

Edward Caldwell Spruce (1866-1922) and the Savage Club.

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Edward came from Knutsford in Cheshire originally. He was employed at a local tile factory first, where it is believed he upset his foreman by sculpting heads out of the surplus clay in his dinnertime. Possibly he was bored with his mundane job and felt there were more opportunities for his talents in Leeds.

In the 19th century education for young adults was only just becoming a reality. The Leeds Mechanics and Literary Institution made tentative plans to promote education for the working classes but these were only partially successful. It was not till the Government financed the Institute in 1846 as a Government School of Design that Leeds became a centre of art education. The School of Art was Incorporated into the Mechanics Institute Building, now (2009) the City Museum. The aims for the Leeds School of Art were stated as being "to prosper instructing young men who were already engaged in art, industry or manufacturing who required more elaborate teaching than had previously been possible." In order to provide this teaching for the hundreds of masons, builders, joiners, mechanics, carvers, upholsters, cabinet makers with suitable light and space it was felt that a new building should be provided. But it was not until 1903 that the building on Vernon Street was finally built, designed by Bedford & Kitson.

So when Edward first came to Leeds the opportunity to use his skills as an artist were few. His first job at the Burmantofts pottery was probably quite routine. He decided to extend his skills by studying in Paris. This proved to be very worthwhile later.

On his return to Leeds, he branched out on his own as a freelance artist and managed to obtain commissions from some of the local



successful manufacturers. He must have been either very successful, or very charming, probably both, in order to be invited to join the Savage Club in Leeds. As an active member of the Savage Club it would have helped him to become well known. This club was quite exclusive and only had fifty members. But people like the Kitsons, Sam Wilson and Edmund Bogg were members and all prominent local business men.

By now he had become the head designer and modeller for Burmantofts Art Pottery then in its early years. Edward spent a number of years there gaining useful and

and practical knowledge of architectural and ceramic decorative work. He was also teaching modelling at the Leeds School of Art and won several prizes in National Competitions.

There seems to have been a fascination for anything to do with Indians in the 19th century. In 1818 a visiting party of Seneca Indians from West New York State came over to England. It appears that they visited Manchester first and then came on to Leeds. As you can imagine articles in the papers influenced an interest in these unusual visitors. It is easy to imagine the excitement when they gave concerts at the hall on Albion Street. People could see demonstrations of natural and simple native manners and customs of a totally different civilisation. Mock battles were performed, peace pipes smoked, and

bows and arrows were also displayed. It seems that this was the first time Wild Indians had been introduced into the kingdom. Certainly it was the first time that supposedly savage Indians had been shown round England to make money rather than for political or spiritual reasons.



Monument at Lawnswood Crematorium to Samuel Wilson who died in 1918. By Edward Caldwell Spruce.



**James Kitson, Lord Mayor of Leeds
By Edward Caldwell Spruce**

The Savage Club was founded in 1857, named after one of the members called Richard Savage, but the style of the meetings reflected the influence of the American Indians. The aims and Rules of the club stated that they were to "Develop and Foster Social and Congenial good fellowship. To encourage good music art, literary and kindred subjects, walking and camping." Although the two latter aims were tried, the more sociable efforts were much more successful.

The club became very popular, the members supporting each other in times of need. They were particularly supportive of widows and orphans. There was obviously a need to raise money for these good causes so the club gave theatrical performances with the aim of raising money and being entertaining.

The Leeds Savage Club was formed in 1898 on similar lines to the London Club. The members being artists, musicians, writers and journalists. The initial meeting was held at the studio of Owen Bowen in Cookridge Street.

Bowen lived in Collingham and was a successful landscape painter particularly of the Yorkshire Dales. Another prominent member was Edmund Bogg who came to live in Leeds from his home town of Duggleby in the East Riding. He wrote a great deal about our area and was a great supporter of local artists. He ran a picture framing workshop on Lands Lane and had a studio for his own artistic efforts on Woodhouse Lane.

Regular gatherings or pow-wows were held. They seem to have been very jolly occasions enlivened by singing, some times talks on such subjects as art, literature, sports, architecture and some times going for walks in the country. One very popular walk was from what we now know as Canal Gardens to Bardsey to look at the Saxon Church. They also seem to have enjoyed the pow-wows enlivened with whisky punch from the Firewater Pot. This was created by Edward from his knowledge gained from his time at Burmantofts.

The Club gave concerts to help worthy causes like the Wetherby Nurses Association. No doubt their strange colourful dress together with their obvious talents would be very entertaining and unusual. On one occasion the Albert Room was taken, programmes printed and sold. This was attended by the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress and the Earl of Harewood.

Another concert was given in aid of the Yorkshire Union of Artists at the City Art Gallery in December 1908. At the meeting at the Grand Central Hotel in October 1908 Member Kesler brought samples of feathered head dresses of three designs for Savages suitable for chief, scribe and treasurer. In 1911 five pow-wows were held.

Edward Caldwell Spruce acted as Scribe (minute secretary) for several years. A lot of money for worthy causes was raised by giving concerts in many places in the county.

Meetings were often held at the studio of Mark Senior sometimes in honour of a member of the club like pianist Frederick Dawson. Edward did a bust of Frederick and later of Phil May the cartoonist, and James Kitson. He became the Indian Chief in 1912 being given the title of T'owd Chief and awarded an honorary life membership.

Edward was probably living and working at his studio in Back Cowper Street then.



Model Heads Above the Doors of Houses in Roundhay Road.

It is interesting to speculate that he produced several model heads that became a feature of the houses on Roundhay Road. Certainly they display the hand of a sensitive and imaginative sculptor. Could some of these heads be those of his friendly Braves? We shall probably never know.

The date of 1887 appears on one of these houses which was called St. Ives. There are also similar heads inside the house and interestingly the path up to the front door appears to have some tiling lining the sides. Could these be a clue to Edwards time when he worked at Burmatofts?

This is very intriguing. I would be delighted to receive any ideas on these questions.

Acknowledgments.

G. Black and C.G Calloway. (Thoresby Publication 1977). Newspaper Cuttings People Vol 1 pages 16, 20, 35, 48 and 120.

Images of Leeds 1850-1960. Behind the Mosaic One Hundred Years of Art Education. The Centenary of the Opening of Art & Design in 1903. Thanks also to Sharon at Leeds Art Library and Adam White at Lotherton Hall.