's picture, showing wooden electricity masts on a deserted beach, has the same linear tautness as some of the details in Ravilious's cement-works series, although Hillier's

painting is removed from a real-life context. While Ravilious selected subjects that conveyed a sense of decay, the neatness and sharp focus of his treatment means that they are hard to see as desolate, so that the content gives way to the message coming from their formal treatment.

Another discovery near Furlongs was the greenhouse at Firle Place, which he painted as *Cyclamen and Tomatoes* (1935, Plate 107), described in the 1936 *Observer* review by Jan Gordon, presumably in respect of its blatant central vanishing point and repetitions, as an 'almost impudently successful composition'.¹⁶³ The hypnotic perspective dominates, yet without any sense of threat. It is a realistic scene, in which the orderly ranks of terracotta flowerpots beneath the trained tomato vines create a parallel world. Three more paintings followed in the series, *Cucumber House* (c. 1935), *Geraniums and Carnations* (c. 1938, Plate 108)



and *The Carnation House* (c. 1935, Plate 109). All are concerned with the same pictorial themes, with the linear frameworks of timber giving a pre-emptively Modernist sense of spatial transparency, against which nature is controlled but displayed as overwhelming pattern, like the bunting that broke out across British streets for the Jubilee of George V in 1935. The designer's eye delights in the formality of the conjunction and the patterns of leaves. In all the pictures, there is a new use of sponged-on colour, sometimes working up to the edge of a white space for which a paper mask was probably cut to allow for a clean

edge. These techniques were used in lithographic printmaking, but predate Ravilious's introduction to it. His sense of control is greater in these paintings than perhaps in any others, possibly helped by the comfort of the indoor location, enabling long hours of work.

Newhaven Harbour lies within walking distance of Furlongs, and caused Ravilious to paint boats in a new setting after the Hammersmith Thames. Ships were celebrated as exemplars of unselfconscious design by Modernist writers such as Le Corbusier, whose argument was persuasive among English people schooled to see



LEFT:

108. *Geraniums and Carnations*,
c. 1938

Pencil and watercolour
46.3 × 55.2 cm (18¼ × 21¾ in)
Private collection, on loan to Fry
Art Gallery, Saffron Walden

BELOW:

109. *Carnation House*, c. 1935

Pencil and watercolour
50.8 × 40 cm (20 × 15¾ in)
British Council Collection

OPPOSITE:

110. *The 'James' and the
'Foremost Prince'*, 1934

Pencil and watercolour
50.8 × 58.4 cm (20 × 23 in)
Private collection

themselves as a maritime race. As man-made objects with personality, they were an ideal complement to Ravilious's fascination with wheeled vehicles, but he stuck mainly to vessels with a Victorian feel to them, such as the cross-channel ferry, the *Brighton Queen*. The *'James'* and the *'Foremost Prince'* (1934, Plate 110), with its belt of buckets and mud chute, suggests a Constructivist sculpture. *Channel Steamer Leaving Harbour* (1935, Plate 111) captures the romance of the night ferry departure.

Ravilious stayed at the Hope Inn in Newhaven during August and September 1935 with Bawden for company, inspired by 'those attractive jetties and dredgers' and spurred by the commission for a lithograph for schools.¹⁶⁴ Ravilious picked out the small lighthouses flanking its mouth, including one with a fine signalling mast seen in the foreground of *Newhaven Harbour* (c. 1935, Plate 112) against a cloudless sky of striated blue. Maritime installations excited other artists at the time, including John Piper whom Ravilious met through Peggy Angus and





her husband, J.M. Richards. His article 'The Nautical Style' in the *Architectural Review* in 1938 made a case for the continuity between the vernacular of masts, lookout towers and other structures and the ethos of Modernism.¹⁶⁵ While Ravilious did not theorise so openly, he seems to have reached the same view intuitively. He knew several Modernist architects, among them Maxwell

Fry, a neighbour in Hammersmith, and Serge Chermayeff. Paul Nash revealed the poetry of the found objects of the shoreline in his Dymchurch works of the early 1920s and at intervals thereafter, and Ravilious commented on 'a lovely green-grey drawing of two jetties with some tiny steps up the middle ... and a really wonderful sea – threshed and stepped'.¹⁶⁶ Arguably, it was Ravilious, with



111. Channel Steamer Leaving
Harbour, 1935
Pencil and watercolour
45.1 × 52 cm (17¼ × 20½ in)
Private collection

his meticulous, almost hyper-real rendering of coiled ropes, white picket fences and the pure cone of the lighthouse tower, who revealed the link most effectively, without straying into the more wilful surrealism of randomly assembled objects found in the work of Wadsworth and Hillier. The same quality of vibrant light comes across in his lithograph of *Newhaven Harbour* (1937, Plate 67).

Newhaven, 19th September, 8.30, 1935 (1935, Plate 113), a painting by Bawden of *Newhaven Harbour*, is helpful for measuring one artist against the other. Bawden's high viewpoint is one that Ravilious later also chose when painting here during the war, and there is the same toy-like rendition of the ship coming into the harbour. The colour range is reduced compared to

Ravilious, and more clearly based on a blue-brown contrast with a greater emphasis on the individual brushstrokes. These factors give a greater sense of tension to the whole picture than Ravilious ever wished to attempt, with the title fixing it to a specific moment rather than the out-of-time quality to which Ravilious seemed to aspire. J.M. Richards noted how the two artists no longer relied so heavily on each other, with Bawden developing 'his spatial sense ... in contrast to Ravilious's greater concentration on pattern and the rendering of the earth's surface and the things that lie about on it'.¹⁶⁷ The difference in paint surface is evident, although it would be unjust to deny Ravilious his own ability to convey space, which continued to develop in his work up to and during the war.

112. Newhaven Harbour, c.1935
Pencil and watercolour
44.5 × 57.3 cm (17½ × 22½ in)
Private collection

113. Edward Bawden
Newhaven, 19th September, 8.30
1935, 1935
Watercolour
44.7 × 57 cm (17¾ × 22½ in)
Private collection





Life in an Essex Village

Although the Downs inspired Ravilious's sense of the sublime, the domesticated landscape of Essex and his new village, Castle Hedingham, still had potential. The privately owned Norman castle keep, which crowns the hill and gives the place its name, looms in the background of *Backgardens* (1935, Plate 114). The painting bears out Bawden's comments on the change in approach, with a tighter quality of design and a greater ability to simplify detail, seen in the silhouette of the furthest line of trees. The variety of shapes and volumes, from the quirky drainpipe in the foreground to the unfolding vista of roofs, seems to slot into position in two dimensions while maintaining the accidental quality of a real place.

Vicarage in Winter (1935, Plate 115) is notable for the crosshatched rainbow colours of the sky. If, as Tirzah's diary records, the paint was frozen on the brush, one

wonders how much was actually executed on the spot, but it was, in Ravilious's words, 'rather pretty ... like a Christmas card'.¹⁶⁸ The vicarage is a substantial Georgian house on the same plateau as the castle, as seen from below in *The Vicarage* (c.1936), where its red brick contrasts with a stippled cascade of ivy coming down to the street, in which the baker's delivery cart stands before the blue gates. There is a level of mild anecdotal incident running through other paintings of the village, such as *Village Street* (1936, Plate 116), with the cycling couple setting out along the wet April road, an arrested moment on an early closing day when Mr Bennett-Smith, the owner of the hardware shop, went off with his wife for a picnic. Ravilious shows his interest in the juxtaposition of buildings as actors on the stage with the other elements of trees and telegraph poles, providing a combination that met his strict criteria for a successful picture. *Halstead Road*



OPPOSITE:

114. *Backgardens*, 1935
Pencil and watercolour
48.2 × 61 cm (19 × 24 in)
Private collection

TOP:

115. *Vicarage in Winter*, 1935
Pencil and watercolour
46 × 56.5 cm (18½ × 22¼ in)
Private collection

BOTTOM LEFT:

116. *Village Street*, 1936
Pencil and watercolour
40 × 52 cm (15¾ × 20½ in)
Towner, Eastbourne

BOTTOM RIGHT:

117. *Halstead Road in Snow*, 1935
Pencil and watercolour
45 × 56 cm (17¾ × 22 in)
Private collection





in 1894, Plate 117) shows his appreciation of the effect of rain on a similar village scene, with scratched-out colours that look like a veil of sprigged muslin. The yellow of the Georgian houses stands out, and Ravilious wrote, 'I have in mind a lot of drawings of houses in this village because the white & blue are such a lovely colour.'¹⁶⁹ *Concubine* (Plate 118, 1935, Plate 118) offers another quiet comment on boyish excitement on the edge of the village, only this time for once active rather than passive holiday fun.

Hull's Mill (1935, Plate 119) shows a watermill not far from Castle Hedingham that Ravilious discovered when combing the surrounding territory for suitable subjects. He liked the form of the building, 'pretty as possible, white and almost new looking', with the stream flowing across the minor road between the neat post and rail fences.¹⁷⁰ He used the scene twice as a subject for engravings. In the watercolour, the patterning of leaves moves to a new extreme, treated as if they were solid forms cut out of sponge, their busy texture contrasting with the plain

118. *Train Going Over a Bridge at Night*, 1935
Pencil and watercolour
40 × 50 cm (15½ × 19⅝ in)
Private collection, on loan to
Towner, Eastbourne

119. *Hull's Mill*, 1935
Pencil and watercolour
45 × 55 cm (17¾ × 21⅞ in)
Fry Art Gallery, Saffron Walden



weatherboarding and the unusually non-naturalistic treatment of the water. Ravelius and Bawden shared an aversion to green, the colour whose natural presence in rural England has always presented problems for the artist. The pre-Romantic solution was to tone it down to brown, as Sir George Beaumont's famous argument with John Constable about foreground tones like violin varnish suggests. Modernism, however, allowed greater scope for substituting alternative, non-realistic colours. Ravelius solved the problem in ways that could be seen as crucial

in determining his choice of subjects. Winter and night offered one kind of solution; dominant buildings or machines another. Seaside subjects avoided the issue, as did interiors. When green was unavoidable, it was only rarely a full leaf-green, being taken instead to the blue or ochre ends of its spectral range, or set against the light.

Two paintings of Ravelius's close-up views of farming, described in the *Observer* review of the 1936 exhibition, are currently untraceable. *Poultry* (which may correspond to an unfinished version)¹⁷¹ was 'a study of a



shed full of white leghorns waiting for shipment', perhaps something similar to the wartime Corporal Steddiford's Mobile Pigeon Loft, Sawbridgeworth (1942, Plate 210). Another showed 'a group of cows in a hollow of the Downs'.¹²² *Two Cows* (1936, Plate 120) and *Friesian Bull* (c.1935, Plate 121) form part of a small body of work showing animals under cover or in enclosures, where they were perhaps sufficiently static to allow for detailed observation. *Two Cows* shows Ravilious's skill in dealing with solid objects in space, not so evident in other work, helped by meticulous drawing with the same silhouette applied to both cows in the almost monochrome simplicity of the cowshed. *Friesian Bull* is unlike any other painting, featuring a disturbing eyeless presence, chained by the nose in a prison-like setting in a 1540 brick barn near Great Bardfield. It was first exhibited in 1935 as part of the *Artists against Fascism and War* exhibition organised by the Artists International Association (AIA), a left-wing group with which Peggy Angus was strongly associated. If it was created for the purpose, the painting can be considered as a political subject appropriate to the Spanish Civil War. Although skilfully inserted, the bull itself is on a separate cut-out piece of paper, a technique



Ravilious used on other occasions to introduce revisions to his work. It would be rash to extend the meaning attributable to this subject further into the other works, for Ravilious's letters make it clear that he realised the insignificance of any political gesture lying within his grasp. Binyon later wrote that he 'always seemed so gay and easy & ready for anything – in fact some of our left-wing friends thought of him as a butterfly'.¹⁷³

New Territories 1937–9

With the 1936 Zwemmer exhibition past, work began on accumulating pictures for its successor, while new areas of activity opened up with the lithographs for *High Street* (Plates 69 to 72) and the beginning of work for *Wedgwood* (see Chapter 4), as well as the distractions of his love life. Few paintings are mentioned in letters during 1936, and a visit to Wales produced nothing owing to wet weather. In March 1937, Ravilious stayed with John Nash and his wife in Buckinghamshire, when snow made his paper so wet he had to abandon work. The visit marked a developing friendship with Nash that is likely to have involved discussions of the watercolour work of both. In April, he was working on two paintings

ABOVE LEFT:

120. *Two Cows*, 1936
Pencil and watercolour
56.8 × 44.2 cm (22½ × 17½ in)
Private collection on loan to Fry
Art Gallery, Saffron Walden

ABOVE:

121. *Friesian Bull*, c.1935
Pencil and watercolour
46 × 56 cm (18½ × 22 in)
Private collection

OPPOSITE:

122. *Wiltshire Landscape*, 1937
Pencil and watercolour
41.9 × 54.6 cm (16½ × 22 in)
Private collection



that extend the downland theme. Ravilious described *The Causeway, Wiltshire Downs*, as 'the green landscape', although the green is alleviated in the more distant areas. 'Finding the tones difficult in the foreground,' he continued, 'but it may be modestly successful, if rather heavy in colour – gloomy enough at any rate. I so want the thing not to look washed out as they so often do.'¹⁷⁴ In a later letter, he wished he could make his drawings 'better colour, they aren't nearly positive enough'.¹⁷⁵ His work from this point onwards tends to have more strongly applied colour and darker tonality. *Wiltshire*

Landscape (1937, Plate 122), from the same period, includes a Post Office van, one of his few vehicles seen in movement; it adds colour and promise to an otherwise bleak springtime landscape, its distance marked by prominent telegraph poles.

The *Wiltshire* work indicates that Ravilious might have felt he had exhausted the possibilities of Furlongs and northwest Essex for the time being. The three years leading up to his next one-man show were marked by excursions further afield. A letter from John Nash's wife, Christine, headed 'The Artists' Country Hunting Society



‘Incorporated’, must have been in response to an appeal for ideas of new places. She recommended Dorset, referring to Paul Nash’s *Shell Guide to the county* from 1925, and ‘if you should prefer something brown-er, and with no trees at all, we would suggest the Sand Dunes called Branton Barrows in N. Devon’, which she commended as being ‘practically Virgin soil as regards the [unimpaired] landscape’.

In 1938, Ravilious went for several weeks to Hill Farm near Llanthony, at the head

of a valley, where Eric Gill had lived from 1924 to 1928. According to Tirtzah, the visit arose from a desire to paint mountains, under the inspiration of Francis Towne, but it would appear to answer a need for solitude and distance from his social circle. However, his new friends, John and Myfanwy Piper, passed through, and he was impressed by Piper’s ability to do three pictures in a day using collage. The weather was cold, although he admitted that he ‘enjoyed mild hardships’, sitting ‘like a rock in any wind’ in two waistcoats and two overcoats. He enjoyed staying

123. *Hill Farm*, 1938
Pencil and watercolour
37.2 × 53.4 cm (14½ × 21 in)
Private collection



124. *Waterwheel*, 1938
Pencil and watercolour
41.5 × 50 cm (16½ × 19½ in)
Private collection

with a farmer's family and helped out on the farm, although an almost unvaried diet of pork became wearing. Artistically, the new subject matter inspired and challenged him. It was 'grand gloomy rolling country and fearfully difficult to paint after Essex'.¹⁷⁷

If he was searching for the sublime, his instinct for human scale remained strong. *Hill Farm* (1938, Plate 123), a patchwork of brown fields and plantations defining the land forms snaking down the valley into mist, is a subject whose grandeur justified the visit, although the details of

farm buildings and fences still catch the eye. *Waterwheel* (1938, Plate 124) reverts to the theme of machinery in landscape, being a home-made device by the farmer's son. The painting seems to mark a further level of simplification of a complex subject through greater emphasis on the graphic nature of the brushstrokes, combined with the simple silhouettes of the trees, with story-book ducks contributing animation. The broken lines of paint made by a dry brush in the foreground are one indication of the influence lithography had on his



TOP:

125. *Wet Afternoon*, 1938

Pencil and watercolour

43.2 × 50.8 cm (17 × 20 in)

Private collection

BOTTOM:

126. *The Duke of Hereford's Knob*,
1938

Pencil and watercolour

44.6 × 53.2 cm (17½ × 21 in)

Private collection

OPPOSITE:

127. *Farmhouse Bedroom*, 1938

Pencil and watercolour

45.1 × 54 cm (17¼ × 21¼ in)

Victoria and Albert Museum

painting technique, laying on colour as a series of open layers rather than overlaid washes. Despite the linear quality of much of the work, the painting, showing a pale sun in the sky, also uses light to create the composition, with a pale area behind the spokes of the waterwheel, and the line defining the nearer of the hills. In *Wet Afternoon* (1938, Plate 125), light vibrates across the densely detailed hedges in the foreground, their wavy calligraphy adding to the rolling movement of the whole subject. In early March, the weather changed, bringing new challenges. Ravilious reflected on the difficulty of reconciling the detail with the larger form, writing, 'The hundreds of small trees in rows and spots, hollies and redges and bracken and gorse – all this has been difficult to manage, and yet the shape of [the] landscape buried under this greenery is wonderful. I can't leave it all out to grief putting it all in.'¹





The Duke of Hereford's Knob (1938, Plate 126) might reflect the influence of Piper's Welsh Chapel collages: the Baptist chapel glowing in sunlight in the foreground, painted head on, with simplified gravestones and rather oversized cows beyond. Ravilious mentioned painting an interior of the chapel, 'lovely primrose and pitch pine with deep blue hymn books', but this painting must have been abandoned, as it was never exhibited. With the

difficulties of outdoor working, it was an indoor subject, Farmhouse Bedroom (1938, Plate 127), that was one of the most memorable and successful outcomes of the visit; its complex space defined by wallpaper and floor patterns, and the solid presence of the iron bedstead, both touching and slightly comic.

The verbal accounts of the visits as much as the pictures themselves give the impression that the

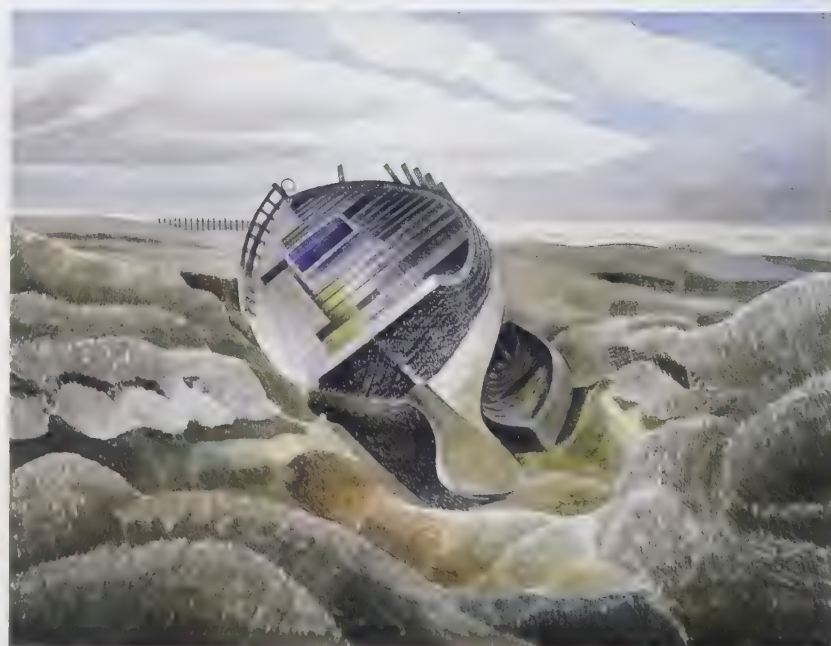


128. *Fishing Boats*, 1938
Pencil and watercolour
43.2 × 52 cm
(17 × 20½ in)
Private collection

129. *Salt Marsh*, 1938
Pencil and watercolour
40.2 × 52.8 cm
(15¾ × 20¾ in)
Private collection

remoteness of the place and the surprises of its landscape satisfied Ravilious's need for variety. The location may have reinforced his feeling of the virtues of the deep countryside in which the modernity of red buses twice a day and a dilatory postman did not detract from a stronger underlying sense of continuity in the landscape.

Returning home in mid-March 1938, Ravilious was hoping to visit Tollesbury on the Essex coast the following month with John Nash to paint 'a dazzling white yacht propped up on the ground' if the weather was bright enough.¹⁷⁹ A further visit was made in July, with three paintings of boats out of the water. In *Fishing Boats* (1938, Plate 128) the boats are pulled up to the shore, with a splash of red to anchor the composition, while *Salt Marsh* (1938, Plate 129) shows one of the many abandoned boats on the tidelines of East Anglian estuaries, a commonplace bleak subject, a maritime equivalent of the industrial machinery of a few years before.



130. *Lifeboat*, 1938
Pencil and watercolour
42.3 × 50.8 cm
(16 5/8 × 20 in)
Private collection

131. *Aldeburgh Bathing Machines*, 1938
Pencil and watercolour
43.2 × 50.8 cm
(17 × 20 in)
Private collection



A fortnight's visit in May to Diana Low, now married to the architect Clissold Tuely, on the edge of Romney Marsh, brought him to another bleak territory, with 'great perspectives of dykes and cows receding to dots miles away. But I can't think how to paint the scene yet and a clever sky won't solve the problem.'¹⁸⁰ This visit yielded two of the greenhouse subjects, and developed his repertory of garden images for Wedgwood. Ravilious and Diana had briefly become lovers at Brick House in 1933, and they had remained in contact. Now the affair was renewed by her and she also acted as his driver, taking him to several of his painting locations.

In Aldeburgh in August, Ravilious captured the sparkling light in *Lifeboat* (1938, Plate 130) where, in contrast to the Salt Marsh, the upright shape and the bright primary colours make it especially toy-like on its turntable rails. *Aldeburgh Bathing Machines* (1938, Plate 131) faces the morning light over the sea directly,



LEFT:

132. *Dungeness*, 1939
Pencil and watercolour
43.8 × 52 cm (17¼ × 20½ in)
Private collection

BELOW:

133. John Nash
Nocturne, Bristol Docks, 1938
Watercolour
40 × 59.4 cm (15¾ × 23⅝ in)
Bristol's Museums, Galleries and
Archives

OPPOSITE:

134. *Paddle Steamers at Night*,
1938
Pencil and watercolour
45.7 × 53.3 cm (18 × 21 in)
Mercer Art Gallery, Harrogate

offering a view through the silhouettes of these Victorian bathing relics. Can he have discovered the mysterious model of a sitting hen on a post in the foreground, or is it a unique instance of his introducing a deliberately surreal intrusion? These two paintings were bought by Ravilious's young supporter and patron, Robert Harling. As anachronistic wheeled vehicles, the bathing machines were a perfect subject, appearing again in *Late August Beach*, the third painting of the visit, this time seen against the row of houses beyond.

Having visited Rye Harbour from the Tuelys in May, Ravilious returned there at the end of August to stay at the William the Conqueror pub, a location known to John Piper who might have tipped him off about it. The long perspective of the tidal channel from the sea to the harbour (itself some distance from the historic town of





Rye, owing to the change of the coastline) was a perfect Ravilious subject, a perspective leading to infinite space and with water mirroring sky. He executed the painting with controlled strokes and yet without having to resolve the paint into lines, instead using a subtle balance of wet and dry.

By now Ravilious had given up his teaching post at the RCA, and so was able to extend his painting season. In October 1938 he was at Dungeness, painting *Lighthouse and Fort* on this visit and returning to paint *Dungeness* (1939, Plate 132) the following year. Both versions

feature a lunar landscape against the sun, with a scatter of beach objects, 'a vast stretch of shingle and only a toy railway that doesn't go anywhere'.¹⁸¹ These were perfect subjects for his imagination, with a strong sense of having reached some brink of experience and being on the border of another world.

Next came Bristol, in the company of John Nash who had previously spotted paddle steamers in the dock. Both artists painted virtually the same subject and the differences are telling. In *Nocturne, Bristol Docks* (1938, Plate 133), Nash took a broader angle view and made



more of the peripheral details. It is a painting full of incident and skilful passages, but less coherent in colour or form than Ravilious's *Paddle Steamers at Night* (1938, Plate 134). There, the background is reduced to a silhouette and the foreground reduced to two vessels, whose pattern of dark portholes is emphasised. The paddle steamers appear again, partially dissolved in a morning light, in *Bristol Quay* (1938).

In February 1939, Ravilious once more turned his attention to the Sussex coast, staying with Tirzah and her mother in Eastbourne and painting *Beachy Head* (1939, Plate 135), and *La Belle Tout Lighthouse Interior* (1939).¹⁸² The painting of Beachy Head shows the famous chalk cliffs, just west of

Eastbourne, with lighthouses on the top and at the base, was a perfect subject. He wrote of how he 'looked into the eye of the sun as long as it could be borne'.¹⁸³ The lighthouse picture, looking out over the cliffs and sea from within the lantern of La Belle Tout (at that time converted as a dwelling), 'drawing the immense expanse below with a gale blowing outside', is a further exploration of how to show refractions of light using colour and line.¹⁸⁴ Following the lead of Seurat, his paintings against the light made him more inventive in his use of colour in shadow. The night picture, *Beachy Head*, anchored on the beams from the lighthouse at the base of the cliff, is one of his most perfect compositions,

135. *Beachy Head*, 1939
Pencil and watercolour
43 × 57.8 cm (16 7/8 × 22 3/4 in)
Private collection



136. *Yellow Funnel*, 1939
Pencil and watercolour
43 × 58.5 cm (16 7/8 × 23 in)
Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool

uncluttered by objects or detail, with a close colour range, in which the lighthouse provides the element of drama and arrested motion.

The painter Michael Rothenstein (the youngest son of William and brother of John), who came to live in Great Bardfield shortly before the war, wrote an account of Ravilious's painting technique based on *Beachy Head*. It is the only detailed description of his working method, although this may have varied from one painting to another. Rothenstein says that he 'spent two evenings making colour notes direct from nature, returning in the daytime to complete his drawing of lighthouse and cliffs. But the actual painting was done from memory, further

night visits to the actual place replenishing his store of visual impressions.'¹⁸⁵ Rothenstein felt that Ravilious had developed a new technique in this painting in order to create interest in the broad sweeps of grass: an open paint texture that relied on 'the lively speckle of pigment and on wiry contour to bring back the sense of tension'. He added that the paper had been damped from the back for the unified passages such as the sky, while some of the highlights were scored with the corner of a razor blade. This picture seems to be the precursor of the chalk-figure series that followed later in 1939.

In March 1939, Ravilious made his first trip across the Channel since his student scholarship journey, staying



137. *Pilot Boat*, 1939
Pencil and watercolour
Dimensions unknown
Private collection

138. *The Bedstead*, 1939
Pencil and watercolour
44.5 × 54.5 cm
(17½ × 21½ in)
Towner, Eastbourne

in Le Havre, where he painted *Yellow Funnel* (1939, Plate 136). It is a dockside picture similar to the Bristol ones, but with a greater sense of space, in which the coloured funnel of the Rothschild family steam yacht is one of his bolder foreground objects, playing against the slate grey of the sky and water. In *Pilot Boat* (1939, Plate 137), the surface of the water becomes especially graphic with a lattice of overlaid strokes, but these are optically blended and never mechanical, becoming the main visual content of the picture. *The Bedstead* (1939, Plate 138) was painted in his hotel. It is a companion piece to *Farmhouse Bedroom* (1938, Plate 127) with a similar sense of the everyday bordering on the uncanny, and the contrast of austere furnishing with bold patterning of walls and textiles.

The visit was a success, and Ravilious expressed such enjoyment of French life and behaviour that it seems certain he would have returned often had the opportunity arisen. He had completed the 27 works needed for his exhibition when Robert Wellington had left Zwemmer, and

it was shown at Arthur Tooth & Sons, who were Paul Nash's dealers, in May 1939. His prices rose modestly from one exhibition to another, starting between 9 and 15 guineas in 1927, rising in 1933 to a standard 12 guineas (although the large *November 5th*, Plate 15, was 25 guineas), and in 1939 to a range between 15 or 18 guineas, the last figure being the equivalent of around £3,100 in 2013.

By 1 June, only three works were unsold. Two major reviews in the leading Sunday papers showed appreciation for his development as an artist. In the *Sunday Times*, Eric Newton tried to convey the imaginative side of the work and the paradox that while it showed the everyday, it owed its success to being internalised and highly personal to the artist. He wrote: 'He makes you feel that each object matters immensely, that it has become inextricably entangled with his experience, and that he wants quite desperately to show you what it is really like.' The intention and the medium were perfectly matched, so that 'all the qualities dear to water-colourists – a full,



flowing brush, a facile exploitation of the charm of the medium – are nothing to him. He paints as a child paints, obsessed with his meaning.¹⁸⁶

In the *Observer*, Jan Gordon was similarly concerned to identify what made Ravilious's work so distinctive. He recognised the influences of Seurat, van Gogh and the Nash brothers, finding that the pictures 'touched true perception' so that 'a combination of unexpected selection, exactly apt colour, and almost prestidigitous water-colour technique and textural variety appears as

something magic, almost mystic, distilled out of the ordinary experience'.¹⁸⁷ The *Manchester Guardian* linked him to Stanley Spencer's ability to 'concentrate so intensely on trivial details and commonplace objects that they cease to be commonplace and take on a sort of mystical flavour'. The concentration of vision gave his work 'a stark reality whose only parallel is in the world of dreams. Not that he has any connection with Surrealism'.¹⁸⁸ This final qualification was apt. Ravilious was interested in surrealism and owned copies of the magazine *Minotaure*,



where articles sometimes concerned themselves with the kind of exotic or outmoded objects that stimulated his own mind. However, unlike Paul Nash he kept his distance from the movement and avoided any direct dislocation of reality in his work, keeping equally clear of all other artistic movements of the time apart from the realist AIA.

