

Eric Ravilious (1903-1942)

December, February and May from

Almanack 1929 with Twelve Designs Engraved on Wood

Wood engravings, 1928

Julian Francis Collection

Almanacs set out the key dates in the calendar and also provided astrological forecasts for the year. They advised on the best times for planting, auspicious and unlucky days and gave long range weather forecasts based on the movement of the stars and phases of the moon.

Eric Ravilious was commissioned to illustrate the Lanston Monotype Corporation's *Almanack* in 1929. He chose to include figures representing the signs of the zodiac in scenes of the Sussex countryside, recapturing some of the old mystical tradition of astrological powers influencing daily life. He wrote that: 'The deities who became symbolised in the planets were thought to govern the change of the seasons and thus the agricultural labours of each month'. Ravilious established his reputation as a wood engraver before becoming better known as a painter of watercolour landscapes.

John Nash (1893-1977)

Wild Garden, Winter

Watercolour, 1959

Tate: Presented by the Trustees of the Chantrey Bequest 1959

In 1944 John Nash moved to Bottengoms farmhouse, a virtually derelict building near Wormingford in Essex. During the summer he would head off on painting expeditions across Britain with artist friends such as Edward Bawden but during the winter it was Bottengoms and the surrounding country that occupied him.

Wild Garden, Winter shows one of the ponds at Bottengoms, the nearby stand of saplings reflected on its icy surface. Nash had overseen the rescue of the garden from years of neglect and saw its layout and planting as one of his most satisfying achievements. He enjoyed capturing the subtlety of the colours he experienced on overcast winter days and it is the balance of light and tone that makes this such a convincing meditation on the season.

John Aldridge (1905-1983)

Winter

Oil on canvas, 1947

UK Government Art Collection

Gardens and gardening were two passionate interests of John Aldridge and a recurring topic in his paintings. Aldridge's move to the village of Great Bardfield in north west Essex and his purchase of 'Place House' in 1933 enabled him to develop his horticultural expertise and create a garden that became much admired. He was to remain in this flourishing artistic community initially collaborating with Edward Bawden, himself a knowledgeable gardener, on a series of wallpaper designs. Aldridge was also in contact with other keen artist plantsmen including near neighbours Cedric Morris and John Nash.

The landscape and rural scenes close to Aldridge's home featured in and inspired his work and he would often be seen working *en plein air* on his portable easel. The delicate and muted tones of *Winter* with its bare trees and heavy snow convey a sense of the bitter seasonal cold, conditions that no doubt favoured working in the warmth of his studio.

Kurt Jackson (b.1961)

Bird song, Lymington River, winter woodland, Feb. 2005

Mixed media, 2005

St Barbe Museum Collection

The trees are showing their bare bones, their true form after shedding their clothes; the only real colour is now in the last bits of foliage left rusting above and below, the reds and browns and orange, tawny and russet, a spectrum of earth and fire in the dark woodland. I sit with my back against the bole of an oak, her corrugated bark rigid against my spine, my legs sprawled in the damp leaf litter. My brush follows these now visible undulating boughs and branches, twisting and snaking, each bend echoing the phrases of the song thrush that repeat and reinvent themselves rising up into the canopy.

Kurt Jackson

Annie Ovenden (b.1945)

Clearing in the New Forest

Oil on board

Collection of the Artist

Driving home yesterday I noticed little yellow dots appearing in the hedgerows. Exciting! The primroses are waking from their winter sleep. Spring is on its way.

Subtle, slow changes to start with, sometimes barely noticeable but as the days grow into weeks, as stormy short days turn long and sunny my artist's palette requires subtle changes too.

For example in winter the sun sits low in the sky casting long shadows, defining contours, hills and valleys needing more ultramarine, alizarin and burnt umber than green. The trees etch their bare branch patterns against the skyline's varying tones of greys.

Annie Ovenden

Graham Sutherland (1903-1980)

Cottage in Dorset, Wood End

Etching, 1929

Stuart Southall Collection

Landscape and the effects of time and weather were significant themes in the work of Graham Sutherland. *Cottage in Dorset, Wood End* draws on elements of these while offering glimpses of his later more distinctive style as he moved away from the pastoral tradition of earlier etchings to establish his own visual landscape. This evolving approach is evidenced in the shape and movement of the row of trees as they wave their bare unnaturally twisted boughs in the chill winter wind. Sutherland evokes a sense of unease, as a solitary stylised bird flies across the dreary landscape.

Cottage in Dorset, Wood End was made shortly before he more or less abandoned the medium in 1930, owing to the collapse of the market for contemporary etchings. Sutherland turned instead to painting and poster design, finding inspiration in the mid-30s and intermittently throughout his life from the wild and dramatic landscape of Pembrokeshire in west Wales.

