

A CHRONOLOGY STUDY OF ALBERT WAINWRIGHT.

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Part of Changing the Record



München, Albert Wainwright

Albert Wainwright was born on May 4th, 1898, in Castleford. Raised by William and Ada, with his two siblings Maud and Hilda May Wainwright. His uncle, a Wesleyan Methodist Minister baptised him shortly after his birth on August 24th, 1898, in Castleford ('Albert Wainwright', 1901).

The youngest of the three children, Albert raised as a Methodist to become an engineer by his father. Alice Gostick, an art teacher at Castleford Secondary school, nurtured his artistic abilities, which allowed him to leave the predetermined career and pursue an education at Leeds School of Art in 1914.

Before the birth of Albert Wainwright, we can see a shift within society's view regarding homosexuality and the perception of LGBTQIA+ individuals. Homosexuality remained a crime from 1885 to 1967 in Great Britain. Attitudes from pivotal roles in society, the former prime minister Sir Robert Peel commented on homosexuality as an abomination, "sins of the flesh" (Weeks, 1977), and at that time comments on the idea of a British nation threatened by homosexuality, thus needing to be dealt with severity.

Following his service in the Royal Flying Corps, Wainwright left the military to re-join his family, now living in Pontefract. The Royal Flying Corps was in existence between 1912-1918, noted within the British Royal Air Force, Airmen's Service Records (1912-1939) for his attestation in 1918, age 19, service number 124144. During this service to the Royal Flying Corps, Wainwright exchanged letters to his close personal friend Henry Moore. Examples of these letters are a part of the collective archives within The Hepworth Gallery and the Henry Moore Foundation.

In 1920, the friendship between Henry Moore and Albert Wainwright assumptively ended as the letters that interchanged through the years spent during the war ceased. The reasoning behind this friendship ending is unknown. 1920 was when he received his first solo exhibition at Leeds City Art Gallery with art nouveau-inspired watercolours, which was very well received and led to future exhibits for the following two years in Leeds and London.

Eventually, he joined the influential artist society recognised as Leeds Art Club. Members discussed in-depth radical socialist politics, modernist arts as well as poetry. He made many connections in the arts and cultural scene, which led to further commissions for set and costume designs for local theatres, such as the Leeds Civic Players. Wainwright illustrated numerous artworks within his sketchbooks that displayed scenes of industrial landscapes from his hometown of Castleford, coal mines, pottery kilns and glassworks that dominated the scene, now ceasing to exist.

Wainwright's illustrative designs and watercolours feature a period that no longer exists within our society but also a style that strongly affiliates with the Art Nouveau movement. The organic and geometric forms within Albert Wainwright's sketches emphasise both an elegant and fluid design.

"Wainwright's illustrative designs and watercolours feature a period that no longer exists within our society."

Art Nouveau featured work that attempted to expand on our reality, to create a new one, progressing towards modernistic styles of the 20th century. Before the First World War, the movement of Art Nouveau had started to fade whilst the modern aesthetic of Art Deco became increasingly prominent. Each country had their interpretation of what Art Nouveau symbolised. However, the origins remained in the English Arts and Crafts movement, moving to influence throughout the world, subtleties to national identity or independence. A British example of this is the work carried out by the artist William Morris that is still widely seen in textiles, museums, etc. Paul Greenhalgh, director of the Sainsbury Centre in Norwich and an expert on Art Nouveau, stated that the "style wasn't defined simply by how things look, it was also an intellectual and ideological outlook" (2000).

"Contrary to the shifting of opinions regarding homosexuality and the LGBTQIA+ within the UK, Germany's LGBTQIA+ community was flourishing and vibrant."

In 1927, Wainwright appointed as the temporary art master at Castleford School whilst Miss Gostick was ill. On the 17th of August 1927, Albert Wainwright departed the UK on a steamship called Stockport, beginning his travels in Hamburg, Germany, with his occupation remaining as a 'Lehrer' (teacher) aged 29 ('Albert Wainwright', 1850-1934).

Contrary to the shifting of opinions regarding homosexuality and the LGBTQIA+ within the UK, Germany's LGBTQIA+ community was flourishing and vibrant. Recorded for its development to subcultures in the 1920s and 30s and how we perceive/understand queer identity, and the erasure it faced by the Nazis. The illegality of homosexuality noted in the law as a form of oppression and criminalised certain sexual acts imposed throughout Germany in 1871. It was enforced more draconian by the Nazis in 1935 until reformed in the 1960s.

The law that prosecuted homosexuals relied upon the testimony of a witness or a confession. Observation, monitoring, and keeping tabs on suspected queer identities enabled tolerance to a variety of different environments and individuals. Allowing for certain social situations to thrive e.g., transvestite balls, cafes, and bars, encouraging growth in that community.

The Institut für Sexualwissenschaft, translated as The Institute of Sex Research, was opened in 1919 by Magnus Hirschfeld and his collaborator Arthur Kronfeld. The institute amassed a large volume of research regarding gender and sexual identities, revolutionising views on the doctrine of sexual intermediacy.

Magnus Hirschfeld believed that all human beings possessed both masculine and feminine traits regardless of their sex. With belief, no one was fully identified as one trait singularly, but a blend of them both. With this stance, he decided that a man who possesses a female sex drive would likely be considered a homosexual. However, male sex organs and mostly female psychological characteristics would

be transgender. In 1930 various endocrinology and surgical services were offered, including the first modern gender affirmation surgery. Hirschfeld worked closely with Berlin's police department creating passes to identify those who had a personal desire to wear clothing associated with a gender that differs from the one assigned to them at birth.

