

Newsletter



The Grayson's Art Club exhibition is here!

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**March 2022
Issue 216**

From the Chairman

Getting back to being sociable

As I said in our December newsletter, both our events and the museums are opening up to reflect the general relaxation in COVID rules, but that path has seen a few bumps along the way. In response to the data and the Government's December/January 'work from home if you can' guidance a few events that had been planned as face-to-face had to be swapped to Zoom. As I write, restrictions have been relaxed again. Hopefully that is a scenario that will continue, but who knows what the situation will be by the time you read this? Over the past 2 years organisers of events across the world have acquired new skills in overcoming difficulties and have of necessity learned to adopt a nimbler approach to event planning, which will hopefully stand us all in good stead for the future.

It is good to hear in the Museum Report that the working exhibits at M Shed are planned to be running throughout the season this year. They have got off to a good start running a 'have a go' sessions for spring half-term. Keep an eye on the Museum's *What's On* pages for details of what is running when, especially the celebrations of Bristol Harbour Railway's 150th Anniversary in March.

Grayson's Art Club exhibition

One of the highlights of the last few months has been the opening of Grayson's Art Club exhibition at the Museum & Art Gallery. I have already visited a couple of times and have found it inspiring.

We are very lucky to have access in our museums to some wonderful fine and applied art from around the world and across the centuries. The artworks in Grayson's show, however, are different. They are concentrated in the two temporary galleries, one the ground floor and one on the top floor, and there are also individual items dotted throughout the galleries, where they fit best with the collections on display. Collect a free map from the front desk and the whole experience becomes a treasure hunt that works for all ages and levels of interest. The individual exhibits are so varied in concept, materials, level of sophistication and skill that it really brought home to me that 'art' is something that we can all do, regardless of ability, and that the personal value of it comes from being creative rather than closely following the rules laid down by our teachers at school.

Philippa Perry's willow pattern plate, depicting a lockdown fantasy of going abroad on holiday

© Sue Thurlow

Cover photo: Portrait of Grayson Perry © Becky Tyler
Becky, a young disabled artist, used eye-tracking software to create the image



▲ Visitors enjoying the working exhibits
© Richard Bryant





◀ An exhibit in the Grayson's Art Club exhibition Triple Art Bypass by Lucy Sparrow
© Bristol City Council

I recommend that you visit – it is on until early September – and see if you find it inspiring too. If you do not, it will not have been a wasted journey as there are so many gems to see from Bristol's own collections just a few feet away.

Staff Changes at the Museum

As you will read in the Museum Report, in December Jenny Gaschke, Curator of Fine Art pre-1900, took up a new post as Senior Curator, Paintings & Drawings, at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Jenny has done some amazing work while she has been in Bristol and has been a particular friend to the Friends over the years. Of course, that has been a two-way street, and both Friends of Bristol Art Gallery and Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives have funded significant fine art acquisitions in that time. One of Jenny's last jobs here was to ask us to fund the purchase of the JB Pyne watercolour that you will read about later in this newsletter.

You will also see that Jon Finch, Head of Culture & Creative Industries, will be leaving Bristol at Easter for a similar role in Barnsley.

We wish both Jenny and Jon all the very best in their new roles.

Sadly, you will also read in the Museum Report the news of significant proposed cuts to the staffing budget across the museums service, due to the need for the City Council to balance the books. That makes for a very worrying time for all the staff, so next time you visit do whatever you can to make them feel our appreciation and support. A warm smile can be seen, and a kind word heard, even when we are wearing our masks!

BAFM – British Association of Friends of Museums

As you know, the Friends as an organisation is a member of BAFM, a charity which exists 'to help, encourage, inform and assist Friends, supporters and volunteers of museums, galleries, and other cultural organisations in all sections of our UK heritage.' BAFM in turn is a member of the World Federation of Friends of Museums and has links with a variety of organisations such as the Department for Culture, Media and Sport; the Museums Association; the Association of Independent Museums; the Heritage Alliance; Arts Council England; and the Charity Commission. BAFM have recently reviewed and updated their approach to communicating with members and one outcome of that is the creation of a new quarterly email newsletter highlighting their current work. If you would like to receive a copy of that email yourself, please contact them at journal@bafm.co.uk, telling them you are a member of FBMGA, asking to be added to their distribution list.

Legacy news

I have just learned that Jennifer Pennington, who died last year, has remembered us in her will. I know that until a few years ago Jennifer was an active member of FoBAG, and her daughter (and executor) Jane has promised to write a short piece about her for the June newsletter.

Sue Thurlow Chairman

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Service-wide developments

We started the year looking forward to (all being well) a return to more pre-Covid museum provision with Blaise, Red Lodge and Georgian House due to reopen after two years of closure and the M Shed working exhibits being able to carry passengers again. However, I have to report that the City Council published proposals to address the financial gap in its 2022-23 budget in January which have implications for the Museums & Archives provision.

After two years of the Council having been able to protect its services from the effects of the pandemic, despite highly significant reductions in the income-generating ability of many parts of the Council operations and with ever-increasing demands on social care, the Council has been left having to look at future reductions across many areas of work.

