

The Barber Institute at 80

Posted on Tuesday 8th January 2013

13 December 2012 was a very special day for the University. On that day 80 years ago, Lady Barber and the original trustees signed the Deed of Settlement, which effectively founded the **Barber Institute of Fine Arts (<http://www.barber.org.uk>)** that was bequeathed to the University 'for the study and encouragement of art and music'.

The opening salvo in a year-long programme to mark the 80th anniversary of the Barber is the exhibition, *Portrait of a Lady: The Life and Passions of Lady Barber*, which looks at the woman and the vision behind one of Britain's greatest public art collections and cultural venues. The Barber Institute of Fine Arts owes its existence to the vision of Dame Martha Constance Hattie Barber (1869 - 1933). Lady Barber was the daughter of a wealthy Worcestershire businessman, Simon Onions, who, after an education at The Cheltenham Ladies' College, married Birmingham solicitor and property developer, William Henry Barber. He proved a highly successful businessman, making his fortune in the expanding suburbs of Birmingham, and by his mid 30s he and Lady Barber were able to retire to Culham Court, an 18th-century country house and estate near Henley-on-Thames.



Barber

Institute under construction

The exhibition offers a fascinating insight into the Barbers' life at Culham Court and its remarkable gardens and collections. A significant part of the latter have passed to the Barber Institute, including the extraordinary group of more than 25 portraits of Lady Barber by her favoured artist, Nestor Cambier – a selection of which forms the centrepiece of the show. Also included are some outstanding but rarely seen textiles from Culham Court, and some of the finest pieces from Lady Barber's exceptional collection of historic lace. These works are complemented by archive photographs of the Barbers, and other documents that explore their lives and interests. A final section explores their connections with the University of Birmingham, culminating in Lady Barber's gift.

Lady Barber's lace collection is also the starting point for mixed-media textile artist Jacqueline Lawrence's series of sensitively observed works, which are currently on display in the exhibition *Inspired By Lace*.

The architect of the Barber Institute, Robert Atkinson, is also celebrated in *'The Most Perfect Example of His Work': Robert Atkinson and the Building of the Barber Institute*, a special display that looks anew at his achievements and the Art Deco masterpiece he created on the University's Edgbaston campus.

Also launched is the anniversary publication, *The Barber Institute of Fine Arts: Foundations of a Collection* (Scala Publishers Ltd), which will include chapters on the Barbers, on the University's response to the gift, on music at the Barber in its early years, and on Thomas Bodkin, the first director. The publications also focuses on the acquisitions Bodkin made for the gallery, which included work by artists such as Tintoretto, Poussin and Whistler.

Barber Institute 80th birthday exhibitions

**Portrait of a Lady
The Life and Passions of Lady Barber**
Until 24 February 2013

**Inspired by Lace
Jacqueline Lawrence**
Until 24 February 2013

**'The Most Perfect Example of His Work'
Robert Atkinson and the Building of the Barber Institute**
Until 5 May 2013

Monday – Friday: 10am – 5pm;
Saturday & Sunday: 11am – 5pm
Admission Free

For more information please contact the Barber on +44 (0)121 414 7333 or visit their website at www.barber.org.uk (<http://www.barber.org.uk>)

[Privacy](#) | [Legal](#) | [Cookies and cookie policy](#) | [Accessibility](#) | [Site map](#) | [Website feedback](#) | [Charitable information](#)

© University of Birmingham 2015

