

Sir David Young Cameron (1865-1945), Sir Muirhead Bone (1876-1953) and James McBey (1883-1959) were Scottish artists, born three decades apart, who were among the leaders of the etching movement in the early twentieth century. All gained international reputations; their editions were often presold before publication or brought astronomical prices at auctions and in the dealers' rooms. The collapse of the etching market during the 1930's had little effect upon their careers, since they were sufficiently versatile to work in drawings, watercolors, pastels or oils. Perhaps the most remarkable parallel is that none of them initially intended to be an artist: Bone studied architecture, Cameron worked in a merchant's office, and McBey worked in a bank. They all studied art, either formally or informally; however, their printmaking techniques were largely self-acquired. Cameron and Bone worked and studied in Glasgow, McBey in Aberdeen. Interestingly, despite these parallels and their geographical proximity, none of the artists appears to have worked with or developed a friendship with the other.

Although the artists did not collaborate, their work has many elements in common. All worked in the tradition of the *peintre-graveur* (painter-etcher), in which the artist creates a work that is an original concept, rather than a reproductive print that copies a drawing or painting. Their style and subject matter were influenced strongly by Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669), Sir Francis Seymour Haden (1818-1910), Charles Meryon (1821-1868) and James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1910). During their lifetimes, the Scottish artists were considered the inheritors of this etching tradition, and their work was discussed in comparable terms with these masters. Just as the three shared international reputations in their day, so they witnessed the end of the print boom and the abrupt decline of fashion in the painter-etcher tradition.

Sir David Young Cameron

Of the three printmakers, David Young Cameron is the most closely associated with the landscape of his native Scotland. The third son of a minister, he began work in 1881 as a clerk in a Glasgow iron foundry. Evidently a career in commerce was unsatisfactory, for in the early mornings and evenings he studied at the Glasgow Art School. Abandoning his job in 1885, he entered the Edinburgh School of Art and joined the Scottish Atelier Society.

Cameron began his career as a portrait painter.¹ Then in 1887 George Stevenson, an amateur etcher and a friend of the English printmaker, Haden, saw Cameron's drawings. Stevenson showed Haden's work to Cameron and encouraged the youth to learn etching. Cameron's sole source of instruction, Stevenson also helped Cameron to bite his early plates of the Clyde Set (1889) — etchings of scenes on the river running through the Scottish countryside.

Cameron etched the catalogue cover for an 1892 Glasgow exhibition of the works of Whistler and Meryon² who, together with Rembrandt and Haden,

were the most important predecessors for Cameron's early style (Cats. 3-8). Cameron's early work in Scotland is largely derivative; nevertheless, *A Perthshire Village* (1888), his twentieth recorded etching, earned him election in the following year as an Associate of the Royal Society of Painter-Etchers.³ During his membership, Cameron exhibited 119 prints, among them a group of bookplates. These (Cat. 63) and book illustrations were among the commissions Cameron was obliged to accept in his early career; nevertheless he concentrated upon developing his etching technique for more important plates.

In 1892, when Cameron travelled abroad to etch the North Holland Set, he established his reputation. The series indicates the beginnings of an individual style, especially in the use of untouched areas of paper as a compositional element. Nevertheless, in these and other works, Cameron's debt to other artists is apparent. *Robert Lee's Workshop* and *Venice from the Lido* (Cats. 9, 10) reflect Whistler's subtle contrasts of light and shadow, his ability to evoke spatial recession and luminous atmosphere, and especially his economy of line. Cameron's overall interest in pattern rather than line, however, makes his work more decorative than Whistler's. *Afterglow (or Evening) on the Findhorn* (Cat. 12) recalls Haden's use of drypoint in dense masses to indicate shadow or foliage, and in the careful balance between light and dark, massed drypoint and delicately bitten line. *Newgate* and *The Five Sisters, York Minster* (Cats. 11, 13) show a fascination with Meryon's ability to express states of mind; but Cameron captures mood without the French artist's sense of foreboding and impending decay.

