

Newsletter

Fashion at Blaise

Highlights of Bristol Museum's Costume Collection,
1750 – 2012

Saturday 9 March 2013

We met at Blaise where Catherine Littlejohns explained that the Bristol Costume Collection with 15,000 items is a very significant part of the Social History Collection.

Museum policy dictates that pieces must have a Bristol connection: to have been made, bought or worn here. The more provenance they have, the better. A wedding dress from 1943 complete with wedding pictures and an account of the day written by the bride, makes an ideal exhibit.

Catherine operates an ongoing programme of care to delay the inevitable process of deterioration. Beetles have devoured all but the yellow thread on a child's embroidered shoes. Shattered silk ruined the toes of early 19th century dancing shoes but luckily conservation was possible. A heavily-beaded flapper dress has torn at the shoulder from the weight of its own beading. Climate control and insect traps, together with thorough packaging, minimise damage. Preparing items for display is a major task, requiring conservation and the time-consuming construction of a suitable mannequin. Since body-shapes have changed over time, a child's figure is often used for size, then padded to adult proportions.

Part of Catherine's remit is to collect recent items. The development of M Shed usefully showed up some gaps, such as 1950s youth culture. A public appeal yielded teddy-boy clothing and a child's fancy-dress from the 1977 Jubilee. While items surviving from the earlier period tend to be special and high-quality, today's collecting policy looks for everyday items to tell our story to a future age.

Margaret McGregor



▲ *Pink synthetic lace dress, mid to late 1950s*

Photos © Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives

▼ *A tantalising peep inside one of the costume wardrobes at Blaise, dresses circa 1730 – circa 1790*



▼ *Blue silk bustle back skirt and bodice, circa 1875*



From the Chairman

British Association of Friends of Museums

I am delighted to tell you that on Wednesday 14 August we will be hosting the BAFM South West annual conference at M Shed. Further details are in the enclosed programme, and this is a great opportunity for members to get together with Friends groups from across the South West to share experiences and enjoy what will be an interesting programme of talks, discussions and activities.

In September I will be going to the national BAFM conference to be held this year from 27-29 in Aberdeen. The conference will be hosted by the Friends of Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums (FAAGM), working in close association with Aberdeen Art Gallery and Aberdeen Maritime Museum. The conference theme is 'Innovative ways of sharing our Heritage' and individual presentations will be given by staff of Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums. There will be opportunities for delegates to discuss issues that are of importance to Friends groups, and to visit the museums themselves. Full details are on the BAFM website, and a booking form is enclosed.

Bristol Harbour Railway

Chris, David and their team of railway volunteers have asked me to thank those of you who responded to the plea for clean cotton and linen rags by dropping off bags of them at M Shed reception as requested. Some of them are being used in the preparations for Portbury's reappearance on the dockside in spanking new livery, due in the next few weeks. The need for rags is seemingly never-ending, so further supplies will always be welcome.

Harbour Festival

At this year's Harbour Festival on the weekend of 27 and 28 July we will be running a 2-day book sale, and will also be selling home-made cake and cold drinks. We shall be based in L Shed, next to M Shed, with the red doors rolled back and with some of the largest objects in the reserve collections providing a bit of atmosphere. We are looking for volunteers to man the stalls, and to bake cakes for us to sell. If you have been to the Festival in previous years you will know there is a real buzz to it, and we will have the benefit of being outdoors and under cover at the same time, so this is an exciting opportunity to join the festivities and to raise funds.

Feedback from members

It is always good to hear from members when they have ideas as to how we could do things better, or if they just want to tell the committee members/editors etc that we are doing the right things. With a membership of over 800, and active leadership within our organisation coming from maybe 5% of

that number, we really need to know how the other 95% of our members feel. And if you would like to take a more active role yourself, for example to help organise an event you are particularly enthusiastic about, that would be great.

This newsletter includes a couple of changes inspired by feedback from members, so please keep the ideas coming.

Royal Opening of Pharaoh Exhibition

I was happy to be able to represent our membership in meeting Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester, when he came to officially open the Pharaoh Exhibition at the Museum & Art Gallery. It was a relatively low-key occasion, and most of the guests were representatives of local businesses who have, or would like to have, links to the museum.



▲ *The Duke of Gloucester at the formal opening of the Pharaoh King of Egypt exhibition*

Photo © Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives

Funding Requests

We recently agreed £200 to fund the purchase of an early Mediaeval piece of Treasure Trove found at Wick, South Gloucestershire. It is one end of a highly decorative gilded silver strap fitting with gold, garnet and blue glass inlays, dating to the first half of the seventh century AD.

We have also agreed up to £1,800 to provide a Perspex display case, and a wooden storage crate, for a recently restored 3rd century BC Italian ceremonial tomb vessel. It is hoped that at some time in the not too distant future the highly decorative pot can be put on display on the empty plinth at the foot of the stairs in the Art Gallery & Museum.

