

Newsletter

**July 2022
Issue 217**

All museum sites now open

In this edition

- celebrating 150 years of Bristol Harbour Railway
- reports of visits to Elgar's home and the Bristol Blue Glass workshop
- a Japanese acquisition and a netsuke exhibition
- news of activities you can join



From the Chairman

Museums full steam ahead

As many of you will already have found, all the museum sites are now open and running full programmes of activities, and the working exhibits at M Shed have restarted running throughout the season. You will read later in the newsletter of the celebration in March to mark Bristol Harbour Railway's 150th Anniversary.

It is also wonderful to have the Houses reopened. On Blaise's first Saturday we set up a stall selling home-made cakes and preserves on the driveway, and it was lovely to chat with visitors rediscovering the museum, who were all in a very buoyant mood. Blaise ran at full capacity all day, and we raised a good sum to add to our coffers.

Like us, Bristol Harbour Railway has moved with the times and is now able to accept contactless payments alongside cash. We certainly saw the benefits of that at our Blaise cake sale with a significant proportion of our sales being to visitors who no longer carry cash.

Sad news of Maurice Bell

Many of you will already have heard the very sad news that Maurice Bell – such a stalwart of the Friends of Bristol Art Gallery (FoBAG) over many years – has died. For 20 years Maurice and his wife Margaret worked tirelessly to run the programme of events that delighted and informed members and raised many thousands of pounds to support the work of the Art team at the museum. Maurice will be sadly missed, and our best wishes go to Margaret and to all his family and friends.

AGM

You will find information about the AGM in the inserts in this newsletter but please pencil the date in your diaries now: 2.30 pm on Saturday 17 September.

Welcoming new members

We have had a regular trickle of new members joining us in the last few months – welcome to all of you and I hope you enjoy our newsletter and our programme of events, and the warm feeling you get from knowing you are supporting Bristol's wonderful museums and archives. One new member is due a special welcome as she lives in New York – our first ever member from the USA I think – and joined as a result of the enjoyment she got from one of the museum's online Winter Lectures, which we sponsor.

Cover photo: Netsuke depicting sumo wrestlers
© Bristol Culture



▲ Our cakes and preserves sale at Blaise, celebrating the reopening

© Bristol Culture

Grayson's Art Club Exhibition

If you have not yet visited the Grayson's Art Club Exhibition at the Museum & Art Gallery, you have until early September to do so. If you have already visited, you will know it will be worth going again!

The exhibits are diverse and inspiring, but it has also been lovely to see so many visitors on the hunt for Grayson exhibits exploring the permanent displays and finding so much more to interest them and stimulate discussion.

BAFM – British Association of Friends of Museums

The annual conference for BAFM is taking place this year in Dundee, home of many wonderful museums and heritage attractions, over the weekend of 1 and 2 October. These include the Verdant Jute Works, the RRS Discovery of Antarctic exploration fame, the McManus Galleries and of course the V&A. The theme of the conference is 'Resilience: Growing and Maintaining Friendships in Changing Times' and will include privileged access to local heritage. Full details are available on the bafm.co.uk website.

Legacy news

Since our last newsletter we have learned that John Hibberd (1938 – 2021), very kindly remembered us in his will. His widow Susan has written us a short piece about John's commitment to and enjoyment of the work of FoBAG (Friends of Bristol Art Gallery).

In our last edition we had news of another legacy, this one from Jenny Pennington, 1936 – 2021, another ex-FoBAG member, and, as promised, her daughter Jane has contributed some memories of her mother which you will find on page 16.

We are always very grateful to receive legacies of whatever size to increase our ability to support the museums service to carry on the great work they do.

Sue Thurlow Chairman

John Hibberd 1938 - 2021

John so enjoyed his involvement with the Friends (then Friends of Bristol Art Gallery) after he was persuaded to join by Elizabeth Herring. She thought it would suit his interests. It certainly did. He appreciated the contact with curators as well as the many 'behind the scenes' tours, lectures in the back hall of Bristol Museum & Art Gallery and the exciting opening of special exhibitions. He loved asking about the sound systems and how the conservators worked their magic. John wanted to make Bristol's collection accessible and attractive to a wider public and gladly supported applications for grants, upgrading of galleries and appeals to conserve and display items hidden away. He was open to new developments in art so was happy to support the acquisition of contemporary work. He wanted the Museum and Art Gallery to draw people in and keep them coming back. We have had real crowd pullers over the years but there are obvious financial threats to future success. John's big dream was to find a large modern sculpture to put in the porte cochère to make even entering the Museum inspiring. That may never happen, but his legacy might allow the Art curators to buy something that will give pleasure.



