

Newsletter

The Bristol Dinosaur a life-size model

Those of you who visited M Shed in the autumn may have seen the work in progress, in the ground floor of L Shed, to create a life-size model of the Bristol dinosaur. It was being constructed by Bristol palaeoartist Robert Nicholls and the University of Bristol, incorporating the latest scientific understanding. This includes new information gleaned from bones extracted from their surrounding rock matrix by the 'Bristol Dinosaur Project', alongside up-to-date understanding about dinosaurs in general.

The Bristol dinosaur, *Thecodontosaurus antiquus*, lived on tropical islands in the Bristol area during the Triassic period around 210 million years ago. Its fossilised bones were first discovered in 1834 in a quarry at Durdham Downs, Clifton, and it was only the fourth dinosaur identified world-wide.

BMGA still cares for many of these original bones in its collections, despite loss of some key material during the 1940s 'Bristol Blitz'.

The original model will be housed at the University of Bristol, and the Friends have agreed to provide funds for the museum to acquire one of a very limited number of painted, fibreglass cast copies, approximately 2.5m long and standing on a replica limestone plinth.

The museum hopes to display the new Bristol dinosaur model in Bristol Museum & Art Gallery's Dinosaurs gallery, alongside the original bone collections. There it will enable people to engage with and visualise the animal to which these bones belonged – according to the latest scientific understanding. It will be interesting to compare it with the 1970s model set in a diorama in the 'Geology through time' gallery, and illustrate how much scientific knowledge and thinking on dinosaurs has progressed in just 40 years. It will also allow the museum to explain to visitors some of the methods scientists use to reconstruct extinct animals, and how artists can support scientific interpretation by bringing the ideas to life.



▲ **'Artist at work'**

© Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives



▲ *Thecodontosaurus* by Bob Nicholls © www.paleocreations.com

Isla Gladstone, Senior Collections Officer (Natural Sciences) says: 'We are enormously grateful to the Friends for purchasing this model for BMGA. It will help us to celebrate and engage people with the history and science of this iconic Bristol story. I am sure it will quickly become a firm favourite with our visitors.'

Sue Thurlow

From the Chairman

Bristol City Budget Cuts

Those of you who take an interest in the local news will know that when the initial proposals for the City's budget cuts were first published in the autumn, the £90m cuts included two that would potentially impact significantly on the museums service. The largest of these was to 'Review . . . alternate funding models. . . for Blaise Castle Museum, Red Lodge, Georgian House, Roman Villa . . . to eliminate cost to Bristol City Council', with a projected saving of £162,000 from Financial Year 2015/16. If no alternative funding could be found, Plan B was to close the houses to the public.

The Mayor's subsequent consultation process gave rise to an unprecedented 4,000 comments overall. One of those was from me, on behalf of the Friends, putting the case against any cuts to the museums and archives service, and in particular any closures.

In the consultation, this potential closure of the houses was in the top 30 which received adverse comment. As a result these savings were removed from the budget, with the statement that '...a fundamental review of museums and heritage buildings is needed. To secure the long term future these attractions can remain open whilst we review a report by externally-funded consultants about the options. It's hoped to secure and improve their operation as historic, heritage buildings with 'museum' elements retained and for public access at no revenue cost to the council'. The houses will therefore remain open, for the medium term at least.

The other significant proposed cut to the service's budget remains in the plan. This is to review the Archives public engagement services and remodel to include greater use of digital sources, with a targeted saving of £50,000 a year from 2015/16.

Because of Government cuts to Local Authority funding,

there are ongoing challenges for the museum service, as for the rest of the local authority, over the coming months and years, so although the situation of the houses is less stark than it was we should expect to see some further cost-savings within the service in future.

Members' Visits and Talks

Once again, my thanks go to the Programme Committee for organising such an interesting collection of events. The January after-dark visit to Slimbridge to see the Bewick's Swans feeding by floodlight was as enjoyable – and 'different' – as I had hoped. Events in the past 3 months have proved generally very popular and almost all have been fully booked, and more. So do please make sure you send your applications in by return to make sure you get the places you want. Otherwise, like me, you will find that you are sometimes disappointed to find your name is on the waiting list.

On 22 March, Ray Barnett is giving a talk entitled 'Museums: Luxury or Necessity'. There are still a few places available for what will be an enlightening and entertaining event. It is easy while we are enjoying all the events in the programme to forget that the primary purpose of the Friends is to support the museum service. Ray's talk will, I am sure, cover some of the less obvious aspects of museums in general, and ours in particular, and enable us both to appreciate our museums in new ways and to deepen our understanding of what is needed to support them.

