

CETG ARCHIVE

Outing to John Lewis Heritage Centre

3rd September 2016

The second outing of 2016 was to the [John Lewis Heritage Centre](#) in Cookham, which holds around 30,000 textile designs dating from 1795 to the 1980s, including work by William Morris, Charles Voysey and Lucienne Day. Eleven members enjoyed a short talk on the history of the archive, followed by time to browse the 5,500 designs on display. The remainder of the collection is held in the strongroom along with other items relating to the history of the John Lewis Partnership. Photographs are not permitted for copyright reasons, but visitors can request individual designs in electronic or hard copy.

The Cookham archive was opened in 2014 in a purpose-built centre comprising the original buildings of Grove Farm and Grove Farm Cottage, with modern additions. The outside wooden cladding is carved in a Voysey design from the collection. This is a working archive, with new John Lewis designs being constantly added, and older ones revisited and updated with scale and colour adapted to current taste, to be used on a range of products including pottery, clothing, greetings cards and giftware, as well as textiles.

The core of the collection comes from the Stead McAlpin textile printing business based near Carlisle which John Lewis owned from 1965 to 2007. When the business was sold, the archive was retained. Stead McAlpin had acquired designs from other printers who were closing down, and the William Morris designs and printing blocks were taken in lieu of payment when the original Morris business closed. The blocks have since been donated to the V&A museum and William Morris gallery. Other interesting designs held are dust sheets for the various residences of the royal family, and the rich pink and purple floral fabric used in the state rooms of the Titanic. One piece of the original printers' test fabric was retained for the archive - the only piece not aboard the fated liner.

The designs are displayed in hanging frames around the room in roughly chronological order and by the end of the visit most of the group felt dazed by the number and variety of predominantly floral designs. How can there be so many ways to depict a rose?

Thanks to Gita for suggesting such a fascinating venue for our second outing of the year. Luckily, the rain held off - just! The archive is open to the public free of charge every Saturday from 10.00 to 4.00. Well worth a visit if you're in Cookham.

Half the group then retired for an excellent lunch at The Ferry overlooking the Thames - the fishcakes in particular were highly recommended - before moving on to the Stanley Spencer Gallery.



Judith reports: After lunch, five members visited the [Stanley Spencer Gallery](#), housed in a compact, former Methodist chapel which the artist attended as a boy with his mother.

Most of his drawings and paintings of buildings, boats, gardens and people reflect the Thames-side village where Spencer spent most of his life. We enjoyed the eclectic mix of subjects....not just religious themes, thank goodness.....and we were amused at some saucy interpretations of domestic scenes but then, Stanley did have his dalliances!!

The size of the gallery limits the number of artworks on display but the collection is revised every six months. Our visit was quite short but it nicely rounded off a very pleasant, illuminating day in Cookham.

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