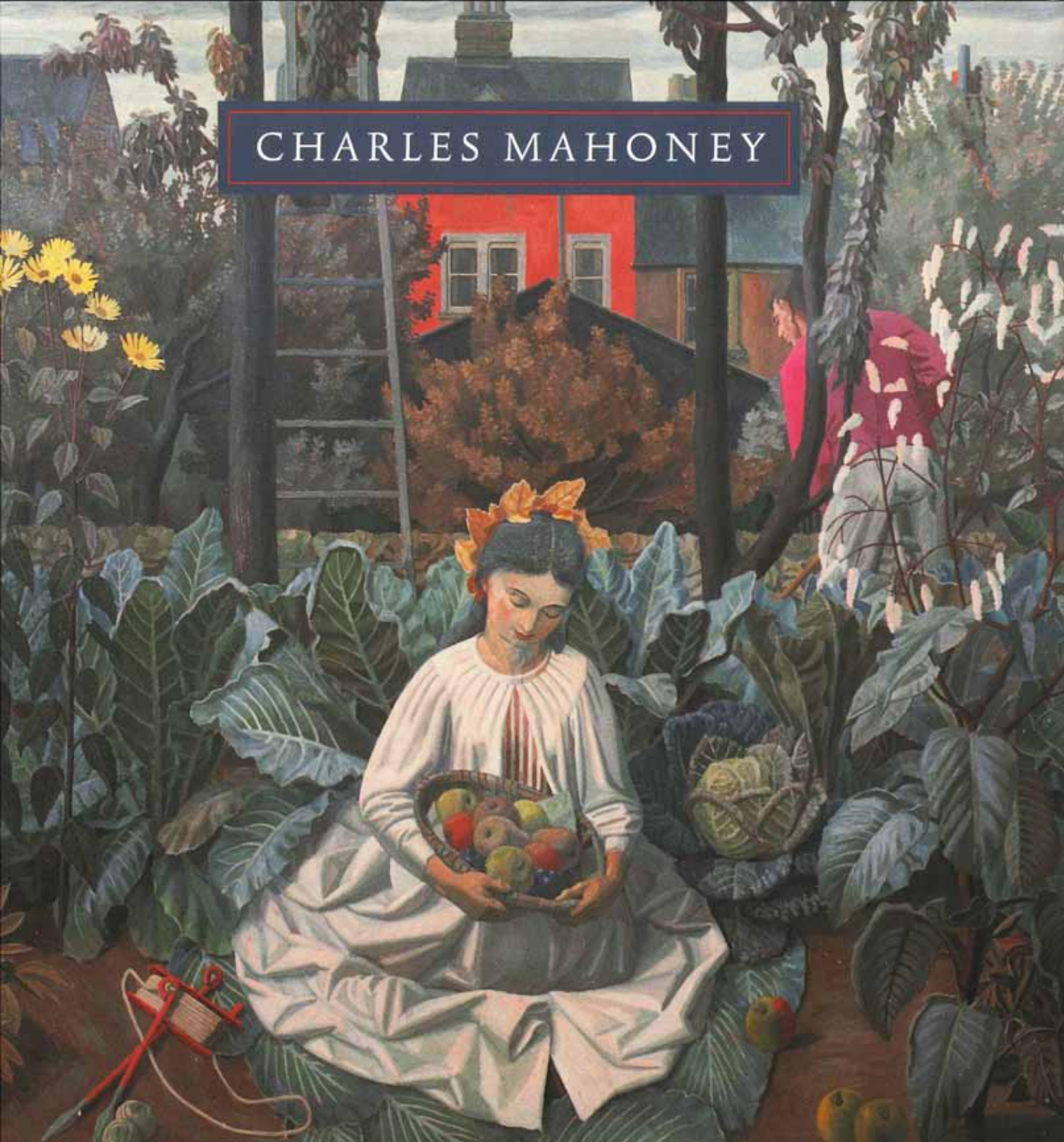
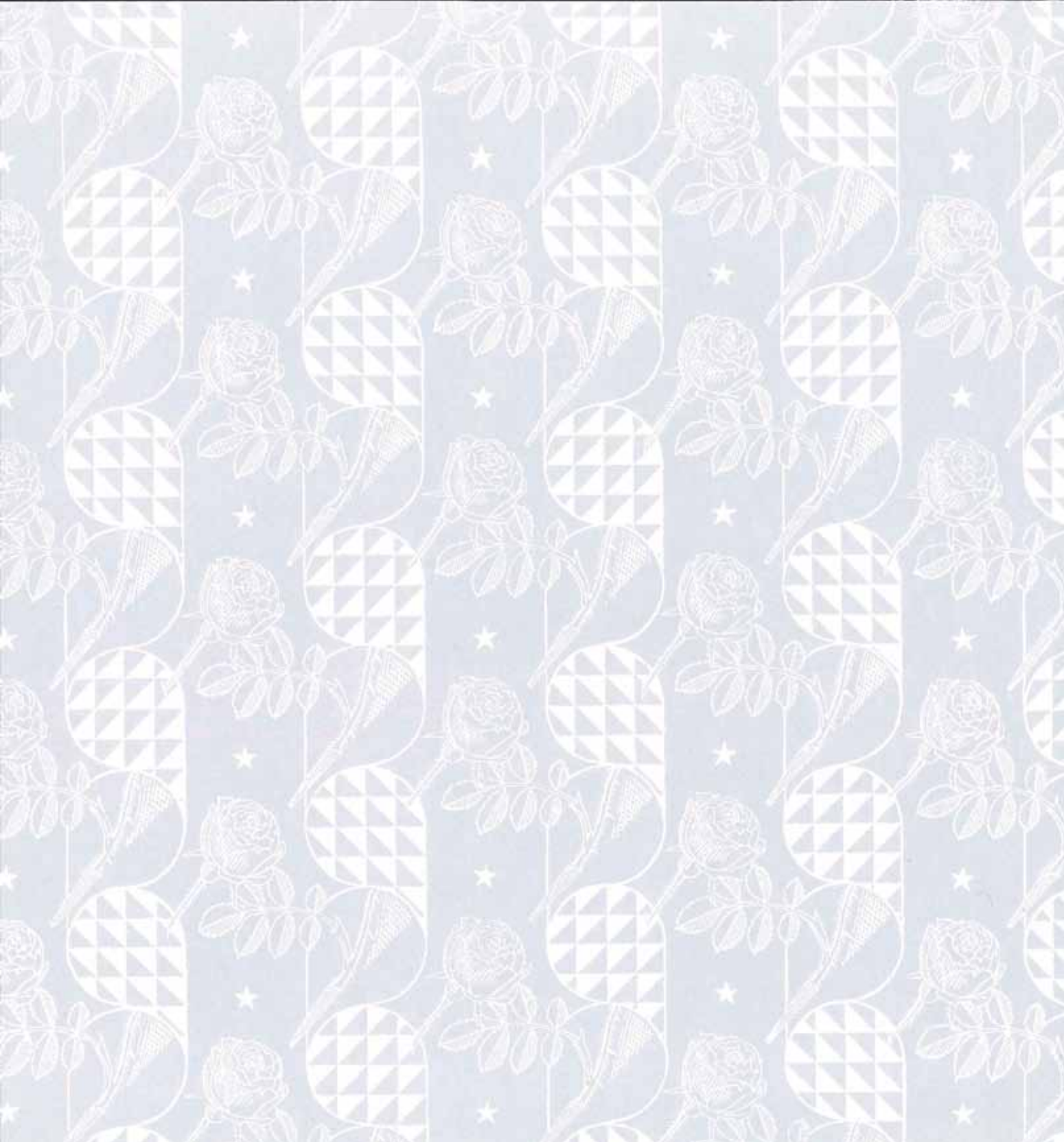


CHARLES MAHONEY





CHARLES MAHONEY  
1903-1968

4 December 1999 - 29 January 2000  
HARRIS MUSEUM & ART GALLERY  
Market Square · Preston

12 February - 11 March 2000  
ROYAL MUSEUM & ART GALLERY  
High Street · Canterbury

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THE FINE ART SOCIETY PLC  
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Charles  
MAHONEY  
1903-1968

THE FINE ART SOCIETY PLC  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH PAUL LISS

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at Pevensey, 1958

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# Preface

PEYTON SKIPWITH

The ten works by Charles Mahoney included in the Barbican exhibition, *The Last Romantics*, in 1989, constituted the biggest single group by any artist apart from Burne-Jones, and were a revelation, the more so as relatively few people were aware of his work, whilst those who were were often confused as to whether Cyril and Charles Mahoney were one and the same person. The exhibition, which tried to make sense of a particular strand of British painting and sculpture that has persisted throughout the century, oblivious to the headline-catching movements from Paris or New York, was subtitled *The Romantic Tradition in British Art: Burne-Jones to Stanley Spencer*. It was divided into sections – ‘Burne-Jones and his Followers’, ‘The Birmingham Group’, ‘The Early Academic Tradition’, ‘Ricketts, Shannon and their Circle’ ‘Celtic Elements in Scottish Art at the Turn of the Century’, ‘Slade School Symbolists’, ‘Rome Scholars, Muralists and Others’ and, finally, ‘In Fairyland’. It was in the penultimate section that Mahoney’s work appeared; with reason considering the importance of his murals at Morley College, Brockley and Campion Hall, highlighting the difficulty of placing Mahoney in context.

Even a list of those fellow artists who were among his closest friends – Edward Bawden, John Nash, Geoffrey Rhoades, Evelyn Dunbar, Tom Hennell and Percy Horton – is only partly illuminating, because a passion for gardening was as strong a link as painting. It is almost as though Mahoney deliberately stood aside from the art-world of his day, but why? Certainly not antagonism or disillusion. His

daughter, Elizabeth Bulkeley confirms his catholicity of taste, whilst Bernard Dunstan refers to his defence of students influenced by late Bomberg. As late as 1956 he read a paper on the work of Cézanne to the Art Workers Guild: in this he asserted that the French master’s early work was Baroque in feeling, and declared: ‘It was Baroque because that was the method of design used by Delacroix and other Romantic or near Romantic painters, who interested him at that time.’ He went on to describe the ‘ding-dong battle’ of the styles – Baroque and Classical – which had raged throughout Europe in the 18th century, leaving Classicism in the ascendant, although by the mid-nineteenth century both styles existed once again side by side. Perhaps this fact and the knowledge that the Romantic tradition had survived into the twentieth century, supported on the way by such luminaries as Delacroix and Cézanne, enabled Mahoney to take a long and detached view of the many ‘battles of the styles’, which raged throughout his own lifetime.

Mahoney lived through every major style change from Cubism to Pop Art, and also witnessed at close quarters the heat and anger generated by the rise of the Modern Movement. In its proselytising zeal the Modern Movement, spearheaded by Ben Nicholson and Herbert Read, was Utopian, and was, as a result, like many Utopian movements, intolerant of those who did not espouse the cause: it was the Australian painter member of the Seven and Five Society, John Power, who declared that tolerance was ‘the worst

of the deadly sins.’ Withstanding the seemingly unstoppable bandwagon of these self-perceived progressives needed considerable strength of purpose; the alternative was to give in or give up. Both Mahoney and Bawden, not wishing to get diverted by such issues, were able to sidestep the battles to some degree because of their artisanal approach to their work: Bawden as a designer and Mahoney as a mural-painter, the craft under which he was elected to the Art Workers Guild in 1942.

Mural-painting is a craft firmly rooted in history and, in the West at least, it is inextricably entwined with the spread of Christianity; and many of its early practitioners remain anonymous. Its original purpose was two-fold: to give pleasure through beauty and, through the combined sensations of beauty and pleasure, to teach the Bible stories, the lives of the Saints and morality to an illiterate audience. The great mediaeval doom paintings are amongst the earliest flowering of a truly English art, just as the frescoes of Giotto are amongst the greatest glories of Italy. Mahoney’s aims as artist and teacher were of a similar nature to those

of these early artist-craftsmen. Teaching, for him, was not just a means of earning a living; it was a calling to which he devoted a major part of his life and an enormous amount of physical and nervous energy. With his appreciation of history he may have been able to afford to take a long view of the development of style, but he was passionate that students should learn their craft from the bottom up. Provided the skills were passed on the future was assured. Just as good gardeners propagate and plant for the future, Mahoney, through passion and zeal, nurtured and encouraged those students who were sympathetic to his approach to history and art. C. R. Ashbee, one of the great luminaries of the Art Workers Guild, who died the year Mahoney was elected, said that ‘something beautifully done, be it a jewel, a lithograph, a basket, a cathedral, may reveal the Truth.’ A statement which Mahoney would have wholeheartedly endorsed; his own drawings were beautifully done, and through his teaching he aspired to to reveal the ‘Truth’ and give others the necessary grounding, so that they in their turn could do things beautifully.



fig.1 Charles Mahoney at work on the murals at Campion Hall, circa 1945

## Charles Mahoney 1903–1968

ELIZABETH BULKELEY

My father, Charles Mahoney, was born Cyril Mahoney in Lambeth, South London on November 18, 1903. He was the eldest surviving child of a family of seven boys, three of whom died in infancy. His mother, born Bessie Rich, came from Exeter; she was a handsome, patient and even-tempered woman, with a flair for creating decorative hats and for intricate crochet work; as a girl she had been a soloist in Exeter Cathedral choir. His father, William Mahoney, was a self-employed mechanical engineer. He had received no formal training as he had been expected to inherit money. This, however, did not materialise, and although as an inventor he was sometimes able to register a patent, this did not provide a satisfactory living. Consequently, the family was frequently in financial difficulties. Charles and his brothers attended the local school at Oakfield Road, where the Headmaster maintained order with great severity and where some of the boys could not afford shoes. Here Charles' gift for drawing and painting was strongly encouraged by the art master, though his parents showed less enthusiasm, and urged him towards a career in banking.

My father's early experience of poverty, combined with Sunday afternoons spent with his brothers at a Socialist Sunday School held at the local Friends' Meeting House, formed in him a lifelong belief in Socialist principles.

At the Socialist Sunday School he also gained his first experience of teaching, taking an Art class for the younger children.

Two early events cast their shadows over the rest of my father's life. The first was the loss of an eye in a tussle with one of his brothers over the possession of some scissors. The second was a near fatal attack of diphtheria, which left him less robust than formerly. In later life his habit of smoking did not help an already weak chest, and his life was to be disrupted by bouts of poor health, particularly chest problems.

His courage and determination however were not impaired, and after leaving school and working for a few months in a City advertising agency,

he overcame his parents' opposition and entered the Art School at Beckenham under Percy H. Jowett. Here he met Hugh Finney, who wrote of my father's early admiration for the work of Italian Renaissance painters such as Piero



fig.2 Bessie Mahoney (née Rich) with Cyril (Charles) and Ernest

della Francesca, Crivelli and Fra Angelico. Charles at fifteen was remembered by Finney for his 'direct and forceful personality'.

From Beckenham in 1922 he won a Royal Exhibition in Drawing to the Painting School of the Royal College of Art, where at that time Sir William Rothenstein was both College Principal and Professor of Painting. Here my father spent four productive years and made many friends, among them Edward Bawden, Barnett Freedman, Percy Horton and Gerry Ososki.

Barnett Freedman was a particularly close friend (fig. 14).



fig.3 Letter from Edward Bawden to Charles Mahoney, 30 May 1930 © Edward Bawden Estate

He was an outspoken and talented Jewish artist from the East End. On learning that my father's name was Cyril, he at once renamed him Charlie. This was a welcome alteration for my father, although it was never accepted by his parents. Charles' friendship with Barnett continued until his early death in 1958. My father later felt that Barnett's early marriage and the need to provide for his wife and home had prevented him from achieving his artistic potential. My father's conviction that the pursuit of material gain could seldom be reconciled with the highest artistic achievement became a fundamental part of his personality, and was at a later stage to affect his own relationship with Evelyn Dunbar.

Edward Bawden was an artist whose home and family formed an intrinsic part of his creative work. He and his wife Charlotte had a handsome redbrick Georgian house in the village of Great Bardfield in Essex, and encouraged my father and other artist friends to settle there also. My father however chose to look for a home in Kent, a county he loved for the unassuming domestic beauty of its cottages, gardens and orchards. Nevertheless he and other friends often visited Brick House and helped in its transformation to a uniquely beautiful home.

The Painting School at the Royal College of Art reflected the liberal beliefs of Sir William Rothenstein. He and Lady Rothenstein frequently invited students to their home, where leading figures in the art world might be met socially, where conversation was stimulating, and books could be borrowed. Sir William assisted students in finding commissions and outlets for their work. Scholarships at that time were very small, and considerable financial hardship was common among the students, with those temporarily better off loaning money to friends for such necessities as rent, fares and decent clothes for interviews. Charles was commonly assumed to live on a diet of tea and treacle.

Under Sir William Rothenstein my father's love of drawing flourished. He came to see life drawing as the most challenging of exercises for the student, for if you could draw the human body, you could draw anything. Drawing in turn he believed to be a vital basic skill which underpinned other disciplines and which would be of use whether an artist worked figuratively or otherwise.

By the end of his time at the RCA my father had developed a particular interest in mural painting and theatre design (cat. 14). He collaborated with Barnett Freedman in designing sets for Zangwill's 'King of the Schnorrers' and for a production of Queen Elizabeth at the Little Theatre. Some

of his designs were bought for the print room at the V & A.

On leaving College Charles became Senior Assistant at Thanet Schools of Art. This proved a depressing time. Mercenary landladies necessitated frequent changes of address and he suffered recurrent bouts of illness. The Schools of Art and their Principal were uninspiring and his limited finances did not allow him access to the stimulation provided by the London galleries and the company of his friends.

After a year he was offered the post of Visiting Painting Tutor at the Royal College of Art. This welcome change was tempered by the news of his father's death in April 1928, at



fig.4 Morley College mural, The Pleasures of Life, 1928-30

the age of 52. His father's death affected him deeply, although he seldom spoke about him in later years. He used to remember with pleasure walking with him in the grounds of the Crystal Palace near their home, and their shared admiration for the glittering Victorian structure.

My father started work at the Royal College of Art in the autumn of 1928. Soon afterwards he was commissioned to paint a thirty-foot-long mural for the back of the stage at Morley College for Working Men and Women, a project sponsored by Sir Joseph Duveen (cat.16–29). The subject was the Pleasures of Life and my father used for the first time the theme of the Muses to illustrate it. The refectory



fig.5 Evelyn Dunbar working on one of the murals at Brockley School, Kent, c.1936

was decorated by Edward Bawden and Eric Ravilious. The Morley College murals were unveiled by Stanley Baldwin in 1930, after a final rush to complete them in which Charles' friend Geoffrey Rhoades assisted.

Geoffrey Rhoades was a Slade student whom he met at the bedside of Barnett Freedman during one of Barnett's serious illnesses. By 1930 my father and Geoffrey were living in Kensington Crescent, W14, a charming Regency crescent, now demolished. In August 1930 they went on holiday with Percy Horton to Blackmore Farm near Marden in Kent, where my father made orchard studies for Morley College. The following winter he and Geoffrey joined Edward Bawden to assist in the redecoration of Brick House.

