

William Nicholson Large Print Guide

ROOM 10.1

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Born in Newark-on-Trent in Nottinghamshire, Nicholson trained at Hubert von Herkomer's Art School in Bushey and the Académie Julian in Paris before forming a celebrated artistic partnership with his brother-in-law James Pryde as 'J & W Beggarstaff' whose bold, simplified poster designs revolutionised British graphic art.

After 1900, Nicholson established himself as a painter of portraits, still life and landscapes distinguished by their quiet poetry and subtle play of light. His portrait subjects ranged from writers such as J.M. Barrie to his own children including Ben Nicholson (who grew up to be a celebrated

illustrator and designer, whose career spanned a period of great social change, from the Victorian age to the Second World War. His work continues to captivate through its elegance, wit and clarity of design.

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After 1900, Nicholson established himself as a painter of portraits, still life and landscapes distinguished by their quiet poetry and subtle play of light. His portrait subjects ranged from writers such as J.M. Barrie to his own children including Ben Nicholson (who grew up to be a celebrated abstract artist). But he was also drawn to depict a cross-section of society from Queen Victoria to pub barmaids, street hawkers and Morris dancers.

Whether in printmaking or painting, Nicholson understood the interplay of dark and light to create visual drama: he was able to take a still life and make it move us. The exhibition explores the full breadth of Nicholson's practice, from his Downland landscapes of Sussex and Wiltshire to less familiar

wartime subjects, theatre design, and beloved book illustrations such as *The Velveteen Rabbit*.

Bringing together loans from public and private collections, *William Nicholson* offers a fresh perspective on an artist whose art of restraint and observation helped shape the visual language of modern British painting.

The Family Home

1887

Oil on canvas

Pallant House Gallery

On loan from a private collection, 2013

This early painting shows the Nicholsons' home at 12 South Parade (now 39 London Road) in Newark, Nottinghamshire where William Nicholson was born. It shows the main reception room with French windows that open onto a single-

storey extension, which may have been a billiard room. When this work was painted, Nicholson was on the cusp of joining Hubert von Herkomer's art school in Bushey, near Watford.

Lady in Yellow
(believed to be Mabel Pryde)

1893

Oil on canvas

Private collection

This painting is believed to be a portrait of the artist, Mabel Pryde (1871-1918), William Nicholson's first wife whom he had met at Hubert von Herkomer's art school. It was painted the same year they married without their parents' knowledge. More a study in painting than a true portrait, the restricted colour palette and tonal arrangement is inspired by the American artist James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), whom Nicholson greatly admired.

J. and W. Beggarstaff

James Pryde [1866–1941)

William Nicholson [1872–1949)

Kassama Corn Flour, 1894

Facsimile poster

Private collection

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

J. and W. Beggarstaff

James Pryde [1866–1941)

William Nicholson [1872–1949)

Harper's Magazine, 1895

Cinderella, 1895

Rowntree's Elect Cocoa, 1894

Facsimile posters

Private collection

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

James Pryde and William Nicholson were both students at the art school of Hubert von Herkomer (1849-1914), and soon struck up a firm friendship, strengthened by Nicholson's marriage to Pryde's sister, Mabel, in 1893. From 1894 they partnered as 'J. And W. Beggarstaff', inspired by a name they once saw printed on a sack of hay. Together, they produced theatre and product advertising posters. These were radical in design, stripped of excessive detail and stencilled using cut-out paper collages.

J. and W. Beggarstaff

James Pryde [1866–1941)

William Nicholson [1872–1949)

Hamlet

1894

Stencil on brown paper

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Given by Mrs J.T. Clarke

In the mid-1890s, William Nicholson, his brother-in-law James Pryde and their friend, the actor Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966), were inseparable. They would prove influential for each other's careers. This is the first poster Pryde and Nicholson produced as 'J. and W. Beggarstaff' to advertise a production of *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare (1564-1616) starring Gordon Craig. It depicts a notable moment in British theatre, as Hamlet gazes at Yorick's skull to reflect on the inevitability of death. This poster sealed Nicholson's long connection to the theatre world.

A was an artist

From *An Alphabet*

published by William Heinemann

1897

Hand-coloured woodcut on paper

UK Government Art Collection

In this rare self-portrait Nicholson depicts himself as a pavement artist. The woodcut features some characteristic aspects of his work: the powerful simplicity of the graphic design, profile outlined boldly against a monochrome background, and chunky hand-cut lettering. This and *D is for Dandy* were made as sample woodcuts and would earn Nicholson the major commission of *An Alphabet*, published by William Heinemann (1863-1920). These prints remain some of his most famous works.

B is for Beggar

From *An Alphabet*

published by William Heinemann

1897

Hand-coloured woodcut on paper

UK Government Art Collection

The title of this woodcut is a nod to J. and W. Beggarstaff, the joint poster-design venture of William Nicholson and his brother-in-law James Pryde. While the bold silhouette is a feature across the *An Alphabet* series, the sombre simplicity of the design particularly suits the subject of this print. Nicholson's small editions of hand-coloured woodcuts were so popular that many were eventually published in large editions as colour lithographs.

J. and W. Beggarstaff

James Pryde [1866-1941]

William Nicholson [1872-1949]

Don Quixote, 1895

Facsimile poster

Private collection

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

An Alphabet [C- Z]

From *An Alphabet*

published by William Heinemann

1897

Hand-coloured woodcut on paper

UK Government Art Collection

William Nicholson's first commission from London publisher William Heinemann, this series of prints matches each letter of the alphabet with an illustrative figure. With their bold simplicity and restrained use of colour, the series presents a broad section of British society, from a countess and milkmaid to a waitress and zoologist. Nicholson's friend, the actor Ellen Terry (1847-1928), particularly enjoyed the prints' 'lovely blobby lettering'. This series made Nicholson famous, and was later republished as lithographs, which were cheaper to produce. In these later editions, the original *E for*

Executioner and *T for Topers* were replaced with *E is for Earl* and *T for Trumpeter* to be more appropriate for children.

ROOM 10.2

‘What in the natural is irresistible’

Throughout his long career, William Nicholson worked effortlessly across media and genres, from book illustrations and theatre designs, to striking portraits and expansive landscapes. Today, he is best remembered for his masterful still lifes.

Beyond being affectionate depictions of treasured objects, Nicholson’s still lifes showcase his artistic skill, designed to dazzle, confound and enchant. He once pronounced that the business of an artist practicing realism was ‘to communicate what in the natural is irresistible to him and what in the act of communication in a particular medium is pleasurable.’

Sybil Hart-Davis

1913

Oil on canvas

Private collection

William Nicholson painted the socialite Sybil Hart-Davis (1886-1927), as well as her two children Rupert (1907-1999) and Deirdre (1909-1998), in the early 1910s. Sybil was the daughter of the famous surgeon Alfred Cooper (1838-1908) and Lady Agnes Cecil Emmeline Duff (1852-1925). Nicholson uses the horizontal line of the reclining figure meeting the vertical of the dark, decorative screen for compositional effect, not unlike in his pared down landscapes.

Sport on the SS 'Cedric'

1921

Oil on canvas board

Estate of Mirabel Cecil

Nicholson painted this scene on his trip to the US after the First World War, to judge the Carnegie Institute International Art Exhibition in Pittsburgh. He employs a vertical perspective, which shows figures on the first-class upper decks observing the crowds gathered to watch and play sports on the lower decks. The background is characteristically pared-back to highlight the movement and activity in the foreground.

