

Newsletter

Illustrated Talk

Blitz Families

Thursday 5 March 2016

Penny Starns described the arrangements made in the 1930s for evacuating children. Sir John Anderson (of Anderson shelter fame) formed a Civil Defence Committee for the nation as early as 1932. This divided the country into Evacuation Areas (which were to evacuate children), Reception Areas (which were to receive children, whether they wanted them or not) and Neutral Areas. It was thought France would hold back the Germans and the Luftwaffe would be unable to fly this far west so Bristol and Plymouth were designated Neutral, and Bristol did not have to evacuate its children. Nancy Astor, the Plymouth MP, had Plymouth redesignated quite quickly. Bristol remained Neutral throughout the war in spite of being bombed heavily and many children being evacuated. There is a fascinating paper detailing a report by Professor CM MacInnes in 1941 called *The Children Who Were Left Behind* on opinions about the bombing and evacuation policy in Bristol up to that time which is well worth reading.

The greatest evacuations were in August/September 1939, though many children were back by Christmas; other waves were in 1940 and 1944. Penny said that the evacuation process was fairly efficient but the follow-up was poor. Some evacuees were ill-treated. Many were very unhappy away from home.

When the physical and intellectual development of the children was measured, there was great official surprise that the children who had gone to fresh air, open spaces and good food were less developed in both spheres than the 'poor' children who survived the Blitz, seemingly ate poorer food and had bombsites for adventure playgrounds. Perhaps the fact that they stayed with their mothers had something to do with it. Many of the evacuated boys were used as cheap labour in dull jobs, while city children perhaps had the added stimulus of the war going on around them. The researches into the importance of family units led to the Education Act of 1944 and the Children Act of 1948, both attempts to improve the lot of children.

Robert Walters



▲ Newfoundland Road – Young girl with dolls' house identified by her daughter as Ellen Rich, aged about 11 years after the Blitz on 16 March 1941

Bristol Record Office,
© Jim Facey

Blaise Castle House Museum

While the house was closed for the winter, work has been going on at Blaise. The shop has been moved from the entrance hall, opening it up so you can see the carved friezes on the walls, which is a vast improvement. Shop items are now attractively displayed in the room behind, which originally held information on the history of the estate, and now has a video interpretation summary of the estate and buildings. On peak days the French windows in the room will be opened, with seating provided and a coffee cart on the terrace.

The wooden partition in the Victorian Classroom display has been replaced with a clear waist-high barrier and the nursery upstairs has been converted into a room where children can dress up in appropriate costume linked to the house. Further improvements to the interpretation of the house, grounds and surrounding areas are expected.

Blaise now looks lighter, more attractive and welcoming so do make the effort to visit and leave ideas and comments.

Remembering Goram Fair

A community event to celebrate the legend of local giant Goram will be held at Blaise on 30 June, a reminder of the annual fair which took place on Blaise Estate from the 1950s until 1996.

There will be a 1950s style funfair, activities and stalls on the park for all the family to enjoy, and in the museum house there will be photos from Goram Fairs of the past, along with memories from people who were there. Before the big day itself there will be giant-building workshops, creating a giant Goram and massive flowers for Goram's garden, on 25 - 29 June at 1.00-4.00pm in the Laundry behind Blaise Museum.

BAfM Conference & AGM at Ironbridge Gorge Museum

Saturday 1 October 2016

This is an excellent opportunity to visit the fascinating Ironbridge Museum, particularly now that David Eveleigh, formerly Curator of Social History at Blaise Museum, has been appointed as Director of Collections and Learning. All members of Friends of BMGA are eligible to attend the conference, the theme of which is Marketing for Excellence. Friends of Ironbridge Gorge Museum have done some research into what the museum provides for its Friends, how they are managed and the relationship with the museum management. The results of this research will be presented at the conference. In addition, there is the option on the Sunday of a guided visit to the Iron Bridge, the Jackfield Tile Museum and Blists Hill Victorian Town. Overnight accommodation is available – see the booking form enclosed with this newsletter for further details.

Programme Committee

David Mizen and Keith Borissow have both stepped down from the committee. We are very grateful to David for

managing the administration of the talks so efficiently and to Keith for organising events. Catherine Dixon has kindly taken over some of the administration for us, which is much appreciated.

Mediaeval Mayhem at M Shed

On 1 April part of the first floor at M Shed had a distinctly different atmosphere from usual. Visitors coming up the stairs were met with the sight of a mediaeval feast laid out on tables; jugglers were teaching children how to throw balls in the air; in the Studio children could make jester hats, dress up in mediaeval costume to be photographed, make stained glass windows and knight's shields, find out about mediaeval artefacts from the museum's collections, and even have a mediaeval hairstyle!

Both the Sewing Group and Cooking Group were involved: the mediaeval

costumes had all been made (including some hand-sewn felt shoes), as had some of the food: rye and bean bread, vegetable pottage and red jelly. Friends were on hand to provide information throughout the day.



