

Art society's 83rd annual show



Alton Art Society's first president Lord Robert Baden Powell



Current chairman Annabel Young



Artist and former AAS chairman John Hearn will open the exhibition



Current Alton Art Society president Jennifer Lines

The History of the Alton Art Society 1925 - 2014

ALTON Art Society is preparing to celebrate its 90th anniversary next year with this November's Annual Exhibition at the Assembly Rooms expected to pave the way for 12 months of reflection over past achievements, while looking forward to the next decade with energy and artistic flair.

AAS was formed at an inaugural meeting called by William Hugh Curtis, curator of the Curtis Museum, on 16 November 1925. World Scout leader, Lord Robert Baden Powell was the first president and remained in that position until his death in 1941. General Sir Alfred Martin was the first chairman and Hugh Curtis and Morgan Owen were joint secretaries. Mr Curtis remained as secretary until 1947.

The annual membership fee was 5/- (five shillings, now 0.25p). An annual membership in 2014 costs £12.

The Society's first exhibition was opened on 27 April 1926 by Lord Baden Powell and remained open to the public for three days. The cost of hiring the Assembly Rooms was £12.10s (£12.50p) and the profit from the show was £10.3s.3d (£10.17p). There were 42 paid up members of the Art Society at that time.

In October of the following year a sub-committee arranged to meet with school teachers to discuss entries in age classes for children in the next Exhibition. Teachers asked if crafts could be included and this was agreed. The schools' section was open to pupils from Elementary schools located in the Alton Urban and Rural District Council area, and to young people up to the age 16, if not at school.

In the early days many crafts were accepted for the main exhibition. Demonstrations were also held at the Assembly Rooms where the society had the use of all rooms for the sum of £10, for the whole week! Craft work exhibitors included Miss Everett with her spinning wheel, using wool that she had gathered from the surrounding countryside, and Norris Thrower with his loom. At a later date there were also pottery demonstrations by Miss

Whitehouse and Mr Plomer, while Miss Clegg demonstrated the art of weaving.

Activities ceased during World War II and the society reactivated in 1946. Mr Curtis remained secretary, Stephen Warner was re-elected chairman, and Lady Charlotte Bonham Carter became AAS president.

During Festival of Britain year in 1951 the society was granted use of the Assembly Rooms for a week, free of charge, by Alton Town Council.

The AAS Sketch Club was started in 1948 by Lt Cdr Brooks at the Butts Tearooms, the home of Miss Clegg and Miss Whitehouse. Members met weekly, moving on to the British Legion Hall in Albert Road, where the club continued to meet until 1960. Since those days the society has adopted a winter and a summer programme of demonstrations, tutorials and informal summer outdoor painting days. Various small groups of members have set up painting groups, which are invaluable to those artists who are unable to paint in their homes.

Sir Hugh Smiley became chairman of the society in 1955 and continued until 1966 when he became vice chairman, handing over the chain of office to H Percy Cox, who had been a member since 1926 and continued until 1979.

Between 1964 and 1968 the society saw a succession of three Secretaries, Miss Tippett, Mrs Dawkins, and Mrs Mallinson, followed by the appointment of Norah Coggin who held the post until her resignation in 1977. Sheila Trimming took on this role until 1990 followed by Judith Shadey.

The 1982 exhibition was the first to feature an award for the most popular exhibit voted for by the visitors. This is a bronze trophy designed by Jack Riviere, well known in the art world, as was his father Briton Riviere. The first winner was Eric Street.

Lady Charlotte Bonham Carter died at the age of 96 on 21 December 1990 after being president of the society for 44 years. She was succeeded by Anne Lady Scott, the wife of Sir James Walter Scott, 2nd Baronet (1924-93) Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire, of Rotherfield Park. Lady Scott visited the annual exhibitions



Lady Charlotte Bonham Carter 1978 by Peter Greenham 1909-1992, allocated to the Tate Gallery in 1992

and insisted on a tour, giving her opinion on the artists' work. She died in 2005 while still president of the society.

In May 1989 spring exhibitions were introduced, first at Oakhanger Church, then St Lawrence Church, Alton, moving on to the Assembly Rooms. For many years the society has also enjoyed using the Allen Gallery for exhibitions.

Art Society members have also been fortunate in being asked to exhibit works at Selborne (usually in December each year) and at Medstead Village Hall.

Local artist and town councillor, Pam (Pell) Jones was chairman of the AAS during the 1980s (60th - 66th exhibitions), and also organised the children's exhibition for around 20 years.

Kate Davis has run the Children's Exhibition since Mrs Jones retired from this role.

Peter Forey served as chairman from 1992 to 1995. A local watercolour artist, he demonstrated his techniques to members during the winter programme and also won Best in Exhibition for his painting *Winter Afternoon* (2012) voted for by the visiting public.

Mary Janaway took on the chairman's role from 2000 to 2004. Mrs Janaway is an active member of the society and paints with the Chawton Art



Pam (Pell) Jones, local artist and former AAS Chairman with 20 years experience running the Children's Exhibition

Group on Thursdays. Jennifer Lines was inaugurated as president of the AAS in 2006 and remains in this role to the present day. Mrs Lines is also the membership secretary and keeps her finger on the pulse of all changes to the membership. She too is renowned for her excellent watercolour paintings, many of local scenes. Many have been turned into greeting cards, and Mrs Lines has had Christmas cards of her paintings accepted by the Wessex Cancer Trust, for sale at Alton Library.

John Hearn and Mike Cross served as joint chairmen until 2007. Mr Hearn became sole chairman in 2007 and retired in 2013, due to ill health, after 10 years in the role. While his vibrant presence and leadership have been missed by AAS members, Mr Hearn remains with the society as a lifetime honorary member and will open the society's 83rd annual exhibition on November 5, at the preview evening.

John Hearn's artwork is much admired, especially his detailed painting of Chawton House Library.

Annabel Young succeeded Mr Hearn as chairman of the art society in 2013. Her lively presence at meetings and events is said, by members, to be "appreciated, especially her diligence in looking after the art society's smooth running, with the back-up of a strong committee and several volunteer members who step in at exhibition times."

Sally Cox is the vice chairman. The society moved into the technological age during the 2000s, and now two-thirds of its 220-strong membership are contactable by email. Exhibition entries are also sent via the AAS website at www.altonart.org.uk to Kaye Garrett, from one web page to another. This saves time in administration and posting and printing costs.

AAS secretary, Ann Sayers summed up: "We have travelled far since 1925, what changes we have experienced and what joy has been earned by members of Alton Art Society, and all the people in the local community who have seen the wealth of talent available."

● To be staged at Alton Assembly Rooms, the Alton Art Society's 83rd Annual Exhibition, incorporating the 82nd Children's Exhibition will open to the public from 10am to 5pm on Thursday, November 6, and will continue through to Sunday, November 9.

Hundreds of exhibits will be on display and all will be available for sale. Although the majority are paintings in different media, there will be sculptures, ceramics, textiles and other art works.

Members are able to submit up to three paintings and 3D works each. Folios (unframed paintings) and cards will also be available to browse in stands. The Children's Exhibition will run at the same time. It should be noted that children who are 'home taught' are also welcome to enter artworks which should be handed in at the Assembly Rooms before 10am on Wednesday, November 5. Paintings should be mounted on card and clearly marked with the names and age of the artist on the front.

For further information visit www.altonart.btck.co.uk/AnnualExhibition



John Hearn's painting of Chawton House Library



Pam Jones painting of Alton Assembly Rooms