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Charles Rutherston's "Gift to Manchester": The Evolution of a Modern Art Collector, 1890—1926

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Introduction

In 1925 the Bradford businessman Charles Rutherston (1866—1927) agreed to donate almost 500 paintings, drawings and sculptures, most of his modern art collection, to Manchester Art Gallery (MAG) on the condition that the artworks would be loaned to art schools and galleries throughout Lancashire and Yorkshire to enrich the lives of ordinary people and educate a new generation of aspiring artists.¹ Rutherston's collecting began in the 1890s when he was introduced to the artistic circles of his younger brother, the artist William Rothenstein, in Paris and London. He went on to build a collection including works by some of the most well-known modern English artists of the early twentieth century. There is little published literature about Rutherston and his collection and he did not leave behind diaries or memoirs. This article therefore examines Rutherston's evolution as a collector of modern art by drawing on fragmented primary source material including MAG's records and archives, correspondence between Rutherston and brother William in the Houghton Library, Harvard, William's autobiography *Men and Memories*, contemporary press coverage and Rutherston's own words taken from his speech in July 1926 on the formal handover of his gift.

The article also uses secondary sources as a theoretical basis for interpreting Rutherston's collecting, including Susan M. Pearce and Russell W. Belk who provide the following complementary definitions:

The usual distinction between "collector" and "miser/accumulator/hoarder" is that the collector has a "rational" purpose in mind which the other does not ... collections seldom begin in a deliberate way.²

Accumulating does not preclude a consumer from imposing or finding a unifying principle for items accumulated and then proceeding to add to the resulting collection according to this principle; by so doing an accumulation can become a collection.³

In these terms, the article describes how Rutherston evolved from an "accumulator" of modern art, acquired from artists he knew personally and was keen to support financially, into a purposeful, proactive "collector" with a clear view of the "collection" as an entity and the artworks he wanted it to comprise. It should be noted that Rutherston also collected other types of art, for example antique Chinese bronzes, ceramics and jades, but unlike his modern art collection he essentially remained an "accumulator" of individual art objects for



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the personal pleasure they gave him. Rutherston's wider collecting is not considered in detail in this article.⁴

The article (and the wider research project of which it forms a part) provides a new insight into an important period for the development of modern art in England by considering it from the perspective of a little-known patron and collector from the artistic periphery of the industrial North of England, rather than the established art historical focus on artistic production and London as the metropolitan centre. Rutherston was the grammar school-educated eldest son of German-Jewish immigrants who, after leaving school, joined the textile merchant business established by his father which he eventually went on to run. Rutherston lived in Bradford his whole life whereas William and youngest brother Albert were allowed to go to London as teenagers to train as artists. Perhaps collecting art was the only means open to Rutherston to express his own artistic side. Rutherston acquired his brothers' art throughout his collecting career and the Manchester gift included around seventy works by William and thirty by Albert. Given the specific family motivations, Rutherston's acquisition of his brothers' work has not been considered in the analysis which follows.

To an extent Rutherston followed in the tradition of Victorian textile business owners who became collectors and patrons of the arts, although he also represented a break with this tradition in the type of art he collected. Dianne Sachko Macleod describes the typical late-Victorian industrialist art collector's "genuine love of mimesis," a commitment to art which represented real life and a tendency which resulted in England (particularly outside London) being slow to adopt late nineteenth-century developments in modern art.⁵ On the other hand, Rutherston was one of the first people from his background to collect modern art rather than work characterised by the "mimesis" still favoured by many of his peers. Early twentieth-century supporters of modern art were more typically drawn from the public school and Oxbridge-educated professional upper middle class including many of Rutherston's better-known contemporaries as collectors, for example Sir Michael Sadler and Sir Edward Marsh, and key people who influenced Rutherston such as Charles Aitken, Director of the Tate Gallery, whose advice Rutherston sought regarding the plans for his collection, and Lawrence Haward, MAG's Director at the time of Rutherston's gift. Haward was important to Rutherston's choice of MAG rather than, for example, Cartwright Hall Art Gallery in his home city of Bradford, but a more detailed examination of the reasons for this decision is outside the scope of this article.⁶

Philip Dodd argues that, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this social group and the institutions they represented constructed the idea of an English national culture, attributing a high cultural value to certain aspects of culture—a status which modern art gradually began to achieve over this period.⁷ Pearce suggests that collecting objects deemed by society to be "within the purview of 'high culture'" can be interpreted in terms of the collector's desire for social advancement.⁸ Belk describes collections in terms of an "extended self" in which "the cultivation of a collection is a purposeful self-defining act."⁹ Drawing on these ideas, the article considers the extent to which building a modern art collection formed part of an identity Rutherston wanted to construct in terms of his nationality and social class, particularly when considered alongside the step he and brother Albert took in April 1916 at the height of the First World War (1914—1918) to anglicise their surname.¹⁰ The article argues that Rutherston's collection of modern English art demonstrated that he possessed both the financial means and, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms, the cultural capital required to identify with an English cultural elite, differentiating himself from his background as a German-Jewish Bradford textile merchant.¹¹ Furthermore, having his collection accepted by a major provincial art gallery as the basis of a loan scheme not only provided Rutherston with validation of its cultural value and therefore his own cultural and social status, it also identified him as a philanthropist and a benefactor to society.

