

ALTON DECORATIVE & FINE ARTS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Alton
Decorative
& Fine Arts
Society

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SUMMER 2013

Editorial

The start of a new ADFAS season next month commences with the AGM, details enclosed, so please come early for the 7.30pm start. The Chairman will aim to keep it short and to the point so we can start the following lecture on time, but please take the opportunity to attend and find out what the Committee has been doing on your behalf.

There are many ways in which the membership gets involved as there is far more to ADFAS than a rather good lecture every month. The visits are a popular way of widening one's interests, whilst church recording provides a practical way of doing something of lasting value. Our local support of Young Arts Projects is also appreciated, whilst the Heritage Volunteers are actively involved in providing a valuable service at The Wakes in Selborne. NADFAS is proud to be celebrating 40 years of volunteering at a 'national event' in Kensington Town Hall on 12 November and I hope some of you will be visiting Rising to the Challenge (details in the last NADFAS Review and on the NADFAS website) and perhaps come back with ideas we can adopt in and around Alton.

Special Interest Day

**The Romanovs – Tyrants and Martyrs
of Imperial Russia**
Thursday, 21 November
Beech Village Hall

Douglas Skeggs makes a welcome return to Alton DFAS for what promises to be an interesting day. We will discover the course of this hard, determined, often brutal dynasty which ruled Russia for over 300 years from Peter the Great – the founder of St Petersburg, through to his eccentric daughter Elizabeth to Catherine the Great – the most powerful of all the Empresses of Russia who had no real claim to the throne. Then to the tragic figure of Nicholas II, the last Tsar and one of the most poignant figures in history whose death in a cellar in July 1918 ended the reign of this turbulent and ill-fated family

Bookings via Kit Butterfield (01420 88356)



For your diary

Thursday, 19 September
Longleat House, Wiltshire



Longleat House is regarded as one of the best examples of Elizabethan architecture in Britain. Mostly completed by 1580, it is the home of the 7th Marquess of Bath and is packed with antiques and paintings. The gardens will also be of interest. The grounds extend to 900 acres which were landscaped by Capability Brown.

Bookings via Niven Baird (01420 85520)

**Thursday, 7 November 2013, St Paul's
Cathedral and the Bank of England
Museum**



St Paul's Cathedral, the masterpiece of Britain's most famous architect Sir Christopher Wren, is at least the fourth to have stood on the site. It was built between 1675 and 1710, after its predecessor was destroyed in the Great Fire of London, and services began in 1697. The Bank of England Museum tells the story of the Bank from its foundation in 1694 to its role today as the United Kingdom's central bank. There is also an exhibition consisting of published and unpublished material from the Bank of England's own collection of prints and drawings including the works of James Gillray, John Tenniel and Steve Bell.

Bookings via Vanessa MacMahon (01420 561709)

A Gem of a Day



The success of our March Study Day in Beech Village Hall with John Benjamin was due to the ability of our speaker to enthuse, educate and entertain – all at the same time. We were given a crash

course on diamonds (the 4 c's - carat, clarity, colour and cut) and when they became the 'must have' item of jewellery, replacing pearls.

A portrait of Queen Elizabeth I was described as 'groaning with jewellery' but all before diamonds were readily available or fashionable. The 18th century was the age of the faceted stone when Huguenots discovered how to cut diamonds and they became the aspirational stone of the wealthy. At this time candlelight was the norm and diamonds sparkled to good effect in the flickering light. We were treated to the historical development of diamonds, the language of gem stones and the changing fashion of jewellery including cameos, novelty items and then the mass produced items of the Edwardian era which gave rise to the arts and crafts movement where style, individuality and integrity were the aims.

Reflecting the life style of the times, the use of diamond jewellery changed and it was interesting to hear that in the 1960s professional women wanted to wear them at work and this led to the rise of 9 carat gold and diamond jewellery which could also be worn for fashionable evening cocktail parties. By comparison, the 1970's "was the decade that time forgot" with regard to diamond jewellery, whilst modern items incorporate the full range of clarity types of diamond.

