

# ALTON DECORATIVE & FINE ARTS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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## Editorial

Did you manage to look at the *Art of Living Impact Report 2015* which accompanied the last edition of NADFAS Review? There was a wealth of data to assimilate. I think we are all aware that there are numerous societies (377 in total - we are society no. 303) and it does not take a mathematical genius to realise that if each society does the sorts of things we manage to undertake – lectures, visits, heritage volunteering, church recording and young arts activities, then NADFAS has a considerable effect in promoting the arts and heritage.

NADFAS itself is a charity with stated objectives and whilst we subscribe to the same list of aims, Alton DFAS decided against applying for charitable status, as some societies have, for we are relatively small. Nationally the organisation has to be seen to fulfilling its community responsibilities to show that charitable status is justified. That is why we are so keen to do more than arrange lectures and visits which simply benefit our members. Our heritage volunteering, church recording, support of arts educational projects and the church trails we have recently taken up, all benefit the wider community and demonstrate that we are fully signed up to the notion of providing a force for good in arts and heritage education locally.

The new Director mentions that we should feel proud that our quiet and understated organisation achieves so much and reaches well beyond its membership. We all appreciate our local lecture programme and visits but are there other things we can do to help promote arts and heritage education? To misquote John F Kennedy (1961) Ask *not what ADFAS does for me, but what can I do for ADFAS?*



## ‘Replacement’ Visit

**Wednesday 2nd December**

**A backstage tour of Covent Garden**

Backstage Tours include an introduction to the colourful history of the theatre, an insight into the redevelopment of the Royal Opera House and a look at aspects of current productions. As the Royal Opera House is a fully working theatre, each tour is a unique experience, and may include opportunities to see The Royal Ballet in class, or the magnificent backstage technology in operation. Bookings to be taken at the October & November meetings meeting.

## Dates for your diary

**5th November - The Georgian Country House - its interior, decoration & furnishings**

Bookings to be taken at the September meeting.

# Visit to Sandham Memorial Chapel & Highclere Castle

The chapel, designed to showcase the artistic talent of Stanley Spencer, was built as a memorial to the forgotten dead of the Great War. The paintings in the chapel depict everyday scenes from Spencer's own experiences on the largely forgotten Salonika front in northern Greece. Members considered the short talk and introductory film gave just the right amount of information to appreciate what we were looking at.

Highclere Castle nearby was designed by Sir Charles Barry, architect of the Houses of Parliament. The two buildings have many similarities, in particular, the tower so reminiscent of the Victoria Tower. The house was built for the 3rd Earl of Carnarvon and to this day the 8th Earl continues to regard it as his family home, a sentiment much appreciated by many of our group. There were flowers and plants throughout the house which was very crowded in the middle of the day, due no doubt to the 'Downton effect'. Someone even commented that there much about the house that was familiar. The views from the house are magnificent, the parkland setting resplendent and the house looked wonderful in the sunshine and the wind.

In the cellars, Lord & Lady Carnarvon have laid out an excellent display of Egyptian artefacts from the tomb of Tutenkamoun.



Many of the artefacts are reproduction but of the highest quality. One exhibit had several letter box type openings. On looking into these openings, you see a reconstruction of what archeologist Howard Carter might have seen when he first looked into the tomb in 1922. "Wonderful things" - magic!

**John Harrap**

## A Performance in Three Acts



The Study Day in late March, described as a 'performance in three acts', was a day of sheer delight. Jeanne Dolmetsch entertained us with illustrations of paintings featuring historic instruments, recordings of similar instruments and information about the musical tastes of the periods. If that were not enough she, ably assisted by her sister Marguerite, played a selection of pieces on a variety of recorders and viols, and a spinet and these interludes were a joy to behold.

