



THE ARTS
SOCIETY
WELWYN
GARDEN

A brief history of Welwyn Garden Decorative & Fine Arts Society 1980 – 2009

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- updated 2009*

In 1979 Alison Leakey gathered together a few friends living in the Tewin area with the idea of forming an Arts group under the auspices of NADFAS. The first committee meeting was held on 29th October 1979 by which time 71 members had enrolled. We still have a number of these founder members belonging to the society today. The subscription was £5 and it was agreed to hold seven lectures at St Francis Hall, Welwyn Garden City. Visitors would be charged 75p and the lectures would take place on the second Wednesday of the month with coffee at 10 a.m. and the lecture at 10 30 a.m.

The first meeting was held on 12th March 1980, and the lecture was "Ways of Looking at Paintings" by Mrs Michelle Sykes. The first outing, supported by 50 members, was to the Cecil Higgins Museum, Bedford on 20th May 1980. Tickets cost £1.80.

In the first year there was an average attendance of 104 members and a waiting list of 33. So at the end of the year it was agreed to increase the membership to 200 and the number of lectures to 9. By the end of 1981 there were 199 paid up members and 50 on the waiting list. It was agreed that members not attending at least 3 meetings should be asked to resign and if membership was not renewed by the end of November "time and money will not be spent on reminders".

In 1983 the subscription was raised to £6. Jimmy and Joyce Little founded the Church Recorders Group. The first church recorded was St Peter's, Tewin. The group are at present working on their 15th church at Watton-at-Stone.

July 1984 saw a successful open evening with 8 exhibitors showing antiquarian books, buttons, antique silver and porcelain, book binding, modern silver, textiles and treen.

In June 1985 a second evening meeting "A Musical Journey through the Ages" with Brian and Glynis Radford was held. The charge was £2, including wine, but attendance was disappointing and no further evening meetings have been held. In September 1986 the committee were told that St Francis Hall would not be available from January 1987. After considerable effort to find a new venue they were eventually able to book Campus West at £36 for 3 hours. This move proved to be to the advantage of the Society as it was more comfortable and it was possible to increase the membership further.

By 1989 there were 318 members and there was a "Social Get Together" at which the members of the committee outlined their roles.

1990 was the 10th Anniversary and the membership was 345 with a subscription of £10.

Membership has remained at around 350 since then and there has always been a waiting list.

Peter Medhurst gave the Anniversary lecture "Music at the Court of Henry VIII" and this was followed by a finger buffet in the Terrace Suite. The Guest of Honour was the National Chairman, Shirley Hewett, and the founder member of the branch, Mrs Alison Leakey, was made Honorary President of WGDFAS - an office that was not replaced on her death in 1998. Peter Medhurst and Company were once again booked to celebrate a milestone in the history of the Society when they performed "Music to celebrate Ireland's Patron Saint" at the 25th Anniversary in March 2005.

There was a celebratory lunch in the Terrace Suite and the then National Chairman, Nester Wain, was guest of honour.

The pattern of 9 lectures, 3 or 4 outings and study days was well established and continues to this day. The choice of lectures has been aided by a list supplied from NADFAS House and has covered a wide variety of subjects from Ancient Egypt via Spain and Italy to Japan, personalities such as Inigo Jones, Bess of Hardwick to Jacob Epstein and topics varying from silver jewellery, long case clocks and furniture. The list is never ending!

In 2007 and 2008 the Society supported Young Arts by organising a day when young carers were given the opportunity to work with celebrated illustrators of children's books. In May 2002, a 4 day visit to Liverpool explored its cathedrals, art galleries and museums with visits to Packwood House and Ragley Hall en route. In June 2009, a successful 4 day trip to Normandy visited the many Chateaux and Gardens that were mentioned in a lecture the previous April.

The Society continues to thrive and evolve. Recent changes have been the introduction of digital notices, digital presentations, and the setting up of a Society web-site.