

Kenneth Leslie Graham (1900–1979) – A Man For All Media

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KENNETH GRAHAM'S BIRTH certificate records him as having been born on 8th February 1900 at 21 Leamington Terrace, New Wortley, in Leeds. He was baptised at St Mary of Bethany's Church on 20th February.

Kenneth was the second child of Thomas and Lavinia Graham, who were originally from Glasgow; his elder sister Dorothy was born nine years earlier. However, as the family soon relocated to 32 Western Street, Barnsley, the people of Barnsley can claim him as a 'local lad'.

Kenneth's father was a school master from West Hartlepool, in County Durham and joined the teaching staff at the former Holgate Grammar School in Barnsley. As we shall see, Kenneth was not to follow his father's footsteps into higher education.

As early as the age of seven Kenneth began to show a keen interest in drawing. By the age of 16 he was exhibiting his work in galleries in Wakefield and Sheffield.



Holgate Grammar School in the early 20th century from an old postcard. Part is now the Cooper Gallery

Upon leaving Holgate Grammar School, at the age of 14, Kenneth began his working life at Dodworth Colliery, Barnsley as a colliery surveyor, and being trained probably in the Harvey Institute, Eldon Street, Barnsley.

In 1918, during the Great War, Kenneth enlisted in the 85th Training Reserve Battalion in Pontefract. With his enthusiasm and abilities, by October 1918 he was soon appointed to a temporary commission as Second Lieutenant in the newly formed Royal Flying Corps.

During the last months of the war, Kenneth flew with a photographer over the German trenches. In 1924 Kenneth was promoted to Flying Officer in the Reserve RAF.

In 1925 Kenneth married Lenore Armitage at Holyrood Church in Barnsley. Lenore was a pianist by profession who taught piano and played in local cinemas. She also ran a keep fit class for ladies.

The Armitage family relocated to Barnsley from Gateshead. Walter, Lenore's father was a jeweller, originally from Bradford and Lenore was named after her mother who came from Harrogate. Originally the family lived at 6 Spencer Street, Barnsley, but at the time of her marriage to Kenneth, Lenore's parents were both deceased and she was living at 8 Grove Street, Barnsley.

In 1926, Kenneth joined the staff at Wood Brothers Glass Company Ltd. Founded originally in 1828 at Worsbrough Bridge, Barnsley, it was taken over by John and James Wood from Staffordshire in 1834. The company was re-established in Hoyle Mill, Barnsley in 1872 after the landlord refused to renew the lease on the Worsbrough site. William, a brother, joined the family business in 1854 after leaving the 'Baccarat' glassworks in France and another brother Alphonse, joined the company in 1870. The firm later specialised in making laboratory ware, perfume bottles and car headlights.

A daughter, Sheila, was born to Kenneth and Lenore in 1926 at 56 Lambert Road, Stairfoot, Barnsley, near Wood Brothers Glass Company in Hoyle Mill. Sheila was to become a successful theatre and film costume designer and she went on to marry Hector John McClusky, who was the first artist to illustrate Ian



Second Lieutenant Kenneth Graham,
RFC Cadet Wing, 1918
Courtesy of G. McClusky



Kenneth Graham at Hendon by an
aircraft of the De Havilland Hire Service
c. 1920. Courtesy of G. McClusky



Panels by Kenneth illustrating the glassmaking process. Courtesy of Barnsley Arts, Museums and Archives Service, Experience Barnsley

Fleming's new character James Bond. He was initially approached by Fleming to create a sketch of how Fleming imagined Bond. Afterwards he illustrated the *Daily Express* comic strip 'James Bond'. From 1958 to 1966 he adapted as comic strips 13 of the Fleming James Bond novels.

Kenneth's flair as a glassware designer was becoming recognised, but he also continued with his art activities, producing work in various media. Designs in oils on panels, showing the different aspects of the glassmaking process, were designed and painted by Kenneth for the foyer of Wood Brothers Glass Company. Kenneth also created stylised paper sculpture figures showing, again, the glassmaking process.

Kenneth continued in his spare time to draw and paint. He regularly exhibited in the Barnsley and District Art Society and Wakefield and Sheffield Art Societies exhibitions.

In 1932, Kenneth was supported by the editor of the *Barnsley Chronicle* to produce 45 pen and ink drawings of Barnsley and district (see appendix). Kenneth was inspired by the beauty of the countryside around Barnsley. His artistic instincts were particularly stimulated by the interest and charm of Barnsley's historic churches and buildings, inns and inn yards and its famous market. Something, he noted, most people did not recognise in the industrial town. The pen and ink drawings were published in the *Barnsley Chronicle* between 1933–4. The *Barnsley Chronicle* republished a selection of about 18 drawings in



Paper sculpture of a glass blower by
Kenneth L. Graham



Kenneth in his studio in the 1920s
Courtesy of G. McClusky

1988. A set of the exclusive edition of six pen and wash drawings produced in 1932 were donated many years later by Kenneth's employer, Haslam Wood, of Wood Brothers Glass Company, to Cawthorne Victoria Jubilee Museum.

