



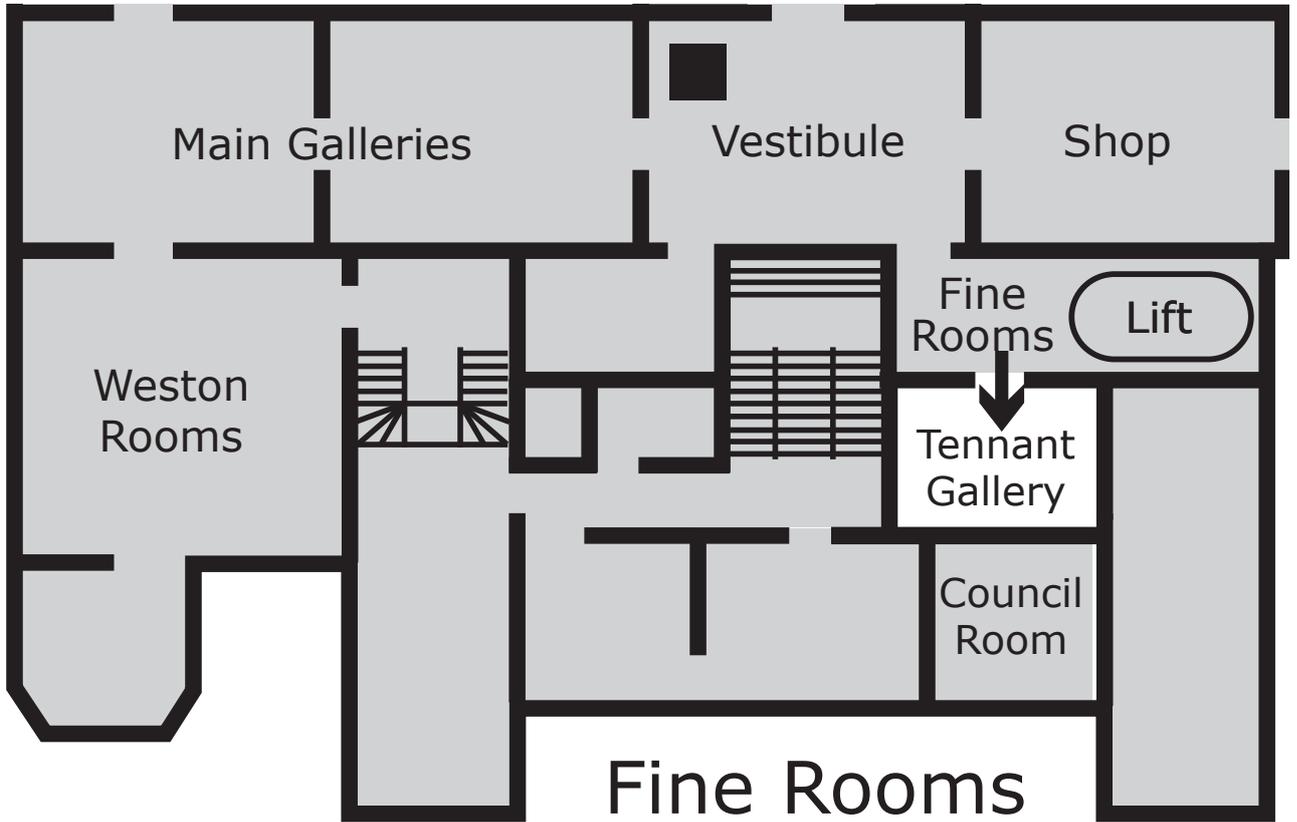
Large
Print

Second Nature

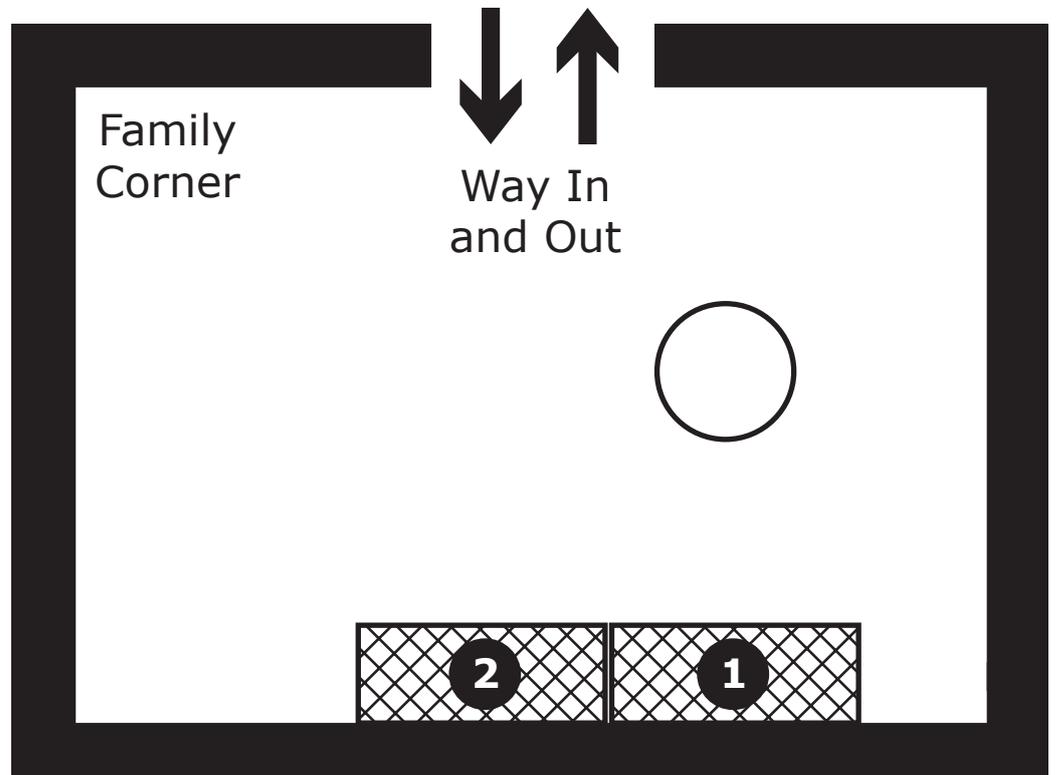
The Art of Charles Tunncliffe RA

Tennant Gallery

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Second Nature: The Art of Charles Tunnickliffe RA

Tennant Gallery

11 July – 8 October 2017

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Exhibition guide for younger visitors - blue labels

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Second Nature: The Prints of Charles Tunnickliffe RA

Charles Tunnickliffe (1901-1979) was Britain's foremost twentieth-century wildlife artist. He was renowned for his decorative watercolours of birds that he exhibited annually at the Royal Academy of Arts.

Today, Tunnickliffe is less widely known as a printmaker. He came to prominence as an etcher in the late 1920s. It was as a printmaker member he was elected Royal Academician.

For most of his subjects, Tunnickliffe drew on his experience of growing up and working on a farm near Macclesfield in Cheshire. A scholarship made it possible for him to study at the Royal College of Art in London yet the city never featured in his work.

“Farm work was never-ending”, Tunnickliffe wrote about his youth. “Within a radius of three or four miles”, he gained “an intimate knowledge of nearly every square yard of ground.”

Observational studies prepared Tunnickliffe for his animal portraits. His work captures the distinct qualities and characteristic behaviours of animals.

Tunnickliffe also believed that traditional farming methods were “worthy to be set down on paper”. Many of them were disappearing in his lifetime.

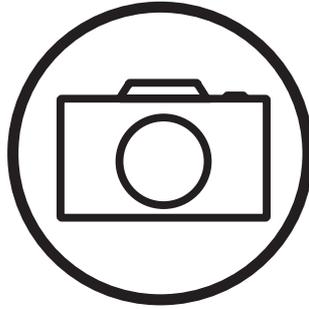
His etchings of farm labour are mostly unsentimental and do not shy away from the harsh realities of farm life. Such subjects differ from the nostalgic portrayals of rural England by some of his contemporaries.

