

The Royal Pavilion & Museums **Review**

1994 Number 1

The iconography of wealth & privilege: a portrait of Mary Tourle (1775-1846) of Preston Manor

Gulbenkian Award for the Booth Museum

A new look at old faces: the story of the town's civic portraits

Fossil insects in amber

Laurence Scarfe 1914-1993

With a little help from our Friends

Chinese puppets in the collections of Brighton Museum & Art Gallery



THE ICONOGRAPHY OF WEALTH & PRIVILEGE: A PORTRAIT OF MARY TOURLE (1775-1846) OF LEWES AT PRESTON MANOR

*Kay Diggins,
Education Assistant, Preston Manor*

As one gazes around the grand and imposing entrance hall of Preston Manor, it is difficult to ignore the three large family portraits which dominate the eastern end. Pausing to admire these works it is easy to overlook the comparatively small and, perhaps, rather dowdy portrait of Mary Tourle of Lewes which hangs between those of Lady Thomas-Stanford and her half-sister Diana (Fig.1). Mary became the second wife of William Stanford in 1802, and bore him seven children (Beevers, 1992). Aside from these few facts, little information has been discovered about her life, or about the history of this painting. Nevertheless, overshadowed as it may be, this single portrait says as much about its particular circumstances of production,

as the more eye-catching, and more readily identifiable tributes to the wealth and social importance of the Stanfords, which surround it.

William Stanford (1764-1841) acquired Preston Manor in 1794. His family had been tenant farmers throughout Sussex for over 400 years, and were connected with the manor farm from 1758. Thus at the age of thirty William found himself to be the lord of the manor and a very wealthy man. In 1808, he was appointed High Sheriff, a position of great honour, which indicates the status which the Stanford family had been able to attain in such a short period of time (Beevers, 1992). It is not surprising, therefore, that William thought it appropriate to commission portraits of himself and his wife, in order to proclaim their standing within the local community. Many well-to-do families recorded important family events such as marriages, births and deaths in this way, and that might also include prestigious civic appointments (Lippencott, 1983). Examining Mary's costume, it seems likely that the portrait



Fig. 1 English School, Mary Tourle.

was painted late in the 1820s, when she and her husband were firmly established at Preston Manor. The portrait would seem to express the Stanfords' confidence, as well as their immense social success. However, the fact that the painter remains anonymous is perhaps rather problematic.

It was possible to gain a degree of social eclat if one commissioned a well-known and currently fashionable portrait painter. Through his reputation, a family that had only recently climbed the social ladder might enjoy the distinction of their painting being issued from the same studio that had produced works currently hanging in the homes of more illustrious patrons. The consideration that an artist's reputation

reflected the importance of the sitter may lay, in part at least, behind the choice of Sir William Orpen or Sir James Jebusa Shannon for the later portraits of Sir Charles Thomas-Stanford and Diana Macdonald. Yet, the fact that Mary Tourle's portrait was not commissioned of a known artist, does not necessarily reflect adversely upon her social standing: it suggests rather that Mr and Mrs William Stanford expected their portraits to achieve a very different set of ends to those of subsequent generations.

It would have been a simple task to find a suitable artist for the job. Many critics of the day noted, often with disdain, that portrait painting was a flourishing business, both in London and fashionable provincial centres such as Bath and Brighton. In the ten years between 1824 and 1833 for example, portraits outnumbered all other categories of painting exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions on all but one occasion (Denvir, 1984). In 1846, Thackeray commented upon 'those geniuses who frequent the thoroughfares of the town' who

made a living from copying old masters and reproducing their style in numerous cheap portraits. While the hordes who flocked to these journeymen painters required flattery and demanded: 'to have their coat, waistcoat, and breeches, their muslin dresses, silks, sophas, and settees ... all that belongs to them, and nothing else painted', the swift fluctuations of public opinion would rapidly condemn such superficial images to 'the domain of the absurd' (Thackeray, 1841). Mary Tourle's portrait appears to bear this problem of balancing fashion and posterity very much in mind.

Dressed in sombre black, the subject wears a high-waisted gown with the rounded shoulders and puffed leg of mutton sleeves popular at this time. Mary also wears the wide-brimmed hat trimmed with ostrich feathers seen frequently in the works of Sir Thomas Lawrence. In 1827 Lawrence exhibited *Lady Peel* at the Royal Academy. The sitter was the wife of Sir Robert Peel, who had bought Rubens's portrait of *Susanna Fourment*, also known as the *Chapeau de Paille*, in 1822. This portrait was the apparent inspiration for Lawrence's picture.