In 1932 my father was asked to organise a mural scheme for the hall at Brockley County School for Boys (now the Prendergast School for Girls, cat.30–33). The building still stands in parkland on top of a knoll called Hilly Fields with views across South London in every direction. My father undertook the work with three of his senior students from the RCA, and the subject matter for the murals was selected from Aesop's Fables. The scale and challenge of this project occupied much of his time over several years. He himself painted two of the five large panels, 'Fortune and the Boy', and 'Joy and Sorrow', besides several smaller works. The setting for the paintings is the Kent countryside, as Brockley was then part of Kent.

The most talented of his student assistants was Evelyn Dunbar (cat.34), and my father's friendship with her dated from that time. Her first letters to him are business-like and formal, but after a while their shared interest in plants, gardens and painting becomes apparent and an intimate and enchantingly illustrated correspondence emerges. Evelyn Dunbar's ability and dedication as an artist made her sensitive to the same qualities in my father and their re-

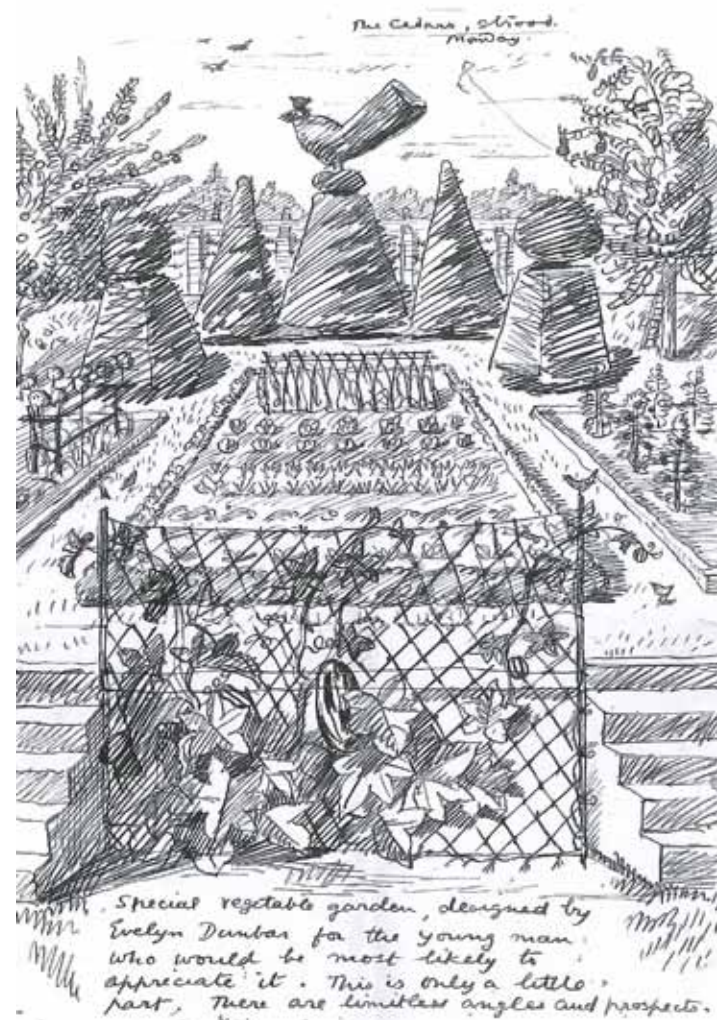


fig.6 Letter from Evelyn Dunbar to Charles Mahoney, September 1935:

'Special vegetable garden, designed by Evelyn Dunbar for the young man who would be most likely to appreciate it. This is only a little part. There are limitless angles and prospects.'

© The Estate of Evelyn Dunbar

spect and affection for each other deepened. Perhaps they were almost too similar; they undoubtedly shared very many aspirations and interests. Only over religion was there a difference; my father's later agnosticism was closer at this time to atheism, while Evelyn Dunbar and her family were Christian Scientists. Later a further problem was my father's concern that, should they marry, motherhood and the role of a woman in the home would impede Evelyn's promising artistic development.

The early to mid-1930s were a productive period for them both. After the physically and emotionally exhausting task of completing the Brockley murals, they worked together on a book, *Gardeners' Choice* (cat.46–56), published by Routledge in 1937. In this, the full-page illustrations were my father's, the vignettes and much of the text were by Evelyn. They presented the plants that they liked to draw, paint and grow. These were sculptural and bold, yet subtle, and unusual for their time. Each one was described lovingly, as if in sharing their favourite plants they were sharing their mutual happiness. Before 1937 when my father bought Oak Cottage, Wrotham, he had no garden of his own, but Evelyn's family garden at Strood in Kent was spacious, and there they could grow plants that were new to them as well as old favourites. Their letters reflect their delight at the growth and development of their chosen plants. Fortunately parcel post was cheap and there was a constant exchange of plants and cuttings between themselves, Edward Bawden, Geoffrey Rhoades and John Nash. Charles and Evelyn made many visits to Brick House where they helped among other jobs to marble the hall, and admired Edward's fine garden. Other, less hard-working, visits were made to the various homes of Geoffrey and Joan Rhoades.

My father's love of plants and gardening is first apparent in the early paintings of his home in Anerley (cat.1).



Thereafter they are a constant theme in most of his compositions; they form the setting for Adam and Eve (cat.118–121), for Bathsheba (cat.122–127) and for the Muses (cat.128–133). His feeling for plant life was so powerful that most of his figures appear subsumed in a framework of growing things. As my mother wrote, he ‘showed uncompromising vigour in recording the structure, detail and above all the total feeling of the plant, each growing and bearing fruit in its particular way’ and again ‘Charles delighted in plant life, its richness, strength, grandeur, colour, form and infinite textural qualities’. He showed an instinctive understanding of the place of man within the world; a being dependent on plants for his survival.

When Charles bought Oak Cottage (cat.41–45) in 1937 as a home for himself and his mother, he displayed his usual ability to discover things of fine quality. The strongly-built 16th century cottage was inexpensive and unspoilt by modernisation. It had once been a small hall-house, an upper floor having been inserted later. It was frame-built of re-used oak timbers, each showing evidence of a particular history by peg-holes and rebates. Though appearing to stand four-square, there was not a right-angle in it, and the



building with its humped peg-tiled roof seemed to have the organic structure of a growing thing. It stood in a garden which had been cultivated for centuries; the black soil was the finest that people had seen and full of old coins and seals, bones and broken crocks. Initially much painstaking work was required to restore the worm-eaten timbers and to make the cottage habitable. My father did much of this work himself, at some cost to his health.

The cottage interior was simple with massive beams, solid second-hand furniture, and my father’s collection of Staffordshire ornaments from markets and junk shops. After the sale of a painting my father surrounded the living room fireplace with Delft tiles of flowers and strange animals; a floor-length mirror doubled the apparent size of the room and reflected the view of the garden. Upstairs one room still retained the roof itself as its ceiling, and this later formed a studio for my mother.

Together house and garden made a harmonious whole. The layout of the garden was unfashionably formal, though within this formality plants grew freely and exuberantly; only the hedges of lavender and box that confined them were clipped. A large bed of old roses, which at that



figs.7 & 8 Oak Cottage, Wrotham, and a view along the garden showing the artist’s studio

time were unusual, concealed the studio. Cottage flowers and many less familiar filled the beds between house and studio, while at the end of the garden there flourished an eclectic mix of fruit trees and shrubs. Interwoven with these were my father’s huge specimen herbaceous plants which he grew in order to draw them: giant hogweed, Japanese knotweed, *Cephalaria gigantea*, sunflowers, and plume poppies. To walk up the garden past the lawn and the rosebed was to enter one of my father’s paintings; plants waved above your head, silhouetted against the sky in mysterious patterns, and in wet weather deluged water down your neck. In fine weather my father would emerge from the studio and sit absorbed in drawing his plants for hours on end, always wearing an old jacket and trilby hat. His garden provided him with more subject matter than he could ever use. By the time he was 45, his health did not allow him to undertake heavy gardening, but he continued to enjoy the less demanding jobs.

The studio, built after the war from munitions packing cases, stood among luxuriant plants halfway down the garden. He would retire there after breakfast, and, ignoring lunch, would paint until the light failed. The studio held his extensive art library, and when light conditions were not suitable for work, he would read in his well-worn armchair, increasing his considerable knowledge of painting, or else making lists of new plants for the garden in his rounded copperplate hand. Evelyn Dunbar once warned him in a letter: ‘Don’t ever have too big a garden, or with your avidity for making the names in the catalogue come true, you’ll never touch a brush or a pencil.’

My father’s scholarship was considerable, and his library extensive. His interests included botany, horticulture, and architecture as well as drawing and painting, abstract as well as figurative art, and artistic conventions ranging from the ethnic to the work of Ingres. His erudition was

impressive and he was a lively speaker, lecturing at the RCA, the Artworkers Guild, the Ruskin School at Oxford, and the Royal Academy Schools among other places.

Although he worked incessantly, he produced work slowly, and set himself the most exacting standards. Frequently a painting which had apparently been finished would be found, much of its paint removed by swift swipes of his palette-knife. He was seldom satisfied with his work, and it is perhaps surprising that any work survived in a finished state. This meant that he would not enter into a contract with a gallery to produce a certain amount of work. He exhibited only those works with which he felt most satisfied, usually at the New English Art Club or the Royal Academy. In 1950 he was elected member of the New English Art Club. He did not become a Royal Academician until 1961, having turned down an earlier opportunity with characteristic modesty, since he felt he had not proved himself sufficiently as an artist.

When war broke out in 1939 my father and his mother were established at Oak Cottage. His relationship with Evelyn Dunbar was over, although they remained friends. Between 1937 and 1940 my father made sketching expeditions around Wrotham (cat.62), making studies of the North Downs, the brickfields at Platt, and the Borough Green sandpits. His friend Tom Hennell, who lived nearby at Ash and shared his love of the Kent countryside, sometimes joined him. During this time Edward Bawden wrote from Brick House asking for money for refugees from Spain and Germany whom he was accommodating at the request of John Nash and Robert Graves. In 1937 Charles’ brother Ernest had left to fight in the Spanish Civil War, returning at the end of a year in poor health after spending time in one of Franco’s gaols; in 1939 he was in hospital in Britain and was subsequently declared unfit for military service. My father, with one eye and a weak chest, was also

unable to join the Forces, although he later joined the Home Guard in Ambleside.

In late 1940 the Royal College of Art was evacuated to Ambleside in the Lake District (cat.69–72). My father and Percy Horton were among the male staff to accompany it. The students were housed in two hotels, men at the Queen's and women at the Salutation; my father was resident master in charge at the men's hostel. Conditions were bleak, especially in winter, with cramped conditions and inadequate heating. My father vividly remembered being woken by the screams of a blood-bespattered student whose nose had been bitten by a rat. The problems of settling students into a rural area away from the stimulation

of London were compounded for my father by the news that Morley College had been bombed. His early mural had been totally destroyed, together with the work of Bawden and Ravilious.

However the evacuation also had a happier side. While the Royal College of Art was in London, staff from the sculpture, painting and design schools seldom met socially. Ambleside created freer conditions, enabling my father to meet Dorothy Bishop (cat.72), a calligraphy tutor from the design school. They were married in September 1941, and spent a brief honeymoon in Edinburgh; my father was 37 and my mother 39. Their lodgings were spare rooms and attics in various houses. My father was reluctant

to start a family on their slender means and under wartime conditions. However my mother's wishes prevailed, and I was born in 1944. My arrival aggravated the accommodation problem still further. To quote Percy Horton: 'After a desperate search for a temporary home, Charlie Mahoney has found a place near Prospect Cottage and has gone to fetch Dorothy and babe up here. I hope they will get settled in comfortably. No one up here wanted to take a newly married couple with babe.' When the war ended, the family returned with much relief to Oak Cottage and my grandmother.

Charles was a most caring and conscientious father (cat.73). He taught me to read very early, using a delightful Victorian primer, illustrated by Walter Crane. We regularly read to each other before the evening meal. When I was very young he could still enjoy long walks, and I would accompany him while my mother worked. On one magical Christmas afternoon we walked for many miles through frost encrusted landscapes below the North Downs until, as dark fell, we came to a lighted station and were fortunate enough to find a train to take us nearer home – by the time we returned Christmas dinner had been waiting for many hours! Charles liked to travel on the top of buses from where he would point out different styles of architecture and encourage me to guess the age of buildings. Journeys were an opportunity to observe rather than to bury your head in a book, though after dark he enjoyed a good detective novel.

Although he was a countryman by adoption, my father remained fascinated by London and other towns. He delighted in showing me the London side-streets, their lines of shabby but unspoilt Georgian and Victorian buildings punctuated by Wren churches. Afterwards we would lunch at Schmidt's in Charlotte Street with sawdust-covered floors. At other times we took the bus to Maidstone, which

then had a most charming old centre. After visiting the tall seedsman's warehouse on many floors we would walk through back lanes, past a shop where Victorian stuffed birds sang sweetly if you inserted a halfpenny, and finish with a visit to the evocative museum of carriages. One of his favourite writers was Dickens, and he enjoyed tracing the places of which he wrote in London and the Kentish towns.

In December 1941, while still in Ambleside, my father was asked to decorate Lutyens' Lady Chapel at Campion Hall, Oxford (cat.74–87). It was a Jesuit College and my father was neither a Catholic nor religious in a conventional sense, but he admired the dedication of certain Jesuits and he relished the opportunity to depict the life of the Virgin in a straightforward manner using modern dress.

In his initial optimism he decided to work *in situ*. The chapel was dimly lit by a small window, and he could only work there in the Easter and summer vacations – and then only when light conditions allowed. This meant that the project continued for years, during which time his health declined, so that eventually a small panel was left unfinished. My father made portrait studies for the murals, using as models the Jesuits, their staff, and Lutyens himself. Over the years several of the Fathers became his good friends, including Vincent Turner, Stanley Jones and Vincent Bywater.

My father's only regular income was from part-time teaching. This, in combination with my mother's part-time earnings, was just sufficient to maintain our household, though by the end of the long summer holidays the strictest family economy was necessary. Occasionally we could afford a summer holiday. We used to rent a small beach house called Shangri-la on the shingle beach at Pevensey Bay (cat.63–64). It stood next door to a picturesque wooden caravan belonging to the sculptor Mark Batten



fig.9 The artist and daughter, Elizabeth, feeding chickens at Ambleside, 1945



fig.10 The artist and family at Oak Cottage, Wrocham, circa 1955

whose daughter Griselda was my friend. Here my father sat on his stool on the shingle or perched on a breakwater, capturing the fleeting light in rapidly painted sketches. When it rained he relished a visit to Eastbourne to scour the second-hand bookshops.

In the years following Robin Darwin's appointment as Principal of the RCA in 1948 considerable changes were made, causing painters such as Gilbert Spencer and my father to leave. Darwin placed no value on crafts such as calligraphy, and consequently there was no position for my mother either. This simultaneous loss of employment came as a great blow to my parents.

It was at this time that my father applied, unsuccessfully, for the Headship of the Sidcup School of Art (see Appendix 1). In 1953 he obtained part-time teaching work at Bromley School of Art and in 1954 at the Byam Shaw School of Painting and Drawing. When he left there in 1961, he took up a post at the Royal Academy Schools where his qualities as a draughtsman and painter were particularly well appreciated.

My father was a dedicated teacher, with a genuine sympathy for the problems of young artists, and would often be found late at night writing last-minute references. Sir Henry Rushbury, Keeper of the Royal Academy Schools wrote: 'I know of no other teacher who has given so much without thought for himself.'

The physical exhaustion resulting from my father's work on the Campion Hall murals made it clear to him that he could no longer think of himself as a painter of full scale mural schemes. In 1950 he was asked to contribute work for the Festival of Britain 'Sixty Paintings for '51' exhibition (cat.91-94), and for this he painted a large mural in his studio entitled *The Garden*.

Subsequently he planned mural schemes in the form of long narrow panels which required less effort to execute.

Painted around 1960, his last scheme, the *Muses* (cat.128-134), remained an unfinished cartoon. Even so it is still impressive, enabling one to see the care with which he constructed his work, and the way in which he built up colour and tone.

As the effort of supporting the weight of a palette became too great, he concentrated on drawing; since drawing was for him an art in itself, he then produced some of his finest work (cat.103). The richness and delicacy of his latest drawings reflected his admiration for Samuel Palmer, who had worked at nearby Shoreham.

Throughout the fifties my father's chest problems became more severe and although after one particularly serious illness, he no longer felt the urge to smoke, he had by this time developed emphysema. In 1966 and 1968 he underwent two lung operations at the Brompton Hospital. After the second operation, cancer of the colon was discovered. He died soon after a third operation in the Royal Marsden Hospital in 1968.

A word which recurs often in connection with my father is enthusiasm. As many letters testify, his students and friends appreciated his genuine interest and encouragement, and one of his greatest dislikes was cynicism. He felt very passionately about issues such as the war and the holocaust, the displacement of the Palestinians and the injustices suffered by the indigenous people of South Africa. He was also noted for his integrity. He was a most loyal friend and could always be relied on to do what he had promised; back-biting was completely foreign to him. Though sorely tempted by shortage of money, he would not allow himself to take advantage of people's ignorance. He had a discerning eye and whenever he recognised neglected but valuable pictures or objects in people's homes he would let them know, rather than make a profit for himself. It may seem strange that a man of such strong convictions and positive

disposition should be so reluctant to advertise himself or his work. His modesty however allowed him to recommend anyone but himself, and his perfectionist tendencies ensured that he felt that any work of his own could always have been better.

Perhaps, as Edward Bawden and my mother believed, his passionate intensity was attributable to his Irish blood. Certainly he could talk fluently and persuasively. Even dur-

ing his prolonged final illness, his mental vigour was hardly impaired. As Jane Greenham wrote, 'Charles's death is such a severe loss because he was so tremendously alive, however ill he was ... I am very glad he taught me - one feels he is a permanently fruitful influence.'

Note: Unless otherwise stated, quotations are from private correspondence in the owner's possession.



fig.11 Dorothy working at kitchen table, *Ambleside* (cat.72)

## Colleague, Draughtsman and Friend

BERNARD DUNSTAN



fig.12 Rodrigo Moynihan 1910–1990

Portrait Group (The Teaching Staff of the Painting School at the Royal College of Art, 1949–50), 1951

Oil on canvas, 213.3 x 334.6 cm. Tate Gallery, London 1999 © John Moynihan

The figures shown are (from left to right): John Minton, Colin Hayes, Carel Weight, Rodney Burn, Robert Buhler, Charles Mahoney, Kenneth Rowntree, Ruskin Spear, Rodrigo Moynihan.

