

February 2019

NEWSLETTER

The Arts Society of West Suffolk



Next Meeting: Tuesday 5th March 2019

Lee Miller Witnessing Women at War

Anthony Penrose will document one of the biggest social changes in British and European history as three million women left their normal housewife roles and entered industry and the armed forces, discovering careers and undreamed of freedom. Told against the background of Lee Miller's own life story, he will take her from being a fashion supermodel via life as a surrealist artist to a combat photographer and finally a gourmet cook.

The Destruction of the Monasteries Our February talk by Mark Corby was a riveting account of what has been described as "the greatest act of artistic vandalism in English history": the destruction of the monasteries. Mark is a dedicated classicist in history and architecture and has lectured at The Institute of Archaeology, University College, London. He is a researcher and presenter of TV historical documentaries including "The Real Spartacus". He has also been a guest lecturer and historical guide for St James Arts Tours.

Monastic life and architecture in England began with less than a hundred monasteries in the country by 1066, increasing to almost a thousand after this date. The Normans brought both violence and piety, plundering the country but establishing numerous religious institutions ranging from magnificent foundations to much more modest establishments; two of the finest being In Peterborough and Bury St Edmunds. By 1536 these monastic communities owned vast amounts of land and commanded a greater income than that of the King. Cardinal Wolsey then ordered a judicial dissolution of about thirty monasteries with the intention of using their wealth to create a prestigious school in Ipswich and an outstanding Oxford College. Later, taking advantage of Henry VIII's strained relationship with Rome, Thomas Cromwell began the defamation of the monasteries and went through Parliament to close them down. About two hundred small abbeys were closed resulting in rebellion. To prevent further unrest, later closures were accompanied by offers of either generous pensions (paid from the proceeds of previously acquired ecclesiastical property) or gruesome martyrdom. Most, but not all, abbots chose the former.

Approximately 850 abbeys, priories, friaries and nunneries were destroyed. Some were totally obliterated, some (e.g. Bury St Edmunds) reduced to ruins, and some retained walls and windows (e.g. Fountains Abbey). A few were saved as cathedrals (e.g. Durham, Winchester) or purchased to be used as parish churches and at least one (Buckland Abbey) was converted for domestic use. Only these survivors still display the magnificent Norman architecture, stone vaulted ceilings, Gothic arches and the obvious influence of both French and Middle Eastern architecture, which would also have been present in those that were destroyed.

The systematic destruction of the monasteries also resulted in a grievous loss of beautifully illuminated manuscripts in extensive libraries, painstakingly built up by the monks. Books, paintings (including decorated panels and gilded triptychs) and wooden structures from the buildings were burnt to melt down lead from the roofs. Even the dead were shown no respect as their tombs were callously destroyed. The riches seized were used to fund frequent wars and the King's greed. In a few short years, the vast majority of England's splendid religious architectural and art was lost forever.



Mark illustrated his fact-filled talk with pictures of the impressive survivors of this mass destruction together with the remaining ruins of others, including our own Bury St Edmunds Abbey. His sad tale of doom and destruction was lightened by his robust delivery and a remarkably humorous turn of phrase.

To assist in the choice of future speakers, please comment on the last lecture by completing the feedback form on the website .

Website: www.theartssociety-westsuffolk.org.uk

(Registered Charity Number: 281081)

Venue: Meetings are held at the Blackbourne Community Centre, Elmswell IP30 9UH

(NB Wetherden Road will be closed for the next two months)

Everyone please sign in at the Welcome Desk on arrival.



Special Interest Day: Thursday 21st March

Form and Fortune - 50 Years of British Sculpture

Two morning talks by Mary Yule.

Coffee and biscuits will be provided but please bring your own packed lunch. Guests welcome. Applications and payment to Mrs Linda Orford.

Visit: Wednesday 10th April City of London

Coffee in St Paul's Cathedral crypt followed by guided walks around Shakespeare's City and the Hidden Gardens of the City. £42 per person. Applications and payment to Mrs Julia Eeles.

All payments by cheque please.