

# **THE ARTS SOCIETY LEICESTER**

## **Chairman's Report to 40th Annual General Meeting**

When I wrote my chairman's report last year I was in the best of health. However, on the visit to Liverpool in mid September, a number of the party contracted Covid. I was one of those unfortunates and as a consequence was absent from the annual meeting. The fact that I stand here this evening demonstrates the dangers of not being present when you are proposed for election.

The society has had an interesting year with a good programme of lectures arranged by Will Gilding. Committee members review each lecture after the event assessing the lecture against criteria determined by the national Arts Society. We have almost always given the lecturer top marks. This reflects the professionalism of the lecturer and the standards demanded by the Arts Society, thus ensuring that we get top quality lectures. I do not normally highlight individual lectures but on this occasion I would mention two. In November Professor John Thomas spoke about the discovery of the Rutland Roman Mosaic. In January Sophie Matthews spoke about Music in Art and gave live demonstrations on replicas of the instruments depicted in the illustrations.

In 2023 we have had two successful visits out of Leicester. At the end of March we went to Cambridge on a very wet day. The walk round tours were somewhat curtailed by the weather but, split into two groups, each group was given a very interesting talk on Kings College Chapel, including why the floor of the chancel was lowered and how the chancel came to have under-floor heating. On a very hot day in September we had a self drive visit to Compton Verney where we had a guided tour of the exhibition of work by Quentin Blake: Birds, Beasts and Explorers. You get so much more from an exhibition when it is explained by a first class guide.

In June we held a study day, the first time that we have been able to do so for a number of years. By good fortune we had booked this six months ahead on the Thursday, five days after the Coronation. 57 people came to hear Andy McConnell talk about 5,000 years of glass. After lunch he assessed items of glassware brought in by those attending the day but, so far as I am aware, he did not tell anyone that they had a fortune hiding in the corner cupboard.

In September, four days, four country houses, one church, one minster and one cathedral and glorious weather for the first three days - this does not do justice to a successful visit to Hull and East Yorkshire. Each house we visited was different from the other three. The timetable allowed free time on each day for everyone to plan what they wanted to visit. Of particular interest were the Wilberforce House in Hull Old Town and the Lincoln Museum.

In common with other bodies our society has not recovered its membership numbers since the Covid lockdowns. This is despite the excellent lectures in the programme. The committee is very conscious of this position and is actively seeking to find ways to offset the effects of this.

The programme of lectures for the forthcoming year is as interesting and as varied as previous years. We start the programme in October with a talk on William Morris's last masterpiece, the Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, and his collaboration with his great friends, the printer Emery Walker who inspired him to start the Kelmscott Press, and the artist Edward Burne-Jones, who provided the 87 illustrations in the book. This will be followed in November by a lecture entitled 'Aubrey Beardsley in Black and White'. Beardsley was diagnosed with tuberculosis in childhood and knew that his life would be short. This lecture charts his brief but brilliant life through his extraordinary art.

On behalf of all members I thank the committee for their continued support over the past year and their willingness to continue

As usual our lectures for the forthcoming year will begin at 7.30 pm. I shall be at the door of the auditorium to welcome you.

**Martin Wragg**

Chairman

22 September 2023