

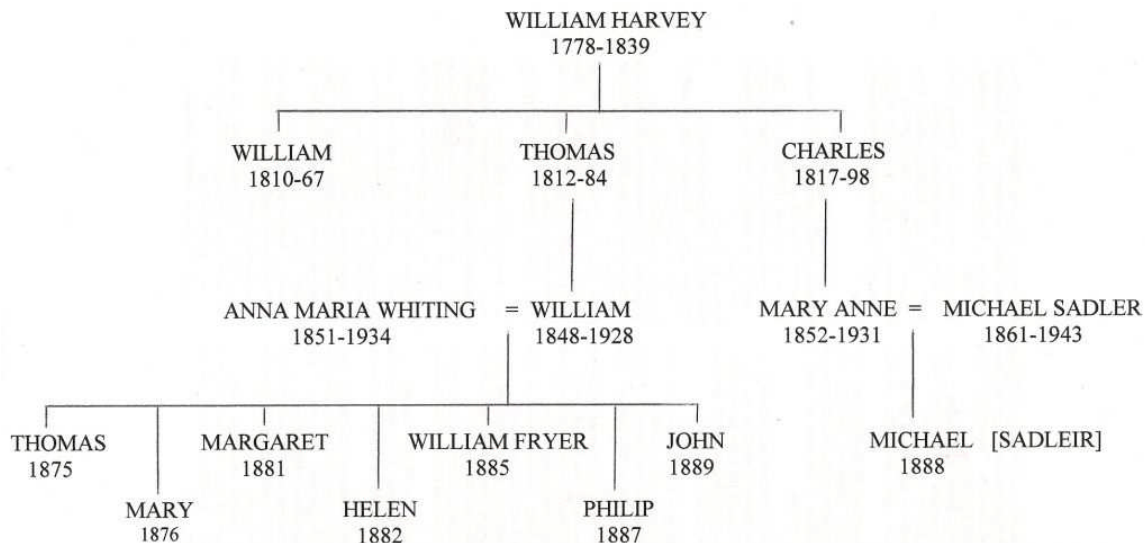
# **Education as Exploration: Sir Michael Sadler, Eva Gilpin, and Artwork at the Hall School Weybridge**

**Oliver Pickering**

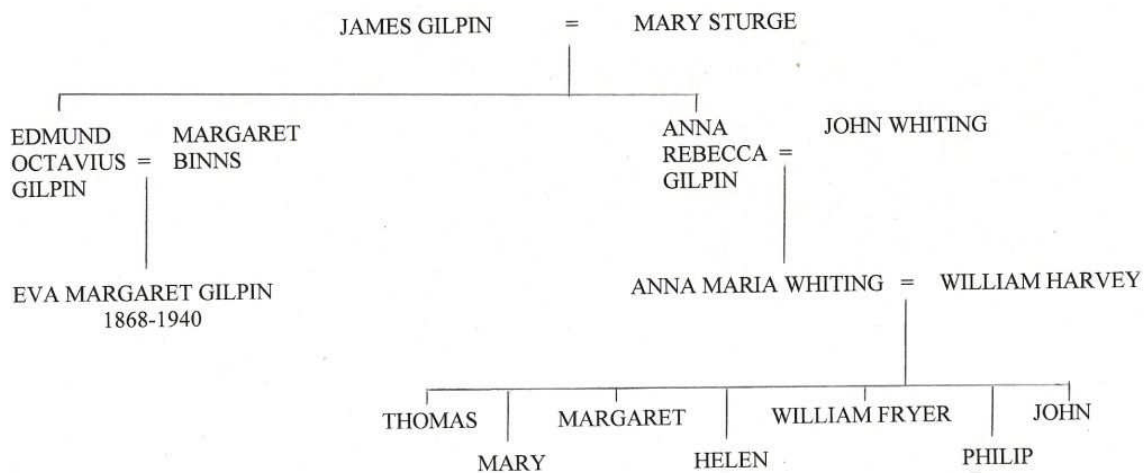
An illustrated talk given in the Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery,  
University of Leeds, on Saturday 18 February 2012

Sir Michael Sadler, who was born in 1861 and died in 1943, had two Quaker wives, and it's Eva Gilpin, the second of them, who is the main focus of the talk today. Before he became Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leeds in 1911, Sadler had spent the years 1885-95 in Oxford as organiser of extension teaching for Oxford University (summer schools and adult education classes) while at the same time, through political contacts within the Liberal Party, becoming increasingly involved in the campaign for the reform of secondary education in England. He became recognised as one of the leading educationists of his day, which took him to London in 1895. But Sadler was born in Barnsley, which was also the home of his first wife, Mary Anne Harvey, whom he married in 1885, and the Yorkshire connection was a strong one.

