

Newsletter

Masters of Japanese Prints showcased!

This edition packed with

- news and photos of Bristol's museums, galleries and archives including the Masters of Japanese prints exhibitions, the exhibition of drawings by Leonardo da Vinci and British Tattoo Art
- reports of trips to Wells, Reading, St George's, Old Bowlish House, Being Brunel and many more
- news of upcoming events, talks and visits you can join

From the Chairman

Coffee in the Café

Those of you previously members of the Friends of Bristol Art Gallery will be familiar with Coffee in the Café, but for others you will be seeing that as a monthly event in our official programme for the first time. It is a very informal event, and all members are invited to drop in to the café at the Museum & Art Gallery at 10.30 each second Tuesday of the month for a sociable chat with fellow members. Sometimes one of the museum team – maybe a curator, a conservator, a documentation expert or an archivist – is able to join us, and the group might then be taken on a short and informal visit to one of the galleries. If that sounds appealing, then do come and join us.

British Association of Friends of Museums Annual Conference 2019

This year the BAFM annual Conference in October will be hosted by Reading Museum, making it realistic to take part in without an overnight stay. The museum was the focus of one of our January trips and I hear it was much enjoyed, so I am now looking forward even more to the Conference – it may not be as exotic as some recent venues such as Newcastle, Aberdeen and Swansea but ease of travel is a plus and it sounds like we will have excellent hosts. If you would like to know more there are details on the BAFM website.



© Sue Thurlow

Bristol Tobacco Advertising

A year ago the Friends pledged a 'war chest' of £1,000 to the purchase on eBay and similar sites of Bristol tobacco advertising ephemera in preparation for an exhibition on the Bristol tobacco industry planned for 2022. That money has now been spent and has netted a total of over 20 items including some quite rare pieces. Most of these were designed and printed in Bristol by Mardon Son & Hall, in addition to the product being advertised emanating from the city, making them doubly valuable. Many of the artists working at Mardons were also members of the Bristol Savages and, though the images are seldom signed, Eric Craddy's signature appears on one.

Andy King, Senior Curator History

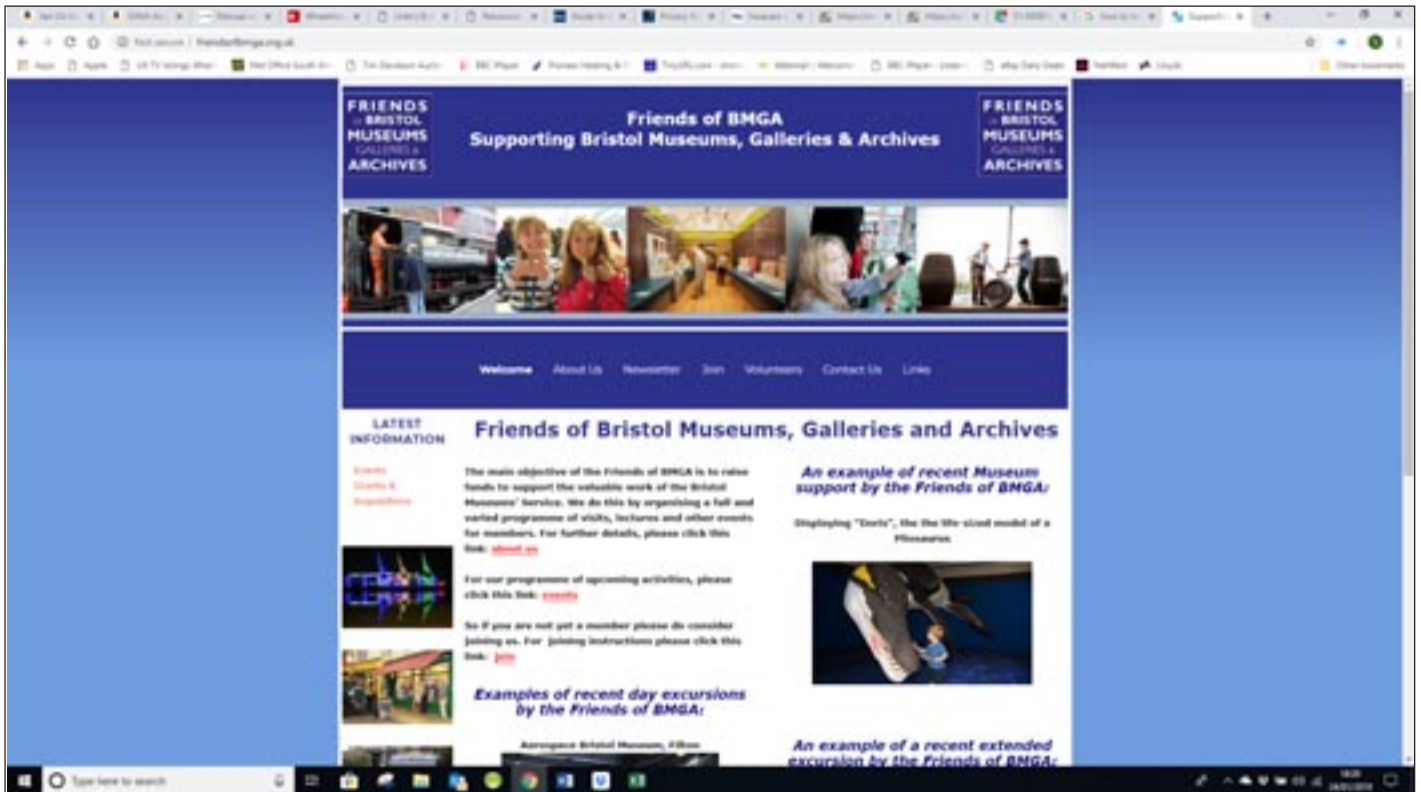
In the late 1950s Wills used a series of cartoon characters and jokey captions to promote Woodbines, at the time still the most popular cheap cigarette after 75 years.

