



NEWSLETTER

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

www.friendsofthemercerartgallery.co.uk

Registered Charity No 1011431

Welcome...

We are hoping that a Spring Newsletter for the Mercer Gallery Friends will bring a touch of normality as we all struggle, each in our own way, with the difficult consequences of the Covid-19 outbreak. But, Spring is in the air, the birds are totally unaware of any sort of crisis and the flowers gladden any heart.

The committee is very conscious that April is when we ask you all to renew your membership subscription and yet we have just cancelled all the wonderful events and outings for the foreseeable future so, a heartfelt thank you to all those Friends who have paid and continue to pay their 20/2021 subscriptions. Be assured that normal service will resume as soon as possible. We hope that you will continue to support us and we shall jump into action the minute we are allowed to. Julie and Andrew are brimming with enthusiasm to reinstate the exciting social events they had planned and bubbling with ideas for the future. The arts and the pleasure such activities bring will be more important than ever.

Thankfully the Turner exhibition 'Northern Exposure' in the North Gallery has had excellent exposure, running alongside the exhibition of local Yorkshire artists in the Main Gallery and visitor numbers were very high before the Gallery had to close.

I am very excited about the next exhibition 'Their Safe Haven' showing the work of seven Hungarian artists who fled to Britain from their homeland to escape the Third Reich. Hopefully, we will all be able to see it later in the year and we have been promised a celebratory party in the gallery to welcome its arrival as the planned Preview cannot now take place.

Please keep safe and well and we will look forward to all meeting again soon.

by Judith Thomas



Future dates for your diary (we hope!)

April 27 2021

Doddington and Portland Trip

29 June 2021 Manchester

Our New Treasurer Paul Greening



Paul was born and brought up in south east London. After becoming an accountant in the civil service, he and his wife Liz moved in 1992 to Glasshouses in Nidderdale where they live with two cats.

When he retired, Paul was looking for something to keep his brain active and was therefore delighted at the opportunity to become our Treasurer.

He has a keen interest in all sorts of history, the subject he studied at university, and also enjoys dabbling in the garden.

Finance Update from Paul

"Up till now, this has been a good year financially for the Friends. In addition to funding from subscriptions, we've raised about £8,600 for charitable activities through our functions, compared with about £5,500 in 2018/19.

This has enabled us to make more grants than last year: £1,500 of prizes in connection with the Harrogate Open Exhibition last Autumn, provide £1,700 of support for the Contemporary Arts Society and £7,000 of support for the Frith and Safe Haven exhibitions."



Judith Thomas, Chair.



Tom King, Secretary
with his grandson Alec



Julie Goldsmith, Chair of
Social Sub Committee



Christine Brown,
Membership Secretary



Paul Greening, Treasurer



Richard Thomas



Anne Smyth



Mary Jane Ogden



Paula Russell



Ann Joslin



Emily Ogden, Co-Opted



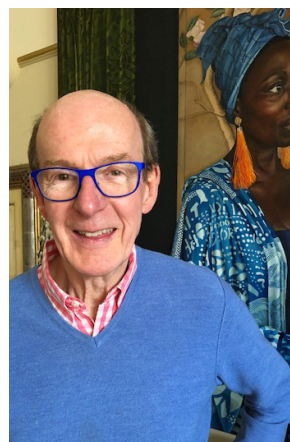
Alice Atkinson



THE HARROGATE ARTS
& MERCER GALLERY
DEVELOPMENT TRUST



Catherine Wright,
Deputy Chairman



Charles Spencer

with very best wishes from,
The Friends of the
Mercer Art Gallery Committee

Turner Exhibition

When the Friends of the Mercer Art Gallery gathered on the evening of Thursday, 30 January in two consecutive groups at the Gallery, who would have thought it was to be one of the last such gatherings for the foreseeable future, followed only by one other talk.

The calendar year at the Mercer Gallery initially opened for a now sadly curtailed exhibition of "Turner, Northern Exposure". The Turner pictures were brilliantly complemented at the Gallery by a concurrent exhibition from contemporary Yorkshire artists who have recognised Turner as an important influence in their own work. These were further coupled by works from local, historic stand-outs such as Grimshaw and Evans. (Incidentally and very importantly there was a fantastic exhibition of watercolours inspired by Brimham Rocks from the young artists at Western Primary School - where I have to confess I spent as much time as I spent with the Turners!)

We were privileged to have as our speaker David Hill, renowned Turner expert, author and Emeritus Professor at Leeds University.

