

## **ARTEFACTS - The penetrating gaze.**

October 29, 2022

If you are interested in history there is no better place to find it than in the history of art. Charlotte Crawley who was our speaker on October 29th described art as the 'mirror' of history. Her two talks revealed this through looking at the portraits of several different people from the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

We are probably all familiar with the portrait of Henry VIII by Hans Holbein but how much do we know about the artist himself?

It is frustrating that there is actually not a lot known about Holbein's life but there are some dates which define his movements.

Charlotte's aim in her talk was to tell us about the portraits Holbein painted of the Hanseatic merchants who lived and worked at the Steelyard or Stalhof (which is now Cannon Street Station) in London.

King's Lynn was, outside of London, and alongside Boston, the largest Hanseatic port. It is the only town left in the country which has a Hanseatic warehouse.

Our local links to this trading group (which went on into the 1800s) excited my interest in these Holbein portraits. Who were these merchants and what did they look like?

Holbein's prowess in painting was so good that to look at one of these portraits is to look at the person himself. The thrill of gazing into the eyes of the penetrating gaze is extraordinary. The man, Georg Giese from Danzig (Gdansk), could have been sitting in the room with us. This is history brought to life.

We were shown many portraits executed by Holbein, all of the same fine quality.

Charlotte told us that there was no other artist of his skill in England at that time, so he brought something exceedingly valuable to the Tudor world. After he died in 1543, he left a huge hole in English art for 40 years.

After a coffee break Charlotte moved on to discuss a portrait of John Gresham known to her through personal connections with Gresham's School at Holt.

John Gresham (1495-1556) founded the school towards the end of his life and there has always been a portrait of him in the hall at Gresham's.

Over time with her knowledge of portraiture she felt that this portrait was possibly not who it portrayed. She became increasingly intrigued and started out on her very own Fake or Fortune pathway.

You can find an excellent talk by Simon Kinder on Gresham's life on the school's website. For Charlotte her research as to whether this portrait was actually of John took her to many interesting places which she described to us.

What became clear was that trying to solve a mystery like this takes time and depends on convincing others of your argument.

Finally, she did persuade Gresham's that the one they had could not be John and the portrait of Thomas Gresham (his nephew) at Dunham Massey (a National Trust property) in Cheshire is likely to be him.

Her research has now been accepted by the National Trust as valid and if you search the internet, you will see the 'new' portrait.

However, I noticed that Gresham's are still using the old portrait to head Simon Kinder's talk!

It was fascinating to have revealed to us the workings of Charlotte's research and world of art where sometimes all is not as it seems.

We are very grateful to Charlotte for her input which left me, for one, with a keen desire to see more portraits by Holbein.

If you are interested in **Dutch art** our next speaker is Andrew Taylor who will enlighten us on 26<sup>th</sup> November at the Conservative Club. The day's study session is entitled Vermeer at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, looking at the paintings in the exhibition to provide background and analysis, and illuminating why the artist is regarded as such an important, revolutionary and much-loved painter.

Do contact Carolyn McDermid at [crmcdermid@hotmail.com](mailto:crmcdermid@hotmail.com) if you are keen to come.

And for after Christmas on Saturday 11 February Carolyn and I will be presenting Hieronymus Bosch. This will be a morning session and is designed to be a session where your participation will be welcome. Looking forward to seeing you there!

Margi Blunden, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022.