

**March 2023  
Issue 220**

## **Happy 200th birthday Bristol Museum**

### **In this edition**

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- *John King* gets a facelift
- spectacular Chinese New Year celebrations at the Museum and Art Gallery
- visits to Bristol Archives, Stourbridge Glass Museum, Mottisfont Abbey and the New Art Gallery Walsall
- news of upcoming exhibitions and events

## From the Chairman

### Major Staff Restructure at the Museum

By the time you read this, the museums' new staffing structure being implemented to meet the very stretching target of reducing their operational cost to the council by over £400k a year, should be finalised. I am sure you can imagine how stressful the process has been for all the staff involved, with many jobs potentially on the line. The team has continued throughout the long process of consultation to work to deliver the museums' priorities and to plan how commitments already made – particularly to Arts Council England and other national-level funders – can still be met by a much-reduced team.

Ray Barnett, a great friend of the Friends and for many years our primary contact with the service, took early retirement at the end of 2022 after 33 years at the museum. I am delighted that even before he left the museum, he had joined the Friends as a member!

### Electric Cranes at M Shed are now listed

Many of you will have seen the good news in November that the four electric cranes on Prince's Wharf and the rails that they are mounted on have been given Grade II status in recognition of the role they and the docks played in Bristol's industrial history. The story of the cranes is an interesting one which we hope to tell in a future issue.

### Museum Winter Lectures

The last Winter Lecture in the current series was on 9 March. The subject was the creation of the British Museum's forthcoming China's Hidden Century exhibition exploring the last century of imperial rule in China from 1796-1912. Bristol's Chinese collections are so strong that the British Museum is borrowing some objects from us to include in the show.



▲ The four electric cranes outside M Shed are now Listed Grade II  
© Sue Thurlow

For the February talk we had a visit from 'our very own' Jenny Gaschke, now Senior Curator of Paintings and Drawings at the V&A but until the end of 2021 Curator of Art Pre-1900 here in Bristol. She showed us some images of the beautiful Bristol School paintings and drawings in the V&A collections alongside those held in Bristol and spoke passionately of her quest to re-establish the reputation of the Bristol School of Artists on the national and international stage.



▲ *Clifton Rocks from Rownham Fields c. 1821 by Francis Danby (Bristol School) – see Acquisitions on page 3*  
© Bristol Culture

### Online Booking for Friends Events

The number of Friends booking online for our events where that is set up is slowly increasing. It really is a very easy process and for members eliminates the paper form, the cheque, the envelope, the stamp and the walk to the post box. It also very much simplifies the admin for the volunteer handling the bookings, so if you have not tried it yet do please give it a go!

### British Association of Friends of Museums annual conference

This year's BAFM annual conference is in Doncaster on Saturday 30th September on the subject of Regeneration in Challenging Times. Full details will be on the BAFM website shortly. The city has a history stretching back over 2,000 years. The new Danum Gallery, Library and Museum has been open for nearly 2 years now and houses Doncaster Museum, the Art Gallery, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry Museum and the Rail Heritage Centre. Other historic Yorkshire cities such as Sheffield and York are nearby so the location makes a good base for a short break either before or after the conference.

**Sue Thurlow** Chairman

Cover photo: 'Mummies in the Bristol Institution' – John Skinner Prout (1806-1876) © Bristol Culture

# Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives

As Ray Barnett explained before he left at the end of the year, we, as job-share Development Manager, shall be the Friends' main contact while the new staffing structure – as we write, yet to be finalised – is implemented and the key senior roles have been filled.

The work on the staffing review – necessary to meet Bristol City Council's significant budget cuts – has not surprisingly taken up a lot of time and attention across the whole service. For many members of staff, it has been an anxious time, but the whole team have continued to work together to deliver a great Museums & Archives service to the people of Bristol and beyond.

One element of the structure which is agreed is the continuation of three slightly-modified posts which manage the museum and archive teams and report to the Head of Culture & Creative Industries. These roles have been advertised and are well on their way to being filled. In the meantime, since Ray's departure at the end of 2022, Fran Coles, whose usual role is Conservation and Documentation Manager, has been seconded to cover Ray's role until a permanent appointment is made.

Throughout the review period management have been working hard confirming our activity plan with Arts Council England to secure our National Portfolio Organisation funding, which comes to £4 million over the next 3 years. We have submitted our plans to ACE for assessment and we hope to hear back very shortly.

