

A photograph of a woman from the waist up. She has dark hair pulled back and is wearing large, dark, teardrop-shaped earrings. She is wearing a dark, sleeveless, textured dress with a ruffled hem. In the background, there is a large, abstract painting with geometric shapes like triangles and rectangles in shades of grey, blue, and white.

British Art Studies

March 2019

**Theatres of War: Experimental
Performance in London, 1914–1918 and
Beyond**

**Edited by Grace Brockington,
Impermanence, Ella Margolin and
Claudia Tobin**

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Cover image: Film still, The Ballet of the Nations, 2018.. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.

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Beyond London & the War

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Introduction

The life of the little theatres continued long after the war and their influence spread far beyond the limits of their studio audiences. This section of the exhibition examines aspects of the work of little theatres into the 1920s, under the changing conditions of the post-war settlement. The new political and social landscape was shaped by advances in mass communication and entertainment, notably through radio and cinema, increasing exposure to American culture, labour unrest culminating in the General Strike of 1926, financial crisis, women's enfranchisement, educational reform, and the demise of the aristocracy.¹ These massive demographic and economic changes—which had begun before the war but accelerated after it—changed the game for the little theatre movement, creating new political imperatives, audiences, and uncertainties.

The community of artists and performers that had drawn together in Chelsea during the war dispersed, but the recent experience of global conflict, and the possibility of shaping a new world in its aftermath, acted as a stimulus to their ambitions. New groupings and collaborations sprang up, committed to the project of rejuvenating the arts and making them available to as many people as possible. In this part of the exhibition, we watch the development of the Margaret Morris method as it grew into a worldwide movement with branches in health care, sport, and education, as well as in professional dance. It follows the Greenleaf Theatre to the USA, where the Armfields made their mark on the American Arts and Crafts and little theatre movements across the Atlantic, before returning permanently to the UK in the early 1920s. Two new groups feature in this display: the Arts League of Service, which held its inaugural meeting at the Margaret Morris Theatre; and the British Drama League, which was founded and led by Geoffrey Whitworth, the editor at Chatto & Windus, who published *The Ballet of the Nations* and whose name recurs in this exhibition as an active supporter of London's little theatres.

The Arts League of Service and the British Drama League developed directly out of the wartime little theatres, but others were arguably related. Miles Malleson's work with the Independent Labour Party (ILP) Arts Guild is a striking example. During the war, Malleson had published two pacifist plays with the Bomb Shop, which were confiscated by the police, and also worked with the Pioneer Players and the Plough Club.² His flat in Bloomsbury, known as the "Attic", became a gathering place for pacifists, including the philosopher Bertrand Russell, "Bomb" Henderson, Clifford Allen, Chairman of the No-Conscription Fellowship and later of the ILP, and the novelist Douglas Goldring.³ Immediately after the war, Malleson set up his own little theatre, the Experimental Theatre, which toured to the East End and other areas of London before finding a permanent home at the Everyman Theatre in

Hampstead.⁴ The Arts Guild, which was launched in 1925, was on a different scale, with its national network of theatre groups, screenings of foreign-language films, and weekly shows at the Strand Theatre. The Margaret Morris dancers contributed to its programme, as did Edith Craig.⁵ Connections such as these indicate a regrouping and expansion of the little theatre network between the wars, and a legacy which continues because the ideas and problems which they addressed are ongoing.

Margaret Morris Movement

Between the wars, the Margaret Morris Movement (MMM) went from strength to strength, expanding into education, health care, and physical training.⁶ Teaching had been at the heart of MMM from its earliest days, when Morris trained her troupe of “Dancing Children” over a milk shop in Covent Garden.⁷ After the war, her educational projects became increasingly ambitious, contributing to a progressive movement in education that had been gathering strength internationally since the late nineteenth century. Her School of Dancing (first in her house at 1 Glebe Place, then in larger premises off the Fulham Road) offered a full curriculum alongside an holistic training in the creative arts.⁸ The approach to discipline was liberated: “the teachers not to tyranise over the children, nor the children over the teachers”, as the school prospectus dictated.⁹ Given the politics of post-war reconstruction, it is significant that the school’s aims were explicitly internationalist: “to give a child a wide and understanding outlook on life, and the relationship and inter-dependence of one nation to another by the study of international history, and the literature and art of all nations.”¹⁰ That internationalism was also evident in the setting up of sister schools in Paris and Cannes, and the increasingly global reach of MMM centres. By 1939, the movement was active in the USA, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Cuba, France, India, New Zealand, South Africa, Switzerland, and the West Indies, as well as the UK.¹¹

Morris became interested in the remedial possibilities of her system after she discovered yogic breathing.¹² Her ambition for her movement broadened, as she put it, into “a wider vision to include all humanity”, including those with disabilities, and she became convinced that an aesthetic approach to medicine could greatly facilitate the work of healing.¹³ Her idea was that physiological exercises could be made more enjoyable by incorporating them into dance. From the mid-1920s, she worked with the medical profession, running classes in London hospitals and qualifying as a physiotherapist herself in 1930. Her work with disabled children was pioneering because it enabled her patients to become performers in a way that anticipated much

more recent developments in dance practice, notably the work of the dance companies Dancing Wheels (founded 1980, the year of Morris's death) and CandoCo (1991).

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 1.

Margaret Morris (choreography), Topical Film Company (production), Miss Margaret Morris' Merry Mermaids, 1923, silent film, 2.40 minutes. Digital image courtesy of Digital file courtesy of BFI.

This short film of a Margaret Morris summer school shows off many of its best features—dancing barefoot on the beach, happy children, and Margaret Morris herself. Harlech was the school's first destination after the war, and Morris remembered that everything about it “was perfect—*except the weather!* It rained and rained.”¹⁴ They joined an artists’ colony convened by the wealthy photographer George Davison, a founding member of the Linked Ring Brotherhood, who became managing director of Kodak UK and had anarchist connections.¹⁵ Several of the guests would have been familiar to Morris from the London little theatres, among them Harley Granville Bantock, Cyril Scott, Arnold Bax, Harriet Cohen, Alvin Langdon Coburn, and Eugene Goossens.¹⁶ It was Goossens who first introduced Morris to Davison, at the Margaret Morris Club. The Harlech schools were good for publicity. As the art historian Richard Emerson remarks, photographs taken by Coburn and Fred Daniels “mark a clear break with the past and were picked up immediately” by journals such as *The Tatler* and *The Dancing Times*.¹⁷

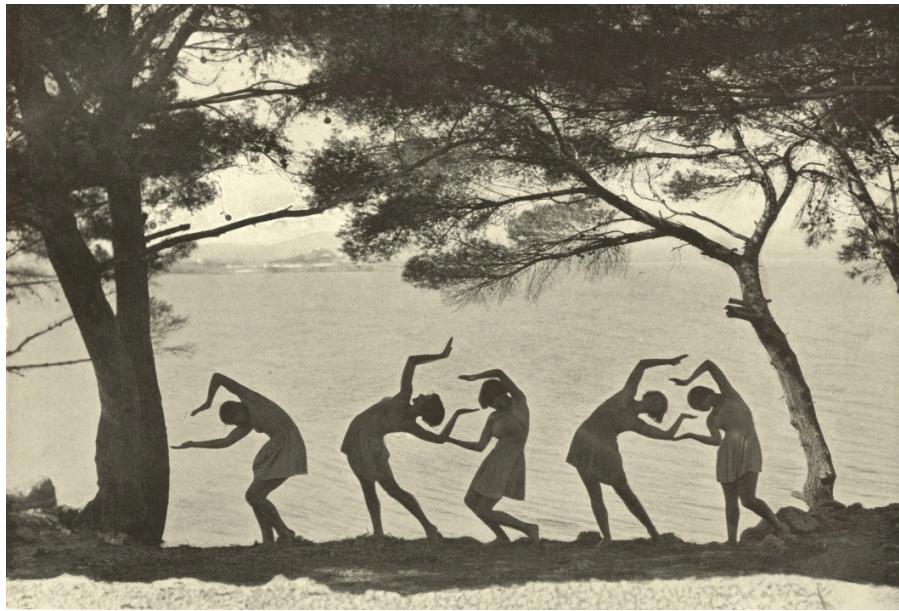


Figure 2.

Frieze Silhouette. A picture taken on the road to the Cap, with the fort and old town of Antibes in the distance, photograph, in Margaret Morris and Fred Daniels, *Margaret Morris Dancing* (London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1926), plate 30.

