

THE GILDED AGE + TWO TEMPLE PLACE Thursday 15th February

After the American Civil War, the US economy grew at lightning speed. The so-called robber baron families built vast fortunes from monopolies in steel (Carnegies), oil (Rockefellers), railways (Vanderbilts), banking (JP Morgan) and real estate (Asters).

Mark Twain called these unprecedented times The Gilded Age. We tell the stories of Gilded Age Americans in London in the squares and streets they colonised and examine their impact on British Society - that's Society with a capital S.

This is a tale of money, mansions and marriage. On the cusp of the Victorian and Edwardian eras, American Dollar Princesses who had everything they wanted except invites to the nicest parties crossed the Atlantic, husband hunting for a cash strapped Duke or Earl. It was a game of keeping up with the Asters. (Think of Cara in the TV series Downton Abbey).

We begin at 10.30/45am with morning refreshments (included) before exploring the Gilded Age enclave that began between Pall Mall and The Mall before expanding into the grand squares of Mayfair and Belgravia. It is quite a story. For lunch we have free time at the Royal Courts of Justice end of Fleet Street. There are pubs, cafes and restaurants to hand or you could use the time to take a peek inside the Royal Courts, the RAF Church of St Clements or the atmospheric lanes of the Middle and Inner Temple. After lunch it is a short walk down to the Embankment and Two Temple Place. This is truly one of London's hidden architectural gems. Overlooking the Thames this Victorian neo-Gothic mansion, with a Tudor twist was built for William Waldorf Astor - the richest man in the world. The opulent interior is decorated with literary, mythic and historic references – characters from Shakespeare and Anne Boleyn are carved into precious woods alongside Robin Hood and the Three Musketeers. The property is only open from select dates each year when its guardians The Bulldog Trust host special exhibitions within the building.

In 2024 Glass Heart presents a bold new exploration of glass in the UK starting in the mid-19th century, featuring rarely seen works from key UK collections. The exhibition will examine how this remarkable material – unforgiving, fragile, strong, sustainable – has illuminated and contained human narratives and ideas, featuring historic and contemporary works rethought in the jewelled heart of Two Temple Place. Our visit will include a guided tour of the astonishing Astor interiors plus time to browse the exhibition and buy a cup of tea before heading for home.

Accessibility: a few steps up and down to negotiate, plus approximately 400 yards walking.

There is a lift to all floors inside.

Cost: £65 inc. morning refreshments and tip for driver. Trip ref: **GA**

Leave Xcel, Walton 9 a.m. sharp

Return approx. 6.15 p.m.

Please contact Di (07809 209691) or email dilewi26@gmail.com .

Available places are limited and each trip must be the subject of a separate booking. Bookings are made on a first come first served basis and no booking is confirmed **until both prior agreement has been reached with Di and until payment is received**. Remember also that if you have agreed a booking with Di (including whether payment will be made by bank transfer or cheque) and until payment is received **it is for you to keep her informed** about the progress of your payment because if she hears nothing she is entitled to assume that you have changed your mind and may give the place(s) to someone else.

If anyone booked on a trip has special needs / mobility issues these should be communicated to Diana at the time of booking. Members are allowed to bring non members but only if there are enough places.

Members have priority.

To pay for a trip

Bank Transfer (preferred method):

Elmbridge u3a

Account No 56598750

Sort Code 60-08-04

Please put the reference (in this case GA trip) followed by your initial and surname and membership number in the reference section on the bank transfer.

By cheque, *but only by prior arrangement*, made payable to:

Elmbridge u3a, naming the trip on the back.

Send to: Di Lewington, 20 Melrose Road, Weybridge KT13 8UP.

Once you have made your bank transfer/posted your cheque you must let Di know, preferably by email, so she can confirm your place.

N.B. If you later cancel your booking, your payment will be refundable only if someone else takes your place, as provided by our Trips and Events Policy (see Trips and Events on the Members/Committee Reports and Policies page of our website, or telephone the Membership Secretary).

Unless otherwise stated all coach trips leave from and return to Elmbridge Xcel Leisure Centre, Waterside Drive (off Terrace Road and Hurst Road), Walton on Thames KT12 2JG.