

ALTON DECORATIVE & FINE ARTS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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Editorial

It's the time of year when membership renewals fall due and enclosed you will find the relevant paperwork. The Membership Secretary would appreciate a prompt return. At the March meeting the speaker remarked on the friendly nature of ADFAS as before his lecture he observed people in conversation over a glass of wine and we would like to think you also appreciate this aspect of our meetings. Pity those poor societies who meet during the day when all that is available is a cup of dubious coffee or lacklustre tea with an economy biscuit!



It is often mentioned that Alton DFAS seems to do rather a lot compared to some other societies. Whilst that may be so, we are fortunate to have a membership

which is keen to embrace the full range of NADFAS activities. Our lecture programme is comprehensive, our visits are educational, our Special Interest Days are varied and our volunteering in the areas of supporting the local heritage and church recording is active. Added to this is our positive attitude towards Young Arts – developing church trails and creating projects with local educational establishments, such as the recent mosaic at Rowledge Primary School. It would be easy to just do things that benefit us. ADFAS is fully aware of the charitable aspect of our national organisation and that we have an obligation to generate an awareness of the value and enjoyment of the arts, in all their forms, to younger folk in the hope that a spark or two which we generate, will smoulder and ignite as they get older.

With the AGM coming up in September now is the time for you to consider contributing to the work of ADFAS by offering your skills to the committee, although a sense of humour is also a useful pre-requisite. New ideas and new people are the lifeblood of groups like ours, so please help to maintain ADFAS as a successful, lively and friendly society.

Dates for your diary



8th June - Blenheim Palace - day visit

22th September - Portsmouth Historic Dockyard & the impressive new Mary Rose Museum - day visit



Bookings open at the April lecture meeting. If a booking is cancelled a refund can only be made if the event is full and there is a replacement from the waiting list.

Special Interest Day

Thursday 24th November 2016 at Beech Village Hall Chloë Sayer will entertain us with a day devoted to the Splendours of Ancient Mexico and Peru.

Booking via Paulette Murray at lecture meetings or by e-mail (paulette_murray@aol.co.uk). If a booking is cancelled a refund can only be made if the event is full and there is a replacement from the waiting list.



London Visit



Monet, the greatest exponent of garden painting said "I owe my painting to flowers". However he was far from alone in his fascination with the horticultural world as we discovered six weeks ago at *Painting the Modern Garden - Monet to Matisse* on show

at the Royal Academy. Works on the garden theme by Renoir, Cezanne, Pissarro, Manet, Sargent, Kandinsky, Van Gogh, Matisse, Klimt and Klee are all included in this exhibition. New plant species from Asia & America inspired artists to explore innovative ways of depicting the natural world. By the turn of the century, the mounting pleasure for gardening as a pastime led to a splendid array of garden painting that documented the intertwining of artistic & horticultural fashion across Europe.

A traffic free journey allowed us a four hour stop at the Academy with plenty of time for coffee the exhibition, lunch and to taste the delights of Piccadilly.

By mid-afternoon we were through security at the Palace of Westminster and were lingering in Westminster Hall which has a shop & café. Soon we were being entertained by a delightful guide as he led us on the route taken by the Queen at the opening of Parliament. We went through the Queen's Robing Room, then the Royal Gallery and the Prince's Chamber into the Lord's Chamber (The House of Lords). Our tour then took us through the magnificent Central Lobby, backdrop to many a TV political commentary, then into the Member's lobby, through the voting lobby before ending up in the Commons' Chamber (House of Commons).

Everyone seemed to have an enjoyable day, nobody got lost and Ray got us back safely on time – a successful set of outcomes for any visits organiser.



Are you aware of Area study days?

An Area Team exists to support local Societies and in addition to the two Area Meetings per year where representatives of the 21 Societies that comprise the Hampshire & Isle of Wight area of NADFAS may air their views and concerns, the Area Co-ordinator for Education generally runs three study days in Winchester designed to complement the programmes of local Societies like ours. Area events are open to all, including non-members of NADFAS. This Spring the study days were held in the Winchester Guildhall (easy to get to by car or bus) on the 26 February, 11 March and 8 April covering a range of topics.

Details of future Study Days will be available through a link on the area website (<http://hantsiownadfas.org.uk>) and they will be listed in the Autumn edition of NADFAS Review on the area courses pages. Booking forms will be sent by post or email in early November 2016 and to receive this material please contact Barbara Arthure on 01983 872902 or e-mail barbara.studydays@gmail.com.

