

The Chase that captured so much creativity

Simon Tait

Cranborne Chase — 380 acres south of Salisbury that spill across Wiltshire, Dorset and Hampshire — was established a millennium ago by William the Conqueror as a hunting ground. A rolling region of chalk grassland and ancient woodland, it is one of the richest spots in Britain for ancient burials. The archaeologist General Augustus Pitt Rivers spent 20 years excavating there.

The Chase was also an extraordinary source of inspiration for a wide group of 20th-century artists, from Augustus John to Lucian Freud, for whom the area was an inspiration, and they are the subject of an exhibition at the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum.

Between 1920 and 1990, more than 50 artists were enchanted by the place; some stayed for the rest of their lives, others used it to regenerate themselves and moved on; some painted the landscape, others found the ambience perfect in which to paint their portraits and abstracts.

The exhibition, *Circles and Tangents: Art in the Shadow of Cranborne Chase*, is only the second art show in the the museum, which is otherwise mostly devoted to archaeology. The first was a well-received display last year of pictures by John Constable painted in the Salisbury area.

The exhibition is part of a long-term multimillion-pound programme to raise the profile of the independent museum which is set in a partly 13th-century building in the cathedral close.

The artist and art historian Vivienne Light has spent 12 years researching the exhibition and the artists, and all the art has been loaned, mostly by the artists or their families. The story begins with Henry Lamb who in 1918 left his Hampstead studio to move to Stourpaine, on the Stour which runs through the Chase's heart. In 1920 he invited the Spencer brothers, Stanley and Gilbert, still shocked and recovering from their First World War experiences in the Royal Army Medical Corps, to join him. Stanley began to paint again, settling near by at Durweston to work on landscapes. He returned to Cookham in Berkshire a



Boveridge by EQ Nicholson: her brother-in-law Kit, son of the painter Sir William Nicholson, built Augustus John's studio

couple of years later, but Gilbert settled permanently at Melbury. "How many times I tried to master Melbury Beacon it would be difficult to say... I regarded it as a challenge, not a defeat, and certainly not a halt sign," he wrote.

In 1927 Augustus John moved to live on the edge of the Chase near Fordingbridge in a studio built for him at Fryern by Christopher Nicholson, known as Kit, one of the sons of John's friend the painter Sir William Nicholson. Another son was Ben. Kit died young in a flying accident, but his wife, always known as EQ, lived and worked on the Chase, as did Ben and his first wife, Winifred, and Ben's sister Nancy, who worked in textiles and prints and was the wife of the poet Robert Graves. Kit and EQ's son, the painter Timothy

Nicholson, still lives and works in the family cottage at Boveridge, close to Cranborne village.

John Craxton had known the area from childhood, and in his late teens in the 1940s met EQ Nicholson and later became her lodger when she lived at Alderholt Mill, Rockbourne. With him at Goldsmiths had been Lucian Freud, and in their early twenties they both painted at Alderholt where Freud drew EQ's donkey, Tommy.

The exhibition is introduced at the front of the museum by a large Elisabeth Frink of a *Seated Man*. Frink lived and worked at Woolland, a village above Cranborne Chase with a view of five counties, for the last 17 years of her life. It became her studio and her showroom, with 16 acres in which to place

her sculptures. Cecil Beaton lived at Ashcombe in the heart of the Chase for 15 years, loving its "green calm" and the "abandoned and virginal" landscape. He had become enchanted while visiting John and his family at Fryern Court, declaring breathlessly, "here is the dwelling place of an artist."

"This rather small area had so much to it — woodland untouched for centuries, the undulations of the downs, the mysteries of the barrows and former civilisations — that it's hardly any wonder that it was so beloved by artists," said Vivienne Light, adding as a local artist, "And it still is."

Circles and Tangents: Art in the Shadow of Cranborne Chase, is at Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum until Sept 29

Oliver Kamm
The Pedant



The Queen's English Society, a pressure group whose slogan is "Good English Matters", announced this week that it would close owing to lack of support. Journalistic commentary has been respectful and regretful. Anne McElvoy, the presenter of *Night Waves* on Radio 3, commented on Twitter that there would be "no one to tell us off for 'me and him', 'for free' and 'these ones'. And yes, it does matter"; and she declared herself a proud pedant.

People who care about language are valuable, and I'm sorry that the Society, which I once addressed, has abandoned its task. But I disagreed fundamentally with its campaign a couple of years ago to establish "some form of moderating body to set an accepted standard of good English".

