

Newsletter



The Saxon Warriors have arrived!

This edition packed with

- news and photos of Bristol's museums, galleries and archives
- reports of trips to 15th century Athelhampton House, the romantic ruin of Witley Court, Saltford Brass Mill, Avoncroft Museum and many more
- news of upcoming talks and visits you can join

**December 2016
Issue 193**

From the Chairman

Annual General Meeting and social event

I hope that those of you who came to our AGM evening at M Shed in September feel it was worthwhile – I was pleased that a couple of members made a point of thanking me and the committees afterwards for all that we do. As I promised, the formal business was kept to not much more than half an hour. While I recognise the importance of keeping proceedings 'legal' we succeed, I think, in avoiding them being stuffy. The AGM was followed by some short presentations from museum staff, and after that we were able to chat over a glass of wine.

Welcome to our new Treasurer

I am delighted that Robert Walters, who had been Independent Examiner of our accounts for several years, has volunteered to be our new Treasurer (taking over from Nicholas King) and was duly elected at the AGM. Geoff Clements has volunteered to be our new Independent Examiner. Thank you to Nicholas, Robert and Geoff for their support, both past and future.

Prehistoric Craft Project

In June, we agreed to provide funding for a Prehistoric Craft Project to introduce 60 children from a local Primary School with the Iron Age landscape at Blaise Castle House Museum & Estate in a new and exciting way. An Iron Age camp was set up in the grounds of Blaise Castle House Museum where students could get hands-on and have a go at wool combing, spinning and weaving, hammer their own coinage, dress in period costume and find out about Iron Age food.

Students also watched prehistoric pottery demonstrations and then created their own pots to take home before exploring Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives amazing Iron Age collections and climbing up Blaise Castle's very own hill fort.

As well as providing funding, our sewing and cooking volunteer groups helped bring the Iron Age alive for the children by providing costumes and 'authentic' prehistoric food.

British Association of Friends of Museums

Along with Katherine Martin, and Mary and Martin Bailey, I went to the BAFM annual national conference at Ironbridge in October. The theme was Marketing for Excellence, with



▲ Primary School pupils dressed as Iron Age warriors taking part in the Prehistoric Craft Project

several excellent speakers. For me the most interesting was the Visitor Experience Manager from the National Trust who shared the secrets of Marketing for the Trust in a way that made them relevant to the whole audience.

Outside the Conference proper there were fascinating guided visits to several of the many museums run by the Ironbridge Museums Trust, although it would take several days to do them anything like justice.

We also took the opportunity the day before the



▲ Chairman Sue Thurlow enjoying Ironbridge with Lucy Bailey and Toby Pinn from the Friends of Bristol Art Gallery committee

Cover photo: Stylised sea horse with filigree decoration

K1497 ©Birmingham Museums Trust



▲ Retiring BAFM Chairman Bernard Rostron presenting newsletter award to our chairman Sue Thurlow

conference started to have lunch with David Eveleigh. David is Director of Collections & Learning at Ironbridge but many of you will remember him as the Social History curator who ran Blaise Castle House Museum until seven years ago.

After several years without a BAFM South West Conference, the new BAFM SW Regional Representative, Muff Dudgeon, organised one at the RWA in October. Delegates came from across the Region, and it was a great opportunity to make new contacts and catch up with some we had not seen for a while. I particularly enjoyed the speaker from Happy City Bristol, but probably the most relevant was from Exeter Cathedral, talking about the principles of effective fundraising. Thanks to Mary Bailey and the cake-makers for catering for this event.

The Newsletter

One highlight of the BAFM National Conference was receiving our runners-up certificate in the BAFM national newsletter award. Congratulations to Tim and Ann Wood, our newsletter editors, and to all our contributors of articles and images.

I am sure you will have noticed our new, more eye-catching, approach to the cover page. The change of approach came from a review of how we could give our newsletter more impact. We do hope you like it.

Sue Thurlow Chairman

Photos by Bristol Culture and Katherine Martin

Council Consultation on Museum Budget Cuts – Make Your Voice Heard !

The Council is carrying out a public consultation on their proposed budget cuts over the next 3 years – including plans to cut a further £200,000 from the Museums budget. They would achieve this by reducing opening hours of M Shed and Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, so that both museums would be closed to the public from Monday to Wednesday every week, which would clearly have a significantly negative impact.

We all have the opportunity to comment on these proposals. Bristol is increasingly seen as a cultural beacon at a national level, and the museums play a key part in that. The more people – resident in Bristol or not – who comment on the proposals, the more likely it is that we will be listened to.

Information packs detailing the full set of proposals – which range across all the Council's services – are available in libraries and citizen service points. If you are an internet-user you may find it easier to access the information from the Council's website – just scroll down to Consultation section near the bottom of their homepage. The consultation closes at 5pm on Thursday 5 January 2017.

