

The logo for Whitechapel Gallery, consisting of a blue square with the text "Whitechapel Gallery" in white, stacked above a solid blue horizontal bar.

Whitechapel  
Gallery

# Intellectual Barbarians: The Kibbo Kift Kindred

10 Oct - 13 Mar 2016

Large print labels and interpretation

Gallery 4

**Outside gallery:**

**Intellectual Barbarians:**

**The Kibbo Kift Kindred**

This exhibition presents the art, craft, design and dress of the English organisation the Kibbo Kift Kindred, who were active from 1920 to 1932. Kibbo Kift means proof of great strength and originates from an archaic Cheshire dialect. The founder of the group, commercial artist, writer and pacifist John Hargrave led its several hundred members and attracted the support of suffragettes, artists and scientists, amongst others. Unusually for the time, the group was open to every age and gender.

Actively campaigning through an idiosyncratic blend of hiking, camping and handicraft, Kibbo Kift aimed at world peace. The handmade insignia, costumes, banners and totems presented in this display express the group's complex social and spiritual philosophy.

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Their design influences derive from mystical, medieval and modernist styles and create a remarkable aesthetic with elements drawn from Ancient Egyptian, Anglo-Saxon, Celtic and Native American crafts.

In 1929 the Whitechapel Gallery staged a major Kibbo Kift exhibition as a way of communicating the group's ideas and educational ethos and to showcase their artefacts and ambitions to a wider public. This marked the peak of Kibbo Kift's cultural production before they radically shifted identity and purpose to become an economic-political campaign group in the 1930s.

Drawn from surviving archive material in both private and public collections, the display offers a new interpretation of the group's vision. Previously unseen woodcarvings, furniture, ceremonial dress and photographs of Kibbo Kift on parades and in camp present a forgotten English social movement with a futuristic utopian vision that continues to resonate today.

**Inside gallery:**

**Display case:**

**Piltdown Man plinth, c.1924**

Carved wood

Collection of Jon Tacey

**Piltdown Man skull, c. 1924**

Plaster of Paris

Collection of Judge Smith

The Kindred were fascinated by prehistory. In 1912 fragments of a skull discovered in a gravel pit in rural Sussex were claimed as the earliest surviving human remains and offered material evidence of ape-like human ancestors. The so-called Piltdown Man was revealed as a hoax in the mid-twentieth century but in 1923 Kinsfolk had declared the skull to be 'an ancestral relic of every member of the Kibbo Kift, as indeed, of the whole of the human race'. Plaster cast replicas were constructed and psalms were composed in his honour, and a Kin pilgrimage was made to the Piltdown site.

Photographs, clockwise from top left:

**Angus McBean**

**Kinsman on rock, Switzerland, 1930.**

**Kinsfolk in 'wok' (Wedge of Kinsmen) formation, 1930.**

Courtesy of Tim Turner

**Scenes from camps, c. 1927-30**

Courtesy of Tim Turner

**Angus McBean**

**Kinsfolk in colour, c.1929**

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / LSE Library

**Scenes from early camps, 1923-1925**

Courtesy of Tim Turner

**Angus McBean**

**Kin Council, 1929**

**Banner Park, 1929**

Courtesy of Tim Turner

**Free Right of the Totem House for Carol Griffiths (Dione),  
1927**

Design on paper

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

The Totem House registered the Kin names for each member. Kinsfolk had their symbol carved into a wooden disc.

**John Hargrave**

**Sigil designs for Lodges, 1929**

**Sigil designs for Kin Photographer, 1929**

Design on paper

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

Hargrave used the term sigil for the symbols to indicate specialisms within the Kindred. The term has occult significance, suggesting that they carried magic intentions. The stylised camera with a haunting eye was designed for Angus McBean, Kin Photographer.

## **Surcoat (Herald), c.1923**

Costume

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

The Herald made important announcements in camp in stylised language and booming tones. The role was bestowed annually to a Kinsman who wore the double-sided surcoat for ceremonies. The garment includes a red lens shape to represent the Herald's parted lips, and elemental symbols for the tree of knowledge and the water of life.

