

Art and Economics in Cambridge

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In her Will, written on 16 June 1938, Mary Paley Marshall left clear instructions regarding the bequest of income from the copyrights of her husband's books, her savings and investments, and the remainder of her library. Having disposed of those items of her property which she clearly felt were of greatest importance, she then bequeathed 'any articles of personal or domestic or household or garden use or ornament' to her Trustees (John Neville Keynes and her nephew, Claude Guillebaud), adding that she hoped that any instructions she should leave, written or verbal, as to the disposition of any such articles would be honoured by her Trustees.

This lack of precision leaves modern researchers with some problems concerning two items of personal property which are of lasting interest. As we have seen, some confusion remains over the ownership and identification of the manuscript or manuscripts of Mary Paley Marshall's memoirs, *What I Remember* (McWilliams Tullberg, *Bulletin* no. 3, pp. 47). The donation of 100 of her water-colours to the Marshall Library creates similar difficulties.

In 1944, John Maynard Keynes received the following rather formal postcard from Charles Ryle Fay:

A volume of water colours by Mrs Marshall relating to Sicily and the Tirol, 100 pieces in all, were left by arrangement to Mr C. R. Fay for presentation to the Marshall Library. It is hoped to secure from Prof. G. able of St John's College an appreciation of the work, which will be deposited also in the Marshall Library (C. R. Fay to John Maynard Keynes postmarked 20 April 1944, Keynes Collection, King's College, Cambridge, JMK L/MM).

There is no record as to when the paintings were deposited in the Library. However, a letter in the Marshall Library files from William George Constable indicates that Fay did not make his request for an assessment of the paintings until 1959:

23 Craig Street
Cambridge 38
Massachusetts.
February 16, 1959

My dear Fay,

I owe you a great deal more than the kindly eye you cast upon my papers in the Tripos. I remember with deep gratitude a visit to your home and to the Lake District during which I re-oriented all my views on economics, thanks to you. Needless to say, I shall be delighted to do anything I can in connection with Mrs Marshall's water colours. It was a most generous and appropriate gift on your part to the Marshall Library. I saw the water colours scattered about the Marshall's house; but it's a long time ago and, before I can write anything worth writing, I must see them again. As usual, I shall be in England this spring and summer and either in the early part of April or more probably in (*sic*) latter part of May I'll come to Cambridge, look at the water colours, and then tap your brains as to biographical details.

I shan't find any difficulty in writing an appreciation of the water colours. They are painted in an old-fashioned way, but, with such sincerity (*sic*) and genuine feeling behind them that they have great charm, at least for me.

Yours ever,
(signed) W. G. Constable.

C. R. Fay, Esq.,
King's College,
Cambridge (1).

The war was possibly to blame for Fay's failure to contact Constable about the paintings in the mid-forties. Why he waited until 1959 remains a mystery, in view of the fact that Constable appears from his letter to have been a regular visitor to Britain from 'the other' Cambridge (2). The delay confirms the view that after Mary Marshall's death, her paintings, together with other archival material that came from the Marshall household, were put away in cupboards and largely forgotten.

William George Constable was born in Derby in 1887, related in a distant and unclear fashion to John Constable, the famous painter of English landscapes (3). William George entered St John's College, Cambridge in 1906. He took Part 1 of the History Tripos in 1908 being awarded an *aegrotat*, presumably on the grounds of illness at the time of the examinations. In 1909, he was awarded the minor Whewell Scholarship for International Law. The examination included questions on both historical and modern aspects of international law, politics and political economy. Constable was particularly commended for his knowledge of political philosophy and economics. He then went on to read Part II of the Economics Tripos which he passed with a First Class in 1910, the only First for that year (4). In January 1911, he was awarded the valuable McMahon Law Studentship by his College for four years, entered the Inner Temple and was called to the Bar in May 1914.

The McMahon Law Studentship was open to any member of the College who was not yet an M. A. who intended to prepare himself for the practice of Law. It could not be held simultaneously with a Fellowship in any College. Nonetheless, Constable prepared a Fellowship thesis, 'Studies in Price Movements' and it was in this connection that he got to know the Marshalls. Marshall had retired in 1908 but he continued to take an interest in advanced students such as Fay (5) and Constable. Marshall generously lent him reading material and talked widely on economic subjects, so that Constable felt he was sitting at the feet of one of the great biblical prophets. He also met Mary Paley Marshall during these visits, heard the stories of their travels and was occasionally shown one of her watercolours.

Constable submitted his 384- thesis in 1912 to St John's College. It was reported on by H. S. Foxwell, who found that it contained a great deal of interesting material which had not yet been thoroughly digested and over which its author lacked logical command. He advised a re-working and development of certain themes in the thesis. In the following year, Constable submitted two papers, a new version of his original work on price movements and a second paper on 'Authoritative Intervention in Industrial Disputes'. This time, the examiner, A. W. Flux, was less than flattering. He felt that though the papers showed some originality of thought, it was little promise of more advanced work from their author. With commendable patience, Constable re-wrote and submitted his theses a third time, this time limiting his original paper to 'Studies in the relation between wholesale and retail prices'. Both pieces met with the approval of the examiners, Sidney Chapman and Foxwell, as solid contributions to scholarship. It was felt that Constable's legal studies had contributed to his grasp of the issues involved in State intervention in labour-market disputes. There were, however, better candidates in the Fellowship race and Constable was passed over (6).

