

Newsletter



Ballooning in the Bristol Area 1784 to 2005

Photo by kind
permission of
John Penny

Wednesday 7 August 2013

John Penny galloped through a fascinating history of ballooning. Most people know about the Montgolfier brothers and their hot air-filled paper balloon of 1783. But have you heard of de Rozier and d'Arlandes, who made the first balloon ascent with passengers across Paris later that year, sparking a new European interest in ballooning?

Locally, a number of people experimented successfully with balloon flights, including John Dinwiddie, whose model balloon achieved a 10-mile flight, ending up in the area now called Air Balloon Hill in St George. Dr Edward Jenner experimented with model balloons, making his first attempt inside Berkeley Castle. Jenner met his wife Catherine after a trial balloon ended up on Catherine's father's property. Joseph Deeker Junior made a balloon flight from Bristol to Bath where, amusingly, the travelling car underneath contained a seat and some oars for steering!

John explained how these pioneering voyages drew crowds. Although, if a balloon failed to take off or did not live up to people's expectations, the watching crowds could sometimes be quite merciless – even throwing things at balloonists, who sometimes had to run for their own safety!

The use of coal gas in balloons helped to reduce costs and also the time it took to inflate the balloon, hence another 'rise' in ballooning popularity. By 1810 Mrs Margaret Graham had invented leaflet advertising by balloon. In 1898 John Bacon and his daughter Gertrude took what were probably the first aerial photographs of Bristol using the recently invented Box Brownie.

Modern ballooning 'took off' in the 1960s, with the successful flight of Britain's first modern hot air balloon, *Bristol Belle*. One of its passengers, Don Cameron, went on to set up the highly-successful Cameron Balloons. Bristol's first Balloon Fiesta, held in 1979, put Bristol firmly at the centre of the ballooning world.

Angela Johnson

From the Chairman

Annual General Meeting

It was good to see so many of our members, especially those who joined during the year, at the AGM in September. Following some healthy debate about our costs, the motion to increase our subscriptions to £22 sole and £32 joint was passed with no votes against. Officers and executive committee members all agreed to stand again for the coming year, and were all re-elected. We still have a couple of vacancies on the executive committee, and on the programme committee, so do please let me know if you would like to be more involved in ensuring our continuing success.

Newsletter

One of our biggest ongoing costs is for printing and distributing our newsletter. We are looking at ways of reducing those costs, but there are some key elements we have no plans to change in the foreseeable future; we will continue with the full-colour A4 paper format delivered through your letterbox and dispatched to all members on the same day.

Email

Although we plan to continue to send you a high quality printed quarterly newsletter, I would like us to be able to supplement that from time to time with emails, when we have short notice of museum events or news that misses our copy date for the newsletter. I appreciate that not all our members have access to email, so we shall continue to include notice of all Friends' events, and Museum events of which we have sufficient notice, in the newsletter.

Ahead of the AGM, I emailed members for whom we have current addresses to outline the full rationale for the subscription increase. If you have email access but did not receive that message, please email me and ask to be added to our list.

I can reassure you that we will use email addresses only for Friends' communications, and will not make them available to anyone else, including the museum service.

Julie Finch

You will read in the Museum Report that Julie Finch, the Director of the Museums Service, is leaving Bristol to take up a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to set up a new museum in Perth, Western Australia.

Julie joined the service in 2006 to head up the team delivering M Shed, and as a member of the Public Advisory Board for our new museum I was privileged to work with Julie and her team on that project, and get an insight into her vision. I was delighted when she was appointed as Director of the whole service in 2009. In that role she has been an effective and popular leader, and has made many new friends for the service within local government, big business and the international museums community. She is

leaving the service in a good state, but will be very difficult to replace at what is a particularly challenging time for museums across the country.

I am sure you will all join me in wishing Julie every success in her exciting new role.

Our programme of events

As ever, the programme committee has put together a very varied and interesting collection of events for the coming quarter. One trip that has particularly caught my eye this time is an evening visit to the Bewick's swans at The Slimbridge Wetland Centre, with supper, on Tuesday 14 January. I find the prospect of an after-dark visit particularly enticing, and probably something I would not undertake under my own steam.

International Contacts

A couple of months ago Sue Giles, Senior Collections Officer – World Cultures, invited me to join her for lunch with four international curators spending 10 days with the museum as part of a longer training visit to the UK centred on the British Museum. My role was to explain how our friends group works to support the service. The visitors were from Egypt, India, Palestine and China, and I think I learned as much about their experience as they did about mine. I discovered that none of those countries has friends groups in the way we do in the UK, and that in India the museum visitors are almost exclusively foreign tourists, rather than the local population.

A week or so later I met an Austrian tourist when I led one of the regular public behind-the-scenes tours at M Shed. He looked surprised when I introduced myself as a volunteer, and explained to me that the culture of volunteering is virtually non-existent in Austria. He was in no doubt that he feels that his countrymen are missing out.