The painting of *Susanna Fourment* (Fig. 2) appealed to the taste for historical masquerade costume known as 'Van Dyck' dress, which had developed during the eighteenth century, and which used another portrait by Rubens as its source (Fig. 3). This picture was owned at the time by Sir Horace Walpole, and was believed to depict Rubens's second wife Helene. It was also thought to have been painted, not by Rubens, but by Van Dyck himself. The costumes which evolved from this painting in particular were loosely based upon seventeenth-century dress and appeared in various forms in hundreds of portraits of the later eighteenth century (Cherry & Harris, 1982). The extent to which the popularity of Rubens's work still prevailed in the nineteenth century may be seen in the carefully selected details and accessories, such as hats, necklaces, cuffs and collars, to be found in many fashionable works of the time. Moreover, the arrival of the *Chapeau de Paille* in England in 1823 caused such a sensation that crowds of reputedly tens of thousands thronged the Old Bond Street area of London, where the painting was on public display for a half crown admission (W. T. Whitley, 1973). Thus, it would not be surprising if



Fig. 2 Sir Peter Rubens, *Susanna Fourment*. The portrait is also known as the *Chapeau de Paille*.

Mary Tourle had insisted upon references to such an important cultural event, in order to assert how up to date she was. To this end, perhaps, it is possible to trace other influences which remind the on-looker of works such as Ingres's *Marcotte de Sainte Marie* (1826) (Fig. 4) or Sir Martin Archer Shee's *Elizabeth, Duchess of Rutland* (c.1820) (Fig. 5), in which each subject sports voluminous sleeves, drawn close at the wrist, and toys with an eye-glass on a chain which, draped across the breast, catches the viewer's attention with its large gilded links. While it is possible to connect this portrait with certain high-fashion trends and conventions operating during the first decades of the nineteenth century, there are, however, other incongruities which suggest another tradition, which had no relation to the fripperies and transience of fashion. These elements, expressed in the muted colour scheme, the flattening of pictorial space, and Mary's striking white collar and cuffs, all suggest a much older style of painting. The quotations from Rubens (as we have seen, the painter of the *Chapeau de Paille* was supposed for a long time to have been Van Dyck), add to the antiquarian feel of this image, particularly when we remember the fairly loose interpretation of historical costume which was normal practice (Ribeiro, 1975). Many of Lawrence's ladies have frilly collars to their high-necked dresses, which to us seem to belong completely to the early nineteenth century, yet as Aileen Ribeiro points out in her description of Lawrence's *Lady Wigram*, the subject would have considered such detail as sufficiently historically correct to evoke Elizabethan costume (Ribeiro, 1986).

Ribeiro also notes that this trend was soon to wane, although other art historians, such as David Piper, consider its impact to have lasted throughout the nineteenth century (Piper, 1957). Certainly Mary Tourle's portrait resembles the effigies of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods described by Piper, and the Stanfords' use of the format belongs to this older iconographic tradition of presenting the subject as a symbol of rank and power.

As a relatively new family the Stanfords did not have the sense of traditional wealth and status enjoyed by those houses which possessed large collections of family portraits: they could not remind visitors to Preston Manor of their illustrious

heritage. Some patrons might choose to 'fill in the gaps' by commissioning imaginary likenesses of long-deceased forebears, or highlighting family connections by purchasing, and if necessary renaming, portraits already in existence (as did Lady Thomas-Stanford in collecting paintings of the Cavendish family who were related to her first husband, Vere Fane-Benett) (Robinson, 1986; Beevers, 1992). Others, like Mary Tourle appeared in costume which suggested that the family could trace itself back to Tudor times. Such a portrait was designed to blend in with existing works in the family gallery and would, therefore, attempt, to a certain extent, to eschew tell-tale signs of contemporary dress. In addition, if we consider the fact that a copy of Holbein's *Anne of Cleves* had been in the house since 1788, it would perhaps lend a

degree of authenticity to the association with Henry VIII's wife, which the family liked to foster, if family members were portrayed in a sympathetic style. It might also give the subject an appearance suitable for the founding generation of what might become a new Sussex dynasty. In this respect, the portrait of Mary Tourle can be treated as looking both backwards to an imagined past, and forwards to a possible future. Arguably these hopes were achieved, if we look at Lady Thomas-Stanford's portrait, in which a very strong family resemblance is clear, both women being of a similar age.