© Bristol Culture



Cover photo: *Inume Pass in Kai Province by Hokusai*

© Bristol Culture



© Friends of BMGA

Our Website

Most of you will know that we have a website, and it is listed each quarter in our contacts information on the back page. It contains information that is either interesting or useful – often both! So for example it gives a list of all our upcoming events, which Brian Vincent, our current website manager, updates each quarter when the new programme is published. From time to time we add information about how our funds are being used to support the museums, galleries & archives. There are copies of previous Newsletters, and we have now added the last 3 FoBAG Bulletins. If you explore the website further you will find a copy of our constitution, a downloadable membership application form, and more information about our organisation.

In practical terms, most of what we need to have online is there, and I am grateful to Brian for keeping it up-to-date. But technology and people's expectations have moved on since the website was built over 10 years ago, which is why the committee are planning to do a full re-design incorporating some of the clever features and contemporary layouts that are now widely used elsewhere. Because we are all volunteers, and we are keen to spend as little of our hard-earned money as possible, the timescales for this are uncertain at the moment. But you will see on this page that we are looking for someone to manage that re-design process, and also someone to take over from Brian in running the new – and in the meantime the old – website on a week-to-week basis.

If you would like to know more about either of the vacancies; if you would like to help with the development of the new website; or if have any ideas that you would like to see incorporated, please let me know.

Sue Thurlow Chairman

Volunteers needed to refresh and run our website

Brian Vincent has been managing our website for seven years and would like to move on. Coincidentally, although our website is functional, the committee feel it is time to carry out a more major overhaul than we have done in the past. So we have 2 vacancies, which could potentially be combined in a single role if we have a suitable volunteer who would like to do both.

Website Administrator

To keep the website up-to-date with events (quarterly) and other news such as recent acquisitions (occasional, say 10 times a year). Training will be given, and we have a paid professional we can call on for help if needed.

Website Development Lead

To work with a small sub-committee to agree requirements for a redesigned website (probably in WordPress) and manage that through to delivery, with paid professional help where needed. We would expect a person carrying out this role to have some experience of working with websites. There is no requirement for them to be a member of the Friends, and it might be an opportunity for a younger person among your family and friends to gain experience in this type of work.

If you are interested in either of these roles, or know someone who might be, please contact Sue Thurlow (details are at the foot of the back page) for more information.

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Staff news

At Bristol Archives a new team has started work as part of 'Unlocking Our Sound Heritage', a national British Library project to digitise and share at-risk sound recordings. We are one of ten regional hubs for this work – project manager Katie Scaife, cataloguer Philippa Lewis and audio engineers David Brookfield and Samuel Bates will be working with collections from across the south-west for the next three years. In the searchroom Nicola Hole has joined as our new Archives Assistant; and, as part of a new cataloguing project with Bristol Cathedral, archivist Anne Lovejoy will be working with us part-time for the next year.

Catherine Littlejohns (Senior Curator Historic Houses) is now on maternity leave and Isla Gladstone (Senior Curator Natural Sciences) is about to return. Claudia Hildebrandt, who is seconded from the University of Bristol to cover for Isla, will revert to her post in the University caring for their geology museum.

DB Redfern (Families Engagement Officer) is leaving the service after contributing much, such as the Fairy Doors programme and family activities around the Pliosaur exhibition.

In January Andy King (Senior Curator History) returned to full-time after a few months on reduced days and Helen McConnell-Simpson who has been supporting Andy over that time will leave at the end of March.