I first met Charles Mahoney when I was teaching at the Byam Shaw art school in the sixties. He came to join the staff at the suggestion, I think, of Peter Greenham. The Byam Shaw had been run for many years by F.E. Jackson, a great teacher of classical draughtsmanship, who inspired a remarkable degree of loyalty and respect among his students. After his death the School continued along his lines, though without his driving force; and as soon as Charles arrived it was clear to all, students and staff alike, that he had the same sort of strength as a teacher. Though very different in personality, he commanded the same respect. His qualities were immediately recognisable: single-mindedness, conviction, a passionate belief in the value of his subject. Peter Greenham, who was a student of Jackson's, and later on took over the Royal Academy Schools, was in his own quite different and undramatic way another who commanded great respect, and I feel myself very lucky to have known three such remarkable artists and teachers.

In appearance Charles Mahoney was tall, lean, and inclined to stoop. In repose he often gave the impression of being withdrawn, meditative; but his face would light up in a moment and he would speak with directness and vigour – outspoken, even combative at times, and feathers could be ruffled; but the youngest student was treated with the same attention and courtesy as an older colleague.

Yet there was something uncompromising, a sense that he lived by clear standards that he had worked out for himself – he often used the phrase 'certain standards' in conver-

sation – and I can see how he was said to get on very well with the Jesuits on his visits to Campion Hall to work on his murals. For all his very different ideas and beliefs, it was not too difficult to imagine him, in a different age, in a monk's or abbot's habit.

An informal likeness of Charles appears in Rodrigo Moynihan's fine group portrait of the Royal College staff (fig.12). He sits, rather in the background, in a characteristic attitude, looking downwards with something, perhaps, of detachment from the College personalities around him – Minton, Spear, Weight. I don't want to suggest for a moment that he was in any way solemn or unsociable. He could be extremely good company, and his characteristic opinions or statements – 'I had to move in on him', for example, said of a less than co-operative student or colleague – were treasured by his friends. And it was a real pleasure to go round a gallery or an exhibition with him; he was full of knowledge and enthusiasms, sometimes for quite unexpected things.

In his later days at the Byam Shaw Charles was also teaching for a day or two a week at the Bromley School of Art, and I joined him on the staff there. An example comes to mind from this period of his attitude to students. We had at Bromley a group of painting students, all male, who were deeply influenced by the work of David Bomberg – his late work. This meant they painted large black pictures, heavily loaded with thick paint; their drawings were equally aggressive, black with charcoal and heavily rubbed.

Nothing further from Charles's precision and deliberation could possibly be imagined. Yet he was about the only member of the staff who went out of his way to encourage them. I remember going with him to pay them a visit in the shed they had managed to find to work in, the art school having become a little too small for them. He took real trouble with them; he responded to their single-mindedness, and they in their turn opened up to him.

A student of his from the Byam Shaw remembers how he used to insist that no material should be used until it had passed at least a ten-year test of permanence. Titanium white, for instance, was frowned upon at that time. Canvases and panels had to be primed with a recipe including rabbit-skin size, the jelly just stiff enough, and lead white (in powder, she recalls, 'from which we survived'). When painting or drawing for a student 'each line and every brush stroke was carefully contemplated before being applied - his hand making the action before touching the surface.'

At this time Charles was doing a number of quite large drawings of plants, including sunflowers. The mural paintings, into which he had put so much energy, were behind him - a superb body of work, even though incomplete; and with the pressure of teaching, and the continual travelling by train that it incurred, he concentrated his creative energies on these superb drawings.

They seem to me to sum up the characteristics of integrity and concentration I have spoken of. They have great directness and objectivity and yet great warmth of feeling. They make most drawings of plants, seem by comparison, weak or merely botanically accurate.

Since Leonardo or Dürer, it is rather surprising how few draughtsmen have dealt with the lavish delicacy of plant life, compared with the number who have made masterpieces of drawing from the human figure. In England par-

ticularly, the land of gardeners (and draughtsmen), one might expect more; yet apart from John Nash I can think of very few recent artists who have drawn plants with the vigour and understanding that Mahoney brought to them. Both Nash and Mahoney were expert botanists and grew their own plants, and they were able to approach plant drawing not merely from an aesthetic, or merely from a botanist's point of view. There was a genuine empathy, a warmth of feeling - an essential element of fine drawing, perhaps even more than in painting. A 'correct' drawing can be made without love or understanding, but it will remain only a superficial statement.

I have sometimes thought that his garden in Wrotham was Charles's equivalent to Stanley Spencer's Cookham - a village back-garden of Eden, in which sunflowers, sheds, weeds, cabbages and brick walls were treated with love and equal respect, and took their places naturally in his mural designs. For him, his garden was the ideal subject, cottage garden and plantsman's garden combined, giving equal space to old-fashioned roses, huge sunflowers, and great rank growths of umbelliferae that any tidy gardener would have expelled in horror (fig.8).

I remember an outing my wife and I made to Wrotham to choose a drawing. Charles showed us the garden and displayed, with real pride, the most enormous hogweed I have ever seen. In the small cosy cottage Mrs Mahoney, herself a most distinguished calligrapher, gave us tea while we looked through the drawings. The one we chose has been hanging on our bedroom wall ever since, for thirty years or so; we see it every morning on waking, and will never get tired of its richness, the vigour of the curvature and the sense of growth, and the way his instinctive feeling for design makes deeply satisfying shapes and tonal masses out of the disposition of the separate studies on the page (fig.13a).

Anyone who watched him draw will remember the concentrated deliberation and thoughtfulness of his line. His eye absorbed in the growth and structure, his pencil would remain poised over the paper until the precisely 'right' line flowed from it - though he said 'there is no such thing as a perfect line - there is always a better one'. There is no gestural 'freedom', no flourish; the curvature of a leaf or a stem is too subtle and strong to be described by mere approximate curves. Every curve is different and changes subtly throughout its length.

A fine example is the drawing *A Galaxy of Sunflowers*

(fig.13b). The complexity and vigour of this drawing is astonishing. None of it is padding or repetition, so easy a trap to fall into when trying to sort out a complex area of plant growth like this; the angle and pitch of every leaf is observed for its own sake and for the part it plays in the whole structure.

These studies seem to me to be drawing on the highest level - they are drawings which, by deeply felt and particularised observation, expose the natural rhythms, the forces underlying the structure, and set them out in a consistent whole.



fig.13a Sunflowers, 1960 - signed with initials and dated - 20 x 13 1/2 in  
Collection of Bernard Dunstan



fig.13b Galaxy of Sunflowers, 1967  
(cat.103)



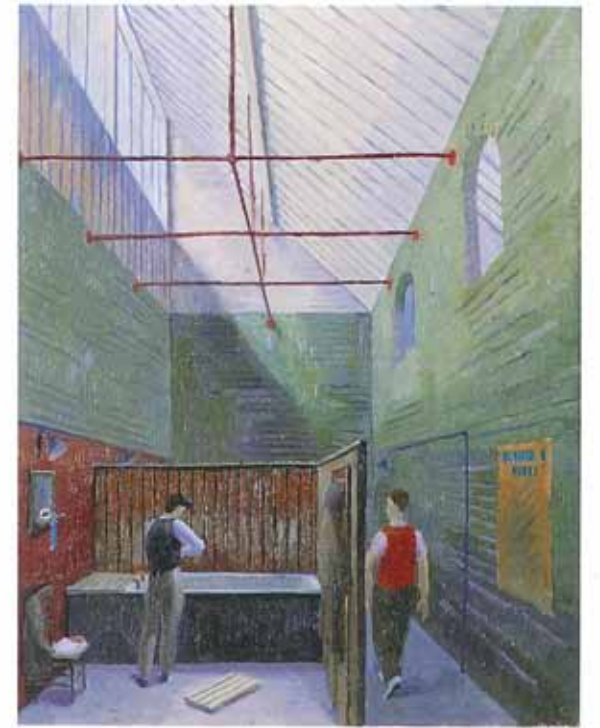
fig. 14 Portrait of Barnett Freedman (1901-1958), circa 1929 (cat.15)



View from rear window at Mahoney's family home, Anerley  
Oil on canvas board, 14 x 12 (35.6 x 30.5) · cat.1



Mothers watching children at play  
Oil on paper, 12 x 11¼ (30.5 x 28.6) · cat.6



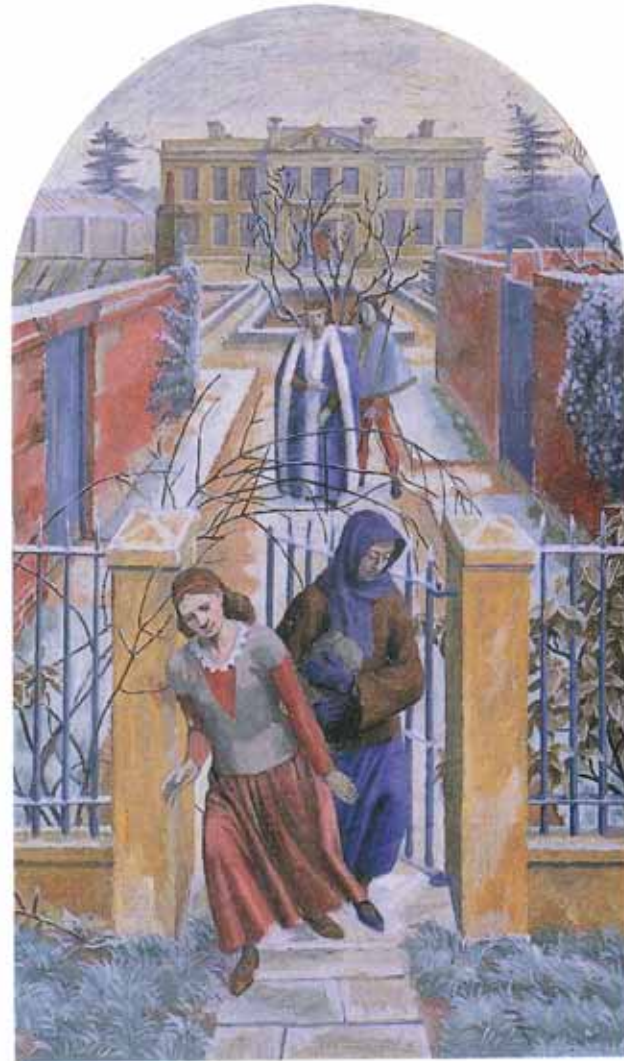
The Public Baths, circa 1927  
Oil on paper, 15 x 12 (38.1 x 30.5) · cat.11



London digs, circa 1926  
Oil on paper, 11 x 14 (28 x 35.6) · cat.13



*Joy and Sorrow: Cartoon, circa 1933*  
Pencil and watercolour, squared, 51 x 29 (129.6 x 73.7) · cat. 30



*Joy and Sorrow: Colour study, circa 1933*  
Oil on paper, 18 x 10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> (45.7 x 27.3) arched top · cat. 31



*Joy and Sorrow: Mural at Brockley School, circa 1932-36*  
Photo: Mark Fiennes



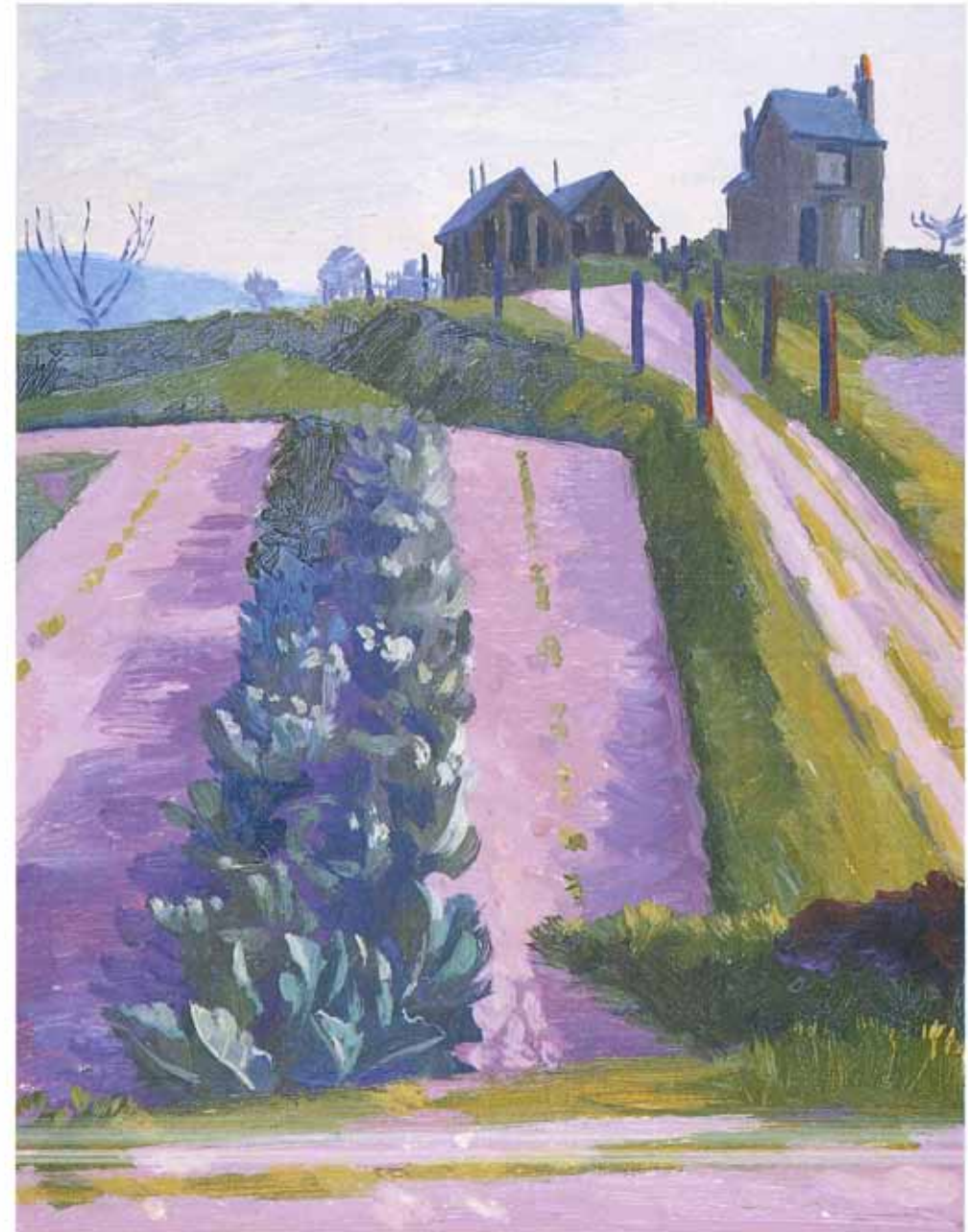
*Fortune and the Boy at the Well: Mural at Brockley School, circa 1932-36*  
Photo: Mark Fiennes



Evening, Oak Cottage, 1938-9  
Oil on canvas, 18 x 14 (45.7 x 35.6) · cat.43



The Kitchen, circa 1937  
Oil on paper, 12 x 14 (30.5 x 35.6) · cat.41



Allotments beside White Hill Pumping Station, Wrotham, circa 1938  
Oil on paper over Black Prince pencil, 13 x 10 (33 x 25.4) · cat.62





Inula, mid 1950s

Oil on paper, squared in chalk, 18 x 14 (45.7 x 35.6) · cat.105



Crown Imperials, mid 1950s

Oil on paper, 17 x 10 (43.2 x 25.4) · cat.107



Auriculas, late 1950s

Oil on paper, 10¼ x 21½ (26 x 54.6) · cat.108



Elizabeth - her book, circa 1946

Watercolour, charcoal, pencil and pen & ink, six double sided pages, each 11½ x 9 (29.2 x 22.8) · cat.73



Study for the Birth of the Virgin, circa 1942  
Oil on paper, 11½ x 11 (29.2 x 28) · cat.75



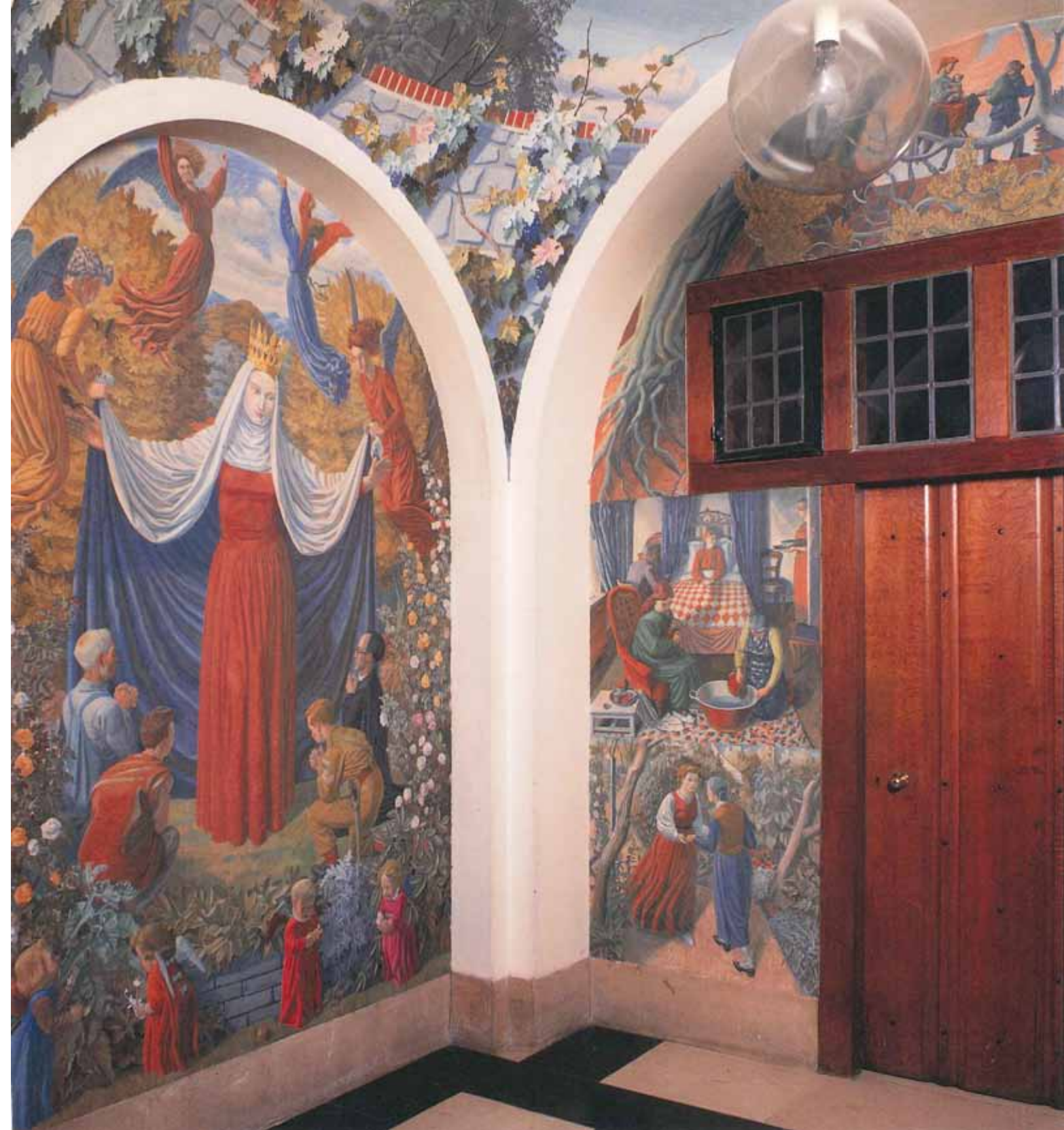
The Marriage of the Virgin, circa 1942  
Oil on paper, 11½ x 11½ (29.2 x 29.2) · cat.79



Father D'Arcy with two undergraduates in the garden  
Oil on paper, squared in chalk, 11¼ x 11¼ (28.6 x 28.6) · cat.86



Lutyens conversing with a Campion Hall gardener  
Oil on paper, 11¼ x 11¼ (28.6 x 28.6) · cat.87



Opposite: The Lady Chapel at Campion Hall  
Photo: Richard Ivey



Composite plant, 1954  
Oil on hard board, 18 x 14 (45.7 x 35.6) · cat.104



Autumn, circa 1951  
Oil on board, 84 x 48 (213.4 x 121.9) · cat.88



The Garden, 1950  
Oil on canvas, 72 x 48 (182.9 x 121.9) · cat.91

## Charles Mahoney as a mural painter

ALAN POWERS



*Muses, circa 1961*  
Oil on panel, 18½ x 96¼ (47 x 244.4) · cat.128



*Muses: Study for group of figures to far right, circa 1961*  
Oil on paper over watercolour and pen & ink · 12½ x 20 (31.8 x 50.8) · cat.129



*Muses: Study for left hand side, circa 1961*  
Brown wash over charcoal pen & ink, 15 x 22 (38.1 x 55.9) · cat.133

The desire to paint murals weaves through the last two hundred years of British art, displaying certain constant characteristics. Mural painting is hardly ever the result of a demand by the public, and only rarely by private patrons. Most often, the impulse to work in this way originates from within the artistic community itself, and the demand has to be created artificially. Mural painting is favoured because of the discipline it offers to artists, in designing work on a large scale and using media and techniques other than conventional oil on canvas. It also offers artists the ideal of public service and usefulness to society they have often wanted since the Romantic period.

