

Dame Laura Knight Society



Summer Newsletter

July 2024

Following four major Dame Laura Knight exhibitions over the past 3 years, her work is enjoying renewed interest and appreciation. We are extremely fortunate to have had one of those major exhibitions on our doorstep at Worcester Art Gallery.

Many thanks to Heather Whatley, founder member of the Dame Laura Knight Society, who has contributed much to the success of the exhibition. Here is her report:

“The Show is Over”

‘Fantastic, splendid, most enjoyable, impressive, thank you and can we have more please’, were some of the comments left by visitors to the WMAG Laura Knight show ‘I Paint Today’. Sadly, this finished on 30th June after six successful months. We hope you all had time to visit and enjoy? Calculations are yet to be finalised, but the ticket office believes numbers



Detail from 'Sundown' Dame Laura Knight oil on canvas c 1940s

were a record high and visitors came from all over the county, and much wider, to view and enjoy it.

This exhibition, like that of 12 years ago, raised interest in and awareness of Laura’s (and Harold’s) work, exhibiting a range of her subjects, media and styles,

from Staithes to London and Malvern. 'Beulah' and 'Lake Windermere' were two of the Gallery's new acquisitions which they were able to showcase here, whilst many private owners, some our members, were willing to lend their paintings. This provided a unique opportunity for the public to see pieces hitherto unseen, and perhaps unlikely to be seen again.



Lake Windermere and Langdale Pikes Dame Laura Knight c 1940s

Popular Bitesize Talks and lectures gave colour and life to exhibits throughout the running of the show.

Background talks to groups about DLK and Malvern and presentations for the partially sighted using our archives '10 Objects that Tell', were contributions made by DLKS committee members. There were other talks by specialists such as Philip Serrell who conducted an anecdotal tour of his connections with DLK sales, whilst Pamela Nunn examined DLK in her prime 'At the top of her tree'. Alison Bevan looked at DLK in Cornwall, Clare Cochrane explored DLK and the Theatre and another involved DLK and the Gypsies.

For the first time our Society was asked to contribute to the exhibition: from 2023 in its planning, suggested talks, presentation and possible exhibits, our advice was actively sought.

Because of the exhibition, the DLKS has developed a strong, cooperative relationship with WMAG, its curators and all the staff. Along with our archives now being housed at the Gallery, some of which were used as exhibits, we now 'have our foot well and truly in the door'. For future exhibitions we hope this will stand us in good stead. There is rumour that possibly next year there may be another Cornish themed show and one on Barry Jackson and the Malvern Festival, whilst this autumn a Romany Exhibition is set to happen.

Huge congratulations must go to Philippa Tinsley for authorising the Exhibition, Deborah Fox as Senior Curator with Clare Cheshire for curating the whole event and all other support staff for making it go so smoothly. And at times of limited funding, to Worcestershire City and County Council, for believing in Laura Knight and that her contribution as a local artist was worthy of a show. When will the next one be please?

Heather Whatley June 24

Dame Laura Knight and the Ballet Russe

Jill Salmons Colwall Village Hall 20/4/24

Jill Salmond's richly illustrated talk on 20th April conveyed something of the numerous stylistic developments in the arts in the first two decades of the C20th, and of the mercurial Russian Sergei Diaghilev who drew together the most gifted composers, choreographers, dancers and designers and brought them first to Paris and then to London in 1911.

It was he who invited LK to work backstage at the Coliseum when the Russian Ballet returned after the War in 1919, and Laura's successful solo exhibition in 1920 was entitled 'Paintings of the Russian Ballet'. Jill focused on the studies Laura made of dancers in motion which Paul Konody published as an album, 'Twenty-one drawings of the Russian Ballet by Laura Knight' also in 1920; but she explored the subject widely in evocative paintings such as 'Carnaval', the expressive enamels she produced in collaboration with the jeweller Ella Naper and the vigorous etchings inspired by the Spanish fandango and sevillanas in the 'Three-Cornered Hat'. The world of the theatre enchanted Laura Knight but she was also drawn to the rigour and discipline of the work backstage, the transformation of the dancer and the stage itself where the illusion takes place.

