

# Robert Gibbings: a centenary exhibition 1989

## List of items exhibited

### Entrance

- *Glory of Life*, by Llewelyn Powys, 1934. 15 wood engravings including the lettering of the title by Robert Gibbings. One of the first books published by the Golden Cockerel Press under its new management, in a limited edition of 277 copies.  
Widely regarded as the finest example of Gibbings's book illustration, he too thought it among the best work he had so far accomplished and some compensation for his loss of the Press
- Robert Gibbings at work on **Two People** at Waltham St. Lawrence [enlarged photograph]
- Robert Gibbings rowing on the Seine [enlarged photograph].  
Intended for the dust-wrapper of *Coming Down The Seine*, 1953, but not used

## 1. Early work and the Society of Wood Engravers

### Photographs

Copies from original photographs in the possession of the family:

1. Robert Gibbings as a baby
  2. Robert Gibbings in the uniform of the Royal Munster Fusiliers, c.1914
  3. As above
  4. Robert Gibbings with his father the Reverend Edward Gibbings and eldest son Patrick, c.1923
  5. Studio portrait of Gibbings by Elliott & Fry, London - Gibbings posed holding a wood engraving, ca1920
- **Fowey Harbour** from *Twelve Wood Engravings* by Robert Gibbings, 1921. This was his first published collection of engravings, which was a limited edition of 125 copies

- An extract copied from a letter by Philip Hagreen describing how he and Gibbings first thought of forming the Society of Wood Engravers in 1920.  
Photocopy of the original letter in the possession of David Knott
- Photograph of Gibbings with members of the Society of Wood Engravers, probably taken at the private view of an exhibition held in the 1940s.  
In the foreground are, from left to right:  
Leon Underwood, Gwen Raverat, Tom Balston, Robert Gibbings, Gertrude Hermes, Reynolds Stone (behind), Noel Rooke
- Catalogue of the first exhibition held by the Society of Wood Engravers in November 1920. Gibbings was the main exhibitor, showing twelve prints. The engraving on the cover is by Lucien Pissarro.  
Loaned by the Society of Wood Engravers
- Invitation to an exhibition of the Society of Wood Engravers in Manchester in 1930. With device by Gibbings.  
Loaned by the Society of Wood Engravers
- Letter from Robert Gibbings to Margaret Pilkington, Secretary of the Society of Wood Engravers, 1931, declining to talk: "...barring the application of woodcuts to type I have no ideas & as the Society aims rather at wall decoration, it would hardly be in line..."  
Loaned by the Society of Wood Engravers
- *Erewhon* by Samuel Butler, 1923  
This was Gibbings's first commission to illustrate a book
- An unrecorded edition of *Twelve Woodcuts* used as decorations for *Erewhon*  
Loaned from the collection of A.C.Cooper
- Letter from Gibbings to G.Wren Howard, a director of Jonathan Cape Ltd, looking back with a certain dissatisfaction at this early work.  
From the Jonathan Cape Archive, Special Collections
- **The Little Copse** and **The Power Station** from *Change: the beginning of a chapter*, 1919. This journal used illustrations by Gibbings and a number of other notable wood engravers. **The Waning Moon** by Philip Hagreen is shown, bottom right.
- **Clear Waters**, 1920, reproduced in *The Studio*, vol.81, 1921
- Book jackets designed by Robert Gibbings in the 1920s.  
Most of his commissions were for Chatto and Windus, whose archives include documentary evidence (such as the receipt shown) for these and several other designs.  
Originals are rare; two photocopies and one original are shown
- A proof print of the engraving designed for the jacket of *The Danger to St. Paul's*, published by Jonathan Cape, 1925 Previously unrecorded  
Loaned from the collection of A.C.Cooper
- A poem and two illustrations by Gibbings from wood engravings published in *The Beacon*, March 1925

## 2. Prints c.1913 to 1925

- **William Walcot** 1921  
Loaned by Patience Empson
- **Dublin under snow** 1918  
Loaned by Patience Empson
- **A Cornish Harbour** 1920  
Loaned by Patience Empson

- **Clear Waters** 1920.  
Photographic copy. Loaned by Patience Empson
- **Corner in Malta** 1918  
Loaned by Patience Empson
- **The Crest of the Hill** c.1913  
Loaned by Patience Empson
- **The House Painters** 1921
- **London County Hall** 1922  
An advertisement for Henry Hope and Sons Ltd, Smethwick, Birmingham  
Loaned by Duncan Campbell Fine Art
- **Blogg's Pond** 1925  
Loaned by Patience Empson
- **Painting the 'Myosotis'** c.1923  
This is a later state of the engraving of the same title illustrated in *The Wood Engravings of Robert Gibbings*, 1959, p.26
- **On the Slip** c.1923  
This is a larger version of the engraving of the same title illustrated in *The Wood Engravings of Robert Gibbings*, 1959, p.27  
Loaned from the collection of A.C.Cooper
- **A Girl's Back** 1925
- **Gossips** 1925  
Loaned from the collection of A.C.Cooper
- **Tigne, Malta** 1921  
**A Street in Macedonia** 1920  
**The Rickyard** 1921  
**The Model in the Mirror** 1921  
**The Girl in the Garret** 1921  
All loaned by the Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester

## 3. Golden Cockerel Press

### Photographs

1. Robert Gibbings and A.C.Cooper checking a proof sheet from *The Four Gospels ...* 1931
  2. Relief carving by Eric Gill above the doorway of Four Elms, the house at Waltham St. Lawrence where the Golden Cockerel Press was established. The design incorporates the initials of Gibbings and his wife Moira
  3. The compositors F.Young and A.H.Gibbs working at the Press
  4. A.C.Cooper, pressman, printing on a Victoria platen press
- Golden Cockerel Press prospectuses decorated by Eric Gill
  - Golden Cockerel Press prospectuses decorated by Eric Ravilious, showing Gibbings as the Ring-master
  - Golden Cockerel Press prospectus decorated by Eric Ravilious, with lettering by Eric Gill
  - Golden Cockerel Press prospectus decorated by Eric Ravilious, showing Gibbings carried aloft by the Golden Cockerel

- Proofs of *The Canterbury Tales*, 1929, printed on vellum, with wood engravings by Eric Gill
- Letter from Robert Gibbings to Geoffrey Whitworth, 1924, written immediately on his arrival at the Golden Cockerel Press. In it he looks forward to "many years among fruit trees, flowers and printing presses"  
From the Chatto & Windus Archive, Special Collections

## Seven cases containing Golden Cockerel Press books illustrated by Robert Gibbings

- *The Lives of Gallant Ladies*, 1924  
The illustrations for this book were commissioned by Harold Taylor. It was the first book to be printed by Gibbings after he had taken over the press
- *Songs & Poems* by Henry Carey, 1924
- *Miscellaneous Writings of Henry the Eighth ...* 1924
- *Samson and Delilah ...* 1925
- *Pelagea & other Poems* by A.E.Coppard, 1926
- *The True Historie of Lucian the Samosatzenian ...* 1927  
A particularly successful integration of the English translation with the original Greek text and illustrations
- Letter from E.Powys Mathers ("Bill") addressed to "Dearest Bounding Viret" (Moirá Gibbings ?), congratulating the Press on the appearance of his book *Red Wise*, 1926. He also refers to his translation of Chamfort's *Maxims*, which was published by the Press in July of that year
- *Red Wise* by E.Powys Mathers, 1926
- *Lamia ...* by John Keats, 1928
- *Count Stefan* by A.E.Coppard, 1928
- *A Circle of the Seasons ...* A translation by E.Powys Mathers, 1929  
An unusual example of copper engraving by Gibbings
- *The Hundredth Story of A.E.Coppard*, 1931  
The first book printed in the Golden Cockerel type, designed for the Press by Eric Gill
- Two proofs of chapter headings for *Salambo*  
Gibbings evolved the practice of sending to the engraver a proof of each page to be illustrated. The artist then knew exactly where on the page his engraving would fall, and could therefore alter the weight of it or make use of the typography to balance illustration and text. These exhibits show Gibbings himself using paste-up proofs to achieve an integrated design  
Loaned from the collection of A.C.Cooper
- *Salambo* by Gustave Flaubert, 1931
- *Initiation: translations from poems of the Didinga & Lango tribes* by J.H.Driberg, 1932  
The text is printed throughout in Gill Sans type, and each engraving is in one of three colours
- *Rummy ...* 1932
- *Crotty Shinkwin ...* by A.E.Coppard, 1932
- *Troilus and Criseyde*, by Geoffrey Chaucer, 1927  
Illustrated by Eric Gill, the first of three books which demonstrate his outstanding collaboration with Gibbings. *The Canterbury Tales* followed in 1929 and *The Four Gospels* in 1931

- *The Four Gospels ...* 1931  
Decorated by Eric Gill - the outstanding achievement of the Press. Christopher Sandford, who, with his partners took over the Golden Cockerel Press in 1933, later wrote of this book:  
"Conceived in the fruitful mind of Robert Gibbings, this is the Golden Cockerel book usually compared with the Doves Bible and the Kelmscott Chaucer. A flower among the best products of English romantic genius, it is also surely, thanks to its illustrator, Eric Gill, the book among all books in which Roman type has been best mated with any kind of illustration". (*Chanticleer*, 1936, p.36)  
Loaned by Berkshire County Library, Reading Local Studies Collection
- Golden Cockerel Press announcement that *The Four Gospels* "...at last approaches completion", 1931. Two engravings by Eric Gill
- Photograph of a forme from *The Four Gospels*, consisting of two pages of type and Eric Gill's block, locked up in the chase

## A.C.Cooper - pressman (see also §16 below)

Undoubtedly the high reputation of the Golden Cockerel Press was in part due to the exceptional standards of presswork that Albert Cooper achieved. After an apprenticeship in Reading, and attending evening classes in printing at the University College, he worked for a number of local printers. He joined Harold Taylor in 1922, shortly after Taylor established the Cockerel Press and remained throughout the period of Gibbings's direction.

He himself was an enthusiastic and prolific artist and wood engraver in his spare time, and was encouraged in this by Gibbings. On four occasions he exhibited with the Society of Wood Engravers. His engraving **Morning** was used in a Golden Cockerel Press prospectus of 1926. He died in January this year, aged 98, and a number of the items in this exhibition have been generously loaned from his collection by his wife Dorothy.