Part of a Mediaeval strap fitting, funded by the Friends

Photo © Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives



Portbury overhaul

Portbury has just returned from the South Devon Railway's workshops, where it has undergone extensive repair work. This has cost about £85,000, rather more than anticipated but it is impossible to foresee what will need attention on locomotive boilers until they have been removed and minutely inspected. In *Portbury's* case, major surgery was needed, but the results will give the boiler a further 25 years of life at least.

None of the work could have been done in house and we are very grateful to the Friends for your major contribution to the work - your money paid for the repair of the saddle tank, which is the most up-front part of the engine (in more ways than one) and it has been done so well that you would be hard pushed to see that anything has been done to it! We will prepare a full technical report on the work for anyone interested.

Work has started now on the bits we can do ourselves - rebuilding the engine and cleaning the paintwork. Nearly all of this will be done by volunteers and we hope to have *Portbury* ready to steam again in time for the Harbour Festival at the end of July. Anyone who would like to help with this should contact David Martin (david.martin@bristol.gov.uk) or Chris Ecclestone (chrisandemily@waitrose.com).

Andy King Senior Collections Officer, Industrial & Maritime History & Working Exhibits



▲ *Portbury* returns to M Shed, her boiler repaired and ready for painting

A message from the Museum's Volunteer Co-ordinators

Summer is coming and the Museum is recruiting for a wide variety of new and existing volunteering roles at M Shed and Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. If you have some time to spare and are looking to pick up new skills and experiences then please get in touch. Whether you are looking to support our events and exhibitions, or volunteer longer term, we have a variety of volunteering opportunities on offer.

For more information please call Alex Hardy or Naif Pierre on 01179223618 or email museum.volunteering@bristol.gov.uk.

Leaving a Bequest to the Friends of Bristol Museums Galleries and Archives

The funds that the Friends raise and make available to the museum service often go direct to the small projects for which other sources of funding are effectively unavailable, with minimal bureaucracy. In other cases we provide seed-corn funding which can then release matched amounts from national sources. Mostly we are supporting the work of individual members of staff, so our contribution makes a real difference to them in a very personal way.

To ensure that we are able to continue to offer that support at a time when council budgets are coming under pressure, I hope that like me you would consider leaving a legacy to the Friends in your will. A legacy is an effective way to mark your enjoyment of Friends membership over the years, and ensure that we can continue our work in the future.

All legacies to charity are free of tax. Next time you update your will, your solicitor will be able to advise on appropriate wording, but if you would like to discuss it with me my contact details are on the back page of the Newsletter.

Sue Thurlow Chairman

Vacancy: Publicity and Marketing Officer

We have a vacancy on the Executive Committee for a Publicity and Marketing Officer. This is an interesting role working with the other committee members and the webmaster, with a fair degree of autonomy, and opportunities to introduce new ideas. Remit includes, but is not limited to, membership leaflets, Facebook and promotion within museum sites. If you are interested, please contact Sue Thurlow.

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Quarterly Report

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester formally opened the Pharaoh King of Egypt exhibition on 14 March. There was also a visit from the Minister of Culture from Hunan Province in China.

Work is continuing behind the scenes on the collections acquired from the former British Empire & Commonwealth Museum and in the summer an oil painting of the Delhi Durbar of 1903, more than 20 feet wide, is due to go on display in the Front Hall.

M Shed

Improvements have been carried out to the 2nd floor terrace, including the installation of a 'talking' telescope. A new sculpture is on display in the main foyer – a piece by artist Mark Titchner incorporating redundant reduction gear from our industrial collection. The gear, which was incomplete, was already earmarked for disposal.



▲ *A Naiad - the new sculpture in the main foyer of M Shed*
Photo © Max McClure

M Shed received a visit earlier this year from Maria Miller MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport, who is particularly interested to see the effect of introducing so many different people in our approach to developing the M Shed.

Georgian House & Red Lodge

Both houses underwent their annual 'spring-clean' in March and re-opened on Easter Saturday.

Until the end of June, both are now open Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 10.30am to 4pm. In July to August they are also open on Tuesday and Friday.

Blaise Castle House

Until the end of June the House is open Wednesday to Sunday, plus Bank Holiday Mondays, 10.30am to 4pm. In July and August it is also open on Tuesdays.

Bristol Record Office

BRO's online catalogue was recently updated to add over 30,000 new entries. These include listings for the archives of local chocolate-makers Elizabeth Shaw Ltd and Fry's and the artists' books in the Arnolfini archive.

Essential exterior maintenance work is currently in progress at B Bond Warehouse. This work is being carefully planned and monitored to minimize inconvenience to BRO visitors.

Staff news

Isla Gladstone (Senior Collections Officer Natural Sciences) and Bonnie Griffin (Collections Officer Natural Sciences) both joined us in April. Isla joined us from York Museums and Bonnie from Bristol Zoo.

