

Newsletter

The summer season has begun!

In this edition

- A new Triassic fossil
- Visits to Cardiff Museum, St Nicolas Church and the Hogarth Triptych, and the Peter Brathwaite exhibition
- The new Lascaux Virtual Reality experience
- Preserving the BLM placards collected after the toppling of the Colston statue
- How you can help the Friends
- News of upcoming exhibitions and events

From the Chairman

New volunteers needed to help run the Friends

The Friends is in a strong position in terms of financial reserves, although we are generating significantly less of an annual surplus than a few years ago due to rising costs such as printing and postage, and a slimmed-down events program.

However, if we are to thrive in the future, we need more members to step up now to take an active part in running the organisation. Is this something that you would be prepared to consider?

For many volunteer roles there is no need to be a trustee and 'committee work' is only a small (although essential) part of the overall picture. There are lots of varied opportunities to make a real contribution to the success of the Friends. We have a flexible approach and can offer ongoing practical help and support to all new volunteers. Most of the roles could be covered on a shared basis, if you would like to link up with a friend to become part of our volunteer team.

There is more detail of the opportunities available later in the newsletter. We do not need to fill all the roles straight away, but we do need to inject some new energy to secure the future of the Friends.

If you value our organisation, and our support for Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives, now is the time to get involved.

Online Booking for Friends Events

You will see from the events inserts that we have increased the number of events for which online booking is an option.

Every member who uses online booking - rather than the paper form, the cheque, the envelope, the stamp and the walk to the post box - is helping to simplify the admin for the volunteer handling the bookings and so free up some of their time for some more rewarding activity than 'paperwork'.

Bristol Museums Development Trust launch 1823 Club

As part of the celebrations of the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Museum, BMDT have launched a one-off membership scheme called the 1823 Club which will run until February 2024. 1823 Club members will have access to a bespoke set of benefits including an exclusive behind the scenes tour led by one of the curators, two complimentary tickets to all charging exhibitions during membership, an invitation for two to the Bristol Museums



◀ *Bristol Museums Development Trust have launched a one-off membership scheme called the 1823 Club*

Development Trust Summer Party and 10% discount in the giftshops and online shop. You can join the club for a donation of £200 (£50 membership fee and £150 donation). To see the full list of benefits, and to sign up, go to: bristolmuseums.org.uk/support/1823-club/

If you would like to consider making a significant donation to Bristol Museums Development Trust every year, rather than just to celebrate the 200th anniversary, you could join the Patrons Circle which for a £500 annual donation offers an exclusive programme of free events. You can find details at: bristolmuseums.org.uk/support/join-our-patron-circle/.

Of course, the Friends are very happy to accept donations from members and others, but we do not offer any exclusive package in return - only the warm glow of knowing you are supporting an excellent cause. If you would like to donate to the Friends, please contact me on: sue.thurLOW@outlook.com

Annual General Meeting

Saturday 23 September 2023-2.30 pm at M Shed

Enclosed in this newsletter you will find a formal notice of the AGM and a nomination form for committee membership. Following the business (which will be kept to a minimum) there will be short presentations from museum staff about some of their current projects. We will conclude with tea and cake.

Do please come along to the AGM as we do like to get feedback from our members, and this is a good opportunity to give us your views.

Election of Executive Committee officers and members

The current officers of Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives are: Sue ThurLOW, Chairman; Katherine Martin, Secretary; Robert Walters, Treasurer; and Richard Avery, Membership Secretary.

The remaining elected members of the committee are Mary Bailey, Clive Burlton, Gary Gostelow, Susan Hibberd, Carol Lear, Toby Pinn and Steve Sparks.

All except Katherine Martin, Secretary, and Gary Gostelow are standing for re-election.

As well as the four officers we can fill up to eight places on the committee so there is a vacancy for Secretary and two for a member. If you are interested, please complete the nomination form enclosed and return it to the Secretary. Brief profiles of all known candidates are on the back of the AGM agenda.

Cover photo: Unconscious Rivals by Lawrence Alma-Tadema - available as a print from Bristol Museum & Art Gallery shop
© Bristol Culture



Bespoke prints available from Bristol Museum and Art Gallery shop

Did you know that you can buy copies - in a variety of sizes - of some of the best-loved paintings on display at BMAG? You can find out more by visiting the shop in person or going online to shop.bristolmuseums.org.uk and selecting 'prints' then 'fine art prints'. Images available include some of my personal favourites such as Alma-Tadema's *Unconscious Rivals* and Danby's *Clifton Rocks from Rownham Fields*. Every purchase you make in the shop helps to support Bristol Museums.

British Association of Friends of Museums annual conference

This year's BAFM annual conference is in Doncaster on Saturday 30th September on the theme of *Regeneration in Challenging Times*. Full details are now on the BAFM website. As well as heritage sites in Doncaster itself, other historic Yorkshire cities such as Sheffield and York are nearby so the location makes a good base for a short break either before or after the conference.