Please do make your voice heard and let the council know how unhappy we would be to see this implemented. The cuts are still just proposals at this stage and therefore your feedback to the council is vital. If you are not able to use the official mechanisms, and live in Bristol, please write to, e-mail or speak to your councillor to make your views clear.

From the Membership Secretary

A reminder that subscriptions for 2017 are due on 1 January 2017 so we can send new membership cards out with the March newsletter to those who have paid. If you are a cheque-payer and your membership is due for renewal you will find a form enclosed with this newsletter. Please make cheques payable to Friends of BMGA.

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

Mr John Leggatt	Con Sonmez
Mrs Sorel Leggatt	Mrs Darlene Stephens
Alderman Bill Martin	Mrs Dee Vockings

If you would like to give a gift of membership to a friend for Christmas please contact me, 0117 962 4872, and your recipient can receive the current newsletter directly gift wrapped by me or I can send it to you to give yourself.

June Hibberd, Membership Secretary

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Bristol Culture

The Council is currently reviewing how it will make savings in 2017-18, to meet government requirements. They have published a draft Corporate Strategy identifying a £92million gap in its funds for 2017-2022, and are inviting public comment. Three proposals impact upon the Culture team and budgets: a 50% cut to the £1m annual subsidy provided to Colston Hall; a 50% cut to the £1m annual budget provided to the Key Arts Providers in the city; and a £200,000 cut to the museums budget to be found from reducing the number of days of the week which BMAG and M Shed would be open to the public.

There are currently two separate reviews into museums in the UK. The first is by Department of Culture Media & Sport (DCMS), and considers England only.

The Museums Association has set up its own 'Museums Taskforce', chaired by Laura Pye, to review museum provision across the whole of the UK and consider the impact of current issues such as local authority funding, Brexit, sustainability, and reaching new audiences.

Staff news

Long-serving members of staff who have left recently include John Bryant and Heather Lockett, both having worked for about 40 years for the service, and Carole Yeo and Paul Sullivan, both with about 10 years' service each. Molly O'Doherty has also left the Bristol Record Office to participate in the European Voluntary Service scheme for a year.

Rhian Rowson and Vicky Purewal have spent a week in Jamaica (grant aided) working with the Jamaican Institute on Arthur Broughton's late 1700s pressed plant collection – the conservation of which the Friends provided funding for last year. The links established hold great promise for future international collaboration.



▲ *Young people taking part in the Talking Heads workshop*

© Bristol Culture

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

Our exhibition 'Death, the human experience', was awarded the prize for Most Significant Contribution to the Understanding of Death at the 2016 Good Funeral Awards on 8 September.

Talking Heads workshops, jointly funded by Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives and Friends of Bristol Art Gallery, aimed to introduce children with little knowledge and understanding of art to paintings in the permanent galleries. There were six workshops for over 130 children aged between 10 and 11 years. The feedback from the children has been extremely positive.

August saw the temporary exhibition gallery at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery transformed for our young people's summer programme, '25 Below'. Over the course of 3½ weeks over 100 young people aged 14-25 attended workshops and events delivered by creative youth organisations and artists from across the city. The attendees made paper sculptures, digital soundscapes, animations and creative writing all in response to the collections within the museum. The work was exhibited and young volunteers helped to design and manage the space. The programme closed with an evening celebration event. The rear hall was filled with young people and their families, who came to see the exhibition as well as some exciting performances including street dance, spoken word, songs and raps.

An exercise to test our response to an emergency was held at BMAG in October with the Fire Brigade. Much useful information was gained and the activity seems even more relevant following the fire at St Michael's Church just a week or so later.



▲ *Young Rappers performing in the 25 Below summer programme*

© Bristol Culture

The Terra Nova penguin ▶
© Bristol Culture



M Shed

The temporary exhibition 'The Story of Children's Television' on tour from the Herbert in Coventry, was a real success, and exceeded our expectations in relation to visitor numbers, with over 21,000 visiting over the summer and into September.

Bristol Record Office

After consultation, the BRO is to become known as Bristol Archives, which it is felt is more descriptive for those who are unfamiliar with Record Offices.

Collections

The natural sciences team has been working with volunteers to research and document our collections for the upcoming exhibition Pliosaurus: Dive into the Jurassic Deep, opening in June 2017. As part of this work, Curator Bonnie Griffin has made two important finds in our bone collection, giving us a glimpse of rich stories awaiting rediscovery:

Researching a number on the base of a taxidermy penguin labelled 'Gentoo penguin' revealed that the specimen was collected during the *Terra Nova* expedition - Captain Scott's last expedition to the South Pole, 1910-1912. The significance and history of this specimen had been lost until now, and we were very humbled to realise its incredible provenance, which can now be shared with visitors on store tours.

Hidden writing uncovered by shining UV light on a mystery dolphin skull showed it is a highly unusual Clymene dolphin.

This is the only known species of marine mammal created from the natural hybrid of two separate species (the spinner dolphin and striped dolphin), and the first of its kind in our collections.