Cooper described the printing methods of the Golden Cockerel Press in an article in 1962. Most of the books were hand-set in Caslon Old Face by the compositors working always in close association with Robert Gibbings, who supervised and checked all the stages of production. Proofing was done on a Columbian hand press and the printing on a Victoria powered platen press and a heavy Phoenix platen press. For a while another printer Mr Mills shared the presswork with Cooper.

- Plan of the Golden Cockerel Press at Waltham St. Lawrence based on a sketch made from memory by A.C.Cooper
- **Morning** by A.C.Cooper, 1924.  
Artist's proof, signed and numbered 10 / 50. Exhibited at the Annual Exhibition of the Society of Wood Engravers in 1924  
Loaned from the collection of A.C.Cooper
- **The Mill** by A.C.Cooper, undated.  
Artist's proof, signed and numbered 1 / 50.  
Loaned from the collection of A.C.Cooper
- "Notes on the printing methods of the Golden Cockerel Press" by A.C.Cooper.  
Reprinted in *The Private Library*, with an additional illustration, from *Robert Gibbings: a bibliography* by A.Mary Kirkus, 1962  
Cooper's manuscript draft, addressed to Patience Empson, is shown below.  
Both items loaned from the collection of A.C.Cooper

# 4. The University of Reading

## Photographs

1. Robert Gibbings playing bowls on the lawn at Acacias, the Senior Common Room at the University's London Road site, c.1939 From an original photograph by Dr Ian Crichton
2. School of Art group photograph 1937 Seated with Gibbings in the second row are, from the far left, Will Wilder, M.E. (Mary) Mills and Elisabeth Geddes. Flanking Gibbings are, on his right Anthony Betts and on his left Margaret Webb. Behind her is Joan (Willis) Wilder From a photograph in the possession of Mr and Mrs W.C.Wilder
3. School of Art group photograph 1940 Seated with Gibbings in the second row, on his left, are his fellow members of staff, A.C.Carter, Anthony Betts, Frank Ormrod, Harold Yates and Hubert Davis. Margaret Webb is standing at the extreme left hand end of the row behind.
4. Dust-wrapper of *Blue Angels and Whales*, 1938

## In the Beginning

A practical project set by Robert Gibbings for University School of Art students studying wood engraving

1. Five stages of the project as executed by Will Wilder in 1939. The sequence begins with his original heightened ink drawing above the printed text, and Gibbings's comment: "I think forms of crystals should be kept much much simpler. Try & suggest the grandeur of primaeval nature. RG". There follow a revised drawing, the wood block, a proof of the block and the final printed version
2. The same project completed by a student in 1936, and published as an illustration in the students' magazine *Tamesis*. Perhaps the work of Theodore Naish
3. The project as executed by Joan (Willis) Wilder in 1939. The wood block and final printed version

All original items loaned by Mr and Mrs W.C.Wilder

## The Viper and the File

A practical project set by Robert Gibbings for University School of Art students studying wood engraving

Seven stages of the project as executed by Will Wilder in 1939 are shown. The sequence begins with a printed transparency of the text overlaying the original pencil drawing, which allows the precise relationship between them to be established. There follow the pencil drawing transferred to a sheet with printed text, the heightened ink drawing with text, proofs of two stages of the wood engraving, and the final piece. (Finished block in case below)

Loaned by Mr and Mrs W.C.Wilder

## Ephemera illustrated with wood engravings, printed in the School of Art under Robert Gibbings's direction

- Menu 1937
- Menu 1938
- Prospectus for *Loftur*, 1939. Wood engraving by Stephanie Maberly Smith. (The book is shown in the case below)
- Notice by Robert Gibbings 1940. Wood engraving by M.E. (Mary) Mills
- Christmas card 1941. The house is Four Elms, Waltham St. Lawrence, formerly the home of the Golden Cockerel Press
- Wine list for Barry Neame, proprietor of the Hind's Head Hotel, Bray-on-Thames. Printed by Robert Gibbings in the School of Art, with decorations by Aldo Cosomati, 1939. File copy with annotations

Loaned by the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, University of Reading

## Publications of the School of Art produced under the direction of Robert Gibbings

- *Fatherless Oberlus ...* 1936. "The decorations have been designed and engraved on wood by G.Young, M.Webb, B.Cook, T.Naish, S.Green, K.Ambrose, S.Fraser and P.Andrews". 25 copies were printed.Two are shown
- *The Diary of W. Lashly ...* 1938-39. "Illustrations designed and engraved by students of book production". 75 copies were printed
- Letter from W.Lashly to Robert Gibbings, 1938, in which he approves the publication of his Diary
- *Log of the Yawl 'Sea Bird' on a Voyage from Southampton to Bermuda via Madeira* by E.Whitfield and E.S.Dunch; foreword by Robert Gibbings, 1939. Wood engravings by M.E. (Mary) Mills. 75 copies were printed
- *The Man who Saved Two Hundred* by Ralph McCarthy, 1940. 100 copies printed for Barry Neame, proprietor of the Hind's Head Hotel, Bray  
Loaned by the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, University of Reading
- *Observationes Anatomicæ Selectiores Amstelodamensium 1667 . 1673*, 1938. Type facsimile, with the illustrations engraved on wood by R.J.Beedham. 100 copies printed for Professor F.J.Cole. This is copy no.1 with a proof of Beedham's frontispiece portrait and his original block
- *The Book of Orders of 1630/1 reprinted at the University of Reading, in the year 1940*. Type facsimile, with the decorations engraved on wood by R.J.Beedham. Page 1 is shown with his original block for the chapter heading  
Block loaned by the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, University of Reading
- *Loftur: a play*, by Jóhann Sigurjónsson, 1939. 105 copies were printed. Wood engravings by Stephanie Maberly Smith
- *The Shepherd of Banbury's Rules to judge of the Changes of the Weather ...* by John Claridge, 1941. 120 copies were printed. Designed and illustrated with wood engravings by Margaret

