

# ALTON DECORATIVE & FINE ARTS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



ISSUE 38

SPRING 2017

## Editorial

The Spring edition of *NADFAS Review* carried a report of the rebranding exercise which will result in a change of name of *NADFAS* to The Arts Society following the national AGM next month. The re-branding exercise came about as *NADFAS* was thinking about its future and wanted to increase its membership and raise its profile – to be more distinctive and recognisable. Both are deemed worthy aims to be in place for the 50th anniversary next year.

If by any chance you have missed this important matter so far, you are encouraged to log on to the national *NADFAS* website view, the short video and read the accompanying frequently asked questions (FAQs). Societies which wish to adopt the new branding will be provided with the relevant logos, brand guidelines and templates. Your committee have discussed this and whilst there was great interest in the new national identity, it was felt there were issues to be resolved before Alton *DFAS* adopted all that the re-branding entailed.

The small matter of our name changing from Alton *DFAS* to The Arts Society Alton was seen as a starting point; national guidance suggested that competition or conflict with an existing local art society 'can be resolved amicably at local level'. By the time you read this our Chairman will have approached The Alton Art Society to discuss the matter. There are some cost implications for local societies and a suggestion that a grant be made available for the change to be implemented were met with guidance that 'sensible budgeting and prudent planning of resources can be covered through annual budgets'.

What do you think?



## Special Interest Day

**Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> November 2017**  
**Beech Village Hall**

Two Desert Emporia – Palmyra and Petra. Sue Rollin will present a day devoted to an exploration of these two fascinating ancient sites. Petra, hidden away in the mountains south of the Dead Sea, was the capital of the enigmatic Nabateans, wealthy traders who carved impressive monuments from the multi-coloured sandstone of their desert stronghold and embellished the city with water courses and gardens. Palmyra, in the Syrian desert, was capital of the infamous Queen Zenobia who controlled a virtual caravan empire and dared to challenge the might of Rome. The once colonnaded streets, temples, tombs, theatres and villas bore witness to the elegance and wealth of these once powerful desert emporia – until Isil destroyed much of it in recent years.

## Dates for your Diary



### **8th June - Studley Castle and Hildcote**

The former is a Grade II\* listed building is now a hotel. The house was completed in 1836 and designed by Samuel Beazley in the Gothic Revival style. The latter is one of the best-known and most influential Arts and Crafts gardens in Britain, with its linked 'rooms' of hedges, rare trees, shrubs and herbaceous borders. It was created by Lawrence Johnston and is now owned by the National Trust.

Bookings via John Harrup at our lecture meetings



### **20th September - Kingston Lacey near Wimborne**

A day visit to this elegant country mansion formerly the seat of the Bankes family, is set in attractive formal gardens and extensive parkland.

Bookings via Vanessa MacMahon from the May lecture meeting.

# Ancient Mexico and Peru - a Continuous Thread



Chloë Sayer brightened up a dull, windy autumn day at Beech Village Hall late last November with an explanation of the peoples of the middle Americas and colourful pictures of their fascinating material culture. Ancient burial grounds in Central and South America have yielded exquisite gold work, carved stonework, statuary, fine ceramic vessels and some of the richest textiles in the world.

The morning session was devoted to ancient Mexico and we learned that before the Spanish Conquest in the 16th century, numerous civilisations rose and fell in what is now Mexico, creating a number of great cities in the process. Of particular note were the Mayans, but there were also the Olmec - the first great civilisation but the last to be 'recognised' in the 1930's, the Zapotec - archaeological evidence shows that their culture goes back at least 2,500 years, the Mixtec and the Aztec. The last of these rose to power in 1325 and were cut off in their prime in 1519 by the Spanish. For comparison with UK history, this was roughly between the death of Edward II at Berkeley Castle and Henry VIII completing St George's Chapel at Windsor Castle.

After a splendid lunch, one of the highlights of the day, there was a session devoted to Peru, the Incas and their predecessors. The Incas were the last in a dizzying succession of cultures and were able to take on the mantle of earlier

civilisations'. Peru was blessed with gold, silver and precious stones and cotton growing seems to have started around 2500BC. However, ceramics came later. The Inca dynasty was founded around 1200 AD and their empire stretched along the Pacific coast from Ecuador to northern Chile, lasting until the end of the 16th century when the Spanish arrived.

Some of the audience had been to the region and experienced the cultures; others were about to go. Everyone felt better equipped to understand and appreciate the history as few countries in the world display such a rich and varied cultural heritage as modern Mexico. We learned that their many and varied peoples show a resilience in the arts alongside the influence of Spanish colonization and conversion to Christianity.

## Supporting the arts for talented youngsters



Recently the Art Department at Amery Hill School in Alton were very pleased to be able to purchase a printing press following the generosity of ADFAS, the Hampshire & IOW Area Committee of NADFAS, along with an award from the NADFAS Patricia Fay Memorial Fund.

The GCSE Art & Design course allows students to experience a wide range of materials, techniques and processes over a two year period. The exam programme is made up of coursework (60%) and the final exam (40%). Any piece of coursework can be re-visited over the two years and improved, so that everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Whilst talent is not the only prerequisite for success, motivation, hard work, enthusiasm and patience are also needed! During the course smaller 'skills workshops' are run, where students create work in response to an Art department trip and this year they visited the Natural History and Pitt Rivers museums in Oxford for inspiration. Amery Hill students now have the opportunity to add printing to their portfolio of work, along with silk/glass painting, oil pastels, drawing, sculpture, clay construction, digital photography, mixed media and textiles.





