

Four British War Artists – Two Wars and Between

Garry Law

- Paul Nash 1889 - 1946
- John Piper 1903 - 1992
- Eric Ravilious 1903 - 1942
- Rex Whistler 1905 – 1944

All war artists – one in two wars

Art and Class

- Art to the upper class was connoisseurship, patronage, or a pastime practice
- Not seriously regarded by the middle classes though it was an opportunity for social mobility, if one could overcome family resistance
- Real artists living as bohemians might operate somewhat outside the class system overcoming a 'trade' label associated with earning a living from their skills

Art and Class

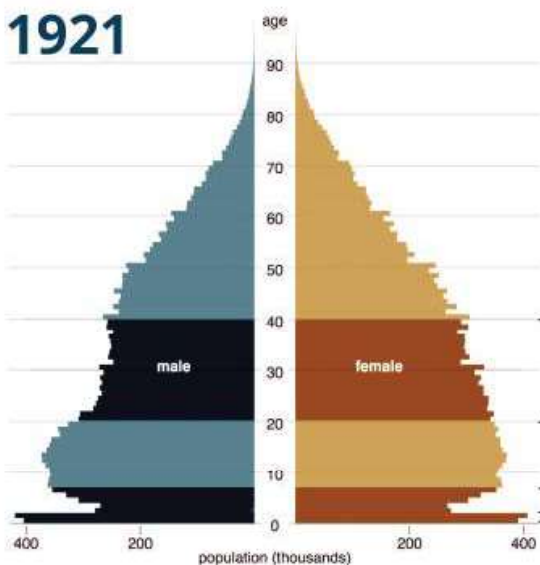
- Art to the upper class was connoisseurship, patronage, or a pastime practice
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- Real artists living as bohemians might operate somewhat outside the class system overcoming a 'trade' label associated with earning a living from their skills
- The Bright Young Things, was a nickname given by the tabloid press to a group of bohemian young aristocrats and socialites in between wars London.

Harold Acton
Patrick Balfour
Cecil Beaton
John Betjeman
Bryan Guinness
Oliver Messel
Diana Mitford
Nancy Mitford
Beverley Nichols
Elizabeth Ponsonby
Loelia Ponsonby

Anthony Powell
Edith Sitwell
Osbert Sitwell
Sacheverell Sitwell
Stephen Tennant
Henry Thynne
William Walton
Sylvia Townsend Warner
Evelyn Waugh
Rex Whistler

This chart shows 1921 Census data for England and Wales. This was 3 years after the end of World War One and the effects of the conflict can be clearly seen in the population structure.

1921



- **The population aged 20 to 40.**

There are more women than men in this age group. This reflects the 723,000 British servicemen who died between 1914 and 1918.

- **The population aged 2 to 6.**

There were a low number of boys and girls in this age group in 1921, as WW1 caused a dip in birth rates.

- **The population aged 0 to 1.**

There were a large number of 0 to 1 year olds in 1921, caused by the rapid rise in births after WW1 ended.

Paul Nash 1889 - 1946

- Surrealist
- War Artist – two wars

Born London but raised in Buckinghamshire

Solicitor father but for much of childhood his fathers earnings went to support a mentally ill mother

Developed a deep love of the countryside and archaeological features within it.

Failed naval entrance exam and reverted to art

One year at the Slade School but was poor at figure painting and did not persist, Fellow students there Ben Nicholson, Stanley Spencer
Some success before the war in prints and painting – landscape oriented - with a brooding vision

Married 1914 Wife was a suffrage activist.

Joined the Artists Rifles

Commissioned to an infantry regiment– served on the Ypres front from early 1917

Fell into a trench and was sent home injured – missed an attack in May 1917 where most of his unit were killed.

