



NEWSLETTER

Friends of Harlow SCULPTURE COLLECTION

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Changes and Challenges

It is clear from recent statements by the Council, and the Conference held at the Study Centre where interested parties were asked to bid for Harlow's most precious amenities, that we cannot assume that the Gallery will be available to us in its present form for ever. With the news that Sam Clark will be moving on, the possibility of there being no one responsible for the Arts on the Council is very real. Other options are being considered. In the meantime we must mount a defence of this most precious space, which not only houses Sir Frederick Gibberd's water colour collection, but is one of the best areas for displaying sculpture and other works in the South East. Under the guidance of Arts officers Nick Bullions, Kelly Lean and Sam an astonishing variety of Summer Exhibitions and other shows have been mounted. The Friends are entitled to claim a good part of the credit for Harlow's designation as 'Sculpture Town', which has resulted in an improvement in the Town's public image. This space will not be given up without a fight.

Barbara Burge

PS At a meeting of Harlow Arts Strategy on 31st August it was minuted that the success of the John Mills Exhibition is largely due to the Friends' interactive invigilation, which makes the works more accessible to the visitor retrospective since 1971.



'Astonishing, marvellous, stunning, and to meet the artist as well – what a treat!' (From the visitor's book).

This is typical of reactions to the John Mills exhibition which I have been privileged to mount at the Gibberd Gallery.

More than 1600 people have so far seen the exhibition - making it the most popular show yet to be staged at the Harlow Council-run venue. The retrospective, which opened in June this year, consists of more than 120 sculptures, sketches and pieces of preparatory work, and covers the artist's career from 1949 to the present day. It is the first major John W Mills retrospective since 1971.

The London-born artist is nationally known for works like *The Women of World War II*, a 23-ton sculpture adjoining the Cenotaph in Whitehall, and the design he produced for the Royal Mint for a 50p coin to commemorate the 1944 D-Day landings. His work also covers contemporary popular culture - the Harlow show features images of Queen guitarist Brian May playing on the roof of Buckingham Palace as part of the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2002.

John has a long-established connection with Harlow, both as a former member of the Harlow Art Trust and due to the fact that two of his pieces already form part of the town's sculpture collection. They are *Buster Keaton* (1981-82), which stands inside Harlow Playhouse, and *Chinese Dynamic* (1992), inspired by images of the Tang horse, which can be seen outside Tesco in Church Langley. He has been generous with his time, speaking to invigilators before the exhibition opened, and doing two tours of the show for the general public. The last talk will be on September 22nd at 6.30. While admission is free, booking is advisable.

The Friends of Harlow Sculpture Collection again have played a key role in the exhibition, providing invaluable gallery invigilation and group tours which have been hugely popular.

The exhibition is my final show, as I will be leaving Harlow Council in October, having been offered the opportunity to join an international company based in London, but it is with much sadness that I leave the Gibberd Gallery. I have been privileged to manage it for the last two years and in that time have worked with a wide variety of people across Harlow, all of whom have a great passion for the arts and who provide immense support. Thank you to everyone who has helped make the Gallery successful and I very much hope that this will continue into the future.

Sam Clark

School Children and Harlow Sculpture

At the beginning of the school year, in September 2010, I joined a group of children in the first of our walks to look at local sculpture.

I had been approached by the Head Teacher of Milwards School and Nursery to explore the possibility of after-school walks, to improve fitness for those going on a school trip to Edinburgh. Looking at the Sculpture Map we came up with a series of walks covering several sculptures.

Our first outing was local – I met this intrepid band of children, teachers, teaching assistants and parents, who had walked nearly the full length of Southern Way to the mound at Staple Tye topped by the shiny 'Echo' by Antonas Bradzys. This was a good place to start – it even outshines the big 'M' sign. The children were very interested – what was it made of, how was it made, what did it represent? And came up with their own ideas – lots of language opportunities here!

Upcoming Event

Coachtrip to see the newly opened Firstsite Gallery in Colchester, designed by Rafael Vinoly, on Tuesday 18th October. Pickups at GPCA and The Wayre 9.00 am return 4 -4.30 pm. £13 members £15 non members. Contact Lin on 01279 415007 to book places.

After that we walked briskly along the cycle track to see Edwina Chaston's 'Letting Go'. They were very calm and quiet there, thinking about the open hand and why it was called Letting Go. They thought it was in an appropriate place and liked it a lot.

A few weeks later we walked to the Town Centre and focused on abstract sculptures Trigon, Vertex, High Flying and Upright Motif. They wanted to see and feel the sculptures, and to know their histories.

Our next meeting in dark and dismal November started in Market Square with Meat Porters – we were focusing on figurative sculpture. They agreed that the piece was in a suitable spot, though they didn't really like it. F E McWilliams' Portrait Figure, Buster Keaton by John Mills and Henry Moore's Family Group all sparked off interest and discussion, and follow-up work at school. They remembered what they had seen for some time later.

In January we stayed local again and looked for the Dolmens in Hollyfield. We found two carved stones remaining from a much larger sculpture created in the Water Gardens for an Arts Festival in 1965, On the way back the children discovered a 'natural' sculpture – a fallen tree trunk, and then found the stone TV in the Barbara Castle Health Centre. They knew it was old by the knobs! The Robert Koenig Grizedale Panel was also admired.

