

NEWSLETTER

The Arts Society of West Suffolk

NEXT MEETING Tuesday 7th May 2024 Blackbourne Community Centre, Elmswell

Doors open 10am for Welcoming Coffee/Tea

10.45 am Fashion Fury: Women's Fight for Change ... Tessa Boase

This lecture shines a light on the intriguing story of women's love affair with plumage – and of the brave eco-feminists who fought back on behalf of birds. Visit a world where every woman of every class wore a hat!

Tessa Boase is a social historian, free lance journalist., author, lecturer and campaigner with an interest in uncovering stories of invisible women from the 19th and early 20th centuries - revealing how they drove industry, propped up society and influenced politics. Tessa is an author of three books of social history, and when not writing, she's broadcasting, lecturing and campaigning. Tessa has toured extensively as a speaker, sharing her passion for original research and storytelling.



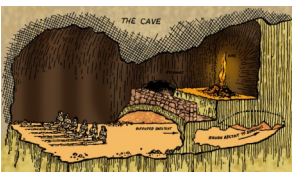
SWIMARATHON



Our thanks and congratulations to our fantastic team of swimmers, Di Hollins, Anya Barrett, Liz Rowlands and Jacky Livens, who swam 63 lengths in 40 minutes in the Rotary Club Swimathon. Thank you also to sponsors and members for their generosity. With just over £600 raised to date, this has already been set aside for new Young Arts grants and projects. Look out for the Young Arts report in the Annual General Meeting papers which will tell you all about activity over the year.

Is this the real life? (or just fantasy?)

Mary Sharp used the opening phrase of Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody as the title of her lecture this month. Her focus was not on fantasy, but on alternative realities as in Plato's Cave 370BC. In this allegory, prisoners chained in front of a blank wall were only able to see firelit shadows of happenings behind them; this was their reality. If a prisoner was freed, he would be blinded by the light of the fire in the cave and want to return to the safety of the dark. However, if he continued into daylight, he would eventually see the world beyond and wish to share it with his fellow prisoners. Exposure to the light would render him unable to see in the dark, therefore the other prisoners would infer that being outside the cave had harmed him, so would refuse to venture from the cave themselves.



This theme of a parallel world, discovered by enlightenment, which inspires attempts to educate others only to be met with disbelief and scorn, has many examples. In his 1816 sonnet *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*, John Keats praised how Chapman's translation of Homer's writings had miraculously shed light on a world previously unseen by him. St Paul was blinded on the road to Damascus before seeing the light of Christianity and facing disbelievers. John Newton's evangelical conversion turned him from slave trader to abolitionist, but was also met with scepticism. In C S Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, Lucy stepped into the world of Narnia through the wardrobe, but had great difficulty in convincing her siblings of its existence. James Joyce was mocked for his attempts to dispel doubts about his sudden leap from hedonism to purity. In *Wind in the Willows* Kenneth Grahame described Toad's sudden infatuation with cars being derided by his friends. He also highlighted the selfishness of zealots, like Toad, when attempting to convert others.

Echoes of Plato's Cave are also apparent in Tennyson's poem *The Lady of Shalott* where she can only experience life in a mirrored reflection; *The Silver Chair* by C S Lewis in which William has to convince everyone that he is the reality; the film *The Truman Show* where a child brought up in a fake world eventually confronts her controller, 1984 by George Orwell featuring totalitarianism; J K Rowlings' magical world in the *Harry Potter Books*, and *The Matrix* film where the choice of a blue pill or a red pill decides one's reality.

Much of today's world is spent in the virtual world of TV and media. We may sometimes wonder about a better, parallel world, a different life. The loss of religious faith or tantalising glimpses of an unattainable reality, as in *Kubla Khan* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* by John Keats, and *The Lost Chord* by Arthur Sullivan only result in sad longing. This is the real life, this is reality. As in *The Matrix*, we can choose the option to understand either what is actually occurring or to live in an illusion.

VISITS

About 20 members visited the Suffolk Record Office and Archives on 27th March. We enjoyed an unique and fascinating insight into the miscellany of historical treasures held for us in Raingate Street with evidence and stories of significant moments in our local history including the Zeppelin raid on the Buttermarket and a private view of the Bury Psalter.

Wednesday 22nd May at 2 pm Island Hall, Grantchester

Travel by car to meet at Island Hall, the Georgian ancestral home of the Vane Percy family, who have lived there for eight generations. Cost £29 per person to include a private guided tour of the house/garden and afternoon tea. Please sign up with Julia Eeles by email juliaeeles@hotmail.co.uk and pay by BACs to CAFBANK sort code 40-52-40, account 00084690 with reference your name and Island Hall or by card at the May monthly lecture (last chance).



EUSTON OPEN DAYS 2024

April 19th, 20th, 21st.

May 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th.

August 16th, 17th, 18th.

September 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd.