

Newsletter

Milestones Museum, Basingstoke

Wednesday 11 February 2015

Milestones Museum comprises a network of recreated, former buildings and streets, largely based on those found in either Victorian or 1930s Hampshire towns. The museum is housed in a large modern enclosed building, which was opened in December 2000 by the Duke of Edinburgh. It was a joint project between Hampshire County Council and Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. In 2014 ownership of Milestones Museum was transferred to the Hampshire Cultural Trust.

The buildings illustrate a large variety of shops and workshops. The shops include, amongst others, a post office, a cycle shop, a camera shop and a toy shop. Several important Hampshire engineering firms' workshops are represented, including Taskers, Wallis and Steevens, and Thorneycrofts. There is also a typical Edwardian pub, The Baverstock Arms, where ale can be purchased and consumed. Various road and rail vehicles are on display, including a tram, two buses and various vintage cars and commercial vehicles, as well as a railway steam engine. Households and their contents, ranging from Victorian to modern times, are also displayed. There is also a large collection of old penny-in-the-slot amusement machines.

Visitors, on arrival, are supplied with audio-guides to explain the various buildings and objects on display. The whole experience was very informative and enjoyable. Our visit, organised by Ruth Welch, was rounded-off by a cream tea in the Museum café.

Brian Vincent

▼ *Brian and Don wonder how to spend their penny on sweets. You would need 70p today to buy what that old penny did then.*



▲ *Ruth, Brian and Eddy consider a motorbike and side car*



▲ *Decision made! A pennyworth of aniseed balls.*

From the Chairman

The funds we raise

Through the sterling efforts of our wonderful Programme Committee and volunteers, our events raise funds steadily throughout the year. In recent years this has amounted to in the region of £20,000 a year, a magnificent sum for an organisation like ours. We also receive donations and bequests, some particularly generous, for which we are always grateful. Subscription income, after the costs of the newsletter have been paid, also contributes to our coffers.

Thank you all for your contributions to the funds we raise.

And how we spend them. . .

The pattern of passing these funds on to the service is less regular and predictable, and dependent on their needs and priorities. Often there will be a period of several months in which we will receive no funding requests from the service at all because staff are aware of waiting for the opportunities to make best use of our funds.

Sometimes our funding can be planned well in advance, such as our contributions in the tens of thousands to the development of the Egyptian Gallery at the Museum & Art Gallery, and more recently towards the development and opening of M Shed.

There are also many occasions when the service cannot plan in advance, as desirable objects which are a great fit for the collecting strategy might become available at any time, for example at auction.

We recently funded the acquisition of the ship's log of the barque *Fantee* for Bristol Record Office. You can read more about the log in the Museum Report. Our agreement of that funding needed to be completed in record time.

On the Wednesday the Record Office was alerted that the log was for sale on the online auction site eBay, with a closing date of that coming Saturday morning. The *Fantee* has very strong Bristol connections, but very little was made of these on the eBay listing details, so it had been hard to spot. With such short timescales we were the only possible source of funds, so were asked on the Thursday if we could help.

Formally our decisions are made at our monthly Executive



▲ The Fantee log recently purchased on eBay thanks to an eagle-eyed Friend

© BMGA

Committee meeting, but exceptionally I emailed the committee members for their 'vote' and by Friday I had responses from almost all of them, all clearly in favour. We were therefore able to say 'Yes', and Clive Burlton, committee member and Record Office volunteer, placed the bid. Happily we were able to acquire the log at the reserve price, although we had agreed to pay up to a limit that was greater than that, if necessary, to secure such an important document.

It was very satisfying to feel we had been able to beat the odds and help the Record Office so speedily and with such a great result. And if you are one of those who see being part of a committee as boring, this is an example that there are times when it can be quite exhilarating.

Bristol Harbour Railway

Although I was brought up in a world of fine art, my first involvement with the museums in Bristol, almost exactly 25 years ago, was as a volunteer on Bristol Harbour Railway at the Industrial Museum. M Shed has long since replaced the Industrial Museum, but the railway, and my fondness for it and the other working exhibits, lives on.

With the development of BRT2, the guided busway, the railway this year is facing considerable disruption, and in response the team has taken the opportunity to bring some variety to the public service – and for the volunteers – in the shape of some visiting locos. *Portbury* has been sent on loan to Beamish, The Living Museum of the North, until the autumn. Taking her place until the end of June is *Kilmersdon*, a Bristol-built Peckett on loan from the Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust at Washford, on the West Somerset Railway. *Kilmersdon* will shortly be joined by *Teddy*, another Peckett and one of the smallest standard gauge locomotives ever built. The highlight of the season for many will be a 'Three Pecketts' celebration on the last weekend of June, when *Kilmersdon* and *Teddy* will be joined by our own *Henbury*, currently due to start a major overhaul.

If you love steam railways, I hope you will go down to M Shed on one of the steaming weekends – phone M Shed for dates if you do not have internet access – to take a ride behind one of the visiting locos.

◀ *Kilmersdon* waiting for passengers

© Lee Hutchinson



Museum Sewing Group

Once again the members of the Museum Sewing Group have been busy working on what has definitely been the most challenging project to date: making costumes and props to be used at the Bristol Rocks! family day which took place during the February half-term.

We were asked by Deborah Hutchinson, collections officer for Geology, to make a range of dinosaur costumes in various sizes, and a collection of marine creatures, insects and the ghost slug (unique to the Bristol area) to be used as props for the activities during the day.

