

**June 2025
Issue 229**



BAFM comes to Bristol this Autumn

In this edition

- a peek at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery's new children's book starring Doris the Pliosaur
- visits to the Underfall Yard, Court Barn Museum, Wightwick Manor, Trymwood Studios and the Herbert Museum
- news of electronic versions of the newsletter
- exciting developments at the museum shop

From the Chair

Sad News – Gary Gostelow

I feel I must start with the sad news that Gary Gostelow, a stalwart of the Events Group and known to so many of us, has died. Gary stood down from the Events Group in 2024, and over the years made an outstanding contribution to the success of the Friends. He organised events large and small, including holidays, day trips and our very popular quizzes, and was always ready without fuss to cover many more impromptu jobs as they came up, such as helping to mail out the newsletters, collecting donations at the Museum's Winter Lectures and organising refreshments for the AGM. Apart from that, he was always a welcoming presence at our events ensuring that new members were made to feel at home. Over the last year he continued to take part in our events when his health allowed, and he will be very much missed. Our thoughts are with his wife Hilary and the rest of his family, and with his very many friends.



▼ Gary Gostelow manning our book stall at the 2021 Harbour Festival
© family photo

British Association of Friends of Museums (BAFM) Annual Conference 2025 – in Bristol

The BAFM 2025 Annual Conference is here in Bristol, at M Shed, on 4 October, hosted by us, on the theme of Who do we represent? Diversity and inclusion in Friends' groups and in the heritage we support. Bristol is, of course, a city noted for its diversity and vibrant cultural life, and the museums and archives play a very significant part in highlighting and celebrating that.

We will have some excellent speakers, from within the museums we support and from the wider cultural sector. They are listed on the booking form enclosed. This is a once-only opportunity to show Friends groups from across the country what a wonderful city Bristol is, and the part that our museums and archives play in that, and which we in turn support. Do please consider joining us at the conference to enjoy the programme and to meet with like-minded members of Friends groups from across the country. For those coming to the conference there are also some optional activities on the Friday afternoon and the Sunday morning, providing another chance to meet our visitors.

After the conference, in a change from our original plan, the dinner will be at the Bristol Hotel in Prince Street, which many of you know as a pick-up point for our coach trips. It is easy to get to by bus from most parts of the city and has an



▲ The Bristol Hotel, the venue for the BAFM Conference dinner
© The Bristol Hotel

integral car park. Our guest speaker will be Marc Allum, a freelance art and antiques journalist, writer and broadcaster based in Wiltshire, known to many of us from his work as a specialist on the BBC Antiques Roadshow. His interests range from pre-history to modern design and he has a particular passion for the unusual. We can look forward to a very entertaining evening. Tickets for the dinner are open to everyone, not just those attending the conference.

We now have enough volunteers to run the conference, but those of us organising it would very much welcome

Cover photo: *Is that Doris?* Detail from an illustration from the book produced by the museum team with financial support from the Friends

© Tilia Rand-Bell (Illustrator) and Bristol Culture



▶ *M Shed, where we will be hosting this year's BAFM conference*

© Chris Bahn

members to join us at the conference and/or at the dinner to show the BAFM members from across the UK what a great Friends group we are and how lucky to have such wonderful museums in a city as diverse and welcoming as Bristol. If you would like to join us, please complete the booking form enclosed.

Museum Discount as a benefit of Friends Membership

As many of you know, we claim Gift Aid on your subscriptions and donations which increases them by a healthy 25%. But Gift Aid eligibility rules, not unreasonably, place very strict limits on what we can offer members in the way of benefits beyond the newsletter and the opportunity to join our many events. I have been working with Michael Dunn, Head of Commercial and Operations at the museum, and he has found a way of offering members a limited annual discount of within to the 25% of your subscriptions allowed by the Gift Aid legislation. Enclosed with this newsletter you will find a voucher that will enable you to claim the discount for this membership year. This is a pilot, and continuance in future years will depend on how smoothly this runs, and how much additional work it creates for our volunteers and for museum staff.

Reasons to visit M Shed this summer

The working exhibits are now in full swing, with outdoor activities almost every weekend through to the autumn, plus a variety of entertaining and informative historical walks on offer, all detailed on the museums' M Shed What's On pages. Indoors there are tours behind the scenes every day, Tuesday to Saturday, and of course the fascinating displays in the galleries. One particular display that has been updated only a couple of months ago is the Transatlantic Traffic of



Enslaved Africans Gallery. You will read more about it in the Museum Report, and I would highly recommend a visit. The intervention, GRIOT, has not significantly changed the content of the gallery, put together in 2006 for the opening of M Shed, but has added layers of new ideas, creativity and colour thanks to a talented group of people who, through their ancestors, are impacted by the story. The result sheds a different light on the contents of the gallery, brings it up to date, and makes it altogether more engaging.

Sue Thurlow Chair

Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives

Staff News

Amber Turner, Curator of Applied Art has now started her maternity leave, in preparation for her baby due in May.

We welcome some new starters at Bristol Archives. Dr Charlotte Berry is our new City Archivist and is relocating from Edinburgh. She has worked in archives and museums for nearly 25 years, is a Fellow of the Archives and Records Association and has a PhD in modern British publishing archives.

Dr Hector Roddan has recently joined us as Archivist from Kresen Kernow (Cornwall Archives).

Beck Price has been appointed as Project Archivist to catalogue and record the significant cultural records of Bristol Ideas following the organisation's closure in 2024. The role is funded for 12 months through a generous grant from Bristol Ideas itself, arranged before it was wound up.

