



Cranbrook and the British Arts & Crafts Movement: George Booth's Legacy

CRANBROOK ART MUSEUM

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CRANBROOK AND THE BRITISH ARTS & CRAFTS MOVEMENT: GEORGE BOOTH'S LEGACY

**presents Cranbrook's
collection of British Arts &
Crafts Movement objects
collected by Cranbrook's
founder, the newspaper
publisher George Gough
Booth (1864-1949).**

An anglophile and metals artisan, Booth greatly admired the father of the Arts & Crafts Movement, William Morris (1834-1896), and agreed with Morris' belief that the only way art and design could progress was through arts reform and education. Booth's admiration for Morris manifests itself in his participation in the founding of the Detroit Society of Arts & Crafts in June 1906, and his subsequent role as the Society's first president. Through this venue, Booth began a long career in arts patronage that involved supporting and educating artists and subsequently exhibiting their works in order to expose the public to the highest forms of art. Later, Booth established Cranbrook Educational Community based on Morris' philosophy that all the arts should have equal recognition, be it metalwork or painting, and that artwork was an integral part of a healthy life. The majority of the objects in this exhibition were purchased and later donated by Booth, with other objects coming into the collection of Cranbrook Art Museum as a result of the strength of Booth's vision to create an Arts & Crafts utopia in the United States in order to foster new art and design.

BRITISH ARTS & CRAFTS IN DETROIT

William Morris believed that the industrial revolution of the 19th century had led to poorly designed objects with unnecessary applied decoration that concealed an object's use and materials of construction. These objects not only made peoples' homes cluttered and unattractive, but they also signaled the decreasing role played by skilled craftsmen and designers in industry. Morris called for a revival of craft-based industry based on the guild system customary in Medieval Europe, a time when he believed art and life were completely intertwined as craftsmen took pride in and gained personal fulfillment through their work. Additionally, Morris felt that if ornament was needed, it should be used sparingly and based on abstracted depictions of nature. Otherwise, surface decoration of objects

should be minimized so that the beauty of an object's material was evident.

George Booth closely followed contemporary activities occurring in England in the late-19th century. This interest, which was in part the result of his family's ancestry, combined with his appreciation of the arts, led to his involvement with the British Arts & Crafts Movement. Booth joined the Boston Society for Arts & Crafts, the first such society in the United States, at its inception in 1897. Booth's admiration for William Morris began at this time and his commitment to Morris' ideals became decisive with the founding of the Cranbrook Press in 1900. The press was located in the attic of the Detroit Evening News, the paper managed by Booth and owned by his wife's, Ellen Scripps Booth, father. Booth's Cranbrook Press took its name from the town in Kent County, England, where his family originally was from, and was a revival of the private press tradition practiced by Morris at his Kelmscott Press. Each of the limited-edition books produced were hand-printed on handmade paper using a font similar to Morris' Golden type. These books subsequently reiterated Morris' belief that design reform was based on good craftsmanship. The subject matter of the books ranged from fictional stories about Cranbrook to religious texts and a biography of Abraham Lincoln. Booth wrote of his admiration for Morris and the Kelmscott Press:

The literary work that Morris did would seem to have been a life-work in itself. His life in any case is a most striking example of the accomplishments of industry and purpose, and an evidence of what is possible for one man to do when pleasure accompanies labor. His life was one great determined protest against modern industrialism.

Booth's resolve to aid in the artistic and cultural reform of Detroit led to the founding of the Detroit Society of Arts & Crafts (DSAC) in 1906 and the founding of the related art school in 1926 (now the College for Creative Studies). This was a crucial time in Detroit when the city was becoming increasingly industrial and modern as the automotive industry began to flourish. This also was a time nationally when the quality of American art and design was questioned. During the DSAC's 25-year existence, the work of several skilled contemporary artisans and craftsmen from Europe and America was exhibited and sold through this venue. Not only did the DSAC serve as a public showroom for

the highest achievements in art and design, but educational lectures and workshops also were conducted for members.