For the Culture & Creative Industries team it has been decided that the impact of these budget proposals will fall on Museums and Archives. The proposals are two-fold. Firstly, that work be undertaken to investigate establishing a roof-top bar on the western end of M Shed which should generate a new income stream to offset some of the budget reductions. Secondly, that the Museums and Archives staffing budget be reviewed with the aim of making savings of up to 10%, with such changes being implemented from the autumn of 2022. These proposals have yet to be worked through but could have a very significant impact on service provision.

The problems of ageing building stock have been apparent over the Christmas period and throughout January. Water ingress in two of the basement collection stores has meant staff working to protect collections, limit the impact and working with the buildings team to resolve the causes. By the time you read this we should have heard if we have been successful in being awarded a grant through ACE (Arts Council England) from the MEND (Museum Estate and Developments) fund, specifically set up to support museums with building issues like this.

Staff news

Jon Finch has resigned as Head of Culture & Creative Industries to take up a similar role in Barnsley, Yorkshire (Head of Museums and Visitor Economy). He will be leaving at Easter. In his three years overseeing the C&CI team Jon has seen considerable changes to the portfolio of the role (eg taking over The Create Centre) and steered the service through the difficult years of the Covid pandemic. We wish him all the very best in his new role.

Roisin Daly has been appointed Documentation Assistant; previously she was in the Digital Team developing virtual content.

Eve Andreski has joined the British Empire and Commonwealth Collection team as an Archive Assistant on a year-long contract, having been in our Front of House team.

Jenny Gaschke, Curator of Art, has left to take up the position of Senior Curator Paintings & Drawings at the V&A. During her ten years at Bristol Jenny made a really significant contribution to the work of the museums service, and is noted for her wide-ranging expertise, dedication to museum work and her innovation and drive. Kate Newnham (Senior Curator, Visual Arts) described some of Jenny's achievements for a staff meeting as follows:

Jenny came in early 2012 from the National Maritime Museum and set to work on the first Leonardo drawings exhibition. She is very creative and persuaded a Michelin starred chef to create 10 flavours of ice cream linking to 10 Leonardo drawings for visitors to taste. You should have seen the crowd at BMAG!

Jenny worked on the refurbishment of four of the art galleries, many exhibitions including the Hogarths from Tate which featured many of Hogarth's most famous paintings, and high-profile loans such as the Rembrandt self-portrait from the National Gallery and the Dieric Bouts St Luke drawing the Virgin and Child which became the focus of Ailsa Richardson and the Participation Team's work with people living with dementia.

Jenny has made many acquisitions for the museum including a Turner and The Young Catechist by Meyer, now hanging in gallery 4. She is great at giving talks to our visitors and also in charming patrons.

Most recently, Jenny spear-headed an exhibition of 60 paintings by Bristol School artists of 200 years ago in our twin city in Bordeaux.

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

The Grayson's Art Club show is proving very popular and receiving excellent reviews. With the show bringing more visitors into the building – many for the first time – it is particularly unfortunate that the main public lift has been



◀ **Mr Chonky Chonk by Grayson Perry**
© Bristol City Council

plagued with faults over the last few months: engineers are busy working on means to ensure a lasting repair is achieved. Our apologies if you have visited the site on a day when the lift has been unavailable.

M Shed

The display of the Colston statue closed at the start of January 2022 but it was heartening to see how well it has been received over that time and the museum praised for its approach to display. The report following the consultation around the display was published in early February. It has recommended that a more permanent exhibition be made of the statue in the city's museums, and we will be working on that this year. In the meantime, the statue is in the M/L Shed main store and so can still be seen by the visiting public by booking on one of the daily volunteer-led tours we have on Tuesday to Friday each week.

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2021 at M Shed retains its appeal and is performing well, as in previous years.

We anticipate getting back to more normal operating in 2022 with the public back on our boats, cranes and trains. Do check out the 'have a go' weekends which make great presents and help fund the continued existence of the working exhibits.

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

The Houses will all reopen at the start of April (see website for exact dates). After two years of being closed it is excellent to be able to anticipate seeing visitors on the sites again. There will be several new Front of House faces fronting up the buildings, who will all be delighted to welcome you back.