The Harveys were a prominent and extensive Quaker textile manufacturing family, middle class, hardworking, and very comfortably off. This family tree (below) shows that Charles Harvey, Mary Anne's father, had a brother Thomas, who was one of the leading Leeds Quakers of the second half of the nineteenth century. He had a son William, who was therefore a first cousin of Mary Anne Harvey. William and his wife Anna Maria Whiting had seven children, who were consequently second cousins to Michael, the only child of Michael Sadler and Mary Anne Harvey, and who in later life, when making a reputation as a bibliographer and novelist, spelt his name Sadleir in order to distinguish himself from his father.



William Harvey was a successful businessman, but partly because of his own prosperity and partly because of the money he inherited from his very wealthy uncle William, who was a bachelor, he decided to withdraw from business in 1888 in order to devote himself to philanthropic, civic, and Quaker activities, which occupied the rest of his life. In 1891 he moved his family from Leeds into a large house on the edge of Ilkley Moor. It was well supplied with staff and servants, and in 1892 he engaged a governess for his five youngest children, who were aged at the time from three to eleven. This governess was Eva Gilpin, who was a first cousin of William's wife, Anna Maria, as shown in this second family tree:



She was born in 1868, and so was twenty-four when she joined the Harvey family, having previously worked as a pupil-teacher at a private school in London. We are fortunate in having a photograph showing Eva Gilpin and the three youngest Harvey boys, which must date from about 1892.



We are fortunate also in that a lively and detailed account of the whirlwind of creative activity that Eva Gilpin brought to the Harvey family's schoolroom can be found in William Fryer Harvey's memoir of his childhood called *We Were Seven*, published in 1936. She was obviously extremely good with children, enthusiastic and fun, and there were plenty of games and a lot of dressing up and acting. She made learning enjoyable. It does not seem so revolutionary now, but Eva Gilpin believed that education should be child-centred and that subjects should not be taught in isolation from each other; and so history, and English, were taught and brought alive through art and song and drama. To quote from *We Were Seven* (p. 95):

We were encouraged to hunt up illustrations for our history and other lessons from every available source. This was exciting work, but not so exciting as those occasions when we prepared and gave a lesson on a subject such as Coal or Bread or the life history of the Frog. For these we were given right of access to the blackboard on which we would reproduce appropriate illustrations, carefully shrouded by dusters from inquiring eyes until the moment came when we were called upon to expound.

In the late nineteenth century this was very much progressive education, and it was encouraged by William Harvey's generation of prosperous, educated, middle-class Quakers, who in both religion and social attitudes were now far more liberal and open-minded than their strict and evangelical forebears, including William's own father Thomas.

Because of the cousinship, visitors at the Harveys' house in Ilkley included Mary Anne and Michael Sadler, which is where, in 1892, the future Vice-Chancellor first met Eva Gilpin. Michael Sadler their son, who was four that year, and so in age between the two youngest Harvey children, turned out to be sickly, and in need of air (so it was thought) fresher and healthier than that of Oxford, and Sadler was so impressed with Eva Gilpin's methods in the Harveys' schoolroom that it was arranged that the young Michael should stay with the Harveys in Ilkley for months at a time. This was a great success, and certainly good for his health, as Michael Sadleir makes clear in the detailed memoir of his father (entitled *Michael Ernest Sadler*) that he published in 1949.

Three years later, in 1895, Michael Sadler, now recognised as a far-sighted educationist, was appointed Director of the Office of Special Inquiries and Reports within the Board of Education, and so had to move from Oxford to London. 'The idea was ... mooted', says Michael Sadleir – very likely by his father – that Eva Gilpin and the youngest Harvey boy, John, should come and live with the Sadlers when they were settled in their new home, 'so that she could continue to the advantage of the two little boys, the teaching for which she had so remarkable a gift' (p. 132). This plan was agreed, although it was 1897 before it was fully realised, after the Sadlers had found a house in Weybridge. It seems clear that Eva Gilpin had begun to formulate hopes of starting a children's school before the move south, and Michael Sadleir, in his memoir, stresses how much energy his father expended in helping her, not least by emphasising the importance of first obtaining a recognised teaching qualification. 'He pointed out that it was all very well to have a genius for teaching, [and] to bubble over with ideas for turning dull subjects into exciting ones. ... But a school requires pupils; pupils have parents; and parents are guided by credentials' (p. 145). 'She was most unwilling', Michael Sadleir goes on, 'to face an examination of any sort, for her talents were spontaneous and creative, and she dreaded failure in the face of factual questions and examiners' expectation of precise knowledge'.

