

Newsletter

Underfall Boatyard

Thursday 17 September 2015

Many of you will have driven over the Cumberland Basin viaduct, glimpsed a tall chimney and wondered what was hidden in the shadow of the A-Bond warehouse. In the heart of Bristol, tucked away by the swing-bridge on Merchants' Road is a unique Victorian survival. For over 200 years the Underfall Yard was the operations centre of the docks, containing the dock sluices, the pump house and hydraulic lock systems, a slipway, and a complex of buildings currently housing the Harbour Master's office and several boat-related workshops.

Most of the area is now in the care of the Underfall Yard Trust. The aim of the Trust is to restore, conserve and display historic buildings and machinery; and to create additional maritime workshops and office spaces. It also runs a visitor centre dedicated to explaining the workings of the Bristol docks system.

We met our guide at the Harbour Office and were first shown the 4 underfall sluices which control the level of water in the floating harbour and the discharge of silt from the harbour to the river Avon as it flows through to the New Cut. The Yard gets its name from these sluices. This historic installation dates back to the 1830s and is associated with both Jessop and Brunel himself. The adjacent buildings are being restored both internally and externally and will contain machinery to create a Victorian workshop - with some working machines to illustrate the original operations.

Further round we passed the quayside workshops being leased to commercial builders - an activity which it is intended to continue within the Trust. Adjacent is the historic slipway restored and fully operational with new machinery to pull the sloping cradle out of the water. Some years ago I helped to scrape the steam tug *Mayflower's* bottom as she rested in this cradle.

Further round is the pump house together with its chimney which used to discharge smoke from coal-fired boilers, long since gone and replaced with electric pumps. These pumps used to supply pressure to the harbour hydraulic system powering not only the dock gates but also cranes and machinery right around the dockside.

Finally we saw the area near the dock cottages. It is planned to readjust this area to fill in the gap in the circular path around the docks so that we will all be able to use it a main recreational footpath for our enjoyment of the Bristol Docks.

Harry Hibberd

*Traditional boat building skills are kept
alive and well in the Underfall Yard*

Photo by Carol Ouvry



▲ Aerial view of Underfall Yard.
© Underfall Trust



From the Chairman

Annual General Meeting

Our AGM in September at M Shed was agreed by all there to be particularly successful. We completed the formal business in less than half an hour and the rest of the evening was given over to entertainment and socialising. Ray Barnett, standing in for Laura Pye, spoke about the bigger picture for the Museums Service, and Debs Hutchinson, Geology Curator, talked enthusiastically about the very impressive life-size replica piosaur skull we recently funded, and which she brought with her for us to see. We finished off with some interesting archive films shown by City Archivist Julian Warren and light refreshments.

To charge or not to charge. . .

When Ray spoke at the AGM, he explained museum policy on charging for exhibitions. For touring exhibitions created outside Bristol, for example *Wildlife Photographer of the Year*, there is an entry charge to cover at least part of the costs, although there will continue to be one free day a month to ensure that nobody is excluded because they cannot afford to pay. For major exhibitions created in-house, using primarily the museum's own collections – for example *death: the human experience* – there is no entry charge, but an invitation to visitors as they leave to make a donation equivalent to what they feel the exhibition was worth to them.

Exhibition: *death, the human experience*

About a year ago I accepted the museum's invitation to be one of a group of community partners providing input to the creation of the exhibition *death: the human experience* now on at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. I found it fascinating to get more of an insight into how an exhibition is planned and put together, and met some interesting people at the same time. One of our members, Mina Malpass, was representing the University of the 3rd Age, and with her permission we have printed her insightful piece written for the U3A newsletter.

Engaging the next generation ... the BAFM Annual Conference

Mary Bailey and I enjoyed our visit to the British Association of Friends of Museums national conference in Cheltenham. The theme of 'Engaging the next generation' is very relevant for Friends groups around the country, including us. The thought-provoking speakers ranged from an internationally known curator from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to an engagement officer from Tunbridge Wells at the start of her career who spoke about her project working with young people to help them understand the art of the self-portrait and to create their own with the help of a professional photographer.



▲ Sue Thurlow collects the Newsletter Award at the BAFM Annual Conference

Photo © BMGA

Our Award-winning Newsletter

I am delighted to report that our fantastic newsletter was runner up in our class in the national newsletter awards announced at the BAFM conference. Huge congratulations to our wonderful newsletter editors Tim and Ann Wood.

Congratulations too to Friends of Bristol Art Gallery who won first prize.

The Museum Report is a key feature of the Newsletter, and for the last couple of years the content for that has been collected from across the Service by Deborah Sale. Deborah has now left Bristol to work closer to home, and I would like to thank her for making sure you can read all the relevant news from the museum, and for being a pleasure to work with.

Donation in memory of Roger Vaughan

In the September newsletter you saw news of the sad death of Roger Vaughan, who retired as Geology Curator less than 2 years ago. We are grateful to Roger's family who very kindly requested his friends and ex-colleagues to make donations in lieu of flowers, and as a result have given us over £200 to add to the funds we use for the benefit of the museums service.

Blaise House consultation

In early September I took part in the start of a public consultation about the future of Blaise House, as advertised in our September newsletter. There were about 50 participants, and the overall sense was very positive and collaborative – but it remains the case that there are many groups and individuals who have a passionate interest in Blaise and hold a wide variety of views as to how its future should be shaped. Consultations continue, and if you would like to take part, or just be kept up-to-date, please email catherine.littlejohns@bristol.gov.uk, or ask the staff when you next visit the house.