## 200th Anniversary of the founding of Bristol Museums

Bristol's museums turned 200 years old on 6 January 2023. We would like to offer our sincere thanks to all our supporters over the years, particularly the Friends. We are hoping to run a series of events during the year to commemorate this anniversary but finalising the plans must wait until the impact of the restructure is more fully understood.

## Acquisitions

More good news: Julia Carver, Fine Art Curator, was successful with the application to the V&A to enable the purchase of a watercolour of the Avon Gorge by John Scandrett Harford. Thank you much for the Friends' kind donation to support this. We will be able to tell you more about the painting in a future newsletter.

We have been given two beautiful and complementary collections of Miao textiles from southwest China and Amy Raphael is working on cataloguing these.

On International Women's Day, 8 March 2023, we will be launching the display of *Goldenhot Butterfly Queen*, 2015 by Stacy Lynn Waddell in the contemporary art gallery. This major new acquisition came from the successful application to the Contemporary Art Society (CAS) Valeria Napoleone XX award, an annual award to acquire a work by a female artist



▲ *Goldenhot Butterfly Queen (detail)*, 2015 by Stacy Lynn Waddell

© the artist, courtesy of Christopher Ciccone Photography

for a public collection. Stacy Lynn Waddell is a woman of colour based in the US who works with gold leaf and burnishing to create, reclaim or reinterpret icons from history and pop culture. The artwork is based on Sarah Baartman, the so-called 'Hottentot Venus', and also pays tribute to Thelma 'Butterfly' McQueen, the actor who played the maid Prissy in *Gone with the Wind*.

## Displays and Exhibitions

*The Art of Japanese Porcelain*, Amy Raphael's exhibit in the Asian gallery, is proving popular. In the same gallery we have a recently-installed single-case display of The Whitaker Collection of Chinese Jades. *The Nativity* by Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678) is again on display in the Old Masters Gallery following extensive conservation treatment.

By the time you read this the new displays of Delftware in the ceramics gallery at BMAG will be complete. Many thanks to the Friends for their help in acquiring the Lund's vases and the Delftware punch bowl with an image of a Black child that will both feature in the new displays.

During the first lockdown in 2020, with all his performances cancelled, baritone, artist, broadcaster and writer Peter Brathwaite began researching and reimagining more than 100 artworks. These artworks featured portraits of Black sitters, as part of the online #GettyMuseumChallenge to use household objects to re-stage famous paintings. Three years on, with a London exhibition behind him and a book due out with Getty Publications, Peter Brathwaite brings his whole practice to the history of Georgian House Museum and the collections of Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. New interventions and sound installations reveal the Black presence hidden at the heart of our spaces and objects. The exhibition will open to coincide with the anniversary of the Barbados insurrection, 14 April 1816.



▲ *One of the Lund vases - an acquisition which the Friends helped to fund*  
© Bristol Culture

*Peter Brathwaite's Portrait of an Unknown Man, part of his intervention at the Georgian House*

© the artist



## Staff News

Ali Shohrati – whom many of you will know or recognise from his role as Museum Assistant at M Shed – has been appointed as the new Operations Manager looking after all the buildings in the museum service as well as The Create Centre and Filwood Business Park. We wish Ali well in his new much larger role.

Emma Meehan has joined the Visual Arts team for a year as a curatorial trainee in a partnership with the National Gallery. Emma has been researching the history of the art collections pre-1900 and the early art exhibitions of the Bristol Institution.

Emily Roy, who was backfilling the Applied Art curator post whilst Amber Turner concentrated on Delftware, is on maternity leave and has had a baby boy, Owen. She will start a new job next autumn at the National Trust in Bath, working on the refurbishment of the Assembly Rooms.

**Beth Cutter** and **Caroline Booth Morris** Development Manager (job share)

## Museum Events

Yinka Shonibare: End of Empire intervention  
*Until 2 April – Bristol Museum & Art Gallery*

Head to the Enlightenment Gallery at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery to see End of Empire by Yinka Shonibare CBE RA.

This installation explores the First World War and Colonialism, showing two Victorian figures wearing suits made of 'Dutch wax' fabric, which the artist often uses, to represent Europe's colonial power in African nations.

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2022  
*Until 29 May – M Shed*

From fascinating animal behaviour to remarkable species, 100 powerful photographs illustrate the precious beauty of our planet. These images shed light on stories from all over the world and convey the impact of human activity in ways that words cannot.