Marian Chester



Dancers of the Ballet Russe Dame Laura Knight Enamel Plaque 1914

Society member, Alan Seddon, lives in Colwall and was interested in finding out more about Laura Knight's connection with the village. His research

culminated in compiling a Laura Knight walk around Colwall assisted by his wife, Virginia.

THE DAME LAURA KNIGHT WALK IN COLWALL

It was with some trepidation that I agreed to compile a walk visiting places that Laura Knight may have sketched and painted around Colwall on the lower slopes of the hills. Initial research did not reveal many painted landscapes in identifiable settings but after I put a call out for help, enough material started to emerge and the walk developed into a “walk and talk” stroll with frequent stops to view a photocopied relevant painting or sketch and listen to short extracts from Laura’s biographies and in particular her autobiographies.

It was advantageous when plotting the route that Colwall has such a fantastic web of footpaths so that stiles and steep slopes could be eliminated making the walk suitable for most people.

The response seeking places when the walk was advertised to members was immediate and within 24 hours the limit of 15 participants was achieved.

The walk was to start in Colwall Railway Station car park on the 10th April but as this date drew near the weather forecast was poor and although we set off in good heart, the rain started after 20 minutes, and we had to discontinue as we were all getting wet, cold, and the paperwork soggy. However, by then I had managed to describe the history of the village and set the scene of a vibrant and industrious Colwall after the advent of the railway and the road through Wyche Cutting. Also, the income of schools and industries during the Second World War whilst Laura and Harold stayed at the Park Hotel needed description. They would have seen Colwall in a very different light to the sleepy settlement it has now become.



Society members on the Laura Knight Walk around Colwall

Virtually all participants wanted to continue with the walk when the weather was more settled so we agreed to meet again on the 5th June.

This time the conditions were very favourable and we continued from where we had left off. We proceeded to leave the centre of the village and gently strolled into the scenic countryside passing through orchards and fields, stopping to view sketches and paintings of women at work ploughing for wartime crops, the gypsy encampment by the old brickworks, fields where Laura painted the harvesting of corn, and women sowing potatoes. Then back to the village to hear Laura’s view of the village clock and what motivated her when painting. Finally, we returned to the Park Hotel, to see her paintings and sketches from around the swimming pool and hear her views on her partnership with Harold and her happy

memories of the times they had spent in the area.

Here the walk ended with her memory of when she bade farewell to the staff at the Hotel. Harold and she had lived or made holidays together there for so many years and when she was asked, "Do you still go on painting?" her wry reply was, "Yes I still keep goin' on, goin' on."

Our walkers were very complimentary and appreciative of the experience and Clive Hooper kindly wrote his reflections of the event, an extract of which runs as follows

"It was good to get a sense of what the village might have been like during the 1940s and learn about how Laura and Harold spent that time. Laura had clearly got to know many of the villagers and was often seen out and about on her painting and sketching expeditions. It was a fascinating, informative and most enjoyable tour of the village."

Alan Seddon

DLKS links up with Colwall Village Society (CVS)

Andy Ball is the CVS newsletter editor and has written a series of excellent articles for them. He has composed a lengthy 17 page piece about Laura Knight and her connections with Colwall for their archive after realisation that it contained very little about this important historical association. Andy recently became a member of the DLK Society. He was given access to the DLKS archive and much of his piece is based on Heather Whatley's book and other books in our collection. A precis of the article is reproduced below with the kind permission of CVS.

Coincidentally, CVS is currently working on a project for **Hereford History Week** to record village life in Colwall during the Second World War and this of course was when Laura and Harold were living there and is one of the pieces being developed. This project will culminate with an event in Colwall Village Hall in **May 2025** and will give great insight to generations who have subsequently settled in the village, particularly their children, into what it was like living through that period.



DAME LAURA KNIGHT and COLWALL

Amongst the many famous people associated with Colwall is the artist Dame Laura Knight (1877-1970). Born in Long Eaton in Derbyshire, she emerged from a disadvantaged childhood to become one of the pre-eminent artists of the 20thC, becoming a Dame in 1929 and the first woman to be elected a Royal Academician in 1936.

Laura and her artist husband Harold had been introduced to the Malvern Hills by Barry Jackson, the theatre director and entrepreneur. He lived at the house called 'Black Hill' and subsequently at 'Hambleton' both in the Colwall Parish, on the Malvern Hills close to the Malvern Hills Hotel. At his invitation the Knights visited Malvern annually during the 1930s to attend the Malvern Summer Festivals.