Susan Hibberd



▲ A work from Grayson's Art Club Exhibition: *Social Creatures – Tiger*, by Imogen Paton. Constructed largely from household waste within the theme of creative sustainability

© Sue Thurlow

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Service-wide developments

Genevieve Adkins took up post as the new Head of Culture & Creative Industries on 20 April. Her main task has been to get to understand the service quickly so as to take a leading role in the service review.

That review is charged with looking to make the service even more efficient and to make substantial budgetary savings over the period 2022- 2025, along with moving us to be truly embedded in the local community in all that we do. Changes are therefore going to happen and the whole team will particularly value the support of the Friends through that process.

The three museums which remained closed over the two-year pandemic period, Blaise, Red Lodge and Georgian House all reopened at the start of April and the Working Exhibits outside M Shed also began operating, carrying members of the public again. The three museums have seen new artwork interventions and new events and activities, which have been very well received and welcomed back.

School bookings remain very high across the whole service, with all slots snapped up almost as soon as they are made available.

At M Shed we are working on improving the displays, bringing back well-loved aspects such as the access onto the Lodekka bus and reinstating interactives where we can (and considering how to improve them). Following the recommendation of the We Are Bristol History Commission planning has started on building the statue of Colston into the permanent galleries at the site. A means of integrating this large exhibit into spaces which have been very carefully planned in terms of the way visitors interact requires careful thought.

We were delighted that *The Colston statue: What next?* was recognised with a Highly Commended award at the Museum & Heritage Annual Awards ceremony held in London in May, in particular for the partnership working it demonstrated with the We Are Bristol History Commission and with the people of Bristol. The Front of House team for museums were also shortlisted for the new category of Visitor Welcome Award, a great testament to the excellent work they do every day in interacting and helping our visitors.

In mid-May we submitted our application for continued National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status to the Arts Council England. If successful this will continue the very substantial funding we currently receive annually, for a further three years from April 2023. We should hear news later this year.

Staff news

Archives Assistant Mark Small has left to join the council's Registry Office team. We wish him well in his new post.

Jo Barlow has moved from the Front of House team to be our *Curating for Change* curator - an 18-month externally

funded scheme which is designed to bring new people into the profession.

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

You may remember that during the winter there was water ingress in two of the basement collection stores due to three different reasons, meaning already-stretched staff needing to take urgent action to protect collections, limit the impact and work with the buildings team to resolve the causes. Thanks to the recent award of a substantial sum from the Arts Council England/DCMS MEND (Museum Estate and Developments) fund we anticipate work will start soon on improving some of the back of house areas such as these which are urgently in need of maintenance.

Ray Barnett Head of Collections & Archives



▲ **Issam Kourbaj (b.1963, Dark Water, Burning World, 2016** see 'Crossings' on page 5
© Bristol Culture

Dates for your diary

Stourhead

Thursday 20 October 2022

A visit to Stourhead house and grounds near Warminster

The Flying Sikh, Hardit Singh Malik and the First World War

Illustrated talk by Stephen Barker

Saturday 19 November 2022,

2.30pm at M Shed Studio

Stephen Barker is the author of a book on Hardit Singh Malik, the only Sikh airman in the Royal Flying Corps and the RAF in WW1, who spent time at Clifton College and Filton aerodrome.

Booking forms for these events will be with the September newsletter.

Museum Exhibitions and Activities

Netsuke: Miniature masterpieces from Japan

Exhibition: Bristol Museum & Art Gallery - until 31 July. Free

You have until the end of July to see the fascinating display of 75 netsuke from Bristol's collection in the Eastern Art Gallery. Each of these finely carved miniature sculptures – Japan's solution to a lack of pockets in men's kimono and other clothing during the Edo Period (1603-1868) – is unique. They depict a huge range of subjects from Japanese popular culture – animals, mythical creatures and people as well legendary gods and heroes – and offer a fascinating glimpse into popular Japanese culture.

Grayson's Art Club

Exhibition: Bristol Museum & Art Gallery – until 4 September

An exhibition of art works chosen by Grayson Perry and guest celebrities during season two of the hit TV series, *Grayson's Art Club*. Spread across three floors in the museum, the artworks made by the public, established artists, and celebrities – selected from over 17,000 entries submitted – are powerful and very personal responses to the pandemic. There is a free map available to make sure visitors do not miss anything.

You can view the exhibition online by typing in *Grayson Perry Exhibition Bristol* and click the link to view the exhibition online.