▲ *The Colston statue display at M Shed*

© Khali Ackford

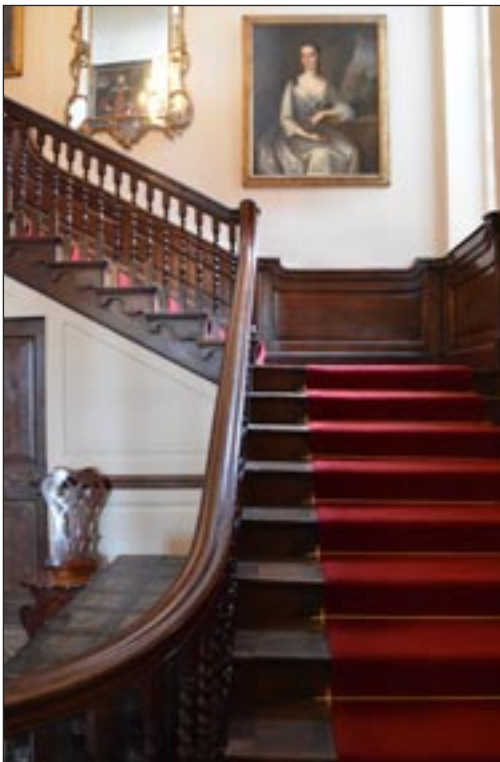


▲ *Georgian House*

© Khali Ackford

▼ *Blaise Castle Museum*

© David Seaman



▲ *Interior of Red Lodge*

© Sarah Laborde



Bristol Archives

The Archives have maintained their public service across the winter period and the annual cleaning and stock taking week took place in January to ensure the service provided remains top notch.

Ray Barnett Head of Collections & Archives

'Cutting It Fine'

Wednesday 12 January 2020

The crisp day turned to bright sunshine as the coach arrived at Salisbury Museum. We were there to see an exhibition – *Cutting it Fine: The Art of the British Wood Engraver* – featuring around 100 wood engravings, almost all from a private collector living in Dorset.

The previous Saturday a talk at M Shed by the exhibition's curator, Dr David Boyd Haycock, had been arranged. Unfortunately, because of the large numbers and Covid concerns, the talk was switched to Zoom. This disappointed some members unable to access the talk this way. It also led to a few cancellations for the visit, so a double disappointment for some. This was most unfortunate, and typical of the difficult times we have been living through recently.

In his talk David explained that many of the artists in the exhibition had studied at the Slade School of Art, even though it had not been teaching printmaking in any shape or form, but rather training people to be the great oil painters of the age. The medium was thought of as a craft rather than an art form.

David said that working wood to make prints probably dates back to the 1st century. There are two main types – woodcuts and wood engravings – both created by carving pictures and patterns in a block of wood using knives, gouges and chisels. Wood engraving is distinct from woodcut in that the line is incised into the woodblock, rather than the background being cut away to leave a line in relief. It is usually done on the end grain of a block of boxwood, which is very hard, and so extremely fine detail is possible. The ink is applied to the raised areas of the pattern and printed with low pressure. Wood engravings tend to be smaller than woodcuts because of the limit to the size of end grain woodblocks. It is possible to make larger prints by gluing and screwing blocks together, but this is not often done.

Perhaps the most famous early woodcuts were made by Albrecht Dürer in the 15th century. David showed us a woodcut by Dürer alongside a late 18th century wood engraving of a blackbird by the famous British artist Thomas Bewick. A Bewick woodcut of a magpie was the Friends' logo when we used that name. Bewick perfected and popularised wood engraving as an art form. Born in Northumberland in 1783, he was apprenticed as a metal engraver but became famous as a wood engraver. Producing exquisitely detailed prints of animals and birds, he achieved great fame and became very successful as he travelled around England selling his books.

In the 19th century, William Blake and Edward Calvert created wood engravings as book and newspaper illustrations. The works of individual artists were copied as wood engravings and printed in large numbers so the process developed into a commercial process for mass production of images. Wood engraving was introduced to children as illustrations in books and to the wider public as book jackets. Famously many Penguin paperbacks had cover illustrations that were wood engravings.

A Society of Wood Engravers started in the UK in 1920 to promote the medium. This thrived until 1939, then was revived in the 1980s. A review of an exhibition in the 1920s stated that: 'No praise of the woodcut can conceal the fact that it is a more difficult way of doing something that could be done easily'. David summed up his feelings for wood engravings by saying that in the process there was something magical created from a block of wood, rather as a sculptor produces something wonderful from a block of stone.



▲ **Black Poplar Pond**
© Paul Nash (Private Collection)



▲ **Boxwood Engraving, this clearly shows the equipment and process used in producing a printing block**
© Paul Phipps



▲ **The Swimmers**
© Gertrude Hermes (Private Collection)

Most of the exhibition was in black and white, although for the purposes of book illustration some are in colour.

Black and white images obviously work well in this medium. Strong contrasts in winter scenes and views at night stood out. I was drawn to a picture by Clifford Webb of African animals, including zebras, drinking at a waterhole. Clifford Webb was responsible for the original illustrations in *Swallows and Amazons* by Arthur Ransome.

There were some lovely Clare Leighton prints of pastoral views of the countryside. A wood block produced by Eric Ravilious was on display. He went on to make a name as a watercolourist, bringing the techniques he had learned as an engraver in the lines he used in his paintings. People may have seen his work without realising it as he designed the motif of two cricketers which has featured on the cover of Wisden's Almanack since 1938.

In an adjoining gallery was a large companion exhibition of wood engravings and watercolours by Howard Phipps, a currently working Wiltshire artist. His work explores the countryside of Dorset and Wiltshire: the hill forts, the ridge and furrow of the worked farmland and the trees.

Wood engravers often first make a drawing to follow. Phipps makes a watercolour first and then a drawing of the watercolour, sometimes tracing that drawing onto the wood before beginning cutting. Clearly prints from wood engravings can be mass produced, although fine artists will generally limit production to around 80 or 100 images before destroying the block.

