



Dame Laura Knight Society



## Winter Newsletter

December 2024

At the end of a particularly busy and exciting year for the Society, we would like to send you our very best Christmas greetings and to bring you up-to-date with Society news.

At the AGM in September, we said 'Au revoir but not goodbye' to Heather Whatley, founder member of the Society in 2008, as she stood down from the committee. More about Heather's latest plans in her article on p.8 but first here are important dates for your diary for 2025:

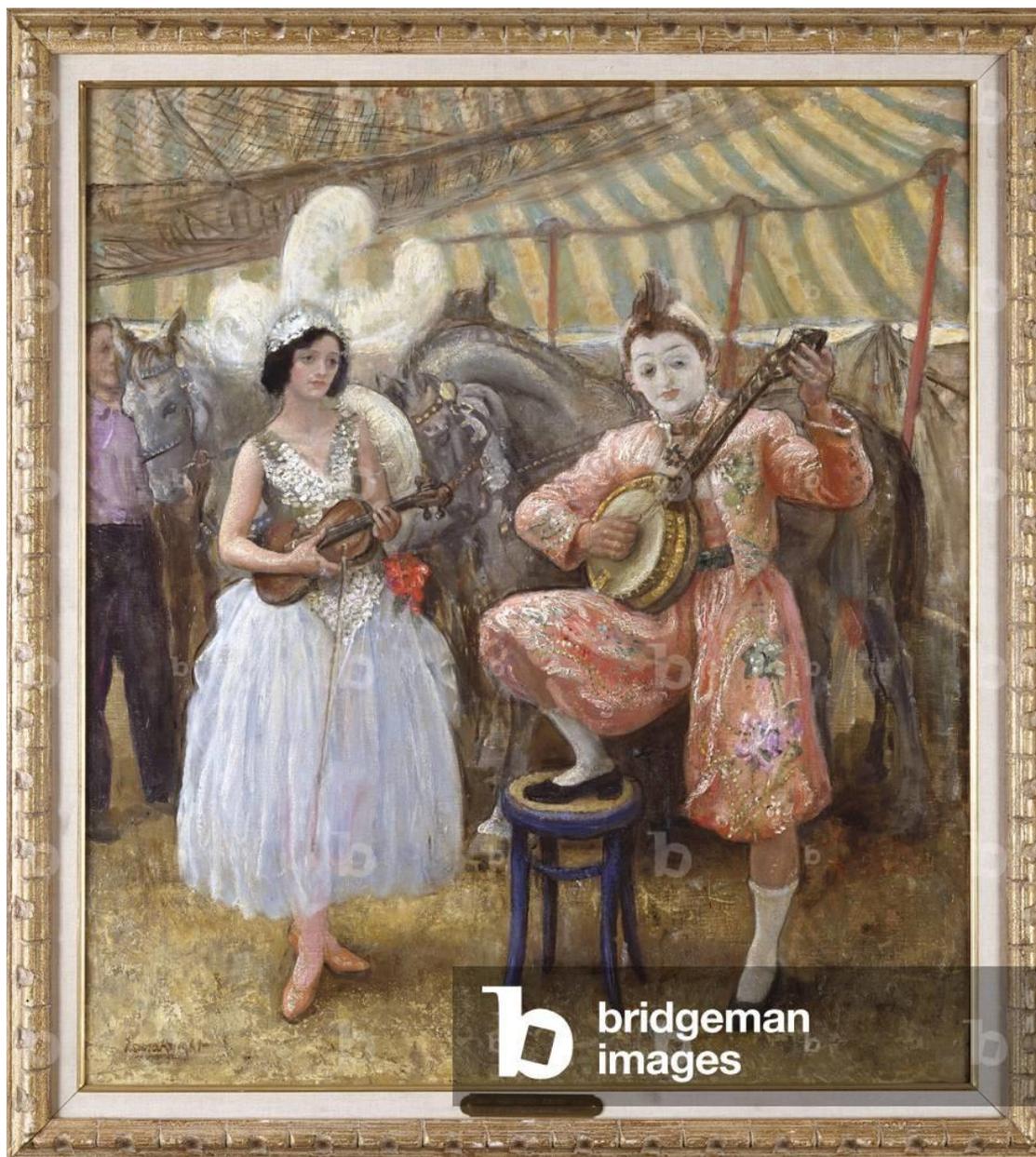
**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> March** 2025 3pm Colwall Village Hall Talk by Prof. Clare Cochrane 'Laura Knight and the Theatre'.

**Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> April** 2025 Visit to the Red House Glass Cone and Stourbridge Glass Museum. What is Laura Knight's connection with Stourbridge Glass Museum? All will be revealed when details are sent out in January!

More planning is in the pipeline for a talk in May and a film in Colwall Village Hall in collaboration with Colwall Flicks. Details to follow.

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It is well known that Laura Knight was a prolific letter writer, and we are fortunate to have examples of her correspondence in our archive. Alan and Virginia Seddon, our committee Archive Administrators, have researched a **letter written by Laura in December 1967**, three years before she died, to Mr Sternberg who purchased her painting 'Tuning up in the Stable Tent'.



Tuning up in the Stable Tent Oil on canvas Laura Knight c.1930 Courtesy of Bridgeman Images

Over to Alan Seddon for his research on the letter:

Letter to

Maurice Sternberg Esq. 149 West Kinzie Street, Chicago, Illinois

In sorting out the archive files into periods of Laura's life, I noticed this remarkable letter. This correspondence was written by her when she was aged 90. It reinforced her mantra 'to keep on going on' and is revealing of her still

strong mind and work ethic at that ripe old age. I think writings dashed off, as this obviously was, reveal a lot about the person.

This letter discloses her desire for appreciation, her perseverance and her combative approach to wanting proper value for the sale of her art works. No wonder she became a celebrity at a time before women's work was properly recognised.

The little stories embedded in the narrative are memories she treasured of her connection with the circus. Below is Laura's transcribed letter:

11 December 1967

16 Langford Place, St Johns Wood, London NW8 tel Mai 4098

Dear Mr Sternberg,

Your exquisite gifts to Miss Worth and me arrived a few hours ago. She, I am sure, is writing to you herself. We are both thrilled to have so lovely a perfume.

My very dear new friend I find it hard to fully express my gratitude to you for your great generosity both of thought for me as an artist and in action.

During those last few hours you spent in my studio, you made history for me. Never in my whole life has anybody so fully and graciously expressed his appreciation of what I try to do in pencil and paint. I can never forget your words that spur me on to take brush in hand again in the hope of earning your praise.

I have to admit I regret parting with "TUNING UP IN THE STABLE TENT" which I believe to be one of the best pictures of circus life I ever painted.

It had been shelved for many years in my studio, after being brought out to the easel again and again in the hope of being made worthy of so beautiful and intimate a subject.

It might interest you to know that it was actually first painted while I was on tour with Carmo's Circus. Mr Carmo had previously made fame as an illusionist, even making "Mary" the full grown elephant I painted so much, vanish from the stage. He was a great man in his own art, (Australian by birth) but unfortunately a bad businessman. His magnificent circus I travelled with eventually met with tragic financial disaster. This was a great grief to all his artistes as well as to myself, to whom he gave all help possible.

I remember one instance when on tour in the provinces and there was not enough money in the House to buy cigarettes for the Refreshment Stall, as well as

our arrival at Blackpool, where enthusiasm was so enormous, too much money came into the Pay Tent to hold, which from hour to hour had to be taken to the Bank.

During this period, I exhibited the start of "TUNING-UP" at the Royal Academy, but dissatisfied, never exhibited again until recently at the Upper Grosvenor Gallery.

While on show at the R.A., a man wrote offering thirty pounds for it, which I refused to accept. He then wrote again saying:

"you will live to regret this offer."

I hope you had a good journey home and found all well and happiness there.