Kenneth designed a brochure and a bazaar for Holyrood Church in 1938, which was to raise funds for St Joseph's Senior School, Kendray, Barnsley, in which he was assisted in the design by another Barnsley artist, Frank Milner.

During the 1930s Kenneth acted as honorary architect for the proposed Ardsley Parochial Hall whilst designing perfume bottles and toiletry containers for Boots the Chemists.

In 1934, he wrote a paper titled 'Glass Container Design'. In the same year as he entered work in the Royal Academy for the exhibition entitled British Artists in Industry.

Kenneth and Lenore became friends with The Elmhirst family and Kenneth painted a watercolour of Round Green farm in 1932. It was painted when they possibly lived there from 1936 to 1938.

Wood Brothers Glass Company was noted for their specialist bespoke glass products. This included the perfume bottles they made for Coty Perfume Company. It was to Coty where Kenneth next moved.

In 1938, Kenneth, Lenore and Sheila moved to Holland Park in London, when Kenneth was appointed by Coty as their Creative Director. Kenneth's family believed he designed the famous Coty logo.

Despite relocating to London, Kenneth still maintained his contacts in Yorkshire and he continued to exhibit his drawings and paintings in the Yorkshire art societies he maintained contact with.

BELOW

Drawing of Pinfold Steps, Barnsley
Courtesy of Barnsley MBC Arts,
Museums and Archives Service,
Experience Barnsley Collection

BELOW RIGHT

Drawing of Worsbrough Mill,
Barnsley. Courtesy of Barnsley MBC
Arts, Museums and Archives Service,
Experience Barnsley Collection





Drawing of Gawber Hall, Barnsley
Private owner

During the Second World War Kenneth was engaged in essential scientific work of a secret nature somewhere in England, but it has not been possible to discern what, or where it was.

After the war, around 1945, Kenneth left Coty and worked as an independent industrial design consultant from his office and studio at Kenneth and Lenore's home at Melbury Cottages, West Kensington, designing commissions including bottles for the Elizabeth Arden and Helena Rubenstein cosmetic companies.

Throughout the time he worked in London, Kenneth became a member of many London artists' clubs and societies. Whilst he was a member of the London Sketch Club in 1949, the artist, etcher and book illustrator Salomon van Abbe painted Kenneth's portrait. Salomon van Abbe was one-time president of the London Sketch Club and Kenneth too, later became president of the club.

Whilst being active as an industrial design consultant and an active member of a number of artist clubs and societies in the 1950s, Kenneth still found time to record in pen and ink the quaint and interesting buildings, alleyways and yards of London that caught his eye and interest, as Barnsley had done for him in the 1930s.

Throughout the 1950s and '60s Kenneth began writing for various magazines; these included *The Glass Packer* and *The Glass Container*. Also, from the late 1960s, during this active period of his life, Kenneth gave lectures on art history and 'self-help' in painting to various groups, clubs and societies.

In 1954 he was awarded the Grenfell Medal by The Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, London, for the 45 oil paintings of the gardens he executed over the four seasons. He was observed in all kinds of weather making sketches. In winter he would don two overcoats, muffler and waders in order to record the gardens in inclement weather. Whilst working on the project, it was noted various birds

Kenneth with his wife Lenore and a friend in front of his self-portrait
 Courtesy Barnsley Arts, Museums and Archives Service



rested on his easel while he intently observed and painted, but they did not disturb him.

His reputation as an artist led in 1959 to him being elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Artists, which was founded in 1754.

His creative flair and accumulated scientific knowledge led to him inventing for Watts & Co. his own translucent paint, which he called Vivacol.

From 1964 to 1973 Kenneth opened the Da Vinci Gallery in Duke Street, St James, London, from where he carried out specialist restoration work on paintings from various periods of art history. He also looked after a number of private collections and regularly held exhibitions by artists including Walter Sickert and sculptor Anna Mahler.

After an active and busy professional life Kenneth and Lenore retired in 1973 to the village of Woolpit in Suffolk, although he continued to paint, restore pictures and give lectures on art.

On 30th March 1979 at the age of 79, Kenneth died. His ashes were scattered in the back garden of Melbury Cottage.

In the 1990s Sheila, Kenneth's daughter, organised two exhibitions of her father's oil paintings, watercolours and drawings of landscapes, portraits and wild life. The first was held in the Seven Springs Gallery, Ashwell, Hertfordshire, in June 1994 and the second at The Cooper Gallery, Barnsley, in July 1996. The exhibition at The Cooper Gallery brought happy memories to Sheila of her father taking her to exhibitions there as a little girl.

Kenneth led a very productive life as an artist, designer and writer with many of his pictures in collections; truly a man of all media.



Painting of Woolpit village courtesy
St. Edmundsbury Heritage Service

SOURCES

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McLUSKY G. family records and memories

War Office Registry Records

Air Ministry, *letter, October 23rd 1924*

Barnsley Chronicle 1933/1934

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Barnsley Chronicle April 19th 1996

GRAHAM S. *Archive, Barnsley Arts, Museums and Archives Service, Experience Barnsley.*

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At the end of the book there are images of fifteen drawings of Views of Old Barnsley by Kenneth L Graham, page 311.