La Place des Papes, Avignon

(Le Château, Avignon)

1925

Oil on canvas board

Private collection

In 1925, Nicholson and Edie visited Avignon, in the south of France, spending three weeks painting scenery and buildings. In the 14th century, Avignon was home to seven consecutive Popes, and the Papal Palace remains one of its most famous landmarks, located on the Place des Papes. Nicholson's softly applied golden light conveys serenity and warmth.

Gold Jug

1937

Oil on canvas board

Lent by His Majesty The King

Although more likely to depict a brass measure than a gold jug or mug, as it has been variously titled, this painting is astonishing in its powers of suggestion. The metallic glint of the central object, oozing with light, seems almost liquid. Its luminosity is emphasized by the contrasting background, an unfinished canvas so loosely sketched in chalk and charcoal

that it almost looks abstract. It was acquired by Queen Elizabeth (1926-2022) in 1942 on the advice of Kenneth Clark (1903-1983), Surveyor of the King's Pictures.

Silver

1938

Oil on wood

Tate: Purchased 1938

William Nicholson's progressive simplification of forms reached its climax with this painting, a symphony in silver and whites. Tellingly, it was to become one of his son Ben Nicholson's favourite paintings, for its monochrome brightness verges on abstraction.

Anonymous, British 19th century

Staffordshire jug and three paintbrushes, belonging to

William Nicholson

ca. 1860

Ceramic, wood and hair

The Courtauld, London

(Samuel Courtauld Trust)

William Nicholson was a collector of pots, jugs, and other ceramic paraphernalia, most of which he acquired cheaply in street markets, second-hand shops, and public houses. He used these to store his paintbrushes, but also as subjects for his paintings. This jug features as a flower vase in a luminous still life, *Cyclamen*, displayed nearby. Its handle was broken at the time it was painted but was subsequently repaired – faint break lines are still visible.

Cyclamen

1936

Oil on panel

The Courtauld, London

(Samuel Courtauld Trust)

Here, a delicate relief-moulded Staffordshire jug adorned with a refined woodland scene ‘poses’ as a vase for a vibrant sprig of crimson cyclamen. This jug was otherwise used for keeping paintbrushes, as seen nearby.

Sun Fish

1935

Oil on canvas

Arts Council Collection,

Southbank Centre, London

The fish's gleaming scales and the translucent ice shining in a pale porcelain dish show that, even late in life, Nicholson's painting retained its evocative powers of suggestion. Rather than being laid on a table, the plate is resting on a board on the chequered floor of his studio. Such a background, with its angles, contrasts and shadows, plays with our sense of perception.

Sidney and Beatrice Webb

1928

Oil on canvas

London School of Economics and Political Science

This portrait was commissioned by the London School of Economics to celebrate the 70th birthdays of founders and social reformers Sidney (1859-1947) and Beatrice Webb (1858-1943). They were working on their groundbreaking history of the Poor Law at the time, shown through the proof in Sidney's hand, and the papers strewn on the floor.

Nicholson noted the challenge of representing the fireplace, saying 'I had to forget they were bricks and think of them as colour'.

Pears

1938

Oil on wood

Leeds Museums and Art Gallery (Leeds Art Gallery)

Given by the Contemporary Art Society, 1944.

The subtle elegance of this painting is animated by light touches of red that evoke the decorative pattern of a china plate on which fruits are awaiting to be consumed. The diagonal angles of the knives are used to create depth and draw the eye into the composition – a common device used in tabletop still lifes.

Waiting for the 'Heraclea'

1937

Oil on panel

Private collection. On long term loan to the Courtauld Gallery, London

This is a rare example of William Nicholson's night-time scene where artificial light features, demonstrating an engagement with the modern world. This painting shows a group of figures waiting on a landing-stage for the 'Heraclea', a ferryboat that connected Venice to the Lido, where Nicholson was staying in September 1937.

The Silver Casket and Red Leather Box

1920

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Here, William Nicholson substitutes the reflection of inanimate objects in the polished silver of his earlier 'casket' (displayed nearby) with a large window and his own indistinct features, distorted by the rotund shape of the vessel.

Intriguingly, an early photograph reveals that the box on which it rests was originally painted in contrasting diamond patterns. It is unknown why Nicholson altered its appearance so significantly, but the crimson colour adds to the dramatic impact of this painting.

The Silver Casket

1919

Oil on canvas

Private collection

The subject of this still life is a tea caddy, one of several 'silver masterpieces' by Hester Bateman (1709–1794) that William

Nicholson owned. From this treasured object, Nicholson created his own masterpiece, focussing on the reflection of the blue gloves and the black and vermilion necklaces on its curved, polished surface.

Hester Bateman [1709–1794)

Tea Caddy, belonging to William Nicholson

ca. 1780

Silver

Private collection

Hester Bateman was a celebrated 18th century silversmith whose creations William Nicholson collected. He wrote to his friend and patron Ada Pringle: ‘Hester Bateman... was a wonderful artist. I have four or five of her silver masterpieces. Subtle simplicity is her “note”’. This tea caddy, still with the artist’s family, was depicted in several of his works, two of which are displayed nearby.

The Brass Canister

1917

Oil on canvas board

Private collection, courtesy Patrick Bourne & Co.

This still life has the pared down quality of William Nicholson’s landscapes with a faint, trembling line on the wall resembling a hazy mountain range against an overcast sky.

Notebooks, quill, book and canister appear as landmark features on the sand-coloured tabletop.

Rose Lustre

1920

Oil on panel

Private collection, courtesy of Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert

Alongside a pink 'splash lustre' goblet, William Nicholson depicted a mirror reflecting 13-year-old Pamela Bianco (1906-1944), busy drawing. An artist and 'child prodigy', Bianco contributed to the first issue of *The Owl* in 1919 and stayed with Edie and Nicholson in summer 1920. Daughter of children's book author Margery Williams, she had illustrated her mother's 'Velveteen Rabbit' for a periodical. Nicholson would take on this challenge himself when the children's story was republished as a book in 1922.

Poppies in Pewter

ca. 1933–34

Oil on wood

National Galleries of Scotland. Bequeathed by Dr R.A. Lillie
1977

While William Nicholson's earlier still lifes tended towards naturalism and polished surfaces, from the 1920s his handling of paint became looser and his colour palette brighter. This shift had been inspired by the work of his wife Edie and his daughter-in-law, Winifred, both painters. With its dazzling colours and rich painterly effects, *Poppies in Pewter* shows him at his most experimental. He used a palette knife and the wooden tips of brush handles to play with texture.

Diana Low

1933

Oil on canvas

Private collection

William Nicholson first met the subject of this painting, the artist Diana Low (1911-1975), whilst she was being taught by his son, Ben. Low abandoned her sessions with Ben, who in her words 'had no sense of humour', to take lessons with Nicholson instead. Depicted as a confident individual, her bold steady gaze looks directly back at the viewer. Their letters between 1932 and 1937 make reference to several paintings in progress, revealing a significant creative exchange between the two artists.

ROOM 12

Early Portraiture

In 1897, William Nicholson's woodcut portrait of Queen Victoria was published in *The New Review* and became a huge success. It was later included in a series of prints published by William Heinemann, *Twelve Portraits*, depicting famous faces of the era. From 1901, Nicholson decided to step back from printmaking to focus on portrait painting, which would provide a good income to support his growing family.

He began by using family and friends as models, but soon became a sought-after portraitist, working to commission. His prints and portraits demonstrate a breadth of interesting subjects, from Morris dancers, flower girls and barmaids to writers, artists, actors and political figures. Nicholson's relationships with key figures in London's cultural world, including influential publishers and writers such as Heinemann, W.E. Henley, and J.M. Barrie or theatre luminaries including Edward Gordon Craig, would have a significant impact on Nicholson's development as an artist.