The portrait also demonstrates the importance of presenting an elegant face, which exudes an aura of superiority and dominance. Images such as *Mary Tourle* elevate the subject out of the normal conditions of existence, transforming the outward aspect into a symbol of wealth, social position, achievement, and even ambition. The surface of the painting is treated as if it were a heraldic device; a public declaration of family pride, rather than an exploration of an individual's personality (Chirelstein, 1990). In addition to this submergence of the sitter's character, the presence of the artist is carefully excluded: we do not need to know his identity in order to understand or



Fig. 3 Sir Peter Rubens, Susanna Fourment. This picture was widely believed to be a portrait of Rubens's second wife, Helene, by Van Dyck.

appreciate this work, for we are invited to regard this image as a testament to Mary Tourle's power over us in this house and, through her husband, in the wider community, not as a representation of the painter's personal view of the subject before him. With the artist's role kept so firmly subservient to his patron in this way, it would seem that the Stanfords' ability to command extended even as far as the creative process undertaken in this commission. The commonly accepted divisions and relationships around which a portrait is constructed do not therefore seem to apply here. However, a further study of the portrait in its present location will show that within the confines of the Preston Manor estate, in private life, normal relations exist between master and servant, husband and wife.

If we compare Mary's portrait with that of her husband, it is clear that she conforms to the feminine ideal of the demure and self-contained matriarch. While both images tend to flatten the depth of pictorial space in order to suggest an archaic style, Mary is pushed forward out towards the viewer and the household of which she is in control, while her husband is not constrained in this manner. Wearing more strikingly colourful attire, and a formal powdered wig rather than his own hair, his implied intercourse with the world of public affairs is further suggested by the inkstand beside him and the opening of the background on to a suggested landscape behind. For William Stanford the realms of public and private are divided merely by a flexible curtain, which billows in the breeze and which, as an important accoutrement of state portraiture, emphasises his civic stature. Mary Tourle, however, is firmly fixed within the confines of this interior space, within which she controls the interplay of symbols and meanings - indeed, as far as her portrait is concerned, the world which is glimpsed from around the edges of this image is a blank wall, confining her movement inside the frame, just as the limits of decorous wifely behaviour confine her on the outside.

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Fig. 4 J.A.D. Ingres, *Marcotte de Sainte Marie*, 1826.



Fig. 5 Sir Martin Archer Shee, *Elizabeth, Duchess of Rutland*.

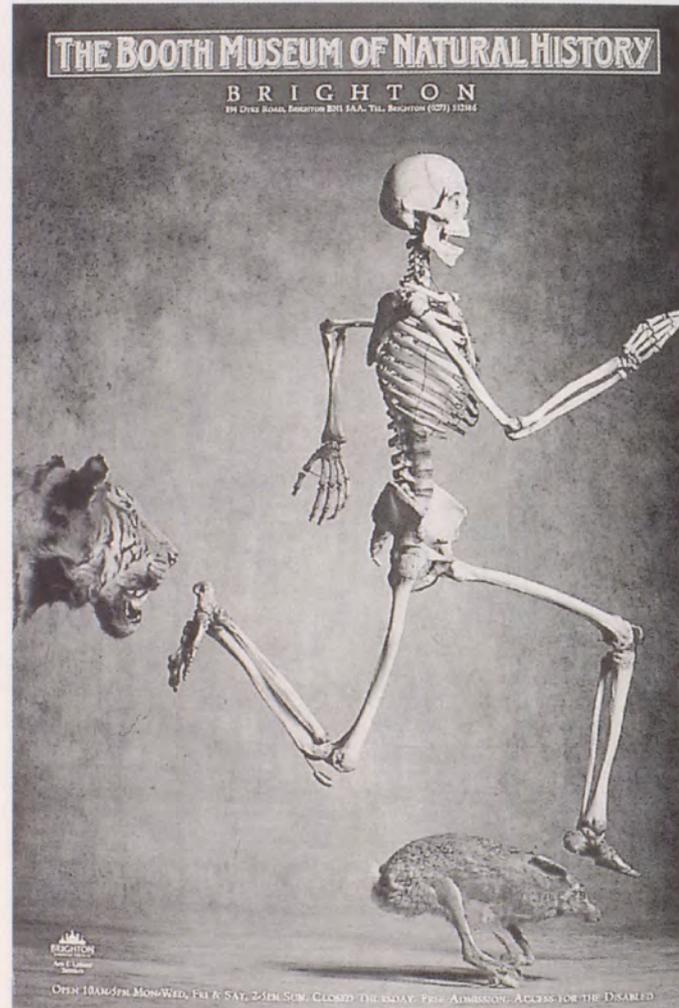
GULBENKIAN AWARD FOR THE BOOTH MUSEUM

The Booth Museum has won a Gulbenkian Award for Museums and Galleries 1993 in the 'most successful Museum Poster' category. The poster, illustrated right, is the work of Nigel Cunningham, Museum Designer, and photographed by Robin Matthews. 'The Times' columnist, Simon Jenkins, presented Nigel with a certificate and a £250 cheque at a ceremony at The British Museum in October (Fig. 6).

