

# SURREY LIFE

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Festive issue

Free  
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Your 2018  
Surrey Life  
calendar

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Join us and  
some familiar  
faces for a  
very special  
Surrey Christmas

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ANISA TOPAN

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IT'S tricky convincing teens and tweens that a trip to an art gallery is a good idea, but it is a good idea, especially if grandparents are visiting because we ought to do something and monopoly (even the Guildford version) just causes a row.

Art is inspiring, even if you don't consider yourself arty or you can't draw (which are just two of the excuses kids use to wiggle out of a gallery visit). We can all feel, in fact teens do feeling stuff very well, we can think, believe, debate – again, fortes of the teen – so I think it's a perfect daytrip destination.

Watts Gallery in Compton has been neglected by our family because it's on our doorstep; you know, the way Londoners always say they've never been on the London Eye, we've never visited Watt's Gallery. What a mistake.

The visionary Victorian artist, George Frederic Watts was in his lifetime as famous for his art as his contemporary Charles Dickens was for his writing. Both were concerned with the issue of social injustice; a topic as relevant now as it was 200 years ago.

Watts is hard to categorise because his long career means that his work, which is in several mediums, changed and developed; it's possible to see influences of Pre-Raphaelites and foreshadowing of the modernist movement. Not limiting himself in any way, his subjects ranged



## Finding hope

*Bestselling author Adele Parks follows in Barack Obama's footsteps and finds inspiration in the work of GF Watts*

from celebrities, to divinities and allegories. It's perhaps no wonder that, when he died in 1904, Watts was one of the foremost artists in the land, lionised as "England's Michelangelo". He spent the latter part of his life living in Surrey. A man of good taste and sense, clearly.

### Vibrant volunteers

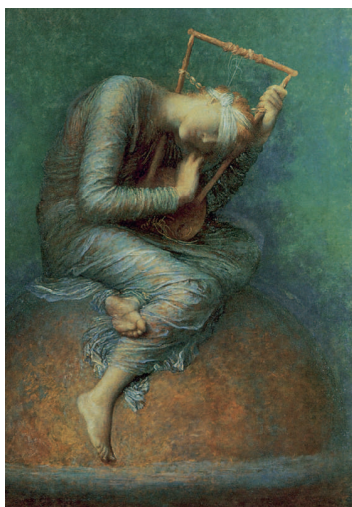
The gallery is staffed by lots of wonderful volunteers. We fell under Susan's wing and charms as she offered vibrant background on some key pieces. The gallery is curated brilliantly, the art works are at once thought-provoking and accessible, with enough information to make us feel interested but not overwhelmed.

**'Hope triumphs against all the odds, against all experience. Obama found that concept irresistible'**

Returning to my point about inspiration I was awestruck to discover that the painting *Hope*, which Watts produced in 1886, is Barack Obama's favourite painting and arguably set the President on his path to the White House.

*Hope*, Watts's melancholy painting of a hunched, blindfolded girl sitting on top of a globe, falteringly plucking at a single string on her crude wooden lyre, is not at first glance the most comforting of images, but the painting's message is one of faith in the face of adversity. *Hope* triumphs against all the odds, against all experience. Obama found that concept irresistible. I think Watts would have been delighted that his art continued to be an agent of change.

We also visited the beautiful, idiosyncratic, terracotta chapel and the artist's home – we enjoyed a guided tour from the effervescent and knowledgeable Toni. All rather nicely rounded off in the charming teasop. I promise you, if paintings and politics don't lure the teens, the cake will. ♦



Top: Adele at Watts  
Left: *Hope* by GF Watts