Salisbury museum had other fascinating things to see, including a revamped archaeology and Stonehenge gallery and a re-displayed Fashion gallery, exhibiting clothing and accessories spanning the last 300 years. There was also the café to be enjoyed; many agree that the Friends' army marches on its stomach, fuelled by tea and cakes!

Richard Avery



▲ **Bathers**
© Gwen Raverat (Raverat Archive)

Wildlife Photographer of the Year Exhibition

Monday 18 January 2022

The Wildlife Photographer of the Year is an annual international competition developed and produced by the Natural History Museum. The competition is now in its 57th year. Selected entries are organised into an exhibition that showcases the world's best nature photographs to a global audience. The exhibition goes to ten locations in the UK and many others worldwide. We are privileged that it comes to Bristol each year. It is on at M Shed until 5 June.

Members who joined the behind-the-scenes tour were fortunate to be guided through the exhibition by Rosamund Kidman Cox, who is the current chairman of the judging panel. She told us about the early years of the competition, which began here in Bristol in 1965 courtesy of BBC Wildlife magazine and joined forces with the Natural History Museum in 1984.

Roz explained that since 2005 all entries have been digital. Using technical data, great care is taken to ensure that any attempts to use software to improve the image can be detected. We were told that a few entries do get rejected for this reason each year. All the pictures are judged 'blind', the panel having no idea of the name, gender, age and experience of each photographer.

The overall winner is awarded £10,000 and there are many smaller class prizes including a 'People's Choice' voted for by members of the public. The prestige and generous prize money of the competition attract photographers from all over the world. Anyone can enter but only the very best will win. There were over 50,000 entries this year, many from leading professional wildlife photographers, who often win. But one of the great joys of this competition is that there is room for amateur and young photographers.

The touring exhibition displays 100 images which were taken by 71 photographers from around 30 countries. Only seven of these are female. However, Roz said that about 30% of the junior photographers and 25% of the adults who enter are female. She also said that over the years she had witnessed young entrants go on to become top-flight adult photographers.

Winning images are selected for their creativity and technical excellence. We were told that



▲ **Head to Head. Reindeer during the rutting season**
© Stefano Unterthiner, Wildlife Photographer of the Year



◀ **Sunflower Songbird. A warbler flits from sunflower to sunflower. 15-17 years class**
© Andrés Luis Domínguez Blanco, Wildlife Photographer of the Year



▲ **Creation**

© Laurent Ballesta, Wildlife
Photographer of the Year

the judging emphasis these days is on originality – different or surprising shots rather than just the beautiful – although most photos are that as well. I was surprised that there were some photographs taken by drones. Roz explained that the judges are conscious of the problems of using noisy drones. They are careful not to encourage a method that might frighten animals being photographed. With climate change in mind, although there are pictures from all over the world, these are mostly taken by photographers who are native to each country, rather than by people jetting all over the globe to get the shots.

Two overall winning images are shown here. Laurent Ballesta was the Grand Title winner this year. Laurent is a French nature photographer who specialises in underwater photos and has written 13 books. His diving team visited one lagoon regularly for five years, diving day and night to photograph camouflaged groupers spawning. They were often joined by reef sharks hunting the fish. The Young Grand Title winner was Vidyun R Hebbar with his picture of a tent spider, called ‘Dome Home’. The rainbow background is provided by a passing tuk-tuk. Vidyun lives in Delhi and is 10 years old.

The pictures are judged backlit, which is also the way they are displayed in London. The travelling exhibitions, like the one in Bristol, are of prints and Roz was disappointed in the way that one or two of them had turned out. She pointed out, for instance, that a category-winning picture of two ravens was too dark, meaning that details of the birds’ plumage was missing. She was also disappointed to see that the accompanying descriptions had been pared down from those displayed in London, possibly to speed the flow of visitors. She recommended buying the book, which has much greater detail about each picture and its photographer.

As usual, there are some stunning pictures in the exhibition, and visitors will wish to spend a considerable amount of time examining each one. Our thanks to Roz for her expert insights, and to Carol Ouvry for organising this event.

Richard Avery



▲ **Dome Home. 10 years and under class**

© Vidyun R Hebbar, Wildlife
Photographer of the Year

Scott House Museum and the Wetland Centre, Slimbridge

Thursday 4 November 2021

Swans, geese, ducks, flamingoes – there was no shortage of birds to see at Slimbridge Wetland centre and all bathed in sunshine on the day we visited. However, the main focus of the day was the house where Sir Peter Scott, the founder of the Wildlife and Wetlands Trust, and his family lived; it had been opened as a museum in 2019.

