

Newsletter

Death: the human experience

Exhibition at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

24 October 2015 – 13 March 2016

At our annual event to thank all our volunteers for their contribution to the work of FBMGA, Lisa Graves (Curator, World Cultures) gave a presentation on the exhibition at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery due to open at the end of October. FBMGA has made a major contribution to this exhibition by providing funds to conserve, mount and present some of the star objects in the display, including a Victorian mourning dress, Papua New Guinea 'payback' figures, a Bristol undertaker's outfit and Nigerian masquerade costume. These particular objects will reveal the different ways human beings relate to and demonstrate their feelings of loss and grief and the social norms that they observe.

'Death: the human experience' tells the story of this universal subject and how it is experienced by different people and cultures across time and throughout the world. Lisa explained that the exhibition had been put together after extensive consultation and research and, as well as raising scientific and ethical questions, will act as a platform for discussion and highlight how people have responded to death creatively, with music, humour, film and literature. Almost 90% of the objects, ranging from coffins to brooches in this object-rich exhibition, are drawn from Bristol Museum's own collections, many of which have not been seen in public for many years. From the colourful rituals of the Day of the Dead in Mexico to the black mourning of the Victoria era in Britain, to mummification and bespoke coffins, the exhibition will highlight objects from the museum's collections of world cultures, natural sciences, social history and art.

The exhibition will be free to enter, offering visitors the choice of paying what they feel it is worth for them.

Mary Bailey



▲ Papua New Guinea 'payback' figures: stylised dolls made of people who were killed; the doll was discarded when the death was avenged



▲ Nigerian masquerade costume, showing how different people mark the death of a member of their society, in this case through masquerades associated with connecting with ancestors

◀ The Victorian mourning dress where black is the colour associated with death in Christian societies



From the Chairman

Fundraising success

In the September newsletter each year I have the pleasure of telling you how much we have raised in the financial year ended 30th June. This year it is just over £19,000, an impressive sum by any standards - all of which will be used to support Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives. A huge amount of dedicated effort goes into raising money on this scale. I am sure that all the members would like to join me in thanking the Programme Committee and their band of helpers for their dedication and creativity in organising and delivering such an impressive calendar of events. From time to time I meet members of museums friends groups from outside Bristol, and they are always amazed when I tell them how extensive our programme is, and how much money we raise.

The 2-day book, cake and drinks sale which we ran at the Harbour Festival in 2014 was a major contributor to this sum, and six weeks ago we were at this year's Festival, raising over £1,300 through selling delicious home-made cakes and second-hand books, all donated by members. This has become my favourite Friends event each year, not because we raise so much money but because I have the opportunity to volunteer alongside everyone manning the sales tables and to chat to festival visitors and members who support us by buying cakes, drinks and books. Andy King and his M Shed volunteers really make us welcome in L Shed, and make sure we have everything we need. And it is a real privilege to be spending the weekend surrounded by the fascinating objects that are stored in that area including the lovely Bristol lorry (apologies to those who find the concept of a lovely lorry strange), the Concorde prototype cockpit, and the 1955 Bailey's caravan, all of which draw in additional visitors.

Annual General Meeting and social event

Our AGM evening – on Tuesday 22 September at M Shed – is a great opportunity for members to get together socially and to enjoy some free entertainment. The formal business is kept to around half an hour.



▲ *Friends, volunteers and staff at the Harbour Festival*
Photo © BMGA

One of the items we have recently funded (jointly with the Cheltenham Science Festival) is a life-size recreation of the skull of the Westbury Pliosaur. In this case 'life-size' is an impressive 6 foot long, and Deb Hutchinson, Geology Curator, will be bringing it along to the AGM for us to see.

Engaging the next generation. . .

The BAFM national conference this year, on the third weekend of October, will be in Cheltenham. This year the theme is 'Engaging the next generation' – a topic that is as relevant to us as it is to other Friends groups around the UK. It is a great opportunity to meet members of friends groups from around the country to share ideas. Because of our group membership, any of our members is welcome to take part. I shall be going, and if you are interested in joining me you can find all the details on the BAFM website.

▼ *The Three Pecketts (see page 5)*
Photo © Chris Ecclestone



More than Tea & Cake

Volunteering in museums today

In June I went to Devonport for the annual conference of the South West Federation of Museums and Art Galleries – the SW Fed. We heard some very inspiring speakers talking about their approaches to volunteering, including some from accredited museums that are entirely volunteer led. As museum budgets tighten, organisations become progressively more creative in the use – and even in the definition – of volunteers. A guest speaker from Luton Museums told us about their concept of Museum Makers, very similar to the Games Makers at the London Olympics. As well as carrying out the more traditional roles the Museum Makers are expected to be vocal advocates for the museums service, and Luton have clearly had a lot of fun making that work. Maybe it is something we should try in Bristol. . .



▲ Ben Garrod, Tone Hitchcock, Isla Gladstone, Deb Hutchinson and the Pliosaurus skull
Photo © BMGA

Digital in the Museum

You will read later in the newsletter a report of Zak Mensah's fascinating talk to us in June. When we think of digital we tend to think of the touch screens in the galleries, and maybe the website, but Zak helped us see how progress in this area had so much potential to benefit both the visitors and the museum. Even those members who feel they 'don't do digital' will find over time that it has become so much part of the landscape that they are using some of it without thinking. For example the new 'What's On' digital signboards at M Shed and the Art Gallery & Museum are an effective way of telling visitors of events and exhibitions on the day they visit without them having to read through a list of events that are not on today.