Mabel Pryde [1871–1918)

Portrait of William Nicholson

1911

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Mabel Pryde and William Nicholson met at Hubert von Herkomer's art school in Bushey. They eloped in 1893 and later had four children. A talented painter, Pryde, or 'Prydie' as Nicholson called her, painted her husband as a dashing figure, wearing gloves, a tightly buttoned cut-away coat, starched white collar and strapped pantaloons and patent pumps. Nicholson is sat in their home, The Grange in Rottingdean, East Sussex, where they lived from 1909 until 1915.

H.M. The Queen (Queen Victoria)

From *Twelve Portraits*, published by William Heinemann
1899

Colour woodcut on paper

Private collection

Nicholson's affectionate portrait of Queen Victoria (1819-1901) accompanied by a Skye Terrier was published in the *New Review* by W. E. Henley (1849-1903) in a double-page supplement to celebrate the Queen's diamond jubilee. It could also be bought as an original hand-coloured woodcut and was a huge success. The writer Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) owned one and wrote that it was displayed in his chalet as 'Every poet should gaze at the portrait of his Queen, all day long'.

James McNeil Whistler

1902

Lithograph from the original woodblock

Pallant House Gallery

(Muriel Wilson Bequest (2019))

The subject of this print, the influential American artist James McNeill Whistler, admired William Nicholson's work. Whistler

introduced Nicholson to the publisher, William Heinemann, helping launch his early success as a printmaker. Here Nicholson echoes Whistler's restrained approach to composition, placing the figure against a simple background as if on stage. Nicholson also employed this approach in later portraits and still life paintings. This print was first made as a woodcut for *Twelve Portraits* (1899), which was so successful that it was editioned in the cheaper lithographic medium.

CASED OBJECTS

Ex Libris for William Heinemann

1897

Woodcut on paper

Private collection

This ex libris (a bookplate pasted in the front of a book to show ownership) was designed for Nicholson's publisher William Heinemann. It features a windmill adapted from an engraving by the French artist Jacques Callot (1592-1635) of the Siege of Breda. The windmill design was later adopted as the 'colophon' (a publisher's imprint, usually on the title page of a book) for all of Heinemann's publications.

Ex Libris for William Ernest Henley

1900

Line block on paper

Private collection

This bookplate was designed for the patron of William Nicholson, the poet W.E. Henley. The bull is based on a sculpture of a bull on the inn sign of the Bull and Mouth Inn at Aldersgate Street in London, reflecting Henley's love of old London.

The Square Book of Animals

Published by William Heinemann, London

1896/1899

Book

Private collection

Woodblock for Cockerel from The Square Book of Animals

1896/1899

Woodblock

Private collection

This book of woodcuts is inspired by reading primers (books for teaching children to read) popular in the 19th century. William Nicholson uses the woodcut medium to great and humorous effect to portray both the personality and physical attributes of each animal. The images are complemented

with verse by Arthur Waugh (1866-1943), whose texts were designed to appeal to children and adults alike. It was designed in 1896, thus predating his other woodcut blocks, but not published until 1900.

Portrait of a Man of Letters: W.E. Henley

1901

Oil on canvas

Tate: Bequeathed by Mrs W. E. Henley 1925

This was Nicholson's first formal portrait commission and reflects a key relationship in his career. The poet, critic and dramatist W.E. Henley was an early patron and wrote verse for Nicholson's *London Types* in 1898. Henley is shown before the South Downs at Worthing as a merry figure, wearing his distinctive hat, which is the subject of a lost still life painting by Nicholson. He leans forward on his walking stick, having had a leg amputated as a younger man. Henley partly inspired the character of Long John Silver in *Treasure Island* (1883) by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894).

Sir Max Beerbohm

1901

Oil on canvas

Lent by the National Portrait Gallery, London. Bequeathed by Gertrude Kinnell (née Cass), 1953

William Nicholson started his career as a portraitist by painting people within his social circle such as lifelong friend, the caricaturist Max Beerbohm (1872- 1956). Nicholson met Beerbohm through a mutual friend, the theatre director and designer Edward Gordon Craig, as part of a young generation of cultural figures who found fame in the 1890s. Nicholson depicts Beerbohm with his eyes cast down in perhaps an ironic gesture of humility, whilst looking sophisticated in his glossy top hat and patent leather shoes.

[80 words]

Portrait of J. M. Barrie

1904

Oil on canvas

National Galleries of Scotland. Purchased with Art Fund support, 1943

This portrait and the one of Max Beerbohm (displayed nearby) have the same pared down quality as Nicholson's woodcuts, with the sitters' profiles standing out on tawny backgrounds. In 1904 Nicholson was commissioned to portray Scottish playwright J.M. Barrie (1860–1937) during

rehearsals of the first production of *Peter Pan* at the Duke of York Theatre in London. Nicholson was also involved in costume design for the play, and playwright and painter became firm friends.

La Petite Marchande (The Little Shopkeeper)

1902

Oil on canvas

Estate of Mirabel Cecil

Chairing the Feathers: The Eynsham Morris at the Gates of Blenheim Palace

1902

Oil on canvas

English Folk Dance and Song Society

Rosy of Winchelsea

1901

Oil on panel

Estate of Mirabel Cecil

The sitter for these two paintings is Rosemary 'Rosy' Craig, daughter of Nicholson's friend, theatre director Edward Gordon Craig. Nicholson was particularly skilled at painting

children, presenting them as individuals rather than sentimentalised figures, as was popular at the time. Craig encouraged Nicholson and Pryde's 'Beggarstaff Brothers' venture in the 1890s and lived with them for a time. In this portrait, Nicholson chooses a high viewpoint, with Rosy looking down over Winchelsea from her grandmother, the actor Ellen Terry's home at Tower Cottage.

Edward Russell Dancing the Morris

1901

Oil on canvas

ING UK Art Collection

Whilst Nicholson was living in the Oxfordshire village of Woodstock, he painted several portraits of Edward 'Feathers' Russell (1872-1942), the Eynsham Morris dancer. Nicholson had an interest in folk traditions, often incorporating elements from popular art in his portraiture, from Punch and Judy props to Staffordshire pottery.

Near Littlehampton

1906

Oil on canvas board

Private collection

Courtesy Patrick Bourne & Co.

This painting is one of William Nicholson's earliest landscapes showing his beloved country of Sussex. It shows a view of Clymping Gap- an area of sand dunes running between the River Arun and Littlehampton. It was painted whilst on a family holiday, visiting their friend, writer J.M. Barrie, in the nearby village of Rustington. Nicholson had painted Barrie and provided costume designs for *Peter Pan* in 1904. Whilst the surrounding landscape was one of busy trade with timber mills, breweries and golf courses, Clymping Gap was virtually untouched by industrialisation.

London Types

Published by William Heinemann

1898

Colour woodcuts on paper

Private collection

In the 1890s, representations of London and its people become very popular, resulting in a range of histories and anthologies of verse and prose. The bold shapes and block lettering of Nicholson's *London Types* recall the style of 19th century 'chapbooks', a cheap form of street literature including folklore or nursery rhymes. Each 'type' shows a character you may find in London, for example the *Guardsmen* (Westminster), the *Newsboy* (the City) or the *Bus*

Driver (Knightsbridge Road). Nicholson's publisher, William Heinemann, a supporter of women's rights, suggested adding more female types, like the *Barmaid*. The style of the 'coster' (or street seller) was fashionable amongst Londoners of the time, including Mabel Pryde. Each print was accompanied by a quatorzain (a 14-line poem) by W.E. Henley.

