

Newsletter

Kings Weston House

Monday 8 September 2014

Kings Weston House, situated on an escarpment overlooking Avonmouth, is a Grade 1 listed, Georgian House. It was designed by Sir John Vanbrugh (architect of Blenheim Palace and Castle Howard) for Sir Edward Southwell (the Secretary of State for Ireland at the time). One prominent feature of the Vanbrugh design is the square arcade of chimneys rising above the roofs, to evoke a 'castle air' as at Blenheim. The original house has undergone substantial remodelling over the years, in particular between 1763 and 1768 by Robert Mylne and then between 1845 and 1850 by Thomas Hopper.

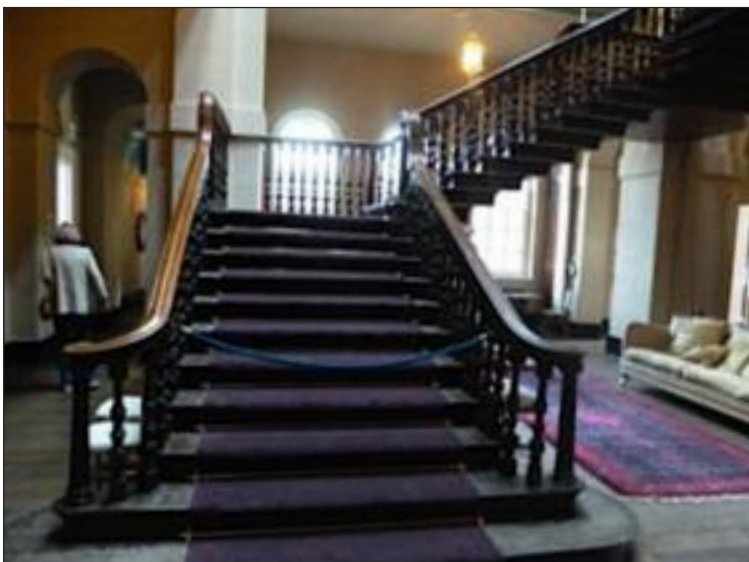
There are 220 acres of extensive and landscaped parkland, much of it accessible by the public. Some, including Penpole Wood and the Home Park, are owned by Bristol City Council, and a further 90 acres, including Shirehampton Park, are owned by the National Trust.



▲ *Kings Weston House was constructed between 1710 and 1719 on the site of an earlier Tudor house. It is built of local ochre limestone, quarried on site, which has weathered to give an orange-pink tone. The chimneys were rebuilt in 1968, using Bath stone.*

Photos by Carol Ouvry

▼ *It was Hopper who put in the unusual, 'hanging' oak staircase. It is one of only two known staircases of this kind; the other is in St Petersburg.*



The house passed through several generations of the Southwell family until the estate was sold in 1833 to Mr Philip John Miles. It continued as a family home until 1935 when, on the death of Philip Napier Miles, it was bought by Bristol Municipal Charities and leased to the education authority, firstly by Queen Elizabeth Hospital School, and then by Bath University School of Architecture. In 1970 Bristol City Council purchased the House and it was set up as a training centre for the Bristol (and from 1974 the Avon and Somerset) Constabulary until 1995. Abandoned for five years, in 2000 it was leased by local businessman, John Hardy, and partially restored as a business centre. In December 2012, following a short period of closure, the house was leased to Norman Routledge. He and a group of supporters are gradually restoring the house to its former glory. They occupy the top two floors of the house, whilst the public rooms on the ground floor are used to stage events, such as weddings and conferences.

Brian Vincent

From the Chairman

All change at the top of the service

You will see from the Museum Report that Laura Pye has been appointed as the Head of Culture, starting on 2 January. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Laura to Bristol, and I look forward to working with her.

I would also like to thank Vivienne Bennett for all she has achieved as interim Head during 2014, and to give her our best wishes for the future. Our best wishes also go to Tim Corum, Deputy Head spanning 4 directorships, who is leaving in January.

Annual General Meeting & Social evening

I am pleased to report that the formal business of our AGM evening in September ran smoothly and the entertainment afterwards was enjoyable, informative and well received. Gail Boyle brought along some of our recent purchases of local treasure – there have been images of some of them in previous newsletters – and Clive Burlton, local historian and member of our Executive Committee, showed us a fascinating archive film of Bristol soldiers at Temple Meads in 1914. The film was much more about real people in Bristol 100 years ago than about the military; the individuals really jumped off the screen, and we enjoyed searching – unsuccessfully – for anyone not wearing a hat! I'm hoping there will be other opportunities to see the film, given the current focus on commemorating World War I.

British Association of Friends of Museums national conference - Swansea

The BAFM national conference this year was in Swansea, with the Friends being represented by Elizabeth Mackenzie, Mary Bailey and me. Our hosts organised a packed programme to accompany the formal AGM, on the theme of 'Keeping Heritage Alive'. We heard a variety of excellent speakers talking about the opportunities Swansea had seized to make the most of their remaining industrial heritage – Copperopolis in particular – and to optimise their use of volunteers. The indoor programme was supplemented by a wide variety of expeditions to see more of the history in and around the city, and to mix very informally with members of other friends groups to share ideas. The weather was exceptionally kind to us (I made sure I had a paddle in Swansea Bay) and contributed to making it a very enjoyable, informative and inspiring weekend.

Ken Andrews

I am sorry to end on a sad note, but many of you will already know that Ken Andrews, a long-time member and a stalwart volunteer at the Industrial Museum (and later M Shed) has passed away after a long battle with cancer. Andy King, Collections Officer for Industrial & Maritime History, spoke for many of us when he said 'Ken worked for us as a volunteer in almost every area. He particularly enjoyed skippering our boats but would turn his hand to any activity and was a great asset. His courage and determination and his constant optimism set a benchmark for us all and he will be much missed.'