Christmas Fair

This year's Christmas Fair is as BMAG on Sunday 6th December. It is a very sociable affair and great opportunity to meet other Friends as well as top up your Christmas Shopping. I hope to see you there.

◀ **Crowds enjoying the 2014 Christmas Fair**

Photo by Sue Thurlow



Death: The Human Experience - exhibition at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

We all love the planning and anticipation of a birth; celebrating a new life, full of hope and expectation, but we tend to shy away from thinking about death, even though these two things are as inevitable as each other, and part of the natural order of things.

Along with one or two other people, over the last year I have been representing U3A in a consultation exercise with Bristol museum curators around the planning of their next exhibition - *death: the human experience*. It has been fascinating to be made to think about how different people in other cultures or at other times have chosen to make death a more natural part of their lives and communities, (which in turn leads one to think about one's own expectations and emotions.)

This exhibition comes at a time when there is a current public debate about aspects of death and dying which is very relevant to government policy and medical ethics. Although we might think that death and dying is of more concern to those of us in our Third Age, it actually impacts on all ages, and the museum is giving us an interesting opportunity to look at death and dying through a new lens.

As well as the more conventional displaying of many interesting artefacts from the museum archives, the exhibition aims to provide quiet space for contemplation and the opportunity to leave a record of how you felt about issues raised.

Mina Malpass

Dates for your diary

Here are some events to whet your appetite for the next quarter.

V & A Museum – Botticelli re-imagined

Friday 15 April 2016

This will be the follow up to an illustrated talk to be given by Jenny Gaschke at M Shed to put the exhibition into context.

Torre Abbey

Thursday 26 May 2016

Torre Abbey is probably one of the best venues in the country to tell the story of 800 years of Catholicism. Remains of the old abbey still exist plus a small but interesting garden. It has been greatly improved recently due to a substantial grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The application form for these events will be with the next newsletter.

From the Membership Secretary

Subscriptions for 2016 are due on 1st January! This is not my favourite time of year so please try and make it easier by ensuring your standing order is increased to the new amount (£32 or £22). If you are a cheque payer you will find a form for renewal in this newsletter. Membership cards will be sent with the March newsletter to those who have paid. Cheques should be made payable to Friends of BMGA but a stamped addressed envelope is not needed this time.

We welcome to the Friends the following members who have joined since the last newsletter:

June Hibberd, Membership Secretary

Mr Simon Bilsborough
Miss Julia Coulthard
Mr Ken Cruickshank
Mrs Geraldine Cruickshank

Ms Susan Holder
Ms Susan Rooke-Matthews
Mr Jonathon Seagrave
Mr Anthony White

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

In September, Visit England released their annual survey of visitor attractions, and Bristol Culture was thrilled to be recognised as the Number 1 most visited free attraction in the South West, and 13th most visited in the country.

Staff news

Helen Lewis has been appointed as the new Retail Manager, having been acting in the role for nearly a year. Mark Pajak has been promoted from Documentation Officer to Digital Manager moving from Collections & Archives to the Transformation team. Frances Coles, previously at the Science Museum, has joined us as Conservation & Documentation Manager within the Collections & Archives team. Darren Roberts is our new User Researcher, who will be working with Fay Curtis to better understand our audiences and inform our decision making. Chris Ecclestone has been formally appointed as Operations Manager – Working Exhibits; he will continue to look after the hugely popular trains, cranes and boats based at M Shed.

Isla Gladstone, Senior Curator Natural Sciences, gave birth to a baby boy in August. Vicky Purewal, previously at the National Museums Wales has been appointed as Isla's maternity cover. Hearty congratulations also to Sarah Crowder (Senior Learning Officer), who gave birth to twins in early October. Our congratulations and best wishes go to them all.

Development Manager, Deborah Sale left us at the end of October, so that she can work closer to her home in North West Wales. Through her hard work, dedication and passion, Deborah has brought about real change for Bristol Museums and will be greatly missed.

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

The amazing trio of *scelidosaurus* fossils on show at the museum played a starring role on ITV programme 'Dinosaur Britain', presented by Ellie Harrison and palaeontologist Dean Lomax. This two part feature brought back to life (with fantastic animations) the diversity of dinosaurs that once roamed the British Isles. Our *scelidosaurus* was discussed by Professor Mike Benton from the University of Bristol who described how this animal lived and died.

In the British Birds and Mammals gallery, the staircase has been returned to the gypsy caravan. Visitors can now climb onto the deck and see the wonders inside.

A very generous anonymous donation has been made to match the £25,000 granted by the Headley Trust in July for the refurbishment of the European Old Masters Gallery. These additional funds will allow for the restoration of key paintings to complete curator Dr Jenny Gaschke's vision for the gallery, as well as specialist cases to house two of our most delicate works.

National press interest followed the publication of the findings of the Spoliation Advisory Panel in respect of a Renoir oil painting displayed at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. The panel advises government on issues where claims are made against works of art which may have been



▲ *Cros de Cagnes*, Renoir
© BMGA

lost by their rightful owners during the 1933-45 Nazi period in Europe. A claim for restitution against *Cros de Cagnes*, displayed in the Impressionist Gallery, was not upheld by the Panel on the grounds that a sale in which the painting was included in 1935 was due to the Jewish owners at the time needing to pay inheritance tax duties and there was no evidence to support the claim that the sale was a 'forced' one by the Nazi regime.

M Shed

Early October saw the Docks Heritage Weekend attract thousands of visitors to M Shed, where they enjoyed crane and boat trips, watched re-enactments of dockside activities from the 1950s, and even had the opportunity to drive one of our visiting steam locomotives. Films of the historic dock in operation were also screened. Volunteers and staff alike were thrilled to share these experiences with the people of Bristol.



