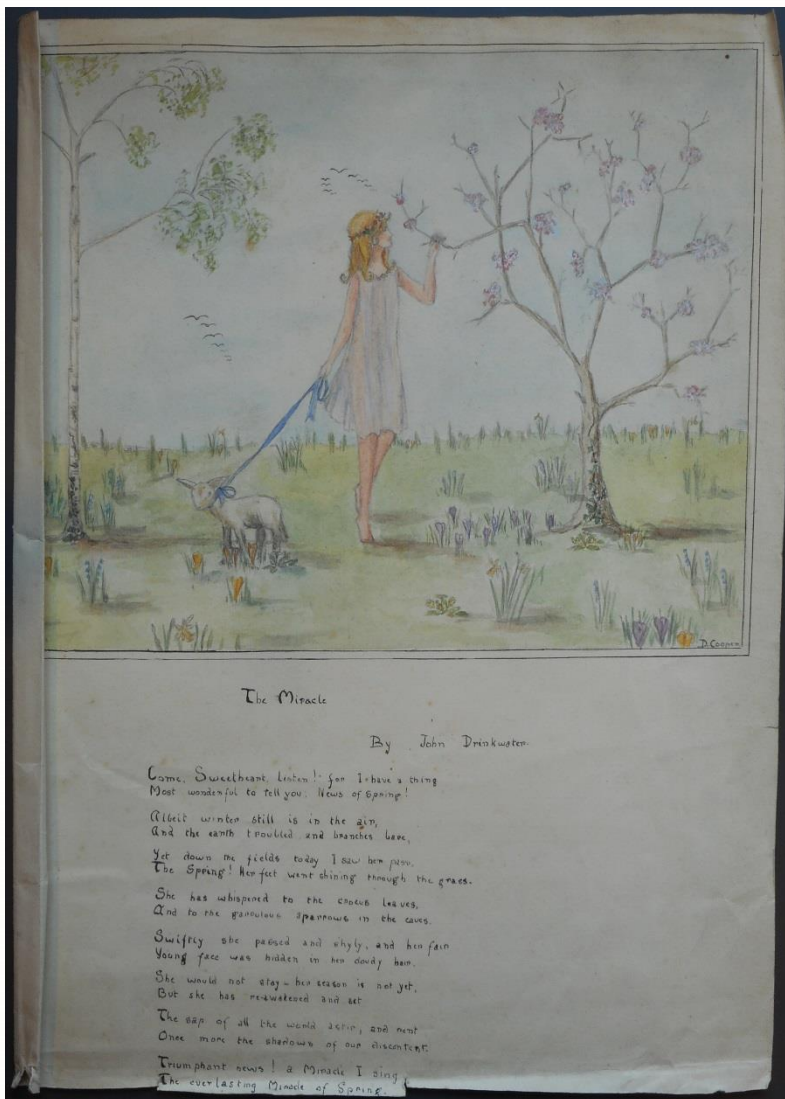


Doreen Wright's Artwork (CR4356/5/106)

Spring is finally here! With the weather getting warmer and Easter later this month, it seemed a fitting time to showcase this watercolour and pencil sketch from the Doreen Wright collection (CR4356/5/106). Yet there is much more to this pretty sketch and poem than at first meets the eye.



Doreen's artwork from Easter 1924, Warwickshire County Record Office CR4356/5/106

Doreen Wright

The artist, Doreen Wright, is best known for the wartime diaries she wrote, comprising letters to her husband who had been lost in action during WWII. The diaries, along with other items relating to Doreen Wright came to Warwickshire County Record Office to be catalogued as part of the Doreen's Diaries project. The project was generously funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Leek Wootton History Group and also resulted in the publication of her diaries under the title *She Could Not Have Loved More*.

Doreen's published diary has provided a compelling insight into her life during the War. Gilbert Wright, whose parents had inherited Wootton Court, and Doreen Cooper married in Kingston on Thames in 1934 and settled in Chalfont St Giles. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Gilbert took up service in the RAF and Doreen took their three children to Wootton Court where she lived with her parents in law. Gilbert went missing on 22 May 1940; his loss radically changed the course of Doreen's life but never lessened her love for him¹.

