



THE WILLIAM SHIPLEY GROUP FOR RSA HISTORY

Newsletter 37: April 2013

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

13 May 2013 at 8pm. **Long May They Reign. Jubilee Souvenirs from George III to Elizabeth II**, by Dr D.G.C. Allan. This talk follows the AGM of the Borough of Twickenham Local History Society will be held at St Mary's, Church Hall, Twickenham at 8pm. £2.50 on door.

22 May 2013. Mat Paskins will be presenting a 15 minute paper titled **The Mock-Heroic Public Sphere: Satire and Materiality in the Eighteenth Century Society of Arts** as part of UCL Department of Science and Technology Studies Research Day. (Time and location to be confirmed)

3 June 2013 at 12pm Franklin and Medicine by Lady Reid, Benjamin Franklin House, 36 Craven Street, London WC2N 5NF. £5/£3.50 Friends and concessions. Lady Reid will explore the connections between Franklin and medicine. He was an ardent supporter of inoculation, popularised the bifocal spectacles, was one of the first to recognise the effects of lead poisoning, and invented a flexible catheter. To book call 0207 925 1405 or email: info@BenjaminFranklinHouse.org

8-10 July 2013. The Centre for Medical Humanities at the University of Aberdeen is hosting the Association for Medical Humanities Annual Conference 2013. WSG Chairman, Dr Nicholas Cambridge will be talking on "'Boz" in the Time of Cholera: Dickens and the Asiatic Cholera Pandemics', at a joint panel with Professor John Drew, 'Global Health Humanities and the Mid-Victorian Magazine: Free Trade or Fair Trade?' and Dr Tony Williams 'Over the border: Health Humanities in Dickens' Journals', from the University of Buckingham.

EXHIBITIONS

Lifework: Norman Parkinson's Century of Style. Lyttelton Exhibition Space, National Theatre, South Bank, London SE1 9PX. 1 March – 12 May 2013. Free. Regarded as the father of modern fashion photography this retrospective exhibition, to mark the centenary of his birth, covers all aspects of his long career as a fashion and portrait photographer. In 1986 Parkinson joined the contingent of British designers who had been offered a place at the prestigious Aspen Institute Conference, where he gave an urbane account of a life spent photographing nobilities and fashion. Parkinson, who also created his range of 'Parkinson banger' sausages, was elected a Fellow of the RSA shortly before his death in 1990.



Quentin Blake: Drawn by Hand. Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB. 12 February – 12 May 2013. This exhibition brings together the last ten years of Blake's work ranging from book illustrations to etchings, together with a display of pens, inks, watercolours and other materials from his studio. Blake was elected a member of the Faculty of RDIs in 1981

Through the Looking Lens: Cornelius Varley's Wondrous Images of Art and Science 1800-1860. APS Museum, American Philosophical Society, 104 S. Fifth Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106, USA. 17 May – 29 December 2013. Thursday – Sunday, 10.00am to 4.00pm. Varley's work, at the intersection of art and science, is revealed in this exhibition of stunning watercolours of vast panoramas rendered small and microscopic algae made large, through his use of the special telescopic and microscopic drawings he invented, including his Graphic Telescope patented in 1811 for which he received the

Society of Arts Large Silver medal. Included in the show, alongside landscapes, portraits, architectural renderings and cloud studies (which predated Constable's work), is one of the few remaining Patent Graphic Telescopes on loan from the Franklin Institute.

Extraordinary Stories about Ordinary Things. Design Museum, Shad Thames London SE1 2YD. 30 Jan 2013 – 4 January 2015. Tickets £11.85 (Concessions £10.70) This exhibition considers key designs that have shaped the modern world with some elements being changed every year. RDIs featured in this exhibition include Margaret Calvert, James Dyson, Charles Eames, Sir Jonathan Ive and Jasper Morrison. Also on display is the red K6 telephone box designed by RSA Albert Medallist Sir Giles Gilbert Scott.