Webb. Known also as *The Country Calendar*, a trade edition was published under this title by the Sylvan Press in 1946. A copy is shown in the next case.

## Publications by students of the School of Art who were taught by Robert Gibbings

- *Gulliver's Travels ...* 1938. The final volume of the *Penguin Illustrated Classics*. Robert Gibbings was Art Editor of this series, all of which used wood engravings. He illustrated Herman Melville's *Typee*. Theodore Naish, the illustrator of this volume, was a student in the University School of Art from 1934 to 1936
- *Ballet ...* 1938. Kay Ambrose, the illustrator of this book, was a student in the University School of Art from 1934 to 1935
- *Early English recipes selected from the Harleian Ms. 279*, Cambridge University Press, 1937. Edited and illustrated with wood engravings by Margaret Webb, a student in the University School of Art from 1934 to 1937 and in 1940. In the preface she offers sincere thanks "to the many friends who have helped me, particularly Mr Robert Gibbings and Mr F.Young"
- Bookplate for Alfred Alleyne by Margaret Webb. Printed in the School of Art in 1942. Loaned by the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, University of Reading
- *The Country Calendar ...* 1946. Wood engravings by Margaret Webb. The trade edition of *The Shepherd of Banbury's Rules ...* published in a limited edition by the School of Art in 1941, shown in the previous case
- *Animal Antics* by Elisabeth Geddes. London : Golden Cockerel Press, 1937. Dedication, dust-wrapper and prospectus. Elisabeth Geddes was a student in the University School of Art from 1935 to 1938. Book with dust-wrapper loaned by Mr and Mrs W.C.Wilder

## Blue Angels and Whales

In 1937 Gibbings went to Bermuda and, using special diving apparatus, spent a great deal of time underwater making pencil sketches of the marine life among the reefs. In pursuing this passion he had spent some time experimenting with techniques which would enable him to make drawings beneath the surface of the water. He wanted to get on "closer terms with the fish, and to meet them on their own level". His first thoughts involved copper plates prepared for etching but a better solution was suggested by Cyril Pearce, a colleague in the University School of Art. He proposed that Gibbings should try drawing on sheets of xylonite, a waterproof celluloid-like substance which, when roughened with sandpaper, would accept the marks of a pencil as well as paper. This proved to be a successful solution and the drawings were reproduced in *Blue Angels and Whales*.

- Two underwater drawings, Bermuda, pencil on xylonite, 1937  
Drawing below loaned by Patience Empson
- *Blue Angels and Whales ...* 1938. A Pelican Special. Illustrated with a coloured frontispiece, thirty wood engravings and sixteen plates which include twelve of Gibbings's xylonite drawings. This copy inscribed by Gibbings to Mary Kirkus, November 1938, "with any amount of thanks for any amount of work"
- *Blue Angels and Whales ...* J.M.Dent & Sons, 1946. In this revised edition the original pencil drawings are substituted for the wood engravings which appeared in the first edition. Nineteen xylonite drawings are reproduced in cerulean blue throughout the text
- Three photographs of Gibbings in the sea off Bermuda, 1937

- In the Red Sea, 1938 [photograph]
- Two studies of tropical fish, Bermuda, 1938. Watercolours. Reproduced in black and white in *Blue Angels and Whales*, 1946. Loaned by Patience Empson
- **Bermudian Fish.** Wood engraving, 1938. Loaned by Patience Empson
- Four pencil drawings used for wood engravings in *Blue Angels and Whales*, 1938, and reproduced in the revised edition, 1946. Two have Gibbings's notes to the printer. Loaned by Patience Empson
- Two pencil and watercolour drawings of Bermudian fish with Gibbings's annotations, 1937. Loaned by Patience Empson

Although Gibbings left the University in 1942 he remained in touch with many of his former colleagues. In particular he greatly appreciated the University Library staff for the research they did on his behalf. Mary Kirkus, a member of staff since 1928 and University Librarian from 1943, became a particular friend, and early in 1955 she broached the subject of a bibliography of his works.

