

The Friends of Dame Laura Knight Society, Malvern & Colwall Branch  
7th October 2017: a talk by David Evans on  
Harold & Laura Knight - a Partnership of Painters



Heather Whatley, welcomes our speaker  
David Evans



Gwyn Klee gives a Vote of Thanks



Harold and Laura Knight, photographed by Ella Naper, 1914, whilst in Cornwall



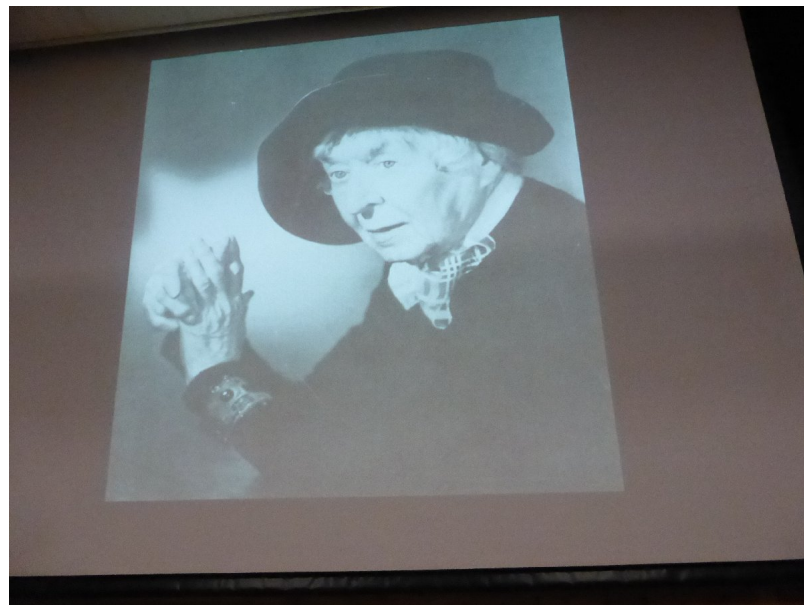
Peter Smith, Director of the Autumn in Malvern Festival and a patron of our Society



David Evans chatting to audience in the break



Our members arriving catching quick cuppa



Portrait of Laura Knight circa 1960.  
by Yousuf Karsh (1908-2002), Photographer

Last October, courtesy of the Autumn in Malvern Festival, we were privileged to hear a fascinating talk by David Evans, Patron of the Lamorna Society and DFAS Lecturer. He spoke with authority as someone who had been part of the Lamorna community as a child and remembered the Knights and their artist friends. So with the aid of a small box of books, a tiny memory stick and many personal anecdotes he delivered an absorbing talk, unfolding the long lives of two distinguished artists married for 60 years and who both became Royal Academicians.

He explored their development and careers from early student days at Nottingham School of Art to Staithes, then Cornwall, London and Malvern from the 1930's. With the examples of paintings from both artists, many of which were new to us, David Evans explored how their styles, confidence, the balance of their partnership and their creativity changed dramatically over the years.

At 17 Harold had been a star pupil at College whom the 13 year old Laura admired, whose techniques she admittedly copied. Later at Staithes where they married, they painted and used the same studios for over a decade, both exploring the lives of fishermen 'en pleine air'. When Harold won 3 scholarships to Laren, Laura too came under the influence of the Dutch painting Schools.

Their differences in style became more distinct once they moved to Cornwall in 1907, paralleling their complementary personalities: Harold quiet, introspective, sometimes depressive, very principled, whilst Laura sociable, hugely energetic, extravert, adventure seeking, risk taking. In bohemian Lamorna they shared the same fellow artists as friends who were also subjects for their work. They often painted them at the same time eg Ella Naper, 'Bloat' Munnings and Morny Birch, but later worked in studios 2 miles apart and rarely compared notes.

Harold's stand as a conscientious objector caused some estrangement from their friends and so they were motivated to move to London after the war. Here Laura blossomed with involvement in theatre, ballet, circus and gypsies whilst Harold's more solitary focus was on portraiture and interior settings.

By the 1930's both artists had achieved national fame and had become Academicians. By the time they arrived in Malvern at Barry Jackson's invitation they were both in their 50's and enjoying the 'golden age' of their careers. Sadly Harold became less well during the war and was treated in Colwall by a trusted GP, whilst Laura found new fame as a war artist and propagandist for women's work in the war effort.

After Harold's death in Colwall in 1961 Laura wrote about the endurance of relationship and her deep bereavement. She regretted that she may have 'stolen his thunder' as an artist and after initially being her rock, her inspiration he was forced somewhat to 'live in her shadow'. She always reckoned he had been the superior artist.

David Evans concluded only time would tell, both painters having achieved much in different ways. The mystery remains: To what degree can their achievements be attributed to their very long if 'prosaic' relationship?

Heather Whatley - January 2018