



Dame Laura Knight Society



# Summer Newsletter

## July 2023

A question often asked of Laura Knight is 'What is her connection with Malvern?'. She wasn't born there and she didn't die there (although her husband, Harold, did) so what brought her to Malvern? All will become clear in the article on page 2 which delves into the history of the renowned Malvern Festival.

But first, some **HOT NEWS!**



Society friend and eminent Art Historian, **Pamela Gerrish-Nunn**, is currently visiting the UK from her home in New Zealand and the society will host an informal Q and A chat with Pamela at Colwall Park Hotel, followed by tea and cake.

Date: **Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> July 2023**

Time: **2.30pm**

Place: **Colwall Park Hotel**

Please email Evie Knight if you would like to come:

[evieknight3@gmail.com](mailto:evieknight3@gmail.com)

Pamela has in depth knowledge on Laura Knight and she has done extensive research on female artists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>C so please **bring your questions with you**.

There is no charge for this event: please pay the hotel for your refreshments on the day. Tea and cake £5.95

## Other Dates for your Diary

**Monday 18<sup>th</sup> September** 2023 7pm Colwall Village Hall **AGM** followed by a short presentation by Heather Whatley and Marian Chester 'Laura Knight's use of Costume in her Paintings'. All welcome. Refreshments.

**Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> September** 2023 3pm Colwall Village Hall **Talk by David Tovey** 'Exploding the Myths: Discovering the True Story of St Ives Art. This is in association with the Autumn in Malvern Festival. Tickets £7 members/£10 non-members. Reserve in advance with Heather Whatley 07792 154436 or pay on the door.

**20<sup>th</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup> May 2024 DLKS Holiday to Newcastle and the North-East.** 4 nights/5 days. £427/person sharing a double/twin room. £522/person single occupancy. Includes return coach travel from Malvern, accommodation at Holiday Inn Gosforth Park, B,B and evening meal, an interesting art focused itinerary. Contact [evieknight3@gmail.com](mailto:evieknight3@gmail.com) if interested

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## **Malvern Summer Festival**

When discussing the life of Laura Knight it generally doesn't take long for the Malvern Summer Festival to be mentioned. Laura and Harold Knight first came to Malvern in 1930 on the invitation of the impresario Sir Barry Jackson and this began their affection for the town, its landscape and people. Laura was captivated by the Malvern Hills and continued to stay for long periods of time right up to Harold's death in Colwall in 1961.

But what of the festival itself, how did it come about and why Malvern?

Firstly, I should fully introduce the playwright George Bernard Shaw. Both he and Jackson had been close friends since 1910 when Jackson's acting group the 'Pilgrim Players' produced two of Shaw's plays in Edgbaston. However, it wasn't until 1923 in Birmingham at another of Shaw's plays that they actually met, with Shaw later recollecting saying to him that "he must be mad putting on my plays and that he would only send his wife and children to the poor house". Jackson simply replied that he wasn't married and subsequently a close friendship soon formed.

Consequently, it was when both were walking over the Malvern Hills that Jackson raised the idea of a festival to Shaw. Evidently his immediate response was that "I must write you a play", (*later to be 'The Apple Cart'*). Perhaps not so well known was that this idea was to prove a turning point for both men in their respective careers. Jackson was at the point of giving up with theatrical productions, with them being high on capital investment and providing erratic returns, but "better than owning a

steam yacht”, and for Shaw, it provided a new and international showcase for his plays. (*Of the 65 plays produced at the festival between 1929-39, 22 were by Shaw*).

Jackson’s decision to stage a drama festival was not totally impulsive, as he later claimed it was “just waiting for a certain set of conditions to come together”. These conditions were: accessibility, ample accommodation, a modern theatre and to be set in “interesting countryside”. His vision for the festival was to provide “a many sided theatrical experience” or as he later termed as ‘The Malvern Idea’. He wanted the town to become a place of pilgrimage for all serious lovers of drama, set within a ‘pastoral stage’. That said, according to Roy Limbert the manager of the Malvern Theatre, when the event was first established, neither he nor Jackson could foresee its growth into a national then international institution.

It was in August 1929 that the first Malvern Drama Festival took place, organised by Jackson and dedicated to Shaw.



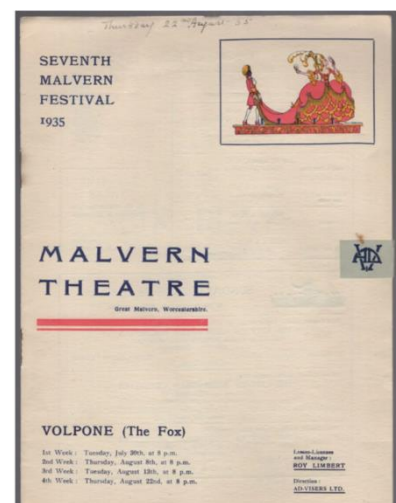
Laura Knight 2nd row from bottom on right hand side at one of Barry Jackson's Malvern house parties during the 1930s. George Bernard Shaw seated front row, central.