This project really taxed our ingenuity and the photos illustrate a few of the items that we made. It is always great fun planning the projects together and then going away to do our best to create them. We are now waiting to see if we are needed again by another of the museum departments – we never know what we are going to be asked to do!

If you would like to join our group and take part in future projects, please contact Carol Ouvry at carol.ouvry@talktalk.net.



▲ The Museum Sewing Group



Dinosaur costumes ►



◀ Marine Puppets and prey

Photos by Deborah Hutchinson

From the Membership Secretary

We offer a warm welcome to the following members who have joined the Friends recently.

June Hibberd, Membership Secretary

Miss Yasmin Al Rehani	Mr Robert Tapper
Ms Jane Bragge	Mrs Carole Tapper
Mrs Sue Chapman	Mr Roger Ward
Mr Bob Havard	Mrs Edeltrand Ward
Mrs Fran Havard	
Ms Sue Hicks	
Mrs Fay Hitchman	
Mrs Pamela Lacy	
Mr Laurence Payne	
Ms Sue Pettit	
Ms Christine Purvis	
Ms Marion Reid	
Ms Suzanne Shallis	

Dates for your diary

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

Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 22 Septembe 2015

The meeting will be held in M Shed starting at 6.30pm followed by archive film presented by Clive Burlton. Free drinks and nibbles will follow the programme.

Talk – Bristol's Lost Rivers

Saturday 10 October 2015

This is the re-arranged date for this very popular talk by Melvin Wood, a civil engineer with the Environment Agency. He will explain how Bristol has developed around its rivers and how flood risk will be a challenge for the future.

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

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Museum Report

Staff news

We are happy to report two new starters at Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives. David Martin joined us in March to take up the vital role of Operations Manager, and Helen Brown, previously at The Wilson in Cheltenham, will be joining us for a two-day-a-week curatorial post looking after our applied art collection.

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

The Café at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery has been treated to a new look and layout, with one wall dedicated to showcasing work by local artists and photographers, and a new menu.



Work to improve the British Wildlife Gallery is progressing well. Old temporary walls and ceilings have been removed, the space re-painted white, and new conservation-level track lighting installed. The refurbished gallery features a new display about Bristol's own special wildlife.



Bristol Record Office

With the support of the Friends, Bristol Record Office was delighted to be able to purchase the ship's log of the barque

Fantee recently. The volume records the Fantee's return voyage in 1855-6 from Bristol to West Africa, with its cargo of palm oil, camwood (for making red dye) and elephants' teeth. It is a fascinating and rare example of a record related to Bristol's continuing trade with West Africa in the years following the abolition of slavery, and includes accounts of the occasionally unruly and drunken behaviour of the crew. The volume is now publicly available to Record Office visitors.

Collections

We're very grateful to the Friends for their generous support of some major object conservation work for death: the human experience, our Autumn exhibition at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. Thanks to you, conservation is being undertaken by external conservators on a stone coffin from Mangotsfield, two 'payback figures' from Papua New Guinea, an English mourning armband, a mourning coat from Ghana, a masquerade costume from Nigeria, a Bristol-based undertaker's suit, an English mourning dress and cap, a mourning outfit from Ghana, an Iranian shroud cover, and a Native American jacket. All these wonderful objects are part of Bristol's own collections, so the legacy of this conservation work will live on for generations to enjoy.



▲ *Payback figure from Papua New Guinea*

◀ *Loading a stone coffin*

Important grants secured

In April, our Natural Sciences team celebrated being awarded £85,000 over two years by the John Ellerman Foundation, to fund the South West Museums Natural Sciences Project. The project will provide our natural sciences curators, and their South West regional counterparts, with a dedicated programme of training for curatorial skills and professional development, and to share knowledge and skills with the wider South West museums sector.

Also celebrating were the World Cultures team, who secured a £30,000 grant from the Wellcome Trust. The grant is for a Science of Death display, which will feature in death: the human experience, an exhibition opening in October at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, which has been created by our own team using objects from Bristol's collections. The Science of Death element will cover topics such as the diagnosis of death, caring for the dying patient and assisted dying; a subject which will also be considered in a temporary, two month display in the Balcony Gallery, accompanied by a public programme of events and discussions.

Exhibitions and Events

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

William Hogarth: Painter and Printmaker to 31 August 2015

£5 adult, £4 concession,
free to under 16s

Tate Britain is lending its collection of oil paintings by William Hogarth, one of the most important figures in British art, for the most comprehensive show of the artist's work ever in the South West. The exhibition will feature walking tours to uncover Bristol in the 1700s, including St Nicholas Church, home to Hogarth's 28ft altarpiece commissioned for Bristol in 1756.



▲ *The Painter and his Pug*
© Tate

Hockney: A Rake's Progress to 14 June 2015, free

Hogarth's classic morality tale gets a Pop Art makeover by renowned and influential artist David Hockney

Modern Art in Britain: Reality Questioned to 31 August 2015, free

See your favourite 20th century British paintings in a new light. Paintings by artists such as Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, David Bomberg and Eric Ravilious reveal how they experimented with primitivism, illusion, visual puns and abstraction.

New York City Apartment/Bristol to 27 September 2015, free

Commissioned especially for Bristol, Do Ho Suh's New York City Apartment /Bristol will allow visitors to experience the ghost architecture of a soft corridor tailored from fabric, based on the artist's home in New York.

