



Newsletter September 2014

Editor's Introduction

I hope all of you have had an enjoyable Summer. Now that we have entered the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness WAHG activities start again and recent trips to see the Imperial War Museum's gallery of First World War artists, followed by a tour of landmark memorials, and an inspection of art works and Maggie Hambling's altar tapestries at Winchester Cathedral have announced the new season with the characteristic stimulating variety of the WAHG activities.

You will notice that this is a bumper edition. So much so that in order to highlight each element and its importance I've decided to provide a brief summary of the contents. Here they are in their order:-

- **News and information from Chair and Programme Coordinator Beth Taylor**
- **News of the WAHG trip to Berlin (including information on a trip to the Hague) from Travel Coordinator Daphne Winning**
- **An interview with Dr Gillian White (she delivered lectures on Van Eyck and Van der Weyden earlier this year)**
- **A book review of 'Montmartre' by Sue Roe by the Editor**
- **A contribution about 'The largest explosion in World War One' from Beth Taylor**
- **A report on the two discussion sessions held in August and September by the Editor**
- **and Endpiece – the WAHG members' Virtual Gallery.**

Beth Taylor Chair and Programme Coordinator writes:-

When membership renewal time came round, WAHG had some members who, for various reasons, did not wish to renew their membership. We are sorry to have them leave us but, as you know, we keep our membership limited to 100 and that meant that we were able to welcome a number of new members to join us. Some new members were disappointed that events were already booked up when they applied for places. In order to prevent this happening next year, we are changing the membership renewal timetable to ensure all members - new and continuing - will apply for event places at the same time. Do look out for new faces at our events, therefore, and make sure you introduce yourself.

Two longstanding members – our founder, Bernard Courtis, and our past Chairman, Fred Middleton – have done so much for WAHG in the past that we felt we should honour them in some way. The committee have decided to establish a category of Honorary Member and we have appointed Bernard and Fred as our first two **Honorary Members**. Those of us who have benefited from all they have done for the Group will join the Committee, I am sure, in feeling that this is a small, but appropriate, token of our thanks.

WAHG's autumn programme has launched with a guided tour of the Imperial War Museum's exhibition of First World War art and of some of the memorial sculptures in central London led by Dr. Antonia Whitley. We have also had the privilege of experiencing small group tours of the modern art works in Winchester Cathedral, including a detailed presentation by the Dean on the Maggie Hambling tapestry which is currently dressing the High Altar. We hope to keep up this standard with our forthcoming seminars and visits! Next up is a talk on modern sculpture by Mary Acton, a follow up to a popular talk she gave last year. We then move into a series of seminars on the art of the East – our main theme for the season. Some of the speakers will be new to WAHG, some are well known to us – but we hope that they will all be stimulating.

One theme of feedback from members has been a wish to have more opportunity to engage in discussion and we are trialling monthly discussion groups as one way to provide this. We are also planning a few

additional small group visits to local venues, including artists' workshops. We will advertise these at our seminars and via mailouts so do watch out to see if there is something that would appeal to you. Don't forget too, that our speakers enjoy having appropriately timed questions from the audience. If you are hesitant about asking a question, why not devise a question from among your table at the seminars? They can be verbal or written down.

We are working on the programme for 2015 (see details of proposed visits elsewhere in the newsletter) which will have- at members' request - a focus on modern art and on architecture – but we will, as always, put in some contrast topics to ensure variety.

Watch out for our updated list of local and national exhibitions which will be circulated separately.

News from our Travel Coordinator Daphne Winning:-

WAHG BERLIN VISIT 2015

After our visit to Amsterdam in April this year, the WAHG committee were asked to arrange another visit, with a majority proposing Berlin as the venue. So we have been working on this visit with a number of tour operators and as a result of our research and deliberations have produced a proposal in conjunction with Heritage Group Travel.

Dates Sunday 3rd - Thursday 7th May 2015

Tour Price £1,150 per person sharing either twin or double room
(single supplement £125)

Hotel Maritim proArte 4* superior Bed & Breakfast

Flights BA Heathrow T5 (depart 10.20 am Sunday, return 8.10 pm
Thursday)

Coach To provide transport between Winchester and Heathrow, forward
and return.

