



NEWSLETTER

Supporting the Mercer Art Gallery by assisting in the acquisition & exhibition of works of art for the benefit of the public

Heartfelt thanks to Judith Thomas who retires as Chair of the Friends after more than 30 years

Judith has been so inspirational in the Mercer Gallery. It is hard to believe that before 1989 Harrogate's Art Gallery was housed in the depths of the Public Library with reserve art work from the collection housed in damp basements and becoming damaged.

The council allowed the empty, old tax office to become the fledgling gallery and Judith assembled a committee of like minded people and the first fundraiser was a candlelit dinner, in the leaking, dark space which would change a derelict Promenade Room into the wonderful Gallery that we have today.

She organised the Friends Committee which with her skilful guidance and knowledge, was the start of all our adventures, discovering amazing visits to historic homes, castles and other galleries. Not forgetting the delicious meals we had on our trips and the fun and friendships we made.

Also, our Christmas parties, where the committee all mucked in to produce a 2 course meal. In the earlier days we actually produced hot meals with Judith finding recipes and menus for us to follow.

The committee has raised over £400,000 to fund exhibitions and acquisitions for the Gallery plus a reputation with the hard work of the curators for important and excellent exhibitions including the Open for local talent.

Judith has a unique skill of asking people to do things without ever seeming bossy or dictatorial, the committee meetings were always efficient and yet fun. Nothing seemed to phase her and she is a good problem solver. Her house was 'open house' many times for meetings, which originated with coffee and biscuits to a nice glass of wine and nibbles.

We must not forget Richard (her husband) who has been a fantastic and guaranteed support.

Her presence on the committee will be sorely missed but warmly remembered by so many people for everything she has done for the Mercer Gallery. She now deserves a little time to herself her husband and family.

written by Mary Jane Ogden and Ann Joslin



Retiring Committee Members



Ann Joslin



Christine Brown



Richard Thomas

Ann joined the committee in 1999 proposed by the then Secretary, David Luery, who knew of her great interest in the arts and her talents as a sculptress as well as her enthusiasm to help promote and work for the Mercer Art Gallery. All that David anticipated happened because Ann became a pivotal member of the committee, always willing to help with whatever task needed doing, be it joining 'recces' for outings or catering for parties (with the involvement of her husband Charles whose sausage rolls became legendary.) Ann was Deputy Chairman from 2001 to 2018, continuing to fulfil that vital supporting role.

Hopefully Charles and Ann will continue to be prominent members of the Friends and will be able to enjoy sitting back and letting someone else do the hard work. I made a new friend when Ann joined the committee and I cannot thank her enough for all her help and support.

When Tony Lumb retired as Membership Secretary 9 years ago there was general dismay as to how we would fill his shoes. Christine very neatly stepped in to them and has been a superb Membership Secretary ever since, bringing us into the modern world by computerising all the lists and mailings. It has needed someone of Christine's skills to manage to coordinate gallery lists with our own lists, oversee complex mailings by post and email and see us through the tricky adoption of all the data legislation. Her calmness and her wisdom were always accompanied by her wonderful sense of humour - sorely tried at times.

Again it is with very genuine thanks that we say goodbye to Christine. I have greatly valued her friendship and practical advice and know that she has left a very sound system for the next Membership Secretary but will always be on hand to help.

It is very difficult for me to write a piece about Richard as I suspect I am more than a little biased.

Richard joined the original Appeal Council to bring not only his legal expertise but his great knowledge of Harrogate to help push forward the plans for the Mercer Art Gallery and was an immense help when various aborted trust deeds were discussed. He has continued to bring that wisdom and sound advice to the Friends committee.

He has described his job as being the sweeper up at the back of our outings and events, making sure that we didn't lose anyone on the way but that underestimates his great contribution. I have always valued and appreciated his unerring support and know that my job both with the Appeal and with the founding of the Friends was made possible by his quiet presence and encouragement.

written by Judith Thomas

News from the Gallery

When are we reopening?