Again, I give you thanks.

Most sincerely yours,

Laura Knight

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The annual art lecture in association with the Autumn in Malvern Festival is always a highlight in the Society's calendar and this year, on 5<sup>th</sup> October, we were delighted to welcome back Alison Bevan who, until very recently, was Director of the Royal West of England Academy.

Alison discussed the life and work of Harold Harvey, friend of the Knights, and drew connections between their art.



*Alison Bevan Photo  
courtesy of Vince Bevan*

Here is a review by member Gwyn Klee:

## **Harold Harvey: Painter of Cornwall**

What a pleasure it was to welcome, once again, Alison Bevan, B.E.M., lecturer and consultant in Art, particularly of the Cornish Schools. The Dame Laura Knight Society know of her from her talks, given to the Society in earlier years, their visits to Penlee Gallery, where she was curator and to the R.W.A. in Bristol, where, during her Directorship there, rejuvenated the Gallery and made it an inspiring place to enjoy. This was her fourth visit to Malvern when, once again, she held the audience in thrall by her

charismatic telling of the life and times of Harold Harvey, a painter of the Newlyn School.

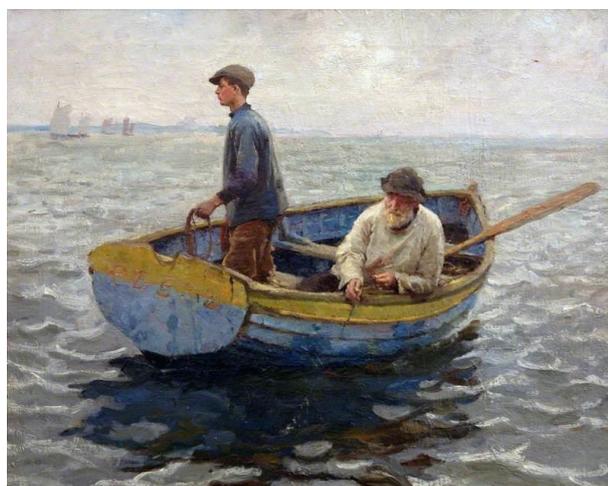


*A Trial of Strength* Harold Harvey c.1909

Harold was ‘a true Cornish man’ born in 1874 in Penzance of working parents. He trained at the Penzance School of Arts under the tutelage of Norman Garstin and spent two years at the Academie Francais in Paris. He married Gertrude Boddinar in 1911.

In spite of his self-effacing attitude, Harold was quickly

absorbed into the Newlyn milieu and became a welcome member of their set at a time when they were trying an innovative style, the square brush technique, brought back from France by Stanhope Forbes. This allowed a marked progress from the representational. It inspired many of the group, particularly Harvey, with his rural realism in which he portrayed working men and women engaged with their daily toil: fishing, landing and gutting the catch, seaweed gathering and driving horses carting their loads. Many of these paintings involved his rendering of the seascape, allowing bolder strokes with the brush. The Newlyn School and the Lamorna Cove set were a close knit group. They shared the landscape and the seascape, the models – especially those from London, more sophisticated than the local ones. How could any painter resist those rocky cliffs: they occur in many of the group’s paintings. The talk was illustrated by almost identical portrayals of subject, pose and place. Each artist feeding from



*In the Whiting Ground* Harold Harvey c.1900

the other, sharing techniques. Harvey's paintings were shown alongside Laura Knight's – the woman facing out to sea, the children playing on the beach, an extended landscape with figures and the use of gypsies as a colourful life to capture. We were shown an image from 1909 – The Beach – showing the influence of Harold Knight.

From around 1920 Harvey brought his own approach to the figurative rendering of the human figure, a cartoon approach, blocking in the colour to give a sculptural effect. One of his more famous paintings – The Donkey Meadow – shows women stooping together gathering anemones, a Cornish export to the London flower markets.



