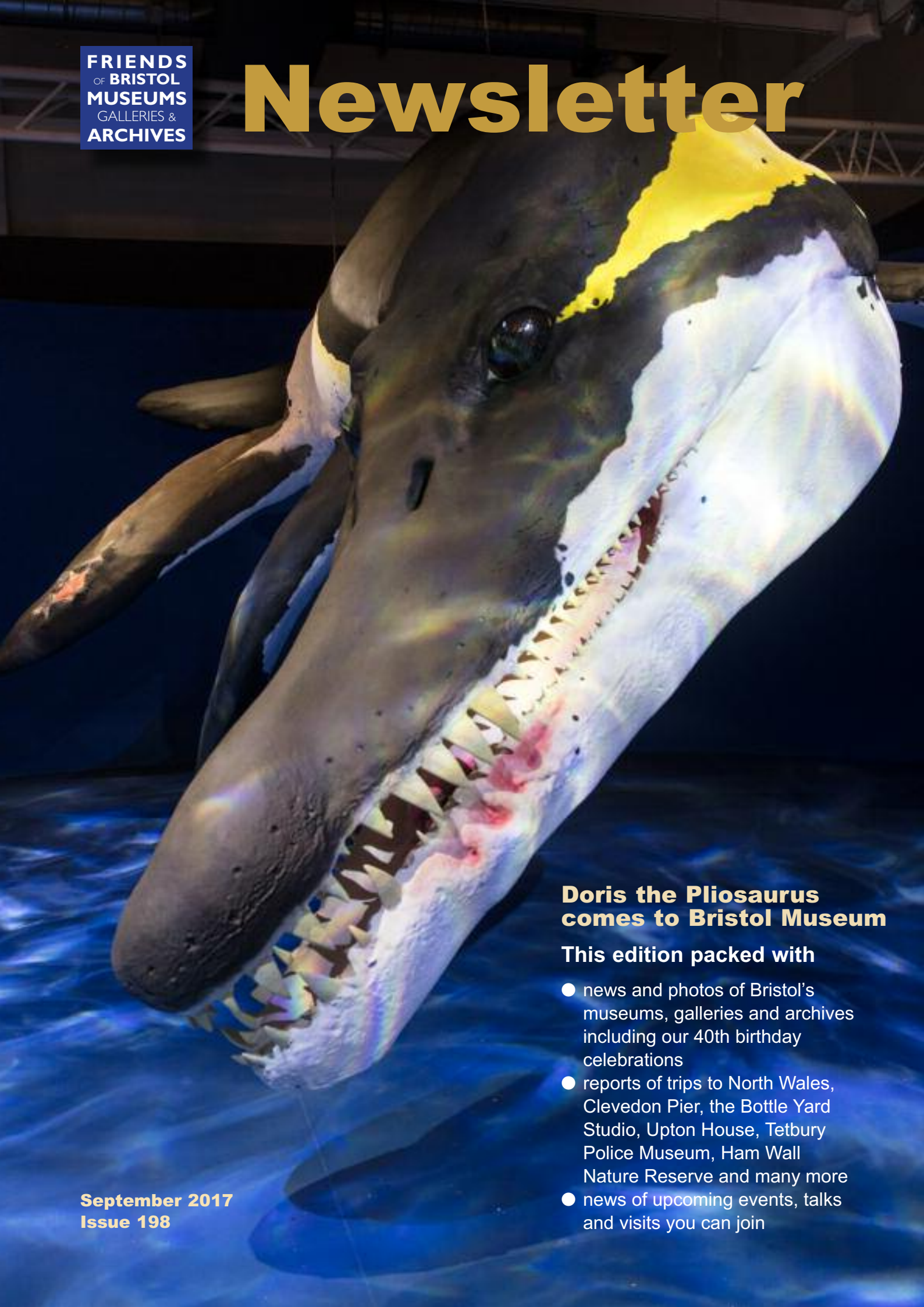


Newsletter



Doris the Pliosaurus comes to Bristol Museum

This edition packed with

- news and photos of Bristol's museums, galleries and archives including our 40th birthday celebrations
- reports of trips to North Wales, Clevedon Pier, the Bottle Yard Studio, Upton House, Tetbury Police Museum, Ham Wall Nature Reserve and many more
- news of upcoming events, talks and visits you can join

**September 2017
Issue 198**

From the Chairman

Celebrating 40 years of the Friends

It was lovely to see so many of you in June at the M Shed celebrations of our 40th anniversary, in the presence of three founder members, Liz Mackenzie, Mary Bailey and David Martin. Liz and Mary are also past Chairmen, and of course it was Mary who organised the celebration and baked the six – yes, six – delicious birthday cakes for us to share.

June marks the end of our Financial Year, and it has been another successful one for us, with our activities raising nearly £23,000. I am sure that all the members will join me in congratulating and thanking the Programme Committee and their helpers for their dedication and creativity in organising and delivering such a rich and varied calendar of events.

Bristol Harbour Festival

Our annual 2-day book, cake and drinks sale at the Harbour Festival – which raised just over £1,000 – was as ever great fun, and an opportunity to chat to fellow volunteers, members, and visitors. My thanks to Andy King, Chris Ecclestone and his team, who again made us feel very welcome in L Shed, and of course to the organisers and volunteers who made it happen.



▲ *Selling books at the Harbour Festival. Note Concorde's prototype cockpit in the background*
Photo by Sue Thurlow

Annual General Meeting and social event

You will find enclosed the details of our AGM evening on Tuesday 19 September at M Shed. As usual we will keep

Cover photo: *The life-size model of Doris the Pliosaurus which can be seen at the Pliosaurus! Dive into the Jurassic Deep exhibition at BMAG.* ©Jamie Woodley



◀ *The Anniversary birthday cake*
Photo by Martin Bailey

formalities as snappy as possible, but in addition to normal business the committee will be asking members to agree some changes – all in accordance with Charities Commission guidelines – to simplify our constitution, and help with the smooth-running of the committee. We also have some interesting speakers lined up for you including Laura Pye, Head of Culture, who will share her view of some of the hot topics for the museums service. Please join us to play your part in the governance of the Friends, and for an opportunity to chat over drinks and nibbles with staff, committee members and other Friends old and new.