Both are granddaughters of Arnold Dolmetsch who was a pioneer of the early music of the Renaissance and we were

treated to some fascinating background relating to the history and technology of the instruments they had brought to play including some remarkable photographs of the family playing them. Comprising a selection of viols, known as *viola da gamba* as they were played on the leg or between the knees, and a range of recorders which their grandfather made fashionable just over a century ago. We learned that Henry VIII had a collection of 76 recorders and imported viol players from the continent, whilst both Charles I and Oliver Cromwell played the viol. This transformed into the cultural 'backstory' of King Louis XIV and 17th century life at the Palace of Versailles which showed the importance of music at that time, before moving onto an exploration of music and manners in 18th century England.

Well-known portrait painters of the day including Zoffany, Hogarth and Gainsborough featured some of their subjects holding, as well as playing, a wide range of musical instruments and we saw a selection of those. At one point Jeanne opened a music case and proceeded to assemble something with an elongate cylindrical body that appeared to be a specialist firearm, but with a reeded mouthpiece added it resembled a saxophone, but it turned out to be a Bass Voice!

The Study Day team under Kit Butterfield provided one of their super lunches with a glass of wine which make such days go with a flourish. The vote of thanks was given by ADFAS Chairman Niven Baird who thanked Jeanne and Marguerite for a truly splendid educational as well as entertaining day.

# ADFAS has a ball in Bath

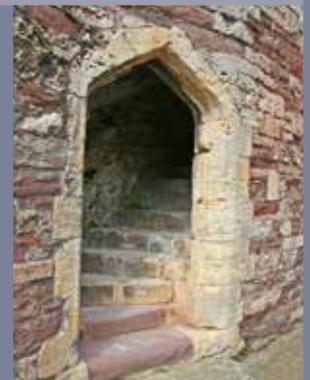
The April expedition enjoyed five action-packed days of visits to fine arts and historical sites in the Bath area. Our first stop was at Dyrham Park, a 17th century NT property, now in the process of re-roofing, with many rooms and exhibits quite literally under wraps. Despite only a limited number of rooms being open, a special exhibition showing many aspects of the restoration work was of particular interest, covering problems created by weather, insects and rodents. Included was the sampling of 18th century hot chocolate, whose peppery taste was invigorating to the throat.

A short drive took us to Bath and the American Museum in Britain. Our transatlantic cousins may not have the same length of historical time as ourselves, but they are masters of presentation, covering some 400 years from the landings of the Mayflower to the Moon.

Economics prevented our group being based in Bath itself, but the Thistle Grand in Bristol proved to be a satisfactory alternative and even made some of the venues more accessible, thanks to the local motorway system.

No visit to Bath is complete without one to Number One, The Royal Crescent, providing an insight into 18th century Bath, its visitors, customs and living arrangements, with luxury and lice living in close proximity. This was followed by a walking tour of the historical centre of the city, taking in the principal buildings and thoroughfares, including of course the baths, notably the King's Bath, which may have done wonders on royalty in earlier days, but would certainly not attract bathers today. However, it emerged as a charming city with new vistas and pleasures to be found round every corner.

**Continued overleaf**



# Forthcoming Lectures

**8th September at Alton College - preceded by the AGM at 7.30pm**

**Wonderful Copenhagen: the story of four magnificent Royal Castles in the Kingdom of Denmark**

**Hanne Sutcliffe**

Denmark is blessed with no less than fourteen royal castles. Over the centuries, the Danish kings enriched the land with a vast collection of buildings, from early simple dwellings to sumptuous palaces. We will hear about the life stories of many of the royal Danish family and four of the most famous and splendid castles will be described.

**13th October at Alton College**

**Eric Ravilious and the English Landscape**

**Dr David Haycock**

Eric Ravilious was one of the most distinctive young British artists working between the two World Wars. This lecture explores his career, looking both at his place in the long tradition of watercolour painting in England, as well as within the social and cultural context of England in the 1920s and '30s. Dulwich Picture Gallery is currently hosting a major Ravilious exhibition so this will be a very popular lecture - please come early!