We are delighted to be back on site after six months away. We are now busy preparing for reopening, planned for Saturday 28th November with two special preview days just for the Friends on Thursday 26th and Friday 27th November. However, we hold on to these plans lightly as local and national changes continue apace.



Night scene at the Royal Hall

That is why we have created our new exhibition, *From Darkness to Light*, featuring works from our permanent collection to reflect how we might feel through this changing season

Arranged in three themed sections, the exhibition starts with “darkness”, works encapsulating night scenes, dark woodlands, rainy days and nights, dark abstract works and a selection of black and white pieces.



Paradise, wood engraving by Robert John Gibbings

Artworks that feature both dark and light elements then act as a bridge towards the final light section, into the light and warmth of summery landscapes, scenes of celebrations and parties and hints of holidays, colourful abstracts and landscapes featuring rainbows in a nod to the evocative symbol that this has become over the past few months.



August 12, 1988 by Patrick Heron

We are excited to be welcoming you back to the Mercer soon.

- written by May Catt

How are you getting ready to reopen? - written by Lucy Scott

The last six months have proved to be a very busy period for all of us with the whole of our small team redeployed to assist other Council departments, alongside ensuring we continued to look after all three of our sites. We took the opportunity to have several pieces of maintenance undertaken, including essential work to allow the Pump Room to reopen post lockdown; we have been working hard on reopening plans for both the Museum and the Mercer with many new challenges to resolve! We also took down the Turner and Landscapes exhibition and reluctantly returned the Hungarian show, which was onsite and due to open back in April.

The Royal Pump Room Museum reopened to the public on 12th September with the new 'Make Do and Mend' exhibition. It is fabulous to see visitors back in the Museum and enjoying their visits.

While the Mercer is closed we have taken a selection of jewellery from the gallery shop to sell in the Royal Pump Room Museum. If you would like to book a visit to the Museum to see the new exhibition, you can do so online at www.harrogate.gov.uk/royalpumproom This also gives you an idea of how the pre-booking system will work at the Gallery.

We are now into the swing of preparing to reopen the Mercer. This is a full team effort as we put the new exhibition in place, introduce new health and safety measures to keep us all safe and redevelop the gallery shop.

Next week our new protective screens will be fitted at the reception desk and new signage is being produced. Our new online booking system for the Mercer is in development, and we will make announcements as soon as the system goes live, so please watch this space.

Will there be lovely new things in the shop?

Yes! We will reopen with new work from artists and jewellers:

Katie Timson produces porcelain work inspired by her love of the natural world. We currently stock earrings and necklaces inspired by the eggshells of British birds and Katie will be providing us with a new collection of tableware.



Cari Jane Hakes originally trained as an architect and Cari's designs draw on her architectural work. She often uses literature or stories as conceptual frameworks for her designs producing wearable sculptures.



Emily Higham: Emily uses the process of enamelling to explore colours and pattern in her jewellery design. The pieces are inspired by the beautiful colours and patterns of honeycomb and the shapes and layers found within beehives.



Ramp Ceramics (Roop and Al Make Pots) is a creative partnership between Alice Hartford and Rupert Johnstone. Together they make earthenware and studio ceramics. Rupert specialises in the throwing of pots and Alice's focus is on the decoration.



What else have you been doing? The collections review - *written by Nicola Baxter*

We started work on reviewing the entire collection earlier this year. This is an essential and significant piece of work – not least because we have almost 30,000 objects – and we need to ensure that all the insurance is up to date, that every item in the collection has a complete database record and that we know where it is and that our collection care meets the rigorous standards of the Arts Council's Accreditation scheme. This scheme gives us access to vital funding and Government indemnity – meaning that we can bring in loans and grants from elsewhere.

We are tackling this task by dividing it into four sections: valuations, addressing long term loans and unsolicited donations; documentation backlog and disposals. This is all underpinned by the Museums Association's Codes of Ethics so we are held accountable in our approach.

I'm currently in the process of the reviewing and updating paperwork for all long-term loans. A schedule is in place for the collections and documentation audit, which I'll be completing thanks to assistance from volunteers and external support from Museum Development Yorkshire.

