



Mary Adshead

An English Decorator





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(1904-1995)

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This publication is dedicated to three Daniels :
Daniel Dullaway, Daniel Simon & Daniel Tommasi Kliwitzky

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Back cover : Mary Adshead painting *The Ascending Christ* in her studio, 1935.

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Edited by Paul Liss





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Preface

Paul Liss

Described in her lifetime as “the cleverest of all our decorative painters” – in what might now be seen as the golden age of decorative painting – this publication seeks to reinstate Mary Adshead as a significant figure in 20th-century British art. Rarely is she credited with producing more decorative mural cycles than any other 20th-century figure, a feat worthy of acknowledgement in its own right.

This publication also celebrates her innate, playful sense of design – a style instantly recognisable as her own. Her work evolved in step with the aesthetic cross-currents of the 20th century, ensuring that pieces from all periods sustain a sense of vitality and engagement.

Brangwyn once described his own life as “a mission to decorate life.” The same epithet might apply to Adshead. She turned her hand to anything, working adeptly across a huge range of media and on scales ranging from postage stamps to huge murals, painted furnishings and glass, illustrated books, prints, commercial art, stage sets, screens, and mosaics.

Only one dedicated publication exists – *Earthly Delights: Mary Adshead, 1904-1995* (edited by Ann Compton and Matthew H. Clough, Liverpool University Press, 2004), now sadly out of print. We are grateful to Ann Compton, Melanie Unwin, and Alan Powers for allowing us to reuse their texts. We have taken the opportunity to include more colour and previously unseen designs.

The book is divided into the following main chapters: Ann Compton’s essay considers Mary Adshead’s contribution to public art; the author’s essay, *A Portrait of Mary Adshead*, provides a biographical account of her life as it relates to her art; Alan Powers’ and Melanie Unwin’s essays describe her mural painting before and after the war; and the final section examines her work as a designer in other fields – books, stamps, posters, screens, and especially collage, in which she excelled.

The Hunterian Art Gallery in Glasgow holds the Mary Adshead Archive, which will ensure her work is brought back to light for future generations.

We are delighted to be holding an exhibition to coincide with this publication, and to be again working in partnership with Persephone Books.

2 – *Wedding of Princess Marina of Greece and Denmark and Prince George, Duke of Kent, London, November 29th, 1934*, signed and dated, pencil and gouache on paper, 14 ½ x 10 in. (37 x 25.2 cm).

Introduction

Paul Liss

Between 1924 and 1985, Mary Adshead (3, 4) created at least 68 mural and decorative schemes. Her career began with a shared commission alongside Rex Whistler, followed by significant works such as the murals at Bank Underground station, a separate collaborative project with Eric Ravilious on the pier at Colwyn Bay, displays at the Commonwealth Institute, and set designs for the Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor film *Cleopatra*. Tragically, less than a quarter of these schemes have survived – a loss attributable partly to the inherent anonymity of public art and compounded by a historical disregard for the work of women artists. As recently as 1998, Mary Adshead’s mural *Totnes in Time* (59, **Appendix: XXII**) has been concealed behind acoustic panels, installed during a building refurbishment. Whilst Adshead’s light is flickering back into view, the shadow of neglect still looms large.



3 – Photograph of Mary Adshead sketching.

Despite these challenges, Adshead’s trajectory was distinct from many of her female contemporaries. As her teacher Henry Tonks wrote to her, “How splendid that at your age your work should be so much in demand.” This success was bolstered by a unique



4 – Stephen Bone (1904-1958), *Mary Adshead Sketching*, signed, oil on panel, 16 x 13 in. (40.6 x 33 cm).

network of support. Her father, a successful Neo-Georgian architect who later became the first Visiting Professor of Town Planning at Liverpool and the University of London, secured her initial commissions. She married the artist Stephen Bone (5), with whom she collaborated on murals and books; however, their dynamic was occasionally strained by the fact that Adshead was arguably more talented and commercially successful. According to their son Quentin, Stephen “had been moderately successful until the end of the war, then people stopped buying his paintings”. He died in 1958.

Perhaps most significantly, Adshead benefited from the mentorship of her father-in-law, Sir Muirhead Bone. With a justified reputation for championing younger artists – including Stanley Spencer, C.R.W. Nevinson, David Bomberg, Gwen John, and William Roberts – he never missed an opportunity to promote his talented daughter-in-law. Tonks himself noted, “You have in your father-in-law ... a saint who will do all he can to help you.”



Beyond professional connections, Adshead possessed personal advantages rare for women of her era: she was tall, striking, and passionate about motorcars (6), often cutting a memorable figure driving her family's 1926 open Rolls-Royce. Furthermore, unlike many peers, she had access to childcare in the form of nannies and, crucially, her own dedicated studio.



6 – Mary Adshead in her first car, a Fiat 10HP.

Adshead's work, however, cannot be viewed solely through the lens of her privileged circumstances. Her art actively engages with the exoticized imagery and colonial-era concepts of race, leisure, and desire prevalent in early twentieth-century British visual culture. Like many artists of her generation, she drew upon imperial iconography to construct scenes of fantasy, travel, and pleasure that reflected the cultural hierarchies embedded in Britain's colonial worldview. These visual traditions are perhaps most infamously associated with Rex Whistler, whose murals have recently undergone critical reassessment for their racialized depictions. Adshead's work similarly warrants examination within this complex context.

Ambitious and self-advocating, Adshead promoted her practice through professional bodies. She served as Secretary of the Society of Mural Painters, participated in the Architectural Institute of Arts (AIA), and helped organize the Women's International Art Club conference on the Isle of Ré. Additionally, she was active with the Artists' Refugee Committee, welcoming artists seeking asylum from Nazi Germany.

5 – *Portrait of Stephen Bone, the artist's husband*, 1931, signed and dated, pencil and watercolour on paper, squared, 17 ¾ x 13 in. (45 x 32 cm).



Mary Adshead and Public Art

Ann Compton

Mary Adshead belonged to a generation who believed that ‘the distinction between fine and applied arts is out of date.’¹ ‘The notion that decoration holds an inferior position among the forms of artistic expression...[and that the designer] is a craftsman of indifferent capacities who takes up a minor form of practice because it is less difficult’ was temporarily eclipsed half a century after John Ruskin (1819-1900) and William Morris (1834-1896) had laid the theoretical and practical foundations of the arts and crafts movement.² Imbued with this philosophy, Adshead not only moved seamlessly between mural and easel painting (7) – the given subjects of her training at the Slade – but also painted furnishings and glass, illustrated books, and designed advertisements, stamps and stage sets.

She approached her work with a tireless energy. This was partly due to the good fortune of having a strong constitution but it was also driven by an idea which permeated discussions of design and mural painting in the 1920s and 1930s namely ‘that the artist ought to be a useful person’.³ The strongest advocate of public art, Sir William Rothenstein (1872-1945) used his Chair of Civic Art in Sheffield (1917-1920) and position as Rector of the Royal College of Art (1920-1934) as a platform to promote his views on the social role of art. Rothenstein strenuously denied the common perception of mural painters as ‘a sort of parasite on the wealthy’ arguing instead that by ‘representing the ordinary life...[the mural] gives people an infinitely wider notion of... everyday life.’⁴ Whilst this belief in the uplifting power of art owed much to Ruskin, it also mirrored the widespread belief that an artist’s eye would transform ‘household goods... into household gods.’⁵ Adshead was not by nature a high-minded idealist, yet these moral and social aspirations were so current in the intellectual fabric of the time that they percolate through her practice. They are particularly visible in her active participation in the Artists International Association (AIA) in the mid-1930s, her decoration of factory canteens during the war, and in individual projects like the Highway Boys’ Club, Shadwell (1924) (**Appendix: I**), the Columba House Services Club, Birmingham (1942) (**Appendix: XII**), and her religious murals.⁶ (8)

Rothenstein’s prescription that muralists should engage with their audience’s ‘everyday life’ was not only deliberately anti-elitist but also encouraged artists to adapt their style and technique to the demands of each commission.⁷ Adshead’s practice reflects this pragmatic stance, showing a versatility that occasionally challenges expectations that artists will have a coherent artistic vision. Perhaps the example of her father’s work in architecture and town planning helped her accept the constraints of working to a brief.⁸ But even if an ‘Adshead’ may be less readily identifiable than the murals of some other artists, such as Eric Ravilious (1903-1942) and Rex Whistler (1905-1944), she outshone both in her treatment of the human form. In many works, and particularly the murals for

7 – Mary Adshead at work, c.1924.



8 – Unused design for church mural, gouache on paper, 15 x 15 ¾ in. (38 x 40 cm).

Lord Beaverbrook (1928) (40-43, **Appendix: V**), *A London Evening* (1933) and *The Cruise* (1934) (9), Adshead's figure painting combines a fashionable primitivism, loosely derived from Stanley Spencer (1891-1959), with a fluency and humour rarely found among her contemporaries. Indeed, her work has a warmth and humanity that is absent from other prominent muralists emerging from the Slade around this time like Colin Gill (1892-1940), Winifred Knights (1899-1947) and W.T. Monnington (1902-1976) whose 'Piero worship' tended towards a certain detachment and distance in figure composition.

A discussion of social engagement in Adshead's work must encompass the privileged circumstances of her upbringing as the daughter of a well-respected academic, and her subsequent marriage to Stephen Bone (1904-58), the son of the highly successful print-maker Sir Muirhead Bone (1876-1953). With schooling in Paris to foster her interest in art, and a car and a bank account whilst a student at the Slade, Adshead's experience of the 'ordinary' was far from typical. Indeed, her first encounter with people suffering

hardship was working on the Highway Boys' Club scheme in 1924 (**Appendix: I**). Yet it is evident from Adshead's committed professionalism that she was far from being an indulged dilettante. In fact, arguably, her father and father-in-law's connections were disadvantageous to the extent that rich women often had to work harder to prove their artistic credentials.⁹

Where Adshead's privileged circumstances undoubtedly gave her an advantage was in being able to pursue an active, successful career whilst also raising three children. Motherhood and art, most especially public art, were usually incompatible at this time. Winifred Knights, the much-lauded Rome Scholar in Mural Painting of 1920, produced little work once she became a mother, although her inclination to devote enormous amounts of time to preparatory drawings and oil sketches also inhibited her output.¹⁰ Other artists, such as Evelyn Gibbs (1905-1991) remained childless even though she married. This allowed her to continue a highly successful career branching out from print making into easel and mural painting, teaching, writing, illustration, and active membership of both the AIA and Midland Group.¹¹

Whilst motherhood remained a continuing issue for women, the very possibility of achieving a prominent position as a mural painter was new. Pre-First World War, most women artists



9 – *The Cruise*, 1934, oil on canvas, 142 x 182.2 cm).Tate Collection.



10 – *A Tropical Fantasy*, 1926, (DETAIL), oil on board, 96 x 169 ¼ in. (244 x 430 cm).
University of Liverpool Collection.

were relegated to working in a separate sphere, such as teaching and designing pottery, or pursuing what was considered the more feminine activity of easel painting. So, for Adshead, Knights, Gibbs and other women muralists of the inter-war period, to be admitted into the physically demanding, masculine world of public art represented a significant change of status. Whilst sometimes their work would be associated with the ‘distaff’ side by context or subject, it is significant that a growing number of women artists were able to compete relatively freely with their male peers.¹²

It was not just the ideas of great Victorian thinkers like Ruskin and Morris that continued to shape art theory well into the mid-twentieth century, nineteenth-century urban expansion also had a lasting impact on Britain’s cultural landscape. This was particularly evident in the larger industrial and commercial centres, such as Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham and Liverpool, which embarked on ambitious programmes of civic improvement in the mid-nineteenth century that included the foundation of art societies, museums, galleries, art schools, technical colleges and universities. By the early twentieth century these regional hubs of art activity were nurturing talented individuals who then had a transformative effect on culture in the metropolis.¹³

Sir William Rothenstein was part of this nationally successful cohort who came from the north, and his early life in Yorkshire fostered a belief that the regions had a special role to play in nurturing mural art. He argued that artists who worked away from London were released from the loftier demands and expectations of the capital and therefore able to develop in a freer, more receptive environment.¹⁴ Adshead was given just such an opportunity in her native Liverpool, when her father’s old friend and colleague, Professor Charles Reilly,

commissioned her to make a mural to decorate his dining room. The resulting work entitled *A Tropical Fantasy* (1926) (10, 35, 36, Appendix: II) encapsulates this sense of artistic freedom by transporting the viewer into the otherness of a jungle panorama. In 1927, Liverpool also provided Adshead with the chance to lecture on mural painting and this led to her ideas receiving their first outing in print.¹⁵ She continued to find support in her home city during the later stages of her career, including the purchase of the delightful easel painting the *Steps, Fortuneswell, Dorset* (1953) which was gifted to the University of Liverpool by the architects Rolf Hellberg and Maurice Harris.

Beyond introducing a modern audience to the pleasures of Adshead’s work, this publication highlights the vigour of mural painting and public art in the mid-twentieth century. It also acts as a timely reminder that there are many precedents for the free and versatile approach to art practice evident today, including the one set by Mary Adshead and her generation.

- 1 S.F. Markham, a director at Sotheby’s quoted by Michael T. Saler in *The Avant-garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground*, Oxford University Press, New York 1999, p.10.
- 2 Alfred Lys Baldry, *Modern Mural Decoration*, George Newnes Ltd., London 1902, p.2.
- 3 William Rothenstein, ‘The Decoration of Buildings’, *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 3rd series, vol. 38, No. 7, 7 February 1931, pp. 199-209.
- 4 Ibid. p.199 and p.200.
- 5 Jules Lubbock, *The Tyranny of Taste: the Politics of Architecture and Design in Britain 1550-1960*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995, p.186, quoted by Michael T. Saler in *The Avant-garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground*, Oxford University Press, New York 1999, p.13.
- 6 See panels for St. Christopher’s Church, Withington (1932-1935) later moved to St Columba’s Anfield; St Chad’s Shrewsbury (1950); the Chapel of St Michael & St George, Plymstock (1957); and St. Alban’s Church, Hertfordshire (1958).
- 7 Rothenstein considered the constraints of working to a commission to be beneficial, see Clare A.P. Willsdon, *Mural Painting in Britain 1840-1940: Image and Meaning*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, pp.20-21.
- 8 Her father was the architect, Professor Stanley Adshead who had an active academic career in town planning.
- 9 For example, the sculptors Lady Feodora Gleichen (a niece of Queen Victoria), Anna Hyatt Huntington and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (both independently wealthy women) all struggled to gain recognition for having executed their own work. Huntington is said to have gone to the length of shutting herself in the studio with one female assistant to work on a life-sized equestrian statue of Joan of Arc in 1909-10.
- 10 Winifred Knights was married to W.T. Monnington and had a son, John.
- 11 Evelyn Gibbs’ career had been launched by winning the Rome Scholarship in Engraving for 1929. Her marriage to Hugh Willat, Secretary General of the Arts Council 1968-1975, was a successful partnership between ambitious professionals.
- 12 For a fuller discussion see Unwin (pages 55-75). An indication of the number of women mural painters practising between the wars can be gleaned from archival records for the exhibition *Mural Painting in Great Britain 1919-39* organised by John Rothenstein at The Tate Gallery in 1939. Out of 89 exhibitors, 25 (or 28%) were women and a further 7 applied but were unsuccessful. Rex Whistler made a characteristically humorous sketch of a mural painter hard at work while planning a major scheme of decorative paintings for Plas Newydd, Anglesey in 1937, see Willsdon, as note 7, p.17.
- 13 Hepworth and Moore are the most conspicuous examples but Frank Pick, Michael Sadler and Charles Holden also came from the north, for a full discussion, see Saler, as note 5.
- 14 See Rothenstein, as note 3, p.200.
- 15 Mary Adshead ‘Modern Decorative Painting’ a lecture delivered at the Liverpool Architectural Society and published in *The Architect and Building News*, 25 March 1927, vol. 117, p.515. See a fuller discussion in Powers (pages 35-47).



11– *Design for decorative wallpaper*, signed, gouache on paper, 20 ¼ x 17 in. (51.5 x 43.5 cm).



12 – *The Nativity*, c.1922, pencil and gouache on paper, 20 ¼ x 17 in. (51.5 x 43.5 cm).



13 – *Self-Portrait*, 1931, signed and dated, oil on canvas, 23 ½ x 19 ½ in. (59.8 x 49.8 cm). Sheffield Museums.

A Portrait of Mary Adshead

Paul Liss

Mary Adshead (13) was born in Bloomsbury, London, the only child of Stanley Davenport Adshead and his wife Annie. Her father was a well-known neo-Georgian architect, talented amateur watercolourist and professor of Civic Design at the University of Liverpool. He moved back to London in 1914 where he became the first Professor of Town Planning at University College, London. He remained there until his retirement in 1935.

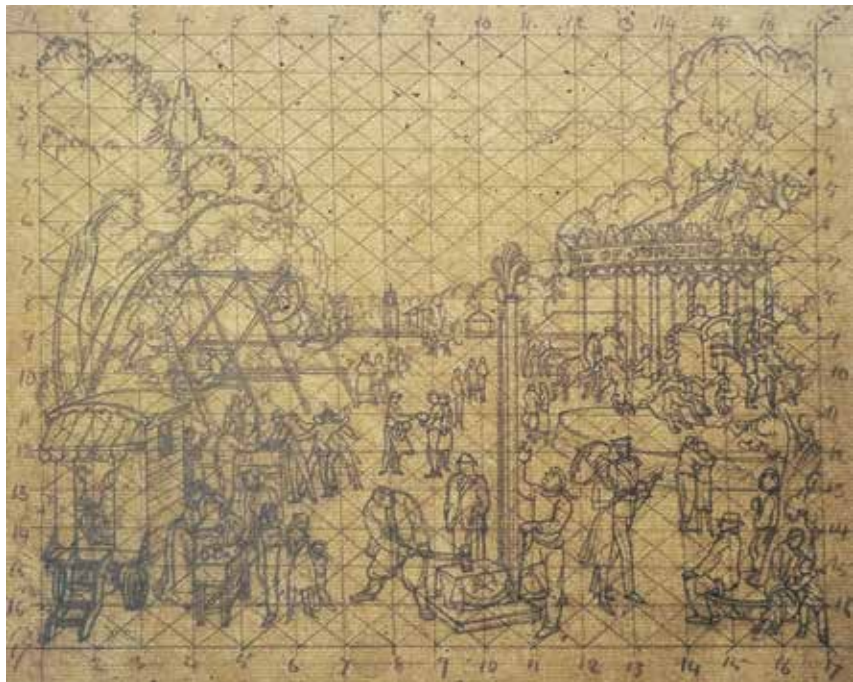
From the age of six, Adshead was determined to become an artist and she spent much of her time drawing. She produced numerous sketchbooks and illustrations. At the age of twelve, she attended Putney High School where she remained for three years. She then went to live in Paris with her mother for a period of six months during which she attended the Lycée Victor Duruy. While in Paris she visited many famous art galleries and museums. She was particularly interested in the murals of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes.

In the Autumn of 1921, her father took her to meet Henry Tonks, principal at the Slade School of Art. Tonks, a former surgeon, had a reputation for being very harsh with his students and he was not impressed with the portfolio of work which she had brought along. However, Tonks finally agreed to allow her to enrol in his art classes, most likely because the Slade was part of University College where Stanley Adshead was a professor. This also meant that she was exempt from paying tuition.



14 – *The Picnic*, 1924, tempera on canvas, 29 ½ x 39 ½ in. (75.3 x 100.3 cm). Collection: Manchester Art Gallery.

Tonks gradually came to recognise Adshead’s talent and in 1924 she and fellow student Rex Whistler won the joint first prize in the Slade’s Summer painting competition. (14) At the end of their studies at the Slade, Tonks arranged for them to undertake a joint mural commission at the Highway Boys’ Club in Wapping in London’s East End. (Appendix: I) This put her in the distinguished lineage of former winners including Wadsworth, Carrington, Gertler, Paul and John Nash, Stanley and Gilbert Spencer, and Winifred Knights.



15 – Preparatory sketch for *An English Holiday, Newmarket Fair*, c.1928, pencil on tracing paper, 8 ½ × 10 ½ in. (21.5 × 26.5 cm).



16 – Preparatory sketch for *An English Holiday, The Winners’ Circle*, c.1928, pencil on tracing paper, 7 ¾ × 11 ¾ in. (20 × 30 cm).

