

Craftsmanship To-Day



A Symposium on Modern Making

The Art Workers' Guild

6 Queen Square,
London WC1N 3AT

24 September 2016

Detail from Philip Hagreen, *Dunstan Pruden's Workshop*, wood
engraving, c. 1933

Keynote addresses by **Tanya Harrod** and **Emily Young**, FRBS

Chair and Programme Organiser: Dr Marcus Waithe, Magdalene College, Cambridge

Programme and Registration: <http://www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk/symposia-education/>

GUILD of St GEORGE



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Venue: The Art Workers' Guild, 6 Queen Square, London WC1N 3AT

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Troubled by the sense of an economy running 'on thin air', and by a trade system that routinely divides the design of a product from its production, a new generation of thinkers and makers are turning their attention to the human and material value of craftsmanship. Recent books on this subject include Paul Greenhalgh's *The Persistence of Craft* (2002), Glenn Adamson's *Thinking Through Craft* (2007), Richard Sennett's *The Craftsman* (2009), Matthew Crawford's *The Case for Working With Your Hands* (2009), and Tanya Harrod's *The Real Thing: Essays on Making in the Modern World* (2015). This symposium is designed to explore and extend such debates.

We will discuss the big questions (What is 'craftsmanship', and what do craftspeople stand for? Is craftsmanship a matter of the hand and the eye, or can it work in partnership with machines and computers? Is craftsmanship a matter of nostalgia, or can it survive in the modern world?). But we will reflect also on these matters in their practical dimension, as we hear modern craftspeople discuss the opportunities and challenges posed by different materials, and by different qualities of finish. In this way, the event combines the insights of theorists and thinkers with reports on the continuing experience of making.

The event is inspired by the ideas and ideals of John Ruskin, a Victorian art critic and social prophet, whose views on the ethical and human value of craftsmanship inspired William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement. Ruskin was interested not only in the past of the crafts, but in their present practice: his stirring personal motto, 'To-day', is echoed in the title of this event. Organised by the Guild of St George, a charity for arts, crafts and the rural economy originally founded by Ruskin in 1871, it follows several successful symposia held in recent years:

How to Build an Ethical Economy: A Practical Conference for Life in the 21st Century
(Mary Ward House, October 2015);
Education for Education's Sake? (Toynbee Hall, October 2014)
Who Pays for the Environment? (Art Workers' Guild, February 2012)
John Ruskin and the Modern World: Art and Economics, 1860-2010 (Art Workers'
Guild, February 2010).

Previous speakers have included Frank Field M.P., Prof. Dinah Birch, Melissa Benn, Sara Parkin, and Andrew Simms.

Programme Organiser: Dr Marcus Waithe, Magdalene College, Cambridge
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PROGRAMME

- 10.00-10.30 Registration
- 10.30-10.40 INTRODUCTION: *WHAT IS CRAFTSMANSHIP?*
Marcus Waithe, Magdalene College, Cambridge
- 10.40-11.40 KEYNOTE ADDRESS (1): ‘Ruskin’s Material Vision’
Tanya Harrod (Independent Writer)
- 11.40-12.00 TEA AND COFFEE
- 12.00-13.00 PANEL 1: *THE MATERIALS OF CRAFTSMANSHIP*

Ruskin believed in a connection between the mind and its materials, as well as between materials and their locale: Where ‘marbles [...] are not found’, Ruskin wrote, ‘Nature has supplied other materials, clay for brick, or forest for timber, – in working of which she intends other characters of the human mind to be developed, and by the proper use of which certain local advantages will assuredly be attained’ (*Stones of Venice*). This panel discusses the art and ethics of this material awareness, and its contribution to modern craftsmanship.