From the Membership Secretary

A reminder that subscriptions for 2015 are due on 1st January so we can send your membership cards out with the March issue. If you are a cheque payer and your membership is due for renewal you will find a form enclosed with this newsletter. Also would members who pay by standing order please ensure they have amended their order to add the extra £7 that was increased last year. If you are doubtful you can check with me before contacting your bank.

We welcome the following new members who have joined since the last newsletter, including our first international member from Brazil:

Mr Eric Albone and Mrs Kumyul Albone
Mr Otavio Anze
Mr Tony Denham
Mrs Jean Denham
Mr Mike Leigh
Mrs Madeline Leigh

June Hibberd, Membership Secretary

Dates for your diary

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

Coventry Cathedral and Herbert Art Gallery & Museum

Monday 20 April 2015

We will spend time in Coventry Cathedral and see the exhibition Britain in Watercolours 1939 to 1943, which is on loan from the Victoria and Albert, in the nearby Herbert Art Gallery and Museum.

Frampton Court

Thursday 4 June 2015

Following on our visit to Frampton Manor this year, we shall visit Frampton Court, the 18th century house on the opposite side of the village green, also owned by the Clifford family.

Application forms for these events will be included with subsequent newsletters.

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Museum Report

New Head of Culture appointed

We are pleased to announce that a new Head of Culture, Laura Pye, has been appointed and will take up post on 2 January 2015. Laura is currently Interim Heritage & Culture Services Manager at Heritage and Culture Warwickshire and has worked for Warwickshire museums for seven years, previously as Learning and Community Engagement Manager. She has a MA in Art Gallery and Museums Studies from the University of Manchester.

Our current Interim Head of Culture, Vivienne Bennett, will finish her contract at the end December. For the past year Vivienne has led the service through a successful Arts Council England Major Partner Museum bid and an organisational re-structure to meet Bristol City Council budget cuts, plus the planning process for 2015-18. She leaves the organisation in a strong position for the future and we are grateful to her for her dedication and leadership shown during challenging times.

Other Staff news

Tim Corum, Deputy Head of the service, will be leaving in January to become Director of Curatorial and Public Engagement at the Horniman museum in Forest Hill, South London.

After 10 years of dedicated press and marketing for the museums service Claire Royall, Publicity Officer, has taken voluntary redundancy. Kerrie Dodd, Marketing & Communication Officer, is now on maternity leave, but her post will be covered by Lauren McGuffog, who joins us from Bristol University Student Union.

Gareth Salway, Documentation Officer, is leaving to take up a new post in the USA. Service Manager, Stella Yates, who has helped the service vastly increase its venue hire income, is leaving on voluntary redundancy at the end of the year. Samantha Boyle has left at the end of her one-year lottery-funded post as Trainee Community Archaeologist.

Alison Brown and David Williams have both left Bristol Record Office after over 20 years, Alison on voluntary redundancy and David on retirement. Mark Small, previously a Visitor Assistant at the Red Lodge, has joined BRO as a new Archives Assistant.

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

The touring exhibition *English Magic* by artist Jeremy Deller, which closed in September, was a great success with 118,000 visitors over the six month period, and much positive feedback received.

Our appeal to raise £18,000 for the

conservation of our wonderful painting *The Garden Court* by Edward Burne-Jones has been successful. £10,000 was raised via the Friends of Bristol Art Gallery within two months of a direct mail appeal to their membership; 142 individual Friends donated. The remainder came from individuals who were invited on behind the scenes conservation studio tours to see the amazing work of our conservation team in action. It is planned that the painting will be back on display in early summer in the 19th century gallery, after an absence of some twenty years from public view.

M Shed

Following its sale, Banksy's *Mobile Lovers* has left BMAG, but his *Grim Reaper* (previously on the side of the *Thekla* ship) is now in store, on loan, awaiting conservation before going on show at M Shed.

In October, M Shed hosted a visit from the President of the Republic of Singapore, part of his four day State Visit to the UK. The jibs of two of the electric cranes were dipped in his honour, and he was given a tour round the ground floor Place gallery.

M Shed played a very active role in Docks Heritage Weekend, welcoming over 4,000 visitors. Activities were run jointly with the Underfall Yard Trust, including demonstrations by the Historical Diving Society. At M Shed, both working electric cranes were in action, one for public visits and one handling cargo with our gang of volunteer dockers. The steam crane and our wagon-handling capstan were also at work. There were films of the Port in the 1940s and 1960s and information about the modern port too. John King ran sold-out trips on both days. Show of Strength Theatre Company provided pop-up drama at both locations, allowing us to tell people about the story of the City Docks in a fun and very engaging way.

▼ *Re-creating the 1950s quayside activities for Docks Heritage Weekend.*

Photo by Dave Crofton



On the same weekend Briswool, the project to knit the city, had its first public outing in M Shed, and attracted over 1,600 visitors.

Wallace & Gromit: from the drawing board, which closed in early September, received over 31,000 visitors bringing in a ticket sales income of over £99,000 for the museum service.

Bristol Record Office

Thanks to funding from the Friends, we have now completed conservation work on the account book of the Jason Gally, an important record of Bristol's role in the transatlantic slave trade. Earlier this year (and covered in the March newsletter), the Friends contributed to the purchase of this document. Now, following painstaking work to repair the covers and binding, the volume is fully available for research.



▲ *The Jason Gally account book after conservation.*
© Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives

BRO and Spike Island have been jointly awarded a 2014 Business Archives Council grant to catalogue the records of Artspace, the pioneering artist-led co-operative which became Spike Island.

Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC)

BRERC has relocated from the Central Library to the mezzanine at St Nicholas Church, joining Bristol and Regional Archaeological Services (BaRAS) staff, who occupy the ground floor.

