

May 2024

NEWSLETTER

The Arts Society of West Suffolk



NEXT MEETING Tuesday 4th June 2024 Blackbourne Community Centre, Elmswell
Doors open 10 am for Welcoming Coffee/Tea

NB Preceding the lecture below, our AGM will be held at 10.30 am

10.45 am Miniature Portraits: Tiny Treasures Close to our Hearts ... Cindy Polemis

From the 16th to the 19th centuries, we look at small portraits that could be held in the hand or placed in locket, creating an intimate relationship between owner and sitter.

Cindy Polemis is a freelance art lecturer, accredited Arts Society lecturer and art guide affiliated to Tate Britain and Tate Modern. She has a BA in History from Oxford University and as a mature student she graduated from Birkbeck College, London University with a BA and then MA in History of Art. She spent many years as a radio producer and presenter for BBC World Service.

Our Chairman, Tony Callender, reminded us that the reports and accounts for this year's AGM have now been circulated. His report contains interesting information about the way forward with the Arts Society as well as his commentary on our own society.

Please could members attending June's meeting ensure that they are seated by 10.30 am in order to proceed with the AGM as scheduled.

Fashion Fury Feminism: Women's Fight for Change

Tessa Boase's well researched lecture this month delved into the beginnings of the RSPB. The fashion craze between 1870 and 1920 was for ladies to adorn the hats that they habitually wore with feathers from a wide variety of birds. Egret feathers were highly favoured, as was plumage from birds of paradise, ostriches, pheasants and even vultures with more common adornments coming from pigeons, turkeys, geese and cockerels. Various millinery decorations were created from these, sometimes featuring the entire bird. The plumage trade was big business. Billions of birds were imported from abroad, warehoused, sold at auction, processed and sold to milliners to be transformed into glorious headwear, some of which measured over 4 feet tall. Over time, this practice resulted in many birds becoming at risk of extinction until sensibilities were raised about their plight.

Campaigners sought to educate women about what they termed as murderous millinery and to outlaw the wide-scale sale of feathers. Chief among these campaigners was Etta Smith who founded an all women Society of Ornithology aiming to convert women from using plumage in hat making. She combined forces with Eliza Phillips in 1889 founding Fur, Fin and Feather Folk, which aimed to protect the welfare of all animals. Later this merged with the Society for the Protection of Birds, which had been founded by Emily Williamson in 1889 and now became known as SPB. Frank Lemon, the society's legal adviser, married Etta Smith in 1892. Mrs Etta Lemon became the first Honorary Secretary of the SPB, which became the RSPB in 1904.

These women's campaign was not only against the plumage trade and women who sported hats with avian adornment but also against those who apparently furthered this practice, namely the Suffragettes. Emmeline Pankhurst encouraged her ladies to wear large showy hats to emphasise their status. This particularly incensed Etta Lemon who became a founder member of the Women's National Anti Suffragette League and organised The Life of the Egret, an evocative placard display highlighting the effect of the plumage trade on this particular bird. Eliza Phillips also protested strongly via an intensive pamphletting attack throughout London.

World War II impacted on the size and shape of hats, but a resurgence of feathered hats began when the war ended. Viscountess Nancy Astor pushed for prohibition and in 1921 the Plumage Importation (Prohibition) Act was passed. Recognition for Etta, Eliza and Emily's achievements were largely ignored until recently when historical plaques were erected, portraits of the three ladies were included in the offices of the RSPB and a sculpture of Emily Williamson is, at present, being commissioned. It has recently come to light that present day relatives of Emily include a bird scientist and a wildlife photographer, continuing along the path she so ardently trod.

Website: www.theartsociety-westsuffolk.org.uk (Registered Charity Number: 281081)



VISITS

There has been a good response to the forthcoming visit to Island Hall later this month. Payments have now been made. The arrangement is to travel in our own or shared cars and to meet at Island Hall, Godmanchester, at 2 pm on Wednesday 22nd May. We will then have a tour of the Georgian mansion, followed by tea.

**TOTAL RAISED THIS YEAR BY THE
SWIMARATHON TEAM
FOR YOUNG ARTS £643.61
WELL DONE!**

EUSTON OPEN DAYS 2024

August 16th, 17th, 18th.

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

