

REPORTS 2023/24

CHAIR'S REPORT

Our new year 2023/24 began, as always, in September, with the first lecture in our annual programme. Once again, thanks to Claire Sarkies, our Acting Programme Secretary, for the energy she has devoted to securing highly recommended speakers on a wide variety of topics. In particular, Gavin Plumley on 'The two Gustavs: Mahler and Klimt', Mark Cottle on 'A photographic odyssey: Shackleton's Endurance expedition on camera', and Chris Aslan on 'Unravelling the Silk Road' - all were rated 'outstanding' by the membership. The 2024/25 programme and the new publicity leaflet are now posted on our website, together with the AGM papers; we hope to see as many of you as possible at each lecture - and do please continue to bring friends along with you. Our visitor numbers greatly increased as the year progressed, and a cheering number have been sufficiently impressed to consider joining the society.

We have had three Special Interest Days during the course of the year, all initiated by our Treasurer, Carole Pook. On 23rd November 2023, 'Frankenstein: the making of a monster' explored how this creature has been portrayed in theatre, film and art. On 22nd February 2024, Peter Hains, a Green Badge Guide, gave a talk on 'Literary Cambridge' - so well received that he was invited back on 23rd April to give the second instalment.

Visits have proved rather more difficult to organise, as we still lack a dedicated Visits Secretary, and coach hire, which is preferred by many of our members, is now so prohibitively expensive. However, thanks to Mary Knowles, our indefatigable Holiday Secretary, thirty-six of us are looking forward to a splendid five-day trip to the New Forest in May 2024. Based in Winchester, with its glorious cathedral and peaceful water meadows, we shall visit RHS Wisley, the Rothschilds' Exbury Gardens, the treasure-house of Kingston Lacy, and take the ferry to the Isle of Wight, to see Osborne House, the much-loved holiday retreat of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, returning home via the NT's Basildon Park.

February 2024 saw the annual CAYAC - Cambridgeshire Young Artists Competition and Exhibition - in St. Peter's School, Huntingdon, once again planned and organised by our Young Arts Secretary, Rosemary Huckle. The exhibition displayed 216 works by artists aged from four to eighteen years, and 590 people visited. It is so very important to support the continuation of art in schools, when STEM subjects are so much to the fore.

In March 2024, Claire Sarkies and I attended the East Anglian Arts Society Spring Forum in Bury St Edmunds, organised by our redoubtable Area Organiser, Angela Payne. This was particularly important, given the Head Office of The Arts Society's recently proposed Governance Reforms. We shall report on the current state of play at the AGM. However, we were most interested to see the reports from other branches of the Arts Society in this region. We are ranked as a small society, but felt that overall we had done rather well, in rebuilding our membership post-Covid, and continuing this year to offer nine lectures, three study days and a holiday. Some small societies had folded, some had been forced to amalgamate, only able to offer six lectures, and no study days, visits or holidays. But it is obvious that we are all having the same problem in recruiting to our committees. As it stands, too many of your HuntsArts committee are wearing two hats. I am both Chair and Secretary. Claire Sarkies is, for the second year, Acting Programme Secretary, but also contributes to Special Interest Days. Carole Pook, our long-standing Treasurer, organises - and frequently delivers - these

Special Interest Days. And crucially, we are losing Bob Woodham, our Webmaster. You hear at every lecture our request for offers of help - no matter how small - and we hope that our recent One Task Pledge initiative might encourage more of you to consider how you might contribute in future to the running of the society, in whatever capacity. More support is vital if we are to continue to maintain the range of events we currently offer.

Although we are not this year holding another competition for the Isobel Lattimore Textile Prize, we are delighted that Long Road Sixth Form College will once again nominate a student for the Isobel Lattimore Textile Bursary.

Though reduced in numbers, our Church Recorders group, under the leadership of Pat Hamilton, presses on with recording St John the Baptist, Holywell, which they hope to complete in a year's time. The bound record of St. Andrew's, Swavesey - delayed because of the closure of the church during COVID - was finally presented in February of this year.

