

Flora Landells,

the Maylands School of Art and other students

Dorothy Erickson continues her series on Western Australian artists, revealing the work of students of Perth art teacher Flora Landells and their 1931 'Exhibition of Watercolours and Hand Painted China'.



1

DOROTHY ERICKSON

One of the best known of Perth's private art schools in the first half of the 20th century was the Maylands School of Art run by Flora Landells née Le Cornu (1888–1981) from her home studio at 34 10th Avenue Maylands (**plates 1–3, 10–13**). Here from about 1925 she taught painting in oils and watercolour, pottery and china painting.¹

Flora, who had arrived in Western Australia from South Australia with her parents in 1896, taught in other locations as well. She had enrolled at the Perth Technical School of Art under James W. R. Linton from 1903 and when



2

1
Flora Llandells
(1888–1981) in
the 1940s

2
Flora Llandells
(1888–1981),
landscape plate
1917. State
Art Collection,
Art Gallery of
Western Australia



3



4



5

the family left to go farming in 1906 she stayed in town earning her living by teaching art – mainly drawing, painting and design. She started with private students in Guildford until she was asked in 1909 to set up the art classes at Midland Junction Technical School and at the newly-opened Methodist Ladies College in Claremont.

Students at Midland included Jock Campbell, later Superintendent of Art Education in Western Australia, and Muriel Southern, who was later a painter and teacher who also helped her mother with an arts and crafts depot in Hay Street above the Book Lover's Library exhibition space. Other students included china painters Bertha Mechenstock (later Mrs Lange of Pingelly 1894–1970), Jean E. Watt (later Mrs Witham) and Mrs Whimpey (plate 4).

Misses Reynolds, Talbot, Bowen, Jacques, Lucas, McKellar, Wilsmore, Nolan, Berkhead, Brown, Dobson, Rita Gardiner and Mr Wilson passed their examinations, but there were undoubtedly other students who did not sit for the exams. Flora's classes at Midland continued until the social mores of the Great Depression caused her to resign in 1930; it was not considered appropriate for a married woman to hold a position that a man could use to feed a whole family – she was taking the food out of the mouths of babes!

Her classes at MLC continued however, and covered all the primary school students, some secondary students and those with talent who took special art classes after school. Her classes continued until 1950 when she

retired. A number of Flora's Methodist Ladies College students continued their art lessons at the Maylands School of Art once they had completed their secondary schooling. Among the students was Ethel Gordon (later Mrs Cyril Peet 1905–1988) (plate 5), who had been a student at MLC in 1917–19 and exhibited with Flora in 1931 in the Industries Hall in Barrack Street in Perth, as did Olwyn 'Bobbie' Munt (later Mrs Sanders 1906–1996) (plate 6) and Isla McLaren. Oenwen Joan Robison, known as Joan (later Mrs Gracey b.1924) (plates 7, 9) was another student at both venues. To take china painting you had to be 12 years old and to my chagrin I was too young when Flora retired.

Flora probably began china painting about 1911 when she was preparing for her marriage to engineer and industrial chemist Reginald Landells in 1913. That year Miss Lottie Fanning (1896–1946), who had recently arrived from Victoria, showed an extensive display of china painting at an exhibition held by the WA Society of Arts, of which Flora was an exhibiting member.

3
Flora Llandells (1888–1981), early jug painted with Qualup Bells. Family collection

4
Mrs Whimpey, cream jug painted with donkey orchids in 1921. Collection John Thomson

5
Ethel Gordon (Mrs Peet) (1905–1988) Geraldton wax 1920s. Collection Dorothy Erickson



6

6
Olwyn 'Bobbie'
Munt (1906–1996)
Leschenaultia c.1931.
George collection



7

7
Oenwen Joan Robison
(Mrs Gracey, 1924–), pin
dish 1940s. Collection
John Thomson

8
Flora Landells
(1888–1981), plate with
Scaevola design 1921.
George collection

9
Oenwen Joan Robison
(Mrs Gracey, 1924–),
plate 1958.
George collection

The reviewer for the *Western Mail* wrote:

Miss Lottie Fanning has the painted china section entirely to herself, and her work is a credit to the State, as well as to the artist hand responsible for the work of designing and painting. A more pleasing dessert service than that represented by three pieces could hardly be desired. The plate beautified by pink carnations is a picture in itself; and the salad bowls, cups and saucers, plates and plaques are hardly less successful. The work is highly finished in every particular.²

None has been located. She had probably been a student of May Creeth.

