

## Tour of the Fine Rooms at the Royal Academy 27<sup>th</sup> May 2014

Court Assistant Mr Nigel Cartwright has been a docent at the Royal Academy for a number of years and he kindly agreed to conduct a tour of the Fine Rooms and give insights on pictures and objects in the collections which are rarely seen by the general public.

Joining instructions for the attendees were to gather in the Reynolds Room for a pastry breakfast. On Nigel's arrival however, he discovered that this and some of the other rooms on the tour were unavailable due to re-hanging of an exhibition! Sadly no witnesses were around to watch, but it's understood Nigel stamped his foot and declared this was intolerable! And lo - the tour went ahead!

After our pleasant pastry breakfast – hastily transferred to the Council Room - the tour started outside, as Nigel explained the history of Burlington House.



We then progressed through some Fine Rooms - including the Reynolds Room and its wonderful ceiling, as well as an exhibition in preparation.....

History was made there when Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace presented papers to the Linnean Society, putting forward the groundbreaking ideas on evolution that were later made famous by Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*.



The Tennant Room was also being prepared for exhibition, but there was no stopping the tour now and the group were treated to an impromptu presentation by one of the Curators who showed and told us about the drawings and documents to be exhibited.

Onto the upper floor and a rarely allowed visit into the library preceded a sit-down where Nigel, standing alongside a little known Michelangelo, regaled us with several tales - including one about the said artist's dubious winter underwear arrangements.....



One Water Conservator, Richard Franceys, was particularly keen to see the Gibson sculptures on this floor, and following the visit, he forwarded some information about Gibson, below.

*Richard's forebears, Franceys and Franceys of Liverpool had been generous enough to buy John Gibson out of his woodcarving apprenticeship, when he had 'gone on strike' after his first year apprenticeship as a woodcarver, at the then not insignificant amount of £70. This to allow him to become an apprentice in the carving of marble. Apparently he worked for the firm for ten years or so and had his first RA submission accepted close to the end of this period but in later years he was obviously not impressed by Richard's forebears 'from whom the Messrs Gibson could learn nothing'. Perhaps they should have paid him more than '6 shillings a week'! The 1829 newspaper obituary of Samuel Franceys stated that he 'was throughout his long life distinguished for his love of the fine arts , and he took peculiar delight in encouraging genius.' A delight not always reciprocated it appears.*

*And a cutting from The Manchester Times and Gazette, Saturday, March 5, 1842.*

## **The Companion.**

Mr. GIBSON, the celebrated sculptor, was born in a small town or village in Denbighshire. His father, who was a warehouseman, or inferior clerk, brought his family to Liverpool, and two of his sons, John and Solomon, were bound apprentice to Messrs. Franceys, marble masons, men in good business, but from whom the Messrs. G. could learn nothing. With the exception of the advice and opinions of Mr. Roscoe, which were freely given to Mr. John Gibson, that talented artist may be considered to be self-taught; and so high does he now stand in the opinion of those best qualified to judge, that it is no vain prophecy to say that he will reach the highest point of his noble art.

A very enjoyable visit to the Royal Academy – very many thanks to Nigel for such a stimulating tour!