▲ **Netsuke**
© Bristol Culture

Crossings: community and refuge – The Lampedusa Cross

Exhibition: M Shed until 18 September 2022

In October 2013, an overcrowded boat carrying migrants from Somalia and Eritrea caught fire, capsized and sank near the Italian island of Lampedusa, close to the coast of Tunisia. 311 lives, fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in Europe, were lost. Moved by the plight of survivors, the island's carpenter, Francesco Tuccio, made crosses from the wreckage. These signified salvation from the sea, hope for the future, and the sad fate of many migrants. The cross in our exhibition, on loan from the British Museum, carries messages about kindness, community and the indifference faced by many refugees.

Alongside the cross will be a display of 12 tiny boats from Syrian-born artist Issam Kourbaj representing the fragile vessels used by refugees to make their perilous voyages as a response to the ongoing tragedy in Syria. In addition, M Shed has commissioned a series of audio interviews from six refugees and migrants living in Bristol today, exploring the motivations, joys and sorrows that migration can involve.

Working exhibits, historical walks and behind-the-scenes tours

Activities at M Shed

The Working Exhibits at M Shed are now fully up and running, with a jam-packed weekend programme throughout the summer months. There are steam train rides, boat rides on *Mayflower*, *John King* and *Pyronaut*, and crane visits. For dates and times, have a look at the M Shed What's On pages on the museum website.

M Shed is the start of a number of volunteer-led historical walks also listed on the What's On pages. Themes include the Floating Harbour, Statues, Monuments & Memorials, The Old City, Redcliffe and the 1831 Riots.



▲ **Lampedusa Cross**
© Bristol Culture

The behind-the-scenes tours inside the M Shed building continue to run at 11.30am Tuesday to Friday plus 3pm on Wednesdays. The tours currently include the Colston statue, which is in store while a contextualised display is developed for one of the public galleries.

Think Global: Act Bristol

Exhibition: M Shed 16 July to 30 October – Pay What You Can

Think Global: Act Bristol explores big environmental questions affecting people here in Bristol and worldwide and presents perspectives from a wide range of local voices. Historical objects from our collections help us to explore how the industry and growth our city is built on has contributed to the problem and led to changes we are experiencing right now. Art commissions help visualise invisible effects and collaborative solutions. Experts and community members discuss the challenges, and the kaleidoscope of great work happening to tackle them.

Find out more about how you can make a difference, share your tips and actions, and meet like-minded people. Contribute your vision of a future Bristol, help to harness the power of collective thought and action, and leave feeling more confident in your power to make change, at whatever level works for you.

Visit Blaise and make a day of it

Blaise Museum is now open Thursday to Sunday 10-4. Check the museum website for additional openings during the school holidays. As well as fascinating displays of toys dating back to the 1800s, costume, and domestic life over the last 300 years, there is the beautiful Picture Room hung with uplifting paintings of local views by well-known artists.

This summer there are plenty of other things to do on the Blaise Estate:

Blaise Community Garden, through the stone gateway to the left of the Blaise Museum entrance façade, is open every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday until the end of August from 10am to 2pm. It is set within the estate's historic kitchen garden and over the years volunteers have restored greenhouses, cold frames and other buildings and planted a wide range of produce.

Blaise Castle, at the highest point of the estate, is open to the public on many Sunday afternoons (2pm to 4.30pm) during the summer, with visitors able to climb the stairs for magnificent views from the battlements at the top. Open afternoons are 17 & 31 July, 14 & 28 August, 18 Sept, and 16 & 30 October. Opening is subject to weather conditions and volunteer availability, so please check the Friends of Blaise website for information if you plan to visit.

Blaise Plant Nursery, a short walk from the car park in the opposite direction to the House, is open daily from 10-4. The nursery is run by Bristol City Council and supplies flowers and plants (more than 1.5 million a year) to local authorities all over the country. The public shop offers high-quality, locally grown flowers and plants as well as garden décor and gifts, and all profits are put straight back into maintaining Bristol's parks.

Sue Thurlow



▲ **Blaise Museum**
© Bristol Culture

The Development of the Bristol Harbour Railway

In March, Bristol Harbour Railway (BHR) celebrated its 150th anniversary. BHR now regularly runs with passengers from M Shed to *SS Great Britain*, entertaining visitors of every age and giving them a real hands-on feel for the history of the docks.

Bristol Temple Meads opened for passengers in 1840 but it was 1872 before the freight-only Bristol Harbour Railway established a vital link between the docks and Temple Meads Station. Before the BHR, goods were transferred from the docks to the railway by cart through the city's crowded streets. This impractical and inefficient transfer of goods caused delays and additional costs. This in turn meant a loss of trade for the docks and placed Bristol merchants at a disadvantage. Many manufacturers and businessmen preferred to use other ports such as Liverpool which could offer cheaper rates. The BHR line solved this problem.

