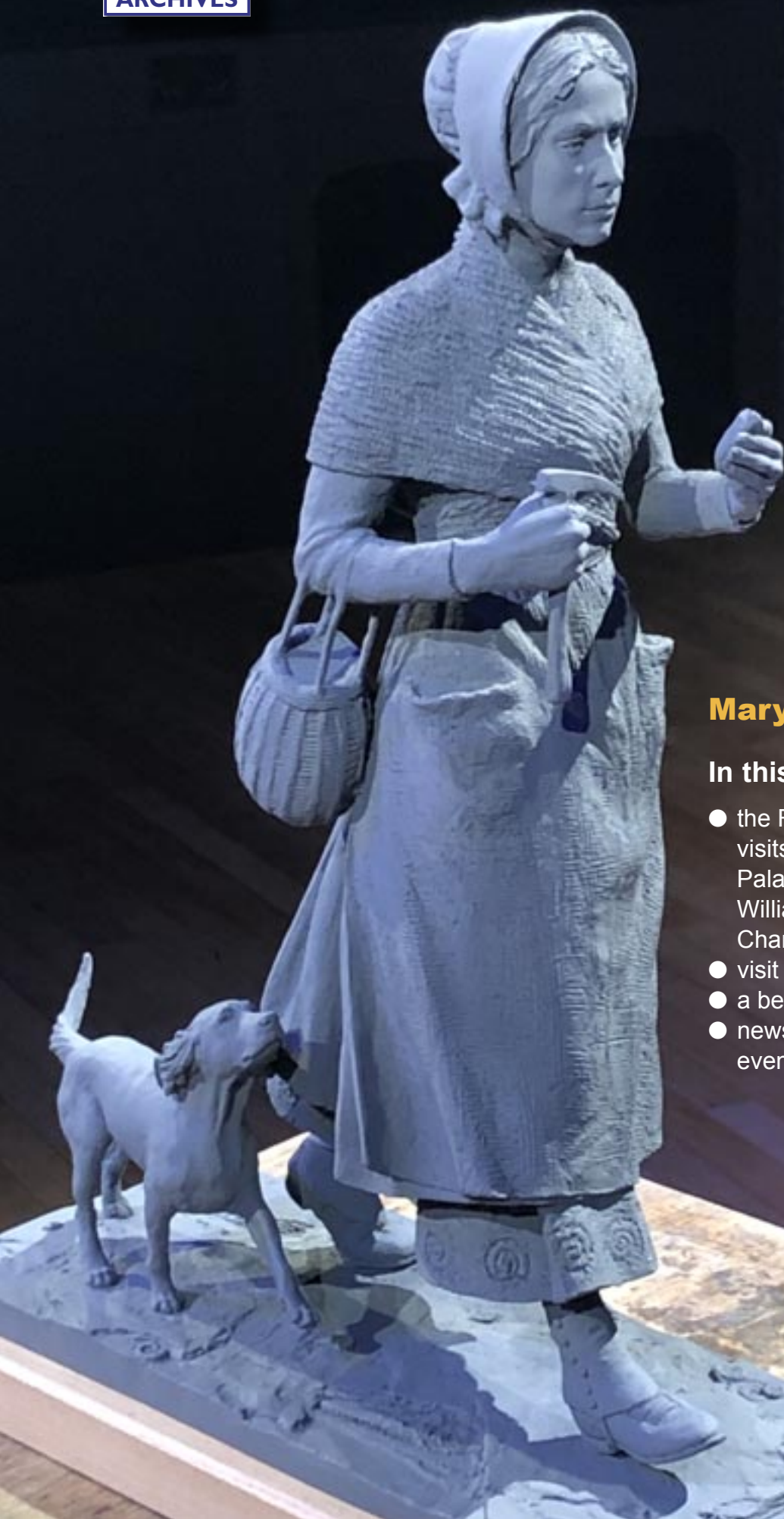


Newsletter



Mary Anning is here!