Art Forms in Nature

4 July—13 September 2015

This touring exhibition from the Hayward Gallery, Southbank, is an exquisite display of beautiful photographic images of close-up plants taken in the 1930s. Karl Blossfeldt (1865–1932) was a German photographer celebrated by the Surrealists and early modernists for his pioneering close-up images of plants and flora. Part of Bristol's official European Green Capital programme.

M Shed

Open for Business

Until 21 June 2015, free

Open for Business is the story of contemporary British manufacturing and industry told through the lens of nine internationally renowned documentary photographers.

Bristol industries are captured by Bristol-based photographer Martin Parr, who shot the innovative industries in the city, from Cameron Balloons' 40 year history as the largest manufacture of hot air balloons in the world to the cutting edge engineering at BAE Systems, and the more painstakingly meticulous work of Aardman Animations.

Nature, Camera, Action!

The Secrets of Making Incredible Wildlife Films

**18 July—1 November 2015 Adult: £5, Concession: £4,
Under 16's free**

The deepest oceans, the coldest continents, the most fearsome animals – wildlife film-makers and photographers have faced it all in pursuit of the perfect shot. Explore the challenges they face and the amazing kit they use, in this exciting exhibition for the whole family. Nature, Camera, Action! will be our flagship exhibition in support of European Green Capital.



▲ *Eggcam*
© John
Downer
Productions

Bristol Record Office

Postcards from Bristol

Until 17 July 2015, free

Some of the stories behind the photographs are revealed in celebration of a volunteer project which has mapped the postcards from the Roy Vaughan collections on the innovative website, Know Your Place.

The Treasures of Bristol Central Library

Thursday 5 March 2015

In 1613 Bristol merchant, Robert Redwood, gave his lodge in King Street, for conversion into a library 'for the free use of the merchants and shopkeepers of the city'. In 1738 the old lodge was demolished and a new library building erected on the same site. Although that building remains, it is now a restaurant. The current library on Deanery Road, which dates from 1906, was designed by Charles Holden, who worked for the architect Percy Adams.

The first-floor reading room in the old Kings Street library was recreated as a facsimile on the first floor of the new building; it was named the Bristol Room. Its most eye-catching feature is the elaborate overmantle to the fireplace by the renowned English woodcarver Grinling Gibbons. Other items that were moved into the Bristol Room include the original book presses; the sideboard table which, it is alleged, the King Street library acquired after it had been thrown from a window of the Mansion House in Queen Square during the Bristol riots of 1831; and the 17th century upholstered chair, located next to the fireplace, in which it is said that Judge Jeffreys (who lodged in King Street) sat in 1685 during the Bristol 'Bloody Assize'.

Two groups of Friends were shown around the Bristol Room and the adjoining former City Librarian's Office by the Local Studies Librarian, Jane Bradley. Jane had kindly arranged a display of some of the Library's most famous antique and rare books, such as the 'Corporation Bible', dating back to about 1200. The earliest books were on vellum, but there were also early printed books including a copy of the Coverdale Bible and the Edward VI Prayer Book. We were a bit surprised that we were not required to wear gloves to handle these precious items, but apparently that can cause more damage than just bare (but clean!) hands.

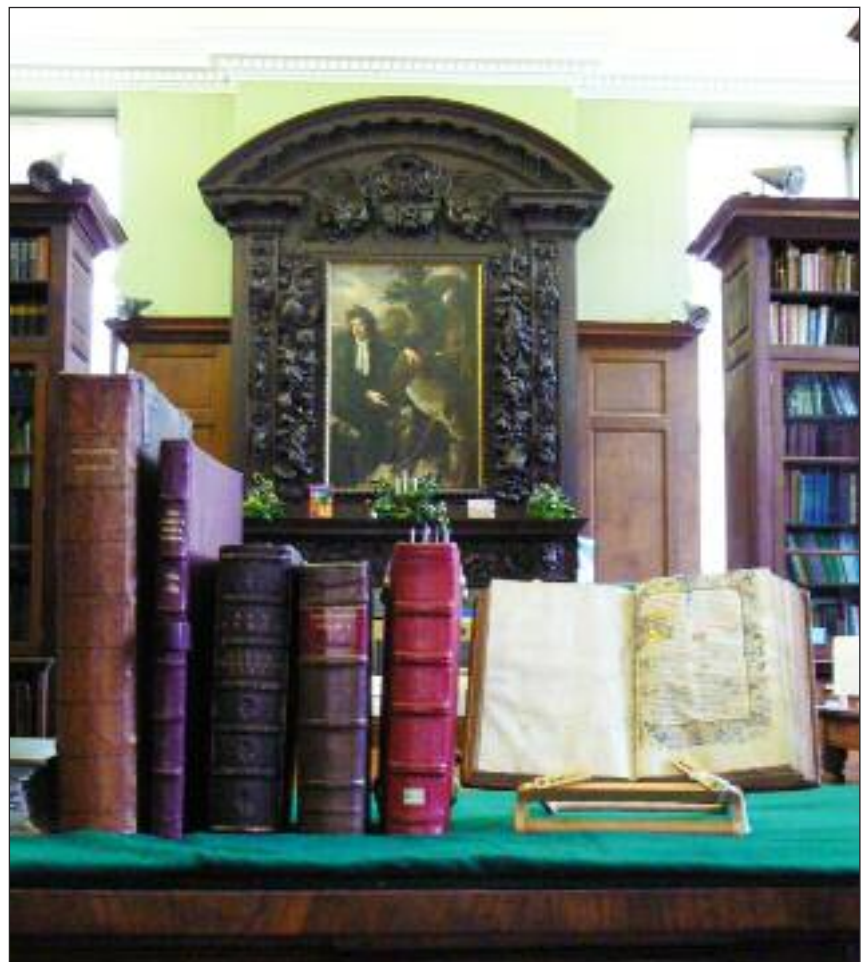
Also on display was a selection of books by, or about, some of the famous poets who lived in Bristol during the 18th and early 19th centuries. It was poignant to see Thomas Chatterton's own pocket note book as well as some original versions of his 'Thomas Rowley' poems. During their early lives in Bristol, the three great romantic poets Robert Lovell, Robert Southey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were close friends, and indeed married three sisters (Mary, Edith and Sarah Flicker). Some first editions of their poetry were on view, as well as an early illustrated copy of the famous, classic children's story, *The Three Bears*, which Southey had written in 1831. Intriguingly, in Southey's original version there is no mention of Goldilocks and the three bears (Huge, Middling and Small) were all males!