But her reluctance was eventually overcome, and she passed a London Matric. exam in early 1897, although this was after Michael Sadleir, as he became, had been joined (now in the schoolroom of the house in Weybridge) by other small boys and girls from local families, to whom Eva Gilpin had been recommended by the Sadlers. In May 1897, following further encouragement and advice from Sadler, and very likely financial assistance also, she

transferred her incipient school to two rooms in Weybridge Village Hall, John Harvey finally coming down from Yorkshire in September of that year. And so the Hall School was born. Eva Gilpin gradually took over the whole building, purchased extra land, hired assistant teachers, and in time even opened a boarding house. She herself was Principal and Proprietor. The school prospered and became well known. At its largest the numbers attending were a little over a hundred, with boys usually leaving at the age of nine or ten, and girls staying on until approximately fifteen. Eva Gilpin herself retired in 1934, when, at the age of sixty-six, she became Sir Michael Sadler's second wife, his first wife Mary having died in 1931. This is a rather dim photograph of them on their wedding day:



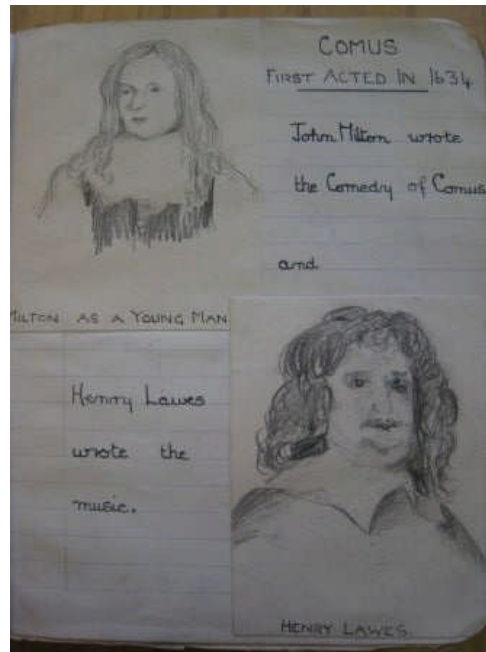
The school was then carried on by Eva Gilpin's niece Monica Brooks, who evacuated it to Somerset in 1939. She retired in turn in 1966, and the school, faced with falling rolls, eventually closed in 1983.

There are a large number of things one could say about the Hall School's curriculum and activities, but Eva Gilpin's achievement as a pioneering teacher who was ahead of her time receives deserved recognition in her entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, and the work of the school has been well documented in two books: first, in *Miss Gilpin and the Hall School*, edited by Marjory Bates and Jean Henderson, which came out in 1949 and includes contributions from all of William Fryer Harvey, John Harvey, and Michael Sadleir; and secondly in a more recent illustrated tribute entitled *A Lasting Spring*. These ex-pupils included William Fryer Harvey's daughter Sarah Graham, who, with her brother Mark Harvey, presented much of the large Harvey family archive to Leeds University Library. *A Lasting Spring* includes excellent reproductions of some of the artwork that is a main focus of the present paper.

Two things before I move on. First, although the Hall School was not a Quaker school as such (and the two books to which I've just referred scarcely mention Quakerism), the records show that Eva Gilpin remained an active Quaker throughout her life, and so she presumably brought her interpretation of Quaker values to her teaching methods. These values would certainly have included child-centred education in the sense of trying to realise the full potential of each individual child and allowing each child to grow creatively in his or her own way. It's probable if not certain that a good proportion of her pupils were the children of Quaker parents. She herself was elected President of the Friends Guild of Teachers in 1937. Secondly, it's only right that I should mention another of Eva Gilpin's achievements (which is of course related), namely her organisation of a whole series of annual international gatherings of schoolchildren, from England, France, and Germany, which were held in these different countries in turn from 1927 to 1937, one of the main purposes being to foster international understanding. She was helped in this enterprise by members of the Harvey family, principally John Harvey, one of those three small boys at the beginning, who was Professor of Philosophy at Leeds from 1932 to 1954, and who helped to found the International Voluntary Services organisation.

What I want to begin to do now is turn my attention to one of the most interesting of the school's activities, the production of what might be called children's artists' books. Before talking about them individually I'd like to stress again how Eva Gilpin saw education as a single whole, with all the subjects intertwined and studied together. Thus she might decide that the overall topic for one term was to be, say the Nineteenth Century, which meant that the history, literature, art, and music of the period would be studied simultaneously – though of course in different classes, with different teachers – quite often supported by expeditions in the form of coach or rail trips in order to bring in architecture and geography. There's

another important archive of Hall School material at the National Arts Education Archive, which is housed in the Lawrence Batley Centre at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. This also derives from the Harvey family. They have there a collection of children's exercise books from the early years, including one from 1910, and I have a couple of photographs from this that show how subjects were taught together.



These are from a History exercise book, but the work has clearly included a lesson on John Milton's masque *Comus*, with mention of the composer Henry Lawes who wrote the music for it, and on the right is quite a good painting of the pagan god Comus leading the lady traveller towards his cottage in the forest.





The subject or subjects were also brought alive by dance, recitation, art, and other kinds of handwork. The central feature of the school's approach to dance was the use of Jaques-Dalcroze's system of Eurythmics, which was first brought to Eva Gilpin's attention by John Harvey, who had visited Dalcroze's school at Hellerau in Switzerland in 1911. Harvey edited a book on the subject in 1912, to which Sir Michael Sadler wrote an introduction entitled 'The Educational Significance of Hellerau'.

One of the central features of Eurythmics is that pupils first listen to a piece of music, several times until they're familiar with it, and then work out their own creative interpretations of the music by means of improvisatory dance. It emphasises beauty, simplicity and freedom of movement, and was taken up enthusiastically by Eva Gilpin. Leeds University Library has two photographs of these dances classes:







But perhaps the most fruitful connecting link between subjects, as one of the contributors to *Miss Gilpin and the Hall School* puts it, was the staging of plays or at least performances, and it's here that Eurythmics came into its own, combined with music (from a wide variety of sources), various kinds of artwork, and very clear verse-speaking – and in most cases the books I'll now be talking about are the record of plays, partly showing how they were put on.

But there were numerous other plays, perhaps once a year – for example productions of *the Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *the Water Babies*, *Mary Queen of Scots*, *Sir Orfeo*, and several French plays such as *Aucassin and Nicolette*, French being the language particularly taught in the school. It's not entirely clear why some productions became books and others didn't – presumably time, resources, enthusiasm, and perhaps the abilities of the children then at the school all came into it – but I shall return to this question later. Certainly the annual plays were often noticed in the press, including the national press such as the *Times Educational Supplement*. The performance of *Sir Patrick Spens*, which was one of the plays that did become a book, was even reviewed in the *Times Educational Supplement* by the novelist E.M. Forster, who was a Weybridge resident at the time.

Certain of the books too were highly praised in the national press, as we shall see, and they became recognised early on as collectors' items, small press productions of a particularly

attractive kind. It seems clear that the ideas for the plays, both the initial conception and the way of doing them, not to mention the energy and enthusiasm that were obviously needed, came mainly from Eva Gilpin herself, though with input from other teachers, especially where music was concerned. But the books owe a great deal to a notably gifted art teacher, Miss E. Cassels Gillespy, who was a practising artist herself with a studio in Cobham, and who introduced the pupils at the school to a wide range of illustrative techniques, which the books exemplify, including wood- and lino-cutting and also lithography. She records in *Miss Gilpin and the Hall School* (p. 38) that the school was the first in England 'to put linoleum and tools into the hands of children' – which sounds a surprising claim but is presumably the case. 'Miss Gilpin and I saw the work at an Educational Conference at Leipzig in 1908 or 1909; she said, 'Can we do it?', I said 'Yes', and we started. We made tools out of umbrella spokes ... We had carving tools shortened and set in engravers' handles.' And what they learnt they then shared with other schools. Miss Gillespy also had her own printing press, which was brought over to the school when needed. One gets the impression that she may have been fully as inspirational a teacher, with the same meticulous standards, as Eva Gilpin herself. I haven't been able to find a photograph of her, but this rather poor slide shows an art class, or perhaps a book production class, in action:



In all there were six books, dating from 1915 to 1930, as follows, and I'll deal with each in turn. The dates at the left are those of publication.

1915, *The Village Hall, Weybridge*

1919, *The Wakefield Second Nativity Play* (performed 1917)

1921, *Sir Patrick Spens* (performed 1920)

1923, *Scenes from the History of Don Quixote* (performed 1922)

1925, *A Nativity, drawn from the Old French Noels* (performed 1923)

1930, *La Chanson de Roland*

### **1. 1915, *The Village Hall, Weybridge***

This first book does not relate to a play, but is a record of school life at the time and an opportunity for the pupils to try out various techniques of reproduction, which are said to have been woodcutting, stencilling, etching, and hecto-ink copying, hectography being an early means of producing multiple copies of the same original. The book was made and bound entirely in the school, and it was covered in vellum, with black strings. An etching press was hired to help with aspects of the work. The text was handwritten and then hectographed. Some of it describes, in the children's own words, the different techniques involved, especially stencilling, which, they say, had to be meticulously neat, with no sloppiness allowed.

