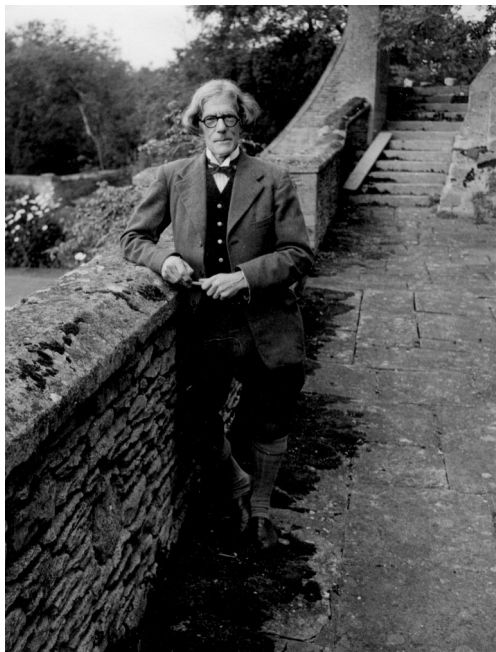


## CHARLES PAGET WADE (1883-1956)

By Jonathan Howard



Charles Paget Wade (1883-1956) was a collector, craftsman, architect, and illustrator who divided his time between England and St Kitts.

As a teenager, Wade's paternal grandfather, Solomon Abraham Wade (1806-1881), moved with his family from St Martin to St. Kitts. Solomon set himself up as a merchant and by the early 1860s had built a thriving business with four stores on St Kitts. Initially it was as S. A. Wade & Co and then, with a trusted employee, Samuel Abbott, he formed the partnership of Wade & Abbott. Through his business as a supplier and increasingly as an agent for the island 'plantocracy' Solomon gained knowledge which, with his profits, he used independent of Wade and Abbott to diversify and acquire sugar cane plantations here, and in Nevis and Montserrat. His success established the fortune of the family into which Charles Wade was later born. Between 1844 and 1855 Solomon had six

children with his black housekeeper, Mary James (1817-1914). They finally married in January 1855. After the baptism of his youngest child, Edwin Somerset Wade, in St Kitts in 1856 Solomon and Mary moved the family to England, though he continued to spend the majority of each year in St Kitts. He retired to England on a more permanent basis in the early 1870s after his eldest son Henry Charles Wade was appointed attorney for the localised management of the family interests in the islands, within a few years of coming of age in 1865. A younger son Edwin also later returned to St Kitts to manage one of the estates, Douglas.

Paget Augustus Wade (1849-1911), Charles's father, the third eldest of Solomon's six children, remained in England after reaching his majority to establish himself as a merchant in London, in the partnership of Sendall & Wade. This company had been formed to manage the exportation to foreign markets of the sugar produced by Neville Sendall and Paget's father and brothers' estates in St Kitts, Nevis and Montserrat. In 1879, in recognition of work for the family, Solomon gave Paget enough money to purchase the plantations of Mansion and Woodleys (which were later known as 'Upper' and 'Lower' Mansion) for himself. This did not prompt a permanent move to St Kitts; Paget remained a merchant in London, returning to St Kitts for long periods of time each year to inspect Mansion. However, after the death of his father in 1881 and older brother Henry in 1882, Paget took overall responsibility for the Wade family plantations from England. At this time the family estates numbered twelve on St Kitts, Nevis and Montserrat.

In 1882 Paget married Amy Blanche Spencer (1858-1943) in England. The Wade family had been acquainted with the Spencer family since at least 1866. Charles Paget Wade was born to them at 'Arthog' (later called Birchlands) in Scott's Lane, Shortlands, Beckenham, Kent, England on 13 February, 1883. There followed two sisters, Mary Constance Wade born 10th February 1884 and Olive Muriel Wade born 19th February 1885. Paget continued to make his annual visit to St Kitts, sometimes with his wife. They would stay at Mansion or the White House, next to the Douglas Estate. Charles was a very imaginative and self-contained little boy, which stood him in good stead when in 1889 he was sent to live with 'Grannie Spencer' at 15 Wellesley Road, Great Yarmouth, to allow his attendance at Miss Haddon's Little School. Having no young companions at home and finding no stimulation and friendship in his grandmother, Wade's creativity and imagination took refuge in characters, objects and scenes found along the quayside and in town, as well as in 'old family relics of interest and value' half-

hidden in the house (many of which are now housed at Snowhill Manor, Gloucestershire). Of particular significance to him was a Cantonese shrine cabinet which was only opened on Sundays. This 'Heavenly Palace of faraway Cathay' ignited his passion for collecting and greatly influenced the interiors he would later create at Snowhill. From 1893 Wade boarded in Eastbourne, first briefly at Timsbury School, then at St Andrews until 1900. His 'chief joy' was carpentry; the only other lesson he enjoyed was drawing. Later in life he was to call schools 'Graveyards of Imagination', and 'Factories of Boredom'. It appears that Wade made his first visit to St Kitts in 1900.