Charles Mahoney was a student at the height of one of these periodic phases of mural enthusiasm and his work, whether or not intended strictly for use as mural art, displays characteristics which typify the values mural painting was intended to encourage. His Principal at the Royal College, Sir William Rothenstein, felt that Mahoney, one member of a small talented group, exemplified the wider movement to restore to painting the intellectual rigour, craftsmanship and vision which, since the mid nineteenth century, had been at risk from the demands of an uneducated art market. Artists of Mahoney's generation mistrusted the facility of older mural painters like Frank Brangwyn, Maurice Greiffenhagen, Charles Sims and Gerald Moira and wanted to replace it with an art that combined observation with imagination, and historical perspective with alertness to contemporary needs.

In Mahoney's own generation, the Slade produced its wunderkind in Rex Whistler (two years Mahoney's junior), who has remained for many people the typical mural painter of his time: as light and sweet on the palate as a good Hock. Whistler's Tate murals of 1926 were sponsored by Joseph Duveen, and William Rothenstein, as head of the rival Royal College, persuaded Duveen to fund the murals for Morley College in 1928. Originally founded as an adjunct of the Old Vic Theatre, Morley College for Working Men and Women gained fame as one of the liveliest adult education institutes in London. Its orchestra was conducted by Gustav Holst, and later by Michael Tippett. In 1927, the college moved into new premises in Westminster Bridge Road, extended by the architects Lanchester, Lucas and Lodge.

Mahoney was given the back wall of the stage in the newly created Assembly Hall, designed to accommodate a full symphony orchestra, while Edward Bawden and Eric Ravilious worked together on the Refreshment Room. Writing in the Studio, John Rothenstein stressed the different briefs for the two rooms. Mahoney's problem was 'to provide a decoration which would make the stage the centre of interest, without distracting the attention of an audience from any speaker or singer thereon. No dashing flights of fancy, therefore, nor humorous sallies were allowed him. In a word his painting had to be interesting but not arresting. Moreover, the large area he had to cover was high up, and divided into three parts.' The division

came about because the back wall was canted to the sides, presumably for acoustic reasons.

A printed notice about the murals describes the subject as 'a composition suggesting the pleasures of life in work and play. It is planned rather in the fashion of a fifteenth century Italian decoration, seven large figures representing Dancing and Plastic Art, Music, Philosophy and Drama, Poetry and Prose, give mass and stability to the lower part, whilst Country-dances, Outdoor Pastimes, and Apple Harvesting groups are more freely and colloquially treated in the spaces above.'<sup>2</sup>

The jokey depiction of Shakespeare's plays in the Refreshment Room had the immediate appeal of Whistler's work at the Tate, while Mahoney's was on a more elevated plane. John Rothenstein wrote that 'His decoration is singularly impressive in its combination of impersonal dignity with energy sternly controlled. Most contemporary mural painters look for guidance to the Italian decorations of the early renaissance, and what they see in them too often overwhelms their work. With Mr Mahoney it was otherwise; for he has assimilated all he has learnt with masterly completeness.'<sup>3</sup>

Since all the original Morley College murals were destroyed by bombing, we have only black-and white photographs and studies on which to assess them (fig.4). P.G. Konody, writing in *The Observer*, noted that blue and red were the key colours. In his view, Mahoney had avoided 'every trace of archaistic primitive affectation. His allegorical figures belong to our own age and are English in type.'<sup>4</sup>

Mahoney's work was a vindication of Rothenstein's encouragement of disciplined technique at the Royal College. The figures have a quality of strangeness and individuality, but less marked than Stanley Spencer's. The outdoor setting and general shape resemble some of the murals painted by students in 1922 for the LCC County Hall which

were published but never installed, but Mahoney's work pulled together figure drawings from life with the depiction of trees and plants, and the overall composition which is both highly formalised and suggestive of real space and place. William Rothenstein later said that Mahoney's work rivalled Ford Madox Brown's murals of the 1880s in Manchester City Hall. The iconography is also significant. At a time when the subject matter of murals and 'decorative' paintings was apt either to be obscurely personal, or trivial and conventional (Rome Scholars furnish examples of both kinds), Mahoney managed to instil a sense of public gravity without bathos which must have expressed the earnest humane character of the college and its striving for the arts as a spiritual birthright. The seated 'modern' Muses, observed by children from behind a brick wall, indicates the dreamlike use of spatial compartments, often defined by garden walls and fences, that is often found in Mahoney's work. Stanley Spencer and several of his contemporaries used similar devices, and this characteristic runs as a curious thread through English romanticism, having a notable precursor in Samuel Palmer's 'Pear Tree in a walled garden' of c.1829, which Mahoney could have seen, exhibited for the first time ever, in the great Palmer exhibition at the V & A in 1926. The drapery over their knees is sculpted with the solidity of Mahoney's college contemporary, Henry Moore. These figures hover on the edge between realism and allegory, suggesting the possibility of symbolic manifestations in everyday life.

If the murals at Morley College had survived, there is no doubt that the Refreshment Room would still command the greatest attention, as it did in 1930, but Mahoney would have remained more firmly in the public eye. His two other major mural commissions, which have survived, are in places which receive few visitors.

The murals at Brockley County School certainly ought

to be better-known, not only on account of Mahoney's work, but for the contributions made by Evelyn Dunbar, Mildred Eldridge and Violet Martin. The building was listed in 1992 on the strength of the murals. The school has a beautiful site in Hilly Fields, but the hall of the 1880s, doubling as a gymnasium, was a difficult room to take over with a painting scheme. The paintings are brilliant in detail, indicating a typical quality of inter-war murals to become the equivalent of illustrations on a large scale (reproduced p.27). This was something remarked on by Hans Feibusch as an immigrant from Germany in the 1930s who had also trained in Paris. He felt that English painters generally did not have the right training for working on a large scale and became too involved in detail. Rather like the murals of the Pre-Raphaelites such as William Bell Scott's scenes of 1855 at Wallington, Northumberland, the Brockley paintings look particularly good in selected detail, and in the preparatory drawings. One hopes that the children were able to divert their attention during school assemblies and travel through the leaves and stems in imagination.

The didactic purpose of the murals is twofold: the fables themselves and the stimulus to look at the world through the way that they are painted. In fact, medium and message work in concert, since the fables are among some of the more metaphysical and contemplative from Aesop, rather than more overtly moralistic.

'Fortune and the Boy at the Well' has the quality of intensified arrested action and heightened perception that comes with 'the illumination of the commonplace'.<sup>5</sup> For this purpose, modern dress and everyday surroundings are the best vehicle from which to travel instantaneously into the beyond. 'Joy and Sorrow' could be imagined as a classical allegory of the eighteenth century, painted by Tiepolo. Mahoney's treatment brings classicism back to its roots in observation and the construction of realistic space, and the result has the lyricism of a folksong retelling an old legend.

figs. 15a & 15b: Brockley School murals. Photos: Mark Fiennes  
Left: The Four Winds of Hilly Fields, Charles Mahoney  
Right: The Cock and the Jewel, Evelyn Dunbar



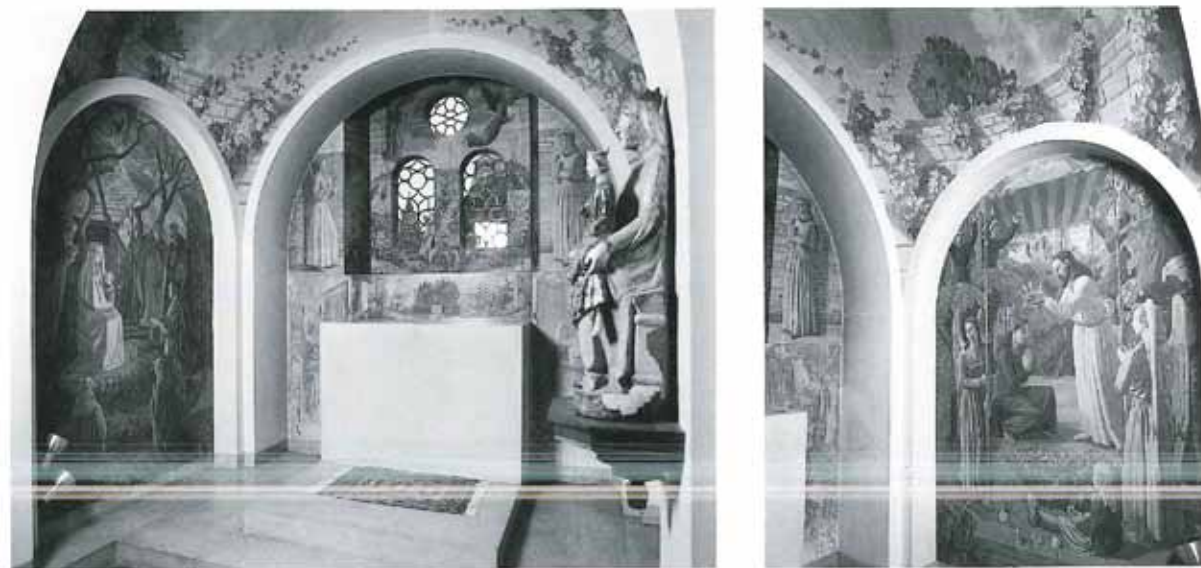
The painting on the front of the gallery at Brockley, a panorama of the school in its landscape, was by Evelyn Dunbar. The underside of the gallery, with a series of three ceiling compartments and arched spandrels below them, was mostly by Dunbar, although Mahoney painted 'The Butterfly and the Rose' the lunette over the entrance with its view down onto a tree-flanked lawn and landscape beyond, with a solitary figure. His ceiling panel, with four roundels of airborne female figures, called 'The Four Winds of Hilly Fields', is astonishing both in subject and treatment (figs. 15a & 15b).

In the broadcast, 'Whither Painting?' on 18 December, 1931 which inspired the headmaster of Brockley to commission the work, Sir William Rothenstein dared to propose that 'illustrative' or 'literary' painting was by no means incompatible with 'complex problems of form, of colour and of composition.' Furthermore, it was a characteristic of English art which need not carry any shame.

Murals, he said, could illustrate local subjects, like those which the RCA students Robert Baker and Edward Payne carried out in the village hall at Wood Green, Hampshire, in 1932, but Rothenstein went on to describe the moment of romantic illumination, 'Only when love comes, the moment of genius in the life of everyone, does the usual assume significance; and again this occurs in the presence of death. But a creative mind does not need these extreme experiences to feel the pathos and beauty of common things, of everyday experience. Therein, I believe, lies the educative value of art and literature; they give value to what is generally little valued. The kingdom of beauty is within you ...'<sup>6</sup>

John Rothenstein commented on the unanimity of Mahoney and Dunbar's work in the Studio, 'In the work of both them is manifested that grand austerity linked with

Mahoney's murals in the Lady Chapel at Campion Hall:  
fig. 16 left 'The Nativity and the Altar Wall. Photo: Richard Ivey  
fig. 17 right 'The Coronation of the Virgin. Photo: Richard Ivey



an intense devotion to Nature which has been the inspiration of so large a part of our greatest poetry, but which, curiously enough, is rarely met with in our painting.' The idea of a contemplative, transcendental painting based on outward appearance was a significant reaffirmation of the Romantic spirit, something that was widely discussed in the field of literature at this time, but not being 'modern', Mahoney and Dunbar have been deprived of their place in the twentieth century romantic lineage. At the same time, Mahoney consciously balanced Romanticism and Classicism, and notes by him on this theme state, 'The subjection of experiences and feelings to discipline and order, the application of method to creative work, and the search for rules and laws that can be made to fit or to apply so that natural phenomena can be subjected to human needs and mystery and fear are to some extent removed.'

Mahoney's Lady Chapel murals at Campion Hall, Oxford, the Jesuit college designed by Lutyens, were painted between 1942 and 1952. The commission came from Father Martin D'Arcy, who initially approached Stanley Spencer, but turned to Mahoney on John Rothenstein's recommendation. The circumstances were far from ideal, for Mahoney had to spend most of his holidays for nearly ten years working at Campion Hall when he badly needed rest for his health. One result was that the paintings were never completely finished (although this enhances rather than diminishes their appeal) and consequently were not published. By the 1950s, the inward-looking romanticism which they represent was no longer fashionable, but it was an astonishingly ambitious attempt, despite its small scale, to bring together symbolism and observation in a single mode of painting. It is an intense and crowded work, like the Medici chapel by Benozzo Gozzoli, but less concerned with the splendour of the world than with nature as a means towards spiritual insight.

What is most successful, perhaps, is the wall opposite the altar where a series of small, intimate scenes from the life of the Virgin are placed above each other without any architectural borders (reproduced p.33). The long panel immediately over the altar, with its imagery of the lily and the rose, the garden enclosed and two towers (from the Song of Solomon), is also perfect in its evocation of the quality of mystery (cat.85). Rothenstein, who watched over the emergence of the whole scheme, wrote in 1975, 'The spiritual and convincing character of the figures is enhanced by the very ordinariness of their environment, the walls, tiled roofs, trees and flowers which he had studied with such loving minuteness around his house at Wrotham and elsewhere.'<sup>7</sup> Still largely unknown, and never previously photographed properly, these murals await re-discovery.

#### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> John Rothenstein, 'The Mural Decorations at Morley College', *Studio*, XCIX, 1930, p.430
- <sup>2</sup> Plans published in *The Builder*, 18 February, 1927
- <sup>3</sup> op. cit.
- <sup>4</sup> P.G. Konody 'Art and Artists', *The Observer*, 9 February, 1930
- <sup>5</sup> This phrase comes from the writings of Theodore Roszak
- <sup>6</sup> Sir William Rothenstein, *Whither Painting? The ninth of the Broadcast National Lectures*, delivered on 18 December 1931, BBC Savoy Hill, 1932, pp.24-5
- <sup>7</sup> Sir John Rothenstein in *Charles Mahoney, A Tribute on the occasion of a Memorial Exhibition*, Michael Parkin Ltd., 1975, pp.12-13

## Charles Mahoney and Christian Art

CANON RICHARD DAVEY

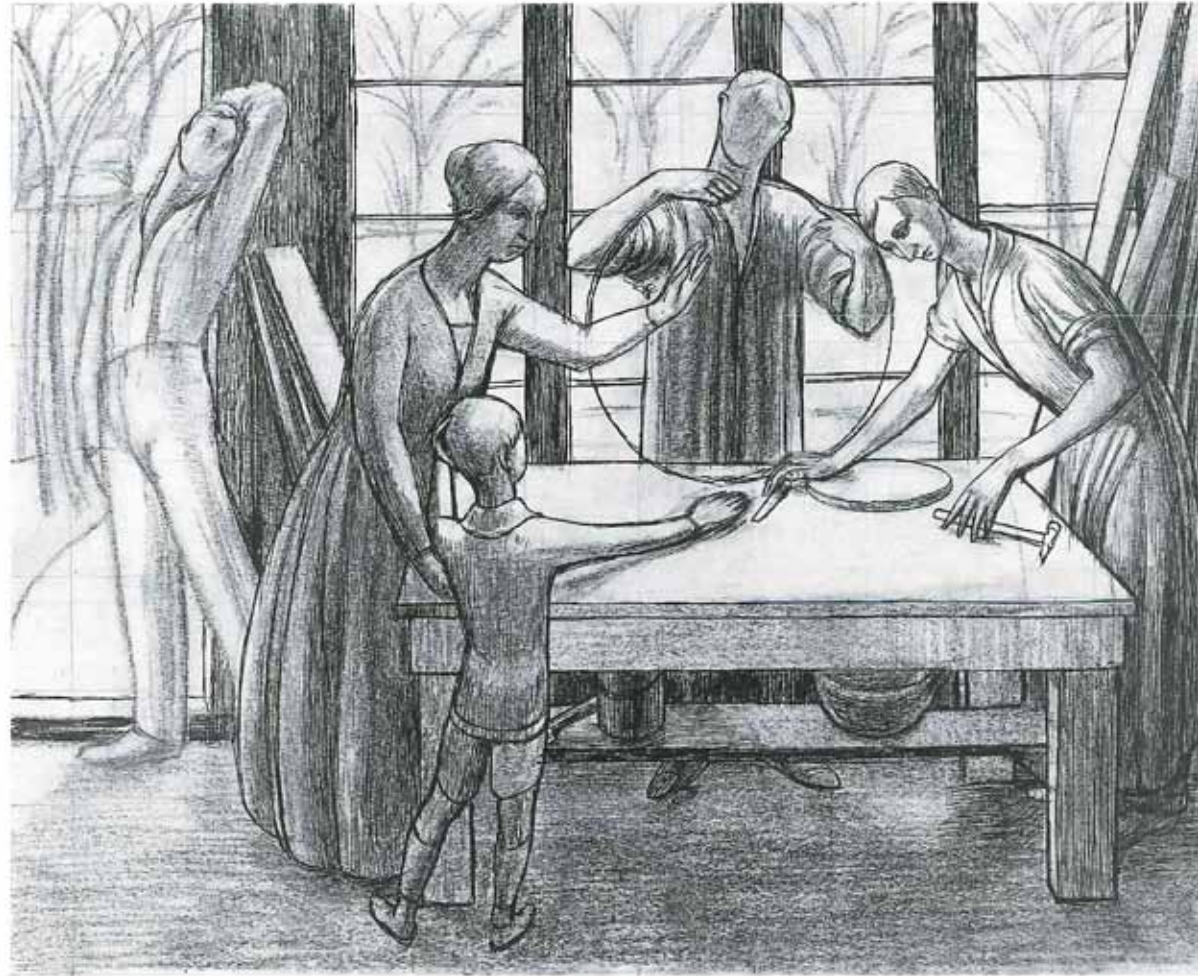


fig. 18 *Christ in Joseph's workshop* (cat. 4)

The early decades of the twentieth century were a time of innovation and experimentation in British art. New styles and subjects, which strove to express and reflect the dynamic quality of the century, emerged and then disappeared. Artists opened new horizons and vistas, which seemed to leave behind the traditional concerns of art. But alongside those exploring this brave new world of abstraction and modernism, there were many who instead sought to breath new life into the established areas of landscape and narrative painting. Artists such as Stanley Spencer, William Roberts, Paul Nash, and Charles Mahoney created an idiosyncratic mainstream that adapted the developments of modernism to their own ends. The English landscape and everyday life was subjected to a new scrutiny that saw beauty within the familiar and ordinary. Consequently, a patch of nettles, a garden shed, and domestic chores became a fitting subject for art. Within this English tradition of narrative and landscape painting many artists continued to use Christian iconography as both a stimulating subject, and as an expression of faith.