*Little Maiden* Harold Harvey 1934



*The Donkey Meadow* Harold Harvey 1924

In the early 30s Harvey painted a series portraying the interior of his home in Penzance, showing the rooms with his wife – a self-taught artist of some renown who often modelled for her husband and for the rest of the School – and their friends in the kitchen or gathered around the table. These were charming images of the domestic life of Harvey whose

expertise conjured the detail and stillness of a Vermeer.

In 1932 he painted several views of Longships Lighthouse showing his mastering of the seascapes and in August 1939 two paintings of Penzance from his house overlooking the town.

He died in 1941. Our speaker quoted from an edition of *The Studio*, marking his eulogy, which recognised 'his simplicity, the non-essential pared away, a true and sincere man'.

Gwyn Klee



*In my Kitchen* Harold Harvey 1923

## Heather Whatley says 'au revoir', not goodbye!

After 18 years since establishing the Dame Laura Knight Society Heather decided now the time had come to 'take a back seat', leaving the second generation of keen Society Committee members to 'carry on the good work'. With confidence she said she was leaving behind a thriving Society under the strong leadership of Evie Knight with over 90 members, now from all over the country.

"Stepping down" at the AGM in Sept Heather looked back fondly at the chance beginnings of the group in 2008, in the very same hall in Colwall. She recalled writing her first article about DLK for a local magazine triggered by the sale of 'Storm over our Town' at Philip Serrell's in 2006 (reaching a record price £30,000!) At the time she researched an artist she had known little about before and whose strong Malvern connections she was surprised to discover. Somehow this magazine was read by R John Croft, Laura's great nephew and Chair of her Estate. He subsequently contacted Heather and visited Malvern to suggest she might coordinate the setting up of a Friends of DLK group. This he intended to revive awareness and promote the work of Dame Laura in this area, where her 30 year residence had indeed been almost forgotten. The following year at Colwall

Village Hall John Croft gave a free lecture about DLK. It was attended by a large crowd including David Prentice, Peter Smith, Nick Neve, Marion Percy, Graham Cowan, John Bishop and many DFAS supporters - all the cognoscenti of Malvern!! Following his appeal a core group of enthusiasts attended a planning meeting and the Society was officially formed in 2008.

This was a very busy, creative time and rewarding time and it soon became clear how keen local people were to support events we offered. The pattern of talks, visits, walks, exhibitions, social events and holidays (Bespoke Art Tours !!) was established and over the years strong connections were made with many art galleries and some exceptional speakers. Pamela Nunn, Alison Bevan, Tim Wilcox, David Tovey, Kenneth McConchie, Elizabeth Knowles, Alice Strickland are amongst these.

Importantly in the early days we realised that there were still people in the area who had had contact with DLK. So, we began recording their memories, building up, along with books, cuttings and other local reference material, a considerable archive. Heather thanked and congratulated the past and present Society archivists who catalogued and stored data, preparing for the current permanent location of the collection at Worcester Museum and Art Gallery. This is now accessible for researchers and members. Our state-of-the-art website now advertises our aims, purpose and events nationally, managed by Michael Johnson who is able to respond to requests about DLK as well as promoting her work and our achievements.

As a 'retiree' Heather was proud to boast there were few people locally now who did not know Laura Knight had lived here, had loved the landscape and its people, aware she had painted some of her best landscapes around the Hills. Over the years members of the group have built up a wide body of knowledge about Laura's work as well as that of Harold, and their contemporaries. Strong links had been made with other cultural Societies particularly the Lamorna Society and the Autumn in Malvern Festival. Our recent full cooperation and consultation with Worcester Museum and Art Gallery in the setting up of the 'DLK : I Paint Today' Exhibition demonstrated the respect which the Society has achieved.

Heather thanked the Membership for joining her in enjoying 2 decades of discovery. It had been a challenging and exciting time, making connections and networking with all aspects of the art world. And she was delighted members had so enthusiastically bought her book to which many had contributed!