The well-credentialed Misses Creeth also exhibited china painting, which they taught in their studio in St Georges Terrace. Although there is nothing in writing to confirm that Flora learnt from Helen and May Creeth, who had trained at the South Kensington Art Schools (now Royal College of Art) in London, she probably did, as the Misses Creeth fired her china painting until the 1920s, when Flora imported her own kiln from America.³

1931 was a sad turning point in art in Western Australia. This was the year when the Technical School was officially obliged to end all fine art classes and concentrate on commercial courses. Fine art was not taught

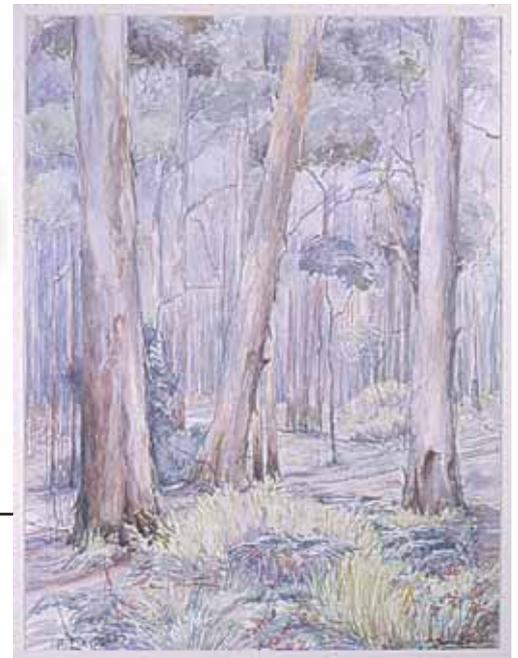


9



8

10
Flora Landells (1888–1981) *Tall Timbers*, watercolour. Collection Methodist Ladies College, Perth



10



again until the mid 1950s. It was the depths of the Great Depression; J. W. R Linton was retired early, and the graphic designer A. B. Webb became art master. Emphasis everywhere was on the commercial applications of art.

Flora, newly retrenched from the Midland Technical School, organised an exhibition of her own and her students' work in the Industries Hall in Barrack Street, Perth (plate 14). The Minister for Industry, J. Scadden opened the 1931 'Exhibition of Watercolours and Hand Painted China'. Part of the review published in one of the daily papers under 'An Admirable Exhibition' read:

Mrs Landells has ample grounds for congratulation on the very choice specimens of ceramics exhibited by herself and pupils of the Maylands School of Arts [sic]. Some of the lustre ware shown is especially beautiful both in colouring and design and the results go to prove what infinite patience must have been expended in their production. All manner of china-ware of a highly decorative description, ranging from epergnes and graceful vases to plates and baskets and dishes hand painted with fruit and flowers, with foliage and birds and other designs far too numerous to specify: tea services and coffee-sets, ash-trays, jugs, and plaques designed and painted for use as brooches, and other small articles of personal ornamentation may all be seen so that

one might say almost at a glance the general effect of the exhibitor's work is impressed upon the onlooker. A large show-case entirely filled with specimens of the work of N. M. Lightfoot is to be seen in the entrance lobby of the building; but unlike the majority of the exhibits, these pieces are unpriced and for exhibition purposes alone.⁴

Flora exhibited 59 watercolour paintings, including tall timber (Karri) paintings similar to that owned by the Methodist Ladies College (plate 10). One of Flora's china pieces, which may have been exhibited here, is a lustre vase painted with arum lilies still owned by a family member (plate 11). Only a few pieces of Nellie Lightfoot's work are known but as she did not sell her work it is possible that earlier pieces

11
Flora Landells (1888–1981)
Arum lilies lustre vase
c.1930. Family collection

12
Flora Landells (1888–1981)
cream jug with donkey
orchid design 1920s.
Family collection

13
Flora Landells (1888–1981)
brooch painted with red
Leschenaultia.
George collection

14
Catalogue of the
1931 exhibition

EXHIBITION
OF
**WATER COLOURS AND
HAND PAINTED CHINA**
BY
*Flora Landells and Students of
Maylands School of Art*