The summer school, which Morris started in 1917, continued annually at idyllic locations in Devon, Wales, and France.¹⁸ They inculcated a natural, holistic way of life, with classes in music and painting as well as dance, and as much time as possible spent out of doors. Students danced barefoot in woodland and on the beach, as in this image of a “frieze” of dancers—a borrowing from the visual arts—at a summer school on the French Riviera. Photographs such as this appeared in magazines like *Vogue* and *The Tatler* as a way of advertising both MMM and the Cap d’Antibes as a newly fashionable resort.¹⁹

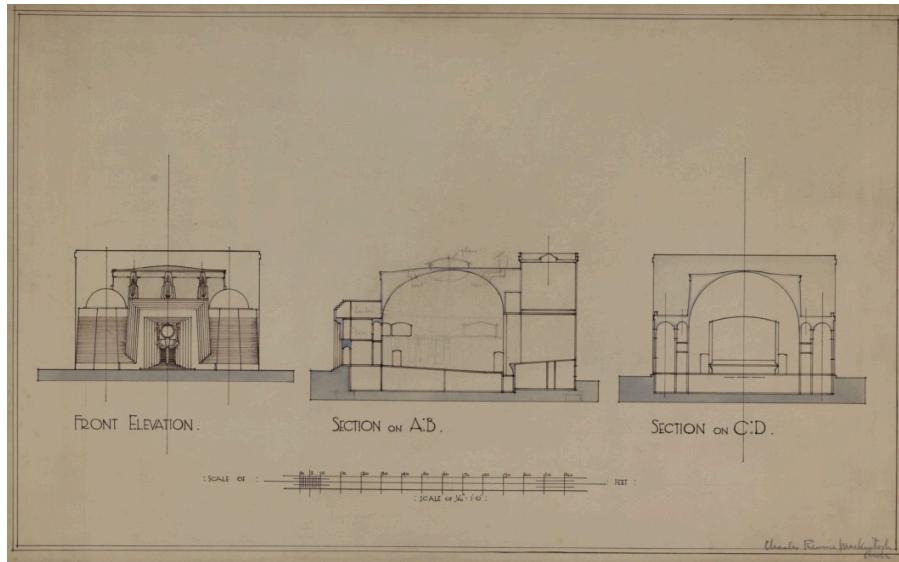


Figure 3.

Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Design for a Theatre for Margaret Morris, Chelsea, London, showing elevation and sections, 1920, pencil, ink, and wash, 43.9 x 72 cm. Collection of The Hunterian, University of Glasgow (GLAHA 52590). Digital image courtesy of University of Glasgow.

“The Scottish architect, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, with his wife Margaret, were frequent visitors at my Club”, remembered Margaret Morris in her memoirs, “and Fergus and I often dined with them at their studio in Glebe Place, or met them at the Blue Cockatoo or the Embankment.”²⁰ The friendship was important to them all and continued through the 1920s, with Mackintosh lecturing at Morris’s summer schools in the south of France.²¹ In summer 1920, he designed a new theatre for Morris, probably intended for a site between Glebe Place and Oakley Street for which he also designed studio-flats for the Arts League of Service. The project was never realized, but it indicates Morris’ ambitions for her little theatre movement after the war, and the extent to which Mackintosh’s involvement with the Chelsea community stimulated his architectural imagination.²² Plans for the new Morris theatre show a striking, windowless façade with a low central entrance framed by a massive architrave. It calls to mind the modern architecture of Central Europe, where Mackintosh had enjoyed his greatest success before the First World War.²³



Figure 4.

Children enacting a Margaret Morris tableau, in Grace Kimmens, *Heritage Craft Schools and Hospitals, Chailey, 1903-1948: Being an Account of the Pioneer Work for Crippled Children* (UK: Baynard, 1948), 83.

In 1926, Margaret Morris was invited to work with the Heritage Craft Schools and Hospitals for Crippled Children at Chailey, Sussex, following demonstrations of her method to doctors in London.²⁴ Established in 1903 by the disabilities advocate Grace Kimmens, the Heritage provided poor, disabled children with medical care and rehabilitation, and a training in traditional craftwork to fit them for future employment.²⁵ Kimmens' roots in the social activism of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and her belief in the therapeutic benefits of outdoor exercise, drew her to Morris' natural system of movement and progressive approach to education. Morris was initially daunted by the severity of the children's deformities—as the historian Lisa Pruitt explains, “most of them had rickets, bone and joint tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, or congenital defects such as clubbed feet”—but developed a way of working that allowed the children to focus on their strengths and to complement one another in the overall design of a performance.²⁶ This photograph of laughing children enacting a Morris dance frieze in a meadow of ox-eye daisies conveys something of the joy that Morris remembered from these classes.²⁷

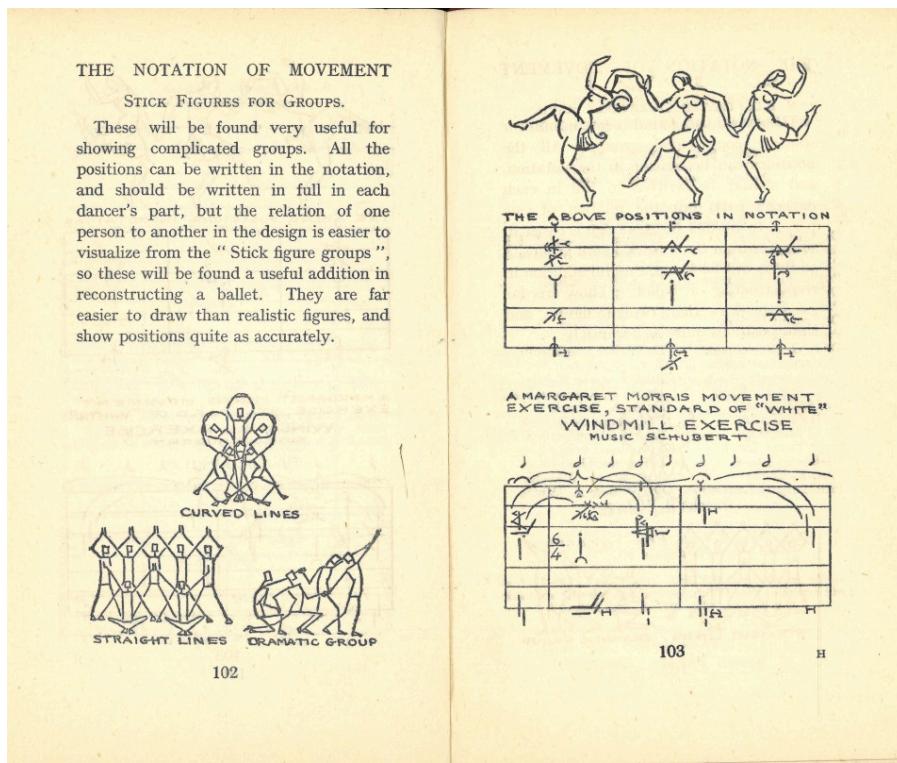


Figure 5.

Windmill Exercise, in Margaret Morris, *The Notation of Movement* (London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1928), 103.

Margaret Morris began to develop her own system of dance notation in 1913 and published it fifteen years later as *The Notation of Movement*.²⁸ Her editor was C.K. Ogden—a linguist, philosopher, free-thinker, and long-term supporter of MMM, who served on the committee of the Margaret Morris Club and lectured at Morris' summer schools in the south of France.²⁹ The connection is suggestive. Ogden is best known for his creation of *Basic English*, a rare success amongst the many universal auxiliaries that were invented in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁰ His interest in Morris' dance pasigraphy situates it within a universal language movement which was closely associated with pacifism.³¹

[mul]

The composer Eugene Goossens worked closely with several of the little theatres both during and after the war—the Plough Club and the Arts League of Service, but most particularly the Margaret Morris Movement.³² His *Three Greek Dances* (1926, originally titled *Three Pagan Hymns*) was composed specially for Morris.³³

The Greenleaf Players

In spring 1916, the Armfields set sail for the United States to relaunch their Greenleaf Players in the “one place where Little Theatres and Community Drama were regarded seriously and where new ideas were being welcomed”.³⁴ It was a risk, both personally and professionally—they were “chased all the way by Torpedo boats”.³⁵ Yet they were exhilarated by Manhattan with its “enormous cliffs of glistening steel, concrete, and glass”,³⁶ and by the internationalism of a country where you “touch and embrace and are part of the whole world in the most marvellous way”, as Smedley put it in a letter home.³⁷ She spent many hours in the New York Public Library researching the folktales of different nations as a way of understanding what she called “the welter of races in the streets”.³⁸

The Armfields quickly found their footing in the art, craft, and theatre worlds of New York and California. A new Greenleaf Studio at 13 Gramercy Park developed into a flourishing school and little theatre centre, and they taught their method at universities, theatres, and women’s clubs across America.³⁹ Exhibitions of their work—Armfield’s paintings, joint shows of their embroideries—attracted favourable attention, including that of Christian Brinton, the critic and curator who was key to the promotion of modern European art in the USA.⁴⁰ In spring 1918, they travelled by train to California and continued their work of teaching and creating in San Francisco.⁴¹ The American Indian artefacts that Armfield encountered along the way were a revelation to him and he argued strongly that their designs were symbolic representations of their environment, rather than abstract decorations: “Their squares and zigzags are thunder and lightning, flower or mountains, quite as definitely as our squares and zigzags which we call letters are flowers and mountains to us.”⁴² Significant too was his discovery of the artist Jay Hambridge and the theory of dynamic symmetry that Hambridge derived from his study of ancient Greek architecture, and that Armfield thenceforth adopted as the basis of his approach to composition, both on canvas and for the theatre.⁴³ It underpinned his designs for a New York production of *A Winter’s Tale* (published as an illustrated book in 1920), and the staging of the Armfields’ own play, *Miriam Sister of Moses*, at the Greek Theater at Berkeley in 1919.