The Hogarth Triptych

William Hogarth's altarpiece painting for St Mary Redcliffe, now in St Nicholas' Church, was the subject of a highly successful British Art Networks Seminar arranged in collaboration with Tate. The purpose was to find possible future solutions for this enormous, yet overlooked, masterpiece and participants came from around the country as well as from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

Doors Open Day

The 21st Doors open Day was another resounding success across the sites, with behind the scenes tours at Bristol Records Office, Kings Weston Roman Villa, Blaise Dairy (including butter making demonstrations), M Shed and Bristol Museum & Art Gallery.

New displays at University of Bristol

Over the last few months members of the BMGA teams have been working with the University of Bristol to create displays within the new University Life Sciences Building on St Michael's Hill, officially opened by Sir David Attenborough in early October. The displays include material from the University's miscellaneous collections of biological specimens, and finds from the archaeological dig at the Royal Fort of a few years ago. The project has strengthened links with the University's life sciences department and opportunities for future teaching collaborations are already being discussed.



▲ *Sir David Attenborough admiring the museum display in the University of Bristol's new Life Sciences building, accompanied by Professor Jane Memmott, Head of the School of Biological Sciences.* © Bristol Post

Exhibitions

M Shed

Moved by Conflict: Bristol and the First World War – Lives changed forever
to 1 March 2015

The First World War had a profound effect on Bristol and its people. Through 100s of original objects and archives Moved by Conflict explores the physical, social and personal changes made by war.

Bristol Record Office

Bristol's White City
to 27 February, free

Explore the story of the 'White City' built in 1914 for Bristol's International Exhibition and taken over for soldiers of the First World War

BMAG

Wildlife Photographer of the Year
to 22 February 2015

Encounter the rich array of wildlife on our planet in this world-renowned exhibition from the Natural History Museum, celebrating its 50th year.

Made in China: an imperial Ming Vase
to 4 January 2015, free

Discover how and why this iconic blue-and-white porcelain vase, on tour with the British Museum, represents a crucial period in China's history.

The Ming vase ▶
© Trustees of
the British Museum



Ahead of the curve: new china from China
13 December 2014 – 1 March 2015, free

Direct from China, this ground-breaking exhibition of new work by 21 Chinese glass and ceramic artists ranges from exquisite craft to conceptual art.

'Modern Art in Britain: Reality Questioned'
from 17 January, free

In collaboration with museums and art galleries in Bristol, Bath, Swindon and Cheltenham and showcasing great art in the West, there will be a series of exciting redisplay highlighting modern gems in each museum's collection and showing the quality and diversity of art collections in our region.

Events

Xmas Steam Up
Weekends of 13/14 and 20/21 December

Drive the steam locomotive Portbury and operate the Fairburn Steam Crane. £25 including festive refreshments in the comfort of the railway's heated brake van. Advance booking via M Shed essential.

The Nightingale and the Rose
Friday 13 February, 8pm – late

Exclusive Valentines event with music, performances and enchanting entertainments. £18.

Chinese New Year 2015

This will run over weekend of 21-22 Feb and this year we celebrate the Year of the Sheep

A Little Kingdom: The Harman Family's Lundy 1925-1969

Tuesday 19 August 2014

I was very much looking forward to this talk, given by local author André Coutanche in the M Shed Studio as, whilst I have heard of Lundy Island, I have never actually been there. I knew that it was famous for puffins and Lundy Cabbage (a plant unique to Lundy), but not a great deal else!

Lundy Island has a long and absorbing history – most impressive for a tiny speck a mere 3 miles by half a mile – but André's talk concentrated on its last private owners, the Harman family, who owned it from 1925-1969. Lundy is currently managed by the National Trust and The Landmark Trust

I found the talk fascinating – Michael Coles Harman, who swore that he would buy Lundy after he visited it in 1903, was an extraordinary, larger-than-life character who saw Lundy as his 'little kingdom'. André had many amusing stories to tell of 'MCH' who issued both Lundy

stamps and coinage (for which he was taken to court as the coins bore his head on the reverse, not the monarch's!). He also attempted to bring wallabies, peacocks and sheep to the island – rather predictably, the wallabies perished, but there are still sheep. The talk concluded with a short documentary compiled by PhD students from the University of Bristol, incorporating ciné film footage from the 1940s and '50s.

After questions from the audience (I asked about the Lundy Cabbage!) we were served refreshments along with some excellent cake made by our members. We also had the opportunity to purchase André's book.

All in all, it was a fascinating glimpse into a unique and little-known world. Many thanks to the organisers and of course to André (and his wife Marie-Jo) for his interesting and lively talk.

Amanda Hemmings

Visit to Berlin

Thursday 2 – Thursday 9 October 2014

The weather was sunny and warm for almost the whole week we were in Berlin – most importantly, for all the visits which entailed walking outside. Our charming and knowledgeable guide, Beate Harnisch Wirth, a Berlin lawyer now turned city guide, led us through the history of Germany from the 17th century to the present day: in six days we journeyed through the baroque and rococo excesses of the Charlottenburg and Sanssouci palaces to the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust, the division of Berlin into East and West, and its subsequent reunification and regeneration.

On the final morning the group split up in several directions to visit different museums – the Technology Museum, the Bauhaus Museum, a model railway in the Sony Centre, the German Resistance Memorial Centre, the National Gallery among them – but that was a fraction of the hundreds of museums in Berlin covering every topic under the sun. Cramming at least two museums or churches into each day, plus walkabouts and a river trip, we managed to get a feel for Berlin as a city and marvel at the amount of rebuilding and refurbishment. It certainly merits a return visit in around six years' time to see the results.

Our thanks go to Pam Roper of Unpackaged Travel for masterminding all the details of our visit.

