



**FRIENDS
OF BRISTOL
MUSEUMS
GALLERIES &
ARCHIVES**

Newsletter

**June 2017
Issue 197**

Dramatic Bristol Slate Works photos acquired

This edition packed with

- news and photos of Bristol museums and Bristol archives, with an update by Laura Pye
- reports of many trips plus details of talks and visits you can join

From the Chairman

Winter Lecture Series 2016/17

Our sponsorship of the Museum's Winter Lecture Series enables the talks to be free to all, not just to members, but I know that our members are well represented in the audience. As usual, this season Ray Barnett sourced some great speakers, but one talk in particular stood out. The lecture I am referring to was remarkable not just because we had two very engaging speakers rather than the usual one – Lloyd and Rose Buck – but because they brought with them some of their feathered family, the largest being Tilley the Golden Eagle, with a wingspan of two metres. For me, the real stars were the barn owl and two starlings that flew above the audience between Lloyd and Rose. Although none of the birds had been 'tamed' in the traditional sense, they clearly felt entirely comfortable in an enclosed space in the company of 200 or so people. The starlings were particularly relaxed and, as you can see from the picture of Gary Gostelow, took audience participation to a new level.



▲ *Gary Gostelow plays host to one of the starlings*

Photo by Ray Barnett

Colin Edwards

I am sorry to be sharing the sad news that Colin Edwards, a loyal member of the Executive Committee and, with his wife Roni, an enthusiastic participant in many of our events, passed away in the spring. His funeral in St Mary Redcliffe was a real celebration of his life, and we were well represented by members of both our committees. I am sure that Colin would have cracked a wry smile at my silliness if he had seen me arriving for his funeral twice, once all by myself at noon, and then again at 2 o'clock with everyone else.

British Association of Friends of Museums

Those of you who use the internet will find the BAFM Website – <http://www.bafm.co.uk/> – to be packed with useful and interesting information. That includes details of the 2017 National Conference at the London Transport Museum on Saturday 30 September, back copies of the fully illustrated BAFM newsletter, and details of how to subscribe to the free BAFM e-newsletter.

Selling books in M Shed Café

If you have been to M Shed Café recently you may have spotted our new bookshelf selling some of our high-quality second-hand books and raising the profile of the Friends. The project has been rather longer getting off the ground than we had originally anticipated, and has required the support of at least half a dozen people – members and staff – so a big thank you to all of them. If you are a visitor to the café, please support this initiative by buying books, and telling your friends about it. We are planning, as for the last few years, to sell books, cakes and bottled water from L Shed over the Harbour Festival weekend, 22 and 23 July. You will find details of how you can volunteer to be part of that included with the booking forms.

Sue Thurlow Chairman

▼ *Our new outlet for second-hand books in the M Shed Café*
Photo by Sue Thurlow



Cover photo: One of the stunning black and white photos recently acquired at auction for the Industrial & Maritime collection. Dating around 1900 they show the working marble yard on Canons Marsh. This photo shows sawing and planing machines at work.

Through an error the December 2016 newsletter was incorrectly numbered 193 and the March 2017 issue 194; they should be 195 and 196 respectively

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

The exhibition of the art work of Adela Breton from her time in Mexico around the start of the 20th century has continued to be very well reported and to receive visits from dignitaries including the Mayor of Bath along with the Lord Mayor of Bristol as Miss Breton had lived in Bath.

'Booty, Baddies & Beasties' an evening of interactive entertainment based around the Beowulf poem – was a very different and exciting experience in the museum for those who attended.

M Shed

A new display as part of the 'Neighbourhoods' around the walls of the Bristol Place Gallery on the ground floor opened in early May and reflects the lives of those who live in Knowle West. Elsewhere a revised display about religious faiths represented in the city is due to be installed into the Bristol Life Gallery this summer.

Blaise Castle House Museum, Georgian House Museum and Red Lodge Museum

Redecoration of the ground floor rooms at Red Lodge has taken place over the closed winter period. Similarly there have been some improvements at Blaise. Do visit our sites to see what is new.

Bristol Archives

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.

Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC)

BRERC's latest local volume, *Geology of the Bristol Region*, which has been partly sponsored by the Friends of BMGA, is expected to be published later this year.

Staff News

After over 40 years of dedicated service Karin Walton, Curator of Applied Art, retired at the end of May. Over that time, Karin has been the key figure who has created the extensively-researched and beautifully-presented interpretations of the two historic houses, Red Lodge and Georgian House. In addition she has curated the highly significant collection of decorative arts including Bristol delftware and Bristol glass.

Bonnie Griffin (Curator of Biology) is currently on an unpaid sabbatical break – volunteering in museums in the USA. Colleagues Rhian Rowson and Deborah Hutchinson are covering her hours so there is no reduction in natural science curatorial cover.

Acquisitions & Archives

A recent acquisition is an Album of 44 photographs of Arthur Lee & Brothers Slate Works in Anchor Lane, Bristol, c1900. Arthur Lee & Bros operated a marble and slate importing and manufacturing business on Canons Marsh from the 1880s, continuing a works that had been established there for decades. In the late 1890s an album of photographs was compiled showing the activities of the works and we have recently been able to acquire this at

A welcome to Bristol Archives

Bristol Archives (previously Bristol Record Office) have produced a short film to welcome visitors to their public search room, thanks to a grant from the Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives.

The film introduces researchers to the services and facilities available at the archives and our procedures for consulting records. It also explains how visitors can help to protect the records they use by following our guidelines and handling documents carefully.

The film was produced by a Bristol film company and includes behind-the-scenes footage of our strong rooms, to show visitors what happens when they order documents for research.

We now ask all visitors to watch the five-minute film before using the search room. It can be seen online via the Bristol Archives website.