Sue Thurlow

Photos by Sue Thurlow

Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 22 September 2015 - 6.30pm at M Shed

Enclosed in this newsletter you will find a formal notice of the AGM, a nomination form and a copy of our annual report. The business of the meeting will be kept to a minimum and will be followed by three interesting speakers giving us brief insights into

- Current issues in the museum service
- A model of a dinosaur skull funded by the Friends
- Some archive film footage

Refreshments will be provided as usual.

Do please come along as we like to get feedback from our members and this is an opportunity for you to express your views.

Election of officers

The current officers of Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives are willing to stand again: Sue Thurlow, Chairman; Katherine Martin, Secretary; Nicholas King, Treasurer; and June Hibberd, Membership Secretary.

Election of Executive Committee members

The remaining elected members of the committee are: Keith Borissow, Clive Burlton, Colin Edwards, Gary Gostelow and Brian Vincent. Shirley Hodgson is a co-opted member of the committee. All except Keith Borissow (who is undecided as we go to press) are willing to stand for election. We can fill up to eight places on the committee so additional nominations are very welcome. If you are interested, please complete the nomination form enclosed and return it to the Secretary.

Public consultation at Blaise

Tuesday 8 September, 6 – 8 pm

An opportunity for you to help develop workable plans for the future of the house by discussing what you value about your visits to Blaise.

From the Membership Secretary

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

June Hibberd, Membership Secretary

Mr John Black	Mrs A Fellingham
Mrs Caroline Black	Mrs Angela Watts
Mrs Margaret Chittock	Mr Steve Wood
Mr A Fellingham	

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Museum Report

Service-wide developments

Head of Culture, Laura Pye, has consulted with stakeholders and staff across the service to arrive at a new Vision for Bristol Culture, which can be summed up in four words, Excellent – Inclusive – Resilient – Valued. There is of course a lot more detail behind those words and the next task is to develop the Vision into a cohesive 10 year plan.

Staff news

M Shed's Assistant Duty Officer Justin Searle has left us to take up a more senior role at Bristol Zoo. Sarah Madden has been appointed to the new post of Digital Engagement Officer for the South West Museum Development Programme. Isla Gladstone, Senior Curator Natural Sciences, has left us for a while on maternity leave. Our best wishes go with them all to their new roles.

Sadly the last few months have brought news of the deaths of two colleagues who had only recently retired: Roger Vaughan, Geology Curator, and Andrew Townsend from Bristol and Region Archaeology Services (BARAS). Our thoughts are with their families.

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

The British Wildlife Gallery has now re-opened after refurbishment. False walls & ceilings have been removed and the pianos relocated to store. With new lighting and a fresh coat of white paint, the gallery now feels much more open. We have added a new element focusing on our amazing local wildlife by recycling and reinterpreting the 'Bristol Wildlife' display created for Wildlife Photographer 2013. Planning for phase two is already in progress, with ideas to create a wildlife storytelling glen around the caravan and a number of other ambitions in the pipeline.



▲ *The refurbished Wildlife Gallery*

Photo © Sue Thurlow

In July we received the good news that The Headley Trust, one of the Sainsbury Family Trusts, had agreed to award Bristol Museums Development Trust £25,000 to help refurbish the European Old Masters Gallery at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, thus enabling us to complete the project to bring all five of the fine art galleries up to 21st century standard. Work on this large gallery will commence in January 2016 and it will re-open in late spring.

M Shed

July saw M Shed contributing to another highly successful Harbourside Festival. Fair weather brought out the visitors in droves, which kept M Shed staff and volunteers very busy as these images show.

For inquisitive nature lovers and admirers of natural history filmmaking, the autumn exhibition at M shed is not to be missed. Nature, Camera Action! The secrets of making incredible wildlife films provide a family friendly insight into the skill and patience required to make those wonderful films and the unique cameras and kit the film makers use, including a number of innovations from Bristol film makers. It runs until 1 November.

Bristol Record Office

Staff at Bristol Record Office have now started work on The National Archives funded project to sort and catalogue important photographic archives from the British Empire and Commonwealth Collections (BECC).

International Training Programme

In August, Sue Giles, Senior Curator - World Cultures, welcomed museum professionals from India, China and Egypt as part of the British Museum's International Training Programme 2015 which Bristol Museums has participated in for the last five years.

Bristol Film Office

Bristol Film Office, part of the wider Culture team, has launched its first set of online Bristol Movie Maps, plotting various locations from major TV and film productions that have filmed in Bristol over the years. Productions listed date back to the 1950s and cover a wide range of BCC and private locations across the city. Visit <http://www.filmbristol.co.uk/bristol-movie-maps> to find locations and view film clips.

