

## SECRETARIES OF THE GUILD OF ST GEORGE

James S. Dearden

When, in 2014, Cedric Quayle suggested that he and I should compile a list of Secretaries to the Guild, we saw no reason why it shouldn't be ready to offer to the Editor of *The Companion* for the 2015 edition. How wrong we were. The years that we could remember—Cedric from 1969 and myself from 1979—were relatively straightforward. All we had to do was to check what we actually remembered. But we had no idea how complex the middle years of the Guild's history would be, and even worse, how almost impenetrable the early years would be.

Mark Frost has drawn attention to the fact that man-management was not one of Ruskin's greatest abilities.[1] Ruskin had made it clear that those who gave real estate to the Guild continued to be responsible for its management. Ruskin's own management

of the Guild's administration must have caused many difficulties for those who helped him!

The genesis of the Guild was announced in January 1871 in Ruskin's first Letter to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain, *Fors Clavigera*. [2] Having devoted the first few pages of the Letter to deploring the state of the nation, Ruskin wrote: 'For my own part, I will put up with this state of things, passively, not an hour longer'. He said that he would devote part of his income to his attempt to make England a better and happier place, and he hoped that others would join him in his crusade. 'St George's Fund' was established to hold gifts of money or land, and in *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 9 (September 1871), [3] Ruskin announced that his friends, Sir Thomas Acland and the Rt. Hon. William Cowper-Temple, had agreed to become Trustees. In announcing their appointment, Ruskin explained that their sole function was to take

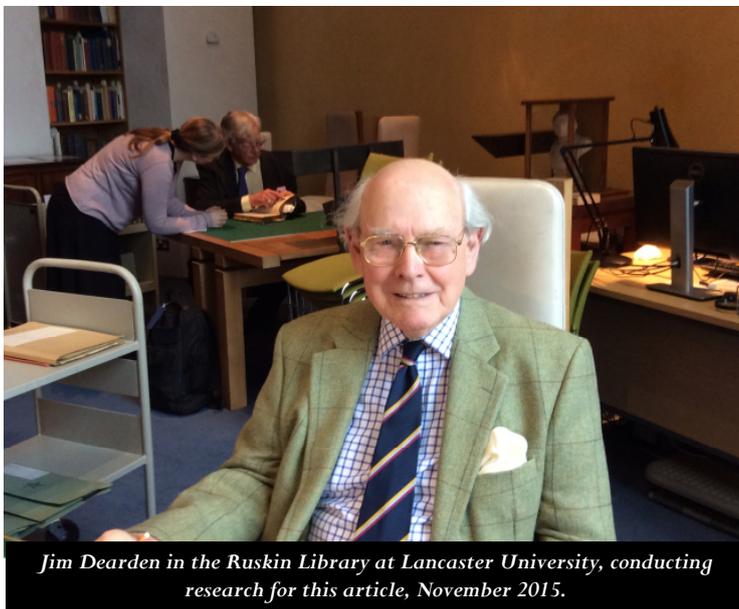
charge of money and land given to St George's Fund, but he also made it clear that they were to have no control over how funds were to be used or spent.

July 1875 a draft Constitution was finally arrived at. A few of Ruskin's friends, and some others, began to subscribe to the Fund, and at the end of the December 1873 *Fors* letter, Ruskin published the first accounts which gave details of subscriptions to the end of the year, a total of £236 13s 0d. [4]

The administration of the Fund added enormously to the strain of Ruskin's already busy life. In November 1875 William Walker, manager of the Chancery Lane Branch of the Union Bank of London, agreed to accept the post of Honorary Accountant to the Fund. His accounts to the end of 1875 were included in the March 1876 Letter of *Fors*. [5] Egbert Rydings, who had established a woollen mill at Laxey on the Isle of Man, began to correspond with Ruskin in 1875 about his books, and in March of the following year, he wrote to Ruskin pointing out some errors in the published accounts. A few days later he wrote again, applying to become a Companion of the Guild, [6] and in the following year, he wrote to Ruskin offering his services to help with the accounts.

So now the Guild had two accountants, Walker and Rydings. It is clear that some cheques for the Guild were being sent to Laxey, others to Chancery Lane, and others to Ruskin himself. In the case of the latter, some were re-directed to the Guild accounts and others Ruskin paid directly into his own account to help defray his own expenses on behalf of the Guild!