The Armfields returned to Britain for good in early 1922—to Armfield’s relief and Smedley’s regret—where they continued their work of writing and producing. On their return, Armfield mounted an exhibition of his American painting at the Dorien Leigh Galleries, a venue run by the photographer E.O.

Hoppé, who had played a prominent part in the wartime little theatres. Smedley wrote up her experience of teaching theatre in America in her book series *Greenleaf Theatre Elements* (1924–1926).

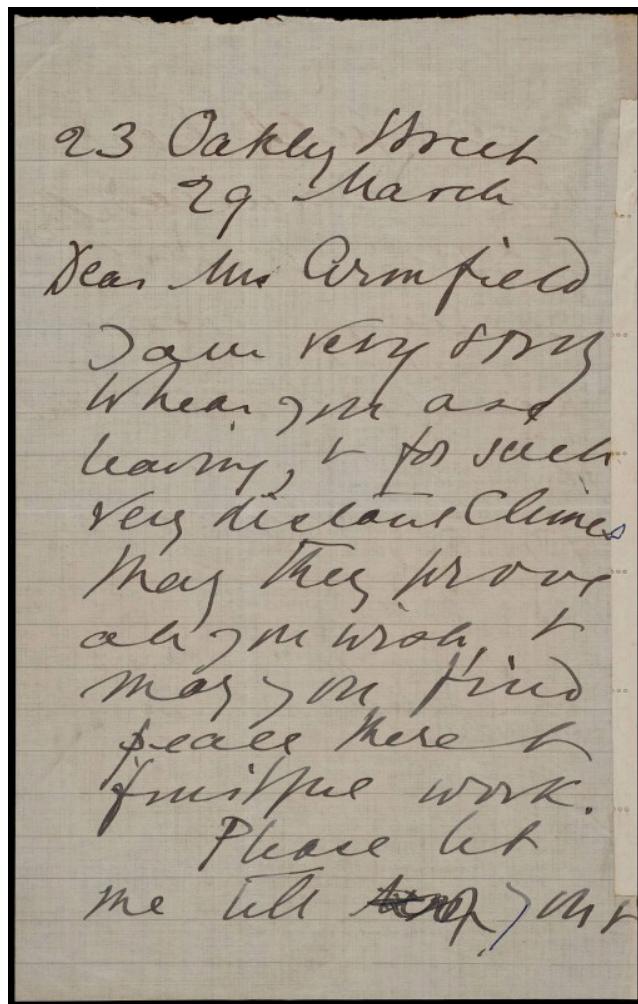


Figure 6.

Vernon Lee, letter to Constance Smedley Armfield
on her departure for America, 29 March 1916.
Collection Tate Archive (TGA 976/7/1/41).

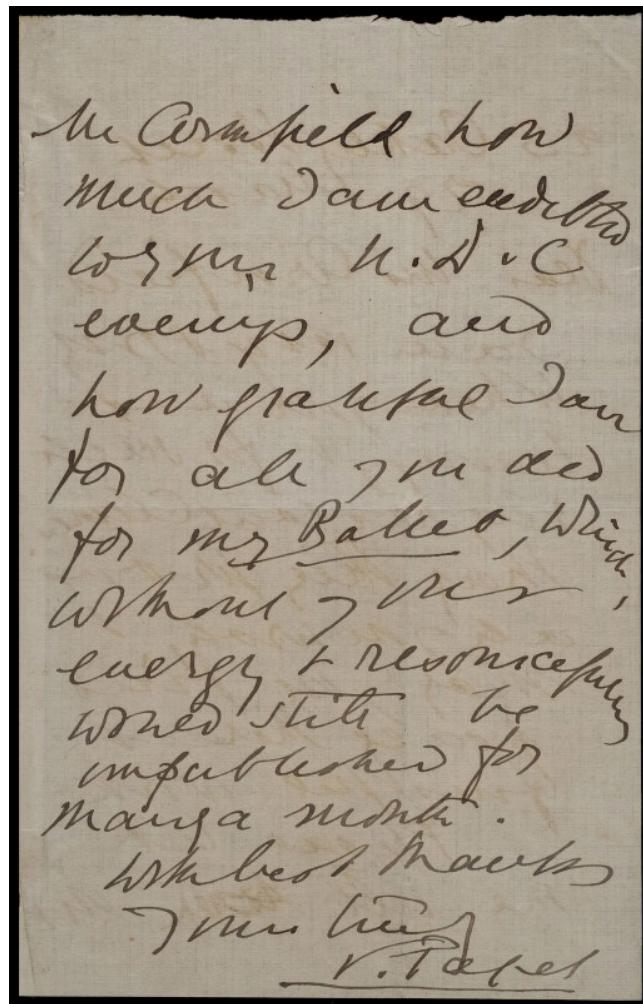


Figure 7.

Vernon Lee, letter to Constance Smedley Armfield on
her departure for America, 29 March 1916.
Collection Tate Archive (TGA 976/7/1/41).

This valediction from Vernon Lee to Constance Smedley as the Armfields prepared to leave for the United States is significant: it confirms the Armfields' recollections that they played a crucial role in bringing *The Ballet of the Nations* to publication, and it suggests that the couple regularly hosted meetings of the Union of Democratic Control, underlining the connections between the London little theatres and the wartime peace movement.⁴⁴



Figure 8.

Unknown photographer, Maxwell Ashby Armfield's Studio in the USA, undated, photograph.



Figure 9.

Unknown photographer, Maxwell Ashby Armfield's Studio in the USA, undated, photograph.

When the Armfields arrived in New York in spring 1916, they rented a studio overlooking Gramercy Park.⁴⁵ This photograph offers a glimpse of their new life in the USA, and of Maxwell's work-in-progress. The large canvas on the easel conveys the ambition of his response to a cityscape which he described in terms of the American Sublime as a vista of "great glistening precipices".

⁴⁶ He sent photographs to his friend, the American artist Edward McKnight Kauffer, who remarked on the difference in his work: "You have lost that which I used to think was very evident in your work (self consciousness) [...] I applaud *your* American point of view which is in every picture."⁴⁷ Armfield later explained that Kauffer had encouraged him towards a bolder, looser style which was "entirely suitable for the vast spaces of America."⁴⁸



Figure 10.

The Mother's Magazine, featuring embroidery by Constance Armfield, March 1917 (Chicago, IL: David C. Cook Publishing Co., 1917). Collection of Hathi Trust. Digital image courtesy of Hathi Trust Digital Library.

"Embroidery, like all other forms of art, is merely a means of expressing beautiful ideas", declared Constance Smedley in an article explaining the cover design exhibited here.⁴⁹ This is a work of art which reflects on its own making: a woman embroiders a picture of the "Bluebird of happiness"—a nod to Maeterlinck—while the real bird perches on the frame. The Armfields both took sewing seriously—a legacy of their training in the Arts and Crafts. They brought a number of embroideries with them from England and continued to make them during their years in America. These provided their first entry into the American art world, leading to exhibitions with the National Society of Craftsmen and at the Palace of Art in San Francisco, and a lecture series for Smedley.⁵⁰



Figure 11.

Maxwell Ashby Armfield (design), *Miriam Sister of Moses*, a biblical drama by Constance Smedley and Maxwell Ashby Armfield performed in the Greek Theatre, University of Berkeley, California, circa 1919, pencil and watercolour poster design, 20.3 x 29.2 cm. Collection of Tate Archive (TGA 976/3/2/4).

In 1919, the Armfields staged an epic production of their play *Miriam, Sister of Moses* in the Greek Theatre, Berkeley, starring the pioneering American dancers Ruth St Denis and Ted Shawn in the title roles, and produced by Sam Hume, a leader in the American little theatre movement.⁵¹ The play was inspired by the paintings of Giovanni Segantini (1858–1899) and shaped by a Christian Scientist belief in spiritual healing.⁵² The costume and gesturing of

the figures on Armfield's poster design, especially the "Pillar of Fire", with the all-over patterning of the robe and the hieroglyphic articulation of the hands and arms, call to mind earlier photographs of Greenleaf Theatre productions.