1800—1899: London, Paris and The Seeds of a Collection

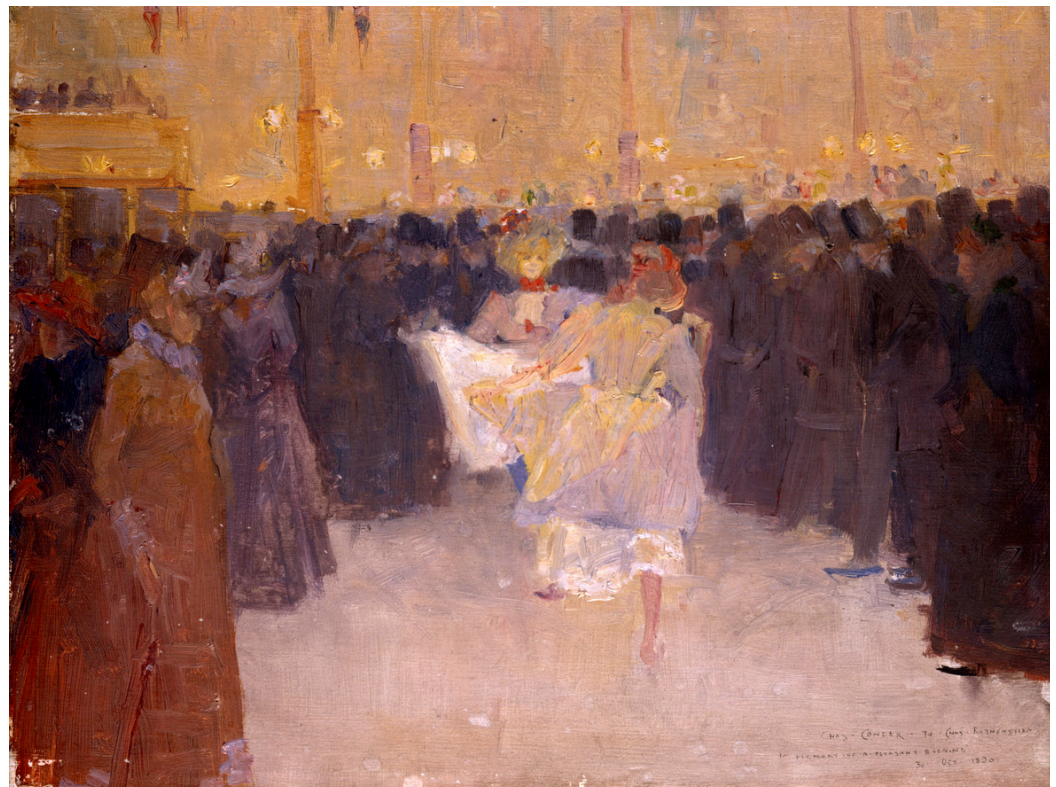
During my early business career I frequently had occasion to visit Paris, where my brother Will Rothenstein was studying painting ... I spent most of my leisure time there with him and his friends. Among these I might mention that remarkable young artist, Charles Conder ... As his work appealed to me and he was in a constant state of financial stringency ... I acquired a number of his paintings in order to help and encourage him ...

After I had been meeting my brother and his circle of friends in Paris for a year or two ... he moved to London ... again through him I met a number of young artists ... I might mention Charles Ricketts, Charles Shannon, Max Beerbohm and Walter Sickert. This group inspired me to commence acquiring a few examples of interesting work amongst the younger English Artists ...¹²

Charles Rutherston, 1926.

Rutherston's earliest acquisition in the Manchester gift was *The Moulin Rouge* (Fig. 1, 1890) by Charles Conder, an English-born painter who emigrated to Australia as a teenager before returning to Europe in 1890 to work in Paris. There he met William Rothenstein, who had gone to Paris the previous year to study art.¹³ William introduced his older brother to Conder in October 1890 when Rutherston visited him and Conder gave *The Moulin Rouge* to Rutherston to commemorate their first meeting.¹⁴

Figure 1. Charles Conder, *The Moulin Rouge*, 1890, oil on panel, 25.6 x 34.1 cm, Manchester Art Gallery, 1925.270. Image used with permission of Manchester Art Gallery under Creative Commons CC BY-SA licence.



Rutherston went on to acquire Conder's work throughout the 1890s including several painted fans for which Conder became well known. In December 1893 Conder wrote to Rutherston from Paris about one such acquisition, probably referring to Rutherston's purchase of *The Rose Fan* (Fig. 2, 1893):

About the fan, I shall be delighted to think of it being in such good hands and hope it will give you pleasure. I need not say from the commercial side what a good turn you do me and how I appreciate it.¹⁵

Figure 2. Charles Conder, *The Rose Fan*, 1893, watercolour on silk, 14.6 x 43.1 cm, Manchester Art Gallery, 1925.242. Image used with permission of Manchester Art Gallery under Creative Commons CC BY-SA licence.



This letter is typical of correspondence from Conder to Rutherston between 1893 and 1899 held in MAG's archive, the general tone of which is friendly and informal and gives the sense of two friends who met up regularly if infrequently and of Conder's appreciation of Rutherston's patronage.

The loose, impressionistic style of *The Moulin Rouge* and the subject matter of late nineteenth-century Paris nightlife shows the direct influence of French Impressionism on Conder's work. However, Conder was also influenced by the romantic art of an older generation of artists such as Watteau, epitomised by a highly decorative style of painting and often depicting scenes of fashionable society at leisure, exemplified by *The Masqueraders* (Fig. 3, 1899). This was purchased by Rutherston in 1899 from the Carfax Gallery in London, which had been set up that year by brothers William and John Fothergill.¹⁶ Conder's work possibly "appealed" to Rutherston because it combined the late-Victorian taste for the aesthetic with the modern influence of French Impressionism and the depiction of a Paris nightlife which Rutherston had experienced with Conder.