Sue Thurlow Chairman

▲ **Bespoke prints are available from Bristol Museum and Art Gallery shop**

© Bristol Culture

▼ **Clifton Rocks from Rownham Fields by Francis Danby, available as a print from Bristol Museum & Art Gallery shop**

© Bristol Culture



Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Welcome to our second museum report since taking custody of the relationship with the Friends after Ray Barnett's departure late last year. We have very much enjoyed attending the Committee Meetings each month as well as attending Friends events and talks. It has been wonderful getting to know you all better.

Staff News

As many of you are aware we now have a new staff structure for the museum service, across all our venues, which continues to see some staff changes. In April we said goodbye to Simon Fenn, our incredible 3-D designer after 20 years of service (including countless display and exhibition designs) as well our Engagement Officer – Families, Suzi Wright. Simon has entered the freelance world and Suzi has an exciting new role at Bath Spa University. Amber Druce, our Social History Curator, has taken redundancy following the deletion of a Social History Curator post in the restructure. We are certain that wherever Amber goes she will inject her usual sense of fun and colour. Many of you will have enjoyed the exhibitions she curated including *Colston: What Next?* at M Shed, and the award-winning *Death: the Human Experience* at the Museum & Art Gallery.

Chloe Little, whom many of you will know from her Front of House role at M Shed, has been appointed to the Volunteer Co-ordinator role. Karen MacDonald has been appointed as the Public Programme Manager and Steven Bradley to the Exhibitions and Display Manager role.

At the end of April both Fran Coles and Mark Pajak returned to their substantive roles after doing fantastic work in their interim Senior Leadership Team (SLT) positions. We were delighted to welcome two of the new SLT members in mid-April: Michael Dunn – Head of Commercial and Operations and Linda Coode – Head of Collections and Archives. I know they will be keen to meet members of the Friends very soon. The third role is yet to be finalised and recruited.

The whole service has also welcomed Dan Feeney to the Interim role of Head of Culture and Creative Industries. Dan started mid-March and is on a temporary 6-month contract. Dan's background is mainly in large institutions across the museums sector, most notably as Head of Visitor Experience at the V&A and similar role for Royal Collection Trust at Buckingham Palace. His focus has primarily been on visitor engagement and bringing places to life. He has also been variously responsible for contemporary art commissioning, community programming, volunteering, marketing, H&S, risk and all things operational across his career. Alongside paid roles, he is also a trustee of the Museum of Richmond in London.

Delftware Symposium

Despite the recent uncertainty across the staffing body, the team have continued to deliver fantastic work across the service. In February we hosted the *Digging for Delftware* symposium over two days at both BMAG and M Shed. This event is of international significance and born out of the



▲ Amber Turner chairing the final lecture on day two of the symposium at M Shed

© Bristol Culture

specialism on the subject held in both the team and the collection here in Bristol. We would like to recognise the depth of work, planning and delivery which Amber Turner and Kate Newnham put into making it all happen. One delegate contacted Dan Feeney afterwards noting that 'hosting this type of event sends a message about the status of the collections at Bristol and it would be wonderful to see similar events in future created around other aspects of the collections in Bristol'. Congratulations to all involved, including the operational teams who kept things running smoothly.

Pyronaut

The hard-working M Shed volunteers, led by our Working Exhibits Manager Chris Ecclestone, are hard at work on a project to lift *Pyronaut* out of the water for some much-needed structural conservation. By the time you are reading this it is hoped she will be out on the dockside outside L Shed to enable this vital work to take place and secure her for future generations. This prime location would allow our many harbourside visitors to watch the work and learn more about her wonderful history. The last time that *Pyronaut* was

**Pyronaut and crew off
The Grove circa 1955**

© Bristol Culture



lifted out like this was 1991, and the first major job for the steam crane after its restoration. We have had very generous gifts from two donors to support this project.

Acquisitions

The Friends were approached in March for support for the acquisition of the family photo album featuring photos of Mary Carpenter and her brother Dr William Budd. Mary Carpenter was the leading female advocate of deprived and delinquent children in mid-19th-century England, and one of the first philanthropists to see the need to provide special facilities for their care at Red Lodge Reformatory School - which opened in 1854. She was based in Bristol from 1829, and the photo album dates from the 1860s, six years after the opening of the school and the last decade of Carpenter's life.

With the support from the Friends, we are delighted to confirm the acquisition of this album at auction. It will be used for research and display (physical and online), fully digitised and catalogued. It will also be a great object to be used in school workshops, especially when we strive to do greater justice to the important, yet often hidden, contribution of women to Bristol's cultural history.

Furthermore, we are currently redeveloping the interpretation of the Mary Carpenter room at Red Lodge. These images can be reproduced in the space to allow for greater access to the works and direct people to the main museum where they can be accessed for research or display.

