

# PATCH ROGERS – NEWSLETTER No 4

Welcome to our fourth Newsletter.

We will begin with an update on our new venture at Liberty's. Since opening our Arts and Crafts department last month on the fourth floor, we have received very good customer feedback and our broad range of stock has attracted much attention. We have some fantastic Arts and Crafts furniture featuring pieces by Arthur Simpson, Guild of Handicraft, Cotswold School, Shapland and Petter, alongside some later pieces by Heals and Betty Joel. Our range also includes embroideries, vases, tiles, pictures, screens, silver ware and clocks by designers and manufacturers such as: William De Morgan, Archibald Knox, Lewis F Day, Voysey, Compton Pottery, Mintons and the Rowley Gallery.

The **Liberty Exhibition** dates for 2010 have been confirmed to run from Saturday **15<sup>th</sup> May till Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> June** and will again be on the fourth floor atrium. This year is a special date for the exhibition as it marks 135 years of Liberty trading and 35 years of the Arts and Crafts exhibition, the date we have chosen falls on the exact day in 1875 15<sup>th</sup> May when Liberty & Co first opened its doors. Following last year's tremendous comments, we hope you will come along and see the wonderful items we will have on exhibit this year. Further details will follow shortly.



Detail of hand painted wallpaper frieze to be exhibited May 15<sup>th</sup> till June 15th

This Newsletter we are featuring a fantastic and rare screen by the **Rowley Gallery**. This particular screen has been the subject of some debate, the design having originally been attributed to Sir Frank Brangwyn but further research has revealed that it was in fact designed by William Chase. 'The Jungle' screen was exhibited in 1924 at Queens Gate, South Kensington, London and a similar screen was, until recently, on view at the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery.



### **THE ROWLEY GALLERY**

The Rowley Gallery was founded in 1898 by Mr and Mrs Albert James Rowley as a small business specialising in picture framing, mounting, restoration, carving and gilding. By the 1920's they had expanded to produce furniture and decorative schemes but were mostly recognised by their distinctive designs for inlaid wood panels, screens and mirrors.

Albert James Rowley was the son of the artist James Rowley, an ecclesiastical carver and muralist. Albert married Emma Hamm in 1898 and together they established Rowley's Picture Gallery in Silver Street (later to be renamed 140 Church Street), Kensington, London. The Gallery undertook framing work for local artists as well as national galleries and museums, including Leighton House, The National Portrait Gallery and the Royal Academy. By 1912 the premises expanded to include 142 Church Street.

Albert Rowley's experiment with inlaid wood panels led to a 'portable and permanent' poster design c1914. The success of this idea enabled the employment of artists to design pictures suited to this style of inlay work. The use of stained woods led to a colourful display of panels, which were sold as items in their own right or inserted into furniture for a rich decorative effect. It was during the First World War that the production of inlaid pictures was stepped up, helping to give employment to artists and utilising the off-cuts of woods from the framing business.

After the War, the largest exhibition of Rowley Gallery wood inlay panels, screens, mirrors and furniture was held at Heal's, London from 7 -13 March 1920. The attendance figure of 626 was small compared to other exhibitions that year but a total sales figure of £890 was extremely high. The catalogue, priced at one shilling, lists over 350 items for sale and prices ranged from one guinea for a small inlaid wood panel to fifty guineas for a triple screen. The appeal of the Rowley Gallery products was their decorative possibilities, which brought designs by famous artists, such as Sir Frank Brangwyn, into the average household budget.



The Gallery exhibited regularly in England, including the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924 as well as on an international scale. They exhibited at the Paris Exhibition 1925 and the 1930 International Exhibition of Decorative and Industrial Art, Monza, Italy. Their work was regarded most favourably in newspaper and magazine articles, regularly appearing in *The Studio*. As well as these and other exhibitions, the Rowley Gallery shop in Kensington Church Street was a display showcase.

Following the tragic destruction of the shop by an incendiary bomb in 1941 new premises were acquired at 115 St Mary Abbots Terrace, where Laurence established the first Kensington Artists Exhibition, later to become an annual event. A move back in 1967 to Kensington Church Street could not save the family-run business and it was sold in 1969.

