

THE ARTS & CRAFTS MESSENGER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
COLORADO ARTS & CRAFTS SOCIETY

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Highly detailed etching of Owlpen Manor by F.L. Griggs, chief among the etching artists in the Guild of Handicraft at Chipping Campden

TRAGEDIES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

(IN ADDITION TO BREXIT)

By Dennis Barrett

I. CHIPPING CAMPDEN

One of the best known stories of the British Arts and Crafts Movement is that of Charles Robert Ashbee, C.R. Ashbee, who founded the Guild of Handicraft in East London in 1888. By 1902, the Guild had grown to 100 craft workers, and Ashbee announced that the Guild was leaving London for the clean air and expansive countryside of Chipping Campden in the Cotswolds. And 100 families of city-dwellers pulled up stakes and followed him! Would you have followed this man into the unknown? He must have been a veritable pied piper.

From there you can follow either of two stories: 1) From Chipping Campden the Guild of Handicraft exerted an influence worldwide, as profound as that of Morris & Company, providing a model of communal living, profit sharing, and joyous labor; or 2) C.R. was a better leader and craftsman than he was an economist, and the Guild went belly-up by 1908. There is truth in both accounts, but even the critics admit that many of the craftsmen did stay in the area

after the Guild closed; their heirs still labor, and their influence is still felt in Chipping Campden today.

I have long wanted to know more about this pivotal figure in the A&C Movement. It turns out that in 2007 a group of descendants and enthusiasts turned a well-constructed but derelict 17th century barn, on the Court property in Chipping Campden, into a museum to celebrate the artisans and craftsmen of the Guild of Handicraft and of the surrounding North Cotswold area. Lured by descriptions like "the former barn now displays a glittering array of silver, jewellery, detailed and delicate woodcarving, etchings, ceramics, and finely-tooled bookbinding," I was eager to see this place.

When we planned a visit to a cousin in a village near Chipping Campden, my daughter (who drives with ease on the left-hand side of the road) agreed to a stop at the Court Barn Museum.

(continued on next page)

UK Tragedies (cont.)



A case of wooden carved objects, including a bust of C.R. Ashbee (at far right)

We were indeed impressed with the Court Barn. We were warmly welcomed by a very knowledgeable and helpful docent. The trusses that have held the sturdy building together for more than three centuries loom above. The displays are substantive and visually appealing. There is a touchscreen catalog with about thirty features on major artists of the Guild and later, and on bookbinding, silversmithing etc. (one could spend the day!) There are memorable pieces, like the iconic photo of C.R. Ashbee taken by Frank Lloyd Wright on one of the Ashbees' visits to the U.S.

But a "glittering array of silver...." there was decidedly not. We were puzzling over this disconnect when I espied the sign, not particularly prominently displayed, which read:

"In the early hours of Tuesday, 1 August [2017], just as we were celebrating the first ten years of the museum's life, thieves broke in and stole the silver from our Ashbee, Hart and Welch cases. The raid was meticulously planned. ..."

"The pieces taken were individual, commissioned works and so irreplaceable, and they form an important part of the story we tell...."

"The story of Cotswold craft will be told more fully, and we will emerge widened in scope, improved in facilities, and refreshed in spirit."

We went on to explore the charming town, indulged in some Pimm's-number-one-cup ice cream(!) and bought an early Christmas present in one of the excellent Chipping Campden antique shops. But my mood was somber as I reflected on the nature of evil, and played over in my mind what it must have meant to the brave souls who had invested heart, soul – and expertise – into their museum, as they viewed the desecration on that August morning. If you visit England, do go to Chipping Campden and the Court Barn Museum: enjoy the much that is left, help with the recovery -- but do not expect to see the best of the silver from the Guild of Handicraft.



Set of alphabet bricks designed by C.R. Ashbee and carved by Alec Miller, for Ashbee's eldest daughter

II. GLASGOW

Charles Rennie Mackintosh is often called 'the Scottish Frank Lloyd Wright,' but he differs from Frank Lloyd Wright (and C.R. Ashbee, for that matter) in so many ways! Whereas Wright lived long and built many buildings, Mackintosh died early and built few. Where Wright was boisterously self-promoting, Mackintosh was self-effacing. The Scot shared credit with his talented wife, Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, while Wright shared credit with no one. But they both had architectural genius, and they both designed every smallest detail in their buildings. And both could evoke that rare experience where I've entered a room and involuntarily gasped for breath, out of wonder, awe, and joy, along with every other visitor there. Although his designs were wildly popular in Austria, Germany and elsewhere at the dawn of the 20th century, almost everything of Mackintosh's is on his home turf in Glasgow.