British Association of Friends of Museums Annual Conference

In late September I joined 4 other members, Liz and Campbell Mackenzie and Mary and Martin Bailey, in representing Bristol at the BAFM annual conference in Aberdeen. We were treated to inspiring speakers, both Friends and professionals, some lively debate, fun social events, and lots of networking opportunities with Friends from across the UK, all in a fascinating location which I might otherwise have had no reason to visit.

Next year's conference is in Swansea, which should prove just as interesting as Aberdeen with the added bonus of being closer to Bristol.

Sue Thurlow Chairman

Explore Your Archive: the *Dreadnought* Journal

Explore Your Archive, a national campaign to promote the archives sector, was launched in November. Bristol Record Office is taking part by telling the story of the *Dreadnought*, an 18th century privateering ship.

The story comes from a journal kept by the ship's surgeon in 1757, during the Seven Years' War. He documented attacks on French vessels - designed to disrupt trade and steal prizes - as well as describing disputes, drinking, accidents and illnesses at sea. Members who came to the AGM had a sneak preview from Allie Dillon.

Until recently, the journal was not available for research as it was kept in private hands. Through their Explore Your Archive campaign, Bristol Record Office aims to show how the diary can be used alongside other documents and newspapers to discover how privateers operated and the profits that could be made.

Several events have been planned for the campaign, including a talk, archive tours and an exhibition. In addition, BRO will be publishing research guides on maritime history on its website.

The ship's voyage will also be brought to life online through regular extracts from the journal on Twitter and Facebook.

For more details, visit www.bristol.gov.uk/recordoffice

Title page: *A journal of the proceedings on board the Dreadnought privateer, James Seisman Commander, mounting 14 four pounders: for a four months cruise against the enemies of Great Britain.*



▲ The Dreadnought Journal

Photos © Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

From the Membership Secretary

With the AGM having agreed an increase in subscription rates to £22 sole and £32 joint, can I please ask those of you with a standing order to change it before Christmas? This will allow your bank to pay it in January at the new rate. Otherwise you and I will spend time sorting it out subsequently after it has been paid at the old rate. Changing the amount is easily done on line if you have that type of account, otherwise you will need to contact your bank in plenty of time.

Cheque payers who are due to renew their membership will find a form with this newsletter. Unfortunately we are charged 30p for each cheque we pay into the bank, so if you feel you are able to take out a standing order and save us this cost now would be a good time to do so. New membership cards will be sent out next time to those who have paid by the end of February. Thank you all for your co-operation.

June Hibberd Membership Secretary

We welcome the following members who have joined the Friends recently:

Miss Sarah Bradfield	Mrs Eileen Lewis
Mrs Angela Ewan	Mrs Trudy Mehigan
Mrs Margaret Forster	Ms Di Parkin
Ms Liz Gazzard	Mrs Anne Rees
Mrs Ann Hall	Mrs W Russell
Mrs Christina Jones	Mr Don Sparks
Miss Josephine Lawlor	Ms Jane Wills

Situations Vacant

Secretary: Richard Avery, our excellent Secretary, has a very busy full-time job which involves him travelling much more than he used to, often at short notice. He would therefore like to hand over his role as our secretary to someone who has a little more spare time than he does, but he would be available to ensure an orderly handover, and to provide occasional advice and guidance as required.

If you are interested in finding out more, please contact Sue Thurlow, our Chairman – details on the back page.

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Quarterly Report

Funding the Service

As an important part of Bristol's cultural offer, Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives have been working hard over the past few years to diversify our funding and to take a more enterprising approach to income generation. This is a time of momentous change for Bristol and, as part of the council, the service faces many changes in the months ahead.

We have already begun these changes and currently have a funding model which means that this year, 40% (£2.6m) will come from Bristol City Council and 23% (£1.5m) from Arts Council England through their Major Partner Museum grant. The remaining 37% (£2.4m) comes from a range of sources including retail, café catering, donations and room hire for conferences.

As the service navigates through the changes to the funding landscape, we will continue to offer the very best experience to each and every visitor. The service will need to take bold steps with programming, partnerships, displays and messaging in order to ensure our future, but we believe by working together we can deliver a truly exemplary service for the 21st century. The support that the Friends offer the service is as vital now as it has always been.

Staff news

Julie Finch, our Director, will be leaving us in the New Year for an exciting role heading up Western Australia's new museum development project. The Perth-based project has been given \$430m (£250m) by State Government for building work to start in 2016 with a 2020 opening date. Julie joined BMGA in 2006, and has held her current position since 2009. She was previously the Director of the National Football Museum (2004-2006).

We also say goodbye to Ben Meller, Community Partnerships Officer, who is taking up a post at Bristol University, and to the Customer Service team's Scarlet Blackmore, who has completed her apprenticeship.

Karin Walton has reached an astonishing 40 years of service in the museum as the Collections Officer for Applied Arts. She has now reduced her working hours as she begins to enjoy flexible retirement.

Roger Vaughan has retired from his post of Collections Officer (Geology) after 20 years with us. Deborah Hutchinson has replaced him. Deborah is an experienced geologist, until now a volunteer in the geology curatorial section, and worked previously as an Assistant Duty manager at M Shed.