▲ *Cargo handling demonstration at Docks Heritage weekend*
© Ibolya Feher

Bristol Records Office

The Vaughan postcard project is now finished! Over the last 18 months, a team of volunteers has added over 3,400 images from the Vaughan postcard collection and added them to the Know Your Place website. City Archivist Julian Warren spoke about the project at a national conference on digital heritage in October.

Recent acquisitions by the Record Office include the letters of Richard Bright relating to architecture of the

proposed new gaol, 1788-1790; Records of the campaign to save Royate Hill nature reserve, from the 1990s; and the floor plan of the Horfield barracks, dating 1933.

Bristol Doors Open Day

This highly popular annual event saw venues across the service throw open their doors for special behind-the-scenes tours. Fully-booked tours occurred throughout the day at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, M Shed, Blaise Castle, Red Lodge, and the Georgian House, and Kings Weston Roman Villa was open for self-led tours. Over 7000 people visited our sites, with hundreds being given behind-the-scenes tours.

The day saw over 600 people visiting the L Shed stores, many of whom were on guided tours. Despite the on-going work to the Prince Street Bridge, the day was a huge success. A big thank you to our volunteers, who organised and led fully-booked tours throughout the day.

Working Exhibits

The M Shed cranes came alive on the evening of October 3rd, performing a synchronised dance set to world music. Viewed by an estimated 8,000 people, the cranes were put through their paces, dramatically lit and even swinging



▲ **Crane Dance**
© Dave Blackburn

cables of multi-coloured lights. If you missed seeing it live, several videos are available on the internet. The dance marked the end of the Docks Heritage Weekend.

Exhibitions and Events

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

Erdkunde: The Study of the Earth

Until 3 January 2016

Free – donations welcome

Artists John Wood and Paul Harrison present 'Erdkunde: The Study of the Earth' a new video work inspired by the Museum's geology collections. Part of Bristol 2015 European Green Capital.

death: the human experience

until 13 March 2016

Free – pay what you think

From the Day of the Dead and Victorian mourning rituals, to mummification practices and fantasy coffins, 'death: the human experience' features over 200 spectacular objects from around the world. Discover how human beings have approached death throughout time and reveal captivating stories behind the most universal of experiences.

M Shed

Wildlife Photographer of the Year

28 November—10 April 2016

£5/£4

The most prestigious photography event of its kind, this exhibition from the Natural History Museum returns to M Shed with 100 breath-taking images. Established over 50 years ago, today the competition receives over 42,000 entries from 96 countries highlighting its enduring appeal.



▲ **The interior of Concorde on display at the L Shed Doors Open Day**
© Lee Hutchinson

Bletchley Park

Thursday 10 September 2015

Bletchley Park stands in extensive parkland containing many huts, where the main work of World War II code breaking took place, with lake and grounds where hundreds of employees took breaks from their intensive intelligence-gathering work.

The site was chosen in 1938: on the A5, a short walk from Bletchley railway station on the main London to Birmingham railway line, and the cross-country Oxford and Cambridge line, easy for staff to access and near existing telecommunications lines. During the war Bletchley became the centre of an immense data-gathering system decoding intercepted messages and transmitting intelligence to Allied Forces.

In the mansion displays featured the making of the recent film *The Imitation Game*. Our guides were enthusiastic about its authenticity including the role of Joan Clarke, a key worker played by Keira Knightley. In the grounds were the huts where myriads of typists and clerks worked. We visualised what a tremendous hustle and bustle there would have been with dispatch riders, runners, and writers everywhere. We saw life-like animated displays of the office work and heard a cultured lady explaining how her knowledge of German dirty words helped her to crack coded messages!

At the outset of war Bletchley's main concern was the Enigma code produced by a mass-produced keyboard code machine, developed in Nazi Germany. In pre-war years Enigma had been researched and partially cracked by a Polish team, and an actual machine had been smuggled into England. The machine relied on mechanical complexity for its security. The message was routed through a series of 3 scrambler wheels which would daily be set by reference to a German pre-printed day-key. At the start of a day, a machine would be set up with its scrambler wheels located in a manner according to the published day settings. Operators used these settings to send and receive messages. The desk-top portable Enigma machine automatically encrypted letters and transcribed them to morse code for radio transmission. The machine could also decrypt, making it easy to use in the field. At one time about 30,000 machines were in use by Nazi forces.

The Poles studied its operation and developed a laborious way of discovering the day settings. Later, British cryptanalysts at Bletchley led by Alan Turing and Gordon Welchman developed faster methods using bombe machines which had also previously been used by the Poles. A bombe contained rotating wheels identical to those in the Enigma, each set to a different initial setting. It would be fed with a crib - in essence an inspired guess at what the message was saying, particularly in its first few words such as some initial station protocol, or some heading such as 'weather forecast' in German. The bombe would quickly test this, stop if it detected continuous meaning, and display likely settings. We saw an impressive reconstruction of an actual bombe machine doing this.

The correct solution revealed the settings for that day for every German Enigma machine and so helped crack a huge number of messages. Other staff set about decrypting all other messages sent with that day's settings, and relaying them via British-encrypted Typex machines.

Properly used, the cyphers should have been virtually unbreakable, but flaws in Nazi procedures and indiscipline created vulnerabilities which made Bletchley's attacks feasible. Changes would certainly have been implemented if the Nazis had gained any hint of Bletchley's success. So the site culture of secrecy paid off.

Bletchley Park is a memorial to, and celebration of, British ingenuity and its attack on its Nazi enemy. What a world away it was then, far from personal computers, instant look-ups on Google, and public key cyphers. Altogether, it was a most interesting visit with many reminiscences of our younger lives, and much potential for a future trip.

