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## The Jobbing artist as Ethnographer : Documenting 'lore'

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'A glance through the numerous illustrations to this book will give a better idea of its wide scope than any description could do....'

Marx /Lambert *English Popular Art*

The term 'vernacular' like the high/low pair is also relative: it positions a standard language against a lesser dialect, a dominant culture against a secondary subculture. The vernacular is the other and every discourse has its other.

*Ellen Lupton Low and high: Design in Everyday Life*

### Abstract

This article focuses on a set of scholarly books published during the period 1920- 1960 written and illustrated by women who were also well known artists and designers, which offer histories and taxonomies of 'popular' and 'folk' art. I would like to argue that their interest in popular and vernacular culture can be seen as a creative as well as scholarly engagement with the history of their own profession- as 'jobbing artists' - the phrase Barbara Jones' used to describe her wide ranging and pragmatic creative output<sup>i</sup>.

Jones was an illustrator of children's books, a mural painter, as well as being a curator, writer and documenter of popular taste. Enid Marx was a printmaker, illustrator and creator of patterned textiles, notably for the London Underground, and a lifelong collector and connoisseur of 'English Popular Art'. Dorothy Hartley was an illustrator, journalist, historian and scholar. They shared an interest in documenting rural crafts, the 'Lost Worlds'<sup>ii</sup> they represent, and the popular or 'folk' culture that was translated into mass produced forms during the industrial revolution- 'the things that people make for themselves or that are manufactured in their taste'<sup>iii</sup>. The authors in question were effective communicators in several types of media, and worked as 'cultural agents' - whether creating contemporary visual culture or writing about the material culture of the past.

I am interested to explore ideas about the popular scholarship and the nature of the research that analysis of the modes of illustration in these books yields, focussing on the role of drawing as a means of recording and exploring a subject alongside writing. I would like to argue that these books offer us models for thinking about hybrid, multi modal 'authoritative' writing and I would like to present this as a distinct genre of scholarship, where the author and the illustrator are the same person, and the visual and verbal elements work alongside each other with a synergy commanded by the single intelligence being brought to bear on the

subject matter. I am also interested to examine whether these illustrated texts interrogate the artefacts in ways that offer an altered epistemological approach to the subject matter, and offer a place for intelligence associated with drawing of empathy, intuition, and emergent visual thinking alongside the conventions of academic writing.

I will look specifically at Dorothy Hartley's *'Made in England'*<sup>v</sup>, Barbara Jones' *'Unsophisticated Arts'*<sup>v</sup> and *'Popular Arts of the First world war'*<sup>vi</sup> and Enid Marx and Margaret Lambert's *'English Popular Art'*<sup>viii</sup> in particular, although will reference other works that fall into this genre of mid 20<sup>th</sup> century populist scholarship examining 'folk' or popular arts. The authors are all 'jobbing artists' and participated in the production of contemporaneous popular art and design, weaving their interest in traditional forms into designs that were often mass produced and displayed in modern settings- for instance Barbara Jones' mural work for the Festival of Britain, and Enid Marx's work as a textile designer for the London Underground.

Jones, writing in 1972 about the 'popular arts' of the first world war focuses on the 'everyday' nature of popular art 'it is about the things that ordinary people who were involved made for themselves or that were made in their taste. It is not concerned with the big guns and tanks in the museums but the little guns and tanks made cosily in wood and brass for the mantle shelf; not with the canvases of the official war artists but with the embroidered postcards sent home from the front.' Myrone (2014) writes that 'folk art may mean something completely different to the anthropologist, art historian, social historian, archaeologist, collector, enthusiast, interior designer or antiques dealer'<sup>viii</sup>, and the definition of folk art is as slippery as an eel, it is often elided with categories such as 'naive', 'outsider' and 'popular' art. Marx and Lambert talk of 'Popular and traditional art' being 'hard to define though easy enough to recognise when seen. It is the art which ordinary people have, from time immemorial, introduced into their everyday lives, sometimes making it themselves, at others imposing their own tastes on the products of the craftsman or the machine, in contrast to the more sophisticated art made by specialists for wealthy patrons'<sup>ix</sup>.

I would argue that there is a lineage between 'popular and traditional' art and the work of commercial artists during this time, with its emphasis on art's functional utility in people's everyday lives.

I am interested to explore the affordances of the different kinds of drawing in the books in relation to the kind of scholarship it evinces. The experience of reading a heavily illustrated scholarly text is worth paying attention to. The linearity of reading is interrupted, as you flip back and forth between plates and text. When illustrations are embedded in the writing, it creates a shift in the type of attention given to the subject as you pause between lines to consider the image. These are interstices of attention which allow a more contemplative 'patched in' mode of understanding alongside the cognitive knitting together the thoughts in the written text. Looking at the different kinds of drawings within the books involves different forms of attention - unfinished observational sketches of places, narrative drawings and photographs of people engaged in their work, highly rendered mimetic drawings and paintings of objects in white space, diagrams, cross sections, flights of historical imagination, and decorative and typographical elements - which created a medley of registers modulating the authorial voice.

Drawing, according to Ingold, is a kind of emergent knowledge, the to and fro of looking and rendering closing the gap between what is seen and what is experienced. He calls for a 'graphic anthropology', calling attention to the haptic and gestural nature of knowledge derived from observational drawing through which the immediacy of the drawn line captures the essence of the observer's subjective impression. For the reader, something of the gesture is

recreated imaginatively in following the line- he argues that the reader thinks with the line as they look at it, and calls for a re-evaluation of ‘graphic anthropology’<sup>x</sup>.