In 1863, the Bristol and North Somerset Railway Company obtained an Act of Parliament authorising it to build a tramway from Temple Meads to Wapping Wharf, and also to connect the quayside to the collieries in Radstock. The first rails were laid but the work was never completed. Our newsletter of March 2021 (available to view on our website) told this part of the story, including the flamboyant ceremonies to mark the laying of the first rails, in more detail.

In 1866, the Great Western Railway, the Bristol & Exeter Railway and Bristol Corporation secured a parliamentary bill outlining plans for a harbour railway and a depot at Wapping.

Construction work on the harbour railway began on 21 August 1868 and took almost three and a half years to complete. Building the line was not an easy undertaking because it included a long viaduct with three iron bridges, a tunnel under St Mary Redcliffe churchyard and a steam-powered bascule bridge at Bathurst Basin. The line was double tracked throughout and laid with mixed gauge rails to accommodate both broad (7ft) gauge and narrow (4ft 8½in, now Standard) gauge trains.

At the Temple Meads end, the Harbour Railway left the Great Western goods terminus and ran alongside Brunel's original train shed. It then went over a 316-yard viaduct consisting of a series of brick-built arches sixteen feet above the level of the roadway. The viaduct crossed Victoria Street on an ornamental iron girder bridge with a span of 65 feet and the width of three lines. Its foundations were built on those of the old Temple Gate, the remains of which were discovered during the excavation work. The line then abutted onto the George Hotel, passed over Temple Street on a second iron girder bridge and over Pile Street on a skew bridge.

After leaving the viaduct, the line continued along a short embankment. The area from the east side of Pump Lane and the south of Pile Street was used for goods sheds and sidings and became known as Redcliffe Goods Yard.

At Pump Lane, it entered a tunnel 282 yards long, constructed using the cut



▲ *Princes Wharf, 1863: Laying the first rail of the line that was never completed*
© Bristol Culture



▲ *The ceremonial spade used in 1863 to lay the first rail of the line that was never completed. Acquired by the museum in 2020 with the financial support of the Friends*
© Bristol Culture



▲ 1872: The new Bristol Harbour Railway snaking towards Bristol Temple Meads goods yard as seen from the spire of St Mary Redcliffe
© Bristol Culture

and cover method. The tunnel passed under the corner of St. Mary Redcliffe churchyard, which meant that many bodies had to be removed. These were re-interred in a new cemetery opposite Arnos Vale Cemetery. As it continued underneath Colston Parade and Redcliffe Hill, the tunnel broke through the middle of Redcliffe caves, arousing much local interest, and involved the demolition of the old St Mary Redcliffe vicarage at the site of what is now the Mercure Hotel. After emerging from the tunnel, the railway passed through a short cutting to the bottom of Guinea Street where it crossed the entrance to Bathurst Basin on a bascule bridge.

Construction work on the 250-ton bascule bridge began in July 1870. It was a lifting bridge with counterbalancing tails designed to offset the weight of the whole bridge. It carried a double track for the railway, a roadway for ordinary vehicles and a water main that had to be temporarily disconnected whenever it was lifted. The bridge could be opened or shut in about thirty seconds and reached a height of 45 ft in its lifted position. It was operated by a two-cylinder horizontal steam engine, built by the Avonside Engine Company in Bristol, now in the stores at M Shed.

Building the wharves at Wapping was the responsibility of Bristol Corporation. The land was acquired to build the station, sidings, goods sheds and landing stages, and involved the infilling of three docks as well as the demolition of a hotel, an inn and a number of houses. The quay wall - about 1000 feet in length - extended on either side of Prince Street Bridge and was equipped with cranes to load and unload goods.

With little ceremony, Bristol Harbour Railway was formally opened as a mixed gauge single line for goods traffic on 11 March 1872, although it was 1876 before the full extent of the wharfage was completed.

Sue Thurlow

This article was summarised from the research and original blog by Marion Blackburn. You can read Marion's full article, packed with interesting detail, and lots more images on Bristol Museum's website here:
www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/stories/history-bristol-harbour-railway



▲ Victoria Street Railway Bridge c.1915, with Temple Meads on the right.
© Bristol Culture

Bristol Harbour Railway 150th Anniversary Celebration

On March 11, exactly 150 years after the Bristol Harbour Railway was officially opened, a large group of Friends, volunteers, museum staff and other well-wishers met on Wapping Wharf to join the Lord Mayor (Councillor Steve Smith), steam loco *Portbury*, and a splendid brass band in celebrating the anniversary.

The Lord Mayor, *Portbury*, Working Exhibits Manager Chris Ecclestone, the loco crew and the brass band members were all looking very smart. The rest of us were dressed for the weather with raincoats, umbrellas and big smiles very much in evidence.