Acquisitions

With support from the Art Fund, the ACE/V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Friends of Bristol Art Gallery, Kate Newnham, Senior Curator – Visual Arts, has been able to raise enough funds to purchase 11 key works of contemporary Chinese ceramics and glass for Bristol's Eastern Art collection. All of the pieces formed part of the



▲ *Wan Liya's ceramic modern beauty and cleaning products from the 'Ahead of the Curve' exhibition shaped using traditional Chinese methods*

recent 'Ahead of the Curve' touring exhibition, which won much praise and acclaim both locally and nationally.

Following the 'Moved by Conflict' exhibition at M Shed, a generous donor has paid for the repair and conservation of an album of photographs from Christmas 1917 of Bishop's Knoll military hospital.

Working Exhibits

Electric Crane 32 has been fitted with a new rope and once officially certificated its 10 ton capacity will make it a useful supplement to our 3 tons cranes. Crane 30 regularly lifts people on to the roof of M shed, often for weddings. It recently performed for its first same sex marriage where the couple were delivered to rousing applause and to the tune of 'It's raining men'.

Our locomotive *Portbury* continues to be a success at the Living Museum of the North at Beamish and we have just signed for her to stay there until January. Our current visiting locomotives, which run the public train service and offer driving experiences for £10, are *Judy and Teddy*. As with our own loco *Henbury* (currently starting on a major and costly overhaul) these were both built in Bristol by Peckett & Sons. We believe there have not been three Pecketts together in the city since the works finished building them in the late 50s.

Exhibitions and Events

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

Karl Blossfeldt: Art Forms in Nature

Until 13 September 2015

An exquisite display of beautiful photographic images of close-up plants taken in the 1930s.

New York City Apartment/Bristol

Until 27 September 2015

Internationally renowned contemporary artist, Do Ho Suh invites you inside his translucent fabric home. Be immersed.

Erdkunde: The Study of the Earth

19 September 2015 – 3 January 2016

Artists John Wood and Paul Harrison present 'Erdkunde: The Study of the Earth' a new video work inspired by the Museum's geology collections.

M Shed

Nature, Camera, Action! The Secrets of Making Incredible Wildlife Films

18 July—1 November 2015

£5 adult | £4 conc. | Under 16s free

Train ride: Bristol Harbour Railway Train

Sat 12- 13 Sun Sept, Sat 26-Sun 27 Sept, 11pm-5pm

Meet at M Shed

£2 single / £3 return to SS Great Britain

Buy tickets on-board on the day. Trips run every 40 minutes.

Celebrating Age Festival Launch

Sun 27 Sep, 10am-4pm

Catch a fashion show, learn to Zumba, salsa or line dance, take a train ride and browse a range of stalls offering information and advice about getting older, services and health checks. Aimed at the over 55s.

Bristol Record Office

Forward to Freedom

to October 2015

Forward to Freedom explores the fight to end apartheid, across Britain and here in Bristol.

Special Events

Make Sunday Special

Sun 6 Sept, 11am – 4pm

Bristol City Centre

Find us at Make Sunday Special and learn about the latest exhibitions, events and projects from the staff at Bristol Museums and Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre. Handle fascinating objects, quiz our curators and find out what happens behind the scenes with our amazing collections.

Bristol Doors Open Day

Sat 12 Sep, 10am-4pm

A once-a-year chance to look behind closed doors and discover the city's hidden treasures. Explore fascinating buildings, join guided tours and enjoy a range of free events and activities.

The Friends Visit to Orkney

Wednesday 1 July – Wednesday 8 July 2015

Thirty Friends assembled rather sleepily at 5.00am on Wednesday morning in Bristol Airport for our flight to Glasgow. There we changed to a smaller aircraft to fly directly to Kirkwall, arriving at 1.00pm. The staff at the hotel could not have been more accommodating and they made us most welcome. After checking in, our afternoon was free either to rest after our very early start, or to explore the small town of Kirkwall.

Each day over the next week, we explored the isles led by our expert guides from Wildabout Orkney. We saw many aspects of these extraordinary islands including archaeology, wildlife, the huge harbour of Scapa Flow, and learned about the social history of the area. I am most grateful to Pam Roper of Unpackaged Travel who was responsible for organising the eventful and interesting programme which we crammed into the following 8 days.

Gary Costelow



▲ *The harbour at Kirkwall, view from one of the bedroom windows*

Thursday 2 July

...dawned bright and breezy for our visit to the Neolithic 'heart of Orkney' built and in use around 5000 years ago; the monuments are the first to emerge in Britain after the Ice Age, and predate both Stonehenge and Avebury.

Skara Brae village is unique in providing an insight into how Neolithic people lived. The museum houses excellent displays of household finds and there is a replica house. So by the time we reached the outdoor site itself we knew all about the layout of hearth, cistern, dresser and bed cubicles identical in each homestead, all made of sandstone flags – the most readily obtainable local building material – and connected by narrow passages built into the same huge mound of discarded waste. Smelly and dark it must have been but also warm and protected.

Stone Age monuments abound on Orkney. We explored the Ring of Brodgar which stands at one end of a causeway with the Stones of Stenness at the other. Brodgar originally had 60 standing stones of which 27 remain – one was struck by lightning as recently as 1980 – set in an earlier ring ditch cut down into the solid bedrock. The effort needed to do this suggests communal cooperation over many generations. Nesting birds stopped us from going through the middle but a walk around the flanking bank gave us a view of the beautifully-placed stones from all angles and a sense of the awe it must have inspired during its use.