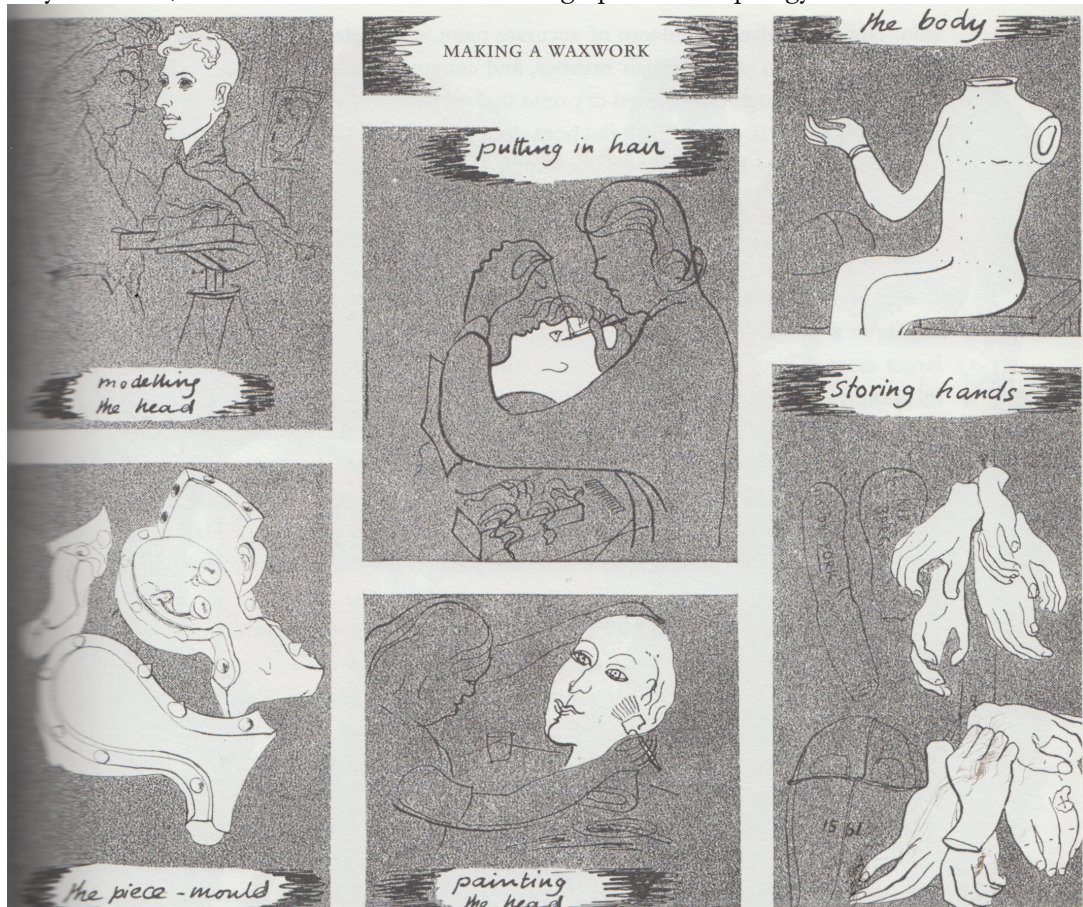


Figure 1: Illustration from Barbara Jones, *The Unsophisticated Arts*, 1951, London: Architectural Press.

The relationship the authors had to their subject matter was not simply expressing an ‘sophisticated’ taste for naive, traditional and homemade artefacts, but recognised the objects and images as a functioning lexicon of forms and patterns that they desired to perpetuate in their own creative design work. This creates a very different, more subjective, interior and creative discourse on the subject, which also found expression within their professional lives as ‘jobbing artists’. The subjective nature of this illustratory discourse with the objects as cultural texts the designer-scholar choose to collect and attend to, offers an insight into the nature of their relationship with the history of design and its impact on their own practice, but also offers a different way of enquiring into the past, akin to an ‘antiquarian impulse’<sup>xi</sup> in which ‘imagination and feeling’ play a part. I would also like to make the case that both the subject matter- what Rosemary Woolf characterises as ‘the ‘feminine past ... the past of place, family, material environment, deemed ... to be a past unworthy of the title of true history’<sup>xii</sup>- along with the multi modal contemplation of the subject matter used by these women can be construed as a feminised form of scholarly writing. Marilyn Strathern asserts-

Feminist anthropology is trying to shift discourse, not improve a paradigm “that is, it alters the nature of the audience, the range of readership and the kinds of interactions between author and reader, and alters the subject matter of conversation between the author and reader in the way it allows others to speak- what is talked about and whom one is talking to”<sup>xiii</sup>

I would like to use the consideration of the illustrations in these books as one of these ‘other voices’ in the text, as a way of locating the various relationships between these illustrator-

scholars and their subject matter. The prose often offers subjective, partisan approval and enthusiasm for their subject matter, which put the writing at odds with traditional 'objective' and 'scientific' models of academic enquiry, and perhaps puts the writing into the genre of what Marina Warner describes as 'a very English tradition, that of the personal, even eccentric essay, the wide-ranging, meditation, and the anecdotal almanac.' There are references in the books to amateur collectors, anecdotes from personal experiences, snippets of song and acknowledgements to people rather than books. Margaret Lambert, discussing the process of gathering the material for their influential book *English Popular Art* (1946), describes the various small-scale collections she and Enid Marx visited to amass information:

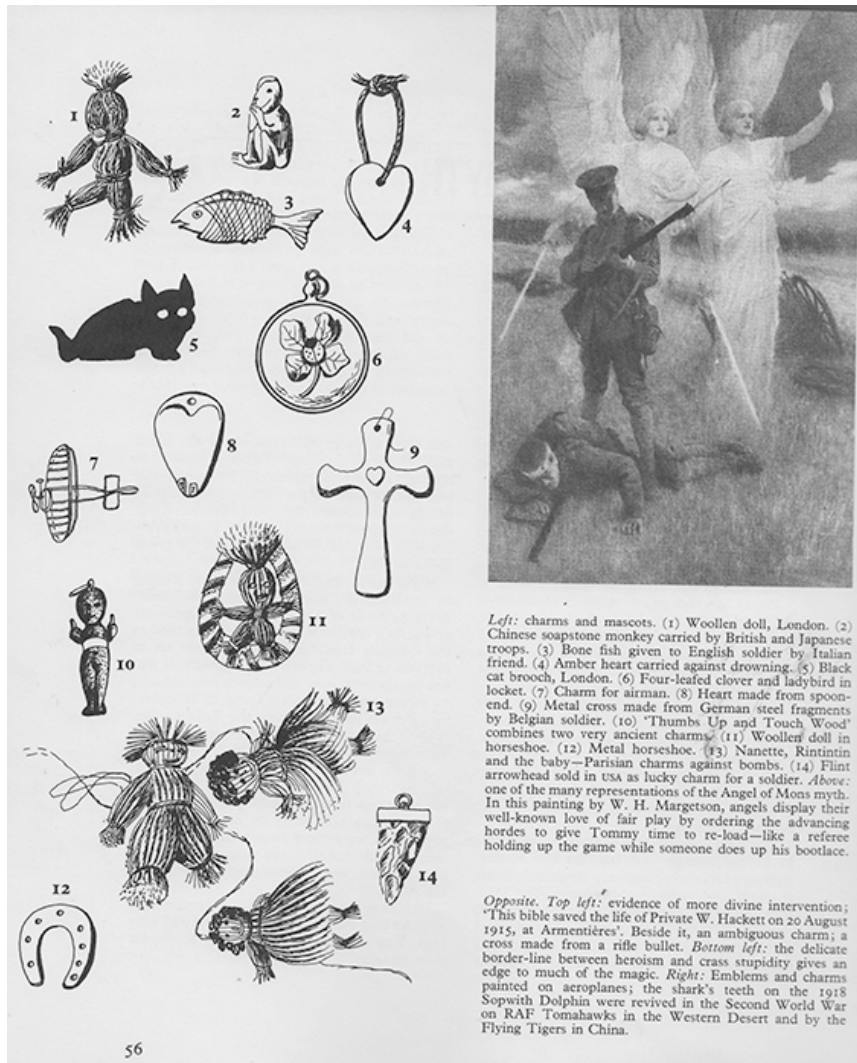
In Oxford, the then printer to the university press Dr John Johnson, let us draw on his now famous collection of printing ephemera. In Devon we met Mrs M.N. Nichol, who had a splendid collection of such things as scrapbooks, pull-up valentines, paper peepshows children's books and toys. Visiting her house was like stepping back a century in time. Dr Anthony Hampton, who broadcast and wrote on gardening under the pseudonym of Jason Hill, introduced us to the world of old-fashioned roses and florists' flowers, beside many botanical curiosities. <sup>xiv</sup>

These private collections could be seen as a 'folk' resource, of enthusiastic amateurs rather than of 'legitimate' institutions for validating collections and bodies of knowledge, and offer a grassroots challenge to the idea of being a 'recognised authority' on a given subject. There is a quietly radical approach to the subject matter, which enables 'other voices' to be heard. The creative and subjective collecting based on personal 'taste' that has formed the basis of Jones' curating and Marx and Lambert's study of their private collections offers us a different paradigm for subject knowledge, foregrounding interiority, emotional attachment and subjectivity as creative and intellectual strengths, rather than striving for an objective analysis that will always be stubbornly elusive in the face of the sometimes ephemeral and often anonymous 'folk art' objects. Reactions to this organising principle in conventional academic writings have historically been dismissive. Dilnot<sup>xv</sup> refers to 'the whimsical conception of popular taste and a concern with what might be called junk antiques', betraying an inherent academic snobbery in viewing the subject matter itself as being beneath notice. What Jones calls her 'discerning eye' is apparent in the choice of objects for her exhibition 'Black Eyes and Lemonade', on display at the Whitechapel gallery during the Festival of Britain in 1951. She writes in the exhibition catalogue that although some of the objects are 'made with such certainty of taste that the highest aesthetic standards can be applied to them', others are more challenging, and 'the museum eye must be abandoned before they can be enjoyed'.<sup>xvi</sup> She goes on to refer to the 'flawless popular eye' that 'arranges lobster and soles on the fishmonger's slab' and relishes the wit and energy of popular taste. Considered alongside a 'modernist' interpretation of design history, such as Pevsner's, which charts a canon of individual achievement in a linear narrative of progress and innovation, the omission of folk and popular taste from this narrative can be seen as ideological, suppressing a different set of values and skills in favour of a dominant, industrialised model based on an object's exchange value rather than its use value. Cheryl Buckley<sup>xvii</sup> argues that innate patriarchal values have held the division of labour and acquisition of design skills on gender grounds, the home being the site of the invisible design activity.

The designs produced by women in the domestic environment are used by the family in the home rather than exchanged for profit within the capitalist marketplace. At this point capitalism and patriarchy interact to devalue this type of design; essentially it has been made in the wrong place – the home, and for the wrong market – the family. (Buckley, 1989)

Jones describes popular taste as ‘the desire to clutter the home with objects’ and how the industrial revolution has facilitated this with a ‘flood of cheap things’ coming from the factories, which in their turn influenced the taste and ‘hobbies’ of the ordinary people.<sup>xviii</sup> She confidently sets out the position that we should view these objects from, the assumption as the author’s status as ‘the expert reader of culture-as-text’<sup>xix</sup>. Jones’s book *Popular Arts of the First World War* is a self avowed ‘picture book’<sup>xx</sup> offering a scrapbook of photographed and drawn objects from her own collection and illustrated ephemera from the time of the ‘Great War’. As such the book presents a ‘cacophany’ at odds with the confident narration of ‘the background and phenomena which provided sources for popular interpretation’. Her loose thematic chapters covering ‘various aspects of the war’ include idiosyncratic categories such as ‘Heroes and Villains’, ‘Magic and Myth’, ‘Parcels and Post’ and ‘Animals’, echo the similarly haphazard and eccentric chapter headings in her book *the Unsophisticated Arts* – with its sections organised into categories such as ‘Skin and Bone’ ‘Automata and Simulacra’ and ‘A Day up the River’.

