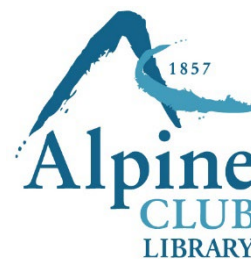


## Alpine Club Library

### Annual Report for 2024



#### *People and Events*

The number of physical visitors to the Library during 2024 remained similar to that for 2023; so, the trend towards conducting research and accessing material online, either via email exchanges or through the website, appears to be continuing for both AC members and the wider public. As well as hosting visitors and answering online research enquiries, Emma, our Librarian, also hosted a number of professional meetings and open days during the year. LILA (London Independent Libraries & Archives) met at Charlotte Road in January. This gathering of specialist and club libraries with similar interests provided an opportunity for networking and showcasing the AC collections. As a result, the Library is now taking a more active role in LILA with Emma becoming one of the current organisers. Two tours of the collections were given to members of CILIP (the UK professional library and information association). The first was an on-site tour for members of the CILIP London Group, discussing the history of the collections and letting members see and handle items first hand. The second was a virtual tour for members of the South-West Group of CILIP, given over Zoom. Both tours aimed to promote the Library and the AC Collections, and the Zoom tour resulted in a follow-up visit from staff working on an exhibition at the National Mountain Museum in Turin. The Library also hosted two public tours as part of the Heritage Open Days initiative. During these, visitors were given a brief history of the Club, as well as a chance to look at items from the collections. They were very well received, and we therefore plan to repeat the exercise again in the coming year.

We were approached by the Cairngorm Club about the possibility of the Librarian giving a talk at one of their regular meetings. It was decided to focus the talk on the exhibition about women's membership of the Club and the Ladies' Alpine Club – *What would Lucy say?* – as this was an area of interest to them. It turned out that one of their members had even climbed with Dorothy Pilley. Emma also contributed an article to the *Bulletin de l'Association Culturelle pour le Voyage en Suisse* on objects from the collections associated with tourism in Switzerland. This included short pieces about de Saussure's compass, one of our Führerbuchen and Whymper's alpenstock, which highlighted the role that the English, and especially members of the AC, had played in early travel and tourism in Switzerland.

Following concerns about the direction of travel of Twitter, and its successor X, the Library has opened a Bluesky account, and this has already attracted close to 4,000 followers.

It is a general policy that, while the Club is happy to accept donations, it does not normally sanction the purchase of items to add to its already extensive collections. It may relax that rule in exceptional circumstances where an item is of significant importance to the history of the Club. That occurred during the year when a portrait of Dorjay Pasang by Francis William Helps came up for sale. Helps (1890-1972) was the official artist to the 1924 Everest Expedition and Pasang was one of only two mountaineers who took part in all of the first three British Everest expeditions of 1921, 1922 and 1924; the other being a certain George Leigh Mallory. Pasang was amongst the 15 high-altitude porters given the nickname "Tigers" because of their exceptional strength and bravery. He was Mallory and Bruce's leading porter, their first pick, and one of the men on whom their high hopes for success centred. Consequently, the Club approved the purchase of this portrait, and it became available in time

to be displayed as part of the *Everest Revisited* exhibition at Charlotte Road (details of which are included later in this report).



*Portrait of Dorjay Pasang by Francis William Helps (1924)*

In the autumn, we were very pleased to receive a second unsolicited donation from the Chalten Fund of the Marin Community Foundation recommended by the Holdfast Collective, which is the charitable arm of Patagonia. The donation was for \$25,000 and was not allocated for any specific purpose. After extensive discussions it was decided to use this award to support the Club's new publishing initiative. It was felt that this would meet the aims of the Foundation as it would be of long-term benefit not only to AC members but to all alpinists.

During November, the Club met for its second six-year review of activities at the Blencathra Field Studies Centre, labelled *Leading Through* to reflect the hope that the Club can continue the progress and momentum generated following the first Blencathra event in 2018. Discussion of the Club's heritage collections formed one of the five pillars of the meeting. The breadth and depth of the Club's holdings in literature, photographs, artefacts and art were explained and discussed, and the need to spread awareness of this amazing resource more widely both to the membership and the public at large was highlighted. A key priority over the next few years will be making better use of digital communications and other novel forms of presentation to better showcase our collections. To ensure that the challenges associated with storage, custodianship and dissemination of the collections are responded to proactively in the future, it was agreed to recommend that the AC should establish a Heritage Board to coordinate these activities. The AC Committee has accepted this recommendation and established a Heritage Board comprising the Keepers, the Honorary Librarian, the Honorary Archivist, the Honorary Secretary, the Chair of the Finance Committee, the Chair of the

Library Council and an external representative from the Mountain Heritage Trust. It will hold its inaugural meeting in early 2025.