Harry Hibberd



▲ *The Mansion - an 1877 mansion bought by the Government in 1938. It is part of the historical Bletchley Estate which became the HQ of GC&CS (Government Code and Cypher School)*



▲ *Typex machine - this deciphered and printed out code from the German encyphering machine Enigma*

Photos by Judith Jones

▼ *Turing Bombe Rebuild Project - this electromechanical machine was designed by Turing for codebreaking. Gordon Welchman improved on this machine. 200 Bombes were made and used in the war.*





◀ South Terrace and Waddesdon Manor

Photos by Judith Jones

Waddesdon Manor

Friday 11 September 2015

The day started well with a leisurely breakfast, the sun shining and a brief journey. The length of the well-wooded drive gave an indication of the opulence ahead. The initial view of the house, a Renaissance-style chateau, confirmed it.

The recently restored aviary proved to be a good introduction to the delights of the gardens. Whilst providing a rare chance to see and hear beautiful exotic birds, it also plays a role in breeding endangered species.

Then we went into the house for the pre-arranged guided tour. First, relevant parts of the Rothschild family history were recounted, giving context to how and why the house came to be built in the 1870s. It was hard to take in that its purpose was always as a setting to display Ferdinand's collections and as a place to entertain and impress guests at summer weekend house parties, rather than as a home. On the ground floor, the chandeliers impressed, as did the Guardi views of Venice, portraits by Reynolds and Gainsborough, the porcelain, the textiles, the panelling, the gilded furniture and countless other treasures.

We were then free to follow our own interests for the rest of the day. There were more rooms and collections to be viewed on the upper floors: several bedrooms and dressing rooms; the Sèvres Rooms, displaying the 3 dinner services; the Batchelors' Wing and several temporary exhibitions. The installation *Beyond All Price* by Jane Wildgoose was an unintended introduction to Bristol Museum and Art Gallery's main exhibition this autumn. Victorian mourning customs were examined and examples of commemorative jewellery, many incorporating human hair, were displayed. Another exhibition in the Stables, was Henry Moore: from Paper to Bronze, 100 drawings from various times during his life.

There was even plenty of choice over what and where to eat. The five catering offerings ranged from a waitress-served 3-course lunch to takeaway coffee, cake and wasps! A bowl of soup in the mid-range Stables Café suited me fine.

Waddesdon certainly did not disappoint and remains a spectacular collection in glorious surroundings. The surprise of the day for me was the amount of contemporary art on display. The prospect of new things to be seen each year is an additional incentive for a return visit.

Thank you, Wendy Aldridge-Morris, for organising such an interesting couple of visits. The contrasts between the two sites added to the enjoyment.

Sue Pettit



▲ *Lafite 2015*, sculptor Joanna Vasconcelos b 1971. This is one of a pair of candlesticks, made of (empty) magnums and is LED light lit. It celebrates the fact that Baron James de Rothschild acquired Chateau Lafite in Bordeaux in 1868

▼ Wine Cooler (one of a pair)



Marks of Genius at the Bodleian Library

Tuesday 15 September 2015

Some will know the Bodleian from having studied at Oxford; others will know it as one of the foremost libraries of the world; and yet others have had it brought to life through the writings of Dorothy L Sayers – whichever way, it was intriguing to have the opportunity to breathe the atmosphere of such a hallowed establishment and we were expertly guided by four of the library staff.

The present library began in 1488 with the gift of 281 manuscripts from Humfrey Duke of Gloucester, younger brother of Henry V, adding vastly to the 20 possessed by the School of Divinity. Most were then lost during the overzealous clearing out of Catholic texts in the time of Edward VI. Half a century later Sir Thomas Bodley, educated at Merton College and a diplomat and spy in the service of Elizabeth I, used his wealth (brought to him by his wife's family trade in pilchards) to collect 2,500 books to refurbish the library which still bears his name. He it was who also instigated with the Stationers' Company of London that a copy of every book published in England would be deposited in the new library. That agreement still stands and together with further purchases, gifts and bequests, the library now holds a staggering 8.5 million books, music manuscripts and maps.

The books in the Duke Humfrey Library are never loaned out – even King Charles I failed – and were individually chained, making use exceedingly noisy, until the practice was discontinued in 1860. The seemingly endless shelves of leather bound volumes set under an exquisitely panelled and painted roof are breathtaking. Temperature, lighting and injurious insects are rigorously controlled. And it can still be used by anyone 'with a good academic reason' (or a Harry Potter film crew).

The late Gothic architecture of the Divinity School below it is unbelievably elaborate, especially its roof bosses, and belies the fact that building it was slow, halting and increasingly simplified as money ran out. The oak panelling and seats of the Convocation House beyond spared no expense either. While both have now outgrown their original roles other uses have been found for them and they are lovingly maintained.

Two pleasant quadrangles away is the 20th Century New (Bodleian) library: renamed the Weston library in 2014 in honour of its recent Canadian (biscuit) benefactor. Here was the 'Marks of Genius' exhibition – in its final week. On view were some of the library's most treasured possessions both manuscript and print: a 1623 Shakespeare, a 1217 copy of the Magna Carta, a Ptolemy map of the known world, a Gutenberg Bible (such clear printing), an exquisite insect head by Robert Hooke, the huge Audubon's birds – almost everything that you might ever have heard of was here – even a hand-written page of Handel's Messiah (not one crossing out), a tapestry map of 1590 and fragments of Sappho's poems written on papyrus.....we were so lucky and privileged.