The chapter in *Popular Arts of the First World War* entitled ‘Magic and Myth’ is devoted to the lucky charms ‘to be worn on the person’ and offers brisk commentary on the symbols of heroism ‘Heroes are singled out by giving them medals- they are ‘decorated’ just like other special items from altars to Christmas trees’. Jones’s own drawings accompany this section, where she groups a woollen doll, a soapstone monkey and ‘amber heart carried against drowning’. The illustrations themselves are witty and spare renditions in line, offering clarity and also perhaps an enjoyment in the subject matter for its own sake, echoing the sentiments in the writing. There is no provenance offered for the objects, and they are presented within the contextless white space of the page. Similarly, the geographic diversity of the list of objects divorces it from cultural context- these objects are the shrapnel of collective memory, dispersed and fragmentary reminders of soldiers’ hope for spiritual protection during battle. The shaping narrative is the author’s ‘discerning eye’.



Left: charms and mascots. (1) Woollen doll, London. (2) Chinese soapstone monkey carried by British and Japanese troops. (3) Bone fish given to English soldier by Italian friend. (4) Amber heart carried against drowning. (5) Black cat brooch, London. (6) Four-leafed clover and ladybird in locket. (7) Charm for airman. (8) Heart made from spoon-end. (9) Metal cross made from German steel fragments by Belgian soldier. (10) 'Thumbs Up and Touch Wood' combines two very ancient charms. (11) Woollen doll in horseshoe. (12) Metal horseshoe. (13) Nanette, Rintintin and the baby—Parisian charms against bombs. (14) Flint arrowhead sold in USA as lucky charm for a soldier. Above: one of the many representations of the Angel of Mons myth. In this painting by W. H. Margesson, angels display their well-known love of fair play by ordering the advancing hordes to give Tommy time to re-load—like a referee holding up the game while someone does up his bootlace.

Opposite. Top left: evidence of more divine intervention; 'This bible saved the life of Private W. Hackett on 20 August 1915, at Armentières'. Beside it, an ambiguous charm; a cross made from a rifle bullet. Bottom left: the delicate border-line between heroism and crass stupidity gives an edge to much of the magic. Right: Emblems and charms painted on aeroplanes; the shark's teeth on the 1918 Sopwith Dolphin were revived in the Second World War on RAF Tomahawks in the Western Desert and by the Flying Tigers in China.

Figure 2: Barbara Jones, *Popular Art of the First World War*, 1972, London: Studio Vista, p. 56.

The positioning of these homely artefacts betrays the metropolitan and Anglo-centric bias of the author's cultural position. But equally present is the author's subjective response to the material – Jones references the sentimental postcard depicting 'angels displaying their well known love for fair play ...like a referee holding up the game while someone does up his bootlace'. This humorous and sideways commentary is typical of Jones, and offer an antidote to the 'modernist design paradigms of objective rationalism' which Katherine McCoy argues are 'typical of a male sensibility, safely disengaged from emotional involvement.'<sup>xxi</sup> The involvement of the author in the subject matter, apart from making for engaging reading, offers a populist tone of scholarship for a mass audience. Jones, I would like to argue, is writing as an antiquarian historian- one who responds to the past with 'imagination and feeling' and placing subjectivity into the modernist environment of the book<sup>xxii</sup> - 'messy, permissive and full of idiosyncratic logic.'<sup>xxiii</sup>



Mr George Burchett at work. Behind are his own paintings, including two superb examples of all-  
 Figure 3: Illustration from Barbara Jones, *The Unsophisticated Arts*, 1951, London: Architectural Press.

Barbara Jones also documented people ‘at work’ in her books. ‘Unsophisticated’ artists such as the taxidermist and tattooist are shown in the context of their workspaces. Jones shows us the interaction between artist and customer, the milieu of ‘art created by and for the people amongst whom the artist lives and worked’, a part of the everyday world of the high street. The illustrations are in watercolour reproduced as black and white lithographs in the books. She renders the tattooist and customer with a kindly eye, at some distance, and depicts them as characters rather than individuals through simplification of detail on their faces. Their workspaces are rendered with great attention to detail as caves of treasure, a hoard of covetable items. Her eye lingers on the stacks of the tattooists artwork, the tattooist’s ‘flash’ on the walls, the drawings that that litter the floor.

Walter Benjamin advocated that ‘the artist should take his place beside the proletariat<sup>xxiv</sup>- and goes on to identify this as the ‘impossible place’ that of a ‘benefactor, of an ideological patron’. This impossible place is also the stance of the ‘participant observer’ anthropologist, who does not ‘belong’ in the culture he is observing and interpreting. Though Jones is a fellow ‘jobbing

artist', she objectifies the tattooist. Creating the drawing of him, she depicts not him as a person, his anecdotes or knowledge base, but as part of a pleasing tableau, creating an image that assumes a perspective of empowered authority, at some distance from the subject. Although her illustration practice is pragmatic and artisanal at times, she does not align herself with the taxidermist as a fellow 'unsophisticated' artist. This attitude is most clear in her writing about popular taste, where she refers to 'the poor' and the 'vast majority', and 'the less privileged'<sup>xxv</sup> positioning them as the 'other' to her sophisticated metropolitan eye.