Meanwhile, in 1875, Ruskin had visited Sheffield and had determined to establish the Guild museum there. In Sheffield again in the following year, Ruskin met a group of



Jim Dearden in the Ruskin Library at Lancaster University, conducting research for this article, November 2015.

men who were interested in his ideas for the Guild and, as a result of the meeting, the Guild bought a small farm at Totley where the men set up a commune. The Trustees of the Guild, Acland and Cowper-Temple, disapproved of the spending of the Guild's money on this venture, and they resigned. George Baker of Birmingham, who had given the Guild seven acres of land at Bewdley in 1871, eventually became a new Trustee, as did Quartus Talbot, whose mother, Fanny, had given some properties at Barmouth, Wales, to the Guild.

Meanwhile, help was at hand in the person of Robert Somervell whose family had established the successful firm of K Shoes in Kendal. In his autobiography,[7] Somervell records that he first fell under Ruskin's spell in about 1872 (when he was about twenty years old) as he read Ruskin's *Political Economy of Art*. Somervell 'set about buying more of Ruskin's works ... He opened my eyes to see, both in the world of Nature and in the world of Art ... as I had never seen before'.[8]

It is not clear when the two men first met. Somervell became involved in the question of railways in the Lake District and in 1875 or '76 he issued a pamphlet, *A Protest against the Extension of Railways in the Lake District*, to which Ruskin contributed the Preface. The Ruskin-Somervell Correspondence in the Ruskin Library at Lancaster University begins with a letter from Ruskin dated May 31st 1876 in which Ruskin says, 'Well, but you can help me infinitely, if you have any time to spare. I will put you in communication with the other Companions, and with their help you can answer all general questions about what we are ... I feel the need of this help more and more every day'. And on 7 June, Ruskin wrote, 'I am grateful for your letter saying you can help me ... I hope you and a few other Companions will be able to manage the Company's affairs with only a question or two to me now and then.'[9]

At this time Ruskin was frustrated by the considerable pressure under which he found himself. The Guild was not yet properly constituted and this work was in the hands of solicitors. Because of this, the Guild as such could not yet become the owner of the land given by Mrs Talbot; and there was also the dispute with the Trustees over the Totley land purchase. One of the commune's projects was to make boots and shoes, and Ruskin had suggested to Henry Swan, Curator of the Guild's museum at Walkley, that Somervell might be able to give some advice.[10]

Ruskin's frustration is evident in a letter written on 25 August 1876 to Somervell from Geneva: 'You and the other Companions must now manage all such business for me ... and I will not be fretted with the law business, so if the Companions can't manage it themselves, they must let it alone for the present.'

Meanwhile, Somervell had become involved in the vexed question of Thirlmere becoming enlarged as a reservoir and his pamphlet, *Water for Manchester from Thirlmere*, was distributed with *Fors Clavigera* in 1877.

Finally, by October 1878, the lawyers had completed the Guild's Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association. Somervell was a signatory to both documents.



Robert Somervell (detail from a family photograph) 1886.

In the final letter of the correspondence at Lancaster, on March 14th 1879, Ruskin wrote to Somervell:

Please, I want you to be treasurer to St G.—My own secretary can be secretary—(or almost any trained clerk) but for Treasurer, I must have someone established in business and known to be upright in it and safe—and I should like you please—if you don't mind. And if possible will you go to this meeting at Birmingham on the 28th[?] I can't and am afraid of there not being power enough to get the work done. Ever your grateful J. Ruskin.

It seems possible that there was confusion over the dates! The first Annual General Meeting of the Guild was held at the Queen's Hotel in Birmingham on 21st February 1879. Somervell's name is not included among the nineteen Companions who attended.

At this meeting, the businesslike George Baker took the chair and wrote the minutes. Among the items of formal business transacted was the election of Ruskin as



Queens Hotel, Birmingham, venue for the first Guild AGM.

'Life Long Master of the Guild'; Egbert Rydings and William Walker were appointed 'Auditors of the Guild' and Robert Somervell 'was requested to act as the Hon. Secretary to the Guild pro tem.' However, there was an Extraordinary General Meeting less than a month later when it was resolved that Somervell be appointed Treasurer and the Master was empowered to appoint a Secretary at a fee of not more than £100 per year. From this, one must assume that Somervell had turned down the original request to act as Secretary.

