London Art History Society

Affiliated to Birkbeck History of Art

Newsletter 2026

Message from the Chair

Dear Members,

I hope you have a happy and healthy 2026. I am delighted to report that our Society has had a very successful year in all respects, with not only a diverse and stimulating programme of study events, but also a continued improvement in our finances which has enabled us to re-introduce the Programme Card and Newsletter and resume our annual donation to Birkbeck for the students' hardship fund, with a much-appreciated £5000 contribution. We have also invested in new equipment and software which allow us to record all in-person study events, opening up our programme to many members who are unable to attend in person.

The programme for the coming year is equally exciting and includes some lectures and events which were suggested by members – a good sign of an interactive and vibrant Society, so please do continue to give us your ideas. We are also approaching a milestone in the history of the Society, with the 45th anniversary of its original foundation and I hope that we can celebrate this at our June lecture.

As always, huge thanks are due to all our wonderful volunteers, both on and off the Committee, as well as Judith Burt, for making everything possible. There is always room for more, so please do contact me if you might be interested in joining our team.

I'm delighted we are reinstating annual Newsletters and our intention with it is for you, our members, to have your say, show us all what you've been up to in the year, and let us know in what ways the Society has brought you enjoyment. We hope you like this approach and do please let us know if you would like to contribute in future editions!

Jeanette McCauley
Chair

Annual General Meeting

26th November 2025 at the Art Workers' Guild

Chair, Jeanette McCauley

Jeanette McCauley, Chair, opened the meeting by noting with sadness the death of our Vice President, John McNeill. However, it has otherwise been a successful year for the Society with an expanded programme of study events. Sue Preston, our Treasurer, explained that well-attended events over the past year meant the Society is in a sounder financial position, which enables us to be more adventurous in future programme planning and to donate £5,000 to Birkbeck from whom we gain so much by our affiliation.

Jeanette announced that the following Committee Members had stood down: John Dunlop, Geoff Shepherd, Maggie Stockton and Gillian Robinson; and the appointment of new Members with Susan Hazeldine as Secretary, and Helen Janecek as events organiser. Jeanette also had great pleasure in announcing that Clare Ford-Wille had agreed to become our new Honorary President.

Clare gave us a timely reminder of the origins of our Society, begun in 1981 by an enthusiastic band of Birkbeck Extra Mural alumni. ULEMHAS (University of London Extra Mural History of Art Studies) as it was then called, was intended to provide continuing academic-level history of art studies, and as the London Art History Society it has continued to live up to this original vision.

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Honorary President, Clare Ford-Wille

AGM continued

The evening was attended by over eighty Members braving local traffic disruption and a cold winter's night, proving how much they value the social side of our Society meetings.

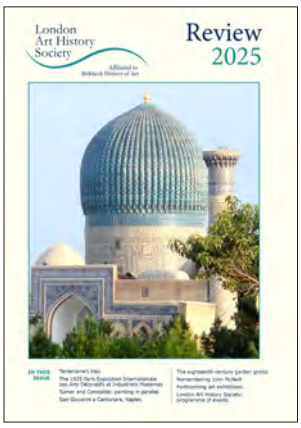
The AGM was followed by the first John McNeill Memorial Lecture given by Richard Plant on 'The Romsey Rood', the intriguing Anglo-Saxon stone carving of a life-size Christ on the Cross on the outer wall of Romsey Abbey.

Barrie MacDonald

Lecturer, Richard Plant

Readership Survey

BARRIE MACDONALD (EDITOR)



Thank you to all those Members who completed the questionnaire for the readership survey of the *Review*. The findings overall were positive about our readers' thoughts about the contents and presentation of the *Review*.

The responses to the question about other subjects or features that readers would like to see included in future issues were particularly useful and will inform the discussions of the editorial panel.