Brian Joseph

I was sad to learn of the death at the end of June of Brian Joseph, who had been a member of the Executive Committee for many years and also served on the Programme Committee until retiring in 2007, organising day trips and holidays (including a memorable one to Orkney many years ago) and even acting as Father Christmas at several of our Christmas Fairs. Following that he volunteered to manage our website when it was first set up and continued to do so until Brian Vincent took over in 2013. He certainly made a big contribution to the Friends.

British Association of Friends of Museums Annual Conference

There is still time to book for the BAFM annual Conference on Saturday 30 September at the London Transport Museum in Covent Garden. The theme is 'Museums, Members and Friends: A harmonious relationship?' Full details are on the BAFM website (<http://bafm.co.uk/>)

Doris the Pliosaurus

If you have not seen it already, do make time to visit Bristol Museum & Art Gallery to see 'Pliosaurus – Dive into the Jurassic Deep'. The exhibition is aimed at children 3-11 and is great fun for all ages, but also includes some fascinating fossils and explains the science behind the research.

Sue Thurlow Chairman

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Service-wide developments

In June, Arts Council England announced the successful bids for Non-Portfolio Organisation status and funding 2018-22 including museums from all across the country. Bristol Museums have been awarded £1.3 million a year for the next 4 years. This status and funding has replaced the 'Major Partner Museum' category used previously and brings museums in line with other arts organisations. Ours is the second biggest award in the South West which shows great confidence and commitment in the work we are doing although it is a reduction of 15% on current funding.

Staff news

Karin Walton (Curator of Applied Art) has retired after nearly 44 years of dedicated service to Bristol Museums, especially to the Red Lodge and Georgian House and the decorative art collection held in Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. Ruth Hecht has retired as Senior Officer, Exhibitions and Events and Becky Peters has been promoted into her role. Harry Metcalf (Paper Conservator) has left for a new post at the Fitzwilliam in Cambridge at the end of July and Julian Warren (City Archivist) also left then to join the University of Bristol. Tom Pace (IT Technical officer) is leaving for a post in Bath University and Tom Newman (South West Museum Development Team) has left for pastures new at the Arts Council.

Site-specific developments

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

A 'Pop up' shop will be trialled in the Front Hall at weekends over the summer.

M Shed

The Reception Desk will be issuing a new floor plan of M Shed to visitors and encouraging donations this summer, following the success of this approach at BMAG

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

The thatch on the Dairy is being replaced this summer.

Bristol Archives

Partnerships with the Bristol Old Vic, British Library and Colston Hall are all bearing fruit and the initial work on the British Empire & Commonwealth Collection – to digitise 40 collections of images, has been completed.

New exhibitions

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

Pliosaurus! Dive into the Jurassic Deep

17 June 2017 – 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,



◀ A young boy gets to know *Pliosaurus carpenteri*
© Bristol Culture

the ultimate ocean predator, was the awesome 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 is on public display for the first time.

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

Alternative Visions – undiscovered art from the South West

3 June – 10 September (Free)

There are many undiscovered local artists, driven to produce art for a wider range of reasons and for different purposes than many mainstream artists. The striking self-belief and determination of artists in this exhibition has led them to develop remarkable art.

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 in partnership with Arts & Health South West and Outside In.

Radical Pottery in Bristol schools

22 July 2017 – 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 to inspire Bristol students. The works were ground-breaking, innovative and often made by women who went on to become internationally recognised for pushing the boundaries of ceramics. The exhibition includes work by leading 20th century potters including Bernard Leach, Michael Cardew, Lucy Rie and Hans Coper.

M Shed

Skeletons – our buried bones

8 April – 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, an exploratory space reveals the science behind the stories. Visitors can test their knowledge of bones, search for 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.

Events:

Blaise Castle House Museum

Goram Fair

9 September 2017 (*Pay what you think*)

Drop in and 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 is growing and find out how you can help it to flourish.

Last Summer Walk – Francis Greenacre - Public Sculpture: architectural, commemorative and contemporary

13 September

Free admission but booking essential via Bristol Museum & Art Gallery website. Sponsored by the Friends of BMGA

M Shed

Radical History Zone

17 September 2017 (11-4pm) (*Admission free – we are keeping 10% of sales*)

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 local and national speakers promising a history-from-below approach and glimpses of an undocumented past missing from conventional accounts. Buy a book from the accompanying book fair.

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

Insect Festival

23 September 2017

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

Winter Lecture programme 2017-18

All talks will be held at the University of Bristol School of Economics, Finance and Management, 8 Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1TU (close to the junction with Priory Road).

Please note that this is a completely new venue. All talks take place on Thursday evenings, 7.30pm – 9.00pm. All talks

are FREE and open to all, thanks to the generous sponsorship of FBMGA. However, places MUST be booked in advance. Contact the Reception Desk at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery (details on the back page). After booking if you are unable to attend please inform the museum service so we can reallocate your place. There is a retiring collection to support the work of BMGA.

The Rise of the Robots: from curatorial scribbles to blockbuster exhibition

Thursday 12 October 2017

Speaker: Ben Russell (Science Museum)

During 2017, the 'Robots' exhibition at the Science Museum, London explored the 500-year story of humanoid robots, featuring a unique collection of over 100 robots, from a 16th-century mechanical monk to modern creations. Ben Russell, exhibition lead curator, will explore the rich cultural roots of robots, and discuss the curatorial process of putting the show together.