Mediaeval costume made by the Sewing Group
Picture by Carol Ouvry

From the Membership Secretary

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

June Hibberd, Membership Secretary

Ms Virginia Bergin	Mrs Louise Lyddon
Mr Brian Boyland	Mr Arthur Massey
Mrs Philippa Boyland	Mrs Brenda Massey
Ms Alison Cooper	Ms Esme Nourse
Mr Neil Deamer	Mrs Patricia Pearce
Mrs Gillian Fraser	Mrs Penelope Robinson
Mr David Iles	Miss Joanna Sarsby
Mrs Sue Iles	Mrs Florence Tweedale
Mr Chris Lyddon	

Dr Broughton's Herbarium: Volumes British I and Jamaican I, III and IV

Senior Curator of Natural Sciences, Dr Victoria Purewal ACR, explains how the support of the Friends has made possible the conservation and digitisation of a significant natural sciences collection, leading to new opportunities for scientific discoveries with national and international partners.

Bristol Museum and Art Gallery is fortunate to hold four bound herbaria of Dr Arthur Broughton, a young physician and keen botanist. This first volume was collected from around his local area in Bristol during the 1770s, first recording the rare Slender Hare's Ear (*Bupleurum temisum*) in the Avon Gorge.

At the age of just 24 Broughton became very ill. He travelled to Jamaica, where he recovered his health, and between the years 1780 and 1790 he collected a further 3 volumes of Jamaican plant specimens. Today some of these specimens are incredibly rare and two specimens have been designated as holotypes, which means they are the only described specimens of that name. Broughton died at the age of 38 but by this time he was an established and well-respected botanist with a genus of orchids named after him.

Before joining the staff at Bristol, I was working as a freelance botanical conservator and was very fortunate to be able to undertake the conservation work. The first priority was to address the level of contamination on the pages and the book covers. Historic preservatives are hazardous and the books must be handled appropriately. Identification was achieved by first scanning with an ultra violet lamp, which causes certain historic chemicals to fluoresce. Further analysis involved X-ray fluorescence, which identified high concentrations of arsenic, lead and mercury. This highlighted that care was needed when handling and working with the volumes and reiterated that the volumes required conservation.

Every specimen was then digitised in situ to provide a complete record of the specimen. This allows images to be sent to researchers and there is also an e-book available so that a small number of the specimens can be viewed on-line.

The specimens within the volumes were very fragile and it required painstaking work to remove each damaged specimen and re-mount onto archival card. This was necessary to improve access to the collections and reduce contamination and handling issues. The images have since been shared with the Natural History Museums of London and Jamaica. These institutions have identified new specimens to science and strong links have been forged with our institution.

This project would not have been possible without the support of the Friends of Bristol Museum, Galleries & Archives. The total project cost of £23,922 was funded through a grant of £5,815 from the Friends of BMGA, £15,107 from Arts Council England's Preservation of Industrial and Scientific Material (PRISM) Fund, and £3,000 from the Finnis Scott Foundation.

▼ *Image of Jamaican Volume IV opened and showing specimen *Croton cascarilla* as originally mounted.*
© Bristol Museum & Art Gallery



Dates for your diary

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

Local Abbey and Monastic Library

Friday 21 October 2016

Visit to Downside Abbey. We will have a guided tour of the Neo-Gothic abbey and the monastic library with its rare books.

Royal Mint and a majestic cathedral

Tuesday 1 November 2016

We will take a guided tour of the new Royal Mint visitor centre at Llantrisant and then visit Llandaff Cathedral on our way home.

Christmas visit

Monday 12 December 2016

This year we will visit the ever popular American Museum where the theme is likely to be Toys.

5 Days in North Wales

Monday 1 – Friday 5 May 2017

On this short break we will be going to Portmeirion, the Snowdon Mountain Railway and the Electric Mountain, a hydro-electric scheme, plus other as yet unspecified places of interest.

Application forms for these events will be with the next newsletter.

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

In these times of austerity, budgets remain tight but despite this the Bristol Culture team is working hard to develop what it offers the public and to improve its services wherever possible. This can be seen in the changes at our three historic houses and particularly at Blaise Castle House Museum.

We are very excited to have been nominated for the prestigious Museums and Heritage Awards for 'death: the human experience' in the 'Temporary or Touring Exhibitions' category; this is industry recognition for the exhibition, which attracted 62,000 visitors, over 8,500 of whom had never visited us before.

Our other main exhibition this winter, 'Wildlife Photographer of the Year', has also generated huge interest, with visitor figures and ticket income exceeding our expectations.

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

As always the preparation of new exhibitions and displays continues behind the scenes. In particular work has been ongoing to refurbish Gallery 3 Old Masters for its re-opening in May.

Chinese New Year was as popular as ever in February attracting excellent crowds. Children's holiday activities, including those delivered by Front of House staff as well as the Learning and Collection teams, have been very well received.

M Shed

Work continues on the development behind M Shed. Museum Street, which runs behind M Shed, now continues behind the Framing Factory to emerge on the dockside past the Olive Shed, resulting in a greater area only for pedestrians. A new walkway from Gaol Ferry Bridge is creating more footfall past the entrance to M Shed and the M Cafe is opening earlier to take advantage of this. More cycle racks are on order for visitors to M Shed and a dedicated disabled parking space should be marked shortly on the new road behind the Framing Factory.