In 1901 Wade was indentured to the diocesan architect Edward Fernley Bisshopp in Ipswich. Here was a rich and varied collection of buildings to study and sketch, and Wade spent many happy hours at the harbour, markets, and antique shops. He found Bisshopp an uninspiring architect, though, and was grateful when H. Munro Cautley joined the practice. Against the conditions of his indenture to Bisshopp Wade was drawn to the theatre, attending historical dramas at the Ipswich Lyceum and, later, in London. Photographic portraits of Wade during this period reveal the influence of the theatre. Many show him in period costume from his own growing collection, in poses and settings reminiscent of postcards depicting theatre stars he saw perform, such as Sir Henry Irving, Sir John Martin-Harvey and Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson. He was to retain a page boy hair cut and an eccentric appearance for the rest of his life.

In May 1907 Wade qualified as an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects and began searching for a post elsewhere. The architect William Flockhart, unable to offer him a position, nonetheless praised the 'lively and delightful architectural imagination' (Letter, 12 November 1907) his portfolio revealed. Around this time he completed an unpublished illustrated essay entitled *The Country Cottage and its Garden* and for the garden design Wade won second prize in a competition run by the influential arts and crafts journal *The Studio*. In the same year he was taken on as an assistant to Raymond Unwin of Parker and Unwin, who were working on the Hampstead Garden Suburb in London. Wade's work in the suburb included the design of the tiled arch of Twitten Passage, Asmunds Place, No. 3 Rotherwick Road, the Great Wall, and the Club House. Unwin recognized that Wade was as much an artist as an architect, and had him illustrate his seminal book *Town Planning in Practice* (1909).

In 1908 Wade's two surviving Uncles, Edwin and Ethelbert Wade, died within a week of each other and left his father Paget solely responsible for the Wade businesses on behalf of his mother, sisters, sister-in-law and his own family. He appears to have been well thought of as both a businessman and an employer. Then, in late December 1911 Paget died in St.Kitts and Wade inherited the Mansion estate as his personal property. Wade's mother, Amy, took overall control of the Wade businesses, having bought out the business interest of other family members. She continued to manage in the style of her late husband, visiting St Kitts annually and corresponding with the estate managers in the islands. Wade had already resigned from Parker and Unwin to concentrate on his new career as an artist and illustrator, but as a result of the death of his father he was increasingly drawn into the family business in support of his mother. He was still able to devote much more of his time to art and particularly illustrating. It was during this period that he produced more than ninety pen and ink illustrations for Mary Stratton's *Bruges: A Record and an Impression* (1914). The following year saw the publication of his friend Kate Murray's *The Spirit of the House* (1915), an account of an imaginary house called Caldicott Court, for which Wade supplied pen and ink drawings and paintings. Two years later he was serving in the Royal Engineers Field Company as a Sapper, sketching and painting French buildings, as well as imaginary scenes, to 'escape from the most terrible surroundings in the midst of all the horrors of war' (*Notebooks*, Vol 29, 1954, p.129). While posted as Orderly Room Clerk near Arras, the style in which he furnished the orderly room with pictures and books and 'a pleasing cover for his bunk' was 'far too comfortable for a war', his officer felt.

While serving in France Wade came across an issue of *Country Life* advertising the sale of Snowhill Manor, an extended sixteenth-century Cotswold manor house. He was on the lookout for a suitable property to

house his ever-increasing craftsmanship collection, which had begun at the age of seven and was now chiefly stored in his bedroom at Red House at Yoxford, Suffolk, the Wades' family home in England since 1896. Visiting Snowhill for the first time in February 1919 he found that it 'was in the most deplorable state of ruin and neglect, but had not been spoilt with modern additions'. He purchased the property and spent three years restoring it, with up to twenty-eight men working and living there at a time. He designed and crafted many of the internal features of the Manor himself. For Wade, the relationship between a house and its garden was vitally important – at Snowhill, the garden was an extension of the house, 'a series of outdoor rooms'. He



worked on its design with M. H. Baillie-Scott, whose works and writings had influenced him greatly and whom he had been acquainted with when living and working in the Hampstead Garden Suburb.