Ravilious declared himself 'set up and a bit above myself' by these reviews.¹⁸⁹ Curators of public collections were beginning to buy his work. The summer of 1939 included another visit to Furlongs, producing *Interior at Furlongs* (1939, Plate 139) and *Tea at Furlongs* (1939, Plate 140). These images have become widely circulated in

recent years and our hindsight of the imminent losses and disruption of war make them all the more poignant. The former scene is domestic and at the same time slightly uncanny, contrasting the texture of the plaster and brick floor with details of the door latch and curtain ties. The latter is a scene waiting to be peopled from the wings, in which the tea table with its appealing English still life is separated from fields beyond – a truthful rendering of the garden in front of the cottage, with the prim bentwood chairs that Ravilious had helped Angus to buy from an Eastbourne draper's shop. It is also a gentle metaphor for the pleasures of the present and the unknown beyond.

139. *Interior at Furlongs*, 1939
Pencil and watercolour
45.8 × 54.4 cm (18 × 21 3/8 in)
Private collection

140. *Tea at Furlongs*, 1939
Pencil and watercolour
45.8 × 56 cm (18 × 22 in)
Fry Art Gallery, Saffron Walden



Figures in the Chalk

With his second child, James, born in Eastbourne in late August, Ravilious prepared to work on the most concentrated series of his career, the chalk figures across the southern counties of Sussex, Wiltshire and Dorset (Plates 141 to 145). They were conceived in relation to a book, but also developed as substantial paintings in their own right. His aforementioned note, 'Preface by the Engraver', for the *Lanstone Monotype Almanack* 1929 (Plates 38, 39) shows his earlier interest in the iconography of the subject, and it is possible that Ravilious had heard about articles published by the

young archaeologist Stuart Piggott, a friend of the Pipers, which explored the dates and possible symbolism of the prehistoric figures with free-ranging imagination.¹⁹⁰ Only two of the chalk figures, at Wilmington and Uffington, have credible claims to antiquity although dates are uncertain. The Cerne Giant was then believed to be ancient, although this has been questioned. The others in the set were relatively recent, the 1778 Westbury White Horse in Wiltshire (appearing twice) and the 1808 King George III outside Weymouth, both fine examples of folk art. The figures were a subject made for him, with their graphic disruption of the landscape and ambiguous scale



The outbreak of war on 3 September 1939 caused only minor interruptions to this scheme. Ravilious joined the Observer Corps at Castle Hedingham until he became a war artist at the beginning of 1940. Just prior to this, in December 1939, he made visits to the chalk-figure sites on one continuous tour. The Wilmington Giant was familiar from his childhood and already used in engravings and in the Morley College murals. The scene in this watercolour (1939, Plate 141) is made stranger by

the lines of barbed wire across the foreground and the distorted mesh of the fence that lines the path towards the base of the hill. Hatching strokes depict varied textures across the hillside and into the foreground, and the patch of yellow corn answers the patch of blue in the sky, with the tilted figure at the centre completing the diagonal between them.

The Wilmington Giant was initially the figure seen from the window in *Train Landscape* (1939, Plate 142)

OPPOSITE:

141. *The Wilmington Giant*, 1939
Pencil and watercolour
44.7 × 53.7 cm (17½ × 21½ in)
Victoria and Albert Museum

RIGHT:

142. *Train Landscape*, 1939
Pencil and watercolour
44.4 × 54.6 cm (17½ × 21½ in)
Aberdeen Art Gallery and
Museums

BELOW:

143. *The Vale of the White
Horse*, 1939
Pencil and watercolour
45.0 × 55.4 cm (17¾ × 21¾ in)
Tate



before the Westbury Horse, itself visible from the railway, was substituted in a pasted-on overlay, no doubt because of its stronger visual impact. The seating fabric of the carriage was altered at the same time. The finished work, bought for the collection at Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums in 1940, is another of Ravilious's most popular pieces, understandably because of the additional attraction of the old-fashioned carriage, with its shadowed numerals '3' and '990' painted on the door with observational relish. Time is frozen here again, perhaps with particular poignancy in relation to the stasis of the 'phony war'

The Vale of the White Horse (1939, Plate 143) is the most adventurous depiction of all. Paul Nash photographed it close up, distorting its legibility, while John Piper published an aerial photograph in *Axis* magazine to emphasise the contemporary quality of the pictogram, like one of the cave paintings of Lascaux, only discovered the following year. Ravilious made the final



144. *The Westbury Horse*, 1939
Pencil and watercolour
44.4 × 55.3 cm
(17½ × 21¾ in)
Private collection on loan to
Towner, Eastbourne

forbidding hillside writhe like a giant skin, speckled with the hairy stalks of dead grass in the foreground, beneath a sky in which the light from the left pushes across the paper in diagonal stripes. The way that the horse tips over the crest of the hill carries the eye into space.

Chalk Figure near Weymouth (1939) presents a more frontal view of the mounted Hanoverian monarch, George III, the lines of hedges stitched across the contours being a gift to the composition. Here, more than in the other paintings, the fact that the hill figures are mainly north-facing helps to emphasise the brooding quality of the final hillside, too steep for cultivation. *The Westbury Horse* (1939, Plate 144) varies the viewpoint by climbing up close to the summit and surveying the plain to the north, where a train crosses with a plume of white smoke. Many allusions can be gathered around this image – the white

horse of the pre-industrial world confronting the 'iron horse', for example, a theme developed in the writings and paintings of the film-maker Humphrey Jennings; or H.J. Massingham's theory that the essence of Englishness was created by communities across the ridges of the southern chalk lands, using the height to defend themselves from attack. Close up, the nature of the turf on the hill becomes more apparent, with the water run-off from the legs of the horse streaking the grass, and the three-dimensional cutting away of its edge around the figure.

The Cerne Giant (1939, Plate 145) gave Ravilious particular pleasure, partly no doubt because of its notoriously overt male sexuality. Barbed wire once more plays a major role, and the foreground grass is scored through the wet paint, a new departure in technique. The clouds descend to shroud the Giant's hill, advancing into

145. *The Cerne Giant*, 1939
Pencil and watercolour
44.5 × 54.6 cm
(17½ × 21½ in)
Private collection



the picture space and making him seem more like an apparition from another world. The bleak December cold permeates the painting, but like its author and the Giant himself, there is a high-spiritedness to it that defies despair. The paintings were not exhibited, but were held at the Leicester Galleries, who sold *The Wilmington Giant* to the V&A and *The Vale of the White Horse* to the Tate.

Civilian Art in Wartime

During his years as a war artist from the beginning of 1940 to his death, Ravilious had periods of leave in which he painted works that are a continuation of his pre-war subject matter and activity. In the summer of 1941, after the birth of Anne, their third child, he and Tirzah moved house, renting a remote farm, known variously as Ironbridge, Ewen Bridge or Ewenbridge Farm at Shalford,

about two miles east of Great Bardfield. The owner was the politician John Strachey, who arranged to take half his rent in the form of pictures (to a value of £70 per year). Ravilious called it 'one of the nicest houses I've lived in', although it proved to be very cold in winter.¹⁹¹ The large garden, set amid fields sloping down to the small River Pant, would have been an attractive space in which their sons John and James could explore and play in place of the small backyard of Bank House, Castle Hedingham.

The non-war pictures are mainly of the house and its surroundings. From June 1941 came *Potato Field* (Plate 146) with an unruly hedgerow on a path approaching the house, and *River Pant, Shalford* (Plate 147), a new departure showing two young women in a rowing boat in a 'tunnel of green gloom', with unfinished trees and foreground an evocation of peaceful pursuits in wartime. Both were



146. *Potato Field*, 1941
Pencil and watercolour
43.2 × 53.4 cm
(17 × 21 in)
Private collection

147. *River Pant, Shalford*, 1941
Pencil and watercolour
38.1 × 50.9 cm
(15 × 20 in)
Private collection

requested by Strachey. Three further outdoor scenes followed in February 1942, during a disastrous winter in which 'John and the baby nearly died of whooping cough' and Tirzah was taken to hospital for an emergency mastectomy. The local farmer had cut down many trees, and their freshly sawn trunks make the foregrounds of *The Pant Valley, Shalford* and *Tree Trunk and Wheelbarrow* (Plate 148). These scenes appear more relaxed and less effortful than some of the pre-war compositions. In the second, the scoring across the wet paint, probably with the wooden point of a brush handle, makes a broad wave of pattern in the left foreground. *Ironbridge at Ewenbridge* (Plate 149), from the same visit, shows a narrow footbridge with elegant iron supports amid slender leafless trees.

A group of interiors at the farm from the summer of 1941 depicts bare rooms with flowers on tables – a new subject for Ravilious who had not shown much previous interest in flowers. In *Ironbridge Interior* (Plate 150) a jug of parsley and bracken fronds stands opposite an



148. *Tree Trunk and Wheelbarrow*, 1942
Pencil and watercolour
49.5 × 54.6 cm
(19½ × 21½ in)

149. *Ironbridge at Ewenbridge*,
c.1941–2
Pencil and watercolour
55.2 × 50.1 cm
(21¾ × 19¾ in)
Private collection, on loan to
Fry Art Gallery, Saffron Walden



unfinished painting pinned to the plaster in an upstairs room, the latter showing a blank version of the 'Burslem vase', a Wedgwood shape used for Ravilious's Boat Race Day transfers (Plate 163), arranged with lupins and marigolds on a table out of doors. This unfinished painting (Plate 151) was in fact abandoned at an earlier point than is shown here, with only loose pencil drawing and single ghostly wash of *terre verte* pigment applied with a remarkable variety of texture. White blades of grass have been masked out before the wash was applied, using some form of resist that allowed for very fine brushstrokes.

Garden Flowers on a Cottage Table (Plate 152) shows the Burslem vase with the same arrangement, now brought into Ravilious's workroom, where a sheet of colour samples and paint tubes make it the one painting where his own activity becomes part of the subject. It is surprising that he did not paint more still lifes. He admired the work of Winifred Nicholson, and the feeling



of these works comes close to interiors by her, as represented in the collection of H.S. Ede, now at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge. More than the outdoor subjects, these paintings mark a fragile moment suspended in time amid the external activities of war.

Although Ravilious went back to his home at intervals during the course of a further year, he would be busy both working to complete pictures as a war artist and keeping house and looking after children while Tirzah was away in hospital. It seems that he did not have the time to develop other subjects. The haste in which these flower subjects were done, as with some of the war paintings,

seems a positive asset in that he was compelled to loosen up his way of working while retaining his sure sense of shape and form. In a short span of years he had come to maturity as painter, avoiding abrupt breaks in style, and he was consistent if varied in his subject matter. When he exhibited one of his Rye Harbour pictures, *Room at William the Conqueror*, in a group show at the National Gallery in 1940 that included examples of Bawden and John Nash, Eric Newton wrote in the *Sunday Times*, 'these three are first-rate of their kind, and it is a kind which will need a full chapter when the history of mid-twentieth century British art comes to be written'.¹⁹²



OPPOSITE:

150. *Ironbridge Interior*, 1941

Pencil and watercolour

46.9 × 55.9 cm

(18½ × 22 in)

Private collection, on loan
to Towner, Eastbourne

RIGHT:

151. *Vase of Flowers in a
Garden*, 1941

Pencil and watercolour

45.8 × 58.4 cm

(18 × 23 in)

Private collection

BELOW:

152. *Garden Flowers on
a Cottage Table*

Pencil and watercolour

51.4 × 55.9

(20¼ × 22 in)

Private collection





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CHAPTER FOUR



ERIC RAVILIOUS AND DESIGN 'FRANKLY AND HAPPILY ORNAMENTAL'

A New Look for English Design

Ravilious lived at a time when many artists saw design and decoration as a legitimate sphere of activity and an essential source of income. His painting, printmaking and transfer decorations for Wedgwood china interweave with each other, and remain among the highlights of the period in which he was working. At a time when there was a growing feeling that Britain might find a middle way between Modernism and tradition in design, Ravilious offered some of the most convincing demonstrations that this did not necessarily involve a dilution of quality or a return to literal historicism.

The course structure at the Royal College of Art encouraged him to diversify in this way, and although William Rothenstein's attempt to balance the competing demands of the institution still neglected the needs of specialised industrial designers, there was little demand for such skills since manufacturers and store buyers were reluctant to take risks on new design. For some kinds of work, the best solution was to practise as an individual artist-craftsman, exemplified in the 1920s by the potter Bernard Leach, with whom Charlotte Bawden studied at

St Ives, or the hand block textile printers Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher, who taught their newly revived use of vegetable dyes to Enid Marx. Tirzah Ravilious learnt on her own how to make marbled papers, working initially with Charlotte Bawden. Her technique was unlike the standard patterns of the time, with softer edges and more open textured effects of great beauty. She sold the papers for bookbinding and lampshades, providing a small but useful income.

There was a paradox in using handcraft techniques to produce objects in a Modernist aesthetic, although the touch of the artist's hand in decoration was still valued. Ravilious and Bawden avoided this level of physical involvement, and instead used their skills mainly for commercial graphics and illustration, where it was possible to retain the quality of the original engraving or line drawing regardless of the quantity produced. Their aesthetic was less obviously Modernist than some of their craft contemporaries, but added a new element to the design reform movement of the time and later came to be seen as a possible basis for a revival of decoration.

Their activity took place against a broader backdrop of revival in the ideal of 'design and industry', influenced much from its Victorian roots but rethought for a more consciously modern age of mass communication. Among Ravilious's patrons were several members of the Design and Industries Association (DIA), founded in 1917 as a voluntary campaigning body for all aspects of design, inspired by activity in Germany. DIA members believed that good design should be an active force in overcoming the negative aspects of modernity and creating a more unified society, through making durable and efficient goods for individual purchasers and for larger-scale equipment, such as buildings and trains.¹⁹⁴ Initially the dominant style of the organisation was a restrained form of classicism, with touches of decoration. Bawden's decorative imagery, whether figurative or abstract, fitted well with this mission of bringing 'sweetness and light' of a type thought to be particularly English in character. In a 1932 pamphlet, *The Projection of England*, the civil servant Stephen Tallents outlined a programme for repositioning Britain as a post-imperial nation relying on its culture and traditions as significant trading assets, assisted by modern communications coordinated by agencies of the state.¹⁹⁵

Designing for Print

Printing was an important field of design reform after 1918, as old historic typefaces were shown to be the most legible for modern use, and were made available for the new automatic typesetting machinery. From 1908 onwards, the Curwen Press in East London, a family firm renowned for 'putting the spirit of joy into your printed work', joined the movement, employing Claud Lovat Fraser for the concluding years of his short life to provide decorative typefaces. Together with Paul Nash and Albert Runcie (1900–1980, brother of William Rothenstein), Bawden was one of the main beneficiaries of Nash's arrival at the

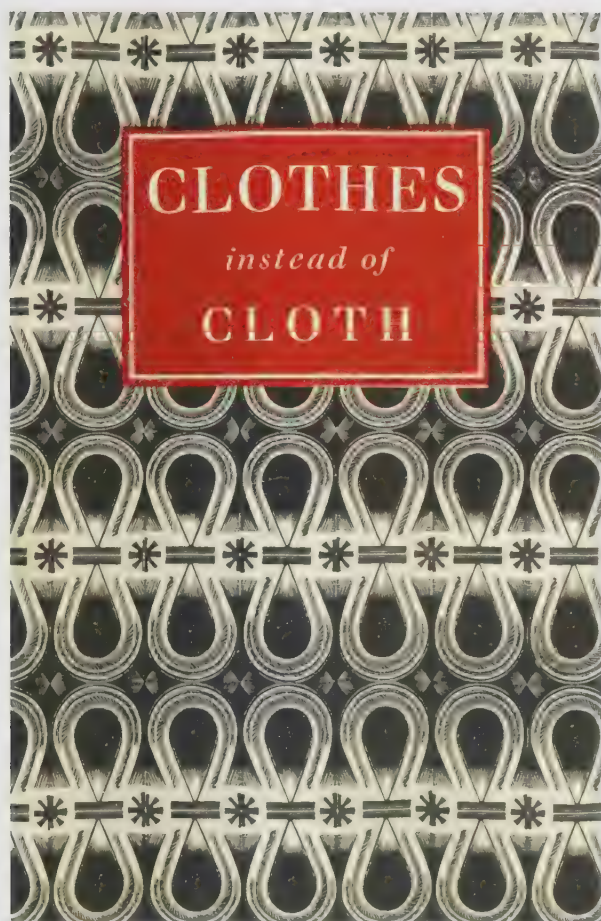


153. *British Art*, BBC pamphlet, 1934
24.8 × 10.5 cm (9¾ × 7¼ in)

RCA Design School in 1924, 'Nash brought into the dingy mustiness of the room a draught of fresh air. He spoke of Samuel Palmer, of Lovat Fraser, the Curwen Press, the processes of graphic reproduction and so forth'.¹⁹⁶ The same could probably be said for Ravilious, although neither of them could be classified as part of the 'modern movement' as it is normally understood.

The Curwen Press acted as a form of advertising agency, receiving instructions from clients for brochures and press advertising, commissioning artists and preparing the typesetting ready to send out to newspapers and magazines. Where Bawden brought humour to his advertising work, especially in the appealing oddity of his human figures, Ravilious brought a sort of lyricism to his engravings, even when they were decorative patterns rather than representations.

In 1922, the Curwen Press began a range of decorative papers intended for bookbinding. They were inspired by a notebook in which Lovat Fraser left some bold, folk-art



154. *Clothes Instead of Cloth*,
Austin Reed booklet cover, 1935
18 × 12 cm (7 1/8 × 4 3/4 in)

style designs inspired by traditional Italian examples given to him by the theatre artist, Edward Gordon Craig. Enid Marx was commissioned to make a repeat pattern wood engraving for a paper in 1925. In 1927 a decoration by Ravilious, one of his illustrations for the book *Desert: a Legend* by Martin Armstrong, was adapted for use as a two colour paper (Plate 51). In that year, Curwen also produced Bawden's earliest designs for wallpaper, printed as lithographs but cut on linoleum in 1924 after he had seen early examples of William Morris papers at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley. One other pattern paper by Ravilious, based on his cover for the 1935 booklet *Thrice Welcome*, was marketed briefly by Heal's, while another repeat pattern design, for the Austin Reed booklet *Clothes Instead of Cloth* (1935, Plate 154), was originally used only once.

Ravilious and Bawden both depended on commissioned work in illustration and engraving to supplement their income from painting and teaching.

Furthermore, they found the business of working to a brief a stimulus to creative invention, even if the client demanded revisions. Ravilious described working on a sales pamphlet for Austin Reed in 1936

It is puzzling to me where the spirit comes from to draw and redraw these rather boring things for Curwen – I suppose a lot to do with it is the dictatorial way such people have. A positive statement of what is wanted always has a hypnotic effect on me, just as it does with Edward's. In the end it becomes almost fun and worth doing, seeing that the bell shall be made to ring.¹⁹⁷

Ringing this bell, to borrow his useful phrase, implies a self-critical sense of standards that was crucial to the success of both artists and saved them from descending into self-parody or repetition. They shared the sense of fun, not only in the more overt humour of Bawden's illustrations but also in Ravilious's combination of energy and elegance in abstract designs as much as in figurative ones. Even at one of their first public appearances, at Heal's with the Junior Art Workers Guild in 1925, a major magazine singled them out as 'specially recommended to advertisers and printers'.¹⁹⁸

At the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris in 1925, Ravilious showed a design for printed tiles, a decorative panel, playing cards and wood engravings.¹⁹⁹ Of the tiles and the panel nothing further is known and clearly, despite such prominent exposure, no manufacturers or retailers came forward. A 'Panel in a Firescreen', painted in oil and wax with a repeat pattern of what appear to be Red Indian heads a photograph of which was published in *The Architectural Review* in 1930, is a similarly mysterious work from this early period unlike anything he was ever to produce. In the 1920s, Bawden easily outran Ravilious in the

quantity of his work for Curwen and other patrons. He contributed to a London Transport poster for the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924, when he was only just 21, and not long after started to design graphics and humorous pictorial tiles for Poole Potteries, a company fully in line with Design and Industries Association ideas.²⁰⁰ In 1927, Ravilious worried that 'Bawden is overdoing it now I think will kill himself.'²⁰¹

Art and Industry in the 1930s

The year of 1930 was pivotal. The onset of economic depression exposed the urgency for social renewal across a spectrum of national life. Design came to be seen as a cure-all solution to transform the chaos of unlimited free enterprise and the decay of nineteenth-century industry into a harmonious new world of clarity and reason, from household goods to the cleaning up and rationalisation of both town and countryside. Artists were, perhaps unrealistically, seen as 'form givers' who could stimulate business as well as spiritual recovery, if only they could be brought into a productive relationship with manufacturers. The Society of Industrial Artists was formed in 1930, with Paul Nash serving as President in 1932–4, to represent practitioners in the field. Nash gained prominence by writing about these hopes, and in 1932 organised the small exhibition, *Room and Book*, at the Zwemmer Gallery, to coincide with the launch of his book of essays on design. With textiles, ceramics, furniture, paintings and sculpture, visitors were given an impression of what a modern room might look like, with an emphasis on national character in Modernism.²⁰² Although the chrome furniture may have seemed cold, the overall effect would have been softened by the repeat patterns of block printed fabrics and paintings by Ivon Hitchens and David Jones. Ravilious was included among the artists with a *Design for a Cactus House* (1932, Plate 155), an object with a fairground folk-art character to display the Modernist's only permitted



155. *Design for a Cactus House*,
1932
Pencil and watercolour
56 × 38 cm (22 × 15 in)

houseplant.²⁰³ Bawden's wallpapers added a further element of fantasy and humour. Despite divergences, *The Times* critic (presumably Charles Marriott) recognised the sense of unity, 'related by the time spirit rather than by identity of aim by their designers and producers'.²⁰⁴

Small gestures such as *Room and Book* and its successor exhibition *Unit One* form the links in a chain of events leading up to the more substantial post-war engines of design reform in education and manufacture. The field of design was prone to committees and representative bodies whose scope was limited to publications and exhibitions. The most notable was the Lord Gorrell committee set up by the Board of Trade in 1931, which reported the following year, finding in design exhibitions the readiest means of engaging the public. The *Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home*, organised by a committee chaired by the *Country Life* writer, Christopher Hussey, and designed by Oliver Hill with theatrical panache that scared the DIA members, was an unofficial response to the Gorrell Report. It proved a considerable success in 1933.²⁰⁵



156. Vase, decanter and sherry glass for Stuart Crystal, 1933

157. Design of vase for Stuart Crystal, 1933
Pencil and watercolour
Dimensions unknown

In the same year, Ravilious made designs for Stuart Crystal (Plates 156, 157), a long established firm at Wordsley, near Stourbridge, in the West Midlands. The simple abstract patterns were cut into the surface in an updating of the popular Victorian technique – Paul Nash was one of the other artists engaged.²⁰⁶ These formed part of a display of *Modern Art for the Table* at Harrods in October 1934, opened by William Rothenstein. As well as crystal, the display included hand-painted plates and candlesticks from E. Brain & Company's Foley China. The publicity claimed that 'each day ... thousands of people have moved through Harrods China Galleries paying enthusiastic tribute to the work of famous living artists.'²⁰⁷ These artists included Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Barbara Hepworth, Laura Knight, Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson and Graham Sutherland, a broad church in terms of taste, in a field where distinctions between different trends and groups were becoming important. The difference between the large visitor numbers and the scarcity of the actual items points to the fact that while the public enjoyed taking part



as spectators, they were unwilling to risk investing money and social capital in a further stage of commitment.

Ravilious's glass designs were probably produced in very small numbers. The patterns consist of dotted lines in rings along with stars and brilliant cut ovals, similar to some of his wood-engraving motifs. They were shown again at the Royal Academy Exhibition of British Art in Industry, held from January to March 1935, with Ravilious serving on the selection panel for the book production section.²⁰⁸ Over 350 individual items were shown in the 'Glassware' section designed by Maxwell Fry with decorative panels by Ravilious. They came from a range of makers and designers, eleven of them being Ravilious pieces including a decanter, a broad conical vase, a cocktail shaker, several drinking glasses, a water jug and a flower bowl. One reviewer thought it the best room in the show, 'most in accord with the spirit or alleged spirit of the exhibition'. For the rest, it spoke to him of 'an England that has not shifted a jot or tittle from the firm base of its solid narrowly diffused prosperity'.

with 'anger and peace, stupidity and goodwill'.

Ravilious translated his work in glass 'a mere gesture', yet the designs, compared to the half-moderns in their various guises, were fresh, unpretentious and appropriate to their position.

Dunbar Hay – Between History and Modernism

These exhibitions revealed divergences of taste within the sector and the press. These could be about the role of domestic decoration, but were in fact about less tangible issues of taste. From 1935, Ravilious and a small group to whom he was connected were able to develop a coherent style for objects of several kinds that reinvented a form of decoration that was accepted by most Modernists, if not by a wider buying public.

Ravilious's RCA friend Cecilia Dunbar Kilburn played an important role in bringing this new style to light. Having travelled the world while failing to develop a career either as a sculptor or a writer, she was encouraged by Athole Hay, the young Registrar of the RCA, to set up a small company in 1935 to sell a mixture of traditional and modern designs for domestic objects. Ravilious fitted naturally into this enterprise, which he had failed to do in the context of either the Room and Book or the Harrods initiatives. She was managing director, while Hay was her business partner, providing contacts with students who might be able to offer work for sale in their showroom, called Dunbar Hay. The purpose was to show 'objects of applied art which in the ordinary way it might be difficult to market'.

Ravilious's result was to have a clientele, initially in consequence of the Museum and then a site in Albemarle Street, the showroom was halfway between a gallery and a shop and was intended to suit the many people who 'are not art galleries, but are the art stores'.



a doll's house effect (1938, Plate 158), a perfect emblem of the playful, rather retrospective quality of the project. Athole Hay died suddenly in 1937, but the shop continued until the start of the war, when Kilburn married the Earl of Sempill, heir to an ancient Scottish title and to Craigievar Castle.

As a business run by an 'insider' to the art movements of the time and offering the public a share in this elite taste, Dunbar Hay resembled the Little Gallery in Harriet Street, off Sloane Street, run by another friend of Ravilious and his circle, Muriel Rose. However, while the Little Gallery was primarily a craft gallery, showing furniture, textiles and ceramics, Dunbar Hay's intention was to make small production runs in order to try out designs that would then be made available to all retailers if there was a demand. It was an attempt to become the missing link between the designer and the market, taking the risk of production and display in order to disprove the standard commercial response that there would be no

158. Trade card for Dunbar Hay Ltd, 1938
Wood engraving
12 x 21.7 cm (4 3/4 x 8 in)

159. Chairs for Dunbar Hay Ltd,
1936
Mahogany
Height 87.5 cm (34½ in)



demand for new design ideas. In the short lifespan of the business, the aim of launching new products remained more a dream than a reality. The shop needed to be stocked in the meantime, and in some ways the most creative and original aspect of Dunbar Hay was the sourcing of existing products that were brought together to create a distinctive look from the past. Finding a cupboard of undecorated white Wedgwood ware at its Etruria factory in Stoke-on-Trent, Kilburn ordered a supply, and Copeland china was also bought in plain form. In the case of Worcester wares, which Kilburn thought had been ‘murdered by modern decoration of the wrong kind’, a simpler eighteenth-century blue transfer print was applied.²¹² Another staple was Wedgwood’s ‘Napoleon Ivy’ pattern.

The idea was current that while the country was apparently agonising about ‘How to go Modern and be British’, in Nash’s words of 1932, it was heir to an undercover residuum of unconsciously Modernist vernacular industrial design, including items such as sporting equipment, menswear, shoes and undecorated Wedgwood ware.²¹³ The latter made an appearance in the ur-text of this proposition, Steen Eiler Rasmussen’s Copenhagen exhibition catalogue, *Britisk Brugskunst*, of 1933, and again on the cover of Nikolaus Pevsner’s book,

An Inquiry into Industrial Art in England, 1937. Products such as the sporting goods and leather luggage prominently displayed in the Pavilion of the United Kingdom at the Paris exhibition of 1937 – and shown in front of painted backgrounds by Ravilious (Plates 24, 25), Bawden and John Nash – reinforced the proposition, and were among Britain’s strongest exports to France.