Bristol Commercial Vehicles Celebration  
*Sunday 4 June from 10.00am-4.00pm – Outside M Shed*

2023 is the 40th anniversary of the closing down of Bristol Commercial Vehicles, whose factories were in Brislington. To mark the occasion there will be a display of Bristol vehicles on Wapping Wharf on Sunday 4 June. The BRS '8-wheeler' flatbed lorry and two bus chassis from the museum's collection will be joined by a dozen or so buses and coaches from the Bristol maker brought by preservationists. Some short free rides will hopefully be available.



▶ **Yinka Shonibare: End of Empire**  
© the artist and Bristol Culture

## M Shed Working Exhibits

The M Shed Working Exhibits plan to start their seasonal operations in March. The draft timetable – dependent on weather conditions and volunteer availability – for the start of the season is:

### Bristol Harbour Railway

April 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 29, 30

May 1, 6, 7, 8, 27, 28, 29

June 17, 18

### Mayflower steam tug

March 18, 19

April 15, 16, 29, 30

May 1

### Pyronaut fire boat

June 3, 4

### John King diesel tug

April 22, 23

May 6, 7, 8

### Electric cranes

March 25, 26

April 15, 16, 22, 23

May 13, 14, 20, 21

June 10, 11

Have a Go - driving a steam locomotive and an electric crane (book in advance on the M Shed website)

March 25, 26

▶ **1957 Bristol LDL, originally with a roof but converted to open-top in May 1973.**

*She is the immediate predecessor model to the Bristol FLF (the big green bus) displayed in M Shed.*

© David Pringle



▼ **1934 Bristol 'J' type chassis, originally built as a coach, then given this 1947 replacement bus body. Behind it is the 1957 Bristol LDL**

© David Pringle



## Bristol Archives

Tuesday 31 January 2023

All Bristolians are familiar with the three large square red brick buildings that dominate the Cumberland Basin but how many driving by know about the treasures hidden in B Bond Warehouse? On 31 January, twenty of us had the privilege of visiting this former tobacco bonded warehouse to explore some of its historic contents and learn how the dedicated team at Bristol Archives preserves and shares these witnesses to our past.

Some facts to start with: pretty much everything in the archives is stored onsite in B Bond Warehouse; there are some 2 million items on 10 miles of shelving; the oldest item is from 1347 and new items are added all the time; the geographic area covered by the collection is broadly Bristol and its surroundings.

Our tour started in the Research Room, which is open to all and popular with local historians and genealogists. We were advised that if you are looking for a particular item it is worth calling in advance to discuss with the very helpful staff team, but there is no need to book your visit and staff are very happy to help visitors find their way around the catalogue, which is also available on their website.

The highlight of the tour was our visit to the Strong Room to see some of the two million items preserved by the Archives. Luckily for the Archives and the items, their home in the bonded warehouse provides the perfect controlled atmosphere to ensure preservation – the optimum conditions for tobacco storage being very similar to the optimum conditions for document storage. We started by being shown the 1347 charter for the punishment of fraudulent bakers which has the most wonderful illuminated illustration showing a bad baker being dragged on a hurdle through the streets. The seal of Edward III is still fixed to the bottom of the parchment.

Some of the larger records held are the plans for all new buildings in Bristol between 1849 and 1950, which had to be submitted to the City Engineer to ensure compliance with various regulations. These are a brilliant resource for building historians and anyone with an interest in the development of the city. The plans are bound in huge red volumes, often with multiple sheets on the same plan, unfolding out to a great width which means they are hard to digitize as it's not just a question of putting them on a scanner, though there are plans to start doing some of the over 100 volumes.

One set of records that many are familiar with are parish registers and bishop's transcripts. As well as being of vital use for family historians building their trees, they can also reflect wider history. We were shown what looked like a small black and white brick – a parish register that had survived the Bristol Blitz in a strong box but been completely shrunk by the intense heat. An unscathed register from St Michael's church recorded the marriage in 1743 of two Bristolians of African heritage – John Quaco and Penelope Webb – a glimpse into the city's past links with slavery. A different record shows John Quaco to be a freed slave, who worked as a sailor.