More commissions followed and the same year she created the mural *A Tropical Fantasy*. (10, 35, 36, Appendix: II) It was commissioned by Charles Reilly, professor of architecture at Liverpool University, and one-time colleague of her father. *A Tropical Fantasy* is now housed at the Liverpool University Victoria Art Gallery. Adshead also completed a large mural entitled *The Housing of the People*, which was exhibited at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley.

In 1928, Lord Beaverbrook, the Canadian-British newspaper publisher and politician, commissioned Adshead to paint a series of murals to cover the walls of the dining room of his Newmarket House, Calvin Lodge. *An English Holiday* (15, 16, 41-44, Appendix: V) depicts scenes of Newmarket life such as the horse racing and the fair as well as a number of his well-known friends. Combining humour with an insight into the life of privilege and elegance, the scenes were described as being in ‘the manner of English 18th-century sporting prints and aquatints’. Lady Diana Cooper, a good friend of Lord Beaverbrook and who also appeared picnicking in one of her paintings, persuaded him not to install the murals for fear that with time he might regret being surrounded by portraits of his acquaintances. Following her advice, Lord Beaverbrook returned the panels to Adshead and paid the two-thirds rejection fee.

The panels were reassembled and exhibited at the large Peter Jones Department store in Central London in 1930 (Appendix: V) before being rolled up and relegated to a cupboard in the Adsheads’ house. For many years it was believed that they had been destroyed by fire, until they re-surfaced at auction several decades later.



17-19 – London Underground posters, c.1937, lithographs, 40 x 25 in. (101.6 x 63.5 cm) each. Printed by Waterlow & Sons Ltd.

Adshead carried out decorative works at Bank Underground Station in 1925 (Appendix: III-IV) and at Piccadilly Circus Station in 1928. During the period 1927-37 she designed posters for the Underground Group and London Transport. (17-19)



20 – Stephen Bone (1904-1958), *Design for Piccadilly Circus underground station*, 1929, signed, inscribed and dated, pencil and gouache on paper, squared, 19 x 29 ½ in. (48.4 x 75 cm).

In 1929, she married the painter Stephen Bone, the son of the artist Sir Muirhead Bone, with whom she had been a student at the Slade and collaborated with on murals for London Transport. (20) The couple went on to have three children, two sons, Quentin and Sylvester, and a daughter, Christina. In 1930 Adshead was elected a member of the New English Art Club.



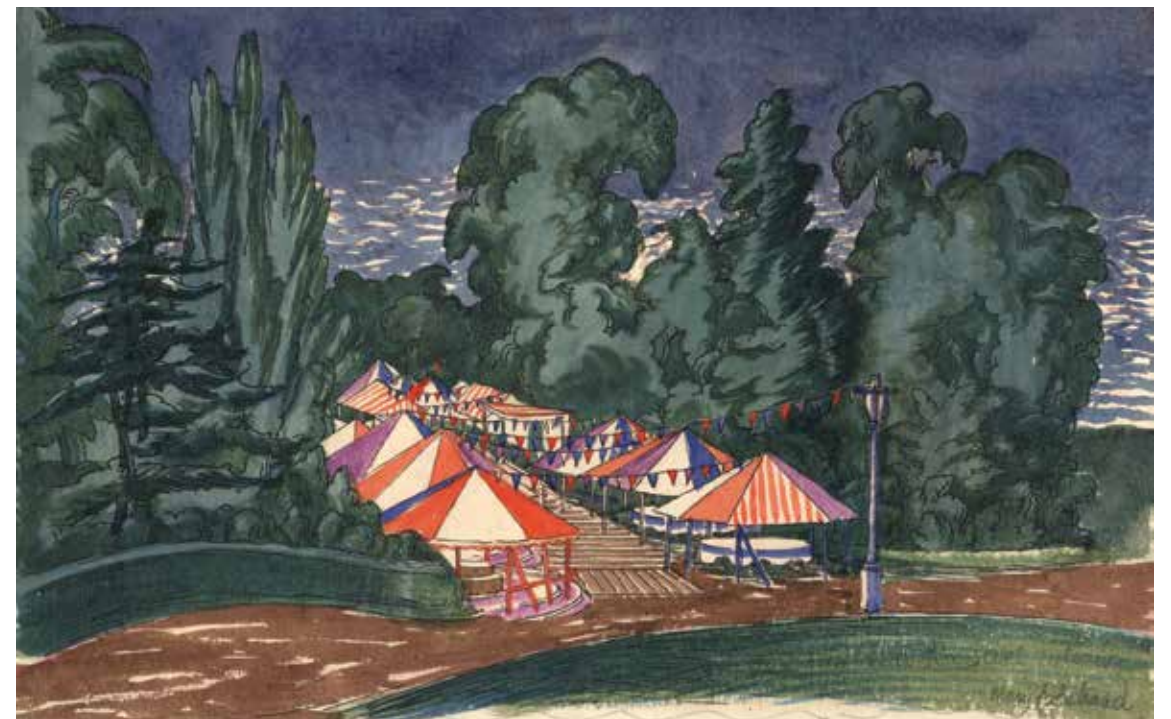
21 – Stephen Bone and Mary Adshead working on a cruise liner mural, c.1935.

Adshead and Bone collaborated on a proposition for a mural for the Queen Mary cruise liner in 1936. (21) They also worked together on a series of children's books such as *The Little Boy and His House*, of the same year, for which she provided the illustrations. (see 71, 73a)

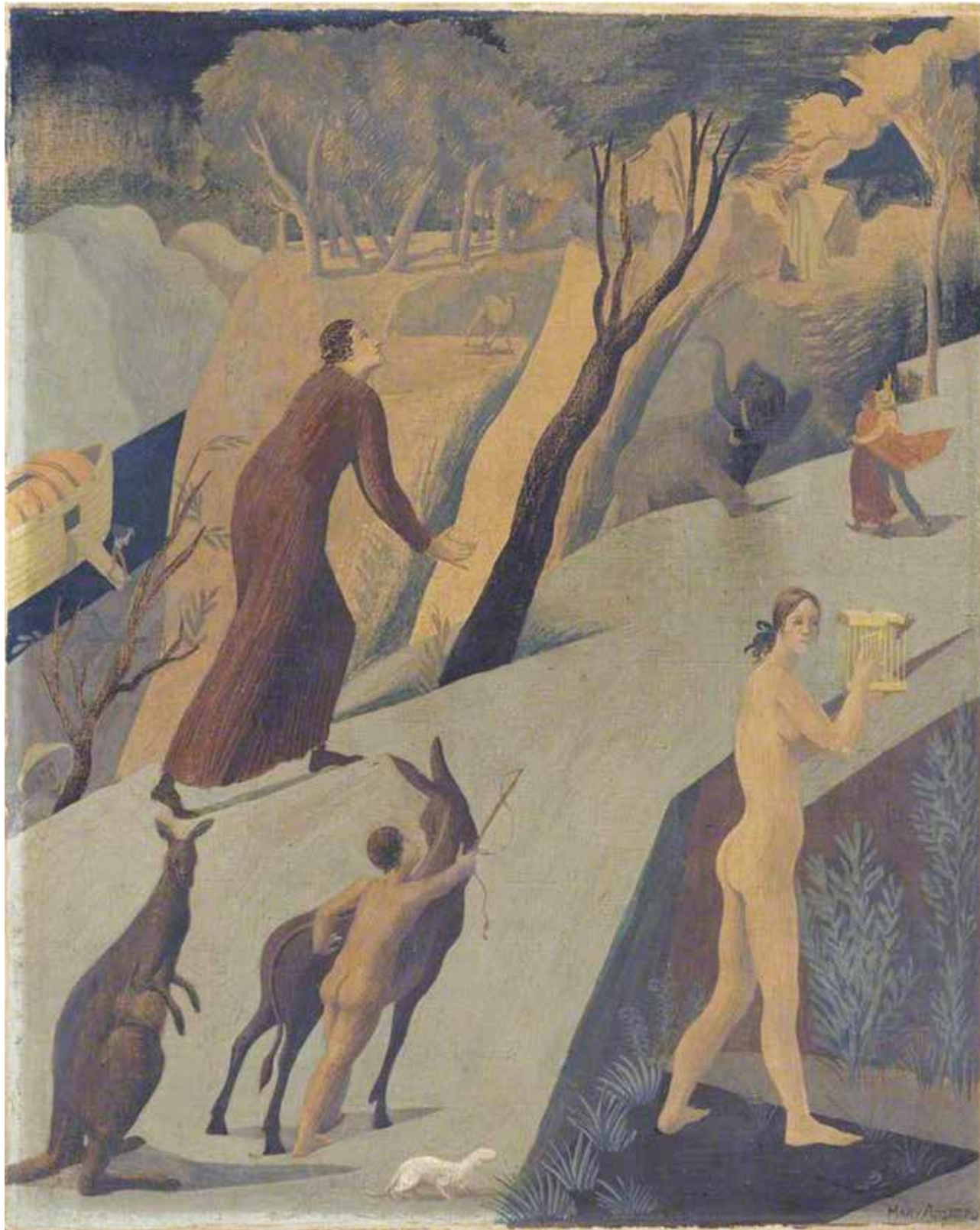
During their early married life, the couple made painting and sketching tours during their travels through Europe. (22) Adshead received commissions through her architect father and her father-in-law who was well known for helping young aspiring artists such as Stanley Spencer, Gwen John and Christopher Nevinston.



22 – *St Tropez*, 1931, signed and dated, pencil and watercolour on paper, 10 x 13 ¾ in. (25.5 x 35 cm).



23 – *Side-shows at the Crystal Palace*, 1931, signed and inscribed, titled to the reverse, watercolour on paper, 8 ¼ x 12 ½ in. (21 x 31.7 cm).



24 – *Morning After the Flood*, 1928, signed, tempera on canvas, 20 ¼ x 16 ¾ in. (51.5 x 42.7 cm). Tate Collection.



25 – *Street Scene*, c.1930, pencil and oil on paper, 13 x 16 ¼ in. (33 x 41 cm).

In 1934, Adshead and Eric Ravilious were commissioned to paint Art Deco murals for the interior of the Victoria Pier Pavilion at Colwyn Bay, North Wales (**Appendix: X**). This third pier structure replaced two earlier ones, which were destroyed by fire in 1922 and 1933. The pavilion was designed by Adshead's father, architect Stanley Davenport Adshead. After being badly damaged by gales and the sea in 2017, the pier was dismantled. The murals, which had been largely hidden under later layers of plaster and wallpaper, were removed during dismantling; significant portions survive and are currently awaiting restoration. Adshead also painted a mural for the British Pavilion at the Paris International Exhibition of 1937.

Throughout her life, Adshead participated in group exhibitions such as the Applied Art Exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1926, and the Art in Industry Exhibition at Burlington House, 1935. She exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy from 1927, and with the Women's International Art Club from the mid-1930s, serving on their Committee in 1951. Her first solo exhibition was held in 1930 at the Goupil Gallery and included the painting *The Morning after the Flood* (24), characteristic of Decorative Painting as taught at the Slade Art School where she was a student from 1921 to 1924. One art critic wrote that her figure painting combined a fashionable primitivism, loosely derived from Stanley Spencer, with a fluency and humour rarely found among her contemporaries. As a composition it does more than make a friendly nod to Winifred Knights's celebrated winning entry for the Prix de Rome, *The Deluge* (1920).

Adshead was also a talented portrait painter, combining her innate sense of design, humour, and perceptiveness to create memorable images, ranging from her self-portrait (1931, Sheffield Museums collection) to *Portrait of Marjorie Gertler* (1931) (26) and *Portrait of Daphne Charlton* (c. 1935) (27) – both Slade alumnae who modelled for Sir Stanley Spencer. Adshead's *Portrait of Beth Tomalin* (c. 1930s) (28) is painted in a more self-consciously modernist idiom, demonstrating her dexterity in assimilating the decorative and stylistic crosscurrents of her time.



26 – *Portrait of Marjorie Gertler*, 1931, signed and dated, oil on canvas, 39 ¼ x 30 in. (100 x 76 cm).



27 – *Portrait of Daphne Charlton*, c.1935, oil on canvas, 35 x 24 in. (89 x 61 cm).

During World War II, Mary Adshead balanced family life with a remarkable series of public art projects. In April 1941, Adshead submitted a small number of paintings to the War Artists' Advisory Committee, of which the Committee purchased one. She spent summer holidays with her children on the Cambrian Coast, North Wales, producing works such as *Troops Riding into Barmouth* (now in the Imperial War Museum), *British Restaurant Coventry After Dinner* (1941) (29) and *The Landlady's Daughters, Harlech* (c.1941) (30). Adshead also contributed extensively to the British Restaurant scheme, creating murals that lifted morale in civic and industrial spaces. Her work included murals for the British Restaurant in Leamington Spa, the factory canteen at Rugby, and the Columba House Services Club in Birmingham, depicting servicemen arriving, eating, and resting. (Appendix: XII)

28 – *Portrait of Beth Tomalin*, signed, oil on canvas, 10 x 15 in. (101.5 x 76.2 cm).



In 1942, she painted *The World's Foods* for the British Restaurant on Granville Street, Birmingham (**Appendix: XIII**), and later completed murals for the Vauxhall Motors canteen in Luton and stylized park scenes at the YMCA Services Canteen in Westminster.



29 – *British Restaurant Coventry After Dinner*, 1941, oil on panel, 12 x 13 ¾ in. (30.5 x 35 cm).



30 – *The Landlady's Daughters, Llanbedre, near Harlech*, c.1941, oil on canvas board, 12 ¼ x 16 ¼ in. (31 x 41 cm).

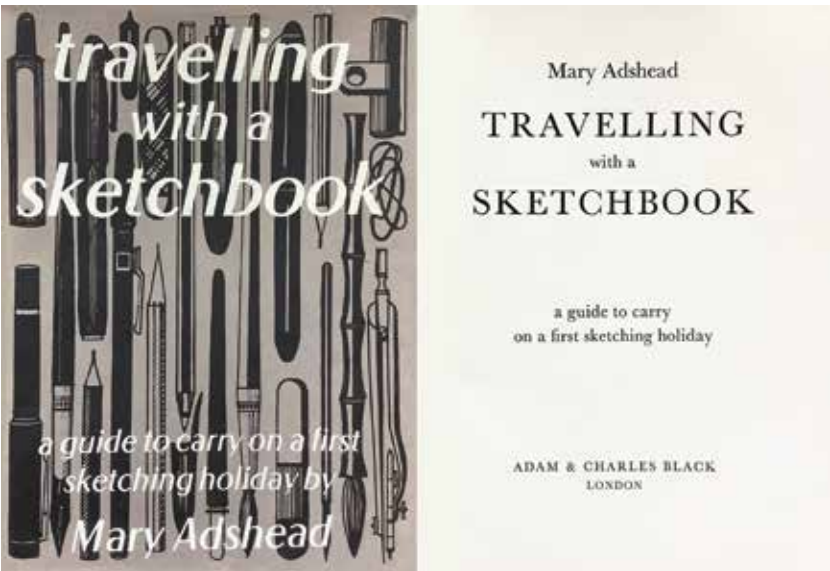
Between 1948 and 1963 she submitted designs for a number of Post Office stamp issues including the Universal Postal Union stamps of 1949, the Festival of Britain stamp of 1951 and four denominations of the Wilding definitive stamps of 1952, which featured the Dorothy Wilding photographic portrait of Queen Elizabeth II. Adshead's design for the 8d, 9d, 10d and 11d were chosen. (31) (For further reading see Matthew H. Clough's essay on stamp production and design in *Earthly Delights – Mary Adshead 1904-1995*.)



31 – Wilding definitive stamps of 1952 designed by Adshead.

In 1950 she decorated the fourth-floor restaurant of Selfridge's with jungle scenes. (57, **Appendix: XVI**) Despite her busy work schedule, she also found time to organise the Society of Mural Painters. She was elected secretary of the society in 1953, a post she kept until the end of the sixties.

Stephen Bone, Mary's husband, died in 1958 at the age of fifty-three. After the death of her husband, and with her children all grown up, Adshead travelled widely in both Europe and the United States. During one of these trips in 1966, she carried her sketchbook and filled it with drawings of her journey. When she returned to England she published a book about her travels entitled *Travelling with a Sketchbook*. (32)



32 – *Travelling with a Sketchbook*, 1966, a guide to sketching by Mary Adshead.



33 – *Still-life of Poinsettia with Leopard Skin*, c.1935, signed, oil on canvas, 34 ¾ x 28 ¾ in. (88 x 73 cm).

Adshead remained an active working artist for seven decades. (34) Her growing interest in mosaic design led her in 1962 to study at Ravenna and in Sicily, and to take a course in the techniques of Italian mosaic design at Kingston Art School. In 1966 she produced a decorative pool in mosaic, marble, stones and cable sections in the Telephone Exchange Courtyard, Guernsey. In 1983 she embarked on a major mosaic mural project for a pedestrian subway in Rotherhithe, London (**Appendix: XXIX**); a project which required long hours of work inside a cold tunnel during winter. During the 1980s and 1990s she made sketching tours in Malta, Turkey and Madeira.

In her latter years, lameness caused by painting off ladders hampered her work and life, but, ever purposeful, she would crawl where she could not walk with a stick, curious glances notwithstanding. She died in London on September 3rd 1995, aged 91.



34 – *For Fun*, 1982, signed and dated, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in. (91 x 76 cm).



Mary Adshead and English mural painting before the Second World War

Alan Powers

When one reviews the position of mural painting in the first half of the twentieth century in England, the conclusion is easily reached that murals provided the answer to a question that was never clearly defined. This is another way of saying that artists produced murals for a number of reasons, against most dictates of economics or logic. When we consider the career of Mary Adshead, we certainly need to try and understand why murals were such a central aspect of her career, and through this, we may come to understand more about her work and that of several of her contemporaries in this and related fields.

One possible answer to the question 'Why murals?' would be that there was a demand for them from patrons, and they therefore became a way for artists to earn good money. While it was possible for established painters such as Frank Brangwyn to charge enough to make the labour worthwhile, this was not the answer for most artists. The market for modern pictures in London was relatively undervalued and slow between the wars, and this admittedly could have helped murals to be seen as a relatively attractive commercial proposition, offering at least a few months' assured income. Even then, artists were more likely to boast of how little they had been paid for painting a mural than how much. Not surprisingly, many artists who painted murals when young gave them up later.

There was a demand for murals, however, even if it did not involve large financial rewards. In the twenties there was a fashion for private domestic murals, and especially complete painted rooms that, while anticipated by a few schemes before the First World War, became much more widespread than ever before. We may associate this trend chiefly with the artists of the Bloomsbury Group, who developed what the art historian Christopher Reed has called the 'Amusing style', with cheerful colours and fantastical or exotic subjects.¹ The mural painting careers of Adshead and her contemporaries such as Rex Whistler, Eric Ravilious and Edward Bawden were based on the 'Amusing Style', which has indeed become synonymous in some minds with the whole art of mural painting. Amusement in painting consorts well with *trompe l'oeil*, although it was Rex Whistler who pioneered the revival of this neglected form of art.

In her dining room murals for Charles Reilly (10, 35, 36, Appendix: II), Adshead created one of the most enjoyable examples of the 'Amusing style', in the year immediately following the *Exposition des Arts Decoratifs* in Paris of 1925, which she probably visited since she had designs for theatre sets on display. In a broad sense, the 'Amusing style' related to the designers of the Russian ballet and the new movements in decorative arts in mainland Europe, before and after the First World War, that make up the composite style Art Deco.



36 – Six panels of the Charles Reilly dining room mural, *A Tropical Fantasy*, 1925, University of Liverpool Art Gallery & Collections.

The belief nonetheless persisted from early in the previous century that mural painting should compensate for the apparent shallowness of the artist's existence in modern society that lacked the kind of challenges responsible for the great art of the past. A rather artificial demand for high minded mural art continued to be generated by prominent cultural figures, such as the large historical panels in St Stephen's Hall in 1927. A Slade graduate close in age to Adshead, Tom Monnington (b.1902), was the youngest artist employed.

Her own earliest mural work, such as the panel *The Housing of the People* shown at Wembley in 1925, has the air of melancholy that serious murals often affected.² With the Borough Polytechnic Refreshment Room murals of 1912, which Roger Fry organised, a precursor of the 'Amusing style' had invaded the sphere of artists doing good deeds for the poor. The commission for the Highway Boys' Club in Shadwell (**Appendix: I**), which Adshead shared with Rex Whistler, continued the high spirits, more evident however in his work than in hers.

Speaking to the Liverpool Architectural Association in 1927, Mary Adshead expressed the belief that the demand for mural painting ought to come not from municipalities (which were very unreliable patrons) but from 'the private individual, business firms, hotel and restaurant proprietors, shipping companies, and, above all, from the smaller and more individual shop owners. Art is more and more centring around commerce.'³

This was an interesting perception, largely accurate in respect of her own work at Bank underground station in 1929 (**Appendix: III, IV**), a curious hybrid of the commercial and



the high minded, showing a street scene as a sort of product placement to include real advertisements that were paid for by the companies concerned. This experiment was never repeated, and Adshead's only experience of working for a shipping line, when she and Stephen Bone painted panels for the *Queen Mary* in 1936, was a disappointment, since the ultra conventional directors of Cunard rejected his work, and felt they could not therefore accept hers. To balance this, she succeeded well with Selfridges (57, **Appendix: XVI**) and other department stores, and with some small restaurants.

Mary's architect father, Stanley Adshead, was himself an excellent watercolour artist. While distanced stylistically from the Arts and Crafts movement, he shared with that generation of architects a general belief that architecture would be improved by the incorporation of painting and sculpture. Architects were part of the question to which murals were the answer, and Mary was well placed to encourage them to use murals, and to benefit when they responded. For architects, murals had the advantage of permitting a longer-lasting control over future decorative alterations by the building's users, since a greater initial investment had been made at the outset.

Charles Reilly was Professor of Architecture at the University of Liverpool from 1904 to 1933, and Stanley Adshead, a friend of several years' standing, joined him as Professor of Civic Design in 1912. Reilly's own practice as an architect was limited, but his dining room commission (10, 35, 36, **Appendix: II**) became part of a more general promotion of murals, when he exhibited them at the Royal Institute of British Architects in October 1926. He

was presumably responsible for inviting her to lecture to the Liverpool Architectural Society in 1927, when she provocatively ended her talk with the words, ‘It is the timidity of architects that the mural painter is up against.’⁴ Her father’s academic career, combined with consultancy in town planning, meant that he did not build very much during her years as a young muralist, although he was the architect for the Pier Pavilion at Colwyn Bay where she painted the theatre in 1934. (Appendix: X)

Bernard Miller was one of the graduates of the Liverpool School of Architecture who gave Adshead commissions, notably for the large-scale reredos at St Christopher, Withington. (37, Appendix XI) Other architect friends included Oliver Hill, for whom she painted panels and a pictorial map in the restaurant at the British Pavilion at the 1937 *Exposition universelle* in Paris (38), and Geoffrey Jellicoe, who commissioned the paintings for Totnes Town Hall (Appendix: XXII).

An incidental motive for mural painting was its publicity value, which would benefit both the artist and the patron. Murals have always been considered a worthy subject for news coverage, and the lengthy column in *The Times*, with two photographs, that discussed the Highway Boys’ Club in September 1924 (Appendix: I), was evidence. Perhaps the essentially charitable nature of the work meant that it could receive more attention than a commercial art exhibition.

In trying to understand the importance of murals, no factor appears more important than its role in art education. In this context, the uncertainty about demand for murals was almost irrelevant compared to the strong belief that developed among art educators before the First World War that murals, and the associated field of ‘decorative painting’, were a means of developing in students the traditional skills of drawing, compositional design and handling unconventional materials and media. Sir Joshua Reynolds’ desire in his Discourses in the 1760s to aggrandise art in Britain by diverting students away from portrait, landscape and genre, and towards grand history painting was repeated from one generation to another, with the 1840s adding a more specific plea for murals as the best means of developing a grand style.

If art was going to earn social and academic status, it had to be seen to be sufficiently difficult, and this could be achieved through murals by a combination of large scale,



37 – *The Ascending Christ*, 1935,
St. Christopher’s Church, Withington.



38 – *A Culinary Map of Britain*, (Design for a glass map for the 1937 *Exposition universelle* in Paris, signed, titled to the reverse : “*Design for Paris Exhibition 1937, (Broken in transit)*”, pen & ink and gouache on paper, squared, 30 x 22 ¼ in. (76.2 x 56.4 cm).

intractable paints and surfaces, and, in many cases, the need to work uncomfortably in situ. Mary Adshead obviously enjoyed these sorts of challenges, as one might enjoy feats of endurance in sport or exercise. She painted the pictorial map in 1937 to a tight deadline while heavily pregnant for the third time. She attributed her lameness in later life to long hours spent up ladders. There was an aesthetic dimension of difficulty to murals that she never seems to have worried too much about, although her good instincts as a designer, lacking in many more famous painters, helped her to avoid most of the pitfalls.

Together with the belief in the positive virtues of murals, there was a loss of confidence, among critics and patrons, in the usual alternatives. Adshead told the Liverpool Architectural Society in 1927, ‘Even in the Academy, I am told, there is an uneasy feeling awakening as to the probable doom of the purely “easel picture”.’⁵ After 1900, there was



39 – *Homage to Mozart*, 1930s, signed, inscribed to reverse : “*Design for large picture Cousin Penelope & Stephen*”, gouache on paper, squared, 13 x 11 in. (33 x 28 cm).

a conscious focus in the art schools on ‘decorative painting’, which curiously combined the most traditional artists and teachers (if Henry Tonks is to be numbered among them) and the most avant-garde, many of whom had been his students.

The term ‘decorative’ is misleading, for it was not an indication of triviality, but rather of a more conscious effort at formal composition than normal, making the picture suitable to take its place in an architectural setting in the renaissance spirit. Piero della Francesca, who so clearly embodied these qualities, was reaching a new height of popularity, which also affected modernist artists.

The Slade School Summer Composition Prize was a notable vehicle for developing ‘decorative painting’. Stanley Spencer, who won the competition in 1912 with *The Nativity* (College Art Collections, University College London), was one of the most successful exponents of this manner, and this work remains outstanding, with none of the adverse qualities so often present in art school set pieces. In her preference for rounded figures well forward in the pictorial space, very different to Rex Whistler’s smaller and slighter figures, Mary Adshead showed a consistent affinity to Spencer, although lighter in touch and probably influenced by her time spent in Paris with her mother before beginning at the Slade. She was one of many artists of her time to remain true to her training, not only in a long-lasting devotion to murals, but also in making ‘decorative compositions’ like *Homage to Mozart*. (39)

Also in 1912, the 1851 Commission founded the Rome Scholarship in Decorative Painting as the equivalent of the French *Prix de Rome*, together with scholarships in Architecture and Sculpture. This was official recognition at a high level that a new and serious kind of painting had arrived and it was hoped that winners of the scholarship would be the mural painters of the future, so competitors had to go through an elaborate portfolio preparation designing a painting to a given subject, and for a particular architectural position. The Slade produced all the early Rome scholars, including the first, Colin Gill, in 1913, and after the war Winifred Knights, in 1920, whose competition piece, *The Deluge* (Tate), was widely exhibited (a young woman artist was still definitely newsworthy). The next award went to Tom Monnington in 1922, before the Slade monopoly was lost.

Neither Mary nor Rex Whistler competed for the Rome Scholarship, although they each stayed at the British School at Rome as summer visitors. The Principal of the Slade, Henry Tonks, had other plans for them at the Highway Boys’ Club, a scheme which, as *The Times* reported, was started on the rebound from his earlier unsuccessful attempt to have lunettes painted above doors for the new County Hall building on the South Bank by students from London art schools. Tonks had a sum of money available, but ‘he disclaims being a philanthropist’, *The Times* continued, ‘he is an artist deeply interested in wall decoration, anxious to see it used, and fully aware that unless the artist is caught young he will never succeed at it.’⁶

The report contrasted the greater depth and movement of Rex Whistler’s panels with Mary’s ‘inspiration from the Italian Primitives, with hints from the East.’⁷ Both artists

were launched artistically and socially, and went on to specialise in murals, Whistler reaching a much wider public with his Tate Gallery restaurant, opened in 1926 when he was still only twenty-one.

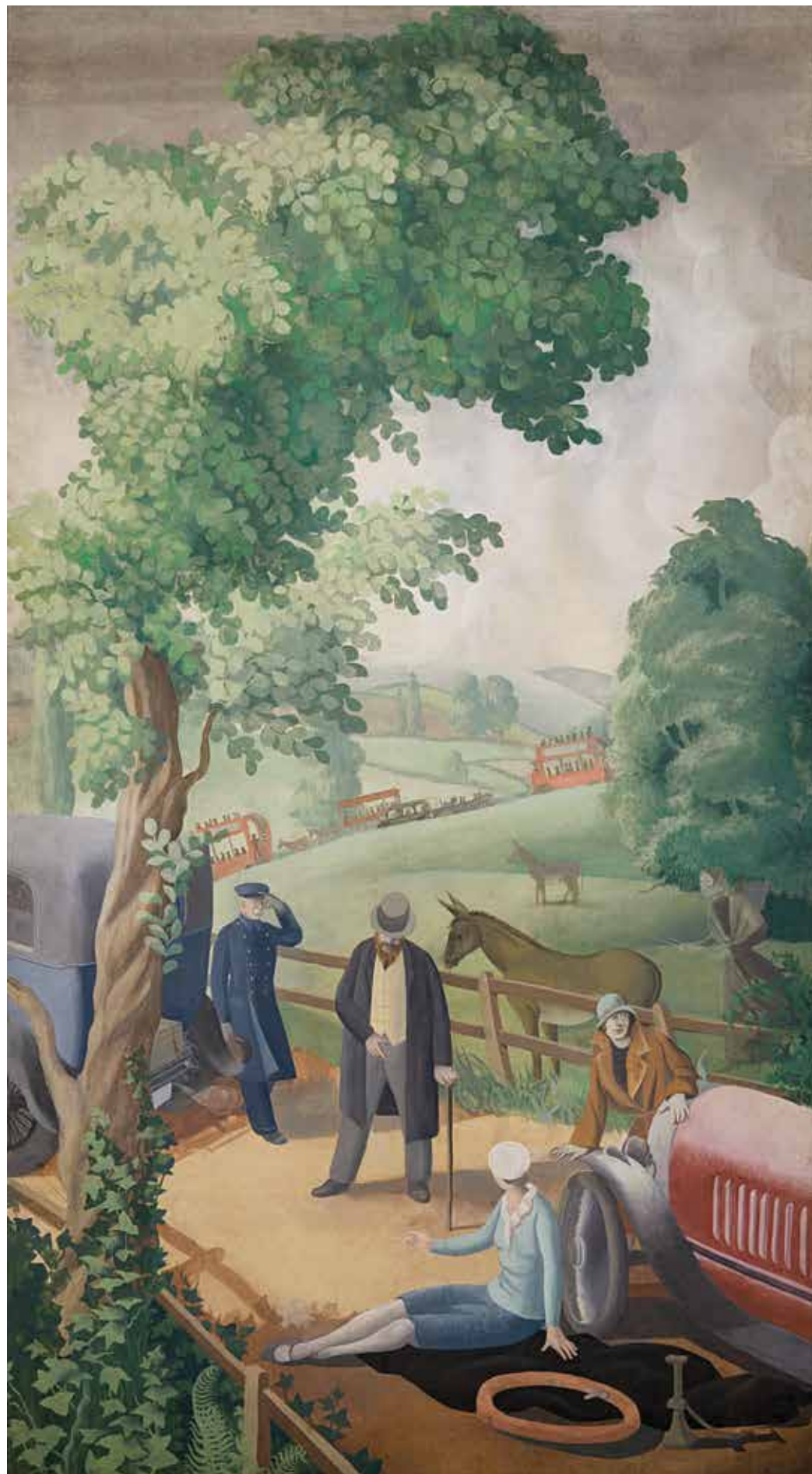
By showing Mary Adshead against this background of developing interest in mural painting, we can see aspects of her career that followed a typical pattern. The subject and treatment of the Reilly dining room panels look as if they may have been influenced by Whistler's Tate scheme, with its panoramic treatment and emphasis on depicting the pleasures of eating, with exotic references in an eighteenth century manner. The common source was probably in French scenic wallpaper of the early 1800s which was enjoying a revival in twenties interiors. The Whistler influence remains strong in the Beaverbrook dining room murals of 1928 (15, 16, 40-43, **Appendix: V**), which were described in print as being in 'the manner of English eighteenth century sporting prints and aquatints.' If this scheme had actually been by Whistler, Lady Diana Cooper, who doted on him, would probably never have intervened with Beaverbrook, as she did over Adshead's murals, persuading him not to install the works on the rather specious grounds that he would quarrel with most of the people portrayed in them. Perhaps this was a sign that the moment for being amusing was already passing, although Adshead went on for some while as a typical decorative artist of the twenties. Her panels in light grey, pinks, blues and greens for the nursery at No.6, John Street, commissioned by the architect of the Ritz, Arthur Davis, 1929, were vignettes of the seasons in a whimsical style that seems generic to the twenties. being similar to work by Doris Zinkeisen.⁸



40 – *An English Holiday, Newmarket Fair*, 1928 oil on canvas, 82 x 120 in. (208 x 305 cm).



41 – *An English Holiday, Village Inn*, 1928, signed lower left, oil on canvas, 85 x 38 in. (217 x 96.5 cm).



43 – *An English Holiday, Thee Winners' Enclosure*, 1928, oil on canvas, 85 x 128 in. (216 x 326 cm).

While Rex Whistler's style as a mural painter never substantially changed before his death in 1944, Adshead's seems to have gone through a major shift after 1930, as did many artists and designers in Britain. in response not only to their growing awareness of examples of modernism in Europe, but also in response to the more serious political climate. The fact that Mary and Stephen's flat in Hyde Park Gate was lent to Raoul Dufy when he visited one summer is an indication of wider sympathies that, while scarcely revolutionary, would not have agreed with Henry Tonks. On the other hand, it must be remembered that Muirhead Bone, described by Kenneth Clark as 'one of the most honest, warm-hearted and unselfish men I have ever known', was a close friend of Jacob Epstein and sympathetic to younger modernist artists in Britain.⁹ They certainly followed him in broad mindedness., which helped to make Stephen a respected art critic. and Mary a good organiser for the Artists International Association in the thirties and for the Society of Mural Painters after the war.

The first manifestation of a modernist Mary Adshead, in the Colwyn Bay pavilion panels in 1934 (**Appendix: X**), marks a dramatic change, although her new style, derived from the decorative version of cubism then much practised in Europe, was entirely unthreatening. On this occasion, it was not directed by the architecture of the pavilion, which was essentially classical. She continued to work in this vein in the panels for Lewis' Store at Leicester (1936) and in the smaller decorations for the British pavilion at Paris in 1937.

42 – *An English Holiday, The Puncture*, 1928 signed lower left, oil on canvas, 85 x 47 in. (217 x 121.5 cm).

Her reredos for Bernard Miller's church at Withington (37, 44), on the other hand, shows a different line of development, partly going back to Adshead's interest in the early Italian renaissance, while designed with a boldness that suits the blocky architecture.¹⁰ The overall shape of the work in relation to the box-like interior of the church, its iconography and formal arrangement of panels around a central figure of Christ in Majesty is strikingly similar to Graham Sutherland's design for the tapestry behind the High Altar in Coventry Cathedral. Art Deco does not seem a naturally sacred style, but here the effect of concentrated attention through geometry is well matched to the liveliness of the background patterning.

These shifts responded to new types of commission and an absence of self-importance. Mary Adshead was not ashamed of being a jobbing painter, with all that this implies about diversity of style. Adaptability is an important part of the mural painter's repertoire, although it may seem to contradict the 'high art' aims of the genre. While some painters of her generation became stuck in a pre-war style, she was able to move on to achieve some of her best work after the war, such as the church at Luton, where symbolism and style achieve an even more successful junction than at Withington. Without her murals, Mary Adshead might have been an agreeable but essentially minor artist. A lot of the time, that is what she was in a most successful way, but her sense of occasion in the churches, particularly, helped her to find the sort of depth that the promoters of mural painting had hoped would emerge from their long efforts.

- 1 See Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, London & New Haven. Yale University Press 2004.
- 2 Published in *Studio*, vol XC, September 1925, and exhibited at the Fine Art Society, London, in 'Eric Ravilious in Context', 2002. Private collection USA.
- 3 Mary Adshead. 'Modern Decorative Painting', *Architect and Building News*, 25 March, 1927. vol 117, p515.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 'Mural Decoration - A Slade Experiment in Shadwell'. *The Times*, 24 September. 1924. p3.
- 7 Caption to illustration in *Architectural Review*, vol 67, 1930, p259.
- 8 Illustrated in *Studio*, vol 97, 1929, p370.
- 9 Kenneth Clark, *Another Part of the Wood*, London, John Murray 1974, p59.
- 10 The church was the centrepiece of a new working class overspill suburb of Manchester. Although by then a listed building, it was demolished in the mid 1990s because of maintenance problems and a diminishing congregation, and the painting was relocated at another church by Miller, St Columba's, Anfield, in Liverpool.

44 – Mary Adshead painting *The Ascending Christ* in her studio, 1935.
 Photo: Estate of Mary Adshead





45 – *Scenes from the Life of Christ: Preaching the Gospel*, mid 1920s, oil on canvas, 20 x 51 in. (51 x 130 cm).
OPPOSITE: detail

This unfinished reredos is likely to date to the period in which Adshead produced her first mural, *The Joys of the Country, Shadwell* (1924), painted in collaboration with her fellow Slade student Rex Whistler. The scenes from the Life of Christ follow a conventional iconography until the last two panels which include a scene with a missionary reading the scriptures in Africa and figures in contemporary dress apparently admiring a Neo-Classical building.



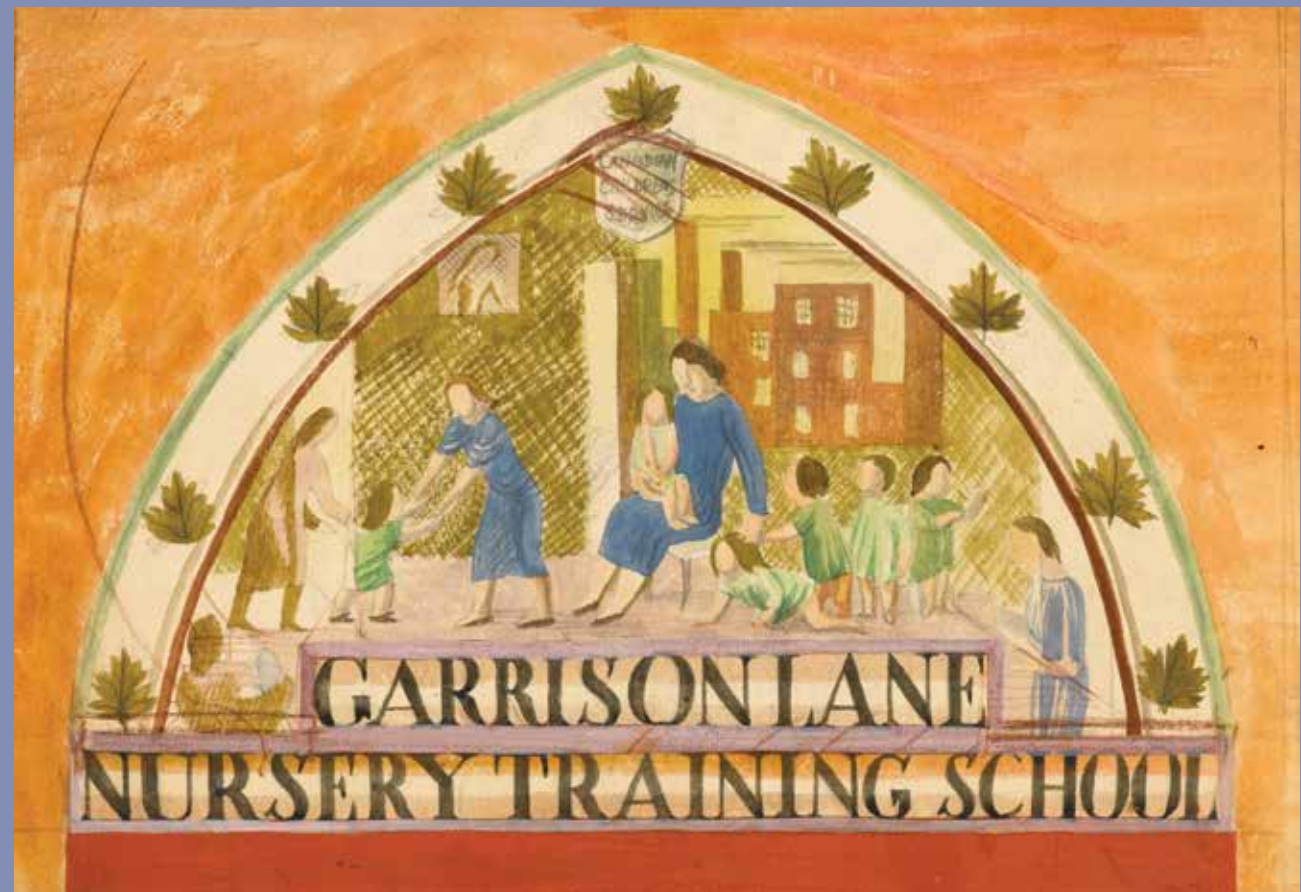
46 – *The Nativity*, 1932, Lady Chapel, St Columba, Anfield, Liverpool. Side panels added in 1956.



