

Creatively Campden

Tracy Spiers discovers the creative force running through Chipping Campden

Calligraphic brushstrokes dance across her canvas in glorious colour and joyful movement echoing the emotions of a cheerful walker wandering through the Cotswold countryside. I'm looking at the large work of South African-born fine artist Susan Rosenberg, which tells a story of someone who sees the beauty and balance in what's around her. Forgive me for being poetic but it's the influence that Chipping Campden has on me. There's a magnetic pull to the place that urges the creative within to want to come out. It inspired CR Ashbee, a leading figure of the highly influential Arts and Crafts Movement, to leave London and encourage an exodus of 150 craft workers and families to move here. And his workshop in the Old Silk Mill in Sheep Street – a hive of creative activity all those years ago – continues to have that same dynamic prolific influence. Creativity bursts at the seams in this delightful market town, which is full of character, charm and

seems so alive. Susan Rosenberg is just one of many artists who are part of Creative Campden, established by publisher/entrepreneur Arthur Cunynghame and photographer/business consultant Paula Lingard three years ago. It acts as a promotional and social forum for all the creative people in the town and surrounding villages and has helped establish Chipping Campden as a centre of creative excellence.

"We realised that Chipping Campden was home to a great many creative folk who could come together for mutual support and to promote their works. The fact that we have 45 creative people involved shows. We have everything from architecture to musicians to artists. We meet up once a month to discuss a topic, which acts as a catalyst to inspire everyone to make even better and glorious work," explains Arthur, a former wine merchant, cheesemonger and now owner of a small independent publishing company called Loose Chippings.

Several 'Discover Creative Campden Weekends' have taken place and the organisation seeks to promote members' individual events through its website and eNewsletter.

But prior to Creative Campden it was Ashbee's influence which prompted Paula Lingard to set up the Gallery at the Guild, open daily 10am-5pm. Attracted by the Old Silk Mill's history and arts and crafts heritage, she launched this outstanding co-operative of 25 artists, ceramicists, designers, furniture makers, writers, photographers, sculptors and textile artists who moved into Ashbee's former workshop in 2005 and now incorporates Susan Megson Glass. Parallels can be made between Ashbee's original guild and this thriving cooperative as some of the members have given up high powered jobs and urban life to devote their time to what they enjoy doing.

"It is a great thrill to share in one

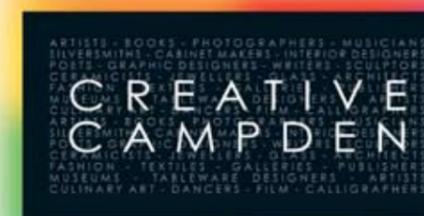
another's success and achievements – we have members who have been commissioned to work at Windsor Castle, to produce one-offs for Fortnum & Mason, been awarded prizes by The Royal Watercolour Society and been invited to teach and lecture across the country and our members' work has been sold all over the world," explains Paula.

As in Ashbee's day, cooperative members face competition from mass produced items but in an age where consumers are faced with more choice than ever before, there is a trend towards an original piece of art, which they will find in Chipping Campden. Creative industries are in abundance and have a long history of establishment.

Robert Welch, designers of beautiful cutlery and other award-winning products sold all over the world, had its origins in the Old Silk Mill. In 1955, fresh from the Royal College of Art, Robert Welch rented a small room here and installed his drawing board and a truckle bed. His strong design principles later made him an MBE and a Royal Designer for Industry. Robert's son Rupert and daughter Alice have been responsible for the company's direction since 1993 and continue to ensure its success. Look at the extensive list of past and present customers and one can't fail to be impressed – No 10 Downing Street, Sir

Winston Churchill, Virgin Atlantic Airways, John Lewis and many of the world's leading hotels and restaurants are but a few. The company is still based in the Old Silk Mill and has a shop in Lower High Street.

Other lucrative businesses and



individual success stories in Campden include award-winning Reg Ellis Architects, internationally renowned Jazz musician Bob Wilder, cabinet maker Jeremy Green who was inspired by the life of William Morris, Ernest Gimson and the Barnsley brothers; Creative Cows run by Keyna Doran and Vanessa Rigg who started the successful Campden Comedy Club in 2011 and now attracts circuit comedians from all over Britain; and fine artist and illustrator Caroline Green, who has published two children's book Oscar and the Suitcase and Oscar Goes

Left: Susan Rosenberg and her paintings
Below: Ferns at Hidcote by Susan Rosenberg, acrylic on canvas



Authors: (Left to Right) John Mullan, Paula Byrne, Joanna Trollope, Alan Rusbridge

on Holiday.

Artists produce work regardless of the economic climate – it's in their blood to create whether it is music, literature, painting or using any other artistic medium. In Chipping Campden there is desire to bring those talents together, celebrate them and promote them so in terms of festivities there is a lot going on.

In May, two major events marry well together. Chipping Campden's Literature Festival runs from April 30 until May 5 – marking the start of the town's well-known Music Festival, which runs until May 18. They dovetail well and are organised by husband and wife team Charlie and Vicky Bennett. Charlie, who is also a co-owner of Bennetts Fine Wines, an independent award winning wine merchant in the High Street, puts together an eclectic classical music programme of astonishing range and depth, featuring international artists while Vicky uses her talents to ensure an interesting range of literary talks and workshops.