Appeal for Volunteers

To continue to offer our rich programme of events we need more volunteers. Please think about joining the team. Plenty of support is available as you get to know the job. If you think you can help in some way, please contact the Chair at:

chairman@londonarthistorysociety.org.uk

Birkbeck News

JOHN PEACOCK, BIRKBECK LIAISON

Birkbeck continues to be our valued affiliate and a regular provider of lecturers and writers. I am delighted to report we were able to renew our donation in 2025 to support Birkbeck History of Art students. The donation is highly prized and enables students to meet expenses in their studies that might otherwise be out of reach. Both staff and students are deeply grateful to the Society for our generosity.

An important organisational change has taken place in the last two years. The four previously autonomous schools of History of Art, History, Classics and Archeology, Philosophy, have been combined into a single School of Historical Studies. This has allowed current History of Art BA and MA students access to a wider range of subject lectures than before.

The principal lecturers in the History of Art team are well known to many of us and include Dr Dorigen Caldwell, Dr Zoë Opačić, Dr Robert Maniura, Professor Patrizia di Bello, Professor Fiona Candlin and Dr Mara Polgovsky Ezcurra.

Patrizia di Bello is my Birkbeck liaison opposite number.

Putting a face to a name

Judith Burt is the friendly and efficient Admin support who helps so many Members and event organisers. She is responsible for so much that makes things run smoothly.

"I am a country girl at heart and live in rural Herefordshire. In my spare time I enjoy hill walking in the Herefordshire countryside and Welsh hills and am a member of the Ramblers. I've been a trustee of the local village hall for 10 years and organise the monthly film night. Before Herefordshire, I spent 12 years living and working in Bermuda and the Cayman Islands in the offshore legal and financial industry and travelled extensively – much of North/South/Central America, as well as Canada, Europe, Australia, South Africa, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia."

Why we value the Society

I love London, but not living there I appreciate belonging to an excellently organised, friendly London Society that offers a wide variety of lectures and visits with expert lecturers and guides. This encourages us all to expand our horizons.

Recently I have swung with American art of the sixties, followed in the footsteps of John Donne, with good company, proving that no man is an island, soared over Byzantine domes, stunned by their gold and mosaics, promoted modernism with Gertrude Stein in her salon in Paris, and wandered through Ely and Worcester Cathedrals on fascinating explorations, one led by an architectural and the other by a medieval historian.

Then the recordings of the lectures arrive and they can all be enjoyed again. Thank you, London Art History Society!

Celia Jones

Society members enjoying the John Donne Walk on 14th May 2025

I have been a member of the Society for a number of years, ever since doing a BA and MA in Art History at Birkbeck. I have missed the rigours of academic study but the Society goes a long way in making up for this. What I particularly like is the breadth of subject matter on offer and the different ways this is delivered. There is something to suit everyone whether this be an hour's evening lecture at the Art Workers' Guild, a day's course or a longer course in person or on Zoom, and visits with specialist guides to organisations or private collections not always accessible to the general public. I personally prefer in-person events to those delivered by Zoom as I enjoy the camaraderie of fellow members. What I also find particularly useful is the list of forthcoming exhibitions published by the Society.

Viv Pert

Society events provide 'university level' lectures and events in a cost-attractive and friendly manner. They offer a wide range of topic areas to suit all tastes, along with high calibre speakers, always with strong credentials for their chosen topic. In-person lectures are held in a variety of historically significant venues, and online sessions work seamlessly. All in all, they offer a great solution to those wanting to follow their art historical interests without committing to formal study.

Simon Everett

It is a friendly Society which includes amongst its offerings topics that some other organisations have considered too academic to be commercial. They cover a wide range of topics, presented by excellent lecturers, many of them specialists in their own fields. For those of us to whom technology is a foreign country it is a great relief that, though some of the lectures are on Zoom, many are live and it is a great pleasure to have lectures delivered and our questions answered by a real person.