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL ADDRESS 2013. FROM TINY TIM TO MR PICKWICK CHARLES DICKENS AND MEDICINE

Dr Nicholas Cambridge introduced his current research on Dickens and Medicine in his talk following the WSG Annual General Meeting on 18 March 2013. His lecture focused on Charles Dickens



*Mrs Gamp. Dickens
commemorative stamp
2012*

interests in the medical world and in particular the medical writings in his novels. These included doctors such as the shabby Doctor Haggage in the Marshalsea prison who attended to Mrs Dorrit in childbirth to the ineffective Mr Chillip in David Copperfield. However, the most famous and colourful of all Dickens's medical characters was Mrs Gamp, the nurse, in Martin Chuzzlewit who together with Betsy Prig was ruthless in the treatment of patients. One of Dickens great qualities was his accurate description of diseases and medical conditions. He took great pleasure in portraying the bizarre, the grotesque, and, indeed, the horrifying. The reference to the slaughter house of blood was the scene he was confronted with after his father was treated at home by a surgeon for a urethral stricture. Other cases he described included the Pickwick syndrome, epilepsy, various types of stroke, tuberculosis and gout.

Dickens made a number of speeches throughout his career in support of those hospitals which, as charitable institutions, depended on voluntary financial support. For example, he spoke on behalf of the hospital for consumption and diseases of the chest in 1843 and University College Hospital in 1864.

As a child Charles Dickens lived only a few doors away from the workhouse infirmary in Cleveland Street which was near The Middlesex Hospital. This workhouse was the likely inspiration for Dickens book on Oliver Twist.

In 1852 Great Ormond Street hospital for children was opened and it was Dickens more than anyone who, with many of his close friends, supported this hospital in the first precarious years of its existence.

Another area that concerned Dickens was prostitution and whether prostitutes could be helped and encouraged to return to a normal way of life. Together with his philanthropist friend Baroness Burdett Coutts, Urania cottage, an asylum for prostitutes was established in 1847 to rehabilitate former prostitutes and other "fallen women."



Tiny Tim by M.F. or E.M. Taylor

Dickens campaigned on public health issues together with his friends including Thomas Southwood-Smith and Edwin Chadwick on issues including water quality, atmospheric pollution and living conditions in slums. He also developed an interest in fringe medicine including phrenology and mesmerism which he practised on his friends.

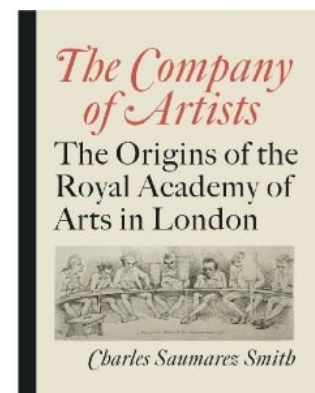
Dickens worked extremely hard throughout his life and at times suffered with overwork (he used to write on average of 20-30 pages per day) and as a result suffered with stress and near breakdown. Perhaps to clear his mind he would sometimes walk 30 miles from Tavistock House, his home in London, to his house in Gads Hill, Kent. His medical history included obsessive compulsive disorder, anal fistula, renal colic, gonorrhoea, gout and a fatal stroke in 1870.

Finally, there is a link between Dickens and the [Royal] Society of Arts. He was elected a member on 28 November 1849 and in the following year he served on the 'Committee for the Working Classes' appointed to advise the Commissioners of the proposed Great Exhibition, which again brought him into contact with Henry Cole. Dickens disagreed with Cole over the timing of the shilling admission days but, as a member of the Committee, appointed by the Society of Arts on 4 September 1850, to promote the 'legislative recognition of the rights of inventions in arts, manufactures and science', Dickens was Cole's close ally.