Back downstairs, the Education Room (also the Research Room of the Bristol & Avon Family History Society) had on display some manuscripts and other items purchased through funds provided by the Friends. These ranged from relatively recent photographs of the Goram Fair from the 1950s and 1960s to a beautifully handwritten and illustrated diary of an early Victorian visitor to the city. Their acquisition was only possible through the generosity of the Friends and is something that we should be very proud of facilitating.



▲ *Equipment used for digitising records in the archives*

© Carol Ouvry



▲ *A baker's charter (1347)*

© Caroline Totterdill

As well as the Bristol collections, the Archives now houses the Empire and Commonwealth Collection, which has a fascinating exhibition in the reception area on lesser known and further flung members of the Commonwealth such as Kiribati. This collection covers not only documents but also objects, films, photographs, and sound recordings, some of which have been digitised.

One of the challenges for the Archives is dealing with digital material in all its many formats, ensuring that older material (floppy disks, tape recordings etc) remains accessible as technology changes. There are two small rooms tucked away to one side of the entrance hall with all the equipment needed to make the transition between formats, and there are projects underway addressing this problem.

Our group was made to feel very welcome by all the team at the Archives and for those who have not yet visited (many of our group had used their services before), it is well worth exploring. Access by public transport is by the M2 bus which stops outside, and there is some free parking onsite, though remember to get a permit from reception. There is also a café for refuelling! Many thanks to Carol Ouvry for organising the visit and to Anne Lovejoy and her team for hosting us.

**Caroline Totterdill**

*Stacks of volumes of building plans* ▶

© Caroline Totterdill



## Quiet Voices of Empire

### British Empire and Commonwealth Collection's travelling exhibition

In January, a group from the Friends were able to view the British Empire and Commonwealth Collection (BECC)'s travelling exhibition during their visit to Bristol Archives. *Quiet Voices of Empire* is a temporary, travelling display that explores previously unheard perspectives on the British Empire through audio recordings.

In 2022 the exhibition visited local libraries throughout the city. This culminated in an event at the Create Centre with guest lectures from Saima Nasar of Bristol University and Dolar Vasani from *Expulsion @ 50*, an oral history project commemorating the 50-year anniversary of the expulsion of Asians from Uganda by President Idi Amin in 1972.

The exhibition will continue to travel through 2023 - first stop is the library hub at the University of the West of England!

**Eve Andreski** Documentation Assistant, British Empire and Commonwealth Collection



▲ **Visitors to the BECC Travelling Exhibition at Bristol Archives**

© Eve Andreski

## Celebrating 200 years of amazing collections and stories

Bristol Museum's forerunner, The Bristol Institution for the Advancement of Science, Literature and the Arts, officially opened 200 years ago on 6 January 1823. We have been adding to its collections ever since and today Bristol Museums care for, display and interpret millions of scientific specimens, objects and works of art across six museum sites.

Housed in a newly-built building at the bottom of Park Street (now marked with a blue plaque) at a cost of £11,000, the Bristol Institution aimed to 'disseminate useful knowledge through lectures and experiments' and 'promote the advancement of Science, Literature and the Arts'. It was equipped with a lecture theatre, laboratory, library and reading rooms, exhibition rooms and of course a museum. An allegorical frieze representing the Arts, Sciences and Literature being introduced to the City of Bristol by the Bristol born artist E.H. Baily (1788-1867), was installed under the entrance portico and is still visible today.

An important role of the Institution was to actively build up a museum collection which included geology, natural history, archaeology and ethnography. The Institution also put on exhibitions of fine art. Many objects and works of art from this foundation collection survive today and form the core of the collections in the care of Bristol Museums.

Another important aspect of the Institution was to deliver lectures to its members and the wider public. Topics broadly reflected the aspirations of the Institution and were delivered by the leading experts of the day. Lectures were held in the Institution's lecture theatre and were often illustrated by objects from the museum or featured scientific experiments using new apparatus. The Institution became a focal point for debate and learning and was used by many societies as a meeting place.

The new science of geology was of particular interest to the members of the Institution. Many early contributors to the subject such as W.D. Conybeare (1787-1857) and Henry Thomas De La Beche (1796-1855) were also associated with the establishment of the Institution. All the early curators were significant geologists.