Hill reminded his audience of the background for the curation of this exhibition, namely retracing Turner's footsteps in his tour, in 1797, across the North. The core of the exhibition had previously been seen at the Granary Gallery in Berwick-upon-Tweed and then at Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery in Carlisle - both on the route of Turner's tour - and each with local touches added.

Hill traced the tour and pointed out what a deep influence this tour made on the young 22 year-old Turner and his work. Hill suggested that Turner set off on his travels as a architectural draughtsman of some repute and

emerged from it as "a poet of the landscape sublime." We must say that he found his true calling as "an artist through his exposure to the North."



Turner, Joseph Mallord William, Scarborough, c. 1811, Tate (D17167), digital image
© Tate released under Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported) <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-scarborough>

Turner spent three months travelling and sketching. Rather moving in the exhibition are the presence of two sketchbooks that Turner used along the route, often from the top of a stage coach!

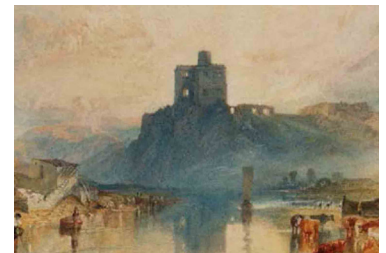
Hill pointed out these pictures not only show us Turner's love and development of dramatic landscapes, replete with good northern weather, even in summer months, but also the inclusion of the human element. For example, in his coastal scenes, the watchful eye of the area customs officer on the beach at Dunstanborough Castle, sailors struggling in wild seas at Tynemouth Priory or families enjoying an outing in the Lake District.

In many cases these early sketches were later developed into full blown paintings. I was struck by Hill showing us the seeds of Turner's great painting, "Snow Storm, Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps", first exhibited in 1812 - the seeds quite evidently seen in his sketches of storms in the Lake District. Hill had himself been to Turner's locations in the Lake District where he took photographs to show us the same scenes today. Hill also checked the historic weather forecasts for that area at the time and confirmed the

presence of storms. One could say a 'typical English summer'! And there in the sketches of 1797 is birth to the idea of THE Storm in the oil painting of 1812 and now at Tate Britain.

I was struck how lucky we are in 'little old Harrogate' to have such a fine resource as David Hill in our midst, but also to be able to see first hand the originals sketches and drawings from this transforming three months in the career of one of our nation's finest artists.

One can only imagine the work, effort and expense that is involved in pulling together an exhibition of such high calibre in our own Civic Art Gallery and our gratitude must surely go to all who made this possible for the good people of Harrogate to savour.



Turner, Joseph Mallord William, Norham Castle, on the River Tweed, c. 1822-3, Tate (D18148), digital image © Tate released under Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported) <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-norham-castle-on-the-river-tweed-d18148>

The only sadness is now, of course, that the Gallery is closed. I was happy to visit the exhibition at leisure over several visits and of course, astonishingly, at no cost. Is it too much to hope that the Gallery might open again before 19 April? Probably. But the catalogue is reasonable and worth a read and reflection, and hopefully available at the shop if the Gallery does reopen.

written by Andrew Sloane.

Gallery Shop - Featured Artist

Cari-Jane Hakes is an architect turned jewellery designer/maker based in East Yorkshire. Cari has been selling her collections in the Mercer Gallery since 2016.

A few months before the 'Turner, Northern Exposure' exhibition arrived in Harrogate she was asked by the Mercer Gallery to send over some new work for the shop. Cari says "I was completely swept up in the anticipation and excitement of this touring exhibition and decided that the new jewellery collection could use Turner's paintings as a starting point for the design process."

She started the collection by concentrating on brooches. "I often design and think about brooches as miniature wearable canvases. I started by looking closely at the gouache and watercolour painting of Dunstanburgh Castle. I began by sketching over the painting and examining the architectural horizon created by the castle. After developing this idea I used the form this line created to generate the silver portion in the top half of the brooch. I then extracted two key colours from the painting (a carnelian orange and a vibrant cadmium yellow) to fill the rest of the brooch's canvas. I used this completed brooch to generate the materials and forms for the other pieces in the collection."

The second brooch she worked on was inspired by the gathering storm depicted in Turner's preparatory watercolour studies of Bamburgh Castle.

"For this miniature canvas I worked with a palette of Payne's grey and Prussian blue. On top of this I layered a silver engraved cloud pattern to create a bold circular brooch."