Gundula Dorey

The next exhibition (23 October – 28 February) at the Bodleian will be on the enduring culture of Armenia. Find out more at:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/whatson/whats-on/upcoming-events/2015/oct/armenia>



▲ Magna Carta

Photos © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford



▲ Kalilah wa-Dimnah



▼ Codex Mendosa

St Mary Redcliffe Church

Friday 21 August 2015

The parish church of St Mary Redcliffe has been a place of worship for at least 900 years, and has played an important part in Bristol's maritime history over the centuries, with sailing ships anchoring nearby and sailors coming in to pray for safe voyages. We met Liz Gamlin, our inspiring guide, in the mediaeval chapel of St John.

St Mary's is an intriguing mix of architecture, religions and customs, with reminders of royals and commoners, merchants and servants, musicians, poets and artists. It is built in the gothic style, with stone columns soaring up to a stunning vaulted roof, some of whose stone bosses weigh a ton! Outside are flying buttresses aplenty and numerous gargoyles, some of which have been brought inside to shelter from the elements, giving us a close view of their various grotesque physiognomies.

Royalty of course has connections with St Mary's. Elizabeth I's visit resulted in not only her comment about 'the fairest, goodliest and most famous parish church in England' but also her endowment of the school in Bristol which still bears her name. Charles II's coat of arms is over the south door, put up as an apology for the city's support of Cromwell during the Civil War.

Merchants in the 13th and 14th centuries onwards endowed the church and memorials or windows bear famous names including Simon de Burton, Colston, Wills, and William Canynge. His tomb shows him as a remarkably sophisticated priest complete with ermine robes and winkle picker shoes. There is even a stone slab commemorating the Canynges' cook, with a colander and knife on it. Admiral William Penn's suit of armour is high on a wall (his grandson called in a debt to Charles II and was given Sylvania in North America, hence Pennsylvania).

The poet Thomas Chatterton's work was discovered in the church (where his father was sexton). Hogarth's huge triptych hung at the east end of the chancel (now sadly it is in a redundant church, St Nicholas). Samuel Taylor Coleridge and his friend Southey married two of the Fricker sisters here. Musicians are represented by Handel's beautiful stained glass window (he probably played the organ in St Mary's), and most recently Roger Bennett (1936-2005) the local broadcaster and jazz musician has a window in the undercroft. St Mary's has other beautiful examples of stained glass windows, ranging from the mediaeval (with representations of the Green Man) to 20th century, by Henry Stammers of York, which beautifully light up the Lady Chapel.

After lunch in the undercroft cafeteria we returned to the church for a reading by Norman Bowler of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, accompanied very effectively by Ruth Bond on her flute, followed by *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* by Oscar Wilde. It was a wonderful end to a fascinating day. Thank you to Colin Edwards and Carol Ouvry for organising it!

Sue Black

In the mediaeval chapel of St John, amongst many ancient artefacts, was this beautiful modern altar table in the shape of a mediaeval boat, carved by Robert Coles of Congresbury to commemorate the start of World War I on 14 August 1914.



▲ Nave showing vaulted ceiling with its gilded stone bosses



▲ Detail of 1960s stained glass window in the Lady Chapel made by Stammers of York



Photos by Judith Jones

Mells and Frome

Wednesday 26 August 2015

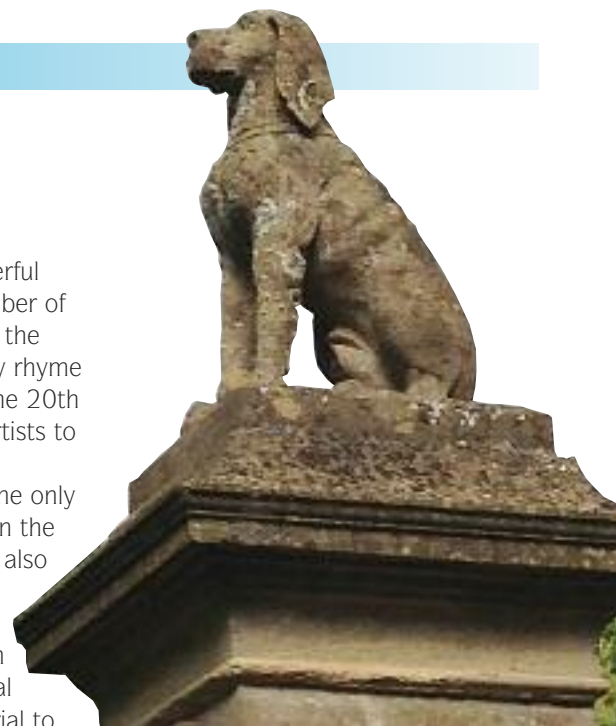
We arrived at the mediaeval Talbot Inn at Mells and were greeted by our wonderful guide, Michael McGarvie. Mells is a beautiful village that, thanks to a high number of listed buildings, has retained its mediaeval atmosphere. After the dissolution of the monasteries several nearby manors were bought by Sir John Horner, (of nursery rhyme fame) and descendants of his still own and live in Mells Manor. At the turn of the 20th century Lady Frances Horner, who was very artistic, persuaded many famous artists to come to Mells and leave beautiful works.