## Display case:

**Totem discs for Idrisyn Oliver Evans (Blue Swift), John Hargrave (White Fox), and Kathleen M. Milnes (Blue Falcon) 1928–1932.**

Carved wood

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

**Kathleen M. Milnes (Blue Falcon)'s Design Book c.1927**

Design on paper

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

**John Hargrave, 1928**

Design for Dexter Archers Equipment

Courtesy of LSE Library

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## Company of Archers brace, belt and quiver 1927-8

Textile

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

Medieval pursuits such as archery were popular in Kin camps. The Select and Most Dauntless Company of Archers had a specially designed costume with a striking cockscomb hood and sumptuously hand-embroidered regalia made to Hargrave's designs. Some members went on to compete professionally.

**Gold lurex surcoat belonging to Kinswoman Carol Griffiths  
(Dione), c.1928**

Costume

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

Surcoats were worn for Kin rituals. Designed in simple T-shapes, the vestments combine elements of a Catholic surplice with the tabard of a medieval knight. The shoulders or 'wings' were worn loose for women, but when stiffened with buckram for men, they stood in dramatic right angles, cutting a heroic, futuristic silhouette.

## **Display case:**

**1. John Hargrave**

*The Kindred in Embryo*, c.1920

Pen and ink illustration on paper

Courtesy of Roger King

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## **2. John Hargrave**

**Letterhead for poster and illustration business, c.1920**

Courtesy of Roger King

## **2. John Hargrave**

**Promotional leaflet for advertising exhibition,**

**Burlington Gallery, London, 1919**

Courtesy of Roger King

The founder of Kibbo Kift worked in the advertising industry. This poster shows influences of Edward McKnight Kauffer.

## **3. Kibbo Kift covenants, 1923 and 1927**

Courtesy of Tim Turner

## **4. Kinsfolk, including suffragette Rosa May Billinghurst**

**(Raccoon) with wheelchair, c.1925**

Photograph

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / LSE Library

The endorsement of Kibbo Kift by high-profile suffragettes attracted many women to join.

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Membership was balanced by gender but few women held senior positions.

**5. Daily Mirror newspaper article, 1923**

Courtesy of Hazel Powell

**6. Stanley Dixon (Hawk)'s photograph album, c.1924**

Courtesy of Tim Turner

**7. Women's costume leaflet, c. 1927**

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation, / LSE Library

Kinswomen hiked and camped in dresses of various colours. Their green suede headdress signalled 'something of the *Valkyrie* in its helmet-like design'.

**8. Kibbo Kift Easter Hike through the Home Counties, 1931**

Photograph

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / LSE Library

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**9. Men's costume leaflet, c.1927**

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / LSE Library

Kin camp clothing was called a costume not a uniform.

It was claimed that the men's outfit 'conforms in many ways to the general dress of Europe during the Middle Ages, and is suitable for the journeyman-craftsman, the pilgrim and the camper'.

**10. Charles Tacey (Will Scarlet)'s hand staff, 1928**

Carved wood

Courtesy of Jon Tacey

**11. Kinsfolk Easter Hike, 1930**

Photograph

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / LSE Library

**12. Kibbo Kift Song Sheets, c.1927**

Courtesy of Tim Turner

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**13.The Kindred...has something to say to you, c.1929**

Calling card and envelope

Courtesy of Tim Turner

**13.Why We Camp, c.1925**

Postcard

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / LSE Library

**14.John Hargrave as Spirit Chief, Dexter Fam Tribal**

**Training Camp, 1928**

Photograph

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / LSE Library

**Surcoat (Skein of Emblazoners), c.1928**

Costume

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

The Skein of Emblazoners was an all-women team of skilled amateur needleworkers, led by Hargrave's wife, Ruth. The group were responsible for much of Kibbo Kift's embroidery and banner making. The motif shows a stylised Kinswoman in green headdress stitching an abstract design on a frame in front of a tipi.

**Personal totem of Kinsman Angus McBean (Aengus Og),  
c.1928**

Carved wood

Angus McBean established a high-profile career as a portrait photographer in the mid-twentieth century. Before this, he honed his craft as Kin Photographer

**John Hargrave's Head Man totem, c.1928.**

Carved wood

With inscription, from William Morris's 1876 Nordic mythological poem, *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*.