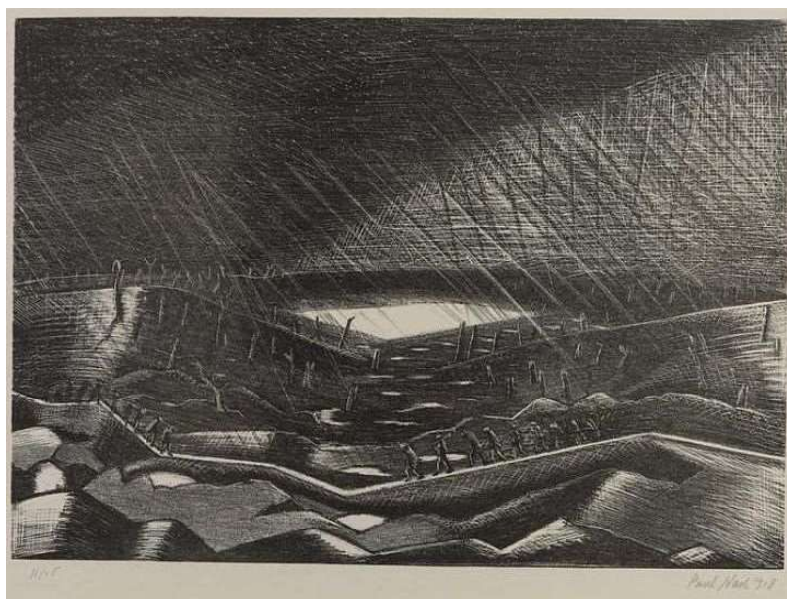
Developed his front pictures and exhibited while recovering
From November 1917 back a Ypres as a war artist. Gassed.



Paul Nash



We are Making a New World



Rain: Lake Zillebeke', 1917

Paul Nash



Ruined Country 1917

Paul Nash

Ypres Salient at Night 1918





The Wire 1918-19

“I am no longer a painter interested and curious, I am a messenger who will bring back word from the men who are fighting to those who want the war to go for ever. Feeble, inarticulate, will be my message, but it will have a bitter truth, and may it burn their lousy souls.”