The Glasgow School of Art is generally considered Mackintosh's masterpiece. Built in two sections between 1897 and 1910 on a square block of central

Continued on next page

UK Tragedies (cont.)

Glasgow, it has been voted “the most important building in Britain” more than once. It is a rectangular building, and each of the four public faces is elegant in itself and completely unpredictable from a consideration of its neighbors. The studios all use natural lighting; the central library with tables, chairs and overhead lighting all of dark local woods, is as comfortable as it is grand. I have twice, in earlier years, toured the school and learned to appreciate some, but surely not all, of its elegant details.

But wood burns! At the beginning of its second century, on 23 May 2014, the Glasgow School of Art suffered a major fire, when one of the students’ projects misfired. Arriving in Edinburgh last summer, I asked friends how the restoration was progressing.

“Didn’t you hear? It burned. Again!”

“No! Say it ain’t so!” After four years the rebuilding was well along, students were expected to move back in 2019... and a new extensive fire prevention system was nearing completion, *but not yet operational*.

The cause has yet to be determined, but on 15 June 2018, the School was again in flames, with 120 fire-fighters working from 20 fire engines, to little avail. The heat from the inferno was felt two blocks away; the interior was destroyed and only the outer walls (of questionable stability) remain. If the first blaze in 2014 was disastrous (estimate of £30 million to re-



Silver-plated jug by William Mark

build) the fire of last summer was catastrophic, and estimates to rebuild are in the £100 million range. That’s a tenth of a billion pounds, about an eighth of a billion dollars. It’s all do-able. Charles Rennie Mackintosh’s original plans specify everything down to the smallest detail, and crafts-men and -women assembled to effect the restoration are still available.

But there has been a lively debate over whether it might be better to start afresh, give a young architect in the 21st century the opportunity that Mackintosh had in the 20th. It appears that the rebuild faction has the upper hand and Mackintosh’s School of Art will rise again. But the statement by Scotland’s First Minister that the setback was “heartbreaking” is certainly a masterpiece of an understatement.



Silver box by Jack Baily, early member of the Guild of Handicraft

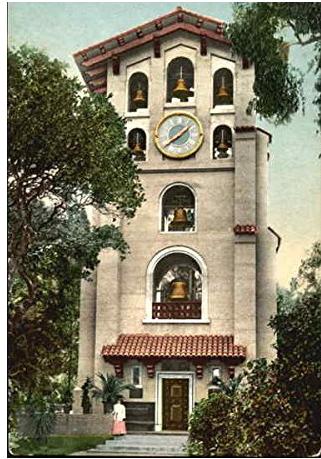


Court Barn Museum in Chipping Campden. The plain exterior holds a host of treasures within.

Julia Morgan: California's Force Majeur



Julia Morgan (c. 1890)



Mills College Bell Tower
(1903)



Hearst Memorial Mining Building (1902)

By Cynthia Shaw

Born into a privileged Bay Area family in 1872, Julia Morgan must have been surprised by some of the barriers that stood in her way when she decided to pursue a career in architecture. In 1890, encouraged by family and friends to follow her passion, she enrolled in engineering school at the University of California at Berkeley (a.k.a. Cal), then the only western school offering some training in the art of building. While Elizabeth Bragg had been the first woman to earn a degree there in 1886, Julia was the only female student 14 years later.

Her innate talents were quickly noticed by an eccentric drawing professor named Bernard Maybeck, who would not only become a legendary Bay Area architect but her lifelong mentor as well. Inviting her to join her male counterparts in his unconventional design and drafting seminars, he then asked her to collaborate with him on campus housing for a Cal geologist. Upon her graduation in 1894, she gained invaluable hands-on experience helping him build his own residence and studio nearby.



Hearst Greek Theater (1903)

Maybeck subsequently encouraged his protege to apply to the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, the world's most respected architecture school (for men only!). Undaunted, in 1896 Julia took the entrance examination but failed to make it onto the list of the top 30 candidates. The next time, she scored much higher only to discover her marks were arbitrarily lowered, *"because they do not wish to encourage young ladies in their profession."*

Placing 13th on her third try in 1898, she made history as the Ecole's inaugural female student. Graduating in 1902 just shy of her 30th birthday (a deadline enforced on all students), she spent a few years working at a French atelier where she received her first independent commission to create a grand salon for a 17th c. house in Fontainebleau. She then returned home to set up a tiny office in her parents' carriage house in Oakland.