Figure 3. Charles Conder, *The Masqueraders*, 1899, watercolour and gouache on paper, 15.7 x 26.4 cm, Manchester Art Gallery, 1925.244. Image used with permission of Manchester Art Gallery under Creative Commons CC BY-SA licence.



Art history has not regarded Conder as a particularly important artist and contemporary reviews of his work were mixed, summed up by his obituary in the *Times* following his death in 1909 which said his artworks represented "the decorative side of art ... with their quaint mixture of new and old ... a charming and original artist, though one whose range and power were alike limited."¹⁷ At this embryonic stage in his collecting career, Rutherston therefore collected Conder's work because they had become friends and he wanted to support him, not because his work was critically acclaimed. Although after 1899 Rutherston's (and his brother's) relationship with Conder appears to have cooled and Conder's work featured little in Rutherston's collecting in the new century, Conder was the first contemporary artist Rutherston patronised and was therefore an important first step in his collecting career.

Rutherston's 1926 speech implies that, following William's return to London, the 1890s continued to be important for the development of his collection. However, the gift included fewer than thirty works acquired before 1900 of which twelve were by Conder and nine were drawings by the Japanese artist Hokusai (1760—1849) or his followers, which being neither English nor modern are amongst a small number of exceptions in the gift. Of the artists in his brother's London network mentioned in Rutherston's speech, only Walter Sickert has a significant representation in the gift, although contrary to Rutherston's inference his first acquisition of Sickert's work was not until 1918. William had become aware of Sickert soon after his arrival in London to study art in 1888 through the New English Art Club (NEAC), of which Sickert was a founder member, and William's memoirs describe the close relationship of the two men in the 1890s.¹⁸ Like Conder, at that time Sickert had financial problems and William recalled that he "could do little to help all these gifted men; indeed, I found it difficult to keep my own head above water."¹⁹ However, despite William's friendship with Sickert and the artist's financial difficulties it appears that William did not encourage Rutherston to patronise Sickert at that time, perhaps because Sickert's loose impressionistic style "puzzled" William who retained a lifelong commitment to a more realistic style of art.²⁰

Correspondence between Rutherston and his brother from the 1890s highlights that in addition to the few works Rutherston acquired by artists in his brother's network and the Hokusai drawings, Rutherston also collected other art including French nineteenth-century prints, the majority by Daumier, and several Goya lithographs.²¹ His acquisition of the Goya's caused William some consternation—he said "[y]ou unprincipled ruffian—what are you doing with Goya? ... I hope you don't mean to collect everything—if you do, we shall all have to be careful what we tell you."²² This suggests that Rutherston was, at this early stage in his career, an enthusiastic accumulator of an eclectic range of art rather than the focussed collector of modern English art he was to become.

1900—1913: The New English Art Club and a Changing Context

Shortly afterwards I became a regular visitor to the Exhibitions of the New English Art Club which brought me into touch with such personalities as Muirhead Bone, Gerard Chowne, Augustus John and his sister Gwen John, C.J. Holmes, Ambrose McEvoy, David Muirhead, William Orpen, Joseph Southall, Wilson Steer, Henry Tonks, and, of course, my brother Albert.²³

Charles Rutherston, 1926.

William Rothenstein's long standing involvement with the NEAC resulted in this group becoming the focus of Rutherston's collecting in the early part of the twentieth century, although during this period he was still acquiring modern art in relatively modest quantities—just over 100 works in the gift were acquired between 1900 and 1913 of which more than forty were by his two brothers. One of the artists Rutherston patronised at this time was Augustus John, whose relationship with the Rothenstein family began around

1898 towards the end of John's time at the Slade where he became friends with Rutherston's youngest brother, Albert, who introduced John to brother William.²⁴ William recalled how he:

became more and more attached to John, and to his wonderful intellect ... While his drawings and pastels got better and better, his painting was still uncertain ... but now and again he gave promise of outstanding genius ... Yet it was hard to persuade collectors to buy his drawings.²⁵

This observation suggests that Rutherston's first purchases of John's work in the gift in 1900, a set of six drawings, might have been encouraged by William.

William certainly claimed the credit for Rutherston's acquisition of *Merikli* (Fig. 4, 1902) from the NEAC's November 1902 exhibition, saying:

But John ... was beginning to show astonishing promise as a painter too ... I thought this portrait of his wife masterly; and when it was shown at the New English Art Club, I persuaded my brother Charles to buy it.²⁶

John wrote to Rutherston on November 15, 1902, saying "I am delighted *Merikli* is in your hands, following so much of my best work."²⁷ This is one of several letters from John to Rutherston written between 1902 and 1906 in MAG's archive which are informal and friendly and refer to visits the two men and their wives made to each other's houses, suggesting they became quite close over this period with John appearing grateful for Rutherston's appreciation and patronage of his work at this early stage in his career. Rutherston purchased another two of John's works from the NEAC's winter exhibition in 1904 and went on to acquire ten drawings by John in the gift after 1906, but only one of these was after 1913.

Figure 4. Augustus John, *Merikli*, 1902, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.7 cm, Manchester Art Gallery, 1925.292. © The Estate of Augustus John. All rights reserved 2022 / Bridgeman Images. Image used with permission of Manchester Art Gallery under Creative Commons CC BY-SA licence.



Figure 5. Philip Wilson Steer, *Portrait in Black*, 1904, oil on canvas, 112.5 x 87.3 cm, Manchester Art Gallery, 1925.282. Image used with permission of Manchester Art Gallery under Creative Commons CC BY-SA licence.



