



Tela



The Magazine of The Friends of
Blackburn Museum & Art Gallery

June 2025

This newsletter is completely FREE



An untitled work in acrylic by Peter Cunliffe,

One of a large number of works by this Blackburn artist who died in 2008, which are currently in the care of the Museum Friends.

See the article on p.15

Programme 2024/25

Unless otherwise indicated, meetings are held in the Museum on the 2nd Tuesday afternoon of the month at 2 pm.

10th June: Members of the Museum & Art Gallery staff talk about recent developments.

Saturday, 14th June, 2pm

David Shipway Lecture

A free event open to all

***Rachel Kay-Shuttleworth pf
Gawthorpe Hall***

A film describing the story of Rachel's collection and its subsequent history, introduced by The Hon. Sally Figgins, Rachel's great-niece.

Sunday, 29th June:

Garden Party

at Mike & Dot Millward's,
36 Parsonage Road, BB1 9NP

Tickets £5 PLEASE COME!

Please note the change of date!

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NEWS

We have a new President!



Dr Cynthia Johnston has accepted our invitation to become President of the Friends. She has been central to the interpretation and promotion of the magnificent books and manuscripts in the Hart Collection, and is currently working on a biography of Blackburn born author Dorothy Whipple.

Cynthia is Senior Lecturer in the History of the Book and MA Programme Director at the Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London.

She has worked with Blackburn Museum & Art Gallery for more than a decade, and amongst her major contributions have been curating the Cotton to Gold Exhibition and organising the Blackburn Symposium on the Hart Collection in 2017 and the subsequent publication of related papers.

She has given talks to the Friends and delivered the third David Shipway Lectures. Her support of the Museum and the Friends makes her ideally suited for this position.

We can look forward to hearing her speak to us at the first meeting of the 2025/26 season in October when "The Nature of Gothic" a major exhibition in which she has a leading curatorial role, will be on show in the Hart Gallery.

Breaking News!

Committee member Janet Ross has just been appointed as North West Regional Coordinator for the British Association of Friends of Museums (BAFM).

Blackburn Friends have had a good relationship with BAFM over many years. Joy Heffernan and David Shipway were BAFM NW Regional Coordinators in the past, and we are pleased to be able to assist this important national support organisation once again.

SURVEY RESULTS

A short survey form was circulated to members with the previous issue of Tela (February 2025) in an effort to find out what members want from the Friends. The response level has been moderate, with approximately 20% of members responding.

Among those responding, the level of satisfaction was high, with 100% of those who replied enjoying the monthly talks and Tela. A number of members commented on the audibility of speakers; a wish that talks be at least 45 minutes long was balanced by one for talks to be shorter to allow for more questions. There were a number of requests for more talks about the Museum's collections. More input from Museum staff was sought for Tela, together with more coverage of societies, institutions and events outside the Museum.

There was positive support for outings of all types, particularly by coach, but rather less enthusiasm for short breaks. Coffee mornings and garden parties were liked, Christmas parties less so, quizzes hardly at all.

Almost everyone agreed that the Friends should support purchases for the museum, be encouraged to attend exhibitions and events and help by volunteering.

Everyone was happy to receive information from other societies such as the Lancashire Local History Federation about their activities and events.

More general suggestions were:

- Some weekend or evening meetings to attract people who could not come during the day;
- More short gallery talks on exhibits in the Museum and Art Gallery;
- Visits to easily accessible local heritage sites such as Samlesbury Hall;
- Making efforts to attract young people by reaching out to, for example, college students.

In general, the survey response, while numerically small, indicated satisfaction and was support. There were a few specific points which concerned members: they would like more information about items in the Museum, more in Tela from the museum staff and want to be able to hear our speakers better. The committee will now consider how to respond.

Dr Patrick Gavin

My good friend Pat Gavin, who will have been well known to many of you, died suddenly in March. He had been a Museum Friend for almost 40 years, during which time he has given talks to our meetings and contributed regularly to Tela.

Pat was an amazing man. He had been head of physics at Stonyhurst, and his funeral resembled a reunion of old boys from the College, many of whom had come a fair distance to be there. I suspect it is quite unusual for that to occur at the funeral of a school teacher who has been retired for twenty years.

Before he took up teaching Pat had an interesting academic career, gaining a PhD and spending several years in scientific research. In 1965 he spent a year at the Leningrad Research Institute in Khrushchev's USSR. He learnt Russian and until very recently, was still corresponding with friends he had made there. Among his numerous books was a complete works of Shakespeare – in Russian.