The market for fine prints collapsed in the late 1920s at the onset of a worldwide financial crisis. Tunncliffe found work in book illustration and advertising.

Since the mid-1930s, Tunncliffe's pictures have been appreciated mainly second-hand: as reproductions in books, magazines and on calendars, as collectible cards and as decorations on biscuit tins.

The wood engravings he produced for novels such as 'Tarka the Otter' are rarely seen independently from the texts they serve. Meanwhile, Tunncliffe's earlier etchings are largely forgotten.

This display shows the range of his work in various media and reintroduces a printmaker whose work is better known than his name.



You are welcome to take pictures in the exhibition, but please do not use flash.

SMARTIFY

Download the Smartify app to find out about more about Charles Tunncliffe's life and the works in this display:

- 1** Go to the Apple or Android app store to download Smartify
- 2** Open the app and hold your phone camera up to the artworks to 'scan' them
- 3** Learn about Tunncliffe's work now, or save for later

Publication

'Charles Tunncliffe, Prints:

A Catalogue Raisonné' is available from the RA Shop and online at shop.royalacademy.org.uk, priced at £35.

Film

'How to make a wood engraving, with Anne Desmet RA'

Running time: 6:24

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Covey

Solway Company

Watercolours, 1944

“Nature is a master pattern maker,” Tunnickliffe wrote. Nature was capable of designs “far more wonderful than anything that I could have invented”.

Yet design choice was important to Tunnickliffe. In works like these, he did not simply copy nature.

Tunnickliffe paid careful attention to patterns, textures, colour and light. He also chose flattened forms rather than an illusionistic technique. This demonstrates Tunnickliffe’s admiration for Chinese and Persian painting as well as Japanese printmaking.

Tunncliffe referred to his paintings as “decorations for modern rooms. Those are the places they are going into, I am pleased to say. Hardly any go into galleries; they are bought privately.”

These three watercolours were, however, bought by the Royal Academy for its collection from the Summer Exhibition in 1944.

Royal Academy of Arts

Harvesters

Etching, 1925

Etchings like this draw on the work that Tunncliffe carried out as a young man. When his father determined that the crop was right for harvesting and the weather was favourable, there followed an intense period of activity on the family farm.

Haymaking was a joint effort of farmers, their relatives and farmhands. In this print, the labourers lead two dapple-grey Percheron horses back to the farm after a day's work.

The labourers were often rewarded with a traditional lunch of Cheshire cheese and bread baked by Tunnicliffe's mother. Tunnicliffe's father celebrated the harvest by opening a cask of beer.

Stuart Southall Collection

To the Slaughter

Etching, 1925

The Tunnicliffes were dairy farmers, but they also bred pigs. Unless the pigs were sold, they were fattened on kitchen slops and slaughtered. There was no place for sentimentality on the farm. There is little in Tunnicliffe's etchings.

In this scene, Tunnicliffe's father drags a protesting pig to its death.

Young Charles pushes the beast towards the block while the butcher places a pail under the table to collect the blood after the throat has been cut. Charles's sister Dorothy stands in the doorway.

"How they would struggle!", Tunnicliffe remembered.

Stuart Southall Collection

The Spotted Sow

Etching, 1928

This sow is a Wessex Saddleback, the name deriving from its piebald markings. This breed is also distinguished by its heavy gait, the dished profile of its snout, and large floppy ears that fall over the eyes.

In 'How to Draw Farm Animals', Tunnickliffe points out that the common boar - once described as "clumsy and disgusting", "gluttonous and excessive" - had, over 150 years of selection, become the Large White, Wessex Saddleback or Tamworth Boar and each fulfilled a particular purpose.

No longer "a despised animal", Tunnickliffe continues, the boar has a "strong and virile beauty," and is a "cleanly beast, both in his habits and his feeding".

Royal Academy of Arts

Hard Winter

Etching, 1928

"If a composition was required with 'Summer' as its subject", Tunnickliffe wrote of his college days, "I could think of nothing but the mowing and carting of hay.

“‘Winter’ meant the hungry cattle and the big knife cutting into the hay stacks...or a group of rough-coated colts with their tails to the weather.”