A review of the 1902 exhibition in the *Times* gave John, and *Merikli* in particular, a mixed reception, saying that an artist who can draw so well "ought to go very far," but the painting as a whole "lacks delicacy, the surface has a certain commonness which mars the whole impression."²⁸ But within two years John was beginning to attract more positive reviews, for example a review of the 1904 exhibition in *Athenaeum* said that "[t]his year for the first time Mr. John gives promise of becoming a painter; hitherto he has been a brilliant draughtsman who painted."²⁹ Rutherston acquired another work in the gift from this NEAC exhibition, Philip Wilson Steer's *Portrait in Black* (Fig. 5, 1904), which the *Athenaeum* described as "one of the most perfect colour harmonies even he has realised."³⁰ This review also suggests that the 1904 exhibition marked a high point for the NEAC as a whole, saying:

it would be difficult to recall another recent exhibition of exclusively contemporary painting in which there was a display of such varied and distinguished work backed up by so good a general level of achievement.³¹

For a short period in the early 1900s, Rutherston was acquiring work from artists in his brother's network which was also attracting critical acclaim, perhaps for the first time giving Rutherston a taste of how it felt to own art that was also culturally important.

Correspondence between Rutherston and his brother William between 1900 and 1913 suggests that Rutherston increasingly purchased contemporary work directly from London exhibitions but still valued William's opinion and approval of his purchases. For example, in November 1903, Rutherston tells his brother "I lost my head" at another NEAC exhibition, buying three works by John, Henry Tonks and Philip Wilson Steer, asking him "What do you think of my modest selection there?"³² The letters also indicate that Rutherston continued to "accumulate" a broad range of art during this period, for example several letters from 1910 and 1911 discuss his acquisitions of Chinese antiques.

Although the pattern of Rutherston's collecting did not change significantly before 1914, this was an important period for the development of modern art in England, with Roger Fry's two exhibitions of French Post-Impressionist art at the Grafton Galleries in 1910 and 1912 being particularly significant. William's memoirs recall how Fry had approached him to exhibit at the Grafton Galleries earlier in 1910:

When Fry had the offer of a gallery, he wanted the older independent artists ... to show their work, together with some of the more adventurous younger men ... I still felt the New English Art Club to be the body with which I had most sympathy ... since I held aloof, the good Roger ... discovered that my work was no longer of any importance.³³

This highlights the change taking place at that time as the popularity of traditional, representational art favoured by William waned, and modern art influenced by Post-Impressionism and the artistic philosophies of Fry and the art critic Clive Bell which emphasised form rather than realistic content, gradually became more accepted in England.

The Post-Impressionist exhibitions were initially not well received, for example the *Observer* art critic P. G. Konody said that the 1910 exhibition was "sending the great majority of London art-lovers into fits of laughter."³⁴ But by October 1913 Konody's review of a Post-Impressionist exhibition at the Doré Gallery was more positive, although he remained unconvinced by the response to Post-Impressionism demonstrated by English artists, saying that they were still "a long way behind France."³⁵ Here Konody referred specifically to several artists who formed part of an avant-garde movement producing abstract work heavily influenced by Cubism and Italian Futurism including C. R. W. Nevinson and Wyndham Lewis.³⁶ Rutherston did not collect the work of these artists at that time, perhaps due to their abstract style not being to his tastes and the influence of critics such as Konody, but they went on to be important to Rutherston later in his collecting career.

A few weeks after the Doré Gallery review the *Times* described the NEAC as a "one of the strongest conservative forces in the artistic life of the country ... an institution," and

one of John's works although "delightful" would be regarded as "commonplace by the most up-to-date artistic opinion."³⁷ And in March 1914 Professor Reilly from the University of Liverpool gave a lecture to students at the Leeds School of Art, in which he said "[a] few years ago Mr. John was thought a revolutionary; today he is accepted as a conservative," encouraging the students to adopt the philosophies of Post-Impressionism in their work.³⁸ This illustrates the extent to which the cultural context had changed, even in the North of England, which, combined with the impact of the War on the production and reception of modern art in England, had a significant influence on the remainder of Rutherston's collecting career.

1914—1926: Cultivating "The Modern School"

I had now come to the conclusion that the cultivation of the Modern School of English Art was well worth while and I decided that this must be my definite policy, I think I may say that I have consistently carried it out right up to the present day as you may observe from the works on these walls of such painters as Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Mark Gertler, Eric Kennington, Henry Lamb, Wyndham Lewis, J. B. Manson, John and Paul Nash, C.R.W. Nevinson, Lucien Pissaro [*sic*], F. J. Porter, William Roberts, and Edward Wadsworth and amongst Sculptors, Frank Dobson, Jacob Epstein, Eric Gill and William Symonds.³⁹

Charles Rutherston, 1926.

During the First World War, artists who before the War had different artistic philosophies coalesced around a common desire to represent the horrors of war, including pre-war avant-garde artists such as Nevinson and Lewis. Even after the War, many of these artists retained a strong representational element in their work, never returning to their pre-war level of abstraction. This provided the context within which Rutherston's collecting expanded beyond his brother's immediate circle to include the work of modern English artists as it continued to be assimilated into English culture. Rutherston's first purchase of a work in the gift by one of these artists was in October 1916, Nevinson's *Motor Lorries* (Fig. 6, 1909—1916), acquired from a one-man show at the Leicester Galleries, in which the representation of men as machines and the unnaturalistic forms using strong lines and angles still referenced Nevinson's pre-war Cubist-influenced work.