Sue Thurlow Chairman

▼ *Reserve Warden David Paynter doing the floodlit swan feeding. The birds are Bewick's Swans, Greylag (grey) and Canada Geese (black and white). The Wildfowl Trust has been studying Bewick's Swans for 50 years*

Photo © Barry Batchelor



Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Quarterly Report

Staff news

We are delighted to announce the arrival of Vivienne Bennett MBE as Interim Director following Julie Finch's departure to Australia at the beginning of the year. Vivienne was until recently Director of Visual Arts at Arts Council England (ACE), following a long career in museums and galleries in many different roles from museum curator to gallery director. She has focussed throughout her career on outreach and innovation, specialising in change management. Particularly relevant to our current situation she has a track record of working with teams to develop a strong vision, underpinned by a resilient business model, to create new spaces and new ways to deliver services. Vivienne will be working with us three days each week on a specific range of projects until the end of March 2014.

Our best wishes go to Kate Iles (Collections Officer Archaeology) and Catherine Littlejohns (Senior Collections Officer Public History) who will both be taking maternity leave in the spring of 2014, and to Sally Ayres (part-time Collections Officer World Cultures) who has left at the end of her contract.

Service-wide developments

Our Interim Director, Vivienne Bennett, and key staff are putting the finishing touches to the Arts Council England (ACE) Major Partner Museum bid which lays out our funding requirements for 2015-18 and outlines how we will develop the organisation over the next few years.

In January, Bristol Museums were announced by VisitBritain as the top free visitor attractions in the South West, generating some welcome publicity. Curators have started a monthly 'show & tell' slot on BBC Radio Bristol with Dr Phil Hammond on Saturday mornings, again raising our profile with the general public.

We are developing a new website, due to go live in April,

which will open up opportunities to further improve access to our collections.

December saw the publication of the catalogue of the oil paintings held by BMGA (and other institutions in Bristol) to supplement the national Your Paintings website. The catalogue is on sale in our museum shops.

BMAG

Gallery 6 has been refurbished and re-hung with Victorian and Edwardian art on the theme of Places of Desire, curated by Dr Jenny Gaschke. The refurbishment was made possible with a donation by The Friends of Bristol Art Gallery including a generous bequest by one of their members.

The success of the 'Roman Empire: Power and People' exhibition has been underpinned by great work across the service both in preparation, curating and set-up (and de-installation afterwards) and in running the many initiatives and activities which created and maintained the public interest.

M Shed

Work has started to widen Museum Street behind M and L Sheds as part of the Umberslade development work. This will extend to resurfacing and improving Museum Square, fronting the cafe; this space will become pedestrianized with road traffic being re-routed around the back of the Framing Factory and the Olive Shed. Changes are also being made to the dockside in front of M Shed to encourage cyclists to use Museum Street rather than the dock, where the sunken rails present a hazard to the unwary.

Henbury, one of our two working steam locos, spent two Christmas-themed weeks in December at the Somerset & Dorset railway in Midsomer Norton, allowing the S&D to run steam for the first time in 7 years.

▼ ***Henbury coasting down the 'bank' to the station at Midsomer Norton on Saturday 21 December 2013.***

Photo © Julian Jefferson/The Somerset & Dorset Railway Heritage Trust





◀ **19th century dress display.**
Photo © Bristol Museums,
Galleries & Archives



Pelisse style robe c 1825. ▶
Photo © Bristol Museums,
Galleries & Archives

The Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2013 exhibition has transferred successfully to M Shed, from its usual venue of Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, although the 2014 exhibition is due to return to BMAG for the 50th anniversary of the prize. Supporting activities included the additional display of specimens highlighting Bristol's wildlife riches and a Slug Trail for children, as well as a programme of events and workshops.

There was a great review in the Sunday Telegraph of behind-the-scene tours of M shed.

Blaise

Two new displays have been mounted in the costume room at Blaise. The central feature of the room, the 19th century dress display, has been totally revamped and eight dresses from the stored collection have been professionally conserved, mounted and installed.

The display now depicts examples of fashionable women's dress dating from 1812 to 1870. It includes a brown pelisse style robe from around 1825 featuring a high empire waist and dramatic 'leg of mutton' sleeves, and a striking bright blue silk bustle backed dress from around 1870. As visitors enter the room they are met by an impressive 1850s wedding dress displayed with both its interchangeable bodices, one demure one for marriage and one for evening wear after the wedding day.

For each dress, a mannequin has been individually tailored to provide the most suitable support. In several cases, undergarments have been made to give the dress the appropriate shape. Lace collars and cuffs from the collection have been added, to show how these dresses would have been accessorised.