WOOD: Peter Burman MBE FSA (Arts & Heritage Consultant) and Nicholas Hobbs (Furniture Maker)

STONE: Richard Watts (Sculptor and Letter Cutter)

WOOL: Rachel Dickinson (Manchester Metropolitan University)

- 13.00-14.00 LUNCH
- 14.00-15.00 KEYNOTE ADDRESS (2): *KINDS OF FINISH*
Emily Young, FRBS (Sculptor)

Ruskin wrote in *The Stones of Venice* that we should ‘Never demand an exact finish for its own sake, but only for some

practical or noble end'. This lecture addresses the question of 'finish' in the context of modern making.

15.00-15.20 TEA AND COFFEE

15.20-16.20 PANEL 2: *MAKING IN THE MODERN WORLD*

Annie Warburton (Creative Director, Crafts Council)

Angela Cork (Designer Silversmith and Vice Chair of Contemporary British Silversmiths)

Sebastian Cox (Designer and Furniture Maker)

Craftsmanship thrived in the world of the medieval guild, and was revived as an ideal at the end of the nineteenth century. Since then, the outlook has been precarious. In the new era, will craftspeople thrive, or merely survive? Might new developments, such as 3D printing, help, or will they hinder? What is the future of the workshop as a place to make, and the apprenticeship as a way to learn? This panel discusses the theory and experience of craftsmanship in the twenty-first century.

16.20-16.30 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Clive Wilmer, Master of the Guild of St George

16.30 END OF EVENT

Speaker Biographies and Abstracts (In Order of Delivery)

Marcus Waithe (Symposium Organiser and Chair)

BIOGRAPHY: Dr Marcus Waithe is a Fellow of English and University Senior Lecturer at Magdalene College, Cambridge. He is the author of *William Morris's Utopia of Strangers: Victorian Medievalism and the Ideal of Hospitality* (Boydell & Brewer, 2006), and more recently of a Guild pamphlet, *Ruskin and Craftsmanship* (Ruskin Lecture) (York: Guild of St George, 2015). He has published many essays and articles over the years on topics in nineteenth and twentieth-century literature and art.

Marcus will open the symposium, and act as Chair for the day.

Tanya Harrod (Independent Writer)

BIOGRAPHY: Dr Tanya Harrod is the author of the prize-winning *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (Yale University Press 1999). She contributes to *The Burlington Magazine*, *The Guardian*, *Crafts*, *The Literary Review*, *The Spectator* and *The Times Literary Supplement*. She is on the Advisory Panel of *The Burlington Magazine* and is Advisor to the Craft Lives Project based at the National Sound Archive of the British Library. She is a member of the International Association of Art Critics, and is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the V&A. With Glenn Adamson and Edward S. Cooke she is the editor of *The Journal of Modern Craft*. *The Last Sane Man: Michael Cardew, modern pots, colonialism and the counterculture* won the 2012 James Tait Black Prize for biography. Her latest book is *The Real Thing: Essays on Making in the Modern World* (2015).

ABSTRACT: 'John Ruskin made a vital contribution to our thoughts on materials and their ethical uses. This lecture begins with the great man's thoughts on the individual character of materials. It moves forward to

the present-day, to look at artists and designers who, on a polluted planet, try to open our eyes to new, sustainable systems of value.'

Peter Burman MBE FSA (Arts & Heritage Consultant)

BIOGRAPHY: Dr Peter Burman read History of Art at Cambridge. His first role, for two decades, was with the Council for the Care of Churches/Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England during which time he developed a *Register of Artists & Craftsmen* and organised an annual conference entitled *The Creative Artist & the Church*. His second role was running the Centre for Conservation Studies at the University of York and more recently he has been Professor of Cultural Management at the Brandenburg Technical University, Cottbus, attached to World Heritage Studies. In between his academic posts he was for five years Director of Conservation of the National Trust for Scotland which has caused him to make his home in Falkland, Fife. Over the years he has been Chairman of the Fabric Advisory Committees of St Paul's Cathedral for 20 years and of Lincoln Cathedral for 7 years and is currently a member of the FAC of St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. In Scotland his two main roles are as Chairman of the Falkland Stewardship Trust, in which capacity he organised and ran a three-day Craft Symposium 19-21 August 2016, and as trustee and Archivist at Hopetoun House, the subject of a recent television programme. The three main involvements of the Falkland Stewardship Trust are with wood, organic food production and craftsmanship. Falkland is also in the process of becoming a 'craft village'. He is a member of the Art Workers' Guild, a Companion of the Guild of St George, and has founded several flourishing organisations including the York Art Workers' Association and the Building Limes Forum of the UK.