▲ The allegorical frieze 'The Arts, Sciences and Literature being introduced to the City of Bristol' by E.H. Baily above the entrance of the Bristol Institution

© Bristol Culture



▲ The Bristol Institution in 1825, attributed to Alfred Montague (about 1811-1887)

© Bristol Culture

▼ The type specimen (a 'first') of *Rhomaleosaurus megacephalus* (Stutchbury, 1846), lost to bombing in 1940

© Bristol Culture



Many of the fossils and natural history specimens in the foundation collections were valuable to science, with many 'firsts' in the collection.

The first fossil to be acquired was an ichthyosaur (a type of marine reptile) from the Jurassic period, purchased from the pioneering palaeontologist Mary Anning (1799-1847). Anning sold many important fossils to the Institution, either directly or to others who then donated them to the Institution.

Archaeology was also well represented at the Institution. Material from ancient Egypt was particularly prized as were objects from some of the earliest local excavations. These include a fragment of mosaic from the Romano-British villa site at Withington, Gloucestershire, and nine Bronze Age urns from the Deverell Barrow in Wiltshire.

It is important to acknowledge that many of the people associated with the Bristol Institution sourced their wealth, either directly or indirectly, from the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans. We acknowledge that the colonial collecting histories across our collections are also complex and need to be challenged. Today the museum team are working to research and learn from these histories.

The Institution quickly outgrew its first building, and a second new museum was built on Queens Road (today occupied by Browns restaurant) opening on Easter Sunday 1872 as the Bristol Museum & Library Association. The Bristol City Art Gallery (today the Front Hall of Bristol Museum & Art Gallery and home to the Boxkite) was built next door on the site of the former Bishop's College and opened on 2 February 1905. In 1930 the Art Gallery was extended to the rear (today the Rear Hall of Bristol Museum & Art Gallery and home to Doris the Pliosaur).

1893 saw the end of the private Institution when the Bristol Museum & Library Association became the Bristol Museum & Reference Library under the care of Bristol Corporation (now Bristol City Council). On the night of 24 November 1940, the museum was burnt out during the Bristol Blitz with the loss of the Geology Gallery on the top floor and severe damage to the Natural History Galleries below. Bristol City Art Gallery next door was hit by an explosive bomb in the Rear Hall at the same time. Despite the extensive damage and loss of many significant specimens and objects, much of the collection did survive. The old Park Street building was also burnt out with only the façade and frieze surviving.

Today, 200 years later, Bristol Museums continues to care for its collections, deliver world class exhibitions and inspire audiences.

**Deborah Hutchinson** (Geology Curator) and **Kate Iles** (Archaeology Curator)



▲ *Upper jaw of a walrus with original inscription, donated to the Bristol Institution in 1823 by Richard Smith Junior (1772-1843)*

© Bristol Culture



▲ *The Werner Collection of rocks, presented to the Bristol Institution in 1824 by Richard Bright Snr (1754-1840)*

© Bristol Culture

► *Fragment of the Withington mosaic depicting a bear*  
© Bristol Culture



# Stourbridge Glass Museum

Tuesday 8 November 2022

This is a new museum and part of the setting-up costs were generously funded by the National Heritage Lottery Fund. The last location was closed several years ago and the contents put into storage so it is good to see the glass items back on display for us all to see. A group of more than 30 of us journeyed up by a Bakers Dolphin coach. An additional extra treat was coffee at the upmarket M5 Gloucester services station, which was followed by a later unplanned stop at the next service area to try to get the coach windscreen wiper working after a rain shower! We arrived slightly late but in high spirits for our tour.

The new museum is set in an old glass-maker's factory by the canal next to the iconic glass cone. We had over four hours to see around the museum and examine the fascinating display cases showing glass from all ages, from Roman to contemporary, and to take part in the interactive displays that enabled us to design glasses and jugs and engrave glass designs on screen. We were able to sit in a glass blower's chair and could also watch the in-house resident glass-blowing pair working with glass in the kiln area.

After the tour of the museum, we were given a fascinating talk about the glass collection by the new museum curator, Harrison Davies, who showed slides of his favourite pieces and some original objects from the collection and outlined plans for the development of the museum in the future. As well as the exhibits and kiln, there is a shop selling surplus old cut glass that has been donated for sale to raise funds, in addition to modern contemporary pieces. Old cut glass is currently surprisingly inexpensive.