Pavlos Kapetanakis joined us as the paper conservator dedicated to the Adela Breton collection of watercolours and drawings of historic sites in central-America. This post is supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund. Samantha Boyle (no relation to Gail Boyle) has joined the archaeology curatorial team as Trainee Community Archaeologist – a grant-aided position funded by the Council for British Archaeology.

Museum & Art Gallery

The Roman Empire: Power & People exhibition, curated by our archaeology team of Gail Boyle and Kate Iles, opened in September to great acclaim. It is accompanied by the display in the Balcony Gallery of the Orpheus Mosaic from Brislington.



▲ *The face of a barbarian woman? A monumental sculpture which may represent the Roman province of Germania*



▲ *Rare survivals: a child's knitted sock from Roman Egypt.*

Photos © Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Work has begun on an overhaul of the Art galleries, including new walls, floors and lighting. Paintings are being conserved and cleaned, and some glazed which were not previously, all which will lead to a much better experience for visitors and improved conditions for the artworks.

Until 2 March, a temporary exhibition on the theme Cities will be in the Modern and Contemporary gallery, showing recent acquisitions from the Art Fund International collection and other works from the wider collection – including an early map of Bristol.

The success of the lift project in improving the circulation and ease of use at the museum and art gallery has been recognised in the form of an Environmental Award from the Civic Society.

M Shed

Developments to the large Umberslade site to the rear of M Shed are underway, and the road between M Shed and the site will be diverted to run behind the Stevedore Shed (the Framing Factory) rather than along the quayside in front. To prepare for this, the temporary engine shed behind the Framing Factory has been dismantled and will be reassembled at the other end of the line, close to A Bond. Museum square, outside the cafe, will be resurfaced over the winter with a completion date of April 2014.

An arresting sight on 3 October was the overnight appearance of a huge National Lottery ball apparently crashing into the top corner of L Shed, part of a nationwide awareness campaign for the re-launched National Lottery draw.



▲ Lottery Ball at M Shed

Photos © National Lottery/PA Wire

The working exhibits enjoyed a successful season, helped by the fine weather.

Railway locomotive *Portbury* finally returned to service in August after her long overhaul. In September the railway was visited by the diminutive twin locos *Alfred* and *Judy*, originally built for the tight curves and low bridge of Par docks in Cornwall. They proved very popular with visitors and worked the train during Doors Open Day.

Blaise Castle House, the Georgian House and the Red Lodge

Until Easter, Blaise Castle House is open Saturday and Sunday, 10.30am to 4pm, and the Georgian House and the Red Lodge are closed.

Bristol Record Office

The visitor entrance to Bristol Record Office will shortly be moving so that public access to the searchroom will be via the Create Centre on the east side of B Bond Warehouse. This change is to accommodate another council service moving into the building. Staff at BRO are working to minimize any disruption to visitors while the necessary building work is taking place.

Recent acquisitions include First and Second World War documents donated by local families at collecting events held at M Shed. These include service papers, registration cards, newspaper cuttings and a soldier's joke book.

Events & exhibitions

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery Main Temporary Exhibition Gallery

Roman Empire: Power and People

to 12 Jan 2014

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery Balcony Gallery (free)

Return from the Underworld – The Orpheus Mosaic

to 12 Jan 2014

M Shed Top Floor Gallery

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2013

to 23 Feb 2014

There will be additional material from our Natural History collections to complement and make connections with the rich local environmental conditions.

Bristol Record Office (free)

Dr White's Almshouse, 1613-2013

to 17 Jan 2014

Dr Thomas White was a preacher and social reformer who founded an almshouse on Temple Street to provide housing for ten poor, elderly people of Bristol. Now based at Prewett Street, the charity continues to provide dwellings for elderly people in the city. Through documents, photographs and objects, this exhibition tells the story of Dr White's legacy across four centuries.

Dates for your diary

Here are some forthcoming trips to whet your appetite for spring of next year.

Morgan Car Factory

Thursday 10 April 2014

Walk through the production line of these famous English cars and later in the day go on to see the Bugatti Trust Museum.

Herefordshire Churches

Thursday 1 May 2014

Steven Blake will conduct us round some more churches including the spectacular and unique church of St Mary and St David, Kilpeck, with its famous sheela na gig sculpture.

Frampton Manor House

Wednesday 21 May 2014

An intriguing timber-framed Grade 1 listed building dating between the 13th and 17th centuries.

Application forms for these events will be with the next newsletter.

Dorothy Brown, MBE

Some of you will have already heard the sad news that Friends member Dorothy Brown died suddenly on 8 October, aged 86, less than 2 weeks after she appeared in good form and asked questions at our AGM. Dorothy was well known for her successful campaigning to save historic buildings in and around Bristol, most notably the Tudor Iron Acton Court, Clifton Lido, and many now-listed buildings in Old Market.