Unlike Jones, who arguably has an aesthetic rather than practical interest in the 'unsophisticated arts', Hartley's approach to material culture is practical- she constantly wishes to demonstrate how these techniques and recipes could be performed today- the past is not 'there' but 'here'. The illustrations are mentioned constantly in the book, referred to as 'sketches' or 'diagrams' explained, and Hartley often describes the conditions the drawing was made under- sitting on tool boxes, or standing in a beech wood with the smell of smoke around her. In her preface to the book she says 'the drawings were usually made of the spot, the proportions roughly measured by hand. The photographs were taken while the workman was actually doing the job so your indulgence is asked for many taken under very difficult conditions'. Hartley's books *Food in England*, and *Made in England* offer a more utilitarian, if still antiquarian, approach to the history of material culture. The books are peppered with observational drawings, drawings of remembered rooms, working diagrams and cross sections. The images are embedded within the text and referred to constantly- Hartley often interjects 'the illustration can explain this much better than I can in the text'<sup>xxvi</sup> The hybridity of her approach is an unforced and multi sensory way of looking and thinking, describing and encoding, using several intelligences at once, and requiring a similar utilisation of different imaginative forms of thought in the reader. She talks in *Made in England* about looking at the objects with a 'worker's eye' (compare this to the 'museum eye' and the 'designers eye' that Jones refers to). There is a non-linear relationship to historical time expressed through the vitality and evergreen nature of the skills and patterns of behaviour that are 'passed on' and the miscellaneous way that the information is presented that characterises this type of writing as a kind of antiquarian anthropology, that is presenting a personal collections of 'relics' - in Hartley's case the relics of rural practices and haptic 'lore' - with imagination and feeling. The ways in which her books contribute to discourses about 'England and Englishness' are not simply presenting historical accounts of a 'folk' culture that was in a safe place 'back then' and 'over there, but are an attempt to trace an English 'way of doing things' and present it as continuum, a set of haptic legacies that continue to be useful to know, either for their own sake as relics interesting to the practice of traditional arts and crafts, signalling an iterative design process rooted in a deep understanding of natural materials . She repeatedly makes the case for multi sensory epistemologies, saying 'few town workers realise the enormous number of things the countryman must carry in his mind's eye' and 'the quiet skilled worker...He has that look that comes to all men who work their wits against the wild things, of thinking with their fingers.' The hybrid illustration/writing demonstrated in her books can be seen as a way of participating imaginatively with traditional forms of knowledge, learned through mimicry of gesture, and which become engrained patterns of thought and deed 'held in the mind's eye' rather than verbalised. There are several ways in which illustration is employed in Hartley's books to do this. As well as documenting objects such as tools and their many iterations and evolution, and being at pains to document 'folk' culture through the practical 'know how' that the objects embody, she often undertakes observational field work, making drawings in situ and living and working alongside rural artisans. Hartley's interpretation of design as an active and embodied collective process 'ruptures the past /present continuum of traditional historical narratives.'<sup>xxvii</sup> By placing the emphasis on the skills themselves, Hartley positions the maker like a traditional storyteller, working with inherited knowledge that is tested and refined through its iteration in many forms. The nature of this 'lore' is at odds with the value placed



by historians<sup>xxviii</sup> on the idea of individual talent. It creates a different relationship to the 'history' being presented, and presents design as an evergreen set of practices, without a single 'source' or author.

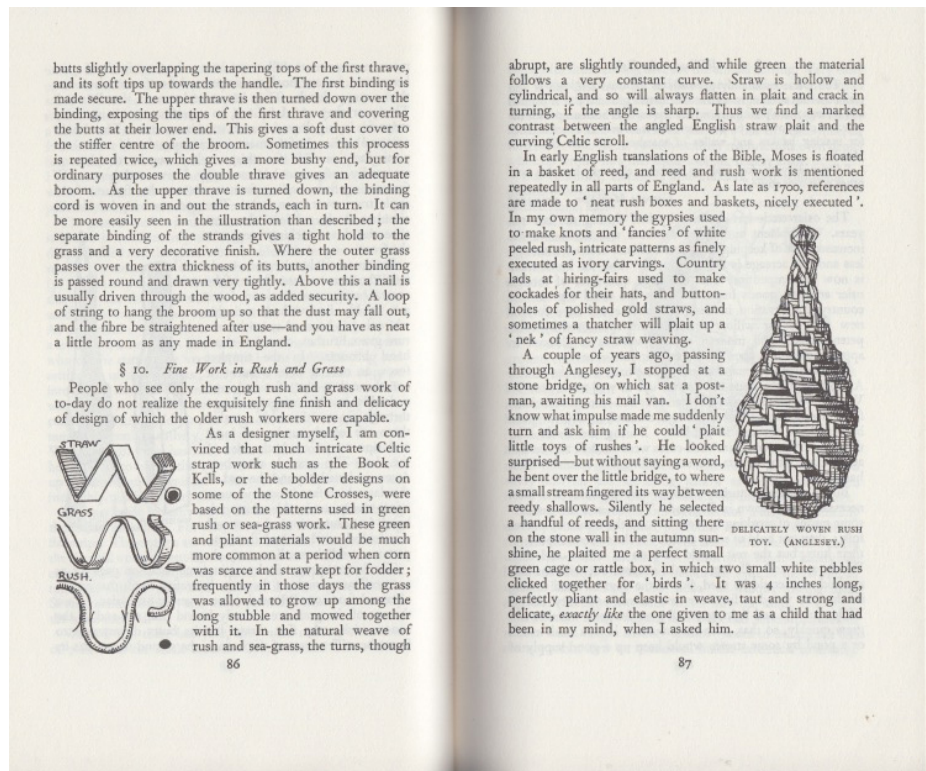


Figure 4: Dorothy Hartley, *Made in England*, 1939, London: Eyre Methuen, pp. 86-87.