In this edition

- the Friends' trip to London including visits to Pitzhanger Manor, Eltham Palace, The Inns of Court, the William Morris Gallery and the Charles Dickens Museum
- visit to the Western Front
- a beautiful dragonfly fossil
- news of upcoming exhibitions and events

**March 2024
Issue 224**

From the Chair

Welcome to the new Head of Culture & Creative Industries

I was pleased to learn in January that the museum has at last been able to appoint a permanent Head of Culture & Creative Industries following on from two temporary appointees, and three gaps where the Senior Management Team have led (in my opinion successfully) 'by committee'. The new Head, Phil Walker, will be familiar to some of you as he was part of the Culture Team's then 'Senior Leadership Team' until 2019.

I have known him myself, and from time to time worked with him as a volunteer, since he first joined the museum nearly 20 years ago. We first met when I volunteered to help provide a learning activity in the makeshift schools' room at the Industrial Museum. Planned and led by Phil it involved cutting shapes out of, I think, expanded polystyrene and helping the children use those with poster paints to print pictures. It was very messy and great fun both for the kids and for us. I have worked with Phil since on rather more grown-up activities, including a 3-year national project funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. For a couple of years, he was the Friends' Committee's main point of contact with the museum, so he is also known to some committee members.

I am sure you will join me in welcoming Phil and sending him our best wishes for success in his new role.

Constable's *The Hay Wain*

I was excited to learn that *The Hay Wain* will be at the Museum & Art Gallery this summer, on loan from the National Gallery as part of their 200th anniversary celebrations. It will be on display from 9 May, alongside an exhibition looking at the context in which it was painted, including 11 Constable oil sketches from the collections of the V&A. Our June newsletter will include an article on the star painting and the exhibition, which Julia Carver has written for us, but sadly we do not have the space for it in this issue.

British Association of Friends of Museums (BAFM)

You may remember that in our December issue I told you that our newsletter had been joint runner up in the BAFM national Newsletter Awards. Following on from that, the next edition of the BAFM Journal will re-publish the beautifully-illustrated article on digitising Chinese minority ethnic textiles that appeared in our September 2023 issue. As well as showcasing our publication it will enable BAFM members across the country to see an example of how we use our



▲ *Baby carrier with folded silk embroidery from Wengxiang village, Guizhou province, 1997. Miao ethnic group.*

© Bristol Culture

funds raised to support the museum in many more ways than simply enabling them to add new objects to the collections.

The 2024 BAFM Annual Conference, from Friday 4 to Sunday 6 October, will be hosted by The Friends of Wisbech and Fenland Museum, Cambridgeshire. More details will be published in the next couple of months, but I am already looking forward to taking part, and to having the opportunity to explore a part of the country I have never visited.

New volunteers still needed to help run the Friends

We still need additional members to step up to take an active part in running the Friends and ensure the continuing success of our organisation for the foreseeable future. Those few who have volunteered in the last few months are already enjoying making a clear contribution to our operations. If you would like to know more, email me at the address on the back page.

Subscriptions

Those of you who were at our AGM in September will have heard me say that this year the committee are looking at increasing our subscription rates in 2025. By then it will be 11 years since we last put them up in 2014, since when our costs have risen very significantly: in particular postage has more than doubled. We will be formally proposing the increased rates at our next AGM, which is pencilled in for 2.30 on Saturday 19 October in M Shed.

Sue Thurlow Chair

Cover photo: . Mary Anning with her dog, Tray

© Mary Anning Rocks

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Staff news

We are delighted to inform you that Phil Walker has been appointed as the Head of Culture & Creative Industries, starting on 18 March.

Some of you will remember Phil from his previous time with us when he was Head of Engagement in our Senior Leadership Team. He started his career as an artist and was a member of Bristol's many studio groups in the 1990s before stepping over into the world of museums. He joined the Learning team at Bristol Museums in 2005 from @bristol (now known as 'We the Curious'). He then moved internally to Exhibitions Manager and Head of Public Programming before becoming Head of Engagement. During his time as Exhibitions Manager, he played a pivotal role in the Banksy versus Bristol Museum exhibition.

In 2019 he became the Head of Culture at Gloucester. During his time there he has raised the profile of the city's cultural offering and implemented many new initiatives.

Phil brings with him vital experience, commitment, connections and enthusiasm – and we know he will be a great advocate for the service. While we are a slightly different service from the one he left, Phil comes on board with knowledge of the teams, collections, systems and processes which will be an enormous head start into the role. His appointment completes the senior management team.

