



The Hundred Parishes

Introduction to a famous local person . . .

ERIC RAVILIOUS (1903 – 1942)



Eric William Ravilious had but a short life, yet his prolific and diverse artwork is still visible today, albeit not always identified with him. His best-known works are wood engravings, watercolours of the South Downs, and sketches and paintings as an official war artist.

Ravilious was born in London and grew up in Eastbourne, Sussex. He studied at the Design School of the Royal College of Art in Kensington where he forged a lasting friendship with Edward Bawden, whose career was to follow a similar path. In 1928, they were commissioned to paint a mural at Morley College, south London. After a year's work, the mural was unveiled by the former prime minister Stanley

Baldwin. The work was lost when the college was largely destroyed by bombing during the Second World War.

On a cycling expedition into Essex, Ravilious and Bawden 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. In 1930, Ravilious married Tirzah Garwood, another talented engraver and artist. In 1932, Bawden married Charlotte Epton and his parents bought Brick House, Great Bardfield for them as a wedding present. The Bawdens and Raviliouses lived there together for a year or so. Great Bardfield became home to a sizeable and active community of artists. Eric and Tirzah later moved to Iron Bridge Farm, Shalford, four miles from Great Bardfield.

Ravilious produced hundreds of illustrations, mainly for books, mostly wood engravings but also using lithography. Possibly his most printed woodcut is of two Victorian gentlemen playing cricket. This has appeared on the cover of *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack* each year since 1938.

He was engaged by Wedgwood to produce designs for ceramics. These included mugs to commemorate the coronations of Edward VIII (who abdicated without being crowned) and George VI, a design that was reworked for the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953.

In 1939, Ravilious was engaged by the British government as a full-time salaried war artist, one of 300 including his friend Edward Bawden. Ravilious was initially assigned to the Royal Navy, where he painted dockyard scenes and then scenes from within the midst of sea battles. He was later assigned to the Royal Air Force and was based at two airfields now in the Hundred Parishes: Debden and Sawbridgeworth. He flew regularly from Sawbridgeworth, sketching other planes in flight from the rear cockpit of the plane.

In 1942, his duties took him to Iceland, where he flew with a search and rescue mission. His aircraft failed to return and he and the crew were declared lost in action.

During the early days of the evolution of the Hundred Parishes initiative, Eric Ravilious's

daughter, Anne Ullmann, most kindly gave permission for one of his wood engravings to be used as our logo. His design, which appears at the top of every website page, first appeared in 1933 in the Kynoch Press Note Book.

The Fry Art Gallery in Saffron Walden has an extensive collection of works by Eric Ravillious, as well as other Great Bardfield and local artists. The photo of Ravillious, taken by Phyllis Dodd, is reproduced by kind permission of the Fry Art Gallery. For more information, see www.fryartgallery.org off Castle Street, Saffron Walden, CB10 1BD – 01799 513779

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