The *Times* was positive about Nevinson's representation of the War, saying that he represented men as machines "with plausibility ... his cubism is justified by what he has to say."⁴⁰ Rutherston went on to purchase another painting and nine prints by Nevinson in the gift, all images of the War, from a March 1918 exhibition also at the Leicester Galleries. In a letter to his brother written from France where he was serving as a war artist, William said "I am interested to hear you have purchased a Nevinson. I gather from what you write the show is very good."⁴¹ This letter is typical of references to Rutherston's collecting in the correspondence between the two brothers during this later period, which indicates that Rutherston no longer sought his brother's advice or approval of his purchases.

Rutherston's first two acquisitions of Lewis's work in the gift were also examples of his war art, acquired from Lewis's *Guns* exhibition at the Goupil Gallery in 1919. The *Observer* described Lewis's work as "among the most significant interpretations of war experience ... Lieut. Wyndham Lewis is out for essential truth."⁴² In the three years 1920 to 1922 Rutherston went on to acquire a further twenty-two works by Lewis in the gift, twenty-one drawings and a single oil painting, *Portrait of the Artist as the Painter Raphael* (Fig. 7, 1921).

This self-portrait exemplifies the realism of Lewis's post-war work although the strong geometric lines and blocks of bold colour still reference Lewis's more abstract pre-war style. Rutherston acquired this painting along with seven drawings from Lewis's *Tyros and Portraits* exhibition held at the Leicester Galleries in 1921. Konody described *Tyros and*

Figure 6. C. R. W. Nevinson, *Motor Lorries*, 1909–1916, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 60.8 cm, Manchester Art Gallery, 1925.322. Image used with permission of Manchester Art Gallery under Creative Commons CC BY-SA licence.



Portraits as a “remarkable exhibition which cannot fail to establish Mr. Lewis as one of the dominant figures in contemporary British art,” exemplifying the positive reception which may have resulted in Rutherston now wanting to collect Lewis’s work.⁴³ Rutherston went on to acquire several works in the gift directly from Lewis in 1921 and 1922 when he became a regular visitor to Lewis’s studio as Lewis recalled in his autobiography.⁴⁴

Paul Nash is a particularly important artist to consider in relation to this phase of Rutherston’s collecting as, unlike Nevinson and Lewis, Rutherston began acquiring Nash’s work before the War on his brother William’s recommendation, his first acquisition being in November 1913, *A Landscape at Wood Lane* (Fig. 8, 1913).

This somewhat romantic and impressionistic landscape is characteristic of Nash’s early work, exemplifying what Konody referred to in a 1916 review as “the usual naïve charm” of Nash’s landscapes.⁴⁵ This was probably meant as a criticism at the time, but the conservatism of Nash’s early work perhaps explains why William recommended him to his brother. Rutherston and Nash seem to have quickly established a good relationship as in 1914 Nash and his wife stayed with Rutherston at his home in Bradford, a visit Nash described in a letter to his friend the poet Gordon Bottomley:

From there to dear Charles Rothenstein at whose house we stayed that night & half the next day. He was delightful and entertained us splendidly ... Stunning early Johns, all sorts of Conders ... & many others ... Everything is first rate. I felt v proud to see my drawing hung up there.⁴⁶

Nash’s depictions of the War marked a change both in his style and in the critical reception of his work. For example, a *Times* review of Nash’s war art exhibited at the Leicester Galleries in 1918 said “he has found a way of his own of expressing [the War’s] effect on him ... he has been struck by the strange, unaccountable beauty of the meaningless shapes of things so tortured and battered.”⁴⁷ These qualities are evident in the strong lines and stark realism of *Chaos Decoratif* (Fig. 9, 1917), one of four of Nash’s works in the gift acquired by Rutherston during the War.

Rutherston went on to acquire a further nine of Nash’s works in the gift after

Figure 7. Wyndham Lewis, *Portrait of the Artist as the Painter Raphael*, 1921, oil on canvas over hardboard, 76.3 x 68.6 cm, Manchester Art Gallery, 1925.579. © Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust. All rights reserved 2022 / Bridgeman Images. Image used with permission of Manchester Art Gallery under Creative Commons CC BY-SA licence.



Figure 8. Paul Nash, *A Landscape At Wood Lane*, 1913, watercolour, chalk, pastel and pencil on paper, 55.5 x 36.7 cm, Manchester Art Gallery, 1925.217. Image used with permission of Manchester Art Gallery under Creative Commons CC BY-SA licence.



the War, reflecting a willingness to continue to patronise Nash as his style evolved. Nash acknowledged Rutherston's long-standing patronage in a letter written to Rutherston's widow, Essil, early in 1928 shortly after Rutherston's death, saying:

He was such a very staunch friend to me, he was one of the very first buyers of my work ... and he has never ceased from before the war to show he wanted to possess my work ... other collectors have fallen off ... bored them or offended them by some change, experiment or development they did not understand or care for—Charles never so.⁴⁸

Over this period Nash became established in England as an important modern artist, for example in his review of the 1922 London Group exhibition from which Rutherston acquired *The Shore, Dymchurch* (Fig. 10, 1922) Konody traced the lineage of Paul Nash's "captivating landscapes" back to Cézanne, one of the Post-Impressionists whose work Konody had been so critical of in 1910.⁴⁹

This illustrates how Nash had evolved from a young artist Rutherston knew personally before the War and was keen to support into an important artist Rutherston wanted to be fully represented in his modern art collection.

Finally, returning to Walter Sickert, Rutherston's first acquisition of Sickert's work in the gift was not until 1918, *Girl Musing* (Fig. 11, c.1914).

The gift went on to include eight works by Sickert including five oil paintings, Rutherston's last acquisition in 1925 being *The Blue Hat* (Fig. 12, 1911—1915).