By the time you read this, appointments should have been made to the posts of Documentation Assistant (Designation Development Fund) – a 12-month post to work with the history collections staff, and to the post of Paper Conservator (Adela Breton collection) – a two-year post to conserve this important archive of paintings and drawings.

BRO archivist Julian Warren took up the post of Senior Archivist (Resources) in February. Malcolm Boyns joined as our new archivist in May.

Events & exhibitions

Chocolate!

Chocolate! at M Shed, is proving so popular it has been extended to Sunday 23 June. There were over 21,000 visitors by the end of April, including more than 1,000 on school trips. At peak times, museum volunteers are running a handling table, focussed on family audiences, with a range of objects prompting discussion around the themes of the exhibition. Four of the volunteers are ex-Cadbury workers who were involved in the development of the exhibition.



▲ *Chocolate! Exhibition M Shed*

Pharaoh: King of Egypt

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

This exhibition presents the splendour and power of the ancient kings and queens in this major touring exhibition from the British Museum.

By the end of April there had been over 10,000 visits with family tickets being particularly popular. On top of that we have had more than 1,000 visits in organised groups, including by schools, many of whom have been taking up our offer of Egypt workshops to accompany their visit to the exhibition.

The exhibition continues until Sunday 21 July. Entrance costs £5 or less, with free admission on Fridays 21 June and 19 July.

Discovery pens

At the start of April we launched the Discovery Pens for the Chocolate! exhibition, similar to the PenFriends that are available for the permanent galleries at M Shed. These provide audio descriptions and are intended for visitors with visual impairment but we are offering them to general visitors as well. For Chocolate! they contain descriptions of the main themes and of a number of key objects, with additional content provided by a range of people, including volunteers, curators and designers.

Entrance costs £5 or less, with free admission on Wednesday 19 June.

Working Exhibits

Winter maintenance has continued up to the start of the operating season, and we had a successful trial of running *Mayflower* through the half term week in February. Volunteers assisted with the installation of Chocolate! and prepared the working machinery that is exhibited there. Others have been hijacked by the Learning section into building boxes and shelving for the handling object store. The electric cranes proved their value again by lifting building supplies to the roof of M Shed for viewing gallery refurbishment, and handled the enormous Delhi Durbar painting from the BECM collection into L Shed store when it returned from its world tour.



▲ Delhi Durbar painting and frame in two crates in L Shed stores, ahead of re-hanging at the Museum & Art Gallery

Photo by Sue Thurlow

Awards & other news

M Shed was one of the finalists for the Micheletti Award, a prize offered by the European Museum Academy. In April, Ray Barnett, the Friends key contact at the museum, travelled to Bursa in northwest Turkey for the award ceremony.

Monument Fellowships are awards given by the Museums Association to fund recently-retired museum professionals in sharing their unrecorded collections-related knowledge. Mike Ponsford has been awarded one of the Fellowships to allow him to transfer his knowledge of the archaeological archive of Bristol pottery to current collections staff.

Dates for your diary

Here is the news of a forthcoming trip to whet your appetite for later this year.

An application form for this event will be with the next newsletter.

Cheltenham Museum and Holst Museum

Thursday 31 October 2013

Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum re-opens in early October after a major re-furbishment. We will have an introductory talk and tour of the new Arts and Crafts gallery plus a visit to the nearby Holst museum in the afternoon.

From the Membership Secretary

Another bit of trivia this quarter! Most of our members live in the following postcodes: BS9, BS8, BS6, BS48, BS10, BS4, BS1.

We welcome the following members who have joined recently:

June Hibberd, Membership Secretary

Ms Judith Ash	Ms Katherine Martin
Mrs Catherine Bartle-Jenkins	Mr A Pardoe
Ms Debbie Brookes	Mrs A Pardoe
Mrs Randy Comfort	Dr G Rooth
Miss Celia Eastlake	Mrs J Rooth
Mr David Ellerby	Mr Nigel Tasker
Mrs Meriel Ellerby	Mrs Caroline Tasker
Mrs Beryl Green	Mr Roger Waite
Mr Stephen Hastings	Mrs Juliana Waite



▲ *Stanley Spencer in World War I uniform*

Photos by Eileen Elsey

Sir Stanley Spencer

His Life and Work

Saturday 23 February 2013

Jan Cox gave an entertaining account of this eccentric artist, who lived from 1891 to 1959. Spencer showed an early talent for drawing and had a prodigious output in a variety of styles over five decades. He was born in Cookham in Berkshire, his 'village in heaven', and barely spent a night away from his family home till he was 20, even taking the train daily to and from London throughout his four years at the Slade. His strong but idiosyncratic spirituality led him to depict many of the iconic events in Christ's life as happening in Cookham.

Spencer's service in the RAMC in World War I saw him tending wounded servicemen at the Beaufort Hospital in Bristol (Glenside), and later in Field Ambulance service in Macedonia. He used images from these experiences to decorate one of his greatest achievements, the Sandham Memorial Chapel at Burghclere, commissioned by the family of Henry Sandham, who died just after the war of malaria he acquired during the fighting.