He was an active member of many different local and national organisations, and in retirement he was often asked to give presentations on a wide range of topics. His knowledge was remarkable: he could (and would) talk eruditely about almost anything for as long as anyone would listen. A special interest was the history of science, particularly the Jesuit contribution, an interest strengthened at Stonyhurst.

The mere mention of some obscure query would be followed a day later by an email with a link to an internet page or a knock at the door with a book or a photocopy of an article in the Tablet. His curiosity seemed endless and his memory infinite. This is well illustrated by his recent contributions to Tela:

John Lingard, Objective Historian and Catholic priest at Hornby
Sir Ernest Marsden of Rishton, atomic physicist
Science in Blackburn, Pendle and the Ribble Valley
Catholic relics at Whalley, including Abbot Paslew's ring
Nicholas Breakspear, Pope Adrian IV

He also provided the material for articles about a medieval crucifix found at Osbaldeston and most recently (in February this year), on Jerome Hesketh, 17th century portrait painter and undercover Catholic priest in the Ribble Valley.

For the past 10 years I have lived just down the road from Pat, and he was a daily presence in my life, walking up or down to or from church or the shops, often stopping for a chat. I miss him greatly.

Our thoughts are with Margaret and to their three sons, Paul, Dom and Ben.



Mike Millward

TWO LARKHILL CHURCHES

Visit to Holy Trinity and St Albans Churches, 18th June 2025

Members should already have received details of this visit. If not, please contact Mike Millward.

Holy Trinity Church, Mount Pleasant is a Church of England commissioners church, designed by Edmund Sharpe of Lancaster and built in 1837. It became redundant in 1981 and is now in the care of the Church Conservation Trust; Ken Ford is the local key-holder and author of the article in the last edition of Tela which can be found on the Friends website. St Albans, a large Roman Catholic Church, was founded in 1824, but of the original building only the gatepiers remain. The present church was designed in 1898 by Edward Goldie, a prominent Catholic church architect.

We have arranged to visit these neighbouring churches on Wednesday, 18th June at 2pm, meeting at Holy Trinity, Larkhill and continuing to the nearby St Albans, where we will be welcomed by Father Jude.

The two churches provide an interesting contrast in architecture and observance.

A LIGURIAN FLOWER SELLER by H. H. LA THANGUE (1859 – 1929)

By Ken Ford

This painting in the Victoria Gallery is a firm favourite of mine. I love the dappled light and shade, the way the colours of the girl's clothes and hat are echoed in the flowers, and how she appears fully engrossed in her work.

Early in 2024 whilst volunteering in the gallery I was expressing my admiration of the painting to a visitor when he asked if I knew about its companion piece that had fairly recently been sold in Yorkshire. I did not, but set about finding out. It appears that in 2022 a picture entitled *In a Ligurian Garden* was sold at Tennant's Auctioneers and was described as having been exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1908 (as was Blackburn's *A Ligurian Flower Seller*). Its whereabouts had only recently come to light and was attracting a lot of interest. Shown below, it clearly depicts the same girl in the same pergola but with oranges instead of flowers.



Intriguingly, in the auctioneer's catalogue it was stated that in 1929, La Thangue replied to a letter from Thomas Howarth at Blackburn Art Gallery enquiring about the 'Flowers' painting. In his reply La Thangue said 'the girl was so exceptionally nice and posed well' and that it was painted in the garden of 'a fine old house'. The author of the auctioneer's description was art historian Kenneth McConkey who wrote in a catalogue for Oldham Art Gallery's La Thangue Exhibition in 1978 that 'this important document is one of the few surviving pieces of evidence concerning the painter's extensive explorations of Liguria'.

I was keen to see this letter but searches at the museum and the library failed to produce anything. Then online I found another reference to this letter by the same author for a sale at Christie's. This time he stated that the letter was to Richard Howarth, the noted Blackburn art dealer. So I have come to the conclusion that the 'Blackburn Art Gallery' was not the Museum's gallery but the one belonging to the dealer. Nevertheless it got me interested in finding out more about the artist.