The Society had a strong beginning and its first major exhibition, held in 1907, showcased decorative arts from England and America. This exhibition traveled to several American cities including Chicago, New York and Boston. Although work from other countries was also shown, the DSAC's affiliation with art in England continued and in 1908, T.J. Cobden-Sanderson (1840-1922), of the Doves Press, London, lectured at the DSAC during an exhibition of books from the Doves Press and the Kelmscott Press. May Morris (1862-1938), William Morris' daughter, presented a lecture in January 1911, in conjunction with a small exhibit of her jewelry designs. This lecture was perhaps the start of the relationship between Ms. Morris and the Booth family. Letters in the Cranbrook Archives give evidence of this friendship as various members of the Booth family called on her in England. In one letter, handwritten to George Booth in May 1922, May Morris writes: "I am very sorry not to have met you. Perhaps you will be over again sometime. If I had known whether you were motoring in my neighborhood, I should have begged you to pay me a call here [Kelmscott Manor] on your way. It is the most beautiful moment of the year for my garden." This casual note speaks of the relaxed manner of their relationship.

Although several exhibitions and lectures were organized by the DSAC each year, perhaps the most important exhibition was held in late 1920 and featured work by important British Arts & Crafts designers. Each of the 320 pieces was selected by a small committee from the DSAC that traveled to England, and the exhibition's success brought national attention to Detroit and the Arts & Crafts Movement in England and America. Booth acquired many pieces from this exhibition, including bed hangings designed by May Morris that he used for his own bed at Cranbrook House. He also purchased other items like *The Three Perfumes* painted by Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh (1864-1933) and *The Beatitudes*, an illuminated page by Ella Gordon Milne (no dates available) and the *Raleigh Ship Casket* by Omar Ramsden (1881-1958) that were among the many works first loaned to the Detroit Institute of Arts before coming to Cranbrook Art Museum.

Like these pieces, the majority of Booth's purchases throughout his long collecting career were meant to be seen in museums and likewise serve as tools for public art education. Through his involvement with the DSAC, Booth also began lasting relationships as a patron and friend to many of the artisans exhibited. Booth's interest led him to support artists and thus enabled them to produce works that could then be shown in public venues. In

addition to his relationship with May Morris, Booth also continued to commission and purchase works from British craftsmen like Omar Ramsden and émigré silversmith Arthur J. Stone (1847-1938).

ARTS & CRAFTS AT CRANBROOK

Booth established Cranbrook as an arts community combining nature, art, education and spirituality to foster the well being of students, artists and visitors. As such, Cranbrook is one of the few successful enterprises based on the tenets of William Morris. Cranbrook was begun in 1904 with the purchase of land in Bloomfield Hills by George and Ellen Booth. In 1908 Cranbrook House was completed to the specifications of the architect Albert Kahn. Despite its size, Cranbrook House's simple façade and layout is similar to houses built in the British Arts & Crafts manner that were meant to mimic cottages in the British countryside.

Beginning in 1922 and throughout the decade, the Booths continued the development of Cranbrook by converting a small meeting house into a series of structures that became Brookside School, also in the mood of the British Arts & Crafts Movement. Christ Church Cranbrook was consecrated in 1928 and became an early repository for Arts & Crafts objects at Cranbrook. Among the many exceptional pieces, two tapestries from the Merton Abbey looms in England, a workshop owned by Morris and Co., hang in the church's narthex; an Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) tapestry, also from Merton Abbey, hangs in the church's library; and objects by eminent British silversmiths are used for services. Additionally, the church's sanctuary features a large fresco by Katherine McEwen (1875-no date available), a British artist who, upon moving to Detroit, was instrumental in the administration of the DSAC. It is also interesting to note the extent of Booth's commitment to the arts as he dedicated the church's small chapel to St. Dunstan, the patron saint of artists and craftsmen.

In 1925 Booth began discussions with Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen (1873-1950) and plans soon were developed for Cranbrook School for Boys and Cranbrook Academy of Art. Although these buildings were not designed in the Arts & Crafts style, Cranbrook School for Boys was furnished with pieces designed by Gustav Stickley (1858-1942), an American craftsman greatly influenced by Morris and his followers. Resulting from Booth's interests in supporting artists and from Saarinen's needs as Cranbrook grew, craft studios were established in 1927. These studios formed the basis of the Academy of Art and contained workshops for sculpture, cabinetry, silver, iron, bookbinding and weaving. Several international craftsmen were hired including British sculptor David Evans (1895-no dates available) and British silversmith Arthur Nevill Kirk



William Morris, Wallpaper Sample "Pimpernel" (detail), 1876



Arthur Nevill Kirk "Altar Cross" (detail), Mid-1930s

(1881-1958). Booth brought Kirk to America in 1927, and he completed several pieces for Christ Church Cranbrook, the Booth family and the Cranbrook community. Likewise, Evans came to America in 1929, at which time he created a bronze relief panel depicting the boys' football team to adorn the school's stadium. The arts and crafts workshops were structured in such a way that master craftsmen worked with and educated apprentices in order to provide objects for the ever-expanding Cranbrook community. Additionally, craftsmen were encouraged to accept outside commissions as a way to remain financially solvent. However, for a variety of reasons, including financial difficulties that resulted from the Great Depression, Booth closed the workshops in 1932.