Cameron's major etchings represent architecture and landscape. Initially he gained renown as an architectural etcher, and travelled to Italy, London, Venice, Belgium and Egypt. According to Lowe, Cameron's graphic "grand tour" of Europe "established the precedent for the travelling draughtsman-etchers of the 1920's."⁴ Among them were Bone and McBey. In 1912 Cameron decided to concentrate upon the architecture and landscape in Scotland, and he wrote, "no more roaming, there is so much at home I want to draw and paint."⁵

Unfortunately his plans were interrupted by the war. During World War I, he was the official war artist for the Canadian government. Unlike Bone and McBey, he produced no war lithographs, drypoints, or etchings; like them, he made a series of drawings typified by *Ypres II* (Cat. 54), a sketch drawn in Belgium during that period. He was grieved by the war's destruction as well as by the "growing modern cult of ugliness,"⁶ and declared, "the world requires, and will more urgently require, all the beauty it can save from this hurricane of man's folly."⁷

From 1918 until 1922 Cameron ceased etching and concentrated upon oil painting. According to Hind, this was partially in reaction to commercialism in the print market.⁸ In 1920, Cameron wrote concerning the question, "...I have not etched a plate for years and don't know when I may return to my needle. I always hope to and intend to, but other work — during the war — took me to France — and much else here has especially prevented me do-

ing any plates.”⁹ Fortunately, in 1923, Cameron did return to printmaking.

Cameron glorified the Scottish countryside in various media. Often he made watercolors, oil paintings and etchings of the same subjects. There is an evident parallel in the watercolor and etching studies of *Ben Lomond* (Cats. 21, 22) in the attempt to capture the effect of light on the hills and water. The freshness of the color is typical of Cameron’s technique. In contrast, the oil painting of *Dunure Castle* (Cat. 25) has a darker, more somber atmosphere. The human figures in it are dwarfed by the hills, the rocks and the ruined castle. Cameron’s two best known prints, *Ben Lomond* and *Ben Ledi* (Cats. 22, 26), are remarkable for their serenity; no human figures intrude upon nature. The only indication of man in Cameron’s landscape etchings is in the occasional habitation — generally a building or a ruin from the past — in the composition (Cats. 27, 28, 30). In all of Cameron’s landscapes, man is subordinate to the grandeur and beauty of nature.

Throughout his lifetime, Cameron’s career as an artist won him continuing success. Elected to the Royal Society of Painters in Water-Colour in 1904, in the following year he was made Associate of the Royal Academy on the basis of his etchings. In 1916 he was again elected for his oil paintings, the only artist so honored in two areas. In 1920 he was made a full Academician. Almost a national hero in his native Scotland,¹⁰ Cameron was made an Associate of the Royal Scottish Academy in 1904 and an honorary member of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Water Colours. In 1924 he was knighted.

From 1932 until his death in 1945, Cameron made no further etchings; nevertheless the five hundred plates he had etched over forty years established his reputation as one of the foremost contemporary etchers. He was the leader of a school of Scottish etchers who made landscape views in his style. His influence extended to America in the early works of Hermann Webster (1878-1970, Cat. 77), Louis Rosenberg (b. 1890, Cat. 79) and Chauncy Ryder (1868-1949).

Like Whistler before him, Cameron exercised strict control over the impressions of his works. He printed most of his own plates in small numbers; very few plates were steel faced to enable them to hold up to large editions. He often used old Dutch or Japanese paper for his proofs, and collected antique paper in Britain and on the Continent. Occasionally he used the greenish-toned paper prized by Meryon (Cat. 7). It is not surprising therefore that the quality of his impressions is generally superb.

