



FRIENDS OF THE MERCER ART GALLERY

NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2022

Thanks to Judith Thomas

The Friends' summer party proved an ideal opportunity to say a massive thank you to our founder Judith Thomas for her unstinting 33-year contribution to the group and to the Mercer Art Gallery.

In that time, Judith has been fully committed to the life of the gallery, seeing it through redevelopment from a dilapidated rates office in 1989 to the glorious art space that it is today.



Judith with Harrogate Borough Council chief executive Wallace Sampson

Mingling among the artwork on display, nearly 200 guests enjoyed an evening of drinks, canapes and conversation and listened to words of praise for Judith from Harrogate Borough Council chief executive Wallace Sampson and Friends chair Julie Goldsmith.

Wallace Sampson said: "Although I'm sure it wasn't always easy, Judith exemplifies inspiration, resilience and determination."

He continued: "Judith and the Friends have shown commitment and determination from the outset, bringing our gallery back to its glory and building on its success ever since."

Julie added her own words of thanks and noted that for more than three decades, the Mercer and the Friends had shared an ambition to create a gallery that Harrogate was rightly proud of.



Celebration artwork on display during Judith's thank-you event

She said: "The success of this enduring relationship is thanks not only to the vision of the gallery's curators past and present but also to the extraordinary passion of the Friends founder Judith Thomas for the visual arts and her unstinting commitment to the trust and its role."

MERCER OPEN UNDER WAY

With a new name and an extended catchment area, the Mercer Open exhibition is now well and truly under way, displaying 170 works by 90 artists.

This year's show will run until 8 January 2023 and has been curated by artist, curator and collaborator Courtney Spencer with the selection committee comprising Redhouse Originals gallery director Richard McTague and artist Michelle Duxbury.

The display began in 2003 as the biennial Harrogate Open event and this year has seen some changes with the aim of bringing the gallery to the attention of a wider audience and spearheading the introduction of new artists.

For the first time, submissions were sought from artists who lived, worked or studied in the whole of Yorkshire after the catchment area was extended. Participation was also encouraged by a reduction in artist fees and a move online for the submission process.

Courtney Spencer said it had been an "absolute joy" to curate The Mercer Open, adding: "It's fantastic

to see the contrast of contemporary works in such a stunning historic space and it's been so nice to welcome visitors and hear their responses to the exhibition."

Mercer Art Gallery Curator Karen Southworth said: "We were knocked out by the range and quality of art that we saw and think The Mercer Open is a celebration of talent across Yorkshire. It brings new artists to the gallery alongside many who have been part of the Open exhibition over its twenty-year history."

She continued: "This really is an exhibition with something for everyone, from meticulously observed paintings to bold and colourful abstract work. It's a visually exciting exhibition - there's something wonderful in the juxtaposition of such vibrant, contemporary art and the elegant historic interior of the Mercer Gallery."

The slow looking activities continue during the Open with books around the gallery for visitors to record their responses and, of course, the slow-looking chair is in place.

MEET THE OPEN ARTISTS

The Friends are sponsoring the highly anticipated Meet the Artists session, that is being held as part of the latest Mercer Open exhibition. A panel discussion featuring exhibiting artists, Balbinder Broadbent, Christopher Tansey and Nel Whatmore, will take place on Friday 28 October from 7.30-9pm.

Join in as the trio discuss their approach to their work with Open

curator Courtney Spencer, and discover more about these talented artists, what inspires them, the role drawing plays for them and their thoughts on 'slow looking' as a way to invite audiences to form their own connections with their work.

Tickets are £5 and accompanied by a glass of wine or a non-alcoholic alternative. The Eventbrite

booking link can be found on the Visit Harrogate website at www.visitharrogate.co.uk/mercero-penevents. Doors open at 7:15pm.

The discount code for Friends to book tickets for the panel discussion is Member. When you have selected the tickets you want, click 'enter promo code' at the top left, and enter the code.

Talk: collaborating with the artist

Art activity got back on track in the summer when master printmaker and etcher Nigel Oxley gave the first Friends talk in the gallery since lockdown.

His talk provided an interesting insight into the role of printing and etching in producing works of art and the amount a printmaker has to achieve when working in collaboration with the artist.