◀ *The Clymene Dolphin*
© Bristol Culture

Working Exhibits

The ground floor of L Shed has been changed to create a space where larger scale work than was possible previously can now take place on our steam locomotives and rolling stock. *Henbury* has now been placed in L Shed as major overhaul work commences. The Fairbairn Steam Crane has also been taken out of steaming for an overhaul. Docks Heritage Weekend and the Harbour Festival were the highlights of a packed programme across the summer for all our working exhibits.

Exhibitions & Events

Blaise Castle House Museum

Christmas at Blaise Castle House Museum

3 December 2016 11am - 3.30pm (Drop in)

Join us to celebrate a cosy Victorian Christmas at Blaise. Our traditional Christmas celebrations will see the house decked with boughs of holly and evergreens from the estate. Get into the spirit of Christmas with music and storytelling, and try your hand at some festive craft activities.

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

Warrior Treasures: Saxon Gold from the Staffordshire Hoard

To 23 April 2017

Ancient Mexico in Colour

To 14 May 2017

Featuring the extraordinary drawings by Adela Breton curated by Sue Giles

Stone Age to Iron Age

To 25 June 2017

Showing how resourceful, inventive and skilled prehistoric people were. Curated by Gail Boyle

M Shed

Wildlife Photographer of the Year

To 5 March 2017

Bristol Archives (previously Bristol Record Office)

Bristol's Australian Pioneer: Robert Bush and the Bishop's Knoll First World War Hospital.

To 13 January 2017

Curated by Clive Burlton.



▲ *The Victoria Rooms in Victorian times*
© Bristol Culture

Tour of the Victoria Rooms

Tuesday 4 October 2016

Our visit to the Victoria Rooms in early October provided as many insights into the history of the building in the last 50 years as in its Victorian heyday. As we entered, some members of our group remembered happy visits there, when it was used as a venue for a surprising variety of public events.

Our well-known local guide, Elvyn Griffiths, began with a little historical context. The Victoria Rooms (and also originally Gardens) had started life on 'Plot 253', a vacant piece of land, to provide an additional facility to supplement the Clifton Assembly Rooms. Designed by Charles Dyer, in the Greek revival style, it was opened in 1842, at a cost of £23,000. The entrance was particularly impressive, an eight-columned Corinthian portico surmounted by a classical relief of Athena in her chariot. It provided a very attractive venue for the wealthy to enjoy talks, music and promenade in the gardens. It was surprising to know that at that time it was the only building in the area apart from the old Habitat building (now part of the University) which was then a hotel. From the entrance there was an uninterrupted view down towards Park Street (undeveloped at the time).

Victorian highlights included visits by Charles Dickens and Jennie Lind, and also banquets to commemorate the opening of the Clifton Suspension Bridge and the quartercentenary of Cabot's discovery of America. In 1874 a meeting took place which led to the founding of the University College, Bristol, a precursor of the University of Bristol. Significantly, the Victoria Rooms were used by local organisers of the Women's Social and Political Union (the Suffragettes) for meetings.

The distinctive 'frontage' came much later. The lovely fountain with its numerous fantastical sea creatures was erected in 1913, alongside the steps, balustrades and ornamental crouching lions. The work is in the Art Nouveau style. The fountain is now maintained by the Council. It is controlled by an anemometer, so that on windy days water does not blow across the roadway. The statue of Edward VII was erected in 1913 but was ultimately moved forward towards Park Street. A mystery surrounds the whereabouts of the lions' predecessors ... two sphinxes which have disappeared. Any sightings?

In 1920 Sir George Wills bought the building and gave it to the University for its Students' Union. With just 250 students at that point the building had plenty of space. It remained the Union until 1964, when the new one in Queen's Road was created. The building seems to have been used for many purposes over the next 30 or so years. There is a wonderful sprung dance floor and group members recalled dances there. The acoustics are excellent and it has been the venue for many different types of music such as choral, piano, orchestral and popular, with perhaps the most significant performers being Pink Floyd in 1967 and 1969. Others in the

group recalled wrestling, pantomimes and the first incarnation of the city's Exploratory. For some who had studied at the University, the memories of it as an Exam Hall dominated and for others a place for student drinking in the 60s - provided the men wore ties!

The building is now central to the University as a teaching and learning space, and home to the Music Department. Recently renovated, the foyer and main auditorium make an impressive meeting and performance space. Public concerts and lectures still take place there. The basement area has state of the art music studios. The building is constantly buzzing again with students from Europe and around the globe, evoking much of the original educative and entertainment purpose of the building.

Jane Wills



▲ *The Victoria Rooms on Thursday 3 November 2016*

Photo by Martin Bailey

Balancing Current Budgets

Message from Laura Pye, Head of Culture, Bristol City Council

Dear All,

I wanted to talk you through some changes we are making in order to balance our current budgets. (This is separate from the council's proposals for cuts next year and beyond, which at this stage are very much just proposals.) This is actions we are taking to deal with an historic overspend we have had in the Museums for a number of years. The changes impact most on our operations (Front of House) team, with a small alteration to our opening hours.