That approach is nicely encapsulated in McElvoy's comment. And it's bound to fail. The reason is only partly that telling people off for poor English is undiplomatic. More important, it misrepresents language. English usage is a set of conventions, or implicit and shared understandings, rather than inviolable rules. Where a convention doesn't serve a purpose, it's legitimate to ignore it.

Unfortunately, some widely cited "rules" in English make no sense at all. Take McElvoy's examples. There's nothing wrong with "me and him" (in that order) where the object case of personal pronouns is needed.

Similarly, avoidable misery and confusion ensue from the superstition that you shouldn't end a sentence with a preposition. That advice dates from the *Short Introduction to English Grammar* of Robert Lowth, an 18th-century

Think of grammatical conventions as being like the laws of chess

Bishop of London and amateur philologist. It makes no grammatical sense and is in any case frequently impossible to follow (how would you rewrite "the nights are drawing in"?).

Anyone can spot a split infinitive, but few can advance a good reason for objecting to it. In my opinion, it's a matter of stylistic preference. If splitting an infinitive sounds clumsy, don't do it. If it's idiomatic and observes the cadences of English ("to boldly go where no man has gone before"), you should split an infinitive without apology.

This isn't a counsel of chaos. Breaking a convention presupposes knowing what the convention is in the first place. And while the capacity for language is probably innate in humans, we do need linguistic conventions. You can't learn a language with only a list of words: you need to know how they fit together to form sentences and how they inflect for case, number or gender.

Choosing a word or expression requires many judgments. It will help the reader or listener if your subject and verb match in number (that is, singular or plural) and if your pronouns are in the right case for the role that they play in a sentence. Grammatical conventions aid clarity; they even add to the elegance and appeal of the language. Think of them as comparable to the laws of chess. How a knight moves on the board is a human invention; establishing that shared understanding allows all sorts of the things to be achieved. Understanding words and forming sentences require knowledge and not just instinct. They should be taught well. But scolding people on arbitrary and whimsical linguistic grounds doesn't advance that cause.

A portrait of the 85-year-old artist now in his prime

William Packer

Derrick Greaves is celebrating his 85th birthday with a small, choice exhibition at James Hyman Fine Art. The paintings shown have all been done within the past seven or eight years, and, as we have so long come to expect of Greaves, they are as refined and subtle as ever, as exquisite in the execution as in the image. In short it is a collection to savour.

Greaves is now teasing his assured way into the seventh decade of a career not just productive, but remarkable for the quality of the work through all its shifts and changes of scale, medium and preoccupation. Indeed he was making his mark even before he left the Royal College in 1952. By 1956 he had been chosen, along with John Bratby, Ed Middleditch and Jack Smith, as one of "Four Young Painters" the British Council was sending to the Venice Biennale of that year — he is now the sole survivor of the quartet.

Though all went on to achieve critical and commercial success to some degree, after that early flurry of attention things became much quieter for the Venice Four. Saddled so early with a facile critical label as "Kitchen Sink Painters", with all that mid-1950s baggage of youthful disaffection and



Chromatic freshness and purity of line: Two Cafetieres (2011) by Derrick Greaves

social comment — a label moreover that applied least of all to Greaves — they were burdened also with false expectation, perhaps, of where their work might tend. Dealers and critics are always happier when they know where they stand, and as the work developed, or took other directions, so

critical interest looked elsewhere, and the galleries turned away. Art school teaching took up the slack, and only upon retirement would Greaves at last be able to revert to painting full time.

He has always been a figurative artist, but while he works closely from what he knows and sees and remem-

bers, he does not do so in terms of closely detailed description. Rather he reduces and refines his image — flowers, trees, an architectural detail, a figure, a head, a bird, and flowers again — to an essential descriptive simplicity. Each painting is immediately recognisable as his, yet always a surprise, in its chromatic freshness and the elegant purity of line and form. If it is mannered, it is a manner entirely without affectation: and there is no formula.

There are other artists who, in the linear reduction of their imagery and the simplicity and clarity of its presentation, could well be said to labour in the same vineyard — Julian Opie, Michael Craig-Martin, Gary Hume. Yet, whatever the particular merits of their work, when compared to that of Greaves, it seems, to put it as kindly as possible, just a shade predictable. With Greaves there is always to the work a more direct and personal touch, and a quality of the intuitive in its development and evolution: a sense, that is to say, of the artist surprising himself as the work has gone on — qualities one sees him sharing, rather, with Patrick Caulfield and Prunella Clough.

Derrick Greaves — Milestones at James Hyman Fine Art, 5 Savile Row, London W1, until June 22