

The Savoy Cocktail Book

“Being in the main a complete compendium of the Cocktails, Rickeys, Daisies, Slings, Shrubs, Smashes, Fizzes, Juleps, Cobblers, Fixes, and other drinks known and vastly appreciated in this year of grace 1930.”

A RECENT TRIP to a “bookstore” in one of those tired suburban strip malls, where most of the business transactions are with bundles of mystery paperbacks brought in to exchange for another bundle, yielded a most fascinating and profitable discovery. The average price in the store probably was \$2, and so *The Savoy Cocktail Book’s* quite atypical price of \$30 suggested that someone thought this title was special. Issued by Constable

in 1930, cased in beautifully coloured boards, its bold art deco style and silver spine shouted for attention. Inside the collection of cocktail recipes was lavishly illustrated in colour by the British artist Gilbert Rumbold—a name almost suspiciously apropos for the subject. Taking a gamble on the price paid off: a copy was

recently bid up on eBay \$465 to \$800, and New York City’s Bauman Books lists a copy at \$1,800!

The book’s author, Harry Craddock, was the inventor of the Old Fashioned and the great authority on mixology at the Hoffman House and Holland House in New York City. The Volstead Act of 1920 brought Prohibition to the United States as a reaction to “the patriotic fear of the notorious drinking habits of immigrant working men” and the wartime fear of foreigners and their drinking habits. (Strangely, there is even a Volstead cocktail, created, presumably, with a sense of irony.) The practice of his profession thus encumbered, in 1926 Craddock fled to London’s Savoy Hotel, which then became the first bar in that city to serve cocktails.

Hollywood glamourized the cocktail. *The Thin Man’s* leading man, Nick Charles, explained that “the important thing is the rhythm.

Always have rhythm in your shaking. Now, a Manhattan you shake to a foxtrot, Bronx to two-step time. The dry martini you always shake to waltz time.” And the colourful choice of mixes masked the rough taste and extended the supply of bootlegged liquor.

The ambience of these flamboyant post-WWI times was conveyed by Gilbert Rumbold’s design of *The Savoy Cocktail Book*. Craddock’s collection of hundreds of recipes for cocktails, as well as brief sections on wines, were rendered by Rumbold in a distinctively art nouveau style. The same bold colours were used throughout the book in both the grid, two narrow lines each of one of these colours running across both the top and bottom of the pages, and in the illustrations. These illustrations portrayed a largely Wodehousian world of swells and the relaxed upper classes at play, with attendant butlers and chauffeurs, impossibly slim *soigné* women in silks and furs, and moneybags in their clubs. A number of ads for Booth’s Gin are well incorporated into the general design spirit of the book, suggesting that the company probably subsidized the publication and, therefore, made possible the considerable gilding on both covers.

Biographical details of Gilbert Rumbold, the book’s designer, are hard to come by. He wrote and illustrated several other books—*Birds of the Golf Cot* (1922), containing six drawings of “golfer types”; *The Origins of Life* (1931); *The Treasure Book of Pleasure Cruising* (1934); and *The Wayside Book* (1934), “an eccentric and charming illustrated description of a number of routes for motoring in 1934 and more particularly details of every pub and hotel on the way.” Only the first of these preceded *The Savoy*, suggesting his illustration work in it sufficiently impressed Constable publishers to approach him.

Sadly, the Canadian Whiskey Cocktail, which contains Angostura Bitters, Gomme syrup, and Canadian Club Whiskey, is not illustrated. If it were, the somewhat corny style would probably have shown in some manner a tartan-shirted lumberjack leaning on his axe, nearby beavers looking dispirited that he had got to a tree before them. The note to accompany the Jabberwock Cocktail assures that “This will make you gyre and gimble in the wabe until brillig all right, all right.” The Booksellers’ (Special) Pride Cocktail contains, for whatever reason, orange juice, Calvados, Booth’s Dry Gin, and a green cherry that has been macerated in orange Curaçao.

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