Her theorising of design posits culture as a response to an understanding of the world's materiality rooted in the human senses- an intimate knowledge of the properties of trees, rocks and grasses well and their usefulness for making things. In one section she makes an observation about the quality of line produced in working straw and grass, and offers a hypothesis that this developed into different linear drawing styles and graphic languages, saying-

As a designer myself I am convinced that much intricate Celtic knot work such as the Book of Kells...were based on patterns used in green rush or sea-grass work. These green and pliant materials would be much more common at a period when corn was scarce and straw kept for fodder. ...In the natural weave of rush and sea grass though abrupt are slightly rounded, and while green the material follows a very constant curve. Straw is hollow and cylindrical and will always flatten in a plait and crack in turning if the angle is sharp. Thus we find a marked contrast between the angled English straw plait and the curving Celtic scroll.<sup>xxix</sup>

She is claiming that the linear sensibility used in drawing is itself is generated from a historically and culturally located haptic as well as visual understanding of the natural world.

*Made in England*, Hartley states, is a 'plain record of country work, written as simply as possible'. She says 'I did not wish to include anything that might be called 'olde' sand guarantees 'that these things are still made in Britain, and that the drawings and photographs are taken from those actually in use by country workmen'. Hartley is aware of the function of the images, saying here 'the illustration shows the process of weaving more clearly than it is

possible to describe'. She draws the workman at his bench, showing him 'at work' and then zooms into salient details of the things he is making, sometimes drawing in cross section in order to communicate the process of creating the object in this case weaving a 'slop' or traditional basket. Many of the illustrations are instructional, and contain enough information to enable the reader to recreate these traditional crafts should they wish to, democratising the creativity and skills they transcribe.

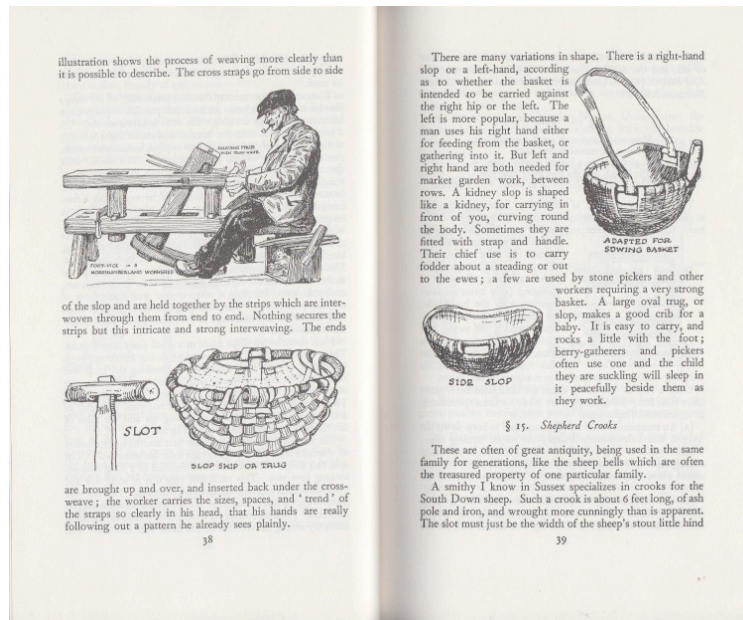


Figure 5: Dorothy Hartley, *Made in England*, 1939, London: Eyre Methuen, pp. 38-39.

Hartley's documentation of things *Made in England* includes a time and motion study of Coppicing being cut- a week's job - in a masterful information graphic. It is a narrative image that offers a diagram of a sequence of events over a period of time whilst retaining a recognisable mimetic mode of drawing. The information depicted in the imagery is highly condensed and expands only when read alongside the anecdotal recounting of her experience of their working life in the woods. The days of the week are marked up the side of the depiction of the space the coppicers' work and arrows show the progress of the work- a visual distillation of a time and motion study. There are personal touches (the directional arrows have feathers) and although lacking the usual mouse or bird observing the scene that Hartley likes to embellish her illustrations with, the small idiosyncratic flourishes give the diagram warmth.

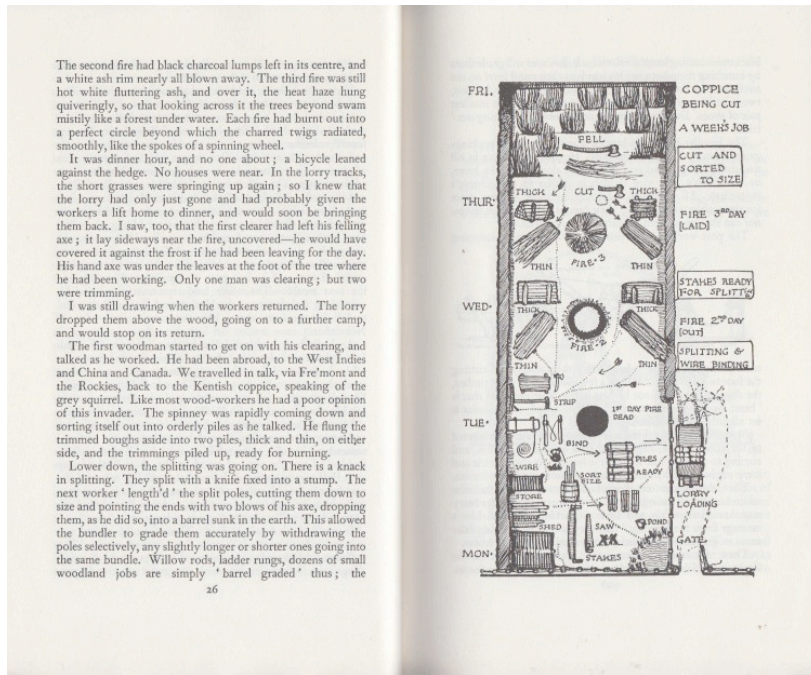


Figure 6: Dorothy Hartley, Made in England, 1939, London: Eyre Methuen, p.p. 26-27

Most of the images in the book are produced as she is sketching while observing the work being done. There are, however, examples of her asking the person she is watching to draw the task themselves. For example 'the sand patterns on the previous page were drawn for me by an old Yorkshire woman...' to demonstrate the performance of 'sanding and hearth stoning'—preparing floors with patterns of fresh sand or sawdust that will soak up the dust and dirt. This was an ephemeral act of making an image, trodden out of sight in moments, but renewed according to practice each morning. *Made in England* is a miscellany of quotations from songs, anecdotes and observations. Her train of thought moves less by logic than by juxtaposition and offers experimental, fragmentary, and provisional forms of knowledge. The effect on the reader is of a modulated collage of information, requiring different acts of attention to process.

