

Saturday 4 October 2025 meeting

Jane Charles – 78 Derngate

"Art is the flower; life is the green leaf" Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

Flowers, leaves and quotes fluttered on Jane Charles' banners in the gardens of 78 Derngate, during a 2023 exhibition she was invited to show at after taking part in Northants Open Studios.

[78 Derngate](#) is the only house outside Scotland designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his wife Margaret Macdonald. The ordinary town house was remodelled in 1917 as a commission from W. J. Bassett-Lowke, a newly married self-made man whose fortune was earned from model trains.

Jane took her cue from Mackintosh's iconic roses and the triangular motifs used throughout the house. Making eco-prints from the leaves growing in the gardens, she added batik and indigo dyeing to reflect the influence of Japanese art on Mackintosh's work. The banners were made from floaty viscose, hung washing-line style on pegs from the trees and a wooden structure in the centre of the garden.



She explained in detail how she set about the work, her inspiration and printing methods. She commented that although the first few banners took some time, once she became attuned to the "handwriting" of the artist's work, it became easier to come up with more patterns in the same style.

She went on to describe other exhibitions, firstly at the [Raveningham Sculpture Trail](#) in Norfolk in 2024 where her banners on the theme of “the stories we tell ourselves” won 3rd prize in the visitors’ choice. In 2025 the theme of “Alchemy” was perfect for the magic of her eco-printing, where she experimented with soy milk mordanting and iron-soaked fabrics, to depict alchemical symbols on onion skin dyed cloth.

Another favourite venue was the [Cowper Newton Museum](#) in Olney, Bucks, a Georgian townhouse owned by poet William Cowper, now telling the story of 18th Century life and that of Cowper’s friend John Newton, former slave trader become curate and writer of the hymn “Amazing Grace”. Jane’s banners focused on quotes from the work of both men, eco-prints of the leaves in Cowper’s beloved garden, decorated with handmade bobbin lace to reflect the town’s lacemaking tradition.

Jane also told us about working as artist in residence at Northampton schools as a result of the Derngate exhibition, and later in Buckinghamshire, appointed by Waddesdon Manor. Working with up to 360 children at a time, which she admitted could be “terrifying”, she kept them busy with the magic of eco-printing, batiks of gondolas and Venetian buildings and writing with oak gall inks and quill pens.

Next year she plans an exhibition in the Wash House Gardens in [Saltaire](#). More washing lines, with aprons and bloomers to reflect the name of the “Wash House Bloomers” volunteer group who tend the gardens.

We learned so much from Jane’s spirited talk, with her lovely banners fluttering on the line. We scarcely missed the slide show we couldn’t watch due to a faulty projector.

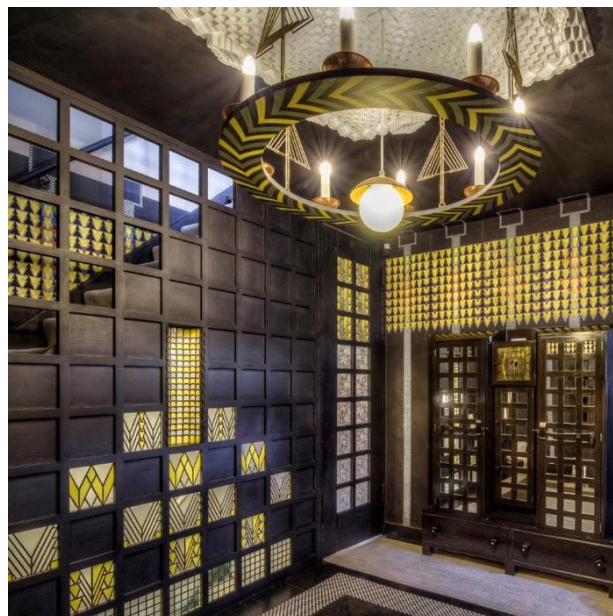
Jane Charles: <https://www.smallbeans.co.uk/>
78 Derngate: <https://www.78derngate.org.uk/>
Raveningham Sculpture Trail: <https://raveninghamsculpturetrail.com/>
Cowper Newton Museum: <https://cowperandnewtonmuseum.org.uk/>

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78 Derngate – dining room



78 Derngate – entrance hall