Henry Herbert La Thangue was born in Croydon, attended Dulwich College and, from 1874 to 1879, the Royal Academy Schools. There he won a gold medal and a scholarship to study in Paris for 3 years – with a letter of introduction from the President of the Academy, Sir Frederick (later Lord) Leighton. He painted in Brittany in the company of his former Dulwich contemporary, Stanhope Forbes, founder of the Newlyn School, but his favourite location in France was on the Mediterranean coast. Returning to England, he spent the years to the end of the century successfully painting scenes of rural life which were exhibited widely in galleries including the Royal Academy of which he was made an Associate Member in 1898. He is pictured, right, in 1890.



On eBay I found and bought the December 1896 edition of The Studio magazine which has a well illustrated 13 page leading article on La Thangue at a time when he had become nationally recognised as an outstanding artist. It states that 'To a very large extent the history of the Naturalistic Movement in England is the history of Mr. H. H. La Thangue'. The magazine also included as a full page supplement the auto lithograph by the artist shown on the right.



The influence of his time in France can be seen in this work of 1897, An Autumn Morning, shown below. Although the woman is painted in a meticulous, naturalistic style, the background is given a freedom associated with the Impressionists. A man in the background just merges in the foliage!



Not long after this, La Thangue felt the need to look for inspiration elsewhere and he found it in Liguria, Northern Italy. Here he painted en plein air scenes of peasant life that had not changed for many generations. He did paint landscapes (there is one in the Victorian Gallery) but it was the local people going about their everyday tasks that inspired him and that brought him great acclaim. From 1904 to the outbreak of the First World War his Ligurian pictures featured in almost every Royal Academy Summer Exhibition and earned him full recognition as a Royal Academician in 1912.

Visiting the area again after the war he felt that it would never be the same again and he considered himself fortunate to have witnessed and recorded such a lost world.

On the right is another of La Thangue's Italian scenes called A Ligurian Winter. Although I for one knew nothing about the artist until recently he is clearly valued in the art world. This painting was sold at Christie's over 20 years ago for just under half a million pounds and then again in 2012 at Sotheby's for 'considerably more'.

La Thangue was reportedly very upset in 1929 when a ship carrying 2 of his paintings floundered off New Zealand. He died on 21st Dec. that year, five days before the pictures were recovered in reasonable condition. When his wife, Kate, died in 1940 she left five paintings to galleries in New Zealand and many to galleries in Britain including two in our Victorian Gallery.



THE DYMOCK POETS

by Jeff Cooper

The Dymock Poets are a part of our literary heritage, with many people recognising their importance and the enjoyment that can be got from their poetry. They were around at the same time that revolutions were taking place in art, music, and literature, leading to 'modernism'. They were not modernists, but can be seen as a stepping stone between the Victorians and the modernists.

This community of poets and potential poets were brought together in the middle of the countryside in Gloucestershire just before the First World War. In 1910 the 29 year old poet and critic Lascelles Abercrombie, who had always wanted to live in the countryside, moved from Birkenhead with his wife and young son to a cottage in Much Marcle, a village in Herefordshire. He delighted in this unspoiled part of the country, but the house was too small. So a year later they moved a couple of miles across the county border to the hamlet of Ryton, near Dymock in Gloucestershire, where they settled in a beautiful 17th century thatched cottage known as the Gallows. Soon after Abercrombie had moved to Ryton, he saw it as an ideal place for a community of poets. He and his wife Catherine had been closely involved in the foundation and formulation of an arts centre in Liverpool, and communities of like-minded people were very much on their minds.

In July 1913 the poets and playwrights Wilfrid Gibson and John Drinkwater visited the Abercrombies. During their discussions Abercrombie persuaded Gibson to move to the area (he was living in London at the time). They also discussed the possibility of starting a journal which would be issued quarterly and publish only their own poetry. Gibson wrote to Rupert Brooke to ask if he would be willing to be part of the enterprise. Brooke was in Canada, but he replied almost immediately to say that he was delighted to be asked. Brooke at that time was the least well-known of the four, having published only one small book of poetry in 1911. He was to become the most well-known of the four within a couple of years.

1914 can be seen as the year of the Dymock Poets. Despite the country's paranoia about an expected war with Germany, there was an enormous amount of optimism at the commencement of the year. Wilfrid Gibson got married, and in January they moved into their thatched cottage, the Old Nail Shop in Greenway, a couple of miles from the Abercrombies and Dymock. Shortly afterwards, in March, the first issue of their journal entitled *New Numbers* appeared, containing new poems from all four contributors.