The critic Malcolm Salaman pointed out how greedily the sheep devour the “huge cabbages that the shepherd is pitchforking to them from a cart”.

The snowy landscape suggests “how they must have suffered from the lack of grazing, and the old sky threatens further fall”.

Salaman did much to promote Tunnickliffe’s etchings. He insisted that “any stock-breeder would recognise that the sheep have been drawn by one who has known them from their lambhood”.

Stuart Southall Collection

Sheep Doctor

Etching, 1928

The sheep of the Cheshire Plain must have their hooves trimmed regularly.

In a damp climate, the long wet grass of the meadows can cut between the toes of the softened hooves. This can lead to sores. Trimming hooves prevents foot rot, which can spread to the rest of the flock.

Observing the work of the sheep 'doctor' offered Tunncliffe "undignified" and "unusual" views of the sheep's legs and feet or "the (normally hidden) underside of jaws, chest, and belly".

Etchings like these were produced nearly a decade after Tunncliffe had left rural Cheshire to study art in London.

At the Royal College of Art, Tunncliffe drew and painted from life. He was taught figure composition. Most of the human figures in Tunncliffe's work were farmers, which he continued to observe on the family farm during college vacations.

Stuart Southall Collection

The Singing Plowman

Etching, 1928

Like his contemporaries – Graham Sutherland, Paul Drury and Robin Tanner among them – Tunncliffe drew for his subjects on the seasonal calendar of the countryside.

Unlike them, Tunncliffe was rarely romantic in his approach to country. He knew the hardship of farm labour too well to romanticise it. This work is an exception.

Tunnicliffe's uncharacteristic nostalgia was roused by his affection for Gawsworth, a hamlet just a few miles from his family's farm in Cheshire.

The "Elizabethan age" seemed to "have impressed its lively and stimulating mark upon the place," Tunnicliffe wrote.

"Quiet and detached, away from the busy traffic of the main road" the parish of Gawsworth was a "favourite haunt" for Tunnicliffe. He associated this part of the countryside not with work but with rare moments of leisure and relaxation.

Stuart Southall Collection

Piebald Pony

Etching and aquatint, 1929

Tunncliffe had a great affection for horses. He attended horse fairs on Water's Green in Macclesfield and was himself an experienced handler.

The Piebald was named for its large, irregular patches of black on white. It was stabled at a wharf near the Macclesfield Canal. The canal passed a short distance west of his family's farm in Lane Ends.

Tunncliffe often walked along the canal towpath. There, he took inspiration for his watercolour paintings.

This print was Tunncliffe's first venture in aquatint. In February 1929, Tunncliffe had visited the Victoria and Albert Museum "to study the aquatint process".

Stuart Southall Collection

The Thief

Etching, 1928

Tunnickliffe spent much of his boyhood working with cattle. He wrote more about the bull – his character and unpredictability – than about any other farm animal.

“If you must draw him”, he cautioned, “see that he is chained up, or that there is a good strong fence between you and him.”

The ‘thief’ in question is a Shorthorn bull. Despite the heavy log chained about its neck, it has broken free of its enclosure. The farmer is keeping his distance.

As one contemporary reviewer pointed out, the bull “watches the spectator with a suspicious and rebellious eye”.

Tunnickliffe’s etchings of animals in a landscape setting are usually drawn from a low vantage point.

They owe a great deal to the compositions of the seventeenth-century Dutch painter-etcher Paulus Potter. As an art student, Tunnickliffe encountered Potter's prints in the British Museum Print Room.

Stuart Southall Collection

The Duel

Etching, 1931

The Tunnickliffes kept Shorthorn cattle. The Shorthorn bull is distinguished by its powerful neck and shoulders. It features prominently in several of Tunnickliffe's prints.

Tunnickliffe was familiar with the territorial behaviour and the signs of aggression these animals display when they feel threatened. They are "not to be trusted", he wrote, being capable of "violent action at any moment".

“A fight between two bulls is an awe-inspiring sight,” Tunncliffe declared.