Allie Dillon, Senior Archivist, Bristol Archives

The link is <https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/bristol-archives/your-visit>



▲ Making the film to welcome visitors to their public search room at Bristol Archives. The work was partly funded by a grant from the Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives.

Photo © Bristol Culture/Bristol MGA

auction thanks to the Friends of BMGA. The exceptionally clear large photos show marble and slate being offloaded from ships at Deans Marsh, various processes to convert the stone into building products, memorials and school black boards, and their final uses in buildings around Bristol and further afield. One of these is shown on the cover of this edition.

In 1907 Lee moved to Cumberland Road to make way for the railway marshalling yard that subsumed Canons Marsh. Their successors in the marble business on Cumberland Road, on the corner of Gas Ferry Road, have only recently moved out, bringing to an end a long-lived dockside tradition.

Awards and other notable successes & achievements

Bristol Culture is short listed for the Museums & Heritage Awards category 'Educational Initiative' for the ESOL programme (English for Speakers of Other Languages) run by the Participation Team.

Bristol Young Heroes Award – museum volunteer Mulue Estifanos was recently awarded '2017 Arts & Culture Hero'.

Exhibitions & Events

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

Alternative Visions – undiscovered art from the South West

Saturday 3 June–Sunday 10 September (Free)

There are many undiscovered artists in our local communities. These individuals are driven to produce art for a wider range of reasons, and for purposes different from many mainstream contemporary artists. The artists in this exhibition are striking because of their self-belief and determination, which has led them to develop remarkable art in sometimes difficult circumstances.

For the first time we have worked with a Bristol-based group of artists with learning disabilities, Artists First, who have produced interpretation for the exhibition.

The exhibition has been developed by us in partnership with Arts & Health South West and Outside In. After being at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery it will tour to Falmouth Art Gallery, The Wilson in Cheltenham, and Poole Museum.

Pliosaurus! Dive into the Jurassic Deep

Saturday 17 June 2017–Thursday 7 January 2018
(Pay what you think)

150 million years ago, where Bristol is now, there was a Jurassic ocean teeming with life. The biggest creature of all was the awesome predator, the pliosaur. Discovered in Westbury, Wiltshire, in 1994, our internationally significant specimen *Pliosaurus Carpenteri* is the world's only example of a new species of pliosaur and will be on public display for the first time. The pliosaur was the biggest and fiercest of all the giant underwater beasts which lived in the Jurassic period. Feeding on fish, squid and even flying reptiles, the pliosaur was the ultimate ocean predator.

Aimed at 3-11 year olds, this exhibition offers a range of activities to investigate how this special creature lived and died.

Radical Pottery in Bristol schools

Saturday 22 July 2017–Friday 10 June 2018 (Free)

Studio pottery in the 1960s and 1970s was underpinned by a passion for the personal, handmade and anti-mass-produced. During this period a collection of studio pottery was created for Bristol schools to inspire students by showing them examples of the very best. The works were groundbreaking, innovative and often made by women who would go on to become nationally and internationally recognised for pushing the boundaries of ceramics; they now form part of Bristol Museum & Art Gallery's ceramic collection.

The exhibition includes work by some of the leading potters of the 20th century including Bernard Leach, Michael Cardew, Lucy Rie and Hans Coper.

Insect Festival

Saturday 23 September 2017

Learn about bugs whether you love or loathe them. Meet insect experts from around the UK, meet crime scene insects and others and have fun with lots of activities.

M Shed

Skeletons – our buried bones

Until Sunday 3 September (Pay what you think)

Twelve human skeletons from Bristol and London, each with a unique story to tell: a young man, buried without ceremony in South Gloucestershire 3,500 years ago; a Roman couple found in a single stone coffin and a girl from a Victorian burial ground. They reflect society's rich and varied past and the changing face of the places we live and work in today.

Alongside the exhibition is an exploratory space which reveals some of the science behind the stories. Visitors can test their knowledge of bones, search for hidden clues to analyse skeletons and hear from experts of the excavation site, lab and museum.

Skeletons: Our Buried Bones is a collaboration between us, Wellcome Collection and the Museum of London.

Skeleton Spectacular

Saturday 15 July 2017 (11am–4pm) (Pay what you think, drop in)

Become a skeleton sleuth at this spectacular family event. Join scientists and archaeologists for interactive talks and workshops; find out about forensic archaeology in our bone lab; help make a giant skeleton on Museum Square; take a tour of our exciting new exhibition Skeletons: Our Buried Bones; dress up and more.

Blaise Castle House Museum

Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology

Thursday 20 July 2017 (Pay what you think, drop in)

Join museum archaeologists and a whole host of local societies, re-enactors, field archaeologists and heritage organisations for a fun-packed day full of tours, demonstrations, displays and activities.

Goram Fair

Saturday 9 September 2017 (*Pay what you think, drop in*)

Join this community event celebrating the legend of Goram, our local giant. Watch theatre, play games, explore stalls, get crafty, listen to stories and see photos from Goram fairs of the past. Treat yourself to tea and cake in Blaise Community garden, see what's growing and find out how you can help it to flourish.

Red Lodge Museum

Hot Dates with the Past

Friday 30 June and Saturday 1 July 2017

(*Booking essential £12/£10,18+*)

The grand Elizabethan Red Lodge Museum will be transformed into a dating site, taking inspiration from chats on dating apps, secret histories and fantasies that reveal all. Join us for a one-off steamy night as we weave through the truths and fictions of dating history with artists Tom Marshman, Timberlina and Catherine Hoffmann. This event is LGBTQ friendly and part of Bristol Pride.

M Shed

Radical History Zone

Sunday 17 September 2017 (11am–4pm) (*Free*)

The Radical History Zone is brought to you by the Bristol Radical History Group and Remembering the Real World War I. This bumper event has a full-day programme of featuring local and national speakers promising a 'history-from-below' approach and glimpses of an undocumented past so often missing from conventional accounts. Buy a book from the accompanying book fair.