The house itself was a medium-sized, unpretentious red-brick building screened by high hedges from the road. Due to Covid restrictions our time in the house was limited but sufficient to absorb some of the atmosphere of a family home mostly unchanged since the 1950s. We were allowed to visit the ground-floor rooms: kitchen, dining-room, small sitting-room and Scott's studio with a huge panoramic window from which he could see directly on to Rushy lake with its large numbers of birds. The studio was the most interesting room. Apart from Scott's desk, a telescope, large numbers of books on the bookshelves and some armchairs, the focus was an easel with a large unfinished painting of wildfowl on which he had been working before his death. Many of his paintings hung on the walls throughout the house and he was certainly an expert artist; he also created the panda logo for the World Wildlife Fund and the swan logo for the Wildlife and Wetlands Trust. This room was the one place in the house where Scott's character and interests came through strongly.

The kitchen was typical of the 1950s, still with its original fitted units but with small personal touches: some of the original items on the shelves, a post-it note attached to a cupboard. There were no modern gadgets and, so we were told by the guide, neither Scott nor his wife Philippa was much interested in cooking. The small dining-room was likewise unremarkable but the guide in this room had a few anecdotes about the famous people who had been entertained there. Apparently when the Queen and Prince Philip visited for a meal, Prince Philip carved the roast chicken as Scott, despite all his remarkable talents and achievements, was inexpert with a carving knife. The sitting-room was Philippa's domain with examples of her interests, including photography. All the rooms had a homely and lived-in feel – definitely a family house and one well worth exploring further with more time.

The remainder of the day was spent exploring the wetlands, spotting various species of water birds and enjoying the opportunity to walk through the carefully-managed nature reserve in the early winter sunshine. Bizarrely, we also saw a nature warden with a flamingo tucked under her arm looking for all the world as though she was going to take part in the Queen of Hearts' croquet game in the rose garden from Alice in Wonderland. Apparently, that is how you carry flamingoes when moving them around.

After almost two years of the pandemic, watching wildlife – birds feeding, flying, swimming in a beautiful setting – provided a much-needed antidote. A most enjoyable day out, thanks to Richard Avery's efficient organisation.

Mary Bailey

▼ *Scott's cottage from the tower*



Photos by Sheila Round

▼ *Moving flamingos to pastures new*



Sir Peter Scott's studio

© Rupert Marlow

The Future of the Colston Statue

Following the balanced and widely-praised temporary display of the toppled Colston statue at M Shed last year, in early February the We Are Bristol History Commission published the results of the consultation on the future of the statue, and their recommendations for what happens next. You can read the full report – which I found very interesting – on the council’s website, but in summary the results of the consultation included:

- 74% of all respondents and 80% of Bristol respondents wanted to see the statue in a Bristol Museum
- for every 1 person from Bristol who said they would like the statue displayed vertically and cleaned up, 5 said to present it in its current state. The most common view was that it should be horizontal and with graffiti intact. Many people said they liked how it appeared in the temporary display
- 65 per cent of Bristol residents said they feel either very positive (50 per cent) or positive (15 per cent) about the statue being pulled down. Different ethnic groups gave broadly similar responses to this question, but there was a clear difference in age profile with, for example, just over 80% of the 18-24 age group feeling positive or very positive, but only about 35% of respondents aged 65-74 feeling the same way.

The recommendations in respect of the statue are that:

- It enters the permanent collection of the Bristol City Council Museums service
- It is preserved in its current state
- It should be exhibited, drawing on the principles and practice of the temporary M Shed display, where the statue was lying horizontally. The history should be presented in a nuanced, contextualised and engaging way, including information on the broader history of the enslavement of people of African descent.

Sue Thurlow



Acquisition of the ‘Emilia’ ship’s bell

The Friends and V&A Purchase Fund have recently jointly funded the acquisition of a bronze 18th century ship’s bell from the *Emilia*, which sailed out of Bristol. The *Emilia* was a 237-ton ship built in 1791 and owned by Bristol merchants Baillie & Co. Founded by Evan Baillie (1741-1835), Baillie & Co. had plantation interests across the Caribbean and owned a small fleet of slave ships.

The 38cm (15 inch) tall bell was made by R. Bush & Co., ‘pewterers, brass and coppersmiths’ of High and St Thomas Streets, Bristol, who may also have co-owned the ship. The firm made goods which were traded in West Africa for enslaved Africans and supplied the plantations in the Caribbean. Senior partner Robert Bush publicly opposed abolition of the transatlantic traffic in enslaved Africans and was a founding partner together with Evan Baillie, James Tobin and John Pinney, of the Bristol West India Association.

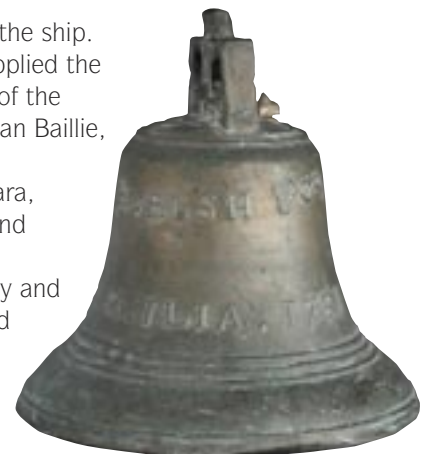
The *Emilia* made multiple voyages from Bristol to Grenada, Barbados and Demerara, shipping supplies to the plantations in the Caribbean worked by enslaved Africans, and shipping commodities back to Bristol.