Liverpool Trip

Friday 6 to Tuesday 10 September 2013

Friday

Jodrell Bank

Our first visit was an inspired choice! We could see the Lovell Telescope some time before we actually arrived. Up close it looked like a giant Meccano set. The radio telescope was the inspiration of Sir Bernard Lovell, a local man from Coalpit Heath. Along with much other second-hand material, old gun turret mechanisms from battleships were used in the motor system.

The telescope became operational just in time for the launch of Sputnik I and subsequently tracked many other artificial satellites. It is currently used for the observation of pulsars, quasars and black holes, and looks unimaginable distances into deep space. Smaller satellite telescopes sited elsewhere are used to calculate these vast distances more accurately.

The site also includes an arboretum and flower garden which with a giant leap of imagination represents our solar system. Following an excellent lunch, we continued our journey to Liverpool.

Gary Costelow

Saturday

Liverpool Docks Visit

We were lucky to have such a knowledgeable guide as John Hinchliffe to explain the history of the Docks, which at seven miles long are the biggest and most complete system of maritime docks anywhere in the world. The world's first wet dock was built directly into bedrock almost 300 years ago.

John told us the names of various docks as we drove along – Garston (privately owned); Herculaneum (filled in and the area now re-used); Harrington (filled in and now a car parking area); Kings; Queens; Princes; Salthouse; Albert... They really did go on and on.

Other landmarks included a transit shed, originally HQ of the White Star Shipping Line with its *Titanic* Memorial; enormous piles of scrap metal probably waiting to be shipped off to China; a ferry moored where millions emigrated to the New World. Is that where I (aged 7) sailed on the S.S. *Orbita* with my family to live in Ceylon?

We left the coach to stretch our legs, looking out at the Victorian clock tower – one of only two in the world (the other is in Russia) which have six clocks. We watched as a barge travelled slowly from the Mersey on to the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.

Liverpool has similarities with Bristol. The Mersey has a 13-metre tidal range. Years ago, sadly, slave ships sailed to Africa and the Americas. Liverpool also has enormous bonded tobacco warehouses. In fact, more tonnage of goods goes through Liverpool today than ever before – even if it is scrap metal and containers, rather than sugar, tobacco, cotton and rum. And much of the Docks is coming back to life as smart apartments, hotels, shops and conference centres.

Ceri Addis



▲ Liverpool from the Mersey Ferry



▲ The Lovell telescope was built at enormous expense and came in well over budget! Completed in 1957 and measuring 76.2m in diameter it replaced the 1947 Transit Telescope to become the largest fully steerable telescope in the world.

▼ The 'Three Graces' from Albert Dock, Liverpool





▲ **Refurbished Reading Room,
Liverpool Central Library**

Liverpool Central Library

Behind the neoclassical façade of the Central Library a surprising transformation has taken place. The post-war interior has been demolished and a magical 5-storey elliptical atrium rises up to a vast glass dome. It cost £50 million and is the largest library development in Europe.

The library has only just re-opened and is already proving very popular with visitors and regular users. The ground floor has a welcoming mix of fiction shelves, café and a scintillating circular children's library. A floor down is the archive collection. Shirley Hodgson researched emigration records of children sent to Canada from Bristol via Liverpool there. Peter Hodgson found information on the Blue Funnel line.

On the first floor, the old Picton Reading Room containing 15,000 rare books has been lovingly restored to reveal the full beauty of its dome, wrought iron

galleries and spiral staircases. A side door leads into the Hornby Library, formerly opened only on request, but now everyone can view the amazing early printed books in the collection. On display were King John's Charter which founded the city in 1207; a signed letter of Queen Elizabeth I; a chained Bible; and an early copy of Shakespeare's complete works. A selection of beautifully-bound books was also on show, one with thousands of jewels encrusted on the front cover.

Another surprise awaits in the secluded Oak Room. There, in a large glass cabinet in the centre of the room, is the star of the collection – an original edition of Audubon's *Birds of America*. Published in 1839, this priceless tome is one of the World's rarest natural history books. The library is a must-see addition for any visitor to Liverpool.

Sunday

Photos by Martin Bailey
and Tim Clark

'Another Place' at Crosby Beach

Sunday morning saw us off to Crosby Beach, where Antony Gormley's installation of 100 cast-iron figures has stood since 2005. The figures, like many of his works, are based on moulds of his own body. His idea originally was to test time and tide, stillness and movement, and somehow engage with the daily life of the beach. The work is seen as a poetic response to the individual and universal sentiments associated with emigration as it looks at the sea, showing sadness at leaving but hope of a new future in another place.

The figures standing across two miles of beach on or in the sand are some 189 cm tall. They are submerged and revealed as the tide rises and ebbs. They face the mouth of the Mersey, monitoring the ships and activity of the river. Time and tide have changed the patina of the figures and their surfaces now carry barnacles and sea weeds. The tide at Crosby rises and falls very fast, so the water advances rapidly like the Severn, allowing the figures to be seen at different stages of the tide as they seem to rise out of the sand. The sun shone and as Wendy had cleverly picked the rising tide for our visit, we were treated to a changing view of beach, river and sea, set with a background of merchant ships entering and leaving the Mersey. It proved to be a very exciting visit.