Inside St Andrews Church, the most striking object is an equestrian statue, the only sculpture by painter Alfred Munnings. It commemorates Edward Horner, killed in the World War I. In the late 19th century a Horner was both lord of the manor and also rector of the church. He founded a college to train clergy and church craftsmen some of whom carved the pews. Two young men, sons of a poacher transported to Australia, were trained in stained glass, and learned their craft in the church. The quality improved as they worked! Under the tower is a memorial to a young friend of the family by Edward Burne-Jones, and opposite, a memorial to Raymond Asquith, a Horner descendant, with lettering carved by Eric Gill. Outside are the graves of family descendants (Horner, Asquith, Bonham Carter) and Mells inhabitants at various times, such as Siegfried Sassoon and Ronald Knox. There cannot be many small village graveyards with such a collection of famous names!

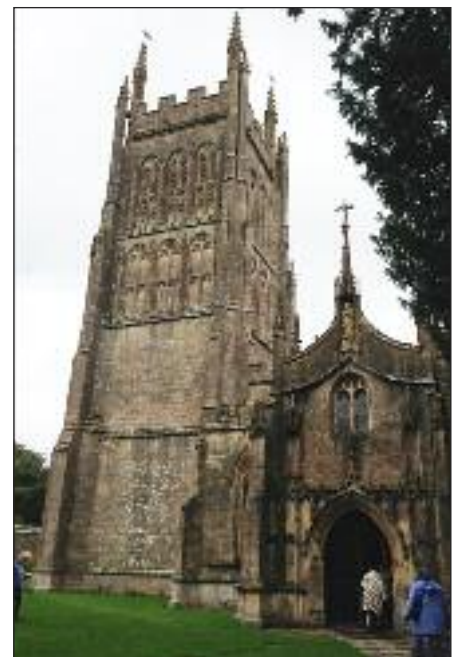
After lunch in the delightful walled garden café, we gathered in New Street, the second oldest planned street in Somerset. As we walked around the village, admiring the atmospheric ancient houses, we saw more work by Edward Lutyens: the World War I memorial with its tall slender column topped by St George, and the poignant triangular building housing a fountain in memory of a Horner who died in 1908 of scarlet fever, its inscription carved by Eric Gill. We saw a large tythe barn dated by dendrochronology to 1590. The ancient lock-up (1798) was as it had been in the days when it housed the village drunks; descendants of some named in the records still live in the village!

On to Frome where the rest of the afternoon was spent wandering around the heritage trail in this delightful town. We enjoyed the narrow streets with lovely names such as Gentle Street (very steep) and Cheap Street (with water flowing down its middle). There were art galleries (many artists and crafts workers have chosen to live here), independent shops, and quirky tearooms. Altogether it was a delightful day out, with perfect weather. Thank you David Snelson for his excellent organisation!

Sue Black



▲ The talbot (a hunting dog) is on the Horner coat of arms, hence the Talbot Inn and the many carved dogs around the village.



▲ St Andrew's church is an imposing building in the perpendicular style, with a large tower. It is beautifully set off by an avenue of yews designed by Edward Lutyens.

◀ Cheap Street, Frome



Photos by Sue Black

Visit to the Geology Store

Tuesday 21 July 2015

How appropriate for this visit to be arranged during the 200th anniversary of William Smith's first geological map – the map that changed the world. Deborah Hutchinson, the enthusiastic curator of geology, took two small groups into the store to tell us about the extent of the collection and to show us some representative examples. Because of the number of interested members, a third group went to the store in the afternoon with Isla Gladstone, senior curator of Natural Sciences.

The collection was started in 1823 and grew out of the former Bristol Institution. Unfortunately some significant specimens were lost due to wartime bombing. One aim of the museum is now to re-establish the marine reptile collection of which some notable examples are both on and awaiting display in the public gallery. This is in preparation for an exhibition scheduled for 2017.

A selection of the collection had been laid out for us to see and was explained by Deborah. An extensive collection of minerals includes a large fragment of strontium containing blue Celastine mineral was historically mined, locally at Yate and in the Avon Gorge. We were invited to identify several fossils at which we were only partially successful. One large object turned out to be the worn-down tooth of a Woolly Mammoth. We were shown the results of the meticulous and time-consuming work of conservation necessary to remove surrounding material from fragments of fossil fish and minute fossil teeth. One famous exhibit which absorbed all was the assembly of fragments of a large pliosaur, an apex predator of the Jurassic marine world, discovered at Blue Circle's Westbury pits. A model of its head and teeth clearly showed where an abscess and decayed tooth must have given the Bristol Pliosaur severe toothache! Deborah mentioned how grateful the museum was to the Friends for the financial support to create a model of the Bristol Dinosaur on display in the gallery.

Unfortunately time prevented us viewing the paper documents in the collection other than an early book containing exquisitely drawn lithographs of the bone structure of early reptiles. We were assured that the vast amount of material was not just carefully kept locked away but in frequent use by researchers, students and scholars. There is a dedicated laboratory at hand for specialist work. It is remarkable how the internet now provides a means of communication for identification and exchange of knowledge between Bristol and museums worldwide. Our thanks to Carol Ouvry for arranging this fascinating visit.

John Rollinson

▼ *A small selection of the many gems held in the Geology Store*



▲ *An ammonite fossil*

Photos © BMGA

▼ *A lifesize model (funded by the Friends) of the original Westbury Pliosaur II also called Pliosaurus Carpenteri after its finder Simon Carpenter*

Photo by Tony Hutchinson



The Hall at Abbey-Cwm-Hir

Wednesday 12 August 2015

On one of the finest days of August we visited this house, which lies in a lovely valley a few miles north of Llandrindod Wells. It is a Victorian Gothic house built by a London entrepreneur, Thomas Wilson, in 1834 on the former estate of a Cistercian Abbey, of which little remains. On the bankruptcy of Thomas Wilson, the house was bought by the Philips family. They doubled the size of it in 1869 and added a magnificent snooker room in 1897. Seventeen years ago, Paul and Victoria Humpherston bought the run-down and empty house, its garden a mass of weeds. With local help and their own hard work, they have, over ten years, restored the house to a splendid residence with 52 rooms; and created a beautiful walled garden, a lake with boat-house and boat, and woodland walks. When we arrived for lunch the house and gardens looked glorious.