The skeleton, shown in the poster, is rapidly becoming a star in its own right. It recently featured in Roger Bamber's exhibition of press photographs shown sprinting away from its case. That photograph appeared in Life Magazine in 1990 as well as on one of the postcards on sale in the Booth Museum shop. The award-winning poster is also available at the shop. price £2.99



Fig. 6 Simon Jenkins (left) presents the Gulbenkian Award to Nigel Cunningham.



A NEW LOOK AT OLD FACES: THE STORY OF THE TOWN'S CIVIC PORTRAITS

Janet Brough
Royal Pavilion Conservator

Since Brighton Town Hall was completed in 1832, its internal decorations have always included portraits of those connected with the governing of the town. This article looks at how these displays were formed and then altered, reflecting social and political changes.

The first two paintings hung in the Town Hall were also the first two acquired by the town. Paid for by subscription, they were of King William IV and Queen Adelaide who, of course, at that time played an important part in Brighton society through their use of the Pavilion. The representatives of the townspeople commissioned the picture to "manifest their feelings of respect and loyalty to the Royal Personages".

In a letter published in the *Brighton Guardian* on Feb. 8th 1832, Sir Herbert Taylor, in response to a deputation from the town, reported that although their Majesties were happy for the town to have portraits of them, they would rather the paintings were copies of existing portraits as "so much of their time since their accession had been taken up in sitting for portraits that their Majesties wish to be relieved from the necessity of doing so". As to cost - it was stated that "Sir Thomas Lawrence received 300 guineas for each copy, but it is to be supposed Mr Wilkie" (the official court painter) "will not be paid so much.."

In the event, William and Adelaide relented and agreed to sit at Windsor for John Simpson (the artist finally chosen). These large state portraits were hung in the "Great Room" on the second floor of the Town Hall. This room, which was 85 feet long by 35 feet wide and 31 feet high (Anon 1860) was used as a concert hall and assembly room. The print from the *Album de Brighton* (Fig. 7) shows the full length portraits of William and Adelaide, joined by others: between 1835 and 1845 the town acquired portraits of the Earl of Egremont (who was Lord Lieutenant of Sussex), Sir George Brooke Pechell, (a Liberal Member of Parliament for Brighton 1835-

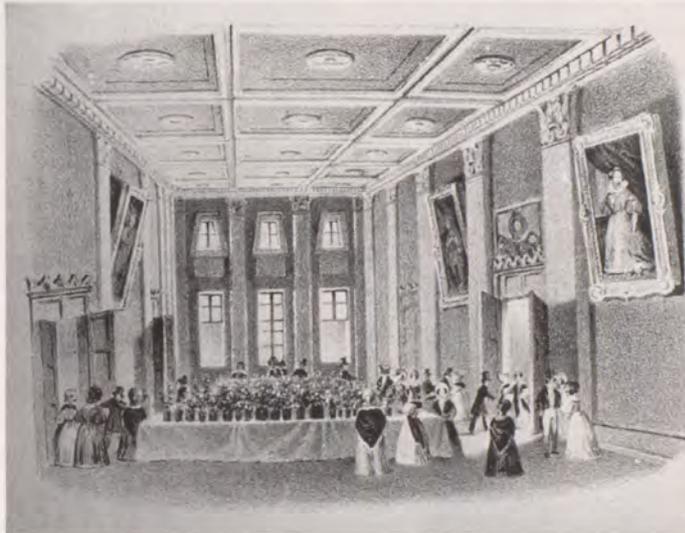


Fig. 7 The Great Room, Brighton Town Hall. From *Album de Brighton 1838 Berthou and Georges, Brighton.* Photo courtesy of Brighton Reference Library.

1860) and the first Marquis of Bristol (a local landowner and benefactor).

These large pictures appear to have left the Town Hall in the 1850s, during which time the town became a corporation: perhaps State portraits were no longer considered appropriate. It may simply have been that they were used to decorate the empty rooms of the Pavilion, now itself a civic building after its purchase by the town in 1850 (Fig. 8).

These large pictures stayed in the Pavilion until the Art Gallery in Church Street was

created; they were then moved to this building and hung in the main gallery until the 'Jazz Age' exhibition in 1968.