### SNOWHILL MANOR

From the outset Wade regarded the manor house as a home for his collection, rather than himself. He moved into the Priest's House, a small cottage beside the Manor, and divided his time between hunting for artefacts (often with friends and fellow collectors, Fred Hart and Sir Albert Richardson), repairing and restoring objects

in his workshop, and arranging them in the Manor. Although a significant proportion of his collection was exotic, most pieces were acquired in England, including seven suits of Samurai armour from a tiny shop in Cheltenham. The collection encompassed such diverse objects as spinning wheels, clocks, kitchen utensils, musical instruments, bicycles, samplers, model ships, masks, toys, pipes, mouse-traps, tapestries, manuscripts, locks and keys, rush lights, and reliquaries. The guiding principles that unified the collection were good design, colour and workmanship – not rarity or value. He set out to create a total environment, to 'find things that would make an attractive series of rooms pictorially, not to form a museum'.

Wade never saw his collection as a merely private experience and much of his pleasure was in seeing visitors' responses to it as he guided them around the house and garden. He had built a very detailed model village in 1907 to entertain Kate Murray's daughter, and now transformed this into a fishing village set around a pond, called Wolf's Cove, which he would dress with model ships, working steam train and canal system when visitors came. One of his most frequent guests was Albert Richardson (later knighted), who brought carloads of visitors. The evenings that followed were often spent by the fireside watching Richardson's lively one-man enactments of various Georgian scenes. Other notable visitors to Snowhill included F. L. Griggs and Graham Greene, who described Wade in vivid terms in *A Sort of Life* (c.1930). J. B. Priestley did likewise in *An English Journey* (1934), as well as writing on Wolf's Cove in *Architectural Review* in 1932. In 1935 John Buchan drove Virginia Woolf forty miles to see Snowhill, as he felt that one could not visit anywhere more unusual. She later complained that she had missed her train because Wade could not tell her the time accurately; although he had more than a hundred timepieces they were all set to different times so that they could be heard to chime and strike individually. In that year Snowhill received 1,357 visitors. Queen Mary visited in 1937 and remarked that Wade was the most remarkable part of the collection.

During the 1920s and 1930s Wade and his mother and sisters, together or separately, were regular visitors to St Kitts. Wade stayed at Mansion, his country estate, or the White House, the town house where his mother stayed. By this time the Wade family had consolidated their assets, owning Canada, College, Douglas, Hermitage, Spooner's, Whites (all purchased in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) and Cunningham (purchased in the 1930s), and the estates in Montserrat. Wade oversaw the reconstruction of the buildings and the installation of state-

of-the-art machinery at Spooner's Cotton Ginney, which had been destroyed by fire in 1938. As Wade grew older he began to look to the future. In 1938 the English National Trust agreed in principle to accept Snowhill Manor and collection at a time of his choosing. Reassured as to its future, he doubled the size of the collection between 1938 and 1946 to well over 20,000 objects of craftsmanship. In 1944, with others in mind, he began to compile an illustrated inventory of all the objects in Snowhill Manor together with more than thirty illustrated notebooks which included guides to the manor and gardens, poetry, childhood memories, and thoughts on architecture. The following year he wrote *Days Far Away*, a memoir. Many of his handwritten notebooks were typed up by Emily Stott, the wife of Douglas Stott, who had been an estate manager and was later Managing Director of Wade Plantations Limited. During the Second World War Wade and his mother could not make their annual visit to St Kitts and relied heavily on the estate managers. After his mother's death Wade became managing director of what was to become Wade Plantations Limited.

Up until now Wade, like his two sisters, had not married, but he eventually married Mary McEwan Gore Graham (1902-1999) on 5 September 1946 at the Cheltenham Registry Office, after meeting her the previous year. In 1947 Wade, with his wife, made his first visit to St Kitts since before the war. Mary then made a long visit by herself in 1948 and they returned together to St Kitts in 1949. By this time Wade had decided to retire to St Kitts permanently and make the White House his home. By 1951, when he handed Snowhill Manor over to the National Trust, he was living in St. Kitts permanently. He returned to Snowhill each summer to stay at the Manor and add to the collection. In early 1956 he left St Kitts for a tour of Europe en route to his annual visit to England. He was unwell during the trip and grew steadily worse during his stay in England. He was eventually hospitalised and died at Evesham Hospital on 28 June 1956. He was buried in the graveyard of the church in the village of Snowhill. Mary Wade returned to St Kitts and lived at the White House until the late 1960s when she went back to live in Broadway, England close to Snowhill. She died at the age of 96 in 1999.

I am a former House Steward of Snowhill Manor, preparing a biography of Charles Paget Wade for publication by the English National Trust. I visited St Kitts for a fortnight in November 2011 to undertake local research, when I was fortunate to find valuable material, both in documentary archives, and through personal interviews. I would be most grateful to hear from any individual or organisation with information, letters, photographs, or recollections that might shed light on members of the Wade family (particularly Charles or his wife, Mary Graham) or on their property and business interests. Please contact me by email: [crowcrag@xtra.co.nz](mailto:crowcrag@xtra.co.nz).

(For more information on Snowhill Manor, log onto website: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/snowhill-manor/>)