

February 2021



NEWSLETTER

The Arts Society of West Suffolk

Monthly Zoom Talk: Tuesday 2nd March 2021 10.45 am
A Brief Story of Wine David Wright

Wine has been part of society for over 7,000 years and this story tells of its origin and appearance across the Mediterranean and Europe, its role in society and its developing importance as a component of faith, well-being and festivity.

Special Interest Days: Wednesday 10th to Friday 12th February 2021 10.45 am
A Journey Through the Imperial Wardrobe David Rosier

The Study Day listed in the programme will now be held over three days with a Zoom lecture starting at 10.45 am each day. Details of these lectures have now been emailed to members.

On last month's virtual tour of theatrical London

Diane Burstein guided 80 of our members along the Thames and through the streets of London from The Globe Theatre through Covent Garden dropping in on all the famous West End theatres including the Royal Opera House, before moving on to the Fringe, Off West End and The Bridge Theatre. With a wealth of historical vignettes and anecdotes about these famous theatres, Diane described the development of theatre from Elizabethan times right up to the socially distanced performances of last summer. Her assurance that, having survived The Plague in the past, theatres will thrive again in the future was a welcome boost to everyone viewing the tour with deep nostalgia!

We are immensely grateful not only to Diane for taking us on this tour, but also to Julia Eeles who arranged for her to do so. If anyone is interested in more London virtual tours, please contact Diane Burstein, London Blue Badge Tour Guide, by email: diane@londonwalkingtours.co.uk



Spring is just around the corner and vaccinations against Covid 19 are now being offered to more and more people. The NHS working with volunteers has organised an amazing programme to deal with the immense task of immunising the nation and cannot be too highly praised for the efficient way in which this is being done. This must give us all hope that this strange time will eventually be over and we can all return to a less restricted way of life. We are aware that, particularly for those of you living alone, present conditions are often very trying. We do hope that you are managing to stay in touch with friends and family by phone and Zoom and that our ongoing programme of Zoom talks provides the occasional welcome break from the norm.

Keep smiling, keep safe and keep in touch!

This month we were delighted to welcome back Dr Claire Walsh, who gave us our first Zoom talk in July. Claire holds an MA from the V&A Museum and the Royal College of Art and a PhD from the European University Institute, Florence. She has worked at the V&A and has lectured there and for the University of Warwick. Claire lectures for the Open University and has also lectured widely in Britain, Europe, the USA and Canada and has published various articles and academic papers. This time Claire gave us a fascinating talk on **The Benin Bronzes**, how they



came to Europe, the expert process of making them, their symbolism and ritual use as well as their influence on avant garde artists such as Picasso, Matisse and Gauguin. The bronzes originated in the ancient city of Benin situated in present day Nigeria, using skills first seen in the kingdom of Ife as early as the 1300s. Artworks were made for trade with the Portuguese from the late 1400s, and subsequently with the French, Dutch and British. However, the famous bronzes were created exclusively for the Benin royal court as sacred symbols of history, hierarchy and respect. Tragically, in the late 19C, during an attempt to make Benin a British protectorate, Benin troops killed most of the armed party sent to force agreement. In retaliation the British overthrew the city, taking 2,400

artworks as spoils of war, eventually distributing them amongst Europe museums. Many avant garde artists were inspired both by primitive African art and the Benin bronzes, welcoming their element of abstraction into the new language of expressionism. Despite the Benin bronzes (which are actually brass) being intricately designed and perfectly made by lost wax technique, museums initially displayed them ethnographically rather than as art, because Westerners could not accept that great art could come out of Africa. Fortunately attitudes have changed and they are now recognised and exhibited as highly sophisticated and significant works of art.