47 – Design for a mural in Henry Carr's house at Esher, c.1935, pencil and gouache on paper, 12 ½ x 17 ¼ in. (32 x 43.8 cm).



48 – Lunette design for a school mural, c.1935, gouache on paper, 6 ½ x 12 ½ in. (16.5 x 32 cm).



49 – Design for Garrison Lane Nursery Training School, c.1930, gouache on paper, 9 x 12 ½ in. (23 x 32 cm).



50 – Designs for altar front in Shrewsbury church, pencil and gouache on card, squared, 7 x 13 ½ in. (18 x 34 cm).



51 – *Allegorical scene*,
watercolour on paper,
9 ½ x 12 ¼ in. (23.8 x 33.5 cm).

Modern Spaces: Mary Adshead's Post-war Murals & the Promotion of Mural Painting by the SMP 1939-1965

Melanie Unwin



During the Inter-war period Mary Adshead's work was primarily identified with two of the traditional sites of mural painting: churches and private houses.¹ Commissions from Frank Pick for the London Underground and from Cunard for ocean liners had given her some experience outside this conventional framework, although the interior design of ships in the early thirties had more in common with grand country houses than modern transportation. A turning point came in 1936, when she was invited to paint murals for the restaurant of the new Lewis' department store in Leicester. This commission offered a different kind of site, commercial and modern, and the opportunity to work in new styles, with new subject matter. It was to be projects of this type that the Society of Mural Painters (SMP), founded in 1939, promoted with the twin aims of expanding the range of sites available for mural painting and redefining it as a modern art form. From the late thirties Adshead vigorously pursued commissions in new and commercial contexts whilst also playing a key role in publicising mural painting, following her election as Secretary of the SMP in 1953.

Contrary to expectation, the Second World War provided fresh opportunities for mural painting and of a kind suited to the objectives of the SMP. Numerous British Restaurants, works and services canteens were opened all over the country that offered un-rationed cooked meals to workers who, after long shifts, were unable to deal with the queues and time-consuming practicalities of rationing. The restaurants were often housed in makeshift buildings. In an effort to make these utilitarian spaces more attractive, the Ministry of Food appointed a special art advisor, an initiative which led to artists being employed.² Adshead undertook murals in six canteens, for example, Vauxhall Motors, St Columba House (Appendix: XII) and the British Restaurant in Birmingham (53, 54, Appendix: XIII), all of which enabled her, and other artists to continue mural painting during the war when private work more or less vanished.

This Ministry of Food initiative had far reaching consequences. From it originated the increased popularity and appreciation of the mural as a legitimate means to enhance public spaces. This continued into the post-war period, reaching a high point with the Festival of Britain. It also validated the idea that sites for mural painting did not have to be permanent high status locations.

The use of mural decorations in wartime canteens was almost certainly inspired by the Tate Gallery's 1939 exhibition *Mural Painting in Great Britain 1919-1939*³ and the formation

52 – Study with Figurine for Tea Room mural, Luton Hoo, Bedfordshire, c1949, pencil and watercolour on paper, 6 x 4 ¼ in. (15 x 11 cm). (See Appendix: XV)

of the SMP earlier that year at the suggestion of the designer T A Fennemore.⁴ The initial executive committee was made up of John Armstrong, Edward Bawden, Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant and Gilbert Spencer. Adshead was amongst the first to apply for membership.⁵

The Tate exhibition was to be followed over the next twenty years by three SMP exhibitions designed to bring mural painting to the attention of the public and architects and other possible commissioners. The Tate exhibition catalogue highlighted one of the central problems with the promotion of mural painting:

The principal function of the Tate Gallery is to represent British painting, but murals are one branch of art which cannot be shown in their original form. This exhibition is in the nature of a reflection and a record ... photographs are necessarily a substitute for original work.⁶

The issue of how to display mural work satisfactorily was one that would dominate SMP exhibitions. The Tate exhibition displayed over one hundred and fifty photographs showing more than one hundred different mural projects including Adshead's Reilly dining room (10, 35, 36, **Appendix: II**) and the east wall of St Christopher's Church, Withington (37, 44, **Appendix: XI**). This selection was in keeping with the majority of murals included in the show, which were in private houses or churches and represented past achievements. The third example of Adshead's work – a panel from Lewis' restaurant – was one of several examples, which also included murals from hospitals, schools, cinemas and zoos, that illustrated future aspirations of the SMP.⁷ Indeed, the central imperative of the exhibition was to demonstrate the modernity of, and wide range of uses for, the mural.

The late forties provided Adshead with the opportunity to build on her experience of war-time murals in canteens, with a series of significant commissions that fell within the SMP's agenda for spaces that were both more democratic and often more overtly commercial than the private commissions typical of the earlier period. Her first post-war mural was at the Cordon Rouge restaurant in 4 Sloane Street, London. This was a new restaurant furnished with Windsor chairs, bentwood tables with wipe clean tops and plain fabric-covered banquettes which provided a modern uncluttered space dominated by Adshead's mural. Her decoration of the Cordon Rouge combined three elements which Adshead frequently marshalled when designing murals – a central panoramic image, *trompe l'oeil* effects and decorative vignettes – the latter being something she had used extensively in her wartime canteens. Panoramic scenes, whether confined to one wall, as at the Cordon Rouge (1946) (**Appendix: XIV**), or wrapped around an entire room as at the Highway Boys' Club, Shadwell (1924) (**Appendix: I**) and in Charles Reilly's dining room in Liverpool (1925) (10, 35, 36, **Appendix: II**) gave Adshead the scope for the creation of decidedly sophisticated effects. The use of *trompe l'oeil* in a mural increases its visual impact by extending the physical space of the room, immersing the viewer in a complete environment. At the Cordon Rouge Adshead painted a *trompe l'oeil* shelf on which were arranged baskets of freshly caught seafood and fishing paraphernalia. An illusionary striped awning screened a 'window' through which the diners could view a seascape. Adshead cleverly merged the blue of the sky and sea, forming a background on which fish and perching gulls, fishing boats and seaweed combined to evoke a landscape that was simultaneously above and below sea level. In contrast to the 'virtual reality' of the *trompe l'oeil* work, the seascape depicted a fantasy world



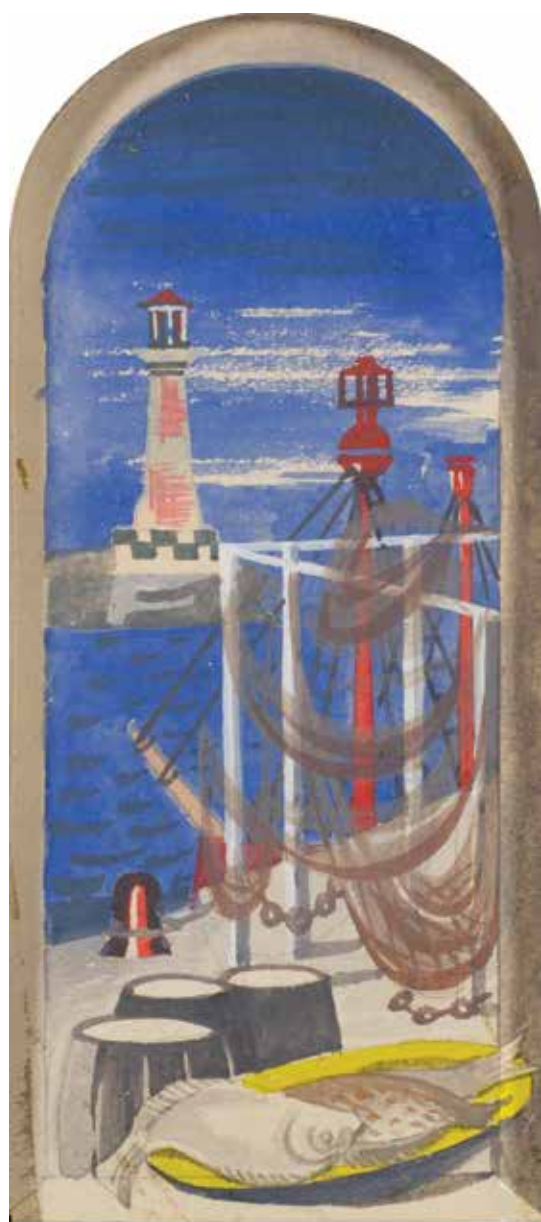
53 – Study for World's Foods murals – Fish from Greenland, c.1942, pencil, gouache and collage on paper, squared, 9 ¾ x 13 ½ in. (25 x 34 cm).



54 – Study for World's Foods murals – Farmers ploughing and sowing the fields, c.1942, signed, pencil and watercolour on paper, squared, 4 ¾ x 7 ½ in. (12.2 x 19 cm).

which included a lute playing mermaid serenading a sailor. The effect was both amusing and evocative, providing diners with a conversation piece a world away from post-war austerities.

The success of this combination of *trompe l'oeil* and large-scale panorama led Adshead to use these devices in her next significant mural commission, the restaurant at Luton Hoo (52, 55, 56, Appendix: XV). This stately home in Bedfordshire had been extensively



55

55 – Study with fishes and lighthouse for the Tea Room mural, Luton Hoo, Bedfordshire, c1949, pencil and watercolour on paper, 7 x 3 in. (17.8 x 7.6 cm).



56

56 – Study of harbour for Tea Room mural, Luton Hoo, Bedfordshire, c1949, pencil and watercolour on paper, 7 x 3 in. (17.7 x 7.8 cm).

rebuilt in the 1760s by the great classical architect Robert Adam. In 1903 the Wernher family bought the property as a secondary residence to Bath House, their London home. Following the death of their only son and heir in the Second World War Sir Harold and Lady Zia Wernher offered the property to the National Trust. When the gift was rejected, the Wernhers made Luton Hoo their permanent home and converted part of the house into a museum for the family's extensive collection of fine and decorative arts. The museum was opened to the paying public in 1950 as a memorial to their late son. Some of the kitchens were remodelled into a licensed restaurant which Adshead was commissioned to decorate in 1949.

The post-war period saw an increasing number of stately home owners opening their doors to the public as a way of raising revenue to maintain the property and meet the high taxes introduced by the post-war government.⁸ The Wernhers were pioneers in this respect and consequently had few examples of the facilities stately homes might require to attract visitors. Their decision to include extensive refreshment facilities was shrewd. The Wernhers anticipated that the restaurant would make an essential last stop for most visitors who, after travelling to the house and then walking around its extensive collections, would welcome refreshments before undertaking their journey home. The popularity of the restaurant generated valuable revenue, and Adshead's extensive mural scheme provided a memorable backdrop to any visit.

Mural decoration was, of course, an established part of interior design for stately homes, not just historically, but also contemporaneously, such as Rex Whistler's extensive interiors at Plas Newydd.⁹ What was significant about Adshead's work at Luton Hoo was that it was not sited in the grand interior of the house but as part of the visitor facilities. The commission thus offered a new, modern space for mural decoration that fell clearly into the commercial sector that the SMP were wishing to encourage and had been signaled in the 1939 Tate exhibition.

No record remains of how Adshead secured the commission at Luton Hoo, however her designs and parts of her mural still exist. She created a complex landscape that drew the visitor on an imaginary journey through scenery reminiscent of the grounds of the house and beyond. The choice of subject matter for the mural was partly a response to the inhospitable space which housed the restaurant: a windowless basement with tiled walls. Like her work at the Cordon Rouge restaurant, Adshead used *trompe l'oeil* techniques to extend the physical space of the restaurant and to add to the illusion of her panorama. These techniques referenced popular seventeenth and eighteenth century decorating styles that had been used widely by architects such as Adam in his substantial country houses. Though the subject matter of these earlier examples was predominately classical or biblical, the desire to impress, surprise and trick the viewer through complex decorative devices provided Adshead with a tradition on which to build. She in turn extended a grand domestic decorative tradition to an environment designed for commercial enterprise. Unusually Luton Hoo, an Adam house, brought together these two previously mutually exclusive elements within one building. A contemporary account described entering the restaurant:

As the door opens, we have the illusion of stepping into a cool marquee, airy and balloon-like, as we look out, under the awnings, into a land and seascape of the artist's imagining. The extraordinary thing is that there is no feeling of being constricted within four walls the design has the effect of dissolving them away.¹⁰



The panorama was not a continuous vista; working within the architectural constraints of the space, Adshead combined views through *trompe l'oeil* windows with more extensive panels of landscape. The 'windows' framed features such as pergolas, classical statues and a fountain; in the distance was open countryside punctuated by pavilions, ruined castles, a viaduct and a hilltop village. This scenery led down to a harbour-side town, complete with pier, lighthouse and the spectacle of a yachting regatta. Here the 'window' views captured a seafood stall, fishing nets and plates of freshly caught fish. Unlike the Reilly and Beaverbrook murals Adshead's landscape at Luton Hoo was, with the exception of a few indistinct figures sailing the boats, unpopulated. There are no picnicking groups of visitors around the pergolas, or quayside crowds watching the regatta, for the viewer to identify with. Adshead's landscape with its ornamental structures and spectacles, like the collections of Italian Renaissance bronzes, Fabergé figures and animals and fine English porcelain housed in the furnished but uninhabited public rooms of Luton Hoo, was to be experienced by the visitor as pure visual spectacle. This idea of visual consumption – looking not touching, passing through but not inhabiting – echoes the landscaped grounds of Luton Hoo designed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (1716-1783) in 1764. Brown created a scenic parkland, a series of impressive vistas which, like Adshead's restaurant landscape, gave the illusion of naturalness, and was designed to be experienced at a distance, rather than at close quarters.¹¹

The uninhabited idyllic scenery of the landscape is interrupted in Adshead's painted version by the rather incongruous insertion of two figures standing either side of a sedan chair. In a review of Adshead's decorations published in 1950 the restaurant entrance is described as having:

two Negro carriers on either side. The walnut colour of their skins is emphasized by their white turbans and diaphanous robes, and by the black and white of the piers and finials against which they stand. The colour of the sedan is lemon yellow, the curtains maroon.¹²

Described in purely decorative terms these two figures relate to the use of black figures in seventeenth and eighteenth century paintings when they were included not as identified individuals but as symbols of their owner's wealth and the riches of empire. Their inclusion in the fifties decorations does seem to make a link to the Wernher family business of the 1870s, diamond mining in South Africa, and to the eighteenth century origins of the house and some of its collections. The artist, the Wernhers and the fifties visitors clearly did not see the decorative and symbolic function of the figures as problematic: rather, they provided, like the collections on display in the house, an exotic 'other' for the visitors to view as part of their experience of Luton Hoo.

Adshead's next major commission, which was to be the largest mural she ever undertook, was also a public dining room, this time not in a stately home, but in Selfridges department store in London (1949-1951) (57, **Appendix: XVI**). Selfridges was in the process of being bought by Lewis', a department store chain, under the chairmanship of Lord Woolton,

57 – *Designs for The Jungle Restaurant*, 1949-51, 4th Floor, Selfridges, Oxford Street, London W1, pencil and watercolour on board. Estate of Mary Adshead.

who, as Minister of Food during the War, had been responsible for introducing British Restaurants.¹³ Amidst this period of uncertainty and change Adshead received the commission to redecorate the main public restaurant. The Palm Court restaurant at Selfridges had been bombed during the War and, though funding was short and much of the store needed renovation, it was the only area to be refurbished beyond the functional necessities. The restaurant operated as much more than just a place to eat; it also offered a venue for activities such as charity functions and balls, exhibitions, theatrical performances and children's entertainments (such as Punch and Judy shows and 'chimps' tea parties). Though not strictly retail activities, these events were used to attract people to the store where, almost inevitably, they would be tempted to buy Selfridges' goods. The provision of a restaurant also meant customers could stay longer in the store and therefore spend more.

Adshead, looking for a theme that would appeal to adults and children alike, returned to the subject matter of her Reilly dining room mural: the jungle. She brought to Selfridges' jungle familiar motifs – the elephant which had carried the tiger hunters in Reilly's dining room (10, 35, 36, **Appendix: II**) and Winston Churchill to the Taj Mahal in Adshead's dining room mural for Lord Beaverbrook, was this time ridden by a monkey and led by a small black boy, dressed in turban and loincloth. Similarly, the Reilly dining room tiger was also transplanted, now no longer the hunted but the hunter. The finished scheme was a spectacular panorama combining tropical scenery, black people and animals from all corners of the Empire. It took Adshead two years to design and complete the commission, with the aid of painting assistants. The jungle theme was continued in the overall design of the restaurant. There were bamboo-clad columns, a specially woven carpet patterned with large exotic leaves and, in the foyer, planters filled with 'birds of paradise' and other exotic plants. The variety of the wildlife (which included flamingoes, camels, iguanas, and anteaters amongst many others) and indeed plant life (cacti, banana trees, monstera and various varieties of palms can be identified) make it clear this was not a geographically specific jungle but a decorative conglomeration; to be 'consumed' by the diners along with their lunch and the many wares Selfridges had on offer.¹⁴

The opening of the Jungle Restaurant coincided with Lewis' formal takeover of Selfridges in 1951. However Adshead's design had more in common with pre-war Selfridges, and its Edwardian origins. Soon Adshead's picture book jungle with its references to Empire as a place to be wondered at and consumed through exotic imagery would be outdated and unacceptable. Indeed, Selfridges, which had celebrated George V's Jubilee in 1935 and the 1937 Coronation with spectacular tableaux celebrating the Empire, abandoned this theme under Lewis' management and for the 1953 Coronation displayed its loyalty by celebrating the history of the British monarchy.

Despite the size of the project and the substantial design task that Adshead had completed she never exhibited designs for the Selfridges' mural at the SMP exhibitions. The SMP had reformed after the War, meeting at the National Gallery in 1946.¹⁵

Their immediate task was to put together a reference library of photographs which prospective commissioners could view, and to organize an exhibition. Held in April 1950 at the New Burlington Galleries the SMP's First Exhibition 1950-51 was supported by the Arts Council. In an alternative to the Tate's 1939 format, SMP members displayed specially prepared mural panels to show the range of styles and techniques that could be employed alongside design drawings for actual murals. Hans Feibusch in his introductory text in the accompanying catalogue was careful to point out that:

a real mural takes its compositional cue from its setting, and that therefore a mural panel not designed for a special place is... aiming at a broad architectural effect.

The catalogue also appealed for mural paintings to be commissioned for modern sites such as new civic buildings, schools, factories and business offices, and the displayed works seemed to indicate that some success was being achieved – with schemes for schools, workers' canteens, a bar and a sports pavilion being included in the designs carried out. Perhaps the most notable initiative was the inclusion in the catalogue of a 'Schedule of Average Rates' along with a list of SMP members, suggesting that all the SMP artists were willing to paint for a fixed rate per square foot regardless of their own status or that of their client.¹⁶ Clearly the SMP felt that their quest for new sites would inevitably mean new clients who would have little experience of commissioning original work and needed reassurance that the process did not need to be prohibitively expensive, nor would costs vary from artist to artist.

Adshead was one of twenty-seven members included in the 1950 exhibition. She showed a design drawing and model for the restaurant at Luton Hoo together with an unidentified painted screen. At this stage she does not seem to have been actively involved in the society's work. Then in February 1953, Adshead was elected Honorary Secretary and therefore became closely involved with the SMP's next exhibition held at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in April of that year. A new Chairman, the Earl of Huntingdon (who worked under the professional name of Jack Hastings), was also elected though he did not take up the position until after the RIBA exhibition.

