

Middlesbrough Museums

Dorman Museum

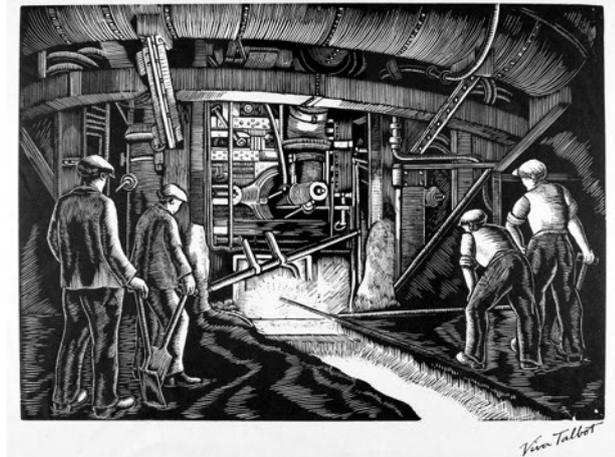
Captain Cook Birthplace Museum

Exhibition Information

‘Steelmaking woodcuts and other woodblock prints by Viva Talbot’

30 March to 18 July 2010

As the last blast furnace on Teesside ceases production, a new exhibition of previously unseen steelmaking images opens soon at the Dorman Museum in Middlesbrough. Over forty woodblock prints have been brought together for this unique exhibition, including fifteen depicting the process of making steel. The unusual subject matter is the work of a Yorkshire artist called Viva Talbot (1900-1983), who created the images during the 1930s when it was almost unknown for women to be allowed access to the grimy and dangerous steelworks.



The chance discovery of these prints in 2006 has generated a new research interest for their finder, Dr Joan Heggie, a Research Fellow at Teesside University. Initially, Dr Heggie was unable to find any information about Viva Talbot. Despite her obvious talent, her name was absent from reference books and it was a mystery as to why and how she had gained such privileged access to the steelworks of Teesside. Since then Dr Heggie has spent every spare minute piecing together the story of Viva Talbot, her life and her art.

Viva was the daughter of Benjamin Talbot (1864-1947), the inventor of the Talbot tilting furnace which transformed the Open Hearth method of producing steel. Benjamin Talbot, originally from Shropshire, came to Teesside at the beginning of the 20th century. Having spent a decade working for iron companies in America, Talbot brought new ideas and inventions back to England at a time when they were much needed. He became involved with two companies in particular – **Cargo Fleet Iron Company (Middlesbrough)** and the **South Durham Steel & Iron Company (Stockton)**, both of which are possible locations for the steelmaking images. In 1925, he became Managing Director of both companies and Chairman of the Board in 1940.

Viva's artistic talent appears to have been encouraged but she received no formal college training. Her first love was music and she was a gifted contralto singer of German *Lieder*. In the 1920s and 1930s she travelled extensively, frequently to Austria to participate in the Salzburg Festival, but also to Italy, America and the West Indies. Many scenes from these travels are represented in the exhibition.

Viva Talbot married Thomas Nussey in 1941 and within a few years she became Lady Nussey when Thomas inherited a baronetcy from his father. They moved to Rushwood Hall, near West Tanfield, Ripon, where they stayed for the rest of their lives. During her lifetime, Viva created hundreds of woodblock prints but there has never been a solo exhibition of her work until recently. This exhibition, developed by Dr Heggie, contains personal items such as sketch books, photographs and even one of Viva's diaries. To learn more about this fascinating woman artist and to see images of Teesside steelmaking unlike any others, visit the Dorman Museum.

The exhibition is accompanied by a public talk by Dr. Heggie at 7pm on the 17th June at the Dorman Museum.
Admission is FREE

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**Middlesbrough**
moving forward

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