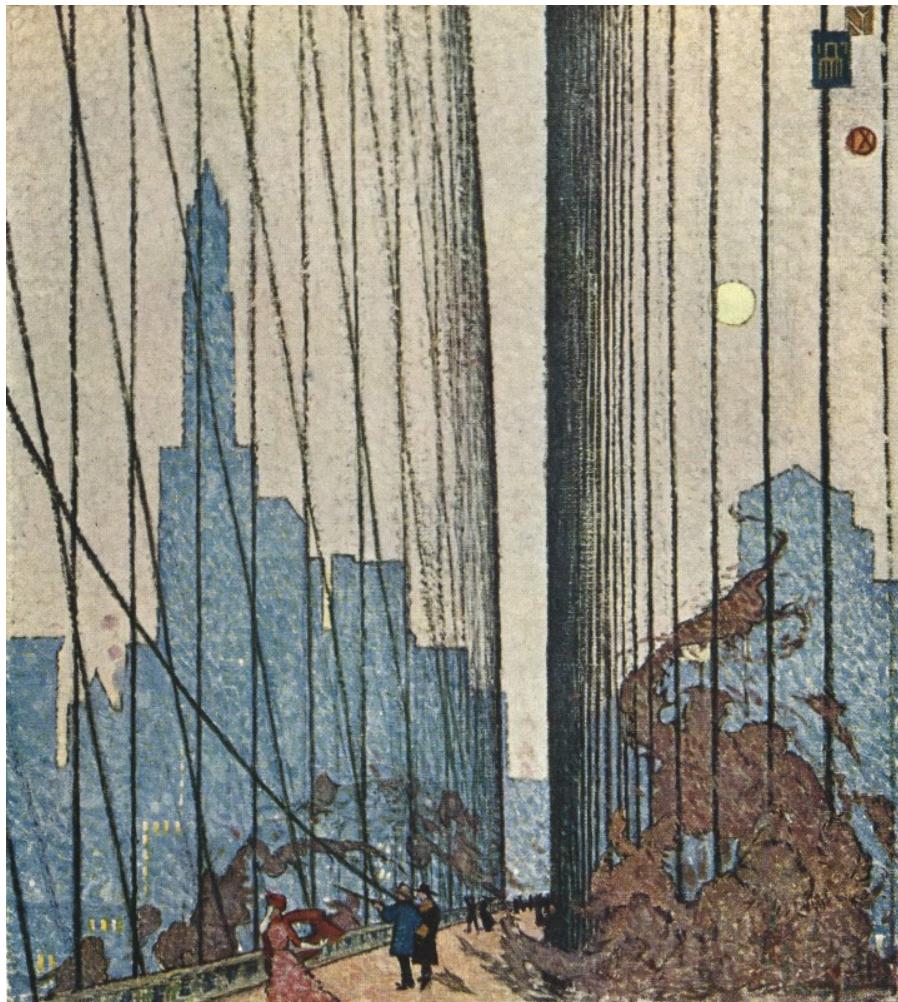


Figure 12.

Maxwell Ashby Armfield, Brooklyn Bridge and Woolworth Tower, 1917, in *Maxwell Ashby Armfield, An Artist in America* (London: Methuen, 1925), frontispiece. Digital image courtesy of Estate of Maxwell Armfield.

Armfield wrote up his journey from New York to California in articles for the *Christian Science Monitor*, which he collected and published after his return to Britain as *An Artist in America*, dedicated to Geoffrey Whitworth. He was unimpressed by the "European jargon" employed by contemporary American painters but excited by the conceptual qualities of indigenous design—there are echoes here of his training in the Arts and Crafts—and by the raw material of land- and cityscape.⁵³ The book evokes a brilliance and abundance of colour; after Europe's "misty golden glooms", the "pure gold of

burnt sedge and water-reed” in Connecticut.⁵⁴ Colour illustrations, such as this view of Brooklyn Bridge striated against the New York skyline, say as much again in paint.⁵⁵

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In 1927, the Armfields published a child’s guide to English folk song: *The Blue Bus Route. Being the Amazing Adventures of Kenneth and Barbara in the Folk-Song World*, which imagined the work of Cecil Sharp as a journey through a land of song. In the early 1900s, Sharp (1859–1924) lead the movement to collect and revive English folk song that he encountered on his travels across England, and in the Appalachian Mountains in North America where English settlers had remained in isolated communities.

The Arts League of Service

The Arts League of Service (ALS) was launched from the Margaret Morris Theatre in May 1919 with a mission to promote “the unity of all the Arts” and to bring them “into everyday life”.⁵⁶ It signalled a new beginning for British theatre after the war, and a renewal of the ambition to bring art to as wide an audience as possible which had motivated the little theatres from their very beginnings.⁵⁷ It was, explains the art historian James Fox, “the most influential” of the cultural organisations to appear in the immediate aftermath of the war, “though one that has been virtually forgotten since the 1920s”; it finally folded at the outbreak of the Second World War.⁵⁸ Its activities were wide-ranging: a travelling theatre, public lectures on the arts, and exhibitions celebrating the modern and experimental—Jessica Dismorr, Marion Dorn, Frances Hodgkins, Edward McKnight Kauffer, Margaret Macdonald, Henry Moore, Paul Nash, Percy Wyndham Lewis, Anne Estelle Rice, and Edward Wadsworth were among those promoted.⁵⁹ It also ran an art library, a bank of contemporary drawings and prints for sale and circulation to schools, and a Service Bureau which offered advice and assistance to artists and writers.⁶⁰

The ALS was the brainchild of Eleanor Elder, a teacher at the Margaret Morris school, and the spirit of the London little theatres was manifest in the work of the travelling theatre. Several of those who feature elsewhere in this exhibition appear on the ALS Council—Laurence Binyon, John Drinkwater, J.D. Fergusson, Eugene Goossens, Edward McKnight Kauffer, Margaret Morris, John Middleton Murry, Nigel Playfair, and Lady Maud Warrender. The theatre programme featured sets and costumes by Kauffer, dance poems by Hester Sainsbury, and Margaret Morris dancing by the Baddeley sisters, “bare-footed and in filmy Greek draperies.”⁶¹ The structure and aesthetic of ALS

performances were strongly reminiscent of the little theatres: a mixture of short plays, songs and dances emphasising “rhythm, colour and form” and precise, dance-like choreography, “every gesture and movement being timed to the music.”⁶² The overall effect was witty and fresh, and praised by critics who warmed to the “beauty and innocent mirth”, the “spontaneity and naturalness”, and the “sheer intellectual delight” of these latter-day strolling players.⁶³



Figure 13.

Presentation of Harvest Hymn, in Eleanor Elder, *Dance, A National Art* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1918), frontispiece.
Collection of The British Library. Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.

Eleanor Elder’s idea for a professional touring company grew out of her experience of making theatre in India, where she spent the last two years of the war. In her memoirs, she explains that she organised some entertainments there for the Red Cross.⁶⁴ She does not mention that she taught Margaret Morris dancing at the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Adyar, Chennai, although this development is of considerable interest, given the cultural significance of Theosophy, and other connections between Theosophy and the London little theatres which emerge from the material of this exhibition.⁶⁵ The performance photographed here was billed as a “Greek interpretation” of an “Indian Harvest Song”, and staged at a garden party hosted by Annie Besant, President of the Theosophical Society.
66



Figure 14.

A.A. Pearson, Arts League of Service promotional postcard, 1920s. Digital image courtesy of Private Collection.

