



**THE ARTS  
SOCIETY**  
BISHOPS  
STORTFORD

**NEWSLETTER**

**FEBRUARY 2024**

## FROM YOUR CHAIRMAN

A Happy New Year to you all, and a warm welcome to all our new members, as we look forward to another inspiring programme of lectures, events and visits courtesy of the efforts of Maggie Simons, Hilary Mathews and Rosemary Thomson. They create your enthusiasm and I'm sure I speak for everybody when I say a big thank you to them for all their hard work. Quietly in the background, of course, are the rest of the committee who create the structure of our society, and my thanks to them all. I think the stunning lecture we enjoyed on 9th January, the huge audience, and the lovely warm atmosphere were testament to their hard work.

We were expecting to vote on the resolution that had been proposed at the AGM, but postponed owing to confusion amongst many members of the audience as to exactly what was being voted for. Your committee was at pains not to try to influence members' opinions, having previously contacted the Arts Society headquarters on this issue, and been informed that there was not a mechanism or inclination for them to investigate an issue which in their eyes was too old to review. My concern for safety, if people were standing on the stairs for too long, echoed in the minds of the proposers and, 20 minutes before the meeting started, I was told the resolution had been withdrawn. I then had to explain the situation to the audience with no preparation, and I apologise if anything I said was not quite appropriate in some people's eyes.

I think we must consider that the Arts Societies cover a wide demographic variation, so it is difficult for HQ to provide specific publicity nationwide. (By contrast, I know of one society which has a venue with only 100 capacity). With the vast array of facilities

they have made available to us, they encourage individual Societies to use them as seems fit for their particular structure. Our Society is considered by HQ to be engaged and well organised, and our increased publicity through the efforts of Mick Fitch, for which we are so grateful, seem to be raising our profile considerably, which is exactly what Headquarters would like every society in the country to do. To reinforce the point, our thanks also go to Karen Brady for her stimulating mail chimp newsletters, David Green for keeping our website up-to-date, and my wife June for making everybody welcome when they arrive at each lecture, not to mention the wonderful facilities that we enjoy at the South Mill Arts theatre.

Another piece of hot news is that Hilary Mathews has kindly offered to be nominated for the chairmanship of our Society at the next AGM. Many thanks to Hilary and, if elected, I'm sure she will perform the task very ably and efficiently, and we would all look forward to supporting her. However, she will have to compete with the tide of nominations from other members!

Member support is everything and, with the use of the tokens to be offered to any friends or family you think might be interested in attending a lecture and perhaps becoming a member themselves, we can present our Society lectures to an even wider audience. We look forward to that possibility.

Best wishes, Jim Barrie.

## LECTURE PROGRAMME

Our programme of lectures this year has had a good start with Sarah Burles' talk on three Impressionist women artists. I hope you are now eager to find out more about the other Impressionist ladies working in France at the same time.

On February 13<sup>th</sup>, Susan Kay-Williams, Chief Executive of the Royal School of Needlework, will bring the history of dyes up to date with her lecture entitled 'Mauve to Mumbai: the recent history of colour in textiles'. In 1856 an 18-year-old student at the Royal College of Chemistry accidentally discovered the first fully synthetic colour. This lecture takes us from Perkin's discovery and comes right up to date with the development and challenges of dyeing in the 20th and 21st centuries with synthetic dyes and fibres. It is a story of serendipity, science, war, innovation, trial and error, environmental concerns, economics and fashion, all of which have had changing demands on the dyeing trade over the last 160 years.

The dyes that May Morris used in her embroideries were probably made from natural material, but we shall find out during Fiona Rose's talk on the 12<sup>th</sup> March, "The Life and Work of May Morris: A Remarkable Woman". May was the younger daughter of William and Jane Morris and is now recognised as a leading figure in the Arts & Crafts Movement. Excelling in the field of embroidery, she was Head of Embroidery at Morris & Co. by the time she was twenty-three. May also designed wallpapers, made jewellery and was a talented amateur watercolour artist. She was instrumental in founding the Women's Guild of Arts formed to support women working in the arts and crafts field at a time when they were excluded from similar organisations. A skilled editor, May spent

her later years editing the 24 volumes of her father's collected works.

We will be introduced to a giant of 17<sup>th</sup> Century European art when Douglas Skeggs joins us on the 9<sup>th</sup> April to talk about “Velázquez: The Great Magician of Art”. Velázquez is probably the most famous artist of the Spanish Golden Age. Born in Seville he made his reputation through traditional religious works and 'bodegones' - literally 'tavern scenes' or paintings of everyday life. However, his introduction to the Court of King Philip IV created many new opportunities for him as artist and statesman.