“They approach each other with blood-curdling bellows, and soon heads are down and horns are clashing against horns.

“Their great shoulder and neck muscles are tensed as they strain and push, each striving for the mastery, until one is forced to give ground and, sliding backwards more and more quickly, decides to give up the fight and turns tail.”

Stuart Southall Collection

The Horse Sale

Etching, 1931

In 1928 Tunncliffe moved from London to Macclesfield. By then his father had died and his mother had given up the family farm. Tunncliffe started “drawing and painting bits of Macclesfield town”.

The Macclesfield horse fairs and cattle market took place on Water’s Green, an open space between the railway station and the old town on the hill. Tunncliffe had known Water’s Green since childhood.

This etching shows the auctioneer Stanley Turner at a horse auction. Turner’s booth is positioned next to the Stafford to Manchester railway, which is elevated as it passes through the town.

Stuart Southall Collection

Geese and Mallow

Watercolour, 1944

Please see page 9 for more information about Tunncliffe's watercolours.

Royal Academy of Arts

The Shorthorn Bull

Wood engraving, 1934

Tunncliffe's family kept Shorthorn cattle on their farm so the artist knew this breed well. This image is less dramatic than some of his depictions of bulls.

Here, the formidable animal stands still and looks towards the viewer. The breed is distinguished by its powerful neck and shoulders.

“Truly the bull is a beast of noble and inspiring form,” Tunnickliffe wrote in ‘My Country Book’, “and rarely does one see an undignified bull.

“Whatever the breed, and this country is particularly rich in the number and diversity of its breeds of cattle, whether it be the slender-limbed Jersey, the magnificent Shorthorn, the ponderous Hereford and Devon Red, the shaggy Highlander or the sleek, coal-black Welsh, the bulls are always worthy of an artist’s attention.”

Royal Academy of Arts

Chinese Geese

Wood engraving, 1937

In 1934, Tunncliffe and his wife vacationed on the Hebridean islands. This was the start of serious bird study. Tunncliffe spent long hours 'birding' – standing, sitting, kneeling or lying on his stomach, field glasses in one hand and pencil in the other.

This print was likely made from Tunncliffe's many studies at Redesmere, a man-made lake southwest of Macclesfield. The domesticated Chinese Goose is distinguished by the knob on the upper side of its bill.

Here Tunncliffe also explores the decorative possibilities of light reflected on the water's surface. "Study reflections carefully," he advised. "Those in still water are perhaps the most beautiful of all."

Royal Academy of Arts

Wood Owl

Wood engraving, 1946

Birds are “so variable in their behaviour”, Tunncliffe wrote, that there was “no danger of exhausting their possibilities”. The tawny owl (or brown owl) is a member of the wood owl family.

Tunncliffe recalled of his boyhood how on “starlit, winter nights tawny owls sent out their high, clear calls over the landscape”.

He could spot their silhouettes as they “hunted on silent wings about the farm buildings, or perched on bare branches of lime trees which bordered the lane”.

In his writing about drawing animals, Tunncliffe advised his readers to observe birds in their habitats.

Their study “will take you into wild and beautiful places” – but “there is always a fierce ornithologist just round the corner, ready to pounce and rend you as soon as you make a ‘birdy’ faux-pas”.

Royal Academy of Arts

Long-eared Owl

Wood engraving, 1955

This is Tunncliffe’s ‘Diploma’ work, presented after he was elected a Royal Academician in 1954.

The size of the block and the detail possible in wood engraving allowed Tunncliffe to lavish great attention on the owl’s plumage. Yet the surrounding pine needles and cones are just as detailed. To Tunncliffe, an intimate knowledge of an animal’s environment was essential to bird portraiture.

Tunnickliffe recommended the study of Chinese, Japanese and Persian artists. Their “exquisite drawing of the flowers and branch, tussock, reed, and bamboo”, he noted, did not “detract one jot” from the main subject.

After the 1930s, Tunnickliffe made very few wood engravings. This is one of his last.

Working with small gravers was a strain on Tunnickliffe’s eyes. He increasingly used less demanding techniques such as scraperboard.