The changes we are making include

- A complete restructure of the team so the staff on our Front of House are not pulled away to deal with contractors and workmen
- From January 2017 both M Shed and Bristol Museum and Art Gallery will be closing at 5pm on Saturday and Sunday in order for us to allow private groups to hire the museums in the evening.
- M Shed will now be open every Monday from 10am-5pm during school holidays following a successful trial of this in 2016.
- From January 2017 Bristol Museum and Art Gallery will be closed on Monday during the school terms but open on Monday in the school holidays – in line with M Shed. It will still be available to private groups by appointment and will also allow us to carry out essential maintenance work whilst we are closed.
- The Historic Houses' opening hours will remain the

same with Red Lodge and Georgian House being open from 11am-4pm Saturday to Tuesday and Blaise Castle House being open from 11am - 4pm Thursday to Sunday from 1 April to 31 December.

Whilst this is a difficult option for us to take we do believe it will be really positive for us as a team - the new staff structural changes will lead to improved consistency of service across museum sites and better levels of customer service, leading to a better experience for visitors. It will also lead to improvements to the management structure and staff communications and development. Ultimately it improves the public offer and increases the resilience of the museum service in future, as this will lead to greater use of museums. I also believe the changes in hour will offer new opportunities to us in term of income generation, collections care and diversity. We will be able to use the time the museum is closed to run private events, move and clean collections or offer sessions for groups who would otherwise find it difficult to visit us e.g. those with learning difficulties etc.

If any of you have any questions or concerns about these proposals I would be happy to discuss them with you in more detail. Please contact the museum and arrange a time for us to chat

Many thanks

Laura

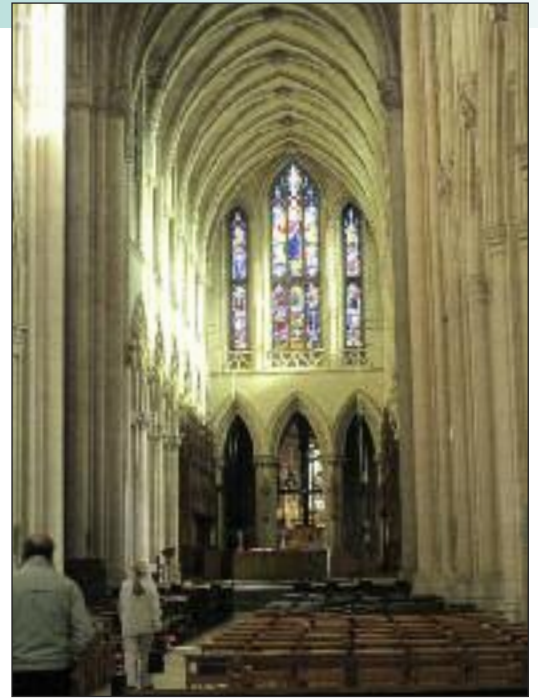
Downside Abbey

Friday 21 October 2016

Downside Abbey in Stratton-on-the-Fosse to the south of Bath is an imposing complex of buildings comprising a school, monastic accommodation, library and basilica. We arrived in time to be served a pleasant lunch of soup and fruit in the visitors' café before being split into two groups for guided tours of the church and library.

The community of St. Gregory the Great was founded in Douai around 1605 where it developed a school to educate Catholic boys. In 1795 they moved to Acton Burnell in Shropshire having suffered greatly in the French Revolution. By 1811, a new, permanent home was sought and found at Downside. The move was made by using the newly-built canal system.

Today, there are 16 monks living by the rule of St. Benedict which requires silent reflection and study, pastoral work and observance of 6 offices of prayer a day. The school has 520 students; 120 day pupils and 400 boarders.



▲ the Nave

At the side of the church is a sacristy which was largely funded by the sale of a stamp album by a monk called Conrad (penny black anyone?). Inside are many stone carvings of spiders, the symbol of St. Conrad. The church itself is vast and imposing but unfinished due to lack of funds. The west end comprises a plain wall built from a cheaper stone than the Portland stone used elsewhere. Inside, the long nave is the newest part. Designed by Giles Gilbert Scott, it is dedicated to the Downside boys who died in World War I. The older part was built



▲ The shiny toe for luck

North/South and retains the old altar in a side aisle. Here also is the shrine of St. Oliver Plunkett whose bones were brought from Germany and now rest in a beautiful gilt/oak casket. It is a place of pilgrimage and popular with Irish nuns as he is an important Irish saint.

There are many works of art including sculptures by Ninian Comper carved from single blocks of alabaster. He used boys from the school as models for St. Sebastian and other saints. At the east end is a recumbent plaster statue of the Virgin Mary wearing knitted slippers to stop her feet crumbling away. Other marble statues have shiny noses and toes as the boys consider it brings good luck to touch them before exams.