Postcards such as this staged the camaraderie of the ALS Travelling Theatre as they travelled up and down the country, bringing the arts “into everyday life” through makeshift performances in village halls.⁶⁷ The van which featured in much of their publicity was important to their image—first a motor wagonette lent by Muriel, Countess De La Warr (a Labour Party activist who used the vehicle to transport luggage and staff to her country house), then a reconditioned Air Force Crossley, and finally the Lancia pictured here, “half-van, half-bus, with seats for the weary players. It was anything but luxurious, but to us it was heaven [...] the words *Travelling Theatre* excited interest wherever we went.”⁶⁸

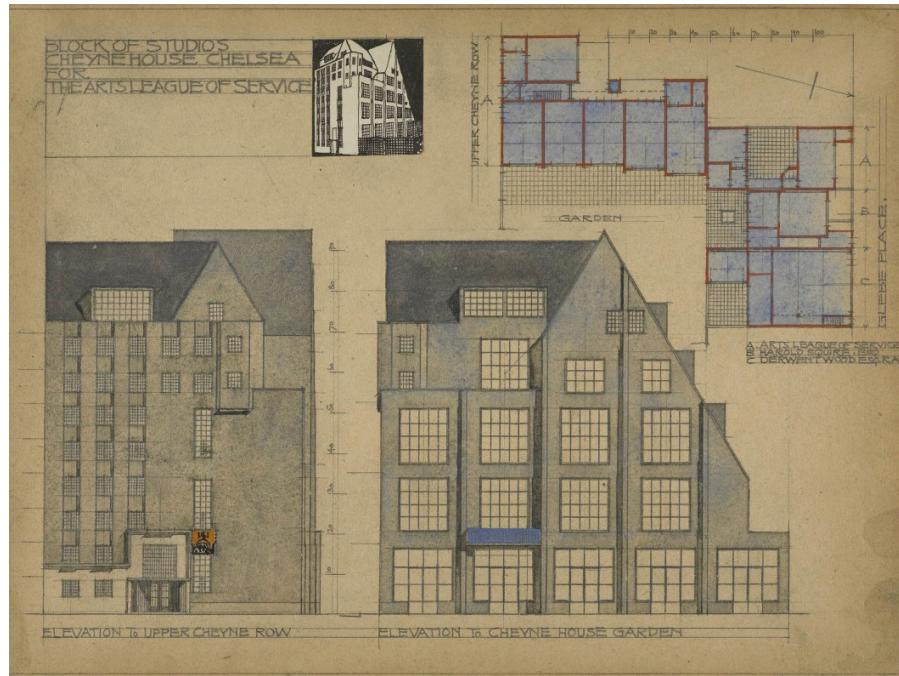


Figure 15.

Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Plans for the Arts League of Service studio-flats, 1920, pencil and watercolour, 27.6 x 37.2 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1981-12-12-24). Digital image courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum.

The front cover of the first *Bulletin* of the Arts League of Service featured an architectural drawing by Charles Rennie Mackintosh: a strikingly asymmetrical block of flats with a sheer, eight-storey front elevation, a gable at the back which sloped dramatically from the roof to the ground, and huge, double-height windows on one side. This same sketch was reproduced in miniature on the sheet of plans and elevations that he exhibited at the Royal Institute of British Architects in December 1922. The *Bulletin* outlined the League's intention to build cheap, attractive accommodation for the exclusive use of artists', writers, and composers.⁶⁹ The project—which was intended for a site behind Glebe Place in Chelsea and also earmarked for a new Margaret Morris Theatre, but which was never realized—responded to an acute shortage of housing after the war.⁷⁰

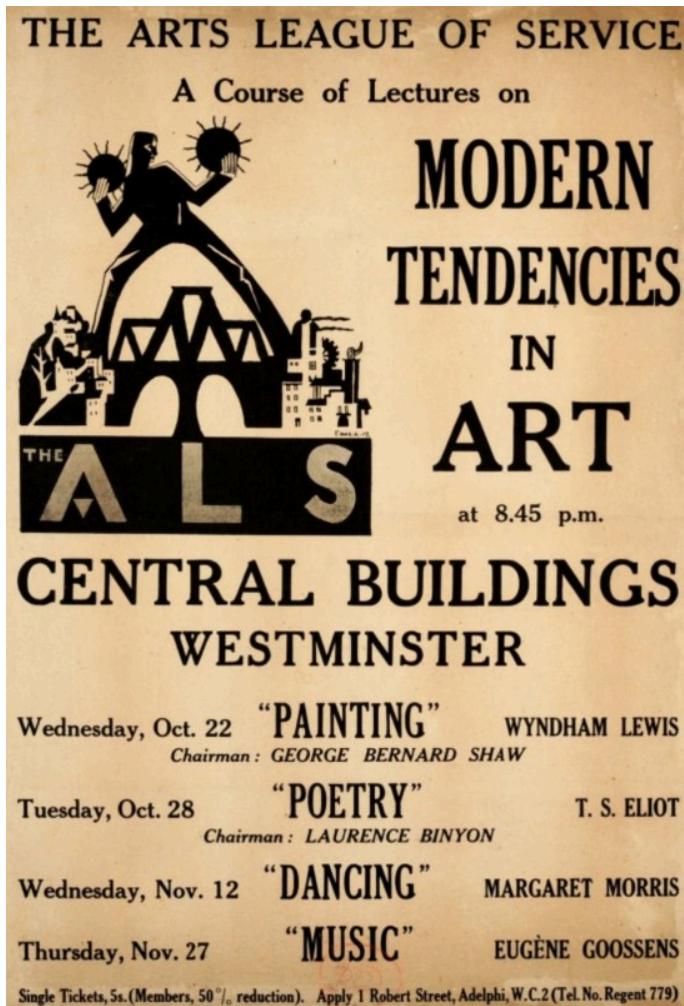


Figure 16.

Edward McKnight Kauffer, The Arts League of Service: A course of Lectures on Modern Tendencies in Art, poster design, 1919. Digital image courtesy of Antikbar.

"We claimed recognition for the modern artists, and the orthodox regarded us with suspicion as revolutionaries and extremists."⁷¹ Eleanor Elder's account of the League's agenda helps to situate this course of lectures on "Modern Tendencies in Art", delivered by Wyndham Lewis (painting), T.S. Eliot (poetry), Margaret Morris (dancing), and Eugene Goossens (music), and taking place within the first year of operations.⁷² Edward McKnight Kauffer's design for the publicity poster features a colossus striding the bridge between a picturesque old town and an industrial centre.

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Eugene Goossens' ALS lecture on "Modern Tendencies in Music" ranged internationally. Amongst contemporary British composers, he singled out Delius, Bantock, Vaughan Williams, Scott, Holbrooke, Ireland, Bax, Bridge,

and Berners. Bax had been involved in the wartime little theatres as a member of the Plough Club committee. His *Elegiac Trio* (1916) was written in response to the Easter Uprising.

The British Drama League

A key player in the production of *The Ballet of the Nations* was Geoffrey Whitworth (1883–1951), the Art Editor at Chatto & Windus, who heard Vernon Lee reciting her book in the little theatres of Chelsea and then commissioned it for publication.⁷³ He was already known as a mover in the world of theatre: in a small way as a writer, since he penned an early study of the *Ballets Russes*, lectured on drama and wrote plays; but most significantly he made his mark as an advocate and facilitator—a creator of systems and institutions which enabled theatre to flourish. Before and after the war, he campaigned for a national theatre in Britain, a project which eventually came into being in 1963.⁷⁴ To this end, he founded the British Drama League in 1919 “for the encouragement of the Art of the Theatre” and “the betterment of social life”.⁷⁵ This, then, was a campaign in post-war reconstruction which combined the aesthetic ambition of the little theatre movement—Edward Gordon Craig’s “Art of the Theatre”—with a socialist conviction that “the drama was the art *par excellence* of the people, and the theatre everybody’s business”.⁷⁶ During Whitworth’s thirty-year service as director, the League became an educational resource for theatre companies throughout the country, and it was important to its ethos that it served amateurs—groups which embodied the “spirit of community enterprise” that Whitworth most valued—as much as professionals.⁷⁷

“Who is this man named Whitworth?” asked George Bernard Shaw rhetorically in 1934.

What is he? He is not a great actor. So far as I know he has never acted in a play. If he has written any plays, I have not seen them. And yet, wherever I go I hear his name: Geoffrey Whitworth. He is one of the most important people in the theatre today.⁷⁸

Whitworth’s name recurs also in the material of this exhibition, weaving through the web of acquaintance and collaboration that held the Chelsea theatre community together. He lived in the neighbourhood, frequented the little theatres, and attended meetings of the Union of Democratic Control—the pressure group which questioned the government’s war aims, and which gives the clearest indication of the pacifist tendencies of the London little theatres.⁷⁹ Through his editorial work, he served also as a link

between Chelsea and the Bloomsbury group, that other island of cultural experimentation and political dissent during the war.⁸⁰ The internationalism of these wartime avant-gardes made its mark on his leadership of the British Drama League: on the League's ambition to build connections between British and foreign theatre,⁸¹ and on his own insistence that "the language of Art is universal".⁸²



Figure 17.

Roger Fry, Geoffrey Whitworth, 1934, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 61.4 cm. Collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (S.114-2000). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 Unported).