He also continued to produce large, decorative watercolour paintings, which he exhibited annually at the Royal Academy.

Royal Academy of Arts

Barn Owl

Wood engraving, 1950

Tunnickliffe came to appreciate birds in the early 1930s while working on illustrations for Henry Williamson's nature stories.

Williamson made critical comments on Tunnickliffe's proposed illustrations.

Williamson's snide remark "see a barn owl somewhere Mister Tunnickliffe" encouraged Tunnickliffe to study birds more closely.

For his efforts, Tunnickliffe was awarded the Gold Medal of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Observations of living birds and studies of dead specimens were essential to Tunnickliffe's work. Pages from Tunnickliffe's sketchbooks were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1974.

For his bird portraits, Tunnickliffe also relied on the work of fellow artists. He admired 'The Birds of America' by the naturalist John James Audubon.

Royal Academy of Arts

The Percheron

Wood engraving, 1940

The Percheron is a dapple-grey draught horse. It was once a common sight throughout Britain. Powerful, good-tempered and intelligent, the Percheron was used for hauling carts and omnibuses, for ploughing and logging, as well as for artillery and cavalry work in the army.

As a farm horse it is pictured in Tunncliffe's earlier etchings such as 'The Harvesters'. In this wood engraving, Tunncliffe emphasises the rounded ribs, wide hindquarters and well-muscled thighs characteristic of the breed.

As far back as Tunncliffe could remember he was "thrilled by these grand creatures... "Whenever I see one," he wrote, "I always want to draw him".

Royal Academy of Arts

The Valley

Wood engraving, 1942

Tunncliffe was rejected for active service in the Second World War. He taught art at Manchester and served as an air raid warden. Despite wartime restrictions, he managed to get his hands on large pieces of boxwood for his engravings.

This wartime treatment of a farming subject differs from Tunncliffe's earlier etched scenes of milking, pig slaughtering and mucking out.

The lambs in the meadow at twilight and the distant church at the heart of a community hark back to a way of life that had come under threat.

Tunncliffe often wrote of his love for his native land, its people and traditions: "These I claim to be my personal country; a country which is full of variety, and surprises, and which never palls."

Royal Academy of Arts

Illustrations for 'What to Look for in Summer'

Pencil, pen and ink, watercolour
and gouache on paper, c. 1960

These are four of Tunncliffe's original artworks for the Ladybird book 'What to Look for in Summer', published in 1960.

Tunncliffe's colourful illustrations seem to effortlessly capture the abundant flora and fauna, and changeable weather, of the British countryside in summer.

Ladybird began publishing educational books for children after the Second World War with great success.

Tunncliffe's first Ladybird commission came in the late 1950s with 'The Farm', a 'Learning to Read' book. He went on to illustrate all four of the 'What to Look for' series on the seasons of the year.

His simple but evocative images were hugely influential at the time, shaping a generation's view of the natural world, and still hold great appeal.

1. A moorhen and her young

**2. Wild rose, briar rose and elderflower
on a stone wall**

3. Sparrows in a corn field

4. Seabirds on a beach

University of Reading, Special Collections / Ladybird
Books Limited

Show case 1

Wood engraved book illustration

Early in 1932, Tunncliffe read Henry Williamson's prizewinning 1927 novel 'Tarka the Otter'. He decided to illustrate a few episodes from the book.

On speculation, Tunncliffe created four etchings with aquatint and mailed them to the publisher G. P. Putnam. Williamson welcomed them as "attractive" and "true to the spirit of the book".

Etchings are impractical for book production so the publisher asked Tunncliffe to supply wood engravings instead. Tunncliffe was new to the technique, but he met the challenge.

He produced over 140 wood engravings for five of Williamson's books over a period of just two years. They were printed from reduced-size facsimiles of the wood blocks.

Tunncliffe retained ownership of the blocks. This enabled him to sell his prints separately.

The last book for which Tunncliffe used wood engraving dates from 1949. Afterwards, he used scraperboard and line drawing for monochrome illustrations.

Wood engraving had been time-consuming and was a strain on his eyes. Using various techniques, Tunncliffe went on to illustrate nearly one hundred books.