Robert Somervell, who had left school at the age of fifteen in 1867 to work in the family business, went up to Cambridge in 1878. However, he returned to the company for a couple of years before going back to Cambridge to take his degree. Following his final term at Cambridge, Somervell married and settled in Liverpool where he had been appointed to teach in a school. He stayed there until 1887 when he left to take up an appointment as a Tutor at Harrow (to Winston Churchill, among many others). He later became a Housemaster at Harrow, and eventually Bursar.

I can only assume that, on embarking upon his teaching career, Somervell's interest in the Guild lapsed, probably due to other pressures.

I can find no further references to him either as Secretary or Treasurer to the Guild. When he lived in Liverpool there was an active Ruskin Society in the city, but I have found no evidence to suggest that he was a member, and there is no evidence that he took any part in the activities of the Mulberry Cottage group of Ruskin enthusiasts associated with the Society.

Somervell's name is included in the list of Companions printed in the December 1883 letter of *Fors*. [11] He is also on the list of Companions in the 1884 Trustees' Report. [12] But, perhaps significantly, his name is not among those Companions of the Guild listed in the 1899 Birthday Address to Ruskin.

I think perhaps George Baker, who was running the Guild during Ruskin's incapacity, decided to manage by employing his own secretary on Guild work.

The next slightly ambiguous reference to a secretary that I have found is in the 1899 Birthday Address to Ruskin. Under the Guild listing, William White appears as 'Honorary Secretary to the Joint Committees and Curator of the Ruskin Museum'.

White had become the Curator of the Ruskin Museum at Meersbrook Park in 1890. Perhaps the 'Joint Committees' were the Guild and the Museum's committee. He was not liked at Brantwood and the arrangements for the delivery of the 1899 Birthday Address had originally received a frosty reception at Brantwood because it was thought that the Address was to be delivered by White.[13] Had he been secretary to the Guild, this would have been a logical assumption.

William White was apparently at cross-purposes with the city's Museum Committee and in 1899 he resigned as Curator. Had he also been the Guild's secretary, he would have given up this post at the same time. After all of the changes, stability came to the secretaryship when, on 28th October 1901, William Wardle was elected to the post. He was one of the group of dedicated Ruskinians who lived in Liverpool and whose activities centred on Mulberry Cottage. A founder-member of the Ruskin Society of Liverpool, Wardle, in company with J. Howard Whitehouse, founder-member and secretary of the Ruskin Society of Birmingham, took to Brantwood the National Address of Congratulation on Ruskin's 80th birthday in 1899. They both met Ruskin on that occasion. It is unclear when Wardle became a Companion, but he appears to have been admitted during Ruskin's time as Master. Whitehouse was admitted by Ruskin's successor, George Baker.

William Wardle continued as Secretary until September 1925. In June 1908, he was joined as Secretary by another of the band of Liverpool Ruskinians, Thomas Harley. The Harleys had moved from Liverpool and settled in Bewdley in 1889. In 1924 Wardle was joined by John Cuthbert Quayle. Letters held by his nephew, Cedric, show that Cuthbert had originally turned down the Master's invitation to become Secretary, but after a second, more firmly worded, letter, he agreed. In the following year William Wardle died, having served the Guild as Secretary for twenty-four years. Cuthbert Quayle seems to have retired in 1925. Both were succeeded by yet another Liverpool Ruskinian, Harrison Ruskin Fowler. Fowler served for three

years until the whole structure of the Guild's administration changed. Perhaps he had only looked on his appointment as short-term.

The Master, who was also elected in 1925, was Hugh Fairfax-Cholmeley. When Fowler resigned as Secretary, it was the Master's responsibility to find a replacement. In this same year there had been an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Guild to confirm some changes to the Articles and Memorandum of Association and the minutes reveal that a Miss A. Churton was acting as Secretary. There were further discussions regarding the secretaryship at the Annual General Meeting in 1926. Discussions continued a year later when Miss Churton was still recorded as Secretary. At the 1928 AGM there was a feeling that the Secretary ought to be a Companion, but as the Master pointed out, volunteers had been sought 'but hitherto no help had been forthcoming for such services'.

It was at the 1928 AGM that the Master announced that the future secretariat of the Guild would be based in London, at Le Play House. At this meeting, Miss Spear (Secretary at the Le Play House organization) acted as Secretary.

During a discussion at the 1927 AGM, on the future policy of the Guild, J. E. Phythian, a leading member of the Ruskin Society of Manchester who had been active in the arrangements for the great 1904 Ruskin Exhibition in that city, said that 'the Guild should co-operate with Associations having similar objects to the Guild' and he had suggested co-operating with the Le Play House organisation. At this time Le Play House was directed by Alexander Farquharson.