It was interesting to hear our speaker refer to member's items as 'the best selection of any study days he had tutored' and that "many of the pieces were very filmable had they been taken into an Antiques Roadshow venue". Some pieces were sentimentally priceless but commercially scrap, whilst others were of exceptional quality. He swiftly gave a description, date, type and value of the items and there were many happy people, but no doubt a few sad ones as well. He worked hard with keen observers all gathered around and we learned that value, insurance value, auction value and retail value were very different. He liked pieces in their original box, appreciated those with a family history and a number of pieces were prefaced with "We like this" and some were valued at many thousands of pounds.

He kept a few items to the end and there were a couple of 'Roadshow Moments' – a rather 'tired' bracelet acquired at a jumble sale for 20p was of micro mosaic, dated around 1860 and probably capable of reaching £1200 at auction. The final item was a 1915 Coral Pink Pearl pendant described as 'a cracking piece of jewellery which was absolutely beautiful' and would probably reach five thousand pounds at auction, although would retail at ten to twelve thousand pounds.

Kit's organisation was as impeccable as ever, as was her delicious lunch and those present had been treated to one of those really special days with a very personable expert whom they will remember for a long time.



Strawberry Hill & Marble Hill House



It was a day of white houses and blue skies when we group set off to Twickenham back in May. Our first stop was Strawberry Hill House, created in the 18th century by Horace Walpole, and internationally famous as Britain's finest example of Georgian Gothic revival architecture.

Walpole discovered Chopp'd Straw Hall in 1747 and set about transforming what was then a couple of cottages into his 'little gothic castle' with pinnacles, battlements and a round tower set in meadows and gardens. Inside he chose the architecture of gothic cathedrals as his inspiration, so that chimney pieces, doors and ceilings were all based on vaulting, medieval tombs and rose windows. As we explored we did indeed find winding corridors and gloomy passageways which would open into the sudden splendour of rooms like the Gallery - 'all Gothicism, gold and looking glass' as the poet Thomas Gray described it. Following

our excellent guided tour around the house – now sadly empty of most of the great collection of art and relics that Walpole had made during his lifetime – we had lunch in the grounds, enjoying the unusual pleasure of warm sunshine.

In the afternoon we drove less than a mile along the river to the very antithesis of the gothic tradition: Marble Hill House. Based on classical lines, order and symmetry it was built by Henrietta Howard, mistress of King George II and friend and confidante of some of the cleverest men in England. A very early example of Palladian architecture, Marble Hill was intended as a retreat from crowded 18th-century London and its grand interiors include a fine collection of early Georgian paintings and furniture. Again, our excellent guides took us through the lovely rooms where we admired the hand painted Chinese wallpaper and views across to the river. Afterwards we had a welcome cup of tea and biscuits, followed by an especially easy run back to Alton and the 21st century.

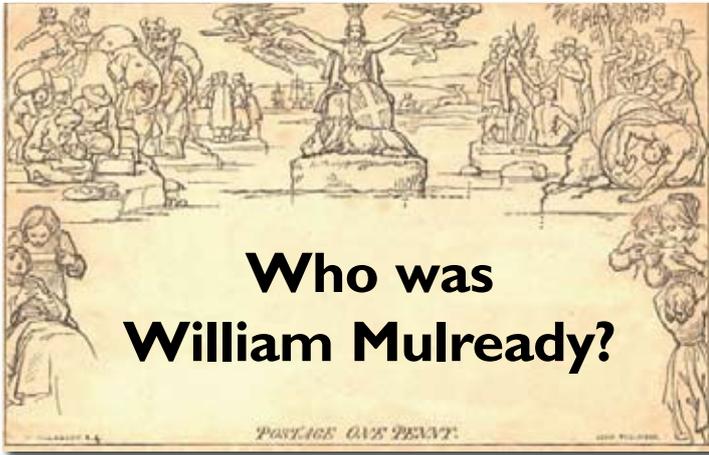
Vanessa MacMahon

Norfolk

The main aim of our Spring Tour this year was to visit some of the great historic houses of Norfolk, via Audley End. Over three days visits were made to Blickling Hall, Holkham Hall and Sandringham. Other visits included The Castle Museum and Art Gallery in Norwich and Walsingham Abbey which encompassed a drive through the Broads and a visit to Cromer for a crab sandwich and the Famous Lifeboat Museum. The East Ruston Gardens gave inspiration to the keen gardeners.

The journey home began at Norwich Cathedral, proceeded to Sutton Hoo and finally Alfred Manning's House at Dedham. With Ray at the wheel a delightful time was had by all and there is great interest in Amsterdam as the location of next year's trip.