ABSTRACT: 'I will speak about my work in encouraging churches and cathedrals to commission artistic work of the highest possible calibre and also as repositories of traditional craftsmanship and craft skills. Ruskin's exhortation to 'cherish above all things local associations and hereditary skill' inspires me on a daily basis and I try to translate this

into action. The second theme is to explain what we are doing in Falkland to encourage traditional skills in a vibrant local craft tradition. The third theme is to explain how I have evolved a distinctive methodology to provide opportunities for contemporary craftsmanship and especially at Lincoln Cathedral where I have been the Arts Adviser since 2008. This has provided an opportunity for commissioning a suite of furniture from our chosen artist-craftsman, Nicholas Hobbs, and my explanation of how this came about will lead seamlessly into Nicholas's own contribution.'

Nicholas Hobbs (Furniture Maker)

BIOGRAPHY: Nicholas Hobbs studied Creative Design at Loughborough University and completed two years' research at the Institute for Consumer Ergonomics. He worked for eleven years after that teaching Maths and Engineering Drawing at Secondary level, before establishing a business with the remit of designing and making furniture to commission. He was commissioned to make an oak chest for the permanent collection at the New Walk Museum, Leicester; he has exhibited at the Gimson Exhibition, Leicester, and has staged a retrospective at the William Morris Gallery Walthamstow. Current work includes furnishings at St Hugh's Chapel, Lincoln Cathedral. He is a guardian of the SPAB, and a member of the Liturgy and Furnishings Committee at the CFCE (Cathedral Fabric Commission for England).

ABSTRACT: The talk will address the qualities of wood as representing Time, Place and Use, including the detail and symbolism in the Altar for Lincoln Cathedral. A key question will be, 'Is wood so wooden?'

Richard Watts (Sculptor and Letter Cutter)

BIOGRAPHY: Richard's first teacher in the art and craft of stone sculpture and letter cutting was his father Peter Watts FRBS, a sculptor in the Gill tradition who taught him from childhood how to handle tools, respect and understand the characters of various stones and to

see strength of form and clarity of line in all good work. A combined love of sculpture and landscape led Richard to a first career working as a Landscape Architect for Sheffield City Council while continuing to carve stone in his spare time. In his work as a Landscape Architect, he led a number of design teams on large civic projects employing artist craftsmen working in their own materials including the commissioning of sculptors and letter cutters. In 2012 he set up on his own and rebalanced his career to concentrate on work as a sculptor and letter cutter.

ABSTRACT: 'I will be exploring the use of various sedimentary and metamorphic stones of the British Isles and how the characters of these materials lend themselves to particular types of work. Ways of approaching both letter cutting and relief carving in these materials will be discussed. I will also share a few thoughts on the use of local materials to enhance local landscape character.'

Rachel Dickinson (University Lecturer)

BIOGRAPHY: Dr Rachel Dickinson is a Principal Lecturer (Research & Knowledge Exchange; English) in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University's Cheshire Faculty. Much of her research is on John Ruskin; her current interest is in Ruskin's use of textiles to teach about ethics and sustainability. In 2013, she curated an exhibition on 'Ruskin and Textiles' at the Ruskin Library, Lancaster University. Inspired by her academic study of Ruskin, she learned to spin yarn and is a member of the Lancs & Lakes Guild of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers. She is a Director of the Guild of St George.

ABSTRACT: Looking at wool through a Ruskinian lens, the talk begins with a brief history of wool in Britain before focusing on what John Ruskin had to say about the fibre. It then offers examples of Ruskinian uses of wool, both historical and in contemporary craftsmanship.