Paul Nash

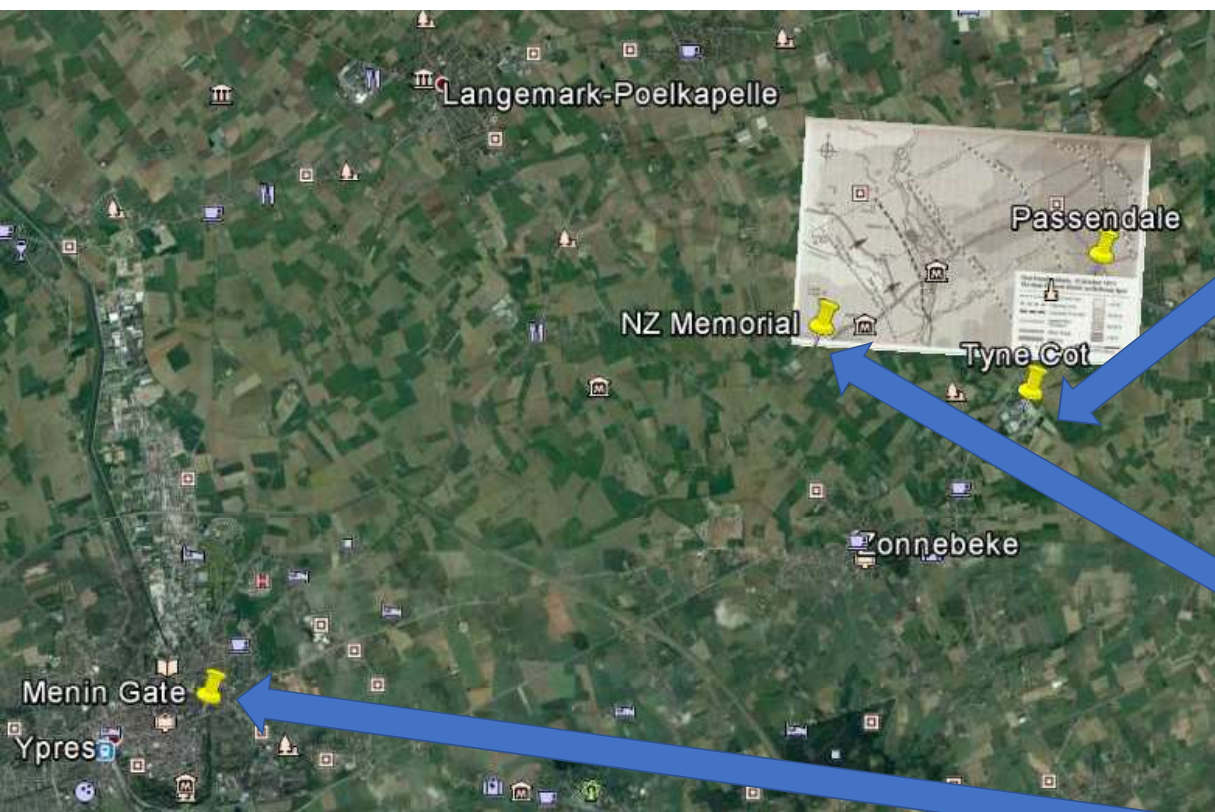


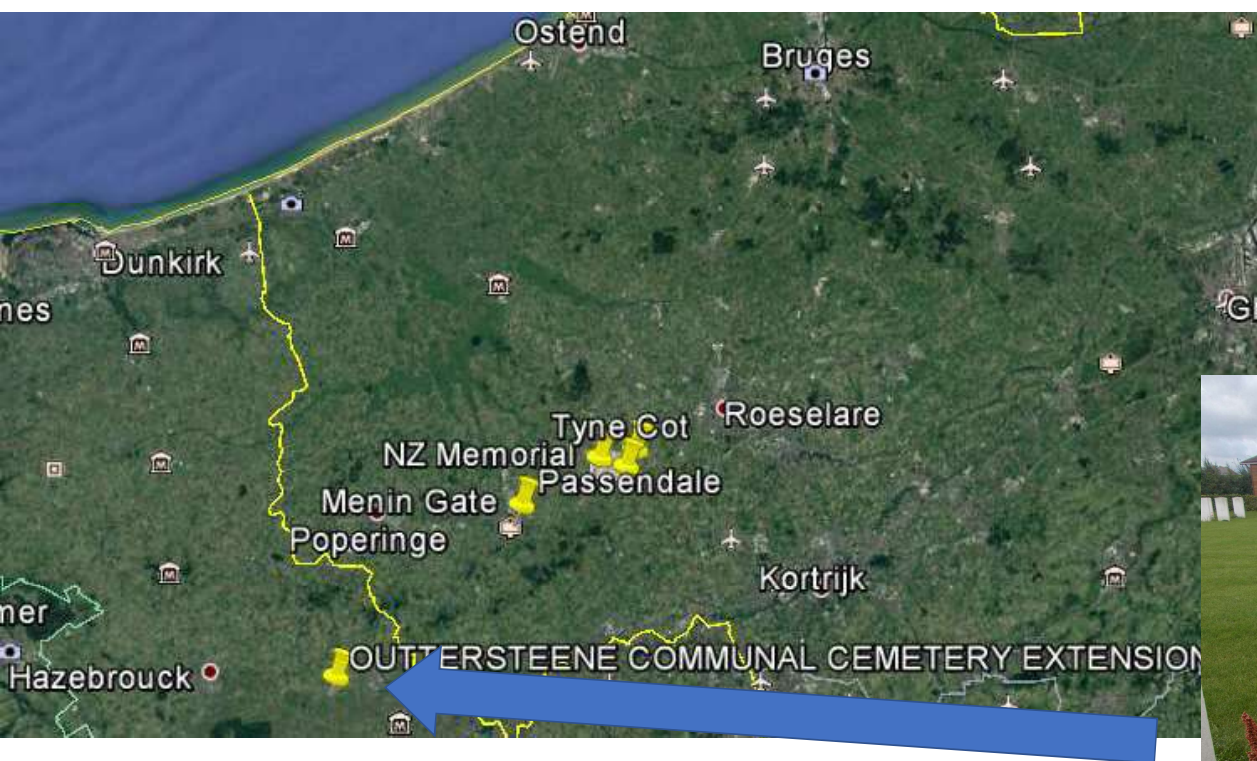
Menin Road 1919

Paul Nash



Bellevue Spur
Passchendaele,
12 October 1917
842 NZ troops
died
Third Battle of
Ypres – First
Passchendaele
Battle