Meanwhile their place at the Town Hall was slowly being usurped by the acquisition of smaller and less grandiose portraits of local politicians, for example, Lewis Slight (Fig. 9). These portraits were undoubtedly painted to emphasise the status and influence of these men, yet many of the sitters recognised their duties as well as privileges, and were well-known for their philanthropy and generosity, motivated by a sense of civic pride in their growing town. Mayor Sir John George Blaker, for instance, gave Blaker Park to the town; Mayor Sir John Cordy Burrows (Fig. 10) paid for the laying out of the Steine Gardens; and there are many other examples. The portraits mostly seem to have been gifts. Councillor George Walter Willett gave several, including one of Alderman Joseph Ewart who during his time as a doctor in India had helped to identify the disease typhoid.

These pictures were hung on the landings of the Town Hall, which were created during the internal remodelling of the building in 1899: the Great Room disappeared, its functions having been superseded by the Pavilion and the Dome which were "easier of approach" (Erridge 1863). After the Edwardian period, however, few new mayoral portraits were added to the collection owing partly, no doubt, to the rise of photography. Among those we have are portraits of Alderman Margaret Hardy, the first woman Mayor, and Alderman Car-

den, who was responsible for the town purchasing a good deal of downland around the town. Both paintings were at the Town Hall until a civic display was created in the museum. Nevertheless other portraits continued to hang in the Town Hall until the last major redecorations of the mid 1980s, when they were all removed.

Earlier this year, a coherent group of these civic portraits was hung on the top landing of the Town Hall. These enhance the building's late Victorian interior, and at the same time bring to life some of the names familiar to us from our streets and parks.. the individuals who helped to create the town as we know it today.

In the 1990s, grand oils of those responsible for the town today would perhaps be out of place. However, local politicians, as providers of services to the community, should be approachable, however, and it helps to "put a face to a name". So, the tradition of portraiture in the Town Hall lives on, even if it is only in the small colour photographs of our present councillors in the entrance hall!

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Fig. 8 Detail from 'North-East view of Brighton from the top of the old church.' Lithographed by J. Newman, Watling Street, London. Circa 1850 (Ford 48c).



Fig. 9 Lewis Slight. Artist unknown (A.C.T.) Painting given in 1873 by Hugh Saunders, Clerk to the Town Commissioners for twenty-seven years. He negotiated the purchase of the Pavilion for the Town. He resigned in 1854, as he did not support the incorporation of the town.



Fig. 10 Cordy Burrows, Artist Unknown. Mayor in 1857, 1858 and 1872. He paid for the Steine Gardens to be laid out, and was also responsible for the library of the Brighton Literary and Scientific Institution being donated to form the basis of the Public Library.

FOSSIL INSECTS IN AMBER

John Cooper

Keeper of the Booth Museum and Keeper of Geology

The Booth Museum of Natural History is fortunate to have been offered a collection of over 300 amber pieces containing some 700 fossilised insects collected from Kaliningrad, on the Baltic shore of Russia. The required price of £2000 has been generously provided by the Friends of The Royal pavilion and the Science Museum's fund for the Preservation of Industrial and Scientific Material. The collection arrived in Brighton in December and is currently being catalogued prior to the best specimens being photographed. A display of some of this material will be mounted at the Booth Museum during Spring of this year.

Amber is the fossilised resin exuded by pine trees and is known from rocks as old as 130 million years, though most, including this material from the Baltic, is considerably younger - around 40 million. Inclusions in amber - especially insects - have a special appeal. Such is the perfection of preservation of fossil flora and fauna in amber that good pieces are the prized possessions of layman and specialist alike (Figs. 11, 12). Most recently, in the highly successful film, *Jurassic Park*, fossil mosquitoes in amber provided the dinosaur blood from which DNA was extracted for dinosaur cloning - an implausible



Fig. 11 Two examples of *Dolichopus*, otherwise known as the Long-legged fly.



Fig. 12 A fine example of a Crane fly.

but highly entertaining scenario!

Over the last few years, the Booth Museum has developed considerable expertise in the study of fossil insects and has already acquired collections of considerable scientific importance. Of greatest significance are insects from Wealden rocks (135 million years old) collected from Sussex and Surrey. About 400 such specimens have been registered, with many more awaiting sorting and processing by voluntary assistance. Many have already been published in both scientific and popular literature. This field of research is maintained by locally-based scientists, including one who is employed on contract to this Museum as a geological surveyor, and registered as a PhD student studying Wealden insects. Specimens obtained for this study are automatically entering our collections. Other researchers from farther afield are also consulting our collections, including the world-renowned school of fossil insect specialists in the Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia. It is from this source that the present collection of amber originates. Once in Brighton, this collection will provide a continuing source of interest for the public and will be a very valuable comparative resource for future scientific work.

