

ULEMHAS

Birkbeck Continuing Education History of Art Society
www.ulemhas.org.uk

Review Two

December 2006

In order to update news and supply fresh information, we are again publishing this supplement to the main issue of the *Review*, which goes out with the mailing in August

ULEMHAS in 1981 – how we started

2006 saw ULEMHAS celebrating 25 years. We are greatly indebted to our founder members and it was good see many of them at our celebratory buffet that followed the 2006 AGM.

One of our founders and former Chairman writes about those early days:-

Twenty-five years! I do congratulate you all, officers and members past and present. Times have changed considerably since the 1980s, as have art history and education, but somehow ULEMHAS seems to remain, at heart, much the same sort of society that the six of us worked so hard to launch when, with trepidation as well as enthusiasm we accepted that task from Maria Shirley.

At first matters were usually too fraught for us to see much beyond each year, each term, indeed each lecture. There would be sighs of relief when an audience materialised. Our publicity had worked; so had our maps and cardboard arrows: our diverse membership had made their way successfully to the Gustave Tuck Lecture Theatre, a handsome purpose built, semi-

circular tiered hall set in the labyrinthine heart of University College and notoriously difficult to find. On Friday evenings (when the central heating was turned off – its draughts were as notorious as its mystery and its five days accumulation of chalkdust) nobody else ever used this hall. This meant that I could engage, for any date, leading scholars from anywhere in Britain who might be coming to London anyway, and were happy to add our £28 fee to their weekend expenses. Many of them welcomed the opportunity to try out or repeat important lectures before an adult audience who attended voluntarily on such evenings. Indeed many were impressed at this dedication to a subject and thus we secured the goodwill of Professors, Readers, Lecturers and Curators well

beyond our London extra-mural boundaries.

Fortunately we were a hardy, persevering lot. Besides we had our eyes opened on such subjects as the scientific side of Leonardo from Martin Kemp; Matisse as seen by Lawrence Gowing; Charlemagne by John Beckworth; Paul Crossley on the intricately organic late Gothic German churches. These are to name but a few of so many. Perhaps the most vivid in my own memory – for its slides and the packed, hushed, absorbed audience – was John Barron's exposition of the then newly discovered Riace bronzes, under the title *In the footsteps of Pheidias*.

As the Society established itself, more members – Erna Karton, Kay Smith, Jill Jennings, Vivien Fyfield, Janet Davies and Sandra James – came forward to sit on the committee that now had considerable responsibility. The pattern of the programme – six lectures, two Study Days and a visit – was laid out from the very beginning, with optional social events when we felt confident. Although mostly independent as to how we worked everything we were nonetheless under more surveillance than strikes me as the case now. When it came to drawing up a constitution, which I drafted with the committee's help, we had to submit it to a

higher authority before we could put it to the membership. When, some years later at an AGM, several clauses were smoothly altered and some, quite rightly in the name of realism, jettisoned completely, I thought back to that long evening in the smoky Tavistock Bar when I hammered out every word with Miss Shirley, who was inclined to forget that membership of this society was not only voluntary but democratic as well. However, it was thanks to this kind of discipline that good foundations it seems were laid, and it has been splendid to see them built upon so well.

Claire Andrews

Dr. Phyllis Kay (who left a legacy to ULEMHAS) and Dr. Marguerite Kay (former Vice President of ULEMHAS) photograph kindly presented by Lynne Mirrey

The 2006 ULEMHAS Study Tour

Following last year's very popular trip to Rome, the 2006 tour of Roman and Medieval Provence was soon fully booked, and 29 participants flew to Marseille on April 29th. The tour had been planned in detail by John McNeill, but for the first time the actual bookings were made, for insurance reasons, by a travel agent, Real Holidays.

The first three nights were spent at Cavaillon, not in itself a very inspiring town, but a good base from which to explore the area east of the Rhone. The remaining four nights were spent in Arles, a city rich in Roman remains. These were a prelude to the subsequent exploration of Provence's well-preserved Roman inheritance: the staggering Pont-du-Gard, the triumphal arch at Orange, and the mausoleum and arch at Glanum, just outside Saint-Rémy-de Provence.

Whole days were given to Avignon and Arles; for the rest of the time we travelled in a comfortable coach and blazing sunshine to find Romanesque and some Gothic treasures, through scenery of vineyards and olives, with views of Cezanne's Mont-Sainte-Victoire, van Gogh's Alpilles and the impressive range of the Dentilles de Montmirail.