Renoir's Cros de Cagnes

Friends may have seen the Council criticised in the press in January regarding the painting by Renoir – Cros de Cagnes. The reporting suggests we are refusing to hand over this painting to its rightful owner following its sale in 1930s Germany. To be accurate, a potential claim was received against the painting in 2014 and, following established national protocol, we referred this to the national Spoliation Advisory Panel, appointed by government. We agreed to

abide by their decision whether to return or keep the painting. The Panel heard the evidence presented by the claimant but judged it had not shown that the painting had been sold under duress and hence recommended we retain ownership. As of 22 January 2019 and despite the press reports, we have received no further evidence nor any further claim against the painting. If we do, we will again refer the matter to the Panel and agree to abide by their decision, whatever that might be.

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

Over the winter period we take advantage of closing some of our sites in order to spring clean at the historic houses and this year at Blaise we are also changing the ground floor displays. The Victorian Classroom will be replaced by a space where we will display some collections but also be asking you, the visitor, what would be interesting for you to see in revamped displays. Your feedback is really important to us so do please visit Blaise to see what we are proposing and make your views heard. As usual we will reopen to the public at Red Lodge, Georgian House and Blaise on 1 April but the new 'test space' at Blaise will not be open on the ground floor until 4 May.

New visitor parking at Bristol Archives

The car park outside the Create Centre is now reserved for visitors to B Bond Warehouse, so it should be easier for archive users to find a parking space. Any visitor using this car park will need to obtain a parking permit from Create reception each time and display it in their vehicle. Vehicles parked at the Create Centre without a permit, or in the lane along the river, may be towed away.



Dementia and Older People

We have run four more Creative Cafés since the summer and have welcomed an average of 10 participants per café. This year we are also organising some Dementia Friendly tours and visits tailored to particular groups. These include access to special exhibitions and complimentary tea/coffee.

◀ **Renoir's Cros de Cagnes**
© Bristol Culture



▲ *Watercolour painting of a bootmaker, India, 1880s*
© Bristol Culture

The exhibition will include examples of all the drawing materials employed by the artist, including pen and ink, red and black chalks, watercolour and metalpoint. It will also present new information about Leonardo's working practices and creative process, gathered through scientific research using a range of non-invasive techniques, including ultraviolet imaging, infrared reflectography and X-ray fluorescence.



▲ *Detail from Leonardo's Cats, Lions and a Dragon from the Royal Collection Trust*
© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, 2019

British Commonwealth & Empire Collection

The Paul Mellon Centre for British Art is funding work to catalogue and digitise around 4,000 of the earliest photographs in the BECM collection, together with a volume of Indian watercolours. The BECC team are also partners in the Building Shared Futures project, funded by the University of Bristol's Global Challenges Research Fund. Archivists, curators and academics from Bristol and Nairobi will share resources and expertise relating to the Kenyan collections we hold. During 2019, we will host visitors from Kenya, join a return visit to Nairobi and digitise thousands of images.

Exhibitions

Leonardo da Vinci: A Life in Drawing
Bristol Museum & Art Gallery to 6 May

Marking 500 years since Leonardo's death the unrivalled collection of his drawings in the Royal Collection will be shared with audiences across the UK. Twelve drawings, selected to reflect the full range of Leonardo's interests – painting, sculpture, architecture, music, anatomy, engineering, cartography, geology and botany – will be shown in 12 simultaneous exhibitions across Great Britain.

Our three young creatives, partly funded by the Friends, have been hard at work on Leonardo Unfinished, their complementary and alternative take on Leonardo da Vinci: A Life in Drawing. It's aimed at a younger audience and will show their own ideas and perspectives.

Masters of Japanese prints: Life in the city
Bristol Museum & Art Gallery to 12 May

Our second Japanese prints exhibition explores the sophisticated urban culture of Japan in the 18th and 19th centuries through Japanese prints in our collection. The subjects range from eating and drinking to visits to courtesans and the kabuki theatre.

Audiences of all ages made over 37,000 visits to the first exhibition, Masters of Japanese prints: Hokusai and Hiroshige Landscapes. An online version of the exhibition is up and running courtesy of our digital team: brism.us/jp.

Thanks again to all our Friends and supporters who have visited and contributed to this project in so many ways. You have enabled a renaissance of interest in Japanese art in the city.



Tattoo: British Tattoo Art Revealed
M Shed to 16 June

A ground-breaking and comprehensive history of British tattooing, showcasing the work of major tattoo artists, this is the largest gathering of real objects and original tattoo artwork ever assembled in the UK and celebrates the astonishingly rich artistic heritage of tattooing as an art form.