The open-air part of the celebrations was conducted at a brisk pace, due to the rain. Both Chris and the Lord Mayor, resplendent in his scarlet robes and black-feathered tricorne hat, gave short speeches celebrating not only the anniversary but the work of the museums and the volunteers who bring history to life and add so much to the cultural heartbeat of the city. The Lord Mayor then cut the red ribbon across the tracks, the brass band struck up a lively tune and we all headed for the dry in L Shed, with the Lord Mayor treated to a footplate ride on *Portbury*.

The Lord Mayor's last official duty was to cut the anniversary cake – baked by Mary Bailey – although he stayed on to enjoy the refreshments and the wonderful brass band music played by the Bristol Vets (short not for Veterinary Practitioners but for Veterans). The museum had also arranged an interesting display of BHR-related items, including the ceremonial spade and the single-line-working staff, the purchase of which the Friends had funded (see newsletters of March and June 2021). There was also the steam engine that had originally powered the lifting bridge at the western end of the tunnel and a selection of fascinating photographs of the line in its first 50 years.

With plenty of cake, music, good company and shared interests the gathering went on for rather longer than planned, and, everyone agreed that it had been a splendid – and, with the added contribution of the rain, a very British – celebration.

Sue Thurlow



▲ BHR 150 Anniversary celebration: the Lord Mayor Councillor Steve Smith with Working Exhibits Manager Chris Ecclestone and loco fireman Emily Ecclestone outside L Shed
© Katherine Martin

Bristol delftware in the Ceramics Gallery

Monday 7 February 2022

Those of us who were lucky enough to be able to hear Amber Turner, Project Curator delftware give her talk at M Shed in October 2021 and be shown around the Ceramics Gallery by her will surely take issue with Banksy. In his tongue in cheek map of the museum for his 2009 exhibition Banksy described the top floor Ceramics Gallery as 'Boring Old Plates'. The Gallery is in fact an interesting and educational place to spend time, be it a few minutes or a whole day.

A small group of us were shown round the gallery on a quiet Monday morning in February when the Gallery is closed to the public. The gallery shows a varied 'tip of the iceberg' display of some of the 2100 delftware pieces in the Bristol collection. It is good to see the collection is growing as Frank Britton, in his definitive 1982 guide *English delftware in the Bristol Collection*, was able to catalogue only 800 English pieces. As well as the delftware, the gallery is currently even more enlivened with some plates from the Grayson's Art Club Exhibition including Philippa Perry's huge Willow Pattern plate.

We knew something of Amber as she gave us all a lavishly illustrated introduction to herself and a background to her work in our June 2021 newsletter. After welcoming us she gave us a tour of the display cases. We were shown the royal chargers 1660 -1690 with the monarchs and consorts drawn in a very naïve style. As we moved round the display cabinets, we saw a rare stoneware coffee pot. Earthenware coffee pots often cracked due to the heat of the hot coffee and they were superseded by more robust stoneware. Our tour finished with the exquisite bianco sopra bianco (white on white) pieces from the 1750s.

After showing us the display cabinets Amber produced and carefully unwrapped a few items from the store. We were told about the intricate painstaking restoration programme conducted by the museum's in-house conservator, Amelie Drewdun.

It was fascinating to hear of the Bristol delftware factories from 1650s to 1780s. They were initially established circa 1652 by a London potter who set up a kiln in Brislington. Factories then appeared at Temple Backs and Redcliffe as well as in Limekiln Lane on Brandon Hill, a very short walk away from where the museum was later built in Queen's Road. We were told that Bristol became a major centre of production and the delftware business flourished until the 1750s, then slowly declined after the introduction of more resilient creamware.

Amber told us of her work in digitising the Museum's collection and her research into the Bristol factories including the lives of the potters and the origins of the materials used in the production of delftware. We heard of her plans to have a short film made for the gallery showing how earthenware was made and decorated. We were told how difficult it is attributing the delftware to different factories as they were often unmarked. The potters with their distinctive styles moved from factory to factory within the area and to other locations such as London and Liverpool.

It was a fascinating and enjoyable tour. It is great news that the collection is being researched and interpreted even more and will be available to a wider audience through the current digitisation programme.

Giles Woodward

Another item from store awaiting in-house restoration - a far more sophisticated later bianco sopra bianco dish with a delicately painted white border

© Bristol Culture



▲ A rare coffee pot made from tin-glazed stoneware to withstand hot liquids

© Bristol Culture



▲ The early 'naïve' royal charger Amber brought out to show. It is soon due to have in-house conservation work undertaken

© Bristol Culture



The Firs

Near Worcester – birthplace of Sir Edward Elgar

Friday 29 April 2022

Fifty Friends visited The Firs, the house where Elgar was born in 1857 and spent his childhood. We were welcomed in the fairly new visitor centre by Richard, who gave a brief overview of the life of Elgar with snippets of Elgar's music, some of which I had never heard before. I did not realise he had composed violin and cello concertos as well as the famous *Pomp and Circumstance* march. Richard was an excellent speaker and has written two books about Elgar.