- Gibbings's reply to Mary Kirkus - "...The mere idea is a huge honour ... ". Autograph letter, signed
- The *Bibliography*, published in 1962, was completed by Patience Empson and John Harris, sadly after the death of both subject and author
- Gibbings's self-portrait pencil sketch on the reverse of a Library loan ticket, carefully preserved by Mary Kirkus
- Proof wood engraving, inscribed "To Mary", sent as a Christmas card in 1956. From Darwin's *Journal of Researches ... during the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle*

## 5. Sweet Thames

### Building and launch of the "Willow": photographs

1. Robert Gibbings, Patrick Gibbings and Hubert Davis working on the "Willow" in the woodwork room at the University's London Road site in July 1939
2. Robert and Patrick Gibbings fitting lockers; a colour chart in the bottom of the boat
3. Robert Gibbings cutting the name

These three photographs from originals in the possession of Patience Empson

4. The launch and testing of the Willow at Moss' boatyard, Caversham Bridge, 26 July 1939. From the left, Robert Gibbings, Hubert Davis, Anthony Betts, Patrick Gibbings, James Hudson (a student in the School of Art) and "Jimmy" Bee (lecturer and rowing coach at the University)
5. From the left, Norman Howard, Robert Gibbings, Hubert Davis

6. From the left, Patrick Gibbings, James Hudson, another, Norman Howard, Anthony Betts, Robert Gibbings, Hubert Davis, "Jimmy" Bee (seated in boat)

These three photographs from originals taken by Will Wilder

- An account of the building of the "Willow", written, designed and printed as a project of self-directed work by Sue Walker and Martin Andrews, associated with the 1975 exhibition *4 Aspects of the Work of Robert Gibbings*.  
A limited edition of 35 copies
- Departure of the "Willow" upstream from Reading, 27 July 1939. Gibbings and his family, with Barry Neame (waving hat), in the launch which towed the "Willow" to Cricklade  
Two photographs from originals taken by Dr Ian Crichton
- Autograph letter from Robert Gibbings to Will Wilder: "... I had hoped to drop in & see you on my way down stream but the nearer we got to war the quicker I worked my arms ..."  
Loaned by Mr and Mrs W.C.Wilder
- Notebook used by Robert Gibbings on his trip down the Thames.  
Wherever Gibbings went he carried in his pocket a set of postcards on to which he could make notes unobtrusively. He later transcribed these into notebooks of the kind shown here. Loaned by Patience Empson
- Page of Gibbings's manuscript draft of *Sweet Thames run softly* - the opening of chapter 14 in the printed book. Significant differences can be seen
- Original wood block for the illustration of Shillingford Bridge, which opens chapter 14 \*
- The page of type set up with an electro of the opening of chapter 14
- *Sweet Thames run softly*, J.M.Dent, 1940. A copy of the first edition, presented by Robert Gibbings to Mary Kirkus, November 1940
- Dust-wrapper from first edition of *Sweet Thames*
- Paperback editions of *Sweet Thames*, left to right, 1944, 1953, 1967, 1983 1953 and 1967  
loaned by Michael Bott
- Various original wood blocks of the illustrations for *Sweet Thames*

## 6. South Seas

- *Iorana! a Tahitian Journal* by Robert Gibbings, with wood- engravings by the author.  
Duckworth, 1932  
Despite pressure of work at the Golden Cockerel Press Gibbings was able to accept a commission from the American publishers Houghton Mifflin to spend three months in Tahiti in 1929 collecting material to illustrate a book by James Norman Hall. In the event, Hall withdrew and Gibbings wrote his first substantial text to accompany his illustrations. The book was first published by Houghton Mifflin in a limited signed edition of 385 copies. *Iorana!* was the first of several works which reflect Gibbings's love of exotic locations and subjects. Twenty years later, when his style had undergone a marked change, he was still able to look back on this work with satisfaction.  
One copy of the book with dust-wrapper loaned from the collection of A.C.Cooper
- The distinctive cover of *Iorana!* The design of its patterned paper is based on sections of copra laid out to dry. It is shown against a background of specimens of binding cloths with other South Sea motifs designed by Gibbings
- *The 7th Man: a true cannibal tale of the South Sea Islands told in fifteen wood-engravings and precisely one hundred and eighty nine words* by Robert Gibbings, 1930

- *Fourteen Wood Engravings by Robert Gibbings from drawings made on Orient Line cruises*. Printed at the Golden Cockerel Press for the Orient Line, 1932  
One copy loaned from the collection of A.C.Cooper
- *Thus we go to Australia. Described and illustrated by Patrick and Moira Edwardes, and offered to the Orient Line after a very happy trip*. London : Orient Line, c.1930  
Gibbings sailed in the Orient Line "Otranto" to Sydney in 1929, en route to Tahiti. This booklet is illustrated with twenty wood engravings which, though poorly printed, appear to be his work. The author statement above may be an elaborate pseudonym based on the names of his eldest son, his wife, and his father. A precursor of the more sumptuous *Fourteen Wood Engravings*, previously unrecorded.  
Loaned from the collection of A.C.Cooper
- *A True Tale of Love in Tonga*  
The first edition, published by Faber & Faber in 1935, is subtitled "told in 23 engravings and 333 words by Robert Gibbings". The copy above has his alterations for the second edition, published by J.M.Dent & Sons in 1954, subtitled "told in 23 engravings and 337 words ...". Also shown is the binding of the first edition with the original wood block.  
Annotated copy and wood block loaned by Patience Empson
- *Coconut Island*  
First published in 1936 by Faber & Faber. Also shown are a Puffin Story Book edition of 1945 and a French translation published by Editions de l'Amitié, Paris, 1949. This seems to be the only recorded translation of a book by Gibbings
- Two proof engravings for *Coconut Island*
- **Paopao Bay, Moorea**, 1947. Pencil drawing used for wood engraving in *Over the Reefs*, 1948
- **Sprouting Coconut**, 1946. Pencil drawing used for wood engraving in *Over the Reefs*, 1948
- *Over the Reefs*, J.M.Dent & Sons, 1948
- Dust-wrapper of first edition of *Over the Reefs*
- *Over the Reefs and Far Away*, New York : E.P.Dutton & Co, 1949
- *The Midmost Waters* by John Fisher, 1952. Illustrated with thirty drawings by Gibbings
- Photograph of Gibbings with Samoan chief in gala dress, 1947  
From an original photograph in the possession of Patience Empson
- Photograph of the "Tiare Taporo" off Rarotonga, c.1946  
From an original photograph in the possession of Patience Empson

