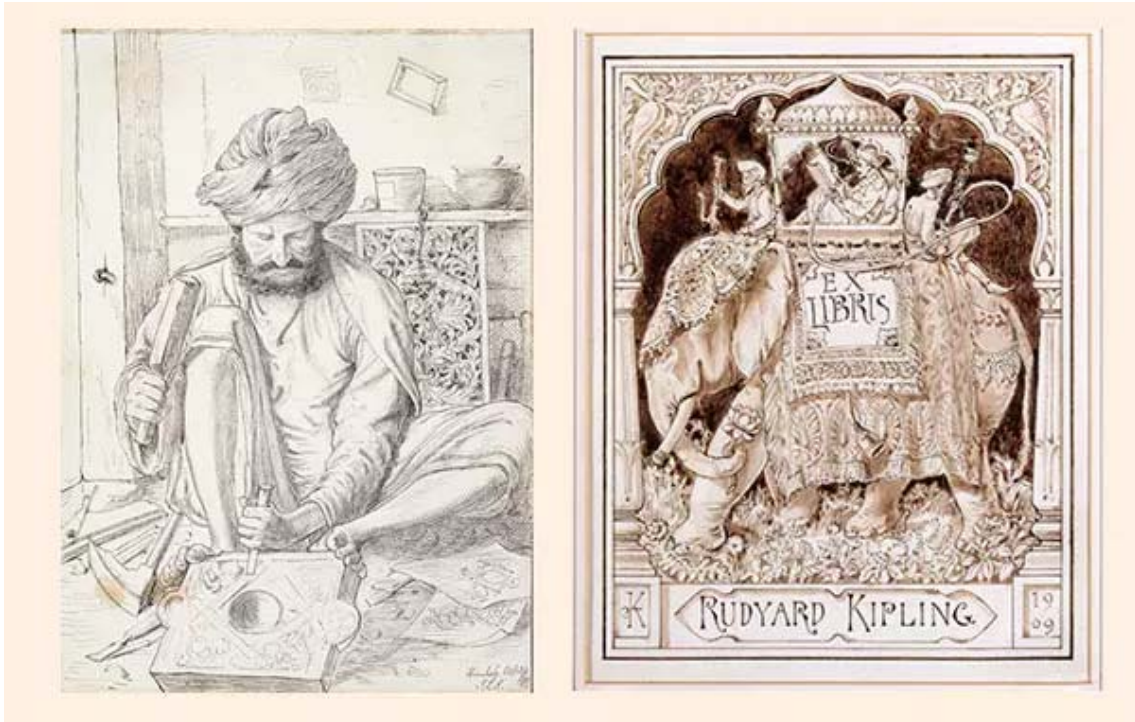


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Visual Arts

The forgotten work of John Lockwood Kipling revived

The prolific and varied output of the curator, teacher, designer and sculptor is on show at the Victoria & Albert Museum



'A Wood Carver' (1870); 'Ex Libris' bookplate for Rudyard Kipling

JANUARY 20, 2017 by: **Jan Dalley**

Eating a ripe mango in the bath, with a local cheroot — this was the answer given by John Lockwood Kipling in 1871 to the question “What is your idea of happiness?” It was for one of those parlour-game questionnaires popular in the Victorian era, included in the Victoria & Albert Museum’s exhibition on the work of this fascinating figure — teacher, curator, architectural sculptor and designer, a brilliant draughtsman who, among much else, created memorable illustrations for the books of his famous son Rudyard.

Lockwood Kipling’s answer to the playful quiz question conjures a picture of a contented man, deeply comfortable in the country he adopted in 1865 when he moved with his new wife Alice to Bombay, to take up a teaching position in the Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy (Sir JJ) School of Art and Industry.

A British-run art school, its aim was to educate students in the western traditions — but the new Professor Kipling soon became passionately interested in the arts and crafts of India, and braved controversy to introduce local influences and practices into his curriculum. In 1870 this interest was intensified when he was commissioned by the British government to tour the

Punjab, north-west India and Kashmir recording local craft skills, makers and tradespeople, both to understand these artistic practices and, of course, to explore their commercial potential. Europe was fascinated by Indian styles, and Kipling's detailed drawings of jewellers, woodworkers, metalworkers, weavers and many others were toured internationally before going on permanent display in 1880 at the South Kensington Museum (as the V&A was then called, and where the young Kipling had worked 20 years earlier).

During the decade Kipling spent in Bombay the city was enjoying an economic boom from the cotton trade, and magnificent neo-Gothic buildings — the celebrated railway station, for instance — were rapidly built. Kipling and his students were commissioned to decorate many of these with panels in tile work, stone or ceramic: still to be seen today are the fine, elaborate friezes in arches and niches on the city's Crawford Market, showing Indian agriculture, crafts and trade, as well as a magnificent central fountain designed by Kipling in a flamboyant stylistic hybrid of neo-Gothic, Indian and Arts & Crafts elements.