Richard also told us of Elgar's interest in science. He once made a loud bang in the garden, surprising the neighbours, but not admitting it was his doing. He also loved cycling around the area.

The house was set in a typical English cottage garden and was quite small considering a family of 7 lived there. Elgar must have enjoyed his childhood as, when he died, he asked his only child Carice to open up the house to visitors. She did so and also provided teas in a cottage opposite. My kind of lady!

The family moved from the Firs to Worcester to live above their music shop which was run with other members of the family. Elgar moved several times during his life into, what seemed from the photos, comfortable dwellings. His composing grew popular following his marriage when his wife was very supportive of him.

The visitor centre has a small but very nice café plus a room dedicated to Elgar's study. Adjoining the car/coach park was a small orchard of cider apples – perhaps I should visit again in autumn!

Thanks to Gary Costelow for organising a thoroughly interesting and pleasant day out.

Catherine Dixon



▲ *Statue of Elgar in the garden*

© Hilary Cleeve



▲ *Exterior view of the cottage*

© Hilary Cleeve



◀ *Mural of Elgar riding his bicycle*

© The National Trust

Behind the Scenes

Grayson's Art Club exhibition

Tuesday 26 April 2022

This was a very cheerful visit, full of exhibits that celebrated ordinary people sharing their attempts at expressing themselves through art. We started in the exhibition gallery, and then went all over the Museum and Art Gallery, taking in two more spaces devoted exclusively to Grayson's Art Club, and seeing on the way many more exhibits dotted around the permanent collections. These drew interesting parallels between old work and new and had the bonus for the museum of encouraging people to explore galleries they might not normally visit.

The museum was very lucky to be the only venue to show works from series two of Grayson's Art Club shown on Channel 4 during lockdown. Steve Bradley, the project manager for the exhibition, showed us round; his enthusiasm for the project was infectious. We must have seen over a hundred exhibits – some by Grayson Perry, some by his wife Philippa, some by well-known artists and celebrities, and many by members of the public. Here is a selection.

Prabhneet Sondhi's work was called *Disjointed Family Portrait* and was about personal space at a time when people were living on top of each other. Sometimes she found this irritating, but overall being 'surrounded by my family helped me through this unprecedented time'.

One of Grayson Perry's sculptures was *Alan Healing the Wound*. He presented his childhood teddy bear, Alan Measles, in the style of Chola bronzes from southern India. 'He's a kind of Hindu deity mixed with a Christian reliquary Madonna and child. Alan the surrogate father goddess.'

One theme was nature, and Esther Jeanes decided to paint miniatures of her daily exercise with her two young children. She was struck how nature carried on 'unaffected by the enormity of our situation'. The grey squares represent the days when she didn't feel able to paint.

Maurizio and Sweet d'Apollonio run a pizza restaurant in Cambridge which could only do deliveries during lockdown. So, they created an installation using two dummies and displayed it in their window. Called *Dinner Date* it made people smile and remember what it was like to eat out.

Chila Kumari Singh Burman created a neon sculpture *Without Us There Is No Britain* as a comment on the legacy of colonialism and the significant contribution of migrant communities to the culture and heritage of Britain. The work was displayed next to a Romany wagon to help us see the wagon as a symbol of migration.

During lockdown the actress Sue Perkins decided to learn crochet. Food became very important for people during the pandemic, and she chose to crochet a hamburger: because it is something that is



▲ *Disjointed Family Portrait* by Prabhneet Sondhi



Called *Dinner Date* by Maurizio and Sweet d'Apollonio ▲



▲ *Without Us There Is No Britain* by Chila Kumari Singh Burman



▲ *Burger* by Sue Perkins

Mr Chonky Chonk by Grayson Perry ▶

gone in a second, compared to the hours she spent creating it. Kate Newnham, the curator, has displayed it for fun in a case with beautiful, centuries-old east Asian ceramics used for formal eating and drinking.

Grayson Perry's *Mr Chonky Chonk* was placed centre stage in the Bristol stoneware display. Amber Turner, the curator, reckons he is the person in charge of the larder. He brings the Bristol stoneware to life.

There is so much to see many of us vowed to return. The exhibition is on until 4 September. Bristol is very lucky to be hosting it, and it is great to see Grayson Perry's quote about us: 'I am especially pleased for all the artists who have contributed to Art Club that they will get to show their work in such a prestigious venue in a great city'. That is mutual admiration in action!