And then Robert Frost, the American poet who had moved to England in 1912 and was living in Beaconsfield with his family, decided to take a house in the area. At the beginning of April Frost, with his wife Elinor and their four children moved into an old house called Little Iddens in the hamlet of Ledington near Dymock. Frost had published his first book of poetry in Britain the previous year, called *A Boy's Will*. He would shortly publish his second, *North of Boston*, which was favourably and extensively reviewed. He was beginning to make a name for himself as an interesting and respected poet.

A couple of weeks after moving in, Frost's friend Edward Thomas came to stay in the area for the first time. Thomas at this time was writing a great many reviews and articles for newspapers as well as books, often on the countryside. Thoughts of him becoming a poet were suppressed, and it wasn't until Robert Frost and other poets (notably Eleanor Farjeon, Gordon Bottomley, and Walter de la Mare) began to prod and poke Thomas's subconscious that poems began to appear later in the year.

So the 'Dymock Poets' were the three poets who lived in the Dymock area (Lascelles Abercrombie, Wilfrid Gibson, and Robert Frost), and two regular visitors (Edward Thomas and John Drinkwater), as well as Rupert Brooke, who was one of the contributors to *New Numbers*, published from the Gallows cottage in Ryton.

On the whole the Dymock Poets were a friendly and supportive community of poets. They went on walks and picnics together, met up at pubs, and visited each other's houses. They also had a wide circle of friends – musicians, artists, and writers, many of whom visited the area, and they were involved in the whole literary and artistic scene of the time. Their poetry at this time can't be taken out of the context of the changes that were happening to poetry and the other arts, and on the whole they enjoyed the artistic revolutions taking place. The likelihood that war may be on the way was the last thing on their minds.

And then the war came. August 4th changed everything. The daily papers virtually ceased publishing book reviews, leaving those that relied on them for their living, like Abercrombie and Edward Thomas, with real financial problems. To help with the finances (and for other reasons), the Frost family moved into the Gallows cottage with the Abercrombies.

Then an unexpected result of the war overtook them: they were all accused of being German spies. Various 'foreign and strange looking' people had visited them and set the villagers' tongues wagging, so that a



Abercrombie



Gibson



Frost



Thomas



Drinkwater



Brooke

policeman came to investigate. Although they were soon exonerated, it left some bad feelings between them and the locals, leading, it seems, to stones being thrown at Frost's children when they ventured into the village, and an argument with a gamekeeper that grew out of all proportion, and affected Frost and Thomas deeply. Shortly after these incidents (but not because of them), Robert Frost and his family returned to America, where he went on to become the great American poet, winning four Pulitzer prizes. He died in 1963.

So how did the war affect the other five? Two of them enlisted and both of them died. Rupert Brooke died in April 1915, the result of an insect bite, just before he would have arrived at Gallipoli (where he would probably have been killed or died of dysentery anyway). He was well loved by other poets and writers before the war, but it was his five sonnets entitled '1914', first published in *New Numbers*, that made his name known to the general public. The following year his *Collected Poems* were published, selling in thousands.

Edward Thomas was killed near Arras in northern France on Easter Monday in April 1917, when a shell stopped his heart but left him unscathed (or perhaps he was killed by a direct hit from a shell: the debate goes on.) His reputation as a poet is now almost second to none. He had started writing his mature poetry four months after the commencement of the war, and his last, 'The Sorrow of True Love' he wrote three months before he was killed. Very few of his poems were published during his lifetime, all under his pseudonym Edward Eastaway: six poems were published as a pamphlet in 1916, and 18 were published in the collection *An Annual of New Poetry* three weeks before he died. Two books of his poems were published shortly after he died, and his *Collected Poems* was first published in 1920.

Wilfrid Gibson tried to enlist, but was declared unfit until 1917 when the country became desperate for recruits; meanwhile he wrote poetry, was operated on for appendicitis, fathered two children, moved to West Malvern in Worcestershire, and lectured in America. He was probably the first poet to depict the banality, senselessness and futility of the war in the poems he had been writing since the war started. They were collected together in his book *Battle*, published in 1915. He survived the war and continued to write and publish poetry, becoming more and more remote from the literary scene, until he died in 1962, having published nearly 50 books of poetry.