Brian Vincent



▲ A drawing by John Constable in the Edith Southey Album

▼ The Bristol Room. The large open book is an early 15th century copy of the Sarum Missal



Photos by kind permission of
Bristol Central Library

Visit to Gloucester

Wednesday 21 January 2015

Museum & Art Gallery

Gloucester Museum is larger than it looks from outside and has a lovely cafe and shop. Some of us were taken by Nigel Taylor-Jones (aka Lucius) from the Civic Trust round the corner to Eastgate, underneath Boots the Chemist, where we saw some impressive remains of the 1st century Roman wall and a horsepool (for washing carts/horses before they entered the town). In the entrance to the museum, Curator David Rice showed us part of one of twelve pillars found in Gloucester and believed to be the largest Roman stone in England. We then saw some of the other exhibits – a 2000 year-old Celtic art mirror dug up at Birdlip Hill with various artefacts including an amber necklace and three skulls, one of which was believed to be a woman. Also on show was a Tables game (an early backgammon set), the oldest complete Tables set in the world, which was probably used in the Royal Court. Half the counters were made of red deer bone and the other half of antler bone. Upstairs there was a collection of local furniture and landscape paintings by Richard Wilson, one of the first artists to deviate from painting portraits. Thanks to David Rice, Nigel Taylor-Jones and Gary Costelow for an interesting day out.

Catherine Dixon

The Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum

This museum is located by the Victoria Dock, part of the City of Gloucester Historic Docks complex. It tells the story of the 'The Glorious Glosters' the regiment which carries more battle honours on its regimental colours than any other British Army regiment. The Glosters were awarded the nickname Glorious (along with 2 VCs and a citation from the US President) after their ferocious stand at the battle of the Imjin River in the Korean War. The origins of the Glosters lie in the founding in 1694 by Colonel John Gibson of the 'Gibson Regiment'. In 1751 this was re-named the 28th Regiment of Foot, before becoming the 28th (North Gloucestershire) Regiment of Foot in 1782. In 1881 the regiment amalgamated with the 61st (South Gloucestershire) Regiment of Foot to form the Gloucestershire Regiment. In 1994 the Glosters were amalgamated into the Royal Gloucester, Wiltshire and Berkshire Regiment. With further cuts to the Army in 2007 this became part of the Rifles Regiment. In addition to the normal badge worn on the front of all soldiers' caps, following a tradition established by the Glosters, the soldiers of the Rifles Regiment uniquely are permitted to wear a badge on the backs of their caps. This is to commemorate the hard-fought Battle of Alexandria, on 21 March 1801, where the Glosters turned the tide, with their fire overcoming the charging French Cavalry. The back-badge depicts an Egyptian sphinx.

The Glosters have strong connections with Bristol. Several battalions of the Gloucester Regiment have been located in Bristol, including 'Bristol's Own', the 12th Battalion of the Glosters, formed of Bristol recruits during the 1914-18 War.

Brian Vincent

Photos by Catherine Dixon



▲ Part of the Roman Wall under Boots the Chemist

▲ The Celtic mirror found at Birdlip Hill



▲ The rear cap badge worn by soldiers in the Glosters

To learn more about the history of the Glosters (also nicknamed the Slashers) and the regimental museum go to:
<http://www.glosters.org/homepage.htm>.
 Read about the battle of Imjin River at:
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/battles/korea/battle.htm>

Herbert Art Gallery and Coventry Cathedral

Monday 20 April 2015

This visit spanned a thousand years of architecture. We started at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum. The Herbert was founded by Sir Alfred Herbert, a Coventry industrialist. It reopened in 2008 after extensive redevelopment and now occupies an imposing modern building, housing an art gallery and a museum.

Recording Britain, a V&A touring exhibition, was a project set up in 1939 asking various artists (including John Piper and Kenneth Rowntree) to paint 'places and buildings of characteristic national interest'. There were 1500 of these as well as photos and paintings/drawings of old Coventry and Warwickshire. My favourite was the drawing *A Six Hour Run from Dartmoor to Exmoor* by Richard Long (1975). It records his walk by tracing a line from an Ordnance Survey Map to show his route (pencil and red crayon on paper). The viewer has to picture this journey themselves.

After lunch we gathered for our Cathedral tour. We learned that Coventry has been a great religious centre for at least 1000 years. The first Cathedral was the early mediaeval Priory Church of St. Mary. We were able to see the remains of the walls which have been exposed many feet below the present ground level indicating that it was a very large building, lying immediately adjacent to the present Cathedral. After this building fell out of use the Church of St. Michael's was built in the 14th century and raised to cathedral status in 1918.