BOOKS

Charles Suamarez Smith, *The Company of Artists. The Origins of the Royal Academy of Arts in London*. London: Modern Art Press, 2012
ISBN 978 1408182 10 9 (£25)

Charles Suamarez Smith tells the familiar story of the origins of the Royal Academy in a fresh and compelling manner. Personalities are invoked and, wherever possible, illustrated by contemporary portraits. As Secretary and Chief Executive of the present day Academy he writes from the inside and is able to use the institutional records to disentangle the events which lead up to the historic meeting with King George III in November 1768. He names the four persons who were received by his Majesty in that occasion as William Chambers the architect, Francis Cotes the portrait painter, Benjamin West the history painter and George Michael Moser the engraver and designer of metalwork and, though he fails to mention their close connection with the Society of Arts, quotes their 'two principal objects' as establishing of a 'well regulated School of Academy of Design' for the use of students in the arts' and the holding of annual exhibitions open to all artists of merit. William Shipley's school of art had provided a pattern for the first. The exhibition held by the Society of Arts in 1760 had pioneered the second. Joshua Reynolds, who became the Academy's first President, had been closely involved in the affairs of Shipley's Society.



Out of the 1760 Exhibition had grown the 'Society of Artists of Great Britain' which was granted a Royal charter in 1767 as 'The Incorporated Society of Artists'. In the meantime the artists who exhibited at the Society of Arts in 1762 formed themselves into a rival 'Free Society of Artists'. Saumarez Smith has a brilliant chapter which he calls 'Quarrelling'. This deals with the crisis of 1767 when the Incorporated Society set up an Academy at Lambe's Auction Rooms in Pall Mall, and refused permission to the Free Society to exhibit in the building and was then faced with a split in its own ranks preparing the way for desertion by Chambers, Cotes, Moser and West and their meeting with King George.

The foundation of the Royal Academy being derived from the Society of Arts' exhibitions led to the cultivation of a legend that the Academy had been founded by the Society. This had its origins in a discourse given by Samuel More, the Society's Secretary, in 1797. More stated that 'after such

Exhibitions had been held during several years the various branches of the Polite Arts were arrived at such a state as obtained them the Patronage and Favour of Majesty and the Royal Academy was instituted’.

Saumarez Smith ‘looking back from a twenty-first century perspective as the Royal Academy approaches the 250th anniversary of its foundation’ writes that he finds, ‘it fascinating that so many artists, societies and organisations were formed in the two decades between 1750 and 1770.’ I remember discussing this phenomenon with the late Sidney Hutchison in the 1960s when the Royal Society of Arts was commemorating the bicentenary of the 1760 Exhibition. Both our institutions continue to echo the ideals of Shipley and Reynolds and their contemporaries in England’s age



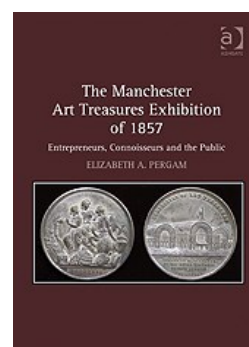
Johann Zoffany, The Academicians of the Royal Academy 1771-72, The Royal Collection©Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

of Enlightenment. Plate 49 in the book shows the Royal Academicians grouped together by Zoffany c.1770-72. WSG members should note the pug faced sitter on the far left absorbed in his own thoughts and holding a palette. James Barry’s quarrel with the RA falls outside the period dealt with here but it is satisfying to put on record the fact that his expulsion was retrospectively cancelled in 2004. It is also a pleasure to congratulate the book’s designer, Derek Birdsall RDI, who has clearly made its production a labour of love at an age when he could well look for ease with dignity.

David G.C. Allan

Elizabeth A. Pergam, ***The Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857: Entrepreneurs, Connoisseurs and the Public***. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011. ISBN 978 1 4094 1830 6

The Art Treasures Exhibition held in Manchester in 1857 has never fallen into complete obscurity, but it has not been at the forefront in studies of cultural history. Its 150th anniversary in 2007 prompted a commemorative exhibition in Manchester and a conference. One of the participants in these events has now produced a book-length study, which aims to present “a detailed analysis of the motives, contents, responses, and repercussions of the event” (p.209).