Henry Williamson, 'Tarka the Otter', illustrated by Charles Tunncliffe, 1932

An unpublished wood-engraving for 'Tarka the Otter'

Henry Williamson, 'The Star-Born', illustrated by Charles Tunncliffe, 1933

Mary Priestley, 'A Book of Birds', illustrated by Charles Tunncliffe, 1937

Richard Jefferies, 'Wild-life in a Southern County',
illustrated by Charles Tunnicliffe, 1949

Kenneth Williamson, 'The Sky's their Highway',
illustrated by Charles Tunnicliffe, 1937

Show case 2

Other commercial work

Most of Tunnicliffe's pictures were only ever appreciated as reproductions. They served as illustrations for novels, advertisements in newspapers and magazines, as premiums such as Brooke Bond tea cards or as decoration for calendars and biscuit tins.

The absence of any message or agenda opened Tunnicliffe's images to a market beyond the art scene.

In advertising, the messages were supplied by the companies that sought Tunnickliffe's work, be it to promote Imperial Chemical Industries or the manufacturers of Dairy Flyspray.

For over four decades, Tunnickliffe's images advertised soap, cruise lines, dog condition powders, stout, fertiliser and the Midland Bank.

After the collapse of the market for fine prints during the Great Depression, Tunnickliffe survived as an artist by working on demand and appealing to a broad audience.

Printmaking played a key role in this. It had brought Tunnickliffe critical acclaim initially, but it also enabled his shift from academic to commercial work.

Birds of the Estuary, 1952

A selection of three Brooke Bond Tea Cards: 'Bird Portraits' (1957), 'Tropical Birds' (1961) and 'African Wildlife' (1961)

Peak Frean biscuit tin designed by Charles Tunnicliffe

'The Farm (A Ladybird Learning to Read Book)', text by M. E. Gagg and illustrations by Charles Tunnicliffe, 1958

'What to Look for in Summer (A Ladybird Nature Book)', 1960, text by E. L. G. Watson and illustrations by Charles Tunnicliffe, 1960

'Both Sides of the Road: A Book about Farming', text by Sidney Rogerson and illustrations by Charles Tunnicliffe, 1949

Information for younger visitors (blue labels)

Who was Charles Tunnicliffe?

Charles Tunnicliffe was an artist who grew up on a farm. When he was a boy he helped on the farm as well as going to art school to learn to draw and paint.

He always loved nature and most of his pictures are of birds and animals in the countryside.

Nearby you can look at the books he illustrated and take an activity sheet.

The artist used the patterns he found in nature to make his pictures eye-catching. The patterns are in the birds' feathers but also in the landscape around them.

Can you tell where the birds are in each of these paintings? How has the artist changed the patterns to look like different textures?

Most of these pictures show life on a farm. When the artist was growing up, horses were still used for tasks like ploughing and pulling carts.

What other animals can you find in these pictures?

How many owls can you find in the gallery?

Tunnickliffe loved to draw birds. He remembered going on walks in the countryside at night when he was a boy. He would see the dark outlines of owls perched on the branches of trees and hear their calls.

Can you make an owl sound?

Would each of the owls sound the same or different?

These drawings were made for a Ladybird book called 'What to Look for in Summer'.

Top left

What is the man on the tractor doing?

What are the birds doing?

Top right

The birds on the sand are called "waders" because they stand in water.

Why do you think they have long beaks?

(continued over)

Bottom left

This picture shows sparrows in a corn field.

Imagine you are standing in a field.

What can you hear? What can you see?

Bottom right

This picture shows a mother moorhen with her chicks.

How many does she have?

What is different about the chicks compared to the Mum?

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We also offer one-to-one audio descriptive tours of the exhibitions with trained volunteer audio describers.

Wheelchair users can also benefit from our volunteers, who can assist with taking you around the galleries so you can enjoy our exhibitions at your leisure. With prior notice we can arrange these at a time that fits in with your schedule. Contact me for further information.

Thank you.

Molly Bretton, Access & Communities Manager



InTouch  **at the RA**

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