According to his fellow etcher, Lumsden, “Cameron has probably done more than any man to popularize etching....”¹¹ During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Cameron was among the most important living etchers. The proceeds from his prints enabled him to develop his skills in other media as well. He became financially secure enough to donate the proceeds of two of his plates to charity¹² and to accept payment from his dealers in Rembrandt etchings.¹³ Cameron’s success was not due to a revolutionary concept or technique. Instead, he worked within traditional form and subject

matter, and developed his craft with such skill that one contemporary pointed out, “technically his work arrives almost at perfection.”¹⁴

Sir Muirhead Bone

The fourth of eight children, Bone was born at Partive, a suburb of Glasgow, eleven years after Cameron. Bone's father was a newspaper reporter, who allowed the boy to accompany him during his work and to make sketches. (Bone retained the habit of taking a sketchpad with him throughout his career.) Initially, Bone studied architecture at the Glasgow School of Art; but he was more interested in drawing and printmaking. He studied lithography there, and even worked briefly at commercial lithography. It was in drypoint, however, that he made his reputation.

Like Cameron, Bone executed his first prints when he was twenty-two. Many of the drypoints he created during the first ten years of his career were among his best. He focused on architectural subjects; two of his most notable early plates are of Ayr Prison and the partially demolished St. James's Hall in London (Cats. 16, 17). Bone's architectural training is evident in the accurate drawing and the spatial relationships of the buildings. The interplay between light and shadow and the brooding atmosphere reflect the influence of Meryon (Cat. 7). Bone was also influenced by Rembrandt and Whistler (Cats. 3-5). Like theirs, his landscapes are on a small scale (Cats. 15, 31, 32). They rely for emphasis upon line rather than masses of drypoint, as in the works of Haden and Cameron.

In 1902, Bone moved to London where he had his first exhibition at the Carfax Gallery. Gaining early recognition and success, Bone became noted for his drawings as well as his etchings. He also acquired a reputation as a book illustrator. Frequently he collaborated with his wife, Gertrude Dodd. She was the sister of the etcher, Francis Dodd (1874-1949, Cat. 1), whom Bone had met at the Glasgow School of Art. The couple's writer-illustrator collaboration continued throughout their careers, being similar to the relationship between the American printmakers, Joseph Pennell (1857-1912), John Taylor Arms (1887-1963) and Samuel Chamberlain (1895-1975) and their wives.

During World War I, Bone was the first of the official government artists to record events of the Western Front. He executed a series of large lithographs that depicted war preparations in England (Cat. 55), and also a series of drawings on the continent. Many of the drawings were published, and resulted in his work being known widely. During World War II, Bone was again a government war artist, serving the Admiralty from 1939-46.

Until 1909, Bone's work centered in Great Britain. During and after the war, he travelled throughout Europe and worked extensively in Italy, France and Spain. Picturesque views of buildings and bridges appealed to Bone. He

was especially effective in capturing night and sunlight, and in the atmospheric effects of wind and rain (Cats. 33-36). Bone's most successful European images were created in Spain, which he first visited in 1925. He made several plates in Ronda, notably his major work, *A Spanish Good Friday* (Cat. 37). He drew the initial sketch in 1925. Later that year he worked on the plate through twenty-nine states. Bone described the effect he strived for:

The effect is stormy moonlight with torches (out of sight) lighting up the distant houses. In addition, the procession in the distance carry torches and lanterns. The figures in the foreground are townspeople and participants in the processions which have been going on all day.¹⁵

When evaluating this print, Arms called Bone "...the most accomplished drypointer who ever lived," and considered him the equal of Rembrandt and Whistler.¹⁶

Another result of the trips to Spain was the book, *Old Spain*, in which the artist illustrated his wife's text (Cats. 38, 39). In addition to the ordinary edition, a leather-bound folio version was issued that contained an original drypoint and sold for one hundred guineas (approximately \$350) — a substantial sum at the time. In a review of one of Colnaghi's exhibitions of the drawings for the book, Herbert Furst wrote, "I know no living draughtman who could have drawn this infinite succession of ancient arches with similar precision."¹⁷