He had come into contact with people like Patrick Geddes and Victor Branford, who were carrying on the work of the once-flourishing Sociological Society. Branford and Geddes were much interested in the work of the French sociologist, Frédéric Le Play, and from the Branford-Farquharson association grew the Institute of Sociology with its headquarters at Le Play House. Victor Branford (d.1923) in fact became a Companion of the Guild during Fairfax-Cholmeley's Mastership, and his signature on the Roll was witnessed by both the Master and Farquharson. Farquharson himself did not become a Companion until 1946, although both he and his wife, Dorothy, were listed as 'Associates' in 1935-6 and 1934-5 respectively. Alexander Farquharson was elected Master of the Guild in 1951. He had been very much involved in the running of the Guild since 1928 although people at Le Play House, such as Miss Churton and Miss Spear, both secretaries there, must have carried out

most of the day-to-day administration.

During its years as the secretariat, Le Play House changed its geographical location several times. In the beginning it was at 65 Belgrave Road, Westminster, moving in 1932 to 35 Gordon Square, London WC1. During the War, the establishment moved out of London, first to Albert Road, Malvern, in 1939, and from 1945 to Ledbury.

Although he was Master for less than three years, Farquharson, as Director of the Institute of Sociology, was drawn into the Guild's work and he did much in its service. He had a deeply Ruskinian mind, sharing Ruskin's concern for spiritual well-being, physical health and cultural life, and considering them indivisible. Those who saw Farquharson at work in the conferences organised by the Institute were able to observe his power of bringing together people of widely differing backgrounds and making them talk freely of their common concerns.

By the early 1950s, Farquharson was not a well man and at the 1952-3 AGM, Bernard Wardle, William's son, and an archivist by profession, was authorised to become Acting Master.

Many changes in the Guild's arrangements were soon to take place. Sheffield Corporation found itself no longer able to make Meersbrook available for the Guild's museum, and the bulk of the Collection was put into storage which was not acceptable to the Guild. Various possible new locations were examined, including Edinburgh University and Brantwood.

Farquharson knew H. A. Hodges, Professor of Philosophy at Reading University. They shared a keen interest in both Ruskin and the Institute of Sociology. After much negotiating, the Collection was moved to Reading and, following Farquharson's retirement as Master in 1953, Professor Hodges became Master of the Guild.

The closure of the Le Play House organisation led to the need for a new Secretary, and in 1954 Bernard Wardle, having given up the Acting Mastership, was appointed Secretary, an office which he filled until 1976.

It was during Bernard Wardle's secretaryship that the re-structuring of the Guild took place, a requirement of the Companies' Acts of 1948 and 1967. From its inception, the Guild had been run by the Master with the help of the Secretary. Additionally, there had been (usually) two trustees to care for the Guild's money, but not to have control over its spending. The two original trustees had resigned as a matter of principle over the Totley purchase. As part of the re-structuring, a Board of Directors was established, chaired



Secretaries Cedric Quayle and Norman Hobbs.

by the Master, and having a formal Company Secretary. The new arrangement was approved at an Extraordinary General Meeting on 31 October 1970.

Bernard Wardle continued as Company Secretary until he retired in September 1976. For a year he was replaced by R. H. Giddings who was the Bursar at Reading University. But the situation at Reading was not a happy one, and although the Collection was more or less brought together on one site in the University by the next Master, Professor Cyril Tyler, at the end of 1977, both Master and Secretary resigned.

By happy chance, J. Peter Cordery, who had been the Guild's accountant from 1950 until his retirement at about this time (1977), agreed to take over the role of Secretary.

Being a good accountant, Peter Cordery was a stickler for accuracy. At Directors' meetings, he would carefully listen to agenda items being discussed and at the end of each item he would turn to the Master and ask, 'Now what would you like me to record?'—and he wrote the next minute there and then. Peter continued in the role of Secretary until he died suddenly in 1992.

Anthony Harris, who was Master at that time, asked Cedric Quayle if he would take on the role of secretary and the appointment was confirmed at the AGM later that year. Cedric was following in the footsteps of his uncle, Cuthbert Quayle.

Cedric had been appointed a Director in 1976, but he resigned from the board when he was formally appointed Secretary. For the next fifteen years, he carried out his duties with great

efficiency, kindness and understanding.