Looking to the future Heather felt the Society would face new challenges: fresh interpretation of the work of DLK and her contemporaries, new research, new speakers, presentations with new angles and approaches, appealing to wider audiences especially a younger generation. Personally, she hoped she would have more time for research and welcomed ideas for topics - possibly the hop pickers of Callow End or the gypsies of Colwall, giving more presentations and devoting more time to establish a long overdue commemoration of DLK in Malvern?



*Heather Whatley receiving a thank you gift from Marian Chester at the Society AGM – one of Marian's own artworks*

Meanwhile she wished the Society every success, waving 'cheerio' just for now!!

Heather Whatley

Nov 2024

*Ed. Heather, everyone in the Society is enormously grateful for all you have done to promote the work of Dame Laura Knight. Huge thanks. We are delighted you are still 'on board' leading the project on a Laura Knight memorial in Malvern.*

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## **DLKS Project – a tribute to Laura Knight in Malvern**

As mentioned above, Heather is involved in this major new project for the Society. At the moment there is lots of discussion on what form the

tribute/memorial should take, where it should be located, size, material and much more, not least the funding needed.

Please do **let us have your ideas** – soonest – as this is the time to speak up, before decisions are made.

Email Heather directly on [hwhatley90@gmail.com](mailto:hwhatley90@gmail.com)

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### DLKS Website News

You will all be familiar with the Society website on [www.damelaurnightsociety.com](http://www.damelaurnightsociety.com) but did you know that it had 5,597 views in 2024 and increase of 78% from the number of views in 2023 of 3,139. Furthermore, whilst 4,713 views were from the UK, there were views from 48 countries around the world including Singapore, Lebanon, Thailand and Costa Rica! Amazing!

Many thanks to member Michael Johnson for editing the website and for dealing with the enquiries.

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### A selection of DLK work sold at auction in the last 6 months

1. [Dreweatts 1759 Fine Sales](#) Newbury, United Kingdom November 21, 2024

Lot 108: *DAME LAURA KNIGHT (BRITISH, 1877-1970)*; **FOUR CLARICE CLIFF 'CIRCUS' PLATES; DESIGNED 1934**



Est: £1,000 GBP - £2,000 GBP

**Sold: £2,400 GBP**

2 [Dreweatts 1759 Fine Sales](#) Newbury, United Kingdom October 23, 2024

Lot 137: **LAURA KNIGHT, TWO ROMANY LASSES ON ASCOT HEATH**



Est: £40,000 GBP - £60,000 GBP

**Passed**

3. [Kingham's Auctioneers](#) Moreton-in-Marsh, United Kingdom July 25, 2024

Lot 266: *Dame Laura Knight R.A 'Hop Picking'*,

*Laura Knight's love for the countryside and people of Worcestershire led her to create a series of works depicting the gypsy hop pickers at work in the fields at Callow End, between Malvern and Worcester, which she started in 1939, just at the outbreak of WWII.*



Est: £15,000 GBP - £20,000 GBP

**Sold: £55,000 GBP**

**Worcester Art Gallery placed a bid for this painting but was pipped at the post by a private collector. A great pity.**



4. [Roseberys](#) West Norwood, United Kingdom September 04, 2024

Lot 15: *Dame Laura Knight DBE RA RWS, Footlights, 1923 Aquatint print, Paris* Est: £800 GBP - £1,200 GBP  
**Sold: £700 GBP**



5. [Sworders](#) Stansted  
Mountfitchet, United Kingdom  
October 02, 2024

Lot 293: ▲ *Dame Laura Knight*  
*RA RWS* **At the circus**  
1930 *Pastel*

Est: £3,000 GBP - £5,000 GBP  
**Sold:** £5,500 GBP

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And finally, a view most of you will be familiar with – the beautiful Malvern Hills which Laura loved and painted many times in all kinds of weather.

We hope you have a wonderful Christmas with family and friends and wish you good health and happiness in the New Year.

With very best wishes

Evie Knight Chair and the DLKS Committee



Malvern Hills Oil on canvas Laura Knight c.1940