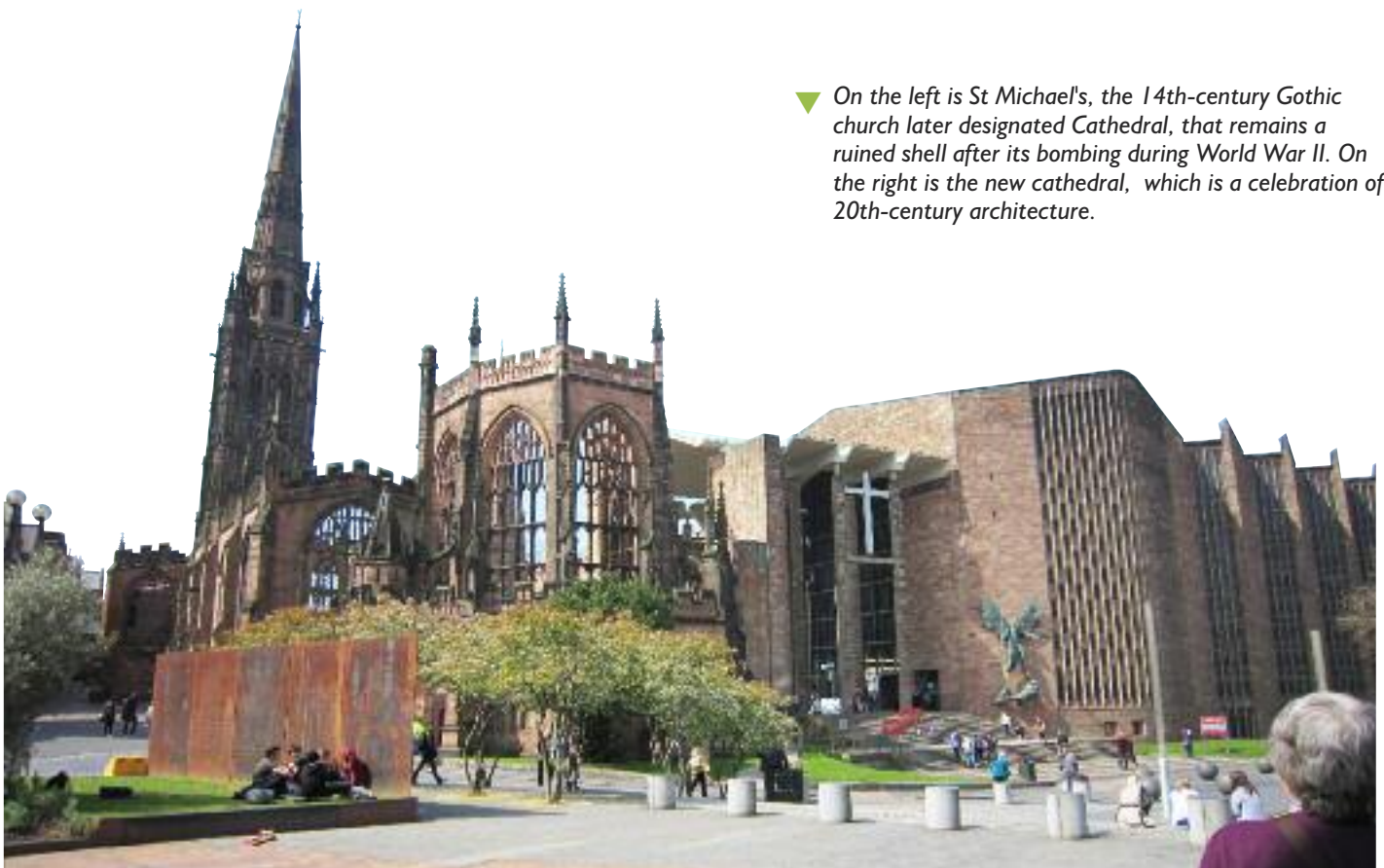
The story of the firebombing of Coventry and the destruction of the Cathedral in November 1940 is well known, but was brought to life by our guide, who described how the construction of the building contributed to its destruction – the flat roofs retaining the incendiary bombs which rained down.

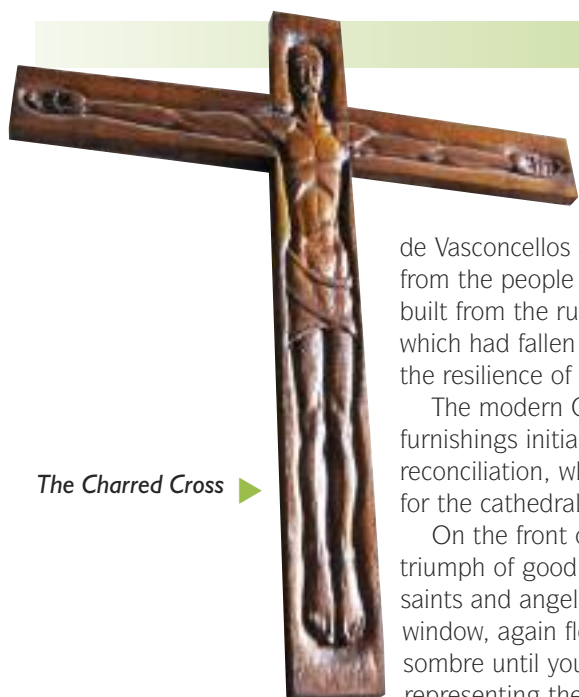


▲ This Jacquard loom stands in the foyer of the Herbert Museum

Photos by Catherine Dixon and Judith Jones

▼ On the left is St Michael's, the 14th-century Gothic church later designated Cathedral, that remains a ruined shell after its bombing during World War II. On the right is the new cathedral, which is a celebration of 20th-century architecture.