This work perhaps exemplifies the loose, impressionistic style which had "puzzled" Rutherston's brother William and resulted in Sickert only being fully recognized in England as part of the wider assimilation of Post-Impressionism from 1910 onwards. For example, a

Manchester Guardian review of a Post-Impressionist exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in April 1914 said “although at one time classed with the New English Art Club group ... Mr. Sickert’s development of himself is one of the most exciting things in contemporary art.”⁵⁰ After the War Sickert’s reputation continued to grow, illustrated by Konody’s review of Sickert’s Eldar Gallery exhibition in 1919 (from which Rutherston acquired another drawing) which described Sickert as “an active force in modern British art—a leader, and a master ... He stands outside all cliques and movements.”⁵¹

Figure 9. Paul Nash, *Chaos Decoratif*, 1917, ink, watercolour and pencil on paper, 25.3 x 20 cm, Manchester Art Gallery, 1925.218. Image used with permission of Manchester Art Gallery under Creative Commons CC BY-SA licence.



A 1919 letter from Rutherston to his brother William gives an important insight into Rutherston’s acquisition of Sickert’s work. Perhaps alluding to the fact that Sickert was not taking advantage of his popularity by inflating his prices, Rutherston said:

Sickert too is having a boom but he is not benefitting by it. I consider his conduct admirable & beyond praise for he could easily profit by it and is not doing so. Although I don’t admire his work very much he is behaving as a true and sincere artist.⁵²

This provides an insight into why Rutherston had not bought Sickert’s work earlier

in his collecting career, suggesting that Rutherston's altruism at that time only extended to acquiring art that he liked, the exception to this perhaps being his two brothers particularly Albert.⁵³ But by 1919 Sickert was recognised as an important modern artist and therefore someone Rutherston wanted to be represented in his collection despite any personal reservations he might have had about the artist's work.

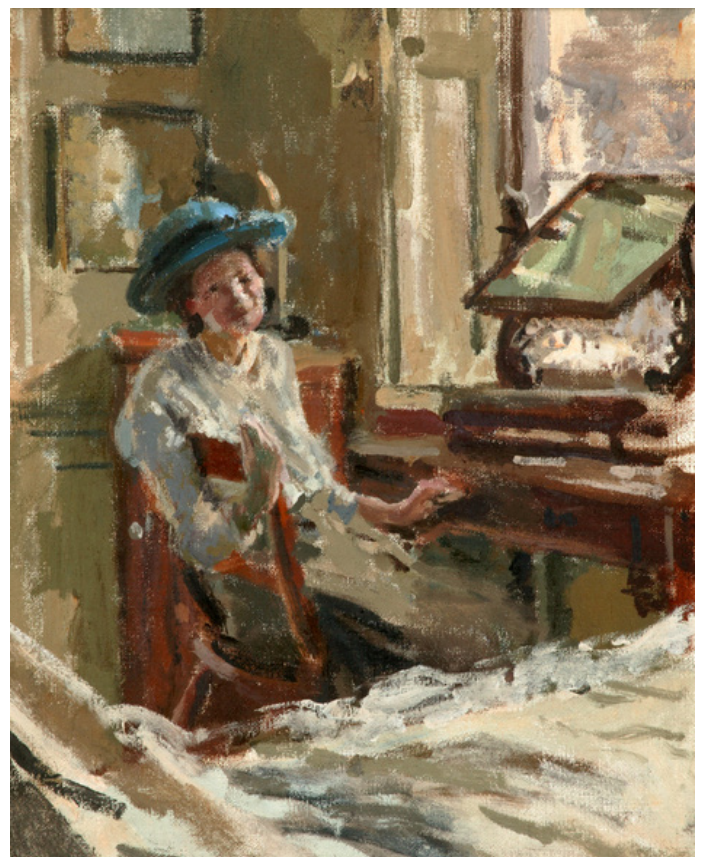
Figure 10. Paul Nash, *The Shore, Dymchurch, Kent*, 1922, watercolour and pencil on paper, 38.1 x 56.1 cm, Manchester Art Gallery, 1925.219. Image used with permission of Manchester Art Gallery under Creative Commons CC BY-SA licence.



Figure 11. Walter Sickert, *Girl Musing*, c.1914, pencil drawing, 29.2 x 21.6 cm, Manchester Art Gallery, 1925.182. Image used with permission of Manchester Art Gallery under Creative Commons CC BY-SA licence.



Figure 12. Walter Sickert, *The Blue Hat*, 1911—1915, oil on canvas, 50.7 x 40.6 cm, Manchester Art Gallery, 1925.265. Image used with permission of Manchester Art Gallery under Creative Commons CC BY-SA licence.



Interpreting Rutherston

The chronological account of Rutherston's collecting illustrates how he began as an "accumulator" of art acquired from artists in his brother William's immediate circle, exemplified by Conder in the 1890s and John in the 1900s, before from around 1914 onwards evolving into a proactive "collector" of modern art including work by Nevinson, Lewis, Nash and Sickert. In his 1926 speech Rutherston appears to have rationalised his collecting career in these terms through the language he used, giving the sense that before 1914 acquiring art was an almost accidental consequence of the social networks he had become part of, before he made it his "definite policy" to focus on collecting "the Modern School of English Art," a change of language inferring a new sense of purpose.⁵⁴ Following his father's death at the end of 1914 Rutherston had inherited the financial means to accelerate his collecting, acquiring around 240 works in the gift, over half the total, in the six years 1917 to 1922, but this alone does not explain the change in Rutherston's collecting. Although to some extent Rutherston continued to support unrecognised young artists and acquired works by his two brothers throughout his collecting career, he also broadened his collecting to include work which he believed had, or would go on to have, a high cultural value in England as modern art gradually became assimilated into the national culture.

