

## Laura Knight Walk - The Malverns. 30-08-17.

Although the day started damply and ended with heavy rain, providentially the Art Appreciation Group had dry weather for their Laura Knight Walk in Malvern. This was led by Mike and Linda Averill, Members of the Laura Knight Society and also of our U3A. The Society was formed in 2008 by a group, keen to keep the memory of this famous painter alive in the town.



The Art Appreciation Group assembled under the Buzzards Sculpture, at the Rosebank Gardens, Malvern with Guides Linda and Mike Averill.

As we assembled in the Rosebank Gardens, Mike began by giving us a brief biography of Dame Laura Knight, whose connections with the town spanned many decades. Born in 1877, Dame Laura showed an exceptional aptitude for art at a very early age. At the age of 13 she started to attend the Nottingham School of Art, where she met her future husband, Harold Knight. Dame Laura's artistic ability covered a wide range of subjects, among them: landscape painting; seascapes; Romanies; the ballet and theatre; portraits - including one of George Bernard Shaw, a close friend (this portrait was painted at the Lawnside School, Malvern); and as a World War Two War Artist. One of her most famous commissions covered the Nuremberg Trials, after the War. She was the only official British painter at the Trials. She also travelled extensively with her husband, including Staithes, on the North Yorkshire coast; The Netherlands (she liked the light there for her painting), and Newlyn in Cornwall, where she became part of the Newlyn School.

She first came to Malvern in 1931 at the invitation of Sir Barry Jackson, and continued to visit the town and live in the town until 1969, often living in the Town's hotels, including the Mount Pleasant Hotel, and using the Lawnside School as a base and centre for her painting.



Commemorative Plaque and Mount Pleasant Hotel today. Dame Laura painted views of Malvern from the bay window on the first floor of the Hotel. One of her paintings, 'Holiday Time', painted from the bay window, shows a view that is still recognisable today. Another dramatic painting, 'Storm Over Our Town, Malvern' (1939), had a view over the Priory that we could appreciate nowadays.



View over Malvern Priory, with Mount Pleasant Hotel.

As we began our walk Mike and Linda pointed out other features of interest: the pub which C S Lewis visited regularly, sometimes with J R R Tolkien; the Aldwyn Tower, where future USA President Roosevelt convalesced as a child; the donkey stable, where the donkeys, frequently painted by Dame Laura, were kept; gas lampposts that inspired C S Lewis' famous lamppost in his story, 'The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe'; the house featured in the Laura Knight painting 'Love Lane' and St Anne's Well, where George Pullen ('Blind George') played his harmonium for over 50 years. He died in February 1936, and Dame Laura may well have seen him.

A gas lamp on the Malvern Hills.





The house that was featured in the Laura Knight painting 'Love Lane' (1940).

As we walked on the Malverns, Mike and Linda pointed out the spectacular views over the town of Malvern, its Priory and the Vale of Evesham, as well as the woods, so familiar to the Knights and which featured in Dame Laura's paintings, such as 'Midway to Malvern Beacon'.



The Group at the Lamppost in Rosebank Gardens, which is considered to have inspired C S Lewis' Narnia Lamppost. The gate on the right features in a Laura Knight painting.

The Group finished their most enjoyable 'Laura Knight Walk' with tea and cakes, at 'The Bluebird Tea Rooms, a favourite haunt of another famous visitor to Malvern, Sir Edward Elgar. Special thanks to Mike and Linda, for their time, their knowledge and their enthusiasm.

Heidy Hague