

A Brief Note on Harris Rackham (1868-1944)

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October 4, 2023

Harris Rackham was a member of a distinguished family of radical, questioning artists and intellectuals who, like the Tabor family, held socially progressive attitudes and were dedicated to the ideal of public service. Harris's mother, Anne (née Stevenson) came from a family of Nottinghamshire lace-makers. His father, Alfred, a legal clerk who had risen to the position of Chief Clerk to the Admiralty in 1875, had 'stormed out' of the Church of England in protest at the treatment of the radical theologian, Frederick Denison Maurice, who played a leading role in the Christian Socialist movement and the Working Men's Colleges in London. His brother, Bernard, was a Keeper of the Department of Ceramics at the Victoria and Albert Museum. There was a thirteen month age difference between Harris and another brother, Arthur, a leading artist of the 'Golden Age' of British book illustration.

Harris grew up in south London and attended the City of London School in Cheapside in the same class as Arthur, a compulsive 'doodler', even given to scribbling at night in bed on his pillowcases, from whom he was inseparable as a child. Harris was a reserved, diffident, young scholar, rather formal in manner, deliberate in his choice of words, although invariably courteous and attentive, when he met his wife-to-be. He was a rising star with a First in Part One of the Classics Tripos and a First in Part Two and a reputation as a 'moderniser' in the field of Classical scholarship which dominated the ancient university. Like his mentor and friend, John Peile, the Master of Christ's College, Harris was a staunch defender of the rights of women to study and to attend lectures at Cambridge University and

a 'progressive' in the byzantine world of university politics. His lectures on Classical Philosophy became so popular and overcrowded that he had to resort to using the Hall in Christ's lecturing from the dais with the women from Girton and Newham Colleges seated at the High Table. He was also the President of the Cambridge University Men's League for Women's Suffrage and the first Chair of Cambridge University Labour Party in 1923. Harris is probably best remembered today for the 'Lorem Ipsum' placeholder text taken from his Loeb translation of Cicero's *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* (1914) which is used in modern typesetting and computer programming and for his for his Loeb editions which revolutionized the world of classical publishing with the ancient texts on one side and the English translations on the other with their unmistakable green (Greek) and red (Latin) covers bringing the wonders and the splendours of the ancient world within the reach of any reader with an enquiring mind.

Apart from a few years during the First World War when Clara was deployed as a Factory Inspector in Manchester and London and Harris left Cambridge to teach the Classical Sixth in Winchester School, followed by his spell in the German Section of the Naval Intelligence Department of the Admiralty and the Treasury 'A' Division to work on fiscal policy with the allies under the direction of John Maynard Keynes, Clara and Harris were never separated throughout their married lives. What had started as a marriage between a college tutor and his former student had none of the deference that might have been expected given the seven-year age difference and the societal expectations of Victorian and Edwardian Britain and grew into a strong and equal union of two people who shared a love of family, travel, 'home life', adventure and outdoor pursuits as well as the socialist convictions that distinguished them from many other members of the social class in which they were born.

Harris was inordinately proud of Clara's intellect and achievements, unfailingly supportive of her aspirations, and prepared to put her interests above his own when the occasion required. He marched alongside Clara in the great Edwardian processions for votes for women and again in the 1930s when she led the huge national demonstrations and protests against the detested Means Test and the discriminatory Anomalies Act which prevented married women from 'signing on' for the unemployment benefits to which they had previously been entitled.

At some point in the mid-1920s -- we do not know the exact date -- Harris was riding his horse on one of the bridleways in the open countryside surrounding Cambridge when the horse stumbled into a rabbit hole and fell. He experienced severe concussion, confusion and memory loss and took to repeating himself time-and-time again so that Clara became very reluctant to travel long distances or to leave him on his own for long which may help to explain some of her conspicuous absences from public life during this time. There was, however, some improvement and Harris was able to continue with his translations and his work for Christ's College, learning to drive a motor car at the age of sixty, flying with Clara on the Rayon D'or from Croydon aerodrome to Le Bourget and enjoying more adventurous holidays abroad before his death in 1944.



Sketch of Harris Rackham, courtesy of Helen Bloxsome and Lucy Tabor



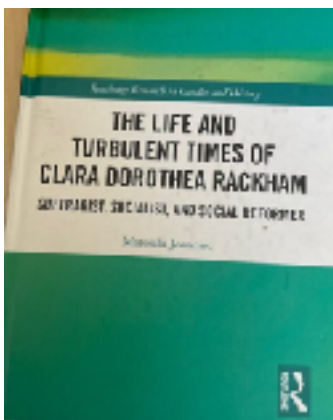
Christmas card of messenger with festive gifts designed by Arthur Rackham, courtesy of the Master and Fellows, Christ's College, Cambridge



Christmas card of gnarled tree with fantastical creatures designed by Arthur Rackham, courtesy of the Master and Fellows, Christ's College, Cambridge



Clara and Harris Rackham on the The Rayon D'or from Croydon to Le Bourget, courtesy of the Master and Fellows, Christ's College, Cambridge



Maroula Joannou, *The Life and Turbulent Times of Clara Dorothea Rackham, Rackham: Socialist, Suffragist, Social Reformer* (Routledge, 2023)

Clara Rackham's biographer, historian, Mary (Maroula) Joannou has written the introduction to Clara Rackham for *Capturing Cambridge*. Mary has also provided the account of Clara and Harris Rackham's family life, the biographical note on Harris Rackham, and compiled the chronology.