
Eric Gill lived and worked in Ditchling, Sussex, from 1907 to 1924, residing initially in Ditchling village before moving in 1913 to Hopkin's Crank on Ditchling Common, two miles north of the village. It was at Hopkin's Crank that the Guild of SS. Joseph and Dominic, the first of several craft communities associated with Gill, was established. During the years at Ditchling, Gill expanded his artistic scope, developing a reputation as a sculptor and a wood engraver that complemented his skills as a “lettercutter.” Not surprisingly, some examples of his work, particularly his inscriptional work, survive in Ditchling or have made their way back there. These artifacts are the focus of the current volume of essays which is edited by Peter Holliday, a design historian and former assistant to Hilary Bourne, co-founder of the Ditchling Museum in 1985. Holliday also contributed two of the essays. Other contributors are Timothy J. McCann, the Assistant County Archivist at West Sussex Record Office at Chichester, and Jill Lingen-Watson who, with her husband Arnold Lingen-Watson, acquired Hopkin's Crank in 1952 and lived there until 1969.

In the opening essay, Holliday provides a brief summary of the life and career of Eric Gill, particularly his work with letterforms. This serves as the context for the analysis of an album of photographs donated to the Ditchling Museum in 1996. The photographs were taken by Gill while on a trip to Rome in the Spring of 1906. Although his wife Ethel (later known as Mary) accompanied him, the trip was mainly devoted to professional interests, as Gill spent much of the time examining Roman letterforms, both ancient and modern. He documented much of this with a camera he had recently acquired and preserved the photographs in a cloth-bound album with his hand-written label: “Rome 1906.” The subsequent history of the album is sketchy, but it is likely that it remained at Ditchling after Gill left for Wales in 1924, and passed through the collections of later members of the craft community who were associated with Hilary Pepler, Gill's friend and founder of the S. Dominic's Press. Holliday reproduces several images from the album and discusses the relationship of these letterforms to the typefaces designed by Gill.

In the second essay, McCann provides detailed descriptions of Gill's surviving inscriptional work in Ditchling. These range in date
from a sundial in St Margaret's churchyard to commemorate the
coronation of George V in 1911 to the stone tablet made for the
coffin of David Pepler, Gill’s son-in-law, in 1934. They include
other memorial inscriptions, private inscriptions on houses or in
gardens, and miscellaneous examples of lettering. The essay is well
illustrated with photographs of the inscriptions themselves and/or
reproductions of Gill’s original drawings or rubbings of the
inscriptions in the collections of the St Bride Printing Library.

By contrast, Jill Lingen-Watson’s essay is a very personal narrative
of the discoveries she and her husband made when restoring Hopkin’s
Crank. The house had come on the market after the death of Hilary
Pepler who acquired the property following Gill’s departure in 1924.
Lingen-Watson recounts her initial visit and meeting with Pepler’s
son Mark who was dealing with the estate. Despite the considerable
work of “modernisation” required in a building that had no gas,
electricity, or central heating, the Lingen-Watsons were undaunted.
They personally took on the work of restoring the garden which
yielded some unusual treasures. A carved stone head of a young girl
(later identified as Petra, Gill’s second daughter) and a wooden
processional standard with seven arms were rescued from the compost
heap, while a coloured stone plaque of St Thomas Aquinas was
uncovered in the rose bed. In a pile of rubbish, they discovered a
large wooden letter-box with an inscription by Gill and put it to use
again. They met Joseph Cribb, Gill’s long-time assistant, who
provided the documentation for their discoveries and presented a
carved stone bowl of his own making. These and other items
associated with Gill went with the Lingen-Watsons when they moved
from Hopkin’s Crank in 1969, but their intention was to return
them to Ditchling. In 1998, the Ditchling Museum received all of
these pieces, except the processional standard (which is promised to
it). The items are illustrated here for the first time.

The final essay by Holliday discusses Gill’s friendship with Amy
Sawyer, an artist who lived and had her studio in Ditchling. In 1913
Gill gave Sawyer, as a Christmas present, an incised panel he had
done in 1912 of the figure of a nude girl. It was modelled by his sister
Gladys. The panel was inset into a wall in Sawyer’s studio and
remained there after her death. It is reproduced here along with a
rubbing of it in the British Museum Department of Prints and
Drawings and a photograph of Sawyer.

As noted above, this slim volume reproduces for the first time a
number of works associated with Eric Gill during his years at
Ditchling. The charming essay by Jill Lingen-Watson is worth the price of the book alone. It is a must for those interested in the life and work of Eric Gill.

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This important collection of nine essays, based on papers given at a conference in November 2000, continues the admirable Publishing Pathways series and extends its scope into yet another aspect of the history of the book. Discussions of the history of book auctions in England normally begin with the statement that the first one was the Lazarus Seaman sale in 1676. Prudent scholars would then add the qualifier that it is the earliest sale for which a printed catalogue survives, implying that it seems likely that there were earlier sales, with or without printed or manuscript catalogues. Giles Mandelbrote is a prudent scholar and in his detailed essay on the organisation of auctions in late seventeenth-century London sticks closely to the surviving evidence. His point that although auctions did become popular as a method of book distribution there was considerable opposition to them from wholesale and retail booksellers is an important one, as the tension between the trade and auction houses continues to this day.

This is an Anglo-centric volume as seven of the nine essays deal with English history, but the two exceptions are important. Otto S. Lankhorst, from the University of Nijmegen, describes the first printed book-auction catalogue of 1599, but then adduces evidence that the history of book auctions in the Low Countries goes back to the first half of the sixteenth century and was then an organised trade. The other exception is Arthur Freeman’s wonderful piece on the Jazz Age library of Jerome Kern which, in 1929, produced the most spectacular American sale of the century. Working with Kern’s own copy of the auction catalogue he demonstrates fully the kind of analysis that can be done by a knowledgeable scholar who has available the right kind of evidence. This is a major contribution to