The event coincided with the gallery's 'Celebration' exhibition featuring 20th century British abstract artists and Nigel was introduced by Lee Taylor, whose collection formed the core of the exhibition.

Nigel joined the Kelpra Studio in London during the seventies and worked closely with many well-known artists including John Hoyland and Patrick Heron, some of whose works were included in 'Celebration'.

Friends were shown an example of an etched copper plate as well as carborundum techniques which create texture in a print. Nigel also showed many original unframed prints where it was possible to see



Nigel Oxley shows a print he created for Yorkshire artist John Hoyland

all the details.

He told the audience that Patrick Heron was especially appreciative of nature of etching in art.

Nigel explained that while, in painting, the brush is loaded with a colour and the mark made with the brush stroke determines both shape and colour, with etching, the marks are made by various

chemical processes and the colour is applied later. This enables many variations of colour on different prints.

The Friends invited students from Harrogate College who were studying printing and were grateful for the opportunity to listen to a master printmaker.

Kynren – an epic tale of England

Two thousand years of history were revealed to a group of Friends in August when they attended Kynren, an epic tale of England, told in a 90-minute live outdoor show, that was packed with special effects and pyrotechnics, writes Christine Wray.

The evening began in earnest at the Black Bull in Moulton for a delicious early supper before the group headed north to Bishop Auckland for the

event which took place on a fine summer night that was full of atmosphere.

All credit must go to the volunteers, performers (equestrian and otherwise) who displayed remarkable farm animal skills and who made it a night of superlatives – spectacular, thrilling, action-packed and emotional.

FRIENDS GO DUTCH

Nearly 40 Friends gathered at the Harrogate Odeon on a dull September afternoon for a big screen tour of the enchanting Mauritshuis Museum in The Hague. The fascinating talk was given by Jane Choy-Thurlow, a docent at the museum, and was streamed live. Home to hundreds of paintings by Dutch artists, some connections between the royal collection of the Netherlands and the Mercer Gallery's own Dutch works of art in the permanent collection were revealed.

Huis work - portrait by Pieter Rijs

Remembering friends

Friends chair Julie Goldsmith writes...

Sadly, we have lost two good friends in recent months, Malcolm Neesam and Andrew Stewart.

Malcolm Neesam supported us over many decades, and we were all sorry to hear of his death. We were fortunate that our last talk with him in February 2019 was a worthy celebration of the publication of Harrogate in 50 Buildings in the Pump Room.

Also gone but not forgotten by us is Andrew Stewart of the 108 Fine Art gallery on Cold Bath Road, who was a former member of the curatorial team at the Mercer.

Andrew was instrumental in the conservation of many artworks in the gallery's permanent collection and, with Pat Clegg, masterminded its relocation from the public library to Swan Road. Both will be very much missed.

Doddington and Welbeck after heist and pandemic

With the pandemic and a jewel heist having previously conspired to delay a day out in Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire, 30 Friends finally visited Doddington Hall and the Portland Collection at Welbeck near Worksop in April, writes Julie Goldsmith.



Friends on the Doddington Hall and Welbeck tour

Doddington Hall is a wonderful Elizabethan manor house with delightful gardens, that is still a family home. The collection of contemporary ceramics in the great hall and an impressive bar awash with bottles of every shape and size were highly enjoyable.

Doddington Hall also has an excellent farm shop and restaurant, so the group were able to eat well, which is always a must for a FoMG outing.

The visit to the Portland Collection at Welbeck was all too brief but the theft, which had prevented our original trip, was acknowledged with the curators leaving in place the case from which the Portland tiara was stolen.

The collection - named after the Dukes of Portland, who owned Welbeck from 1755-1977 - is housed within the architectural award-winning old Victorian Tan gallop where racehorses were once trained. It boasts a stunning array of art including the pearl ear-

ring that Charles I wore at his beheading and works by Van Dyck, Michelangelo, Singer Sargent, and Stubbs.



Scene of the crime: Smashed display case which housed the Portland Tiara

SPIRES AND SQUIRES

FROM VERSAILLES TO PETERBOROUGH

The Spires and Squires trip began in glorious June weather with the first stop being Boughton Hall in Northamptonshire, known as the Versailles of the north, writes Liz Perrett.