Mary Bailey

Friday 3 October

Sightseeing tour of East Berlin by Coach and Boat

Our first full day comprised a sight-seeing tour by coach and boat of the main landmarks in the former Eastern sector of Berlin. Our guide, Beate, informed us, with great enthusiasm and extensive knowledge, about many of the significant buildings and points of interest we passed in the coach. Our first destination was a visit to the Mauer Museum (Museum of the Wall) at Checkpoint Charlie on Friedrichstrasse, the famous crossing point in the former American sector. En route we passed many landmarks, including Alexander Platz (where the 368 m tall TV tower is located), the group of famous museums on Museum Island, the Humboldt University (founded 1810), and various offices that had been occupied by the Nazi Government during the Third Reich. The Mauer Museum is dedicated to the Berlin Wall, erected in 1961 by the East German government to halt the mass migration of East Germans into West Berlin, and in particular to the memory of those who subsequently tried to escape across the wall by various ingenious means; some succeeded, but many were shot by the East German border guards. Some were even left to die in 'no man's land'. The first breach in the wall was made on 9 November 1989, when many climbed on to it. It was finally demolished in 1990.

After an enjoyable lunch at Maximilians restaurant on Friedrichstrasse, we drove along Unter den Linden towards the impressive Brandenburg Gate, turning north just before into Wilhelmstrasse and so into West Berlin. Near the Melkte Bridge we boarded a boat for an hour's trip on the River Spree, which took us past the Reichstag and various government buildings including the Chancellor's Office, back into East Berlin, past the Bode and Pergamon museums and Berlin cathedral on Museum Island, as far as the bridge near the Nikolai Quarter. On the return we passed the famous Tiergarten, a large wooded park where Berliners can relax and enjoy themselves, especially on a sunny afternoon. Then it was back to the hotel.

Brian Vincent



▲ Friends outside the old Concert Hall in East Berlin



▲ Part of the display at Checkpoint Charlie showing Russian and American tanks eyeballing each other at close quarters



▲ Modern re-creation of Checkpoint Charlie

Saturday 4 October

Schloss Charlottenburg

Originally Schloss Lietzow in a village to the north west of Berlin, the palace was renamed Charlottenburg in memory of the wife of Friedrich III, Elector of Brandenburg, who crowned himself Friedrich I of Prussia. Sophie Charlotte of Hanover was the sister of George I of England and she made this palace her rural retreat.

At that time the court language was French and the garden was designed in the same manner as Versailles. The baroque palace was built of brick with a stucco façade. The court at Sophie Charlotte's palace thrived on philosophical debate, music and innovation so it is not surprising that such notables as Peter I of Russia and Handel spent time there, enjoying recent imports such as tea and cocoa.

Besides the highly ornate reception rooms and bedrooms there is a Protestant chapel. The ruling Hohenzollern family converted from Lutheranism to Calvinism in order to take over part of Germany close to the Netherlands. Their subjects remained Lutheran in a time when the two sects were at odds. Our guide brilliantly brought to life the atmosphere of Sophie's court, using the portraits and furnishings as props.

After a brief walk in the garden to admire the seven lines of colour in baroque planting, semitropical plants in tubs, views of buildings and the public enjoying the lake and gardens, we went west to Spandau.



▲ Friends admire a display of porcelain in Schloss Charlottenburg



▲ Spandau showing part of the fortified walls and moat

Spandau

Spandau Citadel was an entirely different building: originally a Renaissance fortress built on the confluence of the rivers Havel and Spree, it also contains the 12th century Julius Tower, from where, if you had enough energy to climb the numerous steps, there were views far over Berlin, which is nearly 30 miles across.

The 16th century fort with its massive star-shaped fortifications and moat included a museum on the history of the fort and another for the mediaeval town of Spandau. In the courtyard we were reminded that there had been a Nazi gas laboratory in the grounds.

Spandau suffered comparatively little during World War II compared to Schloss Charlottenburg, which had to have major restoration. However, the military prison in the town, where Rudolf Hess was imprisoned, was demolished after the war so it would not become a shrine.

Marianne Pitman

Bröhan Museum

Karl H Bröhan started collecting art deco, art nouveau and functionalism in the 1960s, especially porcelain, opening it as a private collection. He then donated it to Berlin on his 60th birthday in 1981. In 1983 it moved to its present site, a former barracks within the Charlottenburg Palace estate. It is now a state museum due to the international significance of the items. I enjoyed seeing a Japanese carpet decorated with five swans and a 40-piece Ceres dinner service from the Royal Porcelain Manufactory shown in 1913 on the occasion of its 150th anniversary at the Jubilee Exhibition in the Museum of Decorative Arts, but only in a side room! My favourite item was a sofa surrounded by a wood screen with glass cabinets and mirror made in 1904 by Alfred Grenader.

There was also a temporary exhibition of advertisements and tins for Herman Bahlsen (of Leibniz fame), who founded his biscuit factory in Hanover in 1889. The Bröhan is a small but very interesting museum, a good contrast to the neighbouring grand Charlottenburg Palace.

Catherine Dixon

▼ Art deco sofa and screen by Alfred Grenader





◀ Exterior of the Reichstag dome

The central glass cylinder inside the Reichstag dome ▶



Sunday 5 October

The Dome of the Reichstag

The Reichstag building was first opened in 1894, but after the 1933 fire was not again used by German parliaments until 1999. After Germany reunification and much debate, it was decided that both government and parliament should return to Berlin from Bonn. A competition for the design of the modern building was won by Norman Foster in 1992, and reconstruction completed in 1999. One of the most striking features of the new building was the glass dome.