Bristol Archives also saw one departure: Dr Ellie Pridgeon left her role as Senior Archivist (British Empire and Commonwealth Collection) in late March and has now moved to Liverpool Record Office as a digital archivist.



▲ *Rebel Curators and Creators working together to create Griot at M Shed*

© Julz Davis

Museums + Heritage Awards – the Oscars of the museum world!

We are delighted to have been shortlisted for a Museums + Heritage Award in the category of Permanent Exhibition of the Year for the Protest exhibition at M Shed. The support of the Friends was critical in creating this exhibition, and we would not have been able to do this without you. On behalf of all the museum team who were involved, thank you for believing in us.

GRIOT – in the Transatlantic Traffic of Enslaved Africans Gallery at M Shed

On 25 March 2025 - to align with the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the transatlantic slave trade - M Shed proudly opened GRIOT, a thought-provoking intervention in the Transatlantic Traffic of Enslaved Africans Gallery, developed by the 'Rebel Curators'.

During Black History Month 2024, a collective of six Rebel Curators and three Rebel Creators were brought together by Julz Davis to reclaim the narrative of the transatlantic trade of enslaved Africans. Recognising the need for an Afro-centric and accessible approach, they co-created a new set of interventions to transform the gallery space, ensuring the histories of African and Caribbean people are told with depth, dignity, and authenticity.

Named after the West African storytellers who preserve

oral traditions, GRIOT invites visitors to engage with narratives of enslaved individuals and their descendants. Featuring digital storytelling, poetry, art and contemporary reflections, GRIOT bridges past and present, challenging audiences to confront the enduring legacies of the transatlantic slave trade.

GRIOT explores reparations, resistance, and resilience. It is a series of short films, poems, illustrations, soundtracks and reading lists.

This project has been made possible by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, thanks to money raised by National Lottery players. The funding has enabled the Rebel Curators and Creators to develop a bold and inclusive vision for re-examining this crucial history.

It is hoped that visitors to the GRIOT display will engage with this conversation and reflect on the themes, fostering conversations that will help shape future gallery developments to tell a fuller history.

Bloomberg Connects

Our Digital Team have been busy working on the launch of our guides on the Bloomberg Connects app bringing our visitors closer to the heritage of all our sites. The app has been created by Bloomberg Philanthropies to make it easier than ever for culture and arts venues across the globe to share guides and maps to their sites online.

We have six free digital guides available for all our sites, including the historic houses and Kings Weston Roman Villa. The next step is to create audio guides for each site to improve our accessibility. Simply search for 'Bloomberg Connects' from wherever you download your apps and explore all our museums from the comfort of home!

Spotlight on the Commercial Events and Catering Team

The Bristol Museums Commercial Events and Catering team have had a brilliant 2024. The long-standing partnership with our catering team Compass has had the best year to date, with income to the museum for the first time reaching over £600K, a 20% increase on last year. We are pleased to be able to announce that we have re-contracted with Compass for another 10 years.

Alongside our private catered events, the team have been working hard to deliver a wide range of ticketed events across the year. Our silent discos have been a huge success with over £47K of ticket sales to date and over 2,500 tickets sold. They have been a popular new addition to the calendar and will be the official silent disco for Pride celebrations in July 2025. We have also developed some more mindful experiences in the museum spaces, for example we have been holding Yoga sessions in the galleries on Sunday mornings.

For the future we will be launching some creative groups and sessions including drawing and photography across our Historic Houses to deliver new ways for people to engage with our buildings and collection. Well done to the whole team and everyone involved!

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery - Glass Gallery Re-Display

We are delighted that work has started on the re-display of the Glass Gallery. Amber Turner and the team have carefully decanted the entire gallery, placing all items into storage. Our Buildings Team have repaired the water-damaged roof, and the ceiling and walls have been repainted. The parquet flooring has also been sanded and varnished to bring it back to its former glory and a new lighting track has been installed.

Work will soon progress on refurbishing the existing cases as well as an extensive programme of conservation for returning objects.

The new display will share the history of glass in Britain but will also include objects from the Bomford Collection of pre-Roman and Roman glass and contemporary glass from both international and British artists.

Caroline Booth-Morris and Beth Cutter
Co-Development Managers

▼ *The Glass Gallery in February looking rather tired, just before being emptied in preparation for repairs and redecoration, partially funded by the Friends.*

©Bristol Culture



Events and Exhibitions

Erased from the Face of the Earth

M Shed until 20 July

Organised by the charity Ukraine Aid and Welfare with the support of the Embassy of Ukraine in the UK, this photographic exhibition showcases the resilience of Ukrainians when faced with immense destruction.

The exhibition is sponsored by William Maude-Roxby, Chair Trustee of Ukraine Aid and Welfare, and was initiated by Antonina Grebeniuk, the Founder of Ukraine Aid and Welfare – both well known for their contributions to the Ukrainian community in Bristol.

Bristol is the first city in the UK to host this photographic exhibition, which has been presented in several European cities, including in Poland, Spain, Croatia and Bulgaria. The exhibition features photographic evidence of the destruction of regions including Luhansk, Donetsk, Slobozhanshchyna and Southern Ukraine.

Much of the photographic materials was provided by renowned military photographers, and photo correspondents from Ukrainian media. For more details, visit the exhibition or see the museum's What's On pages.

'Those that do not smile will kill me': Decolonising Jamaican Flora

BMAG until 27 July

Jessica Ashman's multi-disciplinary installation has been inspired by her research into the collections of two 18th-century biologists held by the museum and archives, including the British Empire and Commonwealth Collection. It invites the visitor to challenge perceptions around nature, botanical knowledge and who owns the rich natural resources on earth.