We are most grateful to the Friends' who have met the costs of both the mannequins and of the conservation work, without which this display would not have been possible.

In the same room there is also a new display of shoes dating from 1730 to the 1870s and in the entrance hall we now have a constantly changing display of recent acquisitions.

Events & exhibitions

Bristol Record Office

Against the enemies of Great Britain: Privateering in Bristol in the 18th century

Until 30 May

This exhibition explores the rewards and risks of privateering - and the effects of foreign privateers on Bristol's trade.

BMAG

Jeremy Deller – English Magic

12 April – 21 September 2014

The exhibition from the Venice Biennale 2013, plus new installations and commissions for the national tour, of which BMAG is one of just 3 venues.

BMAG

Turner: Watercolours from the West

1 May – 6 July 2014

A small, intimate show of watercolours by J M W Turner from collections in the west of England region.

The Roman Settlement at Abona

Illustrated talk by
Peter Insole –
Archaeological Officer,
Bristol City Council.

Saturday 2 November 2013

I was attracted to Peter Insole's talk because I had promised myself to learn about the Sea Mills Roman port, and its possible significance in the Roman transport system.

My interest arose from having previously lived at Brough-on-Humber in the 1950s during a rescue dig of the Roman settlement of Petuaria. Roman roads between Lincoln and York suggested the Humber was crossed travelling north between modern Wintringham and Petuaria, which might have been both the northern landing and also a small port with more distant connections.

The legionary fortress at Caerleon on the Usk could well have depended on waterborne transport, especially for bulk or heavy goods, and a lecture about the Roman navy alerted me to the Classis Britannica alleged to be the second largest Roman fleet, perhaps exceeded only by the Mediterranean fleet that satisfied Rome's insatiable demands for grain. The archaeological evidence is not clear as sea routes do not leave so much buried evidence as roads.

What part might Abona, Petuaria, and other lesser ports around the coast, have had in supplying and communicating between the British settlements, and perhaps further afield? Might Abona, the largest Roman settlement in the Bristol area, have contributed to the supply chain across the Severn to Caerleon? What possible importance of road links with Exeter to the south and Gloucester to the north, and to Bath and further eastward?

Peter described investigations into the extent of the Abona settlement, including some exposed walls near where Roman Way approaches the Portway – I must go and have a look! Recent investigations were greatly assisted by the involvement of the local community, with excavations in private gardens and allotments revealing significant evidence.

Many of Peter's audience will have added his insight into the Sea Mills excavations to their individual interests, and will also have been grateful to Mary Bailey who arranged his talk.

Roy Taylor



▲ Peter Insole's map with inset view of the Roman Way walls.

Dates for your diary

Here are some forthcoming trips to whet your appetite for later this year.

Ashmolean Museum, Broadway

Friday 11 July 2014

A visit to the recently-opened outpost of the Ashmolean in a 17th century house in the Cotswold village of Broadway, plus the Gordon Russell furniture museum.

Harbour Festival Book Sale

Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 July 2014

We shall be running out popular book sale again this year, plus our cakes and drinks table. We shall, of course, be asking for volunteers to assist on both days.

Stonehenge Visitor Centre

Tuesday 2 September 2014

The new visitor centre at Stonehenge has been well reviewed, so we have arranged an afternoon trip to see it.

Cirencester Agricultural University

Wednesday 17 September 2014

An afternoon visit for a guided tour of the buildings, plus a chance to see the unique Orwin collection of 18th and 19th century agricultural watercolours.