Open to the public, the dome sits above the debating chamber of the German parliament (Bundestag) symbolising transparent democracy by enabling visitors to look down on parliamentarians when they are debating. Visitors can climb via spiral walkways to the top of the dome and enjoy 360° views of the city. An important feature is a vast central glass cylinder which is impressive technically and visually; it provides natural ventilation and, by a system of mirrors, directs daylight inside the plenary chamber during the day and reflects it back during the night. A large sun-shield tracks the sun electronically and blocks direct sunlight so protecting those below from being dazzled.

Not to be missed is a series of photographs, which are displayed in the dome, illustrating the changes to the Reichstag over the years and the historical events which caused them.

Don Walter

Holocaust Memorial

A short walk from the Reichstag and the Brandenburg Gate brings you to an area near the former site of Hitler's bunker where there are now 2,711 concrete regular blocks of varying heights which form the Holocaust Memorial. These stelae are placed in undulating but straight crossing lines on a variously tilted floor which, as you walk further and further into the maze, become disorientating and dark. The aim of the designer, Peter Eisenman, was that as you walk you gain some idea of the bewilderment and fear engendered by the complete loss of control experienced by the Jews during the Holocaust. This makes a very effective introduction to the subterranean exhibition, a series of several collections illustrating different aspects of this period. Starting with an overview of the national-socialist terror policy between 1933 and 1945 in the entrance hall, a second room focuses on diary entries, letters and last notes that were written during the Holocaust, some thrown from trains on the way to the camps. Another collection concentrates on the variety of the European Jewish culture before the holocaust. The Room of Names contains the names and brief biographies of murdered and missing Jews. Finally the Room of Sites shows the geographical extent of the holocaust in the whole of Europe. It was a most moving and memorable visit which deserved more time than was possible in our packed timetable.

Pat Walter

▶ Walking into the maze of tall concrete blocks at the Holocaust Memorial gives a feeling of being lost and abandoned – faint echoes of the feelings felt by many Jewish prisoners



▶ The monument of 2,711 concrete stelae commemorates the millions of murdered Jews of Europe. An underground display retells the horror of the 'Final Solution' and holds the names of all the known Jewish holocaust victims



Monday 6 October

Museum Island

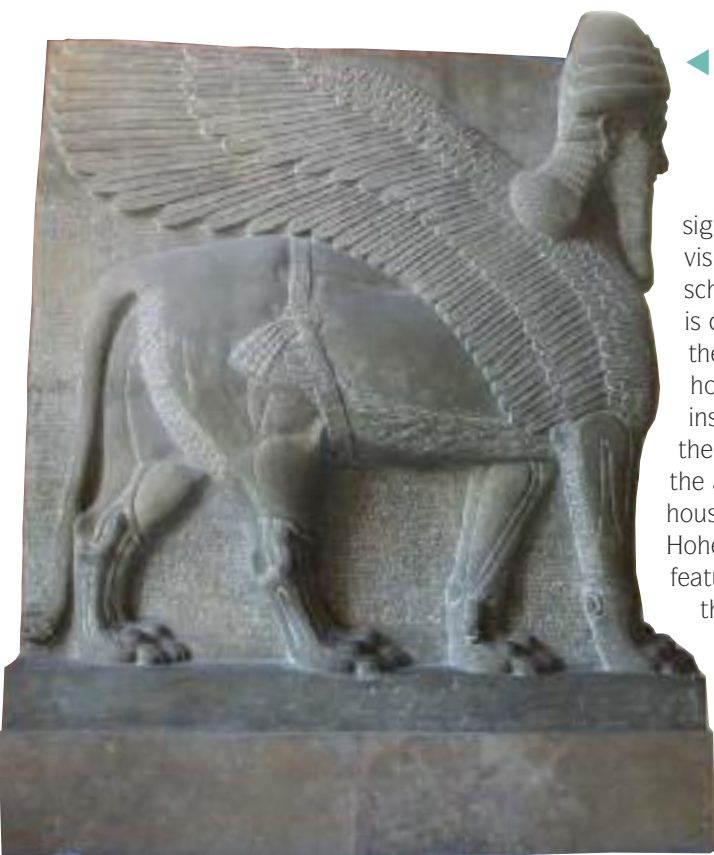
Spreeinsel lies in the river Spree and formed the core of the mediaeval twin towns of Berlin-ColIn. The northern half is known as 'Museum Island' and contains some of the most important of Berlin's museums. In 1810 King Friedrich Wilhelm III decided that Berlin needed a museum to house his treasures so he ordered that some marshy land be reclaimed and commissioned the architect Schinkel to design the building. This became the Altes Museum. German exploration and archaeology in Egypt and Asia Minor was thriving soon after and the collections made by Lepsius in the 1840s formed the core of the Neues Museum. Later that century Schliemann brought back treasures from Turkey for which the Pergamon Museum was built.

As a group we visited two of these. The Neues Museum was badly bomb-damaged, has been rebuilt and renovated by David Chipperfield using as many original features as possible and is worth visiting for its contrasting architectural styles as well as its contents, which include such treasures as artefacts from Troy, the bust of Nefertiti and the late Bronze Age Berlin gold hat. I was fascinated by the articulated models of baking activities in the extensive Egyptian galleries in the basement and helpful exhibits regarding the growth, development & archaeology of Berlin in the attic. The Pergamon Museum is in the process of having an extra wing added and this involves complex building works and a programme of closing different sections as work progresses. Fortunately the intensely blue Ishtar Gate was open for viewing and it is even larger and more impressive than I had expected. Sometimes it is the unexpected items in museums that really delight and I was thrilled by the Islamic Art and historic carpet galleries.