▲ **Another Place – Gormley
and Friends**

Keith Borissow

Liverpool Old Dock

Liverpool One, the new shopping development in the heart of Liverpool, was one of the suggested venues for our Sunday afternoon. However, Friends are made of stern stuff, and 20 of us ignored the delights of retail therapy to visit Liverpool Old Dock, which is to be found under the main street.

Our guide pointed out the dark grey paving stones, which denote the original line of the riverbank. Then escorting us through some doors, which made us think more of subterranean car parks than archaeological sites, we were introduced to The Old Dock. This was the world's first enclosed, commercial, wet dock built in 1715, a huge undertaking and seen as quite a risk. Planning had started in 1708 and the cost was then estimated to be £6,000. Nothing changes, however, and the final cost was £12,000! Liverpool Corporation employed Thomas Steers, a leading canal engineer, who converted the mouth of the Pool, (which gave Liverpool its name). Steers provided the city with a dock with quaysides and a river gate, which allowed ships to load and unload regardless of the state of the tide. This gave Liverpool a great advantage over its rival ports. It almost bankrupted the Liverpool Corporation but led to a great increase in the city's trade.

If you have claustrophobia, you can admire it through a window in the pavement!



▲ *The Old Dock was 'lost' after 1826, superseded by other docks and quays, and not rediscovered until 2001. We were able to see the bed of the Pool and, rising 20 feet from it, the walls of handmade bricks.*

Ruth Welch

Photos by Glyn Stanton
and Martin Bailey

Monday

Sudley Hall

Here, we were lucky to be guided by Julian Treuherz, former keeper of art galleries for National Museums Liverpool. He drew our attention to the history and eclectic nature of George Holt's collection which was financed by the profits of Victorian shipping. Philanthropist Holt came from a Unitarian family and believed in using his wealth for the good of the community. He supported young, struggling artists and craft workers, as well as the more established. He believed money should be spent on beautiful artefacts, which could transform the quality of life.

The Hall contains many pieces of furniture with delicate woodcarving, and inlays, particularly from the 1880s; costumes; a childhood room; and many objets d'art. There is also a stunning collection of paintings. The first known Turner of Margate Harbour sits above a brightly-coloured family favourite by John Phillip, painted in 1854, of Gypsy Sisters of Seville. Holt also commissioned four paintings from John Strudwick, who used rich effects and colours in fanciful themes.

▼ **Sudley Hall**
© National Museums
Liverpool



Further interesting paintings by Millais, Holman-Hunt, Leighton, John Herbert, Corot, Bonheur, Creswick and William Dyce, whose powerful religious images appealed to George's beliefs, crowd the walls. Our attention was drawn to a delicate, tranquil work in soft focus sunlit haze by Turner of Schloss Rosenau, Prince Albert's birthplace. Apparently, the Royals had not been impressed by this style and failed to buy it. Nearby was a fine example of Gainsborough's mastery of painting old age in a portrait of an old woman, and a lively Landseer oil sketch of Highland scenery revealing his skill in recording fleeting effects of light and weather.

A small garden behind the Hall is under the haughty watch of a delicately-painted weather-beaten penguin – an example of Public Art to be added joyfully to the tally of Lambananas, Gorillas and Gromits!

Angela Hammond

Liverpool Churches

St. George's Church, Everton; Princes Road Synagogue; Ullet Road Unitarian Church; All Hallows, Allerton

What an interesting set of buildings was selected by our guide, Peter de Figueiredo. We first visited St. George's. Built on the site of the Everton Beacon it has claims to world importance as the first iron church and one of the first large buildings to be constructed using a cast iron framework. Externally it appears conventionally built from sandstone but inside the iron framework forms a decorative lattice overlaying pale pastel slate infills giving it the lightness of a conservatory.

The Princes Road Synagogue, another Grade 1 listed building, is a fascinating magpie's collection of different architectural styles and religious symbols. The architects, the Audsley brothers, knowing nothing of Judaism, made a tour of North Africa to educate themselves and produced an extravagant mixture of oriental and high Victorian styles. The lavish use of colour and decoration make this a jewel box of a setting for the Torah scrolls.

The Ullet Road Unitarian Church is more than a church – it is a complex of Grade 1 listed buildings. The church, heavily influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement, has magnificent windows designed by William Morris and Burne-Jones. It was wired for electricity so the original 'electroliers' still light the nave today.

The Vestry and the Library feature intricately-painted ceilings by Gerald Moira (a member of The Royal West of England Academy who painted civil war murals in the Old City Hall in Corn Street) with secular themes of virtues and great men rather than religious subjects. The Unitarians are very liberal in their views (they do not necessarily believe in a divine being) and were proud of being the first church in which a gay commitment ceremony was held.