With the onset of the Second World War, Laura and Harold temporarily moved from London to stay local – first at the British Camp Hotel (now the Malvern Hills Hotel) and then, in around 1943-44, they settled at the (Colwall) Park Hotel. The Knights socialised with eminent local people including Barry Jackson, the Cadburys from ‘Wynds Point’ and the Nicholls from ‘Winds Acre’. Harold and Laura utilized several temporary local studios in Colwall including at the (Colwall) Park Hotel (commemorated by a green plaque previously provided by the Colwall Village Society) and the garage at ‘Winds Acre’.

Laura was famous for painting images of people from all parts of society – including those from the theatre, ballet, circus and gypsy communities – previously ignored by other artists. In Colwall she produced some very fine work, notably local landscapes such as *Harvest (1939)* and studies of farming activities like ploughing and sheep shearing. She was a frequent visitor to the local gypsy encampment based at the former Colwall Brick and Tile Works and was accepted as someone who readily fitted into all walks of village life, in a natural, unassuming way, despite being famous. During the war years her national reputation was further enhanced by her incredibly realistic and detailed studies of war workers – especially women. Her work – *Ruby Loftus Screwing a Breech Ring (1943)* – was particularly popular – accurately illustrating how women could readily do work previously considered to be solely a male domain. In Colwall, Laura’s war study work included images of the work being done to test prefabricated concrete railway sleepers at the Dowsett Mackay Company facility, next to Colwall Park Racecourse. After the war, Laura spent several weeks in Germany recording the Nuremberg war trials resulting in 1946 her painting *The Dock, Nuremberg* – a brilliantly composed and executed piece of work. The poverty and destruction of post-war Germany, together with the harrowing details exposed by the trials, seems to have had an intense effect upon Laura and she felt the need to take a break part way through the proceedings to return to Harold in Colwall to recharge her batteries both mentally and physically.

The Knights developed an enduring fondness for the Malvern Hills, and for Colwall, and during the 1950s Laura divided her time between London and this area. Harold passed away in 1961 at the (Colwall) Park Hotel and Laura died in London in 1970.

In 1964 she had written nostalgically about the Malvern Hills – *I long for another glimpse of the top of the Beacon, of the sparkle of the Bristol Channel at midday. I long to hold a sketchbook and note down the ever-changing effects made by the weather on those open stretches of English countryside and perhaps, above all, I long to spend many hours with the many dear friends Harold and I had the good fortune to make amidst that great beauty.*

In October, CVS will be focusing on the life and work of Dame Laura Knight with a display and a talk.

On **Saturday 19th October between 10.00 – 12.00** we shall be hosting a display about Laura Knight and her association with Colwall at Colwall Library.

On **Monday 21st October**, local historian Heather Whatley of the Dame Laura Knight Society will be giving a talk about Laura Knight. Heather has written an excellent book – *Laura Knight in the Malverns* – which details her associations with the area. The venue is Colwall Village

Hall. Doors open 7pm. Talk starts 7.30pm. All are welcome. Admission is free to CVS members and is £2 to non-members.

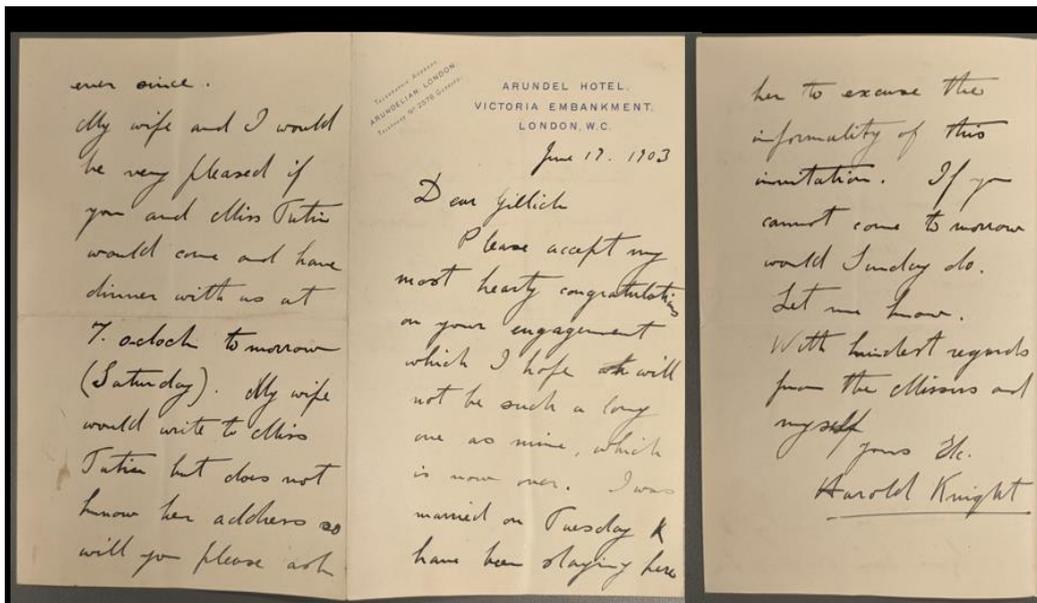
Andy Ball www.colwallvillagesociety.org.uk