▲ *The Ishtar Gate from Ancient Babylon at the Pergamon Museum*

▶ *The Golden Hat, made from half a kilo of beaten gold and bronze, standing 745mm high. This mysterious ornamental Bronze Age hat may have been worn by a priest.*



◀ *An Assyrian human-headed winged bull. Originally Mesopotamian, these powerful protective gods often guard the gates of Assyrian cities.*

Museum Island is full of interesting sights and museums and many of the party visited one or more at times when we had no scheduled visits. The former Berliner Schloss is currently a building site where a version of the Old Imperial Palace is being built to house a mix of scientific and cultural institutions. The Berliner Dom was built at the turn of the 20th century and the grandiose neo-Baroque building houses a crypt with around 80 Hohenzollern sarcophagi. Its redeeming feature is the splendid view from the dome. The Altes Museum

now houses the collection of small sculpture and pottery from the Greek & Roman collections. The Alte National Galerie contains the 19th century section of Berlin's art collection and the Bode Museum contains one of Europe's most impressive and comprehensive sculpture collections.

Jinx Newley



Tuesday 7 October

Potsdam

Potsdam: what history in a name! We set off with great expectations, on an autumnal day, to travel the 30 km to Potsdam. Beate, our wonderfully informative guide, reminded us of the 1618 Edict of Potsdam giving religious freedom to fleeing French Protestants; in 1914 the declaration of war in Potsdam by Kaiser Wilhelm II; and in 1945 the Potsdam Conference dividing Germany between the Allies. We passed through the Grunewald, a huge forest accommodating in-line skaters, cyclists, red squirrels and wild boar; over the Glienicke Bridge where spies were exchanged in the Cold War; past an Aldi with its parking for yachts!

The ruling Hohenzollerns loved the area and hunted there, till in 1747 Frederick the Great built his Summer Palace of Sanssouci (meaning 'without a care'). In 1917, while ordinary Germans were starving, Kaiser Wilhelm II built a mock Tudor palace in the area, for his daughter-in-law Cecilie, calling it Cecilienhof, which was our first stop. Here, Beate told us of the complicated room arrangements during the Potsdam Conference. Of the three Allies who signed the agreement, Truman, Attlee and Stalin, only Stalin was in at the start, as Roosevelt had died and Churchill had been ousted in a general election during the 16-day conference. As the palace was in the Russian zone, a large red floral star greeted the participants, and was still in place for us to admire!

Passing through the town of Potsdam, we noted a striking row of Dutch vernacular houses, log cabins built for Russian choir members, and the old KGB headquarters. We lunched in a Chinoiserie pavilion, constructed for Frederick the Great's vintner, complete with rampant dragons on its roof.

The Palace of Sanssouci was a flamboyant rococo building. Our feisty guide Ramona took us first to visit Frederick the Great's grave. As he had requested, it was a simple stone slab on the top terrace of his vineyards, next to the Palace. Alongside him were 11 of his 13 beloved greyhounds. On his grave slab were potatoes, to mark their introduction by him. Inside the palace we marvelled at the opulent gold and silk of the decoration, a remarkable gold spider's web on a ceiling, representations of birds and other animals, delicate silk upholstered furniture. The gardens were a mix of formal terraces descending from the palace to reach more informal gardens below. A stunning rococo masterpiece and a sumptuous retreat for an iconic ruler.

Sue Black

▲ Cecilienhof Palace, ancestral home of Crown Prince Wilhelm Hohenzollern, was where the Potsdam Conference was held in July and August 1945



◀ Chinoiserie pavilion now the Dragon Restaurant – note the dragon decorations



Pavilion in the gardens of Sanssouci Palace ▶

Wednesday 8 October

Jewish Museum

The initial impact of the Jewish Museum is striking: the zigzag shape of the building with its grey slanting walls alongside the baroque former court house which now serves as the entrance area. Daniel Libeskind's architecture symbolizes the history of the Jews in Germany. In the basement of the building are three corridors: the Axis of the Holocaust, portraying the persecution and murder of Jews during the Nazi era and finishing with the Holocaust tower, a tall grey empty space lit only by a shaft of daylight from above, with a steel ladder fixed to the wall, forever out of reach; the Axis of Exile highlights the experience of Jews escaping from Germany into exile and leads to the Garden of Exile, a tilting courtyard with 49 tall, slanting pillars from the top of which are growing willow trees – life beyond confinement and confusion; a third corridor, the Axis of Continuity, leads to a long staircase to the second floor, where there is a permanent exhibition on 2,000 years of Jewish history in Germany.

Throughout the building there are voids, small windows looking on to grey concrete and a disorientating layout.

The permanent exhibition is chronological with a wealth of information and objects on display, too much to take in on a single visit. It leads you through various aspects of Jewish life and the changes to the circumstances of Jews throughout their time in Germany, emphasising the fact that they were always outsiders, not allowed to participate in political or public life or follow a profession until the early 20th century under the Weimar Republic. Ironically this was for such a short period until the rise of National Socialism in the 1930s.

In fact, the experience of the Jewish Museum was characterized to a degree by the external rather than the internal: the stark architecture, the stone blockades in front of the entrance to prevent bomb attacks, the police presence, and the airport-style metal detector and security checkpoint to enter. These conveyed more directly the experience of German Jewish history than the displays.

Mary Bailey

DDR Museum

The DDR museum was dark, hot, crowded and full of youngsters rushing round the interactive exhibits. Not our cup of tea! But it turned out to be fascinating, with excellent guides who really brought to life what it was like to live in East Germany after World War II. We sat in a typical cramped living room in a DDR block of flats and heard that, while the basic necessities of life were provided – accommodation at a low rent, a job even if this meant overmanning, and cheap basic food – luxuries such as telephones, television and a Trabant car (you could sit in one, and drive down a virtual reality East German street, but we did not get a look in with the youngsters), involved going on a waiting list for as long as 15 years. Everyone was allocated vouchers for three weeks' holiday each year, and we admired the photographs of carefree families enjoying themselves at the beach in the buff. This became the fashion, some said because the swimwear available was so ghastly, but it was probably more to do with being part of a successful protest movement against the state.