◀ *The Daimaru Dry-goods Store, 1847-1852, by Utagawa Hiroshige I (1797-1858)*
© Bristol Culture



▲ Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) Kajika-sawa in Kai Province, c. 1831. From the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*
© Bristol Culture

The Masters of Japanese Prints Exhibition

Friday 4 January 2019

What stays on its doorstep but travels through time and cultures around the world? This may sound like a riddle that popped out of your Christmas cracker last year, but the answer I have in mind is, of course, the Friends. Our first outing of 2019 took us only as far as Bristol's very own Museum and Art Gallery to explore behind the scenes of the excellent Masters of Japanese Prints exhibition. Once again, we have Carol Ouvry to thank for masterminding multiple slots so as many of us as possible could benefit from curator Kate Newnham's erudite expertise and infectious enthusiasm. Through her insights, surprising similarities and differences between art and life in Edo era Japan and our more familiar western world emerged to intrigue and enlighten, and these prints became much more than picturesque records of an exotic and far off land.

First, we learned how they were made: a feat of great skill, patience and team work that, Kate explained, was still in practice today, using nothing more than the traditional materials of cherry wood, strong, handmade mulberry fibre paper, twine and banana leaves. Only the inks hinted at western influences, as she pointed out innovations made possible by the pigment Prussian Blue, following its development by European chemists.

We traced the tradition of woodblock prints from their religious roots over a thousand years ago (with evidence of one ruler ordering 1,000 copies of an image of Buddha!), via Chinese depictions of landscape designed to be rolled up and changed with the seasons, to these 19th century examples. Experimentation with western ideas of perspective and layout contrasted with



▲ Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) Amida Falls, c. 1833. From the series *A Tour of Waterfalls in Various Provinces*
© Bristol Culture

the more expected poetic focus on nature, seasons and the weather, but added drama to cascading waterfalls. Both artists on show also cleverly drew us in with playful characters contrasting with the majestic scenery. In a truly symbiotic cycle, these very images would provide inspiration to western artists such as Van Gogh and Gauguin as they sought to break away from the conventions of their time.

This global communication of ideas was possible because of the astute commercial sense demonstrated by these craftsmen, which meant one set of precisely carved wood blocks (a different block being required for each colour appearing in the final image) could continue producing prints as long as there was a market for them. They even branched out into different formats, such as miniatures, to cater for every budget. The artists themselves tapped into the human instinct to collect, with Hokusai's series entitled '36 views of Mount Fuji' actually consisting of 46 and Hiroshige producing no less than 10 series of '53 Stations of the Tokaido Road'. These savvy men definitely knew when they were on to a good thing!

Having been awed by the workmanship involved in these exquisite time capsules of Japanese feudal life, it was perhaps Hokusai who left our group most inspired. This great master produced the images on display while in his 70s and is quoted as saying 'I will have to live to 100 to become a true artist'.

While many of us will disagree with this modest appraisal of his abundant talent, if our New Year resolutions did not include actually picking up a paint brush, then we can still look forward to the two subsequent exhibitions of Japanese prints, both coming to our doorstep in 2019.

Keira Stobie



▲ **Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849)** *The Great Wave off Kanagawa, c. 1831. From the series Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*

© Bristol Culture

You can still view the Landscape Exhibition on line through the Bristol Museum website.

▼ **Utagawa Hiroshige I (1797 – 1858)** *Kanagawa, View of the Embankment, 1833-34. From the series The Fifty-three Stages of the Tokaido Road*

© Bristol Culture



Old Bowlish House

Tuesday 18 December 2018

Old Bowlish House is a magnificent Palladian family home built during the 17th century from the profits of the wool industry. Wool production was the most important industry in Somerset in mediaeval times, employing thousands of workers. The industry had expanded greatly in the 16th century with the arrival of Huguenot weavers fleeing persecution. They were able to produce fine quality woven cloth that was soon in great demand.

The Grade II listed house has a symmetrical façade, 3-storeys high and 7 bays wide, which retains many original features – elegant plaster mouldings, cornices, sash windows, large fireplaces, wide floorboards and an elegant Jacobean oak staircase with moulded handrail and elaborately carved side panels. The staircase seems to twist the 'wrong way', which suggests the original owner, James Strode, might have been left-handed.

This fine clothier's house was a family home for most of its history apart from a time when it was occupied firstly by Roundheads in the Civil War (the owner was a Royalist) and later by the Royal Navy in World War II. It has appeared in several magazines including *Period House* and *Period Living* and in the TV series *Grantchester*. It even has a ghost – a vaporous lady in a white crinoline – seen during the war by a naval officer who shot at her when she appeared unexpectedly in his bedroom!

The Keys family moved there in 2005 and have lovingly renovated the house and gardens. They welcomed us warmly and, accompanied by period music, they fed us freshly-prepared Christmas fare from various historical periods. The dishes were all interesting without necessarily being delicious. The culinary history, however, was fascinating.

Charles Dickens

The Wassail Punch (in its Wassail Bowl) – made from apples, dry cider, cinnamon sticks, cloves, nutmeg, lemon and sugar. It is served in a loving cup which is passed from person to person with a deep bow.