Having heard Maybeck sing her praises, John Galen Howard, the head of Cal's new School of Architecture, recruited her to help complete the master plan he and Phoebe Apperson Hearst (the University's most generous benefactress) envisioned for a new academic community in the Beaux Arts style. With their white granite facades, red-tiled roofs and applied decoration, Morgan's designs for the Hearst Memorial Mining Building (1902) and the Hearst Greek Theater (1903) remain beloved by professors and students to this day. But after hearing the "compliment" Howard gave her for her contributions to this project (*"And the best thing about this person is, I pay her almost nothing, as it is a woman!"*), she was hell-bent to open her own private practice.

Serendipitously, she received two coveted commissions: one from Mrs. Hearst to remodel her rural estate in the Spanish Colonial style, and another from Mills College to build a bell tower, library, gymnasium and infirmary on the existing campus. She also designed several modest homes in Berkeley and Oakland. Breaking ground yet again as the first certified female architect with an independent practice in the United States, she opened her own office on Montgomery Street in the heart of San Francisco. While the devastating earthquake of 1906 toppled her own building and countless others, the resulting rubble led to endless opportunities for aspiring architects to resurrect and reinvent architecture in the Bay Area.

One plum project was the renovation of the Fairmont Hotel, a grandiose landmark at the top of Nob Hill that was reduced to a shell when a fire gutted its interior shortly after the quake. Approached by the owner to determine if the building could be saved rather than razed and rebuilt, she had no qualms about meeting the challenge. Astonishingly, in less

than a year, the hotel reopened to the public amidst much fanfare. The success of this sublime restoration gained Julia a national reputation as a both a brilliant architect and innovative structural engineer. Beginning with her ingenious use of reinforced cement on the Mills College bell tower in 1903, her career was now firmly "cast in concrete".

(To be continued in Spring Newsletter)



The Fairmont Hotel (1907)

Julie Leidel at Modern Bungalow's Maker Series

As part of the revitalization of the Modern Bungalow, Denver's Arts and Crafts emporium, the new owners (well *fairly* new, more than a year now) Danielle Sandusky and Matt Hubbard have initiated a series of occasional talks by their 'Makers', the artists and artisans whose work they sell. On October 28th, Julie Leidel was in the spotlight.

To an audience of two dozen or so, in the Modern Bungalow showroom-turned-lecture hall, Julie recounted her growth from childhood in an artistic family, through her first misspent year at Colorado State University as a mechanical engineer, to her degree in much more suitable graphic design. As a college student she worked at a restaurant, working on drawings between customers. Colleagues there gave her their highest accolade: based on their somewhat limited artistic experience, they predicted that she might rise to a career as a tattoo artist! Julie showed us a handful of brightly colored paintings from the 1990s, when she was experimenting.



Julie Leidel presenting at Modern Bungalow

Her subject matter was broad and self-proclaimed as "unfocused" -- from kitchen still-life paintings to science-fiction landscapes, from ocean life to birds and flowers. This exploration period helped her to discover that the heart of what she was seeking was still out there to be uncovered.

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Julie Leidel (cont.)

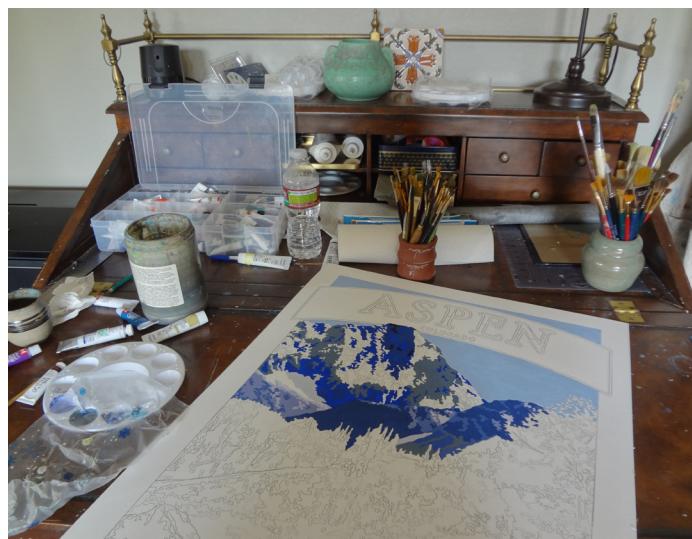
Julie recounted how she was drawn to the Arts & Crafts Movement by Diane Maddex' iconic book, *Bungalow Nation*, and how in 2004 she and husband Brian designed an addition to their 879 square foot Denver home in the A&C style. (Subsequent houses have been larger, but no less Arts & Crafts – their Golden home was featured in a 2015 CACS tour of Golden houses in 2015.)