Clockwise from top left:

Sir Henry Irving

W.E. Gladstone

Sarah Bernhardt

Rudyard Kipling

From *Twelve Portraits*, published by William Heinemann
1899

Colour woodcut on paper

Private collection

Following the success of his woodcut portrait of Queen Victoria, W.E. Henley commissioned William Nicholson to create a series of prints of famous figures of the time, including actors and writers such as Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923), Sir Henry Irving (1838-1905) and Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), and political figures such as the former prime minister, William Gladstone (1809-1898) (who had also acted as MP for Newark, Nicholson's hometown). These, were

published by William Heinemann as *Twelve Portraits*, which also included *H.M. The Queen*.

ROOM 13

The Making of a Painter

Having enjoyed great success as a portraitist, William Nicholson expanded his painting repertoire beyond portraiture. From 1906 he painted the landscapes and objects he found around him. Sussex and the landscape of the Downs became a regular subject of his work, particularly

after he and Mabel bought a home in Rottingdean in 1909. Many works were painted on small canvas boards that could be carried in his paintbox while strolling in the countryside. His depictions of rolling hills and luminous skies are expansive and at times verge on abstraction. More than studies of individual objects, his still lifes explore the relationships between light and darkness, opacity and translucency, absorption and reflection, softness and rigidity.

Two key aspects of Nicholson's life that can't be separated from his art are his sense of style and theatricality – he was known for being a dapper dresser - and his growing family with Mabel. Their children Ben, Nancy, and Kit became an artist, a designer, and an architect respectively, while Tony's life was tragically cut short in the First World War.

Ivan Wilkie Brooks [1891–1952)

William Nicholson and Ben Nicholson

Ca. 1916

Ink and wash on paper

Lent by the National Portrait Gallery, London

Given by an anonymous donor, 1996

William Nicholson and his son Ben (1894–1982) had a complicated relationship, made trickier perhaps by the fact that they were both artists. This caricature captures their uneasy dynamic. The son is tensely painting at the easel in his favourite school First XI cricket blazer while his father towers

over him, cutting a dashing figure in his beloved polka-dot dressing gown.

Portrait of Nancy Nicholson Beside a Table

1902

Pencil and ink on paper

Estate of Mirabel Cecil

Nancy Nicholson (1899–1977) was about three years old when she was depicted here quietly sat at a table. The large hat emphasizes her youthful features, while the medium adds to the sense of immediacy and intimacy of this portrait.

Nancy would become an artist, textile designer, and staunch feminist, and later married the poet Robert Graves (1895-1985).

Nancy in a Feather Hat (The Artist's Daughter)

1910

Oil on canvas

Private collection, c/o the Richard Green Gallery, London

In his studio, William Nicholson kept a box of props, garments and accessories which he used for dressing up his sitters, making his portraits rich in character and colour. With her magnificent ostrich feather hat, his daughter Nancy looks

both regal and fanciful. The bouquet in the background casts her in the role of a flower seller.

The Lustre Bowl with Green Peas

1911

Oil on canvas

National Galleries of Scotland. Bequeathed by Sir Alexander Maitland with life interest to Colonel Peter Dunphie.

Presented by Colonel Dunphie 1997

The subject of this still life is the same as *The Lustre Bowl* (displayed nearby) but here Nicholson lay the emphasis on the reflection of its surroundings within the surface of the central object: the green peapods and white tablecloth on the outer side of the bowl, the wider room on its interior. Dramatically emerging out of the shadows, the bowl is both empty and containing the space around it.

Still life: pink lustre mug and fan

1909

Oil on canvas laid on panel

Private Collection

Nicholson was fond of collecting ceramics and his still lifes grew out of the objects he kept in his home. This painting

probably depicts the same 19th-century Staffordshire mug, commemorating Queen Caroline (1768-1821) that young Ben holds in an early portrait from 1901. Here Nicholson celebrates its reflective qualities while also drawing our attention to the life of this object: a small chip is visible on its rim, perhaps marking its everyday use or a child's enthusiastic handling.

The Lustre Bowl

1908

Oil on canvas board

Private Collection

Painted only a year after William Nicholson started producing still lifes, *The Lustre Bowl* established a formula to which Nicholson often returned. The focus is on a central object placed on a flat, occasionally polished, surface against a dark background. Sometimes these objects are accompanied by secondary motifs (here, the fan and tassel are almost hidden from view in the shadows). Above all else, the subject of the work seems to be light and reflection.

The Convex Mirror

1907

Watercolour on paper

Nottingham City Museums & Galleries (Nottingham Castle)

William Nicholson collected Staffordshire figures and wooden statuettes. As in *A Young Nobleman Surveys the City* (displayed in Room 14), this watercolour shows a man in 18th century dress, wig and hat. In the reflection of the convex mirror, the artist depicted himself at the easel. With the exception of the woodcut *A was an Artist* (1898), Nicholson's rare 'self-portraits' only appear in his still lifes, as hazy silhouettes barely noticeable in the reflective surfaces of objects.

The Grey Shawl

1910

Oil on canvas laid on board

Private collection

Courtesy Piano Nobile, London

This painting is a study in the representation of material and texture. Nicholson paying close attention to the ways in which the (anonymous) sitter's dress can be seen through the fine grey woollen shawl. This kind of knitted or crocheted shawls were made in Ireland and the northern isles of Scotland and were popular in the early 1900s. The landscape in the background may have been based on the countryside around the Nicholsons' home in Rottingdean.

Cliffs at Rottingdean

ca.1911

Oil on canvas board

Private collection

Whilst living at The Grange in Rottingdean, Nicholson and his family enjoyed walking along the cliffs and exploring the beach underneath. The tiny figures in these paintings give a sense of space within the landscape and draw our attention to their interaction with nature. Nicholson's landscapes are often of a smaller scale, a size that would easily fit into a portable paint box, so that he could work outside.

Cliffs at Rottingdean

1909

Oil on canvas

Southampton City Art Gallery

The Vale of Health, Hampstead

1912

Oil on canvas

Estate of Mirabel Cecil

The hamlet known as The Vale of Health in Hampstead, London, was a popular destination for artists and writers. The building in the centre of William Nicholson's composition is the Vale of Health Tavern, a public house with artists' studios on the upper floor. Nicholson may have used these studios when he was living nearby in Pilgrim's Lane. The little figures by the copse of trees have been identified as a group of soldiers on exercise.

Judd's Farm

1912

Oil on panel

Towner Eastbourne. Acquired with the assistance of the MGC/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, National Art Collections Fund and the Friends of the Towner

This painting of a small farmstead nestled in the Downs near Rottingdean is one of the few works about which Nicholson's thoughts were published. In an article for *The Artist* in 1934 he wrote 'The colours – few, but inevitable; my subject – so simple that I could finish it in my head before releasing the paint.' In the same article, Nicholson condemned human development of the countryside, which on the one hand allowed greater access to the land, on the other interrupted views of the Downs.

Sunset

1912

Oil on canvas

Private collection

This painting shows a view over Mount Pleasant in the Sussex Downs near Rottingdean. In a letter to his son Ben dated 1912, William Nicholson included a small sketch echoing the composition of this piece and wrote 'rather a good Downs piece I did night before last looking into eye of Sun [...] Sun to be looked at only through smothered glass'. Nicholson often painted at either dawn or sunset, to show the effects of light and shade on the landscape.