Leeds University Library has two copies of the book, one of which belonged to Sir Michael Sadler and has a loosely inserted handwritten foreword by Eva Gilpin and a list of all the contributing children, who number thirty-one, the average age being eleven. The foreword explains that the idea was to raise money for relief work in Serbia, and that up to thirty copies were produced for sale, and it also makes clear that a huge amount of time and effort was put into the work in out-of-school hours.

The two copies are different in various ways, as might be expected, and this is reflected in the actual illustrations included, the order of elements within the book, the success or clarity of the reproductions, and the type of paper used at particular points. Most of the



illustrations are either woodcuts or stencils. The examples I have here on screen are all cuts of people:



The Village Hall, Weybridge, 1915

but there are also very effective depictions of fruit tree blossom – apple, pear etc. One can see, I think, that SINGING and ARITHMETIC are very likely by the same artist, probably different from the child who produced GYMNASTICS, which is signed F.W.B., i.e. Freda Brooks, aged thirteen (this is unusual, as the artwork throughout all the books is on the whole unattributed).

The next two slides show three other types of illustration. In the first case NET BALL has perhaps been hectographed from an ink drawing, while SUNSET AT AUSTERLITZ seems to be an original water-colour picture from a history lesson sequence to do with Napoleon (it's quite different in the other copy of the book):



The Village Hall, Weybridge, 1915

while the boy in the coach is from an extensive sequence of stencils called COMING AND GOING:



This is only a small selection from a charming but miscellaneous and very much hand-made book, rather like a scrap-book, with all sorts of elaborate fold-outs and explanations.

## 2. 1919, *The Wakefield Second Nativity Play*

This well-known medieval mystery play from the Wakefield cycle, with its famous sheep-stealing scene, was performed at the school at Christmas 1917. The book which resulted is a far more ambitious and accomplished production – perhaps the most attractive and successful of all the six books – and here, quite differently, there was professional input. Miss Gilpin perhaps wanted to publicise what her school could achieve. The publishing firm of Constable advertised and distributed the book, this explained by the fact that Michael Sadleir, one of her original pupils, who had remained a friend, was now a prominent member of the firm. What is more, the sheets containing the handwritten text and music were professionally lithographed in London. But of the 100 numbered copies produced – sold for two guineas each – thirty were bound in the school, the endpapers (which are lino-prints) were made in the school, and the lithographed sheets were returned to the school to be hand-coloured. Most important, the book contains twenty-five full-page linocuts that were entirely the children's own work, being designed, printed, and hand-coloured by them.

Leeds University Library has one copy of the book, but the Harvey family archive includes some loose original linocut prints, which differ in some ways from what are in the finished book. The illustrations, it should be noted, are partly a record of how the play was put on and partly pictures added later, which is a characteristic of several of the books. I've got three slides here illustrating the different kinds of artwork the book contains. The first shows (on either side) two examples of text pages with colouring and pictures added, the first in a simple way, the second more elaborate to illustrate the text of an inserted poem, not part of the mystery play itself. The page in the middle is then a striking example of text and picture combined on a larger scale.



The Wakefield Second Nativity Play, 1917



The second slide shows, on either side, two black and white cuts, first of the shepherds before the angel appears to them ('These nights are long'), and secondly with them unusually and successfully seen from the back, bending over the manger. This last must be a scene from the play because the shepherds are represented as girls; the major parts in the plays were naturally taken by the older children, who were all female. The third picture in the middle is a lively coloured cut of Mac the sheep-stealer and his wife Jill dancing because they think they've outwitted the other shepherds.



The Wakefield Second Nativity Play, 1917

The third slide (*see the next page below*) then shows two more coloured cuts once again with a black background, but the third cut is strikingly set against white – this is the scene in the play where the other shepherds are on the point of punishing Mak and his wife severely.

Constable's prospectus for the book – which describes the original performance as having 'attracted great attention, both among educationalists and also among those interested in artistic theatrical production' – is undated, but it's likely that the book appeared in 1919. That's the year in which Eva Gilpin wrote an article about the play in a magazine called *The Challenge*, in which she in effect summarises her educational method, describing how:

ordinary school subjects were focussed upon the production of this play, which gave to them a vivid object and purpose. Thus history, literature, language were brought into line; the music and songs which were introduced required special search and selection; Dalcroze work and dancing handwork, drawing and painting were essential to the work. The study of old MSS added another factor, and the selection and

elimination throughout the whole production of the play were important points in the educational value of the whole. For it is only by trying things that you find out what will do, and to learn to discard is an important lesson. Much work of many sorts had to go before it was finally decided what was the best that the School could do.



