



The Sketch

The newsletter of the Cambridge Drawing Society September 2026

From the President

Susan Abbs



It hasn't been an easy summer, with the extreme heat and drought. Thank goodness we are now enjoying the coolness of autumn, and even better, some much-needed rain!

Despite the heat, we were incredibly lucky with the weather for our annual summer party. Pamela and Alan Barrell kindly hosted us in their beautiful Cambridge garden, and we couldn't have asked for a more perfect day. Our Events Secretary, Annelies Macintosh, organised fabulous catering, and it was a lovely afternoon. It was particularly good to see so many of you, and especially to welcome some new faces.

One of the nicest things about our summer party is the chance to chat and get to know each other a little better.

It was wonderful to see the work of two Cambridge Drawing Society alumni in the Portraits of Cambridge exhibition at the Museum of Cambridge. One was my predecessor from a different century and the other was the Secretary for many years, rather like our own Steve Ashman. (Steve, you really must start painting - perhaps one day, in the next century, we might see your work in a museum too!). A big thank you to our archivist, Colin Lees, whose work with the Society's archives helped make this exhibition possible. There is more about it below.



As we head into autumn, there is plenty to look forward to. Our next Autumn exhibition will be our first at the Pitt Building, and I'm really looking forward to seeing everyone's work. I'm also looking forward to our next SketchTogether, Bridge the Gap, when we'll be sketching our way around some of Cambridge's colleges. This will be followed by the opportunity to sketch inside Great St Mary's Church, organised by Charlotte Labalette.

In this issue:

From the President

Editorial

John Lee Hooker

Rob Jones

Autumn Exhibition

Monica Alikoviene

News and Events

Workshops, trips, sketching

Portraits of Cambridge

Colin Lees

Welcome Back

Alison Hullyer

Louise Riley-Smith

Obituary



I'm delighted to announce that Annelies has created something new for us: Art & About, a monthly get-together for members who enjoy art, creativity and meeting like-minded people. The idea is to meet somewhere relaxed for coffee or lunch, socialise and perhaps do a little sketching together. There will also be occasional midweek visits to galleries, exhibitions and interesting places, giving us the chance to explore, sketch and find inspiration together. I hope many of you will give it a go.

So, lots happening as we head into the new season. I hope to see many of you at one - or several - of our events.



Portrait of John Lee Hooker Winner of the public vote Spring 2026

Rob Jones



I've always enjoyed drawing people, life drawing and especially portraits really interest me. The drawing of the late, great blues musician John Lee Hooker is based on a photograph taken by the talented music photographer Steve Rapport (@steverapportphotography on Instagram), a Brit who lives in New Orleans and who graciously gave me permission to use his photograph as the reference for the drawing.

I tend to work slowly and try to work methodically. In order to preserve the detail on large works this means generally working from top right to bottom left across the picture (I'm left handed) so as not to touch the paper surface once it has been drawn on. I spend a lot of time establishing the tonal values as accurately as I can, making the darks properly dark helps greatly in creating the structure of the drawing and hopefully bringing some sense of realism. Finally the details are added to each section and then at the end final adjustments are made to the drawing. This process is shown in the images below for a drawing I completed recently.



October Exhibition

Monica Alikoviene



There is something special about returning to an annual exhibition: familiar faces, familiar routines and the anticipation of seeing what fellow artists have been working on. Yet one of the pleasures of the Cambridge Drawing Society's Autumn Exhibition is that there is always an element of the unexpected.

This year, that sense of discovery begins with the setting itself. For many years, the Autumn Exhibition has been held at The Leys School. This autumn, we are trialling the Pitt Building in the centre of Cambridge as a different setting for the show. It offers visitors a fresh way to experience an event that has always had a character of its own.

That character is shaped in part by the fact that, unlike the Society's Spring Exhibition, the Autumn Exhibition is not subject to a selection process. Members are able to submit work without first going through selection, and this often gives the show a greater sense of variety and experimentation. For artists, that freedom can be important. It may be an opportunity to show something they have been experimenting with in the studio, try a subject or process that is new to them, or simply choose a work they feel curious about sharing with an audience.

For visitors, this creates the possibility of seeing another side of an artist's practice. Alongside work by artists whose style may already be familiar, there is always the chance of encountering something unexpected. Part of the pleasure is not knowing exactly what will appear until the works arrive and the display takes shape.

That sense of curiosity can continue beyond the first encounter with an Artwork.