Gender Stories

Exhibition at BMAG until 31 October

The Gender Stories exhibition features a diverse collection of art, objects, personal stories and new commissions exploring the complexities of gender identity.

This is a MAGNET (Museums and Galleries Network for Exhibition Touring) partnership, with Art Fund support using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England. It is been created in collaboration with National Museums Liverpool and Brighton & Hove Museums and will tour both cities following the Bristol launch. MAGNET aims to share collections more widely, with exhibitions being seen by many more people. It also addresses the unsustainability of 'single use' exhibitions.

Bristol Pride x Martin Parr

BMAG mid-June to 30 November

We are collaborating with Bristol Pride to co-curate a free exhibition of photographs from the Martin Parr archive. The exhibition celebrates 16 glorious years of Bristol Pride and will run alongside Gender Stories from mid-June.

Working Exhibits

M Shed throughout the summer

The Working Exhibits collection is brought to life this summer as usual for trips, visits and experiences, enabled by M Shed's fantastic team of volunteers. Steam trains are planned to run between M Shed and *SS Great Britain* on several weekends through to October. There are also opportunities to experience driving a train, operating one of the electric cranes or taking a trip on one of the historic boats. See the museum's What's On pages for details of activity each weekend.

A Summer of Archaeology

Blaise Museum and Kings Weston Roman villa

This summer promises to be an action-packed archaeological extravaganza with events at Kings Weston Roman Villa and Blaise Museum.

As soon as repair works are complete, Kings Weston Roman Villa will re-open with an exciting programme of events. These include monthly sessions on Saturdays and Tuesday afternoons as well as fun-packed Festival of Archaeology activities from 23 to 25 July. A regular programme of school visits and group tours will also run throughout the summer.

Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology is back at Blaise Museum again too. This year's event will take place on Saturday 13 September as part of the Heritage Open Days festival. The day will involve tours, demonstrations and displays put on by a whole host of local societies, re-enactors, archaeologists and heritage organisations.

All archaeology events are supported by volunteers from the Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives so if you would like to get involved, please email Kate.iles@bristol.gov.uk.

For more information about Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology as well as opening times and dates for Kings Weston Roman Villa, visit the Blaise Museum What's On webpages or enquire at Blaise Museum.



Upcoming Events at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

Full details on the Museum's What's On webpages

16 August 2025 11am-3pm – South Asian Heritage Month.

A celebration of Bristol's South Asian community for all the family through craft activities and stalls.

11 Sept 7.30-10pm – Babbers of Comedy.

An evening of stand-up comedy delivered by three of Bristol's finest female comedians: Dani Johns, Capriella Monique and Jasmine Darling.

24 Sept 2025 7.30-10pm Gender Stories panel discussion.

This will explore the themes of the exhibition in more depth. Also on various Saturdays during the run of Gender Stories: LGBTQIA+ tours of BMAG by Jack Shoulder, which include access to the Gender stories exhibition.

13 November, 7.30pm-10pm. The Museum at Night.

A reimaging of the museum through after hour activities centred around the theme of 'Whimsy'.



▲ The Ermine Street Guard Roman re-enactors at a previous celebration of Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology at Blaise

© Eve Andreski

▲ A model of Kings Weston Roman Villa as it would have looked when first built over 1,700 years ago

© Bristol Culture

Wightwick Manor

Tuesday 8 April 2025

On a bright but chilly morning a select group of Friends boarded the coach for the long drive north to Wightwick Manor. Gloucester Services provided the now regular and always welcome food and facilities break.

On arrival at Wightwick, a gentle stroll through formal gardens led to the house. A muster of short-tailed peacocks impressed, as did blocks of tulips and narcissi and the magnolias still at peak flowering.

The Manor House is considered a good example of late Victorian taste and craftsmanship. Construction started in 1887 to provide a moderate-sized home for local paint manufacturer Theodore Mander. Edward Ould designed the house in the 'Old English' style, a mix of timber framing with plaster, tile hanging, stone and red brick. Inside, Morris & Co wallpapers, fabrics and furnishings are in place as are period furniture, oriental porcelain, William de Morgan tiles and stained glass by Charles Kempe.

In the 1930s Sir Geoffrey Manders and his second wife Rosalie Glynn Grylls began collecting the Pre-Raphaelite paintings and drawings which are such an attraction at the property.

Low light levels in the house took a while to get used to but are necessary to preserve the contents. There were more rooms to view than anticipated from outside and all held items of interest. The room guides were knowledgeable and they knew when to leave us to discover treasures on our own. Just as welcome was something which is becoming a rarity in National Trust houses - files giving comprehensive details of pictures, ceramics and other objects.

Two rooms particularly appealed to me: the Great Parlour, designed to feel like a 15th century great hall converted to a late Victorian living room, and the Day Nursery, full of children's toys from the past. The knitted tea party looked to be a recent addition.

We reached the café just before they stopped serving lunch, another sign that we had been engaged by the displays. The rest of our tour was rushed but we managed a quick overview of the De Morgan collection in the Malthouse.

Thanks to Richard Avery for arranging another excellent visit.