Emily Young FRBS (Sculptor)

BIOGRAPHY: Emily Young has been acclaimed as ‘Britain’s greatest stone sculptor’ (*Financial Times*). As a young woman, Emily worked primarily as a painter, whilst studying at Chelsea School of Art in 1968 and subsequently Central Saint Martins. She travelled widely in the late 60s and 70s, spending time in the USA, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, France and Italy, with additional later visits to Africa, South America, the Middle East and China. It was during these travels, whilst encountering an extensive range of cultures, that she developed her broad view of art. In the early 1980s she abandoned painting, and started carving exclusively, sourcing stone from all around the world. The primary objective of her sculpture is to bring the natural beauty and energy of stone to the fore. Consequently, her sculptures have unique characters due to each individual stone’s geological history and geographical source, but they are bound as kin by their earthly origins. Emily Young currently divides her time between studios in London and Italy.

ABSTRACT: ‘When starting to do a piece of stone carving, I often ask myself, what on earth is this thing I am doing, using my hands to cut with sharp tools into the surface of a block of ancient matter, possibly billions of years old? There are many answers, and it will be some of these answers that I’ll be addressing in my talk, while seeing images of the product of this process. The basic premise is that consciousness is manifested back into the shared historical matter that gave rise to life on Earth – I have described humanity as being the children of stone, which holds true both culturally and physically.’

Annie Warburton (Creative Director, Crafts Council)

BIOGRAPHY: Annie is Creative Director at the Crafts Council where she leads on exhibitions, education, innovation and research. Craft is at the heart of her professional life. She began her career working on exhibitions at Crafts Council of Ireland. As CEO at ArtsMatrix, she pioneered professional development for emerging makers, as well as

the inaugural Craft Fellowship. And as Head of Partnerships at Creative Skillset she led major projects expanding apprenticeships in the fashion, tailoring, leather and textiles industries. Annie studied at Cambridge and Bristol universities, is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, an Associate of Newnham College, Cambridge, and governor of William Tyndale School. Annie regularly writes and presents on topics of craft, creative education, and innovation.

ABSTRACT: New technologies are transforming craft, where and how it is made, and how it is sold. At the same time, the worlds of visual art and design are increasingly turning towards materials and the handmade, whilst 'craft' has become a hot, sometimes abused, word in the worlds of luxury goods and consumer marketing. With craft education at risk, what does this resurgent interest in craft mean for makers now and in the future?

Angela Cork (Silversmith and Designer Maker; Vice Chair of Contemporary British Silversmiths)

BIOGRAPHY: Born in the UK in 1973, Angela studied at Glasgow School of Art, Bishopsland Educational Trust and the Royal College of Art. Angela's studio is based in Kingsgate Workshops, an old Victorian Factory in London. Whilst Angela's designs are contemporary, she uses age-old traditional silversmithing techniques to hand make her designs. Commissions include: A Court Cup for Michael Prideaux a Court Assistant of The Goldsmiths' Company; A Prime Warden commission for the Goldsmiths' Company and Sir Joseph Larmor's Plate for St John's College, Cambridge. Works in public collections include: the Goldsmith's Company and the Birmingham Museum and City Art Gallery.

ABSTRACT: Angela's talk will centre on her practice and how she has continued to develop and thrive within the industry as an artist craftsman. Angela will also be discussing the importance of keeping the traditions of silversmithing alive and the support that silversmiths need to do this.

Sebastian Cox (Designer and Furniture Maker)

BIOGRAPHY: Sebastian Cox is a designer and craftsman dedicated to proving that sustainable design does not have to result in a compromised product. He established the Sebastian Cox workshop to design and make fine objects from sustainable hardwoods (such as coppiced hazel) often overlooked by other designers and makers. He undertakes individual client commissions, as well as collections for retailers like Heal's and The New Craftsmen. He has formed partnerships with interior designers and collaborations with Benchmark Furniture.

