

Kenneth Leslie Graham (1900-1979)

Brief biography

Kenneth L Graham was a prolific and eclectic artist, and designer working in many artistic media, e.g. oils, watercolours, pen and ink. He was also a picture restorer and a writer, contributing many articles to magazines and publishing his own magazine.

Shortly after his birth in Leeds in 1900, Graham's family moved to Barnsley where his father became a schoolmaster at Barnsley Holgate Grammar School. By the age of 7 he began to show an interest in drawing and by the age of 16 he was exhibiting and selling his work.

Upon leaving school, Graham trained as a Colliery Surveyor, but by the age of seventeen, during the Great War, he served in the 85th Training Reserve Battalion in Pontefract, but was soon appointed to a temporary commission as Second Lieutenant in the Royal Air Force.

In 1926 he married Leonora and began his employment at Wood Brothers Glassworks, Hoyle Mill, as a glass designer, eventually becoming Chief Designer. During the 1920s and 30s he became widely recognised as a designer, painter and illustrator. In 1930 Graham acted as honorary architect on the construction of Ardsley Parochial Hall.

In 1932 Graham's interest in Barnsley inspired him to produce forty-six pen sketches of the town and surrounding district. These were published in the Barnsley Chronicle in 1932, 1938 and a selection appeared in 1988. They offer a unique view of the more historical and picturesque parts of the town and district at the time.

Throughout the 1930s Graham exhibited regularly with Barnsley and District Art Society, and occasionally with Wakefield and Sheffield art societies, as well as the Royal Academy in their 'British Artists in Industry' exhibition in 1934.

In 1938 Graham qualified as a Designer in Industry and left Wood Brothers to take up the post of Creative Manager at Coty's Perfumery in London. During World War II, Graham was reported as being, '...somewhere in England' on essential work of a scientific nature.'

After the war became an Industrial Consultant Designer working from his office and studio. He also opened the Da Vinci Gallery in St James', London from where he carried out picture restoration work. He was an active member of artist societies. He made several pen and ink sketches of the London landscape. Graham was artistically very active throughout the 1950s and 60s. He also wrote for various magazines including 'The Glass Container' and 'The Glass Packer', and published his own magazine 'The Collector'. It was reported, 'He paints in the morning in his studio at Melbury Cottages, West Kensington and goes to his other studio at Duke Street, St James' in the afternoon where he does very specialist restoration of old masters.'

After a very productive life as an artist, designer, writer and with many pictures in private collections, he retired to Suffolk in 1973, and there he died in 1979.

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