"One-anothering"

Oh dear, rather a corny phrase I suppose! But one likes to think that it does describe the nature of the work of the Social Sub-committee of the Friends of the Mercer Art Gallery! The purpose of this small committee of eight women and one man (!) is quite simply to nurture the fellowship that is the Friends of the Mercer.

This is done by providing certain social and cultural events in the course of a year.

Usually this consists of two parties, Christmas and Summer, two edifying talks, two one day trips and one residential trip over two nights in the autumn. Perhaps it might be interesting for our Friends to know what goes on behind the scenes to accomplish our mission. Here goes!

As they say, it is who you know, not what you know! The location for the summer party really depends on who might know someone who owns a home and garden that would be of interest but that might not usually be open to the public. It, of course, also depends on the owners of such gems being open to being invaded by around 80 people!

In addition to securing a location and a date, the committee then swings into action. The Christmas party is run along much the same lines, though the venue is a given, at the Gallery.

Ideas for the topics and speakers for the two talks come not only from the committee but also from the Friends themselves.

In organising the trips we walk through the whole day(s) from departure from Harrogate to our return. We want all the guests,

when the trip does happen, to feel safe and comfortable. We also like to make sure that once we have paid all the costs of the trip we have reserved, there should be no need for any further expenses, everything must be included. Our guests could leave their purses and wallets at home! We calculate timings from start to finish, check out any stops for refreshment en route and everything that falls in between. We attempt to tend to every detail.

In working with my fellow volunteers, I have had great fun, have felt very much part of the community at Mercer and enjoyed the opportunity to get to meet other Friends in a way that otherwise I might not.

Indeed, I have, as it were, been "one-anothered" by many lovely people, Friends and friends.

written by Andrew Sloane.

Two Star Additions to the Social Sub-Committee

Julie Goldsmith

Julie is, together with Andrew, a relative newcomer to Harrogate. Childhood visits to see an aunt in Harrogate and later trips with husband Steven to various exhibitions in what is now the Nightingale hospital led to a move in 2015 to our town. "We have loved Harrogate for decades and we wanted to live in a town where we could walk everywhere and enjoy culture on our doorstep" says Julie. Access to an RHS garden was also a big draw.

Prior to that Julie lived in a sleepy village in Northamptonshire and for much of her 30 year career in publishing made the daily 200 mile round trip to London. Highlights of her career involved being Senior Vice President of international media group Egmont, running their UK operations and also setting up the Publishing Division of the Royal Horticultural Society. She also spent time in interim roles notably as CEO of Top 200 law firm Roythornes and as Director of Knowledge at the IET.

Having taken very early retirement Julie spent 5 years as a non Executive Director of an NHS trust and also recruiting JPs in Cambridgeshire. Being mistress of her own hours also allowed her to further her passion for the arts which had begun at school where she was an avid thespian.

Like many of her friends Julie is a member of The Arts Society and in fact is the current Chair of the Board of Trustees which she says take up nearly as much time as chairing the social sub committee of the Friends of the Mercer! She is also a keen member of the Harrogate branch of the Yorks Guild of Sommeliers and the Harrogate Medical Wine Society.

"As a newcomer to Harrogate I have to say the Friends of the Mercer has been a great way to make new friends, especially Andrew, and I am proud of my new association with our gem of an Art Gallery"



Andrew Sloane

Andrew arrived in Harrogate in July 2017.

The route here was varied and at times difficult as the transition from full-time work and ministry in the Episcopal Church of the USA proved more than challenging. A restorative stay for some months in a monastery in West Yorkshire, a couple of years working with Christians fleeing Isis in Northern Iraq/ Kurdistan, eventually gave way to full retirement and the move to Harrogate .

Friends and neighbours invited him as their guest on two day-trips with the Friends of the Mercer Art Gallery, which ever since has become a very welcome and lovely way to engage

With time on his hands and with some administrative ability, Andrew was invited two years ago by Judith Thomas to join Julie Goldsmith on the Social Sub-committee to assist with special events for the Friends and has enjoyed the work there. An added benefit has been getting to know different people around the country involved in Culture and the Arts.

Andrew had an early background in church music, and while an awful artist, has always enjoyed viewing and learning about the Visual Arts more and more.

In addition to volunteering at the Mercer Friends, Andrew also volunteers weekly (until Covid 19 put a temporary stop to it!) at the libraries at the Anglican Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield in West Yorkshire and, by way of contrast, at a vineyard in the Vale of York. He is a fan and supporter of Opera North, sang for a season with the Harrogate Choral Society and has enjoyed wine tasting courses at the excellent, local Harrogate Fine Wines in the Montpelier Quarter.