But there was no getting away from the dark side of the regime: if you were lucky enough to have a telephone it would be bugged, your flat might be bugged, your friends and neighbours might be informers – either out of choice or because the Stasi (secret police) had some hold over them. We went into an interrogation cell; more than 3000 political prisoners were held at any one time. We compared the plastic Trabi to the luxury Mercedes allocated to the Politburo. They were all old men, appointed for life, living in a secure compound, out of touch with and out of the reach of those whose lives they made a misery. They failed to invest in industry and the failing economy made life hard for everyone except themselves.

Katherine Martin



▲ The 49 pillars of the Garden of Exile at the Jewish Museum seen from above.

▼ The Garden of Exile seen from ground level giving the powerful impression of darkness and despair below with hope high above where there is light and greenery.



Photos by Martin Bailey,
Mary Bailey, Sue Black,
Elly Chapman,
Catherine Dixon,
Jinx Newley, Pat Walter



Ashton Park Walk to feed the deer

Wednesday 27 August 2014

Exciting wasn't the word I was expecting to use to describe this walk – damp more like, but when the ranger, Mark, went into the deer enclosure with his bag of sugar-beet pellets and called the deer it really was exciting. The stags rushed down the hill to surround him, followed shortly by the hinds and their babies streaming out of the trees at the bottom of the hill and up the slope for their share of the treat. The stags were very big, and the children who came on the walk (ages 2 to 10) were thrilled to be so close to them. The herd of red deer has been in the park almost continuously since 1392. They are completely wild, with no intervention except some winter feeding, and keep the vegetation within their enclosures under control.

We stopped beside an oak and we were asked to assess its age. Even with clues, no one guessed that it was at least 1000 years old. Although pollarded about 300 years ago for the timber, it was still an impressive tree. We looked out over Bristol, and tried to imagine the view when the tree had been just a sapling. Nearby, a small brick building caps a large underground reservoir which in earlier times supplied the house with running water, and fed a water-feature in the garden. It could flood the tennis court in winter to create an ice rink. Near the Domesday Oak, now in a sorry state with half split off and lying dead on the ground, was the Smyth's deer larder. Built in the mid-18th century, it is still in use for preparation of culled deer. Downhill was the fallow deer enclosure. They were much more timid, and only one stag eventually came to feed.

Behind, in Clarken Coombe, is a 'wood pasture' of national importance and a designated SSSI. The trees here are less dense. Rotting wood and undergrowth provide a habitat for rare insects and beetles. It is hoped that the meadow beyond will be designated a SSSI for its wealth of orchids and skylarks.

Mark, ranger at Ashton Park for 28 years, knows the deer, wildlife, trees and plants and history of the park intimately. Ashton Park would not be the wonderful place it is without his hard work. Thank you Mark!

Carol Ouvry

▲ The 1000-year old oak tree



▲ A stag checking us out

Photos by Carol Ouvry and Shoshannah Saunders



▶ *The organised chaos of the Bakelite Museum gives a very good idea of the versatility of this material.*

Photos by Catherine Dixon and David Snelson

The Bakelite Museum & Orchard Wyndham, Williton

Thursday 14 August 2014

The Bakelite Museum is the only one in the country covering the history of plastics from 1850 to 1950. The museum was started in 1974 by Patrick Cook, whose obsession began when he bought a Bakelite radio set in Bristol in 1968. The museum is full of everyday items made of Bakelite including fifty egg cups with matching cruets, vintage radios, vacuum cleaners, TVs, heaters, and cups and saucers (although I am not sure that I would use them as Bakelite contains urea). The most unusual item was a coffin. I never discovered why it was there and whether it had been used. After a pleasant break in the café, we drove through narrow lanes to our next port of call.

Orchard Wyndham is a large, but friendly home dating back to 1170, with various later extensions. It is an SSSI as it houses bats and rare spiders. The Wyndham family have a long heritage and have been benefactors in the region. We were regaled with many stories on our tour, including one about a pregnant Wyndham lady, who was thought to be dead after a fall, but shocked the sexton in the crypt by coming to life when he cut off a finger to steal her rings! She lived on and had her child.

Visiting poets and authors include Evelyn Waugh, whose ear trumpet is on display. Part of Gulliver's Travels was written there and some characters were based on family members. There were many interesting portraits and one by Hogarth which can no longer be moved for exhibitions because of its poor condition. One particular painting of 'The Taking of Gibraltar' by Whitcombe was popular with our group. We also saw a mirror, clock and table from Versailles bought at a sale because it was broken and needed repair.

This is a lovely house with some fascinating tales made even better because we could stand on ancient carpets and rugs, and sit on the chairs. Thanks to David Snelson for organising such a fascinating day.

Catherine Dixon

Visit www.orchardwyndham.com and www.bakelitemuseum.co.uk to find out more.

▶ *My most interesting find was a box with a roll-top lid, which a Friend thought would store cigarettes and deliver them when the box was opened. Any other suggestions?*



Madresfield Court

Thursday 24 July 2014

The Malvern Hills shimmering in the distance, we arrived at Madresfield Court on a sweltering hot day. The moated house is remarkable for being in the possession of the same family, the Lygons, since the Middle Ages. William Lygon was created the first Earl of Beauchamp in 1815 and Earls Beauchamp lived at Madresfield until 1979. The Bear and Rugged Staff, their coat of arms, can be seen throughout their ancestral home. Evelyn Waugh knew the family and modelled *Brideshead Revisited* on Madresfield.

In the early 20th century, improvements in the house were greatly influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement as William Lygon, the seventh Earl and governor of New South Wales, was a patron. There is a set of chairs covered in bargello (Florentine or flame stitch) that he embroidered.