“The Housekeeper’s Tale: The Women who really ran the English Country House” is the subject of Tessa Boase’s lecture on the 14<sup>th</sup> May. The most senior of upper servants, the housekeeper carried a family’s secrets with her to the grave. She ran the English country house, controlled its female servants and conserved its many treasures. Tessa has used old letters, secret diaries and neglected archives, and will discuss three housekeepers: Mrs Wells of Uppark, Mrs Mackenzie of Wrest Park, and Mrs Higgins of Charleston. The role of the housekeeper changed from the formalities of the Victorian era to the social change of the 20th-century. Each housekeeper responded very differently to the challenges she faced.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> June, Colin Pink will give his lecture “The Fate of Art in the Nazi Era”. The Nazis are famous for their opposition to modern art, staging the Degenerate Art Exhibition in 1937 that ridiculed modern art and labelled it a Jewish and Bolshevik conspiracy to undermine German identity. In this talk Colin will examine the complexities of Nazi art policy and what happened to modernist artists during this period. Many were forced into exile, some were

tortured and imprisoned, others sought to reach an accommodation with the authorities, some retreated into a private secluded world to escape persecution.

The rise of the Nazis created undreamed of opportunities for reactionary academic artists who worked in a neo-classical or late nineteenth century realist style and we will look at the rarely seen work of these Nazi artists such as the painters Adolf Ziegler, Werner Peiner, and Adolf Wissel, sculptors such as Arno Breker and Josef Thorak and filmmakers such as Leni Riefenstahl and Fritz Hippler. We will also see how, despite closing down the Bauhaus art school, elements of Bauhaus design were utilised by Nazi designers.

We will look at work made by artists in exile and under Nazi occupation such as the work of Max Beckmann, Karl Schwesig and Felix Nussbaum (exiled in Holland and Belgium) and the Hel Hesten group of Danish artists, who succeeded in creating avant-garde art under the nose of the Nazis in occupied Copenhagen.

Elizabeth Gowing's last lecture to us was via Zoom, therefore it will be good to welcome her on the 9<sup>th</sup> July in person to talk about "Edith Durham's bold Edwardian collection of beautiful Balkan things" or, in Edith's own words *'Such costumes as I have never seen before and never shall again perhaps'*. Edith Durham's travels in the first decades of the twentieth century took her across the unexplored Accursed Mountains between Kosovo, Montenegro and Albania, to what are now UNESCO World Heritage Site monasteries, and through bazaars she describes as 'glowing with goods'. In watercolours and in seven published books she recorded the objects she collected, the landscapes she visited and the people she met. She was elected a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute and was the first woman to become its Vice President.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> September, Toby Faber will make a return visit to us to talk about “The Imperial Easter Eggs of Carl Fabergé: Before the Revolution”. Between 1885 and 1916, Carl Fabergé made fifty jewelled eggs which were Easter presents from Russia’s last two Romanov emperors to their wives. Fabergé and his designers had to conform to only three rules: that each year’s Easter present should be egg-shaped, that it should contain some surprise to amuse or delight its recipient, and that it should be different from any predecessor. The result was a series of creations demonstrating ingenuity and creativity and their styles range from traditional Russian to Art Nouveau. The materials used ranged from carved hardstone to exquisite enamelled gold. Their maker’s relentless search for novelty also means that they provide a fabulously quirky illustrated history of the decline of the Romanovs. The lecture is illustrated with pictures of the Romanovs and their palaces, and, of course, with photographs of the eggs themselves. Unfortunately, there are no samples to take away.

I look forward to seeing you at our monthly lectures and hope you find them enjoyable, interesting and informative.

Maggie Simons

## **OUTINGS**

How times flies when we are having fun – which I hope you all are, despite the unpredictable weather each day. As my garden overlooks the River Stort, I keep an eye on the water levels which are monitored very well but I often wonder WHERE does the water go!

Since I last wrote, we have enjoyed our outings together which have been well attended and allow me to oversee the budget easily.

Looking back to the Autumn, 28 members travelled to Liverpool for the Art and History of that wonderful city. I think we could all pick out particular highlights but my own were almost every day, from visiting museums and cathedrals to Anthony Gormley's "Another Place" at Crosby Beach where some ventured to get a close up on a rather windy and wet day. But I think my favourite was the visit to Port Sunlight built by the Lever family for their workers and where the village has over 900 listed and preserved buildings. We were given one free afternoon when we all went our individual ways and I went with Pat and Alan Matthews on the Mersey ferry where we reminisced about the 1960s and Gerry and the Pacemakers – and of course The Beatles!