The Annual General Meeting in 2006 was held in the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge. During the morning the Museum's Director showed us all the Turner watercolours which Ruskin had given to the University and spoke about them. In the afternoon Professor Sam Smiles delivered the annual Ruskin Lecture on Ruskin and Cambridge. The usual Directors' meeting preceded the AGM on the Friday and of course it was necessary for us to arrive at Cambridge on the previous day. It was while Cedric and I were having tea on the Thursday afternoon that he broke the news to me that he intended retiring as Secretary for various family reasons. During my Mastership, Cedric had been a tremendous help. We spoke on the telephone several times each week and after fifteen years as Secretary, his retirement in 2007 was a great loss. I immediately proposed his re-election as a Director.

As Master it fell to me to find 'a new Cedric'. Looking through the Roll of Companions I spotted three people who I thought might be able to take on the role, but in the event, they were already heavily committed, and turned down my request.

Then I thought of Norman Hobbs. He was an Old Bembridgian, had been a member of my sixth-form Printing class at Bembridge, I think had been the Secretary of the Old Bembridgians Association and, in fact, was the Best Man at my daughter's wedding in School Chapel. I knew that Norman had been the Secretary to a small company working in the aviation industry. He had retired from that and was now working part-time to enable him to spend more time at home with his elderly mother. Like me, he lived in Bembridge—in fact, my garage abuts the end of his garden, but it is nearly ten minutes' walk from door to door!

Norman decided that he would like to take on the role of Guild Secretary but before his first meeting he had an accident, damaging a leg. Following this, he decided to give up working on the mainland to devote himself to his home and the Guild. During his years as Secretary we met several times each week to discuss Guild business. He served the Guild well for five years before finally deciding to retire.

By now Clive Wilmer had become Master and it fell to him to find a new Secretary. His brilliant choice was Stuart Eagles, a foremost Ruskin scholar of his generation. Stuart took on the role in 2012; all Companions will know the success he made of his appointment, and some will comprehend the huge amount of work he undertook for the Guild as its operations and influence have expanded. The Guild's administrative

structure was recently re-arranged to keep pace with the growth of the organisation, and the title of Secretary has been abolished, so this article is complete an account of the Guild secretaryship as it can be. A new Administrator, Martin Green, has taken on the roles associated with the company secretary, and Stuart Eagles continues to offer his services as the Guild's Communications Officer, responsible among other things for correspondence with Companions, Associates and the wider public, editing and designing publicity material, including the website, social media and this magazine.

*I am enormously grateful to both Cedric Quayle and Mike Pye, without whose help it would not have been possible to prepare this paper.*

#### NOTES

1. M. Frost: *The Lost Companions and John Ruskin's Guild of St George*, 2011.
- 2..27.11ff. (All references in this form are to the Library Edition of Ruskin's *Works* (volume no. page number) – see note, inside front cover of this magazine.
3. 28.159
4. 27.[678]
5. 28.557-60
6. Sue King, *A Companion's Story* (2012) pp.18ff.
7. Robert Somervell, *Chapters of Autobiography*, edited by his sons (1935).
8. Somervell, op. cit. p. 44.
9. Ruskin Library, Lancaster University, RF L114.
10. Mark Frost, op. cit., p. 138.
11. 29.477.
12. 30.26.
13. James S. Dearden, 'The Ruskin Galleries at Bembridge School, Isle of Wight' in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, vol. 51, no. 2 (Spring 1969) p. 311.

See overleaf for a table listing all the Secretaries of the Guild identified in this article.

#### RIP DR MICHAEL HUDSON

Formerly a lecturer at the Department of Chemistry, University of Reading. Dr Michael Hudson became a Companion of the Guild in 1974, under Master Prof Cyril Tyler.



### Secretaries to The Guild of St George

William Walker	November 1875
Egbert Rydings	1876
Robert Somervell	Acting, May 31 1876
Robert Somervell	' <i>pro tem</i> ' Feb 21 1879*
? William White	1890-99
William Wardle	October 28 1901
William Wardle & Thomas Harley	June 12 1908
William Wardle & J.C.Quayle	1924-25
Edith Hope Scott	1924 (assistant)
Harrison Ruskin Fowler	1925
Miss A. Churton	1926
Institute of Sociology	1928
(Miss Spear & Miss Wrigley)	(from 1932)
Bernard Wardle	1953
R.H.Giddings	1976
J.Peter Cordery	1977
Cedric Quayle	1992
Norman Hobbs	2007
Stuart Eagles	2012

\* perhaps only for one month.