

GRDM FRIENDS NEWSLETTER 11

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RECENT TRIPS AND TALKS

On Friday 22nd February 2019 Luke Hughes spoke to a packed Edinburgh Room at the Lygon Arms with over 50 Friends present together with more than 30 guests invited by the speaker. We were only one or two short of the Edinburgh Room's capacity of 90. Luke's guests included a large number of employees of Fine Furniture Design in Honeybourne, many of whom are former employees of Gordon Russell. He spoke with passion about the place of design in the digital age and remained after his talk to chat at length with members of the audience. This was a very special evening. Luke gave of his time without a fee and donated £350 to the Friends to reflect the attendance of his guests for which we are very grateful.



Luke addresses a packed Edinburgh Room



Christopher Hotten, Ray Leigh and Martin Blakeman

Luke Hughes with Jonathan Russell, Chairman of the Gordon Russell Design Museum Trust



REPORT ON VISIT TO HANDS OF WYCOMBE

20 Friends visited Hands Furniture Factory in High Wycombe on the 13th March 2019. Divided into two groups we were taken on a tour of the factory where we saw the process of furniture making from receipt of wood imported from sustainable sources all over the world to the cutting and selection of veneers, and the assembly and polishing of the furniture. Peter Head, former managing director of the company, then told us about the history of furniture making in High Wycombe, the foundation and development of William Hands and the links with Gordon Russell. Hands make bespoke furniture by hand and machine in a clear link with the methods of furniture making employed by Gordon Russell in Broadway. After our visit we made our way to the Boot Public House in the Chilterns where we enjoyed an excellent lunch before returning to Broadway.

Dates for your 2019 Diary

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 Regrettably this Trip has been cancelled. Our numbers were depleted by withdrawals to the point at which the Trip was not viable. I hope to organise a visit in the future drawing on some of the lessons I have learned from this experience.

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

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

Friday 5th April: Talk by Mary Greensted, 'Living in all the tenses' - design and craft in the work of Ernest Gimson.

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.

Places still available click here for booking form



Friday 21st June: Talk by Jeremy Broun and Andrew Lawton, 'Product or Service.'

Jeremy Broun and Andrew Lawton are furniture makers based in Bath and the Peak District respectively and they frequently give 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, who opened his own workshop in 1980, is rooted in the ideals of the Arts and Crafts and the 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.

Click here for booking form

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. In 1898 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 upon firstly, the Memorial Library designed by Ernest Gimson (and thus we will see and hear an echo of the talk given by Mary Greensted the previous 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 short distance to the Barnsley Workshops. The Barnsleys, like Gimson, were leading makers of Arts and Crafts furniture and Edward Barnsley was a pupil at Bedales prior to the Great War. In 1920 he trained with Geoffrey Lupton and worked on the construction of the Library, after whom the Hall is named. In 1923 Barnsley took over the workshops from Lupton which have continued to make bespoke furniture to the present day. Alan Peters (see above) was an apprentice at the Workshops and 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.

Click here for booking form

Gordon Russell meets Frank Lloyd Wright: A footnote

Following the piece about Frank Lloyd Wright, which appeared in the December newsletter, Ray Leigh told me that when he was studying in London in the late 1940's he was briefly tutored by the great Frank Lloyd Wright. Another extraordinary link with the Gordon Russell story.

The Pittville Pump Room

Many of you will know the story of the Pittville Pump Room in Cheltenham or will have visited to hear a concert. For those who don't or haven't....

By 1820 Cheltenham had been a spa for over a century and in the mid 1740's a well and pump were constructed and used by local people. However, in 1788 King George III visited to 'take the waters' which broadened the appeal of the spa. Local solicitor, Joseph Pitt acquired land to the north of the Town where he determined to create the spa and town he called Pittville. He employed local architect John Forbes to design the pump room and the layout of the estate including the ornamental lake.

The foundation stone was laid in 1825 amid much celebration. In true Victorian style Forbes designed a neo-classical building with a grand order of Ionic columns, topped by a dome. Building work took almost five years, delayed in part by the banking crisis of 1825 which compromised Pitt's finances. He also fell out with Forbes who resigned his position in late 1828.



By I. Smerus, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2421572

Although the waters were freely available every morning from May 1828 the formal opening did not take place until 20th July 1830, when 1200 people paid 7s 6d each for breakfast followed by a ball held beneath the Dome. Monthly or yearly subscriptions allowed members of the public to take the waters, promenaded the grounds and attend regular balls and concerts. However the Pittville Spa struggled in competition with other spas closer to the Town Centre and the lease passed through several hands. On the verge of bankruptcy and owing almost £150,000 Pitt died in 1842. In 1890 the Council acquired the building and grounds from the last lessee and retain it to this day.

Meanwhile the erstwhile architect John Forbes endured a spectacular fall. He designed and built a number of buildings in and around Pittville, including the widely admired 29-37 Pittville Lawn. He took a substantial stake in the construction of Montpelier Villas on the other side of town and by 1834 was in serious financial trouble. In a foolish and dishonest attempt to extricate himself he forged his partners' signature on a number of bills of exchange. He was discovered, tried and convicted at Gloucester Assize in April 1835 and sentenced to transportation. Widely regarded as unjust a petition was raised and gathered 4,000 signatures within 4 days. The transportation sentence was commuted to two years imprisonment. Sadly he proved not to be a model prisoner and took part in an attempted jail break!

After his release Forbes returned to return to his architectural practice but he is recorded in the 1841 census as living in very modest circumstances and he and his family do not appear in the 1851 census. Whether he died or emigrated is not known.

Today the Pump Room is populated by some fairly hideous metal chairs. It would benefit from an expensive make over by Luke Hughes or at the least a couple of hundred Coventry chairs.

Christopher Hotten Friends Organiser