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

Spike Island

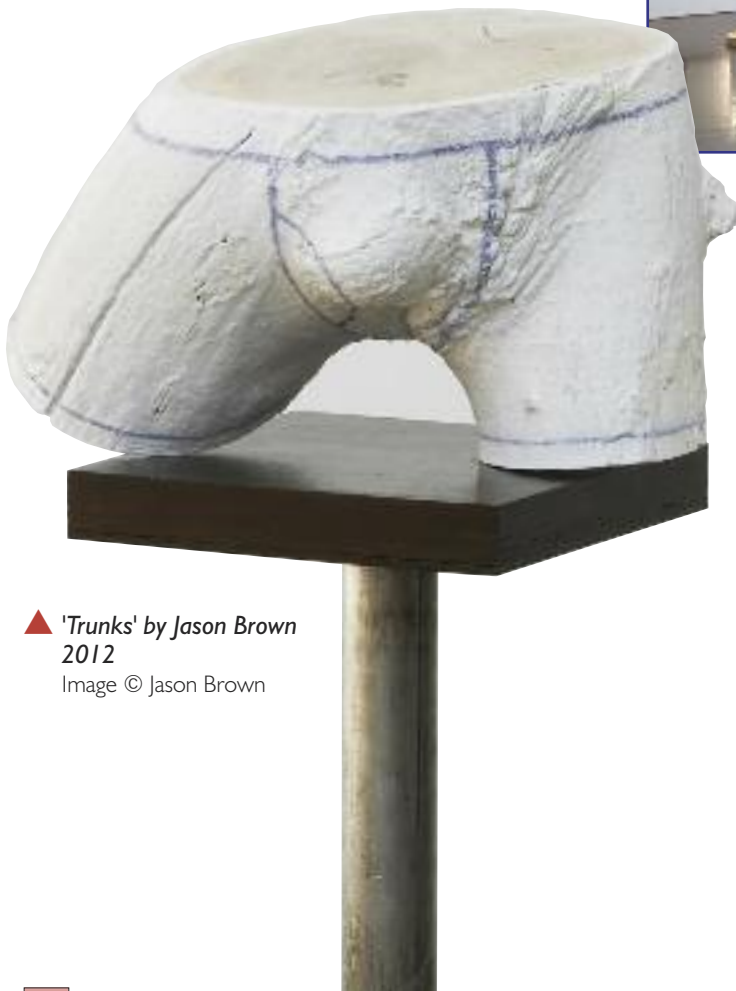
Wednesday 25 September 2013

We were met by Marie-Anne McQuay, the gallery curator, who told us the history of the building and about its present use. Built in 1960, it started life as a tea-packing warehouse for Brooke Bond but by 1990 it was empty. A group of artists then known as Artspace with the support of the Council and the National Lottery moved into the building, and by 1998 Spike Island had come into being. It now houses 50 studios and workshops, some of which are shared, a gallery and a café. We were glad to hear that, as it is on a 100-year lease from the council, there is no immediate risk of it being taken back for development.



▲ Exterior of Spike Island

The New Contemporaries Exhibition ►



▲ 'Trunks' by Jason Brown
2012

Image © Jason Brown

There have been continuous exhibitions at the gallery since 2007. The curators research nationally and internationally to find new artists who would benefit from exhibitions, encouraging and helping them at the start of their careers. The works in the current 'New Contemporaries 2013' exhibition were chosen by a panel of three nationally-known artists. It was very pleasing to hear that, despite the dominance of the London art schools, works of two Bristol artists, Mena Cominetti and Jason Brown, both from UWE, were included.

Exhibits varied from paintings, some using aromatic materials (spices, and incense), videos, textiles, and sculptures and 3D installations. They were intriguing, puzzling, and sometimes positively incomprehensible to those without expertise in modern art. Some commented that most exhibits were for galleries rather than houses. One person said 'I feel as if I have dropped into Alice in Wonderland' perhaps summing up the experience of most of us. It was an enjoyable and at times a very thought-provoking visit.

After the gallery we went on to studios not normally open to the public. Lisa Penderleith and Mark Scantlebury work together as fabricators, creating objects conceived by other artists in a wide variety of materials. Their current

**Exhibit from The New
Contemporaries Exhibition**

work includes a miniature explosion but they have also made large items such as a 26-foot tree. Patrick Haines, a sculptor who creates small objects based on nature, showed us beautifully-crafted birds. Steve Joyce was making railings, each panel based on currents and ripples in the Bristol Channel. The versatility of the building provided the space needed to work on such a large project.

This was a fascinating and very varied tour. Although the public cannot normally go into the studios I would thoroughly recommend a visit to the gallery, which is open daily, with a stop for refreshments built in!

Carol Ouvry



Photos courtesy of Spike Island

From the Membership Secretary

Members will find new membership cards enclosed with this newsletter. We offer a warm welcome to the following new members who have joined us recently:

June Hibberd Membership Secretary

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

Mr Geoffrey Allen	Mrs Rosi King
Mrs Lisa Bell	Mr Michael Laurie
Mr Robert Birchmore	Mrs Jane Laurie
Mr Kevin Byrne	Mr David Mizen
Mrs Moira Byrne	Miss Sue Palfrey
Mrs Mary Eddie	Miss Shelley Sanders
Mr Derek Fawley	Mrs Andrea Snelling
Mr Bill Goodman and Partner	Ms Eleanor Standley
Mrs Patricia Gregory	Mr Fergus Troup
Mr Roger Harrison	Mrs Jill Troup
Mrs Vanessa Harrison	Mrs Graciela Vergara
Mrs Carol Jubb	Mr Nicholas Watson
Mr Davy King	

Volunteering opportunity:

Know Your Bristol on the Move is looking for volunteers to research the Vaughan postcard collection from the city's archives.