Katherine Martin

Photos by Katherine Martin



Behind the Scenes

Bristol Blue Glass

Thursday 12 May 2022

Thursday morning saw an eager crowd waiting to enter The Bristol Blue Glass Emporium. After refreshments, we made our way to the process room to learn about the business of glass blowing.

It is known that glass was being made in England during the 1500s, using wood fires. In 1611 a law was introduced to prevent deforestation. Wood burning furnaces were prohibited and so glassmakers were forced to move production to areas with coalfields. Bristol had opportunities for production as it had a large dock and during the 1700s up to four ships a week were leaving with finished items, mainly to America. Sand was dug locally, and kelp was found nearby which was burnt to make potassium salts. These are important ingredients in the glass-making process. Lead from the Mendip Hills was added plus cobalt to give the colour for which Bristol Blue Glass is renowned.

The glass trade was largely responsible for Bristol's industrial success until it began its demise in the 18th century. Higher taxation and a lessening of demand led to the decline of the market. In 1988, glassmakers Peter Sinclair and James Adlington set up the Bristol Blue Glass company. This brought about the rebirth of Bristol Blue glass and helped retain its reputation for high quality.

We watched a demonstration of glass making. The glass blower gathered molten glass on to a hollow tube called a blowing iron, then took it to a chair with an arm along which he rolled the tube and, with the aid of a wooden block, produced the basic shape. He blew air down the tube to inflate the bubble of glass while rolling and scoring with a specialised tool called a jack. This process is repeated many times to make the necessary shape and size. The glass is reheated to keep it at a workable temperature and kept in constant motion until the finished shape is completed. The blower then cut the neck of the glass piece with the jack. Completed items were placed in an oven to be annealed and slowly cooled.

It was fascinating to watch the objects taking shape before our eyes. We made our way back to the showroom where many purchases were made. It was a most interesting morning and very pleasing to know that this company is carrying on a great local tradition.

Zena Mussett

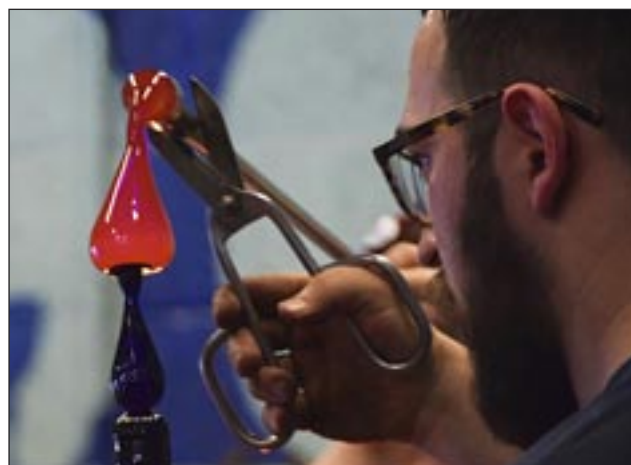


▲ One worker rolls the molten glass on a punty along two steel rails, the other attaches a blowpipe. He blows through this pipe to create an air bubble in the molten glass.

© Bristol Blue Glass

▼ Reheating the piece on the end of the blowpipe

© Bristol Blue Glass



▶ Snipping the work with shears

© Bristol Blue Glass

Japanese lacquer box

An exquisite Japanese lacquer box added to the museum's collections

Thanks to the generous support of the Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives, the Art Fund, and ACE (Arts Council England)/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, Bristol Museum & Art Gallery has recently acquired a beautiful Japanese lacquer box.

The box consists of two tiers, a lid and an inner tray, dates to the Meiji Period (1868–1912), and once stored articles for the incense ceremony. The incense ceremony is the art of appreciating incense by comparing various scents and identifying them through games. During the Edo period (1603–1868), lacquered boxes were prepared to contain the necessary utensils for the incense ceremony by parents for a daughter when she was about to be married.

Decorating the box are eleven utensils of the Japanese tea ceremony. Among them are a bamboo 'one-cut' flower vase, a porcelain incense burner, a bamboo water scoop resting on a celadon stand, an iron kettle decorated with dragons, a bamboo whisk for preparing the tea, a ceramic water jar with a glossy black lacquer lid, a bamboo tea scoop, a fabric drawstring pouch, and a feather for wafting incense. Impressively, all the motifs save the inlay for the porcelain burner are made of lacquer. The box provides a virtuoso example of the lacquer skills and techniques that craftsmen refined during the Meiji period (1868–1912).