4th Battle of Ypres – April 1918 – Defensive battle. German Spring Offensive.
Haigh – 8 April 1918 “Backs to the Wall “
NZ and Aus role in stopping the attack

Private Robert Law,
Cameronians, Scottish
Rifles. 4 April 1918



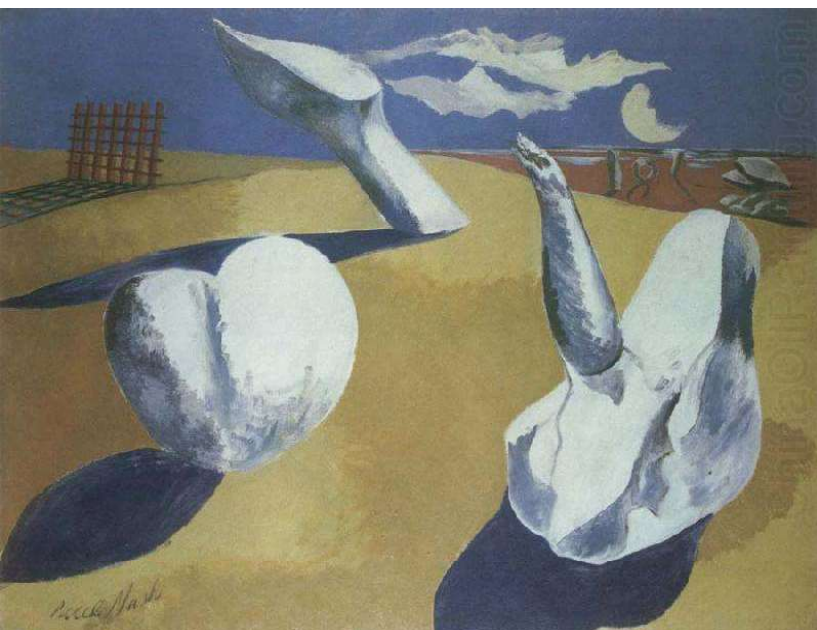
- Suffered depressive illnesses for a long period after the war – one nervous breakdown 1921 Post Traumatic Stress
- Travelled in Europe on several occasions and North Africa
- Influenced by De Chirico
- Representational art – but with a strong surrealist element
- Did engravings, book illustrations, posters, collages and assemblages
- 1924 -25 taught part-time at the Design School at the Royal College of Art, where his students included Eric Ravilious, who remained a life-long friend
- 1933 he co-founded an influential modern art movement Unit One with fellow artists Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson and the critic Herbert Read
- Argued that British art was too insular
- Co-organiser of The International Surrealist Exhibition, London 1936 (Aileen Agar an exhibitor)
- Requested to become a war artist in WW2
- Fell out with the military who wanted more realistic representations



Landscape with two friends, Clare Neilson collection, or - The Dyke by the Road, 1922



Paul Nash



Nocturnal Landscape (1938)

Paul Nash

Rye Marshes 1932 (Shell poster)



Mid 1930's - Eileen Agar – “most intense of his affairs” – sought found objects together



Event on the Downs (1934)

Paul Nash





Wood on the Downs 1930
c.f David Hockney Yorkshire
(Wittenham Clumps Berkshire)

Paul Nash

Equivalents for the Megaliths 1935





Maiden Castle Dorset Photos 1935

Paul Nash





Maiden Castle Dorset early 1940s

Paul Nash

Cowley Dump 1940





Totes Meer
1940 - 41

Paul Nash



Encounter in the
afternoon



The Battle of
Britain 1941

Paul Nash



Defence of
Albion

(Off Portland
Bill)