The Wakefield Second Nativity Play, 1917

1919 was also the year when the *Times Literary Supplement* (on 6 February) printed a long and highly appreciative review of the book, going so far as to say 'It is one of the most remarkable books of our time'. The unknown reviewer, who pays great attention to the success of form and colour in the linocuts ('the whole is joyful and beautiful, like a child's language'), goes on:

It may be thought that we are praising this book too much; that children cannot have done work worthy of such praise. ... [But] the aim of art is expression; and though there is not much richness of content in what is here expressed, it is expressed, as richer content usually fails to be in the professional art of our time. ... Children undoubtedly have a colour sense which most of us now lose before we grow up. Colour is for them actually a means of expression.

The *Wakefield Second Nativity Play* is probably the high point out of all six of the books, but there are still considerable successes to come, as we shall see.

### 3. 1921, *Sir Patrick Spens*

The old Scots 'Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens' was developed into a play performed at the school at Christmas 1920. It was reckoned, by observers and participants, to be one of the Hall School's most successful performances, featuring very effective use of a chorus – which chanted the text of the complete ballad at the beginning of the play and then repeated different sections of it as the action progressed – and also much Dalcroze-inspired choreography, one could call it, to convey the movement of waves, seagulls, oarsmen, mermaids, and of course the storm itself, which tragically overcomes the ship as Sir Patrick Spens is bringing the King's daughter of Norway back to Scotland. Songs and music – Hebridean songs, but also pieces by Grieg, Elgar, and Edward McDowell – contributed a great deal to the overall success. The members of the audience included E.M. Forster, who, as I mentioned earlier, wrote a review of the performance for the *Times Educational Supplement*, in which he wrote: 'The entertainment which followed the opening recitation was a fantasia, or rather a meditation on the ballad'; 'It was a wonderful performance and showed that education and beauty are not necessarily opposed'; 'Not only thought and insight but creative power had been at work.'

The book of the play was published the following summer. This was now a smaller venture again, with no more than twenty-five copies being produced, and everything was done in the school, including all the binding. But there were no more than twenty-five copies because *Sir Patrick Spens* also represents an important though difficult leap forwards in terms of reproductive techniques: for the first time the school had its own press for lithography, but the press that Miss Gilpin and Miss Gillespy had bought, second-hand, was an old and heavy one, which was found to be clumsy and hard to manipulate – hence the small number of copies, which apparently disappointed potential purchasers. The Library is fortunate to have one copy, no. 17.

There are altogether thirty-one full-page illustrations, showing different techniques of reproduction, partly lithographs which were either drawn directly on the stone or transferred from paper, but also linocuts and what are called hardwood cuts. As with the *Wakefield Second Nativity Play*, some of the pictures show the play being put on, while others are illustrative of the story. This first slide has three of the former kind, what I take to be scenes from the play: two grieving girls, which was used as the frontispiece to the book; the expedition leaving for Norway; and, below, a picture called 'Our Galleys', representing the movement of the rowers. The costumes are simple Dalcroze-inspired tunics. But whereas the first two pictures here are, I think, cuts, the third is described as 'litho, in two tones' – the new technique brought into use.



The Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens, 1921

The second slide then has three different kinds of illustrated page. 'The King's Daughter of Norroway' (the first picture, on the left) consists of explanatory, hand-written text, first printed and then hand-coloured – very like the technique used for many pages of the *Wakefield Play*, but this time the printing was done in the school. The same technique is used



The Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens, 1921

on the pages introducing each different scene of the ballad. The second picture (on the right) is an imaginative cut, not from the play, entitled 'Nicholas's ship at sea' – and so here, as in the Village Hall book, we find an illustration attributed to a particular pupil, which happens elsewhere in *Sir Patrick Spens*. It's clear that a number of children had a go at the same subject, and what were presumably thought the best were selected for inclusion. Finally 'From the Depths' very successfully combines illustration – perhaps based on a scene from the play – with text, music, and hand-colouring.

#### **4. 1923, *The History of Don Quixote***

*Scenes from the History of Don Quixote* was staged at the school in 1922. This was a summer production, and it was described as 'very gay with coloured horses' heads, banners and shields', and in some cases costumes. Much use was made of music, as always, predominantly Spanish music, and despite the emphasis on colour the various scenes were as usual depicted through simple, well-rehearsed choreography in Dalcroze style. That's not to say there wasn't an element of humour. One old scholar recalled 'the whole school prancing round the hall so that the best candidate for Sancho Panza's donkey could be found' (*A Lasting Spring*, p. 69).