Sue Pettit



▲ Wightwick topiary peacocks

Photos by Sue Pettit



The Great Parlour ▶



◀ The 'Knitted Tea Party'

Limbs and Things

Tuesday 22 April 2025

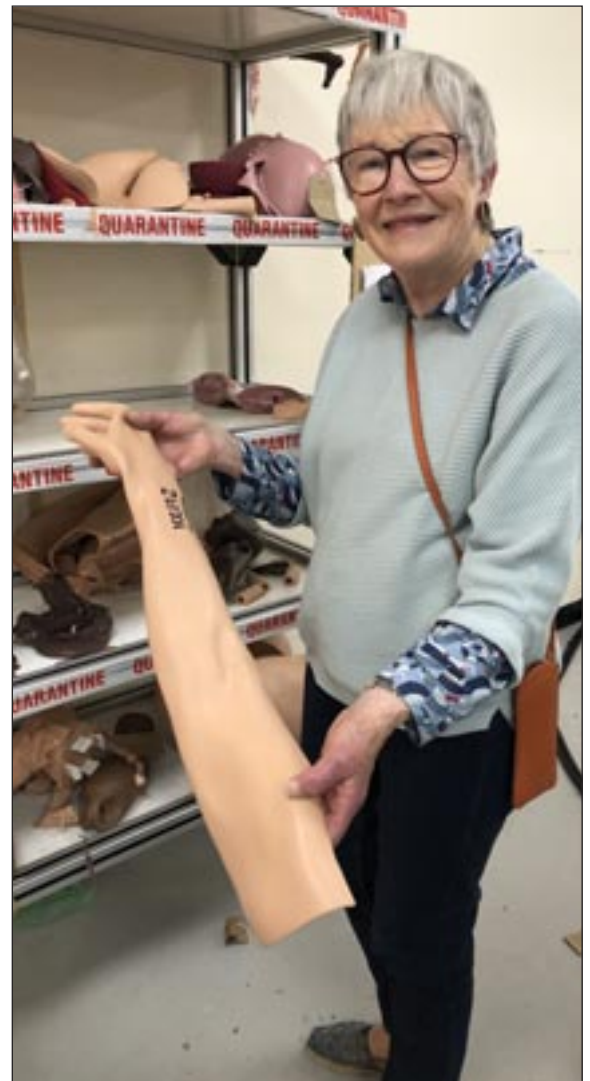
On this trip to a quiet road on the St Phillips industrial estate I thought, for a short while, that I had entered the earth headquarters of the Nestene Consciousness. Those with long memories stretching back to 1970 may recall Jon Pertwee playing Doctor Who in the episode where alien minds took over anything made of plastic! However, while there are some visual similarities, this building contains an Aladdin's cave of plastic items that are altogether less sinister and a great deal more interesting and valuable.

The Friends were visiting the headquarters of Limbs and Things a company that manufacture artificial bodies and body parts for the training of medical professionals. These anatomically correct medical training aids allow medical specialists to train without the need to use live subjects or cadavers. I do not apologise for mentioning that earlier anatomy study involved the use of executed criminals or even live animals, which led directly to a rash of body snatching in the early days of surgery practice.

After a hearty lunch, our experience began with an introductory video by Margot Cooper, a medical artist who in 1990 had 'for the future of clinical education moved away from the challenges of training on cadavers and animals, to a longer lasting solution'. Her company now strives 'to provide repeatable, anatomically accurate and cost-effective training solutions to help students become more competent and confident learners.'

Limbs and Things manufacture hundreds of products - a wide variety of items which are relevant to all branches of medical practice from anaesthesia to urology. The aids help train practitioners in methods of examination of most areas of the body. They also help train nurses and doctors in all manner of treatments including catheterisation, taking blood; giving injections and lumbar punctures; and treating wounds from bed sores through in-growing toenails to setting fractured limbs. It seemed as if no medical problem had been left untouched.

I shall not go into any great detail about our tour as I am sure the accompanying photographs will give a better vision than ever I can.



▲ Mary Bailey holding a silicone arm skin waiting to be transferred into the assembly department

▼ First stage of producing an ultra-sound knee: the bones placed onto an assembly jig in the assembly department



▼ Completed ultra-sound knee which has been over-moulded with silicone ready to be tested



However, as a general outline the work progresses from design and development through manufacture to quality testing, which included a smiling 'live' birth mother. What is also remarkable is that Limbs and Things are adapting the manufacture of bodies and body parts to be more energy efficient and environmentally friendly, especially with a newly-installed machine which combines the mixing of the latex and colouring agents into a single operation.

It was reassuring to realise that these aids are helping to train a new generation of medical practitioners making our hospitals safer places and knowing that as patients we will be in the hands of much better trained doctors and nurses. However, I do not think any of us will soon forget the rows of torsos on shelves or rows of limbs hanging on racks! Thanks to Carol Ouvry for organising this fascinating and unusual visit.

David Evans

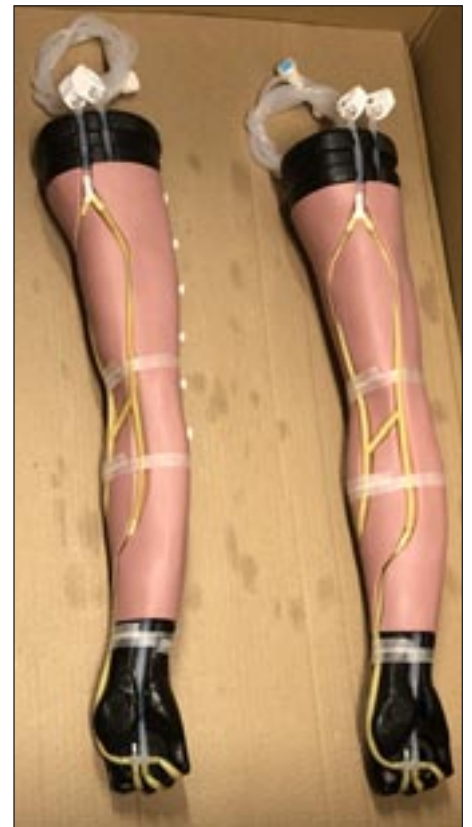


▼ Some of our group in the silicone moulding department



▲ Lower moulded section of an infant hip trainer waiting to be transferred into the assembly department