This was my first trip to the museum, which had a special meaning for me. My late father had, when 26 years old, been appointed Librarian and Glass Curator at one of the local libraries in 1938. He continued this role and Keeper of Glass and Fine Arts until shortly before he died in 1999. I was particularly pleased that one of Harrison's favourite items in the museum was a fragment of glass donated by my father. This came from a large intricate decorative piece prepared for the Great Exhibition of 1851. I had been invited to the patron's opening of the museum on 15 September 2022 but the event had to be cancelled as it was a couple of days before the funeral of HM Queen Elizabeth II.

Apparently, several people in our group afterwards asked if it would be possible to go back and check on developments at the museum in the future. In the meantime, the museum's website can easily be checked for future events at [www.stourbridgeglassmuseum.org.uk](http://www.stourbridgeglassmuseum.org.uk). Thanks to Richard Avery for his entertaining leadership and for organising this visit. I am very much looking forward to my next trip.

**Giles Woodward**

*Modern glass on display in the Gallery* ►

© Stourbridge Glass Museum



▲ *Glass blowers at work*

© Mary Bailey



# Mottisfont Abbey

8 December 2022

Mottisfont Abbey in Hampshire greeted us with ancient golden walls glowing in the sun on a stunning day of clear blue skies, and sparkling frost. The house is the result of many centuries of modifications by successive owners. It is set in rolling parkland with many venerable trees, next to the River Test.

The house started as an Augustinian priory in 1201, founded by the unpopular William Briwere, who had been Sheriff of Nottingham at the time of Robin Hood! In the 14th century three successive Priors were lost to the Black Death. Nevertheless, it survived until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536. Donated by Henry VIII to his Lord Chamberlain, William Sandys, it then became a grand Tudor mansion, whose visitors included Elizabeth I. In 1684 the last Lord Sandys died childless so the ownership passed to a nephew, Sir John Mill. One of his sons, Richard, transformed the rather awkward building into a Georgian family home in 1742. Since then, the basic layout has remained much the same. The Mill family continued to live in it for several more centuries until it was rented out by one of its last owners and rather fell into disrepair.

It was at this stage that Maud and Gilbert Russell, looking for a country retreat, found it in 1934. Imagine their delight to find that Gilbert was descended from that unpopular founder of the original priory, William Briwere! Maud was a regular patron of the arts, and had commissioned several famous painters, including Matisse, to draw her. She made sympathetic restorations of the house, emphasising some of its historical aspects. She commissioned the artist Rex Whistler to paint the drawing room walls in trompe l'oeil gothic style. Maud continued living here for 30 years after World War II, and in 1957 donated it to the National Trust, living on in the house for another 15 years.

Brilliantly decorated for Christmas, the house had an enchanting trail of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* through the rooms and continuing into the garden, with wardrobes popping up all over the place! There was an exhibition of the original paintings for the CS.Lewis series, painted by the illustrator Pauline Baynes.

The frost-sparkled gardens had something for everyone. The stables housed a full-sized horse sculpted with wire. The rose garden, despite its winter repose, came to life in the nearby small house with wall-painted roses and the story of gardener Graham Stuart Thomas, thanks to whom many rare and beautiful roses were saved from extinction. The winter garden was full of stunningly frosted plants and colourful leaves. A walk down through the meadows passed a small herd of cows to reach the crystal-clear chalk waters of the River Test and its wildlife. Finally, the two cafés were welcome havens of warmth! Thank you, Richard Avery, for arranging a most enjoyable day out - possibly one to be repeated at other seasons.

**Sue Black**



▲ *The front of Mottisfont Abbey*

© Sue Black

▼ *One the original paintings for The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe, painted by the illustrator Pauline Baynes*

© Sue Black



## ‘John King’ on the slip 2022

Our long-standing routine maintenance timetable determines that every two years one of our boats should leave the water for a hull inspection and possible repair. Monday 12 September 2022 saw *John King*, the diesel tug, hauled onto the patent slip at Underfall Yard to take her turn. As with so many other things Covid lockdowns had pushed back normal time scales and *John King* needed urgent work to the bow, evident by the daylight entering the forward ballast tank.



▲ *John King* waiting for the Patent Slip to be made ready



▲ *John King* being hauled up the Patent Slip at Underfall Yard



▲ *John King* in position on the Patent Slip

The work was possible only thanks to funding from the Friends to cover yard and surveyor fees plus the cost of specialists and materials to complete necessary repairs and return the boat to a condition that will enable us to run it safely for the next few years. Of course, all the non-specialist work was to be undertaken by our dedicated team of volunteers.