## Windsor visit

Windsor Castle is the largest inhabited castle in the world, and the oldest in continuous occupation (over 900 years). It is one of the Queen's three official residences, and is often said to be her favourite. On a blustery but sunny November day, we discovered just how large Windsor is, and exactly why the Queen likes it so much. There are challenges as well as rewards to a visit to Windsor: the coach park is really not near the castle, so that a coffee stop between the two was welcome as well as necessary. The main reward came in the shape of our excellent Blue Badge guide, Barbara Askew. She shepherded us through the rigorous security into the castle precincts, and then somehow managed to talk to all 50 of us, outside, in a breeze, without losing any of us or our interest, with a range of subjects that encompassed the technical way that the walls were constructed to the history of St George's Chapel, spiritual home of the Order of the Garter and the burial place of ten British monarchs.

We wandered through the gardens and admired the excellent view across to Eton, before Barbara made sure that we were all ready for the Castle's State Apartments, which contain some of the finest furniture and works of art in the Royal Collection, many of which are still in the historic settings for which they

were first collected or commissioned by the Kings and Queens who have lived at Windsor. In addition it was possible to admire the restoration of the Castle, particularly St George's Hall and the Grand Reception Room, following the great fire in 1992 – a testament to the extraordinary skills of some of the finest craftsmen in Europe.

Finally, we visited *Fashioning a Reign*, the exhibition that marks the 90th Birthday of Her Majesty The Queen through a display of fashionable dress, spanning the period from her childhood in the 1930s to the present day. It was fascinating to see examples of the work of the leading British couturiers who were appointed as her dressmakers. There were magnificent evening gowns and elegant day ensembles worn at official events contrasted with fancy-dress costumes worn by the young Princess Elizabeth for wartime family pantomimes at the Castle. We were amazed by her height and her waist (both tiny), as well as the wonderful detail which each of the dresses displayed. It was a complete treat for almost all of us (perhaps some of the men looked a little bored...) and then back to the bus and an easy journey back to Alton.

**Vanessa MacMahon**

# 'Put forth thy hand, reach at the glorious gold'

[Henry IV, Part 2]



With much coin-related interest currently focused on the new twelve-sided £1 coin, you may have missed the issue of the 2017 gold sovereign - the 200th anniversary of the modern 'must-have bling item'. I am sure you are aware that the sovereign is a gold coin of the UK, with a nominal value of one pound sterling. Prior to 1932 it was a fully circulating coin within Britain's then Gold Standard currency. Today it is used as a bullion coin which is popular with collectors and is sometimes mounted in jewelry. However, even coins have to be designed by someone and there is great interest in the 2017 coin as it features Benedetto Pistrucci's original 1817 'garter' design around St George and the dragon for the first time since 1820; it has been struck with tools remastered from Pistrucci's 1817 originals; and the date appears on the obverse for the first time since 1887. The portrait of The Queen by Jody Clark was first used in 2015 and is the fifth coinage portrait of Her Majesty during her reign.

Named after the English gold sovereign last minted in 1604, the name was revived with the new coins of 1816, which followed the Napoleonic War, and minting these new sovereigns began in 1817. The gold content was fixed by the Coin Act of 1816 at 0.235420 troy ounces (7.322381 g). This weight has remained almost constant with rounding to a metric weight taking place on its legal redefinition on decimalisation in 1971.

In Victorian times it was the practice of the Bank of England to remove worn sovereigns and half sovereigns from circulation and to have them re-coined. As a result, although a billion sovereigns have been minted in total, that figure includes gold that has been coined and re-coined a number of times. Interestingly, it was estimated that when in circulation a sovereign could have a lifespan of up to 15 years before it fell below the 'least current weight', [approx. 0.6% - the margin allowed for abrasion] - the minimum amount of gold below which it ceased to be legal tender.



The 1817 Sovereign

Confusingly the original sovereigns were introduced by Henry VIII in 1489 and featured an enthroned portrait of the King in full coronation regalia, whilst the reverse depicting the royal arms, crowned and superimposed on a double rose to symbolise the union of York and Lancaster after the War of the Roses. There was a special issue in 1989 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the sovereign which featured designs based on the original coin and they are highly sought after by collectors

**Tony Cross**

## Forthcoming Lectures



**9th May - Alton Maltings**  
**Life and Times of the Sundial**  
**Kevin Karney**

The history of the sundial outstrips that of the clock by at least two thousand years. This lecture examines how time has been told down the ages from the perspective of both the sundial and its competitors. It compares what philosophers and poets thought about time. It also looks at various aspects of the sundial as a teller of time, a marker for religious observance, a memento mori, a vehicle for exquisite craftsmanship, as well as a sign of elegance, sophistication and civic pride.

**13th June - Alton Maltings**  
**AD 410. The Year that shook Rome**  
**Dr Sam Moorhead**

This lecture outlines the events that led up to the sacking of the 'Eternal City' by the Goths in AD 410. It draws upon architectural masterpieces from late antiquity, along with some of the finest objects in the British Museum. The world of the late Roman aristocracy was one of opulence beyond belief with priceless gold and silver objects, intricate ivory carvings, vibrant wall paintings and glistening mosaics. This new narrative provides fresh insights into what was really happening in the late Roman Empire, as the Classical world was being shaken to its roots.

