



**NEWSLETTER**  
**Issue No. 4 – December 2021**

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## **The Dresser Society is Official!**

The inaugural meeting of the Christopher Dresser Society was held on Wednesday 24 November 2021.

Dresser fans from across the globe were brought together through the magic of the internet and agreed:

- To establish the Christopher Dresser Society
- To approve a proposed Constitution for the Society
- To elect people to serve as Officers and Members of the Management Committee to oversee the affairs of the Society
- To approve proposed Membership Fees for those wishing to belong to the Society (and what those Members may expect in return)
- To approve a proposal that the Society seek charitable status

In addition, the meeting received details of the current financial position of the Society and information on the plan of action for the next year.

There were a number of contributions from those present with suggestions as to how the Society should develop, and in the coming months the Management Committee will be considering how to address these.



## Message from Linda Polley - Chairwoman

The Christopher Dresser Society has been in existence for a number of years but was never formally established with either a constitution, elected officers, or the means to apply for Charity Commission recognition. The purpose of the AGM was to rectify those issues so that the revived Society could develop and grow on more sound foundations and be properly accountable to its members.

The need for this was felt to have become more pressing following a successful Dresser Fest 21 event held in September in collaboration with the Kirkland Museum of Fine and Decorative Art in Denver, Colorado. That experience demonstrated the continued and increasing interest in Christopher Dresser and his work, although it also highlighted some of the limitations of the Society as it existed.

I am very pleased that we have had such a positive response to our notifications of intent and am now looking to the membership to ratify those aims. I do hope the meeting and this newsletter will provide a catalyst for your involvement in future discussion and further development of the Society.

Primarily we see the Society as a means to champion the life and work of Christopher Dresser in as many ways as possible. We will be seeking to develop relationships with a number of higher education institutions and galleries in the UK and elsewhere. We would like the Society to be at the centre of a network of sources of related information. An appreciation society, but one underpinned by rigorous and informed knowledge, and by the concerted efforts of individuals and institutions - potentially a source of reliable information.

The updating of the original membership/participant list is crucial and ongoing – we would like to see your comments, suggestions and contributions to the newsletter and/or the journal. Please contact our secretary in the first instance; he's very good at responding.

Zoom has highlighted the fact that we are no longer limited by distance and will allow (we hope) for an active and interactive international membership. For example, perhaps behind the scenes visits could be filmed to make them more accessible to all. And, of course, guest Zoom talks that are open to the public will provide a vehicle for promotion and a way of attracting new interest and new members.

Although initially in 'catch-up' mode we have identified a number of short term aims:

- We will begin to push out a backlog of articles and research papers
- We need to start thinking now about the next Dresserfest/Symposium in 2023 (and would definitely welcome suggestions for themes)



- We are considering setting up focus or research groups to look at different aspects of Dresser's life and works. We have quite a few experts within the membership who could perhaps take the lead.

Please feel free to add to this list and do please get in touch.

## Joining the Society

We have been delighted at the response we received when we asked how many of you were interested in becoming members of the revived Christopher Dresser Society. Following the meeting held on 24 November, we are in a position to advise you what you need to do to become Members.

Attached is a Membership Application Form which you should complete and return to Martin Peagam, by post or by e mail, enclosing the appropriate Membership Fee payment.

At present we are still exploring the best way for our Overseas friends to pay their fees, and we will provide further information as soon as we have it.

## Who Said This? – A Quiz about Dresser and Morris

Courtesy of Becca Goodrum – Collections & Research Manager at Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art – we have a little quiz.

This is just for fun – there is no Dresser piece being offered as a prize!

Below are some quotes from Christopher Dresser and William Morris.

### QUESTION 1

Who said ...

**"I should say that the making of ugly pottery was one of the most remarkable inventions to our civilization."**

### QUESTION 2

Who said ...

**"In the case of cheap goods we spend time in getting smoothness of surface, while the Japanese devote it to the production of an art-effect. We get finish without art, they prefer art without finish."**

### QUESTION 3

Who said ...

**"My object in writing this work has been that of aiding in the art-education of those who seek a knowledge of ornament as applied to our industrial manufactures."**

### QUESTION 4



Who said ...

**“if any of these things make any claim to be considered works of art they must show obvious traces of the hand of man guided directly by his brain, without more interposition of machines than is absolutely necessary to the nature of the work done.”**

QUESTION 5

Who said ...

**I submit to you that it is to the East that we must go for suggestions in art manufactures and ornament.”**

QUESTION 6

Who said ...

**“...I believe the Persians have preserved and handed down to later ages certain forms of ornament which, above all, must be considered parts of pattern designing, and which have clung to that art with singular tenacity.”**

QUESTION 7

Of which nation was William Morris writing when he said ...

**“...the XXXXXX have no architectural and therefore no decorative instinct.”**

Was it... the British, the French, the Japanese, or the Americans?

QUESTION 8

Of what item was Christopher Dresser writing when he said ...

**“while the XXXXX is an object of use in every house in the land, we have to go to Japan to learn how to make one as it should be.”**

Was it... a cup, a chair, a kettle, or a bed?