As always, we would like to extend our thanks to all the Friends whose support enable this, and many other projects, to be funded. It remains a busy time for the team in the museum service and we hope to welcome many of you to our venues over the coming months.

Caroline Booth Morris

(co-Development Manager with Beth Cutter)

The Mary Carpenter and Dr William Budd family photo album c 1860

© Bristol Culture



Volunteers Needed!

Your Friends organisation needs you!

From Sue Thurlow, Chairman

Over the last few years, we have been running the Friends on gradually diminishing numbers of volunteers and have now reached the stage where many of our volunteers – particularly those with the larger jobs – are stretched further than is reasonable. That means we have no capacity to deal with any situation which takes one or more of us out of the picture, either temporarily or permanently. Also, it is natural that we will all in time move on, whether by choice or otherwise, and we have almost no fresh resource coming through to replace any of us.

Katherine Martin will be standing down as our Secretary at our AGM this year, so we are particularly looking for somebody to replace her as soon as possible. I plan to stand down as Chairman at the 2024 AGM, or earlier if we find someone happy to take over from me.

We need to take action now to ensure the Friends have a future, and to drive that action we need some new volunteers to step forward.

The committee are working to identify new ways of operating on reduced volunteer commitment but whatever we achieve in that will at best reduce the challenge rather than give us a long-term fix. We will still need new volunteers.

There is a wide range of activities that need to be covered, and where the current jobholders are not yet ready to move on, we still need support and to be training successors to take over in the coming years:

- ▶ To exist as a charity at all we need to meet the basic requirements to have trustees (Exec Committee members) and essential officers (chairman, treasurer, secretary and membership secretary). We need to run a well-managed organisation – including regular minuted meetings of the trustees – that satisfies the Charity Commissioner and complies with regulations e.g. Data Protection, accounting rules etc. That includes running an AGM and creating an annual report to members, including a financial report, and various returns to the Charity Commissioner.
- ▶ To raise funds we plan, organise, promote and run events. With the help of some new volunteers we could increase the number of events we run.
- ▶ We run a website which gives us a public profile and a means of new members joining the Friends and enables us to publish events which members can in many cases sign up and pay for online.
- ▶ We welcome new members, bid farewell to departing ones, maintain a robust and secure membership database, reconcile receipt of subs each year and contact the non-payers.
- ▶ We generate income through the difference between the values of subs and the cost of the award-winning Newsletter we create and send members quarterly (which includes the publicity for events). For many members the Newsletter is the only tangible benefit they get from us. Content needs to be written or sourced, edited, laid out, proof-read, sent to the printers, collated with invitations to events and distributed.
- ▶ We sometimes send emails to membership where we need to communicate more quickly.
- ▶ We maintain a healthy and mutually supportive working relationship with museum staff.
- ▶ We optimise income received by claiming Gift Aid on subs and donations.
- ▶ We manage and invest our funds wisely.
- ▶ We consider and decide on requests for funding from the Museum team.
- ▶ From time to time, as required, we lobby on behalf of the museums service.

We are happy to be flexible in offering support and practical help to all our new volunteers. As a member of the Friends' team of volunteers you are never alone, there are always others available to talk things through. And you would have the satisfaction of knowing that you were helping our much-loved organisation to continue to thrive well into the future.

We do not need our volunteers to have any particular professional qualifications. Email is an essential tool for our volunteers these days, and for a few roles a basic knowledge of software such as Excel and Word is useful.

If you would like to find out more about volunteering for the Friends please email me on: sue.thurlow@outlook.com so we can arrange to meet up over a coffee.

A new Triassic fossil for the geology collections

Bristol Museum's geology department is home to many exceptional fossils and, thanks to the support of the Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives and two other donors, another has now been added to the collection. The new specimen is a large block of rock containing, among other things, fossils of an extinct reptile called *Pachystropheus* (meaning 'thick vertebra') from the Late Triassic (around 205 million years ago) of southwest England.

Unique to the Bristol area, *Pachystropheus* is an important animal in the Late Triassic. Current information suggests it was lizard-shaped, maybe 30 cm long, swam underwater and caught small fishes using its tail for propulsion.

The specimen was given the nickname 'Annie' by the collector who found the block at Blue Anchor, Somerset in 2018. It was then prepared for study by the painstaking removal of surface rock over many hours revealing the fossils inside. This exceptional new specimen is the best example of *Pachystropheus* material currently known.

The specimen is currently being studied by researchers at the University of Bristol. In September 2022 the block was taken to the University of Southampton for CT scanning. This is an X-ray scanning technique that takes multiple views through a specimen (or human body) and allows us to make a 3-D digital model showing all the detail of bones and other fossil material, distinct from rock and rock fragments. This was done to enable the research team to look inside the block without having to physically remove each fossil. This method generates a wealth of new information as the relationship between each fossil within the block is preserved.