The collections review will take at least 18 months to complete but by the end of it we will have a tidy store at the very least!





Where were you? written by May Catt

Seven months ago we had to close midway through our Turner exhibition, one of most popular shows to date with 12,715 visitors in just two months - the equivalent of a fantastic 76,280 visitors a year.

But what were we doing whilst the nation was in lockdown? As soon as the Government announced that sites had to close, we quickly redeployed to cover essential services within the Council, supporting the most vulnerable through working with the partnership, engagement and housing teams, making the public feel safe and secure in our parks and gardens and business premises.

From our wider Culture, Tourism and Sport department, 132 staff were redeployed, making a difference to our planning services and supporting our back office teams in delivering important support to the wider community.

We have had amazing feedback with some staff taking up roles that would have traditionally had only men apply. They have made a positive contribution to all services and kept our frontline statutory services running efficiently. We juggled this with children at home, learning new roles and making friends across other departments. I'm very proud of everyone who contributed to the sudden changes so readily and with such enthusiasm, enabling vital public service to continue.

Veronica and Louise share more of their experiences below:

Louise and I were initially re-deployed to 'Shielding' which involved phoning vulnerable people who were house-bound, mainly to check up on their well-being but also to see if they needed any medical or other assistance. We then moved on to the Housing Department where we were tasked with triaging any callers who needed help with accommodation and sometimes other problems. This was not as daunting as it initially sounded and most people, obviously there were exceptions, were really quite polite despite their difficulties. We are delighted to be back in the Museum and are helping May and Nicola to get the Gallery up and running in the very near future.

Veronica Bidie, Museum Assistant

The work on the phone calls was a busy job but very rewarding as we were able to help people who were really struggling with the lockdown scenario. We were then redeployed to the Housing Options Team, who support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. We were provided with the equipment and training that we needed to be able to work from home, and worked alongside the housing team by answering calls, undertaking initial triage, completing the database forms and answering basic queries. This was quite challenging work, and very different from working as a Museum and Gallery Assistant! But we were given a lot of support and encouragement from our colleagues along the way.

Louise Horsley, Museum Assistant



RE:ACT Covid 19 Online Exhibition



henshaws
beyond expectations

wellspring
therapy & training

During lockdown for many people there has been time and space to reflect, and to use this time creatively, perhaps inspired by how our streets have been transformed; how communities have come together; how the environment has bloomed; how life has changed.

The Friends of the Mercer Art Gallery wanted this creativity to be celebrated so came up with the idea of an online exhibition - RE:ACT Covid 19 (Responsive Exhibition: Art Created through Covid19).

A call went out for artists and we were delighted with the response - the works of 95 artists were included. Creations went live on Yorkshire Day, 1st August and there has been a public vote for each category. plus a special additional award selected from a shortlist of pieces, selected by the Friends Committee and the final winner chose from this list by a representative of the Harrogate Hospital and Community Charity, Sammy Lambert.

We were delighted by both the unexpectedly high number of entries and their superb quality, which was astonishing, surpassing our wildest expectations. The exhibition provided a unique snap shot of history. It is available to see online until the end of October 2020.

We hope to be able to create an 'actual' exhibition in the Mercer Gallery when life returns to 'normal' although this still needs to be confirmed and timetabled with the Council. In doing this exhibition we have raised funds for Henshaws and Wellspring Training and Therapy.

Your time in Lockdown

As the uncertainties of tiers and lockdowns continue it reminds us of the creativity of the summer's ReAct online exhibition and aware of some of the positives that come out of this having more time, more space and perhaps more silence? "Mindfulness". Savouring the present moment.....

What has caught your creative eye/ear/imagination ?

A sight - a scene?: leaf, flower, animal ,bird, view, a sound - river , birdsong , wind, music.

A book re-read? Thumbing through a catalogue of an old exhibition ?

An online picture or lecture or virtual tour?

A garden visited? A walk in old haunts or new paths? A new good habit or hobby ?

Food from the garden? Learning a language? Creative writing? Playing an instrument? Writing letters? Keeping a diary?

Discovering new places? Old places in a new light?