The Academy of Art opened that same year as an art school that went beyond customary teaching methods and included almost all media. By following Booth's vision and replacing traditional teaching practices with an open plan where students work with guidance and not through formal instruction from department heads, Cranbrook Academy of Art resembles an Arts & Crafts community more so than an art school. The ten disciplines eventually represented—architecture, ceramics, fiber, metalsmithing, painting, photography, printmaking, sculpture, 2-dimensional design and 3-dimensional design—each are given equal weight and importance, and students are encouraged to explore experimentation with all media.

The campus was completed with the construction of Kingswood School Cranbrook for Girls, Cranbrook Institute of Science and the Booths' final project, Cranbrook Art Museum. All of the structures on campus are institutions of learning, and the Art Museum is no exception. Booth began the museum's collection with the community's students in mind, filling the museum's galleries with outstanding examples of art and design from all time periods and regions. Like Morris, Booth felt that it was imperative for a healthy individual to be surrounded by beauty, whether it was found in nature or man made. Cranbrook fulfills both criteria as the exceptional grounds are complemented by a variety of extraordinary buildings housing beautiful works of art and design. Booth's legacy continues today as the community works to educate students and showcase their work.

Ellen M. Dodington
Collections Fellow

All works Collection of Cranbrook Art Museum by donation of George Gough Booth or the Cranbrook Foundation unless otherwise noted.

BOOKS

CRANBROOK PRESS, Detroit, Michigan
Founded by George G. Booth:

GEORGE GOUGH BOOTH
(American, born 1864; died 1949)
Cranbrook Tales, 1902
Lent by Cranbrook Academy of Art Library

Cranbrook Papers, Book I, 1900-1901
Lent by Cranbrook Archives

The Pleasures of Planting and Other Thoughts, 1902
Lent by Cranbrook Academy of Art Library

The Cranbrook Press and Some Books and Bookmakers, 1902
Lent by Cranbrook Academy of Art Library

GEORGE BOOTH, editor
The Revelation of St. John the Devine,
reprinted 1901
Illustrations by Albrecht Durer
Lent by Cranbrook Archives
Lent by Cranbrook Academy of Art Library

Three Wise Men, 1901
Lent by Cranbrook Academy of Art Library

MUBASHSHIR IBN FATIK, ABU AL-WAFA
(Arabic, 11th century)
The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers, reprinted 1901
Lent by Cranbrook Academy of Art Library

JOHN LOCKE SCRIPPS
(American, born 1818; died 1868)
Life of Abraham Lincoln, c.1900
Lent by Cranbrook Academy of Art Library

KELMSCOTT PRESS, Hammersmith, England
Founded by William Morris:

WILLIAM CAXTON
(English, born 1422; died 1491)
The Recuyell of the Histories of Troye, Book I, reprinted 1892
Lent by Cranbrook Archives

The Recuyell of the Histories of Troye, Books II and III,
reprinted 1892
Lent by Cranbrook Archives

GEOFFREY CHAUCER
(English, d.1400)
The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, reprinted 1896
Illustrations by Sir Edward Burne-Jones
Lent by Cranbrook Academy of Art Library

WILLIAM MORRIS
(English, born 1834; died 1896)
The Water of the Wondrous Isles, 1897
Lent by Cranbrook Archives

CERAMICS

HAROLD and PHOEBE STABLER
(English, Harold born 1872; died 1945; Phoebe birth date
unknown; died 1955)
Bull with Puti, 1914
Clay
Lent by Cranbrook Educational Community, Cultural Properties
Collection (CEC 539)

DAVID EVANS
(English, b. 1895; date unknown)
Model for "Football Group Relief", c.1930
Plaster
(T2003.7)

FURNITURE

GUSTAV STICKLEY
(American, born 1858; died 1942)
Armchair, after 1901
Oak, leather
(Z01979.13)