The Charred Cross ►

The ruins of the old Cathedral were very atmospheric, and as the tracery of most of the windows remains intact we were able to appreciate the beauty of the architecture. The ruins now house a number of sculptures in varying styles including *Ecce Homo* by Sir Jacob Epstein, *Reconciliation* by Josephina de Vasconcellos and *The Choir of Survivors* statue by Helmut Heinze. This statue was a gift from the people of Dresden to Coventry Cathedral in 2012. Above the altar of reconciliation built from the rubble hangs a replica of the Charred Cross, which was created from beams which had fallen from the roof and landed in the shape of a cross. It makes a moving tribute to the resilience of the people of Coventry and the regeneration which followed.

The modern Cathedral was consecrated in 1962. Sir Basil Spence's design and the internal furnishings initially caused much discussion, but have become a popular symbol of reconciliation, which is the focus of its ministry. Many beautiful works of art have been created for the cathedral.

On the front of the building, the Epstein bronze of *St. Michael and the Devil* depicts the triumph of good over evil. On entering the building the West Screen, etched with images of saints and angels from floor to roof, floods the interior with light. The stained glass Baptistry window, again floor to roof, is particularly impressive. From here, the building seems quite sombre until you progress further towards the high altar, when the ten nave windows, representing the ages of life, are revealed one by one. There were so many things to marvel at, especially the mediaeval Cross of Nails incorporated into a modern high altar cross; the Sutherland Tapestry behind the high altar, which has recently been cleaned; the original Charred Cross, kept inside the Cathedral to prevent deterioration.

There was so much to see that our enthusiastic guides had difficulty in keeping to time, and we hurried onto the coach and sat back gratefully after a day packed with interest. We all missed Wendy, who had organised this visit but was languishing at home with a virus. However, her organisation was perfect, and many thanks to Mary Bailey for taking over the task of shepherding us all to the right place at the right time.

Carol Ouvry and Catherine Dixon

▼ *St Michael's victory over the Devil by Sir Jacob Epstein*



► *The Baptistry Window - designed by John Piper translated into 195 panels of stained glass by Patrick Reyntiens*



The Imperial War Museum

a Personal View

Thursday 29 January 2015

On a fine morning, we enjoyed our drive over Salisbury Plain, into London, along the Embankment, then south across the river. The Imperial War Museum is an impressive sight. Founded at the Crystal Palace in 1917, the Museum has been housed in Lambeth since 1936 in what was previously the Bethlem Royal Hospital (Bedlam). Outside, highly impressive twin 16-inch World War II naval guns seem to defend the old building and brought back to me the powerful memory of reading, as a young man, *The Ship* by C.S Forester. This was the power of the place. The museum presented great world events on an impressive and dramatic scale, but also prompted many very personal memories.

Every adult in the country has, I think, been affected in some way by the two major World Wars. Now that over three-quarters of a century have passed by my own consciousness, I reflect on how the wars have affected me. My father experienced the end of World War I in service, went through the Depression, then tried to achieve happiness again by marrying. My parents brought me into a world which was soon to fall into turmoil. The 20-year period between the ending of the First World War and the beginning of the Second seems to me now to have lasted scarcely a few weeks. My mother died as Hitler was enacting his wartime ambitions for a German 'living room'. Five years of extreme anxiety over the war's outcome was followed by the tension of the Atomic Age and the Cold War.

In the Museum, the old World War I galleries have been refurbished to commemorate momentous world events of the past 100 years. They are impressively re-equipped, and now dramatically show the immersive power of modern large-screen movie displays. The World War II exhibits gave personal recollection of the Morrison shelter that was in my childhood home in Birmingham, and the V1 flying bomb that I witnessed when with my aunt in London. We saw the Lewis Gun that my father was trained to fire, and pictures of General Montgomery, whom I witnessed giving a post-war prize day speech at my school.

The Holocaust exhibition, which once entered is very difficult to leave, recalled again the feelings given by similar museum exhibitions I had seen in Jerusalem and Berlin. It is a sobering thought that the event is now very near to leaving living memory. In the Peace and Security section we saw the casing of a US atomic bomb, similar to that used at Hiroshima. Both Dad and I played small parts in building the British equivalent.

Our coach returned over the river with the sights of central London displayed gloriously in the sunlight. I reflected on the potent mixture of world events and personal memories presented by the museum. I had found this a very affecting day.

Harry Hibberd



▲ A 13-pounder field gun as used by the King's Troop of the Royal Horse Artillery to fire salutes

▼ A Supermarine Spitfire. First introduced into the RAF in 1938, it was powered by a Rolls Royce Merlin engine and had a top speed of 584 km/h and a unit cost of £12,604.



Photos by Hilary Cleeve



▲ The Severn Princess loaded nearly to full capacity. Cars were pivoted on deck using a large turntable and then pushed into place. Passengers stood in the open air.