This change can be interpreted in terms of the role collections can play in shaping collectors' identities and Belk's notion of the collection as "extended self." Identity was an important issue for Rutherston who, as the son of German Jewish immigrants living in provincial England, had a difficult time during the First World War, reflected in much of the correspondence with his brother. For example, following the sinking of the British liner *Lusitania* by the Germans in May 1915 Rutherston said "[t]his *Lusitania* business is dreadful and for the first time I seriously wish that my name were less German. I am afraid ... that a terrible odium will be cast upon all Germans."⁵⁵ The following year Rutherston took the significant step of changing his name to clearly identify as being English, by which time both his parents had died and so it was perhaps easier for Rutherston to distance himself from his heritage, and his focus on collecting work by English artists can also be seen as a further attempt to identify with England and its culture. But his decision to assemble a collection of modern art also had class connotations as at that time modern art was largely the preserve of an English metropolitan cultural elite.

Figure 13. Charles Rutherston's home, 7 Ashburnham Grove, Bradford, c.1912. Courtesy of Manchester Art Gallery, archive reference RLC 1/7 File 3



Two photographs of Rutherston's home at 7 Ashburnham Grove, Bradford taken in about 1912 provide some insight here, suggesting that even before the War Rutherston was using art in the construction of his identity. The photographs can be interpreted in terms of Belk's assertion that people maintain "a hierarchical arrangement of levels of self, because we exist not only as individuals, but also as collectivities [*sic*]," the most relevant "collectivities" for Belk being family, community and group.⁵⁶ The first photograph (Fig. 13, c.1912) shows a reception room where guests were received and entertained, with three paintings in the gift by his brother William displayed, two of William's daughters, *Rachel Queen*, 1911 and *Princess Betty*, 1911, either side of *Reading the Book of Esther*, 1907.

Rachel Queen and *Princess Betty* project Rutherston's strong identification with "family" whilst *Reading the Book of Esther* acknowledges Rutherston's German-Jewish heritage and the "community" he chose to identify with, at least whilst his parents were still alive and likely to have been regular visitors to his home.

The second photograph (Fig. 14, c.1912) is of an adjacent room, perhaps a more personal, private space, which shows Rutherston standing by the fireplace with John's *Merekli* (Fig. 5) displayed behind him.

Figure 14. Charles Rutherston at his home, 7 Ashburnham Grove, Bradford, c.1912. Courtesy of Manchester Art Gallery, archive reference RLC 1/7 File 3



Although Rutherston had acquired Merikli when John was a struggling young artist, by the time the photograph was taken around ten years later John had become critically acclaimed in England. This photograph suggests that even before 1914 Rutherston wanted to be identified with modern art as it began to achieve the status of high culture in England, the class associations of which are emphasised by Rutherston's own dress and pose. This is an early indication of the "group" identity Rutherston was to develop further through his modern art collection in the second half of his collecting career. This was also the identity Rutherston chose to project to visitors from his artistic network, with evidence such as Paul Nash's account of his 1914 visit indicating that Rutherston was keen for these visitors to see artworks displayed throughout the house and not just those carefully chosen for the formal reception room. It is also worth noting that both photographs include objects from Rutherston's wider art collection, specifically his Chinese antiques which at the time the photographs were taken formed an important part of Rutherston's collecting.⁵⁷ Here Rutherston was collecting art which was not part of English culture but perhaps enabled Rutherston to demonstrate he was a real connoisseur in this unfamiliar field.

Rutherston's decision to give most of his modern art collection away and the conditions he placed on its subsequent use could also be interpreted in terms of identity. In his 1926 speech Rutherston said:

For several years past I have been casting about in my mind how to dispose of my collection ... It seems to me that a possessor of works of Art is a trustee to the public and is not entitled to be so selfish as to keep them to himself.⁵⁸

Pearce describes how museums sit at the top of the system through which society bestows cultural value to objects and collections:

Museums overarch the system of collections; they are the final, eternal resting-places of those collected objects which are deemed to be paradigms of their kind within the framework of value.⁵⁹

Having his modern art collection accepted by MAG was the ultimate validation of the cultural value of the collection and therefore of Rutherston himself, validation which was reinforced by the congratulatory messages sent to MAG by key figures from the London art world following the formal transfer of the gift in July 1926. Charles Aitken described Rutherston as a "man of taste, foresight and generosity" whose gift "has extended to thousands of people a source of enjoyment and education"; D. S. McColl (artist, art critic and formerly Director of the Tate Gallery and the Wallace Collection) said "this addition to what you [Manchester] have already will bring you incontestably into the first place among English provincial galleries for the range as well as the quality of your display of modern art"; and Lord Henry Bentinck (Chairman of the Contemporary Art Society) said that as a result of Rutherston's gift "Manchester will in future possess a collection of works admired, valued, nay more—coveted by all lovers of modern art."⁶⁰

Through building a modern art collection Rutherston may have aspired to identify with an English cultural elite but, by stipulating that the collection should form the basis of a loan scheme to be used for educational purposes, Rutherston was also expressing a belief that modern art could deliver social benefits beyond those accruing to this elite group. He wanted to democratise modern art and by doing so be seen as a twentieth-century philanthropist, a "trustee to the public." Rutherston's gift to Manchester was in many respects a forerunner of later state-sponsored schemes which shared similar aims, for example the British Institute for Adult Education's Art for the People initiative which began in 1935, almost a decade after Rutherston's gift.⁶¹ Rutherston should therefore be regarded as a pioneer, not only as one of the first collectors of modern English art from his background but also for implementing his vision for making his collection useful to society.