Albert Wainwright's sketchbooks aren't representative of this newly founded freedom regarding sexuality. The artist preferred to travel to Germany's remotest regions using his watercolours to illustrate the culture and lifestyles less documented. Even in these more rural areas of Germany, Wainwright painted the pressure of Hitler's effects within his artwork. As a gay man, Wainwright refers to his sexual identity discretely in his work through symbolic references of gay culture at that time. Many of his artworks contained many symbols and references that alluded to his tendencies as an individual.

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To hypothesise, the use of men in a social gathering similar to what we regard in British history as scouts is a prominent theme within Wainwright's artwork. A movement established before the founding of the Nazi party noted as Wandervogel at the start of the 1890s. This movement was male-only, re-integrating back into nature and rediscovering traditional values. At the Hepworth Gallery within Albert Wainwright's sketchbook, there is an illustration of Brietnau that alludes to this concept. In context to Albert Wainwright's work and his visits to Germany, these social masses often featured these rural areas where Wainwright illustrated the thematic to Wandervogel.

In 1927, Albert Wainwright stayed at the Jübermann household as a guest of Otto's parents. In this time frame of staying at the Jübermann house, believably, he fell in love with Otto and formed a relationship.

Otto is a prominent portrait within Wainwright's sketches and watercolours dating from the last few years of the 1920s.

In the ink wash sketch titled 'Haus Jübermann', there is a depiction of the term "gemütlichkeit" (feelings of warmth, heart, and cheerfulness). The illustration depicts the rustic interior of the bedroom that Albert Wainwright likely would have stayed at, in the Jübermann family home, in Veerssen near Uelzen.



Haus Jübermann, Albert Wainwright

Wainwright adorned numerous artworks with quotations and lyrics from German poets and musicians. The inscription on the "Rheinreise" is an extract from Heinrich Heine's The Lorelei. The poem reads as follows in English:

I cannot determine the meaning
Of sorrow that fills my breast:
A fable of old, through it streaming,
Allows my mind no rest.

The Lorelei by Heinrich Heine, written in 1824, was set to music in 1837 by Friedrich Silcher, becoming one of the most famous and recognised Rhine songs. The mythological creature known as the Lorelei is known as a siren. Within the context of the artwork, the portrait of the male drinking tea beside the German flag at the ship's prow lures as a focal. Arguably, the emphasis on the two could view similar to what we recognise societally as a siren, alluring to the artist.

Europe's progression towards war and the rise of Hitler's influence becoming more evident, Wainwright ceased his travels through rural Germany on the 4th of September 1929, departing from Hamburg. Travelling back to England on the steamboat named 'Dewsbury', his declared destination was noted as Grimsby, aged 31. Assumptively the location that Albert Wainwright resided in his cottage and studio at Robin Hoods Bay, Yorkshire.

In many artworks by Albert Wainwright, there is a bold and sensual stylisation of the male figure. This association is more present within his drawings and watercolours. Many costumes and theatre designs differ in theme amongst the work that Wainwright produced whilst alive. Unfortunately, not many of these designs or costumes remain. His sketchbooks began in 1918 when he first joined the Royal Flying Corps, continuing until 1941.



**"I cannot determine the meaning
Of sorrow that fills my breast:
A fable of old, through it streaming,
Allows my mind no rest."**

Rheinreise, Albert Wainwright

These sketchbooks were never intended for viewing by the public, but they offer documentation to queer intimacy in the 1920s and 30s. The sketchbooks/diaries were made during his many visits to the continent, especially to Germany and Austria from 1927, to 1939. However, there is no census documentation to support his official travels to these countries after 1929.

During the Second World War, Albert Wainwright worked as a camoufleur, designing, and implementing military camouflage in 1939. Contracted by an organisation called F.D.F to paint 'murals', designing and painting dummy builds at Elsham Camp. These decoys were known as Starfish sites, diverting German night bombers from their targets so they would release their ammunition across the countryside (Fell, 2021).

Albert Wainwright died suddenly on the 31st of August 1943, age 45, of meningitis. He left a rich body of work behind that gradually became unknown. "Wainwright's still-life work painted at the family's holiday cottage at Robin Hood's Bay is scattered far and wide, but many of his other creations owned by his one living sister, Maud" (Brookes, 1989). After his death, most of his work was assumedly destroyed. However, stated in a 1980's edition of the Pontefract and Castleford Express, Miss Maud Wainwright lent his work. "Mrs Spencer told Wakefield District Council's Leisure and Arts Subcommittee that Wainwright's work had not been forgotten but had been "underground" for some years. "We are rather pleased with our discovery of Wainwright's work, which is of national as well as local interest," she said, "I don't think any other of his work exists - at least on the same scale" (P.C.E, 1980).

In a 1945 Yorkshire Post obituary dedicated to Albert Wainwright, "an extraordinarily active mind that sought continually and tirelessly to know and by the same token to discover some facet of beauty in things that would escape a more superficial inquiry". Furthering his sense of personality and recognition "confidently said that in certain subjects such as design of an historical character and watercolour portraits of young people, he was an acknowledged master".

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