A cloister links church and hall with a beautiful arched, beamed ceiling and fine mosaic floors. The hall could have been a mediaeval banqueting hall with its spectacular high oak framed ceiling and central lantern. We clustered round the baronial fireplace with the coats of arms of the Brunner and Tate families above it to drink the tea and coffee generously laid on by members of the congregation.

Ruth Stanton

One of the set of magnificent Burne-Jones stained glass windows in All Hallows church ►



▲ *The interior of St George's is a complete surprise with slender iron columns and a beautiful structural latticework bathed in light. Cast iron rafters support modular painted slate*



The Palm House, Sefton Park

Visiting the Palm House was a delightful experience. Built in the 19th century, it was derelict for a long time but has recently been restored to its former glory. It has been replanted as near as possible to the original planting plan of the Parisian gardener, Edouard Andre.

We entered the impressive octagonal glass building through one of the four entrance doors into an open space with a white floor over which three domes were supported on a white cast iron frame. The hanging draperies of Bougainvilleas were spectacular, in shades of pink and maroon. The Australian Bottle Brush bushes were flowering, as were some orchids. I was particularly interested in the 25-foot Norfolk Island Pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*), a relation of the Monkey Puzzle tree. Elsewhere there were banana trees, figs, New Zealand ferns and, of course, palms.

Outside, a broad pathway encircled the building and arranged on it were life size bronzes of botanists and navigators, including Darwin; Linnaeus, the inventor of the binomial classification of plants; Mercator, the father of cartography; Columbus; Captain Cook; and the Portuguese Prince Henry the Navigator.

Sefton Park occupies nearly 250 acres and only in the last few weeks has been relisted to Grade 1 by English Heritage as it has been little changed from when it was opened in 1872.

Chester Guttridge



▲ *Peter Pan and Wendy in Sefton Park*

The Downs

150 years of Clifton & Durdham Downs

Saturday 22 June 2013

▼ *The porch of E W Godwin's house*

Photo by Martin Bailey

The story of the Downs plus tea

Saturday 17 & Thursday 22 August 2013

Bristol is lucky to have Clifton and Durdham Downs so near to the city centre – a large green space where all sorts of events and leisure activities take place which increase the enjoyment of living in the city. Both Francis Greenacre in his talk and Elvyn Griffiths on the walk emphasised the importance of The Downs Act of 1861 in creating this large green space for use by people living in Bristol.

Elvyn showed us some remnants of previous use: the Iron Age hill fort by the Observatory; traces of a Roman road; 'bumps' left by lead mining; the Seven Sisters group of trees marking the edge of a quarry, now filled in. Francis showed us illustrations from the 18th and 19th centuries, some showing a 'lunar' landscape: the limestone downland scarred by quarries and almost devoid of trees. Despite this, the area was used by local people for outings and picnics, much as it is today.

However, the gradual encroachment of building in the 19th century led the Merchant Venturers, who owned Clifton Down, and Bristol City Council, who bought Durdham Down from the Manor of Henbury, to form the Downs Committee with the purpose of protecting this space for use by the public 'for ever hereafter open and unenclosed'. Interestingly, there are few rules about what should take place on the Downs, all requests being considered carefully and a positive answer being 'no objection'.

All manner of activities have taken place on the Downs since then including cricket, rugby, horse-racing and horse-riding, wrestling, boxing and, currently, the Bristol Downs League football. In 1910, a Bristol Boxkite took off from Durdham Down, giving locals their first sight of a flying machine. During World War II an American army unit was stationed on the Downs; huge quantities of downland turf were required to restore it after they left. Today kite-flying, dog-walking and jogging are popular and there is entertainment in the form of circuses, fun fairs, fun runs and charity events.

Francis outlined the difficulties facing the Downs Committee in balancing the demands of keeping the open space and allowing nature to take its course in the form of trees and



▼ *Clifton Racecourse by Rolinda Sharples*

© Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives



shrubs growing where none was before.

To finish the afternoon we enjoyed a delicious tea in the house designed by E W Godwin situated on the edge of the Downs. Angela Nutbrown gave us a brief background to this architect/designer linked to the Aesthetic Movement and let us look round the main rooms. Godwin is an interesting character who merits further investigation – maybe a talk in 2014?

Mary Bailey

Quarrying on the Downs, a watercolour by William Arnee Frank.

Photo by Martin Bailey

The original © Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives



No. 1 Royal Crescent, Bath

Wednesday 2 October 2013

No. 1 the Royal Crescent is the first house at the eastern end. In June 2013, after a huge fund-raising operation, No. 1 was reunited with No.1a (the original servants' quarters) and opened by Mary Berry, the baking queen. This splendid home, built by John Wood the Younger, is laid out and decorated as it was in 1777. At that time, the occupant was Henry Sandford, an Irish M.P. and a widower when he arrived in Bath. Notebooks written by him, found in the national Library of Ireland, have supplied invaluable information as to how he spent his time.