AT INDUSTRIES HALL, BARRACK ST., PERTH
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24th to 25th, 1931

WATER COLOURS		
by Flora Landells		
1 Sorrento, Victoria	Two and a half	Guineas
2 The Bark Hut	Four	Guineas
3 The Estuary, Mandurah	Two	Guineas
4 Kalamunda	Five	Guineas
5 North Beach	Four	Guineas
6 Rocky Coast	Two	Guineas
7 Big Timber	Two	Guineas
8 Low Tide	Two	Guineas
9 The Old Sailhouse	Five	Guineas
10 In the Hills	Two	Guineas
11 The Bend in the Road	Two	Guineas
12 The Bar, Nornalup	Five	Guineas
13 Morning Scene at Nornalup	Five	Guineas
14 Rocky Pool, National Park	Two	Guineas
15 April Morning, Yallingup	Three	Guineas
16 A Fishing Village	Three	Guineas
17 Torpedo Rocks, Yallingup	Two	Guineas
18 The Gardens, Adelaide	Four	Guineas
19 The Boat-builder	Four	Guineas
20 Coast Hills, Nornalup	Four	Guineas
21 At Lorne, Victoria	Three	Guineas
22 Green Bay, Post Elliot	Two	Guineas
23 The Blackwood River	Two	Guineas
24 A Grey Day, Allany	Two	Guineas
25 A Summer Morning	Two	Guineas
26 "Coroona"	Two	Guineas
27 Salt Lake, Wagon	Two	Guineas
28 Camping	Two	Guineas
29 Afterglow, Nornalup	Two	Guineas
30 Spring Garnet	Two	Guineas
31 Hovea	Two and a half	Guineas
32 The Cliff Track	Two and a half	Guineas
33 A Bush Track	Two	Guineas
34 Thompson's Bay, Rottnest	Two	Guineas
35 Fishing Boats	Two	Guineas
36 The Old Mill, West Murray	Two	Guineas
37 Bush Flowers	Two	Guineas
38 The Blue Hole	Three	Guineas
39 Government House Lake, Rottnest	One and a half	Guineas

40 Sunset	One	Guinea
41 Portland, Victoria	One	Guinea
42 Ocean Sentinels	One	Guinea
43 Evening	Four	Guineas
44 Christmas Trees	Four	Guineas
45 Lesmurdly	One	Guinea
46 A Passing Cloud	One	Guinea
47 Springtime	One	Guinea
48 When Shadows Fall	One	Guinea
49 Porpoise Bay, Rottnest	Two and a half	Guineas
50 Camping Ground, Mandurah	Six	Guineas
51 A Windswept Shore	Two	Guineas
52 Green Seas	Three	Guineas
53 A Misty Morning	Four	Guineas
54 The Old Gateway, Rottnest	Two	Guineas
55 Forest Giants	Two	Guineas
56 The Swamp	Two and a half	Guineas
57 Evening Light, Nornalup	Five	Guineas
58 The Settlement, Rottnest	Two	Guineas
59 Golden Glow	Seven	Guineas

A Red Seal Donkey "Sell."

HAND PAINTED CHINA

<p><i>Flora Landells</i> <i>N.M. Lightfoot</i> <i>E. Darton</i> <i>G. Nicholls</i> <i>B. Bridgwood</i> <i>D. McGilroy</i> <i>E. Carter</i> <i>Ethel Gordon</i> <i>L. Meyer</i></p>	<p><i>M. Craigie</i> <i>P. M. Gerson</i> <i>R. M. Gerson</i> <i>M. Hodgson</i> <i>O. Moot</i> <i>C. Barrett</i> <i>E. Barkhead</i> <i>I. Mackay</i> <i>D. Jackson</i></p>
--	---



15

16



17

illustrated here were shown in the exhibition (**plates 15-17**). Nellie née Preston (c.1890–1952) married a surveyor, and took up china painting to fill in the long hours when he was away on expeditions.

Student and good friend Ethel Gordon did not sign her work but two pieces she painted are known by their provenance. They were given to her former classmate Doris Erickson and are now in my own collection. One is a lovely little lustre vase festooned with abstract fruit that was possibly exhibited at this time (**plate 18**). Ethel had been a student at MLC and then continued at the Maylands School of Art. She married real estate developer Cyril Peet about 1936. They had two daughters and a son, a busy social life and travelled frequently so little was done after her marriage.