## Artefacts from Polynesia described and/or illustrated in *Over the Reefs*.

1. Cricket ball made from juice drawn from the banyan tree
2. Pearl fisherman's goggles Both the above loaned by the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford
3. Fish-hook

Loaned by Patience Empson

## Personal belongings used and collected by Robert Gibbings on his overseas travels

Within this case can be seen a miscellaneous collection of objects including two oil paintings on wood, done in Tahiti in 1929, and an enlargement from a photograph of palm-trees which Gibbings owned, suggestive of various motifs which appear in his works; his trunk and kitbag, his hat, and a hatband and Tahitian belt; samples of coral and haliotis shell, two coconut shell bowls, two hanks of coconut fibre from Samoa, a hardwood lidded box, a piece of patterned barkcloth (Samoan or Fijian) and tattooing implements from Savai'i; also a book from his South Seas library, bound in half leather with barkcloth-covered sides.

Loaned (except the book) from the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, and Patience Empson

## 7. Book illustrations commissioned by various publishers 1927 to 1939, including some for the Golden Cockerel Press under the new management of Christopher Sandford and his partners

- *The Charm of Birds by Viscount Grey of Fallodon*; woodcuts by Robert Gibbings. Hodder and Stoughton, 1927
- *The Man from Kilsheelan: a tale* by A.E.Coppard, 1930
- *A Mirror for Witches* by Esther Forbes, 1928  
The pose of the figures in the frontispiece closely resembles that in the sculpture **Two People**
- *The Roving Angler* by Herbert E.Palmer, 1933 This revised edition was published in 1947.
- *The Voyage of the Bounty's Launch ...* 1934 The first of the three Golden Cockerel 'Sea Log' series illustrated by Gibbings, in the 'sail-type' bindings combining two different cloths
- *Narratives of the Wreck of the Whale-Ship Essex ...* 1935
- *A Bird Diary*, by Godfrey Harrison. J.M.Dent & Sons, 1936
- *Beasts and Saints ...* 1934  
Gibbings said about this book, and *Glory of Life* published earlier the same year: "My engravings in these two books were the best that I had so far accomplished, and gradually the sadness that I had felt at losing my Press was dissipated"
- *The Journal of James Morrison ...* 1935
- *Mr. Glasspoole and the Chinese Pirates ...* Golden Cockerel Press, 1935  
Binding design based on Gibbings's title-page vignette
- *The Twelve Months* by Llewelyn Powys, 1936  
The publisher's device on the title-page was also designed by Gibbings.
- *John Graham (Convict) 1824 ...* 1937  
With the original block for the frontispiece

- *A Book of Uncommon Prayer*. Verses by George Scott-Moncrieff, woodcuts by Robert Gibbings. Methuen, 1937  
This is the second edition, with twelve illustrations as intended by Gibbings. In the first edition, published in the same year, the publishers had taken the extraordinary liberty of cutting up several of the blocks to produce additional vignettes. Gibbings took a very dim view of this. In the author's view it was the engravings which "justified this book"
- *Le Morte D'Arthur: the Story of King Arthur & of his Noble Knights of the Round Table written by Sir Thomas Malory ...* Printed at the Golden Cockerel Press, London, for the Limited Editions Club, New York, 1936. 3 volumes  
Every page of text is decorated with wood engravings selected from a total of 63 blocks repeated in a variety of combinations. An opening from vol.1 is shown
- *The Tale of the Golden Cockerel*, by Alexander S.Pushkin. Golden Cockerel Press, 1936. This copy no.84 of 100 bound in cloth of gold
- *Othello ...* Designed by Bruce Rogers and printed at the Press of A.Colish, New York: one of the thirty-seven volumes of The Plays of William Shakespeare published for subscribers by The Limited Editions Club of New York, 1939
- *Type: Narrative of a Four Months' Residence among the Natives of a Valley of the Marquesas Islands*, by Herman Melville, 1938. Volume 8 of the series Penguin Illustrated Classics for which Gibbings was Art Editor
- *Journal of Researches ... into the Natural History & Geology of the Countries Visited during the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle ...* by Charles Darwin. Printed at the University Press, Cambridge for the Limited Editions Club of New York, 1956

## 8. Popular books 1942-1955

### Photographs

1. *Sweet Thames* is "reprinting as fast as the printers can handle it". Advertisement from the *Times Literary Supplement*
2. Robert Gibbings at work in the cottage near Llangurig, Montgomeryshire, where he wrote *Coming down the Wye*, 1942
3. Robert Gibbings rowing on the Seine 1953  
From an original photograph in the possession of Patience Empson