Of the Stones of Stenness only three now stand to full height, not least because the 19th century owner, irritated by the increasing numbers of sightseers, blew several up before being stopped – one stone still has the holes bored for the charge. The original builders carefully chose and placed the tall flat stones: their angled tops match with the hill slopes beyond.

On the Ness of Brodgar, the narrow strip of land between these two circles, lies one of the most exciting excavations of recent years: a huge Neolithic settlement of both domestic and ceremonial buildings providing new discoveries each year. Sadly this year's dig had not yet begun and we saw only the hump under its protective plastic.

Also on our itinerary was Skail House whose owner discovered Skara Brae. We appreciated the sunlit drawing room, the cabinet made with panels from an Armada wreck, the floral painted dinner service of Captain Cook, and the formally



▲ *An inhabitant of Yesnaby*

▼ *Interior of a Skara Brae house showing hearth and stone 'sideboard'*





planted garden. It was an interlude of 18th century elegance.

And we also made a short stop at Yesnaby where there are towering cliffs of the universal sandstone slabs – used as a lookout point in World War II and currently home to a family of puffins. How good can a day get?

Gundula Dorey

◀ *Friends circumambulating the Ring of Brodgar*

Friday 3 July

The dull, rainy weather did not dampen our enjoyment of a guided walk around the town of Kirkwall, the capital of the Orkney archipelago. Our guide explained how the coastline has changed over the years. Part of the town near our hotel now full of shops, take-aways and cafés is built on reclaimed land. One of the old restaurants was once used by press gangs who ambushed young men leaving the pub by dropping a shilling from a top window. When the hapless victim picked up the coin, he was immediately recruited into the navy having involuntarily accepted the King's shilling!

Further along this street we came across an ancient doorway. This we learned to be what little remained of St. Olaf's Kirk which was founded in 1035. The cut sandstone archway was in the heart of old Kirkwall, a short distance from the harbour. 'Kirkwall' is Old Norse for 'Church Bay', so this place may have been the origin of the old town.

After a short film in the visitor centre we followed our guide on a tour of the Cathedral, named after Saint Magnus Eriendsson Earl of Orkney 1108-1117. The Cathedral, distinctive with its sandstone hues of red and yellow, stands high above the Kirkwall landscape. It is believed that mediaeval master stone masons who trained at Durham Cathedral fashioned the external stonework. Romanesque arches line the nave, with stained glass windows one of which, designed in the 1920s, showed St Magnus. A curiosity was an iron ring attached to a wall from around 1651 which was used by Cromwell's troops to tether horses! This Cathedral has the distinction of being the only Cathedral in the British Isles with its own dungeon.

From here our guide took us across the road to visit the Earl's palace built in the early 12th century which was a two-storey hall house. Little of the first floor remains although the ground level is still largely intact. The Earl was not a popular man and so had many gun ports in the palace walls through which he could take pot shots at his enemies! After all the standing and walking on the tour, we repaired to nearby cafés for a well earned rest before our

afternoon visit to the Highland Park whisky distillery. Local peat is used for heating the furnaces which gives the finished product a distinct smoky flavour. At the conclusion we were each given a sample tot plus a small glass to remind us of our visit. The gift shop contained whiskies ranging from around £15 to an eye-watering £11,000.

**Hilary Cleeve and
Gary Gostelow**



▲ *St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall*



▲ *View of the palace front door through the gun port in the Earl's study*



◀ *Barrels of whisky at Highland Park Distillery*

Saturday 4 July

The rain fell as we crossed to Rousay Island (on a ferry built in the Albion Dockyard, Bristol – one of several that connect the 70 Orkney islands). Our tour, led by guide Paddy Macguire, revealed – when the mist rose high enough – a hilly landscape softened by thick vegetation and grazed by sheep and cows, with seals basking on the coast. There are many derelict buildings as hundreds of crofters were evicted in the 19th century, enabling the natural vegetation to take over and a variety of seabirds to nest. With over 100 archaeological sites on this small island, every mound in the landscape is likely to contain an ancient cairn or broch.

We passed the home of a Bristolian 'incomer' whose front garden contains models of a lighthouse, two whale tailfins, a shipwrecked ferry and a shark's fin: clearly keeping our local traditions alive!

At Taversoe Tuick – a rare two-storey structure built 4,500 years ago – we braved a climb down to the claustrophobic bottom level, where a narrow tunnel leads out towards the sea. The upper level entrance is aligned to the winter solstice. As with other cairns, the stonework is impressive, using rounded shapes which have withstood the elements for thousands of years. Beside this cairn, is another, very small tomb in excellent condition, with the bench stone still in place at the entrance. In contrast, nearby Blackhammer Cairn is a long, narrow, ship-like structure divided into sections by upright stone slabs.

Later we visited a mile stretch of coast where the archaeological sites span 5,000 years of human history. The oldest of these is Midhowe Cairn, discovered in the 1930s. It is a massive mound of stone with a central corridor containing stone stalls. Next to this is the largest Broch (fortified house) we saw, built 4,500 years ago as a two-storey dwelling with cellar. The double walls have stairs between them and the centre space is divided into two by giant sheets of stone. Both parts contain the central hearth, box beds, cupboards, millstones and water sinks we saw at Skara Brae, but on a bigger scale.