Library Trustees now have a fixed term of office of three years. Stephen Venables therefore stepped down as a Trustee at the end of his three-year term, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his contribution. After stepping down as Honorary Librarian last year, after many years of dedicated service to the ACL, Barbara Grigor-Taylor also stepped down as a Trustee this year. I am pleased to report that Barbara will continue her association with the Library both as an ACL Member and through taking up the new role of Assistant Honorary Librarian with special responsibility for book sales. Subsequently, the AC Committee has nominated John Porter and Gordon Turner, our new Honorary Librarian, as the new incoming Trustees. They also re-nominated Alan Henderson (Treasurer) and Philip Meredith (Chair) to serve for a further three years.

At the risk of repetition, I feel I need to reiterate that collections don't get smaller but inevitably increase in size over time. This not only puts continual pressure on space, but also on the work required to organise and manage the holdings. We are therefore always looking for volunteers to help with custodianship of the collections. If you are interested in helping out or would like more information about volunteering opportunities, please contact me ([chair.acl@alpineclub.org](mailto:chair.acl@alpineclub.org)), the Honorary Secretary ([honsec@alpineclub.org](mailto:honsec@alpineclub.org)) or any of the Keepers. Not only can the work itself be very rewarding, but it also opens the door to a truly wondrous world of mountaineering heritage.

### ***Exhibitions***

During 2024, as in the previous two post-Covid years, the Exhibitions Sub-Committee organised a full schedule of exhibitions in the Charlotte Road Lecture Room.

The first exhibition of the year comprised a selection of pictures from the Alpine Club's collection chosen by Emma McDonald (AC Librarian) and Ewa Orzechowska (AC Office Manager). This formed the initial part of an initiative to provide more opportunities for members and visitors to view rarely seen paintings that spend most of their time hidden away in the Charlotte Road basement due to lack of display space. The idea is to display and rotate selected artworks on the walls of the office space and in a series of Lecture Room exhibitions. This first such exhibition included works by Karl Milner, Benjamin Eastlake Leader and Arthur Croft.



*Lyskamm and the  
Breithorn by Arthur  
Croft*

*Monte Leone by Benjamin Eastlake Leader*



*Everest Revisited*

In June 2024, one hundred years after the disappearance of George Mallory and Sandy Irvine high on the slopes of Everest, the Alpine Club opened an exhibition which focussed on the all-important 1924 Mount Everest Expedition. Drawing from the Club's remarkable assets such as photographs and artefacts from the expedition itself and other sources, the exhibition also addressed the continuing legacy of this seminal moment in the attempt to summit Everest. *Everest Revisited* profiled the personalities at the centre of the expedition, from Mallory and Irvine to the local workers who made the venture possible, and considered the impact of the expedition on current perceptions of the world's highest mountain. One of the highlights of the display was of course Sandy Irvine's ice axe (recovered in 1933). Aside from the opportunity to see so many Everest related items at first hand, the exhibition also brought to life the experiences of the climbers; from their arrival in Darjeeling to coming within touching distance of the summit.



*View of Everest from the north – 1924 Expedition*

*The 1924 Expedition  
team at base camp  
(courtesy of the RGS)*



*Sandy Irvine's ice  
axe – recovered  
from Everest in  
1933*

Following the opening of the exhibition, a new film about the 1924 expedition, produced by John Porter as a collaboration between the Alpine Club and the Mount Everest Foundation was premiered at the Club. The film, titled *Everest Revisited 1924-2024*, uses extensive historical footage as well as interviews with Everest scholars and mountaineers to tell the story of 1924 and to ask questions about what the mountain means to climbers and Nepalese people 100 years on from the famous expedition. The film has gone on to be exhibited at a number of mountain film festivals, and won a special mention at the 2024 Krakow Mountain Film Festival.