Over the centuries, the English countryside has been shaped by expressions of faith. From the great wool churches and Cathedrals, to small chapels; roadside crosses to gravestones, the church has left an enduring testimony to its power and influence. In country houses and public galleries as well, the religious art of former generations provides a lasting testament to God. However, since the Age of Enlightenment the influence and power of the es-

tablished Church has gradually declined. Religious faith has become a matter of personal decision and choice rather than a common vision shared by all. In particular, the decades after the First World War saw the development of a new interest and concern for the spiritual and divine. However, the doctrine and dogma of the Church were no longer the sole expression of faith. For many people, the philosophies contained in Theosophy, Spiritualism and other new cults offered a more stimulating and acceptable alternative to the traditional forms and beliefs of the Church. As a result a sense of spiritual ambiguity and free choice was created that is reflected in the religious imagery of the twentieth century. This can be seen in the work of Stanley Spencer. In both his paintings, and his scheme for Churchhouse, he created a religious iconography that although reminiscent of the traditional forms of Church art, was a very individual expression of a faith that saw the spiritual within the everyday.

A sense of spiritual intensity also distinguishes the work of Charles Mahoney. As a student at the Royal College of Art, he was required to make religious images. However, his student works, *Christ in Joseph's workshop* (cat. 4), *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (cat. 5), and *Biblical Scene* (cat. 3, fig. 18), reveal his enduring concern with creating a religious iconography that was both distinct and ambiguous. In none of these images is it possible to find an obvious feature that is clearly Christian. On one level these works deal with the dynamics of human interaction. But they also tease the

viewer with a sense of deeper mystery and purpose. The meeting of the old man and the younger figure in *Biblical Scene* hints at a biblical precedent, which may or may not be the return of the Prodigal Son; for Mahoney has offered no definitive answer. It is therefore a work, which echoes the sense of ambiguity, religious freedom, and individualism that has marked modern society. However, this concern with the spiritual was not restricted to student exercises in historical forms and traditions. Throughout his life, we can find a thread of religious inspiration in his work that seems to be a subtle expression of a faith, which is not dogmatic or doctrinal, but individual and personal.

The most striking and overt examples of Mahoney's religious work are the murals he created for Campion Hall, Oxford. In these illustrations of the life of the Virgin, he managed to combine historical models with a sense of modern practice and sensibility. The clothing and compositions have a strong relationship to Renaissance paintings of the subject, and yet they have been set within a distinctly English landscape. The composition and clothing in the *Visitation* (cat.78) is somehow timeless, but the spade stuck casually in the bed next to the figures strikes a distinctly English note. This is not a recreation of first century Judea, or Renaissance Italy, but an evocation of an English country garden. From the stone bridge in the *Coronation of the Virgin* (cat.83), to the dormer window in the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (cat.81) domestic and familiar objects provide a recognisable context for the sacred story. The resulting sense of domestic calm can also be seen in the series of paintings and drawings that Mahoney made on the themes of Adam and Eve, and Bathsheba. The garden setting that provides the backdrop for both stories is again reminiscent of an English garden. The shaped trees, topiary, and mix of exotic and native plants create the sense of a cultivated wilderness that is both wild and tamed at the same time.

There is a strong sense of spiritual innuendo in Mahoney's work. In addition to the obvious doctrinal interpretation, a multitude of different readings can be discerned within the religious work. However, the sense of ambiguity works two ways, and there are many of Mahoney's paintings that may not have an explicitly religious subject matter, but which evoke a sense of spiritual intensity and feeling. In the mural of *Autumn* (cats.88-90), the image of the young woman sat holding a basket of fruit is on one level an image of fertility and bounty. But her echo of Renaissance images of the Virgin Mary, including *The Madonna of the Meadow*, by Giovanni Bellini (National Gallery, London), creates the suggestion of a religious icon. The similarity between Mahoney's painting and the Bellini is particularly striking. In both paintings the women wear a full robe and share the same cross legged pose on the ground. In their laps, they cradle a precious object; but Mahoney has replaced Bellini's figure of the Christ child with a basket of fruit. Behind each of them is a familiar landscape, with tall trees and buildings. The study for the *Muse of Philosophy* (cat.24), provokes a similar reaction of *deja-vu*; one which is supported by the artist himself, who initially intended the study to represent an image of the Mother and Child. However, the sense of spiritual intensity in these paintings is not restricted to those works that have a compositional similarity to Christian iconography. Images as diverse as a landscape view of Allotments at Wrotham (cat.62) and botanical illustrations of plants are imbued with the same quality of wonder and hope that characterises the more explicit biblical subjects.

Since the Nineteenth century, the British landscape has been an important source of inspiration for artists and poets striving to find a new language for the spiritual experience of man. J.M.W. Turner and James Ward created images of the nature that pointed beyond the physical ap-

pearance of things to a transcendent truth. But many English artists rejected the dramatic scenery that inspired these artists in favour of a more intimate and domestic sense of wonder. Like Samuel Palmer, Stanley Spencer and Paul Nash, Mahoney turned to the world he knew for his inspiration; and in the smallest and most ordinary thing he clearly found a sense of spiritual awe and amazement which he then conveyed in his work. The sense of loving accuracy and attention to detail with which he painted the natural world becomes a metaphor for divine hope and love. In his accurate botanical drawings for '*Gardener's Choice*', he produced a modern 'Herbal', which like its medieval predecessors is not only a volume of scientific information but a testament to the glory of God in creation.

Mahoney conveys this sense of spiritual awe in particular, through his manipulation of colour and form. The colours he uses have a rich luminosity that bathes the subject in a warm glow. Each object in the painting seems to have been subjected to a gaze that is so intense that their colours have become heightened and refined tones of reality. Consequently, they carry an emotional intensity that seems to echo and reveal Mahoney's own response to the subject. His handling of line also has a refined, emotional intensity, which creates a strong expressive force. In *Christ in Joseph's Workshop*, the curving and lyrical forms of the figures evoke a sense of love and tenderness that reflects and underlines the subject matter. It is as though his constant observation of the world around has gradually eroded these bodies into an example of Roger Fry's, 'significant form,' which is uniquely expressive of a transcendent reality.

In seeing these works together, we are finally allowed to glimpse the richness of the spiritual vision that appears to have inspired Mahoney throughout his life. It was a vision that was rarely dogmatic or specific, but reflected instead a sense of wonder in creation, and the possibility of spiritual

depths within the world. He can now be seen to stand alongside Spencer, as an artist who sought to create a sacred art for a secular century. Through his peculiarly English voice he offered a sense of hope and stability within a world torn apart by the horrors of war.



fig.19 Autumn: Cartoon (cat.89)



# CATALOGUE

COMPILED BY PAUL LISS

## CATALOGUE NOTE

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Measurements are given in inches and (centimetres). For works on paper these refer to the sight size unless otherwise indicated.

‡ Denotes the work is illustrated in the colour plate section

† Denotes the work is illustrated in black and white

## A NOTE ON MATERIALS

For drawing, Mahoney liked a textured paper, soft to the touch, such as Ingres, or still better, hand-made papers from firms such as Hayle Mill or Barcham Green. Occasionally he bought cheap sketchbooks from Woolworth's because he found the paper so sympathetic as a surface for drawing. For his earliest drawings he used mainly B or 2B pencils, but he later preferred Black Prince or carbon pencils. He often used charcoal, adding white or red crayons to highlight drawings. Sometimes he combined these with conté crayons or pastels. For his later drawings he preferred pen and wash, taking great trouble to mix and dilute his inks until he achieved the required tone and colour. His drawing pens were either reservoir nibs in holders or else cartridge pens.

Mahoney bought the best quality materials, often from Lechertier Barbe, in Jermyn Street. He prepared boards and canvases for painting with much care, using special recipes. In his own words: 'The practical lesson to be learned is that ground and underpainting always have some effect on the final painting, even when it is not apparent, and that pictures must be carefully built up with this point in mind.' His oil paints were artist's colours, which he applied with Hogshair and Sable brushes. He made extensive notes on pigments so that he was familiar with the chemical properties of each colour. For his mural schemes he mixed his oil paints with wax, applied to canvas that had been fixed to the wall before painting commenced. His favourite frames were purchased in the fifties and sixties from Robert Savage of South Kensington.

## MAHONEY AS A STUDENT 1922-27

From 1918 to 1922 Mahoney attended Beckenham School of Art under Percy H. Jowett. Little work has survived from this period. In 1922, on the strength of a Royal Exhibition in drawing, Mahoney enrolled at the Royal College of Art where he spent four productive years under the guidance of the College Principal and Professor of Painting, Sir William Rothenstein. Contemporaries at the College with whom he formed lifelong friendships included Edward Bawden, Barnett Freedman, Percy Horton and Gerry Ososki.

### 1 *View from rear window at Mahoney's family home, Anerley* ‡

Oil on canvas board · 14 × 12 (35.6 × 30.5)

Anerley lies in a hilly area of South London, near Crystal Palace Hill. Mahoney spent his boyhood in what must have been a very crowded terraced cottage for their family of 7 or more, and he admired the vast Victorian mansions which at that time stood in spacious grounds in the area. It is likely that these, with Crystal Palace park, helped to form his ideas of Paradise gardens. Victorian plantings of formal evergreens such as Araucaria, figure prominently in his work.

### 2 *Allegorical figure of Autumn*

Oil on canvas · 18 × 14 (45.7 × 35.6)

### 3 *Biblical scene*

Watercolour over pencil · 8½ × 10 (21.6 × 25.4)

### 4 *Christ in Joseph's workshop* †

Pen & ink over Black Prince pencil, squared · 10¾ × 13¾ (27 × 33.3)  
Illustrated on page 42

### 5 *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*

Oil on paper · 10½ × 12¾ (26.7 × 32.4)

### 6 *Mothers watching children a play* ‡

Oil on paper · 12 × 11¼ (30.5 × 28.6)

### 7 *Family in a garden*

Signed CMahoney (under mount)  
Watercolour over pencil · 14 × 10 (35.6 × 25.4)

### 8 *The Brawl*

Wash and pen & ink over pencil, squared · 14 × 10 (35.6 × 25.4)



### 9 *Figures in a garden* †

Oil on paper with pen & ink outlines · 10 × 12 (25.4 × 30.5)

### 10 *Figures in park* †

Signed on reverse CMahoney × Oil over pencil and ink, squared  
10 × 12 (25.4 × 30.5) · illustrated on page 53

The Anerley area was within easy access of a number of hilly parks, including Crystal Palace. Within the confines of London, parks provided Mahoney with the opportunity to paint landscapes and, in particular, the trees which were to figure so prominently in his later work.

### 11 *The Public Baths, circa 1927* ‡

Oil on paper · 15 × 12 (38.1 × 30.5)  
Exhibited: Exhibition Road, 100 years at the RCA, 1988 (64), reproduced p.150

This painting is believed to represent Fulham Baths and can possibly be linked with the artist's lodging in Chelsea during the latter half of 1927.

### 12 *The Studio, Royal College of Art, circa 1926*

Oil on canvas · 18 × 14 (45.7 × 35.6)  
The seated figure is possibly Geoffrey Rhoades, who, although a Slade student, frequently visited Mahoney at the Royal College of Art. Rhoades soon became one of Mahoney's closest friends and often joined in the painting excursions to the countryside, undertaken by Mahoney and his Royal College of Art contemporaries.

13 London digs, circa 1926 †

Oil on paper · 11 × 14 (28 × 35.6)

Mahoney's student years were punctuated by recurrent ill health and financial hardship – he further suffered at the hands of unscrupulous landlords, lodging at a succession of addresses. It was against this background that Oak Cottage, his home from 1937, came to represent such permanence in his life and art.

14 Backcloth, Merchant of Venice, circa 1926–30

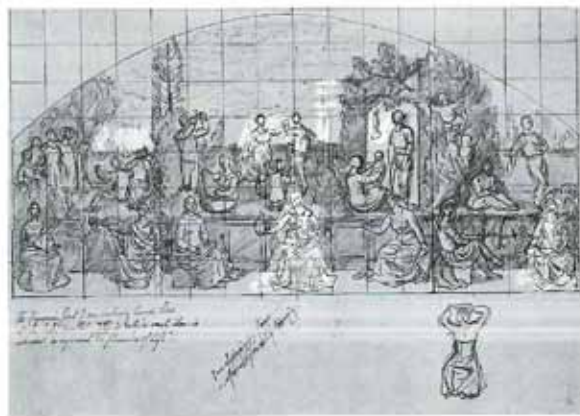
Oil on paper · 9½ × 10 (24.1 × 25.4)

Towards the end of his college period, Mahoney produced a number of theatre designs, sometimes in collaboration with Barnett Freedman. The Department of Prints and Drawings at the Victoria and Albert Museum acquired a group of designs in 1926.

15 Portrait of Barnett Freedman (1901–1958), circa 1929 †

Charcoal with white highlights on grey paper · 21¼ × 15¼ (54 × 38.7) · illustrated on page 24

Freedman attended the Royal College of Art on a London County Council scholarship from 1922, the year Mahoney enrolled. The two formed an immediate, particularly close, and lifelong friendship, Freedman insisting from the start that Cyril Mahoney's Christian name should be changed to Charlie. Both artists went on to join the teaching staff at the RCA in 1928, Freedman as Instructor in Still Life, a post he held until 1940. Freedman was an ambitious figurative painter but is best known for his revival of colour lithography and for his book illustrations. (For a fuller account, see p. 10)



16

MORLEY COLLEGE 1928–30

The scheme to decorate Morley College was funded by Lord Duveen and followed on from his commission for Rex Whistler to decorate the Refreshment Room of the Tate Gallery (at a cost of £1,200). Six painters, all former students at the RCA, were invited to submit designs. Those chosen were Mahoney, Bawden and Ravilious. Mahoney's contribution, *The Pleasures of Life*, was the central feature on the wall at the back of the stage used for orchestral concerts, dramatic performances and folk dancing.

In the foreground were seven Muses: (left to right) Dancing, Plastic Art, Music, Philosophy, Drama, Poetry and Prose. Country Dances, Outdoor Pastimes and Apple Picking were represented in the spaces above (see fig. 4).

The scheme was completed *in situ* during an 18 month period and was worked in oil paint mixed with wax, on canvas, fixed to the wall. The building was destroyed by a bomb during the Second World War and none of the work of the three artists survived.

16 *The Pleasures of Life: Compositional study* †

Pen and brown ink over pencil with areas of correction in white, squared on tracing paper · 12½ × 19½ (31.8 × 48.9) (sheet size)

This drawing is inscribed *The figures in front I am making larger, those at the back smaller. This is only a rough idea – is intended to represent 'The Pleasures of Life' and I am changing this figure for one representing dancing.*

17 *The Pleasures of Life: Compositional study*

Brown ink and wash over pencil, squared · 8½ × 17 (21.5 × 43.2)

18 *The Pleasures of Life: Compositional study for central section*

Pencil, watercolour and pen & ink, squared · 15¾ × 15½ (40 × 38.4)

19 *Muse: Study for Prose*

Black Prince pencil and chalk, squared · 17¼ × 11 (45.1 × 27.9)

20 *Muse: Study for Poetry*

Black Prince pencil, squared · 17¾ × 11¾ (45.1 × 29.8)

21 *Muse: Study for Drama* †

Signed on the reverse C Mahoney, 1 Kensington Crescent, W14  
Black Prince pencil and chalk over watercolour and pencil, squared · 20¼ × 10½ (51.5 × 26.7)

16 Edges irregular

22 *Muse: Study for Music*

Black Prince pencil, watercolour and chalk, squared · 18 × 11½ (45.7 × 29.2) · Edges irregular

In the final design for Music, the recorder and violin are replaced by a guitar.

23 *Muse: Study for Plastic Art* †

Black Prince pencil and chalk, squared · 18 × 11¼ (45.7 × 28.6)

24 *Muse: Study for Philosophy*

Oil on canvas · 23 × 14 (58.4 × 35.6)

This fragment gives an idea of the original scale and the medium used; oil paint mixed with wax on canvas. The early compositional design (cat. 16) indicates that this central figure was originally conceived as a Madonna.

25 *Outdoor Pastimes: Study of boy and girl holding a kite*

Black Prince pencil on tracing paper, squared · 12 × 9 (30.5 × 22.8)

These figures appear to the top right hand side of the mural.



21



23



26

26 *Outdoor Pastimes: Study of a mother and child* †

Black Prince pencil with white chalk highlights, squared in red chalk · 18 × 11 (45.7 × 28) sheet size

These figures appear to the extreme top left of the mural. There is a plant study on the reverse.

27 *Outdoor Pastimes: Study of children with a fishing net*

Black Prince pencil on tracing paper, squared · 12 × 9 (30.5 × 22.8)

These figures appear to the extreme top right of the mural.

28 *Country Dances: Study of musicians*

Black Prince pencil and red chalk, squared · 17¾ × 22¼ (45.1 × 56.5) sheet size

This group appears to the left hand side of the middle ground.