The Library contains many important documents, the most important being the Plantata of 1633, a papal bull issued by Urban V 111 confirming the 'replanting' of the Benedictines in England after the Reformation.

Other unusual items include the log of a slave ship out of Liverpool and various letters to members of the Abbey written by famous people such as the Duke of Wellington.

We returned to the café for an unexpected treat of tea and cake before heading home across the Mendips by the 'scenic' route. Thank you, Gary Gostelow, for organising a thoroughly enjoyable and informative outing.

Mirian Pearce

Photos by Gundula Dorey

▼ The Virgin and her protective slippers



Athelhampton House and Moreton Church

Wednesday 14 September 2016

The sun broke through by the time we reached Athelhampton House. We were greeted, taken into the barn, and treated to coffee and delicious homemade shortbread whilst we listened to an informative talk about the history of the place. The house dates back over 500 years and the Great Hall, with its timber roof, linen fold panelling and heraldic window glass, is one of the finest examples of 15th century domestic architecture in England.

Sir William Martyn built the Hall at Athelhampton in about 1485, fortified it and enclosed 160 acres for a deer park. It remained in his family for four generations but eventually the estate was divided between four daughters. It is now owned by the Cook family.

The tour was most interesting. I especially liked the King's Ante room that contained some designs Pugin did for the palace of Westminster. It was a pity one could not walk around some rooms, such as the library, that were cordoned off but it was well worth climbing to the second floor for a view of the gardens. Thomas Hardy had connections with the house. His father, a stonemason, worked on the building and Hardy himself painted a watercolour of the house. A strong artistic connection is still present in the West-Wing gallery which is dedicated to the work of Marie Bronislava Vorobyeva-Stebelska, known as Marevna (1892 – 1984), who lived at Athelhampton, having married the owner, Rodney Phillips. She was a Russian artist who painted in the Cubist style. A prolific painter, she produced many works inspired by the local area.

After obtaining the key of St. Edward's, an interesting little nearby church belonging to the estate, we were surprised to discover a most unusual interior. It proved to be an Orthodox Church, surprisingly decorated with icons. Mervna's daughter is buried here.

The delightful gardens were a labyrinth of rooms with water fountains and pools. In one area, twelve great topiary pyramids stood over 10 metres high. Gardeners were busy restoring the kitchen gardens, which were built before World War I, and replanting trees, herb borders and vines.

We also visited St. Nicholas at Moreton, a Georgian church with Anglo-Saxon roots and the most uncomfortable pews any of us had ever had the misfortune to use! The church warden gave a very interesting talk about the amazing glass windows, engraved by Lawrence Whistler (Rex Whistler's brother). The original windows were destroyed during the last war. Someone had taken a photo of the bombed church at the time but these were not returned from the chemist until 1960, trapped there by top secret red tape designed to preserve the nation's morale! Somewhere nearby is the site of Lawrence of Arabia's grave but, sadly, there was no time to discover it.

Many thanks to Gary Gostelow for organising such a very interesting and full day at this spectacular venue.

Jean Crick

Detail of a Whistler window at Moreton Church ►



► *The Pyramid Garden at Athelhampton House*

The Great Hall at Athelhampton House ►



► *Detail of The King's room wallpaper at Athelhampton House*

Photos by
Viv Amos and
Martin Bailey





◀ Witley Court

Witley Court

Saturday 8 October 2016

After a coffee stop at the 'new' Gloucester Services, we travelled on to Bewdley for a look around the town and to eat lunch. Most of us found the small but interesting museum, with displays of Bewdley's industrial past which included leather-, rope- and clay-pipe-making, and brass-founding. The town lies next to the River Severn and the original bridge was destroyed by floods. The 'modern' bridge carrying the road over the river towards the town centre was designed by Thomas Telford and built in 1744. We also found a walled garden with a small lake and the results of a quirky competition for the best designed duck house. Not far from this was a very nice café.

Our main aim was to visit Witley Court and Great Witley Church, which is not far from Bewdley. The house is very impressive and has magnificent views of the area. When we stood on the very edge of the formal gardens, the house appeared to be splendid. But when we approached nearer and we could see that none of the windows had glass in them and that the whole building is just a very grand roofless shell.

Thomas Foley bought the Court in 1655 and transformed it into a mansion. It was sold in 1837 to the First Earl of Dudley, who employed William Nesfield, the landscape designer, to enhance the gardens. While occupied by the Dudleys, the Court saw many parties and notable visitors. Lacking the means to maintain the house, the Dudleys sold the estate in 1920. Following a fire in 1937, some of the building was stripped and other parts brought down by vandalism and neglect. However, it is still possible to see the splendid dimensions and character of some of the rooms.