The Windmill, Brighton Downs

1910

Oil on canvas

Nottingham City Museums and Galleries

The composition of this painting is characteristically simple and spacious. Nicholson provides the windmill on the horizon as a focal point within the expanse of sky. As an

iconic part of the Sussex countryside, this windmill at Rottingdean is a recurrent subject in his paintings.

Mending the Nets, Rottingdean

1909

Oil on canvas

Private collection

In 1909 William Nicholson moved to the old vicarage in Rottingdean, a fishing village near Brighton, East Sussex. Renaming it The Grange, it became his house and studio until 1915. In this scene, a group of fishermen are mending their nets on the beach below the cliffs. The calm sky, sea and shingle are practically featureless, turning this work into a semi-abstract arrangement of subtle tones. The sparse composition resembles the work of the American artist James McNeill Whistler whom Nicholson admired.

Sir William Orpen [1878–1931)

A Bloomsbury Family

1907

Oil on canvas

National Galleries of Scotland

Presented by the Scottish Modern Arts Association 1964

William Orpen and Nicholson were friends and shared a studio from 1906 for three years. Here Orpen depicts Nicholson at home in London, sat at the dining table with the children, his wife Mabel behind. Ever-the-dandy, Nicholson wears his usual starched collar, yellow waistcoat 'the colour of newborn ducklings' and much-loved dressing gown, a slipper dangling from his foot. A sense of domestic drama is conveyed by the comical facial expressions of the children and Mabel's hand reaching for the doorknob.

Ben Nicholson as a Child of Six or Seven Years

1901

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Nicholson first tried his hand at a portraiture using family and friends as sitters. He was a sensitive painter of children, avoiding sentimentality to produce characterful likenesses. This portrait of his first child, Ben (1894–1982), was painted from a photograph, perhaps to alleviate his son's inevitable boredom at sitting for long stretches of time. Left unfinished, this portrait remains with the artist's family. Ben grew up to become a leading figure of Modern British art.

The Ruby Glass

1910

Oil on canvas board

Private collection

This still life is a playful exercise in depicting the distinctive material qualities of objects. The dual opacity and translucency of the cut, chased and stained glass goblet is neatly paired with gleaming costume jewellery and a soft ribbon.

ROOM 14

Triumph and Tragedy

At the outbreak of the First World War, Nicholson had been enjoying a particularly productive period living in Paris, working on a decorative scheme for the American playwright and novelist Edward Knoblock.

The declaration of war caused him to move back to England and by the end of 1914 he travelled to India with his friend, the architect Edwin Lutyens, who had secured Nicholson a commission to paint the Viceroy, Charles Hardinge, 1st Baron Hardinge of Penshurst. He returned to England in 1915, later moving to Apple Tree Yard in London, a former coach house converted by Lutyens, which would be his home and studio until the end of the war. Tragedy struck twice for Nicholson in 1918, losing his wife Mabel and his son Tony, within a few months of each other.

A Young Nobleman Surveys the City

1910

Oil on canvas board

Private collection

Although the title suggests that this painting depicts a historic scene, it is actually an assemblage of objects in Nicholson's studio. The figure is derived from a wooden statuette of a French officer that Nicholson had at his home, The Grange in Rottingdean. It stands before a glazed view of classical buildings in which the artist's reflection can be seen. This is one of Nicholson's first still lifes to include a definite reflection of himself, which became a recurring motif throughout his career.

Studio Still Life

1914

Oil on canvas

Tate

Bequeathed by Edward Knoblock 1945

In 1914, Nicholson set up a studio at the Parisian home of his friend and patron, the American playwright Edward Knoblock. The background shows a painting of the Palais Royal as seen from the apartment, while the foreground depicts Knoblock through his possessions: statuettes, wind instruments; elegant gown, walking stick, top hat and gloves of a dandy. Nicholson's own tools – a canvas and paintbrushes – appear among them.

Bombay Landscape

1915

Oil on canvas board

Private collection

While in India in 1915, William Nicholson painted two landscapes of the delta region west of Mumbai (known as Bombay during British rule and until 1995). The area was a strategic location for the British military during the First World War. However, Nicholson depicts a tranquil scene. The elongated palm trees echo a 17th century Dutch painting by Meindert Hobbema (1638-1709), *The Avenue at Middelharnis* (1689; National Gallery, London) which inspired generations of artists and is symbolic of the modernisation of the landscape.

The Viceroy's Orderly, Duffadar Valayat Shah

1915

Oil on canvas

Nottingham City Museums & Galleries (Nottingham Castle)

In 1915, William Nicholson went to India to paint the portrait of Lord Hardinge (1858-1944) to mark the end of his term as Viceroy of India. The commission was a challenging one: Hardinge was often unavailable for sittings and their

relationship was strained. Despite this, Nicholson created this remarkable portrait of Duffadar Valayat Shah (dates unknown), personal secretary to the Viceroy, at the same scale. 'Duffadar' means Cavalry Sergeant, denoting Shah's rank. He is accompanied by a Chukar partridge, the national bird of present-day Pakistan, which was often kept as a pet.

Jennie as Infanta

1913

Oil on canvas

Eric and Rosayn Anderson

Courtesy The Fine Art Society

The sitter for this portrait is Genevieve Carpenter, the only child of the American composer John Alden Carpenter (1876-1951), whom Nicholson may have met through their mutual friend the playwright Edward Knoblock (1874-1945).

Genevieve is wearing a dress similar to that of the portrayal of the Infanta Marguerita by Spanish painter Diego Velázquez (1599-1660), a style which would have been very popular for girls in Nicholson's time. Nicholson was a great admirer of Velázquez, having first seen his works as a student in Paris.

Miss Wish Wynne, Actress, in the character of Janet Cannot for the Play 'The Great Adventure'

1913

Oil on canvas

Nottingham City Museums & Galleries (Nottingham Castle)

This portrait was made as a prop for Arnold Bennett's (1867-1931) *The Great Adventure* (1913), a play about the art market and the making of an artist. Initially commissioned from Mabel Pryde, Nicholson painted it instead, in just four hours, as she was unwell. It appears in the play's third act, as a wedding anniversary present from a famous artist to his wife, Janet Cannot, played by Wish Wynne (1882-1931). She is depicted in her 'cooking sleeves', at work in the kitchen.

The Lowestoft Bowl

1911

Oil on canvas

Tate

Presented by the Contemporary Art Society 1917

Nicholson's still lifes draw inspiration from the Dutch Golden Age, featuring tabletop arrangements on undefined backgrounds and a realistic focus on the material surfaces of

objects. But he avoided the symbolic essence of the Dutch tradition, which often carried a moral message about the brevity of life. Only occasionally, as in this painting- where a fallen tulip petal lies beside its dim reflection- does he briefly touch on life's transience.

A View of the Shop from Chelsea (portrait of Tony Nicholson)

1916

Pencil on paper

Private collection

Nicholson portrayed his son Tony (1897–1918) in the style of profile portraits by the printmaker and caricaturist Robert Dighton (c.1752 – 1814) which Nicholson collected as seen in the background of *A Bloomsbury Family* (on display in Room 13). Seen here in his army uniform, Tony had been called up to fight in 1916 at the age of 19. In October 1918, just one month before Armistice was declared, Nicholson received a telegram stating Tony had died from wounds sustained in action.

The End of War

1917

Lithograph on paper

Pallant House Gallery (Purchased 2024)

This print was commissioned by the British Government's War Propaganda Bureau for a series called *The Great War: Britain's Efforts and Ideals*. It shows a soldier nailing shut the door on war, surrounded by bloodstains and destruction. The subject of this print recalls the defiant act of Martin Luther

starting the Protestant Reformation, through nailing the 95 theses to the church door.