Grave Secrets: understanding the impact of rapid urbanisation on 18-19th century Bristolians through the study of skeletal collections

Thursday 9 November 2017

Speaker: Professor Kate Robson-Brown (University of Bristol)

Over the past 15 years several Bristol cemeteries have been excavated and the human remains meticulously studied. Bristol's population rose rapidly from 1801 which created risks as well as opportunities for the people involved. This talk will explore how the historical lens can illuminate this new urban science.

Mauled, injured and sick: sore tales of giant pliosaurs

Thursday 7 December 2017

Speaker: Dr Judyth Sassoon (University of Bristol)

Pliosaurs were fearsome predators. The two Pliosaurus species displayed in Bristol Museum show signs of disease and injury (palaeopathologies), evidence of significant life events about 155 million years ago. These rare specimens show how diseases in fossil animals can help reconstruct ancient life histories and even instil a deep sense of empathy in us.

From the Membership Secretary

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

Mrs Elizabeth Abbey	Ms Janet Chamberlain
Dr Elizabeth Arthurs	Ms Nicola Price
Dr Phillip Atcliffe	Mr Ken Robinson
Mrs Jocelyn Atcliffe	Mrs Amanda Robinson
Mrs Patti Ballinger	

This is a good time to invite others to come along as anyone joining after 1st October will get 15 months membership for the price of 12!

June Hibberd, Membership Secretary

40th Anniversary Celebration

Saturday 3 June 2017

A Member's View

Sue Thurlow outlined highlights of 40 years of the Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives. Originating as Bristol Magpies in 1977, we have raised some £400,000 to enhance Bristol's museums' collections, educational outreach, publications, conservation, digitisation, demonstrations and displays. The Friends' support for the new Egyptian Gallery played a vital part in its widely-acknowledged success. FBMGA lobbied against cuts in funding, against admission charges, against the demolition of the transit sheds now housing M Shed, participated in the Strategic Review of 2007 looking at the future of the museums service and provided voluntary help. There are now more than 600 members. Great credit is due to the early members, many museum staff and particularly to Liz Mackenzie for her inspirational chairmanship. To end a fascinating afternoon, a colourfully-attired Liz Mackenzie cut a special birthday cake, which was much appreciated by all.

Tony Dickens

A Staff View

It is a great pleasure to be able to record official congratulations and also thanks for the 40 years that the Friends have been supporting the City Council's museums and archives.

Over all that time the membership and the Executive and Programme Committees have been a delight to work with and have enabled us to achieve much that would otherwise have proven impossible. Back in the day, the Art Gallery and Museum had separate directors, reflecting the original division into the Museum building (now Browns restaurant) and the Art Gallery & Museum of Antiquities (now the Bristol Museum & Art Gallery). With a Friends' group for the Art Gallery established after the World War II, Nicholas Thomas as director of the Museum, pushed for a similar supporter's body to cover the remainder of the organisation's work in the 1970s. Ever since, we have been fortunate to have two bodies raising funds to invest in your museum and gallery service.

The funds you have raised over four decades have augmented our wonderful collections with hundreds of new acquisitions which keep the museum alive and vibrant. The beauty of Friends' support is that we can usually amplify it by achieving 50% of the funding through national grant aid if we are assured of having the remainder available to us via the Friends. In this way we make your money go twice as far.

Without the Friends, the working exhibits at M Shed would probably not be functioning today. Operating historic machinery is expensive and challenging and the Friends enabled a team of staff and volunteers to maintain what is a unique offer in the centre of such a busy city. Similarly, projects such as the refurbishment of new galleries have been possible thanks to the dedicated work of the Friends.

On a personal note, I have been the Museum representative on the Executive Committee since 1997. Consequently I have had the pleasure of working with many committee members and the following Chairs – Monica Jones, John Styles, John McOmie, Jane Moakes, Brian Bartlett, David Kingham, Mary Bailey and Sue Thurlow. My thanks to them all for being very welcoming in their meetings and for the support they have shown me.

Ray Barnett Head of Collections & Archives



▲ **Liz McKenzie**
Photo by Katherine Martin

Andy King, Senior Curator of Industrial & Maritime History and Working Exhibits, gave a lively account of some of the ways in which FBMGA had contributed to his collections over the last 40 years – during 36 of which he had been in post. He focused his talk on the working exhibits, a popular and highly-visible part of the museums' collections on the Harbourside.



◀ **John King:** The diesel tug John King was built in 1935 and acquired by the museum in 1990. Her last big job locally was to escort SS Great Britain up the river to the Floating Harbour on 6 July 1970 and, a fortnight later, to tow her back to her original dry dock.

Fairbairn Steam Crane: ▶ Built by Stothert & Pitt of Bath in 1878, the steam crane is the oldest in Britain and a Scheduled Ancient Monument. With 35 tons strength, it was designed to lift heavy weights directly from and into ships' holds.



Photos © Bristol Culture

Visit to North Wales

Monday 1 May

Erddig

Erddig was our first stop on the unforgettable 2017 holiday to North Wales. The National Trust welcomed us to the 1,200 acre estate near Wrexham owned for over 250 years by the Yorke family. The house was reminiscent of Tyntesfield in that over the years the owners had kept just about everything to do with the house and the estate and had amassed over 30,000 items which tell its story, warts and all.

This is probably the only NT house to be entered through the stable yard and the back door. However, once inside there were fabulous bedrooms and a stately dining room, well-equipped kitchens providing activities for visitors and a bathroom with a contraption which turned out to be a primitive shower. Unique to Erddig the happy relationship between family and staff is well documented and included photographs of the servants together with some poetry appreciative of the work they did. Whether they appreciated the poetry is another matter!

Outside, a meticulously laid out Grade I listed garden included 180 different kinds of apple tree, the fruit of which get celebrated and sampled every autumn. Bees were busy!