The moment the boat was out of the water and secure, the unpleasant job of pressure washing the entire hull was done while it was still wet. This removed all the green growth and freshwater mussels, along with some of the old protective paint which has been doing its job underwater for six years.



▲ A volunteer removing marine growth from below the waterline



▲ Volunteers preparing the hull for painting



▲ Chris Ecclestone taking his turn removing marine growth

A marine surveyor inspected the hull and gave a full report, which confirmed what we already knew – the plates on the bow near the water line were life-expired. A welder was brought in to cut out the thin plates and weld on new replacements. Meanwhile the volunteers battled everyday in awkward positions to clean the hull using power tools to prepare for painting.

We found the propellor had suffered damage at sometime since the boat was last out of the water and fortunately the welder managed to straighten and rebuild the damaged blade.

Once all the welding was complete and the hull fully prepared, the volunteers worked hard to apply a full paint system which will protect the hull for a further six years.



◀ Nearly there! Painting below the waterline complete

Photos by Bob Edwardes,  
Robert Skuse and  
Chris Ecclestone

While *John King* was out of the water on the slip it was an added attraction during a busy Docks Heritage Weekend, bringing together M Shed and Underfall Yard with the *SS Great Britain* and Albion Dock. It helped illustrate the history of how the harbour worked and still does with a prime example of a Bristol-built boat on the slip.

Monday 10 October saw the boat return to the water and head back to Princes Wharf outside M Shed. The volunteer team are now completing the work to bring *John King* up to scratch for the 2023 operating season.

**Chris Ecclestone** Operations Manager, Working Exhibits

▼ *John King* returning to Princes Wharf for the next stages of work



# The New Art Gallery, Walsall

Thursday 17 January 2023

After a coffee stop at Gloucester Services we arrived at the New Art Gallery, a modern building constructed with European Union funding. The Gallery is on four floors and has a small canal basin next to it, which is joined to the Birmingham canals system by a short canal. We were given a useful introduction about the Arts Council Collection Touring Exhibition, *Breaking the Mould*. The works in this exhibition were all purchased by the Arts Council, which holds more than 250 sculptures by women in its collection. A focus of this exhibition was to highlight the work of women sculptors who have not been given sufficient recognition in the face of a male-dominated artform.

There were three loose groups of works: the figure, abstraction and found objects. The first item collected by the Arts Council was a drawing by Barbara Hepworth (1947) of three figures (*Reconstruction*), illustrating her interest in human interaction in surgical operations. One of her abstract sculptures was also on display (*Icon*). Rosemary Young was one of the female sculptors represented who, once married, stopped creating their own work to assist in their husband's creative work (*Girl drying her foot*). Jann Haworth's colourful tent-like quilted dress was an item you couldn't miss (*Calendula's cloak*). Although married to Peter Blake, who designed the Beatles' Sergeant Pepper's album cover (it was said she had some input in this), she was able to establish a reputation for her own work in textiles.

Sokari Douglas Camp's three figures, *Audience (from Showboat)*, was another striking sculpture you wanted to see in detail. The figures were made from cut-out metal, casting interesting shadows on the wall.

Veronica Ryan (2022 Turner Prize-winner – in recognition of her major exhibition at Spike Island, Bristol, and her Hackney Windrush Art Commission – was represented by an early work: *Territorial*.

The largest sculpture was by Phyllida Barlow (*Untitled Dunce*), made from common construction materials. Her aim is to disrupt the space her sculptures inhabit – it took up one end of the gallery. A sculpture by Wendy Taylor challenges the viewer on how it is achieved – the metal beam seemingly hanging in mid-air (*Inversion*).

On the top floor of the gallery was an exhibition by Billy Dosanjh – *The Exiles*. Five large mostly-dark photographs detailed scenes from Midlands' life – the rows of terraced houses and their small yards/gardens, a sewing factory, a foundry courtyard, a canal and a pub. When you looked at them more closely, there was much more going on than from first glance.

The first two floors of the gallery show various items and pictures with a mixed selection of famous and more local artists, including some Jacob Epstein head sculptures.

This was a very interesting and enjoyable visit, so thanks to Richard Avery for organising it, especially when there were strikes affecting postal applications.