Some of the Foley designs shown at Harrods were stocked by Dunbar Hay, but not the plain-coloured Wedgwood wares by Keith Murray, which Kilburn disliked despite their being fashionable as a softer form of Modernism. As Kilburn recalled in a talk in 1979, Ravilious ‘could and would design anything and was immensely interested in Dunbar Hay and our ideals’. He was paid a small retaining fee, and in 1936 designed the only furniture made for the firm, a mahogany dining table and set of chairs (Plate 159) in a style reminiscent of the newly fashionable Regency period. The designs betray the inexperience of an artist used to designing in two dimensions, with a rather clumsy junction between the arms and the seat on the carver chairs, but the inlaid decoration of stringing lines and stars on the back rails and the seat front is a touch that identifies Ravilious as the designer. The table, with straight sides but curved corners, was intended to allow up to six diners to sit with

table legs getting in their way. One surviving set is in the V&A collection having been exhibited in the Pavilion of the United Kingdom in Paris in 1937. Another, used by Kilburn in her London flat, was destroyed by bombing, and not many more were made. Some of the chairs had horsehair seats, while some were supplied to Ravilious's RCA friend Beryl Sinclair with seat covers in a printed fabric by Enid Marx.

Ralph Edwards, an expert on historic British furniture, included Ravilious's pieces in a review in *Country Life*, tracing the history of artists' involvement with design. He saw Modernism as an unprecedented break with the past, one which he felt had 'failed conspicuously to produce any characteristic and satisfying forms'. While referring to the 'painful memory' of the 1935 Royal Academy Exhibition of British Art in Industry, he felt that the answer must lie in new designs based on some version of the 'modern traditional'. Ravilious's chairs and table answered the description and escaped the 'evil fashion for "stunt" furniture of all kinds'. Taking his idea from Thomas Sheraton, Ravilious had 'succeeded in transforming a familiar model into something new and personal'. The decorative details gave them 'a touch of style which we are denied in the uncouth objects commonly offered us as chairs ... the whole set is well bred and does not scream for attention: moreover it is impeccably made'.²¹⁴

The neo-Regency character was part of a longer arc of revivalism since 1900, often initiated by artists who matched small spending ability to an originality of vision by moving ahead of the curve of collecting taste. By the 1930s, 'Vogue Regency', as the cartoonist and critic Osbert Lancaster termed it, was a standard style for upper middle-class apartments. Ravilious drew a carpet design for Dunbar Hay, in which he seems perilously close to a kind of pastel-coloured prettiness that his other designs manage to avoid. He was closer to his usual puckish form

with another drawing, part of a scheme to commission designs for needlework started by Lucy Norton, one of Cecilia Dunbar Kilburn's group of artist-designers who specialised in textiles. Norton wrote to him, 'would you be prepared to substitute "butter" or sugar for the cigarette ends and matches in the shell on the right? ... Of course this is a point where the artist must dictate, but will you give it your consideration?'²¹⁵ The project fell through because of the war, when Dunbar Hay shut up shop.

Wedgwood: 'genuine decoration in our age'

Cecilia Dunbar Kilburn and Noel Carrington both claimed to have put Ravilious in touch with the Wedgwood firm in 1936 and their two accounts do not necessarily contradict each other. Kilburn recalled that she introduced him to Tom Wedgwood while Carrington's account is more detailed, starting with a conversation with Tom's cousin, Josiah Wedgwood V (1899–1968), complimenting him on his new shapes (probably those designed by Keith Murray), but saying that 'in decoration and pattern his contemporary wares made a poor showing compared to those of a hundred years ago'.²¹⁶ Visiting their works on a later occasion, Carrington 'noticed several old, and obviously highly skilled, engravers at work on copper plates'. As a printer, he added, he was immediately interested in their work. He regretted that the engravers only copied old prints for the American market, and thinking of the charm of old transfer ware, often combined with pink lustre, he suggested to Wedgwood that, 'this method of illustration was capable of revival in the hands of one of our living artists who knew how to engrave. I knew Ravilious would thoroughly enjoy mastering a new technique'.²¹⁷

The appointment of Josiah Wedgwood V as Managing Director in 1930 coincided with the entry of several other younger members of the family into management

CL 6203. Mug 4169 shape. CORONATION design by E. Ravillious printed in Ordinary Sepia, 4"19 Turquoise band and 2"19 yellow painting.

CL 6203

160. Coronation mug
for King George VI, 1937
Reference proof of engraving
for transfer print with hand-
colouring
Wedgwood Museum



positions at a time when Wedgwood's sales were dropping. A large exhibition of the company's history and recent work at the V&A in 1930 helped to promote the company, as did the appointment of the painter Sir Charles Holmes, a former director of the National Gallery, as artistic adviser. Tradition weighed upon the firm, so that *The Times* commented that, 'Wedgwood has checked the freedom of English pottery, and ... after 200 years the firm bearing his name is working towards freedom again.'²¹⁸ Keith Murray started working for Wedgwood in 1932 on a fee based on two months' work per year, and

in 1934 Victor Skellern, who had known Ravillious at the RCA, became Art Director.

The first mention in Ravillious's letters of his work for Wedgwood came in May 1936, when he seems to have been preparing a range of ideas. 'I shall love doing this job,' he wrote.²¹⁹ At the end of the month, he made his first trip to the factory in Stoke-on-Trent, followed by others in the months that followed. In July, he wrote:

Josiah seemed to like the designs and will produce them – the better ones, so you may look



forward to a Coronation Mug I think ... This job may, just possibly, be really a good one and produce some results: unlike the glass, J.W. is nice, intelligent, a fusion of the business man and the man of taste and all that, and I liked him a lot.

On an extended stay in August, Ravilious was shown round the Wedgwood factory at Etruria. 'The family think our beautiful designs above the heads of their public and that to begin with something should be done safer and more understandable', he wrote to Helen Binyon. Although he wanted them to take a risk, they persisted in their request to make more designs suitable for all the market. The Coronation mug (1936, Plates 160, 161) commission was pursued, however. The painter Dame Laura Knight had already produced one for a rival firm, Mott & Son, an overcrowded design lithographed in several colours, 'bloody beyond all description', as Ravilious said, but was assured that it would sell in large numbers. He was enthusiastic about 'Old Josiah's own pottery, describing them as 'the most perfect pottery I have ever seen in any miller here because they have the most appeal to me. I believe we are the only

designers the firm have had and it is a pity I can't raise up his ghost to help along my argument.'²²¹

Ravilious wanted Wedgwood to take risks not only with his designs but with other potential artists. He wrote to Helen Binyon:

All this job needs is tactful persuasion and some propaganda in the London shops ... But it will mean far more time and patience than I thought necessary at first and visits to Stoke every month or so. I must either give up the job or do it pretty thoroughly – and with a tactful bullying of the Wedgwood family and their travellers – at the moment their factory could be doing good pottery and they seem too timid to give it a trial.²²²

The use of engraved transfers, as indicated in Noel Carrington's account, seems to have been taken for granted. In this technique, a copper plate is engraved and for each item of decoration, a separate print is pulled from the plate on special paper which is applied to the piece after the biscuit firing and before the glaze and any colouring are added. The paper burns away in the firing, leaving the image which is glazed and coloured. The

161. Coronation mugs by Wedgwood (Queen's Ware)
Left to right: George VI, Edward VIII, variant body and print for George VI
Height 11.3 cm (4½ in)

medium allows for fine, precise, line work and stippled shadow, and its constraints are likely to lead a designer towards an effect resembling earlier work done with this technique. Wedgwood and Spode seem to have discovered the technique at much the same time in the second half of the eighteenth century as a cheaper alternative to elaborate hand-painting. After 1800, it gained wide currency at various levels of production, with a great variety of imagery, frequently used as an overall pattern in blue, typical of Spode ware, but also in the form of vignettes of classical or contemporary scenes and subjects. It is not surprising that Ravilious, with so much experience of compressing visual ideas into wood-engraved vignettes, should have found this an effective way of designing and a better outlet for his talents than the glass designs.

With only one exception, the shapes used by Ravilious were taken from stock patterns, some of them long established, others introduced more recently by Victor Skellern and his colleague, Norman Wilson, among them the pint-mug shape used for the Coronation design and subsequent items. Most of the pieces were made in earthenware, which gives them a feeling of everyday normality. The commemorative pieces such as the Coronation mug were in Queen's Ware, which is a refinement of earthenware in a cream colour. Only after the war were some of the designs reissued in bone china, which is rather chilly and brittle-feeling by contrast.

Reviving the transfer technique was a mildly subversive undertaking, since its later and cheaper stages, using lithographic prints rather than the finer quality engravings, had long been condemned on grounds of taste. Hand-painting, used for the Harrods exhibition, was more expensive per piece but more affordable than the high initial investment needed for making plates for printing transfers, and had therefore been more common for experimental designs.²²³ Ravilious's transfer ware

needed the fine detail that only transfers could provide but usually included applied colour, partly in order to make work for the paintresses in the factory.

When thinking about his first designs in 1936, Ravilious proposed some dinner services with decorative borders similar to the original Josiah Wedgwood's Queen's Ware, with its variety of transfer decoration on standard shapes in the 1770s. Some of the new designs were based on the engravings of leaves for Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne* (1789), while others were drawn as repeat pattern borders with typical abstract motifs. One appears to use shapes cut out of Tirzah's marbled papers, while another consists of spiralling ears of corn. They have the same springy quality as their eighteenth-century precursors, but it is not hard to see how far they are from the more sentimental taste of their time, when hand-painting was seen as the main means of creating a higher-value 'artistic' product, as shown in the *Modern Art for the Table* exhibition. Indeed, while Wedgwood produced more of Ravilious's designs than those of any other contemporary, they were never outstandingly successful commercially.

The Coronation mug was originally intended for King Edward VIII who reigned for less than a whole year in 1936 before being forced to choose between marrying Mrs Simpson and abdicating. The drawing of the design has the date 1936, although the proclamation on 29 May 1936 set the coronation date as 12 May 1937, and so the manufactured pieces carry the year 1937. Mrs Simpson herself came into Dunbar Hay to buy one. After the abdication, the mug design was altered to include the letter 'G' for George VI and reissued (Plate 161). It was issued again in 1953 for Queen Elizabeth II.

Pieces of this type were made at many points in the history of ceramics but often not intended for use. The mug is too big for easy drinking, although the provision of a handle is still important for giving it a sense of

direction – the handle is normally displayed facing right, as if it were ready to be picked up in the right hand, so that the surface has a front and back. The broad cylinder shape was a good surface for decoration, with an upper zone like the sky where simplified shapes of fireworks, suggesting sheaves of wheat on the front half, are touched with hand-colouring in 'egg yellow'. The band of colour across the lower half (light blue for Edward VIII, green for George VI and pink for Elizabeth II) unifies the design with the enjoyably primitive aspect of the heads of the lion and unicorn in the Royal Arms projecting upwards into the 'sky'. The letterforms are typical Ravilious inventions, the numerals having the character of ribbons. The stippling, suggesting a night sky behind the fireworks, was roughly drawn in pencil and left to the engraver to interpret into a combination of fine dots and stronger mottled markings, similar to those in the sky of the *Newhaven Harbour* lithograph (1937, Plate 67). Presumably the finer detail of craftsmanship such as this was determined during Ravilious's visits to the factory. As Victor Skellern recalled, Ravilious wanted a single engraver delegated to his work, but this was not workshop practice, and Skellern actually had all ten craftsmen work on a single design, sending it to Ravilious without telling him. Thinking his wishes had been complied with, he expressed satisfaction and, when the truth was revealed, 'he took this very well, and remarked, "I will never argue about the Wedgwood engraving any more, these chaps are without doubt the finest engravers I have ever met"''.²²⁴ A monogram of crown and initials is placed inside the mug near the rim.

The character of the design could hardly be further removed from Laura Knight's rival coronation design, although both share the Royal Arms. It is economical in its use of line and colour, with a strong awareness of the blank spaces as contributors to the rhythm of the design. The decision to make the lion and unicorn silhouettes

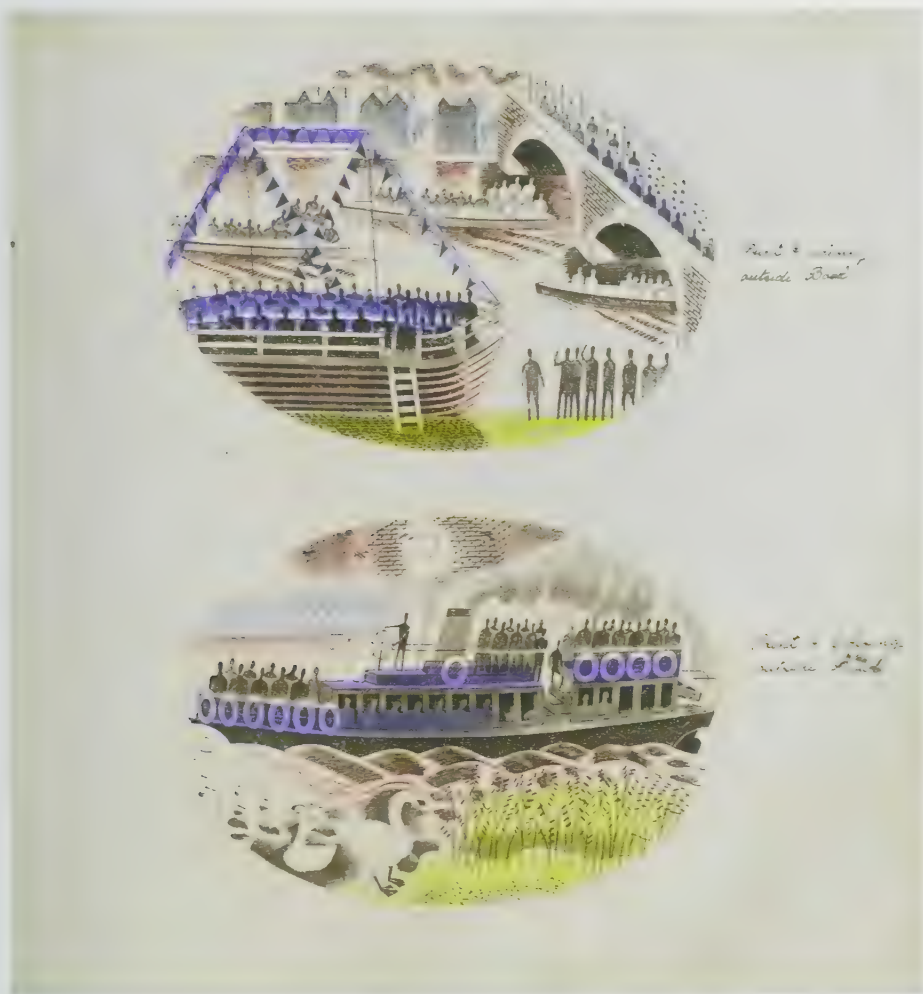
and eliminate all other heraldic detail is bold. The general sense of celebration is the same as the 1937 Paris exhibition catalogue cover (Plate 60), achieved by simple graphic means.

The George VI mug was also made in limited numbers on a pink body with a blue transfer, lacking the added colour. This was admired at a friend's house by the collector H.S. (Jim) Ede, who wrote to Ravilious hoping that one could be obtained for him from the company, although he knew that Ravilious disliked it and had his own reservations. 'It had a transfer look (bad printing!) which lay on the surface and embellished the shape! ... The blue and white (and yellow),' wrote this austere aesthete, 'is too boisterous – makes too much noise in a small house.'²²⁵

The theme of celebration continued with the Boat Race Day bowl (Plates 162 to 165), commissioned by



162. Boat Race Day, 1938
Reference proof of engraving
for transfer print with hand-
colouring for central inside
image
Wedgwood Museum



ABOVE:

163. Boat Race Day, 1938
Reference proof of engraving
for transfer print with hand-
colouring for two of the
vignettes on outer surface
Wedgwood Museum

TOP RIGHT:

164. Boat Race Day, 1938
Wedgwood Queen's Ware vase
Diameter 26.6 cm / 10 in

MIDDLE AND BOTTOM RIGHT:

165. Boat Race Day, 1938
Wedgwood Queen's Ware bowls
Diameter 30.5 cm / 12 in

Wedgwood and designed in April 1937. It was issued in 1938. The engravings were used on two shapes, one a shallow bowl, with the main image of Piccadilly Circus inside and four smaller scenes around the edge, the other a 'Burslem Vase' shape, with the main scene on the outside. Through all the scenes, the crowds of people are reduced to cut-outs, some passive, some gesticulating, in line with the other forms of graphic simplification that pull the complexity of the real-life scenes into the realm of design by applying naive perspective and just enough detail to counteract the abstraction. In the Piccadilly Circus scene, the familiar elements of traffic revolving around the Eros fountain, backed by illuminated advertising, are sufficiently chaotic to evoke the carnivalesque revels then customary after the spectators of the Oxford and Cambridge boat race, conducted from Putney to Mortlake, made their way to the 'Hub of the Empire'.





When living by the river at Hammersmith, part way along the course, the Ravilioues invited friends to their house for the event, serving tea, coffee and sandwiches. After moving to Essex, Eric returned to attend boat race parties held by their artistic neighbours. The annual race is the first outdoor event of spring in the social calendar, stirring the heart with the light and speed of the eights and their flotilla of motor boats coming behind, the latter making the subject for two of the smaller images. Tirzah wrote of how 'there is something supernaturally exciting about mass enthusiasm' in such gatherings, and how 'Eric always particularly looked forward to that charge of small boats and decorated river steamers which like leashed dogs presses behind the racing boats.'²²⁶ The bowl is of the shape and size traditionally used for mixing punch, and this idea of convivial sharing is well suited to the theme.

The other commemorative piece by Ravilious to be produced was the *Barlaston Mug* (Plate 166), anticipating the bicentenary of the firm in 1940 and its move to a new factory at Barlaston designed by Keith Murray and C.S. White. This was a lithographic transfer, with strong browns and buffs for the brickwork background and the schematic kilns with their classic Wedgwood shapes amid the burning fiery furnaces.²²⁷ Designed but not produced in 1939 was the *London Underground Plate*, marking the five-year project for the extension of the tube system into outer suburbs. The four oval vignettes represent

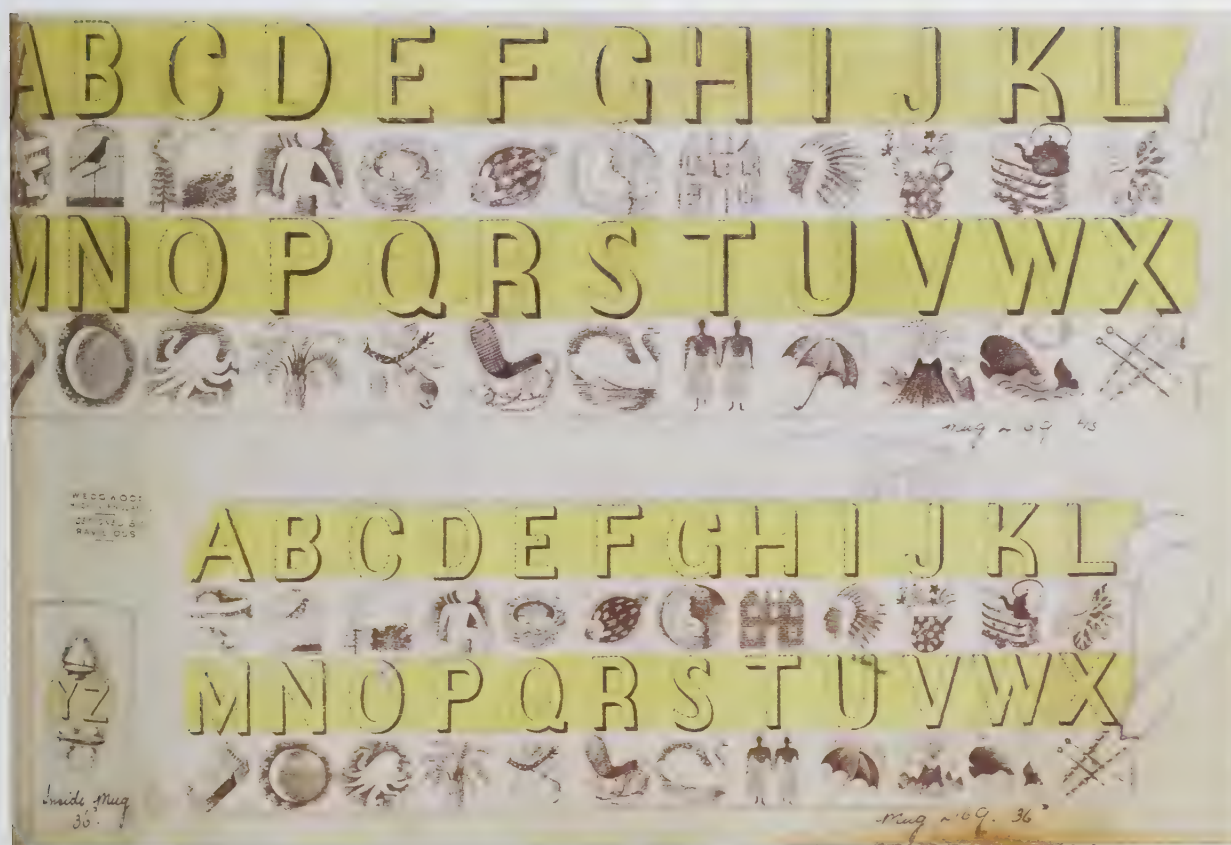


different aspects of Ravilious's pictorial interests, the workers being conveyed up or down the access shaft and those in the tunnel anticipating the submarine lithographs (1941, Plates 75 to 77). The timber framework supporting the workers fixing cable along the track has the quality of a greenhouse interior, while the fourth image of an opening ceremony has something of the boat-race festivity. Heraldic emblems of the four counties spanned by the system fill the spaces between, with the Underground roundel in the centre and sans serif lettering round the rim in the style of the illuminated lettering shop in *High Street* (1938, Plate 72). As usual, he depersonalises the men at work by omitting facial features while making their working environment decorative to an almost exaggerated effect. Had the hopes of his AIA colleagues for socialism in Britain been fully achieved in his lifetime, he would not have made a very compliant social realist or been particularly successful in capturing the heroism of labour.

The *Four Continents bowl* (1939) was another project aborted by the outbreak of war. It was linked to Ravilious's design of cut-out figures for a world map in the British Pavilion at the *World's Fair* in New York. Only a paper collage design exists, an assemblage of emblems, not without some period clichés, but all good humoured, showing Ravilious at work with many animal species. His conventionalisation of shapes into near silhouettes works well in unifying camels and American racing cars.

166. *Barlaston Mug*, 1940
Wedgwood Queen's Ware with
lithographic transfer print
Height 8.2 cm (3 1/4 in)

167. *Persephone*, 1936
Wedgwood Queen's Ware



168. Alphabet mug, 1937
Reference proof of engraving
for transfer print with hand-
coloured background
Height 8.2 cm (3 1/4 in)
Wedgwood Museum

169. Alphabet mug, 1937
Height 8.2 cm (3 1/4 in)
Wedgwood Queen's Ware

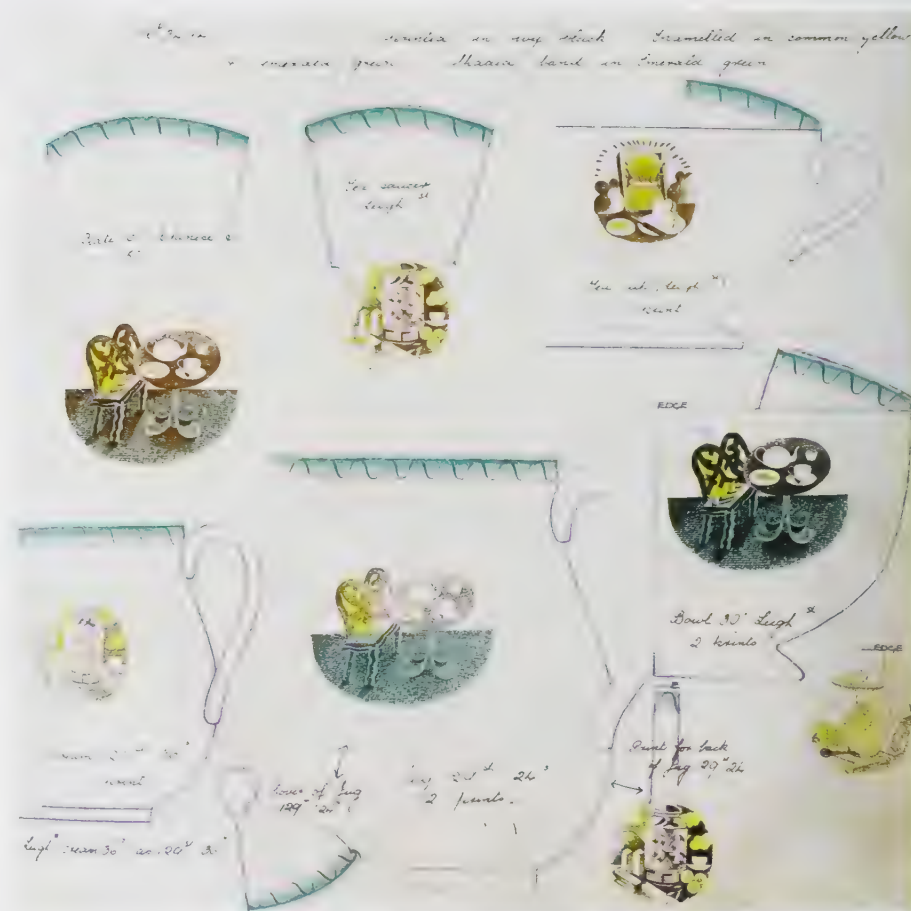
The remainder of Ravilious's Wedgwood pieces were all for use rather than commemoration. He designed three full dinner services, all applied to the same set of shapes. *Persephone* (Plate 167), introduced in December 1936, was the simplest; it is close in character to his first rejected designs with the scrolling pattern of the rim matched to a centrepiece that is used on all the shapes. This shows a rotational pattern of loaves, fishes, a marrow and a cornucopia, derived from the decorative display of food that he drew in the parish church at Castle Hedingham, made for the Harvest Festival, the name originally given to the Wedgwood design. The early examples have coloured bands applied on the rims, although during the war it was issued without colouring, to no great disadvantage. A completely abstract pattern, *Troy*, was introduced early in 1937, but in very small numbers, until an ill-advised 1953 remake in gold joined a coronation issue of *Gold Persephone*.

In 1937, Ravilious's *Alphabet* (Plates 168, 169), a nursery service, was launched, becoming his best known and most frequently reissued design. Was its origin the



recently rejected idea of doing *High Street* in the form of an alphabet, or was this simply a traditional way of designing for children, for whom many delightful transfer-ware pieces were made in the early nineteenth century? Ravilious's set of 26 images for the letters was sophisticated but in no way patronising. The choice for each letter is another conspectus of his mind, recycling some familiar themes such as the diver and the biplane, and adding more such as the whale, the Indian and the bird in its cage. (At his parents' house in Eastbourne in the 1920s, their canary sat on his shoulder while he was engraving.) Each of the images has a quality of centred self-containment. Some are pictograms – the house, for example, seems intended to be read as a letter H, while others, such as the swan, effortlessly achieve the same effect. There seems to be a covert theme of the four elements, with air, fire and water dominating, and earth implied in growing things. The Y and Z, including the then-obsolete Zeppelin of his own childhood, are wittily placed inside the mug, and take sole possession of the egg cup. The mug (in half-pint and pint sizes, the latter being presumably intended for display rather than child use) and the jug are able to carry the whole sequence of letters and images with the letters banded in a choice of colours – yellow, blue, green and pink. The transfer and colours fill the height of the cylinder, although when remade in more recent years the pattern has been shrunk and there is a gap at the top and bottom. The fitting of the upper alphabet band to the vertical rim of the jug is especially satisfying, while the addition of the letters Y and Z to the lower band without images fills the broader diameter. The other pieces in the set, the plate and porringer, take only a selection of images and letters.

In an obituary article focusing on Ravilious's design work and the problem of reinventing a language of decoration after the *tabula rasa* of Modernism, his friend Robert Goodden commented on his fondness for using



alphabets: 'In common with others, he recognised in it a surviving currency of graphic design which still retained appropriateness and meaning and possessed great decorative possibilities.' Ravilious invented rather than copied most of his alphabets, incurring criticism from the typographic expert Robert Harling. For the nursery china, he created a shadowed sans serif not unlike the one designed by Eric Gill, but slightly more condensed in width and engagingly less expert in its details. The use of a pecked outline, unknown in any other typeface, while inconspicuous, provides a slightly sparkling effect. While Goodden thought that most designers had stopped at a threshold of good taste, 'for Ravilious the threshold was there to be crossed. He made repeated expeditions into the enchanted territory which lay beyond, returning again to fascinate our eyes with a gay new version of the alphabet, like a traveller who brings back from a holiday abroad a present of some strange and delightful foreign variety of a thing that we love.'²²⁸

170. Design for *Afternoon Tea*, 1937
Pencil and watercolour
21.2 × 27 cm (8 3/8 × 10 5/8 in)
Private collection, on loan to
Towner, Eastbourne

171. *Garden*, 1938
Wedgwood Queen's Ware

172. *Garden Implements*, 1939
Lemonade set, Wedgwood
Queen's Ware
Jug height 20 cm (7⁷/₈ in)



After *Alphabet*, the sequence continues with *Afternoon Tea* (1937, Plate 170), in bone China with cup and saucer, sugar bowl and milk jug, all appropriately decorated. The preserve jar with its lid and spoon was the only piece for which Ravilious designed the shapes. All were produced in small runs, and only pre-war, but the subject matter is quintessentially Ravilious, reflecting his love of tea-drinking and his other celebrations of it, such as the painting *Tea at Furlongs* (1939, Plate 140). The set was evocative of academic and architect W.R. Lethaby's

selection of the most representative aspects of English life being boy scouting, tennis in flannels and 'simple well-off housekeeping in the country with tea in the garden'. The *Garden* dinner and tea service (1938, Plate 171) uses some similar imagery, each vignette being centred on a tree. Actual scale gives way to charmingly naive evocations of outdoor living, based in part on Clissold and Duffell Tuely's garden, and is poignant in respect to the disruptions of approaching war. *Garden Implements* (1939, Plate 172) continues the theme in a lemonade set with

jug and beakers, touched with pink lustre in trails and solid backgrounds for the vignettes. The nine small close-up vignettes of typical if inconsequential garden details on the back of the jug present what seems to be a child's eye view of things that garden books do not illustrate. The front of the jug and the beaker share the same array of the implements of the title, standing in a wooden barrel in a trophy-like eighteenth-century manner.