29 *Apple Picking: Group study*

Red chalk, squared · 18 × 22¼ (45.7 × 56.5) sheet size

This group appears to the right hand side of the middle ground.

## BROCKLEY SCHOOL MURALS AND OTHER COMPOSITIONS 1932–36

The commission to decorate Brockley (now Prendergast) School in South London, was the result of an appeal by William Rothenstein, Principal of the RCA, for students to be given the opportunity to experiment with mural painting. Mahoney was invited to organise the scheme at the beginning of 1932. The school undertook to pay for the materials. William Rothenstein hoped to find payment for the artists. In the end, Mahoney's payment was only £25 and a silver cigarette case. Situated in the school hall, in five arched-top panels, the subjects of the murals were taken from Aesop's Fables. The paintings were executed in oil on to existing plaster. They were opened by Oliver Stanley, Minister of Education in 1936. (Reproduced page 27)

- 30 *Joy and Sorrow: Cartoon*, circa 1933 †  
Signed on reverse C Mahoney, 3 Willoughby Road, Hampstead NW3  
Pencil and watercolour, squared · 51 × 29 (129.6 × 73.7) arched top  
*Joy and Sorrow* illustrates the fable of two sisters who quarrelled as to which should have precedence. King Minos, as arbitrator, decreed that they should be linked together and each of them in turn should tread on the heel of the other. In an essay published in *Country Life* (30th April 1987), Alan Powers notes 'the setting is a claustrophobic enclosure between brick walls, with watchers on a tower beyond. The walls and iron gates have that strange exactness of place that is at the root of English romantic painting.'
- 31 *Joy and Sorrow: Colour study*, circa 1933 †  
Oil on paper · 18 × 10¼ (45.7 × 27.3) arched top  
Exhibited: *The Last Romantics*, Barbican Art Gallery, 1989 (476)
- 32 *Fortune and the Boy at the Well: Cartoon*, circa 1934 †  
Pencil and watercolour, squared · 49 × 29 (124.5 × 73.7)  
In the fable of *Fortune and the Boy at the Well* a sleeping boy is woken by Fortune, anxious that he should not fall into the well.
- 33 *Fortune and the Boy at the Well: Colour study*, 1933  
Signed Cyril Mahoney and dated 1933  
Oil on paper · 18 × 10½ (45.7 × 26.7) arched top
- 34 *Sweeping Leaves*  
Oil on paper over pencil · 14½ × 11¼ (36.8 × 28.6)

The figure shown in this painting is probably Evelyn Dunbar.  
(For a fuller account, see pp. 12–13)

- 35 *Homecoming, early 1930s*  
Pen & ink and wash over pencil, squared · 10½ × 13 (26.7 × 33)  
Mahoney was fond of the short stories and poems of Walter de la Mare. This and the following drawing are possibly inspired by de la Mare texts.



32



36

- 36 *Priest guiding a traveller, early 1930s †*  
Pen & ink and wash over pencil · 12¼ × 9¼ (31.1 × 23.5)  
Collection of Elizabeth Bulkeley
- 37 *Girl sorting pears, circa 1932*  
Pen & ink and wash over pencil · 13 × 10 (33 × 25.4)  
A dated design in the artist's studio indicates that Mahoney worked on a number of similar drawings in the early 1930s.
- 38 *Girl sorting pears, circa 1932*  
Pen & ink and wash over pencil · 13½ × 10½ (34.3 × 26.7)
- 39 *Thomas More with the Tower of London in the background*  
Oil on paper · 12 × 8 (30.5 × 20.3)  
This is a study for a mural undertaken for the Holy Redeemer Church, Chelsea in 1932.
- 40 *Thomas More standing at a table*  
Oil on paper 12 × 8 (30.5 × 20.3)  
This is a study for a mural undertaken for the Holy Redeemer Church, Chelsea in 1932.

## OAK COTTAGE, WROTHAM, KENT

Acquired in 1937, Oak Cottage, in Wrotham, Kent, was very much Mahoney's spiritual as well as actual home. It was also a home for his mother, Bessie, after she left Anerley in 1937. Charles lived at Oak Cottage from 1937–40, during which period he renovated it, and again from 1945 until his death in 1968. Once the garden that he planted had matured, he seldom worked anywhere else. For Mahoney, Oak Cottage had something of the quality with which Stanley Spencer imbued his childhood home, Fernlea; in both cases the frequent pictorial references to elements of the architecture and garden gives the location an almost mystical quality (see figs. 7 & 8).

- 41 *The Kitchen, circa 1937 †*  
Oil on paper · 12 × 14 (30.5 × 35.6)  
The kitchen here is as it was when Mahoney moved to Oak Cottage. The figure in the red overall is the artist's mother.
- 42 *The Kitchen sink, circa 1937 †*  
Watercolour · 14 × 11 (35.6 × 27.9)



42

- 43 *Evening, Oak Cottage, 1938-9* †  
Oil on canvas · 18 × 14 (45.7 × 35.6)  
Exhibited: New English Art Club, 1951  
Collection of Elizabeth Bulkeley
- 44 *View of St Mary's Lane from Oak Cottage*  
Oil over pencil on board · 14 × 10 (35.6 × 25.5)
- 45 *The Potato Patch, 1960*  
Oil on canvas · 12 × 16 (30.5 × 40.6)  
This is a view from the studio doorway, Oak Cottage.



49

#### GARDENER'S CHOICE 1937

Drawings for *Gardener's Choice*, a collaboration between Mahoney and Evelyn Dunbar, were produced during 1937; the book was published at the end of the same year by Routledge. The full page illustrations were produced by Mahoney, the vignettes and much of the text by Dunbar. As Elizabeth Bulkeley notes in her biographical essay, 'They presented the plants that they liked to draw, paint and grow. They were sculptural and bold, yet subtle, and unusual for their time. Each was described lovingly, as if in sharing their favourite plants they were sharing their mutual happiness'. The page references in brackets refer to the reproduction of the drawings in *Gardener's Choice*.

- 46 *Platycodon grandiflorum Mariesii* (p.137)  
Pen & ink · 10 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 7 (27.6 × 17.7)
- 47 *Verbascum phoenicium* (p.187)  
Pen & ink · 8 × 9 (20.3 × 22.8)
- 48 *Helianthus multiflorus*  
Pen & ink · 12 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 8 (32.4 × 20.3)
- 49 *Veronica gentianoides* (p.193 earlier version) †  
Pen & ink over pencil · 10 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 8 (26 × 20.3)
- 50 *Ranunculus aconitifolius Flore Pleno* (p.153)  
Pen & ink with white highlights  
12 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 6 $\frac{1}{4}$  (31.8 × 15.9)
- 51 *Proof of book jacket design*  
Printed in brown ink · 10 × 13 (25.5 × 33)
- 52 *Angelica archangelica* (p.23 earlier version)  
Pen & ink over pencil · 13 × 8 (33 × 20.3)
- 53 'Rosaceum'  
Watercolour and pen & ink · 13 × 8 (33 × 20.3)
- 54 *Lilium hansonii* (p.121 earlier version)  
Pen & ink with white highlights  
13 × 8 (33 × 20.3)
- 55 *Rudbeckia purpurea* (p.165 earlier version)  
Pen & ink over pencil · 12 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 6 $\frac{1}{2}$  (32.4 × 16.5)

{ 52 }

- 56 *Melittis melissophyllum* (p.125)  
Pen & ink with white highlights  
13 × 6 $\frac{1}{8}$  (33 × 16.8)
- 57 *Formal garden with tulips*  
Gouache over pencil · 11 × 17 (27.9 × 43.2)  
Collection of Elizabeth Bulkeley



10



61

#### LANDSCAPES

Before settling at Wrotham in Kent, Mahoney's landscape subjects were taken from the parts of southern England where he spent his holidays: the Cotswolds, Wiltshire and Suffolk. He also produced occasional paintings when visiting Edward Bawden and John Aldridge in Great Bardfield, Essex. After settling at Oak Cottage, excursions by Mahoney were rare although he did produce paintings whilst at Pevensey in Sussex (1958), Veryan in Cornwall (1959) and Punccknowle in Dorset (circa 1962), the latter two holidays partly funded by the Artists' General Benevolent Institution.

- 58 *Landscape in the Cotswolds, September 1927*  
Inscribed with title to reverse and Cyril Mahoney, 14 Jubilee Place  
Oil on paper · 11 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 8 (28.6 × 20.3)  
This painting was probably produced during the artist's August 1927 painting holiday at Hillside, Stow-on-the-Wold, Gloucestershire.
- 59 *Brent Eleigh, Suffolk, 1931*  
Black and brown ink and wash · 11 × 14 $\frac{1}{2}$  (28 × 36.8) with turned up edges for stretching  
This is a study for a painting in the collection of the Leeds City Art Gallery. The final work has two women in the garden.
- 60 *Brent Eleigh, Suffolk, 1931*  
Oil on canvas board · 11 × 15 (28 × 38.1)  
Collection of Elizabeth Bulkeley
- 61 *Orchards, Marden, Kent, circa 1930* †  
Signed on reverse  
Oil on canvas board · 10 × 14 (25.4 × 35.6)  
Exhibited: Oldham, 1931  
Collection of Elizabeth Bulkeley  
This landscape was probably painted in August 1930 when the artist spent a fortnight's holiday with Percy Horton and Geoffrey Rhoades at Blackmoor Farm, The Beech, Marden, Kent.
- 62 *Allotments beside White Hill Pumping Station, Wrotham, circa 1938* †  
Oil on paper over Black Prince pencil · 13 × 10 (33 × 25.4)  
Collection of Elizabeth Bulkeley  
White Hill Pumping Station was a booster station to raise water to Exydown Reservoir on Wrotham Hill.

{ 53 }

63 Caravan at Pevensey

Signed with initials and dated '58  
Oil on board · 11 × 14¼ (28 × 37.5)

This shows the ex-workman's caravan belonging to the sculptor, Mark Batten. Mahoney rented a small beach house on the shingle at Pevensey Bay next door to the caravan.

64 Caravan at Pevensey

Oil on canvas · 14 × 18 (35.6 × 46)  
See note to cat. 63.

65 Smallholding, Veyan

Signed Chas Mahoney and dated '59  
Oil on board · 11 × 15 (27.9 × 38.1)



70

AMBLESIDE AND THE WAR

Late in 1940 the Royal College of Art was evacuated to Ambleside in the Lake District; Mahoney and Percy Horton were among the male staff. The students were housed in two hotels, men at The Queens and women at The Salutation; Mahoney was resident master in charge at the men's hostel. Whilst at Ambleside, Mahoney became engaged to Dorothy Bishop, a calligraphy tutor from the Design School of the Royal College of Art. They were married in September 1941. For a fuller account of this period see pp. 16–17 and *The Artist as Evacuee, The Royal College of Art in the Lake District, 1940–45*, Dove Cottage and the Wordsworth Museum, Grasmere 1987.

66 Gas Mask Drill, 1939

Pen and wash over pencil, oval  
Inscribed with title  
12 × 8 (30.5 × 20.3)

67 Gas Mask Drill, 1939

Signed with initials,  
Inscribed with title and dated '39  
Black Prince pencil, squared · 15¼ × 11¼ (38.7 × 28.6)

68 Observation Post – Wrotham Hill †

Pen & ink and grey wash over pencil · 8 × 13 (20.3 × 33)

69 View from the library roof, Ambleside, circa 1942

Oil on canvas · 18 × 14 (45.7 × 35.6)  
Exhibited: *The Artist as Evacuee, The Royal College of Art in the Lake District, 1940–45*, Dove Cottage and the Wordsworth Museum, Grasmere 1987 (29)  
Collection of Elizabeth Bulkeley

This composition demonstrates Mahoney's fondness for Victorian Gothic buildings, a taste which, like much that appealed to his eye, was unfashionable at the time.

70 Studio, Ambleside †

Oil on canvas · 20 × 16 (50.8 × 40.6)

In spite of requisitioning two hotels, conditions for the Royal College of Art students were cramped. The majority of space was required for accommodation leaving precious little room for the studios which were mostly set up in lower rooms and suffered from lack of light.

71 Still life with view onto winter landscape, Ambleside

Watercolour over pencil · 19¼ × 15½ (49.2 × 39.4)

72 Dorothy working at kitchen table, Ambleside †

Watercolour over pencil · 12 × 17 (30.5 × 43.2)

Collection of Elizabeth Bulkeley

Illustrated on page 19

Mahoney married Dorothy Bishop, a calligrapher and fellow member of staff at the Royal College of Art in September 1941.

73 Elizabeth – her book, circa 1946 †

Watercolour, charcoal, pencil and pen & ink · Six double sided pages, each 11½ × 9 (29.2 × 22.8)  
Collection of Elizabeth Bulkeley

This book was produced to celebrate the birth of the artist's only child, Elizabeth, born 21st March 1944.

Dorothy, who taught calligraphy at the RCA from circa 1926 to 1953, was responsible for the lettering. Mahoney produced the illustrations.



68

## CAMPION HALL 1941–52

Mahoney was commissioned to produce a mural scheme for the Lady Chapel at Campion Hall in 1941. The scheme was to be made up primarily of three large panels: the Nativity and Adoration of the Shepherds, the Coronation of the Virgin, and Our Lady of Mercy. In detail and composition the paintings owe much to early Italian example. The most notable case is *Our Lady of Mercy* (cat.84), clearly inspired by Piero della Francesca's altarpiece at Borgo San Sepolcro.

Electing to paint directly onto canvas fixed to the walls and by daylight hours only, the project inevitably became drawn out – Mahoney could only work in situ during the Easter and summer vacations when he was not teaching. The project continued into the following decade and coincided with a serious decline in the artist's physical health. In spite of these problems, Sir John Rothenstein, who chose to reproduce one of the murals as a plate in *British Art since 1900* (1962, pl.60), was moved to describe the scheme as 'second ... only to that by Stanley Spencer at Burghclere'. A full account of the circumstances of the commission and some of the problems involved can be found in Sir John Rothenstein's *Tribute to Mahoney* in the catalogue of the Memorial Exhibition held at the Ashmolean Museum in 1975.

- 74 *Preparatory cartoon for the Birth of the Virgin, circa 1942* †  
Charcoal with white highlights  
35 x 34 (88.9 x 86.4)
- 75 *Study for the Birth of the Virgin, circa 1942* †  
Oil on paper · 11½ x 11 (29.2 x 28)
- 76 *Study for the Visitation, circa 1942* †  
Signed and inscribed on a label to the reverse  
Oil on paper, squared in chalk · 11½ x 11¼ (29.2 x 28.6)  
Exhibited: *Ecclesiastical Art*, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, March – April 1957  
Illustrated on back cover
- 77 *Study for the Visitation, circa 1942* †  
Pencil and pen & ink, squared in red crayon · 12 x 12 (30.5 x 30.5)
- 78 *Study for the Visitation, circa 1942* †  
Inscribed Sketch for the Visitation for size 2' 10" x 2' 10"  
Oil on paper · 12 x 12 (30.5 x 30.5)



74

- 79 *The Marriage of the Virgin, circa 1942* †  
Signed and inscribed Study for the 3' x 3' panel on a label to reverse  
Oil on paper · 11½ x 11½ (29.2 x 29.2)  
Exhibited: *Ecclesiastical Art*, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, March – April 1957; *The Last Romantics*, The Barbican Art Gallery, 1989 (481)  
The man breaking a stick in the foreground recalls Raphael's painting of the same subject in the Brera, Milan where this motif is prominent.
- 80 *Study for the Marriage of the Virgin, circa 1942*  
Inscribed Sketch for the Marriage of the Virgin for size 2' 10" x 2' 10", lower left sacristy door  
Oil on paper · 12 x 12 (30.5 x 30.5)
- 81 *The Adoration of the Shepherds (Winter), circa 1942*  
Signed and inscribed on a label to the reverse Study for the 6' x 9' panel  
Oil on paper, arched top · 17¾ x 11¼ (45 x 29.8)  
Exhibited: *Ecclesiastical Art*, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, 1957; *The Last Romantics*, The Barbican Art Gallery, 1989 (480)



77



78

- 82 *Study for the Death of the Virgin*  
Inscribed Sketch for Death of the Virgin for size 2' 10" x 2' 10", lower right side of sacristy door  
Oil on paper · 12 x 12 (30.5 x 30.5)  
The mourning figures are portraits of the Campion Hall fathers.
- 83 *The Coronation of the Virgin (Spring), circa 1942*  
Signed and inscribed on a label to the reverse Study for the 6' x 9' panel  
Oil on paper, arched top · 17¾ x 11¼ (45 x 29.8)  
Exhibited: *Ecclesiastical Art*, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, March – April 1957; *The Last Romantics*, The Barbican Art Gallery, 1989 (479)
- 84 *Our Lady of Mercy (Autumn), circa 1942*  
Signed and inscribed on a label to the reverse Study for the 6' x 9' panel  
Oil on paper, arched top · 17¾ x 11¼ (45 x 29.8)  
Exhibited: *Ecclesiastical Art*, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, March – April 1957
- 85 *Symbols of Mary*  
Oil on paper · 7½ x 30 (19 x 76.2)  
This is a study for the final composition of the wall panel above the altar.
- 86 *Father D'Arcy with two undergraduates in the garden at Campion Hall* †  
Inscribed Top small panel to left of door  
Oil on paper, squared in chalk · 11¼ x 11¼ (28.6 x 28.6)  
This panel, although never executed, was intended for one of a number of small panels on the wooden screen to the vestry.
- 87 *Lutyens conversing with a Campion Hall gardener* †  
Inscribed Top small panel to the right of door  
Oil on paper · 11¼ x 11¼ (28.6 x 28.6)

## FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN, 1951

Mahoney was asked to contribute to the Festival of Britain after an initial shortlist of 145 artists was narrowed down to 60. Percy Jowett and John Rothenstein, members of the selection panel, undoubtedly would have recommended him. The exhibition was entitled *Sixty paintings for '51*. Works submitted were to be a minimum of 45 x 60 in. The oldest artist asked was W.G. Gillies (73 at the time), the youngest Lucian Freud (29). Other artists selected included John Armstrong, Edward Burra, Ivon Hitchens, L.S. Lowry, John Minton, William Scott, Keith Vaughan, Carel Weight and Rodrigo Moynihan (who produced for this exhibition his celebrated *Portrait Group* (fig. 12). Barnett Freedman and Edward Bawden, both also invited, declined.

Mahoney's contribution was entitled *The Garden* and conceived as a mural. Figurative works accounted for approximately half of the contributions submitted and many, like Mahoney's, were firmly rooted in the British tradition of landscape painting. A full account of the exhibition is given in *25 from 51, 25 Paintings from the Festival of Britain 1951*, Sheffield City Art Galleries, 1978.