The resulting book appeared in June 1923, and represents a return to having a degree of professional input, for Miss Gilpin and Miss Gillespy had decided they had to satisfy demand by having more copies produced. And so the print-run was again 100, with most of the printing carried out professionally, with the exception once again of the principal illustrations, of which twenty-five of each were printed on the school's lithographic press. The book was also advertised by Constables, who quote a short highly appreciative review that had already appeared in the *TLS*. The selling price was two guineas and a half. Leeds University Library has two copies, one of which belonged to Sir Michael Sadler.

The formula overall is much the same as before. There are both lithographed and linocut illustrations, hand-coloured where colour was wanted, and text and music that were entirely handwritten before being sent to the printers. But it's noticeable that in spite of the obviously colourful nature of the production there is comparatively little colour in the book, though hand-colouring is used, as before, on the pages announcing each scene. As usual, the illustrations are partly depictions of scenes from the play – these tend to be the black and white ones – and partly imaginative responses to *Don Quixote*.

The images on the first slide are all monochrome, and include the scene of the windmills, which the same old scholar I quoted earlier remembered as a piece of sheer brilliance: 'They consisted of flat cut-outs, each one with two children, back to back, with arms outstretched, beating 4/4 time – but one child beats two beats behind the other, hence the sails went round!'. (What's more, when the children turned round, the windmills turned into giants.) The second picture is a Dalcroze-style tableau of the shepherdesses spreading their nets, from scene 3 of the play. The third is then a cut, which I rather like, which imagines Don Quixote falling from his horse.



Scenes from Don Quixote, 1923

The second slide (*on the next page below*) is the colourful one. The knights on horses are wonderful; there's a similarly colourful scene of massed banners, and I suppose it's possible that these could represent backcloths used in the play. The hand-colouring is evident when the Library's two copies of the book are compared – different children have chosen different colours. The same applies to the illustration, in a different style, of Sancho Panza being tossed in a blanket, and also to the final picture in the book, imaginatively representing Don Quixote's confused dream.





Scenes from Don Quixote, 1923

### 5. 1925, *A Nativity, drawn from the Old French Noels*

The book called *A Nativity*, which appeared in 1925, was based on a production in the school at Christmas 1923, entirely in French. The text is drawn from Old French *Noels* and other poems and carols, and the music was entirely French, from simple lullabies to pieces by César Franck. The action was that of a traditional Nativity play, devised by Eva Gilpin, with the inclusion of some comic relief in the form of a dialogue between the various beasts as they go in to see the new-born Christ-child – we can compare the original *Wakefield Second Nativity Play*, which is notable for its humour. There were some very effective tableaux, grouped round the crib, and one of the school staff said of the play, ‘In its childish simplicity I found this one of the most moving of the plays’ (*A Lasting Spring*, p. 70).

The book that followed is different once again from its predecessors, in that it was now explicitly published by Constables (of which Michael Sadleir was now a director) and appeared in two separate editions, both of them printed by the Chiswick Press. The big change in both cases is that the vast majority of the text is no longer handwritten, but set in type in the usual manner of a printed book. What’s more, one of the two editions was an ‘ordinary’ one, printed on smaller paper, presumably for normal commercial sale. It had mainly black and white illustrations, though designed as always by the pupils, and a single frontispiece in coloured lithography. But there was also a larger-format special edition of 100

copies, which has additional illustrative material in the form of five lithographs and three woodcuts, all drawn or cut by the children, and all printed by them at the school. The single slide I've got for this book shows these techniques: the lithographed pages are printed in blue and then hand-coloured, producing a very successful decorative effect; while two of the three woodcuts were for the first time printed in several colours, rather than being hand-coloured afterwards. But the colours used for these woodcuts were not always the same. The example I've got here, showing one of the Magi, is quite different in the other copy of the special edition in the Library's possession. So, there's less variety of illustration in this Nativity, and a much smaller amount of it, but what there is is very well done.



A Nativity, 1925

But there was then a gap of five years before the final book appeared, and when it did so it was not based on a play. One can surmise that for Eva Gilpin there were various tensions at work: between wanting the books to be wholly the pupils' own work, produced in the school, and the expectations and demand that had built up because of the success of the earlier books; and between the large amounts of time and particular kinds of effort needed to produce the books and what she perhaps increasingly saw as more important, because more all-involving, the production of plays. Certainly there were now three major productions that did not result in books: *Joan of Arc*, 1924, done entirely in French; *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, 1926; and *Sir Orfeo*, based on the medieval romance, 1928. These were all

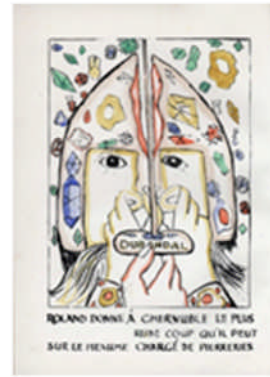
accounted great successes, particularly the *Ancient Mariner*. They were well reviewed in the press, and the last two plays elicited high and very personal praise from Sir Michael Sadler in two handwritten letters to Eva Gilpin (12 April 1928, 18 December 1926) that survive in the National Arts Education Archive. *Sir Orfeo* was even taken to London for performances at the Arts Theatre.