Members of WAHG can invite a non member spouse or guest to accompany them.

For those of you who travelled to Amsterdam with us, this trip will be 1 day longer and the programme is a little more intensive. Flight times mean that we will make more use of the first and last day. Berlin offers a wealth of art, architecture and history for us to experience and all of these aspects will be covered in our itinerary. We have again tried to leave some free time for personal exploration and of course all booked events are optional.

In order to facilitate the smooth running of the programme our itinerary includes some coach transport within the city. There are 3 light lunches and 1 cake/coffee break included in the price as well as a Welcome Dinner in a traditional restaurant close to our hotel.

In addition to its museums and architecture, Berlin has a wonderful range of music on offer which may appeal to members. We have arranged that when members confirm their booking with a deposit, Heritage will send out details of the music options which they will book on our behalf on receipt of payment for the tickets. (If some members may wish to go to the Berlin State Opera on the Sunday evening, we will arrange our Welcome Dinner for the Monday evening.)

TIMETABLE FOR BOOKING THE BERLIN VISIT

A detailed itinerary will be available during the first week in October 2014 and will be sent out to all members electronically or by post if members do not have an email address. Members who decide to book must send their booking forms and deposit to Daphne Winning, at Cannon House, Old London Rd., Stockbridge SO20 6EJ by 31st October 2014. Bookings will be made on a first come, first served basis.

Any questions? Please contact Daphne Winning on winnfam@btinternet.com or 01264 810226.

Can't go to Berlin?

The committee is very keen that members who would like to go on this visit but who, for various reasons cannot, are still able to benefit from the trip. On our return, Beth will run a **Study Day** for members which will focus on art, architecture and history of Berlin as we experienced it.

We are aware that the Berlin visit is quite intensive and costly and so we are planning to organise a less expensive **2 day visit to the Hague by Eurostar** later on in 2015. This will include a visit to the recently renovated and revamped Mauritshuis Gallery which houses a world class collection of artworks by Vermeer, Rembrandt, Fabritius, Rubens and van Dyck among others. We will also visit the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, the Hague's stunning art deco Modern Art Museum which has the world's largest collection of Mondrian's works, as well as paintings by other important modernists such as Picasso and Kandinsky. We hope that this will prove popular with our members.

Interview with Dr Gillian White



Like many of you I attended the two lectures on Van Eyck and Van der Weyden that Dr Gillian White gave in May 2014 and enjoyed her refreshing, lively and humorous delivery on the topics. That prompted me to conduct an interview with her during June and July of this year. Forgive the length but Gillian's replies are thoughtful and interesting. The questions I asked (during an exchange of emails) are shown in bold and the answers in italics, but first an introduction to our honoured guest.

Gillian White trained as a historian before being seduced by the attractions of art history. She formerly worked for the National Trust at Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire, and subsequently completed a PhD in Renaissance Studies. She is now based in the Cotswolds and works as a freelance lecturer, teaching adults in the Oxford University Department of Continuing Education, as well as contributing to the MA on 'The Country House: Art, History and Literature' at Leicester University. Gillian gives talks to a wide circle of groups in the area and is a NADFAS lecturer. She is particularly interested in the late medieval, Tudor and Elizabethan periods, their history, architecture and visual arts, as well as in the development of the country house.

You have an academic background in History. What made you become interested in Art and develop this area?

I feel that I am still firmly a historian rather than an art historian. Historical evidence can take many forms – documentary, visual, archaeological, literary, musical and so on. As an undergraduate I tried to mix the courses I took, so that they included some archaeology courses and one on medieval literature and society (art history was not an option at my university). I followed this up with an inter-disciplinary MA in Medieval Studies and it was here that I steered towards art history. That I seem to have stayed in that direction is no more than happy accident. But I do think that the visual arts are a very interesting way of finding out about the societies that produced them.

Does your choice of period in which you investigate artists' works reflect a historical bias or is it to do with the art produced, its detail, or some other reason?