At the outbreak of the first world war, Constable volunteered for military service, serving with the Sherwood Foresters. He survived the massacre for two years but suffered severe physical

and mental trauma when a heavy shell exploded in his trench only a few feet from him, burying him alive. While still convalescing, he submitted his theses again, having made minor amendments. Both his examiners, Pigou and Foxwell warmly recommended him for a St John's College Fellowship to which he was elected in November 1918 and held from January 1919 to the end of 1921 [\(7\)](#).

His wartime ordeal, however, led him to reconsider careers in economics and law, and to devote himself instead to the arts. He studied at the Slade School of Art in London, worked at the Wallace Collection, and the National Gallery, and as art critic for the *New Statesman* and the *Saturday Review*. As Director of the Courtauld Institute of Art at the University of London, he was instrumental in founding the first degree in the History of Art at a British university. Constable succeeded Roger Fry as Slade Professor of Fine Art at Cambridge 1935-37 and was therefore able to renew his visits to Balliol Croft and his friendship with Mary Paley Marshall. In 1938, Constable left Cambridge to become Curator of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and remained in the States until his death in 1976 [\(8\)](#).

Besides her teaching, Mary Paley Marshall's greatest interest was in painting, mainly in watercolours. While she claims that she was interested in colour from childhood, and was caught up in the pre-Raphaelite movement with regards to dress and furnishings as a student and in the early days of married life, it was first during Marshall's convalescence in Palermo that painting appears to have become an important hobby [\(9\)](#). It is clear that she expected to spend considerable time painting, since windows were introduced into the otherwise unbroken 'catslide' roof which covers two floors of the north-facing rear of Balliol Croft, the house which the Marshalls had built for them on their return to Cambridge. Here she had her 'studio'. She joined the Cambridge Drawing Society in 1885, became its President 1912-14, and was still a member in 1939, holding the office of Vice-President. Constable was on occasions called upon to give the annual criticism of the Drawing Society's exhibition and therefore had the opportunity to examine her work in greater detail.

Constable's touching tribute to the two Marshalls deserves to be rescued from oblivion, as does his assessment of Mary Paley Marshall's unrecognised talents as an artist, which, Constable seems to suggest, went unrecognised at Balliol Croft. The piece was first published in *The Eagle*, the St John's College magazine, in April 1960 (vol. LIX, no. 255, pp. 23-29) and reprinted for private distribution by W. Jefferson & Son Ltd of Ely. It is reproduced [here](#) without the short note appended by C. W. Guillebaud outlining his aunt's life, as the material is familiar to all *Bulletin* readers.

It is not clear whether Mary Paley Marshall herself chose which paintings would enter the Library collection. Another group of paintings was donated to Newnham College, Cambridge and others remained in the family of her executor and nephew, Claude Guillebaud. As part of the Marshall Centenary celebrations at Cambridge in 1990, Philomena Guillebaud generously had five of the water-colours mounted for display, including the 'White Elephant' painting mentioned below. The remaining water-colours are kept in the Marshall Library in their original volume.

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Notes

1. Marshall Library: box labelled Marshall Library's Archives.
2. Fay died in 1962, aged 77, and it may have been a desire to put his papers in order that prompted the contact with Constable.
3. Biographical data on W. G. Constable is drawn from: *DNB* 1971-1980; *Who's Who* 1975 and St John's College, Cambridge Archives D93. 28, 32; D96. 27, 31, with acknowledgement to the Master, Fellows and Scholars of the College.
4. There were seven other Part II candidates.
5. C.R. FAY (1960), "Reminiscences of a Deputy Librarian", in Wood, J.C., ed. (1982), *Alfred Marshall: Critical Assessments*, London, Croom Helm, vol. 1, p. 87.
6. Constable would most likely be competing with his theses not only against other economists, but also against candidates in other subjects. There would therefore be an element of relativity in the judgement of his examiners.
7. Constable also held a St. John's College Fellowship during his period as Slade Professor of Fine Art at Cambridge (1935-37) and was elected Honorary Fellow in 1956.
8. Constable held a number of other academic posts in Britain and the United States and was the author of many books, catalogues and articles on art. He published nothing on economics.
9. "Perhaps one recollects earliest the things that one cares for most, certainly I have always had a love for colour" (M. P. Marshall, 1947, p. 1). Remembering the Marshalls' house in Bristol, G. H. Leonard describes 'the books and the pictures, and a new charm and beauty of its own within, which ... I should like to call "aesthetic"' involving 'a new sense of joy and loveliness in colour and form' (Letter dated 7 October 1924 addressed to the Editor of the *Times and Mirror*). Elsewhere Mary Marshall, describing their honeymoon, wrote of the fortnight spent in Cornwall that 'I preferred the Lizard because of the beautiful colouring; Alfred preferred the [sic] Lands End and its fine forms. I always /loved/ preferred Colour and [Alfred] the Form throughout our lives' (Newnham Notes, ch. 3, reverse of p. 5).

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