It was then time to head back for the return ferry.

Eileen Elsey



▲ Exploring the lower level of Taversoe Tuick



◀ Interior of Midhowe Cairn showing the stone stalls

Sunday 5 July

We began this much brighter, sunnier day visiting the site of the Ness Battery near Stromness. Orkney was the main base for the Royal Navy's Fleet in both World Wars. The Ness Battery was a crucial part of the defences of Hoy Sound, the western approach to Scapa Flow. The original battery was dismantled in the 1920s then rebuilt at the start of World War II. There were six batteries in all each with turrets housing two 6-inch guns as well as anti-aircraft guns all controlled by a single Fire Command. We saw the gun emplacements, the old Mess Hall (the walls painted in trompe l'oeil by A R Woods to resemble a country cottage) and accommodation blocks which were occupied by Army, RAF, WRNS and Royal Marines who operated the guns during the Second World War.

We walked along the coast road to Stromness, an attractive, busy port from where the Greenland whalers and Hudson Bay Company trading ships set sail. Many Orcadians joined these fleets, as evidenced by documents held in the small but fascinating museum, which also includes much information about a famous Orcadian, the Arctic explorer Sir John Rae. In its heyday Stromness had 40 pubs, 2 breweries, and a distillery which flourished until the 1920s when prohibition was declared. It also supplied the Royal Navy with fresh water. Sadly the Pier Arts Centre was closed though we did visit later in the week.

Brenda Thomas



▲ Ness Battery Mess Hall servery showing the elaborate trompe l'oeil country scene



◀ The Churchill Barriers were made from 66,000 locally cast 5- and 10-ton concrete blocks

Monday 6 July

This sunny, windy day was dedicated to the history of Orkney in the first and second world wars. Our first visit was to the former Royal Navy base at Lyness, on the island of Hoy, just a few yards from the ferry terminal which was our landing place. Scapa Flow provided an enormous sheltered anchorage (125 square miles) from which the Royal Navy sought to control the North Sea and North Atlantic. At the end of World War I, the German Fleet was interned in Scapa Flow whilst decisions were made about its future. The German commander, Admiral Ludwig von Reuter, decided to scuttle the fleet on 21 June 1919. Intervening British Guard ships were able to beach a number of the ships but 52 of the 74 interned vessels sank. Many of the wrecks were salvaged over the next two decades while the remainder are popular diving areas.

World War II saw the Home Fleet based at what was considered a secure base in Scapa Flow. However, strong currents had shifted block ships guarding the entrances to Scapa Flow and on 13 October U-47, commanded by Captain Günther Prien, managed to pass between Orkney Mainland and the island of Lamb Holm and torpedo *HMS Royal Oak*. Out of a crew of 1400, 833 lives were lost; to this day a green marker buoy shows the position of the *HMS Royal Oak*, and the site is marked each year with memorial services. This event also had other consequences, the two most obvious are the Churchill Barriers and the Italian Chapel.

The Barriers were causeways that filled in some of the channels into Scapa Flow. The idea of Winston Churchill, the Barriers made the anchorage much more secure. The Barriers were built by Italian prisoners of war. The POWs were not happy at building the Barriers, as they classed it as 'war work', but were persuaded that the barriers were to provide easy access to the islands for the local inhabitants. The POWs then showed how resourceful they were by turning two Nissan huts into the beautiful Italian Chapel on Lamb Holm. Among the prisoners of Hut 60, was a very talented artist, Domenico Chiocchetti, who had already made a statue of St. George from barbed wire and concrete. He decorated the Chapel and later helped restore it.

On leaving the Chapel we walked the short distance to the Orkney Wine Company, where we were shown the various stages of production of their fruit liqueurs. This Dutch family have chosen to build their business on Lamb Holm, and hope to give more employment to the local people. Sampling their produce was a very welcome end to an interesting day.

Ruth Welch



▲ Lyness Naval Museum at Scapa Flow



▲ A searchlight – part of the air defences round Scapa Flow that in 1944 included barrage balloons, AA guns and several air fields



◀ Trompe l'oeil decorations

▼ Exterior of the Italian Chapel



◀ Interior of the Italian Chapel



Tuesday 7 July

The rain returned for our last excursion to Maes Howe tomb, which is part of the Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site. We had to bend double to negotiate the 10m-long entrance passage to reach the interior of this marvel of Neolithic engineering. Its square shape is created by large stone slabs weighing up to 30 tons, similar to those at Stenness, which were then carefully packed with smaller stones so that they were perfectly horizontal. Further up they begin to come inwards in a precise corbel arrangement – which probably continued into the original roof. Three large chambers leading off would have held venerated bones. In addition the entrance passage is precisely aligned on the winter solstice. All kinds of meaning here! Even the Northmen who broke in to the tomb 4000 years later must have wondered, leaving no more than a few boastful graffiti which have gained their own notoriety.

Leaving Maes Howe, we had a short coach ride to Corrigan Farm museum, a typical Orkney 'but and ben' farmhouse dating from the 19th century. The curator showed us how cooking was achieved over an open fire with all the smells of salted fish and livestock around. We were able to pick up and touch many of the household and farming implements on show.