Travel (1938, Plate 173) was another dinner service for Wedgwood, not issued until 1952, and then on a grey body with touches of blue opaque colour. Ravilious was in his element with steam trains, yachts, biplanes in the clouds, antique-looking motorbuses, a hot air balloon and even a paddle steamer (reflecting his love of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and desire to travel to the southern United States). It is somehow typical of his refusal to be literal that the smaller plates have no literal rendering of travel, only a scene (redrawn from *The Kynoch Press Note Book*, 1933, Plates 41 to 44) of a group of trees in snow on a little island in a river. The range of images is generous, and the lids of the vegetable dishes and teapots for *Travel* and *Garden* each have four vignettes not found on any of the other pieces in the service.

A Christmas plate, *Noël* (1939), designed for lithography, was another war casualty, although samples were made. Among other unexecuted designs, one dated 1941 for what appears to be a tea service stands out for the romanticism of its moonlit scenes of moths visiting flowers, like some classic of botanical colour-plate printing from Robert John Thornton's *The Temple of Flora* (1799–1807), including a snail on the saucer with a most elaborate shell (Plate 174).

Thus, with some designs that did not pass the paper stage, the Wedgwood catalogue ends. This work was the summation of his design career, even though its commercial success was variable. 'Ravilious items did not sell well,' recalled Norman Wilson, the Wedgwood Works



Manager at the time. 'The individual items were more saleable than the tableware. *Persephone* sold fairly well but *Travel* was a flop. Buyers and customers alike thought the pattern a joke.'²³⁰ Their lack of conformity makes Ravilious's ceramics especially memorable. According to his contemporaries, he was able to break the taboo about decoration that appeared to be a dichotomy between vulgarity and abstract refinement. The V&A curator, W.B. Honey, stressed the Englishness of transfer decoration, and recognised in Ravilious's work something 'essentially creative in the modern manner. It is entirely original, witty

OPPOSITE:
173. *Travel*, 1938
Wedgwood Queen's Ware
Proofs of transfer engravings
produced after 1953
Wedgwood Museum

RIGHT:
174. *Design for Wedgwood tea
service*, c. 1941–2
Dimensions unknown
Private collection



and beautifully decorative, and typical of the kind of engraving I would like to see on English pottery.'²³¹ For Robert Harling too, the Wedgwood wares seemed like the arrival of a long prophesied redemption from an over-reaction against 'austerity of the most chilling kind', represented by 'streamlined trains and vast blocks of flats ... built-in unit furniture in Balham and Bristol'.²³²

The idea that there was a narrow entry point to such a third way between the austere and the kitsch was taken up by Robert Goodden in the obituary article to Ravilious in the *Architectural Review* in December 1943. The introductory paragraph, probably written by Nikolaus Pevsner, to an article in the same issue by Kenneth Clark on 'Ornament in Modern Architecture', speculated on how Ravilious might have got away with being 'frankly and happily ornamental, not laboured, not self-conscious, and contemporary in every line'. Was it the case, the writer wondered, picking up the theme of Clark's article, that 'ornament is still (or again) possible in the flat,

though not in three dimensions? Or it may be that Ravilious's return to the English vernacular instead of the classical and Gothic traditions of antiquarianism and connoisseurship heralds a new kind of ornament.'²³³ The introduction to Goodden's obituary article continued to marvel that it was possible to create decoration in a style that is 'crisp and vigorous, jolly and original, never mannered and always close to earth and human life'. This, as the author wrote, 'is of the greatest promise to anyone hoping for a revival of genuine decoration in our age'.²³⁴

Ravilious's designs, paradoxically even the abstract ones, seem to involve a mixture of form and content, indicating perhaps a language of decorative form linking nature and made objects with which Ravilious had an affinity. This was Robert Goodden's suggestion in his 1943 text, but he also felt that it was hard for an artist's predominantly visual sensibility to translate into the constraints of manufacture. Norman Wilson felt that only a few of the graphic artists and painters whose designs

were trialled at Wedgwood after the war had understood the nature of the problem, and Ravilious's place among them was not assured. Goodden, who trained as an architect but worked mainly as an industrial designer, argued that underlying Ravilious's work was a perception of the action of light, so that this became a factor unifying form and content. This theory explained for him the centrality to Ravilious's formal vocabulary of 'celestial bodies, pyrotechnics, illuminants of every kind ... devices of pure invention ... a conjuring trick which materialises light and makes it tangible, a ribbon of light for ever tied in a decorative knot'.²³⁵

The 1840 Centenary Stamp

Ravilious submitted his first design for a stamp, a £1 special issue for the Postal Union Congress, in 1929, with flying figures in the style of the Morley College murals. The accepted design was an Arts and Crafts George and the Dragon by Harold Nelson. After this he made no further attempts, despite being mentioned by the chairman of the DIA, M.L. Anderson, in a letter to *The Times* written soon after the accession of Edward VIII in 1936. Anderson recommended that more care should be taken with the new issue of stamps than had been the case with those of George V. He argued the importance of stamps as 'daily ambassadors for our art and culture', and suggested that there were 'at the present moment artists who have shown themselves admirably qualified for such work, men like Eric Gill, [John] Farleigh, Freedman or Ravilious to name only a few'.²³⁶

Barnett Freedman had designed the Jubilee stamp in 1935, the first to reflect the new style of graphic art coming from the 'outbreak of talent' generation at the Royal College – but the Edward VIII definitive issue was already in preparation, unimaginatively using a design by the Hugh Cecil Studio. It was based on a design by an 18-year-old, H.J. Brown, who had



taken it upon himself to send in a proposal to the Post Office. Gill and the French-born designer Edmund Dulac were jointly represented in the background decoration and portrait head of the George VI definitive issue, but Ravilious had his moment in 1939 when he was invited, on the recommendation of Robert Harling, to submit a proposal for a commemorative stamp for the centenary of the first postage stamp (the Penny Black) the following year (1939, Plate 175). He was pessimistic about his chance of success, writing to Diana Tuely, 'small chance of their taking the design I think, and besides they give the job to three people'. Presumably Gill and Dulac counted as two of these. 'Official design is awfully difficult and limited,' Ravilious continued with a surprising sense of inadequacy, given his past inventiveness, 'if you can think of an appropriate symbol, let me know'.²³⁷

In his proposal, Ravilious used a motif of paired arched openings. The silhouette head is graded in tone although not in imitation of a bas-relief. The opening representing 1840 cleverly avoids obvious symbols of Victoria or her reign, but employs a little architectural pavilion, looking like the kind of structure put up for the finale of a traditional firework display. The shadowed typeface for the dates is in the spirit of the *Alphabet china* (1937, Plates 168, 169),

ABOVE:

175. Design for stamp for centenary of Penny Post, 1939
Pencil and watercolour
16.8 × 13 cm (6½ × 5½)
British Postal Museum and Archive

OPPOSITE TOP:

176. *Child's Handkerchief*, 1941
Lithograph in two colours of first version of design with additional repeat patterns
44 × 56 cm (17½ × 22 in)
Private collection

OPPOSITE

177. *Child's Handkerchief*, 1941
Lithograph in three colours, printed on cotton
42 × 43 cm (16½ × 16¾ in)
Private collection



and the design feels as if it would read well at the small scale required. The project was cancelled with the start of the war and then revived with the Dulac head paired with a reworking of Queen Victoria's head from the Penny Black. Ravilious's design was presumably too abstract and quirky for the time, and would not have looked out of place in the burgeoning of special stamp issues in the 1960s, alongside the work of David Gentleman.

Design in Wartime

As Wedgwood took Ravilious off its payroll and Leonard Hay closed down 'for the duration' at the beginning of the war, Ravilious's career as a designer was largely replaced by his new job as a war artist. He did, however, get the opportunity to design for textiles through an initiative from the Cotton Board, a voluntary grouping of manufacturers set up in 1940 to promote British goods and exports. The Board employed Gerald Holtom, a young graduate of the RCA, to approach designers. (Holtom was a conscientious objector who later designed the motif for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which became a worldwide symbol for peace.) The first result of Holtom's initiative was an exhibition of textile designs in Manchester in April 1941, with work by Ravilious included alongside that of Paul Nash, Graham Sutherland, Duncan Grant, and others.⁴⁰⁰ It was initially an attempt to persuade manufacturers to employ some of these designers, and to familiarise the designers with manufacturing processes. Holtom knew of a traditional printed textile by lithography, rather than the prevailing roller-printing process, which required much higher initial investment. The lithographic printing allowed for detailed drawing almost as fine as transfer print engraving, and in his design for a child's handkerchief (1941, Plates 176, 177), Holtom combined the graphic design (the post-war trend for abstract design) with a finely worked detail.



The concept revived a tradition of commemorative and novelty handkerchiefs from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The numbers 1–12 are arranged inside a dark opening, each with an appropriate image, in a manner similar to the *Alphabet china* (1937, Plates 168, 169), with horizontal bands of colour through the numerals.

A paper proof of the handkerchief design was printed in black and blue, with two samples of repeat patterns for dress fabrics in the margin of the plate. Adding the tape measure in the form of a collage from a standard design was an inspired borrowing, for its style matches that of the ribbon-like numerals in the main design. It is likely that this blue version was the one exhibited in Manchester along with designs by other artists in the spring of 1941.²³⁹

Like the *Alphabet* design, the selection of the emblems to match the numbers provides pleasure and surprise. Several are echoes of earlier drawings and designs, and the handkerchief might have delighted children had the item ever been produced in quantity. In fact, it seems that only a handful of samples were printed, using yellow as the second colour and removing the textured background.²⁴⁰

Of his pattern designs, Ravilious wrote to Helen Binyon, 'All I seem to do is little clever piddling things – but why do women wear such tiny patterns? It confines the designer to the scale of a threepenny bit.'²⁴¹ More interesting to him, perhaps, was his patriotic handkerchief design (Plate 182), this time an engraving 'for curtains or chintz'. It featured Britannia and lions amid nautical emblems, thereby rolling together elements of his national pavilion catalogues (Plates 60, 61) with aspects of submarine lithographs (Plates 75 to 77) and other items from his repertory – a further step towards making a modern version of 'popular art'. A design with a different character, probably for a furnishing textile, shows buildings at Castle Hedingham as simple silhouettes against darker oval backgrounds (1941, Plate 178),



repeated within a lattice of dotted white lines – suggesting in its stronger colours and bolder forms the character of post-war design rather than the pale delicacy of the 1930s.

There is little doubt that had Ravilious lived longer, he would have remained in demand for similar surface embellishments for everyday objects of the kind he had created in the last ten years of his career. For Osbert Lancaster, writing an obituary tribute in 1942, Ravilious had already turned the direction of taste and influenced a younger generation. 'No one did more to re-establish the old traditional standards in a realm in which the shoddy and the "kitsch", and the debilitated antiquarian had for



so long held the field', he wrote. 'He had already, in a sadly short career, broken new ground and shown the way to an even younger generation, and his influence has been so far-reaching that one part at least of his mission is accomplished.'²⁴² One might question whether Ravilious had anything as conscious as a mission, but he was able to fulfil the expectations set up at the Royal College that artists could be modern in spirit while looking to the past, and could combine fine and applied art without loss of cohesion in their lives.

OPPOSITE:

178. Design for textile showing buildings at Castle Hedingham, 1941

Pencil and watercolour
36 × 28 cm (14 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 11 in)
Private collection

ABOVE:

179. *They Do Not Reach Germany*, 1940–1

Sketch design, possibly for Department of Overseas Trade
Pencil and watercolour
10.5 × 15 cm (4 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 5 $\frac{7}{8}$ in)
Private collection

RIGHT:

180. Design for embroidery for Dunbar Hay, 1939
39.3 × 52.1 cm (15 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ in)
Private collection





LEFT:

181. Engraved design in two colours for curtain or chintz, 1941
Pencil and watercolour
21.6 × 30 cm (8½ × 11¾ in)
Private collection on loan to the Towner, Eastbourne

OPPOSITE:

182. *Industrial Strength since the Last War*, 1940–1
Sketch design, possibly for Department of Overseas Trade
Pencil and watercolour
10.5 × 15 cm (4 × 5⅞ in)
Private collection

'It will depend on the younger generation,' Lancaster concluded, 'to see that this advance is maintained.' Design was promoted effectively after the war through a new network of state support (the Council of Industrial Design), magazines and exhibitions such as *Britain Can Make It* in 1946. Many textile and ceramic designs in the 1950s and 1960s played with a variety of created and 'found' imagery in two dimensions. Ravilious's careful selection of subject combined with a clear and unsentimental graphic style set an example for being charming but resisting kitsch and sentimentality. Vera Lindsay found in 1959 that 'his wraith seemed to preside at half-strength' at Wedgwood twenty years later.²⁴³ Norman Makinson's *Festival of Britain* mug from 1951 could almost be mistaken for his work, although the comment was made in relation to a piece by Richard C. G. Gutt, designer of a 1953 Coronation mug and the

closest to a replacement Ravilious that Wedgwood was able to find.

Mass-market pictorial designs such as Ridgway's *Homemaker* tableware of the 1950s demonstrated how slightly whimsical drawings on plates (in this case showing the most up-to-date furniture and household objects) were an alternative to the plain surfaces associated with Modernism. At Portmeirion Potteries, Susan Williams-Ellis continued the revival of transfer ware during the 1950s and 1960s. She used a mixture of new graphics and historical borrowings (that anticipated and then converged with the pop art spirit) to give a new impetus and a more obviously ironic twist to national imagery.

During the immediate post-war decades, the hopes voiced by Harling, Goodden and others that decoration could have a legitimate role in modern life seemed to have been fulfilled, and their sense that Ravilious was a



significant precursor was similarly justified. Inevitably, this cycle of taste that could be described as a 'George VI style' came to an end. At the Royal College of Art, nostalgic graphics in the college magazine *Ark* by a younger generation such as David Gentleman, taught there by Edward Bawden and John Nash, showed a recognisable continuity with the previous generation. By the end of the 1950s, however, with Len Deighton's introduction of photography into *Ark*'s pages – then considered a major subversion of established values – a revolution had begun. The older work seemed passé and irrelevant as America became the new focus of attention, with its wilder commercial art of comics and advertising.²⁴⁴

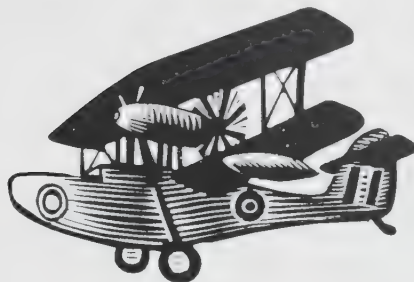
It is fascinating to speculate on what Ravilious might have made of this new world and its imagery. His activity in making scrapbooks and collages from found visual material became important among members of the

Independent Group in the 1950s, especially Eduardo Paolozzi, who also designed printed textiles and patterned ceramics. Meanwhile, Paolozzi's friend and collaborator Nigel Henderson photographed East End shops in London with the same taste for urban vernacular design and display that created *High Street* (1938, Plates 69 to 72). These younger artists shared a fascination with images of all kinds, especially those conveying the power of the childish or primitive eye. Like Ravilious, they discarded the Platonic, pure forms of mainstream Modernism, as celebrated in books such as Herbert Read's *Art and Industry*, in favour of pictures and patterns.

Ravilious's Wedgwood services were put back into production in the 1950s, although the company's policy of selling through restricted outlets may have limited their success in the market.



CHAPTER FIVE



THE WAR THROUGH ARTISTS' EYES 'REFRESHING ACUTELY SEEN VISION'

Becoming a War Artist

The Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, announced the outbreak of war with Germany on Sunday, 3 September 1939. The following day, Sir Kenneth Clark, the Director of the National Gallery, went to call on the Treasury and the scheme that he proposed and chaired, the War Artists' Advisory Committee, first met on 23 November 1939. It took its lead from the similar scheme set up in 1916, with the intention of creating a visual record with potential for work of a high level of imagination while also offering visual artists a salary. The Secretary of the Committee was an artist, E.M.O'R. Dickey, who represented the controlling body, the Ministry of Information, and did an excellent job in helping the different services to work with some of the best artists of the time.

The last three years of Eric Ravilious's life, from February 1940, were largely taken up with working as a war artist (Plate 183). His name came up at the second meeting of the Committee, following on from the Nash brothers, Barnett Freedman and Bawden, who had been strongly recommended on an earlier occasion. In the

same group of names as Ravilious were Piper, Wadsworth, Sutherland, and the brothers Stanley and Gilbert Spencer. In Clark's view, the scheme was as much a way of keeping some of the leading artists away from the dangers of active combat as it was a mechanism for commissioning art. Active service had crossed Ravilious's mind and earlier in the year he had considered joining the Artists' Rifles, but was dissuaded from this by John Nash. The consideration of saving the country's artists from risk of death was largely successful, and there were only three casualties, Ravilious being the first, followed in 1945 by Albert Richards and Ravilious's friend Thomas Hennell.

Clark, a popular and successful director of the National Gallery since 1933, had become increasingly engaged in contemporary British art in the later 1930s. He was antagonistic to abstraction but in favour of the Romantic and national tendencies represented by Piper, Sutherland and Moore, whom he supported as a collector, promoter and friend. The selection of war artists was not entirely in Clark's gift, but it matched his personal preference for artists from a middle ground, neither too



183. Barnett Freedman,
John Nash and Eric Ravilious
in uniform as war artists, 1940
Private collection

influenced by European Modernism nor too conservative. Ravilious was typical of the established yet still relatively young artists selected, although a few with First World War experience, including the Nashes and Muirhead Bone, were also appointed. The nature of the work suited those who also saw themselves at least partially as illustrators. Watercolour and drawing, which in peacetime could contribute to an artist being considered less important than one working in oils, became assets in terms of the relative ease of production without a studio and the portability of materials

Eric Newton, introducing *The War through Artists' Eyes*, a book of reproductions of war artists' work published in 1945, identified qualities in this group that made them suitable for the task:

it is precisely the central quality of British painting that can offer a personal interpretation of the visible world without abandoning the attempt to describe in detail with conscientious accuracy. The British artist, at his best, is fascinated by his subject matter, unlike his French counterpart who regards his subject as a starting-point. The British artist rarely generalises. He stresses his subject's characteristic qualities, yet he imposes his own vision on it.²⁴⁵

Newton went on to single out Ravilious as a demonstration of this point.

A different view was put by Jan Gordon, the author of two of Ravilious's best exhibition reviews, who found

184. *Observers' Post*, 1939
Pencil and watercolour
43 × 57.6 cm (16 7/8 × 22 5/8 in)
Trustees of Cecil Higgins Art
Gallery, Bedford



across all the artists a failure to grasp the emotional quality of conflict:

The pictures are capable and in many ways excellent, but as the collection grows, a conviction becomes increasingly strong that something is lacking from many of them, and that lack seems to be an expression of war consciousness. Every time one goes to the National Gallery saying to oneself, 'Have they yet discovered anybody new who can give us a real feeling that the war is not just a sleek business which an artist can contemplate without his stomach turning within him?'²⁴⁶

Malcolm Yorke identifies 'the dilemma to the artists who felt that they had to decide whether they were there to provide a historical document or to make a good

picture, and very few managed to do both'.²⁴⁷ Within Ravilious's limitations, which were inherent in his technique, the places to which he was allocated and his reluctance to include the human figure, it is possible to claim that he did both. Like several of the other most celebrated war artists, he was able to achieve a sense of continuity with his earlier work. In the same way that the bombing enabled John Piper to depict architecture with theatrical simplification, just as he had begun to do before the war, so Ravilious found landscapes, machinery, coastal subjects and domestic scenes that related strongly to the rest of his body of work. Even his love of painting fireworks was a precursor to his depiction of gunfire. Was he thereby guilty of showing war as 'a sleek business'? His fastidiousness was part of his personality, and it is impossible to imagine him being able to respond to the more stomach-turning aspects of the war, such as the concentration camps, which other artists such as Leslie

Cole, Mervyn Peake and Doris Zinkeisen found predictably traumatic yet attempted to record.

Ravilious's concentration on ports and shipping in the years since 1935 made it particularly appropriate for him to work with the navy. After a year and a half, he was able to focus on aeroplanes, which enabled him to tackle new problems of representing movement and space. We can only speculate on how his approach to landscape could have been permanently altered by this new experience. Bawden, meanwhile, rose to the challenge of painting crowded scenes and portraits in his war art, mainly in North Africa and the Middle East where he travelled with the army.

Lack of people was potentially also a problem with regard to Piper and Sutherland's war paintings. While Piper concentrated on buildings, in town and country, bombed or otherwise, Ravilious tended to make the ships, guns and other hardware of naval warfare his subject, in settings where landscape and light also played a significant part. As with his earlier paintings, a human presence is implied if not always stated. Other artists' greater facility with the figure tended to make their pictures closer to illustration, distracting from the overall quality of design and surface that Ravilious maintained, yet his illustrator's instinct led him to pick subjects that offer clues to various kinds of narrative, allowing the spectator to identify with some situation in the work and feel their way into the scene. Robin Ironside, writing in 1947, called Ravilious's war work 'unimpassioned ... a refreshing, acutely seen vision, in tabloid form, of the smooth performance and neat machinery that we associate with naval activities'.²⁴⁸

Had he not been commissioned as a war artist, Ravilious might have worked in camouflage, as did several of his colleagues on the staff of the RCA. He would almost certainly also have been involved in the 'Recording Britain' scheme, funded by the Pilgrim Trust, which brought topographical watercolours and drawings made

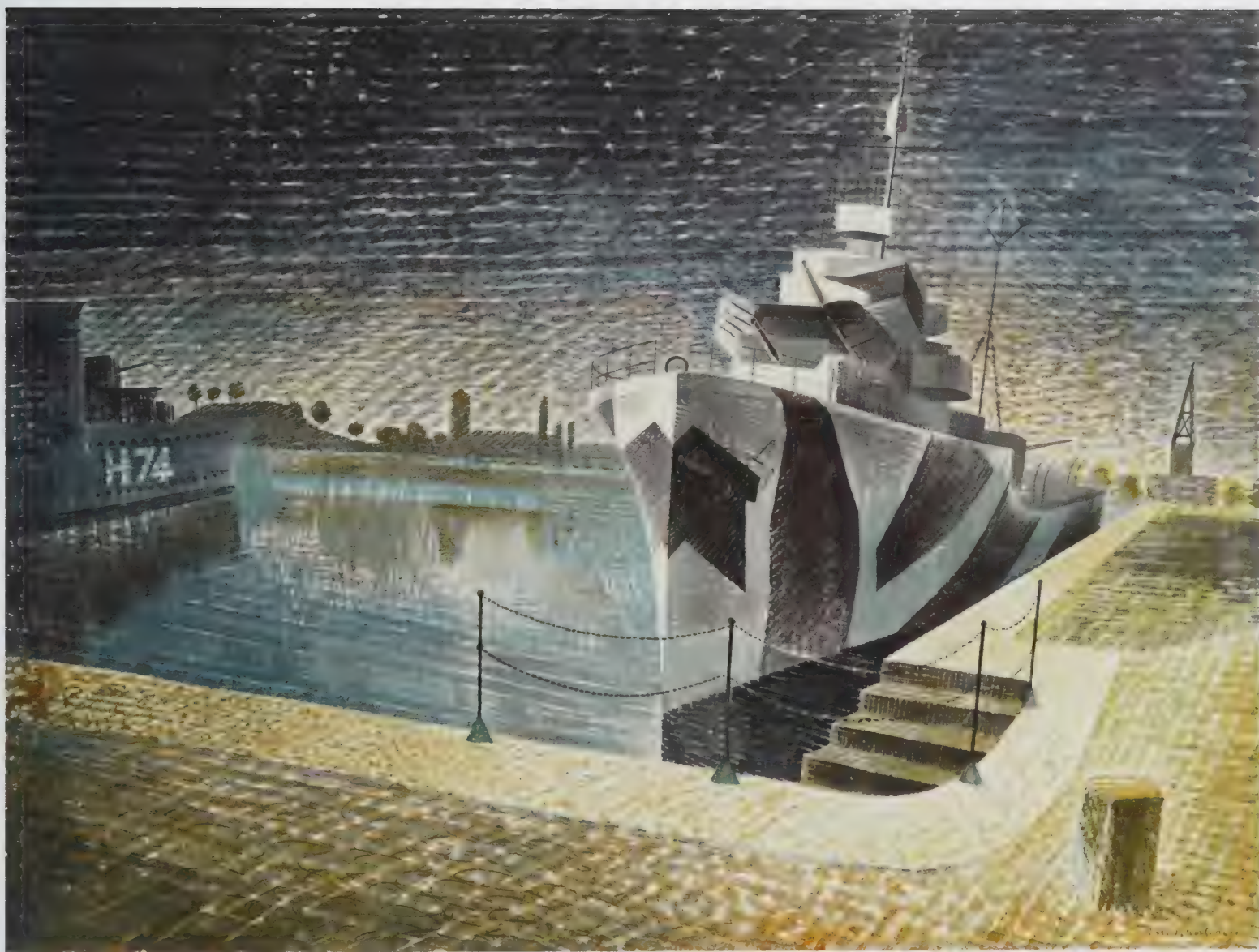


LEFT:
185. Self-portrait as member of
Observer Corps, in a letter to
Helen Binyon, 10 September
1939
East Sussex Record Office

OPPOSITE:
186. *Destroyers at Night*, 1940
Pencil and watercolour
44.9 × 59.1 cm
(17 7/8 × 23 1/4 in)
Canadian War Museum, Ottawa

as a record of the country in a Romantic and antiquarian spirit including the depiction of 'popular art' survivals of the kind Ravilious appreciated. In a sense, his chalk figures, begun after the outbreak of war, were his own personal 'Recording Britain' project, grander in ambition than any of the other paintings produced for the scheme and deliberately aiming to capture the sublime and the homely aspects of this particular form of heritage and national identity.

In the last months of 1939, just prior to becoming a war artist, Ravilious joined the Observer Corps at Castle Hedingham, which involved nights plotting aircraft from a hilltop while wearing tin hats and lifeboatmen's waterproofs. He drew himself 'saving the country' with a cup of tea (Plate 185), while his watercolour (Plate 219) of the interior of the small hut used for brewing up and



storage is a picture of simple but informative details, a microcosm of Englishness under attack with its teapot and enamel mugs. He was able to watch barrage balloons in the dawn light, leaving a record of his sensitivity to light and weather: 'The sunrise this morning was amazing – great bellying clouds at 5 and thin ripped and jagged at about 6 with the church lit up vividly and the tower a lovely pink in a black green surround and then quite a different weather system with blue sky and small white clouds at breakfast time.'²⁴⁹

The Navy Ashore, 1940

Confirmation of Ravilious's appointment reached him on Christmas Eve 1939 and he expressed great excitement in letters to his friends when he and John Nash joined Muirhead Bone as the three artists for the Royal Navy. It was a salaried position (£300 in Ravilious's case, for a term of six months) in addition to which artists were paid for works bought for the War Artists' Advisory Committee scheme. This was the first time in his life that he had been able to paint almost full time, and his rate of production



increased, leading to a more rapid development in technique and a range of new subject matter.

Ravilious's commission as a captain was approved in early February 1940 and although his attachment was to the Royal Navy, his rank was held in the Royal Marines, with the khaki uniform of a war correspondent. The job began with two weeks at Chatham, Kent, during which he fitted himself with some difficulty into the unfamiliar lifestyle of 'Batemanish Admirals and immaculate naval officers, living almost too well'.¹⁵⁰ Chatham and nearby Gillingham provided the opportunity to paint ships in a way that was different only in their shape and purpose to

paintings such as *Yellow Funnel*, from 1939 (Plate 136), and similarly often in the dark, such as *Destroyers at Night* (1940, Plate 186), with its night sky lightening towards the horizon, striated and scored with stars, matched by the similarly textured dockside, against which a camouflaged ship is moored. Two submarines in dry dock, an image adapted later for one of the lithographs (Plate 77), loom into the foreground in another painting, with dark space between the scaffold planks surrounding them.