Vanessa Hartley

Having spent most of my life avoiding study, and seeing it as a necessary evil rather than a pleasure, I was surprised to realise I was spending my post-retirement years choosing to take courses, attend lectures and go on guided art history trips. One of the cornerstones of my new life of learning has been the Society. This has also led to new friends for my new life, including the other Members and the art historians.

Jeff Cotton

2025 Visits and Events

Worcester Cathedral
3rd September 2025

Dr Hugh Doherty conducting his tour of Worcester Cathedral

Transition and change are embedded in the stones of Worcester Cathedral. Dr Hugh Doherty prefaced his excellent tour with a tribute to the late John McNeill, whose role as our guide he had kindly stepped into. He braved the stormy weather by starting outside for an overview: the founding in 680, its early bishops Oswald and Wulfstan (both of whom were canonised), the construction of the hugely significant Chapter House, and its role in crucial moments of history, most famously the Civil War when parliamentary forces ravaged the interior and Charles II's escape after losing the Battle of Worcester.

An intriguing moment on the tour was Hugh's account of research into the lost frescoes of the Chapter House, their depiction of the transition from Old Testament to New Testament narratives intended as a message that the new Norman regime should be viewed not as a shocking break but as a natural progression from the Anglo-Saxon world.

The transition of architectural styles was a fascinating aspect of the tour: from Romanesque to Early English Gothic to the renovations of Gilbert Scott in the nineteenth century. The astonishingly beautiful crypt (begun in 1084) is remarkable, its multiple rows of columns and uniform cushion capitals creating a harmonious space with a profound spiritual atmosphere. Another highlight is the elaborate tracery of the Chantry Chapel (1504) where Prince Arthur, the older brother of King Henry VIII, is buried.

Hugh ended his tour at the tomb of King John. Whether Magna Carta is a significant moment for the nation is debatable, but John's choice of Worcester as his final resting place is a redeeming feature in the career of this least loved of monarchs. Dr Doherty's weaving of historical and ideological narratives around an account of the building's fabric made for a fascinating tour. Thanks also to Norah Moss – her impressive organisation gave us a hugely enjoyable day.

Paul Morris

Gertrude Stein in Paris
30th September 2025

Kathy McLauchlan gave us a fascinating insight into the life of the American writer Gertrude Stein and her place within the international art world. After an interesting evocation of Paris as the capital of the art world at the turn of the twentieth century, Kathy showed us how Gertrude, and her two art-collector brothers, Leo and Michael, impacted on the art scene by their pioneering patronage of such artists as Matisse and Picasso, and how their taste as collectors influenced the development of modern art.

'Gertrude Stein in Paris' was the last study day to be organised by Maggie Stockton. I would like to express our gratitude to Maggie for her commitment to the Society over the past ten years, and for providing us with so many interesting and enjoyable study events.

Barrie MacDonald

St Paul's Cathedral
3rd October 2025

Those who've visited St Paul's before will have been down in the Crypt and up to the Whispering Gallery; this tour was different. The focus was on the exterior in the context of the City surrounding it. The sense of scale you get when inside the Cathedral is more than matched by the building's grandeur when seen against the sky.

We started with the great and the good at the statue of Queen Anne atop Ludgate Hill. Circling the building through the great British drizzle, we were all inspired by the depth, beauty and incredible effort that went into building it, particularly the wealth of sculpted reliefs. The lasting feeling was how it gives history and time such a solid foundation.

Having taken a quick look at Temple Bar and more recent sculptures in Paternoster Square, we marched 'en masse' past Stationers' Hall, back up via the old Deanery (offices of the newly-announced Archbishop of Canterbury) and the ornate facade of the former St Paul's Cathedral Choir School, then headed down Ludgate Hill to Fleet Street to visit St Bride's Church.

Approaching through Bride Lane and the atmospheric St Bride's Avenue alleyway, we ignored the scaffolding encasing the church and entered the calm interior. Whilst the nave and aisles are all Neo-Baroque reconstructions, more than 2000 years of history lurks within the building's fascinating crypts.