In November, much of the content from *Everest Revisited* was relocated to Cumbria as part of a major exhibition on the history of mountaineering and mountain art and culture which took place in the main exhibition hall at the Rheged Centre. This was the largest mountain related exhibition in the UK since the closure of the National Mountaineering Exhibition in 2005. Around 10,000 paying customers visited the exhibition, with a significant number of younger visitors who entered for free. The central theme of the exhibition was the history of Mount Everest from early exploration through to the present day, with special attention on the 1924 expedition 100 years after the loss of Mallory, Irvine, Man Bahadur and Lance-Naik Shamsheerpun.

Thanks to the work of the Club's Librarian Emma McDonald and the support of Keepers Janet Johnson, Bernie Ingrams, William Mitchell, Nigel Buckley and our Office Manager Ewa Orzechowska, items displayed from the Alpine Club's collections formed a significant part of the Rheged exhibition. The storyboards written for the AC *Everest Revisited* exhibition were used as a starting point, and were then greatly expanded upon to encompass many other mountain stories and personalities from the mountain community and the Alpine Club such as Arthur Wakefield and Howard Somervell.

Although Everest was the main subject, the exhibits, art and photographic displays branched

out into much wider areas, such as early mountain film and photography, and contemporary mountain art around the world, with a number of paintings from the first International Mountain Art Festival in Mustang being flown in especially for the exhibition. The Mountain Heritage Trust also made a major contribution of artefacts, as did the Royal Geographical Society with a loan of three Mallory items. Throughout the period of the exhibition, an accompanying programme of lectures from noted members of the mountain community including Julie Summers and Krishna Thapa took place in the IMAX cinema, together with six screenings of the AC film *Everest Revisited 1924-2014*, which attracted around 500 viewers.

Image taken by Arthur Wakefield  
- Royal Geographical Society, 1921

**RHEGED**

**EVEREST  
REVISITED**

**FRIDAY 6 DEC -  
SUNDAY 23 FEB**

With 2024 being the centenary of Mallory and Irvine's disappearance on Everest, this brand new exhibition in Rheged's Gallery will take you on a powerful journey of 100 years of Everest exploration.

Discover UK and Nepalese art, photography, film and rare artefacts, exploring triumphs, 'firsts' and Cumbrian connections, as well as thought-provoking themes of mountain waste, spirituality and motivation.

**£5 Entry  
16 & Under Free**

*E.T. Compton: The Wild Pomp of Alpine Majesty*

This exhibition of the Club's collection of nine pictures by Edward Theodore Compton, presented alongside a sample of the work he did for the Austrian Alpine Club and other prints, provided a rare opportunity to see the works of one of the pioneering *peintre alpinistes* beyond the confines of the Alpine Museum in Innsbruck.



*Grandes Jorasses from Charmoz by E.T. Compton*

As is the case with so many exhibitions predominantly featuring treasures from the Club's holdings, one always learns something new about both the pictures and the respective painters being focussed on. With E. T. Compton and the splendid display of pictures in *The Wild Pomp of Alpine Majesty*, in this instance it showed visitors just how good a watercolourist Compton was. It is well known that Compton combined a celebrated career as an alpine artist with extensive climbing. Between 1878 and 1914 he made 20 first ascents, contributed to 30 volumes of the DAV (Deutscher und Österreichischer Alpenverein) journal and frequently exhibited at the Alpine Club's winter exhibitions. His paintings were celebrated for their realism and featured not just mountains but also climbers. They are dynamic illustrations of the romance of mountaineering and in many ways Compton's life as a *peintre alpiniste* (and that of his son, Edward Harrison Compton) was not dissimilar to that of Gabriel Loppé. Having said that, it could be argued that Compton was a more traditionally schooled practitioner and where he differed from Loppé was in his ability to draw and paint

in watercolours. Indeed, Compton is considered by many a better watercolourist than a painter in oils and nobody before or since him has been able to capture the colours, thrown off by rock under snow especially, of the *haute montagne* in this medium. His ability to draw rock formations and then bring them to life in washes of ultramarine violet, (see, for example, the image of the Grandes Jorasses from the Charmoz) could only have come from thousands of hours of first hand observation. A charming and fun surprise in the *The Wild Pomp of Alpine Majesty* was the inclusion of a hitherto unidentified mountainscape in the Club's collection and the invitation to members and other visitors to scribble down in a jotter their thoughts on its location. The overriding conclusion was that it was of a peak near Lavaredo in the Dolomites.