After an excellent (pre-ordered) lunch at the Smithfield Hotel in the village of Dounby we went to the Gurness Broch. In essence it was very similar to Midhowe but with a village attached. It had been found by pure chance by a picnic party. A leg of a stool had pierced the ground on top of the Broch. Then to the Brough of Birsay, a Viking stronghold, before a second and very short return visit to Stromness and the Pier Arts Centre which had been closed on Sunday to the disappointment of many Friends.

The Pier Arts Centre has an excellent permanent collection featuring many of the St Ives' artists (including Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson and Patrick Heron), as well as a selection of local artists and national touring exhibitions. Hepworth's work included sketches in the development of the 'Orpheus' sculpture and the resulting maquette, and other pieces in a variety of media. The touring exhibitions during our visit were Edmund de Waal and Damien Hirst.

Our ultimate stop was to see a short film detailing an Orkney saga at Earls Bu. It is also the site of a highly unusual circular church and huge drinking hall. We then headed back to our hotel for a well-deserved rest before dinner. It had been another excellent and very full day to round off this wonderful trip.

Gundula Dorey, Eileen Elsey, Gary Gostelow



▲ Farmhouse interior at Corrigan Farm museum



▲ Entrance to Maes Howe tomb



◀ Curved Form by Barbara Hepworth at the Pier Arts Centre

Photos for the Orkney trip were by Martin Bailey, Gundula Dorey, Eileen Elsey, Elly Chapman, Ann Wood



Gilbert White's House

▲ *Gilbert White's House*
Photo by Elly Chapman

Sunday 31 May 2015

After enjoying a most welcome Sunday lunch at The Queen at Selborne - and thanks to Keith for organising it - we crossed the High Street to The Wakes, the home of the Gilbert White Museum and the Oates Collection. Here our guide gave us a short history of Gilbert White and his importance regarding the natural world. In this historic house the author of *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne* lived, observing the world around him and the effect the seasons have on nature.

White was born in Selborne on 18 July 1720 and died at The Wakes on the 26 June 1793. Educated at Basingstoke, then Oriel College Oxford, and later following his grandfather and uncle into the Church, White had a distinguished career as a Fellow of Oriel. He was ordained a deacon and after some years became a curate of Selborne parish. A very keen gardener, White experimented with growing fruit and vegetables - for instance he was the first person in the area to grow potatoes. He recorded notes in his pocket book about temperature, weather conditions, even different bird songs and many of these details were eventually collated and recorded for his *Garden Kalendar*.

This interesting house is set in 30 acres of ancient parkland but with limited time we could only enjoy a taste of it which was a great pity. It had some really quirky features, many designed by Gilbert White including a wine-pipe seat, a cut-out statue of Hercules (he could not afford a proper stone statue), and two hahas. The original layout of the garden has been recreated by studying the old journals, correspondence and household account books of the time - a really ambitious and time-consuming project but a stunning result.

The ground floor consists of the library with a magnificent garden view, the Tea Parlour - which was most welcome and the ubiquitous Gift Shop. The first floor accommodates the Oates Galleries and Gilbert White's bedchamber, study and meeting room. The Oates Collection comprises documents, photography, artefacts, some displayed for the first time, from the famous South Pole Expedition of 1912. This fascinating exhibition is dedicated to Captain Lawrence Oates who accompanied Captain Scott on that historic expedition but lost his life. Some of our party felt really cold studying the photographs and were more than happy to warm up in the tea room! We came away from our visit understanding why Gilbert White has earned the reputation of being 'the first ecologist' - a most apt description.

Hilary Cleeve



▲ *Effigy of Gilbert White*
Photo by Hilary Cleeve

William Hogarth: Painter & Printmaker

Saturday 16 May 2015

Dr Jenny Gaschke, Curator of Fine Art, described William Hogarth as one of the best known English artists – namely for his satirical prints of English society. Indeed, many cartoonists have drawn inspiration from his works. He spun a story among the characters in a print and often gave a moral message within a series of prints. In addition to being a talented engraver, Hogarth was an accomplished painter and Bristol Museum & Art Gallery (BMAG) is fortunate to be able to display Tate Britain's collection of Hogarth's oil paintings until the end of the summer.

Jenny told the history of the Ascension high altar triptych, which Hogarth was commissioned to paint for St. Mary Redcliffe Church in 1755. He was paid £525, which is roughly equivalent to £100,000 in 2014. The altarpiece was painted in London and framed in Bristol. The work was so big that the side wings had to be placed at an angle. Later, the three canvases were rolled up and stored in a box. In 1950, the altarpiece was given to BMAG and displayed in the rear gallery. It then was moved to St Nicholas Church, which at the time was an ecclesiastical museum and part of BMAG. The building is still rented by Bristol City Council (housing Bristol and Regional Archaeological Services) and the altarpiece remains there. It is one of the best examples of Baroque art.