The book begins, as academic works are wont to do, with an exercise in positioning, explaining how the book fills a gap, improves on what has gone before, and so forth. This is entirely legitimate, but invites a similar approach from a reviewer. This can be irritating (it is an old reviewer’s trick to fasten on some good point in a book and grumble that more should have been said about it), but perhaps it is permissible for a reviewer representing a rather specialist group like the WSG. Anyway, here goes.

Dr Pergam suggests that “historians of nineteenth-century exhibitions largely ignore” the Manchester exhibition (p.2). This is true. There are two fields in which it might well have been given more prominence: international exhibitions, and art exhibitions. WSG people will be well aware of the immense literature that has accrued around the former topic, and a case could be made for boosting the reputation of the Manchester exhibition here. However, it is clear that Dr Pergam has not ventured far into this literature, and she does not place the Manchester exhibition more

distinctly in this context. A wider awareness of international exhibitions would have assisted with her comments on topics such as the exhibition building (which stands between the buildings for London 1851 and London 1862, both of which have been well worked over), the provision for working-class visitors (a big issue in 1851), and the transportation of visitors (the Manchester exhibition had its own railway station). As for art exhibitions, these have been less thoroughly studied, and Dr Pergam's book is a welcome contribution in this field.

In the field of art history in general, Dr Pergam makes the point that "France and its avant-garde movements have dominated scholars' attention", with the result that nineteenth-century British art is "marginalized ... in the narrative of modernism" (p.2). This also is true, and not likely to change until a new kind of art history further evolves. It might be claimed that, by virtue of its scale and coverage (see below), the Manchester exhibition did foreshadow a different type of art history. But since Dr Pergam concentrates on its treatment of the accepted canon of fine art paintings, this point remains to be developed.



Royal Visit to the Art Treasures Exhibition. (Illustrated London News)

The fact that the Art Treasures Exhibition was held in the English provincial city of Manchester provokes Dr Pergam to suggest that more work needs to be done on local cultural and artistic provision in Britain, but she does not explore this context very far (pp.3, 216). (Perhaps it would be excusable here to mention the WSG Occasional Paper 16, *The Development of Museums in Victorian Britain and the Contribution of the Society of Arts*, 2010, by the present writer. One of the problems about museum history in Britain is that it has tended to be written by art-historians, and consequently looks disappointing, because there are not enough Raphaels and Rembrandts for every British local museum to have one. However, local museums were more easily able to acquire significant archaeological, geological, and ethnographical material; and they assume a higher intellectual profile when this is taken into account.)

A topic to which Dr Pergam gives some salience is the relation between commerce and art. The Manchester exhibition was staged by provincial business men. But they aimed "to project a commercial-free public face" (p.27); they wished "to separate their enterprise from the pernicious stain of commerce" (p.28). There are two ways in which art and commerce can interact. First, commerce can come into play within the art world: Dr Pergam gives us quite a lot of interesting material on the way art dealers and the art market were involved in the Manchester exhibition. Second, art may have an impact on the production of consumer goods. In the 19th century, this was a matter which occupied the minds of many, and Dr Pergam duly refers to "nineteenth-century discourses on the improvement of the fine arts and the development of industry" (pp.18-19). This is a theme which she might have considered more fully (and on which a few words can be added below).

To sum up so far. Dr Pergam sees that her subject has many connections in the cultural life of its time. She has mastered a vast amount of information about the Manchester exhibition, organises and summarises it well, highlights relevant issues. But in the main, she sticks to the well trodden paths of orthodox art history, in which paintings earn most notice. She writes in chapter 2 about the layout of the exhibition and the display of pictures; in chapter 3 about the interpretation of the exhibition through its own and other publications (a good contribution to the burgeoning study of art-writing in the 19th century); and in chapter 5 about the consequences of the exhibition (including an ingenious comparison between the mid-century Manchester business men, and the end-of-century New York millionaire collectors like Morgan and Frick). The main part of her book is

chapter 4, “Practicing Art History”, and Appendix VII, “Paintings Exhibited at the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition Now in Public Collections”. Here she practises the kind of art history that is concerned with tracking the story of individual paintings and appreciating their value (cultural and financial). This is fine, but there was more to the Manchester exhibition than that.