During the festivals there were many other activities taking place outside of the theatre. Exhibitions, including one on Shaw opened by Edward Elgar, along with a series of lectures featuring various eminent professors discussing the forthcoming performances. In 1931 Shaw’s first ‘talking picture’ “How He Lied to Her Husband” was shown, followed by a ‘Tea-Time Talks’ featuring distinguished

figures of stage, literature and the arts. Speakers included J B Priestly, Hugh Walpole, Val Gielgud and of course George Bernard Shaw.

As the festival grew it became inevitable that a series of Sunday Concerts would be introduced. Once again Malvern soon attracted the famous conductors of the time including Sir Adrian Boult and John Barbirolli. Whilst Elgar did attend some festivals and possibly even wrote for one of Shaw’s plays there is no record of him conducting at any of these concerts.

The festival soon became unusual in both its scope and atmosphere. Whilst at first focussing on the work of one man it eventually broadened its repertoire to include a wider range of quality and sometimes novel drama. A quotation by Jackson summarised the situation well: “It started off predominately as a Shaw festival, but the poor wretched audience found a week of GBS



Poster for the 1935 production of Volpone by Ben Johnson

far too much, their brains were completely fagged out”.

In researching this article, one event that stood out for me was the Lanchester Marionette Theatre called ‘Shakes versus Shav’, containing the immortal lines: “Now is the winter of our discontent. Made glorious summer by the Malvern sun”



Shakes versus Shav

Shaw stayed with the festival until 1937, which was also the last year under production by Jackson and his Birmingham Repertory Company. Evidently, he (*Jackson*) withdrew for a number of reasons, chiefly one may assume was financial, as presenting six different plays in every four week season and no matter how popular, they couldn’t generate sufficient revenue to provide a profit. It also transpired that there was a growing difference between Jackson, Limbert and the Malvern Town Council who claimed that the festival was too

dependent upon the Birmingham Rep presenting too many revivals. The council wanted to increase

and promote a policy of “newness”. Unfortunately, with Jackson and co leaving, this soon affected the stability of the festival and it seems the overall high-quality soon began to falter.

The onset of war in 1939 ended the festival before the newness policy of ‘new plays only’ had time to properly prove itself. However, many were voicing the opinion that without Jackson the festival “would most likely have died out regardless”.

Whilst it was revived in 1949, Shaw stated clearly that he was too old to continue and would not be visiting Malvern again. Furthermore, the oft cited pre-war criticism that the festival only catered for the “metropolitan elite” and that much of the local population was indirectly excluded from both the festival and activities was once again discussed. Right or wrong, post-war funding became a serious political issue as many in Malvern successfully lobbied against the festival sponsorship, opting for additional monies to be used for much needed social housing.

At its best the festival was a truly unique event and one of the earliest to instigate theatre into its surroundings and introduce a ‘festival spirit’, working both inside the theatre and out in the community. It has since been regarded as a “happy set of circumstances” being the coming together of a talented playwright with a wealthy, visionary benefactor.

Michael Johnson

References:

Laura Knight in the Malverns Heather Whatley  
Shaws Plays in Performance The Journal of Bernard Shaw Studies  
Shaw and the Malvern Festival S. Ananisarrab  
Too True to Be Good at the 1932 Malvern Festival S. Ananisarrab  
Wikipedia and various Web Sites

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It is always good to hear news from our members and below is a report from members Alan and Virginia Seddon following their recent visit to Penzance and St Ives.

In May 2019 Virginia and I joined the Dame Laura Knight Society holiday in St Ives. It was a wonderful break and opened our eyes to the magical work artists had created in the area. Hearing last year that there were two special art exhibitions being held in the locality in 2023 we immediately set about booking accommodation and hence we arrived at the end of June full of expectation.

We were not disappointed, firstly with The St. Ives Museum with its unique varied collections relating to the life and times of the town and Cornwall.

Independently run by volunteers, they were holding a 2023 Exhibition 'Discovering St. Ives'. This contained a display of incredible artwork from St. Ives in the years between 1830 and 1895 and David Tovey helped in the curation.

Artists first came to St. Ives as visitors and painted what they saw - the town, the inhabitants, the fishing industry and the spectacular coastal scenery. This struck me as being so akin to the painting that Laura and Harold Knight did when they moved to Staithes in the 1890s.

I was particularly interested in the St Ives pilchard fishing industry with its size and intensity, superbly captured on the displayed canvasses.

This exhibition was an ideal introduction to the artist colonies formed in Newlyn and Lamorna.