Tom Boden, head of museums for Bath Preservation Trust, gave an interesting presentation conjuring up the flavour of the household as it would have been in Henry Sandford's lifetime. Then we were set free to explore. We imagined the elderly, cultured man in his 'Gentleman's Retreat' looking at the cabinets, which are full of interesting curios he had collected. The house is furnished with paintings, china and furniture of this period, which give a vivid impression of the respectable lives of the owner and his servants. Prints on the walls by Thomas Rowlandson (the 'Comforts of Bath') present a slightly different picture.

The house was run by a housekeeper who controlled the household and guarded expensive stores such as sugar and spices. She had her own room which, as the charming small guidebook said, although not luxurious did provide a degree of gentility! The kitchen was especially interesting as I could imagine the activities that went on there and the bustle when Henry's family visited.

We must thank organiser Valerie Andrews, the staff and voluntary guides of this splendid building for this excellent and instructive tour.

Valerie Chown



▲ No. 1 Royal Crescent



Withdrawing Room

Photos © The Bath Preservation Trust

Hellen's Manor, Much Marcle, Herefordshire

Tuesday 31 August 2013

A dull and damp start did not affect a wonderful day in the depths of Herefordshire. Over coffee and biscuits, our two guides Caitlin and Kathryn, who were instructive and great fun, recounted a brief history of the house starting in 1096.

The present Jacobean house is part of a much larger mansion and incorporates a mediaeval tower staircase. The front has that homely and comfortable look of always having been there. We were reminded by the artefacts that Hellen's Manor is a home and each room brought that history to life with its treasures, pictures and reminiscences.

We then assembled in the Great Barn, where we met a model of Blanche Mortimer and listened to a presentation about the family.

The afternoon was taken up with a visit to St Bartholomew's Church, Much Marcle, where we met Blanche again. Her beautiful 14th century effigy is presently removed from her tomb chest so it was possible to admire the detail of this realistic monument. As originally painted it must have been an even more touching memorial. Tea was provided for us in the church before we left for the journey home.

Shirley Hodgson is to be thanked for a most enjoyable and edifying time; the lunch she organised was quite magnificent – verging on a banquet! My appetite has been whetted and I will definitely return.

Michael Seeley



▲ *Hellen's Manor courtyard entrance*

Photos by Judith Jones

The Blanche Mortimer Dress Project

We gathered in the Barn for a presentation by the Mortimer History Society on the Blanche Mortimer Dress Project. Inspired by the effigy of Blanche in her elegant clothing, the Society decided to make a similar garment. They researched and referenced the few surviving portions of mediaeval clothing, such as a buttoned sleeve remnant in the Museum of London.

For reasons not explained, the actual execution of the dress was placed in the hands of the historical clothing company 'Prior Attire'. This meant that the presentation touched only lightly on subjects such as choice of fabrics, what informed colour-choices, and any practical difficulties encountered. Society members did create Blanche's rosary from amber and lapis lazuli beads, and commissioned rings with suitable heraldic motifs. They also made the muslin wimple and linen veil, and created similar head coverings for local school children to try on.

The completed garment will be displayed

▼ *Blanche Mortimer, Lady Grandison, tomb detail*





◀ *St Bartholomew's Church, Norman tub font with a 20th century wooden cover*

See more at <http://www.hellensmanor.com/>
Note that if you are a member of the Historic Houses Association your visit will be free.

▼ *St Bartholomew's Church, ancient Yew*



in local museums and will certainly help to bring alive the beautiful stone figure of the restored Lady Blanche.

Margaret McGregor

P.S.

An unexpected treat for textile lovers was the replacement Music Room curtains commissioned from the local NADFAS group. Skilled needlewomen researched old herbals from the house and designed a 'Tree of Life' theme in crewel work wool embroidery on linen, portraying a variety of flowers and creatures such as spiders, birds and butterflies, documenting every step of the process. The result is a truly inspirational and authentic piece of work, totally in keeping with this beautiful house.

Avonmouth and Portbury Docks

Wednesday 4 September 2013

Sometimes it does not all go to plan.....

The visit to Avonmouth and Portbury Docks (fully reported in June's Newsletter) was repeated by members' demand. Unfortunately, our coach provider sent their standby coach as the one booked had broken down, but it had misted windows and a PA system that did not reach the back seats. Indeed, it fell far short of the standard we set ourselves! I want to thank those who came for their stoicism during the trip; their generosity in waiving the refunds offered and asking for monies to go to the Museum; and for all the nice things said about the efforts that organisers make setting things up. Reservations were expressed about the coach company which reflected feelings that have been building up with trip organisers for some months. There are still trips in the pipeline so changes may take a while. Watch this space...

Keith Borissow

Collected reactions to Art in Action

Thursday 18 July 2013

Our visit to the opening day of Art in Action at Waterperry House not only underlined how beautiful an outdoor show on an English summer's day can be, but also highlighted the range, quality and loveliness of the exhibits by craft workers, artisans and artists that are shown in this annual event. The following comments made by Friends do not even hint at the scope of the exhibits, but do suggest that members had a very good day out.

Keith Borissow

'Waffles! Strawberries! Cream! And unsettling, visceral furniture by James Morton-Evans – superb craft work which also manages to be fine art. The natural colours of the woods, and the forms of his cabinets and tables echo skin, muscle, and skeletal parts of the human body. IKEA it is not!' (MP).