In February and March we saw well heads in the Water Gardens, Hepworth's Contrapuntal Forms and Solo Flight (they guessed it was by Antonas Bradzys) which they could explore internally and interact with. They thought it a good icon for the town.

Our last exploration started at Tesco's with the Chinese-inspired Dynamic Horse by John Mills. Then we explored New Hall and 'Telly Tubbies Hill', then another hollow sculpture – Methuselah by Nick Turvey, and the latest addition, Sophrosyne – smooth and shiny in contrast.

Now I'm looking forward to our last meeting in the Gibberd Garden – where Harlow Sculpture Town began.

Jenny Lushington

(Jenny will briefly cover the trip to the Garden in our next issue.)

Contrapuntal Forms

If you were a student of architecture in 1951 the one thing you had to do in the Summer vacation was to visit the Festival of Britain. So I drove down from Manchester in my 1931 Morris 8 coupe and became one of the eight million visitors to experience the delights of the South Bank exhibition site.

It was the first time since the war that modern buildings could be seen, not just singly, but as a group of pavilions with the spaces between them included in the overall design and furnished with specially commissioned sculpture, fountains, paving, seating, planting and lighting. This was the art of 'townscape' which the Architectural Review had been writing about since 1949.

The site beside the Thames was opened up as a riverside promenade for the first time. There was a holiday atmosphere and everybody seemed to enjoy being there. Breaking with tradition, the sculpture no longer commemorated kings, queens or generals. The Barbara Hepworth piece, as can be seen by my photograph, stood on a high plinth, dominating the central space between the huge Dome of Discovery and the Transport Pavilion where dancing took place and the closing ceremony was held. It was an abstract work and, very unusually for the time, by a woman. It was also unusual for being carved in its blue limestone by the hand of the artist, rather than by assistants.

At the end of the Festival the sculptures, over twenty of them, were distributed, and Hepworth's Contrapuntal Forms came to Harlow where it resides in Glebelands. At the time the Architectural Review was promoting the use of sculpture in the urban landscape but, as a recent book on the '51 Festival points out, 'With the exception of Harlow New Town, which seems to have embraced this idea enthusiastically, most local councils just thought of street furniture as sculpture...' Harlow, however, with the foundation of the Art Trust, began its sculpture collection which continues to this day.

Sadly, the art of townscape seems to have died with the demise of the Development Corporation, for developers have little interest in the spaces between buildings – which do not generate income. Therefore the public spaces in Harlow have followed the sequence of neglect, decay and eventual disappearance under commercial pressures.

This is tragic, for Harlow is not only the inheritor of the Hepworth sculpture but also of the Festival's modern art of townscape. Perhaps this year of Festival commemoration, with the start of the Market Square rehabilitation, might see the beginnings of its rebirth?

John Graham



Our sculpture competition

Our sculpture competition for 15-20 year-olds was successful due to the enthusiastic entries from first and second year students at Harlow College. Thirty designs and 3D models were submitted and displayed at the Gatehouse Gallery in the town centre, where the committee shortlisted and voted on three finalists.

The winners and their classes were invited to the Gibberd Gallery on 9th June and congratulated. The presentation was reported in Harlow Scene. A prize of £100 went to Gavin Bond for his 3 piece sculpture designed for the grassed area outside the Playhouse and Harvey Centre. Runner-up cheques of £25 were awarded to Amy Rowe and Mitchell Seaman for their imaginative ideas for the shopping areas. The Friends have agreed to sponsor future designs for sculpture from the College next year.

Gavin has since been given a grant from Essex's Aim Higher Fund to attend a 3D sculpture workshop at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge this summer.

John Piper at the Southbank

To mark the 60th anniversary of the Festival of Britain, the Southbank Centre programme has been bursting at the seams this summer with special events and exhibitions, including the unveiling of the recently restored John Piper mural The Englishman's Home.

The piece has a special significance for us all as it was one of the works acquired by Harlow after the Festival, alongside Barbara Hepworth's Contrapuntal Forms and 2 other large murals. From the early sixties the mural was displayed in the main hall at the old Harlow College site. Its installation was overseen by John Piper, and involved removing a small section to make way for the entrance to the hall. The mural remained at the College until 1992 when the building was demolished and the College relocated to the Velizy Avenue site. In 2009 the Harlow Art Trust reluctantly sold the piece after exhausting all other possibilities for public display in Harlow. (It is huge – 50 ft long, 16ft high and made up of 42 large panels.)

This has been the first outing for the newly restored mural, and it does not disappoint. For those of you who managed to get to see it, I'm sure you will agree it looked stunning!

Lin Hilton



Kelly Lean



Membership costs £8 for adults, £5 for unwaged/students and £10 organisations
If you wish to join the Friends of Harlow Sculpture Collection please complete this form

Please make cheques payable to 'Friends of Harlow sculpture Collection' and return with the completed form to: Karen Bishop, 78 Bynghams, Harlow, Essex CM19 5NT

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