One has the impression, as I say, that Eva Gilpin perhaps felt her own ideals were expressed most fully in the plays, into which she could pour her special talents for organisation, for inspiring and enthusing others, for choosing appropriate words and music, and for creating beauty out of a combination of music and words and art and movement and feeling. She was not herself a visual artist. But she did contribute a signed sheet entitled 'On the making of this book', to the final one, *La Chanson de Roland*, which appeared in 1930.

### **6. 1930, *La Chanson de Roland***

This was the production principally of Miss Gillespy's art classes, but Eva Gilpin's foreword explains that the Old French epic had formed the basis of history, literature, French and poetry classes for some weeks, in the usual way, so that the children were steeped in the subject. The decision to produce a book was the result of the very high-quality artwork that the children were inspired to create. There was no question this time of involving Constables or professional printers. Fifty copies were made, and the whole work was produced in the school, using lithography and linocut. As Eva Gilpin writes, 'It has taken us a long time to complete, because we have been ambitious enough to do many of the lithographs in colour on two or three stones, and the linocuts on two or three blocks.' Hand-painting was also used in some cases, in order to be able to reproduce the colours of the children's original pictures. She goes on: 'While all the illustrations, and all the writing, are the unaided work of the children, the cleaning of the stones, the laying down of drawings on the stones, and the mechanical working of the presses, have been the united effort of the school. The average age of the children who have taken part in this book is just under 13 years'. She ends with a tribute to the unfailing patience of Miss Gillespy, who had supervised all six of the Hall School books.

Leeds University Library has two copies of the book, and I've chosen six illustrations in different styles from the copy in the Harvey family archive, which is no. 38 out of the fifty. The first slide (*on the next page below*) shows, in the middle, a patterned black and white linocut of the Saracen army with horses, banners and scimitars. On the right we see Roland's sword Durandal splitting open the head of the enemy champion Chernubles, hand-painted, and on the left a coloured lithograph of Roland's soul ascending to heaven.



La Chanson de Roland

The following slide then has a wonderful picture of camels, giraffes, and elephants, presumably representing the exotic animals offered to Charlemagne by the Saracen leader Marsile. Then, for more colour, I've chosen banners once again, and finally angels in Heaven caring for Roland, one of those pictures presumably hand-coloured to match the original artwork. The text, I should say, is all in French.



La Chanson de Roland

Sir Michael Sadler, as I said, wrote to Eva Gilpin in December 1926 with high praise after seeing the performance of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:

The self-controlled freedom of the children, their independence in co-operation, their exactitude in doing what they had learnt to do, their pleasure and seriousness and naturalness, the exquisite colour, the severity of the general design with the grace of gesture and dancing, and the touching, deeply felt message of the whole, made it, I thought, the best you have ever done.

Those words relate to one play, but I hope you feel that most of them are also applicable to the artwork we've seen today. He went on:

You made me feel that we were looking a long way into the future and that it is this lovely combination of words and music and rhythm of movement ... which is going to be the happiness, and in a sense the worship, of the best people in later generations. I felt as I felt when I saw some of Wigeland's sculpture at Oslo, that one was hearing prophecy. What, I suppose, education is really aiming at is the making of a new outlook for the community, or perhaps the group, not merely for the individual.

This is idealistic language, but it's what both Sadler and Eva Gilpin felt. The Hall School, providing education through exploration, with such creative results, was in his eyes doing exactly what a school should.

### *Acknowledgements*

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## SOURCES

Leeds University Library has either one or two copies of the six Hall School books discussed in this talk, held variously in the Early Education section of the Special Collections department and within MS 1701, 'Papers relating to the Harvey family of Leeds'. MS 1701 also contains relevant photographs, prospectuses, and some of the original artwork for the *Wakefield Second Nativity Play*.

The National Arts Education Archive (in the Lawrence Batley Centre, Yorkshire Sculpture Park) has copies of five of the six books and much other valuable material in its Hall School (HS) archive, including children's exercise books, letters from Michael Sadler to Eva Gilpin, and material relating to the plays that did not become books.

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