An Enduring Friendship: Laura Knight and Mary Gillick

On Saturday June 29th the DLKS was delighted to welcome our speaker Philip Attwood, Hon. Research Fellow of the British Museum, to talk about the enduring friendship between Laura Knight and sculptor Mary Gillick.

The connection Philip created between Mary and Laura felt so personal - lifelong friends with many similarities yet so many differences - and this connection ran seamlessly throughout his whole talk. Of course, we were very fortunate to have Kathy Smith and her

sister (great nieces of Mary Gillick) in the audience, able to recount personal memories of their great aunt, and they brought many examples of Mary's work for the audience to handle.



Harold Knight to Ernest Gillick, 19 June 1903
Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, Gillick archive (2006.0041), box 31

Philip showed us a copy of a letter written by Harold Knight to Ernest Gillick in 1903 which indicates the

strength of the Knights' friendship with the Gillicks and gives us an insight into his pleasure at being a newly married man.

One of the highlights for the Society this year was a holiday to Northumberland. We spent a wonderful week embracing the natural beauty and the artistic interests of this border county. Member Jane Hill recounts the holiday:

Society Holiday in Northumberland

The Dame Laura Knight expedition to Newcastle and the North East took place over five days in May. Evie has strong connections with the area and this truly enhanced our trip. The itinerary had an interesting balance of visits to galleries, museums, gardens and coastal settlements and linking all were the glorious long views over the sparsely populated countryside and enormous skies of Northumberland.

It was appropriate that our first stop on the journey North was Staithes where Laura Knight worked as a young woman and grew in confidence in finding her own style of painting. Staithes is a delight with the cottages huddled above the harbour and appears hardly changed since the Staithes Artists Colony worked there around the turn of the twentieth century. We were reminded though by the excellent gallery guides of the tough lives of the fisherfolk and the sheer grind of their daily existence that the painters were attempting to capture 125 years ago. We heard too about the iconic Staithes bonnets worn at all times by the fisherwives and which were designed to protect their heads when carrying the heavy wooden crates of fresh fish. Some of us climbed the winding steps to Ebor House where Laura lived, with amazing views over the harbour. Others found the visit to her studio was magical. Many enjoyed ice creams in the sunshine!



View over Staithes



Water feature in Serpent Gardens, Alnwick

Alnwick Gardens is described as one of the world's most ambitious new gardens. Our guides were enthusiastic and informative and introduced us to the wonderful combination of spaces, themes and quirkiness. The majestic water cascade was in full flow and the garden rooms with metallic structures were intriguing. The cherry orchard with its swing seats was a haven of tranquillity but I couldn't take my eyes from the waist high flowing waves of beech hedges. We returned to our hotel via the Hauxley Nature Reserve. This is a haven for wildlife and was transformed 40 years ago from an open cast mine. Our guide was inspirational and we had

the opportunity to view a host of seabirds from a hide. Someone spotted a bird to add to the dozens already recorded that day but sadly the local red squirrels were in hiding.