Red Lodge and Georgian House Museums

For the new season, the gardens of these two houses have become an integral part of the visitor experience. At Red Lodge the Park Row entrance has been closed and visitors will enter the site through the Knot Garden. As with Blaise, we have standardised opening hours this year and intend to improve the visitor experience further over coming months.

Bristol Record Office

BRO has recently introduced a paid search service to help researchers who are unable to visit our searchroom.

Volunteers are now adding photos dating from the 1930s to the 1970s from Bristol City Council's public relations office to the Know Your Place website. Recent acquisitions include

the personal papers of historian Anton Bantock.

BRO is working with Accentuate on a national social history project, 'History of Place', exploring the history of disabled people in relation to built heritage. Project volunteers will be researching the Guild of the Brave Poor Things in Braggs Lane, which opened in 1913 as the first building designed to bring together disabled people, to produce a new exhibition for M Shed.

Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC)

BRERC has begun digitising ditches surveyed in South Gloucestershire and Avonmouth by volunteers of the A Forgotten Landscape project. Digitised data of museum specimens has also been reformatted as part of a John Ellerman-funded project to make information on natural history specimens available through national and global websites.

As follow-up to the work funded through Bristol Green Capital 2015, urban alleyway data gathered as part of the 'How Green is My Alley' Project is being mapped digitally.

Exhibitions and Events

M Shed

'The Story of Children's Television from 1946 to today'

2 July – 25 September

Meet original characters and objects, including Mummy Woodentop and the original Tracy Island model from Blue Peter, Gordon the Gopher, The Wombles, Morph, Rastamouse and the singing veggies from Mr Bloom's Nursery!

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

'Art from Elsewhere'

until 17 July

This exhibition, shown jointly with Arnolfini, gathers 38 significant artists from 22 countries. The socially-engaged



▲ **Mohamed Bourouissa, La Reflet 2007**

Courtesy of kamel mennour, Paris

work addresses life, politics and identity in a globalised society. The exhibition includes some of the most important artists working today, seminal figures in the history of conceptual art, and young artists whose work enters British museums for the first time.

25 Below

August and early September

Young people take over the main temporary exhibition space with a mixture of scheduled and drop-in activities inspired by the museum and its collections. Watch out for a wall of selfies, music, computer games, videos and much more.



▲ *The Amazing City of Briswool in all its woolly splendour at MShed, with ss Great Britain in the foreground*

© The Bristol Post

the log book of the merchant ship *Fantee* (1855-6), acquired thanks to funding from the Friends.

Working Exhibits

The working exhibits have started their new year and all have already been in action for the public. We are looking for more volunteers to help with their operation and, in particular, need a few people prepared to do some of the administration such as counting tickets and preparing cash bags ready for the weekend. Contact Chris Ecclestone (chris.ecclestone@bristol.gov.uk) if you think you could help. We are also looking for volunteers to clear intrusive vegetation from the railway so, if you fancy a bit of weeding, get in touch.

Portbury is going to be at Beamish for another six months but will be back in July. Restoration work is beginning on

Henbury, and the railway continues to be operated by hired-in former Port of Par engine *Judy*.

Great progress is being made with the construction of a workshop extension in L Shed to allow us to work on railway and larger vehicles under cover – something that has been sorely lacking since the Industrial Museum closed. By the end of June we hope to be using it.



◀ *Rembrandt Self Portrait at the age of 63*

© The National Gallery
London

'Rembrandt's 'Self Portrait: at the age of 63' to 17 July

For 8 weeks this masterpiece from the National Gallery forms the focal point of our European Old Masters Gallery, now significantly refurbished, and the redisplay of our own works by Lukas Cranach, Giovanni Bellini, Jacob van Ruisdael and others.

'Ancient Mexico in Colour'

6 August – May 2017

Artist and traveller, Adela Breton (1849-1923) worked at archaeological sites in Mexico making full-size colour copies of the wall paintings in temples and buildings. From our collection, they are on display for the first time since the 1940s.

Bristol Record Office

Ten Centuries of Records

until 26 August 2016

This exhibition highlights the breadth of the BRO collections, from mediaeval charters which laid the foundations of the city, to records documenting economic development and social change, to modern photographs and films. Also displayed is



◀ *Caryatid by Adela Breton*

© Bristol Culture



▲ A carved boss in the chancel at Compton Martin

◀ The exterior of Compton Martin church showing the columbarium added above the Norman chancel

Three Somerset Churches

Friday 11 March 2016

The weather was fine and dry for our trip down into Somerset. We were lucky to have Dr Steven Blake accompanying us from The Wilson in Cheltenham. He was so informative, giving us an overview at each church that added much to our enjoyment and appreciation. As a Cheltonian born and brought up in Cheltenham I was doubly impressed!