Who was William Mulready?

Born in Ireland in 1786, his family moved to London when he was 6, where he was educated and taught drawing. In 1790 he enrolled at the Royal Academy School and many of his early pictures show landscapes and he established a reputation as a painter of everyday scenes from rural life. In addition he also illustrated books, including the first edition of Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* in 1807. His first painting of importance, *Returning from the Ale House*, now in the Tate Gallery, London, under the title *Fair Time*, appeared in 1809. In 1815 he became an Associate of the Royal Academy (ARA) and RA in 1816.

In philatelic circles Mulready is well known for designing the illustrations for pre-printed postal stationery which were introduced by the Royal Mail at the same time as the iconic Penny Black in May 1840.

The design (illustration kindly supplied by The British Postal Museum & Archive) incorporated a munificent Britannia at the centre top with a shield and a reclining lion surrounded by a representation of the continents of Asia and North America with people reading their mail in the two lower corners, bestowing the benefits of mail services to the countries of the world under British control. The Mulready illustration was printed such that it appeared on the face of the sheets when folded and glued. It is difficult to appreciate that at that time pre-gummed envelopes, as we know them today, did not exist then.

The Mulready illustration was a very elaborate indication that postage had been pre-paid. In the same way that the first postage stamps were issued in two values (Penny Black and Two Penny Blue) both the letter sheets and envelopes were issued in one penny and two penny values in the same black and blue colours as the same value postage stamps.

Stationery manufacturers, whose livelihood was threatened by the new letter sheet, produced many caricatures of Mulready's design and on 12 May, only six days after their introduction, Rowland Hill wrote that *I fear we shall have to substitute some other stamp for that design by Mulready ... the public have shown their disregard and even distaste for beauty* and within two months it was withdrawn, making it collectable and valuable today.

William Mulready died in London 150 years ago, in July 1863 and was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery.

Tony Cross

Forthcoming Lectures

10th September - preceded by the AGM at 7.30pm

Pearls - The Tears of an Oyster

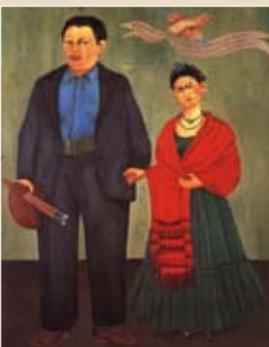
Patricia Law

Pearls were the original gemstone – the most prized and most precious and there was a belief in Roman times that pearls were the frozen tears of oysters. The lecture will explore the history of man's changing relationship with and appreciation of pearls. Not surprisingly it will start in Roman times, proceeding to the pearl discoveries in the West Indies by Columbus in 1498. The development of the cultured pearl in the 20th century resulted in huge changes to jewelry and these will be explored as well.

8th October - Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera:

The Golden Age of Mexican Painting

Chloe Sayer



These two 20th century artists have achieved iconic status in Mexico. The Revolution of 1910 swept away the old regime and banished European influence in the arts. The pair in their different ways helped to shape the cultural identity of the country and made it a magnet for the rest of the world.

The Mexican mural movement of the 1920s was destined to produce some of the greatest public art of the last century. Rivera's panoramic images adorn the walls of public buildings, combining social criticism with a faith in human progress. By contrast, Kahlo's work is small in format and she is probably Mexico's most original painter and made herself the principal theme of her art.

The pair were married in 1929 and their turbulent relationship and the transforming times in which they lived were the subject of *Frida*, a US film of 2002. They are also the key figures in *Lacuna*, a historical novel of 2009 by Barbara Kingsolver.

12th November

Sicilian Splendours: From Greece to the Normans

Dr Paul Roberts

Sicily, with its rich architectural and artistic heritage, is the largest and was one of the wealthiest islands of the ancient Mediterranean. The lecture will start with the arrival of the Greeks and explore their ruins and collections of pottery, stone and bronze in the museums at Palermo and Syracuse. With the Romans came peace and a period of unparalleled prosperity as reflected in the beautiful public buildings and private villas. Finally, the lecture looks beyond Rome to Norman Sicily with its extraordinary artistic flourishing, seen in wall and ceiling mosaic in churches which were heavily influenced by the Byzantine East.