Paul Nash

MR. PAUL NASH

Mr. E. H. Ramsden writes:—

Paul Nash is dead—but who shall estimate his loss? He was not only a great painter: he was also a great man. Moreover, such was his genius for friendship that it is difficult to write of his death with equanimity. "Paul is a poet," his friends always said of him, and in many ways this characterized his attitude both towards his art and towards life as a whole. For, if as a painter he was endowed with a gift that is rare in the imaginative beauty and lyrical grace of its achievement, as a man the magnanimity of his spirit was such that even when he was ill and unable to paint he continued to make a positive contribution to the world by the fineness of his courage and by the greatness of his generosity, for of all artists Paul Nash was the most generous and the most ready to acclaim his fellows. When, too, one remembers the less rarefied side of his personality, the keenness of his wit, and the whole charm of his disposition, one feels that the same simple words might be spoken of him as of another landscape painter before him: "I knew Mr. Constable, Sir," said the old coachman who drove his friend and biographer to the funeral, "and when I heard that he was dead I felt as sorry as if my own father had died: he was as nice a man as that, Sir."

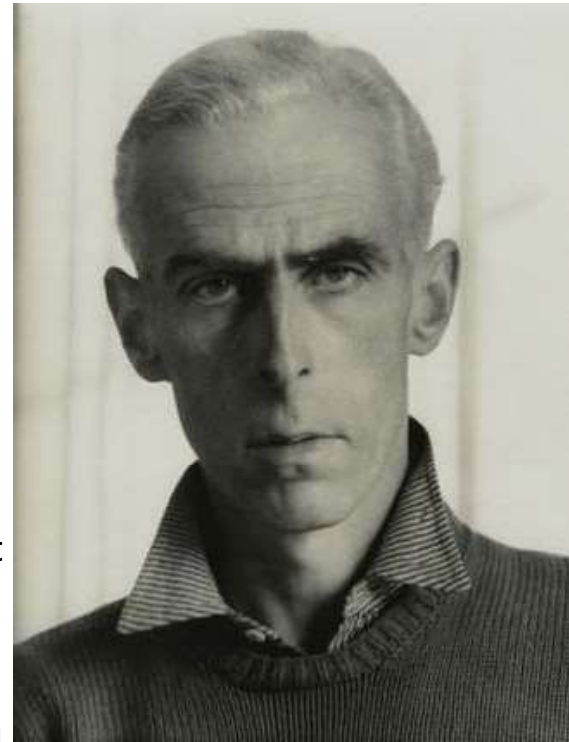
"... genius for friendship... "

"... fineness of his courage and by the greatness of his generosity ... most ready to acclaim his fellows."

"... keenness of wit and the whole charm of his disposition .."

John Piper 1903 - 1992

- Born to a solicitor father with an interest in the arts / ancient buildings
- Showed early precocity in art encouraged by his parents
- Family forced him to train as a solicitor – took articles
- Failed final exams but his father's death relieved him of the obligation to continue. Resented "5 wasted years"
- Subsequently Richmond School of Art and the Royal College of Art, but left the latter. Mother's financial support vital after his father's will made his inheritance conditional completing law.
- Married first to a fellow student - Eileen Holding – they proved incompatible - she taking up with another artist and he with Myfanwy Evans, art critic and later an opera librettist. Married later, several children
- War artist



John Piper

Huge range:

- Painter
- Printmaker
- Collage artist
- Illustrator
- Photographer
- Stage set designer
- Author / critic
- Muralist
- Stained glass designer
- Fabric design
- Tapestry designer
- Ceramic artist

A collaborator with many – readily accepting others as equals.

“... gothic, cerebral, measured and controlled.”