**Personal totem of Kinsman E. Wilson (Chickadee), c. 1928**

Carved wood

All courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

**Kinlog, 1924-1982**

Illustrated manuscript

Kathleen M. Milnes (Blue Falcon), an art teacher, recorded the Kindred's official history in illuminated lettering and watercolour illustrations.

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The tooled leather cover by John Hargrave shows the Kindred's characteristic peace sign in front of an ascending series of historical periods, culminating in the era of the Kibbo Kift.

*A facsimile of the Kinlog can be viewed in the Foyle Reading Room.*

**Bok Scamel, c.1928**

Carved wooden lectern

The lectern was made by Kin craftsman, James G. Cone (Eagle Eye). Its weight is carried by reverent kneeling Kinsmen, with carved hoods, shorts and belted camp knives. The inscription declares: 'Arise, The Kibbo Kift, and give the Sign!'

All courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

**John Hargrave**

**Book of designs for Banners of the Place, 1929**

Designs on paper

Opened at page with design for Long Man of Wilmington banner.

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / LSE Library

**Banner of the Place (Old Sarum), 1929**

Textile

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

These banners depict Kin sacred sites: Stonehenge, Silbury Hill, the Long Man of Wilmington, the White Horse of Uffington and Old Sarum: 'that timeless citadel, earthwork of the little dark men, stockade of the fair ones, hold of the Normans and walled city of church and state: Salisbury the Elder'.

**Angus McBean**

**Four scenes from the Wessex Pilgrimage, 1929**

Photographs

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / LSE Library

McBean's photographs, heroic in their staging and sometimes homoerotic in their gaze, capture the youthfulness, playfulness and strangeness of Kibbo Kift.

## Order of Specialisation Banner (Transport), 1929

Textile

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

Kibbo Kift produced striking and original banners to be displayed in camp and carried on parade. All were designed by John Hargrave but made up by Kin seamstresses. The Transport banner belongs to a series assigned to Kin subgroups, or 'Orders of Specialisation'.

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Few Kinsfolk owned private means of transport but they hoped to establish Kin motor and air squadrons. This banner depicts transportation history from pilgrims with sacks to modern aeroplanes. On the reverse, a car speeds through trees, similar to a Chrysler advertisement by graphic designer Ashley Havinden from the same year.



## Order of Specialisation Banner (Folklore), 1929

Textile

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

The Folklore banner belongs to a series assigned to Kin subgroups, or 'Orders of Specialisation'.

Kibbo Kift looked back in order to move forward. In the Folklore banner, 'The Past' is a crouching skeleton in a burial mound of red and black earth.

On the reverse, pictographic figures emerge from cogs and gears as 'The Future': 'the Spirit of Man breaking free from economic bondage and the toil of the machine.'



Angus McBean

The Kibbo Kift Educational Exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery,  
1929

Installation Photographs

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / LSE Library

The Kibbo Kift Educational Exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery,  
21 April – 25 May 1929

The Educational Exhibition was attended by 42,000 visitors over its five week run. It was launched by celebrated folklorist and educational pioneer Dr W. H. D. Rouse, and Lady Emily Lutyens, a prominent Theosophist. It presented Kibbo Kift's distinctive aesthetic style to the Gallery's public. It was designed to demonstrate their educational system of 'tribal training', which was underpinned by the theory of recapitulation.

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This suggested that children need to re-enact all stages of cultural history –then understood as a linear progression from ‘savages’ to ‘civilised’ – in order to evolve into fully developed adults.

The centre of the exhibition restaged a Kibbo Kift camp, complete with totems, decorated tents and primitive weaving looms from camp craft sessions. Other handmade articles on display included Kibbo Kift toys, posters, ceramics, enamelwork, musical instruments and architectural models.