The Learning Team

In the last year, 2016–2017, the learning team have attracted 35,000 educational visits to Bristol Museums. During the 3 years preceding we engaged with 96% of Bristol primary schools, who visited us at least once in this period, often more. We are optimistic at keeping this momentum going. Just a few of the more recent activities contributing to the success include:

- Popularity of Warrior Treasures workshops and other exhibitions relevant to school curriculum
- Dinosaur Takeover was once again fully booked in March, providing a week of immersive dino workshops to tie in with British Science Week. 200 school children from Bristol and beyond worked with experts from the University of Bristol and got to meet Fluffy the Pliosaur.
- Chocolate! We have been running our popular chocolate workshops at M Shed in the run up to Easter and through to 4 May.
- Wildlife Photography workshops: pupils worked alongside a professional photographer on the harbourside taking their own photos of Bristol nature.
- Proactive outreach activity, going into schools

June–September Summer Walks, sponsored by the Friends of BMGA

The walks are free and open to all but places **must** be booked in advance by using the booking system on the Museum's website – www.bristolmuseums.org.uk. If you cannot access the website please contact the Reception Desk at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery on 0117 922 3571. Places are limited and offered on a first-come, first-served basis. Arrive at 5.45pm for a 6.00 pm start.

Wednesday 14 June

Cecilia Farren – *Bristol's History of Big Tobacco and the Health Fight Back*

Wednesday 12 July

Dr Roger Ball – *'Buried like Dogs?' Pauper death and burial in Victorian Eastville*

Wednesday 9 August

Dr Edson Burton – *History of Old Market*

Wednesday 13 September

Francis Greenacre – *Public Sculpture: architectural, commemorative and contemporary*



▲ Councillor Claire Hiscott (cabinet member for Skills and Education at BCC) attending one of our Dinosaur Takeover days

Photo © James Beck

- delivering workshops and school assemblies, plus loan boxes. This has included Chinese New Year, Brilliant Bristolians, and Transatlantic Slave Trade.
- A new learning offer at Kings Weston Roman Villa and a local history study package developed for schools with Bristol Archives
 - Special sessions for Brownies, Guides, Cubs and Scouts and WEA courses for adult learners.
 - We are delighted to have secured Clifton High School as an Education Programme Sponsor for the year ahead.

Halsway Manor – National Centre for Folk Arts

Monday 13 March 2017

Ruth Welch organised warm sunny weather for our visit to the Quantocks and was rewarded with a coach full except for one single empty seat! Halsway Manor is in an idyllic setting on the steep south side of the Quantocks. After a smooth drive, the last quarter of a mile of high-banked lane was a challenge for both Andy, our very capable driver, and Gary acting as driver's mate. Well done both.

We were the first public group tour and were made very welcome. A well-researched introduction to the house revealed a long and interesting history. It is thought to have originated as a farmstead in Saxon times, if not earlier, and is an ideal setting for sheep rearing. The house is named after the hazel trees, which were coppiced to provide long, straight sticks for making hurdles and fencing as well as providing hazel nuts. The farm developed into a manor house in the 1400s and was the married home of Joan, daughter of Cardinal Beaufort the Bishop of Winchester. There was originally a chapel near the house but this was removed to nearby Crowcombe Court and is now a ruin. Surrounded by gardens at their best with spring flowers, the house has a Victorian extension to the west and a mainly Tudor façade, which has had bow windows added. The fantastic faces of the 'hunky punks' (carved grotesques which are not gargoyles as they do not drain water away) on the gutter line even seemed welcoming.

The barrel-vaulted hall roof is thought to date from the 1600s. In the Great Hall, a bust of Cecil Sharp (of folk song and music collection fame) decorates the fireplace which was brought from Shropshire. The owners made many additions from 1877 onwards. The library and sitting room have fine plaster ceilings possibly dating from the 1400s with later embellishments. While the one in the library is at its original height, the sitting room ceiling was raised in the early 1900s reducing the height of the rooms above.

The linen panelling of the Great Hall and sitting room came from Standen House in Lancashire in the early 1900s and incorporates a hidden door and handle



▲ *Garden scarecrows in the spirit of Halsway*

▼ *Friends admiring the cyclamen. The gardens were carpeted with wonderful spring flowers*





between the two rooms. Going into the corridors at the back of the house it was easy to imagine what the conditions were like for Bristol mothers and children who were evacuated there in World War II. It must have been an idyllic retreat for them compared to Bristol at that time.

The Halsway Manor Society, which now owns the house, needs to raise money to redecorate the main buildings. The library collection is also badly in need of conservation. During our tour of the garden we saw considerable evidence of their fund-raising. The Society's aim is to improve the facilities by building a block of kitchens and toilets for campers with an improved waste water system and a biomass boiler. On the east side in a unique archery ground peopled by very realistic wooden animal targets and full of primroses and white and purple violets.

Halsway earns its title of National Centre for Folk Arts for its wide-ranging programme of week and weekend courses, which include instrumental and sung music, creative writing, instrument-making and much more including many dances, parties and concerts. We had a taste of what goes on in the Mews on the west side which has recently been acquired by the Society to provide extra bedrooms and meeting facilities, where we found a workshop in which a melodeon (a small accordio

was being made with considerable skill.

The enthusiasm of those we met was palpable and bodes well for their success in achieving planned future developments. Many of us came away fired up with enthusiasm and looking forward to participating in future events at Halsway if for nothing else than the quality of the lunch we enjoyed.

Marianne Pitman

Find out more about the vast range of courses at <https://halswaymanor.org.uk/>



▲ *Halsway Manor front elevation showing the variety of local sandstone used and some of the 6 acres of grounds nestling under the Quantocks*

◀ *Making a melodeon. Emmanuel Pariselle, the tutor, showing the first stage of melodeon-making*

Photos by Judith Jones

From the Membership Secretary

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

Mr & Mrs Cheryl Bartelot
Mr & Mrs Jacqueline Chapman
Mrs Angela Farr
Ms Elanora Ferry
Mrs Megan Hicks
Mr Mark Hudson
Ms Eileen Lepine
Mr David Yorath
Ms Janet Margrie
Mrs Hazel O'Rourke
Mr Ian Robinson
Mrs Sarah Robinson
Mrs Rosemary Stibbon
Mrs Sandy Tebbutt
Ms Beryl Tully
Ms Caroline Ward-Bailey
Mrs Anne Wike

RNLI College, Poole

Monday 3 April 2017

We set off on a lovely early April spring morning, driving through Bath and onwards into rural Dorset, with splendid views from the high country around Shaftesbury and then down to the Poole Harbour area. Poole Harbour's perimeter, which is about 200 km long, makes it the world's second largest inland bay after Sydney Harbour.

The RNLI's general mandate is to furnish the boats and train the crew for all of the 237 lifeboat stations situated round the coasts of the UK, Eire and their major off-shore islands. The RNLI College is located on the shore of Holes Bay, a large nearly-isolated bay to the north of Poole Harbour. The buildings comprise the RNLI College (where we had a tour) and also its boat-building factory, and the boat service centre. The College building, which houses its indoor training pool and lifeboat driving simulator, is where the Institute carries out training for lifeboat crews and life-saving services. Its spectacular position on the water-front also provides drinking and dining facilities open to the general public, which provide publicity to the Institute's services and support its donor-based financing. The RNLI has to house its staff when under training and has a 60-room hotel whose spare capacity can be made available for public use.

On the quay our tour started with a close-up view and technical description of several types of lifeboat all of which are named after UK rivers. We also saw the novel Twin Sails Harbour entrance bridge open, to give its appearance, literally, of twin sails seemingly approaching us. Then, moving indoors, we saw the College's hosting and welcoming side, and its training and practice facilities. The indoor training pond is 25 m long, 12 m wide and 4 m deep. It is a substantial facility, built to demonstrate different lifeboat types, how they can be capsized and righted, and how they can behave in extreme conditions of wind, wave, temperature and rain. And also, from jump platforms, what it is like to approach a boat under such conditions, and how to be hauled out of the sea.

We were then shown the Mission Bridge Simulator, an extremely realistic experience of a full-sized lifeboat bridge, where one of our group steered us on a mission to investigate a blazing tanker, alight just off Dover harbour. The instructor tested us with stray water-skiers and other hazards, and by turning on the light and dark, and the wind and sea-states up and down. Fortunately we survived, and calmed down a little by learning how the RNLI also trains beach life-guards from all over the world, demonstrating how many lives can be saved under both exacting and sometimes also under apparently benign shore and river conditions. We saw the small museum collection of historic life-saving equipment which contrasts strongly with the fully-modern, high-tech equipment that the service currently uses.

Relaxing outside at the end we also saw the touching memorial to all of the 600 UK lifeboat crew who are known to have lost their lives over the 100 years that the Service has been in operation.

So this was altogether a very interesting, entertaining, and exciting visit and an eye-opener in so many ways. Many thanks to Ruth and Eddy for organising it. A good visit if you happen to be in that beautiful area of the country!

Harry Hibberd

Photos by Judith Jones



▲ *Heritage Trust Memorial Sculpture 2009 showing a person in a boat saving another from the water. It records the names of all RNLI volunteers lost in the course of their duty by lifeboat station. The sculptor is Sam Holland who says it depicts 'courage, loss and remembrance'*



◀ *1854 Cork Lifejacket with cork strips sewn to linen or canvas vest for buoyancy*

▼ *Sea Survival Centre with water tank, lifeboats and hoist gantry (left foreground). A wave machine creates rough water for rescue simulations.*



An excursion on *MV Balmoral*

Some members have visited *MV Balmoral*, moored outside L Shed, and there will be a film about the ship, its history and restoration shown at M Shed on Thursday 3 August – see booking forms enclosed with this newsletter.

If you would like the opportunity to go on one of *Balmoral's* excursions this summer, the programme begins in late May, running through August, plus a few days at the end of September. Departures are from Clevedon, Portishead, Bristol, Weston-super-Mare, Ilfracombe, Penarth, Watchet, Swansea and Porthcawl. The cruises are generally around the coasts, rivers and bridges of the Bristol Channel, with occasional visits to Lundy Island and some optional links with heritage railways. Provisional timetables are available on website www.whitefunnel.co.uk.

Monday 14 August 2017

Members of Friends of BMGA who live in north or east Bristol may be interested in an outing organized by Downend Folk House. A coach will leave Downend Folk House at 9.00am to join *Balmoral* at Clevedon pier for calls at Portishead, a two-hour cruise to the Severn bridges, and two hours in Clevedon, before the coach returns to reach Downend about 5.00pm.

Tickets are £32 for DFH members plus £4 for non-members, and are available in advance through the DFH office tel: 0117 956 2367.



▲ *MV Balmoral in the docks*
Photo Martin Bailey

Update on Bristol Museum Service

A morning with Laura Pye

On a sunny Saturday morning at Blaise, Laura Pye, Head of Culture, treated an audience from both Friends' groups to an entertaining canter through the last 18 months in the service, and gave us a tantalising glimpse of what is to come in the next few years. The sheer volume and variety of what has been achieved gave us an insight into what Laura's role feels like on a daily basis, and to do it full justice we would need to fill several newsletters.