The Festival of Britain dominated the period between the SMP's 1950 and 1953 exhibitions. It proved to be a showcase for art as much as for the technological and manufacturing advances evident in post-war Britain. However, unlike much of the sculpture and easel painting which was exhibited in discrete fine art exhibitions, murals, in keeping with the goals of the SMP, were included in the pavilions dedicated to specific aspects of British advances evident in post-war Britain. However, unlike much of the sculpture and easel painting which was exhibited in discrete fine art exhibitions, murals, in keeping with the goals of the SMP, were included in the pavilions dedicated to specific aspects of British life, and supported the displays. There is no evidence of the SMP being actively involved with the Festival's organization though many of its members contributed to the displays. Surprisingly for an established mural artist, Adshead does not seem to have produced any work for the London or regional festivals. Possibly this is because she was so busy in the period immediately before the Festival (with the Luton Hoo and Selfridges murals) that

she felt unable to commit to another large mural project. Equally, her invitation from the Post Office to compete to design stamps for their commemorative Festival of Britain issue, though ultimately unsuccessful, may have fully occupied her time.

Although the Festival did not directly advance Adshead's career it did much to promote mural painting as an art form, a point that was picked up by the press: 'it was with an obvious increase in self-confidence that the next [SMP] exhibition was held.'¹⁷ The 1953 SMP exhibition, held at the RIBA, continued to explore ways in which murals could be best displayed. As the press release explained:

The exhibits are not in most cases complete murals but full-sized sections of them or details of part of some scheme of decoration. Alongside each panel is a sketch perspective showing the architect's conception of the mural in its setting and these should be studied in order to understand the full-sized details.¹⁸

Murals were being promoted not merely as large paintings to be hung in an available space, but as an integral part of the space that surrounded them. Holding the exhibition at the RIBA was obviously intended to raise awareness amongst architects of the possibilities mural paintings offered to new buildings. However, this message needed careful presentation if it were to counter the profession's reservations, which the 'Astragal' column of the *Architect's Journal*, covering the opening of the exhibition, highlighted:

It was an excellent idea to show these paintings, together with their actual or mythical building sites... mural painters can be the most dangerous of people to allow into a building — a danger which can only be lessened by architects being thoroughly familiar with the mural painters' work... and by collaboration between painter and architect from as early as possible in the design stage ...¹⁹

Of the twenty-eight murals schemes exhibited, ten identified commissioning architects, including such well-known figures as Basil Spence and Wells Coates. The schemes included schools (which predominated), an airport terminal and a saloon bar. Only two domestic projects and four religious schemes are identified in the catalogue though this probably suggests judicious selection rather than any significant reduction in domestic and church commissions. In a variation on the strongly architectural theme of the exhibition, Adshead elected to show a proposed memorial mural dedicated to her father, architect Professor Stanley Adshead (1868-1946) at St Anslem's church in Kennington, South London.²⁰

The RIBA exhibition, which toured the country throughout 1954-55,²¹ marked a period of intense activity by the SMP under its new Chairman and Secretary. Adshead's first objective was to increase the size of the SMP membership which, at fifty-one, was dismally low. Writing to directors of all publicly funded art galleries she asked for names of muralists, requested their help in identifying possible sites for mural painting, and suggested that their own galleries might be considered. Adshead also approached the Ministry of Works who encouragingly expressed an interest in mural decoration. Adshead and Huntingdon

organized an evening of informal discussion at the Arts Council where the possibilities of mural painting were considered by an audience of muralists, architects and other interested parties.²² Speakers at the event held on 27 October 1954 included the Minister of Works, Sir David Eccles together with the architect Sir Hugh Casson and art critic and writer Eric Newton. A 'lively' debate followed presentations that concentrated on ways in which commercial commissions could be obtained for mural paintings. It was clear that the SMP mandate pragmatically took advantage of a post-war building boom. Working directly with commercial clients and architects was evidently, for the SMP membership, a more desirable arrangement than private clients and domestic commissions. Consequently the SMP decided to address their mandate by producing a brochure for clients outlining how to commission a mural and demonstrating examples of the kinds of effect that could be obtained.

By the Annual General Meeting of 1955 Adshead's efforts to increase membership levels were succeeding; total membership was now sixty-nine. However, acceptance by the society was not automatic and of twenty-five applicants considered only six were elected. Members paid both an annual subscription and a percentage of their fee for any commission obtained via the society.²³ In return, the society held photographs of all members' work which were presented to clients looking for artists. The most significant commission the SMP succeeded in securing, certainly from Adshead's point of view, was at Lewis' department store in Bristol.

The architects Sir Percy Thomas and Sons approached the SMP early in 1955 for assistance with a mural commission for the public restaurant of a new department store they were designing in central Bristol for Lewis'. The SMP suggested that a competition might be held for this prestigious project open to the society's membership who would submit anonymously.²⁴ The SMP managed the running of the competition in close liaison with Lewis' head office at Selfridges and Sir Percy Thomas, Eric Newton and the Chairman of Lewis' acted as judges. Adshead's own submission *Mid-summer Eve Pageant of the Guilds of the Middle Ages* marked a dramatic departure both stylistically and in subject matter from her previously work and it was selected as the winning design (58, **Appendix: XX**).

Adshead's design was a collage of events and buildings relating to Bristol's medieval history. Stylistically, though not abstract, her work showed a debt to cubism, with strong linear designs, geometric shapes and bold use of counter-changing colour giving a dynamic and colourful design.²⁵ Whether selected by Lewis' or Adshead, the choice of historic Britain reflected the more insular nature of post-war society. The British people, in the aftermath of the Second World War, were nostalgic for domestic scenes and history — the jungle scenes and stereotypes of black subjects were rejected, as ideas of empire were being challenged. This introspective mood had been reflected in the rolling green hills and picturesque ruins of Adshead's 'Capability' Brown inspired landscape at Luton Hoo, but was at Bristol developed without the ambiguity implicit in the two black figures included in the earlier work.



58 – *Designs for Mid-summer Eve Pageant of the Guilds of the Middle Ages*, 1957, pencil and gouache on board. Estate of Mary Adshead.

The SMP Executive Committee had met with little success in raising funds in the two years since their meeting at the Arts Council, which had led to a decision to produce a brochure. A Special General Meeting was consequently called in February 1957. The Executive proposed holding a summer school at Dartington Hall in Devon to raise funds. Held in the summer of 1957 the school proved to be a great success. As well as a variety of painting classes there were demonstrations, workshops and an evening lecture series available to the students who were a mixture of beginners and semi-experienced painters.²⁶ SMP members provided all the tuition. The central project of the summer school, however, was the mural painting classes.²⁷ The SMP had secured two mural commissions, one from the architect Geoffrey Jellicoe for two ceiling panels for Totnes Civic Hall, and one for the Ministry of Works naval establishment, *HMS Thunderer*, that was under construction in Plymouth. Mary Adshead and Hans Tisdall each worked with their students on a ceiling panel and Kenneth Rowntree's group worked on the mural for *HMS Thunderer*. Adshead's mural *Totnes in Time* (59, Appendix: XXII) (its



59 – *Totnes in Time*, painted ceiling panel for the Totnes Civic Hall, installed 1960.

counterpart by Tisdall was *Totnes in Space*) responded to its siting by being designed 'in the round' and was a montage of Totnes history, centering on the myth of a green giant. As with her design for Lewis' in Bristol, scenes drawn from myth and early history combined in a richly coloured complex design to dynamic effect. Hans Tisdall's panel, which was mounted in an adjoining room, was stylistically very different, though equally colourful, presenting medieval Totnes in a linear landscape dominated by a flamboyantly depicted sun. It was clear that Adshead and Tisdall had worked from a shared palette to ensure that, whilst the panels were formally disparate, they would work as a pair when installed.

The SMP Annual Report for 1957 described the summer school as 'entailing a great deal of hard work, but the experience of living and working together, for a short period, under unusual and stimulating conditions, appealed to those Members who undertook it.'²⁸ The summer school was also a financial success and provided more than adequate funds to

produce the society's proposed brochure. In a circular letter to members asking them to submit photographs of their best work Adshead announced 'this brochure will become the most important standard work on mural decoration in England today.'²⁹

The brochure was called *Eyes on the Wall* and had extensive sections on materials and techniques as well as an introduction by architect Sir Hugh Casson and a short essay by Eric Newton. Newton's text was specifically addressed to architects whom he encouraged to include murals in their work to add meaning to the functional spaces of buildings. A total of fifty-seven different murals were shown, covering a full range of techniques and materials. Two of Adshead's projects were included, a collaged panel she had produced for the Pullman car of the *Golden Arrow* train in 1952 (107, **Appendix: XVII**), and, somewhat surprisingly given its age, her 1932 reredos for St Christopher's Withington (37, 44, **Appendix: XI**). Her collage panel helped illustrate the range of techniques the brochure was proposing could be employed. It is possible, given the SMP's emphasis on the role of the mural in strong architectural settings, and the importance of collaboration between architect and artist, that the reredos was chosen to reflect these aims. However, the brochure when compared with the Tate Gallery exhibition of murals marked a distinct shift away from church and domestic commissions towards public and commercial schemes. *Eyes on the Wall* provided the SMP with a tangible aid for prospective commissioners and a means of promoting the society and mural painting more widely. The achievement of this publication also spurred the society to hold another exhibition.

Mural Art Today (1960) was the SMP's most ambitious exhibition and reflected the status the society had attained as well as the general interest in murals. Held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the exhibition was designed by Sir Hugh Casson and the Department of Interior Design at the Royal College of Art, and financially supported by the Arts Council, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and four commercial sponsors (John Lewis Partnership, Orient – P&O, ICI and The English Electric Co Ltd). The exhibition combined loaned mural works, design drawings and sample panels from the thirty-five artists selected and forty-six works exhibited.³⁰ Though oil paint predominated as a medium, nearly as many exhibits were in tiles and mosaics, reflecting the expansion of materials available to mural artists. Adshead exhibited two tile based designs as well as one oil panel. The exhibition, opened by Sir Basil Spence, architect of Coventry Cathedral, attracted 10,000 visitors.

Whilst the SMP were encouraging a move away from traditional sites, the church was still an important commissioner of mural works and Spence's many commissions for Coventry cathedral, such as John Hutton's glazed screens,³¹ provided examples of how the definition of mural decoration could be extended to include new materials and techniques – a direction which the SMP exhibitions had particularly promoted. The largest piece of wall 'decoration' commissioned by Spence at Coventry, however, was from painter and SMP member Graham Sutherland, though his vast east wall design *Christ the Redeemer Enthroned in Glory in the Tetramorph* was not painted but a tapestry.³²

For Adshead, the church was an important source of commissions throughout her career. In the post-war period she had completed an altar front for St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury (1950); two side panels to add to her 1932 altar panel at St Columba's, Anfield (1956) (46); a large triptych for St Mary and All Saints, Plymstock (1957), for Frank Crowe a former student of Bernard Miller (60, **Appendix: XXI**); and a wall painting for St Alban's Church, Warner's End (1958). However, none of these commissions had resulted in a substantial piece of work which was integral in the architecture of a new building as achieved at St Christopher's Withington, and which she and the SMP were promoting as the ideal model.



60 – Design for *St Michael & St George*, 1957, gouache on board.

Altar Triptych, Chapel of St Michael & St George, St Mary & All Saints Church, Plymstock. Estate of Mary Adshead.

However 1962 brought her a commission for an east wall mural in a church being designed by Peter Dunham for a new housing estate in Luton, built to provide homes for workers at Vauxhall Motors (where Adshead had painted murals during the Second World War). Though the scale of the two projects is radically different, Coventry Cathedral and Dunham and Adshead's work at St Francis' Luton share similarities.³³ Dunham, like Spence, envisaged in his design an east wall treatment that would dominate the central nave. Spence selected the subject for Sutherland's design 'a majestic figure surrounded by the four beasts...' after reviewing the relevant chapters in the Book of Revelations – 4: 2,3,6 and 7.³⁴ Though we do not know who chose the text, chapter 4:6-8 were also selected for the inspiration of Adshead's *To the End of Time* (61, **Appendix: XXV**) mural at St Francis':

Around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. The four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all round and within.³⁵



61 – *Design for To the End of Time*, 1961-62, gouache on paper.
East Wall, St Francis Church, Vauxhall Park Estate, Luton. Estate of Mary Adshead.

Unlike Coventry cathedral, built to symbolise the Resurrection, following the cathedral's destruction by bombing in the Second World War, St Francis' was a new church built for a community, in Harold Wilson's words, at the forefront of modern Britain's 'white heat of technology' society. Adshead selected two extremes to symbolize the contradictions brought by advances in technology and science, the atom bomb and space exploration.³⁶ However, central to her design, and in common with Sutherland's, were the four apocalyptic beasts symbolizing the four evangelists. Sutherland had chosen to depict the figure of Christ throned at the centre of his tapestry design. This treatment, particularly the 'huge white and amorphous shape' presented by Christ's robes that visually dominated the design whilst adding little to the symbolic meaning, received much adverse criticism.³⁷ In contrast to Sutherland's approach, Adshead depicted Christ's body symbolically as a crucifix. Surmounted by the head of Christ, wearing the crown of thorns, at its apex the cross forms the main structural element of the design. The heads of the four beasts are clearly articulated, in contrast to their wings ('each of them with six wings') which form a sophisticated arrangement preventing any quick reading of the image by the viewer. The complexity of the scene is further reinforced by Adshead's extensive use of white paint which reflects raking light from Dunham's glazed roof panel and illuminates the east end of the church creating a contrast to the relatively dark space of the nave. Formally Adshead's mural developed the style she had adopted at Lewis', Bristol and, to some extent, at Christie Hospital (62, **Appendix: XXIV**). Strongly graphic and linear, Adshead again plays with colour, though this time her palette is almost achromatic adding to the complexity of the design. In common with Adshead's other church work, no attempt is made at dissolving the wall with illusionistic techniques – the congregation is presented with the means for thought and contemplation rather than the opportunity to explore an imaginary landscape. Adshead described her intentions:

This picture aims to give a sense of the strength and permanence of Christianity from the life of Christ to the present day. It stresses the continuity. I have suggested Christ crucified, and have, I hope, used the symbols of the four evangelists in such a way as to convey their power, beauty, and penetration. It is through them that we have the teachings of Christ, and each gospel is a literary work of the first order. Therefore I have grouped them around the cross, but bearing down on our world of today. On one side is destruction and disintegration under the atom bomb, and on the other the family unit midst materialism and scientific discovery, problems of our generation.³⁸

Adshead's work at St Francis', like her work at St Christopher's, was structured on the SMP's ideal model. The combination of artist working with architect on a new building resulted in a powerful and resolved piece of work which successfully harmonised with the architectural context. The similarities with Coventry Cathedral suggest that Dunham and Adshead were responding to the criticisms made of Spence and Sutherland's work, though both projects affirmed the church as an important site for modern murals in contradiction to the aims of the SMP.

Eyes on the Wall and *Mural Painting Today* were substantial achievements for the society, but they were also time-consuming and burdensome for the SMP organisers who were after all actively pursuing careers. Whilst raising the profile of the society and mural painting



62 – Mural at Christie Hospital, Withington, Manchester. Doctors' lounge, Nathan House Library.

generally, there is little evidence that the number of commissions which arose directly from the society's activities were adequate reward for their efforts. With the exception of the Lewis' Bristol competition there is, for example, little evidence that the society was attaining an authoritative role in influencing the selection of mural artists for commissions. By 1965 a further problem was recognized, the lack of new younger members to take over from the existing executive most of whom were mature artists who had been involved with the society since its establishment. Laurence Scarfe summed up the situation in a letter to Adshead:

... [murals] are always (or nearly always) commissioned on a personal basis – and the cumbersome machinery of the Society plays no part in this. I think that most of us will admit that the energy expended on our periodic exhibitions has been quite out of proportion to either interest aroused or commissions... Our failure to attract younger artists is obvious – they simply have no need of us.³⁹

Though Scarfe's conclusion reflected the concerns of the SMP executive, his view was perhaps rather extreme. The society did continue, though at the 1965 AGM the entire executive, including Adshead as secretary, retired on block, not standing for re-election. A new committee was elected in their place but no further exhibitions were organized and by 1970 the future of the society was again in doubt.⁴⁰

The post-war mural in Britain was significantly different from pre-war examples. Oil painting and fresco techniques gave way to new materials, particularly tiles, which in turn influenced a move away from traditional subjects and styles exemplified by academic history painting to increasingly modern themes represented in non-academic and often semi-abstract or abstract styles. Landscapes, local events and fantasy were all suitable subjects and even where historical themes were chosen, there was shift away from significant moments of national achievement to a more democratic 'people's' history as exemplified by Adshead's *Mid-summer Eve Pageant of the Guilds of the Middle Ages* (58, **Appendix: XX**). This change in subject matter reflected the change in location and permanence. The introduction of restaurants, offices and exhibitions as valid sites for murals meant that murals were not expected to be permanent fixtures but would be

replaced as needs and fashions changed. As the wholesale destruction of the Festival of Britain site in London demonstrated, the success of a modern mural was not based on longevity. However this impermanence exacerbated the already problematic position of mural painting in the art world.

The SMP's demise was indicative of the repeated failure of mural painting to gain a strong, autonomous foothold in the artistic life of Britain. This was despite the society's exhibitions and publications and other events such as, ironically, the Festival of Britain. Whilst the SMP identified collaboration with architects as essential to securing commissions and producing work that was successfully and sympathetically sited, this approach fed into the invisibility of mural design. The problem here is that architectural histories have prioritized recording architects and buildings over interior decoration by other artists. Another difficulty, identified in the 1939 Tate exhibition catalogue, was that mural paintings could rarely enter the permanent collections of museums and galleries and thereby secure a place in recorded art history. Murals, like Adshead's *Jungle Restaurant* at Selfridges (57, **Appendix: XVI**), are often destroyed in the normal course of a building's development or, being immovable, painted on the fabric of the wall, or else, as the Doctor's Lounge at Christie Hospital (62, **Appendix: XXIV**), are sited in non-public spaces. The display of murals in exhibitions, temporary or permanent, was, and is, compromised not only by their availability but also by their size.⁴¹

Adshead's career reflects the changes in mural painting in Britain through the twentieth century and runs parallel with the concerns of the SMP. Much of her most successful post-war, and indeed pre-war, work was done in collaboration with architects such as the *Pageant Restaurant* at Lewis', Bristol and St Francis' east wall. The SMP's uncertainty about the role of the church as a modern commissioner of murals is not borne out by Adshead's experience, nevertheless the move away from domestic commissions, which were central to Adshead's work in the twenties, is reflected by their substantial absence from her post-war commissions. Equally, the demise of an active SMP in 1965 coincided with a significant reduction in the number of mural commissions Adshead received – indicative of the move away from mural decorations generally by architects and other commissioners.

1 The third traditional site is perhaps best described as state government and civic buildings.

2 Clive Gardiner, Principal of Goldsmiths College was the appointed art advisor. Whilst there is no complete record of the number of murals commissioned, the Architectural Review noted in August 1943 that 10% of British Restaurants had mural paintings, in addition there were works and services canteens. The Studio magazine reported in November 1943 that over 60 art schools had been involved in mural schemes. Established artists were also involved, Lady Clark, who organized the decoration of British Restaurants in London commissioned Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant and John Piper amongst others to carry out mural paintings.

3 The exhibition was held from 25 May to 30 June 1939.

4 T A Fennemore was a textile, pottery and wallpaper designer and involved with the Central Institute of Art & Design from 1940. In a circular letter dated 1 February 1939 he proposed establishing a Society of Mural Painters. Later that year he wrote to the Tate on paper headed ‘The Society of Mural Painters’ to organize the reception arrangements for the opening of the 1939 Exhibition. Tate Gallery Archives 92/42/4. .

5 Tate Gallery Archives 92/42/4.

6 Paradoxically the Tate was (and still is) one of the few British galleries to have a mural on permanent display – Rex Whistler’s *The Pursuit of Rare Meats* 1926-1927 painted in the basement restaurant (Tate Britain, Millbank).

7 Of the one hundred different mural projects included in the exhibition over half were private domestic commissions (thirty-seven projects) or in churches (seventeen projects).

8 For a full discussion on the post-war opening of many stately homes to the public see Michael Littlejohn, *The Fate of the English Country House*, New York 1997.

9 Whistler was commissioned in 1936 by the 6th Marquess of Anglesey to undertake an extensive mural in the dining room at Plas Newydd. Whistler was a fellow Slade student with Adshead and had painted the Highway Boys’ Club, Shadwell mural with her in the early 1920s.