References

- 1 All details in this article of the artworks included in Rutherston's gift to Manchester Art Gallery have been derived from extensive research of the Gallery's records and archives, including the Rutherston Loan Collection (RLC) archive, Artists' Files (physical records) and Collection Management System (computer-based records). For brevity, specific details for individual references to the collection are not included here but can be provided by the author on request. The article uses the name Manchester Art Gallery (MAG) throughout although during the period covered by this article it was known as Manchester City Art Gallery or City of Manchester Art Gallery.
- 2 Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 21.
- 3 Russell W. Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 67.
- 4 Rutherston's wider collecting will be considered in more detail in the author's PhD thesis on Rutherston and his art collection, due to be completed in 2025.
- 5 Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15–16; 363–366.
- 6 A detailed analysis of the circumstances which led to Rutherston choosing Manchester Art Gallery as the beneficiary of his gift will be included in the author's PhD thesis.
- 7 Philip Dodd, "Englishness and the National Culture," in *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880–1920*, ed. Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 43–45.
- 8 Pearce, *On Collecting*, 369–370.
- 9 Russell W. Belk, "Possessions and the Extended Self," *The Journal of Consumer Research* 15, no. 2 (1988): 154, accessed February 17, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2489522>.
- 10 Middle brother William had also intended to change his name but at the last minute decided to retain the name Rothenstein. This article refers to Charles as 'Rutherston' throughout, except when directly referencing correspondence and other primary source material written prior to his change of name. His two brothers are referred to throughout by their first names William and Albert.
- 11 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010).
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- 13 William Rothenstein, *Men And Memories. Recollections of William Rothenstein 1872–1900* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1931), 55–56.
- 14 Correspondence referring to Rutherston visiting his brother in Paris in late 1890 and his early relationship with Conder cited in Robert Speaight, *William Rothenstein: The Portrait of an Artist in his Time* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1962), 30–31. However, Speaight does not identify his sources. Manchester Art Gallery's records confirm The Moulin Rouge was a gift from the artist to Rutherston on October 30, 1890.
- 15 Charles Conder, letter to Charles Rothenstein, 27 December 1893, Rutherston Loan Collection Archive, RLC 1/24 file 4, Manchester Art Gallery.
- 16 Rothenstein, *Men And Memories 1872–1900*, 343–344.
- 17 "Obituary. Mr. Charles Conder," *Times*, February 11, 1909, 11.
- 18 Rothenstein, *Men And Memories 1872–1900*, 31.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 343.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 168.
- 21 Rutherston donated his collection of nineteenth-century French prints to the British Museum in 1918. The whereabouts of his Goya prints are unknown.
- 22 William Rothenstein, letter to Charles Rothenstein, May 4, 1898, MS Eng 1148.6 Box 4: 18, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
- 23 Rutherston, "Mr. Rutherston's Address," 11.
- 24 Rothenstein, *Men And Memories 1872–1900*, 332–334.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 340.
- 26 William Rothenstein, *Men And Memories. Recollections of William Rothenstein 1900–1922* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1932), 3.
- 27 Augustus John, letter to Charles Rothenstein, November 15, 1902, Rutherston Loan Collection Archive, RLC 1/24 file 22, Manchester Art Gallery.
- 28 "The New English Art Club," *Times*, November 8, 1902, 9.
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- 32 Charles Rothenstein, letter to William Rothenstein, 21 November, 1903, MS Eng 1148.6 Box 1: 9, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
- 33 Rothenstein, *Men And Memories 1900–1922*, 212.
- 34 P. G. Konody, "Art Notes. Post-Impressionists at the Grafton Galleries," *Observer*, November 13, 1910, 9.
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- 36 For a detailed account of these developments, see for example Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism 1900–1939*, 2nd ed. (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 75–114.
- 37 "The New English Art Club. The Fiftieth Exhibition," *Times*, December 1, 1913, 71.
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- 41 William Rothenstein, letter to Charles Rutherston, March 18, 1918, MS Eng 1148.6 Box 4: 18, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
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- 44 Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering: An Autobiography (1914–1926)*, rev. ed. (London: Calder & Boyars, 1967), 219.
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- 48 Paul Nash letter to Essil Rutherston, January 8, 1928, Rutherston Loan Collection Archive, RLC 1/24 file 8, Manchester Art Gallery.
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- 50 "Post-Impressionists for Whitechapel," *Manchester Guardian*, April 9, 1914, 6.
- 51 P. G. Konody, "Art & Artists. Mr. W. Sickert's Pictures at the Eldar Gallery," *Observer*, February 9, 1919, 7.
- 52 Charles Rutherston, letter to William Rothenstein, undated 1919, MS Eng 1148.6 Box 1: 9, Houghton Library, Harvard

- University.
- 53 Correspondence between Rutherston and his brother William in the Houghton Library, Harvard clearly shows that Rutherston provided significant financial support to both his artist brothers by purchasing their art in significant quantities. In the main he liked William's work a great deal although he was not averse to offering constructive criticism. However, he was less complimentary about much of youngest brother Albert's work.
- 54 Rutherston, "Mr. Rutherston's Address," 11.
- 55 Charles Rothenstein, letter to William Rothenstein, May 10, 1915, MS Eng 1148.6 Box 1: 9, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
- 56 Belk, "Possessions and the Extended Self," 152.
- 57 The rooms and their contents shown in the two photographs of Rutherston's home could be analysed in more detail from the perspective of the social and cultural history of the home but this is outside the scope of this article.
- 58 Rutherston, "Mr. Rutherston's Address," 11.
- 59 Pearce, *On Collecting*, 387.
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