▼ Two completed arm trainer assemblies taken off the line to be tested



Photos by Sheila Dawkins

Visit to Coventry

Wednesday 26 February 2025

On 14 November 1940, Coventry suffered an horrific air raid which destroyed many buildings in this beautiful mediaeval city. Further south, Bristol, another mediaeval city, was also being attacked. Bristol was lucky in that its cathedral survived whereas Coventry lost its heart in the blitz. Everyone will remember something from this visit if only for the emphasis nowadays on peace and reconciliation.

The recently restored mediaeval guildhall gave hints of what was lost in the blitz and explained how the city of Coventry had flourished in the past as a centre for the weaving industry.

The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum was refurbished in celebration of Coventry's year as City of Culture in 2021. Overshadowed by a full-sized model skeleton of Dippy the Dinosaur, the galleries told the story of the city from the Bronze Age to the present day. Coventry was an important industrial centre, and many famous firms were based in the city. These include: Courtaulds – pioneers in the development of man-made fibres; Cash's famous for their name tapes; Rover cars; and Raleigh bicycles. Machine tools were manufactured and sold worldwide and still are.

Coventry Cathedral welcomes visitors from all around the world. They are greeted by Epstein's bronze statue of St Michael and the Devil on the wall outside. Inside, the vast expanse of Sir Basil Spence's 1950 design is dominated by Graham Sutherland's enormous tapestry of Christ. The fabulous stained-glass windows by John Piper and clear glass engraved ones by John Hutton provide the light which shines on the altar. The work of great artists such as Elizabeth Frink and Einar Forseth complement the simple charred cross – made from two roof timbers found soon after the blitz. This certainly focusses the mind on the troubled world today. A quick visit to Holy Trinity Church next to the cathedral was made to see their brass golden eagle lectern. This is special because there is a split in the bird's beak where people could once post coins which disappeared into the eagle's interior.

The sun shone for a splendid day out. Thanks to Richard Avery for organising it. Oh! Sorry! I forgot to mention Lady Godiva and Peeping Tom!

Sue Stops



◀ *The eagle lectern at Holy Trinity Church which Sue's mum cleaned every week when they lived there in the 1930s*

Photo by Katherine Martin

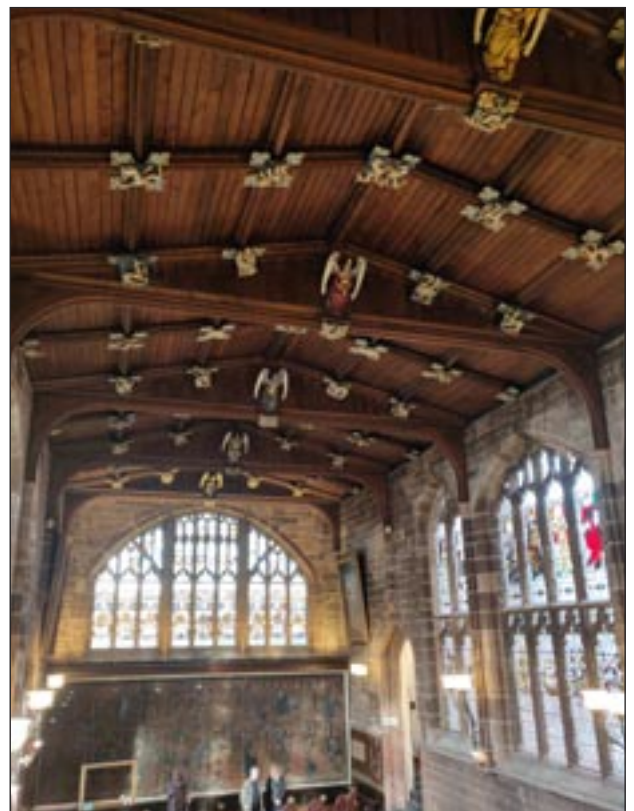


▲ *Christ in majesty: , Graham Sutherland's tapestry in Coventry Cathedral*

Photo by Richard Avery

▼ *The Guildhall*

Photo by Richard Avery



Trymwood Studios

Thursday 13 March 2025

Trymwood Studios is a small artist studio and gallery space in Westbury-on-Trym run by Hannah Athahyde and Lucy Pedlar. When their friend artist-naturalist Greg Poole died in 2018 they were invited with his friend Nik Pollard to catalogue his work. Their first exhibition in 2019 showcased Greg's artwork, which mainly depicts the natural world. Trymwood holds a gallery and printmaking studio where the three of them work with artists who celebrate the natural world.

When we arrived we were given coffee, tea and biscuits in a room with an old bread oven and salting sink. The oldest part of the building is 400 years old but had been sympathetically restored by Lucy's parents. The river Trym runs alongside the building. For most of the year, the house is let as a holiday cottage, although for six weeks in every spring, the house is used as a gallery. The rest of the year the exhibitions are held in the gallery outside.