*Matterhorn by E.T. Compton*

*Auf dem Koblack by E.T. Compton*



*What would Lucy say?*

‘What would Lucy say?’ was an exhibition marking two key anniversaries in the history of the Alpine Club; namely, the 50th Anniversary of the AC voting to admit women members and the 50th Anniversary of the merger of the Ladies’ Alpine Club (LAC) and the AC. The ‘Lucy’ in question was Lucy Walker, the first woman to climb the Matterhorn who, despite this achievement and having already had, by 1870, many successful alpine seasons, could not be elected to the Alpine Club because of her gender. The exhibition title could equally have been asked of a number of Walker’s contemporaries, women who climbed seriously in the



## What Would Lucy Say?

Women Mountaineers and the Alpine Club

12 November 2024 - 13 February 2025  
Alpine Club, Charlotte Road, London, EC2A 3QF

second half of the 19th century and before the founding of the LAC in 1907. The exhibition highlighted a number of these women and their climbing achievements.

It is interesting to note that there was never any official Alpine Club rule against the admission of women; applications from women candidates were simply not welcomed on account of their perceived 'physical and moral deficiencies in the matter of mountain climbing'. The exhibition placed these attitudes in context, with comparisons made with other alpine clubs, organisations and societies. The lead up to the vote, and its eventual passage, were explored, including details of the women who joined prior to the vote and the rather embarrassing tale of Tschingel, the mountain-climbing dog who was reputedly the Club's first female member. With the admission of women to the AC, a merger with the LAC had a sad inevitability. The exhibition dealt with the history of the LAC, its founders, key members and their

achievements over the lifetime of the club. The final section of the exhibition was a celebration of where we are now: the place of female AC members within the club and in the wider mountaineering community. In putting together this exhibition, as with all remembered anniversaries, the curators hoped to prompt discussions of the past and a fresh evaluation of the present. What would Lucy say, indeed?



*Lizzie Le Blond, founder and first president of the LAC*



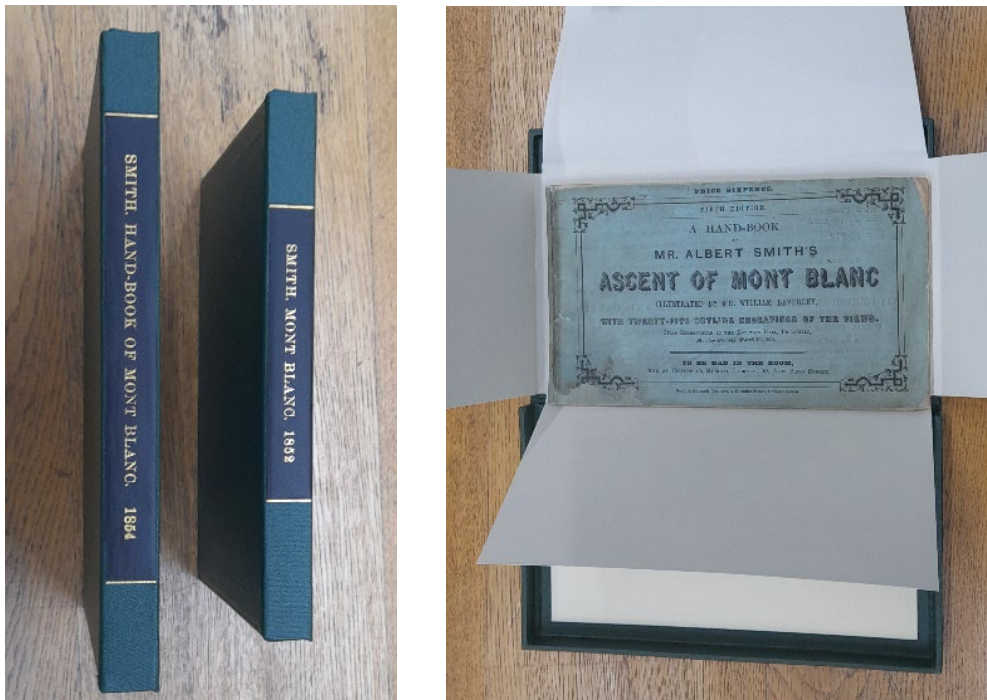
*Sally Westmacott, the first woman to be officially admitted to the AC*

## Collections

### Books

The Library was grateful to receive a donation of seventeen rare and fine illustrated books on Wales from the library of Jon Mellor, donated by Rowena Mellor. The books are 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century titles on Wales and Snowden, and are particularly welcome because they were not previously held in the AC collections. The remaining books in Jon's library, copies of which are already held in the ACL, were sold at auction, with the Library receiving 5% of the proceeds for helping to sort and value the collection.