Armistice Night

1918

Oil on canvas

The Fitzwilliam, University of Cambridge

This painting is a rare example of William Nicholson depicting a specific event; here people are lining the street to celebrate the end of the First World War. Nicholson's loose handling of paint conveys the sense of movement of the bustling crowds and explosions of light from bonfires and fireworks. Despite the collective joy, this would also have been a difficult moment for Nicholson, who, less than a month before, had received news of his son Tony's death in active service.

A Soldier of the 1914-18 War

1917

Oil on canvas

Private collection

This is the first time that this painting is seen in public. It was commissioned by Lady Denman (1884-1954), whose younger

brother was killed in action in the First World War in 1914.
Rather than the portrait of an individual, this painting acts as a memorial to the spirit of the 'Unknown Soldier' – a symbol for all soldiers killed in war.

ROOM 15

Nicholson at Play: Theatre Designs and Book Illustrations

William Nicholson enjoyed experimenting beyond printmaking and painting. His relationship to theatre culture was sparked early on in his career, first through the influence of James and Mabel Pryde who came from a family of theatre lovers, and through his friendship with Edward Gordon Craig and his mother Ellen Terry. Nicholson would contribute set and costume designs until late in life.

His relationships with literary figures would also lead him to illustrate books, for adults and children alike. Known as 'The Kid' to his family and friends, Nicholson rejoiced in the company of children, and his books for them reveal both tender observation and understanding.

Angel Fish

Sturgeon

Octopus

Horseshoe Crab

c. 1920s

Blueprints on paper

Pallant House Gallery

(On loan from a private collection, 2013)

These prints were most likely illustrations for an unrealised book called *Aquarium Life* by E.G. Boulenger (1888-1946), Director of the London Zoo Aquarium. They demonstrate Nicholson as a keen observer of wildlife. The unusual technique of blueprint may have been inspired by architectural practice, perhaps from his association with Edwin Lutyens and his son Kit, both architects.

Christmas Morning

Spring Time

Anxious Times

The Fairy Flower

At Last! At Last!

Designs for *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams

1922

Pen, ink and watercolour on paper

Private collection

In 1922 William Nicholson illustrated *The Velveteen Rabbit*, written by his friend the American author Margery Williams (1881-1944). The story takes young readers through the eventful life of a stuffed rabbit, from his joyful introduction into a little boy's life as a Christmas present, to suffering almost instantaneous neglect, existential doubts and life

lessons, reunion with his child owner, happy times as favourite toy, fresh demise, encounter with a fairy and rebirth as a living rabbit.

Costume design of 'Culverin'

For *Polly* by John Gay

1922

Ink and watercolour on paper

Pallant House Gallery (On loan from a private collection, 2013)

Early in his career, Nicholson tried his hand at designing pirate costumes for J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904). In 1922, he was commissioned to design costumes for a production of John Gay's (1685 –1732) *Polly* at the Kingsway Theatre. In this 18th century play, Polly Peachum travels to the West Indies in search of Macheath who has become a pirate. Already controversial when it was first published, the play includes cross-dressing and a white man masquerading as a black man.

Glove Letter

1919

Pen and ink on paper

Private collection

William Nicholson's humour and creativity take centre stage here. The gloves are delicately drawn and decorated with tassels, dots, and decorative frills. Addressed to his second wife, Edie, this letter dates from around the time they were married. Accessories such as gloves, hats, shawls or walking sticks recur in Nicholson's work.

Clever Bill

1926

Poster

Private collection

Still life on a table

Undated

Caryon on paper

Private collection

Nicholson's preparatory drawings are rare, and they show him experimenting with colour and composition. Here he contrasted the curves of an arrangement of fruits with the pattern of the cloth on which they rest. The subject matter, focus and composition are not unlike the still lifes created by his contemporaries who were inspired by the example of French post-impressionists like Paul Cezanne (1839-1906).

CASED OBJECTS:

Ellen Terry Jubilee Scroll

1906

Lithograph on paper

Private collection

Ellen Terry (1847–1928) was the most famous actor of Nicholson's age, as well as the mother of his close friend, Edward Gordon Craig. 1906 marked five decades of Terry's acting career and a 'Jubilee' celebration was held in London. Nicholson produced this souvenir scroll presenting Terry on stage in her most celebrated roles, from Mamillius in William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* in 1856, to Lady Cecily Waynflete in George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)'s *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, staged in 1906.

Endpapers

Printer's proof for *The Velveteen Rabbit*

1922

Lithograph on paper

Private collection

Writing as William Nicholson was finishing designs for this book, artist Stanley Kennedy North (1887-1942) marvelled: 'He designs an end-paper like that to *The Velveteen Rabbit*, in which hundreds of rabbits are drawn calligraphically without

lifting the pen from the paper in a boisterous humour full of surprise. His drawing of cats, horses, cups of tea, ducks, shoes, gloves, hats... is a happy diversion of his and he would make a first class uncle for anyone's children, for surprise is the royal road to a child's heart...'

The Velveteen Rabbit,

By Margery Williams, William Heinemann, London

1922

Book

Private collection

Still in print today, *The Velveteen Rabbit* contains William Nicholson's best-loved children's book illustrations. This copy of the book belonged to his daughter Liza, also known as 'Penny'. Encouraged by its success and inspired by the company of his young daughter, grandchildren and stepchildren, Nicholson started writing as well as illustrating children's books of his own.

The Skin Horse Tells His Story

Printer's proof for *The Velveteen Rabbit*

1922

Lithograph on paper

Private collection

***Polly*, by John Gay**

Published by William Heinemann, London, first edition

1923

Private collection

William Nicholson was commissioned to design the costumes for the 1922 stage production of *Polly* after the untimely death of Claud Lovat Fraser (1890-1921), the designer for the stage production of its prequel *The Beggar's Opera* in 1921. The shape of Nicholson's 18th century dresses for Polly was inspired by those designed previously by Fraser.

Sheet designs for *The Twelve Days of Christmas*

Undated, ca. 1920s

Ink and watercolour on paper

Private collection

While they were never published, these designs reveal William Nicholson's sense of rhythm and humour as well as his working process: some of the motifs have been cut and pasted as he explored composition. Nicholson's visual interpretation of the famous song about the twelve days that make up the Christmas season is intensely personal, with some of the lyrics adapted by him.

Sheet designs for Clever Bill

1926

Pen and watercolour on paper

Private collection

Written by William Nicholson, *Clever Bill* tells the adventures of a toy soldier accidentally forgotten by his owner, little Mary, as she hurriedly packs her suitcase to go visit her aunt. Determined not to be left behind, the intrepid toy sprints through the countryside after Mary's train. In his book Nicholson gave images more importance than text, the narrative instead is carried by a visual suspense. The illustrations show Nicholson's familiarity with toys overflowing across the home.

The Owl No.2

Edited by Robert Graves and William Nicholson, Cecil Palmer,
London

1919

Journal

Cover design and 'The Shire Horse' for The Winter Owl

Edited by Robert Graves and William Nicholson, Cecil Palmer,
London

1923

Journal

Private collection

After the First World War, there was a resurgence in journals devoted to art and literature, reflecting a desire to reassert culture in a world recovering from war. Nicholson and his son-in-law, poet Robert Graves, published three issues of *The Owl* between 1919 and 1923. Graves chose the contributing writers, such as Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) and Walter de la Mare (1873-1956), while Nicholson selected the illustrators including his daughter Nancy, and 12-year-old Pamela Bianco (1906-1994), daughter of *The Velveteen Rabbit* author, Margery Williams (1881-1944).

