

# ALTON DECORATIVE & FINE ARTS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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## Editorial

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

There are a number of ways in which you can be involved as there is far more to ADFAS than a rather good lecture with a glass of wine every month. The visits are a sociable way of widening one's interests, whilst volunteering through church recording, being a heritage volunteer, assisting with church trails or supporting Young Arts projects provides a practical way of doing something of lasting value. Interested? If so, please have a word with the Chairman.

## Special Interest Day

**Splendours of  
Ancient Mexico  
& Peru - Chloë Sayer  
Thursday 24th  
November 2016**

Beech Village Hall

Ancient burial grounds in Mexico and Peru have yielded up dazzling gold-work, fine ceramic vessels and some of the richest textiles in the world. Even today, nearly 500 years after the Spanish Conquest, textiles remain central to life in the Andes. In Mexico, modern craftspeople combine Aztec, Maya and Spanish traditions. This will be a fascinating [and colourful] experience, second only to visiting the countries concerned.



## Forthcoming Visits



**22nd September - Portsmouth  
Historic Dockyard & the impressive  
new Mary Rose Museum – a day visit**



**17th November - Windsor Castle,  
including *Fashioning a Reign: 90 Years  
of Style from The Queen's Wardrobe***

Bookings via Vanessa MacMahon at the  
September meeting.

# The Gilded Stage



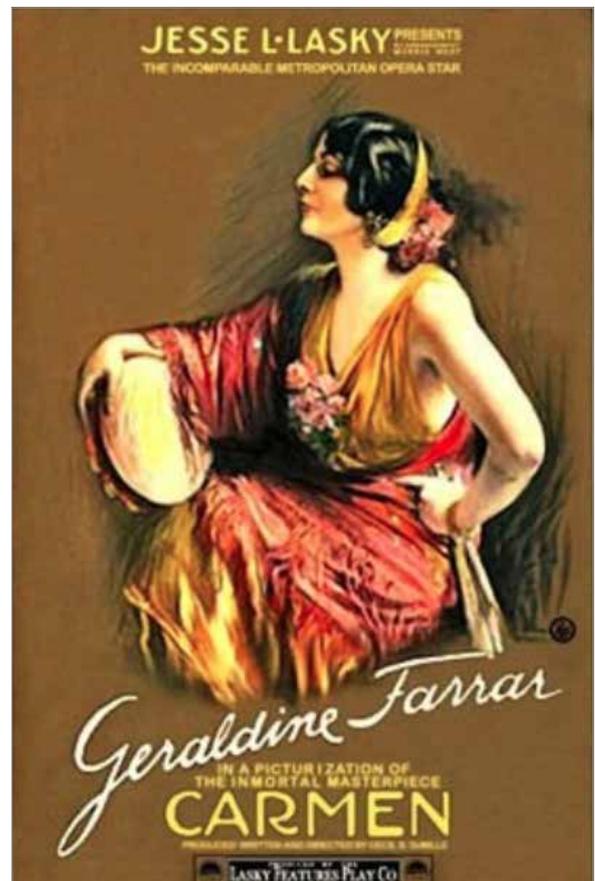
It may not surprise you that opera goes down well with ADFAS audiences as many members are knowledgeable about the subject and regularly attend performances, both in this area and further afield. The Study Day relating to opera held at Beech Village Hall on a beautiful Spring day in March delved into the

interesting 'back story' covering the social history of the art form, rather than dwelling on the detail of individual composers or works.

Daniel Snowman gave a brief account of his early interest in opera starting at the age of 9 when he was taken to see Verdi's *Rigoletto*, having become familiar with opera through his father's record collection. He skilfully set the scene for us with three interlinked sessions which began with an insight into the development of opera in the Renaissance courts and theatres of Northern Italy as the cultural leaders attempted to combine all of the arts as the ancient Greeks may have done. It soon became the entertainment of choice throughout much of Europe and we followed the story from Florence and Mantua to Venice, then to France where it was popular with Louis XIV, Handel's London and Mozart's Vienna and Prague. Appropriate recordings of relevant pieces were played at suitable points to illustrate particular themes in his narrative.

The French Revolution and its aftermath had a great impact on all the arts as the age of romanticism replaced the more genteel aesthetic of the old enlightenment. With opera, audiences expected bigger, more stirring works that gave passionate expression to dangerously erotic or political sentiments often through 'safe' historical settings. It was interesting to learn that the slogan 'Viva Verdi' was used as an acronym for Viva Vittorio Emanuele Re D'Italia (Long Live Victor Emmanuel King of Italy) in 1849. With changes to copyright laws by the late 19th century composers such as Verdi and Wagner were far wealthier and more celebrated than earlier composers could have imagined in their wildest dreams.

The growth of newly invented technologies in the late 19th /early 20th centuries, such as recording, film and radio, allowed the



spread of opera across the New World it enabled the word and sound to become known worldwide. Examples such as the response to Cecil B DeMille's 1915 silent film of *Carmen* and Saturday Matinee broadcasts of relayed performances from New York's Metropolitan Opera House, on the wireless in the 1930's were cited. Opera was used by mid-20th century dictators to boost their popularity, whilst in recent times efforts have been made to democratise a supposedly 'elite' art. Daniel ended by posing the question 'could opera ever become truly 'popular' and does it have a future'? Audience response suggested that access to streamed performances from Covent Garden to locations as modest as Alton's Palace Cinema provided easy access and would enable opera to broaden its audience base. The day was closed by Chairman Niven Baird who thanked Daniel for an interesting, enjoyable and informative day and he also thanked Paulette Murray for the delicious lunch which made the day go so well – a virtuoso performance by all concerned!

