

THE ARTS SOCIETY GRANTA

Special Interest Day

Thursday 5th March 2026, 10am – 3.30pm

Club Room, Churchill College

Gavin Plumley

The Cultural Revolution in Central Europe

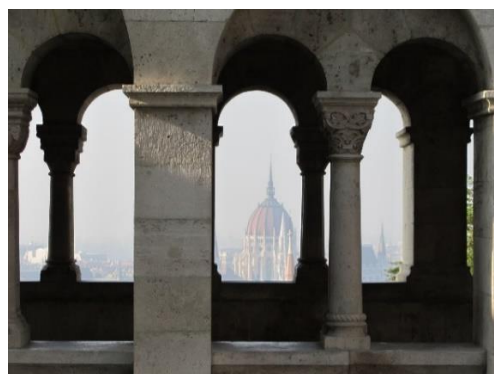
The Magic of Prague: the City & the
Czech Cultural Revival



Ljubljana and Slovene
Singularity



A Hungarian Metropolis



There will be two lectures in the morning, with a coffee break, and one lecture in the afternoon. We suggest that members have cafeteria-style lunch (at their own expense) in the Churchill College dining hall. If you prefer to bring your own packed lunch that is fine too!

The cost is £35 per person. Spaces are limited! To reserve your place, please book at the signing-in table before any lecture, or email Nan Taplin taplin.nan@gmail.com

Payment is requested in advance. Cash or cheques are accepted in person, or you can pay via BACS transfer to The Arts Society Granta, Sort Code: 20:17:35 a/c no: 80433713. Ref: Plumley.

Gavin is a writer and broadcaster. He appears on BBC Radio 3 and 4, and contributes to newspapers, magazines and opera and concert programmes worldwide. He also lectures widely about the culture of Central Europe. Recent appearances include *Klimt and The Kiss* in cinemas worldwide, and talks for the Hay and Cheltenham Literature Festivals, the Royal Opera House, the National Gallery, the National Trust, the National Theatre, the British Museum and the V&A. His first book, *A Home for All Seasons*, is out now. Members will remember him for his outstanding lecture on *Bruegel, the Seasons and the World* in May 2024.

Cultural Revolution in Central Europe

During the 19th century, when many Central European countries were still under the control of the Habsburgs in Vienna, art and culture were often the only ways in which the Empire's constituent crownlands could express national identity. Just over a hundred years after the end of Habsburg dominance, this special interest day looks at three case studies, the Czech lands, Slovenia and Hungary, through the prism of their capital cities.



The Magic of Prague: the City & the Czech Cultural Revival

As part of the Habsburg Empire, Prague was beloved of kings and princes. During the 19th century, however, the Czechs sought to reclaim the city. Tapping their roots and mythology, the Czech people imagined a new future through art, entirely reshaping cultural movements including Romanticism and symbolism in specifically patriotic ways. This contextual talk looks at painters such as Alfons Mucha, Otakar Lebeda and Jakub Schikaneder and composers like Bedřich Smetana and Antonín Dvořák, as well as their forward-thinking literary and architectural contemporaries, to show how the Czechs reclaimed both country and capital by cultural means.



Ljubljana and Slovene Singularity

Situated between the Austrian Alps and the Balkans, Slovenia was subject to opposing political forces during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Crucially, however, many of its cultural figures sought to express an individual brand of nationalism. Artists such as Rihard Jakopič and Ivan Grohar formulated a local type of impressionism, celebrating the Slovene landscape, while architects Jože Plečnik and Ivan Vurnik reimaged the country's capital, Ljubljana, creating one of the most unified urban design projects in Central Europe. This talk looks at their efforts within the context of the history of Slovenia



A Hungarian Metropolis

Budapest was formed in 1873 by the unification of Buda and Pest, situated on either side of the Danube. The new capital was the focus of resurgent Hungarian nationalism, which found expression through lavish new buildings, the continent's first underground railway system and myriad paintings featuring specifically Hungarian subjects and locales. Meanwhile, in the countryside, composers Bartók and Kodály began collecting the songs and dances of their compatriots. Placing these endeavours in a historical framework, this final lecture explores how Hungarians came to understand their national identity through culture.