In December 2023, we sadly said farewell to Emma Meehan, our National Gallery Curatorial Trainee. Emma made a huge contribution while she was here including researching and curating 'Opulent Origins' which shared and celebrated 200 years of art collecting at Bristol Museum. Emma also created and delivered several events to support the exhibition and co-produced our successful Museums at Night event on a similar theme. We wish her all the best for her next steps, and know she has a bright future ahead of her.

Mary Anning – Making Waves display at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

On Friday 12 January we hosted a press launch to open this new display. It was wonderful to celebrate the opening of the exhibition and formally welcome the Mary Anning maquette, which will remain on display until 30 April, after which it continues its national tour. We were delighted with the press coverage on ITV and other media outlets such as Bristol 24/7 and Bristol World following the event.

On loan from The Charity and Trustees of Mary Anning Rocks, the small model shows Mary striding across a rock surface covered in some of her most significant finds, holding an ammonite fossil, her geological hammer, and a basket.

The maquette is displayed alongside part of the huge fossil skull – of a type of ichthyosaur called a Temnodontosaurus – which will be on display permanently alongside the museum's Dinosaur Gallery. Mary Anning



▲ A maquette of Mary Anning with her faithful dog, Tray. We do not know what kind of dog Tray was, but he seems most likely to have been a 'kind of spaniel'. He went with her everywhere and Mary was with Tray in 1833 when he was killed by a landslide which nearly killed her as well.

© Mary Anning Rocks

found the fossil on a beach in her hometown of Lyme Regis when she was 14 years old.

The skull has been in the museum's collection since 1845 but has not been on display for over 30 years due to its complex conservation needs. Thanks to donations made by visitors, Bristol Museums Development Trust was able to fund the conservation and mounting of the skull with financial assistance from the Geologists' Association.



▼ *The temnodontosaurus fossil skull at the heart of the new display*
© Bristol Culture

▼ *Recreation of the temnodontosaurus skull*
© Bristol Culture

The conservation work unexpectedly revealed new and scientifically important information. The skull had been mounted in mortar in a wooden box for over a hundred years, with the lower portion hidden. When the wood and mortar were removed several deep tooth marks were found on either side of the skull. Estimates suggest that the ichthyosaurus would have been about 7m long when alive, but it appears to have been eaten by something even larger. Research into this new information is being carried out by Dr Dean Lomax, the UK's top ichthyosaurus expert, and Nigel Larkin, the palaeontological conservator who worked on the fossil.

The day after the launch saw the first of a series of events for schools and families – generously funded by the Friends. A family performance, for 7 to 11-year-olds along with their adults and siblings, brought to life the amazing story of Mary Anning – inspiring our next generation of fossil hunters & geologists. These events will run on selected dates until April – more details on the museum website. Deborah Hutchinson, Geology Curator, will be giving a free talk about the new display in the gallery at 1.15 on 20 March.



Protest Display

Work is continuing on the development and build of the Protest display in M Shed exploring the legacies of racial injustice. The project is being led internally by Linda Coode, Karen MacDonald, Helen McConnell Simpson and Lisa Graves. A series of workshops have been held with representatives of the local community and Narrative Threads – a UK-based collective of interpretive strategists, planners and developers – to set the tone and theme for the

display. The display will include film footage and personal memorabilia which give individual voice and memories of the protest, which were part of the toppling of the Colston statue. Thank you to both Bristol Museums Development Trust and the Friends for their support of this display which will be unveiled this month.

Historic Houses

As you know the three historic houses closed in January as planned. They will re-open at weekends in the Spring with new activities and events for the year ahead. Please check the museum website for further details.

Winter Lectures

The Winter Lecture Series is continuing over the first three months of 2024. The last talk in the current season on 14 March will see baritone, artist, broadcaster and writer Peter Brathwaite discuss his recently-displayed photographic series 'Rediscovering Black Portraiture'. This series has once again been made possible thanks to the generous sponsorship from the Friends. We appreciate your ongoing and valuable support.