▲ The Jacobean staircase decorated for Christmas



A selection of Jacobean Christmas dishes including a marchpane biscuit and an 'excellent boiled sallat'. Marchpane was an early form of marzipan made from ground almonds, rose water and sugar. The biscuit is glazed with flour, sugar, lemon zest and rosewater. The sallat is made from boiled, chopped spinach with currants, butter, cider vinegar and sugar giving it an unusual sweet and sour flavour. It is spread thickly onto sweet bread. It was washed down with My Lord of Carlisle's Sack-Posset – made from sack, cream, sugar, eggs, nutmeg and cinnamon. It was very cheering!



◀ The Victorian selection included a 5-bird pie (in this case only a 3-bird pie was available), a mince pie, fortified wine and Twelfth Night cake. This was somewhat similar to Christmas cake but less rich. It was decorated with icing. Baked inside one half was a dried bean; baked inside the other half was a dried pea. As visitors arrived they were given a slice – gentlemen from the right and ladies from the left. Whoever found the bean became the King of the Revels for the night, and whoever found the pea became Queen, using their temporary royalty to rule the other guests in whatever ways they could invent.

Period recipes taken from:

The English Housewife,
Gervase Markham, 1615

The Accomplisht Cook
Robert May, 1660

The Closet,
Sir Kenelm Digby, 1671

Photos by Ann Wood

Date for your Diary

Here is an event to whet your appetite for later this year.

Cruise on the Matthew round Bristol Harbour with fish and chips supper.

Tuesday 13 August, 2019

We have arranged a two hour cruise round Bristol Harbour with fish and chips. It will be between 6.00 pm and approx 8.00 pm.

Full details in the next Newsletter.

Averys Wine Cellar

Monday 3 December 2018

As a child in Dublin I was taken to visit the wine cellars beneath St Stephen's Green. I found it fascinating to be underground but, as you might appreciate, the contents were rather wasted on me. This visit was quite different!

Tucked below Park Street, where one of the cellar's walls actually shores up the road, Averys wine cellars were established in 1793, which makes it three years older than Bristol's other great vintners, Harveys. The first Avery took over in 1820 and in 2018 the business celebrated its 225th anniversary.

The Friends had turned out in force and we all trooped down to the vaulted cellars where tables were laid out to welcome us. Apparently, the cellars do go down another level and once went down a level below that. Where we sat was once full of barrels but now merely retains a pleasantly warm and slightly winey smell. A printed list of wines to be sampled lay at each place setting alongside both wine and water glass. A basket of rather appealing-looking bread sat next to a cheese board with four cheeses to taste with the relevant wine. Our glasses were charged with the first tasting while we were entertained to some history by Frank.

We started with a House Champagne which I found light, effervescent and highly potable. My deepest regret was that it was around three in the afternoon when what could have been quite a bibulous time began. We learned that in the 1920s Ronald Avery irrevocably changed the way the wine trade worked. He went to the sources of the wine, to the vineyards themselves rather than representatives coming to him. This self-evidently caught on as did the practice of the equally-pioneering John, Ronald's son, who brought in what we now quaintly call, 'New World' wines – from South Africa, South America, Australia and so on – and he was the first to import wines from New Zealand. There is now a fifth generation Avery in the trade.

We moved on to a very pleasant Riesling which, we were advised, has a 'floral intensity'. It was indeed fresh and, I hesitate to add 'cleansing', as that sounds too much like a mouthwash, which couldn't have been further from the truth. Apparently the third offering, an Italian Barbera, goes very well with turkey. That apart, it was indeed full-bodied, fruity and with little trace of tannin. We ended the visit with an Amontillado, the least expensive of the wines we tasted and probably the one which takes most time to produce. It was a glorious mellow yellow/brown umber, rich in the extreme, which goes so well, I think, with soup. And there the visit ended when we were invited to visit the shop above to choose our wines for the festive season to come and many of us did....

Caro Bailey



▲ Ronald Avery (right) tasting wine in the 1960s

▼ The Friends enjoying their wine tasting at Averys' vaults



Photos by Carol Ouvry and Catherine Dixon, other photos by kind permission of Averys

▼ Averys' cellar





◀ *View of the new extension at St George's*
© Evan Dawson



▲ *The new extension provides a dramatic modern wing for the historic hall*
© St George's Bristol

St George's

Friday 19 October 2018 and Wednesday 21 November 2018

There has been much interest in the redevelopments at St George's, Bristol, and the Friends were invited to learn about what has been happening. In September 2017, a talk was given on the initial results of the archaeological excavation of the graveyard prior to the construction of the new extension (see FBMGA Newsletter Issue 200, March 2018). This recent tour covered the history of the site and building, and provided an opportunity to view the improved facilities. A permanent display about the story of St George's has been set up in the crypt.