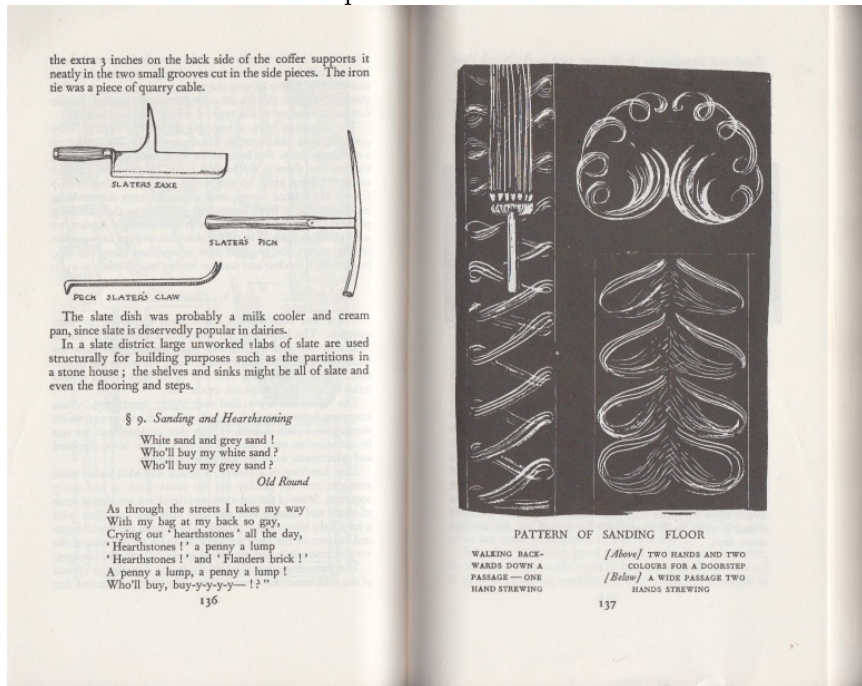


Figure 7: Dorothy Hartley, Made in England, 1939, London: Eyre Methuen, p.p. 136-137

I have been considering some aspects of ethnographic approaches to and material culture that this genre of populist, highly illustrated books about folk life and popular arts embodies. Obviously there are differences in the content and style of the books, but they share many characteristics, the most striking being the approach to collecting material culture and the 'lore' attached, which entails field work of a recognisably ethnographic character- observing and documenting a culture that is 'other' to the author's own, using oral testimony, and techniques of visual anthropology- making annotated sketches, diagrams and photography. Illustration is deployed alongside the text to offer effective ways of communicating epistemologies that do not have a literature and cannot be described succinctly in words, such as haptic skills and ways of doing and making associated with the traditional crafts being described. This is knowledge that can be categorised as 'lore' and is associated with the improvisations and iterations of 'folk art', manifestations of culture that often exists only as memories, patterns and traditions of making.

In her co-authored book *English Popular and Traditional Art* Enid Marx's highly rendered drawings demonstrate close attention to the materiality of the objects under scrutiny. The Marx/Lambert collection of Folk Art, now housed at Compton Verney, has recently been redesigned by curator Penelope Sexton to highlight this connection between the artist's collection and her designs by putting the objects in proximity to the wallpaper and textile designs that she created.<sup>xxxix</sup> The drawings that resulted from this close attention can be considered as a sensory and critical interrogation, made manifest in the abstracting of elements of the objects into Marx's wallpaper and textile designs. This seems to me to demonstrate a central affordance of this multi modal approach to scholarship by 'jobbing artists' and designers- the poetic resonance of the folk art object stimulates the imagination as well as the intellect, and provides a creative trigger for re-interpretation to occur.

The set of books I am considering can also be seen as sitting within the populist discourses of 'Englishness' that mass market publishing enabled during this period, and situate the illustrator/ writer and publisher working together as 'cultural agents' enabling the 'popular diffusion and distribution of ideas' within society<sup>xxxix</sup>. The conflation of rural 'traditional' culture with national characteristics sits uneasily with the internationalist modernist design agendas being promoted at the same time by the newly formed Council for Industrial Design and Festival of Britain- which several of the women artist/writers were involved with. Rather more complex than a simple dichotomy - a nostalgic backwards looking reactionary response to 'the good old days' versus the ideologically driven attempt to build a new world order- these books, and their author's wider work as 'jobbing artists' employed as part of the 'Recording Britain' project, as members of the Royal Designers for Industry and commissioned illustration reveal an investment in the social function of the artist. This can be aligned to their interest in human centred approaches to the anthropology of design and a keen understanding of the audiences for and historical trajectories of contemporary popular culture, evidenced in the populist format of the books themselves. At the same time, the Mass Observation Unit was capturing the voices and opinions of ordinary men and women in an attempt to create an 'anthropology of ourselves.'<sup>xxxix</sup> This work also shares a concern for documenting and preserving the material culture and skills that are felt to be passing out of popular memory in Britain. There was arguably a cultural turn towards 'Recording Britain'<sup>xxxix</sup> through its material and 'folk' culture, looking to rural crafts, buildings and landscape for a lexicon of images through which to define a nationhood which it was felt was under a dual threat from industrialisation of domestic life and ideological invasion from hostile political forces. Within the publishing industry there is an engagement with what Pyrs Gruffudd calls

the ‘growing range of cultural products- travel books, landscape art, popular treatises on rural life, academic studies —[which] contributed to the creation of a ruralist discourse between the two World Wars, each stressing the integrity of rural life and landscapes.’<sup>xxxv</sup> This is often conflated with the nationalist discourses that haunt the concept of ‘the folk’-for instance Marx Lambert and Jones have an explicitly agenda to define ‘Britishness’, and Hartley’s book *Food in England* (1954) has the strapline ‘a complete guide to the food that makes us who we are’. Ironically, the books’ concerns with generating nationalistic narratives around the material culture are also intensely regional.