Ship's Screw on a Railway Truck (1940, Plate 187) is perhaps the most memorable picture from this period. The engraver Gwen Raverat called it 'a devilish design, the

187. *Ship's Screw on a Railway Truck*, 1940
Pencil and watercolour
42.7 × 54 cm (16¾ × 21¼ in)
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford



188. *Dangerous Work at Low Tide*,
1940
Pencil and watercolour
44.5 × 54.6 cm (17½ × 22 in)
Ministry of Defence Art
Collection

screw yellow and wicked against the black sky and winter bushes and white ground'.²⁵¹ The surreal strangeness of the subject is enhanced by the clarity of the depiction, with visual echoes between the curves of the brass propeller, the bare branches and the tyre tracks in the snow. Beneath the dark sky, the scene is not menacing, but still seems on the edge of another reality, capturing the feeling of heightened awareness in the anticipation of real conflict, which Tirzah recalled in her memoirs.

Moving on to Sheerness, the naval dockyard on the Isle of Sheppey downriver from Chatham, Ravilious found a human subject in the 'RMS' or 'Rendering Mines Safe' operations. These involved retrieving a German magnetic mine, dropped by a low-flying aircraft, which was a danger to shipping on oyster beds at nearby Whitstable.²⁵² In *Dangerous Work at Low Tide* (1940, Plate 188), we typically see no faces, but there is tension against the early morning light between those disappearing on the mission into the light, and the support party waiting in the foreground with their casks lashed to oars, ready to float off the mine on the rising tide. Another painting showed a still life of the docks, 'good and lovely Regency buildings almost Venetian in parts, and oh the still-life of buoys, anchors, chains and wreckage', with the artist reminding himself that painting such subjects was not his reason for being there.²⁵³

Barrage balloons gave a pretext for including these aspects. Balloons gave visible evidence of defence activity in the uncertainty of the phony war. They were effective against dive bombers that might have been used to attack and moved too fast for anti-aircraft fire, although they would not provide protection against the high-level bombers responsible for the Blitz. The balloons were also objects likely to appeal to Ravilious for their shape and character. In March 1940, he was taken out in a biting wind to visit the balloon sites in the Thames approaches where they were flown from flat-decked drifters serviced by tugs. *Barrage Balloons at Sea* (1940, Plate 189) is a short-based version of the theme, with three balloons in different stages of their deployment, in the manner of an instructional illustration. *Barrage Balloons Outside a British Port* (1940, Plate 190) shows tugs towing them out into open water, with fine late Georgian dockside buildings of a kind that appealed to J.M. Richards and his colleagues on the *Architectural Review*.

The conditions for outdoor work in the early months of the year were harsh and, lacking other distractions, Ravilious started a variety of subjects, leaving many paintings unfinished. He transferred to Grimsby in April 1940, painting the escort vessels that accompanied trawlers, but high winds continued, and he tried several interiors, including a scene of the bridge of one vessel, 'rather a good design, I think, with a huge figure in the centre', although this was later spoilt and destroyed. Brought down in spirits by the red brick of the town and a vast 'modernistic' hotel, he completed relatively little work, although he brought away notes for future work, including the diver training that featured in the submarine series. One of the finished works, a painting with 'a stabbing red in the foreground', was part of a group of war paintings sunk en route to the United States in August 1942; it is recorded in a photograph.



To the Arctic Circle and Back, 1940

In late May 1940, Ravilious was drawn into the action of the war in Norway. German troops had unexpectedly entered the neutral country the previous month, invading Denmark at the same time to secure the Baltic. The invasion was a serious threat, and British and French troops landed in an attempt to push it back, since Scotland and the Atlantic would be more vulnerable to German attacks by air and sea. On 9 May, however, the German army moved westwards through the Netherlands and Belgium. Although the allied campaign in Norway might have succeeded, it turned into an evacuation in order to make the Allied troops available without delay for the more important front in France.

One of the German objectives was the Norwegian port of Narvik, lying well north of the Arctic Circle, which was the principal outlet for Swedish iron ore. The British initially captured Narvik, but were then forced to use it as one of the exit routes. This was the area to which Ravilious was sent when he joined the destroyer HMS *Highlander*, owing to a contact with the First Lieutenant Richard Rycroft, a neighbour in Castle Hedingham, who invited him to accompany the mission. The movements of the different ships and the rapid changes of objective made for a complex story that spanned a fortnight. It ended with the loss of HMS *Glorious* when attacked by the German battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* on 8 June, by which time the *Highlander* had been detached as escort to the carrier *Ark Royal*.²⁵⁶

Ravilious was able sometimes to work in the captain's cabin and produced eight watercolours resulting from this experience – an astonishingly high level of production in response to the extraordinary sights he was witnessing and his own sense of responsibility to record it. His attitude to what others might have found a terrifying experience of naval combat was insouciant, and on return he wrote, 'It was an exciting month at sea and a lucky escape and when



189. *Barrage Balloons at Sea*, 1940
Pencil and watercolour
45.1 × 54 cm
(17¾ × 21¼ in)
Potteries Museum and Art
Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent

190. *Barrage Balloons Outside a
British Port*, 1940
Pencil and watercolour
43.8 × 54 cm
(17¼ × 21¼ in)
Leeds Museums and Galleries

191 *Passing the Bell Rock*, 1940
Pencil and watercolour
45.1 × 57.2 cm
(17¾ × 22½ in)
Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield



it wasn't rough I enjoyed it a lot, even the bombing which is wonderful fireworks. I managed one gloomy drawing in Norway.'²⁵⁷ The experience seems in fact to have been a form of liberation, and on a brief return to Scapa Flow for refuelling he wrote, 'it is about the first time since the war I've felt any peace of mind or desire to work. It is so remote and lovely in these parts and the excitements from above and below don't interrupt much.'²⁵⁸

The Bell Rock (1940), painted as the *Highlander* worked her way along the Scottish coast, shows his fascination with the wake of a ship in motion, which he was seeing for the first time.²⁵⁹ He wrote 'the wake from a ship like this is very remarkable and I'm trying to do something with it, by day or night'.²⁶⁰ The shape and pattern of the kite-shaped whiteness is fixed against the grey of the sea, with the twin drums for raising the anchor overhanging the stern and forming a geometric focus for the composition. This is one of the first paintings in which he

tried to capture motion, not by a conventional blurring but by fixing the patterns on the surface of the water. He wrote 'one can't keep the edges, and that is apt to spoil the temper', but that problem seems to have been overcome.²⁶¹

Leaving Scapa Flow (1940, Plate 192) marks one of the several departures from the Orkney refuelling base made by the *Highlander* during the months of action; there is a delight in the repetition of the plumes of smoke from the distant ship and the line of camouflaged funnels. The contrast of close-up foreground and background ships became a feature of the paintings on the Norwegian mission. The textures of the painted steel surfaces and the water are explored with different brushstrokes, at times realist and at times bold reductions of form such as the dark inverted V-shape in the foreground of the water.

Being at sea, especially going so far north, provided the excitement for which Ravilious had been waiting. He loved the ship 'so brand new and clean as a pin' with



192. *Leaving Scapa Flow*, 1940
Pencil and watercolour
45.1 × 57.2 cm
(17¾ × 22½ in)
Cartwright Hall, Bradford

193. *HMS Glorious in the Arctic*,
1940
Pencil and watercolour
45 × 56.8 cm (17¾ × 22¾ in)
Imperial War Museum



194. Norway 1940, 1940
Pencil and watercolour
44.4 × 57.1 cm
(17½ × 22½ in)
Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle
Tyne and Wear Museums



chintz curtains in the ward room, and he was at ease with the ship's company. The continuous light of this Arctic otherworld and its barren landscape led him to invoke Edward Lear's 'Jumblies' and their voyage in a sieve:

We have been in the Arctic as high as 70° 30' which I looked up and was delighted to see how far North it was. So I've done drawings of the midnight sun and the hills of the Chankley Bore. I simply loved it, especially the sun. It was so nice working on deck long past midnight in bright sunshine. It never fell below the horizon.²⁶²

In another letter he wrote, 'The seas in the arctic circle are the finest blue you can imagine, an intense cerulean and sometimes almost black: but of course no icebergs.'²⁶³

In *HMS Glorious in the Arctic* (1940, Plate 193) the pale yellow of the sun works into the lattice of strokes in the

blue sky in which planes wheel like birds. The sun sears an Expressionist zigzag shape into the sparkling sea. The elements of the scene are brought together by backlighting, as Ravilious had often done before, and the real drama of the event matches the dramatic lighting effect. The simplicity of open sea, sky and horizon gives the picture a unity and although the two ships are seen in elevation, the quality of space is not flattened owing to the modelling of water and air.

Norway 1940 (1940, Plate 194) is a view from land of a trawler, converted with a gun and moored in a fjord, with another partly sunk beyond. It is a landscape of desolation in some ways (this is the painting Ravilious called 'gloomy'), but the scene is made defiant not only by the historical narrative of a gallant if ultimately unsuccessful attempt to drive back the Germans, but also in its pictorial treatment that seems to hold back the gloom. The shapes lend themselves to broad areas of his



usual speckled and striated working, with the white cloud and snow-scattered mountain making the focus of brightness. The area of shadow beneath the closer boat, defined like a negative halo, represents a new sophistication in the handling of light and shade.

In *Midnight Sun* (1940, Plate 195) redness plays against the dominant blue and features a Paul Nash-like composition of objects. The deck has a depth-charge launching device ready, while the surface is delicately marked with shadow from the mesh at the foot of the mast. In any earlier paintings, Ravilious's

loving attention to detail transforms the mood of the picture, but it is also a painting in which the mysterious light gathers the whole subject together.

Two paintings of HMS Ark Royal in Action (both 1940) show broadside gunfire at night. In one (Plate 196), the tiny planes overhead and the distant convoy are contrasted with the bulk of the carrier itself, with an effect that is indeed similar to fireworks, with the sky arching over the carrier. The treatment of sky and water makes this one of his most technically adventurous paintings, with the whole surface alight with white specks, some created by

195. *Midnight Sun*, 1940
Pencil and watercolour
47 × 59.1 cm
(18½ × 23¼ in)
Tate



196. HMS Ark Royal in
Action 2, 1940
Pencil and watercolour
42.5 × 57.7 cm
(16½ × 22¾ in)
Imperial War Museum

scratching and others apparently by the use of a resist, especially in the left foreground. The other painting, dated 9 June 1940, creates a small human drama with the four crew members looking out towards the action in what is in some ways an awkward composition, but the more real for it, which captures the bow wave of the approaching carrier. If the date refers to the action, then it was only the day after the loss of the *Glorious* and the completion of the evacuation hung in the balance.

In these paintings, Ravilious's longing for remoteness, whiteness and cold appear in the open like

an underground stream. As Peter Davidson made clear in *The Idea of North*, Ravilious's obsession with isolated landscapes and the remote existence they suggest went back much further. He was inspired perhaps by the Arctic explorer Augustine Courtauld, one of his friends in Essex, who had travelled to Greenland in 1930–31 and spent a winter alone in a weather station, receiving the Admiralty Polar Medal at the age of 28. Ravilious owned a volume showing engravings of early Arctic voyages, including people and whale hunts, and even before the war he had planned a trip to Greenland.



197. Coastal Defences 3, 1940
Pencil and watercolour
41.2 × 57.8 cm (16¼ × 22¾ in)
Aberdeen Art Gallery and
Museums

The mission completed, Ravilious returned, with the chance to exhibit this latest work in the first of several war artists' group exhibitions at the National Gallery. The *Manchester Guardian* correspondent singled out his paintings, apparently with approval, as 'queer and creepy'.²⁶⁴ Jan Gordon in the *Observer* judged the show as a whole to fall short of being 'able to convey to the future a sense of the fantastic nightmare of the present'.²⁶⁵

He was next posted to Portsmouth where, despite exhilarating trips in a motor torpedo boat around the Solent with Augustine Courtauld whom he found based at Gosport, he had 'drawn enough sea' and settled into his submarine series (Plates 75 to 77).

When he was summoned to Chatham by the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir Reginald Drax, who was 'in a grand mahogany pulpit with the Pope. I tried to shake him a little.'

The Royal Academician Charles Cundall, whose grand panoramic painting of the Dunkirk evacuation was then on show at the National Gallery, was more representative of Drax's taste, but Ravilious was able to part from him 'on fairly good terms' and return to Portsmouth. There, Admiral Sir William James, the nephew of Sir John Everett Millais and the child model for Bubbles, was more sympathetic. He suggested that Ravilious should go to the familiar territory of Newhaven to paint the coastal defences manned against the imminent threat of invasion.

Passing through Eastbourne, he found a ghost town scarred by bombing and almost empty of people, 'like the ruins of Pompeii'. His own family had gone to Oldham to visit his sister. It would have been outside his war artist's brief to paint it, and it seems typical that, although this scene evidently moved him, he did not record it – evidence of a resistance to putting his deepest emotions into his work. As he wrote later in response to John Piper's

198. *Coastal Defences 2*, 1940
Pencil and watercolour
45.7 × 57.8 cm (18 × 22¾ in)
Museum of New Zealand, Te
Papa Tongarewa, Wellington



paintings of bombed buildings in Bath, 'I don't think I'd care to draw these either, but people who paint devastation have to do this and go on doing it I suppose.'²⁶⁷

Six paintings, one of them lost at sea, were produced during the Newhaven visit from mid-September into October 1940. Ravilious climbed up to the fort, built between 1859 and 1871 against possible invasion by Napoleon III, and painted its ditches and retaining walls perched on the cliffs and overlooking the harbour, where he and Bawden had worked five years earlier. *Coastal Defences 3* (1940, Plate 197) shows the view from the cliffs, with the curve of the mole and its lighthouse, now lined with tank traps, with a section of stonework cut away to prevent its use in a landing. All is apparently serene in the afternoon light. The night painting *Coastal Defences* (1940) is its counterpart, with its searchlight beam and line of motor torpedo boats heading out into the Channel. The sea is painted with broad wet washes, which creates a

contrast with the mottled cliff top and the striated sky.

Coastal Defences 2 (1940, Plate 198) is a view of the fort itself manned with lookouts, flagstaff, searchlight and gun emplacement – it is descriptive but brought into compositional unity with the billowing clouds echoed on the bumpy foreground. Similarly, the single plane flying overhead is matched by birds wheeling around the cliff. Ravilious felt at peace, writing, 'It is marvellous on the cliffs in this weather, though the wind blows a bit, and bombs fall every afternoon, and sometimes planes. One doesn't have to run for shelter as at Portsmouth, so there are less interruptions.'²⁶⁸

The future of his appointment as a war artist was now in doubt. Tirzah reported to her father that 'Eric isn't very sorry because he has really done enough work of that kind.'²⁶⁹ Early in November 1940, his reappointment was confirmed, however, although the turn of the year was taken up with work on the submarine lithographs and

on textile designs. Their third child, Anne, was born at the beginning of April 1941, followed by the move to Ironbridge Farm at Shalford. Between then and July, his main painting task was a series of underground control rooms in Whitehall, recently established under the head of the London Fire Brigade, Commander Aylmer Firebrace. These were separately commissioned by the Ministry of Home Security for a total of just over £54.

The windowless spaces equipped with functional furniture and equipment have something in common with the submarines interiors. The sensibility revealed in the paintings is now familiar from films and art installations from Josef Beuys to the present, but no other war pictures capture what now seems a nostalgic background of dull paint colours, linoleum, varnished desks and filing cabinets, and bare light bulbs in metal shades. Barnett Freedman's *Headquarters Room, Southwick Fort, Portsmouth, June 1944* has the same fittings, but the room is seen in daylight and busy with people who attract attention. Meredith Frampton's portrait of Sir Ernest Gowers, in his role as regional civil defence commissioner for London, shows equipment and maps similar to those depicted by Ravilious, but again these are subsidiary to portraiture and narrative. The most comparable painting is an atypical John Piper, *The Passage to the Control Room, South West Regional Headquarters, Bristol* (1940, Plate 199), another corridor in which stencilled numbers and coloured trunking represent accidental realist adornment rather than Ravilious's quasi-surrealist environment which the disruption of the streets.

No. 1 Map Corridor (1941, Plate 200) shows the receding perspective of a tunnel-like corridor, marked out on the floor by the posts and chains, with maps pasted on the wall. As much detail was eliminated from the scene to create this simplicity. The hanging sign reads 'major' but the rest of the word is obscured, probably, as Ravilious himself suggested, in the unsuccessful hope of



LEFT:
199. John Piper
The Passage to the Control Room,
South West Regional Headquarters,
Bristol, 1940
Oil on panel
76.2 × 50.8 cm (30 × 20 in)
Imperial War Museum

OPPOSITE TOP:
200. *No. 1 Map Corridor*, 1941
Pencil and watercolour
38.8 × 58.4 cm (15¼ × 23 in)
Leeds Museums and Galleries

OPPOSITE BOTTOM:
201. *South Coast Beach*, 1941
Pencil and watercolour
43.2 × 54.6 cm (17 × 21½ in)
Aberdeen Art Gallery and
Museums

avoiding censorship. In the event, the whole series of pictures was classified not to be exhibited during the war. In other pictures, the graphic quality of numbers or chalked up locations play a large part in the subject. The people are mostly turned away from view, rapt in their work. In *No. 3 Teleprinter Room* (1941), items of functional equipment live like church furnishings beneath the timbers supporting the roof, with mysterious and non-realistic lighting from a pair of hanging lamps.

In late July 1941, Ravilious was in Dover in the hands of the army garrison, which he found more sympathetic than the navy, writing, 'I feel a stir in me that it is possible really to like drawing war activities.'²⁷⁰ The German invasion of Russia meant that the invasion of Britain scare was off, and despite poor weather he searched for new subjects. The activities of German guns on the French coast were 'much too small like fireworks in a distant back garden'.²⁷¹ Two beach scenes resulted from this period, reminders of the time when concrete blocks, barbed wire and scaffold poles were a symbolic presence, at least, of



Britain's defensive spirit. They were good subjects for Ravilious, with boats on shingle adding actors to the scene. *South Coast Beach* (1941, Plate 201) shows the lines of repeating framework forms with arabesques of wire, while *Drift Boat* (1941) suggests a confrontation between the safety behind bars and the more dangerous freedom of open water, all toned in grey apart from the bright red and yellow boat.

More coastal defence pictures followed, in which Ravilious tried new ways of portraying gunfire at night, close up and distant. *Firing a 9.2 Inch Gun* (1941, Plate 202) goes furthest in emulating eighteenth-century engravers in seeking a visual equivalent for the plume of light and flame coming from the mouth of the gun, decorative in effect. *Bombing the Channel Ports* (1941, Plate 203) shows distant fire from a cliff road, lined with posts, snaking over the horizon. The painting lacks a fine finish, which suggests that more work was intended. If so, it is no disadvantage. The broader work with colours merged while wet, working against highlights saved with a resist applied



LEFT:

202. *Firing a 9.2 Inch Gun, 1941*

Pencil and watercolour

41.2 × 52.7 cm (16¼ × 20¾ in)

Imperial War Museum

BELOW:

203. *Bombing the Channel Ports, 1941*

1941

Pencil and watercolour

38.7 × 48.8 cm (15¼ × 19¼ in)

Imperial War Museum

OPPOSITE:

204. *Cross Channel Shelling, 1941*

Pencil and watercolour

39.4 × 57.2 cm (15½ × 22½ in)

Whitworth Art Gallery,

Manchester





before the washes, shows a more painterly side of Ravilious with less caution and care for detail. It is impossible to know how much work he did on the site, in this case in the dark, and how much was reconstructed from memory, but the paint here seems to suggest immediacy.

Cross Channel Shelling (1941, Plate 204), probably unfinished, gives a more extreme geometric shape to the light, which is all the more effective in being left white and is used to apply an almost stroboscopic effect to the water. Along with some of the pictures made from aeroplanes in 1942, it reaches out to another possible dimension of Ravilious's work, with abstract form more boldly applied on a large scale.

In October 1941, the Admiralty suggested that Ravilious should go to Rosyth, the naval base on the Firth of Forth. John Nash, no longer a war artist but an

Information Officer with the Royal Navy, was stationed there with his wife Christine, one of Ravilious's most sympathetic women friends. She fed him up and delighted him by her attentions, even going out to buy him cigarettes.²⁷² She noted the typical sounds of a watercolourist at work, a 'pat-pat-pat of texture being laid on, or taken off by some cunning gadget or other', and a sudden dash to the bathroom and a running tap. These are valuable fragments, almost the only written evidence of him at work, and characteristically still secretive. He reported on his alternation of outdoor and studio work: 'I freeze in the docks for about three or four days and then retire here to work indoors.'²⁷³

A visit to the Isle of May, off the Fife coast, delighted him with its bird life and scattering of huts and lighthouses, wooden bird traps for ringing birds and



LEFT:
205. *Convoy Passing an Island*,
1941
Pencil and watercolour
49.5 × 54 cm
(19½ × 21¼ in)
British Council Collection

OPPOSITE:
206. *Morning on the Tarmac*, 1941
Pencil and watercolour
49.5 × 54.6 cm
(19½ × 21½ in)
Imperial War Museum

wrecks off the shore. *Convoy Passing an Island* (1941, Plate 205) is a record of the visit, a carefully detailed picture in which the distant convoy is less important than the foreground with its detail of casks, stone walls and buildings. In the distance is a cross-shaped walled enclosure, made by monks on the island, which he was tempted to make into a picture, but he could find no justification for it in his war artist's brief. The variation of light across the picture, suggesting scudding clouds, is particularly effective

The port of Methil, in Fife, was his next destination in November 1941, in the company of the Nashes. *Convoy Passing an Island* (1941) was one of the resulting works, a

bright scene with the umber beach dotted with footprints and wheel tracks contrasted, like a Piero della Francesca, with the pale blue sea where the ships assemble under barrage balloons.

Amphibious Biplanes, 1941–2

Moving on to Dundee at the end of November 1941, Ravilious became even more pleased with his surroundings amid the Fleet Air Arm. Not only was this branch of the navy less traditional in its attitude and behaviour, but Ravilious was now closer to the actual experience of flying and ready to incorporate it in his art, in which the sky and views from above had often figured.





OPPOSITE:

207. *RNAS Sick Bay, Dundee*, 1941

Pencil and watercolour

48.8 × 54.2 cm

(19¼ × 21⅝ in)

Imperial War Museum

RIGHT:

208. *View from the Rear Hatch of a Walrus*, 1941

Pencil and watercolour

44.2 × 58.6 cm

(17⅜ × 23⅝ in)

Canadian War Museum, Ottawa



As Frances Spalding writes of the views from aloft, 'not only was the scene on the runway shifting and fluid but in the air the absence of verticals and horizontals deprived him of these two traditional supports. All that he could lay hold of in his paintings were clouds, patterned fields and parts of the plane.'²⁷⁴

He particularly delighted in the Walrus amphibious biplanes, mainly used for patrolling and spotting enemy submarines and ships. 'They are comic things with a strong personality like a duck,' he wrote, 'and designed to go slow. You put your head out of the window and it is no more windy than a train.'²⁷⁵

Ravilious painted the Walrus from various angles on runways and slipways. *Morning on the Tarmac* (1941, Plate 206) captures a brief moment of midwinter sunlight reflected in a puddle and seared across the nose of the plane in the foreground, with the aircrew waiting, insubstantial against the light. In *RNAS Sick Bay, Dundee* (Plate 207), he combined elements of previous bedroom

pictures. The neat iron bedstead and the patterned counterpane look like something he might himself have designed. A simple chair spreads some emotional warmth in the pale light, implying a visitor's presence, while the panoramic view from the window of the timber hut offers a tranquil prospect of seaplanes afloat outside. Compared to David Jones and some other interwar artists, Ravilious painted relatively few views through windows, but when he did, as with *Train Landscape* (1939, Plate 142) or *Interior at Furlongs* (1939, Plate 139), the conjunction of inside and outside was such as to give a particular resonance and meaning. The furnishings in *RNAS Sick Bay, Dundee* could not be described as cosy, but the folk-art quality of the counterpane with its exuberant wreath contained in a more severe pattern is particularly affecting in this context. In the sick room, the male body is given emotional respite and tender care, and the vernacular found objects bring gracefulness. The light that enters the room, unimpeded by curtains, is the sort of revelatory



light of a morning's awakening to a clear mind. The white ensign seems exactly right compositionally, forming the apex of a triangle with the chair and bed-head that make the same shape as the triangle in the roof beams above, adding a splash of colour and patriotism. He told Helen Binyon that he thought it 'much the best' of his works shown at the National Gallery in the summer of 1942, adding, no doubt as a double entendre, 'John Piper said to Tirzah – "He's good at beds!"'²⁷⁶

Ravilious was offered a flight in the rear gunner's position in the tail of a Walrus and painted the effect in *View from the Rear Hatch of a Walrus* (1941, Plate 208). Like many of his war paintings, it has an unfinished quality that adds immediacy. In the summer of 1942 he had

more opportunities to paint from the air in *Tiger Moths*, making a small but distinctive series of works in which the emptiness of the scene pushes him towards new effects of space, contrasting the close up details of the plane with the breadth of sky and, in this case, sea. The loose patterning of this background gives an appropriate sense of motion. *View through Propeller* (1942, Plate 209), with the disc of the turning blade and the striped land and sky beyond, is perhaps the most effective pictorial solution to the difficult subject of rapid mechanical motion that prompted the development of Modernism at the beginning of the century that Ravilious had hitherto avoided with his preference for static images and clear outlines.

209. *View through Propeller*, 1942
Pencil and watercolour
43.8 × 58.4 cm (17¼ × 23 in)
Private collection on loan to
Towner, Eastbourne

Flying with the RAF, 1942

Early in 1942, Ravilious was given lunch at Boodle's club ('pure Wodehouse') in St James's, London, by Lord Willoughby de Broke, a group captain in the RAF, to propose that Ravilious should move his attention to the RAF while still ranking as a Marine captain. He declared to E.M.O.'R. Dickey at the War Artists' Advisory Committee, 'I don't want to do any more naval subjects – one must stop at some point', and was prepared to revert to civilian status if necessary.²⁷⁷ This declaration came soon after a notice in the *Observer* by Jan Gordon on new additions to the war art collection at the National Gallery, commenting generally that the war artists were repeating themselves. He characterised Ravilious's lyric rather than heroic gift by writing, 'enough of Ravilious is as good as a feast. To keep him recording the coastal defences is rather like commissioning Herrick to rewrite parts of "Paradise Lost".'²⁷⁸

As a result, the remainder of his war artist activity was almost exclusively associated with planes. At this point, Ravilious hoped to go to Russia where Soviet troops were beginning to push back the German invasion, but that was not allowed. Ireland is mentioned in letters and he was keen to paint Westland Lysander aircraft, small planes designed to work behind enemy lines where they were able to drop and collect agents and rescue aircrew who had evaded capture. A planned posting to Gatwick was cancelled, but after spending most of February 1942 at home in Essex while Tirzah was in hospital for a minor operation, he went to RAF Clifton, near York, where he was immediately taken on a sightseeing flight by the Commanding Officer, 'up and down Yorkshire ... pointing out abbeys and ruins. He promises to take me to Greta Bridge [Cotman's famous subject] and Richmond next time. But it was jolly cold, even with two jumpers and a great coat and a warming parachute.'²⁷⁹ He took sketches back to Essex in March 1942, as Tirzah was urgently required to undergo a mastectomy, the first

manifestation of the cancer from which she died in 1951. In this time of uncertainty, he even tried oil painting again, having been urged by Thomas Hennell to revert to the thin paint he used in the 1920s.²⁸⁰

The next set of paintings included *Lysanders in the Snow* (1942), showing the planes close up with canvas covers held on guy ropes, adding the kind of stringing familiar from Barbara Hepworth sculptures to the machine forms. *Aeroplanes on an Airfield* (1942) widens the angle with wheel tracks diverging on the tarmac and three tents erected to protect the nose and engine of the plane from weather on the runway. While the planes and tents are carefully drawn as ever, the runway, which is partly marked with water-resisting wax crayon, is a demonstration of Ravilious's growing freedom of handling. A small house and trees on the distant skyline bring the scene into a domestic sphere, with a sense of light starting to break through the grey clouds.

His time as a war artist was drawing to a close, though he did not know it. In early May 1942, he was at RAF Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire, for a fortnight. He wrote to Helen Binyon of the problems of his new work: 'Everything is so fluid and shifting and I work in a feverish haste and then dislike the result, or take my time and the subject matter just leaves the field.'²⁸¹ Even planes lost their charm, 'If only aeroplanes weren't so alike and so edgy and tinny.'²⁸² There were compensations apart from the planes themselves, 'The hardships here are just the sort I like, and mean this as you would realise, lovely wooden huts all yellow and green with latrines among the trees ...'²⁸³ One of the easier subjects he found was the mobile pigeon loft (1942, Plate 210) operated by Corporal Steddiford, a man experienced in racing pigeons, from a First World War vehicle, fitted with shelves for the pigeons along each side. The birds were sent out with flying missions and could be released to bring back details of the location of planes that had



LEFT:
210. Corporal Steddiford's Mobile
Pigeon Loft, Sawbridgeworth, 1942
Pencil and watercolour
46.3 × 55.2 cm
(18¼ × 21¾ in)
Whitworth Art Gallery,
Manchester

OPPOSITE:
211. Operations Room, 1942
Pencil and watercolour
50.3 × 55.9 cm (19¾ × 22 in)
Fitzwilliam Museum,
Cambridge

ditched in the English Channel in the hope of an air-sea rescue.²⁸⁴ It was a perfect subject to which Ravilious responded with evident delight, capturing the lively quality of the birds with their red-rimmed eyes standing out from their grey plumage and surroundings. The geometric structure of timber frames recalls the greenhouse paintings (Plates 107 to 109), and the absolute precision with which the wire netting screens are drawn adds to the comic quality, indicating Ravilious's sureness about when to add detail and when to leave it out. The view through the door shows a group of airmen standing on the tarmac receiving a briefing. The painting is faint as if unfinished, but the almost transparent quality of these distant figures prevents them from distracting from the foreground focus.