Lucy, Hannah and Nik run the gallery together whilst also holding down other jobs. The gallery has hosted nine exhibitions and also runs workshops weekly, with most of them concentrating on landscapes or animals. Many of the tutors are teachers and belong to The Society of Wildlife Artists. Some workshops have outdoor settings (the gallery use a marquee in the garden), drawing in sketch books and then making up their work in the studios. There is a 'fledglings' workshop for under-fives and one for grandparents and grandchildren. At the time we visited there was a Land Exhibition and we saw some interesting and varied paintings.

No public funding is received by the gallery, so to help subsidise the venture there are greetings cards for sale by various artists. Also the rooms can be booked for private functions. After the talk we were let loose in the two galleries downstairs and the three bedrooms upstairs that had mostly paintings and some very artistic (dining?) chairs. Next door to the gallery is Westbury Wildlife Park.

Thanks to Lucy, Nik and Hannah for the interesting morning and thanks to Carol Ouvry for organising the visit.

Catherine Dixon



▲ *The front of the house*

Photo by Catherine Dixon



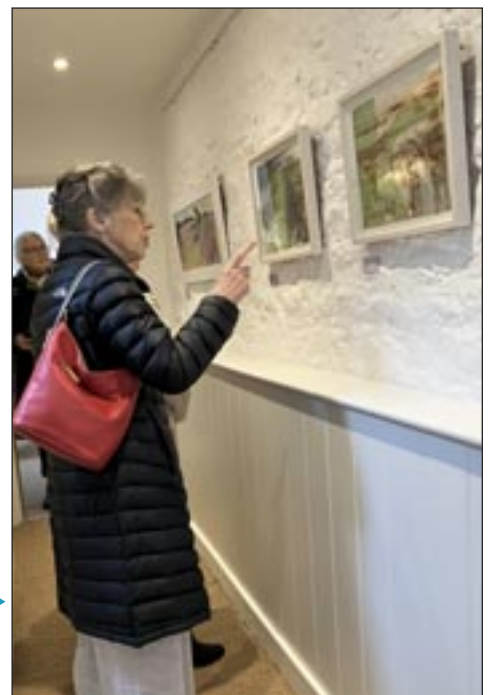
▲ *The cottage main room*

Photo by Sally Dore



◀ *Painting by Daniel Cole, Moon over Cornish Lane*

Photo by Sally Dore



▶ *Looking at pictures in the bedroom floor corridor*

Photo by Sally Dore

Court Barn Museum

Tuesday 18 March 2025

Our trip to Chipping Campden began with spring sunshine and cheers as a coffee stop at Gloucester services was announced. Even warnings of forthcoming logistical complexities could not dampen spirits as roads narrowed and blossom-flecked trees appeared on either side, especially as Richard reassured us with much-appreciated maps and bespoke tickets to make sure we could get the most from our day.

For me, the hum of the motorway was soon replaced by the tranquillity and soaring arches of St. James' church, with its spectacular altar hangings and a richly-embroidered mediaeval cope waiting to be revealed from behind thick protective curtains.

A steady stream of familiar faces assured me that many others had also discovered this gem, no doubt because of its location next to the Court Barn Museum. Here we were warmly welcomed by volunteers full of information to introduce us to C. R. Ashbee and other members of the Guild of Handicraft who had set up their homes and workshops in Chipping Campden in 1902. While I found it fantastic to visualise what a hive of creativity the town would have become, with silversmiths and bookbinders, wood carvers and potters all working within close proximity, trying to imagine the impact 150 new arrivals from London had on the population of just 1,750 was quite impossible.

My attention was all too soon distracted by the stunning and innovative objects on display, such as beautiful jewellery designed by Ashbee himself, pieces which seemed all the more exceptional considering his primary profession was architecture! Alongside sat contemporary works, testament to traditions started over a century before which are still being very much supported today.

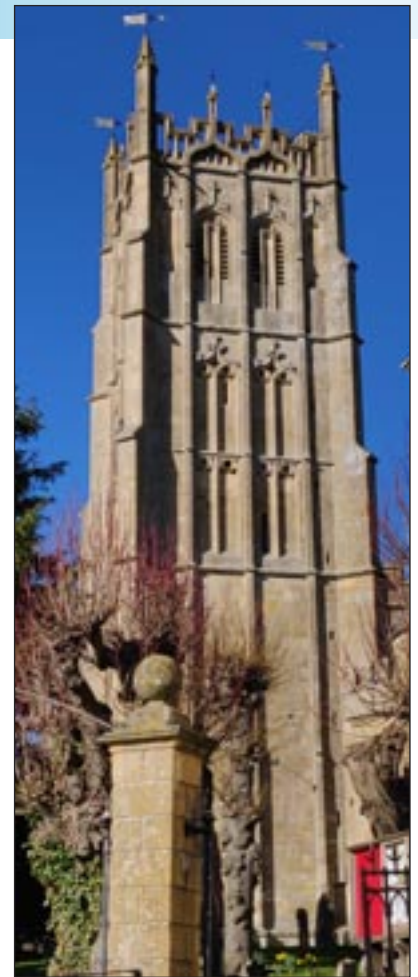
We experienced a little of the atmosphere from the Guild's hey day at the Silk Mill, home to Hart's Silversmiths, as it had been since it was established by Guild member George Hart in 1908. Our charismatic guide was George's great grandson, who showed us a photograph of his forebear working in exactly the spot he sat at today, although nothing could quite describe all that our eyes tried to absorb. Every stage of the intricate process lay before us, literally from drawing board to final polish. Mysterious tools were aligned beside benches covered with sketched designs, prototypes and components, while paper bills were threaded together and hung from the ceiling.