Isla McLaren, who was an old MLC girl and lived near Flora in Bassendean, may have exhibited a plate painted with clematis (**plate 19**). The hyphenated Czecho-Slovakia on the verso dates the plate in the correct period.

Edith Rebecca Trunbull 'Edie' Darton (1888–1981), later a teacher of china painting, exhibited a beautiful lustre compote dish (**plate 20**). Darton, who was born in Victoria, had studied art there and married. Her husband was killed soon after in a riding accident and she came to join her sister Ellen Hodgson in Western Australia about 1924. In 1936 she took over the YWCA china painting classes after Lottie Lapsley (Mrs Irving, 1890–1936) the previous teacher died. Darton lived with her sister in 8th Avenue Maylands, Kirkamill Terrace and in East Street, Maylands. Her niece was the china painter Mattie Hodgson.

15-17

Nellie Lightfoot (c.1890–1952), pin dishes painted in the 1920s with motifs of Geraldton wax and Leschenaultia. George collection and John Thomson collection

18

Ethel Gordon, lustre vase c.1931. Collection Dorothy Erickson

19

Isla McLaren, clematis plate painted on Victoria porcelain Czecho-Slovakia c.1931. Collection John Thomson

18



19



20



21



22



Mary Ann Craigie's Nuytsia teapot and flannel flower sugar bowl were also probably part of this exhibition (plates 21–22). They are dated 1931 on the verso. Mrs Craigie (1865–1947) was a painter who portrayed the wildflowers naturalistically (plates 23–24). However she placed them asymmetrically with a swirl of orange Nuytsia flowers or a trail of snowy clematis draped over the ceramic. Mrs Craigie and her husband Alexander lived in Victoria Park.

We do not know what Grace Nicholls (1909–1982) exhibited but a bowl from about this period, in a private collection in Perth, is painted with nasturtiums and could have been a contender (plate 25). Nicholls had been born in Tasmania but raised on a farm in Western Australia. She also exhibited with the WA Women's Society of Fine Arts and Crafts. Her

subjects were usually wildflowers, birds and local scenes. In a review of the annual exhibition in 1944 the reviewer wrote 'There is not so much china painting as usual but two lovely examples are a plate by Mrs G. A. Nicholls and a bowl by E. Cotton.'⁵ She lived and taught china painting in her home in Adelaide Terrace, Perth, and also taught at Fremantle Technical College after WWII. Her work has gone to a number of places overseas.

Miss Emma Cotton (b. c.1900) was a student at Perth Technical School under J. W. R. Linton (plates 26–27). She was a member of the West Australian Society of Arts, formed in 1896, from 1920–44, exhibiting a batik shawl, watercolours of hovea, kangaroo paws, templetonia and donkey orchids and four pieces of china painting in 1927. A critic wrote of the

20

Edie Darton (1888–1981), lustreware compote c.1931 discussed in the review

21-22

May Craigie (1865–1947), teapot and sugar basin featuring Nuytsia floribunda and Clematis, 1931. Collection John Thomson

23

May Craigie (1865–1947), Sturt's desert pea, 1931. George collection

24

May Cragie (1865–1947), Leschenaultia plate, 1930. George collection



23





25



26



27

25
Grace Nicholls (1909–1982), Nasturtium plate on Victoria porcelain Czecho-Slovakia, c.1931. Collection John Thomson

26
Emma Cotton (c.1900–?), vase painted with wild ducks, on Victoria porcelain Czecho-Slovakia, 1929. Collection John Thomson

27
Emma Cotton (c.1900–?), small bowl featuring a scene 'After H. Herbert', on Victoria porcelain Czecho-Slovakia, 1929. Collection John Thomson

exhibition, 'Although rather crowded, the display of china was good and practically all the artists chose flowers or birds as their motifs.'⁶ In the 1928 annual exhibition, Cotton exhibited figure studies in charcoal, two brooches and two dishes with china painting of roses and waratahs. In 1931, she was one of the exhibitors of china painting in the exhibition Flora organised in the Industries Hall in Perth. She also exhibited with the WA Women's Society of Fine Arts and Crafts in 1944, 1945 and 1947.