The house is now under the control of English Heritage who are also responsible for maintaining the lovely parterre. The Baroque parish church right next to the Court was saved by campaigners. The impressive-looking church is even better inside, with painted walls and ceiling and bright stained glass windows. The large Foley monument by Michael Rysbrack, completed in 1735, is one of the tallest funerary monuments in the country. The details on the pews and pulpit are beautiful and it is fortunate that restoration has taken place over the years to save this interior. I understand the crypt was suitably creepy, but I missed this as it closed early. The tea room was very well-attended, however, and some of the coach party managed to walk around more remote parts of the estate. The lake, emptied for repairs, contained lots of swan mussel shells. These freshwater mussels are often used by anglers as bait for carp.

With many thanks to David and Wendy Snelson for organising a superb day out.

Catherine Dixon



▲ Witley Parish Church – interior

Photos by Catherine Dixon

Friends Sewing Group

2016 has been a busy year for the sewing group, and we are happy to have recruited three more members so we have a good range of different skills. We have had numerous meetings with members of the Museum staff to discuss our new season's tasks and have helped with family activity days, helping children to dress up in the clothes we have made in previous years. Mediaeval Mayhem at M shed and the Bristol Rocks day at the City Museum were both very lively occasions, and it was fun being part of the much larger Archaeology day at Blaise in July. At a schools event there in September we were there again to 'help' the children with spinning, weaving, dying, and preparing the wool.

Our first project of the year was for the Spring Flower Power activity day in April. Our brief was to create sewing 'kits' to represent the flowers being studied in the other activities on offer. These were native spring flowers including celandine, primroses, dog violets and apple blossom. They generated a lot of discussion about how we could make sure that children, who had probably never held a needle before, could achieve a reasonable representation of these flowers in a short time! We then went off to prepare our prototype kits and to estimate what materials were needed. This was very different from previous projects and it really taxed us to make kits which were simple enough, yet satisfying for the children to do.

Over the summer we have been creating clothes again, this time for the Warrior Treasures exhibition, which opened in October. As well as clothes for the associated activity days, some members of the group have been making accessories such as jeweled belt buckles, sword decorations, brooches and necklaces, some of which are displayed in the exhibition.

We have also been asked to supplement the dressing-up clothes in the Little Curiosity area. These will reflect aspects of the permanent displays and include Egyptian clothing, mediaeval dress relating to one of the pictures in the art gallery, and animal masks to represent the natural history gallery, among other things. No doubt we will gather more commissions in the future.

Making the costumes and helping at the activity days makes us realise what an immense amount of work is put in by the curators to organize them. Apart from it being great fun, we enjoy supporting the Museum in a different way and they are always very appreciative. And, if anyone has young children (up to about 9-10 years old) do keep an eye out for these days – there is always so much to do that it is fun for children and adults alike.

Carol Ouvry

Photos by Chris Harley

▼ Creating a replica belt buckle by Chris Harley



▲ *Replica Anglo-Saxon belt buckles made by Chris Harley*



▲ *Embroidered replica Anglo-Saxon brooches made by Margaret McGregor*



Bristol Revisited

Wednesday 31 August 2016

Those of us who attended this excellent event at M Shed Studio were treated firstly to a short talk by Allie Dillon (senior archivist at Bristol Record Office) on the film archives held at BRO, and then to three films about Bristol, which local amateur film-making enthusiast, Gordon Young, was involved in producing.

Allie told us how the collection of around 100, mainly 35 mm, nitrate-based (highly inflammable!) films of Bristol held by BRO, dating back to the 1970s, were firstly transcribed to videotapes in the 1990s, and then more recently to digital format, mostly by two local enthusiasts, Clive Burlton and John Penny. The oldest film held by the BRO dates back to 1895; it shows the first earth being dug for the new Avonmouth docks. These digitised films, which cover many different aspects of life in and around Bristol (including many taken in World War II during the blitz) can be viewed, free of charge, at BRO.

The first of Gordon's films (about 30 min in length) comprised an interesting intermixing of a black & white film made in 1956 (with commentary by the legendary Alvar Lidell) about Bristol, and modern, colour footage shot by Gordon (with engaging commentary by his colleague, Tim Smart) showing the modern, equivalent scenes, some sixty years later. Some people in the audience afterwards voluntarily recalled recognising the 1956 scenes of Bristol!

The second, shorter film, shot by Gordon, was an account of how many of the much-loved landscapes and vistas of central Bristol would have been destroyed if the infamous 'Bristol City Development Plan', commissioned in 1966, had actually been carried through. This involved building new major roads across the city and dockland area. Fortunately, strong opposition to the scheme, and also lack of sufficient funding, prevented this.

Gordon's third film was of the firework display in 2015 at the Suspension Bridge, celebrating the 150th anniversary of its opening. Gordon, who is a volunteer guide at the Bridge, was able to obtain special access to shoot this splendid, memorable film.

This was a special event for all of us, especially Bristolians, and proved to be a most interesting afternoon 'at the cinema'.

Brian Vincent



▲ *Avonmouth Docks – the view from Junction Cut Bridge in the 1960s*
Photo © Bristol Record Office (BRO 40826-DOC-052)

Dates for your diary

Here are two events to whet your appetite for the next year.

