

GRDM FRIENDS NEWSLETTER 10

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RECENT TRIPS AND TALKS

Wightwick Manor

On the 18th September twenty Friends visited Wightwick Manor, a National Trust House on the outskirts of Wolverhampton. We had a fascinating one hour tour of the principle rooms and their associations with William Morris and the pre-Raphaelite artists. We also had the chance to see paintings and poems by the wife of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Lizzie Siddall. She was unpublished in her lifetime but you can find them here: <http://lizziesiddall.com/portals/lizzies-poems/>. Some seem particularly poignant in light of her tragic and early death. The weather was sunny and warm and we sat out for lunch before our return to Broadway.



The National Leather Collection

On the 21st November the Edinburgh Room at the Lygon Arms Hotel was once again the venue for a Friends Talk. Leather might be considered a niche subject for a talk but the overwhelming response of those who attended was that Philip Warner, Curator of the National Leather Collection, gave a fascinating and entertaining insight into an eclectic collection of objects. He told us that the museum had been set up by the Leather Industry and the Leathersellers' Livery Company in 1946 to build on the good work of leather designer John Waterer. Sir Gordon Russell and John Waterer were friends and had both been appointed Royal Designers for Industry (RDI) by the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce - a body which still flourishes to this day. Gordon wrote a foreword to Waterer's book, *Leather in Life, Art and Industry* (1946)

Our thanks go to the Lygon for the donation of the room and to Warners Budgegens for the wine and soft drinks

Dates for your 2019 Diary

There is a distinct theme to this year's Talks and Trips which will focus on the design, making and manufacture of furniture of which Sir Gordon Russell would undoubtedly have approved.

Friday 22nd February: at the Edinburgh Room in the Lygon Arms at 1730 for 1800.
Talk by Luke Hughes [full details below]

Wednesday 13th March: Friends visit to Hands of High Wycombe
Full details and Booking form below

Friday 5th April: at the Edinburgh Room in the Lygon Arms at 1730 for 1800
Talk by Mary Greensted [full details and booking form below]

Friday 17th May: weekend visit to Marchmont Hall, Berwickshire
Details already published. Limited places still available. Contact me for details.

Friday 21st June: at the Edinburgh Room in the Lygon Arms at 1730 for 1800
Talk by Broun and Lawton [full details below]

Wednesday 18th September: Friends visit to Bedales School and Barnsley Workshops at Petersfield [full details below]

Friday 22nd February: *The Arts and Crafts in the Digital Age* - talk by Luke Hughes

Furniture maker and furniture designer of international repute Luke Hughes has managed his own design business since 1985 and, since the mid 1990's, has designed extensively for various Oxford Colleges as well as the furniture for the new British Embassy in Moscow (1997). In 2007 he worked with the architects on the new Supreme Court building in Parliament Square in London. From 2013 he was involved in the re-interment of the remains of King Richard III in Leicester Cathedral. Luke Hughes has been working with the Gordon Russell Trust on securing commissions for the Coventry Chair and he recently supplied 500 of these chairs to Valparaiso University in Indiana. An example of this chair can be seen in the Museum.



[Click here for booking form](#) - separate notices will be sent out nearer the time.

Wednesday 13th March: Friends visit to Hands of High Wycombe

William Hands was founded in 1906 in High Wycombe. It has an international reputation for designing and custom making awe inspiring furniture which it exports across four continents. With a workforce of more than 50 including skilled craftsmen, the company makes furniture by the same mixture of machine and hand work employed at the Broadway Workshops by Gordon Russell. Indeed in 2008 William Hands acquired the Gordon Russell brand and designs to continue the Gordon Russell philosophy. Our guide on this unique tour of the factory will be Managing Director Peter Head, a former trustee of the Gordon Russell Trust.

Cost is £30 per head for coach travel to and from High Wycombe, coffees and biscuits on arrival and a tour of the factory. Lunch will be at a nearby pub at your own expense. Only 25 places are available.



Hands of High Wycombe, The White House

[Click here for booking form](#) - separate notices will be sent out nearer the time.

Friday 5th April: *'Living in all the tenses' – design and craft in the work of Ernest Gimson* - talk by Mary Greensted

Ernest Gimson – architect, designer of furniture and metalwork, chairmaker, plasterworker, and two-dimensional designer – was one of the leading figures of the Arts and Crafts movement. His work was rooted in English traditions and has been a continuing source of inspiration for designers and makers up to the present day. This talk will look at the development of Gimson's work and provide an introduction into the range of his work and his impact on 20th- and 21st-century furniture design.



Mary Greensted was a curator at Cheltenham and is now a trustee at Court Barn. She has written widely on the Arts and Crafts Movement.

Photo credit: New Walk Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester
[Booking form will be sent out in January 2019](#)

Friday 21st June: *"Product or Service."* - talk by Jeremy Broun and Andrew Lawton,

Jeremy and Andrew are furniture makers in Bath and the Peak District respectively. They frequently present joint talks.



Jeremy is the author of *'The Encyclopaedia of Woodworking Techniques'* which was updated in 2018. He has produced a short film on the life and work of Sir Gordon Russell entitled, *'A gem of British Furniture history'*. He is currently a judge for the Alan Peters Award for Excellence which encourages and promotes young talent within the bespoke furniture industry.

Andrew opened his own workshop in 1980. He is rooted in the ideals of the Arts and Crafts and Cotswolds School of craftsmanship while taking advantage of the best of modern methods and material. Three of his designs have been awarded the prestigious Bespoke Guildmark from the Furniture Makers Company.
[Booking form will be sent out in January](#)

Wednesday 18th September: Friends visit to Bedales School and Barnsley Workshops at Petersfield.