This portrait was commissioned by the British Drama League and presented to Whitworth by George Bernard Shaw. It was a tribute to Whitworth's service to theatre, a collective gift from the dozens of organisations and hundreds of individuals who had benefited from his work, including such distinguished signatories as Edith Craig and Edward Gordon Craig. It was also a personal tribute from Fry, the artist, who had been involved in the League from the

beginning, chairing its inaugural Committee meeting, and serving on its Plays and Publications Committee. This was one of the last paintings that he made—he died shortly before its public presentation.⁸³

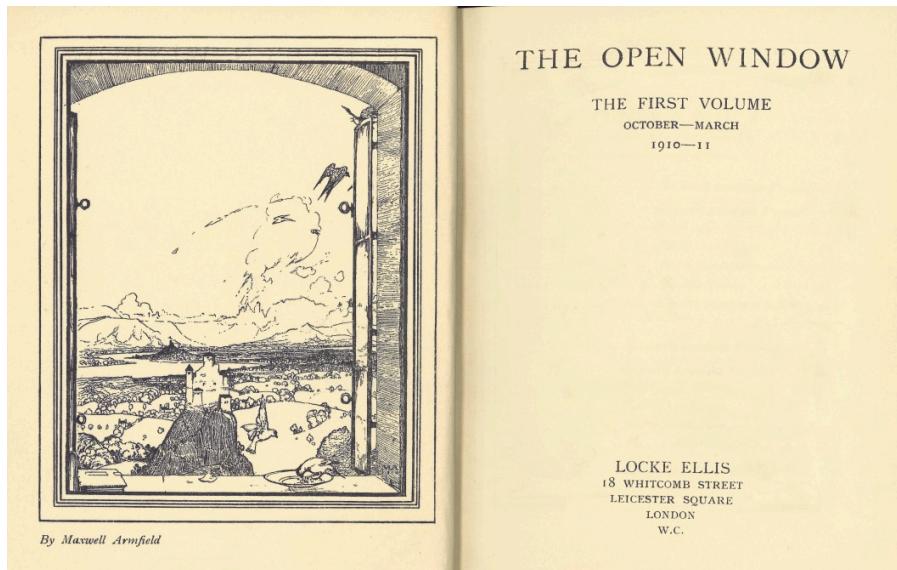


Figure 18.

Geoffrey Whitworth and Vivian Locke Ellis (eds), *The Open Window*, Issue 1 (London: Locke Ellis, 1910), frontispiece design by Maxwell Ashby Armfield. Digital image courtesy of The Estate of Maxwell Ashby Armfield.

Little magazines were crucial to the emergence of new art and writing in the early twentieth century, providing a platform for work that was too risky or obscure for commercial publication. *The Open Window* (1910–1911) was typical of the genre—short-lived, published from home, and revealing, through its list of contributors, a cross-section of the London art world as it appeared in 1910. As Editor to *The Burlington Magazine* and Chatto & Windus, Whitworth was well placed to attract interesting work. There is a glimpse here of the artists and writers who mattered to him and who later played a part in the little theatre network, among them Maxwell Armfield, Katherine Mansfield, Beryl de Zoete (the dancer and dance writer), Douglas Goldring, and Yone Noguchi.

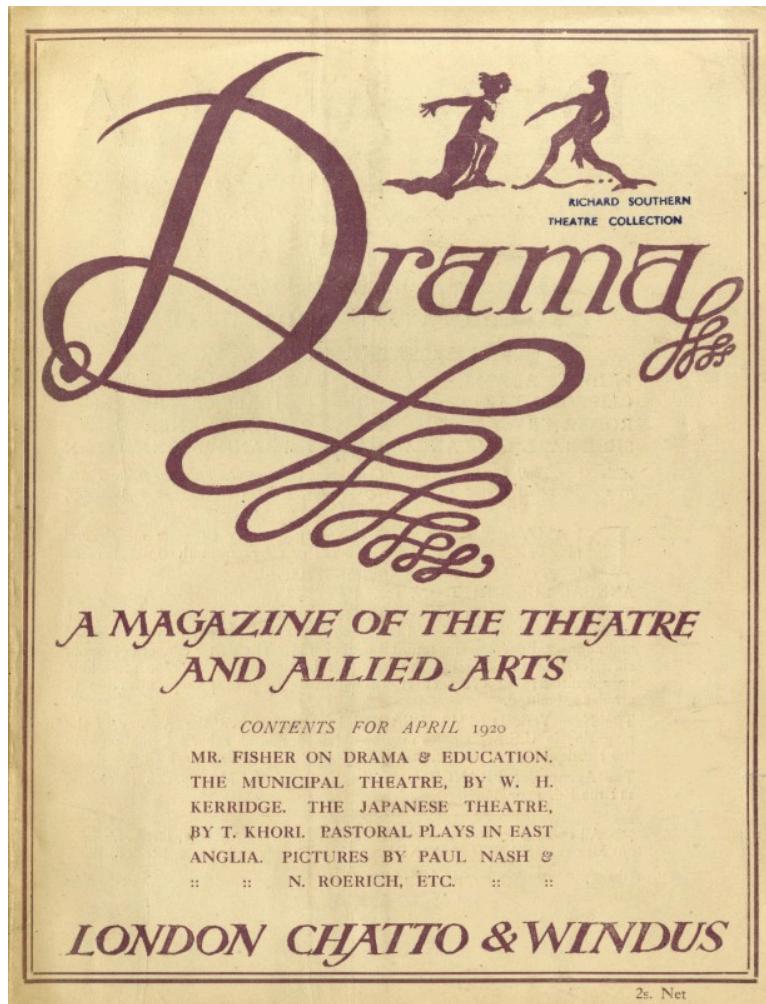


Figure 19.

Drama: A Magazine of the Theatre and Allied Arts, (London: Chatto & Windus, April 1920), front cover. Collection of the Bristol Theatre. Digital image courtesy of Bristol Theatre Collection.

Whitworth edited the magazine of the British Drama League throughout his career as director, and the publication became a focus for debate about British theatre in its international contexts. The issue shown here, for April 1920, lists an article by the Japanese playwright Torahiko Kori, who had been involved with the London little theatres during the recent war; Paul Nash, who turned his attention to stage design after his service as an official war artist; and Nicholas Roerich, the Russian artist and theosophist who designed the set and costumes for Sergei Diaghilev's production of *The Rite of Spring* (1913), and who worked briefly as a stage designer at Covent Garden Theatre after the war, before moving to the USA.

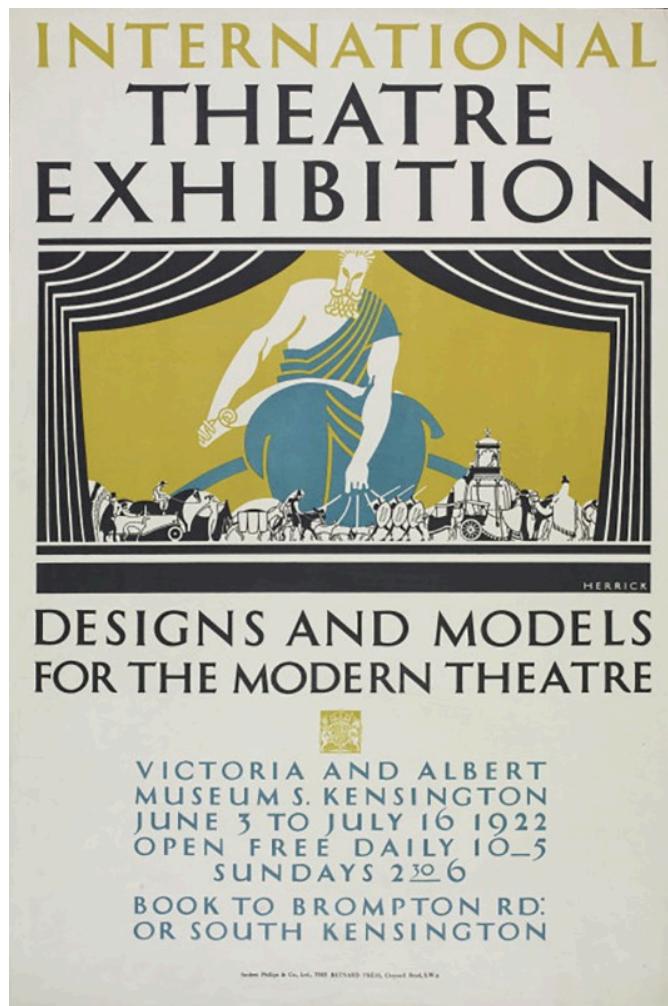


Figure 20.

Frederick Charles Herrick, International Theatre Exhibition, 1922, colour lithograph poster, 75 x 49.8 cm. Collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (E.1072-1922). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum (All rights reserved).

It was important to Whitworth that the British Drama League should promote internationalism in the world of theatre, just as the League of Nations worked to improve international relations in politics. In 1922, he arranged for the *International Theatre Exhibition* to travel from Amsterdam to London where it opened at the V&A.⁸⁴ With its depiction of a togaed figure clutching a handful of puppet strings, the exhibition poster evokes ideas of classicism and puppetry which were important to modern European theatre. The Grecian frieze at the puppet master's feet incorporates a medley of post-war references, including marching soldiers and motor cars.



Figure 21.

Edward Gordon Craig, Set model, 1921, modelled and painted plaster, 32.4 high x 43 wide x 44 deep cm. Collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (E.146-1922). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 Unported).