Operations Room (1942, Plate 211) is another affectionate rendering of a hut, with its fragile shell between the inner and outer worlds, and light spilling on to the ceiling and the chair standing in for a human presence. If Ravilious seems often to have avoided depicting wartime action, he achieved more than any other war artist in capturing the visual quality of ordinary and overlooked settings such as this, with the sense that the people have just walked out of the door. *Breakfast in an RAF Mess, Stringle Hall, Sawbridgeworth, Herts* (1942) is an inhabited structure with a rare effort at portraiture of three rather stiff officers wrapt in their own thoughts.²⁸⁵ Unsurprisingly, the crockery on the table and other details such as the darts board seem to have engaged his interest to a greater degree. The painting probably lacks its





finishing touches but the three-dimensionality of the space is fully realised in the limited colour palette.

Runway Perspective (1942, Plate 212) creates space through a bolder emptiness than before, emphasising the flatness of the landscape while making the most of the ambiguity of cloud shadows and camouflage markings on the ground, with a unique depiction of the Spitfires – the celebrated of all British wartime aircraft – flying

directly above. A tiny figure with a red windsock in the middle distance enhances the emptiness of the space. *Spitfires on a Camouflaged Runway* (1942) is a view downwards, possibly from a control tower, again playing up the ground plane with its markings. 1942 was a 'peak period' for camouflaging air stations, in addition to the creation of dummy airfields with fake planes to divert German bombs away from the real ones.²⁸⁶ Concealment

212. *Runway Perspective*, 1942
Pencil and watercolour
45.7 × 58.4 cm (18 × 23 in)
Imperial War Museum



213. RAF Regiment Ack Ack Post, Sawbridgeworth, 1942
Pencil and watercolour
45.7 × 55.6 cm (18 × 21 7/8 in)
Imperial War Museum

devices such as these were perfect subject matter for Ravilious with his eye for patterns in the natural world. *Dispersal Point in a Wood* (c. 1942) shows Spitfires lurking in rough ground, the detail of the close-up plane giving them an unusual physical presence among the winter brushwood standing out with pale strokes made with wax resist.

Documentary accuracy in some of the war paintings might threaten them with appearing dull, but sometimes

the reality was itself slightly fantastical, as in *RAF Regiment Ack Ack Post, Sawbridgeworth* (1942, Plate 213), where the gunners have tin hats disguised with coloured ribbons, and the ground has been painted in patches and covered with tarpaulins weighed down with bricks that lap over the rim of the sunken gun emplacement. In the 1970s and 1980s, Ian Hamilton Finlay took camouflage as a theme, imagining the machines of war as a variety of

100. The Great War
101. The Great War
102. The Great War
103. The Great War



215. *Hurricanes in Flight*, 1942
Pencil and watercolour
43.2 × 57.2 cm (17 × 22½ in)
Private collection





216. *Boston Bombers in the Sun*,
1942
Pencil and watercolour
44.5 × 54 cm (17½ × 21¼ in)
Canadian War Museum, Ottawa

agricultural objects and drawing out the pathos of their beauty and deadliness, connected with the fragility of nature. He updated a saying of Samuel Coleridge, 'Nature is the Devil in a fancy waistcoat', to become 'Nature is a storm trooper in a camouflage frock.'²⁸⁷ In Ravilious's paintings of 1942, the paradox of decoration derived from the appearance of plant growth and the underlying reality of destruction is similarly apparent.

Ravilious considered the Tiger Moth biplane, used as a trainer plane, 'the perfect plane for drawing'.²⁸⁸ Like the Walrus, it was slow moving, enabling him to show it close to the ground in *Tiger Moth* (1942, Plate 214), where the distinctive yellow underside to the wings is more lemon than gamboge. The watercolour is more lightly applied than usual for a painting that appears to be finished, showing perhaps how the pressure of working against time gave Ravilious the confidence to simplify – evident in the thicket of trees on the left. The camouflage markings on the runway play an important role, and the atmospheric perspective of the bleached out sky creates a convincing sense of open space in the infinitely receding wave markings. *Elementary Flight Training School, Sawbridgeworth, Herts* (1942) is a more detailed depiction in which the yellow wings match what might be dead grass sprayed by the camoufleurs.

Ravilious moved briefly to Westonzoyland in Somerset at the end of June 1942, where he may have painted *Hurricanes in Flight* (1942, Plate 215), which gives a highly believable sense of looking out at cloud level from the body of the plane over the patchwork of fields.²⁸⁹ *Boston Bombers in the Sun* (1942, Plate 216) looks down more closely at the ground surface, including runways less exposed to enemy action, which is lost in mist at the

horizon. The view looks into the light, as it did so often in his earlier work. During this visit, he witnessed a seaplane pilot, one he had talked to and liked, lose control while training and land in the sea. He reported the incident to Helen Binyon when he saw her soon afterwards. She recalled 'I remember him almost shouting "I hate the idea" – of death he must have meant: his own?'²⁹⁰

Back home in Essex, with Tirzah once more in hospital for a further operation, Ravilious was awaiting news about going to Iceland to join the Norwegian Squadron. Following a peaceful British invasion of the island, then a neutral Danish colony, in order to pre-empt a German invasion, the Norwegian Squadron was established in 1941 with Norwegian naval personnel to provide protection for shipping convoys in the North Atlantic. Ravilious hesitated to go on account of Tirzah's fragile state of health, but she encouraged him, knowing his desire 'to paint snow and mountain landscape' in emulation of Francis Towne.²⁹¹ In her autobiography, she wrote, 'this expedition had become to him the promised land'.²⁹² On 26 August 1942, he was at Prestwick near Glasgow for a flight north. He arrived in Reykjavik two days later and ate a luxuriously unrationed lunch before going on to the RAF base at Kaldadarnes, on the coast to the southeast. On 2 September 1942, he flew with an Air Sea Rescue plane, looking for a missing seaplane lost on an operational flight, but his aircraft never returned. It is probable that the engines iced up, which was a recurrent problem.

It was too soon for any paintings to have been begun, although he had already been on a flight 'over mountain country that looks like craters on the moon ... with shadows very dark and striped like leaves'.²⁹³

Posthumous Views

Approaching 40 and conscious of the risks of his war artist life, Ravilious seems to have sensed a turning point, as reported by J.M. Richards with whom he had dinner in London the night before embarking for Iceland. Richards reveals that Ravilious had in some way been unhappy both before and during the war, something that was hardly noticeable on the surface. On that occasion, he:

seemed more tranquil in his mind than he had been throughout the preceding years. Yet I thought I discerned, behind his talk that night, a sense within him that he had come to the end of what he had to do. It may have been no more than a sense of resignation: that he was now content to let events determine the next phase of his life.²⁹⁴

Early in the war, Bawden related a similar account to a mutual friend: 'Eric in his middle twenties spoke of the early thirties as the difficult time and now in his middle thirties he casts an eye upon fifty and the turning point in a painter's life.'²⁹⁵

The critical verdict on Ravilious's war paintings was ambivalent at the time and to some extent has remained so, on the grounds that he appeared to be so emotionally detached from the serious nature of the activities. This may partly have been excused by the limitations on subjects according to where they were stationed and what the censors were likely to pass. Those such as Piper, Moore and Sutherland depicting the Blitz on the civilian home front may have been less constrained. The immediacy of their subject matter, combined with the pathos of damaged buildings, provided an emotional heightening that was less easily found in most of the situations that Ravilious observed, in which the enemy was far away, leaving only the routines of life and the

pleasure of machinery and austere masculine interiors. Only in the two paintings of the HMS Ark Royal in Action (1940, Plate 196) does actual combat appear. The rest is preparation and waiting.²⁹⁶

Writing in the catalogue of a touring exhibition of war paintings organised by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1941, Herbert Read separated the illustrators (Edward Ardizzone, Feliks Topolski, John Worsley and Anthony Gross) from others who 'begin from the reality which is the war and try to achieve a new order of reality or vision'. In the second category he placed Ravilious, but in his opinion, 'though he has painted pictures which are as aesthetically satisfying as any in the exhibition, [he] has not told us anything of particular value about the war'. For Read, Paul Nash's pictures of aircraft achieved this desired effect, where 'the machine which is most typical of the war is animated, is made into a monstrous bird threatening humanity from the skies'.²⁹⁷ It seems that Read, like Jan Gordon and other critics, expected a greater dramatisation such as Nash could provide, even though Ravilious's work suffered more from the censors. Like Nash, Ravilious found his best wartime subjects in the sky rather than the sea, but had little more than a year in which to work on them. Using titles such as *Totes Meer* (German for 'dead sea') for his painting of a dump for shot-down Messerschmitts near Cowley, Nash was able to add a symbolic dimension that would have been alien to Ravilious's unpretentious character. His fastidious nature held him back from wishing to paint bombed Eastbourne. At times he seems like the boy who set out to learn fear in the Brothers Grimm story, until he paid for the lesson with his life in the final fatal flight from Iceland.

The people in Ravilious's close circle of friends were understandably shocked by his loss, even at a time when fate could strike in so many ways. Edward Bawden wrote to Tirzah, 'There was no one whose opinion I valued more

highly than his, no one I know or have known seems to possess what he had, an almost flawless taste, that & our long friendship which commenced on the first day each of us entered Sth Kensington produced I think by habit & intimacy an understanding of each other that went deeper than with anyone else.²⁹⁸

Thomas Hennell wrote of 'the perfect care and thoughtfulness of his friendship, so free and natural in him, which make it like his art, gradual and lasting in its effects'. He also remarked on the development of Ravilious's style in the final years:

Last Friday I was looking again at his war drawings, and with increased admiration at the development of his vision & feeling for space and light. Those railway pictures at Heddingham, the bonfire and the lighthouse, were so clearly a preparation for them. They seemed fluent + brilliant then, but in the light of those sea pictures, slow and difficult. And the effort of the later drawings must have been greater.²⁹⁹

As Chairman of the War Artists' Advisory Committee, Kenneth Clark wrote:

It is a terrible tragedy for English art: your husband had a unique place as an artist + designer. But at present I can only think of what you must be feeling at having lost such a gentle, loveable & beautiful human being. The War Artists' scheme is infinitely beholden to him. His were the first good works the scheme produced, & his last watercolours were better still.³⁰⁰

The March 1943 issue of the *Artist* carried an article by Richard Seddon, part of a series for which Ravilious had provided information the previous summer. The

profile emphasised Englishness in terms of a relationship to national tradition and a rejection of a French style of working, which Seddon felt had demonstrated England's importance in the past (before the Impressionists) and, shortly before the war, was beginning to do so again. He admired the balance of interests in Ravilious's work between form and content, and his ability to keep a fresh eye without repeating himself.

The *Times* obituary did not appear until 21 May 1943. It recorded that Ravilious 'was a typically English artist with a strong illustrative bent, happier in line than in mass, fond of detail, and slightly prim and stiff in style'.³⁰¹ Osbert Lancaster, in the *Observer*, felt that 'the disappearance of this young and gifted artist does inflict a blow which must inevitably impoverish us artistically'.³⁰²

In the midst of war, Ravilious's friends had to keep their sadness largely to themselves. In 1947, Robert Harling's book on the wood engravings appeared in the series of *Ariel Books on the Arts*, giving ready access to succeeding generations of artists to the core of his work in this medium, with a lively text. A memorial exhibition was organised by the Arts Council in 1948 and toured, with a short catalogue essay by J.M. Richards, but also marked the beginning of a longer gap before much of his work was seen again.





CONCLUSION

ENGLISH EDEN WITH 'A BITING EDGE'

Ravilious has become more popular in the early twentieth-first century than he ever was in his lifetime. His ability to stir a particular kind of emotion was already evident in 1940, when one of his paintings was shown in a mixed exhibition of contemporary English art at Mansfield, at which a number of schoolchildren were asked to pick the paintings they liked best and least. Ravilious gained the highest score with 233 'like' votes and only 7 'dislikes.' As the critic Jan Gordon commented, 'the majority votes in favour can still be traced back chiefly to subject interest, while those in disfavour show the childish revolt from abstruseness either technical ([Ian] Fairweather and [David] Jones), intellectual ([Ben] Nicholson) or emotional ([Graham] Sutherland and [Ivon] Hitchens'.³⁰³ On this basis, Ravilious's popularity might then be attributable to a lack of challenging or worrying features in his work. If there were no more to it than that, he would enjoy the same status as accomplished but slightly predictable artist contemporaries, such as Rowland Hilder or S.R. Badmin, who are associated with nostalgic views of the English countryside. As it is, time has shown that he

has qualities of a different order and a greater claim to be considered among the significant artists of his time. Ravilious is integral to certain wider considerations about the strengths and weaknesses of British art running through time, but especially in relation to his own period.

One of the first questions concerns his relationship to Modernism. He did not, like John Piper, go through a passage of abstraction, nor did he seek public association with English representatives of the avant-garde between the wars, as did Paul Nash. Modernism seems to have happened almost unnoticed by Ravilious, as if in another room. It would certainly have been interesting if he had recorded an opinion about it, given that Helen Binyon's sister, Nicolette Gray, was one of the pioneer exhibition organisers for British abstract artists, while he talked enough to Myfanwy Piper during the years 1935–7, when she was editing *Axis* magazine, to know about her struggle with the rights and wrongs of the stricter adherence to abstraction.

Ravilious shared the middle of the road with many other artists; as Mary Chamot wrote in 1937, 'in general, English painters have followed a fairly balanced course, avoiding extremes of abstraction or Surrealism, though

many of them have adopted something from these tendencies to serve their own ends'.³⁰⁴ Apart from the Modernist side of the road, there was another side populated by artists of his generation who were decidedly more conservative than him. A middle way, however popular it may be, is not necessarily an easy one from which to rise to a high level but posterity has judged that he was able to achieve popularity without losing what Marina Vaizey in 1987 called 'a biting edge that lifts it beyond mere charm'.³⁰⁵

Had he lived into the post-war period, perhaps going back to teach in an art school, Ravilious would have been confronted with a more insistent challenge from Modernism which might have pushed him towards a more pronounced form of expression or some form of abstraction. It was not a challenge to which all his contemporaries responded, although it may have worried them. Edward Bawden's work changed character in the 1950s, his topographical subjects often becoming less colourful and darker in tone, and it is possible to imagine Ravilious making a similar change. His influence can be seen in artists such as Barbara Jones and Kenneth Rowntree (Plate 217), and their choices show the possible directions he could have taken. Jones hardly acknowledged Modernism and concentrated increasingly on the content of her subjects. Rowntree made a sincere attempt to become an abstract painter, although not one who was received with great acclaim. Might Ravilious also have abandoned the comfort of the recognisable subject and set sail on a different ocean, like Victor Pasmore who left behind his pre-war scenes of lamplit interiors and the quiet city and country? We do not know and it is hard to imagine. All we know is that he was worried about getting older and conscious that it would become more difficult to sustain his work.

Technique would imagine Ravilious's intense and sensitive English Surrealists were it not for the prism of



linearity in the lines and flecks of the brush – taking on a life of its own, minimising the role of associational props and letting the complex colour and texture in his painted surfaces carry the whole picture. This was something he approached in *Beachy Head* (1939, Plate 135) and in *The Vale of the White Horse* (1939, Plate 143). It is not impossible to imagine him becoming so adept in this vein as to manage without representation altogether, even if still closely connected to the surface appearance of specific landscapes and places.

Does Ravilious have a place among the surrealists? As Mary Chamot suggested, several of his contemporaries found pleasure to different degrees in strange and incongruous aspects of the observed world. With the exception of the strange model of a hen on a wooden post in front of *Aldeburgh Bathing Machines* (1938, Plate 131), the presence of which may have had some real-life explanation, Ravilious worked only by more subtle hints to suggest strangeness, but this aspect of his paintings has added to his popularity. They are perhaps all the better for the subtlety by which an unseen dimension is indicated, less fanciful than, say, John Armstrong, Tristram Hillier, Christopher Wood or Edward Burra.

In staging his scenes without obviously alien elements, Ravilious gives us no reason to doubt the physical reality of what he depicts, proofing his pictures

217. Kenneth Rowntree
Eric and Tirzah Ravilious, c. 1940
oil on board
16 × 23.5 cm (6¼ × 9¼)
Private collection

218. *Submarine*, c. 1940
from *High Street* 1938
pencil and watercolour
14.5 × 15 cm (5¾ × 6 in)



against the probability that repeated viewing will reduce the power of the incongruous image. Despite the precision of his drawing, the close-up inspection of his surfaces is often as interesting as the subject taken in at first glance.

The prancing figures in the back gardens of *November 5th* (1933, Plate 17) open a door into the part of Ravilious's imagination that is close to surrealism without being part of the movement. This is a world of mythology and symbolism prominent in the engravings of his earlier years and present in the floating figures of the Morley murals. As writers from classical times have told us, these deities and archetypes are present in the world even if usually unseen, and may take shape and alter the course of human affairs. Cycles of weather and the seasons are a background to these openings, given iconographic form in his several sequences of the months. The playful sense of a parallel reality confers significance on the confusion of everyday life. We know of his pleasure in fireworks and festivities, with their implication that ordinary life can be momentarily transfigured, although this was a quality he was better able to put into a design such as the *Boat Race Day* bowl (1938, Plate 165) than any of the topographical paintings with their largely empty rooms and landscapes.

There were still more artists among his contemporaries who took conventional or pastoral

subjects and added their elements of strangeness or symbolism – Charles Mahoney, Evelyn Dunbar, Mildred Eldridge, Carel Weight, Richard Eurich and James Fitton, for example, creating dream locations and peopling them with actors of a more or less disturbing kind. Most of these added more conscious narrative elements. Mahoney, Dunbar and Eldridge are known for their murals with highly detailed backgrounds.³⁰⁶ Eurich and Fitton often painted imaginary panoramas from a high viewpoint, and like *November 5th* they often made the scene nocturnal.³⁰⁷ Ravilious could have continued along their road, as some of his engravings suggest, but as a painter he preferred to sit down in front of a 'motif' and work with what chance had given him. Like a photographer, he went in search of content that would at times be surreal if it were not factual, such as the Westbury White Horse seen from a railway carriage (*Train Landscape*, 1939, Plate 142) or the diving suits in a shop window (*High Street*, 1938, Plate 218). At the same time, even when painting the commonplace, his illustrator's instinct about a subject meant that he avoided the deliberately downbeat realism of the Euston Road School painters such as Graham Bell and William Coldstream.

Ravilious has several things in common with Christopher Wood (1901–1930), an artist he is known to have admired, who was more drawn towards deliberately strange or mythical content. During his short but prolific career, Wood painted in oils but drew subjects that have several points of overlap with Ravilious – country and village scenes usually peopled with the same enigmatic effect tinged with amusement that Ravilious brought to Great Bardfield and Castle Hedingham. Wood's more imaginative paintings, such as *The Yellow Man*, share Ravilious's participation in the 'cult of Pierrot', the early twentieth-century fascination with the not quite human characters of the *commedia dell'arte*. According to *The Triumph of Pierrot*, 1993, by Martin Green and John Swan,



LEFT:
219. Observer Corps Hut, 1939
Pencil and watercolour
25.4 x 41.9 cm
(10 x 16½ in)
Private collection

OPPOSITE:
220. Buscot Park, 1938
Pencil and watercolour
41.9 x 51.4 cm
(16½ x 20¼ in)
Buscot Park, The Faringdon
Collection

there was a self-sufficient strand of culture from the 1890s that was called upon in the period of reaction against the First World War. As we recognise in Picasso's Blue and Rose periods and from many works of the 1920s, the *commedia dell'arte* provided a vehicle for deeper anxieties as well as decorative pleasure, offering indirect ways of making the emotional disturbance produced by war bearable. Ravilious's artistic personality took shape within this historicising, play-acting, shadow-zone of Modernism, with its sophisticated reworkings of the traditional formal languages of art, a proto-Postmodernism whose irony does not preclude genuine feeling. This youthful attitude of detachment suited his personality. His reluctance to draw the human figure set him apart from Christopher Wood and Rex Whistler, to pick two artists who belonged more fully to this tendency and whose lives were both cut off before they experienced advancing age and the changes in the world that might have made this attitude second nature. We can see how Ravilious applied this attitude to his painting in the years leading up to the war, to avoid falling into cliché, pastiche and sentimentality, to retain continuity from his

early work while deepening its emotional charge and developing the complexity of his technique.

He was careful about what jobs he accepted and fortunate to enjoy sympathetic patrons. It is interesting to note his anxiety in anticipation of what was his only watercolour subject that he did not choose for himself. In 1938, he offered his services to the AIA for ten guineas to paint whatever a supporter of the Spanish Republican cause wanted from him.³⁰⁸ Having got out of having to paint a dog portrait, his offer was taken up by the second Lord Faringdon, an ardent support of left-wing causes, to paint his inherited Georgian country house, Buscot Park, Berkshire, where a group of Basque refugees was encamped in the grounds (Plate 220). Tirzah's comments are revealing about his wariness over a subject that may have seemed too ready-made: 'Eric found that it was very difficult to make a good drawing of an obviously beautiful house because if done in a straightforward manner it would be so dull. Fortunately the grass was being mown and he painted the various stripes of grass in the fore-ground and a storm was coming up behind in the sky.'³⁰⁹



The English Question

In discussing Ravilious, it is impossible to avoid the question of Englishness (or Britishness, for the two terms were used interchangeably at the time, with little special distinction made for Scotland, Wales or even, sometimes, Ireland). It can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, since we may visualise Englishness in terms of style and subject matter that were formed to a great extent by Ravilious in the first place, all the more so during the past ten years when images of his work have proliferated. The definition of Englishness in art became a subject of fascination for his contemporary critics, writers and artists (who often pointed to Ravilious's 'Englishness') in response to a long tradition of self-belittlement that bred cultural neglect – acknowledging the threat that modernity could overwhelm something of value. Across the western world, the 1930s was a time for the rediscovery of national traditions. This was often a continuation of Romantic national movements from the 1890s, represented in England by the Arts and Crafts, but it extended from the more obvious 'blood and soil' ideology that was co-opted by totalitarian regimes to become an adjunct of a

Modernist quest to validate the overlooked. On this basis, opinions of the value of English art, both historical and modern, became an exercise in selective criticism, which was often aimed at providing a retrospective justification for shaping the direction of the immediate future. From 1930, the cultural guardians of England, both self-appointed and official, seem to have sunk some of their differences in an attempt to boost national cultural self-confidence to help sustain stable politics and economic recovery.

Lecturing on British art in 1934, Roger Fry warned against the distortion that patriotism could bring to judgement, saying, 'let us recognise straight away that ours is a minor school'. He tempered this by adding, 'that does not mean that it is not intensely interesting, that it does not merit the most sympathetic and patient appreciation, that it has not its specific qualities, unlike those of all other schools, which it would be a great loss to miss or misunderstand'.³¹⁰ His criticism arose from the 'easy-going complacency and indifference to the things of the spirit' that acted to suppress artistic promise in Britain. The prevailing mood among other critics was more optimistic. In 1934, W.G. Constable, the first director of the Courtauld Institute, stated in the catalogue for *British Art, c. 1000–1860* at the Royal Academy that while English art might in general have been a side-stream to Europe, it contained its own creativity that was at intervals threatened by inappropriate foreign models, while lately the danger had been of looking too much to the past.³¹¹ Unusually for an art exhibition, *British Art*'s contents included illumination, furniture, armour and embroidery to make up for the lack of painting from the early period, and to carry the point about craftsmanship and design into its supposed culmination in the late eighteenth century.

A series of lectures on British art by R.M.Y. Gleadowe, coinciding with the exhibition (and decorated with a cover engraved by Ravilious Plate 153), also included an

introduction by Constable who wrote, 'Unlike, say, the Italian, the Englishman has rarely produced art for its own sake. When he has attempted to do so, the result is generally empty and meaningless. But in the creation of things to serve a definite purpose, he has shown an ingenuity, an exact adjustment of means to ends, and an imaginative sense of the possibilities of a situation, which are remarkable.'³¹² This might well have been written in justification of Ravilious, Bawden and Paul Nash as a reversal of some of the values on which Fry's strictures were based. The lectures themselves conflated art and craft, praising the unselfconscious and vernacular, and setting them up as an appropriate standard for Modernism. 'The British genius is for line, rather than tone', Gleadowe noted, while engraving was celebrated as a national tradition. Portrait and landscape, especially in watercolour, were the most authentically English forms of painting, he claimed, even though Fry saw these as proof of the weakness of British art.³¹³ Gleadowe declared that 'the technique of watercolour has been used in these islands with unique variety'.³¹⁴

The defence of Englishness as a special artistic condition with its own rules has been related by Andrew Causey to the perilous political conditions of the early 1930s.³¹⁵ However, Ravilious was always aligned to most of the definitions of Englishness produced by Constable and other writers at the time, rather than shaping his work to fit them. The timing of his move out of London with Tirzah in 1933 and his rediscovery of the South Downs in 1934, though, is curiously synchronous with a wave of writing that valorised the country as a reserve of instinctive national identity.

How well does Ravilious's work stand up against Fry's criticisms? It clearly does not compete on the highest level of heroic struggle which Fry sets up as a standard, and can justifiably be allocated to a 'minor school'. Fry complained of the flatness of Cotman's watercolours;

Ravilious may have admired his predecessor, but he worked hard, both mentally and on the paper, to create the more complex build-up of colours and shapes that are so successful in giving depth and contour to the surfaces of hills and fields. His work is easy going for the viewer, perhaps, but does it show 'indifference towards the things of the spirit'? It would seem an odd choice of words to describe work that clearly provides a deep level of satisfaction to a wide audience.

Englishness and Romanticism

If Britishness as Fry described it was a condition that few artists were able to escape, British art was at least undergoing a series of changes in which Ravilious played a significance part. The revival of interest in Englishness during the 1930s is associated with the theme of Romanticism, itself a complex subject in terms of its earlier manifestations, as well as in this mid-twentieth century recurrence. Many of the artists whom Ravilious most admired belonged to the original Romantic period, and he followed them more literally than some of his contemporaries. He did not update their suggestive influence with new ways of seeing taken from Picasso, as did Graham Sutherland or John Piper, preferring if anything to lower the emotional temperature with cool colours and classical decorum. Paradoxically, the effect of such constraint can be to strengthen the emotion conveyed. The *Times* critic Charles Marriott explained the effectiveness of this anti-Romantic quality when reviewing Bawden's first one-man show in 1933, writing that 'the drawings are completely free from rhetoric and from reliance upon the picturesque', and respond to the qualities in the native landscape 'instead of forcing it into a foreign mould'.³¹⁶

Romanticism is a sensibility that attaches to the local and hence takes on a nationalistic flavour, condemning the levelling of local differences associated with modernity. In *Culture and Environment* (1933), the literary

221. *Manor Gardens*, 1927
Wood engraving
12 × 17.5 cm (5¼ × 6⅞ in.)



scholar F.R. Leavis warned against the perils of mass commercial culture (Hollywood films being among its most pernicious manifestations) in contrast to an 'organic' folk culture in rural England. Ravilious was not precious about popular culture, enjoying ephemeral songs, radio comedy and films, especially those starring Ginger Rogers or the Marx Brothers, while succeeding through his work in awakening people to unfamiliar beauties in the world around them. The fact that his work communicated so readily to the schoolchildren of Mansfield could be counted a success in terms of Leavis's programme.

Although many of his subjects were far from conventionally pretty, Ravilious edited his view of England to exclude anything that jarred on his sensitivity. His subjects have a sort of coherence as a set of images that is easy to recognise yet hard to describe. Perhaps the most appropriate characterisation comes from W.H. Auden who, in a lecture delivered as Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1956–7, described the kind of landscape he

called Eden, a place of infantile happiness and irresponsibility evoked by certain English writers that he associated with the character of Mr Pickwick and the writings of, among others, P.G. Wodehouse who happened to be one of Ravilious's favourite authors.³¹ Compared by Auden to the coercive alternative, which he calls New Jerusalem, with its puritan doctrine of work, Eden is made for anarchists. It depends on the innocence of its inhabitants, where 'there are walled gardens but no dungeons, open roads in all directions but no wandering in the wilderness'.³¹⁸ Nature is neither sublime nor uncontrollable, but co-exists with humanity on equal terms. It is perhaps the vision of many artists, where 'whatever people do, whether alone or in company, is some kind of play' – a world with no serious penalties for transgression exactly as in the Marx Brothers or in Ravilious's favourite book, *Huckleberry Finn*.