Can you help to find the stories behind the pictures? Could you help to add the images to the Know Your Place website? (www.bristol.gov.uk/knowyourplace)

If you are interested, come along to the volunteer information session at Bristol Record Office at 2pm on Saturday 1 March to find out how you could take part in this exciting project. Tea, coffee and cake will be provided.

For more information, or if you are not able to come to the information session, please contact the project's Engagement Coordinator, Dr Nick Nourse at n.nourse@bristol.ac.uk: 0117 331 8331 or 07774 883557

▼ **A postcard showing the drinking fountain at Brandon Hill**
Photo © Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives



Cheltenham

Art Gallery and Museum and
The Holst Birthplace Museum

Thursday 31 October 2013

After renovation work lasting two years Cheltenham Museum and Art Gallery was re-opened on 5th October 2013 and re-named The Wilson after Edward Wilson, who died while on the Antarctic Expedition with Captain Scott. Edward Wilson's father had helped to start the original Cheltenham Museum.

At the time of our visit there were four exhibitions to explore. A small but interesting exhibition about news gathering was called The Times Newseum. This is a small exhibition to run parallel to the Cheltenham Literary Festival, showing how news was sent back from the reporters to the editor of the Times. A second exhibition called Casting Brilliance, featured works in glass by Colin Reid. Our group seemed to be impressed by these sculptural pieces, judging by the comments that I heard. It was also possible to see the processes used to produce some of the pieces. The third and very impressive exhibition was the wonderful collection of the Arts and Crafts Movement. We were taken round this amazing collection by Kirsty Hartsiosis, the Curator, who was able to pass on her enthusiasm for this furniture and other decorative pieces. We saw furniture designed by William Morris, embroidery by his daughter, May, and pottery and silverware made by friends and colleagues, finishing with furniture designed by Robin Day in 1950 for Heals of Tottenham Court Road. The last collection was the Open West 2013, a competitive show dispersed among all the galleries. Friends may be interested to hear that Rodin visited Cheltenham in 1914 and to celebrate this visit his famous statue 'The Kiss' will be on display from 14 February onwards.

We were then taken by our guide Dr. Steven Blake to a small family house which was the birthplace of Gustav Holst. Here we listened to music by Holst on interactive recordings played by the Girls of St Pauls School where Holst had been music master. After a walk through Pittville estate and a welcome cuppa and homemade cake at the Clarence Court Hotel, it was back to Bristol, having enjoyed a very well-organised, interesting trip.

Valerie Chowen

▼ *Silhouette drawing of Holst conducting the orchestra of St Paul's Girls School*

▶ *Cheltenham Minster – The only remaining mediaeval building in Cheltenham – St Mary's Church, Cheltenham, was re-titled Cheltenham Minster on 3 February 2013. The Wilson has back opening doors to 'include' the Minster in its 'space'*



▶ *Detail of an embroidery panel designed by May Morris and made by Morris & Co in the early 1890s in silk thread on linen ground*



Photos by
Judith Jones

The Friends Sewing Group

Friends, Romans and Countrymen!

In August last year, Kate Iles, Collections Officer for British Archaeology, asked the Friends to help make costumes for the Roman Empire Power & People exhibition family event in October half term. Email and web appeals resulted in a small group of Friends and other volunteers creating a Roman sewing group.

It was great fun researching styles and fabrics which were as near as possible in texture and colour to those used by the Romano-British. We made costumes of various sizes and ran a stall on the day helping children to dress up before taking their photo as they appeared to eat snails, carry oil-lamps or drink from wooden beakers. Many of the girls had their faces made up and had fantastic Roman-styled hair courtesy of the very skillful and patient girls from the Reflections Training Academy. There were exotic diadems and Roman helmets to make and around each corner there seemed to be a muscular Centurion wielding a spear and shield but ready to chat and explain about his costume.

Over 3,000 people came to the half term event and the museum was full of lively and excited youngsters. By the end of the day it felt as though we had dressed most of them!

The costumes are now being used in mini Curiosity, the under 7s area at Bristol Museum, and will then go on to be used for activity days at Kings Weston Roman Villa.

The sewing group is ongoing, and our next project was to make mediaeval clothes for the next family event at M Shed on 19 February 2014 – quite a tall order as there was not much time to do them. After this, Kate and the other curators have plenty of ideas for future projects! If you would like further information about the group, contact Carol Ouvry at carol.ouvry@talktalk.net or on 01275 394621.