Why does one thing excite all your interest and another leave you cold? It is the big, unanswerable question. The late Middle Ages just do it for me. Recently, though, I was challenged to try to explain why I don't respond to – don't like – Italian High Renaissance art of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Of course it is interesting and one should know about it and I am willing to admit that I am very uninformed on it. But I don't feel that fundamental sense of connection with it, no emotional response. My eventual explanation was that I don't respond to the notion of heroic humanity that the Renaissance seems to promote. And although I am not a person of any active religious faith, I am moved by the way in which so much medieval art and architecture is founded on human frailty and uncertainty and the hope of something better in the afterlife. Or perhaps I just like pointy Gothic arches.

What other art period(s), other than mentioned above, interest you?

I have recently been involved in marking work produced by History of Art Diploma students in the Continuing Education Department at Oxford University. The range of their interests and enthusiasms has been amazing but I have been particularly drawn to their observations on Dutch Golden Age painting. I think this will be the next thing to explore if I can find a suitable outlet for the work. In many ways it is the logical next step for studies that have looked at C15th and C16th northern painting. I've also been doing a lot more work recently on the C18th English country house and its visual culture and I find that very interesting – although it doesn't set the knees trembling like the late Middle Ages! Again, though, it's the range of material for the country house: architecture primarily, furnishings, tapestries, gardens and, always, the background contextual history.

What do you enjoy about the process of investigating art when you prepare your lectures?

A very practical answer first: finding the images to illustrate lectures effectively can be very tedious. And after the first few hundred, I assure you, making PowerPoints loses its novelty! But of course, the research, reading round, looking, making connections is exciting. What I enjoy most, though, is trying to construct a presentation so that it communicates the points effectively – telling a story well. I don't for a moment want to pretend that this always works, but I like the idea of constructing the lecture so that A leads to B leads to C, building a case on logical evidence, in such a way that the listener is putting the pieces together alongside you. It would, of course, be lovely if I could dash off and see all the buildings, tapestries, paintings and so on in the flesh when preparing a lecture but that is a luxury of time and money that will have to wait

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Are we living in the past when we study the past (in relation to art) or does it have a value to our appreciation of the now?



We are each the sum of all the things that interest and intrigue us and we take these things with us about our daily lives in the modern world. We all have to function in the moment that we have been given and I don't think it matters if we bring an interest in the past or an interest in nano-technology to the party. I don't think an interest in (art) history means that we dwell in the past. Art teaches us to think about the world, for good or bad. Once you realise what an artist is doing – looking, analysing, communicating – you can apply the same qualities to your own world. In 1514 Dürer drew an astonishing, haunting image of his dying mother. (Shown left). If we look at it today, it still conveys feelings of suffering, courage and loss. Because the artist left us the image, we are moved to think about something that is still real and immediate five hundred years later, that is relevant now. Art

makes us think and that ain't a bad thing.

What makes a good audience for you when lecturing? Is there anything that makes a difference when lecturing to 3 Age audiences?

I do like an audience that laughs in the right places. Whilst I do think lectures should be factual, accurate and informative, they don't necessarily have to be heavy and a lighter remark is often carefully placed to break a mood or encourage a different way of thinking about the matter under discussion. An audience that seems engaged and thoughtful is also encouraging. And awake! Most of my talk and lectures are to third age audiences but, on the whole, I don't think you can put all third age audiences together in one category. Third agers come in all shapes and sizes, interests and experiences and it is always a mistake to make too many assumptions about who is sitting in front of you. To some extent, the lecturer should be observing the audience and making adjustments as he or she goes on. And the lecturer should certainly be willing to learn from the audience's questions and comments. 10/10 for the WAHG, of course.

What one piece of art that had an impact on you when you were younger would you choose and why? The artefact you choose can include architecture, craft and design as well as a piece of art.



As a child, we didn't really visit art galleries, although my sister and I were taken to and enjoyed a lot of ruins and country houses. The first art work that I really explored in depth was the Beauchamp Chapel, St. Mary's Church, Warwick, (shown left) which I studied for my first MA dissertation. This gave me a lovely mix of medieval arts, including architecture, sculpture and especially stained glass, as well as the historical context of the chapel's founder, Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick. What really excited me as the project advanced was the historical challenge of trying to work out what the original iconographic scheme of the destroyed stained glass had been. This involved finding out about analogous material, looking back through centuries of historical descriptions and ferreting through primary documentary material. You see, I'm just a historian at heart! But it taught me what an (art) historian could really find out about the past and the sheer pleasure of working out a historical puzzle. I think it was probably the most important first step leading me towards my current direction.