The following day we travelled to Penzance and visited the excellent Penlee House Gallery and Museum. The Art Gallery is set back from the busy coast road in a peaceful wooded park with plenty of parking. We arrived when the sun was shining and there was a hum of activity from their busy Orangery Cafe and within the gallery reception and shop.

Within 10 minutes we joined an excellent guided tour of their current exhibition 'Lamorna Colony Pioneers'. It started with an introduction explaining how some of the artists from St Ives moved on at the end of the 19th Century and followed John Birch who had settled in the remote Lamorna Valley, and who later adopted the name Lamorna to avoid confusion with another artist. In particular Elizabeth Forbes and John Noble Barlow brought their students to experience the valley's special charms and increasing numbers of artists were drawn to the valley to work and live. Thus the Lamorna Colony was formed which developed a distinctive rather bohemian way of life.

The style of art changed and professional models were brought in rather than using local people.

I found particularly memorable Laura Knight's painting of SPRING which she originally did during the 1st World War when art was considered to be in its heyday in Lamorna. In 1916 Laura thought that a painting showcasing the glories of spring would be theatrically moving given the gloom of the war and the material lay right at hand behind her Lamorna studio. However, with outdoor sketching banned, she was constantly in fear of being caught and our guide felt that she had to constantly nip outside to refresh her memory. I have no doubt that she also did some sneaky sketching.

The two figures were modelled by Charles and Ella Naper, but quite how they relate to the landscape has always been a puzzle, especially the fishing rod held by Charles.

The painting was well received at the Academy in 1916 but did not sell as it was too large to fit into an ordinary dwelling. Laura eventually painted out Charles and replaced him with a young boy. This version was displayed in Pittsburgh in 1920 and was the subject of a Medici print in 1931. However she decided subsequently to reinstate Charles and extend the curve of the rainbow and this is the painting proudly displayed in this exhibition.



Spring Laura Knight 1916

Irrespective of its chequered history, its size, colour and theatre are very appealing.

However the painting that stole my heart was Norman Garstin's THE RAIN IT RAINETH EVERY DAY. The title appears in two of Shakespeare's plays. This one eyed Irish painter was an early member of the Newlyn School. The painting depicts the promenade between Newlyn and Penzance on a windswept and rainy day in 1889. As it happens we had stayed at an Inn only a few yards from this very spot a few years ago when we experienced the remarkable 12 hour through train journey from Aberdeen to Penzance. The scene had little changed and is so realistic that I could feel myself standing there in the large foreground space he had created with the cool seaspray and wind in my face.

For many years this painting lay hidden in the depths of the local St John's Hall as the Town Council felt that it portrayed Penzance in a bad light and would put off tourists.

We found out after the tour that this painting is the most popular work in the Penlee House collection



The Rain it Raineth Every Day

Norman Garstin 1889

The 'Lamorna Colony Pioneers' exhibition continues at Penlee Gallery until 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023

Alan and Virginia Seddon

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## Working together with Worcester City Gallery

Hard to believe it has been 12 years since we were asked by the City Gallery to be involved with the setting up of an exhibition 'Laura Knight in the Open Air'. At the time we were a small Society, only recently founded and it seemed a very big adventure for us. Nonetheless we made a considerable contribution, giving talks, sharing guided tours, enabling equal opportunities and lending some of our valuable archive for display. And Gwyn's handmade 'Yellow Dress' was the highlight of the show! The whole affair was the first successful promotion of DLK and her work for many years. It made a lasting impact countywide and revived public appreciation of Laura's work in the Malvern Hills.



Beulah No 2 Laura Knight late 1930s

After a short time 'in the financial doldrums' (common to many small city galleries) Worcester City Gallery has had a change of fortune. It has of late been able to put on very popular exhibitions and purchase with public support, amongst others, two new LK paintings. You may have seen 'Beulah' and 'Lake Windermere' if you visited the recent British Impressionist exhibition.

Now the Gallery is forward planning a **Laura Knight Exhibition for 2024 (13<sup>th</sup> January – 29<sup>th</sup> June)** in which from the start we have been asked to contribute. (It is flattering to think how we must have grown in importance since 2008 !) Marion Chester and myself have been the Committee 'go betweens' since February having planning meetings with the 3 Curators. With funding they have already secured a range of loans including 'Storm over our Town', a coup which we missed getting for the previous exhibition. **However we understand they are still short of Cornwall and WW1 paintings.** Should you feel able to lend any paintings from your own collections they would appreciate that. In confidence do contact the Curator [Deborah.Fox@worcester.gov.uk](mailto:Deborah.Fox@worcester.gov.uk)

Besides offering the Gallery our considerable local knowledge of LK, help with talks and guided tours, we thought perhaps a video 'Walk with Laura on the Malverns' might be a possibility? We welcome your ideas of ways in which we might further help make the exhibition a success. (Do phone me on 07792 154436)

Good news that, thanks to your enthusiasm and support, 2024 looks to be another great year for Laura Knight in Worcestershire!