Our first church was Compton Martin, in the centre of the village overlooking the pond. It was originally a simple 12th century Romanesque church. Inside it has a jewel-like chancel with low rib vaulting which has an intimate feel like an undercroft. In the north wall is an effigy of Thomas de Moreton which can be lit with a handy switch to get the full effect. One of the columns in the south side of the nave has an unusual spiral fluted decoration, thought to be copied from Durham Cathedral. It has a surviving Norman clerestory and font. The strangest feature is the existence of a columbarium or dovecote above the chancel ceiling. The assumption is that pigeons were kept for the rector's table. Originally there were 150 nesting holes in the north and south walls – now there are 80. There is allegedly a similar pigeon roof in St Mary Redcliffe. Outside there is a perpendicular tower. The pretty porch is adorned by rambling roses and the north wall has a row of stone-carved figureheads, one of which is a dog. After looking round the church we were given coffee and cake in the old school room next door.

▼ The interior of Compton Martin church



We journeyed on south to Croscombe, east of Wells. Croscombe was once a bustling wool town. This large church, built in the 15th century of grey stone with a 100 foot tower – (and spire, unusual for Somerset), speaks of the prosperity of the wool trade. It is remarkable for its early 17th century fittings, partly funded by the Bishop of Bath and Wells and partly by the Fortescues. It has one of the finest Jacobean pulpits in the country, dated 1616. The two-tired arcaded rood screen is lavishly carved, dark and equally imposing with a coat of arms topping it. The box pews have doors and are decorated with carved ends and poppy finials. Apart from all this grandeur the rest of the church is rather plain. It was a huge contrast



▲ The Jacobean pulpit in Croscombe church



▲ The two-tiered arcaded rood screen in Croscombe church

Photos by Martin Bailey and
Leslie Cooper

▼ The interior of Martock



with the first church. We had a welcome soup and sandwich lunch (and more cake!) in the George Inn nearby. The staff were charming and the lunch served efficiently.

After lunch we continued south to Martock. Built entirely of Ham Hill stone, this was another late middle-ages wool church. It is surrounded by attractive 17th and 18th century houses, an older former Treasury now owned by the National Trust and a 16th century Court House with studded door and a carved portcullis above. When we went inside the church we were blown away by the sheer scale, and by its light and airy feel, rather like Chipping Campden's church in the Cotswolds. The glorious oak angel roof was completed in 1513. In between the wide cross beams are bays of panels. At the centre of each cross beam is a carved angel with outstretched wings and bearing a shield. The panels have 6 different pierced designs. Long carved pendants hang down from the beams. It is hard to describe but magnificent to see, especially if you have remembered to bring your binoculars! How they assembled the roof so high up does not bear imagining. Another remarkable feature is the twelve canopied niches high up on each side of the nave, with paintings on their back walls of the 12 apostles, possibly dating early 17th century. It is doubtful whether they ever contained statues.

Our visit ended with the serving of tea and yet more cake in the church. All the cakes had been made by one lady over two days. The coffee sponge was heaven. And our driver had the last word on the day. He said that the coach was full but carrying no luggage and yet his system was recording overload. He concluded that it must be all the cake we had eaten!

Heartfelt thanks to Wendy for doing all the work to make the day run so smoothly. I cannot help thinking that she has established something with her Three Churches Tours with Steven Blake. I do hope there will be more.

Pat Walker

National Museum of Wales – Cardiff

Friday 15 January 2016

The Davies Sisters and their Impressionist Gifts

This visit included a choice of two curator-led tours, leading to a difficult decision for many of us. I chose The Impressionists' tour which was led by Anne Pritchard, who took us to see some of the treasures of the Museum of Wales in Galleries 11 and 16. She linked the pictures to the generosity and imagination of two wealthy sisters, Gwendoline and Margaret Davies. They were granddaughters of David Davies, a self-made industrialist, the oldest of nine children of a tenant farmer, who made his fortune by building railways, owning coal mines, and building the Barry docks to overcome problems with exporting coal through Cardiff.

We were introduced to a dozen or so pictures purchased before the Impressionists became fashionable and expensive. It would be good to remember them all, but to select my own highlights, I have to include one of Monet's many waterlily paintings with the blooms and leaves floating on the surface of his lake at Giverny. His garden was his workshop, producing the subjects for the paintings which kept his business running. The results are spread around the world, and we can all now enjoy the results.

The highlight of the whole collection has to be Renoir's Blue Girl *La Parisienne*, which is one of those 'never to be forgotten' pictures with a blend of magnificent painting – the texture and colour of the flowing blue dress, and a face which leaves one puzzled – partly bland but also expressive. What is she like? What is she thinking?

In contrast, Anne introduced us to *The Rabbit* by Edouard Manet. The very dead body hangs by its feet from a nail on a window frame awaiting an appointment with the stewpot. It is painted with relatively coarse brush strokes, one of a group of works intended to be viewed from a distance which are typical of the subjects and techniques for which the Impressionists were criticised but which we now find interesting.

More contrast of subject is provided by Paul Cezanne's mountain landscape *Midday, L'Estaque*, showing a small coastal village near Marseille. Fields, a few buildings and trees sloping up to a mountain side in Mediterranean heat – all expressed in confident splashes of golden stubble with more detailed greens of the trees and hazy purple mountain side in the distance.