This bell speaks to many stories about Bristol’s trade economy in the 18th century and the network of people and industries connected to the transatlantic traffic in enslaved Africans. It will illuminate the extent to which the traffic was enmeshed in Bristol society, and the close interconnectedness between the producers of trade goods in Bristol and the owners of plantations in the Caribbean.

Helen McConnell Simpson Senior Curator of History

▼ The bell from the 18th century Caribbean supply ship *Emilia*

© Bristol Culture



Donations and Deposits to the Bristol Institution 1822-1839

In 2023 Bristol Culture will be celebrating the 200th anniversary of the opening of the 'Bristol Institution for the Advancement of Science, Literature and the Arts', the forerunner of the present museum service in Bristol. Many original 19th century manuscripts and documents survive in our archives and are the earliest documentation of the museum's original objects. The acquisitions span geology, natural history, world culture, antiquities and art and reflect ideas about the world, science and culture at the time.

In the lead up to the museum's bicentenary we are examining our original documents to help us understand and investigate our historic collections. Last year, during lockdown, I transcribed the first volume of the original museum Donations Book onto a spreadsheet from digital images taken by Documentation Officer, Frances Davis. I have a particular interest in the early Bristol Institution as all the early curators were geologists of note.

This book covers the first collecting years of the Institution from 1822 to 1839, spanning the curatorship's of J.S. Miller (our first curator, from 1823 to 1830) and partly of Samuel Stutchbury (our second curator, from 1831 – 1850). It contains important information about the aspirations of the Institution and Bristol's wider cultural identity. There are 1,913 individual entries (with some duplicates), some representing single item donations, and some representing many objects. Of course, it is all handwritten, which can often be a real challenge to read and decipher. It is difficult to know for sure how many objects in total were donated or purchased during this time as some entries are frustratingly general. For example, entry number 5 is '*A series of bones of Hyaeas & other animals from the Kirkdale Cave Yorkshire*' (44 specimens survive in the collection today).

The book describes the donations and purchases acquired by the Institution, the date objects were reported to the Committee, the name of the donor(s) and often where the donation came from. Objects arrived at the Institution from all over the country and from all over the world: the Caribbean, Africa, Australia and America, reflecting Bristol's colonial and trading links. The wealth of many early members and donors associated with the early Institution came directly or indirectly through the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved Africans or colonial sources.

The first page illustrates the variety of people associated with the Institution, with perhaps some familiar names such as Cockerell, Bright, Harford and Carpenter. Several significant geologists feature, with one very important name present but not mentioned. The fourth entry is an *Ichthyosaurus communis*, a type of marine reptile, purchased by subscription from the pioneering palaeontologist Mary Anning (1799-1847), and sadly lost to World War II bombing in 1940.

This book was transcribed to enable access to the information it contains and to be able to search through it digitally makes research much easier. This will help us understand its content, and ultimately make it available for wider study. Already this work has enabled the Natural Science team to uncover stories and histories of the collections as the early donations reflect a strong interest in the natural world. Biology Curator Rhian Rowson and I are currently transcribing the second volume, covering the years 1840 to 1870, continuing the curatorship of Samuel Stutchbury, then Robert Etheridge (our third curator, from 1851 to 1857), then William Sanders (our fourth curator (unpaid!), from 1857 to 1871). In 1871 the Bristol Institution and Bristol Library amalgamated into the Bristol Museum & Library Association. The museum then moved from Park Street to a new building on Queens Road (now Brown's Restaurant). Together these two Donations Books can tell part of the story of the Bristol Institution while it occupied its first building on Park Street, now the Freemasons Hall.

Deborah Hutchinson Geology Curator



▲ **Donations and Deposits to the Bristol Institution 1822-1839, open at page 1**
© Bristol Culture

November Seasonal Sale

At our first tentative step at holding a public event since pre-pandemic days, the front-of-house staff at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery came up trumps, providing extra tables and bringing trolley-loads of books and jigsaw puzzles down to the front hall for us to sort and display. Our members had obviously taken the opportunity of this sale to have a clear-out so, after our initial concern that we might be short of stock to sell, we had more than enough. The first shift of volunteers had to work hard to create order out of the piles of books and boxes of jigsaws. We also had a small selection of homemade cakes for sale plus a range of marmalade and chutneys, so there was plenty to attract the visitors to the museum.

Footfall was not huge during the day, but we made steady sales, resulting in takings of over £400. Our investment in a card-reader to enable us to take card payments proved worthwhile: a third of our sales were made this way, being the chosen method of payment by all the students who came to buy cheap books. By the end of the day some inroads had been made into the stock of books, while most of the jigsaws, cakes and preserves had been sold. The volunteers on the final shift did sterling work tidying up and packing away the unsold stock, which was subsequently taken to charity shops as we no longer have anywhere to store books.

The final verdict on the day was that it was definitely worthwhile organising the sale and, once again, we are extremely grateful to all the volunteers who gave up part of their weekend to help raise funds for the museums service and to the members who supplied all the stock for us to sell.