Andrew lives in a flat in an historic house on Park Parade on Christ Church Stray where he has benefited greatly from the kindness and friendliness of fellow-residents and neighbours. "All's well that ends well"!



The Harrogate Open

The biennial Harrogate Open has always been about recognising and rewarding the district's most talented artists, irrespective of their professional status or standing – amateur, professional or student – everyone is welcome to enter the Harrogate Open. The beauty of this competition is that it judges on merit alone. The artworks which might be a painting, drawing, sculpture, photograph or piece of film, textile or craftwork – arrive and are simply assigned a number which means nothing to the judging panel, who then assess them on an individual basis.

On the judging panel for the 2019 Harrogate Open were freelance curator and gallery owner, Lottie Inch who owns and runs the Eonymous Gallery in York, London based heritage retail consultant, Michael Richards who works with some of the most prestigious cultural institutions across the UK, notably the Barbican and Royal Academy of Arts and the critically and commercially acclaimed Yorkshire artist Emerson Mayes. As former CEO of New Light, (the charity and prize exhibition set up by Grantley Hall's Valeria Sykes, to promote and support artists in the north of England) – and with a fulltime artistic career which he credits to winning 'Young Artist of the Year' shortly after graduating from Leeds Metropolitan University, locally based Emerson is a passionate supporter of the Harrogate Open, saying:

"This is a very important exhibition as it allows all artists and aspiring artists the chance to have their work included in a public exhibition in one of our most beautiful regional galleries – something every artist aspires to and an accolade that can be life changing."

The judges tackled the daunting task of selecting 150 works for exhibition from a vibrant submission of 600 entries. Their specialist expertise and distinctive individual styles resulted in a thought-provoking and visually stunning display which ran from October 2019 to January 2020, filling the main gallery space and the North Gallery.

The Friends of the Mercer Art Gallery have generously supported this prestigious event from its inception through sponsorship of the prize fund of £1500, which the judges allocate to the overall winning artworks.

Professional artist, Neil Bolton from Ripon scooped the coveted first prize with a large scale figurative oil painting and the runner up prize was awarded to Balbinder Broadbent from Harrogate for her vibrant, abstract painting entitled Motion.

Prizes were presented by Judith Thomas, Chair of the Friends of the Mercer at the exhibition opening on October 11th 2019.

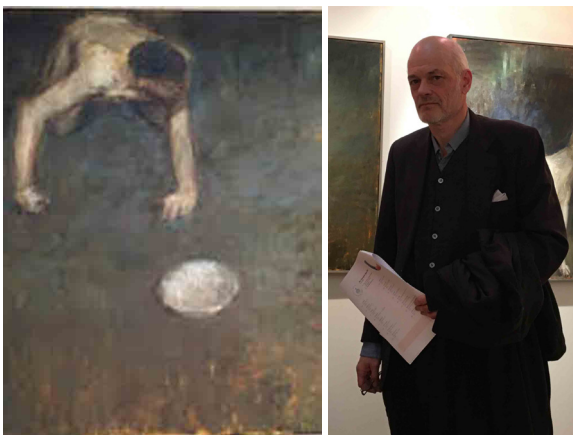
Emerson Mayes said: "Both Neil's and Balbinder's paintings stood out to us for their confident and skilled painterly technique which in both cases created an arresting finished composition. The hidden narrative in Neil's painting was particularly strong and left us all very intrigued."



Balbinder Broadbent, Motion



Sarah Rogers Whitton, The Ambassador's Curtain



Untitled winning entry by Neil Bolton
Neil Bolton at Open Exhibition.

"We were overwhelmed with the standard and variety of the submissions and found making the final selection for exhibition a challenge."

Highly commended awards were also presented to; Elysian Fields by Richard Gray, The Still Centre of the Turning World by Catriona Stewart, Home Life Girl by Jemma Sharp and Twiggy, Not Perfect but Human by Kay Latto.