- *Coming down the Wye ...* J.M.Dent & Sons, 1942
- *Lovely is the Lee ...* J.M.Dent & Sons, 1945
- *Sweet Cork of Thee ...* J.M.Dent & Sons, 1951
- *Coming down the Seine ...* J.M.Dent & Sons, 1953
- *Trumpets from Montparnasse*  
This book describes Gibbings's return to "the freedom and the fun of brushes and colour" after the years of "black and white and the austerities of the graver". The eight colour plates illustrate paintings done at this time. A number are on display elsewhere in the exhibition
- *Trumpets from Montparnasse ...* November 1955. First U.S.A. edition. The frontispiece is **Still Life with Artichokes**

- *Trumpets from Montparnasse ...* October 1955. First edition dust-wrapper, showing **Hat with Fruit**
- *Trumpets from Montparnasse*. J.M.Dent & Sons, 1955. First edition. Wood engraving of the model "Nicole"
- Memoranda by Gibbings 20 to 26 June 1955, recording sessions with models, sometimes shared with Willy [Moren], and observations on the activities of the pigeons nesting in the trees outside his studio. Both subjects are described fully in chapters 21 and 22 of *Trumpets from Montparnasse*

## 9. Commercial work

- *The Story of Bovril* by Richard Bennett; with wood engravings by Robert Gibbings, 1953. Dust-wrapper and engraving for frontispiece  
Frontispiece engraving loaned by Patience Empson
- Title-page for *The Post Office in Pictures*, 1935, and Greetings telegram, 1936  
Loaned by Patience Empson
- **Telephone rates** for the London Telephone Service, and **Anglo Swiss Telephone Service**  
Loaned by Patience Empson \*
- **Old London Bridge** c.1920, for Geo.M.Whiley Ltd. Gold and Silver Beaters. Booklet and proof of illustration. Spoken of by Gibbings as his first commissioned work
- **Gold Leaf the "Beaters Brand"**  
Loaned by Patience Empson
- Design of foreign newspaper headings, with blank above; design with microscope relating to the study of natural history, both c. 1935. Purpose unknown  
Loaned by Patience Empson
- Design of books, press, pen and graver, c.1935. Purpose unknown  
Loaned by Patience Empson
- Four of a set of six headings with quotations from an advertising brochure for Orient Line cruises, c.1935  
Loaned by Patience Empson
- Book token designed for Book Tokens Ltd, London, 1953  
Loaned by Patience Empson
- **Shoveller Duck**, a Christmas card design for G.Delgado Ltd, The "Union Jack" Publications  
Loaned by Patience Empson
- Three of a set of five postcards with illustrations from *Sweet Thames run softly*, for Blackwell's, Oxford, 1941. Printed in the University School of Art  
Loaned by the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, University of Reading
- Design for J.M.Dent & Sons, 1933 or 1934

# 10. Till I end my Song

## Photographs

1. Footbridge Cottage, Long Wittenham
  2. The Studio at Footbridge Cottage
- *Till I End My Song*, October 1957. First edition. Dedicated to Ralph Beedham
  - *Till I End My Song*, New York : E.P.Dutton & Co., November 1957. First U.S.A. edition
  - Two original wood blocks for illustrations to *Till I End My Song*
  - Brochure advertising The Vine, Long Wittenham, with extract and four wood engravings from *Till I End My Song*, printed at the Southwall Press, Abingdon, 1957  
Loaned by Patience Empson
  - **Footbridge Cottage**. Signed and titled proof wood engraving, inscribed "Greetings to A.M.K." (Mary Kirkus). Probably for Christmas 1957
  - Four engravings for *Sweet Cork of Thee*, 1951  
Loaned by Patience Empson
  - Six engravings for *Trumpets from Montparnasse*, 1955  
Loaned by Patience Empson
  - Six engravings for *Till I End My Song*, 1957  
Loaned by Patience Empson
  - *The Wood Engravings of Robert Gibbings; with some recollections by the artist*. Edited by Patience Empson, introduction by Thomas Balston. J.M.Dent & Sons, 1959  
Reproduces one thousand wood engravings, and includes the autobiographical fragment upon which Gibbings was working when he died

# 11. Journalism

A selection of journalism by and about Robert Gibbings from a variety of national and international periodicals: *Woman's Illustrated*, *Picture Post*, *London Calling*, *Terre des Jeunes*, *The Saturday Book*, *Medical World*

Magazines loaned by Patience Empson

# 12. Broadcasting

A selection of material relating to broadcasts made by Robert Gibbings for the BBC. He was a prolific and popular broadcaster, and appeared on television as early as 1938. This case includes articles in *The Listener*, contracts and scripts. Among them are the running order, studio layout and script for the television programme "Private view", no.2 The British Museum, 1950