I hope it will not be too long before I can return to Cardiff, to enjoy again these inspiring galleries containing the generous gifts given by the Davies sisters to Wales. Meanwhile I can prompt my memory from the illustrated guide *Colour and Light*, and look again at the Impressionist paintings in Bristol's Queens Road Gallery. Perhaps I will be able to get to the Impressionist exhibition at the Holburne Museum, Bath from 13 February to 5 June 2016.

Many thanks to Gary Gostelow and his colleagues of the Friends' Programme Committee for arranging an enjoyable visit.

Roy Taylor



▲ Pierre-August Renoir –
La Parisienne. 1874



The Francois Zola Dam –
Paul Cezanne

◀ Dinosaurs



All photos © National Museum of Wales

The Story of Wales

The other tour of the Evolution of Wales was led by curator Cindy Howells. She took us through an exhibition that depicted Wales many millions of years ago until relatively recent times. The geology and geography changed dramatically as we were conducted through time. Many ammonites were displayed as were depictions of dinosaurs and mammoths. Even the floor was uneven to portray changes in weather conditions and water levels. Much imagination had been given to this permanent exhibition.

After this curator-led tour we had plenty of time to explore the rest of Cardiff Museum which has been put together with great thought and creativity.

Gary Gostelow

The Lightbox, Woking

Thursday 28 January 2016

On one of the few sunny days in January we travelled to Surrey to the Lightbox, a purpose-built gallery beside the Basingstoke canal. As well as having contemporary exhibition space the Lightbox is also home to 'Woking's Story', an interactive museum of the town's history. Central to the town's development was the coming of the railway in the 19th century and the shortage of burial space in London. The 'Necropolis Railway' transported coffins and mourners to what became the largest cemetery in Western Europe until World War II.

An exhibition of clothes worn by mourners and funeral etiquette was a reminder that in the 19th century death was a public matter.

The Lightbox is extremely fortunate to have the extensive Ingram collection of modern British art on long-term loan; these include works of sculpture and paintings by the foremost artists of the 20th century. We saw an exhibition entitled 'Bodies' which included sculptures and drawings by, among others, Elisabeth Frink, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Jacob Epstein, Reg. Butler and Anthony Green.

The Lightbox provides an exceptional exhibition, educational and social resource which on our visit was clearly well used by local residents and visitors alike.

Many thanks to Ruth Welch for organising this opportunity to see some exceptional works of art.

Caroline Dallas



▲ **Girl Looking Down (1956-57)**
Bronze with a black patina
© The Estate of Reg Butler

A Day in the Countryside

Wednesday 17 February 2016

On a Wednesday morning in February, 51 of us and our driver set off in the rain for Longleat and a day out investigating its history and attractions. It was a good scenic drive though and much appreciated.

The building of the house commenced in 1568 for Sir John Thynne, ancestor of the Marquess of Bath, and is now thought to be a great example of our Elizabethan mansions. In touring the house with its many rooms, both displayed and unused and those used as private apartments, words and phrases such as opulent, grand and 'out of our league' sprang to mind, together with the thoughts on the mundane matter of cleaning it all! We were informed briefly of the aristocratic connections (though those with royalty stretched back only to Henry VII and went no further forward) and could examine the family 'trees' displayed on the wall if we wished - one for the women of the family but the other was the important one, it was pointed out, as it was for the men.

A lot of family photos were scattered around - a nice familiar touch - many paintings from the years of occupation, libraries, books and furniture (no doubt some of which are important collections) and unexpectedly large modern murals by the present Marquess, done recently in very much his own genre (in medium and style). Some of these were even in surprising geometric patterns on the ceilings, in great contrast to the other very ornate 'earlier in the last century' ones. One cannot blame him for having a good try in the modern mode but the contrast was somewhat startling.

Though one could say that the viewing of the house as part of the attractions is important - certainly it adds to the beauty of the whole estate - the park with its many facilities and educational areas seems to be the major 'draw' and the main attraction and where various celebrations take place throughout the year. The extensive land attached to the house contains the wild-life park, which does valuable service for conservation and which attracts tourists and equally valuable funds for the upkeep of the whole enterprise. This we did not tour as it was early in the season for viewing unfortunately.

However we were able to spot the remains of the Chinese New Year celebrations brightening up the immediate grounds to the house, including an extremely long dragon and lanterns in the trees, plus large boards explaining that this is the year of the monkey, though the explanation for this was missed by this writer! An enjoyable outing however with plenty of chat, giggling and banter to add the ordinary human element to the day - so thanks to Wendy Aldridge-Morris for enabling this!

Pam Sheppard



▲ Longleat House



Two fun items from the Chinese New Year celebrations at Longleat



Photos by
Martin Bailey

Bristol Costume Services

Friday 18 March 2016

Another adventure into the back streets of Bristol provided further insight into the wide variety of businesses which underpin Bristol as a centre of creativity. Bristol Costume Services is known to very few people outside the theatre world despite the fact that it is the largest theatre costume hire service in this country outside London and supplies costumes for the theatre, film and TV industries.