Our late booking for a visit to Bletchley Park did not disappoint even though, yet again, the weather was damp, but this did not deter us from walking round the various workers blocks which played such an important part in helping shorten World War 2. There was just SO much to see that, with a 12-month pass given to each one of us, I suspect many will take the opportunity to visit again shortly. One has to see the departments to realise how basic the resources were each and every day, especially in the cold winter months.

Finally, we ended our days out for 2023 with our Christmas lunch at the Novotel Hotel where 76 members were served with a super choice of menu, plus the obligatory crackers and "fun" boxes which delighted the gentlemen to see who could blow up the largest/longest balloon and of which Mick Fitch has the evidence

in the delightful photos he took (thank you Mick)!! The committee have agreed that the service we received was first class and I have already made a booking for December this year.

You will all now have received your programme card for this year and will see that I have tried to cater for all tastes in planning our outings but, if you have any thoughts of places which we have not yet entertained, please let me know. I am here to please!

Rosemary Thomson

## **DAYS OF SPECIAL INTEREST**

These are held in the months where there are normally no lectures i.e., August and January. They take place with 3 lectures, over a whole day, and with a good lunch included, allowing a deeper level of study on the given subject.

We started this year in January with Simon Whitehouse giving us a humorous but very informative in depth look at the life of Oscar Wilde.

Our next Day of Special Interest is on **August 20<sup>th</sup> 2024** when Lucy Hughs Hallett will be talking about **Women Artists of the 1930's**. There will be a 1 hour lecture on each of 3 different artists including Tirzah Garwood and Suzanne Cooper, who happened to be her mother -in -law! Here, in Bishops Stortford, we have a local connection to the West Bardfield artists and the Fry Gallery in Saffron Walden where many of their original works of art are held.

Tickets for this will be available at our meeting in **June, from 09.30**. If you are unable to be at the lecture, then please ask a friend to reserve a place for you.

Hilary Mathews

## **YOUNG ARTS**

In the September 2023 Newsletter I reported that Richard Whittington primary school were planning to hold a Sketch-Fest of the children's art work and displaying the sketch books we funded. The school subsequently appointed their Year Three Teacher as Art Lead and she will be taking the work forward into the spring term of this year.

We were very pleased that the application made for the Community Grant from the National Art Society (NADFAS) was successful and it has been awarded to the Art department of the Herts and Essex High School & Science College. This award of £250 will help fund an exciting new sculpture project at the secondary school and will result in the participants of the school's art club producing beautiful intricate sculptures of either cacti or succulent plants. Please see our February notice board for the attractively produced poster thanking the society for this opportunity and detailing the project. As the school does not unfortunately possess a kiln, the young people will be working with air-clay to produce the sculptures.

In the latter half of last year, we received a very welcome approach from the Assistant Head (Partnerships) /Teacher of Art of Bishop's Stortford College, Emma Bowater. Emma had recently moved into our area with her family from the West Midlands and had

previously worked in her professional capacity as Head of Art alongside Wolverhampton Art Society.

Together they held exhibitions that celebrated the talent of the young artists in that area and encouraged them in the creative career paths on offer.

Emma was very keen to repeat this collaboration between the schools and our Society. To that end, as your Young Art representative, I have met with Emma to discuss ways in which we can achieve this together. We are now planning to facilitate an inter-school art competition later in this year. The college has kindly offered their superb facilities of either the Memorial Hall or The Ferguson lecture theatre to house the planned exhibition and as the venue for the award of prizes and certificates to the young people participating.

We have preciousely attended private viewings of the Herts and Essex High schools' internal art exhibitions which have proved to be most enjoyable. This endeavour, it is hoped, will open up the viewing to a wider public audience to the amazing talent of the young people in our area, and enhance our society's profile and involvement with the wider school community.

Both Emma from Bishop's Stortford College and Victoria from the Herts and Essex High school have accepted an invitation to attend our next lecture "Mauve to Mumbai: the recent history of colour in textiles " by Susan Kay-Williams. They are both looking forward to meeting with our society and sharing the lecture with us. They will also be looking into the possibility of bringing some of their art students to one of our lectures in due course, which I am sure will prove to be inspiring for them too.

Shirley Moore