Lancelotti Abercrombie was so affected by the war that he virtually stopped writing altogether for its duration. He wrote a couple of poems, one of which, called 'The Lover in Wartime', was published in the *Times Literary Supplement*. He was also unfit for military service, and became an inspector of munitions in a factory in Liverpool. He took up his old interests in the Liverpool arts centre and repertory theatre, maintaining close

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THE DYMOCK POETS, continued

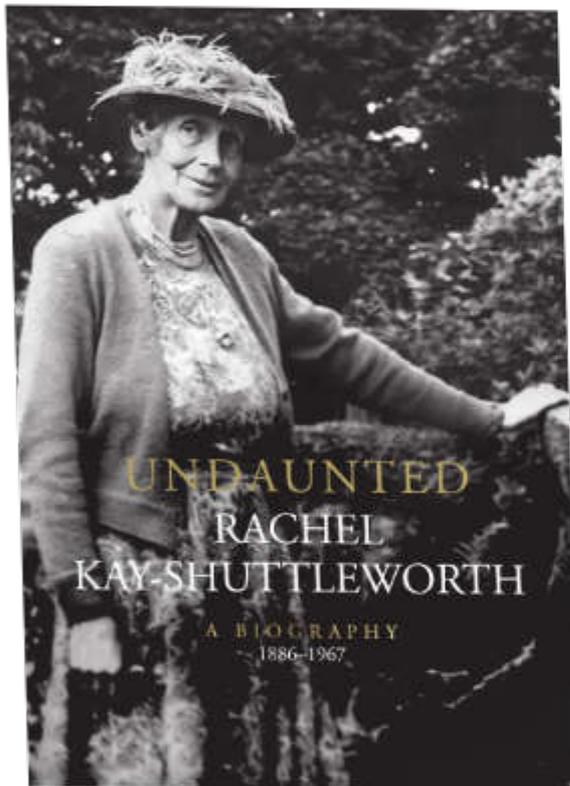
contact with his literary and artistic friends. After the war he continued to write poetry and became a lecturer and professor at the universities of Liverpool, Leeds, London, and Oxford. He died of complications from diabetes in 1938, having published 11 books of poetry and plays, including his collected poems in the Oxford University Press's Oxford Standard Authors series (one of only two living authors in this series), because they thought he was going to be the Poet Laureate after the death of Robert Bridges.

Only one of the Dymock Poets, John Drinkwater, was reluctant to get involved in the war. In 1915 he published his early war poetry in *Swords and Ploughshares*, containing poems of despair, regret and anger. He remained as general manager of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre throughout the war, keeping the people at home distracted from the war and morale high. He also often worked on Sundays in a Birmingham munitions factory, and later he went to France to entertain the troops with his poetry. A month before the war came to an end he became a renowned playwright with his *Abraham Lincoln*. It temporarily made his fortune and changed his life. He wrote about 60 books of poems and plays up to his death by heart failure in 1937.

Although the poets who survived the war kept in touch they rarely saw each other for the rest of their lives.

Gawthorpe Book Launch

Report by Janet Ross



A new Biography of Rachel Kay -Shuttleworth was launched at the Northlight Estates Complex at Brierfield (formerly Brierfield Mill, said to be the largest cotton mill in Lancashire).

This stunning building now houses the bulk of the Rachel Kay-Shuttleworth collection of Textiles which had to be relocated from Gawthorpe Hall due to the storage conditions there becoming unsuitable.

Jeff Cooper, Janet Ross and Mike Millward attended the launch, hosted by Lord and Lady Shuttleworth and supported by a performance from students at Burnley College, illustrating the life of Rachel Kay-Shuttleworth.

The book: *Undaunted* by Jane Hellebrand "shows a life defined by compassion, creativity and care" said Lord Shuttleworth, "Jane's book brings that legacy into the spotlight in a way that is deeply personal and historically important."

The Gawthorpe Textile Collection which Rachel created is one of the most significant in the UK. She was a founder member of the Girl Guides in Lancashire and an advocate for women's education and opportunity.

Jane Hellebrand retired from her career in the NHS and began volunteering at Gawthorpe Hall. She read a previous biography of Rachel, only 30 pages or so long and being pre-internet, containing several errors, decided to produce a more substantial and appropriate tribute to an important Lancastrian woman.

The book costs £14.50 and is available to purchase from Gawthorpe Textiles Collection, Northlight Suite 26, Unit 2, Northlight House, Pendle Road, Brierfield BB9 5FF

Tel: 01282 773 693 Email: info@gawthorpetextiles.org.uk

A selection of items from the Collection is on show at Gawthorpe Hall, Padiham. Visits to see the reserve collection now have to be paid for so if anyone would be interested in a visit, please tell a member of the committee so that if there is sufficient support, we can consider going as a group to make this affordable.