As well as acting as an archive for family traditions and repeated compositions passed down through the generations, the company's library also held records of a bowl commissioned by the Friends of the Art Gallery, which I will definitely be looking out for on my next visit to the museum.

Amongst all this living history there was a very modern tale too, as I was so impressed to discover that much of the silver used was now recycled, including from NHS X-rays!

Remarkably, the sun was still shining as we waited for our careful driver against a backdrop of glowing Cotswold stone, with happy smiles and many thanks to Richard Avery for organising such an interesting day.

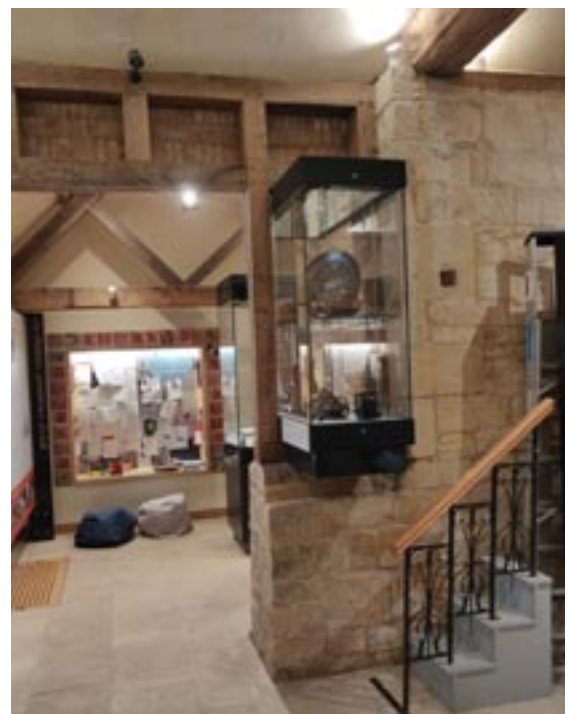
Keira Stobie



▲ St James' church tower

Photos by Richard Avery

▼ Court Barn display



◀ Chipping Camden market hall



Would you like to receive your copy of the Newsletter electronically?

Those of you who were at the Friends 2024 AGM will have heard that the trustees are investigating the viability of offering an electronic Newsletter option for members.

I can reassure you there are no plans to stop producing our print Newsletter. Any electronic Newsletter would have the same content as the print version and would be offered as an alternative which members could choose if they wanted to.

If there were sufficient members who would like an electronic rather than a print version there could be a significant savings on print costs, and particularly on postage, which would mean more of our membership subs could be used directly to support the museums and archives. It would also reduce the environmental cost of producing and distributing hard copy.

There would, of course, be some additional work needed by our trustees and volunteers to develop an electronic newsletter, and then each quarter to produce and distribute the Newsletter – and Events inserts – in two versions. We would also need to consider the issue of timing, so that all members would as far as possible receive their Newsletters on the same day, either electronically or through the post.

One early step in the evaluation is to ask members for their opinions, and we would very much welcome the answer to the following question:

● Would you be interested in receiving a quarterly electronic Newsletter from the Friends instead of the print version, assuming the content was the same?

Answers can be simply yes or no, although longer comments would be welcomed. Please respond on your own behalf, rather than on behalf of others.

If you use email please send your reply to Steve.Sparks@bristol.ac.uk. Steve is co-ordinating our investigation into the viability of an electronic newsletter.

If you do not use email please post your response to: Steve Sparks, Walnut Cottage, 19 Brinsea Road Congresbury, Bristol BS49 5JF.

A recent issue of our award-winning Newsletter, which might become available as an electronic option, instead of the printed version (which would continue for those who prefer it) ►

If we have a valid email address for you we have already sent you this opportunity to tell us if you would like an option to receive your quarterly Newsletter electronically instead of on paper. Thank you to those who responded. If you didn't respond then, this is another opportunity to do so.



Brian Toms 1950-2024

When Brian Toms, originally a member of the Friends of Bristol Art Gallery, died in 2024 he left a very generous bequest to the Friends in his will. Brian's sister Carol Atwell has shared with us a little of his life story:

'Brian Paul Toms was born in Indianapolis Indiana USA. His American father had brought his Bristol-born wife to the States as a GI bride. Sadly his father died only a few years after Brian was born and his mother moved with Brian and his two young siblings back to Bristol. She later married a widower with two children of his own so they were a family of seven.

Brian attended Bristol Grammar School and later Nailsea School where he was head boy. He played rugby at school and at Leeds University where he studied mathematics. He later played 200 games for Clevedon Rugby Club, becoming club captain in 1974, and was also an accomplished swimmer.

For much of his working life he was a pension consultant at Noble Lowndes. He lived in Clifton and enjoyed travelling with his wife Patsy. He was a regular visitor to Bristol Museum & Art Gallery and had an informal gallery of his own at home, where he also enjoyed reading and listening to his records.

He retired in 2007 due to poor health but kept his sense of humour and continued to be cheerful despite his many health setbacks – including a triple heart bypass – over the succeeding years.

Outside hospital stays he continued to live independently and happily at his Clifton home right to the end.'



▲ Brian Toms, 1950-2024, who has left the Friends a generous bequest

© Carol Atwell

Underfall Yard

Thursday 6 February

We met at Underfall Yard and started with a health and safety briefing – we were in a working boatyard and needed to respect those working there, and the water itself. The Yard, with its café and visitor facilities, is run by a small team of staff supported by knowledgeable volunteers, and we were shown round by Flex Toomey, the Community, Learning and Volunteering Manager.