Caroline Booth-Morris and Beth Cutter
Co-Development Managers

'The Hay Wain'

Early summer will bring the exciting opportunity for you to see Constable's iconic landscape painting up close. It will be on show at the Museum & Art Gallery from Saturday 11 May – Sunday 1 September 2024

▼ *Detail of Constable's The Hay Wain*
© The National Gallery



City Break in East London

Sunday 3 to Friday 8 September 2023

We set off for London at the beginning of one of the hottest weeks of the year, so our select group of Friends came prepared for sunny sight-seeing. Our driver, Ryan, managed to remain calm and immaculate throughout the trip despite the frustrations of coping with London traffic. We completed the itinerary without incident and added in a couple of extras: a ride on the Emirates cable car from Canary Wharf to O2 and a ride on the Docklands Light Railway and the new Elizabeth line.

Pitzhanger Manor

Sunday 3 September

Our first destination on the way into London was Pitzhanger Manor in Ealing, the country house of Sir John Soane, the Georgian architect of the Bank of England. He designed and built the house as a retreat from his city home in Lincoln's Inn Fields and would often walk the eight miles between the two properties.

In 1800, when Soane bought Pitzhanger, Ealing was a village. The original manor house was not grand enough for Soane, who wanted to showcase his skills as an architect and his collections of art and antiquities, and to provide a suitable summer retreat for his family and for entertaining. The house was therefore demolished, apart from an extension designed by George Dance on which Soane had worked as Dance's pupil. This block provided a dining area on the ground floor and a grand drawing room upstairs. A new block was designed by Soane to adjoin it, with an additional colonnade to the kitchen block. Adjacent were mock Roman ruins which visitors would see as they entered the gateway to the house.

The park around the house was extensively reworked to create a fashionably picturesque garden with a lake, a rustic bridge and a plantation, plus a walled kitchen garden. Today the park is open to the public as Walpole Park while the kitchen garden contains a café. The house itself has been restored to the period when Soane lived there, following painstaking research into the colours and materials he used. The kitchen block is now a gallery, a small café and a shop.

The profound influence on Soane of the two years he spent on the Grand Tour is obvious throughout the house. The frontage and interior decorations are all neo-classical but with the addition of an inventive use of light and space to give the house the appearance of being larger than it is. His use of colour is striking, often marbled paint contrasting with dark tones, all of which was to complement his collections of books and artworks. The effect is slightly overwhelming except in the two large rooms of the Dance extension – the Eating Room and Upper Drawing Room – where the Wedgwood blues and greens provide a serene contrast.

The Soane family did not stay long at Pitzhanger. Sir John's wife Eliza found it difficult organising the household at Ealing and preferred her life in London. In addition, their two sons, who Soane had hoped would follow in his footsteps as architects, proved to be disappointments. In 1810 Soane sold the house and moved his collections to his London home in Lincoln's Inn Fields, where they can now be viewed. Pitzhanger Manor remains, however, as a fitting testament to the stripped-down classicism of Sir John Soane's influential architectural style.

Mary Bailey

The Chinese wallpaper in the Upper Drawing Room at Pitzhanger Manor ▶



▲ Morning room at Pitzhanger Manor



▲ Sir John Soane's rebuilt Pitzhanger Manor with the Dance wing on the left.



Eltham Palace

Monday 4 September

Built in 1290 Eltham Palace was given in 1305 to the future King Edward II by the Bishop of Durham. The great hall was built between 1475 and 1480 for Edward IV and is still a remarkable building today with a splendid hammerbeam roof. Eltham became a favourite residence of future kings including Henry VIII but Charles I was the last king to visit. The palace went out of favour and was damaged in the Civil War. The mediaeval hall became a barn as part of a nearby farm.

In 1933 Virginia (Ginie) and Stephen Courtauld (of the rayon manufacturing family) decided to purchase the palace, which was mostly in ruins, and architects Seely & Paget set about a modern restoration while retaining the great hall. This attracted some criticism, including the description of 'tobacco factory' for the exterior. Decorated in Art Deco style the building also had all the latest gadgets including the telephone, central heating and a dedicated flower room. Here Ginie enjoyed arranging flowers for all the rooms, using blooms from the sunken rose garden.

The reception rooms on the ground floor were very impressive, particularly the opulent triangular entrance hall with its huge marquetry panels and Swedish-designed furniture. The dining-room is typically Art Deco, making use of the Greek key motif throughout. These rooms reflect the fact that Eltham was used primarily for entertaining – the Courtaulds would hold large weekend parties.