There is no space to record all that we saw, but at a distance of nine months certain impressions stand out: the succession of marvellous cloisters, their paired columns topped by an infinite variety of exquisitely

carved capitals, both foliate and figurative. They stood on stylobates of just the right height to provide seating on which to perch while John enlightened us about our surroundings. Sturdy and plain at the Cistercian Abbey of Silvacane, delicate and graceful at Aix-en-Provence and Arles, these cloisters had an atmosphere of infinite peace – none more so than at Saint-Paul-de-Mausole, moving in its association with van Gogh, who retreated there from Arles at the height of his illness.

The west fronts of Saint-Trophême, Arles, and Saint-Gilles-du-Gard were particularly high points. Reflecting antique models nearby, with freestanding columns framing monumental figures of apostles and saints, they were covered in sculpture of stunningly high quality. At Saint-Trophême serried rows of saved and damned souls flanked an enthroned Christ; the triple portals at Saint-Gilles had tympana with the Adoration of the Magi, Christ in Majesty and a very rare Crucifixion, over a Passion frieze of Romanesque expressiveness and narrative vitality.

We flew home reluctantly on April 25th; the week had seemed too short to take in all the artistic riches of this beguiling region – and needless to say, wine and food and pleasant company had also been in good supply. Our expectations had been high and we were not disappointed.

Anne Scott

Under the Roman arch at Orange

ULEMHAS Review back numbers – an appeal.

We have an almost complete set of ULEMHAS Reviews but there is one gap. We are missing number 5. If any member has this and would be willing to donate to our archives this would be greatly appreciated.

Alternatively, if the missing issue could be photocopied or sent to the current Chair for photocopying and return this would be greatly appreciated. Recorded delivery postage and/or photocopying charges will be reimbursed. Please send to Bill Measure, 90 Richmond Road, Leytonstone, London, E11 4BU; telephone 020-8558-5491; e-mail measure@btinternet.com

Last chance corner

Liz Newlands draws our attention to three important exhibitions that are finishing shortly:

1st January

Rodin at the Royal Academy

7th January

Leonardo at the Victoria & Albert; Renaissance House at the V&A; Holbein at Tate Britain; Cezanne in Britain at the National Gallery; French Drawings at the British Museum

21st January

Velazquez at the National Gallery; David Teniers at the Courtauld; Hockney Portraits at the National Portrait Gallery; Fischli and Weiss at Tate Modern; David Smith at Tate Modern.

Those who are averse to crowds may be interested in three exhibitions that promise enjoyment without the push and shove of the “block busters”

Richard Wilson and the Grand Tour: Highlights from the Brinsley Ford Collection runs until 11th

February 2007 at the Dulwich Picture Gallery. Sir Brinsley Ford was a

renowned scholar of the Grand Tour. He was also a collector and this exhibition will show some of his most famous pictures by Richard Wilson, the 18th century Welsh landscape artist. **William Powell Frith** runs until 4th March 2007 at the Guildhall Art Gallery. This is the Gallery’s biggest exhibition to date and the first significant reappraisal of Frith for over fifty years. In conjunction with the exhibition the Gallery have a study day, *Painting the Victorian Age*, on Thursday 8th February. Tickets £27/£22 Concessions and Friends of Guildhall Art Gallery. Telephone 020-7332-3870 or visit the Gallery information desk.

Art for the Nation at the Queen’s House, Greenwich runs until 2nd September 2007 and brings together 200 of the National Maritime Museum's finest works for the largest in-depth display of paintings they have ever staged – combining works by internationally-significant artists such as Gainsborough, Lely, Hogarth, Reynolds and Turner. The display features recent acquisitions as well as paintings not yet seen by the public. The paintings are hung by collection to illustrate genres, schools and tastes which led to their inclusion in the National Maritime Museum as a collective visual expression of Britain's maritime identity. **Bill Measure**

ULEMHAS members have cause to be grateful to Liz Newlands for the work that she does in bringing exhibitions to our attention. Unfortunately Edward, Liz’s husband, died suddenly in mid-October. ULEMHAS members will wish to join with the officers and committee of the Society in expressing our sympathy to Liz. **Bill Measure**