My favourite thing in this wonderful house was a Cabinet of Curiosities which was large enough to merit its own small room. It was filled, not with the usual well-presented collection of ordered fossils or stuffed birds. It was a mishmash of all sorts of things each of which was fascinating in its own way. I found it fun and refreshing.

We travelled on to Llanberis to The Royal Victoria Hotel which occupied an imposing position overlooking Llyn Padarn. A good dinner was followed by a talk about the hotel itself and Snowdon with its railway just across the road. This whetted our appetites for what was in store the next day.

Sue Stops



▲ *The Friends at the meeting point at Erddig*



▼ *The kitchen at Erddig*



▲ *The conquest of Snowdon!*

Tuesday 2 May

Snowdon

Just 100 yards from our 'basecamp' of Royal Victoria Hotel, Llanberis, we all were aboard the Mountain Train with our engine called Yeti to take us up the rack and pinion rail to the summit of Snowdon. To think the first train – built in Switzerland and transported to North Wales – ran on 6 April, 1896.

We were immediately climbing up past the waterfall and looking back on Llanberis, there were the old slate mining galleries on what we would later discover was the 'Electric Mountain'.

Walkers were going up a most amazing wiggly path (I was glad to be on the train!) Shadows caused some hills to look black whilst others positively glowed in the sun. There were large areas of scree. At a halt we waited for George and his carriages to descend and pass us before we set off on our next stage, looking out at more and

more lakes. Fold after fold of mountains looked like a crumpled bedspread – Snowdonia National Park at its best – truly breath-taking.

Reaching the top station after an hour, we climbed up 91 steps to the very summit at 1,085 m, where climbers were taking 'selfies'. To think Snowdon's shape was formed by ice, and this was once under the sea! The wind can blow at 200mph there and up to 5m of rain falls on the summit yearly. Just 4 days before our visit, the trains were only able to go half way due to the appalling weather! We had Ruth as our organiser and, of course, she seems to have a hot line for glorious weather. A notice in the Summit Cafe informed us in Welsh and English that snow can lie on the summit from early September to late May. We saw none – probably due to the mild winter. In 2008 a time capsule was installed in the cafe by pupils from local schools and it will be re-opened in 2058. Another notice said 'Under your feet there are volcanic ash and shells'.

Half an hour seemed to whizz by and then we were back on board *Yeti* for our descent, passing what looked like Standing Stones quite near the summit, sheep dotted about and here and there a rather lonely little farm building and of course more climbers. We stopped at Clogwyn Halt for *Peris* to climb past us, then down through Hebron Station and Rocky Valley Halt, passing trees, including apples in blossom, the waterfall and a stream tumbling over rocks. Everywhere looked so lovely – it is no wonder we Welsh sing 'Among our ancient mountains, and from our lovely vales.....' Ruth we love your trips. Thank you.

Ceri Addis



▲ One of the narrow gauge locomotives that pull carriages full of visitors to the top of Snowdon

Dinorwig Pumped Storage Power Station – The Magic Mountain

The Dinorwig underground power station was opened in 1984 inside the Elidir Fawr mountain, previously the site of the largest slate mine in Europe. Located in an area of outstanding natural beauty, remote from electricity consumers, the vast structure can generate up to 8% of national production (about half the capacity of the proposed Hinkley C project). During our tour we were driven by coach right inside the mountain into caverns excavated by removing 12 million tons of slate and rubble. The space, large enough to accommodate St Paul's cathedral, and twice as big as the Great Pyramid of Giza, houses massive water inlet valves, giant water turbines and huge generators.

Electricity is difficult to store. Most generating stations use coal, gas or nuclear power to produce heat and drive generators. They take many hours to power up and output can be adjusted only slowly. For best efficiency they need to operate at close to full power. Growing use of wind and tidal generators means supply can be unpredictable. Consumer demand can change rapidly. As a popular TV programme finishes millions of kettles will be switched on and even the National Grid with its many power stations has difficulty meeting the sudden demand. Surges can create up to 5% of total grid demand. The Dinorwig station can meet the whole of that national surge demand within 12 seconds!



▼ The view from Llanberis, showing the inlet road and water exhausts into the lower reservoir of the Dinorwig Power Station.

The Dinorwig station is very simple in principle. When demand surges, water from the high altitude upper reservoir (which holds 9.2 million litres) is discharged through turbines into the lower reservoir. When the national power demand is small, usually at night, the water is pumped back up to the top reservoir ready for the next surge.

However, in order to convert this simple principle into a working system, the station's actual operations are complicated. As well as containing much of the equipment of a normal power station, Dinorwig has specialised machines to provide rapid response to consumer demands. Each of the six water turbines can be filled with compressed air for 'spinning in air' mode, so that their generators run as motors at grid frequency ready for water to be admitted. This allows power to be fed to the grid within 12 seconds. There is enough capacity in the upper reservoir to maintain maximum power for about six hours. The water supply from the upper reservoir travels along almost 1½ miles of passages to reach the inlet valves. A surge pond in the passages acts as a safety valve to dissipate the energy of the flowing water when the inlet valves close. The pond also provides a reserve of water to provide a smooth flow as generation starts. When the water is pumped back to the top reservoir, the generators and turbines reverse their actions to become electric motors driving the water pumps.

This tour of the Electric Mountain was an impressive contrast to the other visits, and we are grateful to Ruth for including it in a week full of interest.

Roy Taylor

Chester

On another glorious sunny day we left Llanberis and set off for Chester, where we were met by Graham Fisher, Vice Chairman of Chester Civic Society, who led us on a guided walking tour of this historic city.

Chester was founded by the Romans in AD 79 as a fort known as Deva. It was a thriving port until the river Dee silted up and became unnavigable. The race course now occupies the site. The amphitheatre is evidence of the Roman settlement, as is the occasional sighting of a Roman soldier followed by an army of marching school children.

The High Cross stands at the historic centre of Chester and is where merchants struck their deals. Unique to Chester are The Rows. Dating back to the 13th Century, they were originally half-timbered shops, taverns and galleries on two levels with covered walkways. There are many examples of black and white timbered buildings, including St Werburgh Mount, which has been described as 'the finest row of black and white buildings in Europe'. Some are authentically ancient whilst others are clever Victorian copies.

The Gothic Revival style town hall was opened by HRH Prince of Wales, Earl of Chester, later Edward VII, accompanied by William Gladstone in 1869. Opposite is a bronze sculpture of Janya the Indian elephant. This was created by Annette Yarow, and was a gift from Chester Zoo to the city in 2010 to celebrate the strong friendship between zoo and city.

In the refectory of the cathedral is a stunning stained glass window, designed by Ros Grimshaw, who lives in Bristol and has links to the Friends group. We ended our walk along the city walls, passing the Victorian Eastgate clock erected to celebrate Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee.

We then dispersed to some of the many eateries in Chester, and then back to the coach homeward bound. Many thanks to Ruth for organising such a fantastic trip and for arranging wonderful weather.

Sarah Bradfield

A view of Chester cross, showing an example of the clever Victorian copies of the famous Rows, double level shops ►



▲ Gary and Hilary walking around Chester's mediaeval walls. They have just passed King Charles's tower where he is reputed to have watched his troops defeated at the Battle of Rowton Moor during the Civil War



Wednesday 3 May

Portmeirion

Created by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis between 1925 and 1975 Portmeirion, it has to be said, is not to everyone's taste. In the sunshine, however, and freshly painted, it looked wonderful. There are about 50 buildings surrounded by 70 acres of sub-tropical gardens. A 10-minute trip on the Forest Train through the Gwyllt Woods gives glimpses of hidden lakes, temples, ruined castles, rare trees and shrubs. Brightly-coloured shops, houses, cafes and galleries, together with statues, sculptures, murals and even a massive chess board, line the path which winds through the village leading down



▲ A general view of Portmeirion showing a variety of eccentric buildings

to Tremadog Bay where the tide races in over treacherous sandbanks. Of particular interest to us was the Bristol Colonnade, reconstructed from the 18th century bathhouse at Arnos Court, which fits perfectly into its surroundings. It is a rare tribute to its designer and builder.

Brenda Thomas

Thursday 4 May

Plas Newydd, Anglesey

As part of the Friends visit to North Wales, we had an excellent visit in total sunshine to Plas Newydd. It was a perfect day for lounging in the gardens which were perched on the banks of the Menai Strait, looking across to Snowdonia. However, we wished to see the inside too and in the Music Room were sidetracked into trying to complete a jigsaw of the painting of the Battle of Waterloo, by Denis Dighton (1792-1827).

The house was originally Tudor, but in the early 1750s was transformed into a castle. It was acquired by the Pagets in the 18th century and the most famous member of the family was the 1st Marquess of Anglesey (1768-1854), known as 'one-leg' following an amputation at the Battle of Waterloo (his articulated false leg is on display). It is said his brother lost his arm also in battle – hence the expression 'costing an arm and a leg'. The 5th Marquess was keen on all things theatrical and many plays were put on at the house. My favourite room was the library, which has several desks so that several projects could be on 'the go' at any one time.

After a tour of the house and lunch, it was lovely finally to sit in the perfect garden watching the boats on the Menai Strait and marvelling at the many tender plants able to grow here thanks to the influence of the Gulf Stream.

Thanks to Ruth Welch for a lovely visit and the five days as a whole.

Catherine Dixon



▲ The study belonging to Henry Paget, the 7th Marquess of Anglesey as he left it in 2013 with a different desk for every job



◀ A detail of one of the main attractions, the Rex Whistler mural in the dining room.

Photos of the North Wales trip were taken by Judith Jones, Catherine Dixon, John Harling and Roy Taylor

Ham Wall Nature Reserve

Thursday 6 April 2017

The weather when we set out was just as I had imagined it when I booked this trip – a lovely, crisp, sunny spring day. The car park when we arrived had a little hut selling tea, coffee and flapjacks, where we could enjoy sitting at picnic benches surveying the sights and sounds of the Somerset Levels, with Glastonbury Tor hazy in the distance. Sun hats appeared like flowers – what more could we want?

Our two guides appeared and, after an introduction, we strolled along the canal bank until we arrived at a small area with a telescope and identification boards. Busy in the wetlands in front of us we saw little egrets, great crested grebes and a pair of marsh harriers, and listened to the Cetti's warbler. We strolled on again, passing a reed bed which had been used as a starling roost that winter. The soil would take a year to recover from the amount of guano it received. We divided into a 'slow' group and a 'slightly less slow' group, visiting different hides, seeing different birds. Some of us were sufficiently attuned to bird cries to hear the characteristic boom of a male bittern. (Worth a listen on YouTube if you missed it.)

Our guides told us how they count the birds, which involves sitting for six hours in a chair like a tennis umpire's. They were well-informed and happy to help us understand the birds we could see and hear. Altogether the visit was a lovely way to celebrate the arrival of spring – many thanks to David and Wendy Snelson for organizing it.

Katherine Martin



▲ View over the nature reserve with Glastonbury Tor in the distance

Photo by Katherine Martin

Clevedon Pier Visitor Centre

Thursday 11 May 2017

Clevedon Pier was described by Sir John Betjeman 'as the most beautiful pier in England'. Unfortunately, structural problems discovered in 1970 meant the pier had to be dismantled and reassembled. The new and more accessible version (now Grade I listed) belongs to the Clevedon Pier and Heritage Trust.

We were ushered into the new Porthole Room by a very enthusiastic young lady, Abbie Edbrooke, the Heritage and Outreach Officer for Clevedon Pier. After a welcome cup of coffee and biscuits we were given a potted history of the pier's construction using old photographs. We learned that the pier was built in the 1860s by just 60 workers and took 18 months to construct using 350 tons of wrought iron. It is 1,024 feet long and consists of eight spans supported by steel rails covered by wooden decking, with an ornate pavilion gracing the pier head. We learned an interesting fact that the legs were constructed of Barlow rail which had previously been used on Isambard Kingdom Brunel's South Wales Railway. This great feat of engineering was opened on Easter Monday the 29th of March 1869 by Lady Elton of Clevedon Court to great acclaim with over 500 people turning up to watch the grand opening with bands

▼ Clevedon Pier
Photo by Hilary Cleeve



playing in the streets for this joyous occasion. Passengers arriving from Wales and Devon on paddle steamers used this new ferry port, and with the opening of the railways and new transport links, Clevedon changed from a small agricultural village to a thriving holiday destination. There were the Campbell sailings, the Balmoral and the Waverley, and with the new railway connections Clevedon became a prosperous seaside town.

Alas in 1970 two of the spans collapsed and demolition was proposed. There was uproar and, after much fund raising plus Heritage grants, the pier was dismantled, reassembled and reopened in 1989. Ten years later it won the title Pier of The Year from the National Piers Society and a Civic Trust Award. Last year the pier was revamped making it accessible to all with new restaurants, a museum, and a magnificent Pagoda at the pier head. Sir John must surely have approved! It was a shame that this highly interesting visit was undersubscribed as just meeting Abbie was so inspiring. She really loved her work and felt she had the best job in the world! Don't miss it next time!

Hilary Cleeve

The Bottle Yard Studios

Thursday 8 June 2017

Even my journey there was an adventure, as I had a wonderful tour of Bristol on the 76 bus, eventually alighting at the South Bristol Hospital near the studios. Originally built as bottling plant for Harveys of Bristol, the site may still be mistaken for a factory. There are huge warehouses, pipes, strange machinery and scaffolding all over the place. But, once inside, we heard a very different story.

Fiona Francombe, the site Director, told us how, with the support of the Regional Development Authority and Bristol City Council, she first went to the site about 8 years ago in order to assess its suitability as a new home for the production of *Casualty*. *Casualty* was moved to Cardiff but Fiona saw the potential of this huge site for the production of films and TV. She persuaded Bristol City Council to let the project go ahead, and so the experiment began.

The Studios are managed by a staff of four and a half people, including Fiona, and the production teams who hire the facility and act as self-contained units, bringing everything with them. The huge warehouses and tank rooms provide flexible space and the operation is very budget friendly, encouraging other productions to come to Bristol rather than London. In addition to the filming, storage and office space there are 22 permanent tenants on site, offering a cross-section of services to the wider film industry. This provides a steady income for the Studio as well as employment for south Bristol.

Last July there were 9 productions going on at once, but on the day of our visit it was quiet and we were able to tour all over the site. 'Trollied' was their first big production and it keeps returning. We explored the warehouse which is permanently set up as the supermarket where the action for this TV show takes place. We went on set to see the filming of Andy's Safari Adventure, a children's programme. Another series of *Poldark* is soon to be filmed on location and at the Studios and we went to Tank House 2 where the view from Ross and Demelza's house is hand painted on to a back drop, ready for their home to be reassembled there. The *Poldark* set is piled high in the enormously tall Tank House 3 where Harvey's Bristol Cream was once stored. As well as productions such as *Broadchurch*, *Wolf Hall*, *Sherlock* and *Three Girls*, smaller programmes such as recent election debates are filmed here.

The Bottle Yard Studios have brought celebrities, money, employment and training to Bristol. They are a fantastic example of what Bristol does so well - creativity and adaptability. Fiona's enthusiasm for the project is inspiring and we really appreciate the time and energy she gave to our visit amidst her busy working day. Thanks also to Carol for organising such a fascinating and surprising visit.

Sue Pears



▲ The set for the sitcom 'Trollied' – this is the set for a supermarket called Valco which is stocked just like any other real supermarket when they are actually filming

Photo by Judith Jones

▼ An empty vast studio which is typical of the many vast spaces they have available for rent, *The Friends* on location in that same studio for their group photo!

Photo by Judith Jones



The International Fine Art Conservation Studios

Thursday 18 May 2017

What is a conservator? During our visit to the airy International Fine Art Conservation Studios on Park Street we discovered it involved being a combination of artist, historian, scientist, skilled technician and researcher.

As members of FBMGA we have all seen hundreds of pictures and other objects in stately homes which were crying out to be cleaned or repaired. This was what the conservators were doing but only after researching the objects they were to work on very thoroughly. Before work begins, detailed information is needed about the creator of the work, the materials originally used, its age, its history, its current condition and only then could the conservators decide what to do.

We saw badly damaged pictures being repaired, backed and re-stretched before framing. Stunning work was being carried out on two wooden panels from a set of fourteen belonging to a Jesuit church in Mayfair, the work of an Austrian woodcarver, depicting the Stations of the Cross. The panels, originally colourfully painted against a gold leaf background, had unfortunately been completely over-painted khaki to look like stone. Then we were shown pictures of one recently restored panel brought alive with colour and new gold leaf. What an amazing transformation! When all fourteen panels are finished, the work will look wonderful.

An enormous painting, hoisted up through a special hatch to a large display area, showed the foundation stone of Swansea University being laid in the presence of Queen Mary in 1923 before a huge audience of unsmiling people. I am sure each could be recognised! The picture had been rolled up and stored, so needed to be cleaned and repaired ready for display next year.