(I'd like to thank Dr White for her response and patience in responding to my interview questions – Ed)

Book Review - Sue Roe's 'In Montmartre' (subtitled 'Picasso, Matisse and Modernism in Paris 1900-1910') Published by Penguin Books (Fig Tree) 2014 Hardback.

You may be a listener to the Book of the Week programme on Radio 4. I am too, although an inconstant one, but earlier this year I happened to catch the adaptation of Sue Roe's book 'In Montmartre'. I'm glad I did as it resulted in my buying the full version. The author is a biographer, poet, novelist and critic. She lives in Brighton. You may have read her work which, amongst many others, includes a best-selling biography of the Impressionists and a widely praised work on the artist Gwen John.

The book charts the seminal moments in the lives of various artists and others during the decade in which their 'struggles...seemed to have created the foundations for the wider arena of modern art'. Despite the meticulous research that is evident in Roe's book what comes across is a vibrant, descriptive, anecdotal and almost novelistic survey of the lives (personal and creative) of the two major artists mentioned in the subtitle.

The title itself names the other 'character' in the book, the place, Montmartre, a shambles of 'half-derelict buildings and shacks' with 'vineyards and scrubland' populated by the poor, 'small tradesmen, entertainers, petty criminals, prostitutes, and artists with varying degrees of talent'.

We are drawn, through Roe's evocative writing, into this world and the milieu of Picasso, his friends, lover Fernande Olivier, fellow artists, associates and patrons (the Steins are prominent), while Roe also charts Matisse's career during the period.

Whilst the book delves intimately into their lives, locale and atmosphere, it does not neglect references to the context of the artists' works and their development. A mild criticism might be that a wider context (it is set in the opening of the 20th Century in which a World War occurred only four years after the closing timeline of the title) could be acknowledged.

I read it and perched my iPad next to the book looking up the references to artists and their works as I devoured the pages. The work includes pictures of art works and Montmartre. A fascinating and illuminating read.

(If you get the chance to read this book I'd welcome your feedback on it for publication in a later Newsletter. And of course if you want to recommend any other Art related publications please feel free to contact me at chris.humphreys3@ntlworld.com – Ed).

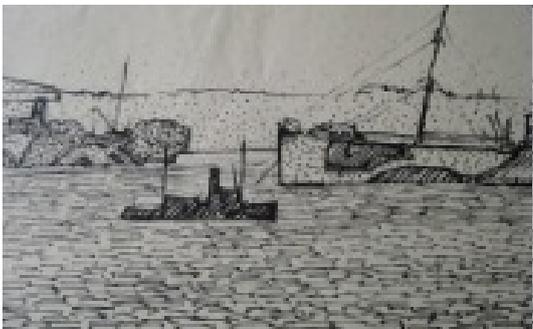
The largest explosion of the First World War: how should it be remembered? - A contribution from Beth Taylor:-

Earlier this year, I visited the Maritime Museum in Halifax, Nova Scotia and was particularly moved by an exhibition entitled *Halifax Wrecked*. This showed the aftermath of the explosion on December 6th, 1917 caused by the collision of a French munitions ship and a Norwegian vessel in Halifax harbour – a crowded port, busy with transports for troops and supplies heading out to Europe.

This explosion created the biggest man-made explosion prior to the development of nuclear weapons with an equivalent force of approximately 2.9 kilotons of TNT. Over 1,900 people were killed immediately, around 9,000 more were injured, many permanently, and 325 acres – almost all of north-end Halifax - were destroyed. The percussive blast of the explosion carried debris for kilometres. A tsunami created by the blast wiped out the local Mi'kmaq aboriginal community.

The shock wave was felt over 270 miles away in Cape Breton. Despite challenging winter weather, care facilities for the wounded and reconstruction of the city proceeded rapidly, thanks to local efforts and financial donations from the Canadian and British governments, from the USA and world wide. Nevertheless, such a major loss of life could not be forgotten.