Bedales was founded in 1893 to be a humane alternative to the authoritarian regimes typical of the late Victorian public schools. Five years later the school became fully co-educational and in 1916 the children were given a formal voice when the school council was formed.

We will tour the whole school but the focus of our visit will be firstly, the Memorial Library designed by Ernest Gimson (and thus we will see and hear an echo of the talk given by Mary Greensted in April) to commemorate the Great War and secondly, the Lupton Hall (originally the Assembly Hall) built in 1911 as a venue for plays, concerts and singing.



After lunch at a nearby pub we will travel a very short distance to the Barnsley Workshops. The Barnsleys, like Gimson, were leading makers of Arts and Crafts furniture. Edward Barnsley was himself a pupil at Bedales prior to the Great War and in 1920 trained with Geoffrey Lupton, after whom the Hall is named, worked on the construction of the Library and in 1923 he took over the workshops from Lupton. The workshops have continued to make bespoke furniture right up to the present day. Alan Peters (see above) was an apprentice at the workshops. James Ryan is the present Designer/Manager. We will have an opportunity to see how hand made furniture is designed and produced today.

This will be a longish day but most of the route is dual carriageway and having made the trip myself to reconnoitre what is involved it is perfectly manageable.

Only 20 places are available. Booking form will be sent out with the March newsletter.

Gordon Russell meets Frank Lloyd Wright

No not literally. However the stories of Sir Gordon and the brilliant American architect Frank Lloyd Wright do interweave.



In his autobiography Sir Gordon recalls that he was fortunate that only a few months prior to his family moving to Broadway, C R Ashbee had brought the Guild of Handicraft from the Mile End Road in East London to Chipping Campden. That their paths did not then cross directly is hardly surprising: Gordon left school in 1908 at the age of 15, however he recalls meeting Ashbee occasionally in the late 1920's when they were both elected members of the Art Workers' Guild.

Ashbee had met Wright on a trip to Chicago in 1900 and they subsequently corresponded. Indeed 10 letters from Wright to Ashbee are known and Ashbee wrote a preface to a book about Wright's executed work, published in Germany in 1911.

Wright visited Chipping Campden and signed the visitor book at Hart Silversmiths on the 17th September 1910. He also took the famous photograph of Ashbee. *[I am grateful to Helen Brown for the information in the preceding paragraph]*. Sir Gordon was then at work in the workshop at the back of the Lygon just 4.5 miles away.

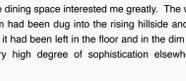
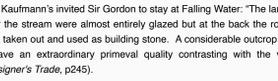
We move on. In 1936 Wright designed one of his best known commercial buildings and certainly one which helped to revive his flagging reputation: the Johnson Wax building in Racine, Wisconsin. The Johnson Wax is particularly noted for its "lily pad" columns.



All the furniture was also designed by Wright and manufactured by a US company called Steelcase. Steelcase, a furniture manufacturer founded in 1912 and, according to Wikipedia, is the largest furniture maker in the world. It was in 1989 that Steelcase acquired the Russell Workshops in Broadway.

Meanwhile, as Sir Gordon recalled in his autobiography, it was in 1948 that he visited New York for the second time and was 'put up' by Edgar Kaufman. It had been Edgard's parents who in 1935 had commissioned Wright to design what is arguably Wrights iconic domestic dwelling, 'Fallingwater' in Pennsylvania. In 1991 it was named the best all-time work of American architecture by the American Institute of Architects.

The Kaufmann's invited Sir Gordon to stay at Falling Water: "The large dining space interested me greatly. The walls over the stream were almost entirely glazed but at the back the room had been dug into the rising hillside and the rock taken out and used as building stone. A considerable outcrop of it had been left in the floor and in the dim light it gave an extraordinary primeval quality contrasting with the very high degree of sophistication elsewhere." (*Designer's Trade*, p245).



Falling Waters exterior and interior views

Wright died in 1959 but he and other Modernist architects had a profound influence on the design philosophy at the Russell Workshops in Broadway. In his biography of Sir Gordon, Jeremy Myerson reports the recollections of Alan Pepler, the wife of Dick Russell, that when Dick moved back to Broadway around 1930 many of his bright eyed graduate colleagues from the Architectural Association would holiday at the Russell family home in Snowhill and "would talk endlessly about such topics as the Bauhaus, Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright" (*Gordon Russell Designer of Furniture 1892-1992*, p51).

The Coventry Chair Goes to New York

I was quite unaware until recently that a significant number of the Coventry Chairs were installed in the historic Chapel of St. John at the Tower of London.



In 2017 Luke Hughes (our February speaker) designed and installed bespoke furniture as part of a renovation of the Chapel but the Coventry Chairs were kept and refurbished.



In September 2018 the Milton Resnick and Pat Passlof Foundation opened in New York. The foundation exhibits abstract work by Resnick and Passlof and Luke arranged for Coventry Chairs from the Tower to sit in the exhibition spaces as a compelling contrast to the modern aesthetic:-

(http://www.lukehughes.co.uk/about/news_story/manhattans_milton_resnick_and_pat_passlof_foundation_opens/)

Museum Shop

And last but far from least, when was the last time you visited our Museum Shop? Verity has dramatically increased the range of products stocked and these include a wide range of Christmas and other cards. You are entitled to a 10% discount so when you are choosing where to buy cards and Christmas gifts remember your Shop. You can help to sustain the Museum at the same time.

Happy Christmas and best wishes for a calm and contented 2019.

Christopher Hotten
Friends Organiser



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