**10th November at Alton College**

**Thomas Heatherwick - the Leonardo da Vinci of our Times?**

**Anthea Streeter**

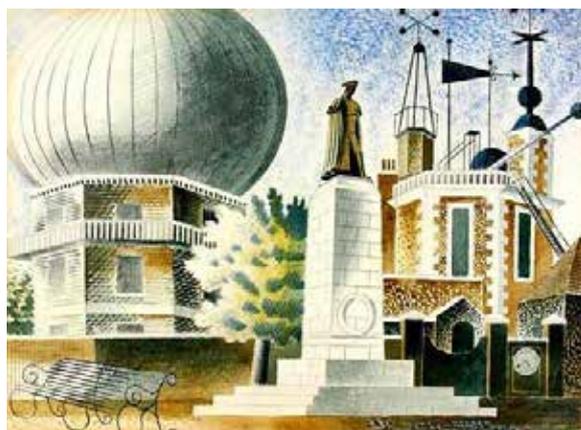
Thomas Heatherwick received worldwide coverage after he designed the Olympic Cauldron for London 2012. Heatherwick and his team have also designed the new red London bus, the first new design of such an iconic symbol of London for 50 years. Heatherwick's approach is multi-disciplinary, and with his team he blends architecture, sculpture and engineering to produce brilliant results, from large urban spaces to individual items.

## ADFAS has a ball in Bath (continued)

We enjoyed a private view of the remarkable paintings at Corsham Court, home to the Methuen family for over 300 years and containing one of the finest private collections in the country. These consist principally of works by 16th and 17th century Italian masters, together with magnificent period furniture, all set in a landscape designed by Capability Brown and Humphrey Repton. Later we took in the Holburne Museum, with its accent on explanation and education covering a wide variety of domestic themes associated with Bath.

Berkeley Castle provided something of a contrast to the sophistication of Bath, with its infamously gruesome history. The castle, built for defence against the Welsh, dates back nearly 900 years, mostly in the ownership of the Berkeley family, who still live there, with guest appearances from several monarchs and many others. The adjoining monastic building, now the parish church, proved to be of great interest for such diverse reasons as its structural movements, also roofing problems caused by the high winds coming down the valley it overlooks. After a brief break, it was back to Bath and dinner aboard the *John Rennie*, a longboat on the Bath and Avon canal.

## A Timely Place



The Royal Observatory, home of Greenwich Mean Time and the Prime Meridian Line, is one of the most important historic scientific sites in the world. It was commissioned in 1675 by Charles II, with the foundation stone being laid on 10 August, a mere 340 years ago, and is the official starting point for each new day, year and millennium. The Observatory is now maintained by the National Maritime Museum and is part of Maritime Greenwich, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1997. Visitors can stand in both the eastern and western hemispheres simultaneously by placing their feet either side of the Prime Meridian – the centre of world time and space. The Observatory was built to improve navigation at sea and this was inseparable from the accurate measurement of time, for which the Observatory became generally famous in the 19th century.

**Tony Cross**

Our final day saw us at Tynesfield, built in the mid-19th century and owned until recently by the Gibbs family, a house famous for being left with almost all of its original furniture and decorations, which were in the Pugin-inspired high gothic style. The NT has been carrying out major restoration, which will continue for some time and improved visitor facilities are still necessary; nonetheless, it is a mecca for any enthusiast of this type of melodramatic architecture and furniture. On the return to Alton we took in the village of Lacock, familiar as a backdrop to many period TV productions, and featuring Lacock Abbey, an 18th century gothic-style house, previously home to the Fox-Talbot family and associated with pioneering photography.

Our driver Ray performed near-impossible feats guiding a large coach through small gateways and narrow overcrowded streets. He also added to the long list of British inventions on the trip; having been plagued during the night by marauding seagulls outside his hotel room window, he placed two toy windmills on the sill: the noisy birds departed forthwith.

Do watch out for announcements regarding the locality of the 2016 weekend.

**Ian Dussek**