

ART and SOUL and a 50th Anniversary by Sally Tyas

A short history of the National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies – NADFAS

In the 1960s 'ART' was on the back burner. Two World Wars had left country houses neglected and facing demolition, churches unaware of what treasures they held and a lack of specialist heritage skills to stop the degradation. Gradually, however, as the hedonistic decade swung on, a growing number of enthusiasts were on a mission to support our national treasures and most importantly take positive action. With this in mind, an event was organised by a young Buckinghamshire housewife. Her name was Patricia Fay and she asked Miss D K Millington to talk about her collection of Victorian teaspoons and found she had a winner when so many people turned up and more chairs had to be found. And so it was in 1965 at Chenies Manor – itself a unique historical treasure of a house and estate – that the Chiltern Antiques Group was formed. This in turn encouraged the formation of other societies, which then grouped together in 1968 as NADFAS and held its inaugural meeting at the V&A.

From then on NADFAS blossomed and established three mainstays of its mission:

- the programme of lectures given by specialists in varying subjects, all of whom are rigorously vetted for their ability to inform and engage;
- practical help with the heritage issues by volunteers, who have training and then work in museums, churches, country houses and galleries. This involves various skills such as book cleaning and repair, needlework, assessing stained glass, dating all manner of objects and furniture from the simple to the priceless and much more;
- as state support for the Arts is dwindling, a Young Arts programme is in situ in most societies to help and promote the general Arts movement for the next generation.

As the movement gained momentum Societies were set up abroad – the first one was in 1984 in Germany. Now there are 385 around the globe.

All this enthusiasm for other facets of Art such as music, dance, cinema and study tours here and abroad gradually introduced the need for a new name. It was felt NADFAS did not reflect the way the Society offers the diversity of artistic interest of the 90,000 members. So it was, after much 'he-ART' searching and discussion the simple name 'THE ARTS SOCIETY' was chosen to celebrate the 50th Birthday. The Patron is the Duchess of Gloucester and the President is Dr Lloyd Grossman CBE FSA.

At a local level there are Arts Societies at Gainsborough, Sheffield and Worksop – the latter known as The Arts Society Dukeries. The meetings for this Society are held at Carlton-in-Lindrick Civic Centre on Long Lane on the first Wednesday of the month at 11 am. Doors open from 10 am. Activities range from heritage conservation at Welbeck Abbey and curating support at Mansfield Museum to Church recording – a volunteer group records EVERYTHING in churches of all religions and has included the recording of St Swithun's in Retford, St Mary's Egmanton, St Peter's Thorpe Salvin, the 'Mayflower' church at Babworth and currently being concluded, the Parish Church of Treeton. Parish trails, a project for young people, have been produced. Support for a young Arts Programme is available each year and Bluebell Wood Hospice has been a beneficiary of this scheme. Study days and Arts based holidays are an integral feature of the Dukeries programme and are always well supported. *Right, The Arts Society Dukeries Church Recorder Group who worked at Babworth.*



The Arts Society is not a fund-raising organisation per se, although sometimes it happens incidentally. Patricia Fay, the founder, said 'Above all NADFAS (now The Arts Society) must be fun'. It is! Need more information? Ring 01909 731415 or 01302 618095, website <<https://theartssociety.org>>.