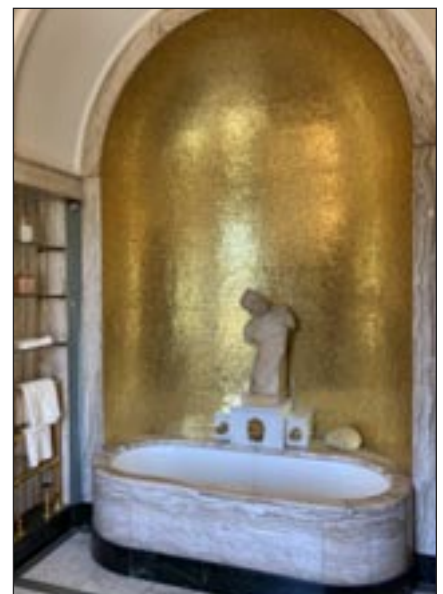
Ginie's personality was extrovert, demonstrated in the design of some of the rooms, all completed to a very high standard of craftsmanship and with top quality materials. Her bedroom suite is like a temple, with extravagant details such as a gold telephone and a gold mosaic alcove for the bath in the ensuite bathroom, all designed by Peter Malacrida, an Italian playboy aristocrat who was their friend and neighbour. Stephen's room by contrast is more restrained, reflecting his character, and here two of the walls are covered in hand-printed Sanderson wallpaper depicting views of Kew Gardens. Throughout the house there are works of art which the Courtaulds had collected, including a charming 1923 portrait bust of Ginie by Filippo Lovatelli.

In the basement is a large, centralised vacuum cleaner servicing the whole house to make cleaning easier for the maids. During World War II, several guests and the Courtaulds used the basement as a bunker, no doubt enjoying the billiard table and games for distraction. However, in 1944 the Courtaulds left Eltham because of the bombing; they went first to Scotland and then emigrated to South Africa. Eltham Palace has since been restored and opened to the public by English Heritage, who now own it. To end our day, we sat in the peaceful garden under the trees in the beautiful hot sunshine enjoying a black vanilla ice cream!

Catherine Dixon



▲ *Eltham Palace seen from the moat*



▲ *Ginie Courtauld's bathroom with gold mosaic decorating the bath alcove.*



◀ *The Art Deco dining room at Eltham Palace.*

William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow

Tuesday 5 September

We spent our second full day in London at the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow. The handsome building which houses the gallery had been home to Morris from his teenage years; its grounds now form the extensive green space of Lloyd Park, with formal gardens, welcome shade and extensive sports facilities.

The Gallery exhibits a huge range of original designs and works, displayed in the context of Morris' life, artistic aims, business ventures, production methods as well as political convictions and activities. The designs he produced were not just the 'must have' of the late 19th century but continued in popularity throughout the 20th and into our own time.

The seven galleries treated aspects of his life and work, starting with biographical details and a splendid white bust as well as fascinating quotes running round the ceiling cornices. Then came influences on his thought, his associates at that time, and examples of his early and not always successful business ventures. His marriage to Jane Burden led to designs for the Red House as their first home. Gallery 3 showed us the range of products from his company Morris & Co. His deep belief in the power of nature was clear in so many designs. He felt that access to his goods should not be limited to the wealthy few, hence the wide range - tiles, ceramics, fabrics, books, wallpaper (even for Queen Victoria) carpets and tapestry. Furniture was also a popular item, including his best-selling 'Sussex' chair.

The central tenets of the Arts and Crafts movement - 'Beauty and Functionality' - were clear in the Workshop Gallery. Morris abhorred industrialised production and insisted that everything should be handmade by his craft workers. The room was fascinating, showing original tools and demonstrating production methods as well as finished products. Morris was inspired by the natural dyes used in traditional Indian fabrics and experimented extensively before he achieved acceptable colours for his own textiles.

'The Shop' came next, a recreation of the Oxford Street store that was the London outlet for goods produced by Morris & Co. Here we could see the 'top sellers' of that time, as well as those which are still popular today.

Gallery 6 showed his experiments in printing and influences upon his work. He wanted to design the ideal type face for his own Kelmscott Press to print the classics and for his own books (he was considered a great poet in his day). His edition of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, with illustrations of the stories as well as page surrounds, was impressive.