Hogarth painted many portraits. One, at the entrance of the current exhibition, is a self-portrait. In it, he is dressed informally and included symbols depicting literature, poetry, nature, and art – could he be communicating that, in his opinion, all were equally important? Another is a painting of heads of six of his servants. The painting tells us he was affluent enough to have servants but may also be an advertisement to potential buyers that he could capture the personality of his subjects. Hogarth's, Roast Beef of Old England shows a scene in Calais that he painted after he visited pre-revolution Paris. It again illustrates his ability to tell a story; it is full of icons, including a hand about to grab the shoulder of Hogarth as he was busily sketching. He was arrested for spying, rather like someone today taking photographs at a foreign airfield.

Having attended the opening, I recommend you check out the exhibitions – you will not be disappointed. Thank you, Jenny, for a most interesting and illustrative talk.

Marion Reid



▲ *Portrait of Edwin Sandys, a botanist, 1741*

Photo © BMGA

▼ *First image in A Rake's Progress – 1735 – as Tom Rakewell starts to spend his inheritance*

Photo © BMGA



▲ *A visitor admires the 'Heads of Six of Hogarth's Servants'*

Photo © Ollie Merchant

St James Priory, Bristol

Monday 8 June 2015

In a fascinating lecture Rob Harding, who has been involved in the redevelopment project, told how the Priory was built by Robert Earl of Gloucester in about 1129, making it the oldest still-used building in Bristol. Robert, who was also rebuilding Bristol Castle, was an illegitimate son of Henry I. The earliest building was probably a chapel to the Virgin Mary, then a church for the monks, and subsequently parish church for the area. It is now a beautiful Norman building overlaid with Georgian and Victorian additions.

In the Middle Ages, the church held lands towards Horfield not to mention its own Broad Meadow (later Broadmead). It also derived income from St James' Fair, an annual trade fair, of which there is a painting by Samuel Colman in the Museum, and from a levy on wine imported into the port of Bristol during the week of the fair.

At the Dissolution of the Monasteries the monks' church was destroyed and an entrepreneur, Henry Brayne, built a house in the cloisters, part of which became Church House. His heir Charles Somerset had to share the house with another heir, George Winter, so they divided it in two. We were fortunate to be allowed in the house which is not open to the public. Charles Somerset has a rather splendid tomb showing him with his wife and daughter in full Tudor dress. The extension of the North aisle in 1864 caused quite a row involving no less a person than George Gilbert Scott.

The church is now run by a Catholic organisation called the St James Priory Project and one of their main purposes, similar to that of the original monks, is to care for the poor and the sick. The beneficiaries of care in two adjoining houses are the homeless and those suffering from substance abuse. We are very grateful to Carol Ouvry for organising the visit and to Rob for his lecture.

Robert Walters



▲ *St James Priory interior*

The Priory has an excellent website and Google Images has lots of pictures including that of the tomb. To see more visit www.stjamesprioryproject.org.uk/history.

▼ *Tomb of Charles Somerset*



▲ *One of many interesting, unusual, amusing and/or scary corbels found here*

Photos by Judith Jones and Martin Bailey

Bruton and Hauser and Wirth

Wednesday 17 June

We do try to organise shorter as well as longer day visits when we can. This trip let us do so – pick-ups a little later than sometimes; Nailsea joining last not first; and a relatively short journey. This also means members joining at Nailsea were the first to be back.

Demand meant an over-sized coach and still some on the waiting list. Bruton's history was presented to us by local historian John Bishton through the story of St Mary the Virgin's church and its development over the centuries. He also introduced the Master of Sexey's Hospital who showed us how a traditional almshouse, while still housing elderly residents, has evolved into a modern grant-making charity, and showed us around the chapel and public rooms.

We moved on to Hauser and Wirth Somerset. This modern art gallery, regularly changing exhibitions, Piet Oudulf designed perennial garden, restored farm buildings and restaurant has made Bruton one of the most visited and lauded towns in Somerset since it opened in 2014. It has become a destination in its own right and breathed new life into the Bruton area.

Keith Borissow



▲ Sexey's Hospital showing the oldest part of the quadrangle 1638. Hugh Sexey had died in 1619 and the Trustees built a 'hospitium' to house the poor - it continues today as a charitable institution to house 25 residents with a Bruton connection

Photo by Judith Jones

Knowle West Media Centre

Thursday 19 February 2015

The rain could not spoil our enlivening visit to Knowle West Media Centre. Established in 1996, the centre moved to the present site in 2008. Both the building and the activities within were impressive. It was the first double-storey straw bale building in the South West – a cutting edge construction at the time – and still stays environmentally current with a solar roof, storage batteries and rainwater harvesting. The building is well insulated against cold and noise by straw bales strengthened with metal rods and faced with lime render. Local young people worked with the architects through the planning and design stages.

Knowle West is the most deprived area in Bristol, and the Centre aims to produce positive social change through numerous educational, training and employment projects. Music production and performance are very popular. The Centre has its own recording studio and record label, so young people can learn the intricacies of production and marketing as well as making music.

We saw Photographic Exhibitions, Digital Storytelling and a Junior Digital Producer Programme, with participants learning to shoot, edit and lay soundtrack. Most intriguing was the Memory Chest, which was contained in a wooden chest of drawers designed by Laura Kriefman of the Pervasive Media Studios. Each drawer held a local memory captured by images, sound, smell and memorabilia. One drawer contained a miniature cinema, with a film showing on the screen, rows of seats, and the smell of chocolate! The chest has been 'on tour', telling young people more about their area and helping people with dementia recover memories.