Bone first visited America in 1923. Over the course of his several journeys, he met the print collectors George W. Davison, Fitzroy Carrington and Frank Weitenkampf, and executed their portraits (Cats. 66, 67). He became acquainted with the etcher, Ernest Roth (1879-1954, Cat. 82) and printed in his studio. As was characteristic of his lifetime practice, Bone drew numerous sketches (Cats. 41, 42, 44). He made minor prints of the Hudson River (Cat. 43) and several New York buildings. The only notable plate that Bone produced here was *Manhattan Excavation* (Cat. 45), which he began *in situ* in 1923 and completed in London in 1928.

With the collapse of the print market in the 1930's, Bone, like Cameron, worked in other media, producing drawings, pastels and watercolors (Cats. 38, 40-42, 44). His reputation scarcely diminished. In 1927 he was knighted. He remained active until his death in 1953, seven years after Cameron.

Although Bone had few imitators, his choice of subject matter and his method of composition influenced many etchers of his generation. In America, the Meryon-Bone element is seen in the early works of Webster and Rosenberg (Cats. 76, 80) and most notably in the prints of Arms and Chamberlain (Cats. 78, 81).

Bone, like Cameron, printed his own work and took great care in the selection of appropriate paper. Initially he used Japanese paper. After 1916 he printed on the old paper that his print dealers, Colnaghi and Co., bought from Joseph Pennell before he left London to return to America. Bone maintained the quality of his impressions by limiting the size of the editions and by not steel-facing his plates.

Bone contributed notable designs in architecture, landscape and portraiture. The architectural works are the largest in scale; people are dwarfed by the surrounding buildings that soar above (Cats. 17, 37, 38). In contrast, the landscapes are small and intimate (Cats. 31, 32). Bone did not portray nature with the expressive mood and sweep of Cameron; but he shared a fascination with the grandeur of ruined buildings (Cats. 17, 28.) Bone's portraits, delicate and sensitive, reflect the personality of the sitters either through the intensity of the eyes or characteristic gestures and attitudes (Cats. 65, 66, 68).

In summary, Bone's success came early in his career and lasted throughout his life. Like Cameron, he developed his technique in the earlier *peintre-graveur* vein, and was not affected by subsequent developments in the art world. Despite post-war movements of increasing abstraction in art and alienation from tradition, Bone concentrated upon the perfection of technique allied to literal representation. In 1923, contemporary opinion of his work was summarized by Arthur Hind, once Keeper of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum, in his definitive book on the history of etching:

...Muirhead Bone has deservedly achieved one of the greatest names in recent etching. Few drawings have been seen to equal his since the time of Rembrandt, and in his studies of scaffold-covered buildings in the breaking or the making, he has followed an individual path, and shown a feeling for the great harmonies of line, which is beyond praise. He works largely in dry-point, a process in which his virtuosity is unrivalled.¹⁸

James McBey

James McBey was born in 1883, eighteen years after Cameron and seven years after Bone. Unlike them, he did not grow up in an urban environment; rather, he lived in Newburgh, a rural village thirteen miles north of Aberdeen. At that time the area was relatively isolated, and little affected by the proximity of a large city. As a child, McBey was interested in art, and taught himself to work in watercolors and oils. At the age of twelve, he won £5 in an interschool drawing competition and spent the money on oil paints and canvas. After he graduated from the village school, he worked in the accounting department in the North of Scotland Bank at Aberdeen.

At age seventeen, McBey saw an exhibition by the Aberdeen Artists Society and decided on his career. Studying art in the mornings and evenings, before and after work, he also read widely in the field and subsequently took drawing classes at Gray's School of Art. Then he took private oil painting lessons; but after a few sessions the instructor returned his money, stating that he had nothing to teach the talented young man.

In 1902, McBey obtained from the library a translation of Maxime Lalanne's book, *A Treatise on Etching* (1866). It contained the first original etchings he had seen and was to be his only source of technical instruction. He began