Yvonne Jackman was our inspiring guide for the morning, a perfect usher for a study of a great church and its environs.

Ethan & Robert Chapman-Ames

Ely Cathedral visit 30th April

Imperial Garden Cities study day 4th July

Charterhouse visit 12th November

Hidden Gems

We asked Members to share with us some galleries, museums and buildings in the UK and abroad that may not be as well known and so not as overvisited.

Bank of England Museum, London

Recent events I have attended include a poetry reading inspired by accounts of eighteenth-century trials at the Old Bailey (the link being that one woman was tried for stealing a key from the Bank). Their current exhibition is on the Bank's architecture; in the past they have had interesting exhibits on topics you might not expect (e.g., *The Wind in the Willows*, because Kenneth Grahame wrote it while he was Secretary to the Bank). They also run free architecture walking tours and curator-led exhibition tours.

Jennifer Harper

Doddington Hall, Lincolnshire

Doddington Hall in Lincolnshire is privately owned but open to the public. Both house and grounds are an absolute model of how you would most like an interesting country house presented. The guidebook is precise and concise. There is a sequence of impeccably furnished rooms and some of the most outstanding tapestries to be found in this country. The paintings are some of the most beautifully restored I've ever seen. There is an original print room. The gardens, immaculately manicured at the front, imaginatively wild at the back, are full of lively contemporary statues. It makes a perfect visit!

John Peacock

Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery, London

In 1800 Sir John Soane built a country house in Ealing to display his eclectic collection, and to entertain visitors such as J. M. W. Turner. However, in 1810 he sold the house and sent his collection to his town house in Lincoln's Inn Fields. In 1910, Ealing Council bought it from the last private owner, Sir Spencer Walpole, and it is now run by a charitable Trust. Between 2016 and 2019, the Trust organised an expert restoration, including original colour schemes and reconstruction of Soane's features such as the colonnade.

Now, a jaunty figure marches ahead of you into Soane's grand neo-classical house with its Ionic columns topped with caryatids. This is one of Julian Opie's bright LED outlines of a walking figure. Since reopening in 2019 the house and gallery has housed imaginative exhibitions by distinguished artists and designers such as Anish Kapoor and Es Devlin. The current exhibition of works by Howard Hodgkin is on until March 2026.

Opening hours for the House, gallery, café and giftshop: Wednesday to Sunday, 10am to 5pm.

Jane Evans

The Perimeter, London

Photo:Joseph Asghard

The Perimeter is a modern art space at 20 Brownlow Mews, Bloomsbury, London. Architects 6A converted a Victorian warehouse into a contemporary exhibition space, with the floor levels linked by an impressive cantilevered concrete staircase which is at the heart of the modernised building.

Their last exhibition (10th October-20th December 2025) showed the work of American artist, Christopher Williams. It was his first solo exhibition in London since showing at the Whitechapel Gallery in 2015. The Gallery is open by appointment only, Wednesday-Saturday 11am-5pm.

Vicky O'Keefe

Puglia

The Life Cycle of Christ *fresco in Puglia*

I discovered a gem in Puglia, Santa Caterina d'Alessandria in Galatina. It has a wonderful cycle of frescoes, possibly painted by Tuscan or Umbrian artists and certainly suggesting acquaintance with Giotto's frescoes at Assisi. *The Life Cycle of Christ* included this depiction of the young Christ preaching in the Temple. There was hardly anyone else in the church when I visited.

Sue Anstruther

Florence

Santa Maria a Ricorboli, Virgin and Child*, by 'Giotto'*

By venturing further afield to some less well-known cities, buildings and works of art previously unknown have become favourites, but hidden gems can still be found on the beaten track too. This year in Florence I found two churches not noticed in two decades researching for my website *churchesofflorence.com*. San Bartolomeo a Monte Oliveto was hard to find and closed the evening I found it, and the hospital around it is in ruins, but it once housed the famous and fine *Annunciation* by Leonardo da Vinci, his earliest existing painting. And Santa Maria a Ricorboli, a clean and functioning church which was open, has a *Virgin and Child* which the church says is by Giotto himself. You may not agree, but it's worth searching out.

