



NEWSLETTER
September 2021

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Greetings!

There were some very positive comments in response to the first issue of the revived Christopher Dresser Society Newsletter. Thank you to everyone who took the trouble to get in touch and tell us how pleased you were that the Society is being revived, and how much you are looking forward to Dresser Fest 21.

As promised, this Newsletter contain further details and booking arrangements for Dresser Fest 21 on Saturday 18 September 2021.

There is also a brief review of a new book about Dresser and his work – the Society Chair, Linda Polley, has provided a brief review of a recently published book on Christopher Dresser by Max Donnelly, the Victoria & Albert Museum's Curator of Nineteenth-Century Furniture.

One of the responses to the last Newsletter was from the Crystal Palace Foundation – their latest Newsletter features Dr Dresser and is attached.

You will also find in this Newsletter more insights from members of the Society Committee into how they 'discovered' Christopher Dresser and his work.

Happy Reading!

Martin
Martin F Peagam
Secretary - martin@peagam.co.uk

Christopher Dresser Society



Dresser Fest 2021 - Saturday 18 September

We now have details of the programme and the booking details for Join US / Dresser Fest 21 on Saturday 18 September 2021 between 3.00pm and 8.30pm BST (8.00am and 1.30pm MT in the USA)



You are Invited...



International Collaboration!
Christopher Dresser Experts!
A Five-Legged Chair!
A Day of Learning!

Kirkland Museum is thrilled to virtually host [Join US Dresser Fest 21](#), an international celebration of British designer Christopher Dresser on Saturday, September 18, 2021, beginning at 8.00am Mountain Time / 3.00pm BST.

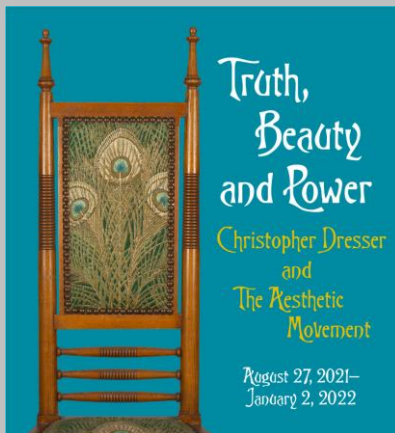


Registration is free but required via the link below. In lieu of ticket costs, donations made to Kirkland Museum or the Christopher Dresser Society are appreciated.

[View the Full Schedule and Register Today!](#)

Join US Dresser Fest 21, organized by the Christopher Dresser Society and the Dorman Museum in Middlesbrough, UK, is aimed at promoting a greater awareness and appreciation of Dr. Christopher Dresser and his work.

***Don't Miss Kirkland Museum's
"Dresser Discovery" Talk
at 12.00noon MT / 7.00pm BST***



Join Dresser Fest at 12pm MT / 7.00pm BST to hear Kirkland Museum's own Becca Goodrum, along with Louise Harrison and Harry Lyons, discuss how an image from the Dorman Memorial Museum in the UK started a conversation about the attribution of Kirkland Museum's five-legged chair and the reasons why Mr. Lyons believes the chair can be attributed to Christopher Dresser.



Book Review

Christopher Dresser, Design Pioneer, Max Donnelly, Thames & Hudson, V&A (2021)

The V&A's recent publication, *Christopher Dresser, Design Pioneer*, is a welcome addition to the Dresser literature; its very existence provides an articulate contribution to the ongoing argument for wider acknowledgement of Dresser's achievements.

Written by the museum's Curator of Nineteenth-Century Furniture, Max Donnelly, this attractive book provides in its illustrated Preface and Introduction a clear and concise exploration of Dresser's philosophy and design work. Given the complexity of the designer's life and thought processes, this is no mean achievement.

The Introduction is followed by 82 Plates, each with a short but informative text. This wealth of illustration, mainly items from the V&A's collection, evidence the range of Dresser's design practice, encompassing pottery, furniture, glass, textiles, metalware. Also, the juxtaposition of some of Dresser's designs with examples of earlier inspiration provides valuable insights, taking full advantage of the museum's artefacts and expertise.

I enjoyed it very much. It is well priced, well worth seeking out and no doubt ideally placed in the V&A shop. One can assume this book will enthuse all those newly introduced to Dresser's designs and act as a welcome additional source for his fans.

Linda Polley, August 2021

The Chrystal Palace Foundation and Dr Dresser

On 31 January 1861 Christopher Dresser gave a lecture as the newly-appointed Professor of Botany at the Crystal Palace School of Art, Science & Literature.

To learn more about this, read the attached Newsletter of the Chrystal Palace Foundation, an organization which seeks to keep alive the memory of the Crystal Palace, and its rôle in the story and social development of Victorian and Edwardian England.

We are grateful to Ken Lewington of the Foundation for the opportunity to reproduce the Newsletter.



Another Dresser Chair!

Following the article in the last Newsletter, about the attribution of a five-legged chair to Christopher Dresser, we received information on another Dresser-design chair from Paul Shutler:

Amongst the designs in the Thomas Knight archive, held at the Victoria & Albert Museum, is a single page containing sixteen designs of chairs numbering from 217 to 232. The index states that the page shows 'Dr Dresser's designs'. This chair can be identified as No. 229 (see below).

Of those sixteen designs, examples of ten had been identified before the discovery of our chair. Nine of those are represented by just a single example and there are at least four known examples of no. 218 (see endnote for details).

We believe that Thomas Knight made one example of each of the sixteen designs as prototypes to stock in the Art Furnishers' Alliance's showroom at 157 New Bond Street London. Pieces were then made to order. This theory can be strengthened when the construction method and detailed measurements are examined further; please contact us for details.