Clive Wilmer (Master of the Guild of St George)

BIOGRAPHY: Clive Wilmer is Master of the Guild of St George. He is also Emeritus Fellow in English at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, and an Honorary Patron of the William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow. He edited both Ruskin's *Unto this Last and Other Writings* and William Morris's *News from Nowhere and Other Writings* for Penguin Classics. He is in addition the author of several books of poetry, including *New and Collected Poems* (Carcenet, 2012).

Clive will give the closing speech of the symposium.

Text of a review by Peter Burman of Nicholas Hobbs's exhibition at the William Morris Gallery, 2010.

During 2009 I had two experiences connected with Nicholas Hobbs. In January I made a journey in the snow to Leicester because I was determined not to miss the exhibition called *Craft & Design: Ernest Gimson and the Arts & Crafts Movement*, curated by Mary Greensted, who has done so much to promote understanding of and interest in Gimson and his circle, which was at the New Walk Museum & Art Gallery during the winter months of 2008-2009. The whole exhibition was enthralling. Many of my favourite Arts & Crafts pieces were there, and some which were unfamiliar but good to encounter. It has all my life been axiomatic with me, following John Ruskin, that we should seek not only to be good stewards of what we have inherited from the past – old buildings, gardens and landscapes, works of art and fine craftsmanship – but that we also should seek to add a layer of interest, beauty and significance of our own day. So I was brought up short by finding that Mary Greensted had included some fine pieces made by living makers whom she judged to be working in the same tradition as the great masters of the Arts & Crafts Movement. This struck me as a wise strategy, not least because it made the point that such fine furniture is not just something ‘back there’, from the past, in museums and houses open to the public, but is part of our contemporary life of living and loving and struggling to have the useful and the beautiful as part of our daily lives.

Of all the new pieces that I saw that day the one that remained with me most vividly was Nicholas Hobbs’s chest. I know now, but didn’t know then, that he has made a number of these chests and that they do encapsulate something important about his work and his approach to design – using native hardwoods, contrasting woods, sturdy shapes, prominent features such as ribs or fins, strongly visible joints – and they have a quality which I would like to call ‘huggability’: they are so friendly, warm in texture and tonality, eloquent, timeless that if only one’s arms were wide enough one would be disposed to give them a big hug. They also have a distinguished ancestry in the chests designed by W. R. Lethaby and in the rather chunky furniture which Philip Webb (my ultimate architect-hero) designed for William and Jane Morris.

Eager to explore further, and with a particular purpose in mind, I made contact

with Nicholas and so it turned out that, on a day in May, but coming this time from Lincoln Cathedral, I presented myself at his well-organised studio on the edge of the celebrated historic hill-town of Wirksworth in Derbyshire. Generously he had agreed to give me a tour of some of his more accessible furniture in churches or in homes where he had been able to arrange for a visit. There is nothing more exciting in this world than sharing interests and enthusiasms, and philosophical musings, with someone you are anyway disposed to like. In short we had an amazing day, the consequences of which are probably only just beginning.

The first place we went to was the church of St John the Baptist at Beeston, Nottinghamshire. This was a Friday morning and I was amazed to find the church bustling with members of the congregation purposefully polishing and cleaning whatever would respond to their touch. The principal focus was Nicholas's nave sanctuary furniture – definitely one of the best ensembles of new furniture I have seen in a church. There is a strong altar table of just the right scale supported on corner posts and five pairs of pointed arches (gently recalling the Gothic language of the church, medieval but largely rebuilt by Sir George Gilbert Scott, with a magnificent timber roof structure); there is a very satisfying but unfussy lectern; and three chairs for the clergy, suitably celebratory in character.