Edward Gordon Craig exhibited this set model at the *International Theatre Exhibition* (V&A, 1922), which travelled from Amsterdam on the initiative of the British Drama League. Craig's model demonstrates his method of using massive, vertical blocks to create dramatic contrasts of light and scale. At this point in his career, he was a veteran of European theatre though still prolific—some even complained, monomaniac—in his writing about the stage and how it should change.⁸⁵

[mul]

In the 1930s, the British Drama League published a series of recordings of British dialects, which have become a standard reference for actors and other researchers. The project was symptomatic of the League's interest in promoting regional variety in the theatre, particularly in the work of amateur groups which represented local cultures and communities, rather than the standard training of the major theatre academies.⁸⁶ There is something of the Arts and Crafts Movement in this initiative, as there is with so much of the material in this exhibition—an interest in the vernacular, combined with, and not contradicting, a commitment to cultural internationalism, and underwritten by a politics of peace and preservation.

Footnotes

- 1 Clive Barker, "Theatre and Society: The Edwardian Legacy, the First World War and the Inter-War Years", in Clive Barker and Maggie B. Gale (eds), *British Theatre between the Wars, 1918–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4.
- 2 The plays were "*D*" Company and *Black 'Ell*—both published by Henderson's Bookshop in 1916. His association with the Pioneer Players included their production of his play *The Little White Thought* at the Shaftesbury Theatre, 3 December 1915.
- 3 See Douglas Goldring, *Odd Man Out: The Autobiography of a "Propaganda Novelist"* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1935), 141–142. Constance Malleson, *After Ten Years: A Personal Record* (London: Cape, 1931), 91–128.
- 4 Together with his wife, the actress Constance Malleson, and Norman McDermott; see Eleanor Elder, *Travelling Players: The Story of the Arts League of Service* (London: Frederick Muller, 1939), 4.
- 5 Ros Merkin, "The Religion of Socialism or a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon?: The ILP Arts Guild", in Clive Barker and Maggie B. Gale (eds), *British Theatre between the Wars, 1918–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 162, 165, and 182.
- 6 Morris's publications in these diverse fields included *Skiing Exercises* (1934), *Maternity and Post-Operative Exercises* (1936), and *Basic Physical Training* (1937).
- 7 Margaret Morris, *My Life in Movement* (London: Peter Owen, 1969), 22.
- 8 Josephine Ransom, *Schools of To-Morrow in England* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1919), 128. It is notable that Ransom was a theosophist, and that several of the schools reviewed in her book had links with Theosophy. See Richard Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour: Hélène Vanel, Loïs Hutton & Margaret Morris* (Edinburgh: Golden Hare, 2018), 46.
- 9 Ransom, *Schools of To-Morrow in England*, 131.
- 10 Ransom, *Schools of To-Morrow in England*, 130–131.
- 11 Margaret Morris Movement website, www.margaretmorrismovement.com/about-us/history.
- 12 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 52–59.
- 13 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 53.
- 14 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 43.
- 15 Colin Harding, "Davison, George (1854–1930)", in John Hannavy (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography* (London: CRC Press, 2008), 387.
- 16 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 42; and Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour*, 57.
- 17 Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour*, 59.
- 18 They included Combe Martin (1917, 1918), Harlech (1919, 1921), Dinard (1920), Pourville (1922), and Antibes (through the 1920s). Morris remembers the summer schools in *My Life in Movement*, 41–48.
- 19 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 45; and Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour*, 168–170.
- 20 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 34. The friendship is described also in Alan Crawford, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995), 166.
- 21 Richard Emerson, "The Architect and the Dancer, Margaret Morris, Mackintosh and the South of France", *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Journal* (Spring 2014): 21–31.
- 22 This and other architectural commissions arising from Mackintosh's years in Chelsea are detailed in Thomas Howarth, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 206–215.
- 23 The project and its architectural references are detailed in "M343 Design for a Theatre for Margaret Morris", *Mackintosh Architecture: Context, Making and Meaning*, University of Glasgow, 2014, www.mackintosh-architecture.gla.ac.uk/catalogue/pdf/M343.pdf, accessed 12 March 2019.
- 24 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 57–59.
- 25 Grace Thyrza Kimmins, *Heritage Craft Schools and Hospitals, Chailey, 1903–1948: Being an Account of the Pioneer Work for Crippled Children* (n.p.: Baynard, 1948).
- 26 Lisa J. Pruitt, "The Heritage Craft Schools and Hospitals for Crippled Children", *Hektoen International: A Journal of Medical Humanities* 11, no. 1 (Winter 2017), <https://hekint.org/2017/02/23/3607-2/>.
- 27 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 59.
- 28 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 60. She later called her system Danscript.
- 29 Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour*, *passim*.
- 30 The language was first published by Ogden as *Basic English: A General Introduction with Rules and Grammar* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1930). His work is discussed in W. Terence Gordon, *C.K. Ogden: A Bio-bibliographical Study* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1990); and James McElvenny, *Language and Meaning in the Age of Modernism: C.K. Ogden and his Contemporaries* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).
- 31 Arika Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2009).

- 32 His work with the Margaret Morris Theatre is mentioned in Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 33 and 42; and detailed further in Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour*, passim. With the Plough Club, he was a member of the organising committee, arranged concerts, and contributed his own music (see Plough Club prospectus, 1919, E.O. Hoppé Estate Collection, Pasadena, CA). He served on the Council of the Arts League of Service, as stated in Eleanor Elder, *Travelling Players: The Story of the Arts League of Service* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1939), 263.
- 33 Gary Higginson, review of *Goossens: Orchestral Works* (Chandos, 2013), *Music Web International*, 13 July 2013, www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2013/july13/Goossens_orchestral_v2_CHSAS119.htm, accessed 21 January 2019.
- 34 Constance Smedley, *Crusaders: The Reminiscences of Constance Smedley (Mrs Maxwell Armfield)* (London: Duckworth, 1929), 216.
- 35 Maxwell Armfield, "My World and I—the Cotswolds and London in War" (unpublished, 1970), 52, Tate Archive: TGA 976/3/2/10.
- 36 Maxwell Armfield, *An Artist in America* (London: Methuen, 1925), 10.
- 37 Constance Smedley, letter to Heddie Gardiner, 4 December 1916, collection of Nichola Gordon Bowe. American internationalism is discussed also in Smedley, *Crusaders*, 226; and Armfield, *An Artist in America*, 3.
- 38 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 229–230. Her retellings of these stories were published as a series of articles in *The Christian Science Monitor* and *Women's Magazine*, illustrated by Armfield.
- 39 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 233–246. Nicola Gordon Bowe, "Constance and Maxwell Armfield: An American Interlude 1915–1922", *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 14 (Autumn 1989), 6.
- 40 Their embroideries were exhibited at the galleries of the National Society of Craftsmen in New York and at the Palace of Art, San Francisco. Brinton organised two exhibitions of Armfield's painting at the Arlington Galleries, New York, the first in early 1917. See Gordon Bowe, "Constance and Maxwell Armfield", 21. For Brinton's career, see Andrew J. Walker, "Critic, Curator, Collector: Christian Brinton and the Exhibition of National Modernism in America, 1910–1945" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1999).
- 41 Maxwell Armfield, "My Approach to Art", in A.A. Ballard and E. Ogborn (eds), *Maxwell Armfield 1881–1972* (Southampton: Southampton Art Gallery, 1978), n.p.
- 42 Armfield, *An Artist in America*, 30.
- 43 John Michell, "Dynamic Symmetry in the Work of Maxwell Armfield", *Maxwell Armfield 1881–1972* (Southampton: Oak Knoll, 1978).
- 44 Constance Smedley and Maxwell Armfield both give accounts of their collaboration with Lee in their memoirs, which are broadly, though not entirely, consistent with each other. Smedley, *Crusaders*, 223; and Armfield, "My World and I", 49–52.
- 45 The address, no. 13, is given on the heading of letters from Constance Smedley to family and friends in Britain, now in the collection of Nicola Gordon Bowe.
- 46 Armfield, *An Artist in America*, 12.
- 47 Edward McKnight Kauffer, letter to Maxwell Armfield, [n.d., but internal evidence suggests 1917 as the letter mentions Armfield's article "Domesticated Mural Painting", *The Countryside Magazine and Suburban Life* (February 1917)], Tate Archive: TGA 976.
- 48 Armfield, "My Approach to Art".
- 49 Constance Smedley, "The Cover Design", *The Mother's Magazine* 12, no. 3 (March 1917), 287.
- 50 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 229. Smedley mentions their New York exhibition in a letter to Heddie Gardiner, 4 December 1916, collection of Nicola Gordon Bowe. She studies embroidery and decoration with May Newall and May Morris; see Gordon Bowe, "Constance and Maxwell Armfield", 9). Exhibitions by the National Society of Craftsmen took place at the National Arts Club Galleries, 119 East 19 Street.
- 51 Ted Shawn (ed.), *Ruth St Denis, Pioneer and Prophet, being a History of her Cycle of Oriental Dances* (San Francisco, CA: John Howell, 1920), 83–85. Smedley, *Crusaders*, 245.
- 52 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 236.
- 53 Armfield, *An Artist in America*, 4 and 27–37. For theories of language and design in the Arts and Crafts, see Morna O'Neill, *Walter Crane: The Arts and Crafts, Painting, and Politics, 1875–1890* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
- 54 Armfield, *An Artist in America*, 9 and 18.
- 55 Armfield, *An Artist in America*, 57.
- 56 "To bring the Arts into Everyday Life" was subtitled to "Arts League of Service". The commitment to aesthetic unity was outlined by Laurence Binyon in *The Arts League of Service Bulletin* (1920) and quoted in the front matter of subsequent editions. The League's inaugural meeting is described in Eleanor Elder, *Travelling Players: The Story of the Arts League of Service* (London: Frederick Muller, 1939), 7.
- 57 There was a socialist underpinning to the work of the ALS. See Elder, *Travelling Players*, 4 and 10. The ambition to bring art to the people is highlighted in *The Times*, 2 May 1919, 7. Paul Nash, "The Arts League of Service", *New Witness*, 23 May 1919, 72.
- 58 James Fox, *British Art and the First World War, 1914–1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 149.