A design for a decorated version of this model appeared in the Furniture Gazette on 2nd October 1880, the year that Dr Dresser was guest editor of the magazine. The 'occasional chair' is described as being '... light and elegant and should be useful'. See a front and side view below.

Among a group of black and white photographs within the 'Chubb archive' held at the London Metropolitan Archives London, is a photograph of a decorated version.

Following the Art Furnishers' Alliance's bankruptcy in early 1883, Chubb as a major shareholder instructed the auctioneers Thurgood & Martin to sell the remaining stock. Accordingly, they held a sale on the 24th August 1883. Lot 145 was a 'Dark mahogany octagon back chair, stuffed and covered in crimson silk (Dr. Dresser's design)'. It is unclear if the chair described is our prototype or the decorated version shown in the black and white photographs held in the Chubb Archive.

For more information, visit <https://paulshutler.co.uk/dr-dresser-chair>



The New Committee

As stated in the last Newsletter, the Society has a new Committee, whose members are committed to reviving the Society after a period in which it went into the doldrums.

Heading the Committee is the Chairman Linda Polley, a former History Lecturer at Teesside University.

Alongside Linda are people who have been involved with the Society for a number of years – Gill Moore, Louise Harrison, Sue Sedgwick, Sarah Welburn, Reba Yuille and Val Harrison - and also a new face Martin Peagam. Gill, Louise, Sue and Sarah all work, or have worked, at the Dorman Museum, whilst Linda, Val, and Reba have been involved for several years as volunteers at the museum, working with the Dresser Collection.

We are very excited to be making progress – with this Newsletter, a number of on-line videos during lockdown, and of course our trans-Atlantic cooperation on Dresser Fest 21.

In due course we will be convening an Annual General Meeting to formalize the Society's management arrangements, but in the meantime the Committee members are, individually and collectively, pursuing ideas to bring the Society back to life, starting with Dresser Fest 2021.

What Brought You to Dresser?

We asked the new Committee Members two very important questions:

- What brought you to Dresser?
- What is your favourite Dresser piece?

Here are some of their answers.... Do you agree with their choices?

Linda Polley – Chair of The Christopher Dresser Society

I first became aware of Christopher Dresser as an undergraduate, in a History of Design lecture, probably in my first year. We were shown Dresser's rather Art Nouveau design for cotton print (for Steiner, although I don't think we knew that then) and one of his geometric wallpaper friezes. Not knowing a great deal about Victorian design at the time, I suppose I responded to them out of context, but they really knocked me out – I think I knew enough to see they were so different and so modern. I made a note to see what else he designed and I was certainly not disappointed. I've been a big fan ever since.



As to my favourite Dresser design, I seem to change my mind regularly and often. The more I see, the more I want! At present I'm very keen on the golden yellow Wedgwood spill vase, but if I had money to spend, it would probably go on a piece of Clutha glass.

Louise Harrison - Curatorial Officer, Dorman Museum

Despite being the daughter of a design lecturer, I have to admit that I hadn't come across Christopher Dresser before starting work at the Dorman Museum in 1994.

Apart from the Linthorpe Art Pottery pieces we only had a small collection of Dresser designs in the museum at that stage so it wasn't until we started researching the 2004 Dresser Centenary exhibition that I started to fully appreciate the amazing breadth and beauty of his work.

For my choice of my favourite Dresser 'piece' I feel obliged out of loyalty to pick a Linthorpe Pottery piece but it is like having to pick your favourite child.

I find the pelican beaked jug, shape number 610, the most dramatic and love the washed-out glaze that our example has. But the piece I admire the most from the whole of our Dresser collection is the Hukin and Heath egg boiler. Unlike some of the more austere of Dresser's designs for metalwork this piece has lovely flowing lines and for a purely functional object is quite beautiful.

Sarah Welburn – Museums Access Officer, Middlesbrough Council

I became aware of Christopher Dresser when I began working at the Dorman Museum in 2002. I was shocked to discover that even though I knew about Archibald Knox and William Morris, Dresser had been left out of my Art History education.

My favourite piece of Dresser is a tough ask. I would probably say the Clutha glass jug in orange and pink that is displayed next to a Roman Glass flagon in the Dresser Gallery

Martin Peagam – Secretary to The Christopher Dresser Society

I have long been passionate about the history of Middlesbrough – the 'Infant Hercules' as Gladstone described it on a visit to the town built on the foundations of iron and steel making. I was aware of the Dresser family of Yorkshire. I was aware of Tom Dresser VC whose statue stands in front of the Dorman Museum. To my shame, however, until relatively recently I did not know about the designer who Art Designer and Art Superintendent for the Linthorpe Art Pottery from 1879 to 1882. That is a gap in my knowledge that I



am putting right, not least through my colleagues in the Christopher Dresser Society.

Choosing my favourite Dresser piece is difficult, as I have only begun to get acquainted with Dresser's work.

However, if pushed, and perhaps not my final answer, I will nominate three pieces that I find attractive. Firstly, the Earthenware Jug manufactured by the Linthorpe Art Pottery – so simple and clean, yet elegant and practical. Secondly, the Jug and Beaker Set, attributed to Dresser and manufactured by the Watcombe Pottery Company. And finally, being a lover of afternoon tea, the elegant yet practical Milk Jug, Sugar Bowl, and Teapot designed by Dresser and manufactured by James Dixon & Sons of Yorkshire.

How did YOU discover Dresser?

Do YOU agree with our Committee Members' choices of their favourite pieces?

Drop us a line to martin@peagam.co.uk and let us know!

Membership of the Christopher Dresser Society

We have sent you this Newsletter because our records show that you are a member of the Christopher Dresser Society.

If you do NOT wish to continue as a member of the Society, please let us know, by e mailing martin@peagam.co.uk

Thank you!