### **SIR FRANK BRANGWYN (1867-1956)**

Sir Frank Brangwyn was the most famous of Rowley's artists and the working relationship between them was long standing, spanning nearly 30 years, and can be traced back to 1916 when an article appeared in the *Studio Yearbook*:

"A few months ago there were shown at the Rowley Gallery in London some panels executed in stained wood from pictures by Mr Brangwyn, Mr Chase and others. These panels were the result of a series of experiments carried out by Mr A J Rowley, and it must be admitted that they possess real decorative value and promise interesting developments.... It is of course, only a certain type of picture which lends itself to successful reproduction in this manner, and under any circumstances considerable freedom must be allowed to the craftsman both in respect to colour and design. With their rich, full colour and breadth of decorative treatment, Mr Brangwyn's works could hardly be surpassed for the purpose, and we notice that the most successful of these panels so far have been based on his designs. We shall watch the progress of this new phase of decorative art with interest".

The Brangwyn/Rowley combination was certainly highly successful. The most illustrated Rowley panels at exhibitions were after designs by Brangwyn: "The Galleon", an "Italian Town" and "The Hollyhocks" triple screen, which can still be viewed at the William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow. In 1933 Brangwyn designed a frieze for the new Rowley Gallery shop front at 140/142 Church Street, Kensington. The three life-sized carved wooden panels depicting carpenters at work were featured in *The Studio* that year and drew much praise from architectural commentators at the time.

In 1931, Brangwyn undertook an important commission to decorate the first class dining room of the new luxury Canadian liner "Empress of Britain". Working with Rowley, he produced a series of 12 decorative panels. Sadly the liner was sunk in 1940 and the great co-operation between these two men has never been fully documented.

## **WILLIAM ARTHUR CHASE (1878-1944)**

William A Chase was the most prolific of Rowley's artists and he is known to have contributed over 100 designs. Chase studied at the London City and Guilds School of Art and prior to the commencement of the First World War he was an extremely successful muralist, designer of stained glass.

As a 'conscientious objector' he left London to live on a houseboat in Essex. It was at that time he first met Albert Rowley and they formed a lifetime friendship. During the next ten years Chase worked for Rowley, most likely out of the necessity to be employed throughout these turbulent years. He helped choose the woods and veneers, working closely with Rowley's craftsmen and at times helped supervise the works in this medium. Although not as highly praised as Brangwyn, Chase was certainly a highly accomplished and gifted artist whose contribution to the Rowley Gallery can be seen by the many varied designs he produced. During the 1930s his departure from inlaid wood panels into murals of luxurious woods, carved in relief, set against silver background reveal an exotic technique.



Although not officially verified, it is most probable that Chase designed the 'Pan' logo that appeared for many years on the reverse of the Rowley Gallery inlaid panels, giving them their distinctive label.

## **ROWLEY ARTISTS AND DESIGNERS**

It is not known exactly how many artists and designers Rowley employed, but more than a dozen names have come to light, most of whom regularly exhibited at the Royal Academy. Alongside Brangwyn and Chase, other artists include; Robert Anning Bell (1863-1933), W J Palmer Jones (1887-

1974), Herbert Davis Richter, Horace Mann Livens (1862-1936), Henry Butler (b1877), E A Cox (1876-1955), Laurence Rowley (1903-1970).

## **ROWLIANS**

Some painted panels have come to light over the years, simply signed *Rowlians*. It is thought that the Rowlians (at one time seven members were credited) were in fact members of staff who submitted designs or painted works for their own pleasure. The term *Rowlian* has also been used as a general description for the use of “burnished silver-gilt lacquer” work which was a feature of the Gallery.

We have been buying and selling items by the Rowley Gallery for many years, they are a regular feature at our Exhibitions and the great appeal of the inlaid wood panels, mirrors and screens has always been for their decorative purpose. The Rowley Gallery were viewed as neither ‘avant-garde’ nor overtly ‘modern’ but as a distinct alternative that would enhance any room decor with their colourful and artistic execution. We hope you have enjoyed learning more about the Rowley Gallery and we are always happy to help with identifying the various artists wherever we can.

Don't forget to look at our website to view our latest stock updates [www.acfc.co.uk](http://www.acfc.co.uk) and we look forward to seeing you at Liberty's / Hove in the near future.

We would like to take this opportunity to wish you a very Happy Easter.

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