I subsequently visited Southampton Art Gallery where there is a small exhibition *Aftermath Afloat: Harold Gilman and the Halifax Explosion* (on until 6th December). This displays the preparatory work



Harold Gilman 1918 – Image is 'Harold Gilman and the Halifax Explosion' – Southampton Art Gallery (permission given).

carried out by Harold Gilman (the British artist who was the first President of the London Group) alongside a life size projection of the work he made as the result of a commission in 1918 from the Canadian War Memorials Scheme, set up by Lord Beaverbrook. Gilman's memorial view of Halifax, is described well on the National Gallery of Canada website: It avoids "any reference to the catastrophic explosion....Only the dazzle ships in the middle distance and the destroyers on the left remind us that this is a wartime scene. It is a remarkably calm panorama, imprinted with a diffused light and an exquisite palette of purples, pinks and green, in the spirit of the French painters Bonnard and Vuillard, whom Gilman admired". **(This work can be viewed on the National Gallery of Canada's website).**

The Southampton exhibition describes the work as an "elegy", a lament for the dead – but I found it an inadequate response to this terrible event. I also wondered why no Canadian artist had been commissioned to paint a memorial – especially as Arthur Lismer, principal of the Victoria School of Art and Design in Halifax from 1916 (and later to become a member of the Canadian "Group of Seven"), had painted a number of the warships in the harbour and, after the explosion, produced sketches and

illustrations of the devastation cause by the Halifax explosion – some published in the Canadian press and in a book published in 1918. He was commissioned by the War Records scheme in 1918 as part of the Home Work section but not asked to paint the memorial to the 1917 explosion. Was he not considered important enough to be given the memorial commission? Or was his work too shockingly realist to be an appropriate memorial once the war was ending?

Whatever the reason, the people of Halifax raised a number of memorials themselves, and continue to mark the event that killed more Nova Scotia residents than were killed in combat in the first World War with a civic memorial service on December 6th every year. Which suggests – to me - that something stronger than an “elegy” was, and still is, required.

Beth Taylor.

Editor's report on WAHG Discussion Group – The two sessions I attended in August and September in a seminar room at St Peter's Church Pastoral Centre in Jewry Street focused on studies of paintings chosen by members of the group. The first session examined Holbein's *The Ambassadors*. This was an inspired choice by Sonia Bolton who originated and led the discussion which delved into the various interpretations of the painting. The group discussion was very responsive and given the complexity and detail of the painting rewarding also as it enabled a full exploration.

The second session focused on John Everett Millais' 'Christ in the house of his parents' or 'The Carpenter's Shop' to give it its other title. There were some changes from the original members of the discussion group which I saw as an encouraging sign that these sessions are attracting interest from our members. The group were engaged with Charles Dickens' stinging criticism of the painting when it first appeared on the Royal Academy's walls and discussion focused on such aspects of whether the work could be called a religious painting or not and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's beliefs which underpinned the nature of the painting.

Overall, the value of such sessions is important, it gives members the chance to participate in direct comment on a piece of art and furthermore, as an ex-teacher I can understand how well group work aids the individual in their own understanding and development.

Endpiece – The WAHG members' Virtual Gallery – (You can participate in this venture by simply emailing me your choice of a work of art and a few words on its importance to you. If you want to avoid unnecessary publicity simply indicate 'Artist' in your email at the end of your piece and you'll be ascribed an artist's name. In terms of a painting or work of art please give its full title and the artist and we'll look it up for providing an image. Thanks, contact me on chris.humphreys3@ntlworld.com – Ed)

Il Quattro Estato (The Fourth Estate) by Giuseppi Pelizza Volpeda - Marina Abramovic (Artist) writes, this picture always appealed to me from when I first saw it in a reproduction. It wasn't until I saw it in its full size in an exhibition that I realised the scale of its ambition and its overall effect. The political nature of the painting I knew but the nature of its use of pointillism, the positioning of the three major figures and the madonna-like intensity of the female figure all had an impact on me.



Il Quarto Estato (The Fourth Estate) – Giuseppe Pellizza Volpedo (1901)

Museo del Novecento, Milan