LAURENCE SCARFE 1914-1993

Stella Beddoe

Keeper of Decorative Art, Museum & Art Gallery

Although Laurence Scarfe spent the greater part of his varied working life in London, as lecturer at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, mural painter and freelance designer, illustrator and writer, he was from 1971 until his retirement, Senior Lecturer in Art History at Brighton Polytechnic. While in Brighton he became familiar with the collection of modern decorative art and design at Brighton Museum and the intention to establish an archive of twentieth-century design material to complement the display. In 1983 he very generously donated to Brighton a large number

of original designs, sketchbooks, printed matter and photographs related to all aspects of his career.

In 1991 he suffered a severe stroke from which he made a gradual but incomplete recovery. On 2nd June, 1993, he was sufficiently well to pay a day visit to Brighton in the company of his nurse and his daughter, Caroline Dear. Stella Beddoe spent a fascinating afternoon with Mr Scarfe showing him the contents of the design archive he had donated in 1983, which he was delighted to see again. He died a month later on 4th July.



Fig. 13 Laurence Scarfe. Printed cover design for *The Saturday Book* 1946.



Fig. 14 Laurence Scarfe. Detail of design for the Maze Bar at the Royal Garden Hotel, Kensington 1965. Photo: Nicholas Sinclair.



Fig. 15 Stella Beddoe with Laurence Scarfe at Brighton Museum 2 June.



Fig. 16 Laurence Scarfe. Vignette for The Saturday Book c.1945. Photo: Nicholas Sinclair.

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

Lucy Morrison
Museums Development Officer

Regency seating in the gardens

Very generous donors have sponsored period-style benches which will be installed in the Pavilion Gardens. Camilla Dinkel has given a bench in memory of her late husband, John Dinkel, Keeper of the Royal Pavilion from 1974 to 1989. Bridget Westerman, Beatrice Gill and Benjamin Bradley have donated a bench in memory of their father, Roy Bradley, who was Decorative Artist of the Royal Pavilion from 1946 to 1976. Mrs Elsa Worrall has given a bench in memory of her late husband, Clifford Worrall, who was the Chief Administrator of Brighton General and Bevendean Hospitals from 1951 to 1975, and who also served for many years as a local magistrate. George Kaviraj Dowden and Nancy Annie Dowden have given a bench. Mr. Basil Pegler has given a bench in memory of Peggy Chapple, who enjoyed the Pavilion Gardens on her many visits to Brighton.

George Walton: Designer and Architect

The exhibition preview on Wednesday November 3rd was a great success. Almost two hundred people came to the



Fig. 17 Guests and Museum staff at the preview of the George Walton exhibition. l to r: Albert Gallichan, long-time Friend and supporter of the Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums; Stella Beddoe, Keeper of Decorative Art; Andrew Barlow, Keeper of Fine Art; and Cllr. Andy Durr, Vice-Chair, Arts & Leisure Services Committee, Brighton Borough Council.



Fig. 18 George Walton Scott, in front of a picture of his grandfather, George Walton.

evening event. We were joined by six members of the Walton family, together with friends and family representing two of Walton's patrons, Rowntree and Davison. We were also honoured to have with us Margaret Hall, Head of Design at the British Museum, and Perilla Kinchon, author and Director of White Cockade Publishing.

We are very grateful to the Friends of the Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums for their invaluable support, without which we would not have been able to host the only English venue of this major survey of George Walton's life and work.

The sounds of Oscar Petersen jazzed up the private preview thanks to the excellent stereo system provided by Powerplant Ltd, Brighton (775978).

Exquisite floral arrangements were provided by Wendy Kelly, who has kindly offered to donate to the Museum ten percent of any purchases from her Kemp Town or Lewes florist shops (93 St Georges Rd, Kemp Town, 609063; 85 High St, Lewes, 480822). Please help us to encourage other businesses to support the Royal Pavilion and Museums by taking advantage of this generous offer. Just mention the Brighton Museum when you call or visit.

CHINESE PUPPETS IN THE COLLECTIONS OF BRIGHTON MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

Anthony Shelton

*Keeper of Non-Western Art and Anthropology and
Research Fellow in Museum Ethnography, University of Sussex*



Fig. 19 Chao Chou horizontal stick puppets. 19th century.

Until recently, the Department of Non-Western Art and Anthropology's puppet collections were restricted to Javanese shadow puppets and British glove puppets. Some of the latter were shown in the 1985 exhibition, *Comedy Characters, Harlequin, Punch and Pierrot in England*, but the remainder were deemed to be too fragile for display.