R.N.L.I. Headquarters in Poole

Monday 3 April 2017

We are having a guided tour of the training facilities followed by lunch.

Clevedon Pier

Friday 11 May 2017

We are going to have an afternoon tour of the newly re-vamped pier. There is an updated visitor centre and a porthole under the decking looking towards Wales.

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

Avoncroft Museum of Historic Buildings

Wednesday 27 July 2016

Avoncroft Museum in Bromsgrove started as a result of a campaign by a group of local people to save an ancient timber-framed building from demolition. The museum now has well over 30 buildings which together represent a record of the social, agricultural and industrial history of the Midlands, as well as the architecture and building craft of the area spanning the last 700 years.

The previous night's rain had washed the dusty air and by the time we had reached the coach stop the sun was out, rendering my precautionary raincoat redundant. The weather remained clement as we were guided around the main exhibits enjoying the interesting commentary and fascinating anecdotes about the buildings and their previous uses.

We followed the course of grain from the threshing barn, designed to separate the wheat from the chaff, through the granary, ventilated to allow air circulation and elevated over dog kennels to discourage the rats, into the windmill and, finally, to the kitchens where we watched bread being baked over a fire by a 're-enactor'.



▲ The Granary



◀ The Tollhouse

Along the way we saw many interesting buildings, including a perry mill - perry and cider were specialities of the area and an important part of the diet where water was largely undrinkable; a privy - providing room for conjecture as to why there were three holes; a nailshop - nailmaking being a major industry in Bromsgrove from the 17th century, gradually declining through the late 19th century due to mechanisation and competition from abroad; an air raid shelter; and a prefab decorated in 1950s style, provoking many childhood memories.

I found the Town House and the Toll House particularly interesting as they both had 'living history' demonstrations of the sort of food that

would have been cooked and eaten at the time. We ate a more modern lunch of sandwiches and pastries which was provided in the impressive Guesten Hall, a new build designed to showcase the lovely 14th century Grade II listed mediaeval roof.

After lunch we had 'free time' to revisit favourite bits or discover those we had not seen, such as the telephone kiosk collection, with a special tour of the windmill provided. We reassembled back at the coach at 4pm after a most interesting and informative day.

Viv Amos



◀ The Tollhouse kitchen

Photos by Viv Amos

Saltford Brass Mill

Tuesday 27 September 2016

The Saltford Brass Mill is a rambling old industrial building on the River Avon cared for by dedicated volunteers. We had already been enthused by one of them – Tony Coverdale – when he spoke to us in January about its ongoing restoration. Funds raised go on essentials such as keeping the roof watertight, rather than on the interpretation and displays, which are all the better for being produced by knowledgeable volunteers without funds for anything fancy.

By the end of our visit we could visualise the mill in its heyday in the 18th century as one of a series of mills in the Avon valley, all using water power to manufacture brass products. Brass ingots were produced in Baptist Mills from copper and zinc and delivered to the Avon valley mills to be beaten into brass kettles, pans and bowls. The finished goods were taken back to Bristol for export. Later Saltford Mill was adapted to produce brass sheet as well as hollow-ware.

Saltford Mill is notable for still having one of its four annealing furnaces; these were used to heat and cool the brass to prevent it cracking while being hammered or rolled. The furnaces used coal brought up-river from the Kingswood coalfield.

The picture of the Avon valley as a centre of industrial activity immediately brings Ironbridge Gorge and Coalbrookdale to mind. It was little surprise, then, to find that Abraham Darby, before his move to the river Severn, was one of the founders of the Bristol Brass Company, and very involved in developing the processes used in the battery mills.



▲ Saltford Brass Mill

▼ Saltford Brass Mill – the annealing furnace



◀ Saltford Brass Mill – a replica battery hammer



Saltford Mill continued working until 1925 – and then became a leisure centre! Eric Butler, a businessman and keen sportsman, bought the mill and converted the area occupied by the water-powered 'battery' hammers into a squash court and installed a dynamo to provide lighting. I imagined the ball bounced at dangerous angles if the walls and floor were anything like they are today!

We ended the visit with tea and masses of cakes at the nearby Bird in Hand pub. This was Caroline Tasker's maiden trip as an organiser; it went very smoothly and was much enjoyed by all.

Katherine Martin

Photos by Martin Bailey



◀ Iron Age Roundhouses



▲ Repainted mediaeval fresco in 12th century St Teilo's church

▼ Workmen's Institute from Oakdale, Caerphilly



◀ Llwyn-yr-eos Farmstead on its original site

St Fagans

Tuesday 23 August 2016

Our visit to St Fagans National History Museum started well with coffee and Welsh cakes served in the Castle. This house, which dates from 1580, and its grounds are original to the site but most of the other 40+ buildings have come from other parts of Wales and been rebuilt. There were fine well-tended gardens, including a seasonally perfect mulberry grove, to admire on the walk to the tunnel leading to the other main area.