10 Draft article by Oliver Hill, Adshead archive, artist’s estate, for the feature on the ‘Murals at Luton Hoo’ which appeared as a picture essay with captions in building magazine, May 1950, pp192-193.

11 It is probably also worth noting that Capability Brown’s style of gardening was regaining popularity and understanding in the immediate pre and post war period in Britain, via the National Trust’s and other’s interest in and promotion of his work. See Jane Brown, *The Pursuit of Paradise: A Social History of Gardens and Garden*, London 1999.

12 See draft article by Oliver Hill, op. cit. note 10, pp192-193.

13 Negotiations to bring Selfridges in the Lewis’ group started in 1947 and were finalized in 1951.

14 Mary Adshead’s jungles are a good example of the visual homogenization of foreign landscapes, specifically those of the countries of the British Empire, which is central to the discourse of the commodification of empire in visual representations. Jeffrey Auerbach’s essay *The picturesque and the homogenization of Empire*, whilst concentrating on the use of the picturesque in the 18th century gives a good introduction and overview; *The British Art Journal* vol V, No 1 pp47-53.

15 The Executive Committee consisted of Augustus John (President) Edward Wadsworth (Chairman), Hans Feibusch and John Hutton (joint Honorary Secretaries and Treasurers), and Augustus Lunn, Hans Tisdale and Barbara Jones.

16 Average fees were given as £4.0.0 per sq ft for up to 50 sq ft; £3.0.0 per sq ft for 50-200 sq ft; £2.10.0 per sq ft for anything over 200 sq ft, *Society of Mural Painters, First Exhibition, 1950-1951*, exh. cat., London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1950 (second impression) RIBA Archive 29281.

17 Unidentified published review article by Stephen Bone (Mary Adshead’s husband and journalist) c.November 1954, Adshead archive, artist’s estate.

18 Press release dated 9 April 1953, RIBA Archive 29281.

19 *The Architects’ Journal*, vol 117 1953, p502.

20 The scheme was never realized and the designs are apparently lost.

21 During 1954-1955 the exhibition was displayed in Hull, Eastbourne, Huddersfield, Wakefield and two south London venues.

22 Undated circular letter from the Secretary of the SMP to all members announcing the event to be held on 27 October 1954, Adshead archive, artist’s estate.

23 Meeting papers March 1955, Adshead archive, artist’s estate.

24 Their suggestion not only ensured the winning design would be selected on merit, but that since first, second and third prizes were to be awarded, three SMP members would financially benefit rather than just the winner.

25 In the absence of any of the competition documentation or records of the other entries it is unknown if the subject matter was dictated by the competition rules. However what is exceptional here is Adshead’s complete change of style from the figurative landscapes of Luton Hoo, Selfridges and earlier murals to the heavily populated dynamic townscape presented for Lewis’.

26 Stephen Bone, Cecil Collin, Barbara Jones, and Julian Trevelyan tutored still-life and landscape painting classes. Demonstrations were given by Peggy Angus, Tom Ingram, Eric Newton, John Rothenstein and Lawrence Scarfe who also gave classes.

27 These classes were taken by Adshead, Vary Fedden, John Hutton, Kenneth Rowntree and Hans Tisdale.

28 1957 Annual Report, Adshead archive, artist’s estate.

29 Circular letter dated 31 December 1957, Adshead archive, artist’s estate.

30 Chosen by a selection panel, made up of representatives from the Victoria and Albert Museum, Arts Council, a non-showing member of the SMP and Sir Hugh Casson.

31 Coventry Cathedral had given permission for John Hutton to show three of his engraved panels for the west screen at the exhibition.

32 Sutherland is included in the 1950 membership list, exh. cat., *op. cit.* note 16. The Sutherland design, together with a woven sample of part of the design, had been displayed at the Victoria and Albert Museum the previous summer.

33 Peter Dunham under the name of the Peter Dunham Group had submitted a design for the competition for the new cathedral at Coventry.

34 Basil Spence, *Phoenix at Coventry. The Building of a Cathedral*, London 1962, p37.

35 Taken from the *Form of Dedication* used at the dedication ceremony c1962, the Adshead archive, artist’s estate.

36 The atom bomb, first detonated at Hiroshima in 1945, was again pre-eminent news following the French atomic testing in 1959 and the Cuban missile crisis in 1961. Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin had become the first man in space in 1961 closely followed by the American Alan Shepard.

37 See For example Wyndham Goodden writing in Design, No 168, 1962, p39 and R. Furneau Jordan writing in *Architectural Review*, vol 132, July-December 1962, p34.

38 Taken from the *Form of Dedication*, op. cit. note 35.

39 Letter sent from Scarfe to Adshead 9 February 1965, Adshead archive, artist’s estate.

40 Notice of General meeting 6 November 1970, Adshead archive, artist’s estate.

41 Space considerations currently prevent the University of Liverpool from putting on permanent display the Reilly dining room panels which it owns, and the vast Pageant Restaurant mural is too big to be included in this exhibition of Adshead’s work.



63 – *A Tropical Fantasy*, 1940s, oil on 5 panels, 70 ¾ x 98 ½ in. (180 x 250 cm). (RIGHT: Detail.)



64 – *Design for a decorative screen*
'A Tropical Fantasy', 1940s,
pencil and watercolour on paper,
13 x 17 in. (33.5 x 43.5 cm).



65



66



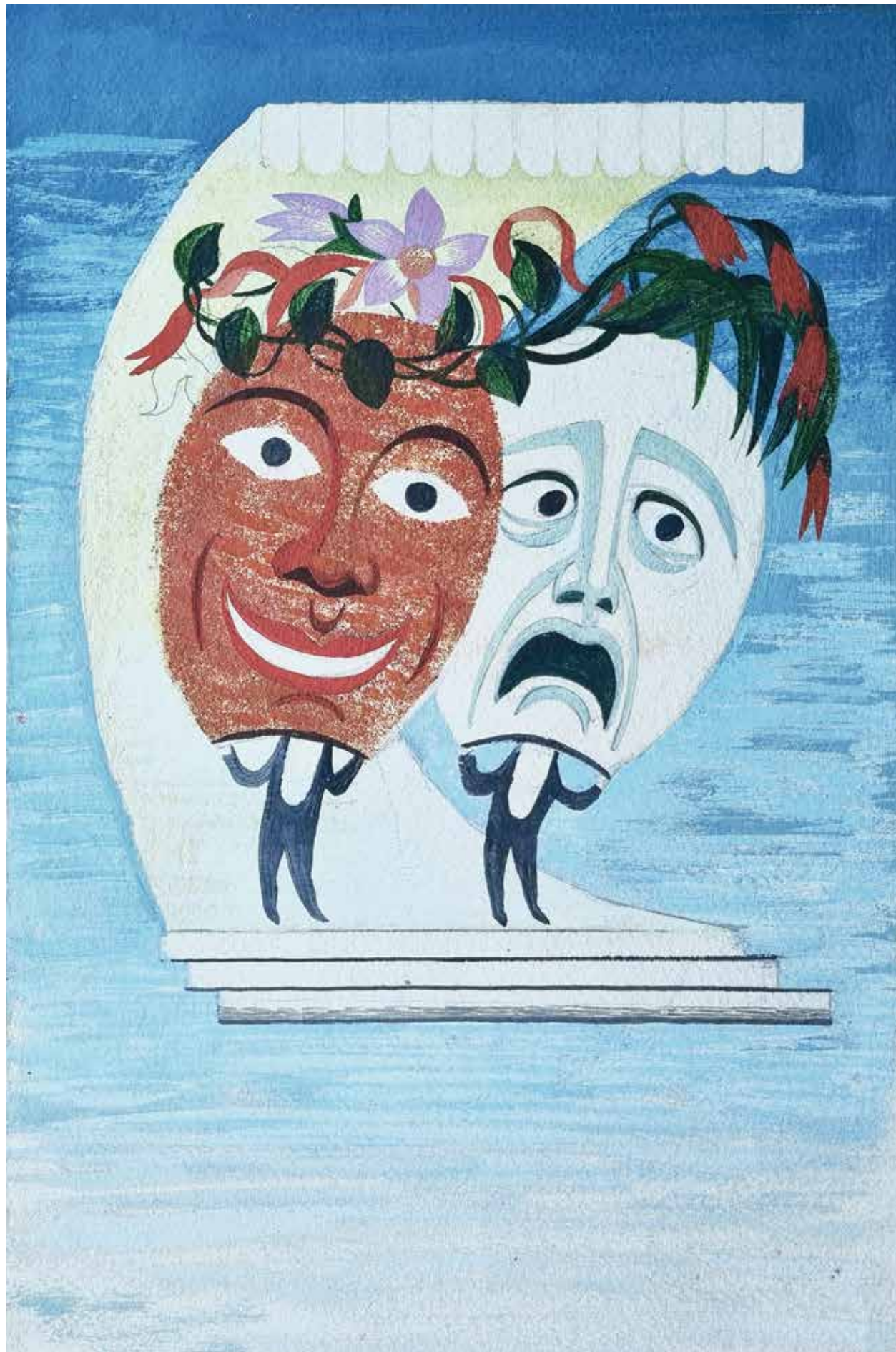
67 – Design for St Dunstan's Chapel, St Peter's Church, Plymouth, 1965-67, pencil and gouache on paper.



68 – Design for Barge/Canal Scene, Buttery Restaurant, The Post House, Leicester, 1969-70, pencil and gouache on paper mounted on card, 6 ¾ x 18 in. (17 x 45.5 cm).

65 – Design for 'The History and Traditions of the City of Plymouth', Civic Centre, Plymouth, c.1962, mixed media collage, 18 ¾ x 27 ¼ in. (48 x 69 cm).

66 – Design for 'The History and Traditions of the City of Plymouth', Civic Centre, Plymouth, c.1962, pencil and gouache on paper, 15 x 22 ½ in. (38 x 57 cm).



Design & Illustration

Paul Liss

As well as excelling in mural and easel painting – the focus of her training at the Slade (1921-1924) – Adshead worked across a remarkably wide range of media, including illustrated books, furniture, commercial advertising, stamps, stage sets, screens, textiles, stained glass, and mosaics. She was especially accomplished in collage, which she sometimes expanded far beyond its traditional format, as seen her witty interpretations of *Cameron Radcliffe* (103), or her surreal *Still Life with Flowering Bouquet* (105), or her striking *Stephenson's Rocket* (107, **Appendix: XVII**) commissioned by Southern Railway for the Pullman saloon coach Phoenix on the Golden Arrow. Less well documented are her designs for complete interiors, ranging from film sets to shop and restaurant environments, and even broader architectural schemes. She operated at every scale, from the intimate to the monumental. Her compositions are consistently decorative and playful, yet always grounded in strong design structure; for this reason, although primarily a figurative artist, she moved with ease towards abstraction. Innovative and restlessly evolving, her style absorbed the prevailing artistic currents of her time – from lingering Edwardian aesthetics through Art Deco and Surrealism to postwar abstraction – without ever simply following fashion. Rather, she helped shape it. Despite the extraordinary breadth of her output, her work remains unmistakably her own.

Alongside this broader practice, her non-mural design work spans a more defined but varied group of projects across books, printed design, interiors, educational objects, and applied arts. In book illustration, she contributed to *The Little Boy and His House* (1936-37) (71, 73a), *The Silly Snail and Other Stories* (1942) (73b), and *The Little Boys and Their Boats* (1953) (73c), all in collaboration with the artist Stephen Bone, as well as illustrating Mary Norton's *Bonfires and Broomsticks* (1947) (73d), and later producing her own instructional book *Travelling with a Sketchbook: A Guide to Carry on a First Sketching Holiday* (1966) (32). In graphic design, she created posters for the London Underground in 1927 and 1937 (17-19), working within the interwar tradition of transport poster design that combined bold composition with decorative clarity. She also designed postage stamps for the General Post Office, including the Universal Postal Union issue (1949), commemorative stamps for the Festival of Britain, decorative frame designs for the “Wilding” definitive series of the 1950s (31), and the World Scout Jubilee stamp (1957). Beyond printed design, she produced a complete themed restaurant interior for Selfridges in 1950 (57), described as a jungle-inspired environment that



70 – *Design for a theatre set*, pencil and watercolour on paper, 10 x 13 ½ in. (24.3 x 34.3 cm). RIGHT: Detail.

integrated decorative schemes and immersive visual design, although this no longer survives. Her applied and educational design work included nursery wall fittings, pictorial educational panels, and plywood-mounted teaching aids and play equipment produced in the 1940s and 1950s, reflecting a modernist interest in combining function, learning, and visual stimulation in early childhood environments. She also undertook at least one known film-related commission for the 1963 British production of *Cleopatra*, likely involving stylised, decorative historical environments consistent with her broader aesthetic. Finally, her applied architectural design work includes a surviving example in the decorative pool for the Telephone Exchange Courtyard in Guernsey (1966), a small but significant late-career work integrating geometric and mosaic-informed design into a public courtyard setting.

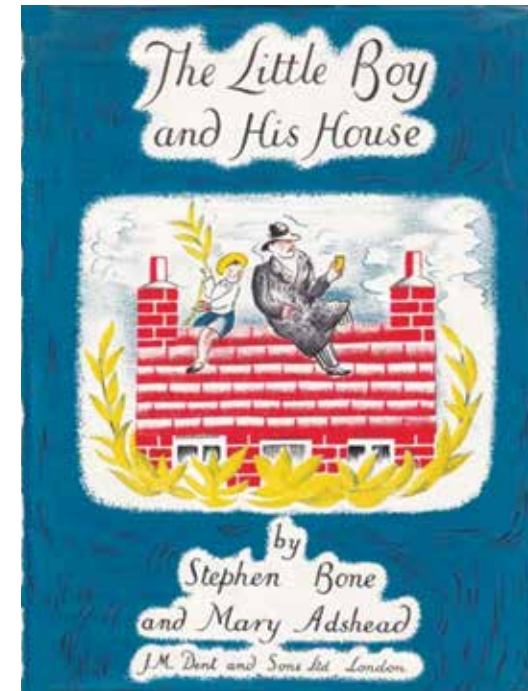




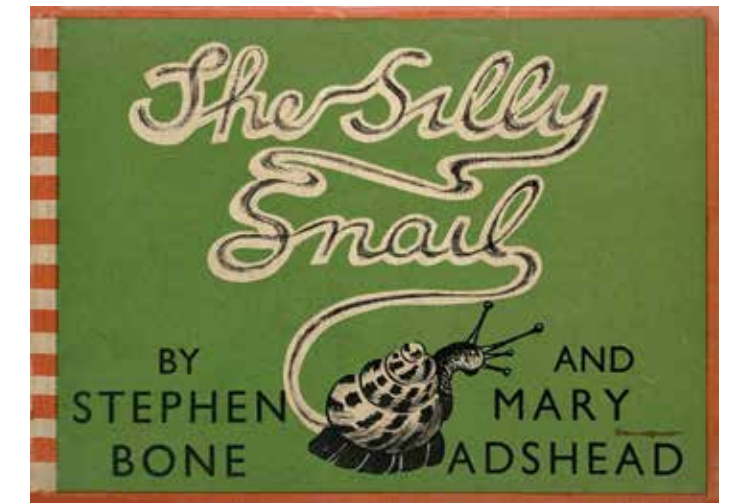
71 – Illustration from *The Little Boy and His House*, 1936, crayon and watercolour on paper, 11 x 15 in. (28.3 x 38.1 cm).



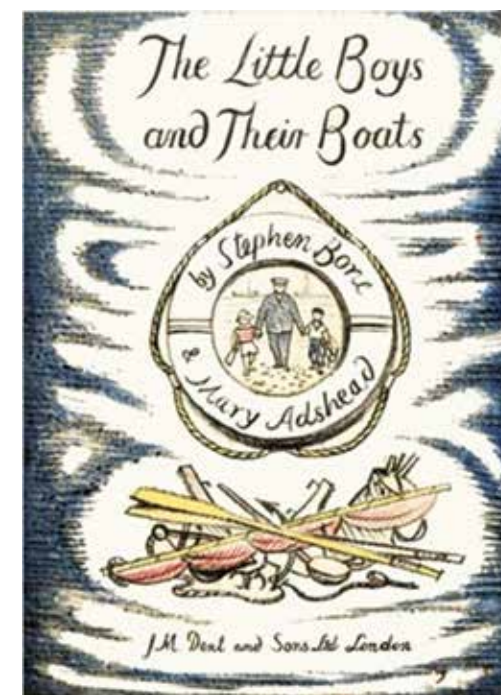
72 – *Woman and Bicycle*, coloured pencils and gouache on paper, 13 ½ x 19 ¾ in. (34.7 x 50.2 cm).



a



b



c



d

73 – Books illustrated by Mary Adshead:

- a – *The Little Boy and His House*, 1936, Author: Stephen Bone, Publisher: J.M Dent & Sons Ltd.
- b– *The Silly Snail*, 1942, Author: Stephen Bone, Publisher: J.M Dent & Sons Ltd.
- c – *The Little Boys and Their Boats*, 1953, Author: Stephen Bone, Publisher: J.M Dent & Sons Ltd.
- d – *Bonfires & Broomsticks*, 1947, Author: Mary Norton, Publisher: J.M Dent & Sons Ltd.



74



75



76



77



78



79

74 – *Splish Splash*, signed and titled,
pen & ink and watercolour on paper; 6 x 8 ¾ in. (15.2 x 22.2 cm).

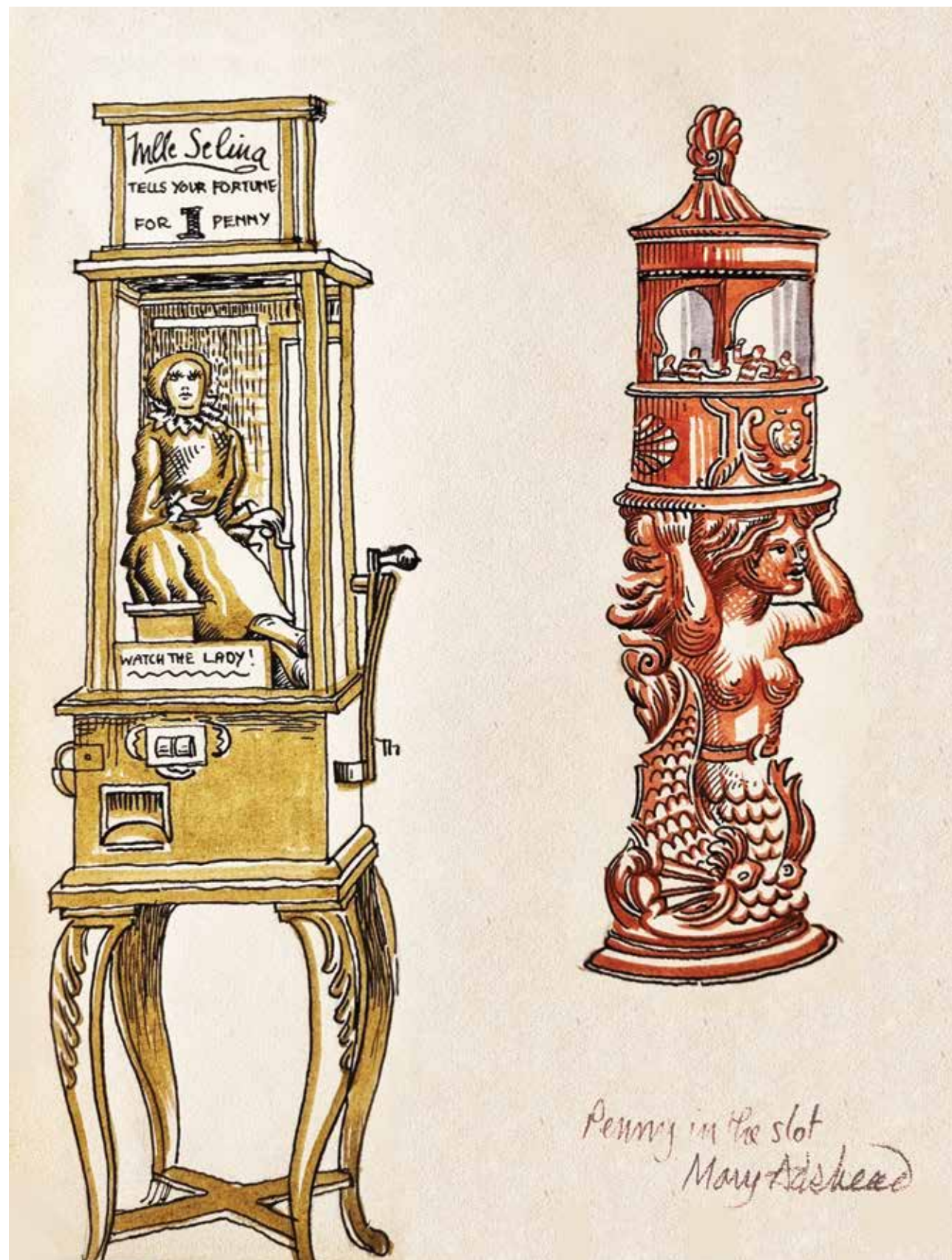
75 – *Evening Primroses in a London Garden*, signed and titled,
pen & ink and watercolour on paper; 4 ¾ x 7 ¼ in. (12 x 18.5 cm).