In 1819, the graveyard of St Augustine-the-Less became full and a new one was started on a green field site on the slopes of Brandon Hill. At much the same time, the Church Building Act 1818 was enacted. Its purpose was to build Church of England churches to serve the growing populations in recently urbanised areas. St George's is one of those 'Waterloo' churches and was opened in 1823. The architect was Robert Smirke, perhaps better known for his work on the British Museum and Covent Garden.

In 1832, St Augustine's was divided and St George's Brandon Hill became a separate parish. The congregation was mostly poor working-class people from the bottom of the hill, though some wealthy families lived on the upper slopes. Burial funds were often limited, as exemplified by the war memorial of 1923. Cheap sandstone was used, so some of the inscriptions are now badly eroded. The nature of the area gradually changed from residential to business. When the last incumbent, Rev Canon Percy Gay, died in 1975, there were few people left living in the parish. St George's was closed as a parish church in 1984.

St George's Music Trust saved the building and developed it as a concert hall. The BBC played a major role in the first decade or so, broadcasting many performances.

The new £6.3 million pavilion-style extension was designed by architects Patel Taylor and constructed by Midas Group. There is now a Café Bar, step-free access, and multi-purpose spaces for performances, education workshops and venue hire.

Our guide said that few documents concerning the church's history had been found. In particular, she has yet to track down the Book of Remembrance, crucial for the restoration of the war memorial. If you have any information on its whereabouts, please contact doreen.pastor@stgeorgesbristol.co.uk. An oral history collection is being set up, so do let her know if you could contribute to it.



▲ *Hanging from the ceiling of the new extension is Luke Jerram's glass sculpture called Apollo after the Greek god of music. It was inspired by a sound wave taken from Second Etude, composed by Philip Glass and performed by him at St George's in 2013.*
© SWNS



◀ Brunel's giant head dominates the room

Being Brunel

Monday 5 November 2018

I visited the *ss Great Britain* and went on a Friends' Behind the Scenes tour of Brunel's records and artefacts some years ago. However, this recently-opened museum, with six galleries contained within a new £7.2 million black wood-clad building, displays over 150 personal artefacts relating to Brunel, many of which have never been seen in public before.

We were given an overview and then let loose on our own. We were able to visit faithful reproductions of Brunel's home in Duke Street, London, and the Great Western Steamship Company Bristol office. Here were displays of items connected with his private and working life. The museum is still acquiring new objects from Brunel family. I liked the wall of chains and top hats at the start of the tour, which visitors can wear for their own photos.

A colourful cartoon timeline showing the main incidents of Brunel's life and work covers one entire wall. These events are brought to life by a plethora of exhibits. In Brunel's dining room we saw the silverware given to Brunel by shareholders of the railway and twelve Shakespeare paintings, some original and some copies, adorn the walls. A Brunel portrait is on loan from Bristol Museums. I enjoyed the sketch of a horse drawn by Brunel when he was just six years old. There were many letters, including one giving details of how Brunel treated some of his workforce – 'you are a cursed, lazy, inattentive, apathetic vagabond...' and a recent acquisition of his probate. Some items are large, – for example part of the funnel from the *ss Great Eastern*, the ship that laid telegraph cables across the Atlantic. Some are intimate such as the last photo of Brunel taken hours before he died, and his cigar case (holding 48 cigars – a day's supply!) containing his final cigar. Many displays are very imaginative, such as a drawer which, when opened, makes the sound of the *Iron Duke* locomotive.

An 8-metre tall model of the great man's head, made by Pinewood Studios, dominates the main room. Inside is a small cinema which shows films of his various projects through Brunel's eyes, complete with dockyard smells and steam from passing trains!

There is so much to see here and I look forward to going back. My favourite item was the topographical map with engine travelling from London to Bristol showing what was built to get through hills, over water, and through valleys. It also shows Swindon engine sheds – reputedly built there when Brunel threw a sandwich on the map to show where they should be constructed! This museum is a kaleidoscopic celebration of the life and times of an engineering genius and superstar of his age. Thanks to Carol Ouvre for organising a fascinating visit.

Catherine Dixon



▲ Gary Gostelow recreates the iconic photograph of Brunel

Photos by
Catherine Dixon
and Ann Wood

▼ This section of the timeline showed how Brunel invented a machine to recover a coin after a magic trick went wrong



Reading Museum and Abbey

Thursday 17 January 2019

Reading Museum shares a central site with the Town Hall and was built with money from a bequest given by local collector, Horatio Bland. The imposing Victorian building is currently being extensively improved and the collections themselves attractively displayed. All should be ready by October when the Museum is to host the AGM of the British Association of Friends of Museums. FBMGA will be there.