Discovered any local hidden gems that you would like to share?

Why not send in something positive and beautiful that had occurred to you in the last six months?

Send us a story, photograph or letter to share and uplift?

These will be published in upcoming newsletters/new online section on the website

Email: hello@friendsofthemercerartgallery.co.uk



RE:ACT Covid 19 - Winners

1st Place - Abigail McGourlay - Brewing

Abi is a 20 year old University of Leeds student studying Fine Art. This piece "Brewing" is 120 x 80cm, oil on canvas.

At the beginning of lockdown Abi struggled both physically and mentally and as a Wellbeing Rep at University, she was sharing words of positivity and productivity without actually listening to her own advice. She is a huge advocate for the arts within wellbeing and especially over this isolated period as we can feel very trapped not only in the confines of our homes but within our minds too.

Art has provided her with an escape, and 'Brewing' really captures this for her. It is the first painting she has done for a long time that not only captures her in the idea of her physical form but in a genuine display of her emotional experience.



2nd Place - Jack Tomlinson Angels in Scrubs

Jack has worked in health and social care for the majority of his career. During the corona virus lockdown, Jack sent his poetry collection to publishers in London and released his debut book 'Behind The Mask' in May 2020.

Lonely days in isolation,
As a viral pandemic
cripples the nation,
Deserted streets and
Abandoned schools,
We must stay safe and obey lockdowns rules.

The roundabout is empty
Where children used to play,
The swings creek in the
Shallow wind,
As the flowers still gently sway.

But not all's silent across the land,
If only we could hear,
In the corridors of our hospitals
Are voices filled with fear.

With strength like the hulk
And superman's powers,
Nurses work tirelessly
Battling the hours,
Scientists test hard,
to find an injection,
As cleaners fight
to combat infection.

Heroes, saviours,
Angels in scrubs,
Armed with face masks,
Aprons and gloves.

Working all day and
All through the night,
With courage of lions
Their halos our light.

Standing tall in our darkest hour,
When many would flee, crumble and
cower,
But not these, no
They'll fight to the end,
Until their body's are broken
And their tired legs bend.

Their tears fall silently,
Behind locker room doors,
In empty canteens,
And hospital floors.

We are all so proud of you,
Beyond words can say,
We send you our love
For the price that you pay,
Not seeing your families and
Putting us first,
Our army of angels
Lifting this curse.

Soon we will drive,
this fatal virus,
Back to where it once came,
But until then we are in safe hands,
And we thank you once again.

3rd Place - Karen Moss Courage in Dark Times



Karen considers herself an accidental artist. She started painting paw prints on pebbles to raise money for Miss Mollies dog rescue in Harrogate approximately 6 years ago. She fosters and re-home dogs and has progressed to canvas work and paint mainly pet portraits. The painting is acrylics and water colours on canvas and measures 10 x 12 inches.