John Piper

Early Career



Beach with Starfish 1933-34

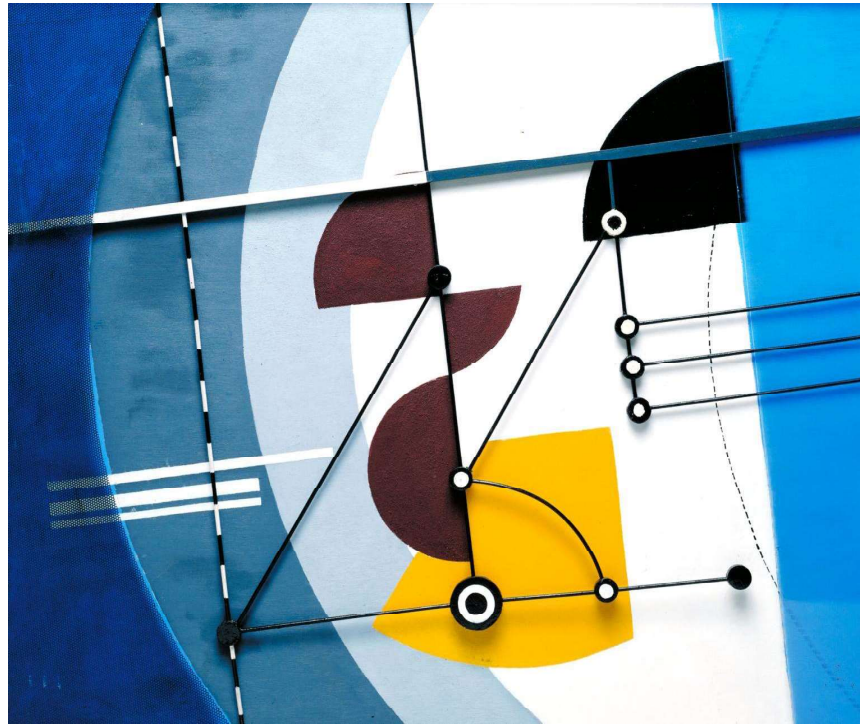


The Harbour at Night 1933
c,f, Frances Hodgkins

John Piper

Modernism - Abstraction

- Had often travelled with family and alone to France and was familiar with modern French art
- Admirer of Braque, Picasso and Miro.
- Took up abstract painting with collage and abstract constructions in the mid 30's.
- Abstraction had returned to international favour with the suppression of modern art by the Nazis and the Soviets requiring its artist to only apply "socialist realism". Abstraction seemed antipathetic to those dictates.
- Was a member of the London 7 and 5 society: Len Lye and Frances Hodgkins members – also Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson
- Wife published an art magazine – The Axis and Penguin Modern Painter series book on Hodgkins



Construction 1934

John Piper



Abstract 1 1935



1935

John Piper

War Artist

- Volunteered for the Home Guard – sense of duty – his oldest brother was killed in WW1
- Expected to be called up
- Kenneth Clark chairman of the War Artists Advisory Committee sought to engage him as an artist. It was initially piecemeal rather than continuous, but it kept him from enlistment.
- Hard to see that he had a strong representational contribution to make so perhaps it was personal regard on Clark's behalf
- Early work included some sites of armed forces activities but at his own request he later focused on buildings at risk and bombed churches

The Passage to the Control-room at South West Regional Headquarters, Bristol

John Piper





St Michaels Coventry Cathedral 1940

John Piper



Windsor Castle 1941 onwards –
Royal Commission
Drawing Room Clarence House



John Piper



North Wales

“Picturesque neo-romantic”

John Piper

Post-War

One of the Great and Good

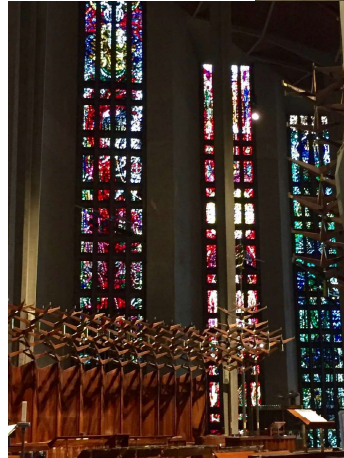
Venice



John Piper
John Piper



John Piper and
Patrick Reyntiens
Baptistry Coventry
Cathedral



Nave windows are by
others

John Piper



Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral's Lantern glass.