At the beginning of the 19th century Bristol was falling behind Liverpool as a port, partly because ships in Bristol harbour were grounded at low tide. The Bristol Dock Company engaged the engineer William Jessop, to solve this problem. He built a lock to retain a constant water level in the docks with a weir channelling the diverted tidal waters of the river Avon through the New Cut, which had taken five years to excavate. With a tidal range of up to 12 metres, the second highest in the world, this was a challenging project. The work solved the problem of grounded ships, but silting was a constant problem and Brunel later replaced the overfall weir by underfall sluices and recommended the use of dredgers.

Underfall Yard, named after the sluices which managed the water levels between the Harbour and the New Cut, was created on some of the land exposed by the damming of the river. We visited the sluices, though it was between high and low tide when we did and there was not much action to be seen. We then visited some of the other buildings on the site. Most of them were constructed in 1892 by John Girdlestone, the energetic Docks Engineer.

Until then, there had been no centralised maintenance for all the work needed to keep the docks and associated engineering functioning smoothly. Girdlestone built a state-of-the-art facility for the workforce including plumbers, electricians, blacksmiths, divers, engineers, fitters, shipwrights and more. The machines were all powered by one steam engine (still in working order) driving a system of belts delivering power throughout the workshop. It is one of the only surviving Victorian dock workshops in the world.

We then went outside, where it was biting cold, but the sky was a brilliant blue. Charred timbers were a sad reminder of the arson attack in May 2023 which destroyed the main boat shed, some workshops and some boats. We were told that rebuilding work was planned to start soon, aiming to recreate the buildings just as they were before the fire but with modern safety provisions. This was really good news.

Outside still, we noted the slipway, another of Girdlestone's improvements, which can lift heavy vessels out of the water for a quick inspection or a major overhaul, and then warmed up (comparatively) in the steam engine house. This originally contained a pair of steam-powered pumps. Their electrical successors powered the docks' hydraulic system of cranes, bridges and locks until 2010.

Then it was time to make for the café for warmth, bacon butties and a hot drink. Having thawed out, there is plenty more to see in the café, including a massive 'earth view' map of the whole Bristol docks area. We had had a fascinating morning, and many thanks to Carol Ouvry for organising it.

Katherine Martin

Photos by Katherine Martin



▲ The harbour with the charred remains of the boat shed in the foreground



▼ Blacksmiths' forges

Is That Doris?

Thirty years on from the discovery of a new species of pliosaur in Wiltshire in 1994, Bristol Museum & Art Gallery has launched *Is that Doris?* An illustrated children's book that follows the adventures of the prehistoric marine reptile, Doris.

The picture book is based on a story created by volunteer interpreters for families and schools as part of the *Pliosaurus!* exhibition that was on display in 2017. The book was edited by Jane Hack (Learning Manager) with advice from Deborah Hutchinson (Geology Curator). The book has been illustrated by Bristol-based artist Tilia Rand-Bell and is published by Bristol Books.

Thanks to funding from the Friends of Bristol Museums, the museum was able to print 2,000 copies of *Is That Doris?* and to send free copies to every primary school and public library across Bristol. The books are also available to buy from the museum gift shop and online, where the brand-new soft toy of Doris is also on sale.

Jane said 'I hope children will enjoy the story and that it helps inspire a love of palaeontology and scientific discovery. This has been an amazing team effort and a special thank you must go to the Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives who funded the print of the first edition of this special book.'

Deborah Hutchinson

Curator of Natural Sciences (Geology).



▲ *Doris illustrated by Tilia Rand-Bell*
© Tilia Rand-Bell and Bristol Culture



▲ At the launch of *Is That Doris?* L-R: Tilia Rand-Bell (Illustrator), Jane Hack (Learning Manager), Isla Gladstone (Senior Natural Sciences Curator), Deborah Hutchinson (Curator of Natural Sciences – Geology) and Tone Hitchcock (the model maker who made Doris)

© Bristol Culture



◀ *Is That Doris?* book and Doris toy on sale in the BMAAG shop

© Deborah Hutchinson

Investing in the Future:

Bristol Museums' Curated Gift Collection

Recently featured in Bristol Living Magazine, Bristol Museums' latest retail gift guide is more than just a beautifully curated collection — it is a celebration of sustainability, self-generated income, and our deep-rooted connection to the museums' own collections. Every purchase made supports Bristol Museums' vital work, from conservation to education and engagement.

The range features unique, ethically sourced pieces. From the Crane Ecu Kimono and matching Canvas Bag (£50 and £28) — both inspired by our Far Eastern textile collections — to the elegant Reversible Glass Vase (£45), echoing the form and function of our historic glassware exhibits, these items invite the public to take a piece of the museum home.

We are proud to spotlight local and sustainable makers too. The Recycled Leather Pouch by VENT (£10) and The Bristol Soap Company's Mandarin & Tangerine Salt Soak (£12) champion eco-conscious practices, while also embodying the values we promote through our programming and exhibitions.

The Palm Pals soft toys (£7.99) and the British Trees Mug (£13.95) bring fun and educational value, appealing to families and nature lovers alike — much like our natural history displays. And for those who treasure art, the Unconscious Rivals framed print (from £80) offers a timeless connection to one of our most beloved paintings.

Explore the full collection online at shop.bristolmuseums.org.uk, or visit the BMAG shop in person.

Sophie Berry Retail Buyer and **Helen Lewis** Retail Manager



▲ Bristol Museums' Curated Gift Collection

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Retail Spring Guide

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