Her Ladyship's Elephant

By David Dwight Wells, William Heinemann, London

1898

Book

Private collection

In order to raise enough funds to buy his grandparents' house, Chaucer's House in Woodstock, Oxfordshire, Nicholson took on more commissions from William Heinemann for book covers in the late 1890s. Among these

was a bold, woodcut design for David Dwight Wells' (1868–1900) humorous novel, *Her Ladyship's Elephant*.

The Hour of Magic and other Poems

By W.H. Davies, Jonathan Cape, London

1922

Book

Private collection

William Nicholson became friends with the Welsh poet William Henry Davies (1871-1940) towards the end of the First World War, Davies often staying with the family in Rottingdean. In 1922, Nicholson provided drawings for Davies' anthology of lyrical poems, *The Hour of Magic*, which reflect on themes of love, grief and death, and the beauty of nature. Seen more as decorations, rather than illustrations, Nicholson's sensitive drawings capture the essence of Davies' text.

The Book of Blokes

Published by Faber & Faber, London

1929

Book

Private collection

During the early- to mid-1920s, William Nicholson developed a style of playful line drawing to make caricatures for family and friends. Most of the 'blokes' in the book are inventions; often designed to amuse his young daughter Liza with his second wife Edie. The book was dedicated to his friend, Max Beerbohm, the noted caricaturist.

Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man

By Siegfried Sassoon, Faber and Gwyer, London

1929

Book

Private collection

William Nicholson designed many book covers, but only once provided illustrations for a significant novel. He met the famous war poet and writer of *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967), through his son-in-law, the poet and novelist Robert Graves. The book is a fictionalised autobiography, an account of a happy childhood and early adulthood in the countryside. Nicholson shared the author's nostalgia for the peace and beauty of a 'lost' England, before the outbreak of war and civil unrest that followed.

On English Poetry

By Robert Graves, William Heinemann, London

1922

Book

Private collection

William Nicholson created a black cobble design for the front cover of a collection of essays by his son-in-law, Robert Graves, entitled *On English Poetry*. Graves was best known for his poetry, translations of Greek myth, and his First World War memoir, *Good-Bye to All That* (1929).

[the below is a group label for 3 works, displayed frame-to-frame alongside each other]

The Cat

The Rake

The Cock

Costume designs for *The Rake*

1925

Performed in C.B. Cochran's 1925 revues *On with the Dance* and *Still Dancing*

Pen, watercolour, graphite and crayon on paper

Private collection

The Rake was inspired by the famous 18th century series of paintings (and subsequent prints) *The Rake's Progress* by William Hogarth (1697–1764). For this ballet, William Nicholson collaborated with the dancer and choreographer Léonide Massine (1896–1979) to design the set as well as the costumes. After the performance's preview, Massine requested changes to Nicholson's costumes to enable greater freedom of movement.

Group label for 2 framed designs:

The Marquise (Act I)

Esteban (Act III)

Costume designs for *The Marquise* by Noël Coward

1927

Ink, watercolour and pastel on paper

Private collection

One of William Nicholson's final theatrical collaborations was for the production of Noël Coward's (1899 –1973) *The Marquise* at the Criterion Theatre in 1927, a light romantic comedy set in an imaginary 18th century chateau near Paris. The play was created for Nicholson's long-standing friend Marie Tempest (1864-1942, whom he portrayed in 1901), who co-starred with her husband, W. Graham Brown (1870-

1937). An anonymous reviewer noted that Nicholson 'should do more work for the stage, he has a real flair for it.'

Group label for 2 framed designs:

William Nicholson [1872–1949)

Elizabeth Drury [Edie Nicholson] [1890-1958)

The Husband

The Wife

Costume designs for *The Tub*

1926

Performed in C.B. Cochran's 1926 revue

Ink and watercolour on paper

Private collection

Following their successful collaboration in 1925, Léonide Massine and William Nicholson worked together again on *The Tub*, a Florentine ballet based on the *Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375). In one episode, Peronella hides her lover, Giannello, in a large pot when her dim-witted husband, Piero, returns home unexpectedly. Nicholson worked on the designs of the Renaissance costumes with his second wife, Edie, who painted under the name of Elizabeth Drury.

ROOM 16

The White House, Sutton Veny

In October 1919, a year after his wife Mabel's death, William Nicholson married family friend Edie Stuart Wortley. This caused a rift with his son Ben, who had also become close to her. Edie was a painter and the couple would go on to have a collaborative marriage, working on joint costume and set designs and creating portraits of one another.

In 1923, they acquired the White House in Sutton Veny in Wiltshire, where Nicholson once more made chalk downland his subject. At Christmas 1924, Ben and his wife, the artist Winifred Nicholson came to stay, prompting a reconciliation. Both Winifred (1893-1981) and Edie's looser handling of paint and brighter colour palette would have an influence on Nicholson's later work.

The White House Sutton Veny (With Kit, Gypsy and Picky)

1924

Oil on panel

Pallant House Gallery (On long-term loan from a private collection, 2013)

Nicholson and his wife Edie were given the Manor House in Sutton Veny, Wiltshire, as a wedding present from her father in 1923. This view shows the north-west front of their house, which they renamed the White House. To the left you can see where Edie's studio was located. The figure stood in the foreground is Nicholson's son, Kit (1904-1948), wearing jodhpurs (a type of trouser designed for horse-riding) with their dogs Gypsy and Picky (who was named after Picasso).

Lady in Grey

1918

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Courtesy of Osborne Samuel Gallery

This portrait is believed to show William Nicholson's second wife, Edie. She wears grey, the colour worn by war widows at the time. This portrait also appears as a motif on Edie's dress illustrated by Nicholson (on display nearby). The painting was exhibited at the International Society in 1918, mysteriously titled *Madame X as 'Megan' in Tân-y-Bryn*. The reason is unclear, as no play or novel by that name exists. A later collector renamed it *Lady in Grey*.

Edie Nicholson's Dress

1918

Glazed cotton with blue silk trim,

Private Collection

This dress was a gift from William Nicholson to Edie. He hand-painted the fabric before it was sewn, hiding pictures, emblems, and messages in the pattern. One reads: 'All this for ESW [Edith Stuart Wortley] from WN [William Nicholson]' above a bouquet of flowers (love) and a horseshoe tied with ribbon (luck). Near the front right hem is a rendition of the painting now known as *Lady in Grey* (displayed nearby) which is thought to be a portrait of Edie. On the front, attached to a button, Nicholson added a brown paper label reading 'For his Sweetheart'.

Elizabeth Drury [Edie Nicholson]

[1890-1958]

William Nicholson

1921

Oil on canvas

Private Collection

Edith 'Edie' Stuart Wortley and William Nicholson had been close family friends, living nearby in Wales. Their relationship kindled in widowhood: Edie's husband died in the First World War while Nicholson's wife succumbed to the 1918 influenza pandemic. Their marriage in 1919 strained Nicholson's relationship with son Ben (1894-1982), who was once romantically interested in Edie. A talented artist herself, painting under the pseudonym Elizabeth Drury, Edie influenced Nicholson's later style, though most of her work is now lost.

Landscape at Harlech

1919

Oil on canvas board

Private collection

Courtesy Patrick Bourne & Co

Mabel and William Nicholson had a home in Harlech in Wales in the late 1910s, where they often received visits from their neighbour and new friend Edith (Edie) Stuart Wortley.