Next we went to a house where we were made most welcome by the son with a striking Mohican hairdo, who offered us tea. We sat at the dining table and he, gauging our interest, said with unsolicited fervour 'Our whole lives revolve round this table'. To complement it, Nicholas had made chairs with tall fairly attenuated backs, with warm comfortable padded seats. Against the wall there was a superb tall dresser, solid below and glazed above, displaying family china. I was particularly struck by the handles which were chunky with 'highlights' in ebony, to which the fingers responded with delight. Upstairs his mother showed us the master bedroom where two chests-of-drawers of *circa* 1950 by Gordon Russell frame and complement a magnificent bed and blanket chest, truly a triumph.

In another house we saw beautiful tables, a chest, a bookcase, an ambitious sideboard with 'fins' of contrasting wood, and a television container which seemed to be the perfect way to tame the impact which a screen can make on

an otherwise harmonious room, and just the right height to place a tea tray on or a vase of flowers.

At yet another house I was very taken by the outer and inner front doors which Nicholas had made, incorporating intricate glazed panels with decorative lead-work (lead was, after wood, the material which the Arts & Crafts Movement made peculiarly its own).

More than anything else I like to see beautiful well-made and interesting furniture in old churches and so I was glad that two of the last visits had an ecclesiastical theme. In the first of these, a modest church at Carsington, Derbyshire, where the west gallery has an incised inscription of characterful lettering dated 1704, Nicholas has made a simple wooden display case for a Memorial Book. I think the acid test of a great master craftsman is that he or she can do simple things well, not only ambitious or elaborate work. Finally, and fittingly in his own parish church up on the hill in Wirksworth, is a paschal candlestick which is worthy to be placed alongside the ebony-and-mother-of-pearl furniture by Ernest Gimson in Westminster Cathedral. Of course it is much smaller, but the way in which it starts from a triangular base and works its way up through the stem to the candle holder is quite masterly, and it more than holds its own in a relatively dark interior in which the 19th century interventions (including the superb floor of encaustic tiles) are very powerful. I also liked especially the decorative use of square panels of mother-and-pearl, which catch the light.

Here then, captured in this exhibition which is sure to go down in the annals of furniture-making history, is a maker for our time: a modest man, who thinks deeply, and has great skills and a palpable love for his materials, knowing just when to enrich (as at Wirksworth) and when to hold back. Here is someone of our contemporary world, and yet steeped in the traditions of English furniture making. Nor is he, I would hasten to say, a voice crying in the wilderness, out on a limb on his own. There are a good many fine furniture makers working in Britain at the present time, and a select number of them – including Nicholas Hobbs – can fairly claim the Arts & Crafts Movement as the ‘rock out of which they were hewn’.

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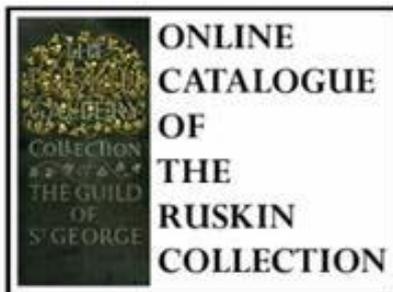
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Welcome to Ruskin's Guild of St George

John Ruskin (1819-1900) was a polymath. As a writer, he commanded international respect. He was an art critic and an art patron, a skilled draughtsman and talented watercolourist, and a fierce critic of prevailing social and political norms. He wrote about nature and architecture, craftsmanship, geology, botany, Greek myth, education—a dizzying variety of subjects. Driven by his deep faith in social justice, he established the Guild of St George in the 1870s to right some of the social wrongs of the day and make England a happier and more beautiful place in which to live and work.



The founding aim of the Guild was to acquire land and—through labour, wind and water power—to bring it into useful production.

The Guild's activities today are mainly focused around the [Ruskin Collection](#) in Sheffield and its [woodlands and rural projects](#) in the [Wyre Forest](#). We also host [symposia](#) on issues of contemporary concern and [publish](#) a growing range of books and cards.

News

e-Newsletter 26th May
Here is our most recent e-newsletter. [More...](#)

Forthcoming Events
Read about the events coming up in May and June. [More...](#)

NEW JOB OPPORTUNITY
The Guild is pleased to announce that it is seeking to appoint a new Administrator. [More...](#)

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