Laura reminded us of many public successes, but spoke, too, about much that is less visible to us. There is a real emphasis in extending the service beyond the traditional museum audience, for example, by running activities and promotions focused on young people and disadvantaged families, on improving the wellbeing of those with mental health issues, and on special tours for Bristol residents whose first language is not English. There are also occasional adult-only Saturday evening extravaganzas tied in with the big exhibitions such as *Death and Warrior Treasures*, bringing in new audiences.

We learned of the many collaborations between the museum and other organisations, including University of Bristol, Ujima Radio, Hanover archives, the BBC, and the National Museum of Art in Osaka, Japan.

Laura also spoke about the budget issues that have been, and will continue to be, a challenge for all concerned but she is confident that her team can continue to find creative ways to thrive even within such tight constraints.

Of course, as Head of Culture for Bristol Laura's responsibilities extend to the Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre, the Arts & Events team,

Modern Archives, and the Film Office, so she also covered some of the highlights there including the 10k run (with 12,000 runners), the half marathon, the Massive Attack gig on The Downs, and the Tour of Britain Cycle Race, which necessitated 86 road closure points and attracted 200,000 spectators.

And what does Laura see in her crystal ball? 2023 will be the 200th anniversary of the museum service in Bristol, and once those celebrations are over Laura and her team are planning – as ever dependent on funding – a major refurbishment of the Museum & Art Gallery. Before that can be realised, the storage issues need to be resolved, with the creation of a Resource Centre at B Bond, adjacent to the archives. The houses will see smaller scale redisplay over the next 5 years, with Blaise being refocused as a community museum.

As she closed, it was clear that Laura's priorities for the service are resilience (to funding cuts and other issues), income generation, and the day-to-day running of the service as a cultural business, reflecting the realities of the 21st century, without losing any of the loyal audiences that we already have.

Thanks to Gary and Mary for arranging this opportunity to learn more about the activities and people we support, and a special thank-you to Laura for coming to talk to us, and for leading the museums service in such a dynamic and inclusive way.

Sue Thurlow

Photo © National Museum Director's Council



Glyn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea

Tuesday 28 February 2017

We had a sunny journey to Swansea passing the newish brick-built university and a major building site for Coastal Housing Association as we climbed the hill to the newly-refurbished gallery.

Daniel took us on a tour illustrating the life of Richard Glyn Vivian. Vivian was born in 1835 at Singleton Abbey. He was the fourth son of the wealthy Vivian family, who owned the most successful copper smelting plant in the world at that time. It was one of the industries that made Swansea prosperous in the time of Queen Victoria. Glyn did not follow his brothers into the family business but, instead, studied fine art at Cambridge.

Glyn Vivian travelled extensively throughout his life visiting most continents by the early 1880s. At a time when Thomas Cook was starting, Glyn planned his own itineraries, possibly looking for business openings for the family firm and certainly collecting objects and works of art. He left his collection for 'the enjoyment of the people of Swansea' and the Gallery opened in 1911, a year after his death.

The Gallery contains his collection, his diaries, his own works including watercolours, pen and ink sketchbooks and photographs. It is an incredibly interesting record. One book is displayed in the form of a digital book which can be opened on each page. I think we all had a go at that one!

Only a small part of what he collected was on show but there was something for everyone including paintings, china and a magnificent silver galleon he received as a wedding present. The miniatures he collected in his 60s when, sadly, he started to go blind, are exceptional for their quality.

Besides founding the art gallery Glyn built a Miners' Institute at Hafod for blinded and disabled workers. Carrying on from this tradition, workshops for the visually impaired and other disadvantaged groups are held in the Gallery with the motto 'art can change lives'.

The imaginative refurbishment of the Gallery will need to be heavily marketed to attract more visitors and there are signs this is happening. The atrium was filled with an upturned boat and there were paintings exchanged with the Tate. A tiny screen showed a cup of tea and every so often a rowing boat crossed it - a true storm in a teacup.

A photographic exhibition by 12 women photographers was due to open on the day following our visit. Entitled *The Moon and the Smile*, this linked to the Dilwyn family who were friends of Vivian senior. Dilwyn was an early photographer, a colleague of Fox Talbot. His daughter Mary was said to be the first to photograph the moon, hence the name of the exhibition.

After enjoying a surfeit of bara brith and Welsh cakes, many of us walked down to the castle ruins and the city centre. Like many British cities which were blitzed, Swansea is still recovering. The newest developments are round the Marina and not where the Glyn Vivian Gallery is above the old city. During our explorations we discovered a very steep hill with stepped pavements named Clifton Hill!

Thanks to Wendy Aldridge-Morris for organising another fascinating day out.

Marianne Pitman

Clifton Hill ►



▲ *Nantgarw Porcelain decorated with naturalistic flowers*

▼ *Silver Ship bought in Frankfurt Germany 1884 soon after he had met his future wife in Wiesbaden*



Photos by Judith Jones and Gundula Dorey

A Fresh Look at Sarah Guppy

Saturday 8 April 2017

Utility, economy and dispatch were her guiding principles, but who was the elusive and little-known Sarah Guppy? On an atypically sunny April Saturday at M Shed, Madge Dresser and Sheila Hannon treated us to an audience with Sarah Guppy through an intertwined lecture and artistic re-enactment.

Sarah was a mathematician and an inventor. She was born in 1770 in Birmingham to a sugar-refining and brass-foundry family. Brought up a Unitarian, she came to Bristol to marry Samuel Guppy at St. Stephen's and the pair set up home in Queen's Square. In 1802 the Guppys met Nelson, who was sourcing oak in Monmouth to build his ships. He was most interested in their nails, which were manufactured in America and patented in 1804. After much time, money and a number of children, the Guppys secured the naval contract providing copper-covered flat-headed nails. The contract was worth £40,000. The nails ensured a barnacle-free passage, which increased the speed of British warships. The venture was so successful that HMS Victory was refitted with their nails to hold the copper sheeting that protected the hull.