At present there is no good reconstruction of what *Pachystropheus* might have looked like due to lack of fossil evidence. Using the CT scan data, the research team will produce a 3-D model of the scatter of bones that will inform an accurate reconstruction of the creature for the first time and give an insight into how it lived in the Late Triassic.

The museum already has many excellent examples of *Pachystropheus* fossils that are regularly accessed for study by researchers, but none that are as comprehensive as 'Annie'. The geology collections hold designated status, and the acquisition of this fossil and the research being undertaken will further develop this nationally and internationally recognised collection. This research also continues to foster the strong relationship of collaboration between Bristol Museums and the University of Bristol.

Thank you for your generous support which has enabled us to acquire this exceptional fossil.

Deborah Hutchinson Geology Curator



▲ 'Annie' the *Pachystropheus* in the geology store at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

© Bristol Culture



A close up of 'Annie' ►
© Bristol Culture

Delftware Exhibition

Tuesday 21 February 2023

Have you ever wanted to stay longer in a stunning art gallery? Or dreamed of returning to absorb more of an intriguing museum? With the fabulous Museum and Art Gallery on my doorstep, I am lucky enough to be able to do both. The recent series of delftware-related events thoughtfully organised by Carol Ouvry has added another dimension, allowing an insight into the challenge of putting together an educational and engaging public display. It has been wonderful to see and hear about its many stages, especially with Amber Turner's knowledgeable enthusiasm as our guide.

The first thing that hit us as we reached the second floor was the colour. The blue backdrop looked so crisp and fresh, immediately sparking associations to the classic tiles. But so much more awaited us, underlining the relevance and significance of this glorious collection.

This time I felt I finally grasped the key facts about the material and its production, no doubt helped by the introductory unpicking of the production process, with steps illustrated by carefully selected objects. Like all the best exhibitions, the material was communicated in a variety of formats, including a mesmerising video of a contemporary British potter recreating traditional examples.

These instances of overlap between past and present were more frequent than I expected, with Amber choosing to highlight 'wasters' (the spectacular results of failures during firing) in one cabinet, to draw attention to the environmental impact of this industry and another piece from a female-owned London pottery, which surely had to be breaking the mould in more ways than one. Another object told the tale of an emerging consumer culture, offering cheaper delftware versions of intricate Rococo silverwork - sauce boats, jugs and teapots and the like - for those with a disposable income but not rich enough to afford the silver versions bought by the wealthy elite.

Perhaps my favourite enigma was the ultimate chicken and egg story, presented in two bowls, one Chinese porcelain and one delftware. The apt chicken decorations were identical. Usually delftware replicates porcelain, but in this instance there is some uncertainty, suggesting that much detective work still needs to be done.

Other pieces reminded us of the decisions faced when presenting objects for display. A remarkable shoe had required such extensive restoration it was included devoid of decoration, but this allowed the viewer to focus on its underlying form. I also looked on commemorative objects in a new light when they were described as the first examples of mass-produced propaganda. It seems that in those times, delftware was a premier method of displaying public and private loyalties.

Links to Britain's growing overseas empire were inescapable, so I was glad those darker overtones could be balanced by the story of delftware being brought to the UK by two potters fleeing religious persecution on the continent. These international links echo delftware's European roots. Some early delftware was inspired by Italian tin-glazed earthenware which was imported into England. These were followed by over 100 years of Chinese influence. European engravings also became a popular source of decorative inspiration.

As well as more conventional research, such as poring over old maps for pottery-related place names, we learned the role played by scientific analysis,



▲ A waster
© Bristol Culture



▼ A rococo sauceboat
© Bristol Culture



employed when curatorial instinct indicated something just 'was not quite right'. Given that we had already witnessed the expertise necessary to complete jigsaw puzzles of theme and colour so that potter, product and location could be correctly matched, I look forward to the further stories this reveals. And, yes, there are tiles, but just a small fraction of the 1,200 in the collection. I am not sure if we were the first public eyes to see the selection on show, but, given that they were mounted the day before our visit, I think I will add this to the many momentous milestones this exhibition represents.

Keira Stobie

◀ **Bowl with hen pattern**

© Bristol Culture

Hogarth altarpiece

Monday 17 April 2023

A keen group of Friends gathered at St Nicholas church for a rare chance to see this major artwork. Julia Carver, Curator of Fine Art at Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, provided us with an introduction to its history and context.

The triptych is large and dominates the otherwise bare church when viewed from either the ground floor or the gallery. The central panel (22 feet by 19 feet) depicts Christ's Ascension and is flanked by *The Sealing of the Sepulchre* and *The Three Marys at the Tomb* (both 13 feet 10 inches by 12 feet).