Here, there were many dwellings to explore, ranging from (reimagined) Iron Age Roundhouses to a 1948 Type B2 prefab, plus places of work, education and worship. My favourite was the Rhyd-y-car iron worker's houses, relocated from Merthyr Tydfil. There are six houses in the terrace, displayed to show how they might have looked in 1805, 1855, 1895, 1925, 1955 and 1985.

The teashop above the Gwalia Stores also scored highly on my 'authentic yet updated' scale. A long wait allowed plenty of time to admire the old fashioned fittings and layout but, once we were seated, the service was wonderful and the food good. The root vegetable crisps with the traditional cheese sandwich were a nice modern touch.

The sunny weather was ideal for exploring an open-air museum: no getting wet

between buildings and a welcome chill on entering dark dank interiors. Many thanks to Gary Gostelow for arranging such an excellent day out.

Sue Pettit



Photos by Hilary Cleeve and Martin Bailey

The Etruscans – Death and Fun

Sunday 25 September 2016

Where the Etruscans came from remains a mystery – possibly from outside Italy or perhaps from the region in mid-Italy which they dominated for a number of centuries before Rome emerged and took control. What is certain is that they left a distinctive legacy of monuments and art which we heard all about from our enthusiastic and knowledgeable speaker, Robert Walters.

In particular many of their stone-built tombs remain dotted about the countryside and many of them are decorated inside with aspirations for the afterlife as well as vivid scenes of real life with nicely-depicted plants and often droll figures. So we get to know that the Etruscans wore togas and reclined on sofas, as did the later Romans; that they enjoyed hunting and fishing. They made vases in the Greek style, often painted with scenes from Homer's Iliad, which they seem to have particularly enjoyed. They produced superb metal work. We saw slides of some including the Chimaera, which is one of their legendary inventions with its lion head and body, snake tail and an extra goat's head on the back for good measure. A sheep's liver modelled in bronze had neat subdivisions with the names of various deities and must have been used for augury purposes. The Etruscan language is a form of Greek which they wrote from right to left and with the letters reversed – you feel you need a mirror to make it look right again.

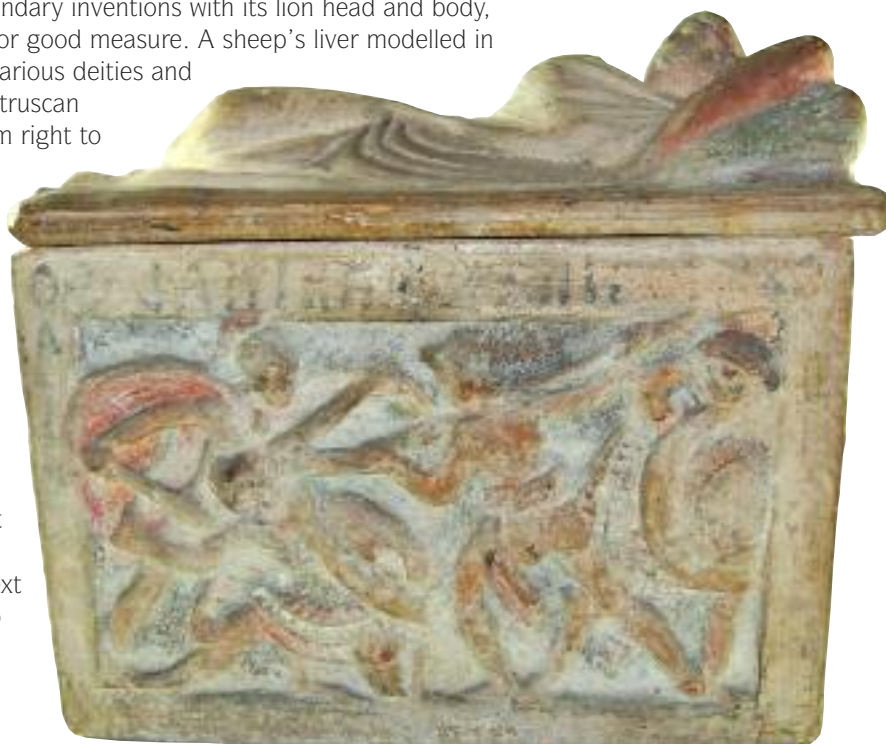
They were fond of showing human figures in action. Even the statues look as though they are in a hurry, Robert said, and would have stood out even more with their vivid paintwork. They loved showing 'strong' animals such as bulls and lions and were not shy of sexual scenes. Altogether the Etruscans give the impression of really enjoying their lives and preparing to do the same in the afterlife too.

But I have to admit that what I like best is that they built the sewer system which the Romans then took on and which is still in use today. So next time you look at the Cloaca Maxima yawning into the Tiber think 'Etruscan!' and marvel at their practical ingenuity.

Gundula Dorey

▼ *Terracotta cinerary urn in the form of a sarcophagus. On the lid is a reclining female. On the front is a moulded decoration depicting a battle.*

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