The auction proceeds have been used to offset some of the costs of conserving other valuable books by our skilled conservator, Cyril Titus. During the year Cyril made two slipcases for our Limited Editions of *Everest 1924* (each valued at over £2,000), as well as new storage boxes for five other valuable holdings; *Southern Tibet* by Sven Hedin, *The Gangotri Expedition 1933* by Colin Kirkus, *Gangotri and Sutlej 1933* by Charles Warren, *Mount Everest 1921* by Charles Howard-Bury and two Mont Blanc titles by Albert Smith.



*New slip cases and book storage box*

During 2023, it was noticed that the rather ancient home-made shelving that housed the folio book collection (heavy, over-sized volumes that cannot fit on standard bookshelves) in the basement was in danger of collapsing. Quotations were therefore sought for a professional replacement. After considering them all, it was decided to go with the Rackline system. This provided a four-bay run of reinforced metal shelving, purpose-built to our requirements, and capable of taking the weight of the folios (100 kg per shelf). It also allows for expansion if more shelving is needed in the future. The system was delivered and fitted during a single day in February 2024, but it took Emma, our Librarian, considerably longer to complete the herculean task of re-shelving all the heavyweight volumes.



*The new folio shelving installed in the Charlotte Road basement.*

### *Archives*

Early in the year, we were delighted to receive the complete archive of Wilfred Noyce. It will probably come as no surprise to members that this constitutes a very substantial amount of material, and includes his diaries from expeditions to Everest, Trivor and Machapuchare. Luckily, the archive is very well sorted and documented, so it should prove to be relatively straightforward for researchers to use and to access any specific information they require.

### *Photographs*

The centenary of the 1924 Everest expedition has seen a plethora of exhibitions, documentaries and publications about that event, and the AC's archives and photograph collections have been asked to contribute material to many of them. In addition to providing images for the AC's own *Everest Revisited* exhibition and the major exhibition at Rheged, the Keeper of Photographs provided images for the Balliol College exhibition *Going up to Balliol: Mountaineering at the College*, amongst others. The ongoing, and seemingly never-ending, activity of digitally scanning photos and 35mm slides continued apace, with particular emphasis this year on the mountaineering photos and slides of Ian McNaught-Davis and A.B. Clarke's slides of the *1970 Manchester Nampa Expedition*.

### *Pictures*

Following on from last year, interest in the pictures from the AC collection displayed on ArtUK and The Watercolour World has increased even further, and that has encouraged us to increase our presence to the next level, allowing us to display up to 300 selected images. Our presence on ArtUK continues to provide a small but steady income stream that has helped to defray some of the cost of conserving two important paintings from the collection; *Clair de*

*lune sur le Cervin* by Albert Gos (1852-1942) and *Dawn on the Matterhorn seen from the Riffelberg* by Gabriel Loppé (1825-1913).

Albert Gos came from an established Genevan family. He devoted his early years to music and studied the violin under Alexandre Calame's wife, Amélie Munz-Berger. Despite acclaim at the Geneva Conservatory, Gos turned to painting when he was twenty-two and took lessons for several months from one of Alexandre Calame's leading pupils Barthélemy Menn. His instruction overlapped with Ferdinand Hodler who was also one of Menn's pupils. Gos's debut picture *Moonlight in the Lauterbrunnen Valley* was hung in the Lausanne Gallery in 1873 followed three years later by a first submission to the Paris Salon in 1876. Gos exhibited at the Royal Academy in London in 1880 and, subsequently, numerous private and official exhibitions, both in Switzerland and abroad, brought the young painter into prominence. His notable early exhibition was a solo one at the Georges Petit Gallery in Paris in 1895 and one which confirmed his reputation as a *peintre de montagne* and one of the best known Valaisan painters of his generation. Indeed, of all the subjects of which it could be said that Gos made his 'own', his prolific Cervin (Matterhorn) pictures were what he became famous for and in alpine clubs and artistic communities, his name was frequently written as 'Albert Gos, *Le peintre du Cervin*'. Unusually, he made many moonlit views of the mountain too and the Alpine Club's *Clair de Lune* is not only one of the largest compositions he ever painted, but is also the largest picture hanging in Charlotte Road.