In 1875, the Kipling family — Rudyard had been born in Bombay in 1865, his sister Alice three years later — moved to Lahore, then capital of the Punjab, where Lockwood Kipling took up the posts of principal of the new Mayo School of Industrial Arts (today, Pakistan's National College of Arts) and director/curator of the Lahore Museum. (The old museum later reappeared as the Wonder House or Ajaib Ghar in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*: the son's books are laced through with his father's experiences and anecdotes.)

Lahore provided superb new visual territory, and Kipling encouraged his students to absorb the riches of the city's Sikh and Mughal architecture, devised new techniques based on traditional local practice, and became an early conservationist — the V&A's exhibition includes an exquisite, intricately carved and decorated bay window which he salvaged from an ancient Lahore merchant's house being demolished, and shipped back to the London museum. To meet the greedy demands of other European institutions for artefacts from the Indian continent, he encouraged the making of copies, photographs and plaster casts so that the originals could stay in place. Meanwhile he edited the *Journal of Indian Art*, a practical manual as well as a showcase that used the newest colour printing techniques.

This craze for Indian style had started as early as the Great Exhibition of 1851, where the lavish, glittering and sophisticated displays of furniture, howdahs and elephant decorations, fabrics, jewellery and precious metals, carpets, intricate crafts of every sort — organised by the East India Company, with an eye on international trade — had astounded ignorant western audiences, and indeed had ignited Kipling's own interest in the continent, when he had visited as a schoolboy from his home in Yorkshire. After that these Exhibitions — usually giant and

ornate temporary constructions, as much devoted to promoting international commerce, and the gospel of empire, as to aesthetics — took place across the world as well as in Indian cities; Kipling organised no fewer than 28 of them in his career, from Glasgow and Calcutta to Melbourne.



'Fumus Gloria Mundi' self-portrait (c1890); 'Toomai of the Elephants' (c1897)

Commissions for grand houses came as part of this Indiaphilia, and in 1891 Kipling and one of his former students, the architect Bhai Ram Singh, created the elaborate Durbar Hall at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight for Queen Victoria, and a grandiose Indian billiard room at Bagshot Park in Surrey for the Duke of Connaught — opulent rooms with worked plaster ceilings, wall motifs, and at Osborne a chimney piece in the form of a giant peacock. Some fixtures and furniture from these rooms are included in the show: for the rest, photographs, or better still visits to the houses themselves, show the true extent of these schemes.

Family life in India appears to have been happy: among the memorabilia here are a jokey cartoon “memo” (from the “Lahore School of Art-lessness”) addressed to his wife Alice, his illustrated menu for Rudyard’s 21st birthday party (showing the writer as a baby in the arms of his Indian nurse) and a volume of pieces written by the whole family entitled “Quartette”, as the foursome called themselves. Alice (née Macdonald, one of four Scottish sisters married to eminent Victorians — one brother-in-law was Burne-Jones) was herself an artist and designer who filled the house with music, books and Indian treasures, and of whom the viceroy Lord Dufferin is supposed to have said: “Dullness and Mrs Kipling cannot exist in the same room.”

Only ill-health could have banished Lockwood Kipling from the country he loved, but in 1893, at the age of 56, he was obliged to retire and moved back to England. Work continued, though, especially in the form of superb illustrations for *The Jungle Book* and other publications of Rudyard's, which appeared in rapid succession.

Some are on display in this inspiring show, which also includes treasures of Indian craft and art, drawings, photographs, tools and much more, as well as films of today's students in Lahore. But work by Kipling himself is necessarily sparse, because so much of his work was either ephemeral or lives on in situ — in, for instance, the decorative terracotta panels he created for Rudyard's house Batemans in Sussex. Some of it, indeed, can be seen at the V&A itself, where mosaic panels on which he worked before his departure to India still decorate the museum's façade, while his portrait appears in another panel overlooking the V&A's courtyard.

With such prolific and varied output, why is its creator not better known? It seems fair to say that since his death in 1911 not only did his style of work — with its elaborate, sometimes sentimental Arts & Crafts emphasis — fall inexorably out of fashion and favour, but so did his whole way of life. Even the most well-meaning denizens of British India are hard put to escape the taint of empire. The continuing controversy about Rudyard Kipling — was he an apostle of the Raj, or its critic, or simply a realist about its complexities? — applies equally to his father. But now, on his home territory, this exhibition should go some way to re-establishing the name of John Lockwood Kipling.

'Lockwood Kipling: Arts and Crafts in the Punjab and London', to April 2, [vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk) (<http://www.vam.ac.uk/>); a book of the same name is published by Bard Graduate Center Gallery/Yale University Press

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