

# FRY ART GALLERY

30<sup>th</sup> July - 30<sup>th</sup> October 2016



*Bullford Mill, 1927*

Edward Bawden:  
The Early Watercolours

## EDWARD BAWDEN RA (1903-1989)

Teacher, illustrator, printer, graphic artist, designer and War Artist ( in the Middle East), Edward Bawden was a prolific master of many mediums. However, perhaps overshadowed by his various other achievements, he was also a fine watercolourist - and has been compared to his contemporary friend and colleague, Eric Ravilious.

Bawden and Ravilious met at the Royal College of Art School of Design in the early 1920s - the pair of them being famously described by their teacher Paul Nash as "an extraordinary outbreak of talent".

Following his marriage in 1932 Bawden and his wife moved out of London to the small Essex village of Great Bardfield and during the 1930s he produced many watercolours of the Essex countryside and beyond - often painting side by side with Ravilious (who, with his wife, lodged with the Bawdens until 1934).

The new exhibition at the Fry Art Gallery will showcase these 'early' watercolours, many of which were exhibited by Bawden at the Zwemmer and Leicester Galleries in London in 1933 and 1938 respectively.

What is most striking about the paintings is their freshness, charm and familiarity - reflecting the everyday bucolic scenes of fields and houses surrounding Bawden and the other Great Bardfield artists in their rural Essex idyll.

Realistic yet impressionistic, they make an interesting contrast to and comparison with the watercolours of Eric Ravilious; the best competing on equal terms with this acknowledged master of the genre.

With paintings from public galleries and private lenders, some never seen in public before, this fascinating exhibition restores Bawden to his rightful place in the first rank of English twentieth century watercolourists.

Keith Nuttall

- 1        ***Essex Houses*, c1917** (In display case)  
(Fry Art Gallery)
- 2        ***Boys 5th Form Classroom*, 1918** (In display case)  
(Fry Art Gallery)
- 3        ***Landscape near the Cheesering*, 1926**  
(Fry Art Gallery)
- 4        ***Liverpool Street Station*, early 1930s**  
(Fry Art Gallery)
- 5        ***Bullford Mill*, 1927**  
(Fry Art Gallery)
- 6        ***Farmyard near Braintree***  
(The Higgins, Bedford)
- 7        ***Finchingfield*, 1936**  
(Private collection)
- 8        ***July 9pm (Ives Farm)*, 1937**  
(Private collection)
- 9        ***The Greenhouse*, 1932**  
(Manchester City Art Gallery)
- 10       ***Ives Farm*, 1939**  
(Private collection)
- 11       ***June 6am*, 1937**  
(Private collection)
- 12       ***Now with Religious Awe***  
(Government Art Collection)
- 13       ***November 3pm***  
(Private collection)
- 14       ***August 7am*, 1937**  
(Private collection)
- 15       ***Winter Landscape with Trees***  
(Private collection)
- 16       ***Landscape in Essex***  
(Northampton Museum)

- 17            ***The Pond, Great Bardfield***, 1933  
(Scarborough Art Gallery)
- 18            ***Stable Yard***, 1933  
(The Alfred East Gallery, Kettering)
- 19            ***Willow Grove***, mid-1930s  
(The Atkinson, Southport)
- 20            ***Back Garden at Great Bardfield***, mid-1930s  
(The Towner, Eastbourne)
- 21            ***Noon***, 1936  
(Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester)
- 22            ***Larchwood***, 1935  
(Museums Sheffield)
- 23            ***March (Brook House Great Bardfield)***, 1934  
(Museums Sheffield)
- 24            ***September 11am***, 1937  
(Private collection)
- 25            ***September 8.30pm - Newhaven***, mid-1930s  
(The Towner, Eastbourne)
- 26            ***Newhaven Harbour***, 1937  
(Private collection)
- 27            ***Edward Bawden Working in his Studio***, 1930  
by Eric Ravilious  
(Royal College of Art)
- 28            ***Absent Presence (Pendant Fuschias)***  
(Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, Carlisle)
- 29            ***Portrait of Eric Ravilious***, mid-1930s  
(The Towner, Eastbourne)
- 30            ***A Country House in Essex***, 1938  
(Private collection)
- 31            ***Brick House Garden, Great Bardfield***, 1936  
(Private collection)

Edward Bawden is one of the most respected artists of his generation, widely admired today for his work as an illustrator, designer, muralist and printmaker. Yet one important aspect of his career has been neglected until now. When Eric Ravilious set about reinventing the English watercolour tradition in the 1930s he did not do so alone, but working closely with Bawden. The two men met on their first day at the Design School of the Royal College of Art and thereafter became not only great friends but also close collaborators whose move to Great Bardfield coincided with a joint decision to focus on this difficult medium.

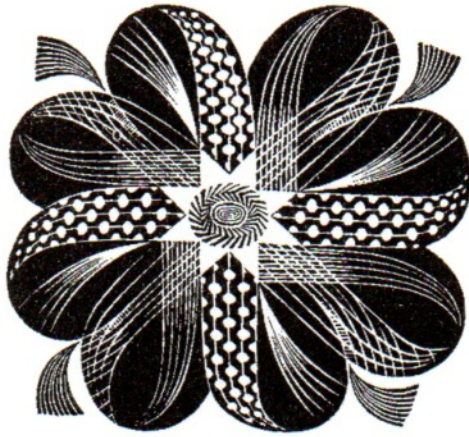
In 1933 both artists held their first solo exhibition of watercolours at one of London's newest and most fashionable venues, the Zwemmer Gallery, and of the two it was Bawden whose work particularly impressed critics and collectors. Five years later he held a second solo show, at the Leicester Galleries, and this was also a success. One critic described the work as 'immensely serious' and likened Bawden to Monet; the artist's status was confirmed when, not long after the war, he was one of only nineteen artists deemed worthy of a title in the series Penguin Modern Painters.

Although Bawden continued to paint watercolours throughout his life, changing tastes in art saw critics cast their praise elsewhere. Gradually, the acclaimed paintings of the 1930s were forgotten - as indeed the watercolours of Ravilious were forgotten.

Several years ago, having produced a number of books on Bawden and Ravilious, Tim Mainstone, of the Mainstone Press, began looking into these pre-war watercolours. Before long he was embroiled in a quest to find and properly identify Bawden's paintings from the 1930s, a task made especially difficult by the artist's choice of obscure fragments of verse or concise descriptions of time and place as titles for his work. Often people simply renamed a picture so that, for example, *My heart, untravel'd, fondly turns to thee* (1932) became *Derelict Cab*. Even when held by public collections these pictures were sometimes near impossible to identify.

The resulting book, *The Lost Watercolours of Edward Bawden*, brings together - in reproduction - the largest collection of the artist's 1930s watercolours ever assembled. And this Fry Art Gallery exhibition is the first to focus specifically on Bawden's pre-war career as a modern watercolour master. With paintings like *Larchwood* and *The Pond, Great Bardfield* on view, this timely exhibition offers a valuable opportunity to re-assess the career of a wonderful artist.

James Russell



THE FRY ART

GALLERY

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[www.fryartgallery.org](http://www.fryartgallery.org)

Opening Hours

Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 2pm - 5pm, Saturday 11am - 5pm

Sunday and Bank Holiday 2.15 pm - 5pm

Free Admission

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