Constance Mary Barrett (Mrs S. Cliff Stevenson 1915–1975), who later had a ceramic studio in Cottesloe and taught art at Methodist Ladies College, was another exhibitor. Connie had been a student at MLC and studied art at Perth Technical School under J. W. R. Linton and A. B. Webb. After graduation she shared a studio in Howard Street with the sculptor Karin Tulloch. She was an accomplished art-leatherworker, a subject she taught at the WA Women's Society of Fine Arts and Crafts with whom she exhibited in 1937. A piece of her leatherwork was presented to Queen Elizabeth II.

Daisy Doric McGilvray (known as Maxine, 1896–1996) was one of the exhibitors in 1931 and could have exhibited a plate featuring a view of early Brisbane (plate 29).

Martha Muriel 'Mattie' Hodgson (1909–1998), a niece of Edie Darton, had studied at Perth Technical School under J. W. R. Linton and the graphic designer A. B. Webb. After graduation she is reputed to have studied overseas, ran a photographic studio in Perth and exhibited with the WA Society of Arts. She married the Reverend Bateman in 1959. I have not been able to trace an example of her work.

Olwyn Ethel Munt, known as Bobbie (Mrs Sanders 1906–1996) also exhibited in 1931, as possibly did her mother Ethel Angel Munt (1870–1949) who was also a china painter (plate 30). They lived in Dean Street, Claremont opposite Methodist Ladies College. Ethel Munt née Miller had been born in Adelaide in 1870 and had her initial art training under James Ashton. She married in 1897 and moved to the goldfields of Western Australia where her husband worked for the Public Works Department; he became under secretary for Public Works.

The other exhibitors were Elsie Birkhead, B. Bridgwood, Daisy Jenkinson, Pearl McGovern, Ruby McGovern and Lil Meyer about whom no more is yet known and no images of their work have been located.

These few students however give a snapshot of china painting in the middle decades of the 20th century in Western Australia. Better known students of Flora at a later period included china painter Amy Harvey⁷ (Mrs Peirl 1899-1991) (plate 31) and china painter and sculptor Marina Philomena Shaw (Mrs Flynn 1903–1996) (plate 32) who will be covered in a forthcoming article, and painter and teacher Iris Francis (1913–2004).

References

- A considerable portion of information on the artists was graciously supplied by John Thomson, whose collection features prominently in the illustrations.
- D. Morrow, M. Sedgely & A. Walsh, *The W.A. Women's Society of Fine Arts and Crafts. It's Time to Remember: 1835 – 1978*, Perth, WSFA&C, 1979
- Dorothy Erickson, Research files for a dictionary of artists, architects, artisans, designers and manufacturers in Western Australia 1829–1959

Dr Dorothy Erickson is a Perth-based historian and author as well as an internationally renowned jeweller. Her latest book is *Gold and silversmithing in Western Australia: a history* UWA Publishing, 2010.

Notes

- 1 D. Erickson, 'A legend in her lifetime: Flora Landells, painter and potter' *Australiana* vol 31 no 4, Nov 2009 pp 4–10.
- 2 *Western Mail* 18 Nov 1911 p 50.
- 3 D. Erickson, 'Enterprising women studio artists: the Misses Creeth' *Australiana* vol 32 no 4, Nov 2010 pp 14–21.
- 4 *West Australian* 10 Dec 1931 p 17. For a list of exhibitors, see *West Australian* 18 Dec 1931 p 9.
- 5 *West Australian* 7 Sept 1944 p 7.
- 6 *West Australian* 16 Dec 1927 p 23.
- 7 D. Erickson, 'Amy Harvey, Western Australian china painter', *Australiana* vol 26 no 2 May 2004, pp 36-37



28

28

Connie Stevenson née Barratt (1915–1975), Kangaroo paw bowl, 1945 on Johnson Bros china. Collection John Thomson

29

Maxine McGilvray (1896–1996), plate painted with a scene 'Brisbane 1852'. Collection John Thomson

30

Ethel Angel Munt (1870–1949) Scarlet runner on an Arzberg porcelain dish c.1930. Collection John Thomson

31

Amy Harvey, vase painted with persimmon leaves 1935. Collection John Thomson

32

Marina Shaw, Ibis vase 1927, Family collection



29

30



31



32

