

Review

THE ELGIN MARBLES:

It wasn't until I visited the British Museum for the first time that I realised “marbles” was not just a boyhood, playground game. There were phrases that stuck in the mind too, one about “Losing one's marbles” and another “It's all Greek to me, mate”, neither of which could be remotely applied to Dr Stephen Kershaw, classics lecturer at the University of Oxford, who gave the most perceptive, absorbing and well-attended talk on the life and times of the Elgin Marbles to the Arts Society at the Manor Pavilion on 7th May.

The classical Greek sculptures, known as the Elgin marbles, are pieces taken from a frieze adorning the Parthenon, dating from the 5th century BC, in Athens. They depict centaurs, chariots, horses and riders, so brilliantly rendered you can almost hear the hooves of the horses, feel the wind ruffling manes and cloaks. The extraordinary quality of the artwork captures precisely the anatomy, flesh and drapery of the human figures.

The Parthenon itself is a stunning monument, but despite its iconic status was not one of the Seven Wonders of the World. From being a pagan temple, it became a Christian church, a mosque, a palace and even a harem. Over the centuries, it was fought over, plundered and pillaged by Ottomans, Turks and Venetians. It was quarried for building materials, was a valuable source for souvenir hunters and eventually for serious collectors like Lord Elgin who in the early nineteenth century was granted permission to remove the sculptures that are now on show in London. The issue of their ownership remains fraught. The film stars Melina Mercouri and George Clooney have campaigned for them to be returned to Greece. The Greek government made a first formal request for their return in 1983, but we maintain they were legally acquired and our government made appropriate financial compensation to Greece for them. The disagreements are unresolved.

So, a thoroughly engrossing and enjoyable time was had by all, rounded off with fresh coffee and cake in the bar.

Our next lecture, in complete contrast, and under the title “Ghastly Good Taste,” brings us back to more modern times, and looks at the highs and lows of British Interior Design from 1880 to 1980. Do join us for our get-together at the Manor Pavilion on Wednesday 4th June. Real, good coffee served from 10.00 am, followed by the AGM at 10.30 am and the lecture at 10.45.

David Smith