The Severn Princess Restoration Project

Saturday 11 April 2015

Meeting for this talk on a sunny morning at M Shed, I recalled vague memories of a couple of times in the late 1950s when I had used the old Aust car ferry, taking one of the boats which preceded the *Severn Princess*. The boats used to ply between a jetty near Aust in Gloucestershire and Beachley on the other side of the river Severn, but also in Gloucestershire. The ferry crossing was just over a mile but saved a 60-mile road journey by land. In essence the crossing was the same as that which is now provided by the first Severn Bridge opened in 1966. But the bridge also crossed the river Wye and opened up the road into Wales for all road traffic.

Our speaker Timothy Ryan, Project Manager of the Restoration Group, gave us a sprightly and entertaining talk on the history of the ferry and the project to restore the *Severn Princess*, now that she has been recovered from Ireland.

I do remember the steep approach down the slippery jetty at Aust, the right-angled turn onto the loading ramp of the vessel, and the on-board turntable used to shuttle and pack the cars into its 19 maximum loading capacity. There were many problems with the flow of the river and its extreme tidal range at what is obviously its narrowest point. Most remarkably, at its

peak, just before the bridge opened, the ferry was under huge demand and carried half a million cars in its final year. Timothy entertained us with many spicy stories of what used to happen!

The *Severn Princess* continued to have an eventful life. We saw slides of her state when she was eventually found beached in Connemara. We heard a frightening tale of her tow back around the south-western coast of Ireland and up the estuary to the river Wye, where she now lies. She has reached the status of having her own Wikipedia site and a new actual site for her has been found under Brunel's railway

bridge in Chepstow. We saw a model of her as it is hoped that she will be restored. We hope to visit her again soon.

Our thanks go to Timothy for entertaining us so hugely, and to Mary Bailey and the volunteers for putting on the customary coffee/cake-consuming session in M Shed's marvellous setting.

Harry Hibberd



◀ The Severn Princess on one of her final runs overshadowed by the bridge that replaced her.



Forde Abbey

Wednesday 15 April 2015

Forde Abbey, takes its name from the 12th century Cistercian Abbey which stood here amidst 30,000 acres of farm and park land. The Cistercians acquired farmland by the river Axe and completed Forde Abbey by 1148. The accompanying abbey church took much longer to finish. Like many monasteries, Forde Abbey grew rich over the next 400 years led by some inspired and well-connected abbots, including Abbot Chard, appointed in 1521. Chard comprehensively remodelled the buildings and fabrics of the abbey, including the construction of the Great Hall. Nicholas



▲ The 12th century lawn mower was admired by many visitors!

▼ This sequence of photos shows the dramatic arrival of the spectacular Centenary fountain. It comes on three times a day, spurting to a height of 160 feet. It is the highest powered fountain in England and can be seen for miles around although the house is mostly hidden from view.



Pevsner refers to the splendour of Chard's rebuilt abbey and included it as one of his hundred best buildings in England. However, in 1539, Chard met his match in Thomas Cromwell and was forced to hand the Abbey to the Crown.

The abbey was more or less neglected by a succession of absentee landlords until purchased in 1649 by Edmund Prideaux, MP for Lyme Regis and a fervent parliamentarian who became Oliver Cromwell's attorney general. Prideaux created an Italianate palazzo transforming Forde Abbey into the magnificent private residence it is today. It is suggested that Inigo Jones may have been the appointed architect, but although the new constructions are in his style, there is no real evidence that this was the case. The abbot's lodging became the family's living space; the former lay brothers' quarters were converted into a grand saloon; whilst state apartments were added above Chard's cloisters. The monks' kitchen and refectories were modernised but retained largely intact.

In 1702, Prideaux's daughter married Francis Gwyn (Secretary for War under Queen Anne) and the Gwyn family were largely responsible for the creation of the beautiful gardens we enjoyed. The Roper family took possession in 1905. The current occupants are Alice Roper, her husband Julian Kennard and their three children.

This memorable visit to the magnificent abbey and its beautiful grounds was flawlessly organised by David and Wendy Snelson, and made even more enjoyable by the brilliant weather. We enjoyed wonderful home-cooked food in the admirable café, sitting outside in the sun; we wandered round the grounds which featured a bog garden and a stupendous fountain; many took home souvenir plants from the well-stocked garden shop. On the way home, as an extra treat, we stopped at Monkton Elm Garden Centre for tea.



▲ The bog garden contains a large collection of Primulas, Iris, Meconopsis and Lobelia. Royal ferns, Lysichitum and Gunnera grow in the deep mud beside the winding streams. Beware of gnats!

Brian Vincent

To find out more, visit <http://www.fordeabbey.co.uk/>

Photos by Ann Wood





◀ A carpet of snowdrops. At different times of year there are drifts of cyclamen, hellebores, daffodils, aconites fritillaria and crocus throughout the park and arboretum. There are snowdrop open days at Colesbourne throughout January and February. See their website for details.

▼ These snowdrops are Primrose Warburg. The gardeners grow 250 varieties of snowdrops at Colesbourne.

Snowdrops at Colesbourne Park

Wednesday 25 February 2015

Although it was cloudy, at least it was not raining when we set off for our visit to Colesbourne Park, described by Country Life magazine as 'England's Greatest Snowdrop Garden'. The park was purchased in 1789 by John Elwes, the son of a noted miser. His grandson, H J Elwes, was born and died there. He was a former Scots Guard, whose main interest was ornithology. He travelled widely including a visit to Sikkim in the Himalayas. After he was married, his new wife encouraged his interest in plants and, during a trip to Turkey in 1874, he discovered a large snowdrop which was later named *Elwesii* after him. Following this discovery, his interest grew until he became one of the most prominent galanthophiles (collectors of snowdrops) of his day, planting thousands of snowdrops and other bulbs widely in the park. The present collection, which includes *S Arnott*, a highly scented variety, is due to the interest of Henry and Carolyn Elwes, the present owners.