A string of other patents followed including one in 1811 for constructing bridges and railways without the need for an archway. Sarah's idea here was to erect a bridge across the gorge capable of transporting freight. She actively sought subscription for this project and made a number of model bridges to further her cause. Though never realised, it shows her technical prowess. It is possible that both Telford and Brunel used her ideas. In 1812 Sarah patented a tea and coffee urn which multi-tasked as an egg poacher and toast warmer and in 1831 she patented an idea for a multi-purpose exercise bed and storage unit. Her final patent was secured in 1844.

More literary pursuits included writing poetic tributes to friends and penning a children's book. The profits of such publications were donated to improve the plight of Bristol's 'female servants'. Further evidence of her public-spirited nature included the notion of collecting human excrement from turnpike roads and transforming it into fertiliser; and campaigning for greater care to be taken over cattle at the market. Pecuniary interests saw Sarah invest in the Great Western Railway and help raise funds for Brunel's suspension bridge.

In 1836, after six children, she was widowed. However, she remarried, at the age of 66, a man thirty years her junior. They moved to Arnos Vale Court. It was not a happy union and her husband gambled away a good deal of her fortune. Her marriage dissolved in 1842, whereupon Sarah moved to Clifton. She died in 1852 at her Richmond Hill home. Two of her sons worked as sugar refiners and Thomas Guppy became Brunel's business partner.

So was Sarah primarily a social reformer, a writer, a philanthropist, an inventor, an innovator, or an engineer? She was multi-talented and her legacy lives on. What is certain is that our appetite for finding out more about one of Bristol's first female entrepreneurial polymaths was most certainly whetted by this excellent talk.

Jenny Brookes



▲ Kim Hicks playing Sarah Guppy in an earlier re-enactment

Photos by Linda Meaton

The front and back of Guppy's very own coin. Used as legal tender, this half penny was made in Somerset in 1812



Glamorgan Archives

Tuesday 7 February 2017

Records of Welsh life and work used to be housed in the centre of Cardiff, in the basement of a building belonging to Cardiff University. They are now held in an impressive new building at Ninian Park next to the football stadium.

The archives are open to the public and have a welcoming entrance foyer next to the Search Room, which anyone can access after registering. A motto informed us that 'Public access to amazing documents and records is at the heart of everything we do.'

We had an extensive tour, starting in the 'Orange Cube', which houses the four strong rooms containing all the items to be stored. Great care has been taken to keep these totally clean and free of insects and vermin. They are climate-controlled, helped by the unique double skin of the building so that there is a corridor between the inner and outer parts. There is also an interesting system in the event of fire. Ranks of gas bottles can be used to flood the area with argon gas to force out oxygen and extinguish flames.

The other part of the building houses offices, a box-cutting room and a conservation room. Everyone was fascinated by the large box-cutting machine which can be programmed to cut boxes of any size to fit any individual volume snugly. Standard, bought-in boxes are used only for loose papers.

Conservation is a major concern of the archives. We found a number of people working in the conservation studio, some of them volunteers. One was restoring a very large map using some of the methods which were described to us. Fine Japanese papers are cut or torn to fit into missing parts. Water-based glue (starch) is used so that any repairs could be reversed. Surprisingly, cleaning is done with water which sounds counterintuitive. Apparently, red ink on a document is a major problem to clean as it can run disastrously. There is an extractor hood for dealing with dust or gases given off by some items.

All items begin in a reception room and are checked for mould and insects. A freeze/thaw method is used to kill insects and flammable nitrate film is frozen before being digitised. Not all acquisitions are accepted. All items start in a sorting room where they are appraised. Some are destroyed confidentially, some sampled and some sent to national collections. Other items are catalogued and put on the website. There are descriptions of over 250,000 items in this electronic catalogue.

Thank you, Gary, for a very interesting and extremely exhausting trip!

Mirian Pearce



▲ **The Glamorgan Archives, Cardiff, exterior view**

Photo © Glamorgan Archives website

The Friends' Quiz Night

Friday 10 February 2016

There were 13 teams of 4 who gathered for the quiz in the Apostle Room in Clifton Cathedral. As usual the event was organised well, and we all enjoyed the excellent food provided in the middle of the evening by our efficient band of cooks.

When our question master announced a Sports round, there was such a groan across the room that he substituted a round of General Knowledge questions instead. This was despite the fact that he had stepped in at the last minute.

The first raffle prize of a large basket of fruit was won by Ann Stuart, who was also a member of the winning 'Golden Girls' team. Each member of the team went home clutching a bottle of wine and handfuls of fruit!

A good time was had by all.

Carole Tapper



▲ **Heroines of the kitchen – Ruth Welch, Pat Walker and Carol Ouvry**

Kingswood Heritage Centre

Friday 3 March 2017

The Kingswood Heritage Centre is housed in the 18th century Champion's factory building. William Champion (1709-1789) was a Quaker who set up his brass works here, and patented a new method of extracting zinc from its ore. The tower of the industrial windmill, used to pound rocks to extract the ore, still stands, and there is a working model of it on display. Champion went bankrupt in 1769, but the factory continued to produce the wire for pins, whose heads were attached and points sharpened by local women and children in their homes or in the local poor houses.

Starting with a lawless forest (the King's Wood) through the Industrial Revolution and on to two World Wars, the centre covers a vast swathe of local history and the various industries associated with the area. The residents of King's Wood, one of many mediaeval royal forests, had to live on their wits. Various kings tried to take back parts of the forest resulting in riots when the poverty-stricken people using the land found that their homes and livelihoods were threatened. The forest's size diminished between the 13th and 17th centuries, though it was restocked with 5000 deer in the 1600s by the wonderfully-named Sir Baynham Throckmorton.