The Golden Age of architecture and interiors



Barbara Peacock led a fascinating study day last November devoted to the Georgian Country House when those present learned much about the architecture and interior design of houses of the period from 1715 to the early 1800s. Whilst the French Court was the centre of their culture during that time, over here the baton was carried by the nobility. It appears

they put their money into their country houses and when they went up to London for the season, it seems they generally stayed in modest town houses. That many country houses were built and furnished during one generation led to examples such as Holkham Hall and Kedleston Hall which provide a valuable window onto the past.

The importance of the Grand Tour in stirring the passions of those with taste and possessing a classical education, led to an interest in the Roman civilisation which was reflected in house design and furnishings. Examples of houses, some of which were known to members, demonstrated the development of designs.

Later, streets of London town houses developed a style imitating classical Palladian designs.

The move into more flights of fancy of interior design led to a style of architecture which began in France and then spread all over Europe, although Rococo buildings were more muted in Britain. It also affected silver and ceramics and then an interest in Medieval Gothic and Chinese styles rather dominated the scene and everything changed again. The neo-classical style beloved by Robert Adam had its roots in the archaeological excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum, whilst others developed an interest in all things Greek which was reflected in architecture and interiors using a new set of rules relating to the proportions of pillars.

Using excellent illustrations Barbara Peacock introduced us to the main architectural and interior design themes through a number of houses and their contents during the three-session day. As usual members enjoyed a very good lunch which is a welcome feature of our study days and Paulette Murray, who had arranged the day so well, was thanked by Chairman, Niven Baird.

Why was Blenheim so important and why were we involved?

When King Charles II of Spain died in 1700 he bequeathed his throne and the Spanish possessions in the Netherlands, Italy and the Americas to Philip of Anjou, the grandson of King Louis XIV of France. The prospect of a union between France and Spain alarmed many European states and Louis further upset King William III by recognising the son of the deposed James II as England's rightful king and cut access to lucrative Spanish trade.

England was a little more involved in European matters back then and with Holland and Prussia supported the Habsburg Empire's rival claimant to the Spanish throne, Archduke Charles. In 1701 they formed the Grand Alliance along with a number of smaller German states. In September 1702 Bavaria allied itself with France and Spain.

Fought on 13 August 1704 during the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-13), Blenheim saw a decisive defeat of the Franco-Bavarian force by the allied English, Dutch and Austrian armies commanded by the Duke of Marlborough (right) and Prince Eugene of Savoy. It destroyed the myth of French invincibility and earned the British Army an enduring reputation for courage and discipline on the battlefield.

When Marlborough returned to England he was showered with honours and granted the royal manor of Woodstock near Oxford



and a grant for the construction of a palace on the site. Blenheim Palace, designed by Sir John Vanburgh in an Italianate style, remains to this day one of the finest examples of English Baroque architecture.

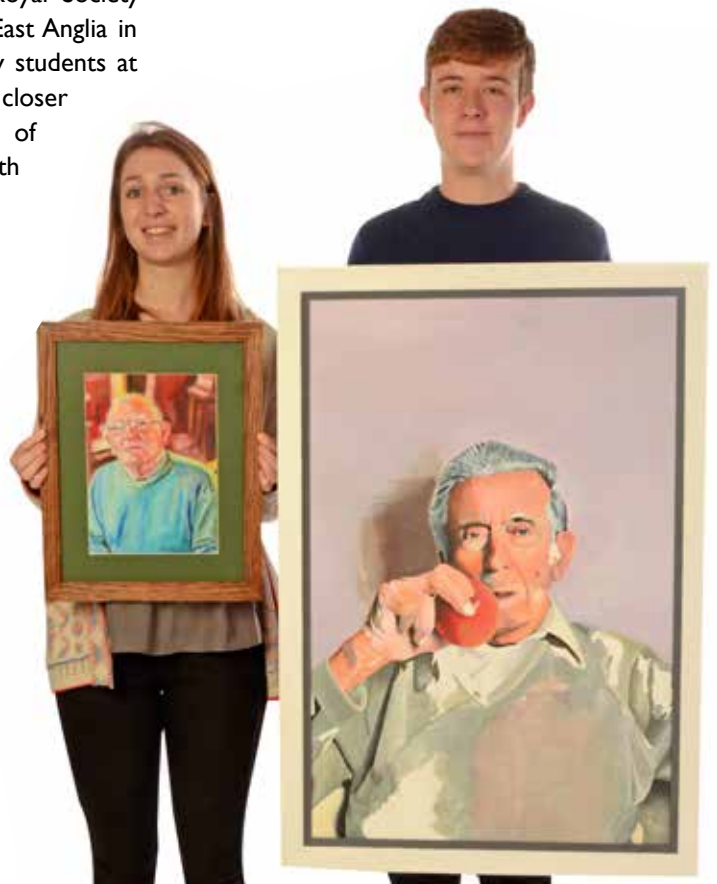
Rising Stars

The very successful collaboration between NADFAS and the Royal Society of British Artists (RBA) came about following a pilot project in East Anglia in 2009. Societies are invited to submit photographs of art work by students at schools and colleges in their locality, which in itself encourages a closer working relationship between societies which tend to consist of mature folk interested in the arts and the younger generation with similar interests.