Spencer's service as a war artist in World War II took him to Port Glasgow to document the shipbuilding but, apart from his war service and an extended two-year painting holiday in Gloucestershire, he lived, moved and had his being in Cookham.

He met and married Hilda Carline, also at the Slade, in 1925, and they had two daughters. But in 1929 he became obsessed with Patricia Preece. His nude paintings of Patricia are powerful and can be seen to have influenced Lucian Freud. Hilda divorced him in 1937 and a week later he married Patricia. The marriage was never consummated. Patricia went off on the honeymoon with her lesbian partner and evicted Stanley from his house. He resumed his relationship with Hilda. All this meant not only that the turmoil of

his life was often transferred onto his canvases, but also that his parlous state encouraged him to paint landscapes (mostly around Cookham) to raise cash. Spencer was knighted shortly before his death and now his paintings sell for many millions.

This was a fascinating prelude to the visit to Cookham and the Sandham Memorial Chapel in March.

Sue Black

- ◀ *The old pram chassis which Spencer wheeled around Cookham carrying his easel, canvas, umbrella, crayon and palette together with a well-worn bible and a notice warning off his enthusiastic followers.*

Friends outside Spencer's house in Cookham ▶





▲ **Patricia at Cockmarsh Hill, 1935. Oil on canvas, 76 x 51 cm. Lent by a private collector**

Photos by kind permission of the Stanley Spencer Gallery, Cookham

The Stanley Spencer Gallery

Cookham, Berkshire

Thursday 21 March 2013

Cookham, the village where Spencer was born, lived and painted most of his life, was his paradise on earth. It nourished the growing boy's feelings of love and spirituality and educated his eye for the surrounding landscape and rural architecture with its rich textures and patterns. He hated being away from it

Nowadays Cookham, with its coffee shops and gastro-pubs, is more of an up-market outpost of London than a rural idyll. Spencer might mourn the passing of many of the village characters he painted, often in religious guise as actors in scenes from the Bible, but many of the landmarks he painted can be identified.

The Spencer Gallery was a welcome refuge from the bitter east wind. This old Methodist chapel where Stanley had worshipped as a child now houses over one hundred of his paintings and drawings. The gallery also keeps books; files of press cuttings and articles; letters; written memories; albums of Spencer's photographs; and a few iconic possessions.

The gallery holds two exhibitions a year. Out of deference to Sir Stanley's elderly daughters' sensibilities none of his nude portraits are on show! Jan Cox, who gave us a talk on the life and works of Stanley Spencer at Blaise in February talked us through the pictures: four superb self-portraits; some of his religious paintings; and 'potboilers' which the impecunious artist was forced to paint to earn money to finance his economic mismanagement and astonishing life style.

Although Spencer complained that he was kept from painting the religious pictures which were more meaningful to him, the commercial paintings are executed with his usual attention to detail and lovingly depicted textures.

In the afternoon we visited the Sandham Memorial chapel in Burghclere. Members who visited the Glenside Hospital Museum in October last year were aware of the Spencer – Bristol connection as it was there during World War I when it was known as the Beaufort War Hospital that he served a very unhappy year as a hospital orderly. This experience inspired some of the paintings which completely cover the walls of Sandham chapel. The paintings took six years to complete and are considered by many to be the artist's finest achievement, drawing such praise as 'Britain's answer to the Sistine Chapel'.

Many thanks to Wendy Aldridge-Morris for organising such a worthwhile experience and conclusion to our explorations of Sir Stanley Spencer's life and works.

Ruth Stanton

Highly recommended: To find out more about the gallery and Stanley Spencer's extraordinary life, visit <http://www.stanleypencer.org.uk/>

The Summer Exhibition 2013: *Perspectives on Love – An insight into the passionate inner life of Stanley Spencer* is on until Sunday 3 November 2013 at the Stanley Spencer Gallery, High Street, Cookham, Berks, SL6 9SJ.

Tel: 01628 471885

▼ **Separating Fighting Swans, 1933. Oil on canvas, 91.4 x 72.4 cm. Lent by Leeds Museums and Galleries (Leeds Art Gallery)**



Avonmouth and Portbury Docks

Wednesday 13 March 2013

This was a first for a Friends' visit in that we never left the coach! We had dressed in our warmest clothes for walking in the biting March wind only to find that everything was viewable from the coach – even a drive-through of the animal feedstuff shed with its mountains of high protein soya and palm nut kernels. As the sites are designed for container trucks and tankers our coach was easily accommodated.

Our guide Sue Turner, Director of Communications, reminded us that there has been a port in the Bristol area since Roman times and the trade which ensued was the basis for the city's prosperity. As ships became bigger and more numerous, Bristol lost trade to Liverpool which had more capacity. In response to this challenge, the City Fathers commissioned the floating harbour which opened in 1809. Avonmouth opened in 1877 and, at first, struggled to compete with Bristol docks until it was acquired by the city in 1884. It then flourished until the 1960s, when lack of investment and problems with the unions brought about a decline.