Doreen Wright's diaries illustrate her incredible fortitude and strength of character as she continued life without her husband. Along with other items in the collection they allow those of us who never knew Doreen a glimpse of her character and offer an insight into her lifetime, including her passion for swimming and her artistic abilities.

Born Mary Doreen Cooper in 1907 in Talawakele (now Sri Lanka), Doreen returned to England in 1919 to pursue her education. While she was taught handicrafts for a hobby, they soon became her passion and career ambition. In 1925 Doreen produced a body of work large enough for her to be accepted into Cheltenham Ladies' College where she obtained the qualifications necessary for securing a place at the Royal College of Art². The watercolour and pencil sketch displayed here as

¹ Leek Wootton History Group, Eds. *She Could Not Have Loved More* (Leamington Spa: Warwick Printing Company Ltd, 2012).

² Leek Wootton History Group, Eds. *She Could Not Have Loved More* (Leamington Spa: Warwick Printing Company Ltd, 2012).

April's Document of the Month is just one example of her artistic talent and was created in Easter 1924, one year before her enrolment in Cheltenham Ladies' College.



Art was a future career as well as a hobby for Doreen Wright, Warwickshire County Record Office CR4356/5/106.

Arts and Crafts

Indeed Doreen Wright's education took place in the wake of an important era for artwork in Britain. The Arts and Crafts movement had swept across the country, promoting a new appreciation for artwork. The movement idealised rural living and lifestyles and took inspiration from the natural world and scenery, as does Doreen Wright's sketch shown here³. At a time when some young women may have been jettisoning handicrafts and art work for newer forms of entertainment such as the radio, Doreen Wright was embarking on a career supported by a reawakened appreciation of the arts.

John Drinkwater

³ "Arts and Crafts: An Introduction," V&A. Available at: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/arts-and-crafts-an-introduction>

The Miracle

By John Drinkwater.

Come, Sweetheart, listen! for I have a thing
Most wonderful to tell you; News of Spring!

Albeit winter still is in the air,
And the earth troubled and branches bare,

Yet down the fields today I saw her pass,
The Spring! Her feet went shining through the grass.

She has whispered to the crocus leaves,
And to the garrulous sparrows in the caves.

Swiftly she passed and shyly, and her fair
Young face was hidden in her cloudy hair.

She would not stay - her season is not yet,
But she has re-awakened and set

The sap of all the world astir, and sent
Once more the shadows of our discontent.

Triumphant news! a Miracle I sing
The everlasting Miracle of Spring.

John Drinkwater's poem accompanies Doreen Wright's sketch. Warwickshire County Record Office CR4356/5/106.

This example of Doreen Wright's work is accompanied by the John Drinkwater poem, *The Miracle*. The poem was published in the 1923 collection entitled, *Collected Poems, vol. I, 1908-1917*. Besides poetry, John Drinkwater had a great passion for theatre and served as manager

of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre⁴, as well as enjoying the countryside, including in Warwickshire⁵.

John Drinkwater was considered both a Georgian poet and one of the Dymock poets. Regarding the former, his poetry was featured in the anthology series *Georgian Poetry* and the style of his work embodied the fundamentals of the movement through romantic subject matter and formalism⁶. With regard to the latter, he was acquainted with all of the other Dymock Poets, and in particular to Rupert Brooke. His great sadness at the death of Rupert Brooke during the First World War was evidenced by the publication of a short book and poem named after Brooke⁷. With hindsight it seems as though there is a parallel to be drawn between Doreen Wright and John Drinkwater, as both lived with the consequences of two different World Wars and loss of those they cared for.

⁴ "John Drinkwater," Britannica. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Drinkwater>

⁵ Linda Hart, *Once They Lived in Gloucestershire* (Kencot: Green Branch Press, 2000).

⁶ "Georgian Poets," National Portrait Gallery. Available at: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/georgianism>

⁷ Linda Hart, *Once They Lived in Gloucestershire* (Kencot: Green Branch Press, 2000).