One current project is a pop-up furniture factory training local people to make and renovate tables and chairs for a new business park. It brings together the guiding principles of the KWMC – ecologically sustainable design and production involving local people, enabling them to develop skills and self-confidence. Many thanks to Carol Ouvry for organising this fascinating trip.

Eileen Elsey



▲ The Memory Chest

Picture courtesy of Knowle West Media Centre

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

Frampton Court

Thursday 4 and Wednesday 10 June 2015

What better place to be on a glorious summer's afternoon than Frampton Court Estate? After being greeted in the Manor farmyard, we proceeded across Rosamund's Green to Frampton Court, which is also owned by the Clifford family. The central part of the house had the pleasing symmetry typical of the Palladian style but the side wings and their tall bell towers jarred somehow, despite being built at the same time in the 1730s.

Once inside, there was a welcome invitation to take a seat while our engaging guides, Jean and David Speed, related highlights of the family history and the house. Some points of interest were: the Norman origins of the family in Frampton with Drogo Fitz Pons; Jane Clifford, reputedly the mistress of Henry II and known as 'Fair Rosamund'; the Bristol connections of Richard Clutterbuck, the builder of the Court, who was Head of the Custom House here; and the original watercolour plates of the Frampton Flora. The business acumen of the family was evidenced in the gravel extraction leases of Hilda, widowed in World War I, and also in the current scheme of using the Court as a B and B, and letting the Orangery for holidays.

After a look at a few of the rooms in the Court, we strolled through trees to visit the Orangery, a delightful 'Strawberry Hill Gothic' confection at the head of an ornamental canal.

The grand finale to the day was tea/coffee and generous helpings of cake back at the Wool Barn. All too soon, there was no cake left, the hay had been mown and Rosamund's Green was no longer an entrancing, flowery mead. It was time to go home. Many thanks are due to Valerie Andrews for arranging such a delightful day out and organising an additional date once the high level of interest became apparent.

Sue Pettit



▲ The Orangery at Frampton Court



▲ A new friend welcoming us to the farmyard

◀ The Wool Barn

Photos by Judith Jones

Digital Technology at BMGA

Saturday 27 June 2015

Zak Mensah, who became the new Head of Transformation at the beginning of 2015, explained how he now leads work to increase use of digital technology to improve the museum service, the art gallery and the archives.

Transformation involves initiating and implementing changes in digital technology to meet the interests and needs of both the general public and the staff teams. The public interest involves helping visitors, and also attracting and welcoming those who have not previously been tempted – especially the younger generation. For the 230 staff members, digital technology provides improved communication and opportunities to coordinate work between teams. A new web-site (www.bristolmuseums.org.uk) gives potential visitors an easy 'What's On' view, including 'when and where' information and may reduce telephone enquiries. Visitors arriving at the museum are greeted by 'What's On' displays and can seek more personal guidance at the enquiry desks.

The museum website includes the facility to search the collections, find job and volunteer vacancies or investigate hiring for a special event. Within the galleries, it is intended to increase provision of digital displays or keyboards, so that visitors can explore timelines and background information to illuminate the contexts of the exhibits, and also to extend provision for speaker units to assist visitors with sight problems. A recent visit to the Egyptian gallery gave a preview of what may be provided throughout the galleries.

As the available digital technologies develop they provide new opportunities but each new product complicates the decisions which have to be made – whether and how it might be employed to develop the effectiveness of the museum service.

Members of the Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives may be well placed to provide feedback to Zak and his team on the effectiveness of changes from the visitors' perspective, and perhaps suggest places where changes might be of benefit.

Roy Taylor



▲ Gallery steward Andy Pendrick using his iPad to bring up images of more works by Do Ho Suh, whose specially-commissioned piece *New York City Apartment/Bristol* is on display at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery.



▶ Tracy MacNeil using the new state-of-the-art till in the shop at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. Modern cash tills collect data and provide the basis for better stock control.

Photos by Mary Bailey

**FRIENDS
OF BRISTOL
MUSEUMS
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ARCHIVES**

**Bristol Museum &
Art Gallery,
Queen's Road,
Bristol,
BS8 1RL**

Tel: 0117 922 3571

bristolmuseums@bristol.gov.uk
www.bristolmuseums.org.uk

FBMGA committee

Patrons

Sir George White Bt
Max Hebditch CBE

Chairman

Sue Thurlow
07836 693589
suethurlow@waitrose.com

Secretary

Katherine Martin
0117 929 2350

Treasurer

Nicholas King
0117 962 3441

Membership Secretary

June Hibberd
0117 962 4872

FBMGA website manager

Brian Vincent
0117 962 1714
brianvincenthorne@aol.com

Members:

Keith Borissow
0117 973 8225
Clive Burlton
01934 832113
Colin Edwards
01275 460411
Gary Gostelow
0117 971 1323

Co-opted Member

Shirley Hodgson
0117 962 4771

Programme Committee

Chairman
Mary Bailey
0117 942 1944

FBMGA website

www.friendsofbmga.org.uk

Newsletter edited by Tim and Ann Wood

tim-wood@blueyonder.co.uk

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