Most exhibited works are accompanied by a QR code linking to the artist's profile on the Cambridge Drawing Society website. If a painting, drawing, print or sculpture catches someone's attention, they can scan the code to find out more about the artist and their wider practice. The profiles are updated ahead of each show, so a moment of interest while viewing the work can lead naturally to discovering more.

Sometimes a work that catches the eye during a visit continues to stay in the mind afterwards, and occasionally finds its way into a new home.

At a time when so much art is encountered through screens, there is something particularly valuable about seeing an original work in person. Its scale, surface, colour, texture and presence can be experienced in a way that a digital image cannot fully reproduce. Where a QR code is available, it offers another way to follow that initial interest by learning more about the artist behind the work.

*Our poster image this autumn
A Place of Keeping by Katy Bailey*



Cambridge Drawing Society

AUTUMN EXHIBITION 2026
Sunday 25th - Saturday 31st October

**The Pitt Building,
Trumpington Street,
Cambridge,
CB2 1RP**

Paintings
Drawings
Mixed Media
Prints
Sculptures

10am - 4pm daily
ADMISSION FREE





A Place of Keeping by Katy Bailey

This year's new setting at the Pitt Building adds another element to the sense of discovery that has long been part of the Autumn Exhibition. The freedom members have to choose what they show, together with the opportunity for visitors to find out more about many of the artists through the Society's website, all contribute to an exhibition where there is always something more to explore.

What remains unchanged is the pleasure at the heart of the show: walking into a room without knowing exactly what you will find, stopping in front of something that makes you look twice, and seeing where that first moment of curiosity might lead.



*St Andrew's Churchyard, Histon, by Marcus Walder
Highly Commended in the Histon Plein Air Artist Competition 2026*

Future Events

Sunday 13th September - SketchTogether Bridge The Gap
Wednesday 16th September - Art and About meet up at Great St Marys
Sunday 4th October - Sumi ink painting workshop with Sachiko Purser
Saturday 10th October - V&A Storehouse trip
October SketchTogether - Great St Marys
November SketchTogether - Cambridge Library
December SketchTogether - Christmas Lights

Workshops and talks are open to the public, other activities are for Members and Friends only. For more information on events contact info@cambridgedrawingsociety.org.

The best way to join our SketchTogether events is via our CDS Whatsapp Group, contact president@cambridgedrawingsociety.org to sign up.

We are always looking for speakers and artists that are interested in giving talks or workshops. Contact events@cambridgedrawingsociety.org for more information.

Portraits of Cambridge

Exhibition at The Museum of Cambridge, until October 5th

Colin Lees, CDS archivist



Polly Greene in her Studio, 1895

Over the years Polly became a significant figure in Cambridge artistic life: she gave art lessons, most notably to the young Gwen Darwin, who would go on to achieve fame as a wood-engraver under her married name of Raverat; she held exhibitions at her studio in St Andrew's Street, opened a weaving room in Botolph Lane and gave therapeutic art classes to wounded soldiers during the Great War. It was her brother who suggested that Polly should draw and paint the various ancient inns, yards and alleyways which were being steadily demolished in the name of slum-clearance, public health and modernisation. Polly took up the idea and made more than forty paintings and drawings which stand today as an important record of how the town evolved from the end of the nineteenth century to the start of the Second World War. It is a small but carefully curated selection of these paintings which forms the core of this exhibition at the Museum of Cambridge.

Mary Charlotte Green (1860-1951), known as Polly to her friends and relations, was something of a Cambridge character. Living outside Cambridge, at Harston Hall, with her sister Helen and brother William, she was unmarried and of independent means, and was thus free to follow her own interests, most of which were artistic in one way or another. As a young woman, she studied art at the Royal Academy in Piccadilly and later at the Colarossi Academy in Paris, before eventually settling in Harston.



The White Horse Inn, by Mary 'Polly' Greene



Polly became a member of the Cambridge Drawing Society in 1894, and she was president of the society from 1926 until 1932. One of her fellow members was Marion Seward, wife of the Master of Downing College. Mrs Seward must have been a talented organiser; among other things, as honorary secretary, it was she who wrote the CDS's constitution which, in updated form, regulates the society's activities to the present day. She was also a gifted watercolorist, and this exhibition offers a rare chance to view some of her work.