The union threat was countered by the use of containers. Cargoes which had taken hundreds of dockers to unload could be handled by one crane and a driver. As container ships were too big for Avonmouth docks, the city built Portbury docks which opened in 1977. Unfortunately most of the container trade was already going to other ports. Bristol ratepayers were left with huge loan repayments and no offsetting income. In 1991 the docks were taken over by private investors who negotiated a 150 year lease and created the Bristol Port Company. Since then they have invested £450 million and have plans for a deep sea container terminal at Avonmouth to cater for the biggest ships in the world.

Portbury is the most centrally located deep sea port in the UK, with access to a population of 45 million in a 300 km. radius; it has the best motorway access and is rail connected. The port handles 700,000 motor vehicles a year. Coal and woodchip for power stations are imported and held in protected storage until needed. Oil and jet fuel are distributed by tanker or the national system of underground pipelines direct to major airlines. Other major imports are paper and wood products; wine and orange juice. Recently a new terminal for fresh produce has been opened; this is being adapted as a temporary venue for welcoming the guests on the cruises leaving from Avonmouth, another venture for the Bristol Port Company.

Our thanks go to Gary Gostelow for organising such a fascinating trip. He presented a cheque for £100 to Sue as a donation to the Quartet Foundation, a local charity.

Ruth Stanton

▼ *The old dry dock which is no longer used, but is very well built and of historical interest.*



▲ *Portbury – cranes in the main dock area.*

Photos by Glyn Stanton

▼ *Car imports and exports through Portbury are second only to Southampton in volume but, with better motorway access, are probably easier to distribute.*





▲ *The Daynton Anglo-Saxon silver buckle, beautifully engraved with a swastika (a peace symbol in that culture).*

Photos © Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives

▼ *Part of the Dundry Hoard: a selection of items including a child's bracelet - a tiny coil of solid gold, which must have weighed at least 6 ounces. Although hundreds of years old, it looks brand new.*



Behind The Scenes

Treasures Unearthed

Thursday 17 January 2013

After the opening dramas of a fire alarm, evacuation and the arrival of a fire engine, we eventually assembled in a first floor lecture room at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. Here Kurt Adams gave a very informative presentation highlighting the definition of Treasure Trove. Simply, if objects of a certain age and value are found and judged to have been hidden to be reclaimed later, they are Treasure Trove and technically belong to the Crown although finders are often paid a reward based on the antiquarian value of the hoard. A local example would be the huge number of Byzantine coins found near Thornbury. The present day value of these is £50,000. On the other hand, objects such as the Sutton Hoo regalia were not classed as Treasure Trove because they were in the grave of a Viking noble and were therefore not expected to be reclaimed. These hoards are the property of the owners of the land on which they were found and can be sold, although the Sutton Hoo treasure was donated to the British Museum.

We were shown a host of information on local finds, with detailed maps and colour photos of many lovely and precious items dating from the Bronze Age to the 15th century. We were also invited to examine recent finds handed into the Museum, many of them found with metal detectors. There are on average 100,000 such items in any one year and they range from scrap to objects of great beauty and value such as rings, brooches, and items for personal grooming. There were hundreds of items laid out for us, far too many to list here. There were chunks of gold and delicate brooches; silver pins, rings and even an ear wax scoop. Some coins from Byzantium suggest trade or tourists coming to Bristol from the Eastern Roman Empire.

Each item told us across centuries that they were once owned, used, treasured and valued just as much as our personal treasures are today. This was a marvellous bridge across time. Our sincere thanks to Carol Ouvry for making this possible and our appreciation to Kurt and Kate Iles who, in spite of the fire alarm, managed to delight us with a glimpse into their world.

Yvonne Lambert

I do recommend you to visit the web site and enjoy the mine of information at your leisure: www.finds.org.uk

▼ *The Thornbury hoard being treated in the Conservation labs at the museum. The hoard consisted of over 11,000 copper alloy Roman coins.*



The Museum of Bath at Work

Wednesday 20 February 2013

The Museum of Bath at Work records the development of Bath as a retailing and manufacturing centre and, since the seventeenth century, as a tourist and health resort. There are three floors of displays including exact reconstructions of factories and workshops complete with working machinery. The main exhibit is the reconstruction of an engineering and mineral water making business set up by Victorian entrepreneur, Jonathan Bowler in 1864.

We were warmly welcomed by Stuart Burroughs, the Director, and introduced to the Museum, which, like all the museums in Bath, is privately owned. The Museum was created by a group of businessmen when they heard about the closure of Mr Bowler's businesses in the late 1960s. They decided to buy the entire contents to save them for posterity. The building, a former real tennis court, is an ideal place to display the artefacts.