The Friends of Reading Museum made us very welcome and we were introduced to the collections by their exuberant Learning Officer. They were especially proud of the boxed collections available to schools. A wander round the galleries enabled us to see finds from Roman Silchester together with a display about Reading Abbey which proved useful to those who braved the cold to pay it a visit. There were displays of stuffed animals and ceramics but particularly fascinating was the collection of tins used by Huntley and Palmer for the biscuits they produced. In particular, everyone was intrigued by the way soldiers in the 1914-18 war had carved into the large biscuits that were part of their rations to make frames for photos and keepsakes.

The museum has a spectacular seventy metres long copy of the Bayeux Tapestry created in 1885 by 35 embroiderers who added their signatures at the bottom of their particular panel. Apparently, groups of children are fascinated by the battle scenes which have beautifully stitched corpses, dead horses and arrows flying everywhere. It really is astonishing. A large art gallery featured an exhibition of twentieth century art with some fine examples including a memorable picture by John Piper.

Reading Abbey, a short walk away, was opened on 19 April 1164 by Thomas Becket (yes, they had official openings back then) but building work went on for another 200 years. It was one of the biggest buildings in mediaeval Britain, and survived the Dissolution – though Abbot Hugh, who refused to bow to the King's demands, was executed. His house became an Elizabethan palace. The abbey was severely damaged in the Civil War and then raided for building stone. Houses were built against its walls and a school established in the chapter house. In Victorian times Sir George Gilbert Scott restored the abbey gateway. The ruins have recently been reopened after major conservation work. Although comparatively little of the abbey remains, the ruins convey the size and majesty of the original building and there is good signage and interpretation. On a winter's day the temperature made visiting a challenge.

Reading has a lot to offer and it would be good to return in warmer weather when the Museum is restored to all its glory. The café should be open by then! We look forward to welcoming their Friends who hope to make a visit to Bristol later in the year to see the treasures that we have to offer.

**Sue Stops and
Katherine Martin**

*The Huntley & Palmers
Gallery in the museum
tells the story of the
famous biscuit
manufacturer*



▲ *One of the magnificent
teapots on display*

Photos by Hilary Cleeve
and Christopher
Widdows

▼ *Reading Museum is housed
in the Town Hall*





◀ *The Vicars' Close, Wells*



▲ *Penniless Porch connects the market place with the Cathedral and is a favourite haunt of buskers and beggars*

Wells City and Museum

Wednesday 14 November 2018

It is strange but true – we travel miles to see wonderful places yet easily forget that Wells is less than an hour away and is better than many of the rest put together! Not only is there a superb Cathedral, a magnificent Bishop's Palace but there is also, the jewel in the crown for me, the Vicar's Close, built in the 14th century, which always takes my breath away.

Wells was at its best when we visited. It was Market Day, the sun was shining and the journey had taken us through Mendip villages. Do you remember when recordings of the bells of Chewton Mendip Church were sometimes played between programmes on the BBC to help with continuity? We passed the church set on the hillside.

The Museum itself was fascinating. We explored an exhibition about pot-holing and caving from the days when there was no specialist equipment and cavers just wore their old clothes and boots. They got wet but they discovered amazing cave systems such as those at Wookey Hole. Nowadays, modern technology has made potholing safer but it remains a very risky activity.

A fascinating Trench Experience exhibition marked the centenary of the end of World War I, showing the vivid sights and sounds of the trenches. The displays covered the home front and the fighting front with images and artefacts from the museum as well as items on loan. It proved popular with visiting school children (as well as FBMGA) and, judging from the noise, was clearly a great success. 'Kids in Museums' would have been thrilled to hear them!

The museum offered many local connections and collections plus a good reference library. Volunteers help to keep it open for the thousands of visitors to the City. Outside, the Market was busy. Local traders sell a wide range of products from fine foods (including proper Cheddar cheese from Cheddar) to some excellent craftwork created by local artists. From the Market Place it was a short walk to the Bishop's Palace where the croquet pitch in front was ablaze with an art installation of red fabric poppies on flexible wire stems which swayed in the breeze. If one bent down to eye level it appeared as a sea of floating poppies. It was an absolutely beautiful display commemorating the Armistice.

There seemed to be general agreement that the day in Wells had lifted our spirits. We were pleased to be reminded that it is always there.

Sue Stops

Photos by Hilary Cleeve and Ann Wood

▼ *The West Front of Wells Cathedral. Although affected by erosion, about 300 of the original mediaeval statues that decorate the front remain intact*



The World of Jacopo Bassano and his Sons

An illustrated talk by Julia Grigg

Thursday 1 November 2018

I have only just rejoined the 'new-style' Friends of BMGA (having previously been a member only of FoBAG) and this was the second lecture I have attended (with my friend) at the wonderful M Shed. M Shed is a brilliant venue and on this day the Lecture Room when I arrived was busy, buzzy and full of atmosphere. It was lovely to walk into a space full of such animated chatter.

