

Leonard Gow

1859–1936

Ship Owner, Philanthropist, and Collector of Chinese Art



Leonard Gow was born in Glasgow, Scotland, the same year his father, Leonard Gow (1824–1910), inherited the Allan C. Gow and Company shipping firm from his brother. Recognizing the advantages of steam over sail and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the elder Gow formed the Glen Line to trade between London, Singapore, China, and Japan. Leonard junior eventually became a partner in Allan C. Gow and, following his father's retirement, expanded the firm and renamed it Gow, Harrison and Company. He also became a director of Burmah Oil and various other companies. A noted philanthropist, Gow established in 1919 a lectureship in the Medical Diseases in Infancy and Childhood at Glasgow University, where he had studied moral philosophy. Glasgow University presented Gow with an honorary doctorate degree in law in 1934.

Gow's exceptional Chinese collection consisted primarily of Kangxi-period porcelains. It also included examples of Yongzheng and Qianlong porcelains, jades, and other hardstones. The collection was housed at Camis Eskan, Gow's country house near Glasgow. It gained international recognition through a series of ten articles by R. L. Hobson in *Burlington Magazine* and through Hobson's catalogue, which Gow published privately in a limited edition of three hundred copies in 1931. Gow lent fifty-six pieces to the 1935–36 International Exhibition of Chinese Art held at the Royal Academy in London.

Just months after his death in 1936, an exhibition of Gow's entire collection was held at Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery in Glasgow. Alfred H. Caspary of New York purchased the greater part of Gow's collection of Chinese porcelain in 1938 and bequeathed more than four hundred pieces to the Philadelphia Museum of Art as The Alfred and Margaret Caspary Memorial Gift in 1955. Sotheby's auctioned the remainder of Gow's Chinese collection in 1943.

Literature

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