The Laing Gallery in Newcastle enabled us to have an overview of the art and culture of the North East over the last couple of hundred years. We began our visit with a talk about

Laura's etchings and drawings that had been put on display for us. Paintings in the gallery included work by Harold and Laura Knight. Laura's 'The Beach' was mesmerising with its impressionist colours and brushstrokes. Ernest Proctor's strange and powerful portrait of 'The Family' was intriguing. The Laing also displays some of the 'Circus' dinner service designed by Laura, and works by the Staithes and Cullercoats Colony Artists.

We enjoyed the added bonus of the National Gallery's 200th birthday celebrations. JMW Turner's 'The Fighting Temeraire', one of the 12 National Treasures, was the centrepiece of an ambitious and moving exhibition, referencing the Industrial Revolution and the passing of the age of the sailing ships.

Our Newcastle day was extremely wet and just a few of us ventured out to view the landmark bridges over the Tyne and the Baltic Centre.

Function Room, Laing Gallery. Store items on display for the DLKS



We visited 3 contrasting places on our last full day. The Woodhorn Museum stands on the site of a former coal mine that owned the largest pit village in the world. Various buildings such as the 2 winding houses are preserved and there is a moving outdoor sculpture made up of 98 birds fashioned from moulded miners' gloves - each representing a life lost at the colliery.

The museum houses the paintings of the Ashington Group, known as The Pitmen Painters, and showcases what daily life was like for miners around Ashington in the 1930s. The group emerged from a WEA course for men with little experience of anything artistic as many of these miners had started work as young teenagers.

Some of us found a room devoted to Oliver Kilbourn's work, a vibrant, poignant display illustrating his 50 years working in various jobs underground. The Pitmen Painters created a unique record of miners' lives above and below ground.

We moved on to Newbiggin-by-the-Sea for lunch in the Maritime Centre and a brisk walk along the Promenade and view of Sean Henry's 5 metre high couple-statue that has stood for nearly 20 years out at sea.



Group photograph

The Artists' Colony in Cullercoats was set up in the 1820s by artists from Newcastle attracted by the breathtaking coastline and the character of the fishermen and fisherwives - an inspiring place to live and work. Probably the most famous name associated with the Colony is the American Winslow Homer who spent a year in 1881 in Cullercoats painting the fisherfolk in watercolour. Our walking tours of the town were most informative and the guides were typical of the warmth and enthusiasm we found in the North East.

We broke our journey south in Whitby at the Pannett Gallery, described as a little gem, high above the town and overlooking the ruins of the Abbey. The gallery holds works by the Staithes artists, including domestic interiors painted by Laura. In fact we were able to view up close a new acquisition by Laura beautifully executed of a woman in a Staithes bonnet. There was also a full-face portrait of Laura as a young woman by Harold Knight. Further works included watercolours by George Wetherby and work by George Soper and his daughters Eva and Eileen. Eileen's work included stunning illustrations for children's books and detailed animal drawings.

Next time we must visit the adjoining fascinating museum. That, actually, sums up a good holiday - there was more to see and explore everywhere we went!

Everyone has commented on the warm friendliness of our group, which helped make the week so enjoyable. On behalf of us all, thank you to Evie and Heather for your thoughtful organisation and planning.

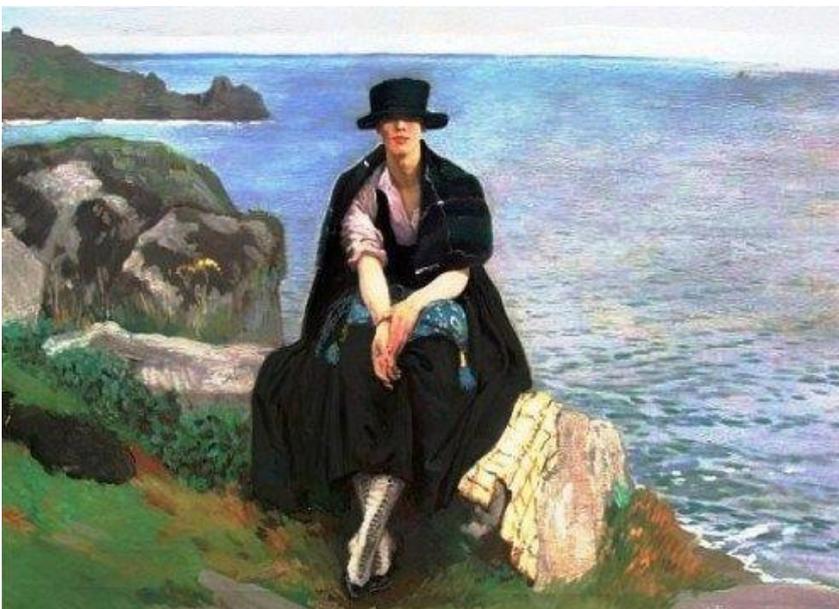
We were well looked after in our Holiday Inn, shaking down well with parties of Roman Catholic Priests and Bikers and even nesting oystercatchers.