Julia started the session by giving us some background information on why the piece is significant and how it came to be painted. She explained that the Reformation had meant that no English tradition of religious art developed. Hogarth felt this lack should be addressed and strongly promoted an English School of painting. His first large history works were produced in 1735-37 for a stairwell at St Bartholomew's Hospital. When St Mary Redcliffe decided in 1755 that a new altarpiece was required, Hogarth applied for, and was awarded, the commission. The fee was £525. The altarpiece took 18 months to paint and was installed in 1756. Thomas Paty made the gilded frames.

By the 1850s the triptych was felt to be unsuitable at St Mary Redcliffe and attempts were made to sell it. They were unsuccessful and it was given to Bristol Fine Art Academy, which later became the Royal West of England Academy. Display of the work was difficult there because of its size and it was eventually rolled up and stored in a basement. Bristol Museum and Art Gallery acquired the work in 1955 and displayed it in the rear hall at the Museum. In 1973 St Nicholas Church Museum opened and the triptych was installed above the stage at the east end.

During question time at the end of the session, several people commented it was hard to make out details of the painting. The cost and practicalities of cleaning and restoring such a huge work were thought to make this unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future. Those of you who went on the visit to St Nicholas will notice that the details of the images are far easier to see on the photo supplied by Julia than they were at the church!

Thank you to Julia Carver for her enlightening talk and to Carol Ouvry for organising the visit.

Sue Pettit

The altarpiece can be viewed on the following open afternoons: 22 June and 27 September, see bristolmuseums.org.uk/bristol-museum-and-art-gallery/whats-on/william-hogarth-altarpiece/

▼ **The Hogarth altarpiece**
© Julia Carver



Black Lives Matter Placards at Bristol Museums

During protests against police brutality and racial inequality on 7 June 2020, people left placards at the base of the Colston statue plinth. This began before the statue was pulled down and continued afterwards.

The following morning the placards were carefully collected up by Bristol Waste, on the instruction of the mayor, and a team of four staff from M Shed took them into the museum. At that time, museums were closed to staff and visitors because of Covid precautions.

There had been some light rain, so we spread them all out in the studio to dry them out and preserve as many as possible. We gave each placard a temporary number, recorded the wording on them, and photographed each one individually. These were used to document them all on our database.

We also received nine placards from Avon & Somerset police, which they had recovered as part of a protest a week later by a group claiming to be protecting the cenotaph. A few placards were also delivered to M Shed anonymously.

In total, there were 568 placards, leaflets, and pieces of fabric from the protests. The Colston statue came in later, after a few days in the harbour, with an attached piece of rope, a bike tyre that became entangled on the statue under water, and an 1895 magazine that was found inside the statue. The latter had the handwritten names of the workmen who fitted the statue in it.

Six of the placards were displayed in a consultation display *The Colston Statue: What Next?* in 2021-22, alongside the statue, a timeline, and background information.

The placards have been viewed in storage by thousands of people on store tours, research trips, and filming visits.

Sixty-four placards have been added to our social history collection. The



▲ Black Lives Matter placards displayed round the empty plinth of the Colston Statue

© Bristol Culture

Three of the many placards collected after the protests

© Bristol Culture





◀ *Colston exhibition in 2021*
© Bristol Design

▼ *Jamell Ackford (Trinity Centre) and Amber Druce in L Shed in 2021.*
© Khali Ackford



selection was based on their local interest, visual impact, current language, and particularly relevant social and political references. Our paper conservator, Ellie Hasler, has assessed them. Some of the placards include stains from eggs thrown at the statue, and footprints – both an important part of their story so they will not be removed. Some of the placards will be used in future displays, and they will be available for researchers to study.

Ellie Hasler, paper conservator, explains: 'protest placards can be difficult to keep in a stable condition – cardboard, for example, is not made for longevity and felt tip pen ink can quickly fade. It's important however to treat these objects like any other work on paper and to slow down deterioration as much as possible. By storing them in archival boxes, acid free materials and in our environmentally controlled stores the placards will be protected from handling, light, fluctuating humidity and pests.

I've carried out 'first aid' treatment on some placards, re-adhering detached sheets and creating cushioned supports so they can lie flat in the boxes, however it's important to keep the works as they were found so dirt, damage and stains need to be stabilised and retained.'

We have been using some of the other placards as handling objects for museum outreach and learning sessions. We transferred others to New Room Museum and Trinity Centre, where they have been used for temporary displays. One hundred placards are now with St Pauls Carnival for community outreach projects and for use in the 2023 parade. We can't wait to see them at carnival.

Amber Druce Curator of Social History



▲ *Paper conservator Ellie Hasler assessing the BLM placards in M Shed*
© Bristol Culture



▶ *Transferring 100 BLM placards to St Pauls Carnival community outreach team in 2022*
© Bristol Culture

Archaeological Festival

Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology Programme wins
Council for British Archaeology Awards

At the end of September 2022 the Museum Archaeology Team entered its programme for an Archaeological Achievement Award under the Engagement and Participation category. These prestigious awards are run by the Council for British Archaeology and are judged by representatives from across the sector. They showcase the very best in UK and Irish archaeology and are designed to demonstrate how archaeology relates to wider society, health and wellbeing, and place.