Jeff Cotton

Santa Maria a Ricorboli, the 'Giotto'

Getting the best out of Zoom

Zoom can never be the same as gathering in a lecture hall but it has several plus points: no travel, crystal-clear slides, no heads in the way, and plenty of personal space to stretch and take notes. Recordings offer even more of these benefits, of course, given you can also pause the lecture whenever you want or repeat any bits of particular interest.

Most of us know Zoom basics very well by now but a few simple ploys can improve the experience considerably.

- Make sure your internet connection is stable — being close to your wifi hub helps. If you share a wifi connection with others in the house, try to persuade them to hold off while you're on your Zoom session.
- Use a laptop or a desktop rather than a phone or tablet if you have the choice.
- Headphones attached to your computer are very good both for clear sound and for keeping friends and partners at bay. Otherwise use speakers if you can.
- Join in good time and give yourself a moment to settle in and check everything is working. Close other programs and turn off notifications to avoid distractions.
- Most of our Zooms use "webinar" or "lecture" mode, so you'll automatically be muted and invisible when the lecture starts — no need to worry about background noise or whatever it is you're wearing.
- During the lecture, maximise your screen view for best effects (the "Full Screen" button helps).
- If there's a Q&A, you may be invited to put questions via the chat or Q&A panel. Select the unmute button on your screen and start with your name if you'd like to be acknowledged.

Lecturing on Zoom is a lonely business for a lecturer. At the end of a Zoom session or whenever invited, do use whatever means are available – chat or questions – to show the lecturer you're out there and you're interested! It will be greatly appreciated.

Post-event Recordings

We much appreciate the work Arthur Sexton has put into upgrading our IT and making high quality post-event recordings available. This has been of great value to Members, both those who prefer online, but also to those who prefer in person but want to revisit the event or have to miss all or part of an event due to unforeseen circumstances.

Newsletter Team

Sue Anstruther, Barrie MacDonald, John Peacock

Upcoming Events

LECTURES

Wednesday 4 March | 6pm
"I was a rich man's plaything": Pop Art in Britain
Dr Ben Street
Online via Zoom

Wednesday 8 April | 6pm
Exemplars of twentieth-century British art and design on the Tube
Mike Grundy
Online via Zoom

Wednesday 10 June | 6pm
Mars and the muses: the Renaissance art of armour
Dr Tobias Capwell
In-person at the Art Workers Guild

SHORT COURSES

8 January-5 February | Thursday 11am-1pm
Not the Dark Ages!
Dr Sally Dormer
In-person at Lettsom House

12 February-19 March
Thursday 11am-1pm (omitting 12 March)
Understanding the Italian Renaissance: history, society and the rise of the artist
Dr Dorigen Caldwell
Online via Zoom

2, 3 & 4 June
Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 11am-1pm
Forging the Baroque: histories of Neapolitan art in the long seventeenth century
Dr Giulia Martina Weston
Online via Zoom

STUDY DAYS

Wednesday 11 February | 11am-4.30pm
The history and art of Heraldry
Adam Tuck, Lancaster Herald of Arms
In-person at The Linnean Society of London

Thursday 16 April | 11am-4pm
Michaelina Wautier
Adam Sammut
In-person at The Linnean Society of London

Tuesday 12 May | 11am-4.30pm
Angevin and Aragonese Naples
Drs Paula and Geoffrey Nuttall
In-person at Lettsom House

Friday 3 July | 11am-4.30pm
American art and its publics
Dr Kathy McLauchlan
Lettsom House

Thursday, 16 July 11am-4.30pm
Biedermeier
Thomas Abbott
Online or in-person to be confirmed

STUDY VISITS AND WALKS

Wednesday 20 May | 11.45-4.15
Canterbury Cathedral
Dr Sally Dormer