In summer 1856, the Executive Committee issued a Circular, soliciting exhibits (reprinted as Dr Pergam’s Appendix III). This states (third paragraph):

By the term “Art Treasures” it is meant to include not only Oil Paintings, Water-colour Drawings, Engravings and Photographs, but the thousand other objects of which Sculpture, in stone, marble, alabaster, plaster, wood, ivory, terra cotta, and bronze, – Decorative Furniture, – Works in gold and other precious metals, – Armour, – Implements of Chase, – Musical Instruments, – Glass, Venetian, German, French, and English, – China, – Delft, – Tapestry, – Antiquities, Costume, may be given as leading examples. Those who have had an opportunity of walking through the Hotel de Cluny, in Paris, and examining the Treasures of Art which it contains, chiefly those of the Middle Ages, can easily understand that a collection of a somewhat similar kind, which it is quite possible to make in this country, would be extremely interesting. (p.245)

This emphasis on decorative arts was soon changed, not least, perhaps, because Prince Albert, when asked for support, offered an “intellectual framework” (p.22) for the exhibition, which foregrounded fine art. Nonetheless the main hall of the Manchester exhibition, named the “Museum of Ornamental Art”, did contain a considerable display of decorative arts, assembled from many lenders. Of course, Dr Pergam does not fail to mention this in passing, but another author, less focussed on paintings, might have given the “Museum of Ornamental Art” greater prominence, especially since this type of art (the “industrial arts”) is where the interaction of art and commerce can chiefly be studied.

It is worth noting that Dr Pergam does fail (except for a single reference) to describe the “Oriental Court”, which is featured in the official catalogue, and must have been an important incident in the reception of Asian art in Britain. And WSG people might have been grateful for more on the photography gallery, in view of the Society of Arts’s pioneering efforts in promoting this field of visual production.

In the end, then, Dr Pergam’s book is for art-historians who see art history primarily as the story of individual masterpieces of painting. But consider these remarks of W. H. Wills, reviewing the exhibition in Charles Dickens’s periodical *Household Words* (10 October 1857, p.351):

... It is not difficult to define popular attractions of the show, apart from the paintings. They are numerous and captivating. Three long, well-proportioned galleries; cases filled with priceless Art-objects in precious metals, in ivory and in wood, and with jewels, bijouterie, and rare carvings: trophies of warlike Art composed of arms and armour: an admirable orchestra discoursing most excellent music; and lastly, the moving spectacle of well-dressed, ever-changing company...

Perhaps rather more of this could have come through in Dr Pergam’s account.

A personal note. The present reviewer helped with the two conferences on the International Exhibition of 1862, with which the WSG was involved in 2012, and well knows how difficult it is to do justice to all aspects of such a complex event. If the WSG had written or commissioned a book on the Manchester exhibition, it would surely have had a somewhat different emphasis from Dr Pergam’s treatment. But Dr Pergam’s is still a learned and interesting book.

Anthony Burton

BLUE PLAQUE UNVEILED TO SIR AMBROSE HEAL (1872-1959)

On a cold but bright afternoon in February 2013 there was a gathering at The Five Courts in Pinner to see the unveiling of an English blue plaque to the furniture designer and retailer Sir Ambrose Heal, RDI. The house had been designed for him by his cousin Cecil Brewer FRIBA, who was also responsible for the company's store in Tottenham Court Road. Heal lived in this Arts & Crafts home from 1901-17. After an introduction by Sir Christopher Frayling representing English Heritage, Oliver Heal unveiled the plaque to his grandfather. The current owners of The Five Courts, Martin & Joanne Verden, then generously welcomed everyone into the house to enjoy their hospitality and hear plans for the future of Heal & Co from the new CEO Will Hobhouse, who then cut a cake in the shape of the firm's logo, a four poster bed. An illustrated guide to the house has been produced by Joanne Verden with the help of local historian Jim Golland and is available from Pinner Local History Society.