Answers will be provided in the next edition of Dresser News.

## **Dresser at the Metropolitan Museum of Art**

Examples of the work of Christopher Dresser can be seen in the MMA in New York, thanks to a generous donation from Society Members Larry and Janet Larose.

On 24 February 2020, the MMA opened its new British Galleries. In the "19th Century Room" are displays of Dresser-designed items. Many of these were donated by Larry and Janet and are now in the permanent collection of the MMA: the Dixon teapot, the Elkington ewer, the Hukin and Heath toastrack, the "Crow Foot" claret jug, the large Linthorpe vase and the Minton "Old Bogey" vase. This donation has greatly expanded the MMA collection of Dresser and will allow the many visitors to the MMA to see and appreciate the work of Dresser.

# Christopher Dresser Society



Larry said 'While we miss the objects, we still have plenty more in our collection!'

The pictures show Larry and Janet on the opening evening, alongside the wonderful display cabinets.





## My Passion for Christopher Dresser

We are delighted to have received another explanation of why one of our Members is so passionate about Christopher Dresser.

**Kathy Warrick** has kindly sent the following insight into her discovery of the great man .....

As a Teesside University BSc Computing graduate, I was offered the wonderful opportunity of an internship based at the Dorman Museum, Middlesbrough as a Photographic Archivist. After such a technical degree I revelled in this creative opportunity to record the many beautiful objects destined to be displayed in the Dorman's Dr Christopher Dresser Gallery. Launched in 2014, this permanent exhibition was dedicated to Dresser as a 'pioneer of modern design', an incredible resource to have on Teesside's doorstep. Grateful thanks are due to Dr. Paul Denison, Chairman of the Christopher Dresser Society at that time, and who gave me first-hand access to a live project while undertaking a Graduate Intern opportunity. In fact, this interesting project facilitated the Dorman Museum's display of the largest collection of Christopher Dresser pieces in the world. These pieces are highly sought after, with the Dorman Museum collection comprising an impressive 1,060 items and representing around 465 of the 2,350 different designs thought to have been produced. The overarching aim of the Christopher Dresser Project was 'to draw together the important historical and contemporary aspects of Dresser's work for the cultural and economic benefit of Middlesbrough and the communities it serves.' By reaching out into the community, by partnering with external organisations within a STEM field, and through the Christopher Dresser Project plus the permanent exhibition, the Dorman Museum established itself as a centre of excellence in the appreciation of Dresser and his collective works. Even the Victoria and Albert Museum in London has a smaller display of Dr Dresser!

The Dresser collection was purchased from Harry Lyons (a Dresser collector) in January 2013 with a Heritage Lottery Fund grant along with other generous donations, and work was begun to raise Dresser's profile locally. Despite a few setbacks, the gallery opened on 4 July 2014, featuring some of Dresser's most iconic designs, including metalware for James Dixon and Sons, Elkington and Co and Hukin and Heath; 'Clutha' glass; wallpaper; textiles and furniture plus ceramics for Minton, Wedgwood, Ault and of course the Linthorpe Pottery. Highlights included a Wedgwood jardinière believed to have been designed for the 1867 Paris Exhibition, a potentially unique 'duck' decanter and a number of colourful examples of 'Clutha' glass. Beautiful Minton 'Cloisonné' ware in pinks and vibrant blues sit alongside domestic



items including coal boxes, shovels, tea pots and toast racks. Less luxurious items that are practical and economical include the 'Kordofan' chamber stick.



Dresser's 'Kordofan' chamber stick, manufactured by Richard Perry, Son & Co, Wolverhampton, 1876, Sheet metal, lacquer, brass, and wood, \*

During this time, I had the opportunity to photograph all the objects in the project and the data was stored at the Museum and Teesside University. I witnessed the building of the Gallery, and the passion and enthusiasm of the then Curator Gill Moore (Dresser specialist) and her wonderful Dorman Team, the development of the Teesside University micro website (sadly no longer available) and the Dresser Society Facebook page. Later I undertook a MSc in Project Management at Teesside University. Developing my research into Dr Christopher Dresser further, I completed my dissertation 'The Christopher Dresser Project – its delivery and outcome without a Project Manager – an investigative analysis'.

I have memories of welcoming Freshers at the University as a volunteer and showing them around campus, but also including a detour to the Dresser Gallery at The Dorman Museum. Since then, I have shown my eight grandchildren the delights of the Dresser Exhibition and Gallery. I was hooked on the history, truth, beauty and power, and still am!

\* Photograph of Kordofan chamber stick courtesy of Bröhan Museum, Berlin – Creative Commons DSCo3930.JPG



**Christopher Dresser Society Newsletter**

We have sent you this Newsletter because our records show that you are interested in Christopher Dresser.

If you do NOT wish to receive further communications, please let us know, by e mailing [martin@peagam.co.uk](mailto:martin@peagam.co.uk)

Thank you!

Last, but not least, we wish you ...

*A MERRY CHRISTMAS*

*and*

*A HAPPY NEW YEAR!*