**Catherine Dixon**



▲ Sokari Douglas Camp – Audience (from Showboat)



▲ Jann Haworth – Calendula's cloak

Photos by Catherine Dixon and Mary Bailey

# The art of Japanese porcelain: the Irene Finch collection

Thursday 15 November 2022

Bristol Museum and Art Gallery has gained an engaging and informative display of Japanese porcelain. We were fortunate to be given a tour of it by Amy Raphael, Project Curator, Japanese Ceramics. This was a welcome follow-up to her taster talk at the Friends' AGM in September.

The session started with background information about the collection that had been generously donated by Miss Irene Finch in 2012 and is now on display. An outline of the history of porcelain production in Japan gave context to her collector's focus on the 'Lost Century', 1720-1820, a time when items were made for the domestic market rather than for export.

Amy told us about her research trip to Japan early in 2022 and how funding from the Friends had enabled the purchase of objects that demonstrate the processes involved in porcelain production. An article detailing these acquisitions and why they were selected appeared in the Friends of BMGA Newsletter No 219, December 2022. In the exhibition, having this material about porcelain production is a helpful lead into the ceramics of the Irene Finch collection.

We studied each display case in turn, from 'Japanese porcelain designs' to 'Japanese porcelain in Europe'. 'Porcelain in Japanese life' focused on dining culture and lifestyles. Woodblock prints illustrated the usage of the objects on show. We learnt that sets of dishes consisted of five items: a definite discouragement if considering divorce! But why was five the ideal number in the first place?

The Japanese believe in lucky and unlucky numbers – they never give anyone four or nine of something. Gifts are given in threes and fives instead. The number 5 is considered a symbol of goodness and can represent the balance of the material and spiritual aspects that should exist in life. They also believe a meal should represent the five 'elemental' colours – red, green, yellow, white and black. Chefs try to include all five in a single meal. They also use the 'Five Preparations' – raw, simmered, fried, steamed and roasted or grilled food – for a complete dining experience. We had another opportunity to learn about the complexity of Japanese dining culture with a discussion about the Tea Ceremony.

By the end of the tour, I felt I had learnt a great deal and made a resolution to return for further study. Many thanks to Amy Raphael for an excellent talk and for curating this exhibition and to Carol Ouvry for organising the visit.

**Sue Pettit**



▲ Amy talking about symbolism in porcelain design



▲ Porcelain in Japanese life display

◀ Dish with design of Mount Fuji and clouds, Saga or Nagasaki Prefecture, Japan 1868-1945

Photos by Sue Pettit

# Lunar New Year celebrations

28/29 January 2023

Over the weekend of 28/29 January, Bristol Museums and community partners wowed the crowds with spectacular Lunar New Year celebrations. The queues went right around the block at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery for the Year of the Rabbit festivities.

The event, which started 20 years ago as a modest activity making paper lanterns, has become one of the most popular events in Bristol's cultural calendar. It is now the biggest spring festival in the southwest, attracting visitors from across the region. It is the result of a passionate and committed museums team, amazing community partners, sponsorship from University of Bristol and University of the West of England, and the participation of their fantastic student volunteers.

There was plenty for families and adults alike to enjoy. They experienced a packed programme of colourful and exciting performances ranging from lion dances and martial arts demonstrations to stunning dance and musical sets by local Chinese associations, schools, students, Filwood Community Centre, and others. Many visitors enjoyed gentler activities such as calligraphy, origami, bunny-themed crafts, tours of the Schiller Gallery, and opportunities to learn about Chinese and Korean culture. There was even a rabbit trail across the museum (which can be picked up throughout the year) and roaming giant pandas!

We were honoured to host special guests: The Lord Lieutenant Mrs Peaches Golding OBE, Lord Mayor Cllr Paula O'Rourke, High Sheriff Alex Raikes and dignitaries from the universities. Director Xue Ling, who heads China National Tourist Office UK, came to Bristol on her first visit to the city specially to attend the weekend.

The event was highly successful and a wonderful start to the Year of the Rabbit. We wish you all a happy, hopeful and harmonious year. Xin Nian Kuai Le! Kung Hei Fat Choi!

**Karen Garvey** Engagement officer, Events (Lunar New Year coordinator)



▲ The University of Bristol Lion Dance Troupe entertained visitors with 4 dynamic performances

© Barbara Evripidou

▼ The Lord Lieutenant and Director Xue pictured with Bristol Shaolin Wutan Academy

© Freia Turland



Portsmouth and Bournemouth Chinese Dance Group travelled miles to join the festivities

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The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those of the FBMGA or Bristol Culture

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