- 88 *Mural painting, Autumn, circa 1951 †*  
Signed and titled on a label to the reverse  
Oil on board · 84 x 48 (213.4 x 121.9) · illustrated on front cover (detail)

Exhibited: Society of Mural Painters Exhibition, Arts Council of Great Britain (46); *Exhibition Road, 100 years at the RCA, 1988 as Mural of figures in a garden 1947-53* (65) reproduced p. 150; *The Last Romantics*, Barbican Art Gallery, 1989 (474).

Although not specifically related to the Festival of Britain commission, *Autumn* was produced during the same period as *The Garden* and but for a slight difference in height could be described as its pair. The artist's wife, Dorothy, posed for the main figure. The formal qualities of the Victorian red brick house – which was visible from the platform at Borough Green Station – held a fascination for Mahoney. He frequently travelled from the station to London during the period that he taught at the Royal College of Art.

- 89 *Autumn: Cartoon †*  
Chalk on squared paper · 56¼ x 31¾ (142.9 x 80.6) · illustrated on page 45

- 90 *Autumn: Colour study*  
Oil over charcoal on prepared paper, squared with white chalk and blue crayon · 28 x 16 (71.1 x 40.6)
- 91 *The Garden, 1950 †*  
Oil on canvas · 72 x 48 (182.9 x 121.9)  
Exhibited: *Sixty Paintings for '51*, Arts Council, 1951-52 (34); *25 from 51, 25 Paintings from the Festival of Britain 1951*, Sheffield City Art Galleries, 1978 (15)
- 92 *The Garden: Cartoon*  
Chalk and pastel on paper, squared in red · 71 x 49 (180.3 x 124.5)
- 93 *The Garden: Colour study*  
Oil on prepared paper · 18 x 12 (45.7 x 30.5)
- 94 *The Garden: Cartoon*  
Charcoal, wash, pastel with white highlights, squared in red · 27 x 18 (68.5 x 45.7)



97

## PLANT STUDIES AND STILL LIVES

Mahoney's interest in formal gardens and plants such as auriculas and old roses – all deeply unfashionable at the time – is typical of the originality and independence of his vision. His unbridled enthusiasm for plants was shared with Edward Bawden, Geoffrey Rhoades, John Nash and Evelyn Dunbar, with whom he swapped cuttings by post. The correspondence between this circle is full of exchanges about the discovery, nurturing and drawing of new potential subjects (fig. 6). Mahoney's plant studies are so remarkably complete in their own right that it is barely possible to attempt to mark a line between botanical study and still life. The two became one and the same; and although some of his compositions were clearly arranged, they rarely appear contrived.

- 95 *Greenhouse interior, circa 1935 †*  
Pencil, wash and pen & ink on tracing paper, squared · 21½ x 15½ (54.6 x 39.4)



95

- 96 *Tomato plant, mid 1950s †*  
Watercolour and Black Prince pencil · 23 x 15¼ (58.4 x 38.7)
- 97 *Crown Imperial, mid 1950s †*  
Inscribed with colour notes  
Black Prince pencil, watercolour and conté crayon · 19 x 15 (48.2 x 38.1)
- 98 *Anchusa (recto), early 1960s*  
*Iris (verso)*  
Pen & ink and watercolour · 19 x 12 (48.2 x 30.5) folded
- 99 *Large Verbascum, early 1960s*  
Pencil and watercolour · 25 x 15 (63.5 x 38.1)
- 100 *Opium poppies, early 1960s †*  
Black Prince pencil and watercolour, on two sheets of paper · 23 x 12½ (58.4 x 31.8)
- 101 *Roses and Catananche, mid 1950s*  
Pencil and watercolour · 15 x 22 (38.1 x 55.9)



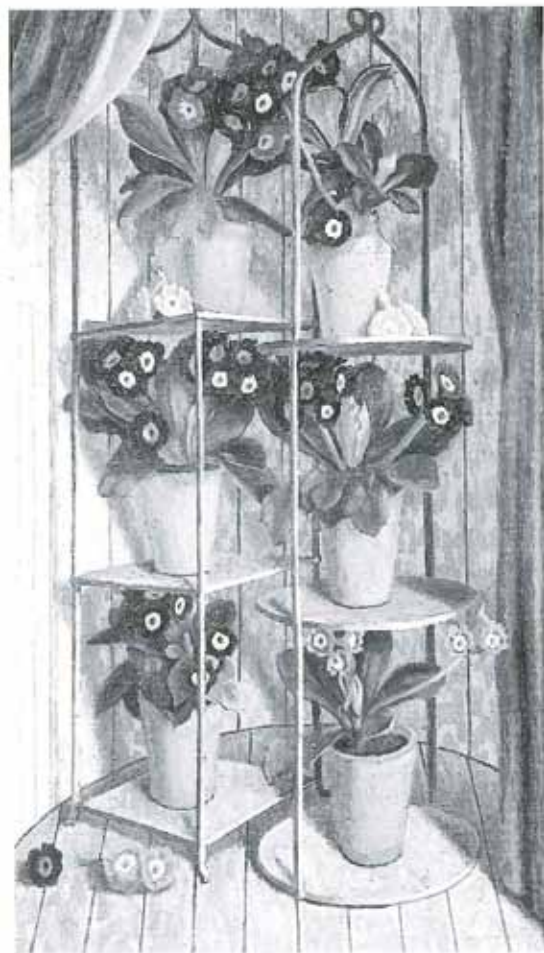
96



100

102 *Sunflowers, behind the rose bed, Oak Cottage, late 1940s*  
 Oil on canvas board · 15 × 11 (38.1 × 28)  
 Collection of Elizabeth Bulkeley  
 Illustrated on page 23

103 *Galaxy of Sunflowers, 1967 †*  
 Pen, ink and wash, on three sheets of paper · 26 × 15¼ (66 × 38.7)  
 Collection of Elizabeth Bulkeley Illustrated on page 23  
 This is the last drawing made by the artist.



109

104 *Composite plant, 1954 †*  
 Oil on hard board · 18 × 14 (45.7 × 35.6)  
 Exhibited: New English Art Club, 1954 Tour  
 This painting was especially admired by Edward Bawden and is referred to in a letter of 1954 as *Woman behind wire netting*.

105 *Inula, mid 1950s †*  
 Oil on paper, squared in chalk · 18 × 14 (45.7 × 35.6)

106 *Crown Imperials, mid 1950s*  
 Oil on paper · 13½ × 20 (34.3 × 50.8)

107 *Crown Imperials, mid 1950s †*  
 Oil on paper · 17 × 10 (43.2 × 25.4)

108 *Auriculas, late 1950s †*  
 Oil on paper · 10¼ × 21½ (26 × 54.6)

109 *Auricula theatre, 1962 †*  
 Oil on canvas · 24 × 14 (61 × 35.6)

110 *Auriculas, circa 1960*  
 Oil on paper · 5 × 9½ (12.7 × 24.1)

111 *Old roses arranged in an orange box, mid 1950s*  
 Oil on paper · 17 × 10 (43.2 × 25.4)

112 *Orange box with cat and hellebore, mid 1950s †*  
 Oil over charcoal · 17 × 8 (43.2 × 20.3)

113 *Flowers in mustard pot, mid to late 1950s*  
 Oil on paper · 18 × 10 (45.8 × 25.4)

114 *Still life with mossy saxifrage and apples, mid to late 1950s*  
 Oil on paper · 10½ × 13 (26.7 × 33)

115 *Yellow peonies, early 1950s*  
 Oil on hard board · 14 × 17 (35.6 × 43.2)  
 Exhibited: New English Art Club  
 The composition combines peonies from the artist's garden with a side view of cottages in St Mary's Lane, Wrotham.

116 *Christmas tree viewed through red curtains, circa 1952*  
 Oil on paper over charcoal · 15 × 12 (38.1 × 30.5)  
 Throughout the 1950s Mahoney produced a series of paintings of successive Christmas trees decorated by his daughter and wife. The small scale of the trees reflected the size of Oak Cottage.

117 *Still life with ludo set and view through open window, circa 1950*

Oil on paper over Black Prince pencil · 10 × 16 (25.4 × 40.6)

Although Mahoney worked independently from mainstream movements, he remained interested in, and open-minded about the contemporary scene. He was especially interested in Surrealism, elements of which are reflected in this painting.



112

## ADAM AND EVE & BATHSHEBA

Mahoney's first depiction of Adam and Eve appears to date to the beginning of his relationship with Evelyn Dunbar in the mid 1930s; references to 'Charlie and Eve' occur in their correspondence. The idea of the Garden of Eden encapsulated the feelings of both about plants and nature, a passion nourished by frequent trips to Kew Gardens. Mahoney delighted in depicting different points in the narrative (*The Garden, The Temptation, The Expulsion*) and the subject remained a recurrent theme right through to his last decorative panel, *The Muses*, in which elements of his vision of paradise gardens combine to form a remarkable panorama (see cat. 128). A painting of *The Expulsion*, circa 1936, was acquired by the Contemporary Art Society for the Tate Gallery in 1941.

Bathsheba was a later theme which evolved throughout the 1950s. Again it provided an opportunity for exploring the relationship between man and nature. Mahoney's admiration for 'Douanier' Rousseau is apparent in these works.

118 *Adam and Eve with cat and pig*

Charcoal and white chalk, squared in white chalk over red crayon  
 19 × 15¼ (48.2 × 38.7)

119 *Adam and Eve with sunflowers*

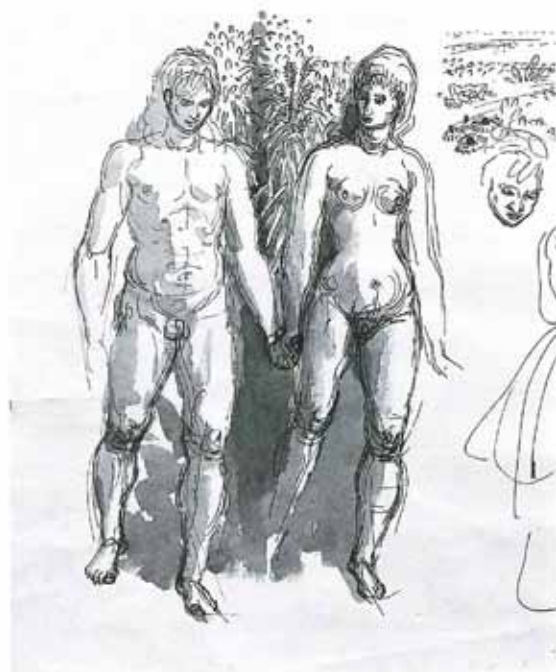
Oil on paper together with a sketch in pencil of the same  
 8 × 6 (20.4 × 15.2)



122



- 120 *Adam and Eve with serpent*  
Pencil and pen & ink, squared in sepia · 15 × 12 (38.1 × 30.5)
- 121 *Sheet of flower studies with figures of Adam and Eve, early 1960s † (detail)*  
Pen & ink and wash · 19 × 12¼ (48.2 × 32.4)
- 122 *Bathsheba, seated, with two figures in background †*  
Oil on paper · 5 × 5½ (12.7 × 14)
- 123 *Bathsheba, back view, with two attendants*  
Oil on paper · 12½ × 19 (31.8 × 48.2)
- 124 *Bathsheba with sunflowers, topiary and monkey puzzle tree †*  
Oil on paper · 22½ × 15½ (57.1 × 39.4)



121

- 125 *Bathsheba, seated, with two figures in attendance*  
Oil on paper over charcoal · 20 × 10 (50.8 × 25.4)
- 126 *Bathsheba, seated*  
Oil on paper · 19½ × 14½ (49.5 × 36.8)  
The setting for this composition was possibly constructed from observation of the lily ponds at Kew.
- 127 *Bathsheba with palm, cypress and monkey puzzle tree*  
Oil on paper · 22 × 15 (55.9 × 38.1)



124

## THE MUSES

The Muses were a favourite theme of the artist's. First used at Morley College, Mahoney appears to have returned to a similar subject in the late 1950s when he was asked to submit, once again, designs for Morley College which was being rebuilt after its destruction in the Second World War. They represented the spiritual and creative values that the artist strove to express both in his life and work.

By the time Mahoney embarked on this last large scale work he must have known that, with his physical health failing, he was unlikely to complete it. The studies however bear testament to a remarkable clarity of vision which never surrendered to physical decline. His drawings, especially for the right hand side, are amongst the most perfect expressions of the artist working in harmony with nature. A youthful artist creates undisturbed in a Garden of Eden, tended by Muses.

- 128 *Muses, circa 1961 †*  
Oil on panel  
18½ × 96¼ (47 × 244.4)  
The artist's daughter and her friend, Griselda Batten, posed for the figures in the garden at Oak Cottage.
- 129 *Muses: Study for group of figures to far right, circa 1961 †*  
Oil on paper over watercolour and pen & ink · 12½ × 20 (31.8 × 50.8)
- 130 *Muses: Study for group of figures to far right, circa 1961 †*  
Pen & ink and wash · 9¼ × 19 (23.5 × 48.2)
- 131 *Muses: Study for group of figures to far right, circa 1961*  
Pen & ink and wash · 13 × 19 (33 × 48.2)
- 132 *Muses: Landscape, circa 1961*  
Wash and pen & ink · 7 × 17½ (17.8 × 44.4)
- 133 *Muses: Study for left hand side, circa 1961 †*  
Brown wash over charcoal pen & ink, squared with blue pencil · 15 × 22 (38.1 × 55.9)

## SELF-PORTRAITS

Self-portraits occur rarely in Mahoney's oeuvre. It is tempting to link this to the artist's innate modesty. An absence of early self-portraits – during a period when artists might obviously explore their own physiognomy – is especially striking. Conversely Mahoney's young contemporaries, for instance, Percy Horton, Geoffrey Rhoades and Barnett Freedman, all made early portraits of him.

The depiction of Mahoney in Moynihan's *Portrait Group* (fig. 12) is a perfect response to Mahoney's reticence.

- 134 *Self-portrait, 1950s*  
Oil on canvas · 20 × 16 (50.8 × 40.6)  
Collection of Elizabeth Bulkeley  
This portrait shows the artist's typical outdoor attire. Weather permitting, Mahoney preferred working outdoors. He also wore his trilby hat to shade his eye from strong light when working in his studio.
- 135 *Self-portrait, 1960s †*  
Charcoal with white highlights on grey paper · 19 × 12½ (48.2 × 31.8)  
Collection of Elizabeth Bulkeley  
Illustrated on page 64



130

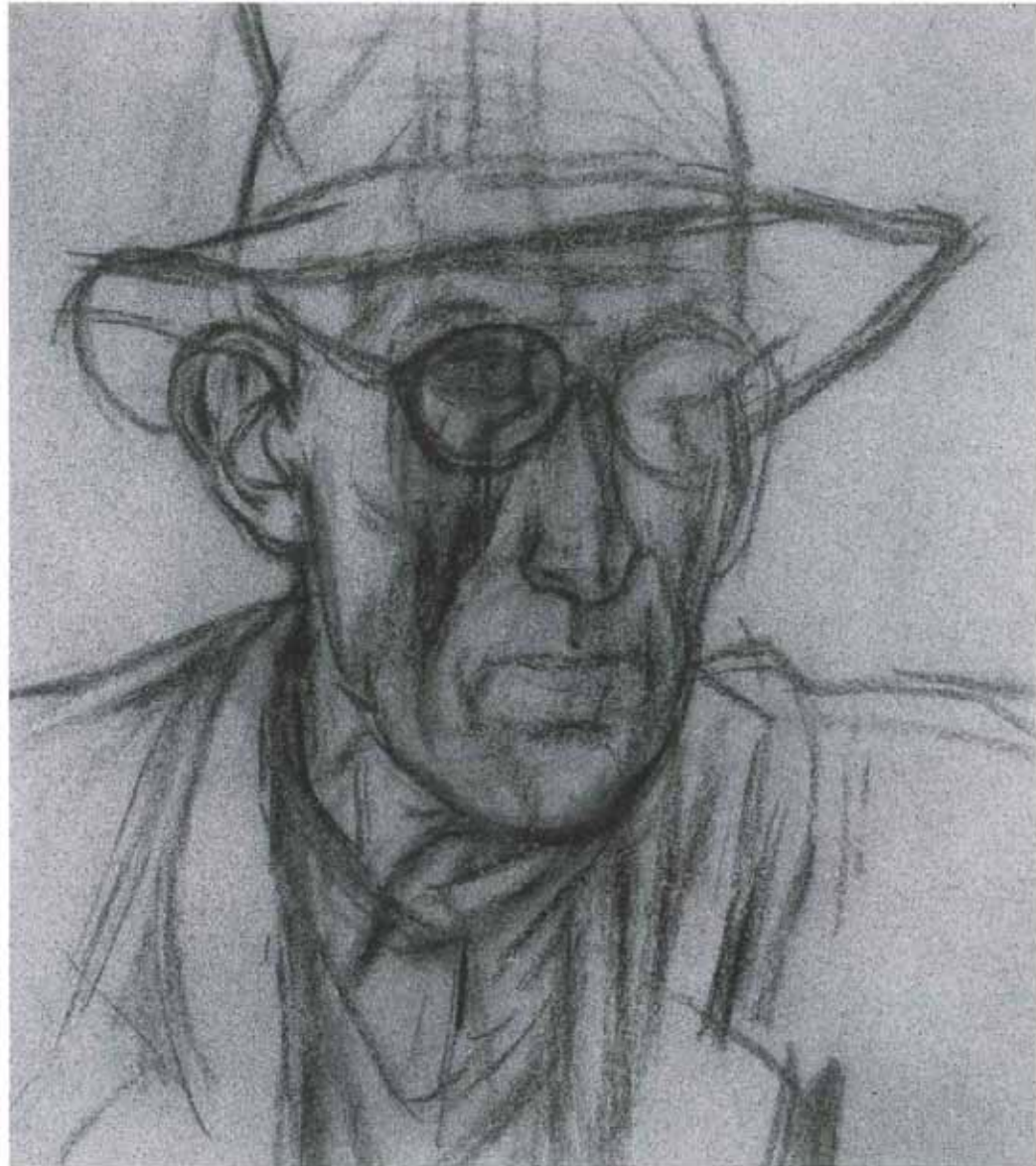


fig. 20 Self-portrait, 1960s (cat. 135)

## Chronology

ELIZABETH BULKELEY

### 18 NOVEMBER 1903

Born Lambeth. Son of Marcus William Francis Mahoney and Bessie née Rich of Exeter. Childhood Home: 58, Stembridge Road, Anerley, South London  
Education: Oakfield Road School, Anerley; Art Master encouraged him to draw and paint left 1917-8; Attended Socialist Sunday School, Friends Meeting House, Venner Rd, Sydenham.

### 1917-8

Advertising agency, City of London, Trainee draughtsman.

### 1918-22

Beckenham School of Art. Principal: Percy H. Jowett. Royal Exhibition in Drawing to the Royal College of Art. Met Hugh Finney.