The programme, which we called the Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology Programme, or BBAP for short, covered all of our archaeological activity from September 2021 to August 2022. Designed to meet the needs of all ages and experience, BBAP included a range of talks, study sessions, walks and family events. These were all delivered at Blaise Museum, Kings Weston Roman Villa, out at archaeological sites or online. Almost all events involved collaborations with local societies, community groups and specialists. Overall, the programme included 25 individual events which fell into the following categories:

- Archaeology Online: a series of online talks delivered in partnership with Bristol and Avon Archaeological Society, Bath and Counties Archaeological Society and Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society. In total, these talks reached 1,496 people in 20 countries.
- Archaeology Study Sessions and Field School: a series of income-generating archaeology courses for adult learners delivered by experts in their field. These reached 192 participants and generated over £4,000 for the service.
- Guided walks to the archaeology and wildlife of Blaise that ran throughout the year.
- Kings Weston Roman Villa Family Fun Days with Roman soldiers, stories and craft.
- Archaeology for the under 5s with mini-excavations, stories, songs and sensory play.
- Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology Festival, which brings together a whole host of local societies, re-enactors, field archaeologists and heritage organisations to celebrate all things archaeological. This event was Blaise Museum's busiest day of the year, attracting 2,374 visitors.

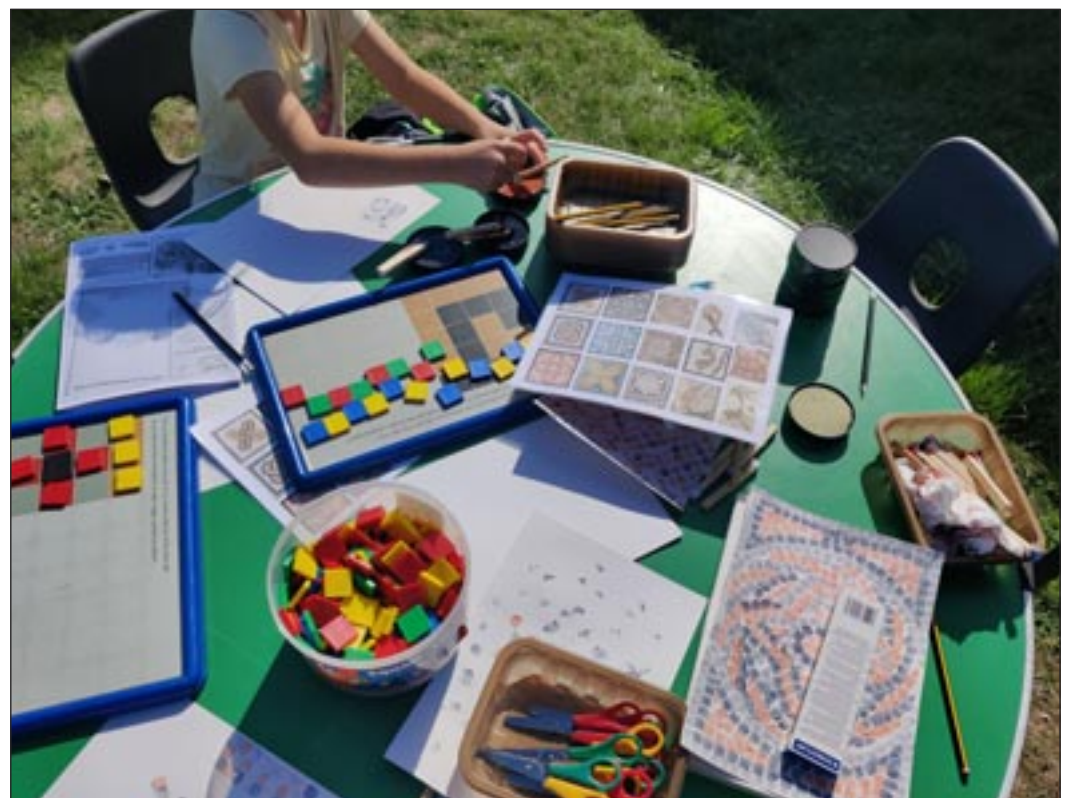
I am pleased to announce that not only did we win in the Engagement and Participation category, but we were also awarded a Highly Commended in the overall Outstanding Achievement Award. This was the first time the judging panel have awarded a Highly Commended for that category. They felt that the project warranted the recognition and were impressed by its depth, its scalability and the relatively small budget we had to support such an impactful and innovative programme.