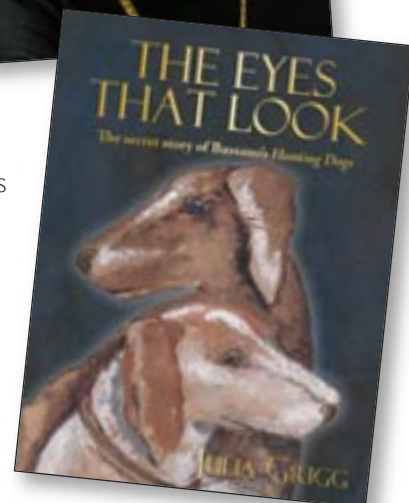
I was very much looking forward to hearing Bath-based author Julia Grigg's illustrated talk largely based on her recently published novel *The Eyes that Look*, an innovative tale based on 'fact and fiction' about the Venetian-based Bassano artist dynasty of the 16th century.

First and foremost, I found Julia's passion for Bassano infectious and engaging and we quickly learned that 'something interesting happened to painting in 16th-century Venice'. One change was that images of dogs became much more common. For the first time, dogs became the principal subject-matter, as in the *Two Hunting Dogs Tied to a Tree Stump* by Bassano (1548), which today hangs in the Louvre alongside Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. This painting was essentially a double-portrait of two Italian pointers owned by philanthropist Antonio Zentani, whose family crest included a dog tethered to a tree. Julia explained that in Renaissance Italy dogs were symbols of high social status and loyalty - 'the dog being the most faithful, beloved animal in the world'.

As 16th-century Venice became more aristocratic and less republican, noble families wanted to display their wealth, including the large estates they used for breeding dogs and hunting. However, although Italian aristocrats often included dogs in their portraits, Bassano's painting *Hunting Dogs* 'broke the mould' and it was this very fact that so intrigued Julia, piquing her curiosity to write a compelling novel of art and adventure.

Finally we discovered that *The Eyes that Look* is Julia's debut novel. It is both a spirited and an entertaining work of fiction, and we now understand just how expertly it also draws on historical facts, inviting readers to revel in the unrivalled artistic riches of the Italian Renaissance. Indeed at her lecture I, for one, wallowed in the intensity of her own passionate account of how she painstakingly researched the world of Bassano's Renaissance Italy.

Karen Zold



▲ The author, Julia Grigg and the front cover of *The Eyes That Look* showing the two hunting dogs

Photos by kind permission of Julia Grigg



◀ *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Leandro Bassano currently hanging in the Old Masters Gallery at Bristol Art Gallery
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Geological Sites of the Bristol Region



The production of the book *Geological Sites of the Bristol Region* was supported by a grant from the Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives. The book, launched in early September 2018, is intended as an accessible introduction to the geology of the region and includes the work of many local experts.

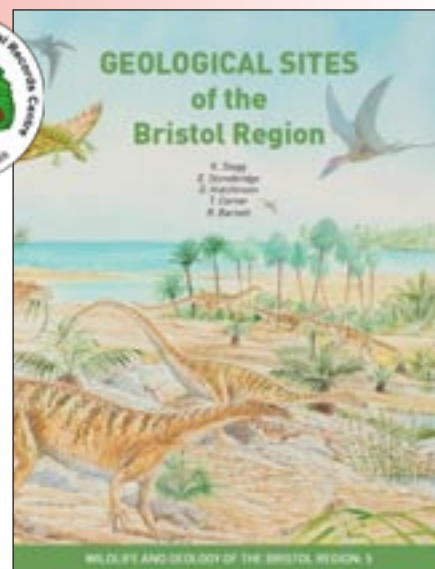
The Avon area is highly regarded as one of the more complex geological areas of the country and also contains such iconic sites as the Avon Gorge. The book aims to promote the gathered records that underpin the designation of Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Sites (RIGS). The book is not a 'geology book' per se and does not attempt to be exhaustive; however, it aims to showcase some of the RIGS themselves alongside the people and organisations involved in their conservation. There are several chapters dedicated to the history of geology and geomorphology in our area and important figures such as William Smith.

The main part of the book is about the sites and modern interpretation of the geological and geomorphological features. Each site's account includes location and geological maps as well as site descriptions and photographs. There is colour throughout with photographs, graphics and artworks. The book is interspersed with 'box topics' of general interest.

Bristol Books were commissioned to design and type-set the book and Bristol Regional and Environmental Records Centre are extremely pleased with the final product. The book is available in the BMAG and MShed shops and online.

Abigail Pedlow (Assistant Manager Bristol Regional and Environmental Records Centre) and **Ray Barnett** (Head of Collections and Archives)

BRERC is administered and supported by Bristol Culture and receives funding and support from the Avon Wildlife Trust, Bath and North-East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire Council and the Environment Agency. For details of BRERC publications, please visit: www.brerc.org.uk/services/publications.htm



▲ Cover of the book

▼ Pages from the book



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