On another occasion, Auden described a technology much in tune with many of Ravilious's subjects: 'In our Eden we have a few beam-engines, saddle-tank

locomotives, overshot waterwheels and other beautiful pieces of obsolete machinery to play with.³¹⁹ Here industry is tamed by obsolescence and thus no longer at war with nature or humanity. Similarly, one can be certain that Ravilious, an enthusiastic drinker, smoker and convivial companion, would have found his way to George Orwell's imaginary London pub, the Moon under Water, with its 'grained woodwork, the ornamental mirror behind the bar, the cast-iron fireplaces, the florid ceiling stained dark yellow by tobacco smoke, the stuffed bull's head over the fireplace'. These were just the kind of features, unselfconscious survivals from a couple of generations earlier, that he enjoyed.³²⁰ These texts projected what was an idea of a country where in reality, as Orwell observed in *Coming up for Air* (1939), large retail and brewery combinations and reforming town planners were replacing the survivals of a gentler world with an anonymous and placeless progress, made worse if dressed quaintly in 'period' style. Ravilious and Piper were among the many artists and writers engaged in showing the virtues of what was gradually being lost, while revealing how it could become integral to a localised form of Modernism.

This intention in his work is implicit and never overtly stated. In the text of *High Street*, where one might expect to find some opinion about the relative value of the older world depicted and the newer world of chain stores, there is only mild regret about the inevitability of change, but this was the voice of J.M. Richards not Ravilious, whose pictures suggest a different attitude. He was one among a group of artists who began with a private reinvention of English style but found their personal vision taken up and projected far more widely through the patronage of organisations such as London Transport, becoming part of the agenda of 'National Projection' as proposed by Stephen Tallents in 1933. So far as this effort was reflected in the making of documentary films, it combined information about the

kind of heavy industries that were in decline with a poetic approach to the lives of workers.

Ravilious was only occasionally hired to further the official programme of representing the nation in this new way. His two poster designs of Greenwich for London Transport (Plate 177) were rejected, but his work was usually well adapted to its aim of charming foreign viewers and boosting exports through what could be considered a refined reworking of clichés about English life.³²¹ His cover engravings for the catalogues of the national exhibition pavilions 1937 and 1939 (Plates 60, 61) showed the world how familiar insignia could be stated in a graphic language lacking pomposity. This fitted in well with a new national mood around the coronation of George VI in 1937, when the past and the home were incorporated in a new-old version of the national identity. The imagery of his Wedgwood ware (Plates 160 to 174) evokes childhood, holidays and leisure through a medium that itself carried homely associations.

In his paintings, he combined images of ancient landscapes with moments from the past, consciously presented in the context of a modern world. Ravilious's 'project', if one could describe it as such, has several points in common with the work of the artist and poet Humphrey Jennings, who came within the orbit of Tallents as a documentary filmmaker at the GPO Film Unit in 1934. Writing in 1982, David Mellor noted Jennings's formation in the shadow of the Arts and Crafts Movement and his later rediscovery of 'rhetorical, literary and dramatic devices – pastorals, triumphs and elegies'.³²² Film director Lindsay Anderson described his subjects, seen in wartime films such as the wordless *Listen to Britain* (1941), as 'at least on the surface, the common ones; yet his manner of expression was always individual'.³²³ Ravilious got ahead of him in most of his watercolours of the 1930s, selecting his subjects with conscious care and intensifying what he observed so that

222. *Greenwich Pier at Night*,
19.5 × 27 cm
(7⁵/₈ × 10⁵/₈ in)
London Transport



the diversity seems to thread together into a similarly wordless film sequence describing the physical features of the country with some of the overlays of its people and culture. Jennings collected texts that, when posthumously published in 1985, helped later readers to empathise with 'the coming of the machine as seen by contemporary observers' in England from the time of Milton to William Morris, later published in book form and influential on the storyline of the London Olympic opening ceremony in 2012.³²⁴ Jennings saw his documentary history of ideas and observations as a construction of the imagination, a word that lies at the root of Romanticism. This was equivalent to Ravilious's particular ability to find and present visual images in such a way that they are immediately memorable and at times haunting for no obvious reason other than their ability to evoke experiences and feelings of a kind that few other artists have touched. Like a film-maker, he is staging a drama in a knowing way.

In *Romantic Moderns*,³²⁵ Alexandra Harris collected a wide range of mid-twentieth century versions of English Romanticism, showing the complexity of this theme as it emerged between different artistic disciplines, groupings of friends and creative minds from different generations. The Modernists who have dominated art history for so long are pushed to the margin, as if the tide had gone out, revealing the intricate cultural ecology beneath the surface that has been largely submerged for many years. The book, coinciding with the expansion of interest in Ravilious and other artists around the time of their centenaries, has added to the understanding of the period as it slips from living memory but seems more vigorous than ever in the world of books, exhibitions and greetings cards. For some artists, the last of these might seem to indicate an art that has been cheapened, but they could also be proof of a penetration of the national consciousness of a kind that Ravilious himself, a maker of printed images, would not have disdained.

NOTES

CHAPTER 1

1. Tirzah Garwood, *Long Live Great Bardfield & Love to You All: Her Autobiography*, 1908–43, Fleece Press, Huddersfield, 2012, p.71.
2. Garwood, *Long Live Great Bardfield*, p.73.
3. Garwood, *Long Live Great Bardfield*, p.74.
4. Helen Binyon, *Eric Ravilious: Memoir of an Artist*, Lutterworth Press, Guildford and London, 1983.
5. Binyon, *Eric Ravilious*, p.21.
6. Ravilious owned a copy of W. Lockwood Marsh, *Aeronautical Prints and Drawings*, Halton and Truscott Smith, London, 1924.
7. Binyon, *Eric Ravilious*, p.77.
8. Binyon, *Eric Ravilious*, p.79.
9. Quoted by Edward Bawden in *Eric Ravilious*, 1903–1942, an Exhibition Organised by the Victor Batte-Lav Trust, exh.cat., The Minories, Colchester, 1972, n.p. Lilian Lanchester married the artist Clive Gardiner, Principal of Goldsmith's College, 1929–58.
10. John Lake, recorded in Binyon, *Eric Ravilious*, p.23.
11. See Stuart Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, University of London Press, London, 1970, from which this account is taken.
12. Sir Lewis Amherst Selby Bigge, Board of Education, draft letter to the Treasury, 28 May 1920. National Archive Ed24, 1595.
13. William Rothenstein to Sir Lewis Amherst Selby Bigge, 23 July 1920. National Archive Ed24, 1595.
14. William Rothenstein, 'Possibilities for the Improvement of Industrial Art in England', Lecture at the Royal Society of Arts, 9 February 1921. *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 18 March 1921.
15. 'Art Exhibitions, Students' Work', *The Times*, 23 July 1928, p.12.
16. Edward Bawden to Eric Ravilious, undated (probably May 1925). East Sussex Record Office (ESRO).
17. Minutes of Junior Art Workers Guild meeting, 23 April 1925, held by the Art Workers Guild, London. 'Art Exhibitions: The Junior Art Workers' Guild', *The Times*, 11 March 1925.
18. Douglas Percy Bliss, quoted in Binyon, *Eric Ravilious*, p.25.
19. Douglas Percy Bliss, 'The Work of Eric Ravilious', *Artwork*, vol.IV, no.15, Spring 1928, p.64.
20. For a survey of issues associated with mural painting, see Alan Powers, 'The Mural Problem', in Alan Powers et al., *British Murals and Decorative Painting, 1920–1960: Rediscoveries and New Interpretations*, Sansom, Bristol, 2013, pp. 1–11.
21. Bawden, *Eric Ravilious*.
22. Bawden, *Eric Ravilious*.
23. Henry Moore, interview with John Heilpern, *Observer*, 30 April 1972, quoted in Roger Berthoud, *The Life of Henry Moore*, Faber & Faber, London, 1987.
24. Paul Nash, 'New Draughtsmen', *Signature*, no.1, November 1935, p.27.
25. Susan Lambert, *Paul Nash as Designer*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1975, p.19, note 15.
26. Enid Marx, 'Student Days at the RCA', *Matrix*, no.16, 1996, p.149.
27. Binyon, *Eric Ravilious*, p.29.
28. 'Applied Painting at Whitechapel', *The Times*, 25 June 1926. The artists with whom he was grouped were Mary Adshead, Nan West and Ethelbert White.
29. Dana Saintsbury Green, quoted in Binyon, *Eric Ravilious*, pp.42–3.
30. Garwood, *Long Live Great Bardfield*, p.59.
31. See plans in *Builder*, 18 February 1927, p.280.
32. See *Mural Paintings at Morley College for Working Men and Women*, Morley College, London, 1930, the souvenir pamphlet for the opening.
33. Denis Richards, *Offspring of the Vic: A History of Morley College*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1958, p.229. A note in the Tate Archive gives the figures expended up to 31st May 1929, and then to July, in numbers of days: Bawden 123 + 30; Ravilious 131 + 30; Mahoney 130 + 31. Tate Archive TG15/9.
34. Charles Aitken to Sir Joseph Duveen, 16 February 1928. Tate Archive TG15/9.
35. See Peyton Skipwith, 'Charles Mahoney: Morley College, 1928–30 & Brockley School, 1932–36', in Powers, *British Murals*, pp.204–17.
36. Charles Aitken to Sir Joseph Duveen, 2 October 1928. Tate Archive TG15/9.
37. One of this pair of drawings, both in a private collection, is reproduced in Alan Powers, *Eric Ravilious, Imagined Realities*, Philip Wilson, London, 2003 and 2012, plate 11.
38. 'Obituary: Captain Eric Ravilious', *The Times*, 21 May 1943.
39. Tate Archive TG15/9.
40. In 1958, Bawden painted a replacement cycle of murals on *The Canterbury Tales* in the new refectory.
41. Eric Ravilious, 'Morley College Decorations', handwritten description printed in Anne Ullmann, with Christopher Whittick and Simon Lawrence, and a foreword by Alan Powers, *Eric Ravilious: Landscape, Letters and Design*, Fleece Press, Huddersfield, 2008, pp.76–81. The references in the text suggest it was written for friends.
42. Ravilious, 'Morley College Decorations'. The figure climbing the stairs is Tirzah Garwood. In the kitchen, carrying an aspidistra, is Beryl Bowker (later Beryl Sinclair), one of the group of Royal College students.
43. Ravilious, 'Morley College Decorations'.
44. This comparison was made by Professor Clare Willsdon in a lecture at the conference 'Murals in Britain, 1910–1970', 8 March 2013, at Morley College, giving Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Stories of St Nicholas* (c.1330, Uffizi, Florence) as an example.
45. Garwood, *Long Live Great Bardfield*, p.92. In June 1931, Ravilious and Bawden's cartoons for the Morley College murals were exhibited at Heal's in Tottenham Court Road, London, as an adjunct to a larger exhibition of Victorian objects; see 'Mansard Gallery', *The Times*, 26 June 1931.
46. Thomas Hennell to Eric Ravilious, 13 January 1942, Anne Ullmann, with contributions by Barry and Saria Viney, Christopher Whittick and Simon Lawrence, and a foreword by Brian Sewell, *Ravilious at War: The Complete Work of Eric Ravilious, September 1939–September 1942*, Fleece Press, Huddersfield, 2002, p.204. Hennell's date of 1928 is too early, as Ravilious and Bawden did not move into Brick House until 1931, where they met Hennell for the first time.
47. Garwood, *Long Live Great Bardfield*, p.94. Binyon, *Eric Ravilious*, p.29. *The Beggar's Opera* ran at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith in 1920–23.
48. The design for this section was published in *Artwork*, no.18, Summer 1929, p.98. It is now lost and the photograph of this area from the main series that documents the room shows it as a space still to be completed.
49. Ravilious, 'Morley College Decorations'.
50. Ravilious, 'Morley College Decorations'.
51. Ravilious, 'Morley College Decorations'.
52. Minutes of Junior Art Workers Guild meeting.
53. A letter from Bawden to Bliss in 1929 shows their familiarity with the writings of Le Corbusier, see Binyon, *Eric Ravilious*, p.40.
54. P.G. Konody, 'Art and Artists', *Observer*, 9 February 1930.
55. Howard Hannay, 'The Fine Arts', *London Mercury*, vol.22, no.127, 1930, p.69.
56. Hannay, 'The Fine Arts'.
57. 'London Art Shows', *Scotsman*, 5 May 1932.
58. See Alan Powers, *Oliver Hill: Architect and Lover of Life*, Mouton Publications, London, 1989.
59. In 1989, a reconstruction was painted in the same space by set designers for London Weekend Television working on the *Poirot* series, with conjectural colouring, but this in turn has been lost.
60. Quoted in Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.142.
61. After initial scrapes in 2004, a larger test portion was uncovered in 2012, with the hope of raising funds for a complete recovery.
62. See Helen Binyon to Eric Ravilious, 14 October 1935, in Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.243.
63. See Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.346, for O'Connor's recollection of this work.
64. Photos of some of the designs, the executed pieces and their installation are illustrated in Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, pp.453–81. See also *Architectural Review*, August 1939, p.80. The display was designed by Misha Black with additional elements by Milner Gray.
65. Apart from a production by his Eastbourne students in 1926 Ravilious never made any stage designs, although Bawden was invited to design a production of *The Tempest* for a school. His drawings for this have recently been rediscovered and were exhibited at the Fry Art Gallery, Saffron Walden, in spring 2013.

CHAPTER 2

66. There are three books on Ravilious's wood engravings: Robert Harling, *Notes on the Wood-Engravings by Eric Ravilious*, Shenval Press/Faber & Faber, London, 1946; J.M. Richards, *The Wood Engravings of Eric Ravilious*, Lion and Unicorn Press at the Royal College of Art, London, 1972; and Jeremy Greenwood, *Ravilious Engravings*, Wood Lea Press, Woodbridge, 2008, with an introduction by John Craig. The last is a meticulous work of scholarship and annotation, which, in terms of cataloguing the work and establishing dates, supersedes the previous works, each of which was, however, pioneering in its own time.

67. Noel Rooke, *Woodcuts and Wood Engravings, Being a Lecture Delivered to the Print Collectors' Club on January 20th, 1925, on the Origins and Character of the Present School of Engraving and Cutting*, Print Collectors' Club, London, 1926, p.26.
68. On Curwen Press, see Alan Powers, *Art and Print: The Curwen Story*, Tate, London, 2008.
69. A.B. Higgs, as recalled by Ravilious's student contemporary John Lake. Helen Binyon, *Eric Ravilious*, p.23.
70. James Hamilton, *Wood Engraving and the Woodcut in Britain, c.1890–1990*, Barrie & Jenkins, London, 1994, p.95.
71. John Craig in Greenwood, *Ravilious Engravings*, p.9.
72. D.P. Bliss, 'The Wood-Engravings of Eric Ravilious', *Penrose's Annual*, Lund Humphries, London, 1933, p.53.
73. Bliss, 'The Wood-Engravings', pp 53–4.
74. Bliss, 'The Wood-Engravings', p.55.
75. Edward Bawden, letter to J.M. Richards, quoted in J.M. Richards, *The Wood Engravings*, p.14.
76. Mary Branson, quoted in Douglas Percy Bliss, *Edward Bawden*, Pendomer Press, Guildford, 1979, p.71.
77. See David McKitterick, *A New Specimen Book of Curwen Pattern Papers*, Whittington Press, Andoversford, 1987.
78. Bliss, 'The Wood-Engravings', p.54.
79. See Tirzah Garwood, *Long Live Great Bardfield*, p.127.
80. See Anne Ullmann, with Introduction by Robert Harling, *The Wood-Engravings of Tirzah Ravilious*, Gordon Fraser, London and Bedford, 1987.
81. Bliss, 'The Work of Eric Ravilious', p.64.
82. On the private presses, see Roderick Cave, *The Private Press*, Faber & Faber, London, 1971.
83. See Martin J. Andrews, *The Life and Work of Robert Gibbings*, Primrose Hill Press, Bicester, 2003; and Roderick Cave and Sarah Manson, *A History of the Golden Cockerel Press*, British Library, London, 2002.
84. In *The Theory of a Leisure Class*, Macmillan, New York, 1899, Thorstein Veblen picked out the Kelmscott Press for reducing 'fine printing' to an absurdity 'as seen from the point of view of brute serviceability alone – by issuing books for modern use, edited with the obsolete spelling, printed in black-letter, and bound in limp vellum fitted with thongs. As a further characteristic feature which fixes the economic place of artistic book-making, there is the fact that these more elegant books are, at their best, printed in limited editions. A limited edition is in effect a guarantee – somewhat crude, it is true – that this book is scarce and that it therefore is costly and lends pecuniary distinction to its consumer.'
85. The correspondence, held in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Austin, Texas, was edited and published in two articles by Joanna Selborne in *Matrix*, no.XIV, 1994, and no.XVI, 1996.
86. Richard Morphet, 'Eric Ravilious and Helen Binyon', in Binyon, *Eric Ravilious*, p.10.
87. Robert Harling, *Notes on the Wood-Engravings*.
88. A table of these variants is included in Greenwood, *Ravilious Engravings*, p.77.
89. Eric Ravilious, 'Preface by the Engraver', in *Almanack 1929 with Twelve Designs Engraved on Wood by Eric Ravilious and a Specimen of the Roman & Italic of Fournier-le-Jeune*, Lanston Monotype Corporation, London, 1928, n.p.
90. Ravilious, 'Preface by the Engraver', final passage of text.
91. John O'Connor, 'Eric Ravilious, A Recollection by One of His Pupils', in *Cockalorum*, Golden Cockerel Press, London, 1950, p.83.
92. Harling, *Notes on the Wood-Engravings*, p.11.
93. Bliss, 'The Wood-Engravings', p.55; *Faustus Conjuring Mephistophiles* was published in *The Legion Book*, edited by Captain H. Cotton Minchin, published for H.R.H. The Prince of Wales by Cassell and Company, London, 1929. It was shown at the tenth exhibition of the Society of Wood Engravers in 1929. Robert Harling, in *Notes on the Wood-Engravings*, says that it originated with an abortive commission from the Golden Cockerel Press, together with a proposed *Hero and Leander* for the poem by Marlowe.
94. Robert Gibbings to Eric Ravilious, 4 February 1931, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin.
95. Robert Gibbings to Eric Ravilious, 7 September 1931, and reply 8 September 1931, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin.
96. 'The Printed and Published Wood-Engravings of Eric Ravilious', *Signature*, no.1, November 1935, p.31. The author was probably the magazine editor, Oliver Simon, a director at the Curwen Press from the early 1920s and a strong supporter of Ravilious's work.
97. Paul Nash, 'New Draughtsmen', *Signature*, no.1, November 1935, p.5.
98. Robert Harling, 'Eric Ravilious: A Memoir', in Robert Dalrymple et al., with Maureen Batkin, *Ravilious and Wedgwood: The Complete Wedgwood Designs of Eric Ravilious*, Dalrymple Press, London, 1986, pp 11–12.
99. See *Away We Go!* Advertising London's Transport, Edward Bowden and Eric Ravilious, Mainstone Press, Norwich, 2006.
100. L.A.G. Strong, *The Hansom Cab and the Pigeons*, Golden Cockerel Press, London, 1935, p.40.
101. Eric Ravilious to Owen Rutter, 16 March 1935, quoted in Greenwood, *Ravilious Engravings*, p.210.
102. The pasted label on the cover gives the title as *The Royal Jubilee 1935*.
103. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 17 March 1935, quoted in Greenwood, *Ravilious Engravings*, p.215.
104. Frank Pick, 'Foreword', *Guide to the Exhibits in the Pavilion of the United Kingdom*, Board of Trade, London, 1937, p.16.
105. Harry Carter to Eric Ravilious, 7 May 1937, in Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.364.
106. Harry Carter to Eric Ravilious, 12 January 1938, quoted in Greenwood, *Ravilious Engravings*, p.255.
107. Undated prospectus, author's collection.
108. Eric Ravilious to Diana Tuely, quoted in Greenwood, *Ravilious Engravings*, p.256.
109. See Alan Powers and James Russell, *Eric Ravilious: The Story of High Street*, Mainstone Press, London, 2008, for detailed information on the publishing history and the identification of the shops. A further reprint with a short commentary by Gill Saunders was published by V&A Publishing in 2010.
110. See Ruth Artmonsky, *Art for Everyone: Contemporary Lithographs Ltd*, Antique Collectors Club, Woodbridge, 2010.
111. Newhaven Harbour is sometimes known as *Homage to Seurat*, following a reference in a letter from Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon.
112. Quoted in June Opie, 'Frances Hodgkins, "The Expatriate", in Her Centennial Year', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, vol.117, no.5160, November 1969.
113. For information on Tallents, see Scott Anthony, *Public Relations and the Making of Modern Britain: Stephen Tallents and the Birth of a Progressive Media Profession*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2012.
114. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 4 October 1936, in Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.332.
115. John Piper, 'Lithographs by Eric Ravilious of Shop Fronts', *Signature*, no.5, March 1937, p.48.
116. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 7 November 1936, in Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.332.
117. See Joe Pearson, *Drawn Direct to the Plate*, Penguin Collectors' Society, London, 2010.
118. G.W. Stonier, 'Cigarette Cards of London', *New Statesman and Nation*, 19 November 1938, p.834.
119. H.J. Massingham was suggested as author, and Carrington also considered writing it himself.
120. Eric Ravilious to E.M.O'R. Dickey, 2 August 1940, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.108.
121. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 2 August 1940, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.109.
122. Eric Ravilious to John O'Connor, 10 August 1940, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.112. See also James Russell, *Ravilious Submarine*, Mainstone Press, Norwich, 2013, and Brian Webb (ed.), *Submarine Dream*, with an introduction by Peyton Skipwith, Camberwell Press, London, 1996.
123. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 12 January 1941, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.143.
124. Eric Ravilious to Diana Tuely, 1 April 1941, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.147.
125. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 11 April 1941, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.150. A 'Chromolithograph' is a Victorian term, usually suggesting a rich and rather crude overlay of oily inks.

CHAPTER 3

126. Bliss, 'The Work of Eric Ravilious', p.64.
127. Alfred Rich, *Water Colour Painting*, Seeley Service, London, 1918, p.219.
128. C. Lewis Hind, *Landscape Painting*, Chapman & Hall, London, 1924, p.33.
129. Laurence Binyon, *English Water-Colours, A & C Black*, London, 1933, p.146.
130. Laurence Binyon, *The Followers of William Blake*, Halton, Truscott Smith, London, 1925, p.22.
131. Laurence Binyon, *English Water-Colours*, pp 191–2. In a postscript to the second edition of the book in 1944, Bawden and Ravilious were singled out as continuing the tradition Edmund Gray, Lawrence Binyon's grandson, believes that this passage was written by his mother, the art scholar Nicolette Gray

132. Timothy Wilcox, *Francis Towne*, Tate Gallery, London, 1997, p.26.
133. Garwood, *Long Live Great Bardfield*, p.138.
134. This painting, in a private collection, was a wedding present for Tirzah's sister, Maggie Garwood. One other oil is recorded but currently lost. See Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.140.
135. Edward Bawden in the catalogue, *Eric Ravilious, 1903–1942*, n.p.
136. 'As a sort of gesture against calamities I'm trying to paint in oil – I don't know what will come of it', *Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon*, 13 March 1942, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.217.
137. Garwood, *Long Live Great Bardfield*, p.138.
138. Garwood, *Long Live Great Bardfield*, p.125.
139. See 'Modern English Watercolours', *The Times*, 27 May 1927, p.14. The review notes two paintings by Ravilious who 'contrives to combine ... observation of Nature and the use of symbols which, as in a child's drawing, convey the idea of a house or of a tree and no more'. This was the fifth exhibition of the Modern English Watercolour Society. The other artists mentioned in the review are Charles Maresco Pearce, Paul Nash, John Nash, Walter Taylor, Bernard Meninsky and Edward Wadsworth.
140. Frank Rutter, 'Introduction', *Modern English Watercolour Society*, exh.cat., St George's Gallery, London, April 1925.
141. 'Notes of the Month', *Colour*, March 1921, quoted in David Peters Corbett, *The Modernity of English Art*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997, p.68.
142. Charles Marriott, *Modern Movements in Painting*, Chapman & Hall, London, 1920, p.158.
143. Peters Corbett, *The Modernity of English Art*, p.100.
144. Frances Spalding, 'Changing Nature: British Landscape Painting 1850–1950', in *Landscape in Britain 1850–1950*, Arts Council of Great Britain, London, 1983, p.18.
145. Christopher Neve, *Unquiet Landscapes: Places and Idea in 20th Century English Painting*, Faber & Faber, London, 1990, p.43.
146. Quoted in *Helen Binyon, Eric Ravilious*, p.40.
147. Garwood, *Long Live Great Bardfield*, p.142.
148. Charles Marriott, 'Art Exhibitions, St George's Gallery', *The Times*, 27 September 1927.
149. Christopher Sandford, 'In Memoriam' (1948 BBC Third Programme talk given by Tirzah Ravilious and John O'Connor), in *Cockalorum*, Golden Cockerel Press, London, 1950, pp.73–81.
150. Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 16 December 1935, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.257. For information on Stiles, see National Gallery website, 'British Picture Framemakers, 1610–1950', www.npg.org.uk/research/conservation/direct-ory-of-british-framemakers/s/british-picture-framemakers-1750-1950-s-part-2.php [accessed 23 March 2013].
151. See Edmund Gray, 'The Representational Painting of David Jones and Ben Nicholson', *Agenda*, vol.12, no.4/vol.13, no.1, Winter–Spring 1975, pp.126–34.
152. Robert Wellington to Eric Ravilious, 26 September 1934, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.157.
153. Jan Gordon, 'Art and Artists', *Observer*, 9 February 1936, p.14.
154. Edward Bawden in *Eric Ravilious, 1903–1942*.
155. *Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon*, 24 May 1935, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.211.
156. *Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon*, 21 March 1935, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.187.
157. Sandford, 'In Memoriam'.
158. *Eric Ravilious to Richard Seddon*, undated (1942), Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, pp.206–7.
159. *Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon*, 19 March 1935, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.186.
160. Binyon, *Eric Ravilious*, p.64.
161. *Eric Ravilious to Peggy Angus*, 15 May 1939, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.473.
162. Binyon, *Eric Ravilious*, p.67.
163. Gordon, 'Art and Artists', p.14.
164. *Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon*, 8 July 1935, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.228.
165. John Piper, 'The Nautical Style', *Architectural Review*, January 1938, pp.1–14.
166. *Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon*, 9 May 1935, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.202.
167. J.M. Richards, *Edward Bawden*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1946, p.11.
168. *Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon*, 15 January 1935, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.171 and footnote p.172.
169. *Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon*, 16 December 1935, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.257.
170. *Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon*, 3 June 1935, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.215.
171. See *Chicken House*, unfinished pencil and watercolour sketch made on the reverse of *Train Going Over a Bridge at Night*, 1935, illustrated in Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.218.
172. Gordon, 'Art and Artists', p.14.
173. *Helen Binyon to Pat Gilmour*, 11 November 1976, Tate Archive TG92/316/17 *Ravilious*.
174. *Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon*, 12 April 1937, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.357.
175. Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.360.
176. Christine Nash to Eric Ravilious, 7 November, 1937, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.375. The editors of the book are uncertain of the accuracy of the year.
177. *Eric Ravilious to Alatheia Fry*, [probably 6 February 1938], Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.386.
178. *Eric Ravilious to John Nash*, 10 March 1938, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.399.
179. *Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon*, 18 April 1938, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.402.
180. *Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon*, 9 May 1938, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.405.
181. *Eric Ravilious to Cecilia Dunbar Kilburn*, 26 October 1938, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.440.
182. A third painting in this set, *Cliffs in March*, was reproduced in *The World of Art Illustrated*, 17 May 1939, and again in Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.461. It cannot currently be traced.
183. *Eric Ravilious to Diana Tuely*, 20 February 1939, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.458.
184. *Eric Ravilious to Diana Tuely*, 1 March 1939, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.458.
185. Michael Rothenstein, *Looking at Paintings*, Routledge, London, 1947, p.20.
186. *Eric Newton, 'Eric Ravilious, Personality in Water-colour'*, *Sunday Times*, 21 May 1939, p.14, reprinted in *Eric Newton, In My View*, Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1950, pp.108–9.
187. Jan Gordon, 'Influences and Fusion', *Observer*, 14 May 1939, p.14.
188. 'Our London Correspondence', *Manchester Guardian*, 26 May 1939.
189. Quoted in Binyon, *Eric Ravilious*, p.108.
190. See Stuart Piggott, 'The Character of Beelzebub in the Mummies' Play', *Folk Lore*, no.XL, 1929, pp.193–5; Stuart Piggott, 'The Uffington White Horse', *Antiquity*, no.VI, 1932, pp.214–16; Stuart Piggott, 'The Hercules Myth – Beginning and Ends', *Antiquity*, no.XII, 1938, pp.323–31.
191. *Eric Ravilious to Alatheia Fry*, 18 April 1942, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.228.
192. *Eric Newton, 'London Art Shows'*, *Sunday Times*, 15 December 1940, p.10.