Thanks must go to the Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives for all their help in making the programme such a success. Friends' funds supported the



▲ A Viking sharing his costume at Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology Festival
© Eve Andreski

▼ Mosaic craft at Kings Weston Roman Villa
© Bristol Culture





◀ **Re-enactors at Kings Weston Roman Villa**
© Bristol Culture

▼ **Visitors talking to the Friends of Bristol Museum – Mary Bailey and Rose Silvester – at their archaeological food stall at Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology Festival**
© Bristol Culture



family events and the under 5s sessions at Blaise Museum, which were an integral part of the offer. Friends' members have also supported us by attending talks, study sessions or walks and each year Friends volunteers go above and beyond to make Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology Festival so enjoyable.

Kate Iles Archaeology Curator

Royal West of England Academy

Thursday 9 March 2023

The visit to the new-look Royal West of England Academy was informative and very enjoyable. We were a large group, but ably handled by Alison Bevan, Director since 2013. She talked about the history of the building, the aims of the recent work undertaken and the current Photographic Open exhibition, as we visited all the galleries in turn.

The RWA has always been ahead of its time for the involvement of women. It was funded by a legacy from the pioneering artist Ellen Sharples in 1849. The first woman president, Janet Stancomb-Wills, was elected in 1911, long before any other British Royal Academy of Art even allowed women as full members.

The Photographic Open Exhibition includes some famous names to encourage visitors including JMW Turner. The photographer Helen Sear has provided some interesting and colourful work combining photography and painting, *Spirits of a Painted Forest*, and Jem Southam's series of photographs, *A Bend in the River* provides atmospheric views of the same spot in different weather and times of day.

The galleries look much as they have always done, but Alison Bevan explained that the recent building project Light and Inspiration, as well as providing a new lift and remodelling the frontage, had included replacement of the central skylights and mitigation of extreme temperatures in the galleries. All gallery walls had been stripped of layers of hessian and old plaster and replastered and painted to allow for swift hanging and interpretation of new exhibitions.

The RWA is working very hard to fulfil its mission to be somewhere that everyone feels welcomed, valued and engaged. It now provides a changing places facility and a family room, and many special activities to attract groups who are normally excluded from art galleries, either by money, lack of facilities or unfamiliarity. When we visited there were a number of groups in the building as well as our own, and a new buzz of purposeful activity.

Katherine Martin



▲ **Helen Sear Spirits of a Painted Forest**
© Katherine Martin

Peter Brathwaite

Rediscovering Black Portraiture

On Friday 14 April we opened Peter Brathwaite's series of interventions among the art collections at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. Peter has been recreating historic paintings featuring Black sitters in photographs with himself and a handful of household props since the lockdown, when he undertook the Getty collection challenge on Twitter. Peter became interested in these images and used objects such as his Barbadian grandmother's quilt and his grandfather's cou-cou stick (used to stir Bajan stews) in a playful manner but also to include aspects of his Caribbean heritage.

For the museum this has turned into a deeper project with his recreation of *The Young Catechist* by Henry Meyer, which shows an African man in prayer. Peter explored his own family history for this work, discovering he was descended from people who were enslaved and enslavers. The re-enactment involved a visit to Codrington College in Barbados, the site of an annual family festival begun by his great-great-great-great grandmother Margaret Brathwaite in 1821 after she converted to Christianity. Peter's recreation examines what conversion meant for people who were enslaved, specifically his own ancestors. The photograph is complemented by the Brathwaite family Bible, transcripts of Margaret's letter and the manumission papers of her husband, Edward Addo. There is a soundtrack in the gallery of the hymn Margaret chose to be sung at the service.

By day Peter is an opera singer and in the museum he has accompanied his photographs with songs and soundscapes, such as the Brathwaite hymn alongside the *Young Catechist* (listen out to hear Peter's own voice in the glass gallery). Elsewhere in the museum the interventions are playful, Peter posing as the Guadelupe Virgin, with football sock ties alongside the museum's painting of the Virgin by Lorenzo di Niccoló. Peter among a giant still life, *The Paston Treasure* (with contemporary meaningful possessions, such as Jessye Norman LP and a toy monkey). Or Peter as the London street performer Joseph Johnson with a boat hat. Each photograph is accompanied by a thumbnail image of the original source picture and Peter's description. The show runs until 3 September, and an accompanying exhibit opens at Georgian House in the summer.