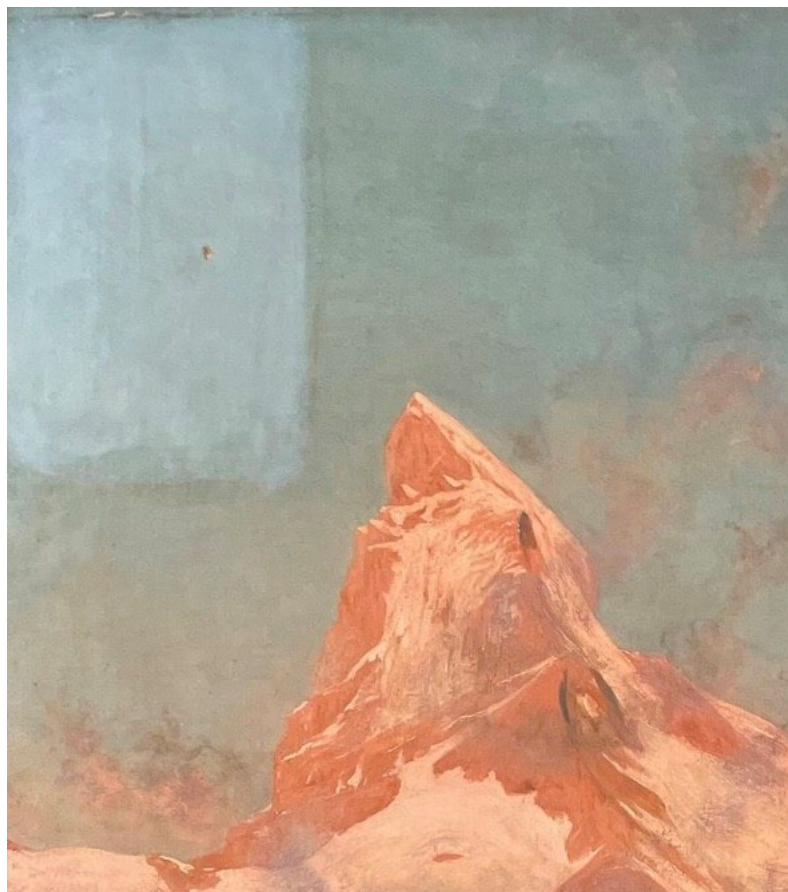
The Gos family divided their time between Geneva and Zermatt and Albert's children became well-known in their respective artistic fields. They were accomplished mountaineers too, especially Charles who made the first unguided ascent of the Zmutt Grat on the Matterhorn's north face. The eldest son, François followed on from his father as a painter, his brother Charles was a writer and the youngest, Emile a widely revered mountain photographer. The title: *Les Gos, une montagne en heritage* seemed a most suitable one for a retrospective exhibition held in Martigny a few years ago and starting with Albert, the Gos family's remarkable affinity with the Matterhorn continued for a few generations.



*Clair de Lune sur le Cervin -  
after restoration and re-hanging*

*Clair de Lune sur le Cervin* (oil on canvas, 209cm x 180cm) by Albert Gos was extensively restored in late 2024 and rehung in its place in the Charlotte Road Lecture Room in early 2025. Until 1999 the painting had never been cleaned and, crucially, restretched on its chassis. This was partly due to its unwieldy size and partly to the neglect. As a result, the unframed canvas had sunk and pooled at the bottom. There was significant paint loss due to the blistering brought on by the collapsing paint surface. In 2000, John Mitchell Fine Paintings undertook the relining of the canvas through Trevor Cumin in Putney and at that stage the priority was to clean the surface where possible but above all consolidate the paint surface from losing any more paint and ground. A generation on, the heavy mastic varnishes used to effectively glue the picture back together had shrunk and discoloured significantly. Apelles Art consulted David Chesterman and Sons in Clapham and whilst costly, the verdict was in favour of a complete removal of all the layers of varnish and a more invasive clean going back to the original paint surface. Thanks to a strong relining done in 2000, the picture stood up to the task and now hangs in all its moonlit splendour in the Lecture Room.

