



BISHOP'S STORTFORD DFAS

A member society of The Arts Society

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2021

FROM YOUR CHAIRMAN

A Happy New Year to you all in these extremely straitened times. We trust it will improve as time goes by but, firstly, a very warm welcome to our new members.

It is difficult for us to feel contented in the present environment although I can only express my gratitude for the welcome and enthusiasm I have received from your committee which have continued to keep the wheels of our society well-oiled and with good hearted amusing discussions during our zoom committee meetings. This has been matched by the excellent lectures which Maggie has ably rearranged with the lecturers who have adapted their presentations so well to the new technology.

I must commend Roger Beeching and the committee for their positive actions in engaging with the technology necessary to continue our programme of lectures and the wonderful information and links that Karen Brady provides in the fortnightly Mailchimp emails. They are interesting and educational and, through these, we can access online resources that may go a small way to make up for the losses in our calendar of visits and Special Interest Days.

We know anonymously how many people see the Mailchimp emails, and think that perhaps some people's servers may block them or regard them as junk mail. The content is extremely rewarding, so perhaps, when contacting friends who are members, we might confirm that they are in receipt of each issue in case they are one of those who is missing out.

I took on the task of chairman because I could not bear the thought of such a vital organisation in our area closing, so may I appeal to you to do everything you can to help sustain our group, please. Our group is already so vital, but we must maintain our momentum. The committee is constantly reviewing fresh ideas to provide you all with as much varied content in the Arts world as we can.

However, we can but look forward to being able to return to our venue in the fullness of time to meet our old friends in person in our usual happy and noisy way. I look forward to seeing you all on that happy day!

Jim Barrie

LECTURE PROGRAMME (February to July)

I hope that you enjoyed David Phillip's talk on Fine Art Forgery in January and here are details of the lectures that will take us in to the summer. We may or may not be able to meet in person, but will still be able to enjoy a variety of talks.

A couple of years ago, Chloe Sayer came to talk to us about Frida Kahlo. Unfortunately, problems with the trains from Liverpool Street to Stortford meant that she was delayed and was only able to deliver half of her talk. On **9th February**, we welcome Chloe back with her lecture: 'Viva México! The Paintings of Frida Kahlo and Mexican Popular Culture'. Few countries in the world offer such a rich and varied cultural heritage as Mexico. Before the Spanish Conquest, numerous civilisations rose and fell. After 1521, Spanish settlers brought new art forms, craft skills and architectural styles and earlier religious beliefs and practices merged with those of Christianity. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 banished European influence and promoted greater social justice.

Frida Kahlo and her muralist husband Diego Rivera helped to shape the cultural identity of twentieth-century Mexico. Rivera's panoramic images, painted on the walls of public buildings, celebrated Mexican history and identity. Kahlo made herself the principal theme of her art.

Today the arts and crafts of Mexico remain an essential part of life. Almost five centuries have passed since the Spanish Conquest and Mexico is home to more than fifty Native peoples. Popular art forms combine Aztec, Maya and Spanish traditions. Contemporary makers create splendid weavings, rich embroideries, shimmering beadwork, jewellery of silver and gold, ingenious toys, imaginative figures of papier mâché, pottery, and finely carved wooden dance-masks. Visually splendid celebrations are inspired by Christianity, yet have their roots in the distant past.

Our **9th March** talk by Elizabeth Gowing is entitled 'The Silver Thread: Silver filigree and traditional arts in Kosovo'. From the early Kosovan silver mines, which are mentioned in Dante, through the twentieth century politics over Kosovo's mines, which resulted in both a war and a golf course, a silver thread winds through Kosovo's history. Its most intricate tanglings are in the country's cultural capital, Prizren, where a seventh generation of filigree artisans use 'filum' and 'granum', zigzags, 'mouse-tooth' designs and other twists and turns to magic lacy creations from dull sticks of raw material. The results, in boxes, buttons, jewellery, religious ornamentation and the talismans of superstition, are a fine narrative of Kosovo's history and traditions.