After the introduction we were shown exact replicas of the different aspects of Mr. Bowler's businesses. Before Mr Bowler's shop was dismantled thousands of photographs were taken of the shop, offices and workshops, and each separate area within the building was measured and recorded so it could all be reconstructed perfectly.

What an Aladdin's cave the museum turned out to be. At every turn there were thousands of artefacts relevant to that particular part of the business, including metalwork, woodwork, aerated water manufacturing, plumbing and gas fitting. This museum is a real insight into how things were done prior to the arrival of modern techniques and was a joy to view. The articles which Mr Bowler sold in his shop were fascinating. There were boxes and boxes of old style plumbing fittings. By all accounts he never threw anything away and because he never did we now have a record of real historic value.

After the tour, we had light refreshments, and plenty of time to re-visit the displays and to view the Kenneth Hudson Gallery on the ground floor which explored the history of Ralph Allen, the Bath Stone Quarries, and other Bath industries.

The afternoon was most interesting and surprising to those of us who had not previously heard of this Museum. It is a treasure store well worth visiting.

Valerie Andrews



▲ The mineral water laboratory

Photos by Margaret
Thewarapperuma and
Eileen Elsey

▼ Graham Vincent in the
Mineral Water Office.



◀ Mr Bowler's shop. There were nearly one million moveable objects in Mr Bowler's business, including 10,000 bottles and half a million documents, all now replaced in their correct positions.



The Wills Tower

Saturday 2 March 2013

With her usual immaculate organisation, Carol Ouvry chose the sunniest and warmest day in March for our visit to the Wills Tower. Some 74 Friends met outside, discovering that the building had been erected as a memorial to Henry Wills III and that Sir George Oatley was the architect.

The guides organised us into small groups dependent on whether or not we were climbing to the top. We gathered in the Department of Earth Sciences where we were introduced to the resident Smilodon. This sabre-toothed cat was trapped and its actual bones preserved in a tar pit 10,000 years ago. The climb started from there.

The group going right to the top (215 feet up) went first, visiting the Library on the way. This room has a magnificent plaster ceiling, and as we traversed the gallery one felt the ceiling was within touching distance. Very unfortunately, the lift was out of action and one or two Friends had to drop out at this point and join one of the other non-climbing groups.

The views from the top of the tower were spectacular and kept us enthralled until we had to leave for the highlight of the tour. This was to stand next to Great George, protected by earplugs supplied by our guides, as it struck 3 o'clock. Great George, named in honour of King George V, who opened the Tower in 1925, is now the 7th heaviest bell in England and the heaviest that can be rung full circle; although this is so difficult that it is rarely done.

Then down to the Great Hall which was restored in the 1960s. Its magnificent hammer beam roof looks as if it has been there for centuries, but photos of graduation ceremonies in the 1950s bear witness to the bad wartime damage it suffered during the Bristol Blitz of 1940.

If you missed this opportunity, the Tower is occasionally open to visitors (the charge is used to raise funds for the Wallace and Gromit appeal). You can be assured that the effort is definitely worthwhile – and the lift should be in use by now!

Ruth Welch

▲ View from the top of the tower looking towards the estuary. You can just see the Severn Bridge in the distance.

Photos by
Mike Woodcock

▼ View from the top of the tower looking towards Barton Hill.



Laura Knight 'In the Open Air'

Tuesday 22 January 2013

'What a fantastic exhibition – I don't think I've ever been to a better one,' was the comment from one Friend. Judging from comments overheard from others, most of those coming to the Laura Knight exhibition at Worcester City Art Gallery would agree. During her introductory talk, Senior Curator, Philippa Tinsley admitted that she had spent 75% of her annual exhibition budget on this one event. We could all agree that it was worth every penny.

The title of the exhibition referred to the use of the outdoors as Laura's studio, from painting the Malvern Hills under a covering of snow (how did cold hands and fingers produce such a wonderful picture?) to painting colourful and vibrant gypsies from the back of her car.

The two largest works were on loan from the Imperial War Museum. One of the Nuremberg Trial, painted from the BBC broadcasting box, was the obvious exception to the open air rule but did remind us of Laura's status as one of only four women official war artists. The second showed women deploying a barrage balloon.



▲ **Dame Laura Knight – Ascot Finery, 1936-8. Oil on canvas, 76 x 63.5 cm.. Dundee Art Galleries and Museums**
© Reproduced with the permission of the Estate of Dame Laura Knight DBE RA 2012 All Rights Reserved.

▼ **Dame Laura Knight – Autumn Sunset**
Oil on canvas, 63.5 x 76 cm
Private Collection, courtesy the Fine Art Society
© Reproduced with the permission of the Estate of Dame Laura Knight DBE RA 2012 All Rights Reserved.



During her time in the Malvern area, Laura and her husband, had become friendly with Munnings, and his influence on Laura's paintings of horses was evident. The painting of 'Nell and Friends' hardly needed the accompanying explanation that Nell (a very old grey mare) was so old she needed to have an apple cut for her to eat, while her friends (two donkeys) seemed to be determined to keep her company at all times.