*Dawn on the Matterhorn seen from the Riffelberg - during restoration*



A second venerable Lecture Room picture, *Dawn on the Matterhorn seen from the Riffelberg* (oil on canvas, 98.5cm x 73.5cm, 1879) by Gabriel Loppé had become very discoloured since its last treatment in 1998 by John Mitchell Fine Paintings. A long overdue removal of oxidised and discoloured varnish was needed. Some further impacted and historic grime was removed and the canvas was given a re-stretching prior to revarnishing. Sadly, this stretcher or *chassis* will need replacing at some point in the near future, but as well as a clean several minor losses of pigment were replaced. Interestingly this picture had also never been cleaned or tightened until 1998 and yet it did not need relining like the Gos. It now looks resplendent after its re-hanging in the bar area of the Lecture Room.

*Artefacts*

The AC's artefact collection is nothing if not eclectic. That was emphasised during 2024 with the donation of a unique piece of climbing hardware known as the Beveridge Block (see photo). This Heath-Robinson piece of equipment was constructed by Adam Roberts. In the late 1970s Roberts was working at the London School of Economics (LSE) and was often distracted by the sight of the corner of the Old Building across the road. Dubbed the 'Northeast Arete', it was made up of blocks of smooth, grey limestone that led to the crux of the fourth-floor cornice. Roberts thought it would go, but was unsure how to protect it. Eventually, he came up with the device in the photograph; the prototype of the Beveridge Block. Its two wedges, made from plywood left over from a kitchen renovation, are secured by an adjustable tongue and groove mechanism that allows the device to fit tightly into the gaps between the corbel stones. Having made the device, Roberts put his homemade contraption to good use in protecting his first ascent of the northeast corner of the Old Building with three friends on 16 April 1978. Apparently, the name derived from the facts that William Beveridge was Director of the LSE before WWII, that Beveridge and Roberts were both Balliol College alumni and, perhaps more importantly, its alliterative construction made it pleasing to the ear. Readers will not be surprised to learn that the device has neither an EU nor UK approved safety rating.



*The prototype Beveridge Block fabricated by Adam Roberts*



*Adam Roberts using the Beveridge Block while approaching the crux on the first ascent of the 'Northeast Arete'*

## *Monuments*

The year was dominated by the successful completion of the long-running project to restore and move the monument to C.E. Mathews in Chamonix from its original position outside the old Couttets Hotel to a new and more prominent location at the entrance to the Couttets Park. As previously reported, the project was delayed and disrupted by the Covid pandemic, but benefitted from the relentless drive and determination of our friends in Chamonix, Claude Marin and Claire Burnett, together with Charlie Burbridge, our Keeper of Monuments. With the additional strong support of the Mayor and his office, this substantial monument was moved, cleaned, repaired and installed in its new location. The official re-dedication ceremony, held in July 2024, provided an opportunity for the AC, Chamonix and the Guides to reaffirm our comradeship. The gathering was modest due to the inclement weather, but in attendance were the AC President, the President of the Chamonix Guides, a representative of the BMG, the Chamonix Tourist Office and the Mayor; making for a very convivial and friendly event.



*The Mathews Monument in its new location in the Couttets Park.*



*Simon Richardson, Claude Marin and Charlie Burbridge in the rain at the re-dedication ceremony.*

The monuments generally continue to attract interest across the Club, and the Mathews project has increased awareness of the existence of monuments elsewhere. The plaque to Maurice Simond attached to the Bar Nationale receives a regular clean from passing AC members. The plaque to Clinton Dent on the Britannia Hit is checked regularly to ensure that it is still in place and weather resistant. The Hinchcliffe Memorial in Riffelalp is likely to need attention in the near future since the chains that surround its base are badly corroded due to the monument's elevated location.

### *End Note*

At the risk of repetition, I again end this report by expressing my gratitude to everyone in the Library team, Librarian, Trustees, Keepers, Members and Volunteers, who once again gave their time so generously and ungrudgingly throughout the year. Thanks also to all who supplied the details of their activities needed to compile this report.

Philip Meredith

Chair of the Council of Trustees of the Alpine Club Library

July 2025