'The Art and Architecture of Travel' is Sarah Pearson's lecture on the **13th April**. Whether by road, rail, sea or air, the infrastructure of travel has provided many

architectural treasures from the thatched petrol station of Blashford, Hampshire to the futuristic styling of Los Angeles airport. This lecture examines the art and architecture of travelling and includes often overlooked gems, including bus and railway stations, travel posters and tube stations. It examines leading artists and architects in the sphere of travel, including John Hassall, Fougasse, Leslie Green, and Richard Rogers.

Our **11th May** lecture by Tobias Capwell has a slightly different title, 'Diplomacy with Axe, Lance and Sword: The Field of the Cloth of Gold (7th-24th June 1520)' from the one on the programme. King Henry VIII was a great jousting and skilled swordsman, and he was fond of showing off his knightly prowess. However, he only ever fought one field battle, 'The Battle of the Spurs', against the French in 1513. The ensuing Anglo-French peace-treaty was followed in 1520 by an attempt to outlaw all war between Christian kingdoms. At the Field of Cloth of Gold, in the Pas de Calais, Henry met the French King Francis I in a lavish courtly spectacle. The meeting took the form of an enormous tournament, with jousts and other supposedly friendly combats taking place over more than two weeks. Despite being one of the most famous events in Tudor history, the nature of the martial contests themselves has remained largely mysterious. On this 500th anniversary year, we shall delve into this oft-misunderstood subject, to uncover both the splendour and the sinister undertones of this extraordinary moment of history.

The **8th June** lecture by food historian Tasha Marks will make sure our taste buds are ready for lunch, or certainly desserts! 'Food and Art Through the Ages: From Renaissance Sugar Sculpture to 3D Printing' is a whistle-stop tour of the history of food as an artistic medium; starting with 16th century sugar sculpture and venturing all the way up to 3D dessert printing and beyond. This lecture is a treat for those with a sweet tooth, as Tasha feels the subject of food and art through the ages is most exciting in the realms of the dessert. She will talk about the origins of dessert, the crossover between sugar and art, architecture and dessert (including Renaissance banqueting houses), sugar and spectacle, food as artistic medium, and the future of food. This exploration into the realms of dessert as spectacle includes an accompanying display to illustrate and enhance the historic subject.

On **13th July**, we welcome back Oliver Everett to talk about the Taj Mahal. His lecture 'The drama behind the Taj Mahal: Mughal painting at its zenith and the life and times of the Indian Emperor Shah Jahan' is based on the Islamic manuscripts, the Padshahnama (chronicle of the King of the World), which is the unique official history of the Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan, who ruled India from 1628 to 1659. He is best remembered for the building of the Taj Mahal as a tomb for his favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal.

The Padshahnama is illustrated with 44 of the finest Mughal paintings in the world. They vividly depict the very dramatic events in the Emperor's life and reign. Most of the important individuals in Shah Jahan's court can be identified and the paintings tell the remarkable story of the intrigues of court life as well as the Emperor's Coronation, royal weddings, bloody battles and hunting scenes.

The book is the finest Islamic manuscript in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle and was given to King George III in 1797 by the ruler of the north Indian state of Oudh.

I hope you enjoy the lectures and wish you a happy and healthy 2021.

Maggie Simons

DAYS OF SPECIAL INTEREST

For those of you who may be newer members, I thought it might be helpful to explain what these days are. We normally hold two a year, in January and August, as there is no monthly lecture planned for these months. The topics available from Arts Society lecturers are excitingly varied and there is a huge choice available! The day consists of three 1-hour lectures on the given subject, held over the whole day, including breaks and a lovely lunch!

August 24th 2021

Having been cancelled last August, we hope that Geri Parlby, an excellent very experienced lecturer, will be able to speak to us on, 'Magic Lanterns to MGM' – the birth of the Silver Screen and the art that surrounded it 'This talk looks at the development of the motion picture industry throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries taking its inspiration from some of the greatest artists, and leading to the birth of Hollywood and epic movies.

I will be selling tickets for this at our **June** meeting, and as these days are so popular you might like to arrange for a friend to book for you in person should you be away.

January 25th 2022.

Mary Alexander will talk to us on 'Why Paris 1900-1947' exploring how and why the city of Paris acted as both a magnet and a cauldron of talent for aspiring artists and designers during those years.

This is a date for your diary as, sadly, we had to cancel her for January this year.

Hilary Mathews