Discussing this exhibition with others, it seems very sad that when referring to Laura Knight a not infrequent response is 'Laura who?' Surely the first woman artist for two hundred years to become a Royal Academician should be better known and more appreciated. I, for one, thank Philippa Tinsley and Worcester Museum and Art Gallery for both arranging the exhibition and then bringing it to our attention. As you will recall, the snow and ice prevented us going on the original date, but the rearranged viewing was appreciated, I am only sorry that those who could not make the rearranged date have missed a great day out.

Ruth Welch

A talk by Fiona Starkey and Mr Tudor

Dressing a Tudor Gentleman

Saturday 26 January 2013

Sitting in a large circle in the Studio at M Shed we had the pleasure of listening to Fiona who had brought with her Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk. As he married Mary, sister to Henry VIII without royal permission and thereby fell from grace, we called him plain 'Mr Tudor'.

Fiona, who had researched and constructed all the garments, introduced Mr Tudor, already dressed in some of his underwear. She made it very clear that we were hearing he was a rich gentleman. As courtiers of Tudor times did not tie bows or pull on their own garments, Fiona acted as Mr Tudor's man servant and dressed him in front of us.

First on was a linen shift. Most Tudor undergarments were made of linen, a fabric then produced in England. Tudor gentlemen enjoyed vigorous sports such as jousting so became hot and sweaty. They needed frequent changes of undergarments and linen was easily washed - a very necessary quality. Underpants were not worn. Instead, shirts were long and made of linen which became softer with washing. Legs were covered by knitted stockings held up by garters just above the knee. Hose made of silk and linen lined was attached to a doublet also made of silk brocade and linen lined. Silk, usually only worn by the rich, was difficult to keep clean.

Tudor fashion for the rich was all about display. Today we might use the word 'bling' to describe the effect. Over his underwear a Tudor gentleman wore the finest fabrics his money could buy. Doublets with extravagant slashes; box pleats set in the coats and sleeves; expensive jewellery; high leather boots; a hat, possibly adorned with an extravagant ostrich feather; a high collar; and fur trimmings completed his outer garments. A handsome and imposing Chancellor's chain of office would indicate the approval of King Henry himself. A pilgrim's badge would prove the wearer had made a visit to a famous pilgrimage site such as Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Mr Tudor, who when fully dressed looked remarkably like Henry VIII himself, assured us that his clothes were very comfortable to wear.

Fiona also explained a little about eating habits. Tudors carried their own eating implements with them, rather reminding me of church socials! Pewter was used for everyday ware. The poor would eat from trenchers made of square pieces of wood, hence the expressions 'trencherman' and 'square meal', which are still in use today.

Rosemary Doggett

Photos by Catherine Dixon



◀ *Mr Tudor in knitted stockings, linen-lined silk hose and linen shirt.*



◀ *Mr Tudor showed us details of his sleeves and cuffs. Like many gentlemen of the time he carries a weapon at his hip.*



◀ *Mr Tudor in his complete outfit.*

Chocolate in Bristol

Saturday 20 April 2013

John Gingell, a chocolatier of over 50 years with Fry's and Cadbury's, presented this lecture, which linked to M Shed's current 'Chocolate!' exhibition. Before John's talk we saw his wondrous and nostalgic collection of beans, bars, chocolate wrappers, ration books, sweet coupons, tools, photographs and presentation boxes. He explained to one questioner that a chocolatier is an experienced scientist who understands the process of chocolate-making from bean to bar.

The fascinating lecture embraced the history of chocolate going back to the Emperor Moctezuma, who was said to consume 50 pitchers of liquid chocolate per day, to the technology of chocolate-making today. The first chocolate house in London opened in 1557 and by 1574 chocolate was put into rolls and cakes. The first Bristol chocolate-maker was Walter Churchman of Stapleton (1729). Joseph Fry started making chocolate in 1761 and soon J S Fry & Sons had as many as seven factories in Bristol. John was at pains to point out that, contrary to popular belief, it was Cadbury's, not Kraft, who closed down the Somerdale factory at Keynsham in 2007.

John explained the processes of chocolate-making, from breaking the bean pod (when it smells right) to tempering of chocolate so that it is shiny and does not turn white (though chocolate that has done so is still excellent). The process is so simple that John's ten year-old granddaughter can do it at home. John let us taste samples of his own home-made chocolate.

At first sight, chocolate-making seems to be a kind of alchemy though the products taste much better. But nowadays, chocolate-making depends on very precise science and technologies which left your note-taker breathless. Temperatures and percentages now rule, although the Aztecs clearly knew what to do over 3,000 years ago!

Robert Walters



▲ *Chocolate boxes galore!*

Photos by Mary Bailey

▼ *Friends will recognise many of these old chocolate advertisements.*



Friday Night at the Cinema

Friday 26 April 2013.

