

## **Charles Haslewood Shannon R.A. 1863-1937**

### **An Introduction from the abridged notes of the late Christopher John Micklethwaite**

Charles Shannon is a celebrated, if minor, artist of his era; a Master Lithographer, portraitist and painter in the traditional Venetian style. He was born in Quarrington Rectory in 1863, the second son of the Reverend Frederick William Shannon who was Rector. Shannon was educated at Carre's Grammar School, Sleaford and then went as a boarder to St John's School, Leatherhead. In 1881, he enrolled at Lambeth College of Art where the next year he met another artist, Charles Ricketts (1866-1931).

Shannon and Ricketts studied drawing in pen, pencil and pastel and learned the art of wood engraving which was then the chief medium for both book and magazine illustration. They regarded themselves as part of the European tradition of pictorial art with particular reverence for the Venetian artists of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, English and French artists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Symbolist painters of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Arts and Crafts Philosophy and the English Pre-Raphaelites.

Ricketts claimed most of his education came from basking in art galleries and he had a tremendous knowledge of art. He and Shannon travelled through Europe and Egypt collecting antiquities, Old Master paintings, drawings and oriental prints. Ricketts left the collection to Shannon who bequeathed it to the National Gallery, the Victoria & Albert Museum, the British Museum and the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.

Ricketts was a very versatile artist: sculpture, woodcuts, stage and costume design, bookbinding and typographical design. He was taught to paint by Shannon. After Art College, Ricketts became an illustrator and Shannon taught at Croydon School of Art.

The two artists produced a magazine about Arts and Literature which they called 'The Dial'. They established the Vale Press, named after the house in Chelsea which they took over from Whistler and opened a shop off Regent Street to sell their books. They illustrated plays, stories and poems by Oscar Wilde who became a close friend.

Charles Shannon taught himself the art of lithography (printing in ink from a stone surface) and mastered the process. This work was greatly admired and collected.

Shannon became more famous, however, as a painter of portraits, nudes and classical subjects. His paintings depict a frozen moment in time, constructed by glazes of colour rather than line.

He aimed at depicting beauty in a most discreet and unassuming manner and unconsciously protested against the vulgarity and ugliness of modern life. Shannon not only lived and breathed Fine Art but produced, discussed, appreciated and collected it.

He exhibited in many galleries at home and abroad and became a Royal Academician in 1920.

In 1928, large retrospective exhibitions of Shannon's work were shown in London and Lincoln.

In January 1929, he suffered a fall whilst re-hanging a painting on the stairs, a portrait entitled 'Miriam' (now in the Usher Gallery in Lincoln). He was badly injured and never fully recovered. He died in 1937.

A memorial service was held in St James, Piccadilly and his ashes were interred in Quarrington churchyard in front of his father's grave.

Admiration for Shannon's skill as a lithographer never wavered but his art fell out of favour in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Scholars are now re-assessing his role in the story of English Art. His work is now exhibited in galleries throughout England, Europe and the USA.

*The full version of this paper is included in the Micklethwaite papers.*

*This summary was edited for Carre Gallery by Chris Hodgson FRSA.*