In 1991, the Museum organised a highly popular exhibition that compared Asian and European puppet traditions, *Epic, Dream, Satire: Puppet Theatre*. Although most of the 230 puppets in the exhibition were borrowed from other museums and private collections around the country, the show's success encouraged the Department to build up its own collections in this area. Various benefactors from Brighton, Hove, and Lewes made donations of puppets, the Department itself purchased other examples from Burma, India, Java and Nepal and, through the generous support of the Friends and a matching grant from the Museums and Galleries Commission Purchase Fund, was also able to acquire a rare collection of Chinese horizontal stick puppets (Chao Chou) which will soon be placed on permanent display. The Department now has ten extremely fine Chinese stick puppets (Figs. 19, 20), each wearing exquisitely embroidered costumes and fine hats, in addition to ten larger Fukienese glove puppets (Figs. 21, 22) of similar artistic merit that are on extended loan from Louise Tythacott.

The use of puppets in China is of considerable antiquity and was until recently, intimately related to Buddhist and Daoist religious and magical beliefs and practices. On mainland China, the Maoists having suppressed most of these ancient associations, have re-directed puppet theatre towards the production of secular plays and propaganda. Paradoxically, in modern Taiwan, and to a much lesser extent in Hong Kong, puppets have retained their ancient religious significance and are still used in popular temple rituals.

Carved wooden articulated figures (known as 'Yong'), forerunners of later puppets, have been found in tombs of the Zhou Dynasty (1027-256B.C.) and may have been buried to assist the journey of the soul through the underworld by warding off evil spirits. The oldest type of puppets proper, dating to the Han Dynasty (202 BC - AD220) were leather shadow puppets that are still found in many parts of China today. String puppets or marionettes date only to the Tang Dynasty (618-906), and rod and glove puppets were developed later still during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

Early historical sources repeatedly mention the ability of puppets to create confusion between inanimate material and living beings. In one tale, a court magician Shao Weng tried to reconcile the emperor Han Wudi over the death of Le Furen, his favourite concubine, by promising to return her to

life. Shao Weng bade the emperor to go to his chambers, where he had erected a paper screen. Hiding behind the screen, the sorcerer manipulated a leather cut-out of the emperor's lover. For a time, Shao Weng brought happiness to the emperor, but then one night when he reached out to try to touch his lover, she suddenly disappeared and the puppet master was discovered behind the screen. In another story, an emperor is said to have threatened to cut off the head of a puppeteer because his actors winked at the court ladies. Only by breaking the puppets in two did he persuade the emperor that they were not made of flesh and blood and thereby saved his own life.

The ability of puppets to pass for living people led Buddhist and Daoist priests to use them to fool malevolent spirits and ghosts. As soon as an evil spirit was tricked into entering such a vessel, it was cast away or destroyed by fire. Alternatively, it may be preserved to imprison the spirit or kicked and hit to punish it for its unwelcome affrontery. In a ninth century tale translated by the eminent sinologist Jan de Groot, a story is told of an expert exorcist, Ts'uen-Ts'ing, who was called to cure the daughter of a certain tradesman. The woman had been infected by an evil spirit who made her laugh and cry the whole day and kept her awake screaming at night. Ts'uen-ts'ing made a puppet of twisted straw, dressed it in multi-coloured clothes and put it on an altar to capture the evil spirit. When the spirit returned, it mistook the puppet for the woman whom it had been tormenting and found itself trapped. The exorcist demanded it identified itself. "I am a siao spectre: Some years ago, in spring, I perceived this lady before the temple of the emperor Yu, and settled upon her, so that whenever she moved or rested, she tumbled, her souls

being perturbed. If you let the puppet go, I will pass beyond the borders and never again venture near any spot where smoke of the fires of men is seen". Ts'uen-ts'ing ignored the spirit's plea "...and laid down an earthen jar beside the straw man, and whipped the latter so that it crept into the jar, crying iu, iu, he then folded a strip of paper over the mouth of the jar, wrote a charm and a seal in vermilion ink on the strip, and closed the mouth with cement of six ingredients; and finally he buried it in a mulberry grove". After this the woman recovered.

Similar rites were performed after a person had fallen into the water or tumbled into a sewer, to transfer the malevolent spirit out of the body of the victim and entrap it into a puppet which could then be destroyed. The rite bestowed purity, prosperity, happiness and longevity, and protected victims against further misfortunes.