Launched in 2002, the music festival has gone from strength to strength, partly because of the outstanding acoustic of St James' Church, described by the legendary pianist Alfred Brendel, as one of the finest he encountered in his 60-year career. Charlie believes this year's music festival is their most exciting one to date. >



The Market Hall, Chipping Campden



Gallery at the Guild





Left: Paul Lewis photo
Below: Sheep sculpture
 by Caroline Barnett
Below: Robert Welch Signature Knife



“Alongside some of the UK’s finest musicians we have artists from Spain, Germany, Romania, Russia and America joining us this year so really can claim to be ‘Chipping Campden International Music Festival’,” he exclaims.

“Whilst we don’t have major themes for each festival we do acknowledge significant anniversaries in our programming; accordingly, 2013 being the centenary of Benjamin Britten’s birth, four of our concerts feature his works.”

The theme of the fourth Chipping Campden Literature Festival is ‘A Backward Glance’. The inaugural talk will be given by Shakespeare scholar Jonathan Bate. Paula Byrne, *The Real Jane Austen* (2013), will discuss with novelist Joanna Trollope her 2013 rewriting of *Sense and Sensibility* while John Mullan answers questions posed in his *What Matters in Jane Austen?* Helen Dunmore reads from *The Malarkey* and Alan Rusbridger presents *Play It Again*. Typography, archaeology, WWII, traditional baking, natural gardening, the economy and environment, papermaking, the Mitfords, Gogol, Proust, and Chaucer will be given an airing. And, in a joint Music Festival event, RSC actors David

“A whole host of crazy energetic activities such as sword-play, hammer throwing, and carrying leaky buckets full of water over a piece of polythene smothered in washing-up liquid go on at the Cotswold Olimpicks”

and Ali Troughton read imaginary dialogues spoken by composers from Palestrina to Messiaen.

These festivals are two of the town’s major cultural events, attracting visitors from all over the UK and Europe, and even from the USA, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.

Then of course there is the famous 400-year-old annual sporting festival Cotswold Olimpicks on Dover’s Hill, where a whole host of crazy energetic activities such as sword-play, sack-jumping, shot put, hammer throwing, and carrying leaky buckets full of water over a piece of polythene smothered

in washing-up liquid go on. Last year my daughter Emily and I had a go at shin kicking, but have vowed to give our legs a break this year to avoid unnecessary bruises.

But it’s a town not only known for its quiriness and creative talent, but for its beauty too. Chipping Campden, which marks the start of the 102-mile Cotswold Way, owes much of its charming character to the design skills of those who built its gently curving honey-coloured High Street. It is a proper market town with a good choice of restaurants, hotels, coffee and tea shops and an interesting mix of independent shops. A few months ago Campden Business Forum was launched by Sir John Armit, chairman of the Olympic Delivery Authority and local resident. Organised by John Lucken, who runs Arkanum, involved with Health Project Developments; Julian Ebbutt who runs Lower Brook House in Blockley and is also part of Bespoke Hotels (owners of Cotswold House Hotel); and Creative Campden’s Arthur Cunyngame.

“Campden is already a great place to live. It has great social vitality. The aim of the Business Forum is to foster a similar >



Above: Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment

economic vitality and to make it a very convivial place to do business. The idea is to bring together all the businesses in and around Campden, of whatever size and whatever trade or profession they are in," explains Arthur.

Since the launch in November, more than 60 businesses have joined the forum, which has strong links with John Sanderson, principal at Chipping Campden School and Sarah-Jane Menato who runs Women in Business.

At a time when the creative industries are blossoming areas of the UK economy, electronic media is also represented in Chipping Campden. Graphic design, interior design and multi-media production are all part of the eclectic mix of Creative Campden and Arthur sees more cutting-edge creatives becoming part of the network, perhaps moving from London in much the same way as Ashbee did a century ago.

The word Chippings means market and the name Campden is thought to be a Saxon name meaning 'valley with fields'. The stone-arched Market Hall, built in 1627, is one of the Cotswolds most outstanding buildings and The Woolstapler's Hall, built in 1340 by wool merchant Robert Calf, was used as a Wool Exchange. Many tourists also visit Court Barn Museum in Church Street to find out more about the Arts & Craft Movement story. And it's here we return. History repeats itself in new ways.



Above: Paul Lewis and Thomas Hull rehearse for Chipping Campden Music Festival

“Creative Campden has helped establish Chipping Campden as a centre of creative excellence”

Fine art painter Susan Rosenberg believes it's that sense of place, history and inspirational atmosphere that attracts people to the town.

"Chipping Campden is a very vibrant community. I love the music festival and the literary festival; they feed the imagination and the intellect with the

quality of music and talks and are just such fun. I do also have a London studio which is important as I need that contact with the city, but my studio here has such an immediate connection with the landscape that I find there is an instant relationship with my painting that I don't get anywhere else," she says.

"Living in a place like Chipping Campden when there has been a long history of creative people; one can sense that not only in the natural environment but in the built environment too. The two work so harmoniously with each other and I can understand why people want to come here. The town is a natural magnet for creative people because it is such a stimulating environment to be in."

It gives a valuable insight into why Ashbee gave up the fast pace of London life to lead an exodus of like-minded people to this Cotswold town over a hundred years ago. And a century on many continue to discover his secret inspiration for themselves and are following his footsteps to ensure the creative spirit of Chipping Campden lives on. ■

www.thegalleryattheguild.co.uk

www.rosenberg-art.com

www.campdenbusinessforum.com

www.creativecampden.co.uk

www.campdenlitfest.co.uk

www.campdenmusicfestival.co.uk

www.campdenonline.co.uk