It was only in his 50s that Morris became politically active. The final gallery illustrated his strong involvement in the Socialist cause, showing the leather satchel he carried for distributing leaflets, homemade banners, his political writings and more. I found it ironic that his insistence on hand-crafted goods ran counter to his desire to improve the lives of the working classes.

The fascinating visit to the gallery was rounded off for most of us by a visit to the excellent but busy café. It provided a shady balcony overlooking the park and just below were several benches which attracted many of our party. And while waiting for the coach we were surprised to see an impressive mural of William Morris on the side of a house - the view somewhat marred by parked vans - but still a vivid memory from a splendid day out.

Susan Hibberd



▲ Morris used red, blue and black ink for the Kelmscott Press.



▲ Praising Angel, a design by Burne-Jones for Salisbury Cathedral.



Examples of some of the tiles made in Morris's workshop. ►

The Inns of Court and the Royal Courts of Justice

Wednesday 6 September

There is a black door in the Strand which you can easily miss. It gives access to an oasis of peace in the middle of the hubbub of London. We were led through the door by Emma Matthews, our guide for the morning. She delivered us first to the Reverend and Valiant Master of the Temple, the Revd Robin Griffith-Jones, who welcomed us to the Temple Church, dating back to 1163.

The church was built by the Knights Templar, the order of crusading monks founded to protect pilgrims on their way to and from Jerusalem in the 12th century; it was built in their characteristic circular form, recreating the shape and the holiness of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. It was probably the first Gothic building in England. To the mediaeval mind, to be in the Round Church was to be in Jerusalem. In 1235 Henry III and Queen Eleanor bequeathed their bodies for burial in the church and the Templars built a hall church attached to 'the Round' to be their burial place (in fact both were eventually buried elsewhere). It is among the most beautiful of all Early English Gothic churches.

The Templars became so powerful that they were suppressed in 1314. At around the same time, lawyers were looking for a home in London in order to attend the royal courts in Westminster. So the Temple was rented to two colleges of lawyers who came to be identified as the Inner and Middle Temples. The two colleges shared the use of the church. In this way, the Temple Church became the 'college chapel' of those two societies and continues to be maintained by them to the present day.

Leaving the church, we walked round the Inner Temple buildings and gardens enjoying the peace of a sunny day while having all our questions about the legal profession patiently answered by Emma, who had herself been a barrister. We learned (if we did not know already) that taking silk is open to a limited number of very able barristers who become King's Counsel and upgrade their plain black gown to a shiny silken one. Chambers are rented from the Inn and all the barristers are self-employed. We asked the difference between the four inns of court and Emma recited the old (discredited) rhyme: Inner for the Rich, Middle for the Poor, Lincoln's for the Scholar, Grays for the Whore! We moved on to the Middle Temple and were allowed a glimpse of their 1573 hall, with its masterpiece double oak hammerbeam roof, laid ready for lunch. We then made our way back to the Strand and crossed it to the Royal Courts of Justice.

The Royal Courts of Justice house the High Court and Court of Appeal of England and Wales, as well as the Inner London Crown Court. It was built for Queen Victoria and provides over 1,000 rooms in an area of nine acres. Designed by G E Street, it took eleven years to build. Its awe-inspiring Victorian gothic revival is familiar as the fitting backdrop to speeches by those involved in famous appeal cases. Passing through security, we sat on stone steps in the vast Great Hall to hear about its history and take in the atmosphere, a mix of Hogwarts and the Church, with an underlying sense that anyone misbehaving would be swiftly removed. We were allowed upstairs to glimpse the rooms, some with courts in session. When we left, Emma offered to take our group photograph. She had been an excellent guide and her insights were the icing on the cake of a really fascinating morning in legal London.

Katherine Martin



▲ The Middle Temple dining room with double hammerbeam roof.



▲ Temple Church, Inner Temple.



► The Friends in the sunshine outside the Royal Courts of Justice.