It is housed in the top floors of a large building on the Filwood retail estate tucked away among factories off the Fishponds Road. Apart from the cold, the first impression is of walking into a giant charity shop with rail upon rail of all kinds of clothes stretching almost as far as the eye could see. There are over 90,000 items in stock including period and contemporary costumes, uniforms, armour, footwear, hats, and pantomime characters. The costumes are categorized by item; men, women or children and then by size. Directors and cast members come to select and try on the costumes so it is quite usual for actors to wander around between the rails.

Here and there were mobile rails of costumes waiting for dispatch to productions such as *Hamlet* and *All's Well that Ends Well* at the Tobacco Factory; *Call the Midwife*; *Fiddler on the Roof*; *Father Ted* and other well-known theatre and TV productions. On other rails were the returned costumes waiting to be checked in, sent for cleaning or mending before being returned to the storage rails.

In the workroom, costumes are made and mended as required. Four or five extra staff come in to do this when needed. Currently they are making postman uniforms for use of visitors to the Postal Museum using original 19th and 20th century costumes as templates. All costumes are made to a very high standard, and have to be robust enough to withstand quick changes, or dressing up activities in museums.

The laundry was piled high with clothes waiting to be washed or ironed. Much is sent out to specialist companies if there are large numbers of items such as shirts, or for starching, but delicate work is done on site by a small number of extra staff who come in part time, and by the permanent staff if they have time.

The business was built up by Jennie Falconer from 1990 with costumes made for or bought from Bristol Old Vic, BBC Bristol, BBC Wales, Welsh National Opera, West End shows and other sources. It continues to be added to either by making new costumes or purchasing them as opportunity arises. They are sent all over the world, and our guide told us that costumes for *Call the Midwife* had just been packed up and sent off to South Africa. There is a permanent staff of only five people to undertake this herculean task. Their enthusiasm was obvious and they gave us a fascinating glimpse of how one very specialized Bristol business operates.

Carol Ouvry



▲ Evening shoes

Photos by Judith Jones



Ceremonial costumes ►



◀ MV Balmoral moored outside L Shed



▲ The engine room with volunteer engineer Peter Dunderdale

MV Balmoral

Thursday 12 February 2016

The weather was kind for our visit to *MV Balmoral*. We found her moored at the quayside outside L Shed, where she has spent the winter being repaired as preparation for an active season of day excursions.

Volunteer guide, Dave Bassett, described how *Balmoral* was built at Southampton in 1949 as the flagship of the Red Funnel Company to reinforce their car and passenger ferry service to the Isle of Wight. As car ferry demand grew, *Balmoral* was transferred to the White Funnel fleet of P & A Campbell in the Bristol Channel, who operated her jointly with the paddle steamer *Waverley* until 2012.

Balmoral is a unique heritage ship. She is owned by a charity – MV Balmoral Fund Ltd – and operated by White Funnel Ltd. Maintenance and operation of the ship is expensive, and demands active fund-raising to top up passenger income. Thanks to Heritage Lottery funding, major refurbishment to *Balmoral* was carried out in 2003 including fitting new engines; in 2014 she had hull repairs and 5-year major survey at Sharpness.

Operation of a heritage ship is more complicated than operation of a heritage railway engine, because it is subject to all the effects of tides, currents, visibility, wind and weather variations, harbours, landing stages, piers, and channels, in addition to the needs of a vessel with many systems on which the safety and comfort of passengers depend. Every day is different.

Members of a knowledgeable team of volunteers took groups of us around the ship showing us the public rooms, the bridge, the galley, the crew accommodation, and the engine room with its two 800 horsepower diesel engines and much auxiliary equipment for the electrical, plumbing and ventilation systems. Particularly impressive was the way in which modern navigational, signalling and safety equipment and appropriate duplications have been incorporated, while preserving the authentic heritage feel as much as possible.

With her crew of 18, and with room for 500 passengers, *Balmoral* completed a day trip programme in 2015, and the 2016 timetable is now available on the White Funnel website. The programme commences with a long weekend of Bristol Channel sailings in May, during which she will transfer from her winter quarters outside L Shed to start her summer programme. The 2016 provisional programme is for June in the Thames and South Coast areas, followed by July in North Wales and the Isle of Man, and back to the Bristol Channel in late July and August.

Many thanks to Carol Ouvry for organising this impressive visit to *Balmoral* which we all enjoyed. Those interested in going on an excursion will find details on www.whitefunnel.co.uk

Roy Taylor

Photos by
Roy Taylor

▼ View from the bridge of MV Balmoral



Forge Mill Needle Museum

Wednesday 6 April 2016

Needle-making was a cottage industry with the needles made by hand. By about 1830 new machines were introduced to increase productivity and satisfy growing demand. Forge Mill was one of the first factories, specialising in scouring (or polishing) the needles using water wheels driven by the River Arrow to provide the power.

Redditch was famous for metalworking and became the needle-making centre of the world. By 1866, 100 million needles could be made in the area each week. It is claimed that, when the Japanese started making needles, one suburb of Tokyo was renamed 'Redditch' just so they could print 'Made in Redditch' on their products.

We were shown how wire was brought into a mill and reduced to the correct size for needles. It was cut into lengths the size of two needles long. Pointers put a point at each end. This was a well-paid job, but it was dangerous. Pointers inhaled dust from the grindstones, slivers of metal could blind them and if a grindstone broke it could cause fatal injuries. A pointer's life expectancy was just 30 years.