Oliver Heal unveils the blue plaque to his grandfather, Sir Ambrose Heal.

©English Heritage

The Five Courts, Moss Lane, Pinner



©English Heritage

At the luncheon party held in 1953 by the Faculty of RDI's to mark his 80th birthday Heal spoke of the past and how much he owed to the friendship and help of industrial designers, both past and present. 'Without them I should have got nowhere – and I most certainly should not be standing here at this moment.' The following year Heal was awarded the RSA's Albert Medal 'for his services to industrial design'.

OBITUARY

MARGARET HARKER, FIIP, FRPS (1920-2013). Britain's first female professor of photography and the first woman President of the Royal Photographic Society (1958-60) died at the age of 93 on 16 February 2013. She was elected FRSA in 1959 and, as Head of the School of Photography at Regent Street Polytechnic, she spoke to Fellows on the subject of 'Photography in Education' in 1961. Examples of her work were put on display around the walls of the 'Great Room', echoing the [R]SA's 1854 Exhibition of Photography, for this occasion. As a member of the RSA's Council (1964-70) she chaired a lecture by R.W. G. Hunt on 'Recent developments in colour photography', before returning to the 'Great Room' in 1973 to give the Dr Mann Juvenile Lecture on 'The Eye of the Camera'. A review, by Alec Stirling, FRSA, of the exhibition she curated on the English pictorialist photographer Henry Peach Robinson (1820-1901), who was best known for his pioneering combination printing, was published in the April 1988 issue of the *RSA Journal*.





DR GERTRUD SEIDMANN (1919-2013). This larger than life character died on 15 February 2013 at the age of 93. Although she had a distinguished career as a teacher of German for which she gained the coveted Goethe medal in 1968, it was her second career as a jewellery historian which brought Dr Seidmann to the notice of the RSA's History Study Group. An inveterate browser of antique stalls she developed a deep knowledge of gem engraving, in particular for the work of Nathaniel Marchant RA (c.1739-1816) and she wrote a number of papers on the Society's role in the revival of gem engraving in 18th century England. In the late 1990s she also undertook several forays into the RSA's archives to produce articles for the Society's *Journal*. Dr Seidmann was elected a Fellow of the RSA in 1985 and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries the following year. She was also a founder member of the Society of Jewellery Historians. At the age of 85, to nobody's surprise, she became a student once again, working on the great collector and benefactor of the Ashmolean and the British Museum, Rev. Greville Chester. Sadly age prevented her from completing her task but she had made considerable headway in her research and was awarded a certificate of graduate attainment in March 2011.



Dr Allan and I both recall her arrival in the Society's archive elegantly dressed and wearing one of her beautiful original cameo brooches. Her inveterate curiosity for historical detail made it a pleasure to share discoveries with her.

Anniversaries

2013 marks the 50th anniversary of the death of John Spedan Lewis, founder of the John Lewis Partnership (1929). Elected a Fellow in 1934, Lewis gave a talk to Fellows in 1941 on 'Partnership on the Scale of Modern Industry'. In the lively discussion that followed his lecture the Chairman, Sir Edward Crowe remarked that he made 'a habit of reading as many articles as I can on the war, articles by strategists and military and air correspondents, and...one of the best, most valuable and most precise contributions I have read was that of Mr Lewis's in his *Gazette*'.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR THE SESSION 2013-2014 ARE NOW DUE

If you have not already done so members are requested to send their £5 annual subscription to the Honorary Secretary, who would also welcome donations to the Group's funds. Please make your cheques payable to 'William Shipley Group' and post to Susan Bennett, WSG, 47 Barringers Court, Neats Acre, Ruislip HA4 7JP

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