Oskar Birckenbach

Kibbo Kift linocuts from German translations of John  
Hargrave books, c.1921

Set of printed postcards in printed envelope

Courtesy of Annebella Pollen

Kibbo Kift boasted an international membership and  
Kinsfolk took part in exchange visits with European youth  
groups. Hargrave's books were also translated into several  
languages.

## **1. The Bodes, 1922**

Carved wood

This carved leaf would be passed around as a ritual means of summoning Kinsfolk to the central circle at annual gatherings. Camp circles were conducted ceremonially with invocations of sacred energy, the burning of incense and the beating of drums.

## **2. Angus McBean**

**Wassail Bowl, c.1928**

Carved wood with blue jasper

The Wassail bowl was used to share food at candlelit midwinter Kin Feasts. Wassail is Anglo Saxon for good health. Kibbo Kift used the term as a toast and a greeting: 'Wes hael - Be thou whole - is the imperative healing commandment of The Kindred'.

All courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

**Angus McBean**

**The Great In-Bringer, 1929**

Painted wood, leather, bone

In-Bringer awards were given to those who had attracted the most new Kinsfolk members. Their motif drew on the shared triangular forms of hoods and tents to signal massed bodies, framed within a silver or gold circle according to how many new members had joined.

**Eostre Belt and Baldur Belt, 1929**

Leather, silver and semi-precious stones

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

Produced by Liberty's, these belts were awarded annually to the fittest man and woman in the Kindred. For Kibbo Kift, the 'cultivation of human beauty' was important. Baldur the Beautiful is a Norse god of summer. Eostre is an Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring.

All courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

**Personal totem of Kinsman Angus McBean (Aengus Og),  
c.1928**

Carved wood

Angus McBean established a high-profile career as a portrait photographer in the mid-twentieth century. Before this, he honed his craft as Kin Photographer

**John Hargrave's Head Man totem, c.1928.**

Carved wood

With inscription, from William Morris's 1876 Nordic mythological poem, *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*.

**Personal totem of Kinsman E. Wilson (Chickadee), c. 1928**

Carved wood

All courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

Charles 'Bill' Tacey (Will Scarlet)

*Herald's Totem*, c.1928

Painting

Collection of Jon Tacey

Charles 'Bill' Tacey (Will Scarlet)

*City and Rooftree*, 1929

Painting

Collection of Jon Tacey

### **Skaldic staff, c.1924**

Carved wood

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

The Skald totem was awarded to the best Kibbo Kift-themed saga or poem performed in the Skaldic contest held at each Althing (annual gathering).

### **Totem of Carol Griffiths (Dione). c.1928**

Carved wood

Courtesy of Barbara Dixon

Carol Griffiths (Dione)'s totem symbol comprises an acorn and an oak leaf on top of a wave, on a white bedrock containing an eye. The base features abstract designs, Kibbo Kift's insignia and the emblem for the keeper of ritual artefacts (Tokenweard), which was Dione's Kin role. The numbers on the staff indicate Althings attended.

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**Personal totem of Kathleen M. Milnes (Blue Falcon), c.1926**

Carved wood

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation / Museum of London

## **Totems**

Totem-carving — the three-dimensional representation of a member's or lodge's chosen motif — was a core Kibbo Kift activity. A 'crude' execution in shape, colouring and finish was promoted. Completed items were paraded in camp, positioned outside the owner's tent, and consecrated in a 'Touching of the Totems' rite. Here, the 'Head Man' anointed each one with his staff of office. None but the owner was permitted to handle the finished item.

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**The Touching of the Totems rite, Althing 1925**

Digital Print (detail)

Original courtesy of LSE Library / Kibbo Kift Foundation

**John Hargrave (White Fox), interviewed by Laurence Elwell-Sutton - extracts, 1978**

Courtesy of Kibbo Kift Foundation

6.12 mins.

**Stanley Dixon (Hawk), singing Kibbo Kift songs with his daughter, Kay Dixon, 1978**

Courtesy of Jon Tacey

*If You Meet the Kindred; Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha; The Wise Old Man; The Morning Mists; Come and Join the Hike; Three Kinsmen; The Archer's Song; The Spirit of Robin Hood.*

17.10 mins.

**Please return this booklet to the gallery  
assistant.**