Coal had been discovered in the 13th century, but as the Industrial Revolution got underway so the coal fields in Kingswood developed. In the 18th century boys as young as 6 were hauling carts underground by straps around their waists. They were often underfed and unschooled. When the Methodist George Whitefield came to Kingswood to preach in the open air in the mid-18th century he noted 'white gutters made by their tears which fell plentifully down their black cheeks as they came out of their coal pits'. He was joined in his endeavours by the Wesley brothers. John Wesley founded Kingswood school (now a private school in Bath) for the sons of miners.

Kingswood industries on display included Douglas motorbikes (the Dragonfly being its most famous model), Kleeneze (which started in an under stairs cupboard in Kingswood!), Carson's Chocolates (well-known for its Famous Names liqueur brand and Elizabeth Shaw), Dalton Young toiletries, and possibly the most unusual product, pressed charcoal, which was exported all over the world for burning religious incense!

The manufacture of boots and shoes locally was important in the 19th and 20th centuries. Between 1900 and 1920 there were more than 100 boot and shoe factories in Kingswood. Due to the Depression and World War II they are now all closed. The skills acquired were turned to making corsets and other underwear for ladies, advertisements for which were on display.

Welcome cups of hot tea and biscuits enhanced our browsing around this fascinating collection of local history. Thanks to Gary for organising this trip.

Sue Black

Photos by Sue Black



▲ After the boot and shoe industry collapsed, the equipment was converted to make underwear such as corsets

▼ A Vespa scooter made under licence in 1950 by the Douglas motorcycle company



Etruscan Ceramics

– the collection in the City Museum

Friday 27 Jan 2017

When Robert Walters gave his talk last year on ‘Etruscan Life and Death’ he mentioned that there was a small collection of material in the City Museum so here we were viewing it with him and with the curator, Sue Giles, who had so carefully laid it out for us.

There were votive offerings in the form of plaster heads and even a beautifully formed foot – someone said that a similar practice of offering still existed in various Mediterranean countries only that now they were made of wax. There were very elegant slim pottery or glass bottles called alabastrons holding perfumed oil which was extracted using a spill. There were large jugs with handles for domestic use, and a metal ladle which would not be out of place in a modern kitchen.

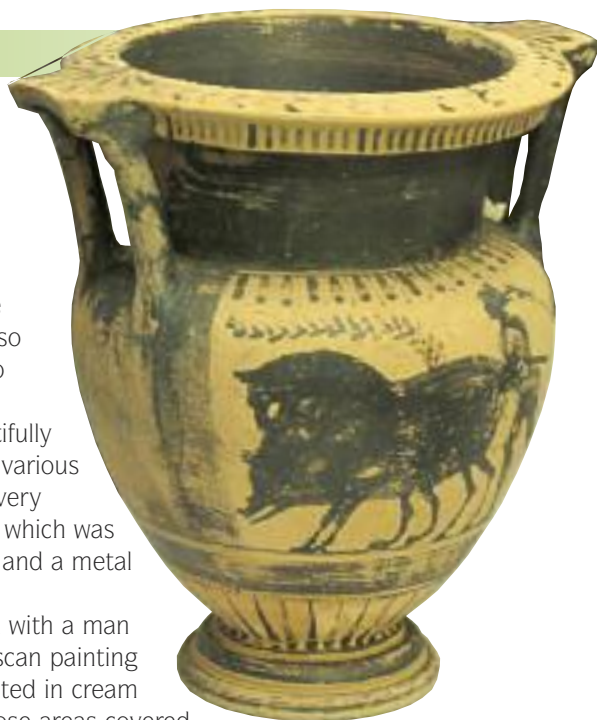
Two objects particularly drew our attention. One was a large vase painted with a man holding a horse which appeared to have six legs – a common theme in Etruscan painting though it is not clear why. Sue told us how the colours were developed: painted in cream and red the vessel is fired excluding oxygen and is black when taken out: those areas covered by a thin slip remain black but the rest reverts in air to the original red and cream giving the characteristic three colour ‘Greek’ vase look.

The second object was a small ceramic sarcophagus still with some of its original red and green paint clinging to it. Although it looked from the reclining figure on the top as though the ashes it had contained were female remains, and the inscription, helpfully translated, suggested so too, the scene carved into one side showed a very male battle scene. It seems that depicting warrior exploits on containers for the dead was the height of fashion for the Etruscans regardless of gender.

