



The Hundred Parishes

Introduction to a famous local person . . .

EDWARD BAWDEN (1903 - 1989)

Edward Bawden, CBE, RA, was one of the most influential artists of the 20th century, one of the “Great Bardfield Artists”. His output was prodigious and he was particularly noted for his linocuts, posters and book illustrations.

Bawden was born in Braintree, Essex and studied for a while at the Friends’ School, Saffron Walden. From 1922 to 1925 he attended the Design School of the Royal College of Art in London. There, he met Eric Ravilious who became a lifelong friend and regular collaborator. Their careers and lives followed very similar paths until the death of Ravilious in 1942.

In 1928, Bawden and Ravilious worked for a year painting a mural at Morley College, south London. The college was largely destroyed by bombing during the Second World War. After the college was rebuilt, Bawden returned in the 1960s and completed a series of murals depicting scenes from Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*.

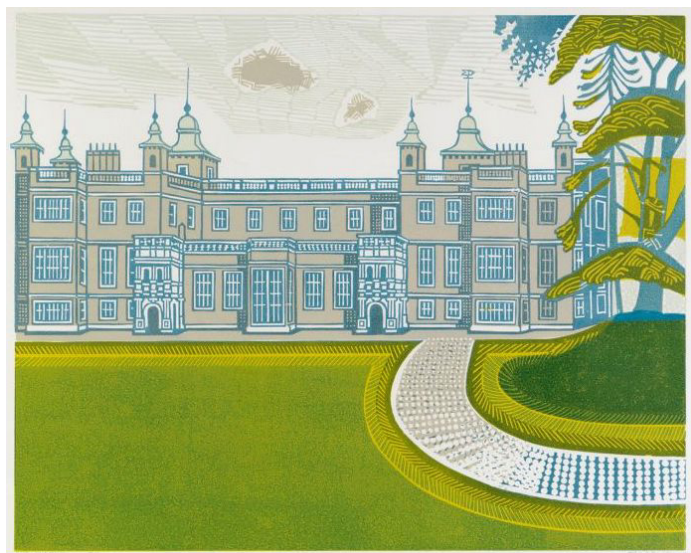
On a cycling expedition into Essex, Bawden and Ravilious came upon the village of Great Bardfield, whose character and inexpensive property appealed to them so much that they rented part of a house together. Ravilious and his wife Tirzah moved from the house after Bawden married Charlotte Epton, a fellow student at the Royal College, and Bawden’s parents bought the house for them as a wedding present. Great Bardfield became the centre of a sizeable community of artists. Bawden lived at Brick House until Charlotte’s death in 1970, when he moved to Saffron Walden and continued to work there until his death in 1989.

Bawden’s early career saw success as a commercial artist, producing illustrations for posters and advertisements for several major businesses including London Transport, Westminster Bank, Shell, Fortnum & Mason and Imperial Airways.

Just like his friend Ravilious, Bawden served as an official war artist. He travelled extensively from 1939 to 1945 around Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, sketching all manner of events, structures and people as required for the war effort.

After the war, Bawden’s great outpouring continued and diversified, with a new focus on lino-cutting and specialisation in book illustrations. His 1949 book *Life in an English Village* featured 16 colour lithographs, illustrating shop interiors and other aspects of social life in Great Bardfield at that time.

He was an important member of the Great Bardfield Artists who attracted thousands of visitors to the village, especially in the 1950s when they staged a series of exhibitions in their own homes. This linocut by Edward Bawden of Audley End House is reproduced by the kind permission of Fry Art Gallery.



Bawden displayed wit and humour in his line drawings and his masthead for the *Observer* newspaper, depicting a puzzled lion and a startled unicorn, was used for 30 years. Today, examples of his work can be seen on tiles on the Victoria Line at London Underground stations – for instance, at Victoria the cameo-style silhouette of Queen Victoria and at Tottenham Hale the image of a ferryman crossing the River Lea.

Edward Bawden was appointed a CBE in 1946, was elected a Royal Academician in 1956 and served as a trustee of London's Tate Gallery from 1951 to 1958.

The Fry Art Gallery in Saffron Walden has a collection of 600 Edward Bawden items, as well as other Great Bardfield and local artists. For more information, see:

www.fryartgallery.org off Castle Street, Saffron Walden, CB10 1BD – 01799 513779.

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