▲ *The ladies of the sewing circle:*
Back row, left to right –
Jo Ashley, Angela Essex,
Lis Henniker-Heaton
Front row, left to right –
Chris Harley, Gillian Joseph,
Rosemary Burton, Carol Ouvry

*Photos © Bristol Museums,
Galleries and Archives*

▼ Children modelling some of the Romano-British costumes



Doodlebugs & Bogeymen

World War II activity day for children
(7-11 years)

M Shed, 3 & 4th July 2014

The Learning team are asking for some of our members with childhood memories of World War II to answer questions from small groups of children about life in wartime. Each Q&A session would last 15-20 minutes, and the team are looking for a minimum of a 2 hour commitment.

Tea, coffee & a sandwich lunch will be included, and there will also be an opportunity to take a free ride on the steam train.

If you would like to help or just want to know more please contact: Sarah Crowder by email or phone: sarah.crowder@bristol.gov.uk 0117 9038429

Wildlife Photographer of the Year Exhibition

M Shed

Wednesday 15 January 2014

This annual exhibition is always a visual feast of stunning photography, but being shown round it by Roz Kidman Cox, who was a judge for many years and editor of BBC Wildlife Magazine, made it come alive in a completely new way. Roz had spoken to many of the photographers about how they went about taking their winning shot, and as she talked about each picture we began to appreciate the skills, patience and dedication involved in each one. For example, a photographer of over seventy years who spent 76 days in a freezing cold hide in Siberia waiting for the endangered Amur tiger to show itself. It did, on day 56, but still he carried on waiting in case another opportunity came.

Roz talked about how far a photographer can go in setting up a shot – additional lighting is permitted within limits, but the subject being photographed must not be disturbed in any way. She talked too about how much 'photoshopping' is allowed; photographers must submit their raw work as well as their submitted picture in jpeg format. She pointed out national characteristics of photographers, for example Finnish work will often have a small character, animal or human, in one corner of a vast landscape.

There were 43,000 entries this year, and Roz told us that initially the entries (all digital since 2006) are divided up for assessment by different panels. All the judging is done anonymously and Roz was very clear that there is always an element of subjectivity in the decisions. As she gave us her views on some of the photographs we began to look at them with new eyes, and with more understanding of what would have been involved in each shot.

Katherine Martin



▲ *Curiosity and the cat.*
Hannes Lochner (South Africa)



▼ *Badger dream scene.*
Marc Steichen (Luxembourg)

The World of Mechanical Music

Saturday 9 November 2013

On a wet Thursday morning stoical members of FBMGA set off for the picturesque Cotswold town of Northleach. Wool is an important theme here. The market square is surrounded by many old houses of great architectural merit which owe their existence to the mediaeval wool trade. The impressive Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, a fine example of 'Cotswold Perpendicular' style, which is often called the 'Cathedral of the Cotswolds' was funded by wealthy wool merchants. The world famous memorial brasses depict wool merchants with sheep and woolsacks at their feet.

At 12 noon we heard a Carillon playing 'O worship The King', then started our visit to the World of Mechanical Music. This business, started in 1961, pioneers the technology needed to restore self-playing musical instruments. These were the pride and joy of our great-grandparents and the only kind of canned musical entertainment available in the home before regular broadcasting started in 1924. On our musical tour we listened to Grieg, Paderewski, Rachmaninov and Gershwins giving concert performances of their own compositions, 'live' on reproducing pianos. The mechanical instruments, all in excellent working order, dated from a 1740 George II barrel organ through a variety of musical boxes both cylindrical and disc driven, to a magnificent Steinway reproducing piano.

After this notable visit we ate a pub lunch then moved onto Tetbury with its wonderful variety of shops, including 25 dedicated to antiques.

David Snelson



▲ A Victorian Juke Box



▲ Model of Nipper the dog in the His Master's Voice logo

A selection of early musical boxes ▲



To learn more visit
<http://www.mechanicalmusic.co.uk/>

Bristol Hippodrome

Saturday 5 October 2013

The Hippodrome opened in December 1912 and, except for a short period as a cinema at the end of the 1920s, has provided 1,951 seats at each performance of musical theatre. The interior has a strong nautical flavour which is very apparent in the galleon-like boxes, porthole windows, stained glass and many depictions of ropes and knots. In its early days the dock provided backstage crew, particularly in the flies, where nautical knots were used to secure the scenery.

The Hippodrome was ahead of its time having an integral vacuum system in the walls and dual lighting, using both gas and electricity. The Grand Tier is cantilevered avoiding the need for supporting pillars, to give a good view from all seats. The many mirrors reflect the importance to a past manager of being able to check on his staff!