Lacquer has a long history in Japan dating back as early as 7,000 BCE. Harvesting, processing and applying lacquer (poison oak sap) is a long and hazardous process that takes several months. Only about 200 grammes of sap can be harvested during the 15-year life of the urushi lacquer tree and it takes a further three to five years after harvesting for the sap to mature. It is poisonous to touch in its raw form and even breathing in its fumes can be dangerous. The lacquering process is incredibly time-consuming and labour-intensive. Each coat must be thinly applied and dried, then polished before the next coat is applied to build up the shiny surface.

The tea ceremony is an important Japanese cultural activity with a long history that dates to the 9th century when tea was drunk as a stimulant by Buddhist monks to improve concentration during meditation. Over the centuries the ceremony has evolved from the aesthetic pastime of aristocrats to an arena for the politicking of warriors; from a salon activity for business elites, to a hobby for largely middle-class housewives today. The tea ceremony involves preparing and drinking tea with a focus on hospitality. It has been credited with having a significant impact on Japanese taste and aesthetics, notably the concepts of wabi and sabi, the appreciation and acceptance of transience and imperfection.

Thanks to a Jonathan Ruffer Curatorial Grant, I travelled to Japan to research Japanese porcelain in March this year. With the Friends' generous support, I was able to acquire additional contemporary and antique Japanese works relating to the Japanese tea and incense ceremonies, objects that will complement this lacquer box in future displays.

Amy Raphael Project Curator,
Japanese Ceramics

One side of the lacquer box showing an iron kettle (*chagama*) decorated with a dragon emerging from the cloud, a celadon lid rest (*futaaki*), and a bamboo water scoop (*hishaku*).

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▲ Japanese Edo period lacquer box used for the traditional Incense Ceremony, recently acquired with help from the Friends

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▲ The lid of the lacquer box decorated with a tea container (*cha-ire*) with a bamboo tea scoop (*cha-shaku*) on a silk cloth (*kobukusa*) and a silk pouch (*shifuku*) for the tea container.

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▲ Side of the lacquer box decorated with a bamboo vase (*hana-ire*) and a porcelain inlay incense burner (*kôrô*).

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Jenny Pennington 1936 – 2021

Jenny Pennington (née Cole) was born in Norwich in 1936 and, whilst at school, developed an early love of history, English literature and drama. She went on to become the first member of her family to go to university, gaining a Social Administration degree from the University of Manchester. Jenny met Arthur Pennington whilst working at Durham University; they married, moved to Bristol and went on to have 2 children, Jane and Richard, joining Sandra and Ian from Arthur's first marriage. Jenny's enthusiasm for history, art and archaeology spilled over into her children's lives and then, of course, her grandchildren's too. Jane and Richard regularly attended the Saturday morning Museum Club and were treated to lunch in the Dinosaur Café. Jenny became a long-time Friend of the Bristol Art Gallery, attending talks, visiting exhibitions and going on trips. She also took part in a number of voluntary projects with the museum including making preparations for the new Egyptian Collection and other archaeological projects and was often to tell the grandchildren, 'Oh Granny's been washing bones again!' when describing her week. We retain a family fondness for the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.

Jane Pennington, Jenny's daughter



▲ **Jenny Pennington**
1936 – 2021

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Maurice Bell 12 April 1935 - 6 February 2022

Maurice became a member of the Friends of Bristol Art Gallery in 1990 because, as he said, he wanted to learn more about Painting and Art. He joined the Committee and in 1995 he organised his first residential visit to Leeds. For the next 20 years Maurice organised a day visit once a month and two holidays a year one of which was usually abroad. His enthusiasm and energy meant that most parts of the British Isles were visited and several countries in Europe including France, Belgium, Germany, Holland and Italy. Margaret, his wife, accompanied all excursions.

Maurice's visits were always well-supported. He ensured their success by his meticulous research not only into the area and its attractions but into refreshment stops and the timings involved in the travel. The holidays ran smoothly and had a wide appeal. As Maurice had been a teacher of English Literature and he and Margaret were both singers, there were often themes of education, literature and music included in the visits made to galleries, gardens, houses and exhibitions. It was not only the content of the programme, but also the friendly and inclusive atmosphere that made these visits so enjoyable.

Because of the frequency and popularity of the visits organised by Maurice, thousands of pounds were raised each year for the Art Galleries. These funds were used in many ways including the refurbishment of a gallery, for travel and training courses and for purchases to enhance the collections of Fine and Applied Art. In addition, these excursions will have extended interests and deepened a love of Art in those who went on them and they certainly have afforded a fund of happy memories of visits planned and accompanied by Margaret and Maurice Bell.

Two long-standing FoBAG members



▲ **Maurice Bell in recent years**

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