John Piper



John Piper and Patrick Reyntiens, Christ's College Christchurch



Peggy Angus

Declined knighthood
was a companion of
honour.

John Piper

Eric Ravilious 1903 - 1942

- Painter
- Wood engraver
- Illustrator
- Muralist
- War Artist
- Born London, son of a servant and a salesman (shopkeeper in another account), raised in Eastborne, Sussex. Sussex was his spiritual home all his life.,
- Trained Royal College of Art under Paul Nash – who became a lifelong friend. Contemporaries were Edward Bawden, Henry Moore
- Married to fellow artist Tizah Garwood
- Friend of the Pipers

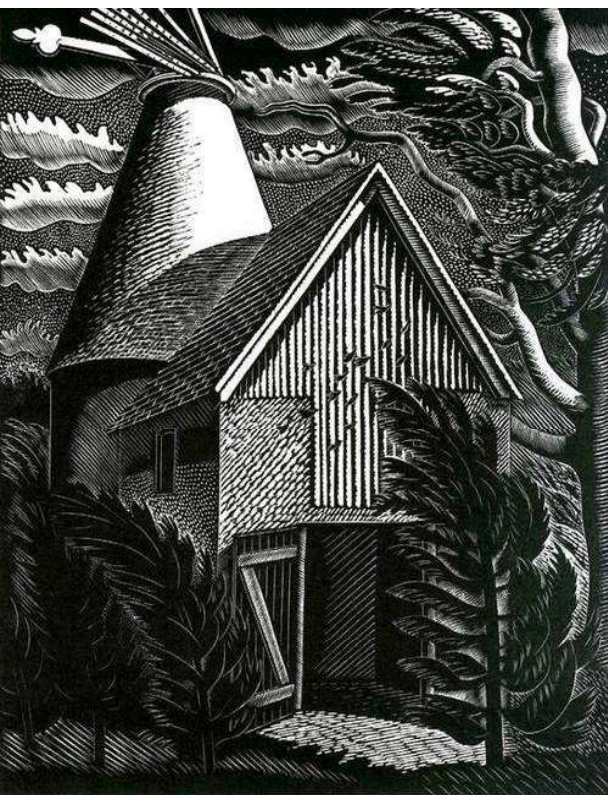


(Unknown artist)