Once the points were made, the wire was flattened in the middle ready to put in the eyes. Two holes were made in the middle of the wire by machines usually operated by women. These could produce up to 3,000 per hour. Next was 'spitting' where needles were lined up and wire put through the eyes. The needles were then split apart ready for hardening and tempering. Some of this work was done by home workers.

We visited the scouring room where needles were put in canvas wraps with powder and soft soap and winnowed in the scourer. This process could be repeated up to four times. A flash of gold could be added around the eye to make it easier to see and thread. Needles were packed and labelled by children. Forge Mill closed in 1956 as automation took over, but some needles are still made in nearby Washford Mill. I did not realise what a needle had to go through to be a needle, so please think of this when you are next sewing.

We went on to Jinny Ring Craft Centre, opened in 1980 and named after the Jinny Ring that was a wheel for a horse to walk round turning shafts to run farm machinery, one of the earliest forms of rotary power used on farms. We ate lunch and enjoyed some retail therapy in the various craft units. Some of us took a blustery walk around the gardens there.

Thanks to David Snelson and his wife for organising a very interesting day out.

Catherine Dixon



▲ There was an exhibition called *Sew Small* relating to how needles were used to make miniature clothes for dolls with incredible detail

Photos by Hilary Cleeve and Gary Gostelow

▼ A pointer sharpening the metal wire on a grindstone – a very dangerous job



◀ A metal tree with glass decorations outside the glass-blowing centre at the Jinny Ring



Botticelli Reimagined

Tuesday 22 March 2016

In the wake of the opening of the V & A's exhibition '*Botticelli Reimagined*' (5 March to 3 July 2016) Dr Jenny Gaschke, Curator of Fine Art at Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives came to whet our appetites. The exhibition, in a different, configuration had come from its showing in Berlin.

In a superb talk, Jenny was able to convey the magic of the Florentine painter Sandro Botticelli (c 1445–1510), his school and his subsequent influence on other artists. Though largely forgotten for 300 years, the exhibition explores Botticelli's eventual rediscovery through the Pre-Raphaelites, Pop Art and right up to the present day in a variety of media.

We started with Botticelli as a young man in his 30s looking arrogantly over his left shoulder. The quality of his draughtsmanship is immediately apparent. This is not a retrospective but a collection of 50 works from Botticelli and his workshop which are able to travel, gathered from Washington, London, Berlin and other galleries lucky enough to have his work. They are displayed alongside works by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, William Morris, René Magritte, Elsa Schiaparelli, Andy Warhol and Cindy Sherman to name a few. We will see fashion, film, drawing, photography, tapestry, sculpture and print as well as paintings.

One can see Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* inspiring Andy Warhol, who gives a 'Pop' twist to the icons of the Italian Renaissance. David LaChapelle uses the same Botticelli to create his *Rebirth of Venus*, 2009. The wonderful *Primavera* (or Allegory of Spring) inspires Edward Burne-Jones (*Mill Girls: dancing by a river to music* 1870) and Evelyn de Morgan (*Flora* 1894).

We heard about Botticelli's Florence, his life there, his rise and fall and his eventual death in 1510, as a destitute man. We learnt how Renaissance paints were made, how he used gold in his work, how he and his school used space in painting the Tondos (round paintings) and also how his paintings defied the frame, moving towards the viewer as they took on that extra dimension. Two of his drawings are also in the exhibition – these show the magnificence of his draughtsmanship.

For those who cannot get to London, Jenny reminded us that Bristol's painting from the Botticelli workshop will be on display here in Bristol from 21 May 2016.

We are very grateful to Mary for getting Jenny to give such an accomplished talk – we look forward to hearing her again!

Judith Jones



▲ The Virgin and Child with Two Angels c. 1490 by Sandro Botticelli

Image courtesy Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der Bildenden Künste Vienna



▲ Rebirth of Venus by David LaChapelle 2009

Creative Exchange Agency, New York, Steven Pranic / Studio LaChapelle © David LaChapelle



▲ The Orchard 1890 by William Morris, John Henry Dearle, Morris & Co

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Illustrated Talk

The Natural History and Conservation of British Owls

Saturday 13 February 2016

A rainy, grey Saturday afternoon was soon transformed into an engaging and inspirational event, through a captivating talk given by Chris Sperring MBE from the Hawk and Owl Trust. Chris ably impersonated many owl calls throughout the afternoon and was accurate enough to evoke a reaction from the live owl in the room. He is a true Doctor Doolittle!

The talk began with an explanation of the anatomy of owls. Like dinosaurs, owls are capable of rotating their heads 260 degrees. Their facial discs and feathers are designed to channel sound to aid hunting and their beaks are hooked to break up prey, which they like to swallow whole. Unlike other bird species they do not have crops and so regurgitate pellets six to eight hours after eating, to get rid of waste products such as fur and bones.