The Museum of London Docklands

Wednesday 6 September

This museum is housed at No 1 West India Quay and its nearest station is the West India Quay station of the Docklands Light Railway. The quay was a dock completed in 1802 as London's first enclosed docks system, to service ships operating the notorious so-called 'slave triangle' sailing between London, West Africa, and the Caribbean, and returning to London. This trade was (i) export of manufactured goods to be exchanged (bartered) for slaves in the African countries, (ii) the transport of these slaves across the Atlantic to the Caribbean countries, and (iii) the transport of valuable Caribbean goods back to Britain. The Georgian-style Warehouse No 1 was originally built with five bays and three storeys and was heightened to four storeys in 1827. Until 1883 the building was one of London's largest tea storage houses. The building survived a fire in 1901 and the German Luftwaffe aerial bombing blitz of 30 nights in 1940. The West India Dock bays themselves closed in 1980, and this Grade I listed building was acquired and converted for use as a museum over the period 1999-2003.

The building itself is constructed with substantial wooden columns and floors and with the outside walls in solid bricks with windows with iron guards. It retains this basic structure to the present as this is very good for mounting and displaying its contents. It is located at Canary Wharf on the north side of the Isle of Dogs peninsula and is one of London's oldest surviving warehouses.

The museum currently houses very many items of memorabilia, films and photographs from throughout the history of London's docks, displaying them in 12 galleries, plus a young persons' gallery called 'The Mudlarks'. Its main displays are of the various forms and shapes of the tools used to handle and measure the different types of goods, e.g. cheeses, bags of sugar, parcels of tobacco etc, and the irons and weigh-scales used to sample and confirm their quality.

It also displays many pictures and other memorabilia from the slavery era - the notorious deck plan of slave stowage itself (actually of a Liverpool slave ship), pictures of the protagonists themselves, and pictures of the places where the slaves were taken from in the Congo and Ghana, for example. It has 40,000 pictures in its photographic collection so there is plenty to consider if you choose to write some history yourself.

Harry Hibberd



▲ 19th century carved wooden trade figure indicating that Turkish coffee was sold



▲ A mock-up of a ship's chandler's shop, Museum of London Docklands.

Mail Rail and Postal Museum

Thursday 7 September

A different sort of visit was to Mail Rail and the Postal Museum, which opened in a new building in Clerkenwell in 1917.

It was another hot day, so we were grateful to descend underground, divest ourselves of all our bags in lockers and climb aboard the first driverless electric train in the world. Originally it would have carried mail bags under London, but this ceased in 1963. The compartments had been converted to have either one or two padded bench seats capable of carrying one adult per seat with a Perspex cover. We travelled a small loop of 0.63 miles, consisting of part of the original route, taking about 15 minutes. Periodically we stopped and saw a film projected on the walls of the tunnel with a commentary describing letters being posted, sorted and delivered. Those who could not climb 70 steps in case of emergency or did not like to be in enclosed spaces watched the film in the adjoining exhibition area.

In this area were various exhibits but the one that caught our

Bristol to London Mail coach, Postal Museum. ▶





Blue air mail post box, Postal Museum.

VW van converted to a post bus for rural areas.



attention and caused much hilarity was a mock-up of a sorting office on a train, where the activity was to beat the clock in sorting a set amount of mail in 2 minutes while the floor moved as though in the carriage of a moving mail train.

Nearby was the Postal Museum, café and shop with an outdoor seating area. Here we learnt that the post started when Henry VIII set up a system of royal messengers to carry letters; this was expanded in Charles II's time, when he was Duke of York, to include precious and aristocratic mail for a price. Later a system of coaches was set up with armed guards and this continued until the advent of the steam train. Stamps were introduced in the 1800s as a means of paying for the service. After a good look at the very many exhibits a sit-down to watch some advertising films from the 1950s was welcome. While appearing quite dated they contained a lot of humour and included one describing the night sorting train in poetry and music.

The museum posed the question as to what future uses there could be for the vast network of tunnels. Possibilities considered already were cycle tracks, parcel delivery and customer supermarket deliveries but suggestions are endless when considering the heavy traffic which clogged the streets of London!

Marianne Pitman

Charles Dickens Museum

Thursday 7 September

Charles Dickens museum in Bloomsbury.



The terraced house at 48 Doughty Street in Bloomsbury was where Charles Dickens lived for three years from 1837 with his wife Catherine and their growing family at the beginning of his career as a writer. Today the house is set up as though Dickens himself had just left. It appears as a fairly typical middle-class Victorian home, complete with furnishings, portraits and decorations which are known to have belonged to Dickens. He himself wrote later in life that the house seemed 'a frightfully first-class Family Mansion, involving awful responsibilities'.