Textile Category:
The Harrogate Scrubbers

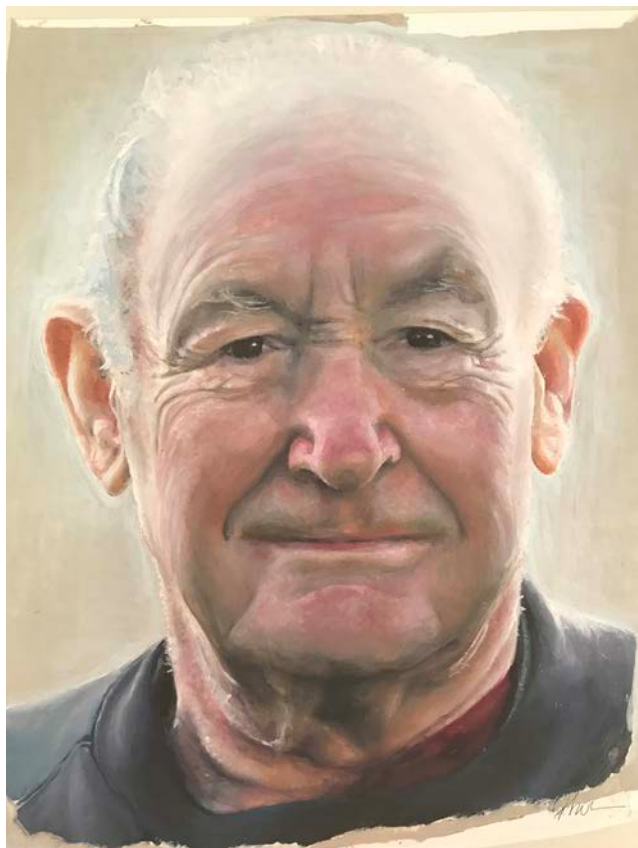


Sculpture Category - Jane Dennis
Lockdown Linda and Fanny Furlough

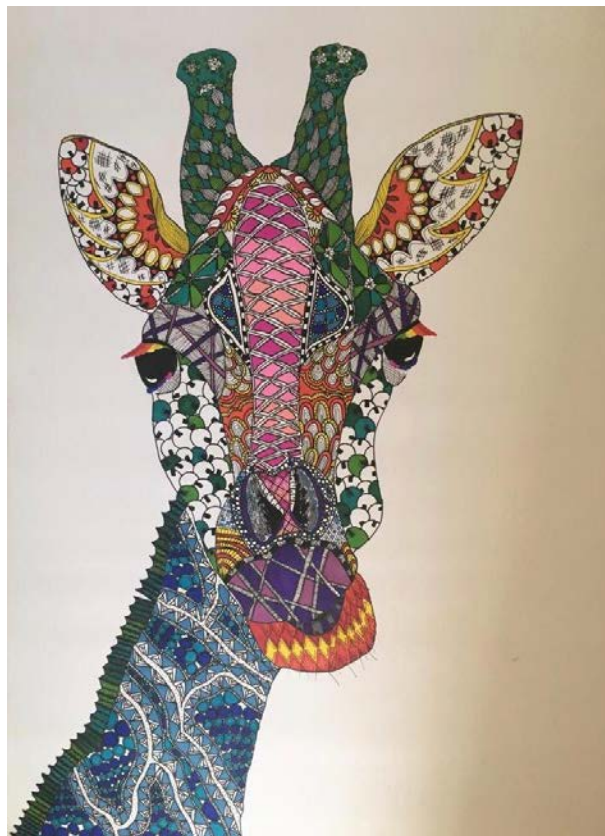


Special Category - Liz Wearing
Voyage of the New Normal





**Joint Winner
Student Category**
- Phoebe Scott (18), Peter



Joint Winner Student Category
- Hollie Bassham (13), Giraffe.



Joint Winner Photography Category
- Pushpika Gamage
A Skeleton of a Tree



Joint Winner Photography Category
Valetta Moyle - Love, Luck and Hope perhaps.

Papercraft Category - Barbara Taylor-Gell
A Very British Lockdown



Editor's Choice

Wing and a Prayer - Ripon Cathedral

If you haven't had a chance to visit Ripon Cathedral yet, to see the Wing and A Prayer Project, it is definitely worth a trip (wearing a face mask of course) It comprises of thousands of angels taking flight into the cathedral's nave, each one representing a prayer left during the COVID pandemic

For details go to

<https://www.riponcathedral.org.uk/>



Hold Still - The National Portrait Gallery

Also, why not take a look at the photography exhibition "Hold Still" spearheaded by The Duchess of Cambridge, Patron of the National Portrait Gallery, Hold Still was an ambitious community project which was launched in May 2020 to create a unique collective portrait of the UK during lockdown.

People of all ages were asked to submit a photographic portrait, taken in a six-week period during May and June, focussed on three core themes – Helpers and Heroes, Your New Normal and Acts of Kindness.

<https://www.npg.org.uk/hold-still/>

Thank you Judith - A selection of some Friends' memories



A selection of some Friends' memories



The picture below is of our last Committee meeting with Judith as Chair. Due to covid restrictions and poor weather we met in Alice's garage! We hope to resume to normal service sometime soon. Keep safe everyone!

Thank you for everything Judith!