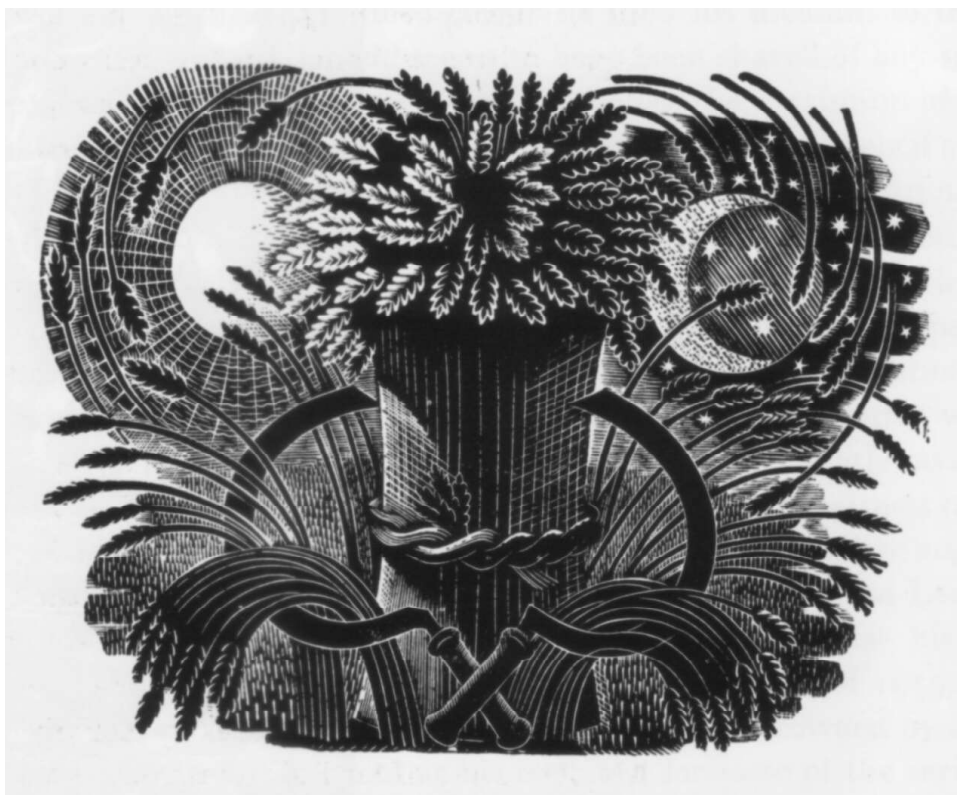
Eric Ravilious

Eric Ravilious 1903 - 1942

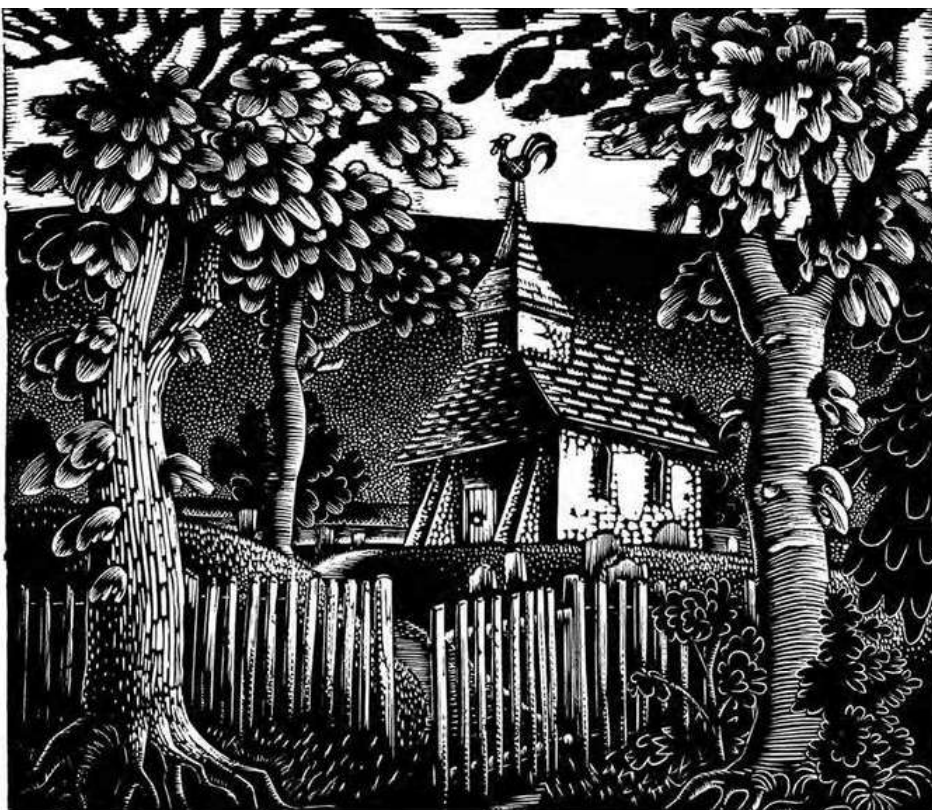
- “He loved dancing, tennis and pub games, was constantly whistling, and even in the mid-1930s found little time for politics, working up only a mild interest in the international crisis or the latest Left Book Club choice. He was, by all accounts, excellent company. "I never saw him depressed," recalled his friend from the Royal College of Art, Douglas Percy Bliss. "Even when he fell in love – and that was frequently – he was never submerged by disappointment. Cheerfulness kept creeping in.”
- The affairs continued after marriage.



Windstorm



Eric Ravilious



Eric Ravilious