The Garden Heritage Volunteers continue to offer an impressive programme of visits, and some excellent study days. We strongly recommend, if you are not already a member, that you consider becoming one.

I should particularly like to thank the committee members not mentioned so far - Alison Clough, our Membership Secretary, without whose meticulous record keeping the society couldn't function; and Elaine Clarkson, Committee Member without Portfolio, who has been willing to step in wherever help was needed. Most importantly, I want to propose a special vote of thanks to Bob Woodham, our Webmaster, who is standing down after the AGM. He redesigned our original rather old-fashioned-looking website, and has since maintained it, so that you could always be sure to find accurate and up-to-date information on the society's events. He will be much missed - not least because we have to date no replacement.

Last, but by no means least, our grateful thanks to Joe Masters, the Corn Exchange Operations Manager, and his colleagues. They could not be more helpful and efficient. Previously, the committee always experienced a certain level of anxiety before our lectures - would gremlins yet again affect the projector, or the sound system? And if so, would we be able to find a technician to help? Since our move to the Corn Exchange, such worries have become a thing of the past, and in the very rare instance of a problem occurring, Joe has been there to save the day.

Jane Woods

TREASURER'S REPORT

A very simple breakdown of your individual subscriptions could be explained as follows: £10 towards the hire of the hall, £30 towards the lecture fees and £16 for the recharge to the national Arts Society - total £56. And of course this does not cover any additional expenses.

The Arts Society is saying that the recharge next year will be lower, at around £13. However, we would still ask that you approve an annual subscription of £55 per member.

We have welcomed many new visitors to our lectures this year and look forward to some of them joining our society next year.

Colin Lattimore generously donated £1,000 towards a Textile Bursary in memory of his wife, Isobel; another grant and some individual members' donations contributed a further £1,000. This money is held in a separate account. This year we awarded the first Isobel Lattimore

Textile Bursary to a student from Long Road Sixth Form College, who was going forward to study embroidery and textiles at degree level. We are already in discussion with Long Road about this year's award.

We were also delighted to be able to support from our deposit account our Church Recorders, with a donation to cover the costs of their excellent record of St. Andrew's Church, Swavesey.

Carole Pook

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT

Our membership numbers over the past year have increased (11 new, five returners) to 135 fully paid-up members.

The Corn Exchange in St. Ives continues to attract more drop-in guests at our monthly meetings and it is hoped some of them might/will go on to become full members of the society.

A reminder please. The membership list needs to be kept up-to-date with all your details, and if you change any of your personal details/address/e-mail address, telephone number/s etc., please do always let me know as soon as possible. I can then ensure that you continue to receive communications from our Committee Chair, general information from our own society - plus all the National Arts Society e-mail/s (including their three times a year magazine). My contact details are on our Huntsarts website, and/or your membership card, and you can also complete a form giving details of any changes at any of our monthly meetings. Many thanks for your cooperation.

Alison Clough

PROGRAMME SECRETARY'S REPORT

The Programme Secretary has to plan a programme of lectures a year in advance using the directory of accredited lecturers on The Arts Society website. Having selected topics, found lecturers, agreed dates and published the programme, collected speakers from Huntingdon station, introduced them to the membership and afterwards given a vote of thanks - the final task is to deliver them back to Huntingdon station for the London train.

Not all our lecturers come from London, however; indeed one of my aims this year was to stay local whenever possible to reduce travel expenses. I managed to find three local boys: Andrew Prince (Catherine the Great), Christopher Garibaldi (Tea and Teapots) & Chris Aslan (The Silk Road). The latter bought a return ticket on the guided bus for £4.00. In contrast, Mark Cottle's journey from Devon to St. Ives cost well over £100. Fortunately, the remarkable story of Shackleton's survival, documented in superb photographs, attracted so many visitors that his transport costs were covered.

Arts Society lecturers pass a rigorous selection test, so it is not surprising that the grading only goes from Good to Outstanding. We are lucky this year to have had three lectures which were classed as "outstanding". Two were regarded as 'excellent', two were "very good" and we await judgment on next week's lecture on Sir Stamford Raffles and his famous art collection.