This year 55 NADFAS Societies from the UK and Mainland Europe submitted some 348 images of original student work including paintings, ceramics and sculpture. The challenge was for the RBA Council members to pick a number of pieces which combined the highest levels of skill, expression and draughtsmanship. ADFAS has taken an interest in the scheme for a while and are pleased that we are amongst those fortunate to be included in the 17 societies whose submitted work was chosen for exhibition.

Alton College student Martha Dobson's *Portrait of a Gentleman* and Nathan Ward's *Man with Apple* were included in the works shown at Lloyds Register Gallery in the City of London in February. They then transferred to the RBA's annual exhibition at the Mall Galleries which ran from 17 March to 2 April where it was displayed alongside that of professional artists.

ADFAS paid for the works to be framed and transported them to NADFAS House in advance of the first exhibition.



Above: Martha and Nathan with their paintings.

Walter quite contrary



Pictured here is one of a group of tiles decorated with nursery rhyme illustrations by Walter Crane who was born on 15 August 1845 (d. 14 March 1915). They were made around 1875-1880 by Maw & Co. in Shropshire and can be seen in Alton's Allen Gallery.

A great deal has been written about Crane's role in the Arts and Crafts movement, his socialism and his later designs for wallpapers and ceramics in the round. But it was his earlier graphic work for children's books, of which the tiles are an extension, that is the most impressive.

His line and colour illustrations for books such as *The Baby's Opera* (1877) were reproduced as woodblock prints; a technique that discourages fine detail and demands that every mark in the composition count. The influence of Japanese woodblock prints, then being seen in England for the first time, shows in the contained areas of colour and deliberate lack of perspective. Japanese design also contributed to the so-called 'Aesthetic' movement in art, of which Crane was then a follower. Another (Indian) theme introduced peacocks to the movement, which explains the topiary.

The nursery rhyme illustrated is Mary, Mary, quite contrary, though in the 19th century it usually began 'Mistress Mary, quite contrary'. It has several unsubstantiated meanings involving, amongst other things, Mary Tudor, nuns and various instruments of torture. More interesting, however, is the Lily-of-the-Valley, here representing 'little bells', and the absence of 'pretty maids'. That is because Crane was thinking of a version from the previous century that had 'cowslips all in a row' instead. It has been said that typically the devotees of the artistic movements of Crane's time moved forward whilst looking back. How satisfying to see the cowslips in the flowerbed giving that game away.

Neil Hyman

Formerly of Hampshire Museums

Forthcoming Lectures

**10th May The Elgin Marbles
- a history of meaning**

Alan Read

In the two centuries since they were removed from the Parthenon by Lord Elgin, the meaning and significance of the 'Elgin marbles' has changed dramatically. From architectural decoration to disputed cultural objects this lecture looks at the response to them over their time in Britain, from the original controversy over their purchase to the current debate surrounding the restitution of the marbles to the new Acropolis Museum in Athens.

14th June L.S. Lowry

Michael Howard

LS Lowry is one of Britain's most popular artists and yet our very familiarity with his work may have stopped us looking as closely as we should at his extraordinary life and art. He was a painter not only of the mills of the industrial north-west but magnificent land and seascapes. We could make the claim that he is one of the great painters of the human condition – the TS Eliot of modern British art and, perhaps, we could even claim him as our very own van Gogh! Why not come long and judge for yourself?

History in Miniature

The January issue of postage stamps from Royal Mail entitled *Shackleton & The Endurance Expedition*, recalls the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition led by Sir Ernest Shackleton in 1914-17, which is regarded as the last expedition of the heroic age of polar exploration. As an attempt to make the first land crossing of Antarctica via the South Pole, it was a dismal failure. Instead it produced one of the greatest rescue stories in history, living up to its billing as the 'Endurance Expedition' (after the name of one of its ships) and making Shackleton one of the most celebrated mariners and commanders of all time.

The stamps tell the chronological story through the photography of the Australian adventurer Frank Hurley, the expedition's official photographer. Why mention that here? Well, the rescued party reached the Falkland Islands a hundred years ago on 31 May 1916 – unfortunately that was also the date of the Battle of Jutland, so a potential 'feel good' news story was displaced from the front pages by the death of over six thousand British sailors and the loss of 14 ships.