Lettice Sandford’s book *Decorative Straw Work*<sup>xxxvi</sup> offers an interesting example of these tensions between the traditional nature of the skills, and the modernist context within which it is being presented. Sandford produced illustration work for the Golden Cockerel press and Folio Society as a wood engraver but was also an expert of corn dollies. She wrote several books explaining their cultural significance and instructing people how to recreate them. Her approach to the subject arguably falls into what Hartley calls an ‘arts and crafts reclamation of folk arts for a genteel audience’<sup>xxxvii</sup>- something that has lost its cultural context. Decorative straw work was not a living art form after the industrial revolution put paid to the rhythm and the techniques of gathering corn. The book is therefore situated at an interesting historical fulcrum- presenting folk art as belonging to the rural past, and reviving it as something with contemporary and relevance, as a living tradition. In the text Sandford attempts to make a case for the continuing relevance of straw work, positing the way it was used in the Festival of Britain, and how it is used in contemporary shop window displays, somewhat ignoring the register that the corn dollies carry as an archaic craft. There is a tension in the design of the book as well, the use of photographs and simple pared back almost clinical drawing of the techniques offering a scientific ‘modern’ register to the instructions.

The fluidity of knowledge of this sort, which before captured in these books would have been passed on through showing rather than telling, suits the visual nature of these texts, transcribed and re-enacted imaginatively through line as well as described in words.

In their reclaiming of the everyday lives and objects of ‘the folk’ these scholar-illustrators were engaged in a re-envisioning of their place within the history of popular and traditional art, and using a feminised form of writing- that embraced the empathic and emergent forms of knowledge that drawing enables. The relationship between writing and drawing in these is one of subjectivity and imagination alongside the amassing of facts and scientific methods of enquiry, and as such offer us a useful paradigm for visualised forms of academic writing. In their reclaiming of the everyday lives and objects of ‘the folk’ Sandford, Hartley, Marx, and Jones were engaged in a radical realigning of concepts of value within design history, and their recognition of the plasticity of ideas in their highly visualised writing reflects this.

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<sup>i</sup> Quoted in Armonstky R. (2008) *A Snapper up of Unconsidered Trifles: A Tribute to Barbara Jones*, London: Artmonsky Arts  
<sup>ii</sup> During 1933-1936, Dorothy Hartley was commissioned by the Daily Sketch newspaper to write articles describing the English countryside, old English crafts and customs, country foods and country ways. The series was called 'Lost Worlds' collected Hartley, D. (2012). *Lost world*. Totnes: Prospect Books.

<sup>iii</sup> Jones (1951) preface to *The Unsophisticated arts* p. 15

<sup>iv</sup> Hartley, D. (1939). *Made in England*. London: Eyre Methuen

<sup>v</sup> Jones, B. (1951). *The unsophisticated arts*. Architectural Press: London (reprinted by Little Toller Press in 2014)

<sup>vi</sup> Jones, B (1972) *Popular Arts of the First World*. London: Studio Vista

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<sup>viii</sup> McMillan, J., Myrone, M. and Kenny, R. (2014). *British Folk Art*, London: Tate Publishing

<sup>ix</sup> introduction to *English Popular Art*

<sup>x</sup> '...anthropologists have long assumed that description is a literary project, and thus that the graphic part of ethnography is writing and not drawing. It is commonly supposed, moreover, that descriptive writing means turning away from observation (e.g., Clifford 1990: 52). If there is a hiatus at the heart of ethnography, it is not then between participation and observation, for these are in truth aspects of one and the same movement. It is rather between observation and description. How might they be rejoined? One way to do so might be to think of description in the first place as a process of line-making rather than verbal composition. And this leads us back to drawing.'

<sup>xi</sup> Battles, K. (2008) *The Antiquarian Impulse: History, Affect, and Material Culture In Eighteenth-and Nineteenth-Century British Literature*, Michigan State University, Department of English Doctoral thesis

<sup>xii</sup> Woolf, D. R.. (1997). A Feminine Past? Gender, Genre, and Historical Knowledge in England, 1500- 1800. *The American Historical Review*, 102(3), 645-679. <http://doi.org/10.2307/2171505> p.677 (accessed December 7<sup>th</sup> 2015)

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<sup>xiv</sup> Lambert, M (1979) *Enid Marx: catalogue of a retrospective exhibition organised by the Arkwright Arts Trust for the Camden Arts Centre*, London: Arkwright Arts Trust 1979

<sup>xv</sup> Dilnot, C. (1984) *The State of Design History, Part I: Mapping the Field* *Design Issues* Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring, 1984), pp. 4-23

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<sup>xvii</sup> Buckley, C. (1986). *Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design*. *Design Issues*, 3(2), p.3.

<sup>xviii</sup> Jones, B. and Howell, B. (1972) *Popular arts of the First World War*. Studio Vista

she goes on to say 'These industrial products and hand made objects add up to popular art. It is not folk art, which is peasant and pre industrial, and it is not fine art. Nor is it pop art in which professional artists re interpret the popular arts. It is certainly not kitsch, which is bourgeois and which involves a degree of cultural pretention foreign to the popular arts...(p7)

<sup>xix</sup> Foster, H. (1996) *The Artist as Ethnographer*, in *The Return of the Real*. Cambridge: The MIT Press,

<sup>xx</sup> *ibid* (p8)

<sup>xxi</sup> Kirkham, P. (2000). *Women designers in the USA, 1900-2000*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. P. 57

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<sup>xxix</sup> *ibid* p.87

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