Sven Berlin (1911-1999)

Gypsies in the Snow

Oil on canvas, 1955

Private collection

Sven Berlin and his wife Juanita left Cornwall for the New Forest in 1953. After an arduous two-month journey in a Gypsy wagon they camped near Minstead just as winter was arriving. With little money, battling illness and nursing a sick child it was a harsh introduction to the itinerant life. However, their saving grace was the support of the local Gypsy community, who showed them how to survive, let them join flower and peg selling expeditions and even paid them to decorate wagons and make signs.

Berlin was accepted by the Gypsies to a remarkable degree and was given unusual freedom to draw and paint their lives in the New Forest compounds. Many of his paintings of the Shave Green compound are marked by the green, aqueous light under the canopy of beech and oak leaves. Life there in summer might seem idyllic but the winters were hard as the Gypsies were forbidden to create any structure with walls or floor and so lived in tents and wagons. In his memoir of these years *Dromengro: Man of the Road* Berlin wrote 'I had seen them here in the snow ... when each figure of man or woman or child stood out as in a Lowry painting, the colours iridescent, the flames of the fires burning bright orange'.

John Nash (1893-1977)

Flood at Wormingford

Watercolour, 1960

UK Government Art Collection

The British countryside was Nash's primary subject matter throughout his life. He preferred subtle and less dramatic subjects and found potential in scenes that, apparently mundane and ordinary, might have been passed over by another artist. He would immerse himself in familiar settings and tease out the details that appealed to him: 'Half a haystack interests me now just as much as a wide stretch of country'. Knowing the local landscape so well Nash was also able to appreciate and capture its changing character across the seasons.

Flood at Wormingford was painted in the winter of 1960 when East Anglia and other parts of the country had been hit by severe flooding, with roads turned into rivers and houses inundated with water. Here the worst of the weather seems to have passed and weak sunlight returns. Nash had a particular fondness for water and the transformation of a nearby landscape into a lake must have been a welcome diversion during one of the wettest years on record. Nash's interest in the shapes of bare trees and the play of the wintry light on the floodwaters evokes a typically calm and reflective scene.

Evelyn Dunbar (1906-1960)

Winter Garden

Oil on canvas, 1929-37

Tate: Purchased 1940

The inspiration for much of Evelyn Dunbar's early work lay in her devotion to nature and the natural world, and in particular the garden, which was deeply rooted in her affection for the Kentish landscape. Dunbar's great interest in plants and flowers and her understanding of their various stages of development and the impact of the season is manifest in *Winter Garden*.

Dunbar worked intermittently on *Winter Garden* for some eight years, commencing in the late 1920s before she went to London as a student, finally completing it in 1937. The painting retains a freshness and vitality which is enhanced by the low tone to reflect the soft winter light. *Winter Garden* depicted the extensive Dunbar family garden at The Cedars, Strood, near Rochester in Kent. Its vagaries were well known to her and this personal connection enlivens the painting.

The garden was well maintained and designed with the different seasons in mind, and despite the enforced lethargy of winter there is a feeling of ethereal beauty about the garden. As the light fades, the gardener can still look forward with confidence and optimism to spring's arrival and the first bulbs breaking through the soil.

Howard Phipps (b.1954)

Winter Stubble Fields, Winkelbury Hill Fort

Linocut, 2004

Collection of the Artist

Winkelbury is a massive Iron Age promontory hill fort that thrusts out from a chalk ridge on the edge of Cranborne Chase in Wiltshire. It is observed here from the head of the Ebbles Valley, and the first springs that develop into the Ebbles chalk stream rise in the lower fields in winter. Working on location on a winter morning I made a watercolour study, from which I developed this linocut. I liked the shapes and patterns within the stubble fields, in addition they made for a contrast with the timeless, rounded form of the hill fort defined by the low winter light, just picking out the ramparts. The hedgerow and first marks of the plough through the pale stubble serve to take the viewer's eye into the picture.

The linocut was printed, using an Albion hand press, from three separately cut blocks: a key block for the black (and the upper most part of the sky colour), and a further three colours from the two other blocks, parts of each colour are superimposed one on another at the printing stage. The key block is printed last.

Howard Phipps

Frederick Golden Short (1863-1936)

New Forest

Oil on canvas, 1900

Southampton City Art Gallery

Short was born at Lyndhurst and studied at Southampton Art School. The majority of his work was based around his New Forest home. Short knew the Forest and its trees as well as anyone and was a familiar local figure cycling with his paints and easel strapped to his back. He never tired of its heaths and glades, capturing their changing character across the seasons.