The Cam from Chesterton Road, 1894, by Marion Seward

The theme of the show is A Town in Transition and the work on show reminds us of what we have lost over the years. If we think, for example, of the popularity of The Eagle in Bene't Street today, it's easy to imagine how much we would have treasured a building like The Wrestler's in Petty Cury, had it survived. Robert Farren (1832-1912) depicted it in an engraving of 1880, one of a set of 25 pictures he made of the town. Sensitively restored and conserved, The Wrestler's would surely have become one of Cambridge's most celebrated buildings. The same might be said of Falcon Yard, painted by Margaret Wadsworth in 1902. Also in Petty Cury, Queen Mary saw a play performed there in 1557.



Change continues, of course, and this interesting show reminds us how lucky we are that so many talented artists recorded so many ancient streets and buildings before they disappeared forever. Polly Greene's small painting of Emmanuel Street in the 1930's will surprise those familiar with the road as it is today, and many will enjoy her charming watercolour of Coe Fen in the 1890's.

Emmanuel Street by Mary 'Polly' Greene

Of most interest, perhaps, is The Albany Café, which depicts the interior of Polly's favourite cafe. Unlike so many of the buildings represented in this exhibition, the one which housed The Albany still stands and remained a cafe until just a few years ago - today it is a souvenir shop devoted to Harry Potter! The painting shows a group of academics (all identified in the excellent exhibition notes) examining a collection of semi-precious stones. In the background sits a young woman wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat. It may well be the only self-portrait Polly ever made. The picture was in a sorry state of repair when it was last displayed at the museum in 2018. Happily, funds were found to restore this charming painting and it now forms a very important part of this fascinating exhibition.



The Albany Cafe by Mary 'Polly' Greene

The exhibition closes on October 5th.

The museum is open Friday to Monday, 10.00* - 17.00 (*11am Sunday)

Member Profile - Welcome Back

Alison Hullyer



I was a member of CDS from 1993 to 1998, not long after getting my degree in Graphic Design. My daughter was born in 1998 and my son in 2000, so I think trying to produce new work each year became more difficult. In 1996 I started taking part in Cambridge Open Studios (COS), which I've managed to keep doing every year since.

This year I found myself with more time. The kids have now left home and I'd recently stepped down from the COS management team. I'd continued visiting the CDS exhibitions over the years and noticed there was also a change in how welcoming it felt as an organisation. There were more events, talks and sketching groups on offer and the application process was more straightforward...no lugging framed work to the Guildhall. So I was thrilled to be accepted again on my first attempt.

I'm still working as a printmaker, mostly with drypoint techniques. I'm not sure my themes have changed greatly as I'm still drawn to nature and landscapes. I'm now using more recycled materials such as cardboard, Tetra-paks and packaging to make my printing plates, which produce delightfully unexpected results. I've also started painting more in oils to give my wrist and shoulder a rest, fellow printmakers will be able to relate!



Cormorant (detail)



Winner of the Milton Bus Stop Competition!



Kingfisher Perch

Louise Riley-Smith 1946-2026 - Obituary

Louise Riley-Smith had been to life classes in her 'teens but she did not start painting again until after she had been to university, had married and had a family. Subsequently, she attended extra mural classes at Reading College of Art and Design where she began to specialise in portrait painting. She had private tuition over several years with professional artists, including John Horton, a former member of CDS and she spent a month of intensive training in neo-classical painting methods at Charles Cecil's School in Florence.

Her developing skill, especially with oil paint, was evident in 1996, when some of her portraits were selected for the Kettle's Yard Open Exhibition and another the following year in the Royal Society of Portrait Painters Exhibition. In 2003, her portrait of Elaine Paige was shortlisted for the prestigious Garrick/Milne prize for portraiture displayed at Christies. (The portrait was purchased anonymously for Miss Paige.)

Louise was selected as a member of CDS in 2005, by which time she had had numerous portrait commissions, including civil servants, clergy, lawyers, military personnel and many senior academics in Cambridge colleges. In 2007, her portrait of the artist John Holder was voted overwhelmingly the 'Favourite Picture' in the CDS exhibition at the Cambridge Guildhall.

Later she painted a series of 22 portraits of the head porters of the Cambridge colleges, celebrating men and women whose work is vital yet largely unnoticed. This inspiring project received widespread praise, and was featured in the national press and on the BBC.

Her considerable talent ensured she was always an extremely busy artist, but she remained a loyal CDS member who exhibited regularly in our exhibition. The demand for her work explained why on more than one occasion the paint was not quite dry!

Janice Andersen and Jackie Duckworth



Portrait of John Holder