The People's Choice Prize is awarded to an artwork that receives the most nominations from visitors to the exhibition and this year the winner was Sarah Rogers Whitton for her striking triptych The Ambassador's Curtain.

written by Karen Southworth



Kay Latto's prizewinning ceramic

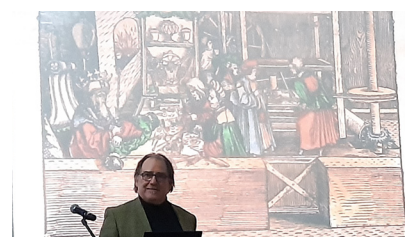
Diamonds: Brilliant Diplomacy

It feels to have been in a different world from these days of isolation as I recall the merry crush in the Pump Room on 5th March, when we shared delicious fizz and canapés and anticipated what Dr Jack Ogden would say about diamonds.

In the event Dr Ogden kept his capacity audience engrossed, delivering an hour-long tour de force on the king of gems. Beautifully illustrated and delivered with verve and humour, the talk took us through the early history of the hardest naturally occurring substance.

We saw images of jewelry from ancient times with uncut diamonds. Among many memorable stories, I particularly enjoyed the account of intrepid seekers after stones in the time of Alexander the Great using meat to deceive birds into picking up diamonds from the bottom of remote and inaccessible valleys. After the Dark Ages (which were dark for diamonds) we saw diamonds reappear in medieval jewelry, learned about the development of cutting techniques and were introduced to many exquisite works as that technique improved. We were treated to the extraordinary story of the Pigot Diamond (sold by lottery and later used as a bribe in international diplomacy) and the complex evolution of the Hope Diamond.

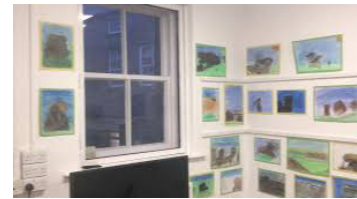
This was a thoroughly enjoyable and very successful event that left me keen to know more. Happily there is the perfect source for that in the form of a wonderfully illustrated book "Diamonds" by one Jack Ogden. Our grateful thanks go to Dr Ogden and all who were involved in the organisation and delivery of a very successful event.



written by Tom King

Letter to the Editor

Visiting Harrogate recently and enjoying your Turner exhibition I was also delighted to see the separate room dedicated to a display of work by Years 5 and 6 from Western Primary School. Its subject was Brimham Rocks. I knew immediately what an outstandingly creative project in school had produced such quality, both the art work in pastels and the written work. This sort of quality doesn't just spring from gifted children. It is the result of a gifted teacher motivating a personal response from all his or her class. It takes time to promote this; and time is hugely difficult to secure within the constraints of usual school timetables these days. Congratulations to the teacher who planned this project - for the preparation of stimuli, the skill in promoting discussion by the pupils and the care taken to display their visible achievements. You will know the invisible enrichment. Congratulations also to the Mercer Gallery for promoting this connection with young people.



SM, Oxford. (Retired teacher and Senco)

Coming soon....

The Art of Comics: a Nobrow Showcase Autumn 2020 – Spring 2021 (exact dates TBC)

The Art of Comics showcases work by a range of influential and ground-breaking contemporary comic artists, from Jon McNaught to Molly Mendoza, who work with the exciting British comic book publishing company No Brow. The exhibition is planned to partner with the Thought Bubble Comic Art Festival, the largest event of its kind in the UK, which received a rapturous reception last year at the Harrogate Convention Centre, and will return in Autumn 2020.

The artists who are confirmed to participate are:

- Luke Pearson (UK)
- Alexander Utkin (Russia)
- Molly Mendoza (US)
- Lorena Alvarez (Columbia)
- Hamish Steele (UK)
- Jon McNaught (UK)
- Joe Todd Stanton (UK)



To give you a taster of the exhibition's content, let me introduce the artist Luke Pearson. In fact, eagle-eyed visitors to the Mercer in October last year will have already seen our 'pop-up' exhibition in Studio 2 devoted to Luke's work, which was the inspiration to organise a more comprehensive exhibition for 2020. Luke Pearson is one of the UK's best known illustrators and cartoonists. He's only been out of university nine years, but already he has published several children's books, landed a New Yorker cover, and most recently enjoyed a Netflix adaptation of his Hilda comic series, with a second series in the offing. It's an impressive set of achievements, even if the artist modestly describes himself as "fairly chuffed" by it all.

Pearson has carved out his own space in the illustration world, becoming as much children's author as he is artist, thanks to his blue-haired character Hilda, who lives in the city of Trollberg. Across the course of six books, Pearson has drawn critical admiration for the series including comparisons to the '90s animation

We're looking forward to bringing exciting new graphic work to the Mercer, along with a programme of drawing workshops, 'meet the artist' events and activities for schools this Autumn.

written by Karen Southworth.