Mary Bailey



▲ Volunteer Sally Meadows with a tower of jigsaws, about a third of the stock of puzzles donated to the Friends' sale

© Rosemary Silvester

Exhibitions & Events

Grayson's Art Club

BMAG until 4 September – Pay What You Can

Art works chosen by Grayson Perry and guest celebrities during season two of the hit TV series *Grayson's Art Club* feature in this brand-new exhibition. Spread across three floors in the museum, this blockbuster show is a vibrant and poignant chronicle of lockdown. The artworks made by the public, established artists, and celebrities are powerful and very personal responses to the pandemic. Collectively they form a lasting artistic record of the unprecedented times the nation has experienced together.

Netsuke: Miniature masterpieces from Japan

BMAG until 5 June - free

75 netsuke from Bristol's collection are beautifully displayed in the Eastern Art Gallery. These finely carved miniature sculptures were Japan's solution to a lack of pockets in men's kimono and other clothing. Each one is unique and they depict a huge range of subjects from Japanese popular culture – animals, mythical creatures and people as well as legendary gods and heroes.

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2021

M Shed until 5 Jun - £7 adult, with various concessions. Under 16 free

Gaze through the lens of some of the world's best wildlife photographers and marvel at the beauty of our planet. 100 powerful photographs tell the story of a planet under pressure, giving us a deeper understanding of the issues facing nature and the actions we need to take to protect it.

Archaeology study sessions: Marvellous monuments of the Neolithic and Bronze Age

Zoom – each Monday evening in March. £40 for the 4 sessions

Explore marvellous monuments of the Neolithic and Bronze Age with archaeologist Susan Greaney in this series of archaeology study sessions. This workshop series will progress chronologically over four weeks, exploring the different forms of monuments that were built in various parts of Britain and Ireland, and what they can tell us about people's daily lives, about their beliefs and worldviews and about the connections between places and people.

Acquisition of a J B Pyne Watercolour

Thanks to the generous financial support of the Friends, the museum has been able to acquire James Baker Pyne's *Figures Sketching near the Avon Gorge*. This watercolour fills a gap in our Designated Bristol collections and is equally important for its historical and artistic value and its relevance.

The Bristol-born artist James Baker Pyne was a follower of Francis Danby and took part in the sketching activities of the Bristol School in the 1820s. He exhibited for the first time in Bristol in

1824. From 1827–30 the young painter William James Müller was apprenticed to Pyne, thereby connecting two generations of Bristol School artists. Pyne later moved to London and became Vice-President of the Society of British Artists. He also travelled widely in mainland Europe. Much of his surviving work is in Bristol Museum & Art Gallery's collection.

The watercolour shows a man and a woman sketching above the Avon Gorge looking towards the Severn estuary with the sun setting behind Cook's Folly. The Folly was a tower built by the Bristol City Chamberlain John Cook in the late 17th century on his Sneyd Park estate. The two artists are working as equals. The woman has put her sketch on the ground and is contemplating the view in front of her. It is not altogether clear if they are professional or amateur artists but, given the informal nature of the Bristol School and art production in Bristol during the early years of the 19th century, this might be quite deliberate.

The watercolour fills a significant gap in our holdings of work by Pyne, most of which are either purely topographical or relate to the Bristol Riots while the present work focusses on artistic production.

The image's depiction of the romanticised landscape around Bristol in the early 19th century is important for our current work with the British Art Network and our ongoing review of the Bristol School for the 21st century. We are building on the success of our collaboration with the Fine Art Museum in Bordeaux and are developing a Landscape exhibition (based on our own collections) and a project dedicated to the early history of the Bristol Institution – the watercolour will play a significant role in both projects.

Most importantly, the watercolour will allow us to continue to tell the story of the Bristol School in new ways. Pyne's image deepens our understanding of female creativity in the city. The latter is a strand we have taken up recently with the acquisition of Mary Carpenter's album of watercolours and James Johnson's depiction of women drawing in Nightingale Valley, both also with the kind support of the Friends.

We are in the process of cataloguing and digitising the image, so it is immediately useful for projects such as popular digital resource Know Your Place and to individual researchers.

Dr Jenny Gaschke Curator of Fine Art pre-1900 (until December 2021, now Senior Curator, Paintings & Drawings at Victoria and Albert Museum)



▲ **J B Pyne Watercolour:**
Figures sketching near the Avon Gorge

© Guy Peppiatt

Ashton Windmill

In 2023 we shall be celebrating 200 years of museums in Bristol. Whilst researching the Bristol buildings that were either purpose-built museums or reconfigured as such, I came across a reference to a museum-owned windmill in the 1966-67 Museum Annual Report.

Ashton Windmill at Chapel Allerton, near Axbridge, was built between 1760 and 1774 on the area of high ground known as the Isle of Wedmore, using timbers from previous mills on the site, some dating as far back as 1317. In the 19th century it was operated by three generations of the Wilkins family grinding corn for flour and beans for cattle food. It ceased working in 1927 and, apart from a brief spell as a Home Guard station during World War II, stood idle for about 30 years. In the 1950s it was acquired by a Mr Cyril C. Clarke of nearby Stone Allerton, who restored the stonework, added a new boat-shaped roof and replaced the doors and sails. Much of this restoration used working parts acquired from a windmill in East Anglia. From 1958, he opened Ashton Windmill to the public.