Heather Whatley July 2023

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## The Scarf Raffle

Sue Wolfendale is the proud winner!



All members of the Dame Laura Knight Society were automatically entered into the raffle for this silk scarf. The magic ticket was drawn by Marcia Whiting after her talk on AJ Munnings in April.

This dramatic scarf was presented to the Society by the National Art Collection Fund as a thank you for our donation towards helping fund the DLK exhibition in Milton Keynes in the Autumn of 2021. The Society also assisted in the curation of the exhibition. Fay Blanchard, the Head Curator, responded by coming to speak to us in Colwall last year.

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News of sales of Laura Knight's work January - July 2023.



1. *Clarice Cliff / Laura Knight Plates, "Circus" Prototype*

Plates were designed as prototypes for the "Circus" pattern, later painted in various colours. Provenance: Christie's, South Kensington, London, acquired in the early 1990s| Collection of Carole A. Berk, Carole A. Berk, Ltd.

Lot 644 Est: \$2,000 - \$4,000 USD **Sold: \$1,100 USD £840** [Palm Beach Modern Auctions](#) May 20, 2023 Lake Worth Beach, FL, US



## 2. "Dressing Room No.2" – Aquatint



Est: \$300 USD - \$400 USD **Sold: \$425 USD £324**

[Roland Auctions NY](#) May 10, 2023 Glen Cove, NY, US

**Description** Dame Laura Knight (English, 1877-1970) aquatint titled "Dressing Room No. 2," pencil signed, not numbered, 55 print edition. Provenance: Phyllis Lucas Gallery, NYC. [Sight: 8 3/4" H x 6 3/4" W; Overall: 12 1/5" H x 10" W]. In good condition with toning, mat burn, and staining in the border.

## 3. A Little Mother: Dame Laura Knight, RA, RWS



Est: £40,000 GBP - £60,000 GBP **Sold: £42,000 GBP** [Bonhams](#) March 29, 2023

**A Little Mother**  
signed 'Laura Knight' (lower right)  
watercolour and bodycolour  
60 x 49.5cm (23 5/8 x 19 1/2in).

### **Provenance**

Mr and Mrs George Roslington.  
With MacConnal-Mason & Son Ltd., London.  
Private collection (acquired from the above, 1999).

### **Exhibited**

London, Leicester Galleries, *Paintings and watercolours of Life and Landscape by Harold Knight and Laura Knight*, 1907, no. 8.  
London, Royal Watercolour Society, *Summer Exhibition*, 1909, no. 124.

This work is listed in the Laura Knight catalogue raisonné currently in preparation by Mr R. John Croft

FCA, as cat. no. 0255.

In *A Little Mother*, which was exhibited at The Leicester Galleries in 1907 (and also at The RWS *Summer Exhibition* in London in 1909), she has managed to capture an intimate moment, presumably between siblings, as they rest beside a path. The spontaneity and confidence of the brushstrokes in the foreground only serve to underline the serenity of the moment. The artist has used bodycolour to give weight to the clothing and add texture to the trees, bushes and grass. The viewer's eye is drawn to the loving glance of the girl by the intense red of the child's cap. The immediacy of the moment would suggest that this is a scene which Laura Knight had actually witnessed, rather than one drawn from her imagination.

*A Little Mother* is a wonderful, tender example of the artist's work from this early period and an interesting addition to the known canon of one of our most loved artists.

#### 4. *Windy landscape*

Est: £3,000 GBP - £5,000 GBP **Sold: £4,800 GBP**



Bonhams March 08, 2023 London, United Kingdom  
Dame Laura Knight, RA, RWS (British, 1877-1970)  
Windy landscape  
pastel, pen and watercolour  
signed and dated 'Laura Knight 1963' (lower right)  
49.2 x 67cm (19 3/8 x 26 3/8in).

**Provenance**  
Anon. sale, Sotheby's,

London, 4 March 1987, lot 160.  
Private collection, UK.

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Finally, we are always looking to add to the society archive - not just artefacts, letters and books, but also recording conversations and memories of people who may have met Laura Knight. Please do get in touch if you have any information you would like to share. The society website is the best way to make contact:

[www.damelauraknightsociety.co.uk](http://www.damelauraknightsociety.co.uk) **click on 'contact us' page**

Many thanks for your support for the Society – it is much appreciated.

We hope you have a wonderful summer and we look forward to welcoming you to one of our events soon. If you are not able to 'have a cup of tea with Pamela' on **Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> July** then perhaps we shall see you at the **AGM on 18<sup>th</sup> September**. This a good time to meet and greet and catch up with friends, particularly if you are a new member.

With very best wishes

Evie Knight (Chair) and the DLKS committee