The frontage was added to a Tudor manor by the first Duke of Montagu who had been ambassador to the Court of Louis XIV. He returned with a passion for all things French, re-designed the manor house and filled it with the most wonderful furniture and object d'art.

Fotheringhay Church was the next stop. Perhaps more well known as the place, Mary Queen of Scots met her end, the church is the final resting place for the second and third Dukes of York and the latter's wife, Cecily, The Rose of Raby.

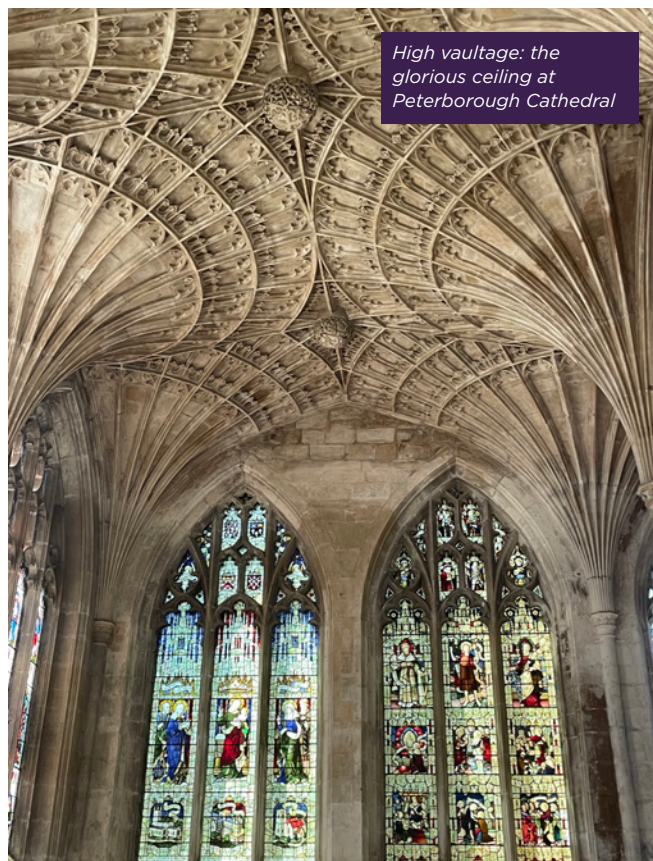
The Barnsdale Lodge Hotel near Rutland Water was the overnight stop and day two saw the second "spire", namely Peterborough Cathedral where the group had an in-depth tour, one of the highlights being seeing the resting place of Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife.

The magnificent Burghley House, built by Elizabeth I's trusted right hand man, William Cecil, was the lunch stop followed by an introductory talk on the family's history before a guided visit of the house.

The magnificently decorated state rooms contained priceless treasures and furniture collected on the grand tour by the fifth Earl of Exeter and his wife, Anne Cavendish in the between 1680-90 and altered and

added to by the ninth Earl.

Huge thanks go to Andrew Sloane and Julie Goldsmith, the indefatigable and unfailingly good-humoured double act who spent so long organising the trip and did a superb job in ensuring the visits ran smoothly.



High vaultage: the glorious ceiling at Peterborough Cathedral

What's On! Dates for the diary

October 2022

- **Tuesday 25th and Thursday 27th** - half term art workshops for families, organised by the Mercer Gallery

For more information, search for The Mercer Open at [Eventbrite.co.uk](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk)

- **Friday 28th** - the Mercer Open panel discussion 7:30-9pm, doors open 7:15pm, organised by the Mercer Gallery

For more information, search for The Mercer Open at [Eventbrite.co.uk](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk)

November 2022

- **Tuesday 8th** - Friends of the Mercer Gallery Annual General Meeting at 7pm

December 2022

- **Wednesday 7th** - Friends of the Mercer Gallery Christmas Party

February 2023

- **Thursday 9th** - Friends of the Mercer Gallery talk on Ruskin by Brian Souter, lecturer in the history of art. Drinks at 6:30pm with talk starting at 7pm

April 2023

- **Tuesday 25th** - Friends day trip to Cumbria including Brantwood, Abbot Hall and the Ruskin Museum

June 2023

- **Thursday 15th** - Friends day trip to Tennants Auctioneers in Leyburn