A large portrait of Winston Churchill in 1915 was being refurbished for the Liberal Club in London. One of our members, Jim Paterson, made the portrait much more interesting for us with recollections of the historical circumstances surrounding the picture. An unhappy Churchill is shown wearing the uniform of the Admiralty from which he resigned in 1915 after the defeat in the Dardanelles. After his resignation he joined the the Royal Scots Fusiliers, the regiment in which Jim's father served from the age of 17. He became a sergeant at 18 and remained very loyal to Churchill, who was credited with having eliminated lice from his battalion - a considerable achievement and great comfort to the men serving under him!

This was a fascinating visit and I am sure that one of the joys of being a conservator is the satisfaction they must feel at the astonishing results they achieve.

Catherine Dixon



▲ *Part of set of wooden sculptures from church in Mayfair will be repainted in nearly original colours*
Photo by Catherine Dixon



▼ *Painting from Bristol Museum about to be repaired*
Photo by Catherine Dixon



◀ Upton House

▼ Looking towards the Mirror Lake in Upton House gardens

Upton House and Gardens

Tuesday 23 May 2017

Described as 'a small country house', Upton House is approached along a tree-lined drive and has a striking honey-brown coloured façade of Hornton stone. The first house was built in Tudor times and the present one around the 1690s by Sir Rushout Cullen. It had many and varied owners, including Andrew Motion, grandfather of the former Poet Laureate, and was altered and extended by many of them. The house was given to the National Trust in 1948.

Visitors are encouraged to view the house as potential purchasers and in each room are designs and extracts from *The House Desirable*, a rather patronising manual for those not used to buying houses. Our group visited the library and the long gallery, which had once been three rooms but was knocked into one to act as a place for music, dancing and conversation. The long gallery houses many works of art including an early Canaletto and some rare English porcelain. We finished this part of the tour in the dining room, which displays a collection of sporting pictures and Stubbs' *The Haymakers* and *The Reapers*.

Much of the art collection is housed in a basement corridor and what used to be a squash court. There was so much to absorb, but El Greco's *The Disrobing of Christ* and *The Adoration of the Magi* attributed to Hieronymus Bosch spring to mind. Here also is a collection of mainly Sèvres porcelain. Upstairs there were all sorts of interesting exhibitions, including a corridor full of Shell posters, on loan from Beaulieu, and a quiz about 1930s style to test our good taste, at which I sadly failed.

There is hardly space to mention the fabulous gardens. A terrace and lawn stretch out from the south side of the house. Beyond this, out of sight from the house, a colourful terraced garden drops via elegant stairs and paths to a kitchen garden and large pool. To the west side are the yew terraces and the bog garden. There was so much to explore and enjoy.

During our visit we were treated to coffee and an excellent hot lunch. Thanks to the National Trust staff and volunteers who were so helpful and efficient in the way they organised our visit. Thanks also to Wendy Aldridge-Morris for setting up such a great trip and to Pat Walker for taking charge on the day.

Sue Pears

The dining room ▶



Photos by Hilary Cleeve and Pat Walker

A Cotswold visit

Wednesday 14 June 2017

Tetbury Police Museum and St Mary's Church

I have often driven through Tetbury so it was wonderful to have the chance to explore this lovely old market town. To reach the Police Museum we walked the length of Long Street which is lined with posh dress shops, antique shops, cafés and pubs. Tractors towing all sorts of machinery trundled along beside us.

The Victorian Police Station now belongs to the Town Council and, amongst other things, houses the Police Museum. The Museum is tiny but well worth a visit. It is crammed with policing artefacts from the past. There are bicycles, uniforms, truncheons, a pre-1980s photo-fit kit to play with and you would never believe the number of different types of handcuffs that exist. Fred is snoring steadily in a cell, sleeping off the night before, and Sergeant Smith is in the office. The ingenious donation box at the exit kept Hilary happy for hours.

Upstairs, in the room used for Tetbury Town Council meetings, is a reconstructed courtroom. The figures are very lifelike and you can listen to the hearing of the case of Mr Pinchar, who stole a rabbit, vegetables and underwear worth two pounds and ten shillings.

From there I strolled through some of the tranquil back streets to visit St Mary's Parish Church, whose spire dominates the skyline of the town. It is an elegant church with a high ceiling supported by slim wooden pillars. The roof itself is held up by oak beams which are higher still. The only means of entry to the pews is through locked doors leading from passages, called ambulatories, on each side of the church. This enabled the parish to rent the pews to wealthy parishioners, leaving so little space in the church for the poor that a new chapel had to be built for them some distance away. In the East Ambulatory is a small and very interesting heritage exhibition, telling the history of Tetbury from 681 to the present day.

There was no time to investigate the market, explore the footpath to Preston Park or to visit the Chipping Steps. So I will have to go back for another visit. Thanks to Pat Walker for organising such an enjoyable morning.

Sue Pears



▲ Tetbury Police Museum – the Magistrate's Court scene in the Victorian courtroom



▲ St Mary's Church Tetbury showing the North Ambulatory which is a corridor giving the only access to the side pews

Photos by Judith Jones

▼ Chavenage House – the front is very familiar to viewers of Poldark. This photo shows the chapel with its folly tower



Chavenage House

Chavenage House, more familiar to fans of Poldark as Trenwith House, is just a short drive from Tetbury. It appears to be an Elizabethan manor house with uninterrupted views stretching to the horizon, though we later learnt that all sorts of extensions have been added including a 'folly' tower attached to the chapel to make it look like a church and an extensive ballroom added in the 19th century. We were regaled by Caroline Lowsley-Williams with a history of the house from mediaeval times to its requisitioning by the Americans in World War II where they mapped the Omaha beach for the D-Day landings. Oliver Cromwell slept in one of the rooms and

spared the owner of the house from punishment as a regicide by appointing a proxy for him to sign the death warrant for Charles I. We heard how David Williams Lowsley was required to change his name to David Williams-Lowesley-Hoole-Lowesley-Williams to save death duties. Such are the vagaries of history.