On our arrival we were served refreshments then given a short talk by Lord Elwes and his head gardener, Christopher Horsefall. They each took a group and we were given a wonderful tour of the snowdrops, swapping guides halfway through. The weather cleared to give blue skies and sunshine and the sight of so many snowdrops was a delight to behold. We learnt how the collection is maintained through propagation, exchanging with other growers and by gifts.

Then it was a short ride to Cheltenham where we were let loose for a few hours. The Wilson Museum proved very popular. Many thanks to David for organising the trip and the weather!

Zena Mussett



To learn more about Colesbourne visit <http://colesbournegardens.org.uk/>

Photos by Patsy Rose

Heritage Motor Museum, Gaydon

Wednesday 12 March 2015

The Heritage Motor Centre at Gaydon Airfield is home to the world's largest collection of British cars. It boasts nearly 300 cars in its collection which cover the classic, vintage and veteran eras and is a mecca for car enthusiasts. The British Motor Industry Heritage Trust was formed to secure and safeguard this collection for the nation. At the end of our visit, we were given a short talk about RAF Gaydon by Jimmy Paterson, who was able to give us a first-hand account of flying from the airfield when it was being used as a base for Victors, Vulcans and Valiants. The Friends had a hugely enjoyable walk down memory lane on this trip. Thanks to Wendy Aldridge-Morris for making the arrangements.

Mirian Pearce and Ian Kerr



▲ The collection contains a huge variety of cars. Some can be hired for events, films or TV shoots



◀ Lady Penelope's pink limousine from the recent Thunderbirds movie. It is a Ford and not a Rolls-Royce as in the original TV series.

Well, I never knew that! A few snippets from the notes of a surprised engineer, aged 75.

- The British mass-manufacturers seem to owe their origins largely to the Wolseley Sheep Shearing Manufacturing Company who branched into cars with a young employee called Austin, who later set up on his own. The Wolseley car company was later taken over by Morris Motors, and the Morris Minor developed from a Wolseley concept car.
- In 1926, the Austin 7 was licensed to the German DIXI-werke, who were taken over by BMW a year later and produced Sevens for several years. The drawings were copied 'opposite-hand' for left-hand-drive, except only for the clutch-brake-accelerator arrangement of the pedals.
- When I was young most cars had worm-drive or re-circulating ball steering which tended to wear and become sloppy, but rack-and-pinion was the preserve of superior models. We saw rack-and-pinion steering on an 1880 tricycle precursor of Rover cars, and on the very first Benz car in Germany (1886). This made its first long trip in the hands of Mrs Benz, with her two sons, and was completed only after a repair involving a hairpin and a garter – that's my kind of woman (with her hair down and her stocking round her ankle in the cause of engineering)!
- I was delighted to see a 1938 black Austin Ruby saloon, just like my first car (DYA892) but could not remember the butterfly/wingnut-type winders to open the rear side windows; however, mine had a sliding sunroof!



▲ They don't make 'em like they used to!

Photos by Bob Birchmore and Leslie Cooper

Hinkley Point B Power Station

Thursday 16 October 2014.

It was a warm autumn day when we visited Hinkley Point B nuclear power station on the Somerset coast. For me it was a sentimental visit as, over half a century ago, I had spent some professional engineering training time on site construction at Hinkley A. Ten years later, working for the designer/constructor, I spent a few months on the boiler design of Hinkley B. I declined an offer of site work there to take a job outside the then flagging British nuclear power industry and I have not returned to it until now, deep into retirement.

Leaving Bristol in our coach we found ourselves reading 'Bristol Nuclear Risk' leaflets that had somehow been left on the coach. Not the introduction we expected! Traffic jams delayed our arrival at the Bridgwater EDF office for an official welcome and introduction from the staff. Our coach then drove past the proposed Hinkley C site; past the decommissioned Magnox plant of Hinkley A; and on to the Hinkley B site office. There we were briefed and kitted out with helmets, glasses and hi-viz clothing.

We went in groups through the turbine hall, up to the control room, then up to the 10th level to see the charging floor where new fuel assemblies are lowered into the reactor. Very clear description boards on the way gave us additional information, and all our guides were very helpful and willing to answer our questions on the operation and rating of the reactors, and upon nuclear fuel management. From the top floors we had splendid views towards the Somerset hills, and out over the Severn Estuary.

We were told that Hinkley B was originally scheduled to shut down in 2016 (40 years after coming on line in 1976) but is now authorised to continue until 2023. So we now witness the last years of the British 'flagship' gas-cooled reactor before the foreign-designed, and more economic, pressurised water-cooled reactor arrives.

Personally, I wish the site well. I hope that the last obstacles are overcome and that they proceed with construction of Hinkley C, strengthening our national supply of base-load power, independent of the wind blowing, the sun shining, or interruptions to the gas flow from the east. I hope that it gives a new burst of technical activity in the area and opens the way for new careers. I also hope that the inflow of value to the area will prompt the local authorities (at very long last) to improve the road infrastructure. I recall similar traffic jams 55 years ago when I used to try to drive my newly-owned old car from the site to my home in Birmingham!

Harry Hibberd

▼ **Hinkley Point
Power Station**



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