This introduction was followed by an overview of British owls. With 25 to 30 breeding pairs in the UK, the Eagle Owl has evoked some controversy. Whilst not native and so not 'British listed' it is nevertheless EU protected. Experts are debating whether its reintroduction is the result of escape from captivity or natural migration. A 25% decline in the numbers of Tawny Owls has triggered its amber status. Males typically have a white cross on their face, whereas females sport a more Chanel-like logo. The lemon-eyed Short Eared Owl, which winters in the countryside surrounding Bristol, came next followed by its longer tufted counterpart, the Long Eared Owl. Sadly, this species is facing regional extinction with only 10 – 15 pairs remaining. Another species, introduced by the Victorians to rid gardeners of the bullfinch (which ironically it does not hunt!), is the Little Owl. Again, not native and so not listed, it too is declining and threatened. From Britain's smallest owl to its most popular one, the talk ended discussing Barn Owls. Despite its decline since 1932 from 12,000 pairs to current estimates of 3,500 – 4,000 pairs, this species is doing well. The female is darker, has a more defined bib and a 'mascara' effect around the eye area. This owl is the perfect barometer of climate change. If conditions are right pairs can breed up to three times a year but three days of heavy rain without food is life-threatening.

The afternoon concluded with a look at how we can support the owl population by providing nest boxes where there is a ready food supply; re-wilding areas of gardens, parks and farms which allows biodiversity to recover, which in turn fuels predators such as owls. Finally the audience met a five-month-old Barn Owl reared in captivity. Given the thorough and fact-filled talk, all were instantly able to identify Portia correctly as female!



▲ Chris Sperring with Portia, the barn owl
Photo by Mary Bailey

Jenny Brookes

Culture Vultures Youth Reporters

Look out – the Culture Vultures are swooping down on our events and exhibitions to get the scoop about what's on in Bristol Culture! We have commissioned a project for a group of ten young people aged 14 to 25 to receive training in radio production with Ujima FM, and they are gaining exclusive access to our projects for their monthly culture show on Ujima 98FM. They will also be gaining an Arts Award through their training.

The first show was broadcast on Saturday 26 March. The young people also reported on the 'Death Exhibition' and 'Death: Is it Your Right to Choose?' and interviewed curator Lisa Graves. They visited M Shed for International Women's Day and were able to engage the public and the speakers in discussions about equal rights for women.

The second show was on Saturday 23 April and then on every third Saturday of the month on Ujima 98FM at 11am-12noon. Catch up with the next show, and look out for our young reporters around our museums and galleries.



▲ The Culture Vultures swoop!
Photo © BMGA

Friday Night at the Cinema

Friday 19 Feb 2016

This highly entertaining and memorable event, organised by Gary Gostelow, was held in the Apostle Room at Clifton R.C. Cathedral. The presenter was John Penny, who has archived reels of film-footage about Bristol and the South-West of England from sources such as the BBC and the Bristol Record Office, where he is a volunteer.

The evening was divided into two halves, with a refreshment break at the interval (sadly, no ice-cream usherettes however!). In the first half we were treated to three short films about Lulworth Cove in 1900; a fun-packed coach-outing by ladies from St Anselm and St John's church in Bristol to Lyme Regis in 1938; and a similar trip made by Londoners to Southend, also in 1938. These were followed by a longer, 50-minute film, entitled 'A Day at the Seaside', but which John Penny introduced as 'The Avon and Somerset Riviera'!

The resorts featured, in clips mainly from the 1960s, were Weston-super-Mare (complete of course with donkeys and the, sadly no more, annual outing for deprived Bristol children organised by the city's taxi-drivers); Burnham-on Sea (with its 7-mile beach and lighthouse on sticks...); Clevedon (including the fight to save the pier); Minehead (with the opening of Butlin's) and last, but not least, sunny Severn Beach (mmm, no comment!).

The second half comprised a selection of vintage, short films from the BBC in Bristol, entitled 'Points in Time'. There were 25 films made in this series, but the ones that John Penny selected to show us were entitled: 'the Weather', 'the Police', 'Traditions', 'Whacky Things' and 'Fashion'. Many of the scenes featured were very amusing, and some even cringeworthy (not least the local headmistress giving lessons in how to behave to her 'gals'!).

What added to the evening's splendid entertainment, in addition to the films themselves, was John's witty commentary! So many thanks are due to him (and to Gary) for putting this all together.

Brian Vincent



▲ Donkey rides at Weston Super Mare

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

Tel: 0117 922 3571

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

FBMGA committee

Patrons

Sir George White Bt
Max Hebditch CBE

Chairman

Sue Thurlow
07836 693589
suethurlow@waitrose.com

Secretary

Katherine Martin
0117 929 2350

Treasurer

Nicholas King
0117 962 3441

Membership Secretary

June Hibberd
0117 962 4872

FBMGA website manager

Brian Vincent
0117 962 1714
brianvincenthome@aol.com

Members:

Clive Burlton
01934 832113
Colin Edwards
01275 460411
Gary Gostelow
0117 971 1323
Shirley Hodgson
0117 962 4771

Programme Committee Chairman

Mary Bailey
0117 942 1944

FBMGA website

www.friendsofbmga.org.uk

Newsletter edited by Tim and Ann Wood

tim-wood@blueyonder.co.uk
0791 7331 810

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