We were given a tour of what is definitely not a National Trust historic house. This is a family home that shows off the owners' compulsive and eclectic acquisitiveness coupled with their somewhat eccentric sense of whimsy. A few examples may give a flavour: in the garden there are three pastel-coloured beach huts complete with internal furnishings and signs directing us 'to the beach'. In one of the upstairs bedrooms there is a complete BSA motor-bike. The master bedroom has what was once a four-poster bed but which now has no front posts because one of them spoiled Victoria's view of the television. The canopy is now supported by chains instead but on top of the front of the canopy is, in large metal letters, the word 'AMORE' while a prominent cushion on the bed bears the legend 'Calm down and drink wine'. This is a house where one learns in every room to expect the unexpected.

On the other hand it has a wide variety of very attractive rooms with different interior styles both modern and Victorian, and all the rooms are filled with odd collections including enamel signs, expensive porcelain and pottery figurines, boys and girls adventure books, stuffed animals, radios and phonographs. The snooker room has a King Arthur theme with the names of the knights painted in antique script round the walls.

The scenery going there and back was spectacular and we are most grateful to Gary Costelow for organising the trip.

Robert Walters



▲ Detail in the pantry

▼ Detail of Maw & Co tiled floor in the hall



◀ The Hall - southern elevation mainly but also shows gothic porch. Grade II listed Victorian Gothic Revival built in 1834 with the spoils from the cotton trade. The present owners have restored the hall (all 52 rooms) and the gardens.

Photos by Judith Jones

Jamaica Street Studios

Friday 9 October 2015

Our visit to Jamaica Street Studios revealed another of Bristol's secret places. We were welcomed by Lucy, the Manager for the co-operative, who told us about the building, its fascinating history and how it is now used.

The Studios are housed in a Grade II listed carriage works built in the 1870s. The construction of the building was cutting edge at the time, with a wood and cast iron frame supplied in 'kit form' using the same construction technique as New York skyscrapers. The ground and first floors are double height to accommodate the carriages built there. The top two storeys were added by 1908 and partitioned for workshops and offices. Fifteen years ago the façade was restored by the current landlords with the help of heritage funding.

The ground floor is open plan, and we were able to move around between the artists' different areas and talk to them about their work. They were very welcoming and willing to discuss what they were doing.

Up steep and narrow stairs to the first floor landing (almost room to breathe here!) where Lucy explained how the co-operative operates. The 40 artists include painters, illustrators, textile artists, sculptors, and printers. Some have international standing, and some are newly qualified, with all shades of experience between. The upper floors are divided into smaller studios, some of them shared. The large windows made them wonderfully light, and the height of the building gave extensive views over Bristol from the upper floors.

In 2005 the Jamaica Street Artists became a limited company. The occupants are responsible for the rent and payment of utilities. When a studio becomes vacant, the new occupier is voted in democratically by all those on that floor. Commitment to the enterprise is essential, and artists are expected to be there at least two days a week and to take part in general meetings and events.

During our visit we were able to wander freely through the building, and wherever we went we were made welcome. Many artists who were not actually there had left their studios open so that we could see their work.

Carol Ouvry

Photos by Carol Ouvry

We were welcomed by all ▶



▲ *Top floor corridor with studios off*



Museum Friends Sewing Group

at Bristol's Festival of Archaeology

Sunday 26 July 2015

Our latest project for the Museum was creating Iron Age clothes to add to the collection of Romano-British and mediaeval garments we have already made for the Museum. This was for the children's dressing up stall at Bristol's Festival of Archaeology held at Blaise Castle Museum and grounds on Sunday 26 July.

Although this was not one of our most challenging projects, the time scale and the number of members available for sewing at this time of year created a bit of pressure. However, a number of cloaks and dresses were delivered on time, and members of the group were there on the day, encouraging the children and helping them to try the clothes.

Carol Ouvry

Some of the finished costumes. ▶

Photo by Carol Ouvry



Getting to know moths

Saturday 8 August 2015

This was a real voyage of discovery. Ray Barnett had set up moth traps with bright ultra-violet lights in two locations near the pond in Royal Fort Gardens and we met in the gathering dusk to be introduced to the world of moths – and what a complex world it is. We learned that about 2,600 species of moth have been identified in the UK and that about 800 of those are large. The others are all micro moths and both types have an extraordinary variety of different markings, habitats, reproduction and food sources.

Carpet moths eat plants not carpets but were so named in the 18th century. The moth which eats clothes and carpets has thrived in recent years as it has evolved to enjoy fluff underneath floorboards. One common species, a grass moth, came from Australia and colonised the southern UK. The larvae of aquatic moths spin silken cocoons in waterside plants, sometimes under water, and the adult moths swim to the shore. One species has developed a sword-like proboscis which cuts into fruit flesh – maybe the theme of a future creature in a feature horror film?

We wandered from trap to trap trying to absorb countless facts but failing to find a really spectacular specimen. Ray explained that conditions have to be absolutely right for successful moth trapping: a warm, humid night is much better than the clear sky we had. There was also the distraction of fireworks from the balloon fiesta and music from a Bristol Grammar School disco.

By the end of the evening we began to understand why moths hold such a fascination for many people. We are very grateful to Ray for giving up a Saturday evening to give us an introduction to their world.