## Chester & Liverpool

The journey up north saw us stopping at Shugborough, ancestral home of the Anson family. One family member served with Sir Francis Drake, another circumnavigated the globe in the 1740s. But more in keeping with our times, the apartment, that had until his death in 2005, been lived in by society photographer Patrick Litchfield (5th Earl of Litchfield), has been opened up to the public with many of his photographs on display.

Our party of 34 stayed at *The Queen*, a 150 year old hotel next to Chester Station. On Day 1 we visited Crosby Beach, just north of Liverpool. It being low tide, we were able to get up close to

Antony Gormley's *Another Place*, a collection of 100 life size iron statues each one placed in lonely isolation & many stretching way out into the sea. This was followed by a guided tour of Liverpool and a visit to the Maritime Museum where we were shown how the growth and prosperity of the city had been built on the slave trade and the suffering that this involved.

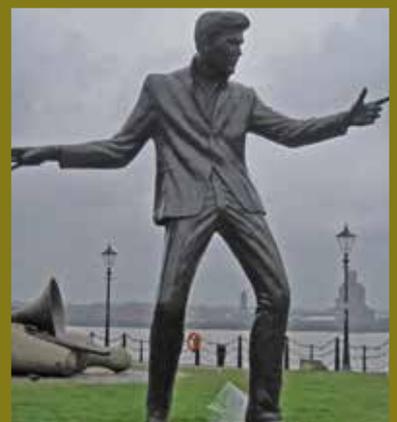
Much interest was taken in a café called Ziferblat in the Albert Dock where food and non-alcoholic drinks were on offer free of charge. The cost was based on time spent on the premises at the rate of 8p a minute.



On Day 2 we visited Port Sunlight Village, created by Lord Leverhulme for workers employed at his soap factory. His success in business allowed him to become a collector of art on a grand scale, as we were later to appreciate during a visit to the Lady Lever Art Gallery. It also allowed him to become one of Liverpool's most famous sons on account of his philanthropy and his funeral was attended by 30,000 mourners. In the afternoon we were at liberty to explore the Walker Art Gallery, St George's Hall and the two cathedrals. Day 3 took us on a guided tour of Chester with an opportunity to walk around the Roman Walls and to take a boat ride on the River Dee. Also included in the trip were visits to Chirk Castle & Charlecote Park both NT properties.

We are all grateful to Ray, our faithful driver for taking care of us and bringing the party back safely home.

**John Harrap**



# Forthcoming Lectures

**13th September**

**The Life Enhancing Garden  
- art appreciation in their design  
Dr Laura de Beden**

Like any form of art, garden design has a language and vocabulary which needs to be understood in order to gain a fuller enjoyment and greater awareness. Inspirational images will illustrate the aspects involved, both material and spiritual, from the crucial importance of space to the awakening of the senses and the powerful role of memory. They all contribute to the make-up of a successful garden that will answer the unstoppable search for beauty, serenity and meaning. References to the other arts will widen and deepen the understanding of this approach to the making of gardens, and study cases of gardens designed by the author will provide further inspiration

**13th October at Alton College  
Power, Propaganda and Men in Tights  
- English Art under the Tudors  
Linda Smith**

This lecture looks at the key developments in early English painting, which in the 16c, were being made largely by foreigners. Important works by artists such as Holbein, Eworth and Gheeraerts are explained in detail, and close attention is paid to symbolism, both personal and political.



Portraiture dominated the period, and images of the great monarchs and personalities of the age are compared and contrasted in terms of the functions they were intended to fulfil. Other genres, such as religious subjects and the early beginnings of landscape painting, are also featured.

**8th November  
Murder and Modernism  
- Walter Richard Sickert  
and the Camden Town Group  
Nicola Moorby**

The Camden Town Group was an innovative circle of painters united by the desire to paint works of a modern character. They combined the techniques and visions of European Post-Impressionism with the changing modernity of Edwardian London. This lecture introduces the core members of the group, led by Walter Richard Sickert, and tells the story of their brief but significant association. We will examine the key themes addressed within their work: urban life, popular entertainment and the lower social classes, as well as Sickert's infamous series of paintings inspired by the notorious 1907 Camden Town murder.

# Mrs Brown's Boy – the master gardener



Lancelot Brown was baptised on 30 Aug 1716 at Kirkharle, Northumberland, the fifth of the six children of William Brown, a yeoman farmer and his wife Ursula, who had worked in the big house on the Kirkharle estate. He went to the village school at Cambo, and then began work as a gardener at Kirkharle, leaving in 1739.

He reached Stowe, Buckinghamshire a couple of years later where he rapidly assumed responsibility for both architectural and landscaping works in the famous garden.

It was at Stowe in 1744 that Brown married Bridget Wayet, with whom he eventually had nine children. While at Stowe, Brown also began working as an independent designer and contractor and in autumn 1751, he was able to move with his family to the Mall, Hammersmith, the market garden area of London. He later worked at Warwick Castle, Hampton Court, nearby Petworth House and a host of other prestigious properties. It is said that during his lifetime he had no rivals, few imitators and only a handful of critics.

'Capability' Brown is best remembered for landscape on an immense scale, constructing not only gardens and parkland, but planting woods and building farms linked by carriage drives, or 'ridings', many miles from the



main house. Although his work is continually reassessed, every landscape gardener and landscape architect since, both in Britain and across the developed World has been influenced in one way or another by Brown. Over two centuries have passed since his death, but such are the enduring qualities of his work that over 150 of the 260 or so landscapes with which he is associated remain worth seeing today. The images that Brown created are as deeply embedded in the English character as the paintings of Turner and the poetry of Wordsworth.

He continued to work until his death on 6 February 1783. He died in London, but was buried at Fenstanton, in Cambridgeshire, the only place he is known to have owned property and where he was Lord of the Manor.