We have made a habit of selecting a different sort of lecture for our AGM. Rather than drawing on the Arts Society's pool, we have approached experts in local history and the arts to give a talk. Last year Bridget Flanagan delighted us with her research on artists of the Ouse Valley. This year we are looking forward to a talk on the discovery of a quantity of Roman coins near Peterborough which has become known as the "muddy hoard".

We have held three Study Days this year. In autumn, members of the committee collaborated to present a series of talks based on Mary Shelley: firstly on her scandalous life, secondly on the structure of her gothic horror story, 'Frankenstein', and thirdly on the portrayal of the story in film. Since then we have enjoyed two talks on Literary Cambridge by Green Badge Guide Peter Hains.

In October we are holding a more ambitious whole day event with two hired speakers; the topic is Costumes and Costume Jewellery. Lunch will be served between the two sessions, followed by tea and cake at the end of the day. We are hoping for a large and enthusiastic audience.

Claire Sarkies

VISITS/HOLIDAY SECRETARY'S REPORT

On Wednesday 7th June last year, 42 members enjoyed a visit to Felbrigg Hall, a National Trust property just inland from Cromer. As well as touring the fascinating Jacobean house, we were also able to explore some of the 500 acres of woodland and lakeside walks, as well as the walled garden. For a final treat, our Dews driver made a slight detour on the way home and drove along the coast road between Cromer Pier and Sheringham, so that we could enjoy views of the sea.

Unfortunately we no longer have a dedicated Visits Secretary, so it has been impossible to organise any further visits during the past year. However, the Committee recognises that for members visits are an important and popular component of the society's events, and are keen to try to offer at least a limited number. The National Gallery is celebrating its bicentenary in 2024 and the celebrations will culminate from September in a major exhibition of works by Van Gogh. Tickets will go on sale over the summer and we will try to obtain a block booking for a group visit sometime in the autumn.

This year's holiday has been a long time in the planning but has proved to be a very popular offering. 36 members will be setting off for Winchester on 19th May for a five day tour. The undoubted highlight will be a day on the Isle of Wight, sailing on the IOW ferry from Southampton Docks to Cowes, and visiting Osborne House. En route to our hotel in the centre of Winchester, we will spend an extended lunchbreak at RHS Wisley. We will also be visiting Exbury Gardens, famous for their magnificent collection of rhododendrons, and the National Trust properties of Kingston Lacy in Dorset and, on our return journey, Basildon Park in Berkshire. Of course, there will be plenty of time to explore the historic city of Winchester, with its cathedral and association with King Arthur, King Alfred the Great and Jane Austen.

Mary Knowles

YOUNG ARTS SECRETARY'S REPORT

In 2023/24 Young Arts continued to celebrate and encourage Art in Cambridgeshire.

We promoted the new Arts Society 'A' Level Art Competition 2023/2024 (formerly RBA Rising Stars) . The competition and resulting exhibition was held online. The submitted artworks were shortlisted by a panel of judges, including a member of the Royal Society of British Artists . The final selection of fifteen pieces of artwork was made by a poll of Art Society members in January/February, and the winners were announced in March 2024 . One school in our area entered - Sawtry Village Academy - which submitted eight pieces of work, but sadly this year they were not in the final fifteen. I would like to thank Kevin Terry, Head of Art at Sawtry, and to congratulate the students on being selected for this competition.

Cambridgeshire Young Artists Competition 2024 (CAYAC 2024) - an art exhibition and competition of work by young artists in Cambridgeshire schools - was held at St. Peter's School, Huntingdon, on 2nd March. Thirty-nine schools entered the competition, thirty Primary schools and nine Secondary schools. We welcomed more than 590 visitors to the exhibition to view 216 pieces of brilliant artwork by the youngsters aged four to eighteen years old. Those viewing the exhibition had the opportunity to cast their votes for their favourite pieces of work in " The People's Choice " . This Year the Primary winner was Ivan Khrypunov from Haslingfield Endowed Primary School, and the Secondary winner was Kiera Hufford, from St Ivo School. Thank you to all the colleagues from the Arts Society who helped to make the day successful and to St. Peter's school for hosting and for being so supportive. Sawtry Village Academy has agreed to host CAYAC 2025. The Hinchingsbrooke Hospital Project continues; artwork from schools is still being displayed on the walls of the hospital. Staff, patients and visitors have appreciated these displays and it gives schools a chance to share their creative endeavours with the public.