Special thanks must go to our coach driver Ian who transported us everywhere so smoothly and to his wife Lore who was so attentive and caring.

I would also like to thank Sue, Rosemary, Helen and Jackie who contributed their personal memories of the week.

Jane

DLK and HK Auction News Dec 23 - July 24



[Lot 65: DAME LAURA KNIGHT, My Lady of the Rocks oil on canvas 24 x 36 inches](#)

[by Christie's](#) December 14, 2023

Est USD 300,000 – 500,000

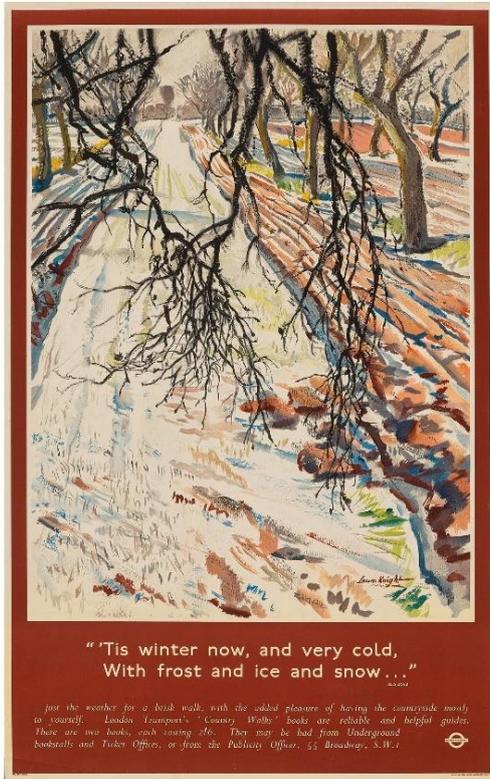
Passed

[Lot 24 DAME LAURA KNIGHT](#)

TIS WINTER NOW, 1957
lithographic poster, condition A-; not backed

[by Lyon & Turnbull](#) April 24, 2024

Sold:GBP 380



24th January 2024 Lays Auctioneers
Dame Laura Knight
Dancers of the Ballet Russes
Limoges enamel plaque, 5.3 x 4.9cm
SOLD £8,000



Dame Laura Knight, RA, RWS
(British, 1877-1970)
A study of Pay Up and his groom, 1936
signed 'Laura Knight' (on a detached
section of the canvas laid down to the
backboard)
oil on canvas
44.5 x 51.5cm (17 1/2 x 20 1/4in).

[Lot 23: Dame Laura Knight, RA, A study
of Pay Up and his groom, 1936](#)
[by Bonhams](#) March 13, 2024
Sold:GBP 6,000



[Lot 100: DAME LAURA KNIGHT -
ROLLING HILLS Watercolour
and charcoal](#)
[by Dreweatts 1759 Fine Sales](#)

March 13, 2024 Sold:
GBP 1,600

Forthcoming DLKS Events

- **Monday 16th Sept.** Colwall Village Hall Jean Simon Room 7pm AGM followed by short talk by Society member
- **Saturday 5th October** 3pm Colwall Village Hall Talk by Alison Bevan Director of RWA 'Harold Harvey – Painter of Cornwall' In association with Autumn in Malvern Festival
- **Saturday 19th October** 10 – 12 noon Display Colwall Library about Laura Knight and her associations with Colwall by Colwall Village Society
- **Monday 21st October** Colwall Village Hall 7pm Talk by Heather Whatley for Colwall Village Society (all welcome) about Laura Knight

The committee is planning a programme of events for 24-25 and this information will be available soon.

We thank you all for your support for the Dame Laura Knight Society and look forward to meeting you at one of our events soon.

Have a wonderful summer!

Very best wishes

Evie Knight (Chair) and the DLKS Committee