To complement the current exhibition at M Shed the theme for the evening was chocolate made in Bristol. The first archive film showed two children floating down the river in a punt and mysteriously arriving at Fry's in Keynsham. They were taken, by the hand, by a gentleman totally unknown to them and given a full tour of the factory, after which their father was contacted by telephone and they were collected by chauffeur-driven car and taken home. Where were the CRB checks not to mention Health and Safety? Without such organisations how did we survive?

After a refreshment break including, of course, chocolate biscuits we went into the second half. The film included the closure of the Elizabeth Shaw chocolate factory at Greenbank, some Pathé News and old advertisements, some familiar but others totally unknown.

All in all it was a very enjoyable evening expertly put together for us by Clive Burlton and John Penny, who spend many hours at the record office digitising reels of archive film. Our grateful thanks to them and to everyone who turned up to make this such an enjoyable event.

Gary Gostelow



A still from the oldest known film about Fry's at Somerdale, made in 1929 as publicity by a company called Publicity Films of Wimbledon. The 12-minute film shows the journey of a brother and sister who drift downstream in a punt and land at the Somerdale jetty. A kindly factory worker shows them around all the chocolate making processes before their father turns up in a chauffeur-driven car to take them home. On their way home, they stop off for some chocolates in a local shop...

◀ *Clive and John also showed a film about the demise of Elizabeth Shaw at Greenbank. This company started life as Packers Chocolates. This is one of their first advertisements.*

Exhibition at Radstock Museum

FBMGA member Wendy Walker, from Radstock, is co-ordinating a full-scale museum exhibition for the first time. The exhibition, *Children of the Pits*, opens at Radstock Museum at the beginning of May and will run until the end of July. It examines the lives of children who worked in the Somerset Coalfield during the 19th and early 20th centuries, covering family, work, educational, health and legal aspects, and the scores of dreadful tragedies which took many young lives in the pits.

Wendy, who has been a Friend for eight or nine years, started work as voluntary press officer and general assistant at Radstock Museum as soon as she retired from full time work four years ago. She said: 'It's thanks to being a Bristol Friend and taking part in FBMGA activities and visits that I have gained inspiration to help with past Radstock exhibitions, and now to actually co-ordinate one. I don't think I could ever have done it, otherwise.'

FBMGA members are warmly invited to come along and support this exhibition.



▲ **1898 Camerton Mining Boys - some wearing harnesses for hauling tubs of coal**

Photo courtesy of Radstock Museum

Highclere Castle

Tuesday 9 April 2013

Such excitement to visit Highclere Castle - or should I say, Downton Abbey, thanks to its TV fame! The now iconic view of the house did not disappoint - although Matthew not jumping out of the bushes to ask me to marry him did!

Set in 1,000 acres of sweeping parkland, with gardens commissioned by Capability Brown in 1770, the landscape of the house still contains features from the Mediaeval, Bronze and Iron Ages. The Bishops of Winchester were granted an estate here in AD 749 and continued to own it for some 800 years. William of Wykeham, the eminent Catholic prelate and architect, rebuilt much of the Manor of Highclere in 1368. In the mid-16th century the estate passed into the secular hands of the Herbert family, ancestors of the Earls of Carnarvon. The 8th Earl still resides with his family here. The Elizabethan house and gardens were successively transformed until in 1838 the 3rd Earl commissioned Sir Charles Barry, who also built the Houses of Parliament, to create the current grand Victorian Bath stone mansion with its great central tower. The structural work on the Castle interior was later completed by Thomas Allum in 1878.

In the 20th century, the castle was used as a hospital during the Great War and for evacuees during the second, finally opening to the public in 1988. The interior of the house, with its dramatic Gothic entrance hall designed by George Gilbert Scott, the architect of St. Pancras Station, leads into an opulent library and successive lavishly decorated rooms, containing not only Napoleon's desk and other objets d'art, but also intimate portraits and photographs of the Earl and his family. This, for me, was the most enjoyable part of the visit, and I enjoyed learning about the family's horse racing connection, the 7th Earl having been the Queen's Racing Manager. The present family still run the Highclere stud and we could see the gallops out of the windows.

Of course, Highclere and the Carnarvons are also famous for the 5th Earl's involvement with Howard Carter and the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922. There is an informative and extensive exhibition in the cellars of the Castle celebrating his archaeological involvement, extraordinary achievement and infamous demise. There is so much to be seen and enjoyed at this remarkable and popular attraction.

Julie Lang



▲ This iconic view of Highclere Castle regularly features in the opening credits of Downton Abbey

Photos by kind permission of Highclere Castle

▼ The East lawns of Highclere Castle with the Jackdaw's Folly in the foreground. The castle is set in 1,000 acres of parkland designed by Capability Brown with stunning gardens, woodland walks, several follies and countless breathtaking views.



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The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those of the FBMGA or Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives

**Next issue: copy deadline
21 July 2013 for early
September publication**