Rosemary Huckle

WEBMASTER'S REPORT

I am resigning from the position of Webmaster from 6th June 2024, having served in this capacity since 2019. Since then, every effort has been made to make the web site more attractive and more accessible - an up-to-date source of information for members of all the society's activities. I had hoped to have a shadow this past year, who might then have stepped into my shoes, but I regret that at the point of writing, Huntsarts faces 2024/25 with no Webmaster in post.

Bob Woodham

VOLUNTEERS' REPORTS

CHURCH RECORDING

Huntingdon Church Recorders is a small group of eight volunteers currently meeting on a Thursday morning a couple of times a month, when we can.

At the time of writing (April 2024), we are continuing with our recording of St. John the Baptist Church, Holywell. We began recording this beautiful small church, situated just outside St Ives, in March 2023. Progress is steady and we are on target to complete in about a year's time.

In early February 2024, the completed and bound copy of the Church Record for St. Andrew's Church, Swavesey was finally handed to a church representative. It saw the end of a very challenging project due to the size of the church and its closure for 18 months due to COVID.

We hope they are enjoying their Church Record, a copy of which will shortly be available to view at the Cambridgeshire Archive in Ely.

As always, I extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation to all members of my CR group, past and present, for the considerable time, effort and commitment they have given to our CR projects.

Church recording is very much a team effort. The dedication of the group has led to the end of another successful project at St Andrew's Church, Swavesey and the continuation of the current one at St John the Baptist, Holywell. My heartfelt thanks to them and our local TAS who support us.

We always welcome new volunteers. Please feel free to get in touch if you would like to know more.

Pat Hamilton

GARDEN HERITAGE VOLUNTEERS

Last year several Huntingdon AS Garden Volunteers, including Claire Sarkies and Janet Probyn, have joined our newly launched Listings Project. Working with members of Cambridgeshire Gardens Trust, an organisation that we support, we have started to reappraise Historic England's register of parks and gardens in Cambridgeshire, which were first listed 40 years ago or more. Do they still merit their listing; are they under threat? Should other special gardens be included? Huntingdon AS members are already on the job.

Over 40 gardens are officially listed and, from our experience or local knowledge, there are probably many others that deserve the enhanced protection that listing offers from threats such as development, climate change or pollution. Your help and enthusiasm would enable us to complete our listings review more quickly.

To further our charitable object of raising awareness of the importance of our landscape heritage, CGT has a healthy Small Grants Fund and distributes cash awards twice a year to applicants who wish to fund a project consistent with CGT goals, such as creating or improving a garden space. This year's awardees have included the Wildlife Trust for Beds, Cambs and Northants for a children's garden at their Ramsey Heights Countryside Centre and Abbots Ripton C. of E. Primary School for new raised vegetable beds.

Thanks and congratulations to all our members who have taken part in these important outreach activities; if you know of anyone seeking funds for a suitable project, please let me know or look at the CGT website <https://cambridgeshiregardenstrust.org.uk/>

Over the year, members and their guests have enjoyed over a dozen talks, visits and training on subjects as diverse as landscape painting and viticulture. We have also been delighted and instructed by guided visits both to historically important gardens and little-known private gardens not usually open to the public, such as Ousden House, Suffolk and Glebe House, Bedfordshire.

If you have not sampled a CGT event, please see the programme on our website and do come along as a guest; or you may like to consider joining us and enjoying the benefits of meeting diverse and stimulating people, some of whom you will probably know already. Perhaps you

will be tempted to pursue garden-related research from your armchair or even beyond. Or, if you are able to engage even for a few months in more hands-on ways, such as helping with our Events Team, advertising, hospitality, website or accounting, please do talk to me or a member of the Huntingdon AS Committee.

Judith Christie