Chao Chou puppets, like those in the Brighton collection, were used in many of the large elaborate public ceremonies dealing with spirits and other supernaturals. Until relatively recently, they were used in the Hungry Ghost Festival to attract and trap spirits and thereby cleanse the area of their malevolent influences. Similarly, puppet troupes performed their plays at the Ta-chiu Festival in the seventh lunar month and on the fifteenth day of the first moon at the Lantern Festival where street vendors sold dolls, similar in every detail to the puppets but lacking movable limbs and rod attachments (Fig. 23). Couples wishing to have a son or daughter or wanting to find their children suitable marriage partners, bought the appropriate doll and cared for it in their home. Puppet plays were also performed as part of wedding ceremonies where they were thought to promote harmony between the



Fig. 20 Chau Chou horizontal stick puppets. 19th century.

groom and bride.

Since exorcism is a form of purification ceremony, puppets served a similar purpose in all these festivals. The principal difference between cleansing a victim of possession, purifying a betrothal or expelling malevolent spirits from an area, is one of scale and not kind.

The strong connection between Chao Chou puppets and exorcism ceremonies is underlined by the troupes' patron saint Feng huo yuan T'ien yuan shuai who is remembered for having expelled large numbers of spirits and alleviating a major epidemic. Similar connections are still present in Taiwan where Fukienese glove puppets are commonly used in temple ceremonies. Puppets usually include three jesters who represent the gods of theatre and music who not only assist in Daoist exorcism ceremonies, but also act as intermediaries who take messages from humans to the gods.

The Chao Chou puppet theatre, now on the verge of extinction with few troupes in Hong Kong and none on the mainland, and the Taiwanese theatre both perform purification ceremonies before their play opens. The Chao Chou theatre sacrifices a cock and daubs its blood on the stage and the musical instruments which accompany the play. In Taiwan, offerings are made to the jester gods and a ceremony performed to "open the puppets' eyes" and give them a soul so that the performance can take place.

The plays themselves usually have set introductory episodes. In Chao Chou this may often start with the "Birth-day of the Eight Immortals" which is meant to bestow longevity, rank, wealth and fertility on the audience. This is followed by the purification ceremony described above to frighten away evil spirits, and ends with "the Banquet at the

Capital" which congratulates the troupe on its performance. Many of the principal puppet plays are based on operas where themes are drawn from literary or mythical stories which are spoken or sung by the puppeteers.

Close parallels exist between the Chinese puppet theatre and classical opera. Like the face painting used by actors in Chinese opera, the patterns and colours of the puppets' faces represent set emotional and moral qualities that readily identify them with particular personalities. Red is generally associated with courage, loyalty and sincerity, black with impulsiveness and brusqueness (generals and warriors), blue with cruelty, conceit and arrogance (bandits and outlaws), yellow can indicate cunning, but also intelligence and reserved qualities, white is for infamy and treason. Green is usually reserved for devils and demons and brownish-purple for less than courageous educated officials. Gold is used to denote powerful supernaturals, while silver is used for minor gods. The gods of fire and clouds wear symbolic flames and clouds on their faces, while the Justice God's face is painted half black, half brown and has a half moon on his forehead. Hair, moustaches and beards also provide important clues to a character's identity. A well-combed beard signifies an upright gentleman, while a longer and less well-kept beard would denote a rougher character. The complexity of hats and the elaborateness of embroidered costumes disclose a person's status. Only male members of the Imperial household wear yellow costumes with embroidered dragons, while the phoenix motif is reserved for its female members.

According to Helga Werle, who has long studied Chao Chou puppets, the colour conventions are different from those from Fukien described above. White faces express literary or



Fig. 21 Fukienese glove puppets from Taiwan. Late 19th century.



Fig. 22 Fukienese glove puppets from Taiwan. Late 19th century.

elegant males or females, flesh-coloured and rosy faces indicate middle-aged or old people, a white patch on the nose denotes the clown, while a variety of multi-coloured designs identify warriors and fighters.

The history of the two collections of Chinese puppets at Brighton is both contorted and tragic. The Chao Chou puppets were part of a larger set numbering approximately forty found by Gordon Reece Esq in northern Thailand in 1990. The remainder were sold to other buyers in England. The Tythacott collections were also disused and had been sold to a Welsh shopkeeper in Hong Kong where they were found by their present owner. Both sets had been brought out of China, where they had fallen into disuse to be put on sale to foreign dealers.

A complete set of Fukien puppets from Taiwan traditionally consisted of seventy-two interchangeable heads and thirty-two bodies representing the total spirit population in the universe. Chao Chou puppet troupes operating in Hong Kong share about sixty bodies to eighty heads. While it is unfortunate that the Brighton collections cannot boast a total set from either of these regions, because of their rarity, we must feel privileged to have the twenty puppets that the kindness of Friends has entrusted to our keeping.



Fig. 23 Chao Chou dolls sold at popular festivals.

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