Julie's recitation of influences on her thought and work, aptly illustrated by a rich slide show, pretty much traced the history of the A&C Movement, with a few surprises: from Ruskin to Morris, to the Glasgow four (Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Herbert McNair, and their wives Margaret and Frances MacDonald), as well as C.R. Ashbee. And then, the lesser-known Czech artist and designer of the Art Nouveau period, Alphonse Mucha (1861-1939), who, like Ashbee, believed in investing everyday wares with beauty. Then on to the Roycrofters and the Stickleys, to Louis Comfort Tiffany and the Saturday Evening Girls, and to Allen Tupper True (1881-1955), Colorado muralist with work in the Capitol rotunda, the Brown Palace, etc. Julie's current work explores nature in Colorado, as did True's.

The artist provided some insights on how she creates her original paintings. For her Colorado artwork she works from photographs but adds "artistic license," through shape, color, contrast and luminosity, to resemble the block prints characteristic of the A&C period and National Park posters of the WPA era.



The crowded showroom of the Modern Bungalow becomes a crowded lecture room – but everyone found a seat



A Colorado gouache painting in progress

The search for enhanced luminosity has led her to using gouache and, more recently, to enamel on stained glass panel. For her Tile-Inspired Series, she works on masonite board, adds molding paste for the background and the high-relief outlines for her landscapes, and then sands the artwork to prepare it for a wash of acrylic paint. She then lays it flat and allows the paint to pool in the reservoirs in various layers, to build the color and saturation, and finally knocks the bold color back with a few layers of her personal antiquing method to make the finished product feel weathered and worn. A particularly revealing series of slides showed us the steps, from start to finish, in making her Art Nouveau Raven, working through composition stages, background preparations, her layering of flat acrylic, metallic acrylic, and enamel paint, and lastly her build to the final detail layers.

After the lively question period, light refreshments encouraged attenders to chat, and to view Julie's prints for sale, as well as the multitude of other A&C items on display at the Modern Bungalow.



The Leidel young ones, Abby and Brady, sat right up front, cheering their mother on

DON'T MISS OUR WINTER SYMPOSIUM SATURDAY, JANUARY 26TH, 4-8PM

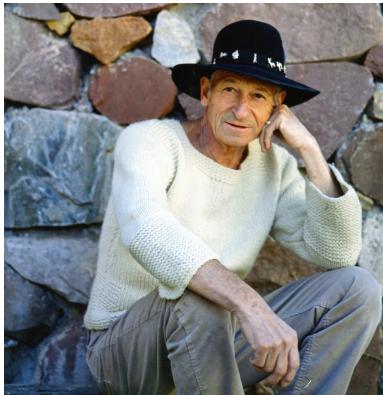
Featuring Stephanie Soldner Sullivan

The daughter of legendary ceramic artist and teacher Paul Soldner (pictured below) will talk about her late father's legacy and the family compound in Aspen that she hopes to turn into the Soldner Center for the Arts & Innovation.

This unprecedented event will take place inside the historic Boettcher Mansion's cozy Fireside Room.

Cost of catered dinner and lecture is \$40 (CACS members) and \$50 for the general public. RSVP by January 18, 2019!

For more information, contact cshaw@jeffco.us or (720) 497-7632. The mansion website is: www.jeffco.us/boettcher-mansion.



MODERN BUNGALOW'S MAKER SERIES CONTINUING IN 2019

Modern Bungalow is continuing the Maker's Series in 2019!

Modern Bungalow brings artisans to speak on (and often demonstrate) the unique aspects of different crafts. These provide an opportunity to see different makers in an intimate setting, and to learn more about what goes into handmade items.

2018's offerings included a presentation in October by Julie Leidel of The Bungalow Craft. Julie spoke on her creative process. In November Leon Loughridge demonstrated wood block printing.

In coming months other artists will bring additional insights to guests at Modern Bungalow. In February (date TBD), Lorenzo Chavez will discuss his plein air pastels and oil landscapes. On March 24, Jeff Icenhower of Mission West Wood and Leather will describe how decorative leather goods are created, and how they complement bungalow style design.



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