Julia Carver Fine Art Curator



▲ *A Portrait of an African Man. Original by Jan Mostaert, 1475-1555, oil on panel © Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. 'Reworked with West African print fabric, surgical gloves, my grandfather's cou-cou stick, a wool hat, a coin, and a gold medallion'*
© the artist



▲ *The Young Catechist. Original by Henry Meyer, 1827, oil on canvas © Bristol Culture. 'Reworked with Harrington style jacket, and photocopy of ancestor Gladys Brathwaite'*
© the artist



▲ *The Paston Treasure. Original by unknown artist, about 1665, oil on canvas © Norwich Castle Museums and Art Gallery. 'Reworked with Afro hair products, Côte d'Ivoire prints, Granny's patchwork quilt, Jesse Norman and Leontyne Price records, and luggage from my family's arrival in the United Kingdom'*
© the artist

National Museum of Cardiff

Tuesday 28 February 2023

The welcoming Welsh National Museum in Cardiff is lofty and spacious and well able to do justice to their wonderful art collection, much of which was given to them through an astonishing bequest during the last century. The Davies Sisters – Margaret and Gwendoline – who inherited a fortune from coal, railways and docks, amassed one of the great art collections of the 20th century. They bequeathed 260 works of art, raising the status of the museum to world class in one fell swoop.

We spent a wonderful time exploring the museum although we concentrated on the current exhibition – *The Rules of Art?* To help visitors discover the answer to this question, intriguing examples of poetry, drawing, pictures, film, photography and ceramics were displayed. These were divided into five subjects – Portrait, Landscape, Still Life, Everyday Life and History. Each had its own gallery to display something relevant both contemporary and from the past. There was so much to look at and admire but sadly no catalogue was available.

Everyone will have their own favourite memories, but few will forget the stunning painting *Aberfan* by James Reilly or Helen Sear's huge image of straw bales (Blocked Field) displayed on sixteen metal panels. These completely blocked out a traditional view of Raglan Castle. Rachel Whiteread made the invisible visible with her beautifully crafted bookcase, viewed from behind. We were informed that a fine painting of an elderly lady by Rembrandt was worth £30,000,000! Donald Rodney's large photographic image *In the House of my Father* showed his hand with a tiny house made from his own skin left from operations to his palm. Sadly, he died a year later from sickle cell anaemia. My personal favourite was a photograph by Clementine Schneidermann and Charlotte James of a group of young girls who had been given an assortment of black dressing up clothes. Having obviously enjoyed themselves greatly they must have had difficulty keeping straight faces when the photograph was taken.

There was something for everyone in this exhibition but the question of whether there are any 'Rules for Art' must remain under discussion.

Oh! I nearly forgot! Many of us visited the glorious Impressionists' Gallery then explored the Geology, Fossil and Dinosaur displays. We saw fabulous ceramics and enjoyed the nostalgic '100 years of BBC Wales' exhibition. There were ancient TV and radio sets, puppets such as Muffin the Mule and a display about 'Casualty' (which, of course, started in Bristol). It all gave enormous pleasure. There was even the Tardis from Doctor Who. Who could ask for more?

Thank you to Carol Lear for providing such a great day out.

Sue Stops



▲ **Helen Sear, 2012, Blocked Field – Raglan. Inkjet print on aluminium**
© National Museum of Wales

▼ **It's called fashion (Look It Up)**
© Clementine Schneidermann and Charlotte James



Photos by Mary Bailey and Katherine Martin

The Cave Art of Lascaux

A virtual reality experience!

We are delighted to announce the opening of *The Cave Art of Lascaux – a Virtual Reality Experience* which runs until 10 September. Visitors are now able to step back in time 21,000 years and visit the incredible Stone Age cave art of Lascaux in immersive 3D. The Lascaux Cave, in the Dordogne, France, was discovered in 1940 by two teenagers. It features large and small etched and painted images of many animals. International teams of experts have spent decades researching and analysing them, working out how they were made and what they might mean.

The site itself has been closed to the public since 1963, but there is a full-size replica of the cave complex in France. Now, using the latest technology, you can 'visit' the caves here at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. As well as the VR experience the exhibition also features displays on Cro-Magnon (early European modern human) life and culture. The exhibition has a higher ticket price of £15 per adult, which we hope will drive up our commercial income during these challenging times.

Caroline Booth-Morris Development Manager



▲ An image of a bull from the Cave Art of Lascaux

© SPL Lascaux

Virtual Reality – how does the experience work in practice?

If you have never tried Virtual Reality before, you may be wondering what to expect. The Lascaux virtual reality experience is simple to use, and our friendly staff will be on hand to provide an introduction, help you navigate the experience if you have questions, and trouble-shoot any technical issues. When you enter the gallery, one of our museum team will give you a virtual reality headset and set you up safely in a spot within the exhibition. The headsets are size-adjustable and can be worn with glasses. Once wearing the headset, you will be digitally transported to the caves of Lascaux. Here an orange ball of light performing the role of 'the spirit of Lascaux' will guide you through the virtual caves, pointing out interesting features, guiding you through simple tasks, and provide historical context.

The experience lasts approximately 15 – 25 minutes, depending on how much you want to explore, and you can stop at any point. It works best when you stand, move around, and investigate but if you would prefer to sit then please just let our team know and this can be arranged.

The exhibition also contains more traditional content such as objects, replicas and text panels so there is more to see and do beyond the virtual reality aspect.

Steven Bradley Exhibitions and Display Manager

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