76 – *A Good Answer*, signed and titled,
pen & ink and watercolour on paper; 6 x 8 ¼ in. (15 x 21 cm).

77 – *An Unpleasant Surprise*, signed and titled,
pen & ink and watercolour on paper; 6 x 5 ¼ in. (15 x 13.5 cm).

78 – *John's House*, signed and titled,
pen & ink and watercolour on paper; 6 x 6 ½ in. (15 x 16 cm).

79 – *Sunset*,
pen & ink and watercolour on paper, 6 ¼ x 7 ¾ in. (15.8 x 19.7 cm).



81 – Study for a screen, pencil and gouache on paper, 13 ¾ x 17 ½ in. (35 x 44.5 cm).

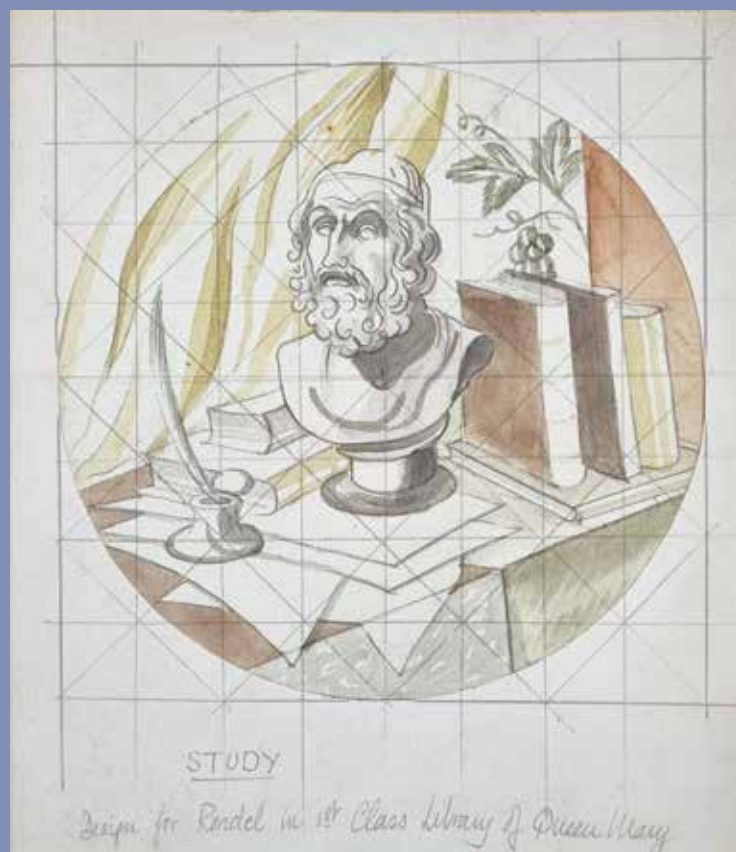
80 – Penny in the Slot, signed, pen & ink and watercolour on paper, 11 ¾ x 7 ¾ in. (30 x 20 cm).



82 – *Livestock Market*, c.1930, signed, gouache on paper, 10 x 20 in. (25.3 x 50.8 cm).



83 – *Ebb Tide C140*, underglaze transfer for ceramics, 10 x 14 ¾ in. (25.4 x 37.8 cm).



84 – *Design for Ronde, 1st Class Library of Queen Mary*, c.1935, inscribed, pencil and gouache on paper, 12 ¾ x 8 ¾ in. (32.2 x 22.2 cm).



85 – *Birthday Greetings – The Launch of the Livadia*, signed, pencil & gouache on paper, 10 x 14 ¼ in. (25.4 x 36 cm).

The Livadia was an imperial yacht of the House of Romanov built in 1879-80 by John Elder & Co. of Govan on the Clyde. The card was for Adshead's father-in-law, Sir Muirhead Bone, who witnessed the launch as a child.



86 – *Departure*, pen & ink and gouache on paper, 13 ¼ x 20 ½ in. (34 x 52 cm).



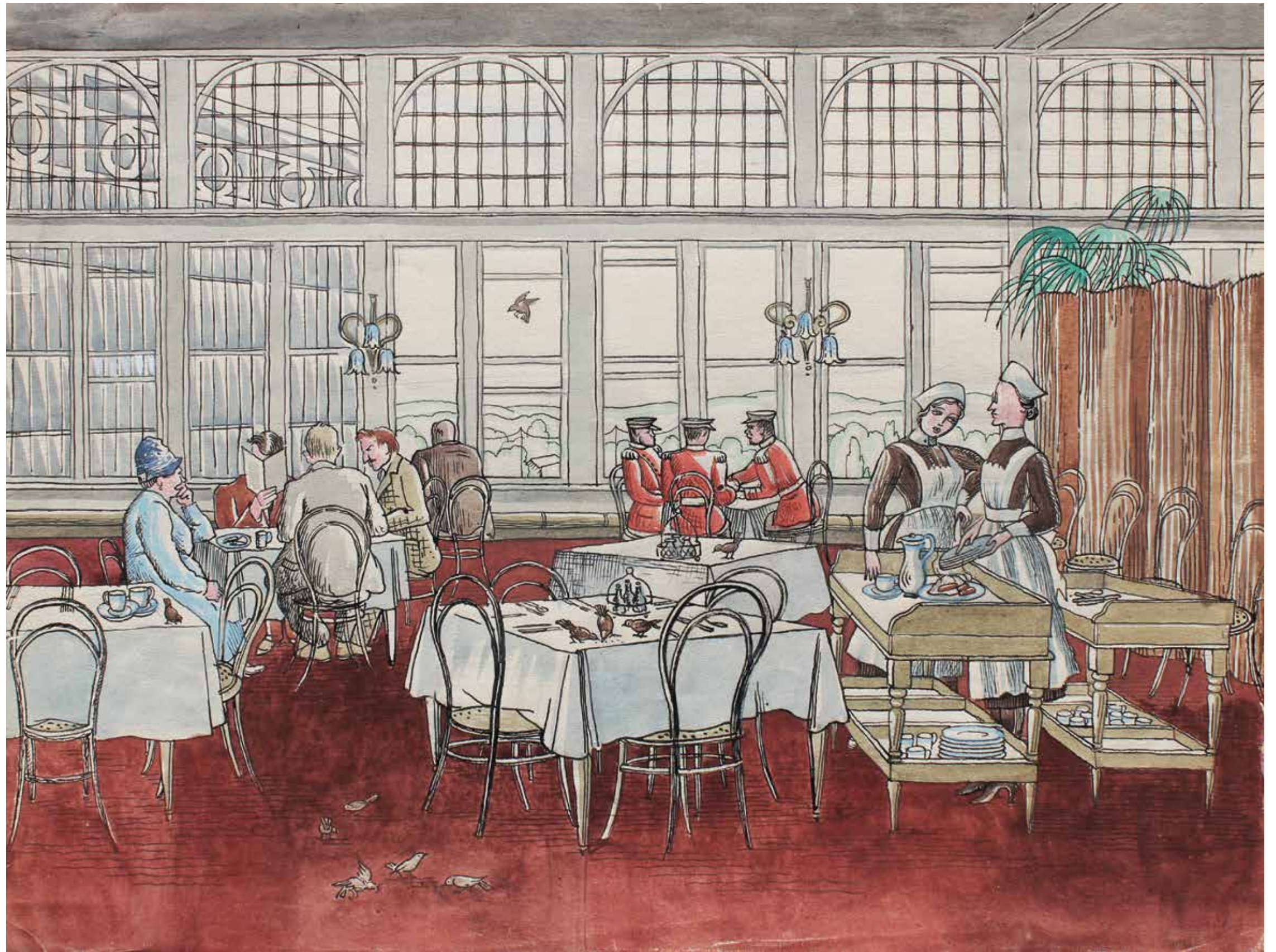
88 – *Tea Plantation Fantasy*, (design for a canteen mural), signed, pencil, gouache and chalk on paper, 12 ¾ x 19 ¼ in. (32.2 x 49.2 cm).



87 – *Amerindians and Wigwams*, crayon on paper, 10 x 15 in. (25 x 38 cm).



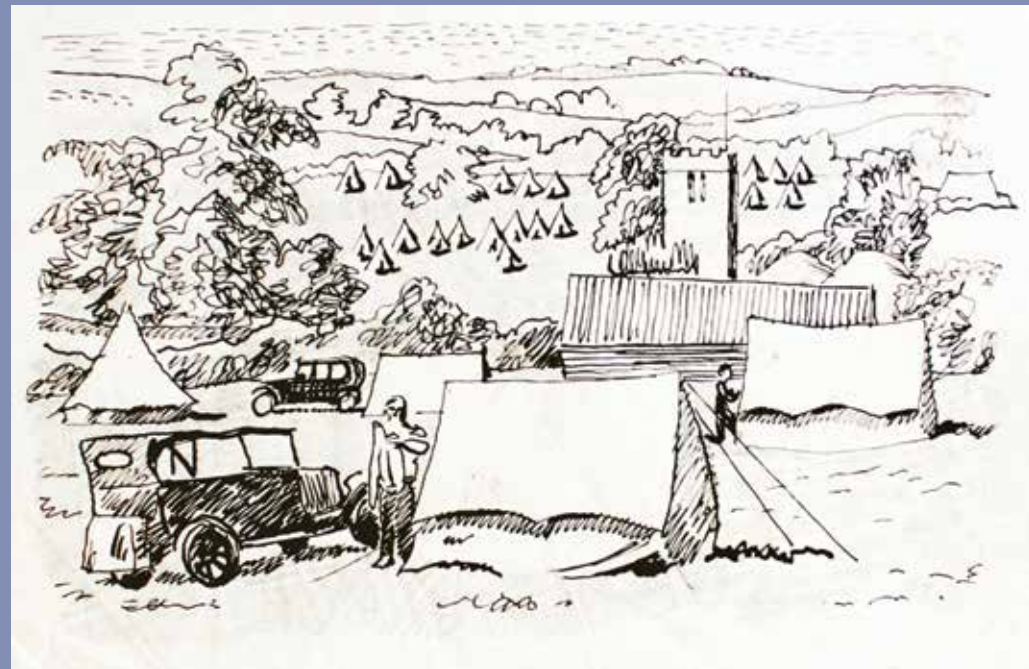
89 – *St Michael's Mount*, pencil and gouache on paper, 10 x 14 ½ in. (25.5 x 37.2 cm).



90 – *Restaurant Scene*,
pencil, pen & ink and watercolour on paper,
13 x 16 ½ in. (33 x 42 cm).



91

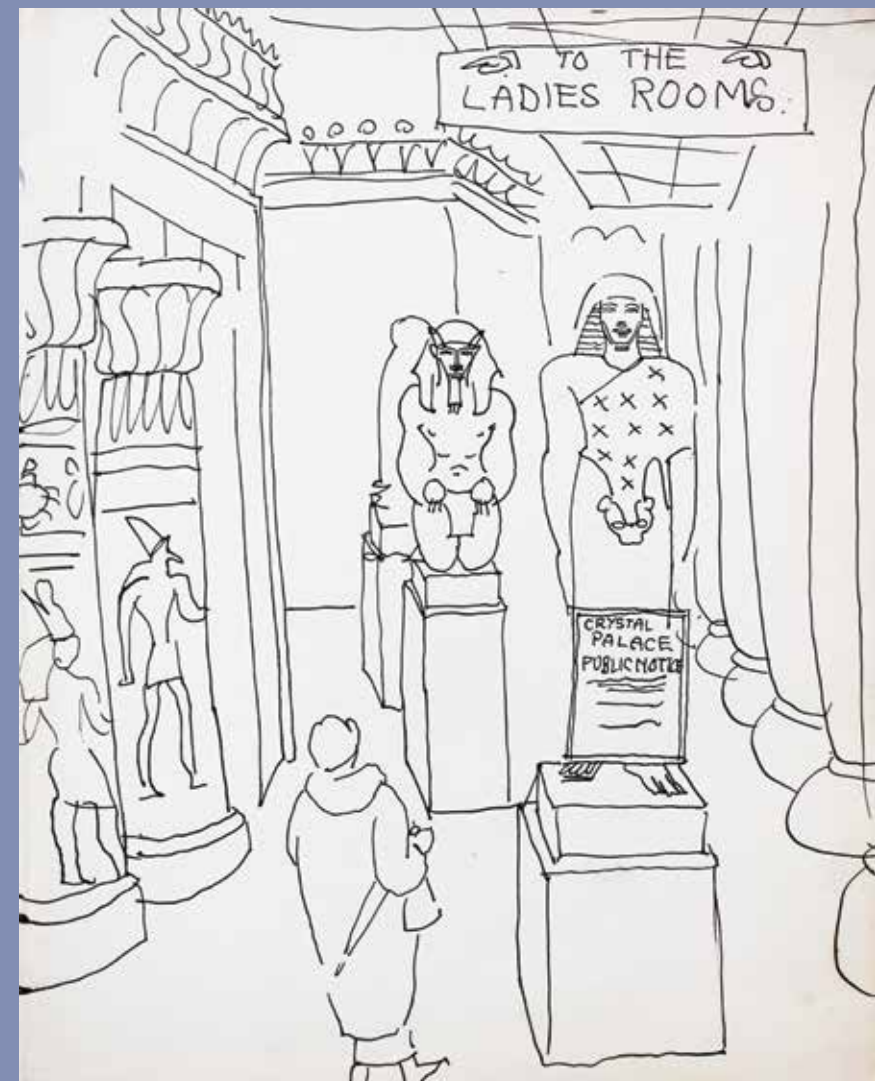


92

- 91 – *Walking Mailbox*, pen & ink on paper, 4 ½ x 4 ¾ in. (11.7 x 12.3 cm).
 92 – *Camp site*, pencil and pen & ink on paper, 6 ¾ x 9 ½ in. (17 x 24 cm).
 93 – *January 6th*, pen & ink on paper, 3 ½ x 6 ¾ in. (9.3 x 17 cm).
 94 – *Ladies Room – Crystal Palace*, pen & ink on paper, 8 ½ x 7 in. (22.8 x 18 cm).



93



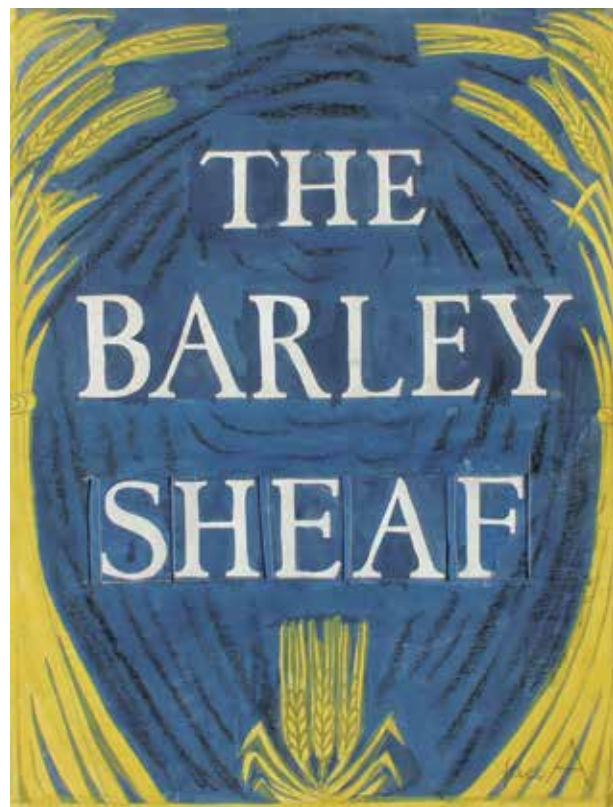
94



95 – *Mr Bright & Venus*, pencil, pen & ink and watercolour on paper, 15 x 11 in. (37.7 x 28 cm).

96 – *Gladstone & Venus*, 1931, titled and dated, inscribed to the reverse: 'Gladstone following Venus of Crystal Palace', pencil pen & ink and gouache on paper, 12 ½ x 8 ½ in. (32 x 22 cm).





97 – *Design for Barley Sheaf Pub, Plymouth* (recto-verso), c.1961, pencil and gouache on card, 13 x 9 ½ in. (33 x 24.5 cm).

98 – *Crystal Palace*, 1931, titled and dated, pencil and pen& ink on paper, 12 ¼ x 16 ½ in. (31.2 x 42 cm).

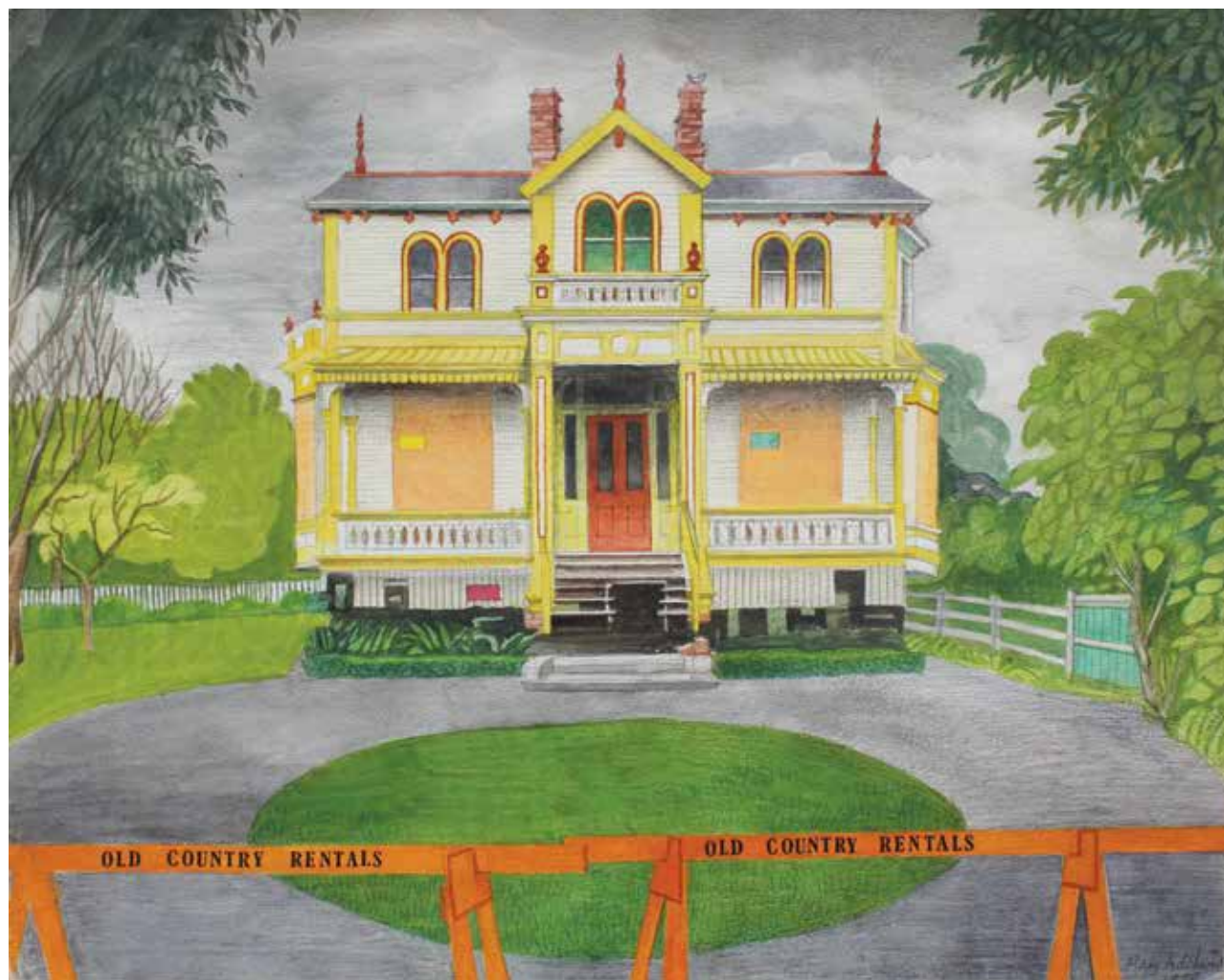
99 – *Design for Hall Mural for Mrs Lutyens-Humphrey at West-Wigmore, Beare Green, Sussex*, pencil and pen & ink on paper, 16 ¼ x 20 in. (41 x 50.7 cm).