'Not surprising that straw hats were on display on one of the hottest days of the year – however in the corner of the Textiles Marquee were hats which were purely and simply works of art. Elsa Cappelli has trained and advised women in a remote Ugandan village to upgrade their traditional palm-plaiting to complex designs for the western high-fashion millinery market. These beautiful creations are all hand-crafted, unique designs to be worn, or increasingly, bought to be displayed in the home.' (WAM)

'I enjoyed the whole day and admired the glass blowers working in such heat. The best bit was the tea and waffle stall. I also enjoyed the gardens and chapel. I bought a key ring from Hikmet Barutcugil!' (CD).



▲ *Keith Borissow, who organised the day, also visited Hikmet Barutcugil. He is not only probably the world master of Turkish 'Ebru' marbling on silk, but had allowed Keith to buy two of his waistcoats some years ago at Keith's first visit to Art in Action.*

Photo by Keith Borissow

▼ *Waterperry House provides an elegant background to the exhibits*

Photo by Ann Wood



Exmoor and Arlington

Saturday 10 August 2013

It was a hot summer day and from the coach we were able to appreciate the huge variations in Somerset's landscape from the Mendip Hills, across the Somerset Levels, and over the gently-wooded Quantocks to Exmoor. After a stop for coffee and retail therapy at the picturesque village of Dunster, we held our breath up Porlock Hill. Thank heaven brakes are more reliable nowadays! After a fabulous drive over Exmoor with the blue sea to the right and wild expanses of purple heather-clad moorland to the left, we reached Arlington Court.

The house was in the Chichester family from the 14th century until Miss Rosalie Chichester bequeathed it to the National Trust in 1949. The exterior was somewhat forbidding and harsh but inside it was warm and welcoming with volunteers leading some community singing in the hall! Some of us joined in. There was a lot to see – all the usual rooms but with some unusual contents including fine model ships and the Beauvais Tapestries.

Outside, the grounds were beautiful pleasure gardens set in stunning countryside. The Victorian Garden was a delight and the undulation of the land together with ancient trees created memorable vistas. Some found the Rabbit Pit where Miss Chichester once kept her pet rabbits.

It was quite a surprise to discover the National Trust Coach and Carriage Museum, a modern building built alongside traditional stables, which gives visitors the chance to admire and learn about many types of horse-drawn vehicles. Some looked incredibly uncomfortable especially in bad weather. One spectacular coach, obviously from the same era as the Coronation Coach, was the star. This was the 'Speaker's Coach' sparkling with gilding and decoration. A groom, (or was he a stable lad?) led a sturdy horse into the yard and demonstrated how to harness it to pull a carriage. Thank you to the Snelsons for organising a proper summer's day out.



▲ A member of the National Trust staff in Victorian costume organising the visitors.

Photos by David Snelson

Sue Stops

▼ Exterior view of Arlington Court



The Watts Gallery

Wednesday 18 September 2013

It was a long drive from Bristol to the Surrey village of Compton to visit the recently-renovated Watts Gallery – but definitely worth it.

The gallery was founded by George Frederic Watts, a celebrated Victorian artist, and his wife, Mary Seton Watts, also an artist and sculptor. After an introduction to the history of the gallery and its two founders given by knowledgeable and enthusiastic guides, we explored Watts' paintings and sculptures, and a temporary exhibition of paintings by Frank Holl.

Watts was known for history paintings but also for portraits, landscapes, paintings of social commentary and, most importantly, allegorical paintings. These are all represented in the gallery. One notable picture is a Turner-esque depiction of mist, sea and ship.

Frank Holl was another famous artist in his day. But this exhibition is the first to be solely devoted to him since his death in 1888. This was a unique opportunity for us to see his genre paintings showing mostly women and children in moments of great dread and distress. He spent some time in a Northumberland fishing village and captured the intensity of grief and anxiety which was the daily lot of fishermen's wives. In contrast his portraits show well-established, self-confident Victorian gentlemen.

Nearby, is a Romanesque cemetery chapel designed and decorated by Mary Watts. The outside is covered with terracotta plaques made by her Compton Pottery. Inside is an art nouveau experience of gesso decoration – an overwhelming but remarkable interior.

The café served delicious food and the gift shop had an unusually wide range of books and rather beautiful objets d'art. Thanks go to Gary Gostelow for organizing such an interesting day.

Sue Chambers

Watts, a sickly child whose only gift seemed to be drawing, was apprenticed first to a sculptor and then entered the Royal Academy Schools of Art. He won a prize to decorate the Palace of Westminster which allowed him to travel to Italy to see the classical and renaissance art which he admired so much. As his success grew, so did his versatility.

To find out more visit <http://www.wattsgallery.org.uk/>



▲ G.F Watts, 'Self- Portrait of G.F Watts in Old Age', 1904

©Watts Gallery

Watts Gallery
Exterior,
Photograph by
Julian Nieman
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