This painting is among Short's larger and more impressive works and reflects his skill in capturing the colours of the New Forest in varying qualities of light. Here the purple heather blooms of summer are long gone, and the ponies move across a landscape of browns and ochres, and yet Short conveys the spirit of warmth and optimism that a clear bright day towards the end of winter can bring. Patches of sunlight slipping between the passing clouds highlight a distant stand of trees and catch the first new flowers on the gorse bushes.

Gertrude Hermes (1901-1983)

Mistletoe

Wood engraving, 1930

Stuart Southall Collection

Gertrude Hermes and her husband Blair Hughes-Stanton were key figures in the revival of British wood engraving between the wars. In 1929 they moved from London to Hatcheston in Suffolk and it was there that Hermes developed the illustrations for *A Florilege: Chosen from the Old Herbals* (written by Irene Gosse and published in 1931), her most significant body of work at that time.

Mistletoe is one of 20 wood engravings Hermes created for *A Florilege*. As a group they are a remarkably powerful set of botanical portraits, combining accurate detail with a dynamic use of abstract pattern and sharply contrasting darkness and light. Hermes' love of the natural world is reflected by the sketchbooks she kept, crammed with studies of plants and animals and this first-hand knowledge underpinned her engravings for *A Florilege*. Each of the plants featured has its own beauty and flowering season but *Mistletoe*, which appears against a burst of light bringing all its associations of Christmas jollity and renewed fertility in the depths of winter, is perhaps the most arresting image of all.

Howard Phipps (b.1954)

Snowdrops

Wood engraving, 2004

Collection of the Artist

In 1989 I was commissioned to engrave five vignettes as chapter headers for a book by Mirabel Osler on her Shropshire garden, including tulips - white against dark foliage. An ideal subject for the wood engraver given we start with a blackened rectangle of wood, and that each incision into the surface of the boxwood will appear as white in the final proof.

I have since then enjoyed making occasional very small vignettes such as a primrose bank, the pale flowers set against the dark of ivy and grasses. In *Snowdrops* however, despite them being white, I selected a ground level view, just simple shapes against the white of the paper, defined in the main by black line, which means carefully lowering the area all around and endeavouring not to bruise that black line.

Snowdrops are the first cheerful signs of spring and are a common sight alongside the chalk rivers here in Wiltshire.

Howard Phipps

Clare Leighton (1898-1989)

Twelve Illustrations for *The Farmer's Year*

Wood engravings, 1933

Stuart Southall Collection

Clare Leighton became one of the most prolific and successful book illustrators of her day. Her most notable publications were those she wrote and illustrated including *The Farmer's Year* (1933), *Four Hedges* (1935) and *Country Matters* (1937).

The Farmer's Year: A Calendar of English Husbandry was a labour of love that featured a large-scale engraving for each month with a facing text and decorated initial letter. The book proved extremely popular, running to three English editions and an American one in just three months.

Leighton's illustrations for *The Farmer's Year* are an elegiac but unsentimental record of agricultural work across the seasons during the 1930s. They depict a disappearing world of horse-power and manual labour with the focus very much on the endeavours of the ordinary workers. She celebrated their quiet skill in these timeless tasks, providing food for a nation largely unaware of their existence.

January - Lambing

February - Lopping

March - Threshing

April - Sowing

May - Sheep-shearing

June - Haymaking

July - To the Milking

August - Harvesting

September - Apple-picking

October - Cider-making

November - Ploughing

December - The Fat Stock Market

Robin Tanner (1904-1988)

Wiltshire Hedger

Etching, 1928

Stuart Southall Collection

After qualifying as a teacher Tanner started evening classes at Goldsmiths' School of Art where he studied life drawing and etching. His artistic development was greatly influenced by the 1926 exhibition of Samuel Palmer's work at the V&A. Tanner developed his own re-imagining of rural Wiltshire, but one that was based on an intimate knowledge of a vanishing landscape and way of life.

Wiltshire Hedger was his seventh etching, intended as part of a series on rural labours along with *Wiltshire Roadmaker* (1928) and *Wiltshire Woodman* (1929). He based the setting on landscapes around Weavern and Slaughterford where he had watched a hedger at work. Hedging was a job for winter when other tasks on the farm were impossible and here upright shoots are being partially cut with a bill hook and then woven into a stout framework from which the hedge would re-grow and keep livestock contained.