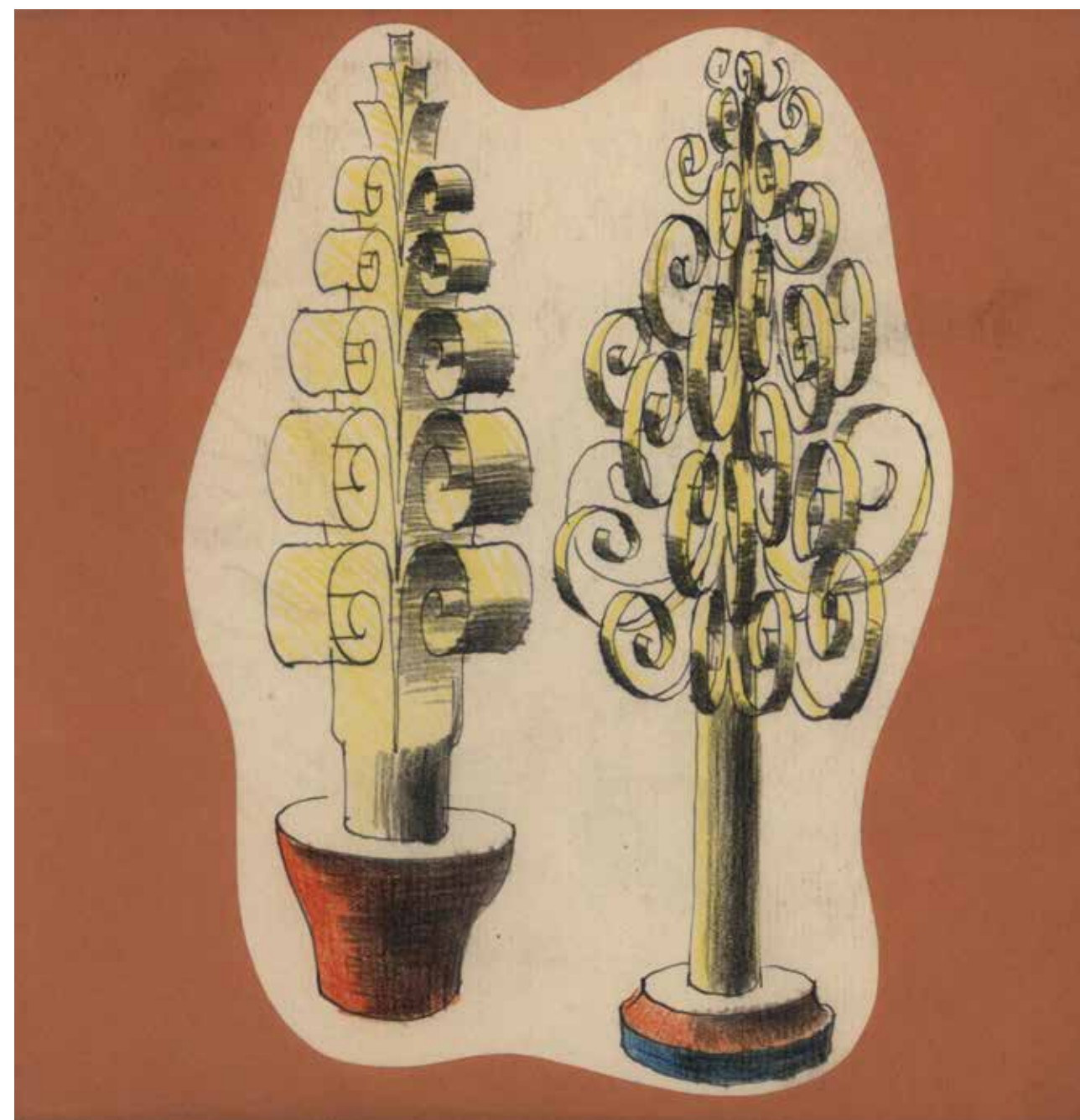
98



99



100 – *An Artist's House in Victoria, Vancouver Island*, 1982, signed and dated, pencil, gouache and Letraset on card, 16 x 20 in. (40.5 x 50.7 cm).



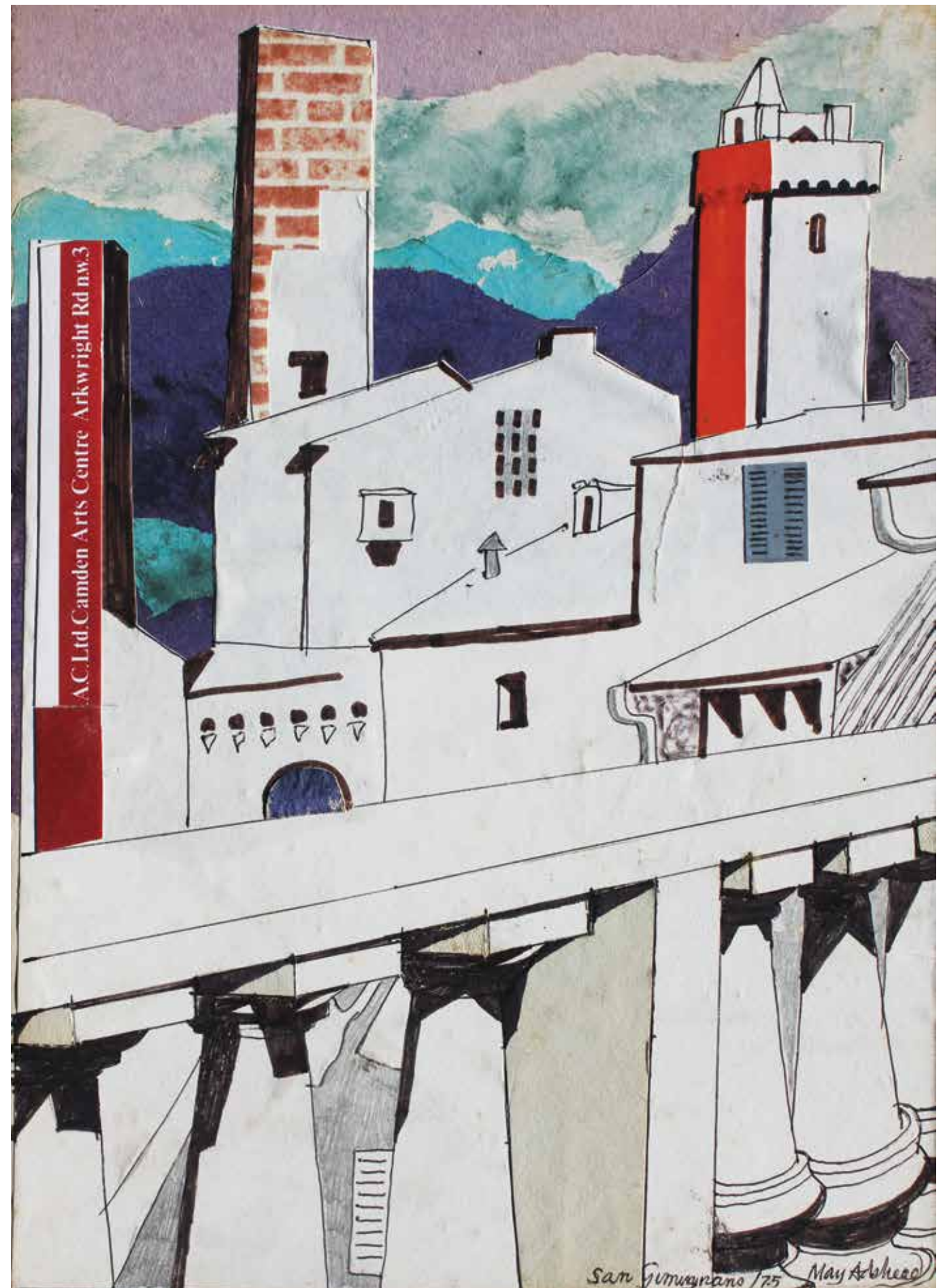
101 – *Finial decorations*, pencil, pen & ink and coloured pencils on paper, 7 ¼ x 7 in. (18.5 x 17.8 cm).



102 – *Village Street*, signed,
pen & ink, gouache and collage on board,
15 ½ x 21 ¾ in. (39 x 55.5 cm).



103 – *The Radcliffe Camera, Oxford*, signed, gouache and collage on paper, approx: 29 ½ x 29 ½ in. (75 x 75 cm).



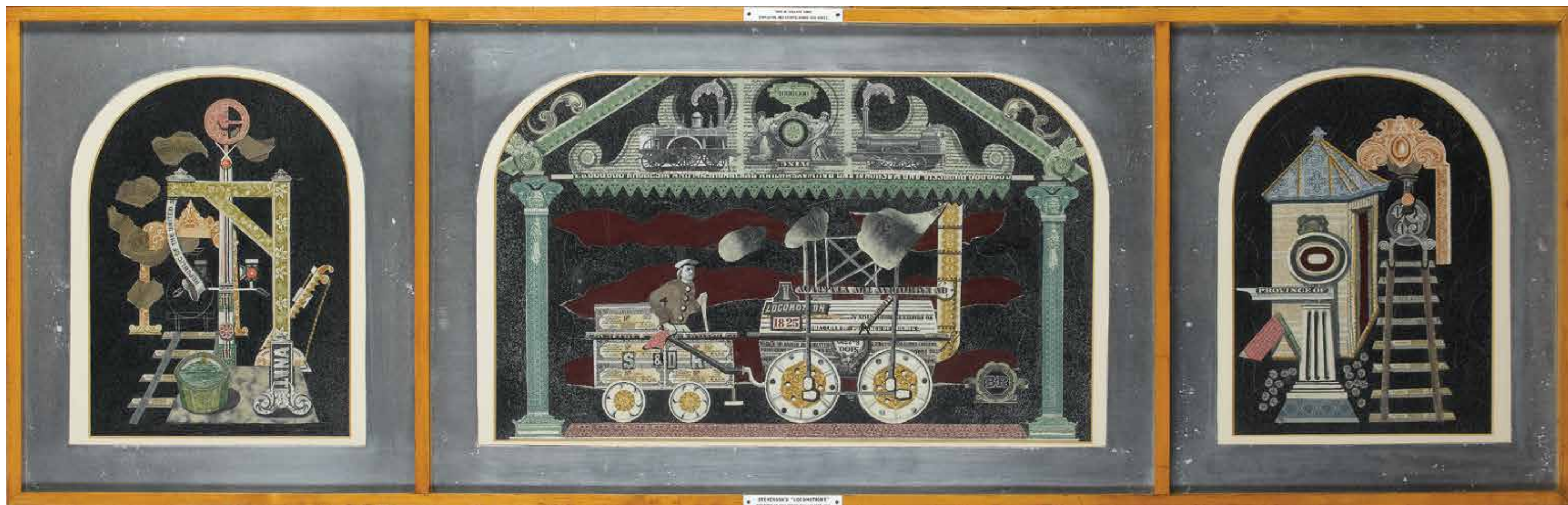
104 – *San Gimignano*, 1975, signed, titled and dated, pen & ink, colour and collage on board, 10 ½ x 7 ½ in. (27 x 19.5 cm).



105 – *Still life with Flowering Bouquet*, late 1930s, collage on paper, 13 x 12 ½ in. (33 x 31.8 cm).



106 – *Conversations*, 1945, signed and dated, pen & ink and collage on card, 9 ½ x 14 ¼ in. (23.8 x 36.3 cm).



107 – *Stephenson's Locomotion I*, 1952, collage from old stamps, bonds and notes.
 Central panel: 14 ½ x 24 in. (36.8 x 61 cm), lateral panels: each 14 ½ x 10 in. (36.8 x 25.4 cm).



108 – *Chair in garden*, pen & ink on paper, approximately 9 x 7 ½ in. (23 x 19 cm).

APPENDIX

MURALS, MOSAICS & DECORATIVE DESIGNS BY MARY ADSHEAD



MURALS, MOSAICS & DECORATIVE DESIGNS BY MARY ADSHEAD

Works that are extant, either in their original or other location, appear **outlined in red**.
Other works have been destroyed or are presumed lost.
Unfortunately, visual documentation for certain projects could not be found.



I

1924
The Joys of the Country, Highway Boys' Club, Shadwell, London. Commissioned by Sir Joseph Duveen.
Photo: Estate of Mary Adshead

The Housing of the People, exhibited at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley.



II

1925
A Tropical Fantasy, oil on canvas, 244 cm high, varied widths. Commissioned by Sir Charles Reilly for 71 Bedford Street South, Liverpool, Collection: Victoria Art Gallery & Museum, University of Liverpool.
Photo: Estate of Mary Adshead

Pompeian Room, 1 Chester Gate, Regents Park, London. Commissioner: Stanley D Adshead.



III

Ripolin Paints, Mural (advertisement), 2 panels, 226 x 467 cm and 223 x 452 cm, Bank underground station, London.
Photo: Estate of Mary Adshead



IV



V

Remington Typewriters, Mural (advertisement), 1 panel, 147 x 701 cm, Bank underground station, London.
Photo: Estate of Mary Adshead

1928
An English Holiday, oil on canvas, dimensions vary. Commissioned by William Maxwell Aitken, first Lord Beaverbrook for the dining room at Calvin Lodge, Newmarket. Commission withdrawn in August 1928.
Photo: Estate of Mary Adshead

The Four Continents – Africa, Asia, America, Europe, Decorative round panels, 2 Beford Square, London. Commissioner: Weedon Grossmith (1852-1919).

Mediaeval port scenes, Four panels on walls surrounding indoor swimming pool. Mereworth Castle, Maidenhead, Kent. Commissioner: Hon. Esmond Harmsworth MP, Second Viscount Rothermere.

Piccadilly Circus underground station, London.



VI

1930
Saint Cecilia Music Room Decoration, Decorative scheme commissioned for 47 Grosvenor Square by Stephen and Virginia Courtauld, Collection: Eltham Palace, Court Road, London SE9, under the care of English Heritage.

New Zealand, South Africa, Australia, India, Antwerp, Exposition Internationale Coloniale, Maritime et l'art Flamand, British Pavilion.



VII



VIII



IX

Painted fireplace, Private house, Byways, Hampshire. Commissioner: Sir Muirhead Bone. Photo: Estate of Mary Adshead

1931

Gewgaws, Over-mantel panel for boudoir, Oxford. Commissioner: Sir Muirhead Bone. Photo: Estate of Mary Adshead

1931-2

*Screen Design
Photo: Estate of Mary Adshead*



X



XI

1934

The Pier Pavilion, Colwyn Bay Pier, decoration of auditorium commissioned by Stanley Adshead. Photo: Estate of Mary Adshead

1931-35

The Ascending Christ, (full length reredos of 27 conjoined canvases depicting the life of Christ) East wall, St Christopher's Church, Withington, Manchester, Current location: St Columba's Church, Anfield, Liverpool where there is also Adshead's The Nativity, Lady Chapel, 1932, commissioned by the Lunt family. Photo: Estate of Mary Adshead

1935

Keats, Youth, Innocence & Spring, Travel and the Arts, Queen of May, Queen Mary cruise liner First Class Library, designs not adopted, plain wood panels ultimately used. Commissioner: Cunard.

1936

Untitled, Lewis' Restaurant, Leicester.

1937

Gastronomic Maps of Britain: Fruits of the Sea and Game, British Pavilion, Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne (Expo 1937), Paris.

1941

Mural for British Restaurant, Leamington Spa.

Mural for Factory Canteen, Rugby.



XII



XIII

The World's Foods, British Restaurant, Granville Street, Birmingham.

Photo: Estate of Mary Adshead

Mural for Staff Canteen, Vauxhall Motors, Luton.

1945

Stylized park scene with castle, (on panels), YMCA Services Canteen, Central Hall, Westminster.



XIV

1946

Cordon Rouge Restaurant, Sloane Street, London.

Photo: Estate of Mary Adshead

1949

Decorative Scene at Peter Robinson's, Oxford Circus, London.



XV

1949-50

Mural for Tea-room, Luton Hoo House, Luton.

Photo: Estate of Mary Adshead



XVI

1950-51

The Jungle Restaurant, Fourth floor restaurant, Selfridge's, Oxford Street, London. Destroyed 1967.

Photo: John Lewis Partnership



XVII

1952

Stephenson's Locomotion I, collaged panel produced for the Pullman car of the *Golden Arrow* train.

Shell mosaic, mosaic design, Daneway House, Sapperton, Gloucestershire. Commissioner: Oliver Hill (architect).

1953

Memorial to Stanley D. Adshead, unadopted design intended for St. Anselm’s Church, Kennington, South London.



XVIII



XIX



XX

1954

Architectural Vista, Costain House, 111 Westminster Bridge Road, London.

1954-55

Stained glass window design, St Michael and All Angels Church, Borehamwood.

1957

Mid-Summer Eve Pageant of the Guilds of the Middle-Ages, Pageant Restaurant and Food Hall, John Lewis’ store, Cribbs Causeway Shopping Mall, Bristol.
Photo: Estate of Mary Adshead



XXI

St Michael and St George Triptych, St Mary and All Saints Church, Plymstock, Devon.

Unknown title, Spencer House, 27 St James Place, Westminster, London.



XXII

Totnes in Time, Totnes Civic Hall. (Painted ceiling panel installed in 1960.)
Commissioner: Geoffrey Jellicoe.



XXIII

1958

St Alban, St Alban’s Church, Warners End.

Wall map of the Crown Agent activities, Crown Agents Office, Millbank. Designed but possibly not executed. Commissioner: Douglas Taylor Architects/Crown Agent.



XXIV

1959

Abstact Design, Christie Hospital, Withington, Manchester. Doctors' lounge, Nathan House Library. Commissioner: Harry S Fairhurst and Sons, Architects and Surveyors.

1961

Unknown title, Barley Sheaf Pub, Plymouth.

Maps of Kent, bar of Winter Gardens, Margate.

Channel Islands panel, Commonwealth Institute, Kensington, London.



XXV

1962

To the End of Time, East Wall, Saint Francis Church, Vauxhall Park Estate, Luton. Commissioner: Edwin Austin Abbey Memorial Trust Fund through P Dunham, Architect.



XXVI

1962-63

Plymouth Landmark Events, Civic Centre, Plymouth. Ground floor entrance hall.



XXVII

1964

Wall decorations, collaboration with Barbara Jones, private house, Bishops Avenue. Commissioner: Mrs. Oppenheim.

1965-67

St Dunstan, reredos, Chapel of St Dunstan, St Peter's Church, Plymouth.

1966-67

Pool decoration, mosaic designed with Sheila Lintell, Forecourt, Telephone Exchange, Upland Road, St Peters Port, Guernsey.

1967

Unexecuted design, Children's Wing, Stoke Mandrville Hospital.

French Occupation of Guernsey, Commonwealth Institute, Kensington, London.

1969-70

Barge/Canal Scene, Buttery Restaurant, The Post House, Leicester.



XXVIII

1972-73

Unknown title, Reception area, Champneys, Tring, Herts.

1975

Decorative stone path, Private garden, Chipping Campden. Commissioner: Sir Gordon Russell.

1976

Unknown title, Bedroom, Cocuron, Vaucluse.

1977

Unknown title, Children's room, private residence, Blackheath. Commissioner: Mr & Mrs Quiney.

1978

Unknown title, Gallery of rebuilt barn.



XXIX

1985

Mosaic mural: *Rotherhithe Fighting Temeraire*, Beatson Walk Underpass, Surrey Docks, London. Collaboration with Mark Lintell.

NO DATE

Four Seasons, Nursery, 6 John Street, Berkeley Square, London.

Folding Screens: *The Steps*, *The Winds*, *Vendanges*.



Photo: Estate of Mary Adshead



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