The theatre has a reputation among performers for being intimate. This became clear when we went on stage and the concrete-filled metal safety curtain was raised so that we could look out at the seats as the actors do. A fire in 1933 resulted in the backstage area being destroyed but the auditorium needed only redecoration because the safety curtain did its job. Some of the brass fittings in the stalls are original.

Backstage an equivalent area to the public part includes dressing rooms on three levels. Only the pantomime uses in-house equipment. Visiting productions bring all their own electrical equipment and scenery, all of which comes in through Denmark Street. This is the stuff of nightmares for the drivers of the giant pantechnicons. For one show there were 50 of these!

Under the stage is a spring that is used to provide water for the ice shows and a large disused tank, which was used in the past for water shows. Those of us who managed to ascend 58 feet to the flies saw the mechanism used to lower scenery on cue. It is all carefully weighted to favour moving the scenery up in the case of an accident. We admired the dome, which was opened only once in 2013 as it leaks. Finally we were shown the newly redecorated Cary Grant Bar named in honour of its namesake who started his career in 1917 as a callboy at the Hippodrome.

Marianne and Michael Pitman



◀ A photo of the globe on the roof of the Hippodrome taken in 1912

Hippodrome interior ▶

Photos © Bristol Hippodrome



▲ Corbels in the shape of figureheads in the auditorium





Wightwick Manor

Friday 6 December 2013

On a glorious sunny morning we headed up the M5 in a brand new Turners' coach to Wolverhampton. On arrival we were given a guided tour of this 17th-century manor, lovingly restored and extended by the Mander family (of paint fame). From 1887, Theodore Mander employed Edward Ould to design the half-timbered Victorian masterpiece and doubled its size by adding a half-timbered east wing in the style of a mediaeval manor house with great hall and minstrels' gallery.

The interior decor is notable. Mander, a man of taste, faithfully used Morris and Co wallpapers and fabrics for wall-covering and upholstery. William De Morgan tiles, antique furniture and eastern carpets make the house a delight to explore. Mander's eldest son, Geoffrey, enhanced the artistic appeal through his wife's interest in pre-Raphaelite art and there are many paintings by Rosetti, Millais, Holman Hunt, Ford Maddox Brown and Edward Burne-Jones as well as stunning stained glass mainly by Charles Kempe.

A magnificent 16th century fireplace in the drawing room, sumptuously decorated with De Morgan tiles, hides a secret stair for the hostess to escape unwelcome visitors!

The house, gifted to the National Trust in 1937, has been carefully restored, retaining original floor and wall coverings and enhanced furniture and art works. The rooms were full of cheer with Christmas trees and wonderful Victorian Christmas decorations. The Great Parlour, the most impressive room in the house, gives the impression of a 15th-century hall, with ogee arches, open timber roof, a minstrels' gallery, an enormous inglenook fireplace and Elizabethan-style frieze (featuring the tale of Orpheus and Euridice with added kangaroo for fun). Clever heating and lighting systems provided comfort for the late Victorians.

After refreshing soup and sandwiches we pottered round the 17 acres of garden which were redesigned in the 20th century. War memorials to those who died in the two great wars are an appropriate reminder of sacrifice, 100 years after the start of the First World War.

Many thanks to Ruth for organising a super day out. She continues her annual tradition of booking a visit combining the best of Christmas festivities with a fascinating venue.

David and Margaret McGregor

▲ An exterior view of the east extension of Wightwick Manor showing off the spectacular half-timbering.



▲ Among the many stunning features are the red brick chimneys designed by Edward Ould

Photos by David McGregor
/ Judith Jones

Swindon Museum and Art Gallery

Friday 15 November 2013

From Heelis House, where we had a very substantial lunch, the coach climbed to Swindon's Old Town, passing terraces of small Victorian houses. At the brow of the hill we stopped at a slightly unprepossessing early 19th century house with a 1960s Brutalist extension at its side. Swindon Museum has been located here since the 1930s when Apsley House was gifted to the borough.

Three floors contain an eclectic mix of artefacts including a small Egyptian mummy and the Wroughton Hoard of coins (dating from Edward IV to Charles I) buried in the Civil War. However, the museum is remembered with great affection by many local people for visits to 'the croc', a huge stuffed gharial filling a room on the second floor.

