

Whistler, Laurence 1912 - 2000

Alan Charles Laurence Whistler [commonly known as Laurence Whistler; and as Sir Laurence Whistler] was born in Eltham, Kent, England on 21 January 1912. His maternal great-great-grandfather was the silversmith Paul Storr (1871-1844) and his brother was the painter, designer and illustrator Rex Whistler (1905-1944).

He studied at Balliol College, Oxford where he read first history then English. It was his ambition to be a poet and although he was awarded first King's Gold Medal for Poetry, in 1935, he achieved little success otherwise in this field. It was as a glass engraver that he discovered his forté. He was largely responsible for reviving the tradition of point engraving on glass goblets and bowls that for the most part lain dormant in England since the 18th century.

Whistler's first foray into engraving on glass came in 1934 when, while staying with a daughter of Sir Edwin Lutyens in Northumberland he engraved a sonnet on a window pane, with a diamond-tipped pencil. Encouraged by his brother Rex he continued glass engraving. One of his earliest commissions came from Queen Elizabeth (later the Queen Mother) for whom he engraved a casket which she gave to her husband, George VI. Other commissions included a centrepiece for the Goldsmiths' Company in 1967, and a pair of memorial panels with quotations by T. S. Eliot, and the Rex Prism in the Morning Chapel, both in Salisbury Cathedral. He engraved several glass windows, including all 12 windows of the church of St Nicholas in Moreton, Dorset. The project was begun in 1955 and took over thirty years. In 1947 he engraved a glass goblet presented to Princess Elizabeth (later Queen Elizabeth I) as a wedding gift.

Whistler was the author of two books on the architect and dramatist Sir John Vanbrugh:

Sir John Vanbrugh: Architect and Dramatist (1938), and the Imagination of Vanbrugh and his Fellow Artists (1954);

He died in Headington, Oxfordshire on 19 December 2000.

Worked in

UK

Bibliography

Engraved Glass: By Laurence Whistler. London : Fine Art Society, 1975.

Fifty years on glass : engraved glasses by Laurence Whistler and by his sons & daughter, Simon, Daniel & Frances Whistler. London : Greater London Council, 1985

Laurence Whistler, C.B.E.: an exhibition for his 80th birthday, sponsored by Sotheby's and Pilkington. London: Sotheby [1992]

Links

- Robin Ravilious, 'Whistler, Sir (Alan Charles) Laurence (1912–2000)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2009 [Subscription service] <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/75009>
- Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laurence_Whistler
- YouTube. Salisbury Cathedral - Glass Engraving - Rex Whistler Memorial <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAkg95TdrY8>
- Gordon Campbell, Sir Alan Charles Laurence Whistler. Grove Art Online - Oxford Art Online [Subscription service] <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T2074462?q=whistler&search>
- National Art Library Catalogue <https://nal-vam.on.worldcat.org/search?databaseList=&queryString=Whistler%2C%20Laurence%201>
- Janet Green. Sir Laurence Weaver. The Guardian 6 January 2001 <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2001/jan/06/guardianobituaries.books>