Settle, c.1908
Oak, leather
(Z01979.14)

ILLUMINATED TEXTS

JESSIE BAYES
(English, born 1890; died 1934)
Hymns to the Elements, c.1923

Ink, gilding and paint on parchment
Lent by Cranbrook Educational Community, Cultural Properties
Collection

ELIA GORDON MILNE
(English, no dates available)
The Beatitudes, 1920
Ink, gilding and paint on parchment
(CAM1944.127.1)

The Courtenay Tree, 1921
Ink, gilding and paint on parchment
(CAM1944.127.2)

M. H. ROBERTSON, attributed to
(English, no dates available)
A Sonnet Addressed by King James to his Son Henry, early
20th century
Ink, gilding and paint on parchment
(CAM1924.6)

METALWORK

ELIZABETH COPELAND
(American, born 1866; died 1957)
Box, 1922
Silver, cloisonné enamel
Lent by Cranbrook Educational Community, Cultural Properties
Collection (TH1990.46)

DOUGLAS DONALDSON
(American, born 1882; died 1972)
Tea Caddy, early 20th century
Silver, enamel and semi-precious stones
(CAM1944.115)

ERIC GILL
(English, born 1882; died 1940)
Alms dish, early 20th century
Silver
(CAM1930.74)

ARTHUR NEVILL KIRK
(English, lived in America, born 1881; died 1958)
Altar Cross, mid-1930s
Silver and enamel with semi-precious stones
Lent to Cranbrook Art Museum by Marion Kirk Jones
(T2002.18)

Cigarette Box, 1929
Silver, ivory
(CAM1933.38)

Cigarette Box, 1929
Silver, copper
(CAM1933.44)

Compote, 1929
Silver, cloisonné enamel and gemstones
(CAM1933.37)

Hand Mirror, c.1931
Silver, ivory, enamel and semi-precious stones
(CAM1987.61)

Pitcher, c.1927-1947
Silver
(CAM1999.8)

Sweets Dish, 1929
Executed by Margaret Biggar at Cranbrook Academy of Art
Silver
(CAM1933.35)

Sweets Dish, 1929
Silver
(CAM1933.41)

Triptych, c.1940
Silver, enamel
(CAM1940.69)

OMAR RAMSDEN
(English, born 1873; died 1939)
Goblet, c.1921
Silver
(CAM1921.3)

Mazer, early 20th century
Silver, wood
(CAM1930.62)

Raleigh Ship Casket, c.1920
Silver, enamel
(CAM1944.122)

ARTHUR J. STONE
(English, lived in America, born 1847; died 1938)
Coffee and Tea Service, 1916-1917

Silver
Tea Tray (CAM1944.9)
Coffee Pot (CAM1944.10)
Tea Pot (CAM1944.11)
Sugar Bowl (CAM1944.12)
Cream Pitcher (CAM1944.13)
Tea Strainer and Stand (CAM1944.14 a, b)
Tea Caddy (CAM1944.15)
Hot Water Bottle Stand and Burner (CAM1944.16)

PAINTING

MARGARET MACDONALD MACKINTOSH
(English, born 1864; died 1933)
The Three Perfumes, 1912
Watercolor on vellum
(CAM1955.275)

TEXTILES

MAY MORRIS
(English, born 1862; died 1938)
Valance, c.1917-1919
Embroidered wool on linen
(Z01982.20)

Bed Hangings, pre-1917
Embroidered wool on linen
(CAM1955.402)

WILLIAM MORRIS (designer)
(English, born 1834; died 1896)
Selection of upholstery samples, late 19th/early 20th century
Wool and cotton
Gift of Mrs. William H. Hansen (CAM1991.16)

WALLPAPERS

WILLIAM MORRIS (designer)
(English, born 1834; died 1896)
Selection of wallpaper samples, late 19th/early 20th century
Block print on paper
Gift of Mrs.. William H. Hansen (CAM1991.17)

CRANBROOK AND THE BRITISH ARTS & CRAFTS MOVEMENT
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Cranbrook Art Museum, a non-profit contemporary art
museum, is an integral part of Cranbrook Academy of Art, a
community of artists-in-residence and graduate-level students
of art, design and architecture. The Academy of Art and Art
Museum are part of Cranbrook Educational Community, which
also includes Cranbrook's Institute of Science, Schools and
other affiliated cultural and educational programs.

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