

**Edward McKnight Kauffer (1890–1954); Marion V. Dorn (1896–1964)
Hubert Lindsay Wellington (1879-1967); Irene Wellington (1904-1984)
The White House, North End, Henley-on-Thames RG9 6JZ**

The artists

McKnight Kauffer

McKnight Kauffer was a versatile artist who drew on a wide variety of styles to create his work: Japanese art, Fauvism, Constructivism and Surrealism. He worked in the areas of painting, applied art, interior design and scenography and is best known for his posters such as those for London Underground (130 posters) and Shell during the inter-war years. He was born in Montana, USA and came to England at the outbreak of WWI and stayed until WWII, over 20 years. He was a friend of the American artist Man Ray. His benefactor was Joseph McKnight of Utah University who in 1912 funded his studies in Paris, and in gratitude Kauffer adopted his name.

Marion Dorn

Dorn was a textile designer, primarily in the area of wall hangings, carpeting and rugs, but also produced wallpaper, graphics and illustrations. Known for her significant contributions to modern British interiors, in particular her 'sculpted' carpets, she collaborated with well-known architects of the period, contributing to some of the best-known interiors of the time including the Savoy Hotel, Claridge's, the Orion and the Queen Mary. Dorn, also born in the USA (California), was McKnight Kauffer's second wife.

Hubert Wellington

Wellington was born in Gloucester and studied at the Gloucester School of Art, Birmingham School of Art and finally the Slade 1899–1900. In the 1930s he was principal of the Edinburgh College of Art where he was part of a group whose aim was to bring Modernism to Scotland. Wellington was also well connected, bringing in architect and Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius and Russian Modernist Serge Chermayeff to give lectures. During WW2 he was appointed by the Ministry of Production to assess the possibilities for the appointment of artists to document factory activities (IWM). The Wellingtons probably did not stay long at the White House, later returning to the Cotswolds, and no paintings have been found from their time in Bucks.

The house

North End straddles the Bucks/Oxon border, the east part where the White House is being in Bucks. It is 1.5km from Turville Heath and approximately 8km north of Henley-on-Thames, sitting in the heart of the undulating Chiltern Hills. Stonor Park is immediately to the south and the vast Wormsley Park 2km to the north-east. Wormsley was the inspiration for McKnight Kauffer's work 'How Bravely Autumn Paints Upon the Sky' (1938). He also painted the village in 1939: 'Spring in the Village'. His artwork was often translated into posters.

McKnight Kauffer and Dorn lived at Swan Court, Chelsea Manor Street in Chelsea (a plaque was erected on the building in 2015), and they leased the White House as a country retreat in April 1938. Jack Beddington, Shell's Publicity Director, was a good friend of the couple as well as a loyal patron

who commissioned McKnight Kauffer to design the posters for the company. Beddington also had a weekend cottage in Turville Heath hence the attraction for McKnight Kauffer. He felt perfectly at home in England and there was nowhere he loved better than the rolling hills of Buckinghamshire (Webb and Skipworth).

The White House is no longer actually white, the paint having now (2019) been stripped from the bricks.

The garden

The gardens of the White House are relatively small and today are laid to lawn, with a gravelled area to the front of the house; the garden is separated from the heath to the front by a beech hedge and picket fence. Today (2019) there is a tennis court, while a number of mature conifers and other small trees surround the garden.

McKnight Kauffer and Dorn only used the cottage at weekends over a period of two to three years before abandoning everything including their artwork and returning to the USA in July 1940. The reason for their sudden departure was a lack of employment opportunities. The painter Hubert Wellington took on the lease of the White House.

It is quite likely that both couples grew vegetables during the war years. Both artists used natural forms in their work; however they were not inspired by their garden but probably more likely by the surrounding countryside. Marion Dorn used botanical images on her fabrics when she returned to the USA (see image below).

Significance to Bucks

McKnight Kauffer was a key figure of British Modernism and his artwork featured on London Transport posters throughout the Underground. It would have enticed Londoners out into the suburbs on the Metropolitan Line and into Buckinghamshire to experience the wonderful countryside of the Chilterns.

Paul Nash wrote 'Kauffer is responsible, above anyone else, for the change in attitude towards commercial art in this country' (Webb & Skipworth).

The art of advertising

By the end of the 19th century poster art had become a respectable art form, largely due to the invention of large-scale colour lithography. It was popularised in Europe by artists such as Alfons Mucha and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. By the 1920s it was the cornerstone of graphic art, and key companies and organisations were commissioning artwork from renowned artists including Nash, Whistler, McKnight Kauffer and Piper. Most of the Bucks artists produced work for Shell and/or London Underground at some time between 1930 and 1960.

References

London Transport Museum postcard book *McKnight Kauffer*, 2007

NADFAS Review Autumn 2011, 'The Poster King', pp. 56–57

Webb, Brian and Skipworth, Peyton. *Design – E. McKnight Kauffer*, 2007.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marion_Dorn

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1050000748> (accessed 20/10/20)

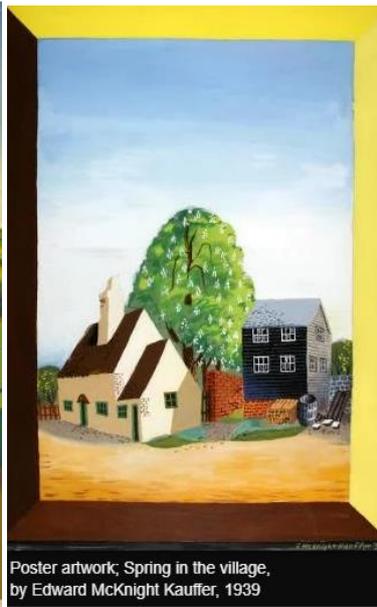
Many thanks to Graham Twemlow for background information and arranging access to the White House.



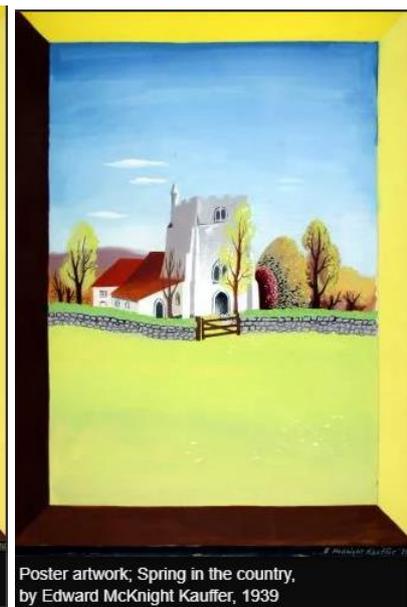
The White House before and after alterations (B&W photo source unknown, recent photo G. Twemlow)



Views of the rear garden (2019) C. de Carle



Poster artwork; Spring in the village,
by Edward McKnight Kauffer, 1939



Poster artwork; Spring in the country,
by Edward McKnight Kauffer, 1939

Kauffer artwork



Fabrics for House and Garden 1947 (Décor Arts Now) <https://www.fjhakimian.com/blog/marion-dorn> (accessed 19/11/20)

For paintings by Wellington (none of Bucks) go to: <https://artuk.org/discover/artists/wellington-hubert-lindsay-18791967>

Claire de Carle 2019