Mary Bailey

Lost Rivers of Bristol

Saturday 10 October 2015

Melvin Wood of the Environment Agency first pointed out that a loop in the River Frome was the main reason why Bristol castle and the old city were built where they were, and that the Frome once joined the Avon near Bristol Bridge. Now the river, which starts from the Cotswold Edge, is 20% urbanised along its length. Most of the urban Frome was covered by 1880 although the centre section was not covered until 1938.

As street names indicate along its route, it is well known that the River Frome travels through much of Bristol but as so much runs below ground not many of us have travelled along it. Melvin used a laser presentation to carry us under Bristol from River Street around Castle Park, under Broad Weir through Fairfax Street, and under buildings near the Pithay to Rupert Street and Stonegate at the northern end of the Centre where the river becomes tidal. We went with the flow under the Floating Harbour and into the Cut near Bathurst Basin. Unusual objects spotted en route were fleeting images of the people taking the scans, and a three-piece suite trapped by a trash screen.

The tidal mud deposited near the exit raised the question of whether it was possible and cost-effective to remove it. Perhaps more alarming was that the owners of buildings under which there are culverts are responsible for repairing them (at an estimated £1.6m per 100 metres!). The integrity of the culverts can also be threatened by the development of new buildings with deep foundations.

An intriguing system of weirs prevents back-flow from the tidal river to the static Floating Harbour, and the recurrence of a 'Great Stink' from sewerage. Flooding is another periodic threat. In 1994 the five-metre diameter Northern Storm Water Interceptor was built running from Eastville to Black Rock in the Avon. This is activated if water levels rise in Frenchay.

Other local lost rivers include the Malago, Colliters, Longmoor and Ashton Brooks coming in from the south but still traceable above ground in places.

It was a fascinating talk, which posed as many questions as it answered.

Marianne and Michael Pitman



▲ **Elephant Hawk Moth caterpillar has a 'trunk' which retracts in the face of danger and huge eye markings to repel predators.**

Photo © Natural History Museum

▼ **Trash screens stop shopping trolleys and other debris being carried down river. Screens have to be cleared regularly and until 1960 there was a special Dead Dog collection boat!**

Photo © Environment Agency



Victoria Art Gallery and the Holburne Museum

Friday 1 May 2015

The Victoria Art Gallery, near Pulteney Bridge, was named to celebrate Queen Victoria's 60 years on the throne. Designed in 1897 by John McKean Brydon, the gallery is run by Bath and North East Somerset Council housing their collection of paintings, sculpture and decorative arts. Canaletto's 1740 masterpiece *Regatta on the Grand Canal* was on display, on loan from the National Gallery, along with 18th century views of Bath.

There was an exhibition of Beryl Cook's popular paintings, noted for her plus-sized ladies. She had lived in Bristol for a short while but moved to Plymouth where she and her husband ran a guest house. She died in 2008.

Afterwards my friend and I enjoyed a good lunch at Garfunkels in the former Empire Hotel overlooking Parade Gardens. We were then taken by coach to the Holburne Museum in Sydney Gardens. The railway passes nearby and we could hear trains roaring by as we sat in the café. The collection was formed by Sir Thomas William Holburne (1793-1874) a naval officer who eventually inherited a baronetcy and there are over 4,000 exhibits, including pictures, books, silver and porcelain. The museum was restored in 2011. We saw the *Home and the World Exhibition Gwen John to Lucian Freud* selected by Dexter Dalwood. The 32 works are linked by a confident sense of national identity with a yearning for exploration. They included the boldness of Vanessa Bell; the introversion of Gwen John; the gravitas of Duncan Grant; the Pop Art invention of Richard Hamilton; and the intensity of Lucien Freud. Many thanks to Wendy Aldridge-Morris for organising this fascinating day.

Rosemary Doggett



▲ Beryl Cook Dirty Dancing

▼ Detail from Canaletto Regatta on the Grand Canal



▲ Canaletto Regatta on the Grand Canal

Find out more about the Victoria Art Gallery at www.victoriagal.org.uk

Photos by kind permission of the Victoria Art Gallery

Beer, Cider and Sidmouth

Tuesday 14 July 2015

It appeared that nobody on the coach had ever been to Beer Quarry Caves or even heard of them for that matter so the extent of the site and the fascinating history came as a complete surprise and eye-opener. Hard-hats raised expectations.

John Scott, local historian and leader of a willing band of volunteer tour guides, provided a wonderful introduction to the caves and to the endless hard grind that the quarry men put up with as they produced blocks of Beer stone for such famous buildings as Exeter and Winchester Cathedrals as well some landmark buildings in London. Apparently the noise of them chipping away at the rock face led to the saying 'stone deaf'. From Roman times to more recent ones the quarry was worked by up to 600 men who left behind caverns, galleries and inter-linking passageways in which a stranger could easily get lost. We were told stories of local involvement in smuggling when even the parson lent a hand. When the excise men came sniffing around there were endless hiding places in the caves and smuggling became regarded as an intrinsic part of life.

We moved on to Sidmouth where most people found lunch, went shopping or visited the volunteer-run museum which celebrated all things local especially the fact that we were on the Jurassic Coast.

It was then off to Perry's Cider Farm at Dowlish Wake in time for a Somerset Cream Tea with some of the biggest scones I have ever seen in my life! There was the usual discussion about cream or jam first on the scone then a look round their small cider museum, followed by sampling and buying of bottles to take home. Rain had been forecast for all day but somehow we escaped. We were very lucky!

Sue Stops



▲ Beer Quarry Caves – the chapel

Photos © Beer Quarry Caves

▼ Beer Quarry Caves – top wagon road



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