The drawing room has French furniture and objets d'art collected by Catherine Denne, the first Countess of Beauchamp, who brought them back from Paris after the defeat of Napoleon. Her four sons were also collectors of historical portraits, miniatures and snuff boxes. On display were strands of hair from the Duke of Wellington and William Pitt the Younger, and a bullet taken from the neck of the fourth Earl who was injured in the Peninsular War.

The magnificent library designed by C.R. Ashbee contains about 8,000 books, the earliest being missals written by monks before the age of printing. We also saw the chapel with stained glass, painting and metal work made by the Birmingham School of Arts and Crafts.

The staircase hall is lit by three large glass domes and decorated with portraits, and swans, bears and emblems all associated with the seventh Earl's career. We also saw the dining room, part of the old house with a minstrels' gallery and a hammerbeam roof hung with flags.

Many thanks to Gary Gostelow for organising such an interesting visit.

Rosemary Doggett



▲ *Madresfield Court was greatly extended in Elizabethan times and later, when the family became immensely wealthy after a marriage to a cousin of William Jenner, William III's godson.*

Photo by Hilary Cleeve

To see pictures and learn more about Madresfield Court visit madresfield@btconnect.com



▲ *The Royal Coat of Arms above the organ in the chapel*

Royal Agricultural University

Wednesday 17 September 2014

It was a warm afternoon when we visited the Royal Agricultural University at Cirencester. Earl Bathurst originally leased the site to build a college into which students were admitted in 1845. The college was granted full university status in 2013.

We were greeted by Mary Catling and taken to the Chapel which contains a window, the top half of which was designed by William Morris to show the signs of the zodiac. The lower portion was designed by Paul Quail in 1963 and commemorates Robert Boutflour, a principal at the college. It depicts all of God's creations worshipping him.

▶ *The stained glass window by William Morris and Paul Quail.*

From the chapel we went to the Bathurst building where some of C S Orwin's agricultural works of art are displayed. Many of these paintings of animals had strangely proportioned bodies and legs. The Emrys Jones building was originally the Department of Mechanisation where tractors were brought in for demonstration purposes. The building has had an overhaul and now contains lecture halls and more displays of C.S. Orwin's pictures.

Following an excellent cream tea we departed for home. This had been a fascinating tour of a building not normally seen by the public. Many thanks to Gary for arranging our visit to such an interesting venue.

Zena Mussett



Photos by
Hilary Cleeve



Stonehenge Rocks

Tuesday 2 September 2014

Stonehenge is one of Britain's most historic monuments. Built in several stages, it began as a simple earthwork enclosure, with the famous stone circle being installed in the late Neolithic period around 2500 BC. Many burial mounds nearby are proof that Stonehenge remained important into the early Bronze Age.

Last year, a new visitor centre was opened, costing £27 million. This shows how important Stonehenge still is today, 4000 years on from its construction. Looking around this visitor centre formed a major part of our visit, as it contained a lot of artifacts and information about the history of Stonehenge, which in turn showed us much about the history of our country.

One reason Stonehenge captures the public imagination is because the original purpose of the stone circle is still debated amongst experts. This is why one of my favourite parts of the visit was the 'Set in Stone' exhibition, dedicated to the various theories about Stonehenge's origins. For example, did you know that, according to Geoffrey of Monmouth, Stonehenge was built by giants in Ireland and was moved to its current resting place by Merlin the wizard?

However, the main attraction of Stonehenge is the stones. Although, sadly, visitors are allowed near the stones only on special occasions such as the summer and winter solstices, even to be as close as we were allowed made us feel a real connection with history. No matter what Stonehenge's purpose was thousands of years ago, to picture our prehistoric ancestors standing almost where we stood, looking at the same sight, is an experience that I will never forget and one that cannot be replicated.

A big thank you must go to Ruth and Gary for organizing the trip.

Pearl Andrews-Horrigan



◀ The shop in the new visitor centre

Photos by Gundula Dorey



▲ Senior school buildings
Photo by Catherine Dixon

Clifton College

Thursday 4 September 2014

Fiona Hallworth, who has been at the College for 30 years and is Director of Heritage, gave us a fascinating talk on the history of the College and its ex-pupils. We learned that the proposal to found Clifton College was heard at a meeting held in 1860 at the Wasborough home (of Veale Wasborough solicitors fame). The school began as a company, although now it is a charity. After the talk, we explored the pavilion, the dining hall for a very good lunch, and the Chapel (which opened in 1867) to hear beautiful organ music. Some of us visited the crypt, which contains the tomb of the first Headmaster, the Reverend John Percival, grandfather of the actor Lance Percival and later Bishop of Hereford, who is buried in there.

Thanks to Fiona Hallworth and Sue Stops for organising this super morning and lunchtime out. Did I mention the lovely lunch we had?

Catherine Dixon

Clifton College Facts

- Currently 1200 pupils are taught at Clifton. 40% girls; 50% boarders.
- Charles Hansom (brother of the inventor of the famous cab) was the architect for most of the buildings.
- The school was used by the Americans during WW2 where plans for operation Neptune (D-Day) were formed while the pupils were evacuated. Houses in Percival Road were built with verandahs especially for the Americans using the school.
- Queen Mary visited the school for tea during WW2.
- Three former pupils are Nobel Prizewinners including John Kendrew (Chemistry – for work on molecular proteins).
- There is an impressive list of former pupils from all walks of life, including Field Marshal Earl Haig, John Cleese, Sir Roy Fedden, John Inverdale, Patrick Jenkin, Sir Michael Redgrave, Julian Richer (of Richer Sounds) and H.H. Wills.
- The world's highest cricket score was achieved in 1899 by Clifton pupil, A E J Collins (13 years old), who scored 628 not out in a house match. He also took 11 wickets in the same game! Collins was killed at the First Battle of Ypres in 1914.
- If the school clock is hit by a ball during cricket, the pupils are given a day off.

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