Mr Clarke died in 1966 and the following year the windmill, along with two and a half acres of surrounding land, was given to Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. About 70 windmills had been recorded in Somerset but at the time of Mr Clarke's gift Ashton Windmill was the only one left standing. There is no record in the museum archives as to why Mr Clarke chose to leave it to Bristol rather than to a museum in Somerset.

Bristol continued to provide public access to the mill on an ad hoc basis. Visitors had to obtain a key from Mr & Mrs Burbidge, the owners of Ashton Mill Farm, and let themselves in. There is no evidence of interpretive displays or organised events being held at the windmill during Bristol's ownership. A later report to the Arts & Leisure Committee mentions that it could be used to 'teach a number of lessons about life in rural England', but it appears that ongoing maintenance issues hindered this, and the problem of providing proper staffing for the windmill was never fully resolved.

In 1972 it was listed as a grade II* building. Annual visitor figures from around this time numbered 'a handful', but after the mill was featured in the AA Britain's Heritage guide, visits rose substantially - as did acts of vandalism and occasional reports of people climbing on the sails. By the mid-1970s, the wooden stocks which held the sails had rotted badly and one had fractured, adding to the danger. In June 1976 after a full structural survey, the sails were taken down as a precaution. Some remedial restoration followed, funded by Bristol City Council, Sedgemoor District Council and the Area Museum Council for the Southwest. For the rest of the 1970s, the sad, sail-less state of the windmill remained plain to see.

The windmill was given to Bristol during an extremely busy period for the Museum & Art Gallery. Plans for a substantial new museum on Castle Park occupied the museum authorities for most of the later 1960s. After this was shelved in circa 1970, attention turned to the rebuilding of St Nicholas church as a museum dedicated to Bristol's mediaeval and ecclesiastical history (opened 1973), and to the provision of new offices and stores at the Queens Road building. With all these developments on the doorstep, trying to extend the museum's reach 22 miles south-west into Somerset was ambitious.

In 1979, further restoration was undertaken. The rotted wooden stocks were replaced with steel ones and the sails returned. The windmill once more resembled its old self, but the whole episode had led to questions about its long-term care and ownership. In July 1980, after a campaign by local residents and organisations such as The Mendip Society, responsibility for Ashton Windmill passed to Sedgemoor District Council. It is now run as a visitor attraction with a team of local volunteers.

Trevor Coombs Documentation Assistant until November 2021, now retired



▲ This photograph of Ashton Windmill appeared in the 1966-67 annual report and shows Mr Clarke's restorations. It was taken by a Bristol engineering company, Parsons, Brown & Partners, possibly as part of an initial structural survey.

© Bristol Culture

▼ Ashton Windmill as it appears today

©Virginia Flew



Find out more at www.allertonvillages.co.uk/ashton-windmill/141-ashton-windmill-history.html

News from the Museums' Participation Team

Museums for Everyone – Working with the Bristol Disability Equality Forum

Over the last year we have been working with an advisory group set up by Bristol Disability Equality Forum with the support of National Lottery Heritage Funding. The 'Museums of Everyone' group comprises disabled people from all walks of life who have carried out mystery shopper visits to BMAG to test how accessible the building is for disabled people. The group have used their findings to work with us to draw up an action plan to improve signage, the lift, and our website. Working together, we have co-produced solutions to the group's priorities for action, including a new 'Access Hub' which should be installed in the front hall at BMAG this summer.

Get Started with Arts and Culture – Working with The Prince's Trust

In September 2021 we ran Get Started with Arts and Culture, our first week-long programme in partnership with The Prince's Trust. This programme saw 12 young people out of work, education and training taking part in a week of creative workshops and practical activities across our sites. As well as introducing the group to the rich cultural scene of their city the course had a focus on celebrating the positive relationship between wellbeing and art; something particularly important for young people in today's current Covid context. We captured some great feedback demonstrating the programme had increased motivation, confidence, and wellbeing for all the young people involved. Many of those young people have continued to volunteer with us since the programme finished, taking on regular volunteer roles in working exhibits, documentation, and with our Digital team. We are looking forward to running more of these courses in 2022 and continuing to develop our partnership with The Prince's Trust.

Volunteer Handbook

We are in the process of developing a volunteer handbook. This is an opportunity to have a useful resource to allow prospective and new volunteers to understand the potential roles that they could have once they volunteer with us, any questions that they have regarding volunteering and the service, information regarding our sites, etc. This was drawn up to address a need to have a resource which people can use to understand how they can participate and get involved with the work that we do as we do get a lot of queries on this topic.

Jackie Winchester Senior Officer – Participation



▲ 'Get Started with Arts and Culture' participants at M Shed
© Bristol Culture



▲ 'Get Started with Arts and Culture' participants volunteering at L Shed workshop
© Bristol Culture

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The opinions expressed in this
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