Loaned by Patience Empson

## 13. Technique

Wherever he travelled when collecting material for his books, Gibbings made pencil sketches of what interested or attracted him. From these sketches he later selected those relevant to his text and adapted them for the graver; as a rule these were reproduced photographically on the surface of the blocks. This involved coating the block with a light sensitive white substance and making a contact print on its surface. Gibbings used a comparatively small range of tools and interpreted his designs in terms of the marks made by them. He worked with the block flat on a table, without the traditional wood engraver's sandbag, and as he worked he would shake white powder over the block and smooth it away with his hand to show up the engraved lines. He preferred to work in natural light, and when engraving fine detail used a powerful magnifying glass supported on a wooden stand. After engraving the design in outline, he would often arrange for R.J.Beedham, a highly skilled commercial wood engraver to cut away the surface of the block beyond this boundary, before completing the design himself by engraving the finer textures. Nearly all the blocks that Gibbings used throughout his life were made of Turkish boxwood and were supplied by T.N.Lawrence of London. Among the items to be seen in this case are Gibbings's silver case for carrying a supply of postcards on which to make notes, his sketch pad, and three photographs of him at work, using the magnifying glass and taking a proof. These items loaned by Patience Empson. Also to be seen are various blocks, some large, one unengraved, and engraving tools.

- **Wisley.** Key block and colour separations for three-colour poster advertising the Royal Horticultural Society's gardens at Wisley

## 14. Paintings

- **Seated Couple**, Paris 1926. Oil  
Loaned by Patience Empson
- Two paintings, Tahiti 1929. Oil on wood  
Loaned by Patience Empson
- **Pacific Seascape**, 1946. Oil  
Loaned by Patience Empson
- **Still Life with Artichokes**, Paris 1954. Oil. Reproduced as the frontispiece in *Trumpets from Montparnasse*  
Loaned by Shaun Gibbings
- **Boats in Harbour**, Ile de Ré 1954. Oil. Reproduced in *Trumpets from Montparnasse*, opposite p.8  
Loaned by Patience Empson
- **Hat with Fruit**, Positano 1954. Oil. Reproduced in *Trumpets from Montparnasse*, opposite p.94 and on dust-wrapper  
Loaned by Charles Ede
- **Orange on Green Saucer**, Positano 1954. Oil  
Loaned by Patience Empson

# 15. Two People

**Two People.** Low relief in Portland stone

This is Gibbings's first sculpture which he describes at some length in *Till I End My Song*. "It began with a photograph that I saw in the souvenir programme of a Paris music-hall - two girls dancing, their arms interlocked to make a geometric pattern. From that, with the substitution of a male figure for one of the dancers, a composition of more virile implication evolved on paper." Eric Gill chose tools for him and showed him how to use them. Gibbings worked at the piece during the many enforced interludes in his work at the Golden Cockerel Press, and at some stage made the wood engraving used as the frontispiece to *A Mirror for Witches* (1928) which closely resembles the sculpture. It remained at Waltham St. Lawrence until 1956, when it was removed to Bray-on-Thames for Barry Neame, proprietor of the Hind's Head Hotel.

Gibbings is thought to have completed only four sculptures in stone.

On loan from the Hind's Head Hotel, Bray

## Foyer : Albert Cooper 1890 - 1989

**Albert Cooper, printer, artist and craftsman**

**Albert Cooper was the pressman at the Golden Cockerel Press at Waltham St. Lawrence from 1922 to 1933. Undoubtedly the high reputation of the Press was in part due to the exceptional standards of presswork he achieved. He was also an enthusiastic and prolific artist and craftsman in his spare time. A selection of his work is displayed in this case.**

Born in Reading Albert Cooper began his apprenticeship as a printer at the age of fourteen. He also attended evening classes at the University College Reading, where he was introduced to graphic design and illustration. He worked for a number of local printing firms including Knill & Sons and the Eastern Press before joining Harold Taylor at the Golden Cockerel Press in 1922. He worked closely with Robert Gibbings who took over the direction of the Press in 1924. During this period he met many prominent artists and writers. Gibbings encouraged him to develop his own work, particularly wood engraving, for which he showed considerable talent. He exhibited with the Society of Wood Engravers on at least four occasions and sold work through the Redfern Gallery London, and elsewhere.

Together with his wife Dorothy he made numerous sketching trips throughout Britain and Ireland, and regularly cycled into Reading to attend evening classes at the University Fine Art Department. For many years he was an enthusiastic member of Reading Guild of Artists, and the Twyford and Ruscombe Art Group of which he was a founder member.

He and his wife Dorothy had moved to Ruscombe in 1924. Together they lived there until his death in January this year at the age of ninety-eight.

Reading Museum & Art Gallery is very grateful to Mrs Cooper for the loan of material on display here and in the exhibition in the gallery upstairs.

- **Mid-night Travellers**  
**Headlights**  
Two wood engravings
- **The Road-Makers**  
**Old Pollarded Willow Tree**  
Two wood engravings
- **The Kennet in Reading**  
Etching
- **Donegal**  
Wood engraving
- Watercolour showing a steam lorry at night
- **On the Farm**  
Colour woodcut
- **Near Binfield**  
Watercolour sketch dated 1931

## Photographs

1. Albert Cooper and Robert Gibbings inspecting a proof at the Golden Cockerel Press, Waltham St. Lawrence, c.1931
  2. Albert Cooper printing on a Victoria platen press at the Golden Cockerel Press, Waltham St. Lawrence
- An article about Albert Cooper published in the *Journal of the Twyford & Ruscombe Local History Society*, Spring 1989
  - Prospectus for an open day for governors of the College.  
"Printed at the University College Reading by the students of typography January 1908.  
Block designed and drawn by Albert C.Cooper."