### 1922-26

Royal College of Art. Principal: William Rothenstein. Friends included Barnett Freedman, Edward Bawden, Percy Horton, Gerry Ososki, and Hugh Finney.

### 1924

ARCA. Met Geoffrey Rhoades (Slade student). Developed an interest in mural and theatre design.

### EARLY 1926

Sharing studio with Hugh Finney - 60 Bath Road, Bedford Park. Musical evenings at Bernard Casson's house.

Taught life drawing evening classes at Gravesend School of Art. Collaborated with Barnett Freedman in designs for Zangwills 'King of the Schnorrers' and also 'Queen Elizabeth' at the Little Theatre. Theatre designs bought for the Print room of the V&A.

### 1926-27

Career: Thanet Schools of Art; Senior assistant (full-time); Stayed with Mrs Coates, 22 Union Street, Margate.

### 20 MARCH 1927

Letter from Percy Horton describes pugnacious musical evening with Barnett Freedman who was 'outspoken', 'Soc', Gerry Ososki, Frank Barber, Fortin, and Heel.

### APRIL 1927

Lodged at Pentire, Quex View Road, Birchington, Kent.

### 23 MAY 1927

Percy mentions in letter Charles paintings of a cockney, a house, and 'the big picture'.

### 16 JUNE 1927

Charles reported as 'very depressed'. In letter Hugh Finney mentions lithographs of 'the bootmaker' and 'the girl'.

### AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1927

Stayed temporarily at 14 Jubilee Place, Chelsea.

### AUGUST 1927

Painting holiday at Hillside, Stow in the Wold, Glos. and Ramsdlean Nr Petersfield, Hants.

### SEPTEMBER 1927

Returned to Margate lodging with Mrs Hughes, Rowland House, 38 Fitzroy Avenue, Margate.

### 13 FEBRUARY 1928

Letter reports 'all' involved in painting the 'Crittall portraits.'

### 2 APRIL 1928

William Mahoney dies of heart failure aged 52.

### JULY 1928

Moved to The Bungalow, St Peter's Footpath, Margate.

### SEPTEMBER 1928

Winstons, Far Oakridge, Chalford, Stroud, Glos., home of Sir William Rothenstein.

### 1928-1953

Royal College of Art.

### AUTUMN 1928

Starts work as tutor at the RCA. Commissioned to paint Morley College murals.

### 1930

Lodged at 1 Kensington Crescent W14; Geoffrey Rhoades lived at number 14.

AUGUST 1930

On fortnight's holiday at Blackmoor Farm, The Beech, Marden, Kent with Percy Horton and Geoffrey Rhoades. Edward Bawden suggests Great Bardfield artists' colony in letter.

WINTER 1930

Charles and Geoffrey Rhoades at Brick House, Great Bardfield helping Edward Bawden decorate. Motley College murals unveiled by Stanley Baldwin.

1931

Charles and Geoffrey Rhoades holiday together in Lavenham.

OCTOBER 1932

Charles asked to organise murals for Brockley County School for boys with the help of three senior students. One of these was Evelyn Dunbar.

AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 1933

On holiday at Brick House, possibly with Evelyn.

OCTOBER 1933

Evelyn Dunbar to rent studio from Noel Carrington; 99, Southend Rd, Hampstead. Exhibits at New English Art Club.

AFTER CHRISTMAS 1933

Charles stays with Joan and Geoffrey Rhoades in Oxenwood Wilts.

1934

Charles shares 17 Willoughby Road NW3 with Geoffrey Rhoades.

JANUARY 1934

Marbling the hall of Brick House. Working on the Brockley murals.

APRIL 1934

Holiday at Noons Farm, Wilts. with Geoffrey Rhoades.

MAY 1934

Moves to 3 Willoughby Road NW3.

DECEMBER 1934

Working at The Studio, 99 Southend Road, Hampstead NW3.

MAY 1935

Stays in Sutton Valence near Maidstone. Brockley Murals completed. Charles stays in Margate with Mrs Coats, Union St.

JULY 1935

Painting of greenhouse.

SEPTEMBER 1935

One week's stay at Noon's Farm, Wiltshire.

JANUARY 1936

Evelyn Dunbar making quilt to Charles' design.

MARCH - MAY 1936

References to sketches and to painting of Adam and Eve.

SPRING 1936

Evelyn Dunbar mentions Charles' 'little bathroom picture'.

APRIL 1936

Rent paid to Noel Carrington for the Hampstead studio, shared with Evelyn Dunbar.

JUNE 1936

Evelyn Dunbar mentions Charles' 'big picture'.

OCTOBER 1936

Charles stayed at 42 St Margaret St, Rochester and at Strood. Mention of Charles' hen picture (painted in Rochester garden).

OCTOBER 1936

Thomas More commission in progress for Holy Redeemer Church, Chelsea.

1937

Charles purchases Oak Cottage, Wrotham, Kent for £300 with brother James.

1937

Charles and Evelyn Dunbar working on Gardener's Choice from her home in Strood (the Cedars). Edward Bawden agrees but fails to write preface; book published by George Routledge & Son; chosen as 1 of 50 books for 1937 by first edition club.

1938

Monica Layman requests photos of Charles' work for a book on modern mural decoration. Sketching with Thomas Hennell near Wrotham.

1940

Royal College of Art evacuated to Ambleside; Charles resident master in charge of Hostel for students (Queen's Hotel). Morley College bombed. Tate purchases 'Landscape with out-houses'.

20 SEPTEMBER 1941

Marries Dorothy Bishop, calligrapher (honeymoon in Edinburgh).

OCTOBER 1941

Staying at Underfell, Elerigg, Ambleside.

DECEMBER 1941

Commissioned to decorate Champion Hall, Oxford.

1942

Elected to Art Workers Guild. 'The expulsion from the Garden of Eden' (Oil) and 'Landscape' (Oil) shown in National Gallery exhibition of wartime acquisitions by the Tate Gallery.

21 MARCH 1944

Birth of Elizabeth Julia.

1945

At Miller Bridge, Ambleside.

MID 1945

Charles returns to Oak Cottage with family.

1949

Edward Bawden writes to Charles praising student murals for Chelsea Library and 'exciting work in mural department'.

1949/1950

Art Review: Charles writes on mural painting.

1950

Elected member of New English Art Club. Robin Darwin becomes Principal at Royal College of Art.

1951

Festival of Britain '60 paintings for 51'; Charles exhibits mural panel 'The Garden'.

1953

Charles and Dorothy leave Royal College of Art.

SEPTEMBER 1953

Charles applies for Headship at Sidcup School of Art. Starts teaching at Bromley School of Art.

1954

EB mentions Triple Flower Composition 'Woman behind Wire Netting'.

1954-61

Teaching at Byam Shaw School of Drawing and Painting.

1956

Holiday at Pevensey, Sussex.

1957

Holiday at Veryan, Cornwall, after illness.

DECEMBER 1957

Edward Bawden mentions an incomplete design of Charles' for rebuilt Morley College: 'submit to RA'.

1958

Holiday at Pevensey.

MAY 1959

Charles ill again.

1961-8

Royal Academy.

1961

Elected ARA; starts teaching at RA Schools (until 1968). Starts to paint the Muses.

1961/2

Holiday in Dorset at Puncknowle.

APRIL - JUNE 1966

In Brompton Hospital for first lung operation.

AUGUST 1966

Stays at Place House, Great Bardfield, home of John Aldridge, RA.

APRIL 1968

RA Elect. Second lung operation at Brompton Hospital.

MAY 1968

Transferred to Royal Marsden Hospital.

11 MAY 1968

Dies after unsuccessful operation for cancer of the colon.

# Appendix I

## MAHONEY'S APPLICATION TO BECOME PRINCIPAL OF SIDCUP SCHOOL OF ART, 1953

### I · REFERENCE FROM EDWARD BAWDEN

I have great pleasure in supporting Mr Mahoney in his application for the post of Principal of Sidcup School of Art.

I have known Mr Mahoney since 1928 when he was commissioned by Lord Duveen to design and execute a mural painting at Morley College. He was asked to decorate the Assembly Hall, where, above the dais, he painted a very large figure composition on the theme: 'The Pleasures of Life'. He constructed a dignified and most impressive composition in which his personifications of the Arts and Letters were treated in an allegorical and yet contemporary manner, accompanied by scenes illustrating sport, harvesting and dancing.

A few years later, working in collaboration with Miss Evelyn Dunbar, he decorated a Gymnasium used as an Assembly Hall at Brockley County School for Boys, where he painted a series of large panels with subjects taken from the Fables of La Fontaine. The decorations gave him scope for the expression of a restrained sense of humour, but even more for a detailed and loving observation of country life as it exists to-day. As paintings they were delightful in the true meaning of the word.

The most recent mural painting is at Champion Hall, in Oxford, a small Chapel designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens on which he has been working for the past ten years. This latest work reflects an astonishing development upon previous mural paintings; again, his intense love of the countryside is evident, but linked to a depth of experience which to me make this small Chapel the finest expression of religious art so far achieved by any contemporary painter.

Mr Mahoney was invited by the Art Council to contribute to the Exhibition of 51 Artists which was shown in London and elsewhere during the Festival of Britain. He has exhibited at the New English Art Club, the Royal Academy and at the Leicester Galleries where his work has been outstanding because of its freshness, its originality and its beauty of execution. He is represented at the Tate Gallery. In my opinion he is a most distinguished painter and draughtsman, a genuine artist who is absolutely sound as a craftsman.

For twenty years Mr Mahoney has been a colleague of mine on the staff of the Royal College of Art. He is conscientious and reliable, a person of integrity. He has shown a persistent regard for maintaining the highest possible standard and has inspired students with his own ideals, looking after their welfare and helping them with an unselfish disregard of his own time and convenience.

### II · REFERENCE FROM SIR JOHN ROTHENSTEIN

It gives me great pleasure to support the application of Mr Cyril Mahoney for the vacant Headmastership of the Sidcup School of Art.

I have known him for well over twenty years, first of all as a student of my late father's at the Royal College of Art. Since that time I have been in regular touch with him.

He is an artist of exceptional talent which is clearly manifested in the remarkable series of wall-paintings which he has almost completed for Champion Hall, Oxford. I have had no direct experience of his work as a teacher, but I have heard from

many sources accounts of his success – a success based on a wide knowledge of History of Art, a firm grasp of the principles of drawing, and a particular interest in the progress of his students. Should it be regarded as desirable I would willingly add to this expression of my confidence in Mr Mahoney's ability to fulfil admirably all the duties required from a Headmaster of an art school.

### III · MAHONEY'S OWN APPLICATION

I have the honour to submit for your consideration my application for the post of Principal of the Sidcup School of Art. I enclose a short statement of my experience as an artist and a teacher of art.

Like so many artists to-day I have had to depend upon part-time teaching of art for my livelihood, but I have always enjoyed doing it and by its means I have been able to maintain an independent course as an artist.

I have been privileged to study under, and later to know intimately, some of the most successful teachers of art in the country; their ideas have influenced my methods of teaching, and I have been able to test the truth and efficiency of them over a long period. For a number of years I have helped in selecting the entrants to the School of Painting at the Royal College of Art, and I have in consequence, been able to review the work of students from all parts of England and Wales. I have also assisted in judging the work for the College painting diploma.

About eighteen months ago I was invited to become a member of the Governing Board of the Gravesend School of Art, and thus have been able to acquire some knowledge of the administrative side of an art school.

Though most of my teaching experience has been in connection with drawing and painting, I have always taken an interest in the work of the other schools at the RCA. I am friendly with many prominent designers and craftsmen.

With the exception of my first year or so of teaching, I have

always had to deal with advanced students, and I have sometimes felt that I could have been of more help to some of them at an earlier stage in their development. I would welcome the opportunity to have an influence on young students at the beginning of their art education.

### Education

I was educated at Oakfield Road School, Anerley, where my interest in drawing and painting was strongly encouraged.

On leaving school I entered an advertising agency in the City. I stayed only a few months, but gained some useful knowledge of commercial art practice. Feeling a need for basic training in drawing and design, I persuaded my father to allow me to enter the Beckenham School of Art. I gained a Royal Exhibition in Drawing to the Royal College of Art in 1922. In September of that year I entered the School of Painting which was then under the active professorship of Sir William Rothenstein who was also Principal of the College. I took my diploma in painting in my second year, and was placed second on the list. I stayed on in the School of Painting for a further two years and was given a fourth year scholarship.

Towards the end of my studentship I developed a special interest in theatre design and obtained a prize for some of my designs from Mr Albert Rutherston. The knowledge I had acquired of this subject was useful to me when, soon after leaving College, I collaborated with Mr Barnett Freedman in producing the settings for Zangwill's 'King of the Schnorrers' and also the setting for 'Queen Elizabeth', a play that was produced at the Little Theatre. Some of my designs for theatre sets and costume were bought for the Print Room of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

### Teaching Experience

During my fourth year at the Royal College of Art I taught life drawing in the evening classes at the Gravesend School of Art.

In 1926-27 I became, for about a year, full time senior Assistant at the Thanet Schools of Art. I left in 1928 to become a visiting tutor in the Painting School at the RCA. I have now been at the College as a teacher for twenty five years, and for the greater part of that time, was in sole charge of the classes for figure composition. I have also regularly taught in the life-classes for two evenings a week.

My teaching subjects were extended somewhat during the war, when the College was evacuated to Ambleside (1940), and I took classes in life-painting and still-life-painting. For a year, until I married, I was the resident master in charge of the men students' hostel.

When Mr Robin Darwin came to the College as Principal in 1948, I was asked to collaborate with Mr Kenneth Rowntree in re-organising the mural-section which was transferred from the School of Design to the Painting School. The students of this section have since carried out some elaborate and successful schemes of mural painting, and the class was highly praised by Mr Victor Pasmore who was visitor to the School of Painting four years ago. Unfortunately few College students now specialise in this subject, and consequently, the staff of the Mural Painting section of the Painting School is being reduced.

#### Professional Experience

In 1928 I was asked to join Mr Edward Bawden and Mr Eric Ravilious in a scheme of decoration for Morley College. This was sponsored by Lord Duveen and Sir William Rothenstein, and my contribution to it was the decoration of a large wall over thirty feet long in the College hall – a mural painting containing many figures.

1932-33 I undertook the organisation and part of the execution of an ambitious mural scheme for the hall of the Brockley County School. This work was designed and carried out by myself and three senior students from my class at the Royal College of Art. It contains six large panels and many smaller ones, and I believe it to be, of its kind, one of the most considerable schemes carried out in this country. It was completed in 1935.

I was commissioned in 1942 to decorate with mural paintings the entire Lady Chapel at Campion Hall, Oxford – a building designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. The paintings have been done during the Easter and summer vacations, and are now very nearly completed. The scheme which illustrates the Life of the Virgin contains many designs both large and small.

Recently I have done other large panels of a decorative or semi-decorative character. I exhibited at the Exhibition of the Society of Mural Painters sponsored by the Arts Council in 1950, and in the following year I was invited by the Arts Council to take part in their Festival of Britain exhibition '60 Paintings for 51'.

I am a member of the Society of Mural Painters. I have lectured on mural painting at the RCA, the Art Workers Guild, and at the Ruskin School of Drawing at Oxford; and have written the article on recent mural painting in *Art Review* 49-50.

From the beginning of my career I have been a painter of easel pictures. I am represented by two pictures in the Tate Gallery and by paintings and a drawing at the Sheffield, Leeds and Carlisle galleries.

During 1936 I collaborated with Miss Evelyn Dunbar in writing and producing a book on gardening: *Gardeners' Choice* (published 1937 George Routledge and Son, Ltd.). The book contains over eighty line drawings.

## Appendix II

SIR THOMAS MONNINGTON'S ADDRESS AT THE MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR CHARLES MAHONEY  
ST JAMES'S, PICCADILLY, 18 JUNE 1968

We are here today to respect the memory of the life of a friend – a painter, and a brave and honest man.

Charles Mahoney – sometimes known as Cyril Mahoney – was born in London in November 1903. He died on 11th May last in his 65th year. Although he was born in London, his name suggests another origin – and of course latterly he lived in Kent.

He studied art first at the Beckenham School of Art and subsequently at the RCA. At Beckenham he was under P.H. Jowett (who later became the head of the RCA) and at the RCA under Sir William Rothenstein, and – strange as it may seem, I suppose – under me. I was only one year his senior, but I remember him more as a member of the staff at the RCA, which he joined in 1928 at the age of 25, than I do as a student. He continued to teach at the RCA until 1953.

In that year 1953 when he left the College, he became Senior Instructor at the Byam Shaw School of Art.

His last appointment, which dated from 1960, was as Master of the Drawing and Painting school at the Royal Academy Schools.

For the moment I will only say that these teaching appointments brought Charles, over a period of 40 years, into contact with a great number of young people. Although some of them are not so young today, all, I think, will remember the benefit they received from his example, his teaching, and his attitude to life. In regard to his teaching – if they did not always agree, they were stimulated to react which is perhaps not a negligible part of a teacher's work.

As a painter, Charles was interested in the decoration of large

wall areas and in the more intimate approach of easel painting; and of course there was his continual preoccupation with drawing.

His first wall painting, 'The Pleasures of Life' was carried out at Morley College, but unfortunately this work was destroyed by a bomb in the last war.

His most ambitious work was the large mural painting for the Lady Chapel, Campion Hall, Oxford. He was engaged on this for several years, and it is undoubtedly his major work.

As a painter and draughtsman, I think of Charles as a man who never sought an easy way through evasion or mannerism. His style – or means of expression – was the direct outcome of facing his problems squarely. What was his problem? I cannot answer that – but I think one gets the idea from his paintings that he found in nature the manifestation of his belief in an ultimate or superior order, and I think he tried to confirm this belief in his honest attempt, to translate this reflection of ultimate truth he found in nature, into the simplest terms of painting and drawing. Charles might say I am putting my ideas into his head – but I know our ideas had something in common.

In any event, you may see some very fine drawings by Charles in this year's Summer Exhibition, and I am glad that in his last year he was so well represented, and that due appreciation was shown in the way his work is hung. I am also glad that his work found recognition by purchasers for the Tate.

A man makes his contribution in life not only through the work he produces – but also in his attitude to life and his attitude to his fellow human beings – in fact, by his example.

It is not for me to say what are the greatest virtues in life – we have the Highest Authority for that. But I can say what seem to me very high human virtues – these are *courage* and *honesty*. I do not believe that you can have either, in anything approaching a true sense, without the other.

Both these qualities, *courage* and *honesty*, were apparent in Charles Mahoney's work as a painter, and a teacher, and both these qualities, *courage* and *honesty*, shone out in the man himself and his attitude to life. Leonardo da Vinci said something to this effect – I am not an Italian mediaeval scholar – 'All our lives we are learning how to die'. When I first read that as a young man it did not have so much meaning to me as it has now.

It is for this reason – to pay homage to a brave and honest man, a painter and a teacher, that we have gathered here today. This is the outward and visible sign of our respect. A more lasting tribute will be our *memory* of a good man.