- 59 This list is drawn from Elder, *Travelling Players*, 5; Martin Hopkinson, "The Arts League of Service in London, 1919–1928", *Print Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (June 2013), 180; and the catalogue for the *Arts League of Service Exhibition of Practical Arts*, 17 November–6 December (London: Twenty-One Gallery, 1919). Hopkinson notes that the *Practical Arts* exhibition features Wadsworth's woodcuts made for John Rodker's Ovid Press—another Chelsea connection. Other notable ALS exhibitions included a group show of work by W.S. Murray, Cedric Morris, Frank Dobson, Marion Dorn, Ossip Zadkine, and Duncan Grant (1924) and a retrospective of Kauffer's posters (1925), both at 60 Gower Street.
- 60 For an account of ALS activities in the field of the visual arts, see Hopkinson, "The Arts League of Service in London".
- 61 Elder, *Travelling Players*, 13, 15, and 60.
- 62 Elder, *Travelling Players*, 13.
- 63 Elder, *Travelling Players*, 58, quoting the *Morning Post*; "The ALS Travelling Theatre", *Hendon & Finchley Times*, 15 January 1926, 9; *Travelling Players*, 21, quoting the *Westminster Gazette*. For a recent reimaging of the ALS, see *Players and Gentlemen* (2012), a play by Frank Hatt.
- 64 Elder, *Travelling Players*, 2. She states that the Travelling Theatre programme included "*Columbine's Choice*, a ballet-trio of the Pierrot-Harlequin type, that I had previously produced in India", Elder, *Travelling Players*, 31.
- 65 For the cultural history of Theosophy, see the research project *Enchanted Modernities: Theosophy, Modernism and the Arts, c. 1875–1960*, History of Art Research Portal, University of York, <https://hoaportal.york.ac.uk/hoaportal/enchanted-modernities.jsp>; and Christine Ferguson and Andrew Radford, *The Occult Imagination in Britain, 1875–1947* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018). Margaret Morris and her mother were both members of the Theosophical Society. There were close connections between the Margaret Morris School and the Garden City Theosophical School (renamed the Arundale School), and both were promoted by the leading Theosophist, Josephine Ransom. See Richard Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour: Hélène Vanel, Loïs Hutton & Margaret Morris* (Edinburgh: Golden Hare, 2018), 46. Elder mentions that there was a Theosophists circle within the Arts League of Service; see *Travelling Players*, 8. The Theosophist Daniel Nicol Dunlop was member of the Plough Club. The connections between Theosophy and the circle of W.B. Yeats are explored in Helena Capková, "The Hawk Princess at the Hawk's Well: Neo-Noh and the Idea of a Universal Japan", in Charlotte Ashby et al. (eds), *Imagined Cosmopolis: Internationalism and Cultural Exchange, 1870s–1920s* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019).
- 66 "On the Watch-Tower", *The Theosophist: A Magazine of Brotherhood, Oriental Philosophy, Art, Literature and Occultism* 39, no. 1 (March 1918), 594. The event is described also in "Greek Dancing at Adyar", *Adyar Bulletin* (1918): 56–61. Elder published an article promoting Margaret Morris dancing: "Movement, and the Culture of Expression", *The Theosophist* (March 1918): 616–631, which was revised as *Dance: A National Art* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1918). Both publications are illustrated with photographs of her students striking Margaret Morris poses.
- 67 Elder, *Travelling Players*, 7, and throughout for an account of ALS tours.
- 68 Elder, *Travelling Players*, 11, 30, 64, and 84.
- 69 *Bulletin of the Arts League of Service* (1920): 1–3.
- 70 For the housing problem, see Eleanor Elder, *Travelling Players*, 6. For the siting of these developments, see the catalogue entry: "M339 Design for a block of studios and studio-flats, Chelsea, London", *Mackintosh Architecture: Context, Making and Meaning*, www.mackintosh-architecture.gla.ac.uk.
- 71 Elder, *Travelling Players*, 5.
- 72 On the modernity of the Arts League of Service, see Fox, *British Art and the First World War*, 150. Goossens lecture was published as a pamphlet: *Modern Tendencies in Music* (London: Arts League of Service, 1919).
- 73 His role in the production of the book is recounted by Maxwell Armfield, "My World and I—the Cotswolds and London in War" (unpublished, 1970), 49–50, Tate Archive: TGA 976/3/2/10.
- 74 For the campaign for a National Theatre see Simon Callow, Helen Osborne, and Trevor Nunn, *The National* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1997). Whitworth tells his own story in *The Making of a National Theatre* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951).
- 75 *Drama: A Magazine of the Theatre and Allied Arts* (July 1919), inside back cover and 22.
- 76 Edward Gordon Craig, *The Art of the Theatre* (Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1905). The League's library incorporated Craig's personal collection, see E. Martin Browne, "The British Drama League", *Education Theatre Journal* 5, no. 3 (October 1953), 204. Whitworth's declaration of the "Objects of the League" at its opening meeting is given in *Drama*, 22.
- 77 Geoffrey Whitworth, *The Theatre of My Heart* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), 14.
- 78 Daniel Rosenthal, *The National Theatre Story* (London: Oberon Books, 2013), 34.
- 79 Armfield remembered that "Geoffrey was one of [the Clarissa Club's] most enthusiastic admirers, as of ours"; see Armfield, "My World and I", 42.
- 80 In 1906, Whitworth secured his first editorial job at *The Burlington Magazine*, which had been co-founded in 1903 by Roger Fry, the artist and critic at the centre of the Bloomsbury group (see Fry's portrait of Whitworth below for their ongoing connection). As Editor to Chatto & Windus, Whitworth commissioned work by the Bloomsbury writers Lytton Strachey and Clive Bell, while Gilbert Cannan and E.M. Forster, also associated with the group, wrote for his magazine *The Open Window*.

- ⁸¹ The League's statutes included a commitment to: "undertake a research into theatrical movements and activities in Foreign countries. For this purpose a continual supply of Foreign literature bearing on subject will be secured, and arrangements will be made for correspondents in the principal cities of the world. It is hoped also, by means of these correspondents and otherwise, to promote a greater interest in good British plays on the Continent and elsewhere." *Drama: A Magazine of the Theatre and Allied Arts* (July 1919), front matter.
- ⁸² Geoffrey Whitworth, *Theatre in Action* (London: The Studio, 1938), 11. Whitworth's various internationalising projects are discussed in F.S. Boas, "The British Drama League and Its Founder", *Drama the Quarterly Theatre Review* 23 (Winter 1951): 14–16; and recorded in his file in the Bristol Theatre Collection (Mander and Mitchenson Collection). His *Who Was Who* entry (2007) notes his work for the Universal Society of the Theatre, and for UNESCO.
- ⁸³ See the V&A catalogue entry, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O37609/geoffrey-whitworth-painting-fry-roger-eliot/>, accessed 24 December 2018.
- ⁸⁴ Boas, "The British Drama League and Its Founder", 15.
- ⁸⁵ Paul Nash complained of Craig's "monomania" in a letter to Gordon Bottomley, 20 March 1924, in Claude Colleer Abbott and Anthony Bertram (eds), *Poet and Painter: Being the Correspondence between Gordon Bottomley and Paul Nash, 1910–1946* (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1955), 177.
- ⁸⁶ Browne, "The British Drama League", 206.

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