We learned from Caroline, who was a very accomplished raconteuse, how the aristocracy coped with poverty. In the Edwardian era the aristocracy married American heiresses to provide funds. In more modern times, the Lowsley-Williams 'married' English television companies. Chavenage has been used in several films and television programmes and one could say that Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Lark Rise to Candleford, Grace and Favour, Hercule Poirot and Ross Poldark have kept the roof on the house and the wolf from the door. The family also host around 37 weddings a year. The tea was excellent too. It was a very interesting and informative afternoon and many thanks to Pat Walker for organising it

Robert Walters

Adela Breton: Ancient Mexico in Colour

Friday 28 April 2017

A number of us visited Bristol Museum for a guided tour of the exhibition, 'Adela Breton Ancient Mexico in Colour', which consists of life size watercolour copies of 8th and 9th century wall and temple paintings from the Maya and other civilisations of Mexico. Sue Giles, the Curator of World Cultures, gave us a very illuminating lecture on the artist and her works.

Adela Breton (1849-1923) lived in Bath as a well-educated English girl until she was 38 when her father died leaving her a house and about £1.5 million in modern values. She did attend Bath College of Art and studied under William Harbutt, the man who invented plasticine. When she was free she travelled to many places including Japan and then in 1892 she went to Mexico, acquiring a young guide, Pablo Solorio. She worked at several archaeological sites in Mexico making full-size colour copies of wall paintings at ancient Mexican ruins. At one site she was at first regarded as a bothersome old soul but by experience she became an authority. She herself was a tireless horsewoman riding many miles side saddle in full Victorian rig.

Adela was meticulous about reproducing the original colours which have now faded on the sites themselves through neglect. Her copies of the wall paintings in temples and buildings in Chichén Itzá, Teotihuacan and Acancén are now the only full record of what was there in the early 1900s and allow today's academics to interpret the images and the history they show.

The images themselves, which are very large, are remarkable for combining some easily recognisable battle scenes with other images which have a highly developed vocabulary of exotic symbolism. As an example priests seemingly uttering kind words have a stylised speech bubble with many flowers.

This is the first time since 1946 that the large watercolours have been on display at the Museum and at the end of the exhibition they will again retire into darkness to preserve their pristine colours. We were also shown some of her notes, her own photographs and some rather beautiful shiny black obsidian tools from the volcanic mines. It was a privilege to see them and we are grateful to Carol Ouvry for organising the visit and for Sue's excellent exposition.

Robert Walters



Detail copied life-size from the bottom of the south west wall, inner chamber, Upper Temple of the Jaguars, Chichén Itzá: the Sun Disc, a warrior wearing a green feather headdress and holding weapons, sits within a rayed circle, shown on top of a standard in the camp.

Watercolour of Caryatid XIV, recording the colours still visible on one of the 15 stone figures holding a stone table top or seat in the outer chamber of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars, Chichén Itzá



▲ Adela Breton with Pablo Solorio, photographer unknown, probably taken on one of her tours of Mexico in the 1890s.

Photos © Bristol Culture/BMAC



Bishop's Knoll World War I Hospital

Saturday 20 May 2017

From 1926 to 1973 anyone going along the Portway could look up just beyond Cook's Folly and see a splendid Victorian house. This was Bishop's Knoll, built in 1861 when 'superior residences' on the Sneyd Park Estate had been legally permitted for just 8 years. It had 14 bedrooms, central heating, a 42-foot billiard room and a tower room with a rooftop belvedere. Bought in 1908, it was Robert Edwin Bush's home until he died in 1939.

Bush, an Old Cliftonian and cricketing team-mate of W.G. Grace, came from a family with ancient links with Gloucestershire. A Bristol branch started when Paul Bushe was consecrated by Henry VIII in 1542 as the first Bishop of Bristol. Robert Edwin Bush sailed to Australia in 1877. He looked for land north of Perth and by 1905 owned 2,000,000 acres, 100,000 sheep, 10,000 cattle and 500 horses! He returned to Bristol in that year, a very rich man and was elected High Sheriff in 1911.

When World War I started and mass casualties were sent back to the UK, Bush decided to repay the country that had made him wealthy by opening his home as a hospital for wounded Australian servicemen. It was ready by 24 August 1914, under the command of Bush's younger brother, Lt Colonel J. Paul Bush. There were 100 beds in 13 wards with a newly-built operating theatre suite. The hospital was equipped and staffed entirely at Bush's own expense costing £100,000 by 1918, equivalent to £10 million today.

The first patients were admitted on 13 September, casualties of the first battle of Mons. By August 1915 it was agreed that only Australians would be admitted. The average stay was 42 days and the longest 21 months. More than 2,000 non-commissioned soldiers had been treated by the end of the war. The last patient left Bishop's Knoll in February 1919 when the house returned to family duties.

Bush declined the offer of a CBE in 1920 but his wife received an OBE for all her duties as Hospital Quartermaster. Bush was appointed Deputy Lieutenant in 1922 of the county and the city of Gloucester, and also of the city and county of Bristol. He participated annually at the Anzac Day service at Arnos Vale, where 20 Australians are buried. His ongoing public service locally included the Presidency of Gloucestershire County Cricket Club and of the Old Cliftonians' Society; he was also an artist member in the Bristol Savages.

Tony Dickens



▲ Ward 2 before the war

▼ Ward 2 during the war



Photos © Bristol Archives
(from a photo album donated by Tessa Kerry, granddaughter of Robert Bush)

Read more in *Bristol's Australian Pioneer – the story of Robert Bush and his Bishop's Knoll World War I Hospital* by Chris Stephens published by Bristol Books.

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