Following Mabel's death in 1918, Nicholson spent more time there, joined in 1919 by Edie as his new wife. This painting demonstrates Nicholson's love for experimenting with light and scale. His use of bright light and shadow creates a flattened perspective. Drawn to its ancient traditions and features such as dry-stone walls, Nicholson painted several views at Harlech.

Snow in the Horseshoe

1927

Oil on canvas board,

Private Collection

Courtesy of Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert

William Nicholson painted several landscapes around his home of Sutton Veny, Wiltshire. This example shows the remnants of winter snow lying on the north facing Wiltshire

Downs. The 'horseshoe' is a land formation found frequently in this area of the Downs. The figure in the hat, sat looking away from the viewer over the landform in the lower half of the painting, is probably Nicholson's wife Edie with their dog 'Gypsy' to her left.

Miss Jekyll's Gardening Boots

1920

Oil on wood

Tate

Presented by Lady Emily Lutyens (1944)

It is said that Nicholson painted the celebrated garden designer's boots while he waited for the opportunity to complete her portrait, as she only allowed sittings once the sun began to set. Luckily, Nicholson enjoyed exploring texture, light and still life, and was especially interested in what garments could quietly reveal about their owner.

Gertrude Jekyll

1920

Oil on canvas

Lent by the National Portrait Gallery, London

Given by the wish of Sir Edwin Lutyens, 1947

Gertrude Jekyll (1843–1932) was a celebrated garden designer, whose partnership with architect Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) shaped some of England's most admired landscapes. Originally trained as an artist she turned to

gardening in 1891, owing to failing eyesight, and designed over 400 gardens. William Nicholson and Jekyll had met through Lutyens. At 77 years old, Jekyll was reluctant to sit during the day due to her busy schedule, but she and Nicholson got on well and she is said to have enjoyed his conversation.

Mixed Flowers in a Mug

1929

Oil on canvas

Private Collection

This painting is a study of contrasts. Nicholson sets light against dark and solid objects against empty space. The curvature of the white mug is echoed by the roundness of the grey bowl. Likewise, the empty bowl contrasts the fullness and colour of the yellow, purple and pink flower arrangement. The mug is believed to be French and belonged to Edie.

Flowers and books (for Siegfried Sassoon)

1929

Oil on canvas board

Private Collection

The poet Siegfried Sassoon and William Nicholson were friends. Both had lost relatives in the war; Nicholson his youngest son, Tony, and Sassoon his brother, Hamo. They met

through the poet Robert Graves, who became Nicholson's son-in-law after marrying his daughter Nancy in 1918. Sassoon bought this painting as a gift for his lover Stephen Tennant. The flower arrangement, including poppies and sunflowers, is placed on top of stack of books which is likely to be an homage to Sassoon's work.

ROOM 17

Late Landscapes

Later in life William Nicholson took on fewer portrait commissions, which allowed him more time to paint landscapes. By the early 1930s, there were tensions in his and Edie's marriage, which only worsened during their trip to visit her parents in South Africa. They separated in 1933, although they remained friendly.

In 1935, Nicholson went to stay with his friend, the zoologist Peter Chalmers Mitchell in Malaga, Spain, where he met and fell in love with the writer Marguerite Steen. They travelled together in Spain and France, where in 1939 Nicholson suffered a stroke whilst staying in La Rochelle. When the Second World War was declared in September that year, Nicholson and Steen returned to England, but left the studio on Apple Tree Yard, London, as a result of the Blitz.

Fish and Sun

c.1939

Pencil on paper
Private collection

A Glade Near Midhurst

1937

Oil on wood

Southampton City Art Gallery

This sun-dappled scene depicts woodland near Midhurst in West Sussex. Two small figures can be seen walking along the path in between the birch trees. The brighter colour palette and freer handling of paint is characteristic of Nicholson's later landscapes. In this composition, Nicholson has used the end of his brush to scratch into the surface of the paint.

The Picnic

1932

Oil on canvas board

Estate of Mirabel Cecil

This painting shows a family picnic near Codford in Wiltshire, during the last summer the Nicholsons spent at The White House, Sutton Veny. Edie and their daughter Liza (known as 'Penny') are sitting in the shade with their dog, Gypsy, whilst Nicholson's granddaughter, Jenny, has climbed the haystack.

Along with *Letterfrack*, a landscape made during a holiday in County Galway, Ireland, it captures happier moments, at a time when relations between Nicholson and Edie became strained.

Letterfrack

1931

Oil on panel

Pallant House Gallery (on loan from a private collection, 2013)

South Harting

c.1932

Oil on canvas

Private collection courtesy of Jenna Burlingham Gallery

This view looks north-west from Harting Beacon on the South Downs Way, over South Harting village to Torberry Hill. The blue-green of the copper-clad spire of the parish church in South Harting punctuates the Downs, and was a navigational marker for the Southdown Gliding Club, an activity introduced to Nicholson by his youngest son, Kit.

The Gliders on the Downs

1932

Oil on panel

Lent by The Savile Club, London

This landscape demonstrates Nicholson's experimentation with aerial perspective, and reveals his bond with his son, the architect Kit Nicholson. It is believed to be a view of the landscape from Dunstable Downs towards gliders belonging to the British Gliding Association. Kit started gliding in 1932 and this painting was inspired by a flight William and Kit had taken together. In 1948, Kit tragically died in a gliding accident at Samedan, near St Moritz in Switzerland.

The Helderberg

1931

Oil on canvas board

Private collection

Courtesy of Piano Nobile, London

In 1931 William Nicholson and Edie visited her parents, Sir Lionel (1855-1936) and Lady Phillips (1863-1940) in South Africa. Nicholson was commissioned to paint a portrait of J. W. Jagger (1859-1930), a British industrialist and politician involved in drafting the South Africa Act, which established

the Union of South Africa and embedded racial segregation by excluding the majority Black African population from political participation. Jagger's estate looked over Helderberg Mountain. Nicholson wrote to his daughter Elizabeth that painting this view was his favourite part of the trip.

A Game of Pelota

1939

Oil on canvas board

Private collection

In the first part of 1939, Nicholson and Marguerite Steen were staying in La Rochelle on the west coast of France, where he made a comical sketch, *Fish and Sun*, on display nearby. In late March Nicholson suffered a stroke and travelled further south to St Jean-de-Luz near the Spanish border to recuperate. This painting depicts a group of people playing Pelota, a traditional Basque game, taking place at Sare, a village near St Jean-de-Luz.

The Castle, Malaga

1935

Oil on canvas board

Private collection courtesy of Jenna Burlingham Gallery

William Nicholson met and fell in love with Marguerite Steen (1894-1975), a writer, whilst staying with his friend, zoologist Peter Chalmers Mitchell (1864 –1945), near Malaga in Spain in 1935. Together, Nicholson and Steen went on excursions around Malaga, where Nicholson painted these landscapes, depicting the range of hills surrounding the city. Nicholson employed a looser handling of paint and a brighter, more colourful palette for *The Castle, Malaga*.

Spanish Hills

1935

Oil on wood panel

Pallant House Gallery (on loan from a private collection, 2013)

The Legation in the Blitz

1941

Oil on canvas

Private collection

In 1941, Nicholson was commissioned to paint a portrait of Björn G Prytz (1887-1976), a Swedish envoy, staying at the

Swedish legation (or diplomatic offices) in London. Nicholson wrote to his daughter Liza, 'I have been painting a bloke who lives in a danger zone. I arrived one morning to go on with my work and found the house without windows and my easel and portrait nearly up to the knees in broken glass.' The portrait was never completed, but this oil sketch survives as Nicholson's only record of London during the Blitz.