CHAPTER 4

193. See Michael T. Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Inter-War England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999.
194. See Anthony, *Public Relations*.
195. Edward Bawden, letter to James King, in *James King, Interior Landscapes: A Life of Paul Nash*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1957, p.116.
196. *Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon*, 30 May 1936. See Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.297, where this design, '100 ideas for presents for men', apparently his only use of pen and ink artwork for reproduction, is illustrated.
197. 'Bits from Everywhere', *Commercial Art*, May 1925, p.144.
198. International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Art, British Section, exh.cat., Paris, 1925, pp.141 and 205.
199. 'A Craftsman's Portfolio XLVIII – Accessories to Decoration', *Architectural Review*, May 1930, reproduced in Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.85.
200. The poster, *British Empire Exhibition Map*, was a collaboration with Thomas Derrick. See Peyton Skipwith, *Edward Bawden's London*, V&A Publishing, London, 2011, pp.18–19.
201. *Eric Ravilious to Cecilia Dunbar Kilburn*, 6 November 1927, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.62.
202. *Room and Book*, ex.cat. facsimile reprint in *Matrix*, no.15, 1995.
203. The drawing was exhibited, together with a three-dimensional realisation of the design at full size by the artist Jeremy Deller, as part of the exhibition *The Strawberry Thief*, Fine Art Society, London, October 2011, which contained reworkings of existing pieces by various artists.
204. 'Art Exhibitions – "Room and Book"', *The Times*, 11 April 1932, p.10.
205. Ravilious was invited by Hill to contribute a mural to this exhibition but declined.
206. In 1931, The Studio Ltd published *Modern Glass* by Guillaume Janneau. This includes examples of engraved crystal with patterns,

- similar to those by Ravilious, from Orrefors of Sweden, with a photograph (p.129) credited to the Little Gallery in London. This was also the year of an exhibition of Swedish design at the Dorland Hall, Regent Street, following widespread attention to Sweden in 1930 on the occasion of major exhibition at Stockholm.
207. Observer, 28 October 1934, p.11.
208. The Times, 3 August 1934, p.1.
209. Joseph Peter Thorp, 'RA Exhibition of British Art in Industry', *Architects' Journal*, 10 January 1935, p.45.
210. Printed circular for Dunbar Hay, July 1935. Copy in Ravilious papers at East Sussex Record Office ACC 8494. See also Cecilia Sempill, edited and introduced by Alan Powers, 'Dunbar Hay: Notes for a Lecture', *Decorative Arts Society Journal*, no.27, 2003, pp 52–61.
211. Sempill, 'Dunbar Hay'.
212. Sempill, 'Dunbar Hay', p.57.
213. Paul Nash, 'Going Modern and Being British', *Week-end Review*, 12 March 1932.
214. Ralph Edwards, 'Modern Furniture: The Artist as Designer', *Country Life*, 10 October 1936, Supplement, pp xxxvi–vii.
215. Lucy Norton to Eric Ravilious, 31 May 1939. Quoted in Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.29.
216. Noel Carrington, 'An Artist Who Saw Life Whole', *London Calling*, no.309, September 1945, p.6. Transcript of broadcast on the BBC Overseas Service.
217. Carrington, 'An Artist'.
218. 'Wedgwood and His Wares', *The Times*, 30 April 1930.
219. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 18 May 1936, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.296.
220. Eric Ravilious to Gwyneth Lloyd Thomas, 9 July 1936, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.307.
221. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 19 August 1936, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.323.
222. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 23 August 1936, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.323.
223. Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1937, pp 79–80.
224. Victor Skellern, 'Lectures on Wedgwood', unpublished manuscript, c.1957, Wedgwood Museum, Barlaston, quoted in Dalrymple et al., *Ravilious and Wedgwood*, p.46.

225. H.S. Ede to Eric Ravilious, 10 July 1937, Ullmann, *Eric Ravilious*, p.371.
226. Garwood, *Long Live Great Bardfield*, p.128.
227. In 1959, Victor Skellern told Vera Lindsay of the *Sunday Times* that only six of the Barlaston mugs were sold. See Vera Lindsay, 'A Crux of Crocks', *Sunday Times*, 3 May 1959, p.10.
228. Robert Gooden, 'Eric Ravilious as a designer', *Architectural Review*, December 1943, pp 161–2.
229. W.R. Lethaby, 'Town Tidying', *Form in Civilisation*, Oxford University Press, London, 1920, p.21. Lethaby was appointed the first Professor of Design at the RCA in 1901.
230. Norman Wilson in 1982, quoted in Patricia R. Andrew, *Eric Ravilious 1903–42, A Reassessment of His Life and Work*, exh.cat., Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne, 1986, p.37.
231. W.B. Honey, *The Art of the Potter*, Faber & Faber, London, 1946, p.102.
232. Robert Harling, *Engravings by Eric Ravilious*, Faber & Faber, London, 1946.
233. Unattributed introductory text, *Architectural Review*, December 1943, p.147.
234. Goodden, 'Eric Ravilious', p.155.
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CHAPTER 5

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250. Eric Ravilious to Tirzah Ravilious, 13 February 1940, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.58. 'Batemanish' refers to the cartoons of H.M. Bateman, famous for the series 'The Man who . . . involving various transgressions of etiquette and the outraged responses that they cause.
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253. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 28 February 1940, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.69.
254. Eric Ravilious to Tirzah Ravilious, 12 April 1940, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.78.
255. *Light Vessel and Duty Boat*, 1940, illustrated in Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.89, pl.43.
256. Information from Lt Cdr Geoffrey B. Mason, 'Service Histories of Royal Navy Warships in World War 2', 1996, Naval History website, www.naval-history.net/xGM-Chrono-10DD-33Brazil-Highlander.htm [accessed 24 March 2013]. See also John Winton, *Carrier Glorious*, Cassell Military, London, 1999; Mike Rossiter, *Ark Royal*, Harper Collins, London, 2011.
257. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 19 June 1940, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.99.
258. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 30 May 1940, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.93.

259. The title is probably a mistake for the Bass Rock, at the mouth of the Firth of Forth.
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261. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 22 May 1940, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.93.
262. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 30 May 1940, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.93.
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265. Jan Gordon, 'Art and Artists: Work of War Artists', *Observer*, 7 July 1940, p.11.
266. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 18 August 1940, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.112.
267. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 8 May 1942, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.230.
268. Eric Ravilious to E.M.O.'R. Dickey, 29 September 1940, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.119.
269. Tirzah Ravilious to Colonel F.S. Garwood, 10 October 1940, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.129.
270. Eric Ravilious to Diana Tuely, n.d. Quoted in Binyon, *Eric Ravilious*, p.130, and in Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.160.
271. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 20 July 1941, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.160.
272. Christine Nash, diary for 18 October 1941, quoted in Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.184.
273. Eric Ravilious to Tirzah Ravilious, 20 October 1941, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.185.
274. Frances Spalding, 'Introduction', *Ravilious in Public*, Black Dog Books, Norwich, 2002, p.xix.
275. Eric Ravilious to E.M.O.'R. Dickey, 11 December 1941, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.198.
276. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 6 June 1942, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.236.
277. Eric Ravilious to E.M.O.'R. Dickey, c.12 February 1942, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.210.
278. Jan Gordon, 'Art and Artists', *Observer*, 1 February 1942, p.7.
279. Eric Ravilious to Tirzah Ravilious, 26 February 1942, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p.213.

280. Thomas Hennell to Eric Ravilious, 13 January 1942, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p. 204; Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 13 March 1942, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p. 217.
281. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 8 May 1942, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p. 230.
282. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 16 June, 1942, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p. 236.
283. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 8 May 1942, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p. 230.
284. For further details see the letter from Ramsay Burt to the Assistant Keeper of the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, 29 March 1976, in Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p. 232.
285. The house where the airbase was located was Shingle Hall although Ravilious always refers to it as Stringle.
286. See Henrietta Goodden, *Camouflage and Art: Design for Deception in World War 2*, Unicorn Press, London, 2007, ch. 5.
287. Yves Abrioux, Ian Hamilton Finlay: *A Visual Primer*, Reaktion, London, 1992, p. 304.
288. Eric Ravilious to Helen Binyon, 6 June 1942, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p. 236.
289. James Russell identifies the planes as Mustangs rather than Hurricanes. An almost identical depiction of the biplane wing appears in a lost painting, *View over the Starboard Wing of a Moth*, 1942, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p. 252, pl. 162.
290. Helen Binyon, *Eric Ravilious*, p. 136.
291. Notes by Tirzah Ravilious for 'In Memoriam' broadcast, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p. 259.
292. Garwood, *Long Live Great Bardfield*, p. 244.
293. Eric Ravilious to Tirzah Ravilious, 30 August 1942, Ullmann, *Ravilious at War*, p. 260.
294. J.M. Richards, *Memoirs of an Unjust Fella*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1980, p. 106.
295. Edward Bawden to Gwyneth Lloyd Thomas, 14 November 1939, private collection.
296. The artist and curator Sharon Kivland included two of Ravilious's submarine prints in an exhibition, *Afterwards*, at the Mead Gallery, University of Warwick in 2008, based on Sigmund's Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit* or deferred action.
297. Herbert Read, 'The War as Seen by British Artists', in Monroe Wheeler (ed.), *Britain at War*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1941, p. 12.

298. Edward Bawden to Tirzah Ravilious, 17 March 1943, East Sussex Record Office ACC 8494.
299. Thomas Hennell to Tirzah Ravilious, 15 September 1942, East Sussex Record Office ACC 8494.
300. Kenneth Clark to Tirzah Ravilious, Private collection.
301. 'Obituary: Captain Eric Ravilious', *The Times*, 21 May 1943.
302. Osbert Lancaster, 'Art', p. 2.

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303. Jan Gordon, 'Art and Artists', *Observer*, 6 October 1940, p. 2.
304. Mary Chamot, *Modern Painting in England*, Country Life, London, 1937, p. 94.
305. Marina Vaizey, 'Teasetts and Tables Make Fine Art', *Sunday Times*, 1 February 1987, p. 51.
306. A range of murals by these artists is illustrated in Powers, *British Murals*.
307. See, for example, James Fitton, *Canal Bridge* (1933), and Richard Eurich, *Mischief Night* (1975).
308. I am grateful to Roger Vlitos, Curator of the Faringdon Collection at Buscot Park, for providing additional information about this commission.
309. Garwood, *Long Live Great Bardfield*, p. 202.
310. Roger Fry, *French, Flemish and British Art*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1951, p. 138.
311. W.G. Constable, *British Art, An Illustrated Souvenir*, exh. cat., Royal Academy, London, 1934, pp. xii–xiv.
312. W.G. Constable, 'Introductory Essay', in R.M.Y. Gleadowe, *British Art*, BBC, London, 1934, p. iii.
313. Fry, *French*, pp. 193–4.
314. Gleadowe, *British Art*, pp. iv–v.
315. Andrew Causey, 'English Art and "The National Character"', 1933–34, in David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell (eds), *The Geographies of Englishness, Landscape and the National Past 1880–1940*, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, London, 2002.
316. 'Art Exhibitions: Mr Edward Bawden', *The Times*, 7 October 1933, p. 10.
317. Ravilious once reported a dream in which he had been commissioned to illustrate the works of Wodehouse for the Left Book Club.
318. 'Dingley Dell & The Fleet', in W.H. Auden, *Selected Essays*, Faber & Faber, London, 1954, p. 168.
319. W. H. Auden, 'Vespers', *The Shield of Achilles*, Faber & Faber, London, 1955, p. 75.
320. George Orwell, 'The Moon under Water', *Evening Standard*, 9 February 1946.
321. Christian Barman, Publicity Officer for London Transport, wrote to Ravilious about a drawing he had submitted: 'I think it is completely useless for the purpose of attracting traffic to Greenwich. Kensal Green cemetery with a stiff East wind blowing would be just about equivalent in traffic value.' 17 November 1937, in Ullmann, *Ravilious*, p. 375.
322. David Mellor, 'Sketch for an Historical Portrait of Humphrey Jennings', in Mary-Lou Jennings (ed.), *Humphrey Jennings: Film-Maker, Painter, Poet*, exh. cat., Riverside Studios, London, 1982, p. 64.
323. Lindsay Anderson, 'Only Connect: Some Aspects of the Work of Humphrey Jennings', *Sight and Sound*, April–June 1954, reprinted Jennings (ed.), *Humphrey Jennings*, p. 53.
324. Humphrey Jennings, *Pandemonium 1660–1886: The Coming of the Machine as Seen by Contemporary Observers*, André Deutsch, London, 1985.
325. Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Artists, Writers and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2010.

CHRONOLOGY

1903

22 July: born at 90 Churchfield Road, Acton.

1914

Eastbourne Boy's Municipal Secondary School.

1919

Scholarship to Eastbourne School of Art.

1922

Scholarship to Royal College of Art, London.

1924

Passes Diploma Examination with distinction. Design School Travelling Scholarship to Italy. Travels to Rome, San Gimignano, Florence and Venice.

November: exhibits work at RCA Sketch Club.

1925

Final year at Royal College of Art. Shares studio with Douglas Percy Bliss at 38 Redcliffe Road, Earl's Court.

April: exhibits work with Junior Art Workers Guild at Heal's Mansard Gallery.

May–September: exhibits work in student section of *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, Paris.

July: exhibits wood engraving at Redfern Gallery, London.

September: begins teaching at Eastbourne School of Art.

October: elected to Society of Wood Engravers, proposed by Paul Nash.

1926

Designs production of *The Careful Wife* for Eastbourne students.

Meets Tirzah Garwood (11 April 1908–27 March 1951), student at Eastbourne School of Art.

June: exhibits work in *Exhibition of British Decorative Art*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London.

1927

May: exhibits with Modern English Watercolour Society at St George's Gallery, London.

October: joint exhibition of watercolours with Edward Bawden and Douglas Percy Bliss at St George's Gallery, London.

1928

March: exhibits engravings in the Golden Cockerel Press exhibition at Whitworth Gallery, Manchester. Selected with Edward Bawden to paint murals in Refreshment Room of Morley College. Work on site begins in September, continuing to the end of 1929.

1929

Publishes many wood engravings. May: exhibits with Winchester Art Club.

December: exhibits with Society of Wood Engravers, St George's Gallery, and shows designs for Morley College with Edward Bawden at Bloomsbury Gallery, London.

1930

January: engagement to Tirzah Garwood.

February: official opening of Morley College murals by Stanley Baldwin. Meets Geoffrey Fry and paints Tennis panels for his London flat.

5 July: marries Tirzah Garwood. After honeymoon in Cornwall, moves to 5 Stratford Road, Kensington, and later to Weltje Road, Hammersmith, overlooking the River Thames. Begins teaching part-time at Royal College Design School, London, and Ruskin Drawing School, Oxford. December: exhibits with Society of Wood Engravers, Redfern Gallery.

1931

Joint tenancy of Brick House, Great Bardfield, Essex, with Edward Bawden.

March: exhibits portrait of Edward Bawden at Imperial Gallery, London.

June: exhibits cartoons for Morley College with Edward Bawden at Heal's Mansard Gallery.

December: exhibits with Society of Wood Engravers, Redfern Gallery.

1932

Design for Cactus House is included in the *Room and Book* exhibition organised by Paul Nash at Zwemmer Gallery, London.

May: exhibits painting of fireworks in *Modern Designs for Mural Decoration* at Carlisle House, Soho.

November: exhibits with Society of Wood Engravers, Redfern Gallery. Gives up regular oil painting.

1933

Paints ceiling decorations for the dining hall of Merchant Taylors' School, Rickmansworth, architect W.G. Newton (no visual record of this commission known).

April: paints murals in the Tea Room of Midland Hotel, Morecambe, Lancashire.

August–September: painting in Essex.

24 November–16 December: first one-man exhibition at Zwemmer Gallery, with 36 watercolours priced between 8 and 25 guineas. December: exhibits with Society of Wood Engravers, Redfern Gallery. Meets Diana Low at Great Bardfield.

1934

February: first visit to stay with Peggy Angus at Furlongs, near Lewes, Sussex.

March: return visit to Morecambe to repair water-damaged murals.

April: paints mural for the tea room at Pier Pavilion, Colwyn Bay, architect S.D. Adshead.

Spring and summer: further visits to Furlongs, purchase and restoration of former 'Fever Wagons'. Commencement of love affair with Helen Binyon.

September: moves to Bank House, Castle Hedingham, Essex, and gives up share in Brick House.

October: engraves glass designs for Stuart's of Stourbridge, shown in *Modern Art for the Table* at Harrods.

1935

January–March: Ten decorative designs on black 'Vitrolite' glass for the Royal Academy Exhibition of British Art in Industry, for architect E. Maxwell Fry; exhibits 11 designs for Stuart Crystal plus engravings for books.

June 21: son John Ravilious is born. Works with Royal College students on Royal Jubilee street decorations. J.M. Dent launches Ravilious's new designs for 'Everyman's Library'.

August–September: painting visit to Newhaven with Edward Bawden, staying at Hope Inn. First trial designs for Wedgwood. Begins to draw shops for eventual publication in *High Street*. Exhibits *Bull* at the AIA exhibition, *Artists against Fascism and War*. Work shown in a group exhibition of Essex artists at Silver End, Braintree.

1936

5–29 February: second one-man show at Zwemmer Gallery with 35 watercolours and designs all priced at 12 guineas. Coronation mug design for Wedgwood. Engravings for London Transport Board. September: exhibits with Essex artists at Braintree. Begins *Newhaven Harbour* lithograph.

1937

Gives up teaching. Works on catalogue cover and tennis stand with assistant John 'Cotton' Cotton.

for Pavilion of the United Kingdom at *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*. Visits John and Christine Nash in Buckinghamshire and Clissold and Diana Tuely in Kent. End of affair with Helen Binyon.

1938

February–March: visits Capel-y-Ffin, Breconshire.

May: visits the Tuelys.

July: visits Tollesbury.

August: visits Aldeburgh and Rye Harbour.

October–November: visits Dungeness and Bristol (with John Nash). Offers to work for 'Artists for Spain' fundraising campaign.

1939

January: member of selection panel for AIA exhibition *Britain Today*, a travelling exhibition of graphic art that includes two Ravilious lithographs from *High Street*.

February: stays in Eastbourne and paints *Beachy Head* and lighthouse.

March: visits Le Havre. Designs stamp commemorating centenary of the Penny Black. Exhibits in British Pavilion, *New York World's Fair*.

11 May–3 June: exhibition at Arthur Tooth & Sons, London, with 27 watercolours priced at 15 and 18 guineas.

22 August: son James Ravilious is born (dies 29 September 1999).

Wolfgang Meunzer, German refugee, stays at Bank House.

Summer: begins series of chalk hill figures.

3 September: declaration of war, volunteers for Observation Post duty at Castle Hedingham.

December: Admiralty offers position as official war artist.

1940

February: commencement of commission as war artist, stationed first at Chatham, then Sheerness, Whitstable and Grimsby (April).

May–June: joins crew of HMS *Highlander* on expedition to Norway and the Arctic Circle.

July: first exhibition of War Artists' Work at the National Gallery.

Summer: at Gosport, drawings of submarines.

September–October: drawings of coastal defences at Newhaven and Eastbourne.

October: Tirzah's first operation for breast cancer, exhibits in *Art for the People*, British Institute of Adult Education, Mansfield.

November: Morley College murals are destroyed by bombing.

1941

Completes submarine lithographs at W. & S. Cowell, Ipswich, and exhibits work at Leicester Galleries, London.

25 February: death of Emma Ravilious (mother), aged 77.

1 April: daughter Anne Ravilious is born.

April: exhibits textile designs for Cotton Board in Manchester.

Moves from Castle Hedingham to Ironbridge Farm, Shalford, Essex.

Summer: paints at Dover.

October–December: in Dunfermline and Dundee. Exhibits work in *Britain at War*, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

1942

February: *War Paintings* exhibition, National Gallery, London.

March: Tirzah has mastectomy operation.

Spring: with RAF in Yorkshire, Essex and Hertfordshire.

July: at RNAS training station, Westonzoyland, Somerset.

28 August: arrival at RAF station, Kaldadarnes, Iceland.

2 September: joins air-sea rescue mission which fails to return; presumed dead, aged 39.

1943

30 January: death of Frank Ravilious (father), aged 84.

1951

27 March: death of Tirzah Ravilious, aged 42.

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Collections including works by
Eric Ravilious

UK

Aberdeen Art Gallery

Cecil Higgins Art Gallery, Bedford

Birmingham Museum and Art
Gallery

Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool

Cartwright Hall Art Gallery,
Bradford

Brighton Museum & Art Gallery

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

National Museum of Art/
Amgueddfa Gelf Genedlaethol,
Cardiff

Tullie House Gallery, Carlisle

Pallant House Gallery, Chichester

Towner, Eastbourne

Faringdon Collection, Buscot
House, Faringdon

Kelvingrove Art Gallery and
Museum, Glasgow

Mercer Art Gallery, Harrogate

Ferens Art Gallery, Hull

Leeds Art Gallery

Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

British Council, London

British Museum, London

Imperial War Museum, London

London Transport Museum,
London

Ministry of Defence, London

National Maritime Museum,
London

RAF Museum, London

Royal College of Art, London

Tate, London

Victoria and Albert Museum,
London

Manchester City Art Gallery

Whitworth Art Gallery,
Manchester

Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon
Tyne

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Museum of Reading, Reading

Fry Art Gallery/North West Essex
Art Collection Trust, Saffron
Walden

Scarborough Art Gallery

Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield

Potteries Museum and Art Gallery,
Stoke-on-Trent

Overseas

Australia:

Queen Victoria Art Gallery and
Museum, Launceston, Tasmania

Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery,
Hobart, Tasmania

Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria

Canada:

Canadian War Museum, Ottawa

National Gallery of Canada,
Ottawa

New Zealand:

Museum of New Zealand/Te Papa
Tongarewa, Wellington

SELECT EXHIBITIONS

1932

Water-Colours by Edward Bawden,
Douglas Percy Bliss, Eric Ravilious,
St George's Gallery, London

1933

Water-Colour Drawings by Eric
Ravilious, Zwemmer Gallery,
London

1936

Eric Ravilious: Exhibition of Water-
Colour Drawings, Zwemmer Gallery,
London

1938

Eric Ravilious: Exhibition of Recent
Watercolours, Arthur Tooth & Sons,
London

1944

Eric Ravilious Memorial Exhibition,
Eastbourne and Brighton

1948

Eric Ravilious 1903-42: A Memorial
Exhibition of Watercolours, Wood
Engravings, Illustrations, Design &c,
Arts Council of Great Britain

1949

Eric Ravilious, 1903-42: A Memorial
Exhibition of Water-Colours, Wood
Engravings, Designs, Graves Art
Gallery, Sheffield

1972

Eric Ravilious 1903-1942, The
Minories, Colchester; Ashmolean
Museum, Oxford; Morley Gallery,
London; Towner Art Gallery,
Eastbourne

1980

Eric Ravilious Watercolours 1940-42,
Imperial War Museum, London

1981

Eric Ravilious 1903-42: An Exhibition
of Wood Engravings, Drawings and
Watercolours, Rye Art Gallery

1983

Eric Ravilious, Garton and Cooke,
London

1986

Eric Ravilious 1903-42: A Re-
assessment of His Life and Work,
Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne,
and touring

1986-7

Eric Ravilious: Wood Engravings and
Lithographs, New Library, Exeter
University

1990

Eric Ravilious, Decorative Arts
Group, London

1992

Eric Ravilious, Lithographer, Illustrator
and Designer, Fry Art Gallery,
Saffron Walden

Eric Ravilious 1903-42:

A Commemorative Exhibition,
Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne

2002

Eric Ravilious in Context, Fine Art
Society, London

2003

Eric Ravilious: Imagined Realities,
Imperial War Museum, London

Edward Bawden, Eric Ravilious: Design,
Fry Art Gallery, Saffron Walden

Ravilious in Print, Manchester
Metropolitan University Library

Familiar Visions: Eric and James
Ravilious, Towner, Eastbourne

2011

Ravilious in Essex, Fry Art Gallery,
Saffron Walden

2012

Eric Ravilious: Going Modern/ Being
British, Royal West of England
Academy, Bristol

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Douglas Percy Bliss, Eric Ravilious,
St George's Gallery, London

1933

Water-Colour Drawings by Eric
Ravilious, Zwemmer Gallery,
London

1936

*Eric Ravilious: Catalogue of an
Exhibition of Water-Colour Drawings*,
Zwemmer Gallery, London

1939

*Eric Ravilious: Exhibition of Recent
Watercolours*, Arthur Tooth & Sons,
London

1948

Eric Ravilious Memorial Exhibition,
Eastbourne and Brighton

1948-9

*Eric Ravilious 1903-42: A Memorial
Exhibition of Watercolours, Wood
Engravings, Illustrations, Design &c*,
Arts Council of Great Britain.
Foreword by Philip James,
Introduction by J.M. Richards

1958

*Eric Ravilious, 1903-42: A Memorial
Exhibition of Water-Colours, Wood
Engravings, Designs*, Graves Art
Gallery Sheffield. Introduction
by Richard Seddon

1972

Eric Ravilious 1903-1942,
The Minories, Colchester;
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford;
Morley Gallery, London; Towner
Art Gallery, Eastbourne.
Preface by Michael Chase and
recollections by Edward Bawden,
Douglas Percy Bliss, Cecilia Lady
Sempill, Helen Binyon and
John Nash

1979

Eric Ravilious Watercolours 1940-42,
Imperial War Museum, London

1981

*Eric Ravilious 1903-42: An Exhibition
of Wood Engravings, Drawings and
Watercolours*, Rye Art Gallery

1983

Eric Ravilious, Garton and Cooke,
London

1986

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A Re-assessment of His Life and
Work*, Towner Art Gallery,
Eastbourne and touring.
Commentary by Patricia
Andrew

1986-7

*Eric Ravilious: Wood Engravings and
Lithographs*, New Library, Exeter
University. Commentary by
Michael Pidgley

1990

Eric Ravilious, Decorative Arts
Group, London

1992

Eric Ravilious, Lithographer, Illustrator
and Designer, Fry Art Gallery,
Saffron Walden. Introduction by
Olive Cook

Eric Ravilious 1903-42: A

Commemorative Exhibition, Towner
Art Gallery, Eastbourne.
Introduction by Penny Johnson

2002

Eric Ravilious in Context, Fine Art
Society, London. Commentaries
by Richard Morphet and Peyton
Skipwith

2003

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Fry Art Gallery, Saffron Walden.
Introduction by Peyton Skipwith

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Introduction by Gaye Smith and
contributions by Stephanie
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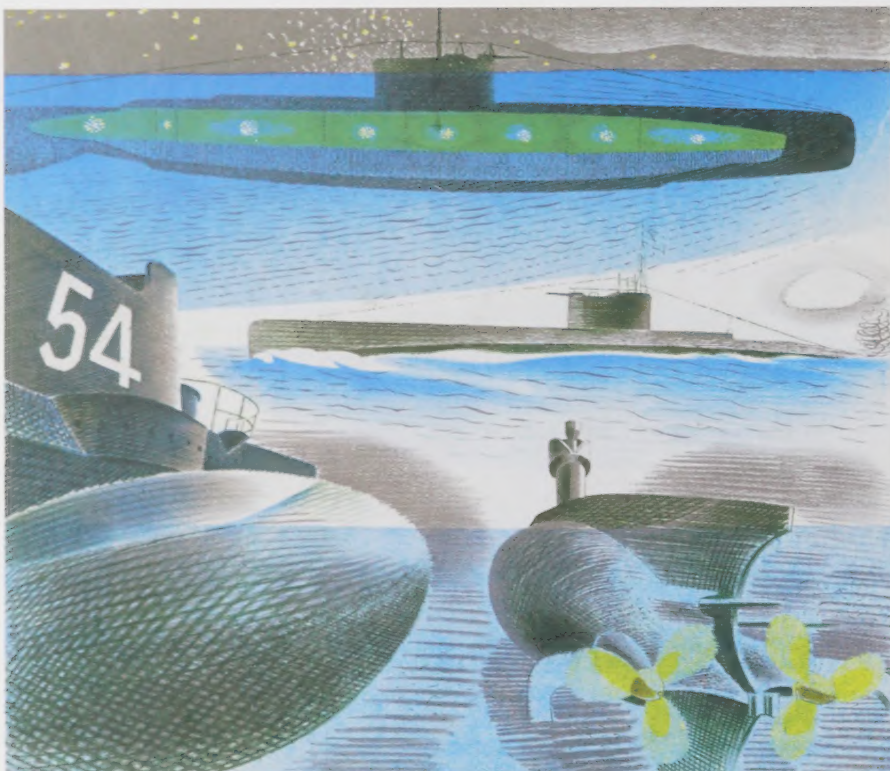
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ERIC RAVILIOUS (1903–1942) stands out from the artists and designers in the England of his time for his subtle transformation of traditional media – watercolour, wood engraving, mural painting and decorated ceramics – into memorable images of the familiar seen afresh. Using the extensive documentation of his work, Alan Powers has re-examined how Ravilious developed in each of these fields. Ravilious's work was poised between past and present, making it neither conservative nor avant-garde, but possessed of its own integrity based on imagination, knowledge, wit and technical skill. As the most comprehensive publication on the artist to date, this book positions Ravilious as a significant figure in the history of early twentieth-century British art, with a special affinity to places and objects.

DR ALAN POWERS is a lecturer and writer in the field of twentieth-century British art and design. His research covers a wide range of topics, including architecture, painting, typography, illustration and textiles. He was a guest curator of the centenary exhibition *Eric Ravilious: Imagined Realities* at the Imperial War Museum (2003) and his other books include *Britain in the series Modern Architectures in History* (2007) and *Curwen: Art and Print* (2008).

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