The extension consists of one large L-shaped space hung with a selection from the expanding collection of 20th century paintings established by James Bomford, who donated the first pieces in exchange for an undisclosed quantity of champagne. The work on show (about 20% of the whole) ranges from the Bloomsbury group to a more recent painting by Maggie Hambling 'The Descent of the Bull's Head', multiple images conveying the idea of the dying bull at the end of a bullfight. Early to mid-20th century paintings include work by Ivon Hitchens, Ben Nicholson and Bristol's own Mary Fedden. Artists of the 1960s are well represented by Richard Smith, R.B. Kitaj, Gillian Ayres and John Hoyland, whose large colour-field paintings dominate.

Such an important collection of 20th century art, one of the very best outside London, is well worth a visit and deserves our support. Many Friends may be interested in a new exhibition Action! which opens there on 8 February 2014.

Mirian Pearce

'Girl selling flowers'
by Desmond Morris
Image © Desmond Morris

Photos courtesy of Swindon
Museum and Art Gallery

Action!

A new free exhibition of abstract art full of colour, movement and energy featuring works by Roger Hilton, Howard Hodgkin, George Melhuish and Stephen Buckley will run at the Swindon Museum and Art Gallery from 8 February to 31 May and can be viewed Wednesday to Saturday 11 am to 3pm.



▲ A newly-acquired large Roman jar with original lead staples from a contemporary repair





The Origins and Traditions of Mummings' Plays

Saturday 11 January 2014

Mary Bailey gave an introductory talk before we watched a mummings' play. The word mummer probably comes from the High German meaning a disguised person. The tradition goes back to the middle ages, when mummings were troupes of travelling actors who performed their plays at the time of a festival in return for food and ale. By the 18th century mummings were local people, each community having its own text, in verse, handed down orally. There is a great variety of characters, some influenced by pantomime and Commedia dell'arte, such as St George, the Turkish Knight aka Bold Slasher, a doctor, Father Christmas, Robin Hood, a fair maiden, and even Oliver Cromwell. Common to all the plays is the theme of death and resurrection, with the doctor as the agent of rebirth. Mary showed us slides illustrating the enormous range of plays and costumes and then introduced the Bristol Morris Men, who perform the Keynsham Mummings' Play every Boxing Day and who performed it again for us.

The seven men stomped on with enormous gusto, singing a carol. Their play started with the slaying of St George but then things took a turn for the better and it was discovered that he only had toothache! The tooth was extracted on the doctor's instructions with much heaving and groaning. The play went on in this inconsequential and exuberant way for ten minutes or so before ending with a stamping dance and another carol. There were some good sword fights, and a well-endowed maiden with long curls and a beard who played the accordion.

We ended with tea and delicious cakes. Thanks to the cake-makers, and special thanks to Mary for doing the research that enabled us to enjoy the performance knowing some background. The play we watched was fairly inscrutable in its message, but nonetheless very enjoyable and a festive way to bring the Christmas season to a close.

Katherine Martin

▲ The Keynsham Mummings play – St George has been slain and the doctor (left) is about to revive him.

Photo by Martin Bailey

New acquisition for Bristol Record Office

18th century account book of the *Jason* slaving voyage

The Friends, together with the Victoria & Albert Museum Purchase Grant Fund, have recently provided the funds for Bristol Record Office to purchase an account book recording a slaving voyage in the 1740s, a compelling record of the Bristol slave trade.

The handwritten accounts provide details of a slaving voyage of the *Jason*, a 'gally' which sailed under the command of John Bartlett from 1743 to 1746. The book was originally owned by Cranfield Becher, one of the merchants who invested in the voyage. His family was significant in Bristol politics and trade, and owned a plantation in Jamaica. Along with detailed records of the costs and profits of the voyage, the book contains precise instructions for Bartlett on purchasing slaves in Angola for sale in the Americas.

Dr Madge Dresser, Associate Professor in History at UWE, says: 'The Becher volume affords a unique and rare insight into the workings of the Atlantic slave economy in the 18th century, on racial attitudes and on the occupational structure of Bristol itself'.

The volume also contains later domestic accounts (1790 to 1818) kept by Becher's wife, Bridget Swymmer, who came from another Bristol family involved in the slave trade. By 1794, the Becher family lived at College Green and her records of servants' wages and household expenditure give an insight into the lifestyle of a Georgian merchant's family.

Allie Dillon, senior archivist at BRO says: 'There is no doubting the historical significance of this book as a record of the transatlantic slave trade. It records what was once considered a legitimate commercial business seeking potentially huge profits. It is important that this book is part of our archive and available for people to study and we are very grateful for the generous support of the Friends and the Victoria & Albert Museum in obtaining this item for our collections.'

The book is fragile but has been digitised and can be used for research by visitors to BRO.



▲ **The Becher Journal**
Photo © Bristol Museums,
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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 April 2014 for early
June publication**