Stanley Badmin (1906-1989)

Potato Clamps

Etching, hand coloured, 1931

Stuart Southall Collection

This etching shows potatoes being retrieved from a clamp: they are sorted, sacked and then carted away. The clamp needed well-drained soil so the potatoes would not rot. The base was covered with a layer of dry straw and the potatoes piled on top forming a long ridge with a triangular section. This was covered with more straw and then soil. Badmin took care to depict the ventilation holes appearing at intervals along the clamp: 'You can see the straw ventilation going up, covered with earth, like little chimneys'. Protected from frost and damp in this way the potato harvest could last through the winter.

Stanley Badmin studied at Camberwell School of Art and the Royal College of Art. During the Second World War he contributed to the *Recording Britain* scheme, making drawings of places at risk from development, decay or enemy action. Badmin reached his widest audience as a commercial artist and illustrator working on children's books such as *Village and Town* (1939), *Trees in Britain* (1942) and *Farm Crops in Britain* (1955) for Puffin and other commissions from Ladybird, Odhams Press, Shell and The Reader's Digest. Many of these publications focused on the countryside, nature and farming.

Charles Tunnicliffe (1901-1979)

Uncovering Mangold Roots

Watercolour, 1959

Ladybird Books / University of Reading Special Collections

Charles Frederick Tunnicliffe was Britain's most notable twentieth century wildlife artist. He was a prolific book illustrator, working on over 80 publications during a 40-year period. Tunnicliffe was also commissioned by companies such as Shell, ICI, Mackeson Stout and Harris Tweed to create artwork for products and advertising campaigns and illustrated several sets of Brooke Bond Tea collectible cards. As a result there can be few people living during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s who did not come across his work, even if they never knew the artist responsible.

Tunnicliffe inspired a new generation's interest in the countryside through his work on the Ladybird *What to Look For* books, first published between 1959 and 1961. The text and illustrations celebrate the everyday wonder to be found on country walks, at the farm, by the seashore and in the garden. This illustration shows mangolds being retrieved from a clamp to feed the waiting cows but also includes carefully observed details such as the hovering kestrel and two fleeing mice in the bottom left corner.

Charles Tunnicliffe (1901-1979)

A Hard Winter

Etching, 1928

Stuart Southall Collection

Tunnicliffe attended the Macclesfield School of Art in Cheshire aged just 14, later winning a scholarship to the Royal College of Art in London. His family ran a farm at Sutton Lane Ends near Macclesfield and this was his day-to-day experience from birth until he left for London 19 years later. Although he decided to become an artist rather than continue the family business he retained a fascination for agricultural work and it provided the subject matter for many of his prints and book illustrations.

In *My Country Book* Tunnicliffe explained that while these formative years did not make him an artist they shaped his interests because they were 'spent in the heart of the country, in close contact with animals and birds, with farms and farmers and their ways of life, and all the thousand and one jobs which a farmer has to do'. His intimate understanding of the countryside and the activity that unfolded there across the seasons is reflected in his depictions of agricultural work. His affection for the ordinary tasks of farming shines through in this scene of cabbages being fed to hungry sheep while snow covers the grass.

Robin Tanner (1904-1988)

Christmas

Etching, 1929

Stuart Southall Collection

Christmas remains an enduring image of much that Tanner held dear throughout his life. Detailed studies were made at Biddlestone of the bell turret, pond and thatched cottage, a few miles west of Chippenham where Tanner was living. The tall Flemish buildings, barns, inn and market cross were sketched by moonlight when he and his wife Heather, whom he met when both were pupils at Chippenham Grammar School, walked to Castle Combe late one night. They married in 1931. Tanner recalled how eerie it felt in the empty village hearing the sleeping villagers snoring and bedsprings creaking.

A sense of timelessness and anticipation of the festivities to come is evoked in *Christmas*. Children carry lanterns and gather round as the waits, who were local people who received money for their singing, commence.

Sara Hannant (b.1964)

The Holly Man, Twelfth Night, Bankside

Archival pigment print, 2007

Collection of the Artist

On Twelfth Night - the end of Christmas Festivities, also the day before a general return to the rigours of work known as Plough Monday - members of the The Lion's Part perform an ancient midwinter celebration with a contemporary twist. The Holly Man, who they describe as 'the Winter guise of the Green Man from our pub signs, Pagan myths and folklore', 'wassails' or toasts the people, the River Thames and Shakespeare's Globe. The Bankside Mummers then perform a St George Folk Combat play, featuring the Turkey Sniper, Clever Legs, and the Old 'Oss. At the end of the play, cakes are given to the crowd, those who find a bean and a pea hidden in their cakes are hailed King and Queen for the day and crowned with ceremony. They then lead the people through the streets culminating in drinking, dancing, singing and storytelling.

Sara Hannant