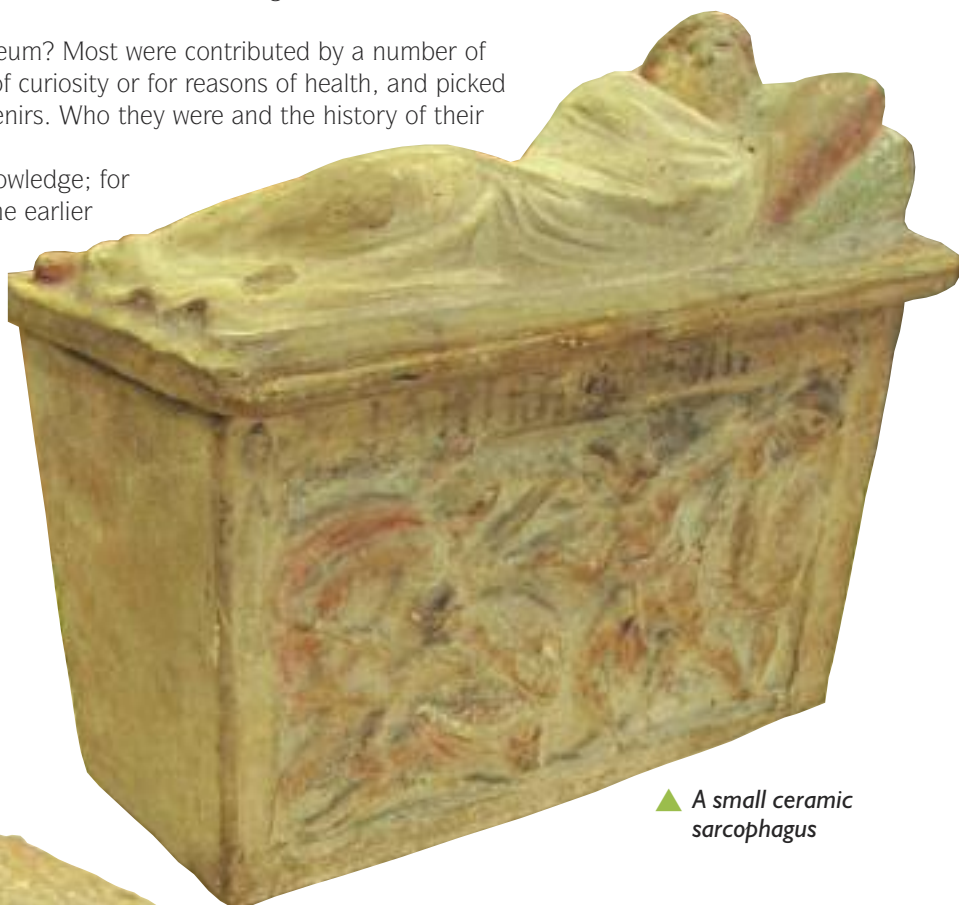
How did the ceramics come into the Museum? Most were contributed by a number of 19th century travellers, who journeyed out of curiosity or for reasons of health, and picked up artefacts openly or bought them as souvenirs. Who they were and the history of their collecting is a story on its own.

For some of us the collection was new knowledge; for others it brought out the connections with the earlier Greek and then later Roman styles and practices; for others it revived memories of holidays and things seen. We had a lovely time.

Gundula Dorey



▲ A large painted vase



▲ A small ceramic sarcophagus



◀ A plaster votive foot

Photos by Gundula Dorey



▲ *Exeter Cathedral Clock*

Exeter and its underground passages

Thursday 19 January 2017

We arrived just before noon and as our group (second of three) was not due in the Passages until 1.30pm, some of us went to see the Royal Albert Memorial Museum while others visited the Cathedral, passing the remains of the recently burnt-out hotel very close by. Although it was cold the bright sunshine lit up the inside of the Cathedral through its stained glass windows. Apparently a seagull was seen inside the Cathedral, no doubt looking for a warm spot without paying the entrance fee. I hope it got out eventually. We found some very ornate woodwork in the choir and some fine coloured tombs. However, my very favourite discovery was the Exeter clock, with its unusual dial and a very old wooden door below, with a round hole at the bottom for the Cathedral cat to use.

After walking back through both old and new Exeter, we entered the Underground Passages through a very modern, glass door and down four flights of stairs. There was a small but interesting exhibition and then we saw a video of the history of the passages. These date back to the 14th century when they were used to supply fresh drinking water into the city from two major wells. Suitably kitted out in hard hats, we entered the very narrow and sometimes not very high underground passages. It was difficult to understand how people could work in such constricted spaces. The passages have been extended over the years, but were closed finally in 1901, following a cholera outbreak. They were used again as a bomb shelter during World War II. Only some of the passages are now open and as they are 6-7 metres below ground, there is no sound of the busy city above. In reply to a question about flooding, our guide informed us that the passages have only ever suffered from puddles. Once back out in the cold and bright sun, we obtained lunch at The Real Food Store just opposite, which I thoroughly recommend.

Thanks to David and Wendy Snelson for an interesting and lovely winter day out.

Catherine Dixon



▲ *Greenery growing in Exeter's Underground Passages*

Exeter's Underground Passages ►



Photos by Catherine Dixon

The University Library

Thursday 9 March 2017

On arrival we were welcomed by the Special Collections Librarian, Michael Richardson, and the archivist, Hannah Lowrey. On a large table in the middle of the room many books and documents were temptingly set out, each on its own protective cushion.

The general theme running through the items they had selected to show us was 'women' in recognition of the International Women's Day 2017 the day before, on Wednesday 8 March. It included material given by, created by, about and bound by women. The founding Minutes of the University stress the importance of women's education and University College Bristol was based on the equality of men and women.

Among the items was a very old book with an embroidered cover, a recipe book of the Pinney family, who lived in the Georgian House, dating from the late 17th century, a very rare music book from the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapels, a book of Botanical Illustrations and a specially bound book for Mrs. Stonehouse by Hannah Moore.

The oldest book on display was Ogilby's Virgil, dated 1340, and this was wonderfully illustrated. Other material included political documents such as election posters and addresses, and examples from the medical and mathematical collections. We saw examples from the Feminist Archive South and the Greenham Common protesters, and about Dame Katherine Furse, the founder of the VADs in World War I.

After our introduction we were invited to look at any of the books at our leisure. Gloves are not used unless handling reactive surfaces such as photographs, as readers are more dextrous and therefore do less damage when not wearing gloves. As Michael commented 'where we lead the British Library follows'. Michael and Hannah were constantly occupied answering members' questions and directing them to other sources for their own individual research.

The library is open to the public (at no charge) by appointment, and the collection uses 5km of shelves, not all on site. The Penguin collection occupies 1km of the store. Another part of the collection is the Brunel Archive which is housed at the Brunel Institute by the SS Great Britain.

This was an extremely interesting visit and members were very appreciative of the time that Michael and Hannah had given to selecting the material for us to see and sharing their enormous knowledge and expertise with us.

Carol Ouvry



▲ FBMGA members
studying hard
Photo by Carol
Ouvry

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The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those of the FBMGA or Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives

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