The guides in each room were knowledgeable and gave us plenty of background information, including, in the room designated Mary Hogarth's room, details about Dickens' sister-in-law who died tragically young at the age of 17. Dickens first three serialised novels were written while living here: *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Nicholas Nickleby*. Some of his manuscripts were on display along with many personal items such as Catherine's engagement ring, Dickens' writing desk and his court suit.

The independent charitable trust which runs the museum bought the next-door house at number 49 and this now serves as the entry point with the all-important shop and café, plus spaces upstairs for receptions, exhibitions and research. The small garden areas at the back offered a welcome opportunity to enjoy a cool drink in the afternoon heat.

On arrival at the museum, we had to wait while a very large party of schoolchildren finalised their shop purchases and assembled outside with their teachers. The museum works closely with schools and 48 Doughty Street certainly offers visitors a glimpse into the personal life of a great author.

Mary Bailey

The London Wetland Centre

Friday 8 September

In 1995 work began to convert four redundant rectangular concrete reservoirs into what is now the London Wetlands Centre. It was the vision of Sir Peter Scott, founder of the Wildlife and Wetlands Trust, who did not live to see its opening in 2000. Today you would never believe its origins as it seems to be 105 acres of watery countryside. It is close to Hammersmith and an ideal place to start our journey back to Bristol. School holidays were over, so it was quiet, but it is easy to see it full of families on a day out with an excellent café, toilets and plenty of picnic tables in sunny and shady spots. On arrival we were given a brochure with a useful map and identification guides to the wildlife we were likely to see on our visit.

Following the South route takes you through an educational area with lots of activities suitable for all ages. The Pond Zone has a study room with huge models of pond creatures hanging from the roof and projection microscopes to study the real ones in more detail. 'Down the Plug hole' explains in an entertaining way, with plenty of noises off, what not to flush down the loo. The sustainable gardens were full of insects pollinating a mass of colourful flowers. We wandered on through the rain garden, where rainwater is used sustainably. The Wild Walk takes you on a boardwalk across some very reedy ponds, wondering what lurks beneath. We walked past the Sheltered Lagoon and the bank where the sand martins nest to reach the Peacock Tower, one of six hides scattered around the site. We climbed to the second storey where, by lifting one of the glass viewing hatches, a breeze flowed through, cooling us wonderfully on one of the hottest days of the year. There are identification guides in plentiful supply for novices like me and boards to report the day's sightings. I was glad I had brought my binoculars. We saw ducks and geese galore, and herons landing. We like to think we saw a widgeon.

We wound our way back to the café for a rest, a cool down and an excellent lunch. The afternoon began with a delightful talk at feeding time at the otter enclosure, where Tod and Honey, two Asian small-clawed otters, live. They are the smallest species of otter and are land based. Their keeper obviously has a great fondness for them as they are great characters. She explained that they would take their time coming down to the pool from the shady spot up the hillside where they were sleeping. They eventually appeared taking a circuitous route to get to the feeding spot. Tod is the younger of the two and rushed around like a lunatic, jumping in and out of the water. Honey was brought in to keep him under control, which she does most definitely. At 9 years she is old for an otter and rather arthritic but still seems to thoroughly enjoy swimming and splashing in the water.

There was just about time left to explore some of the West route, which is slightly wilder. We saw two cranes and plenty of wildfowl from other parts of the world. What a perfect way to end a fascinating holiday in London. Thank you to Mary Bailey and to Martin.

Sue Pears



▲ Ducks and geese on a lake at London Wetland Centre.



▲ View of the peacock hide across the lake, London Wetland Centre.

Photos for the London trip were taken by Mary Bailey, Susan Hibberd and Katherine Martin.

A new ancient dragonfly fossil

Bristol Museum's geology collections contain many important and beautiful fossils acquired over the past 200 years. The collections are continually being enriched and developed with the addition of new material. In 2016 an incredible fossil of an incomplete dragonfly forewing was discovered by the quarry foreman at Bowden's Quarry, near Langport, Somerset. The rock that this beautiful fossil was found in dates to the Late Triassic, approximately 205 million years old. The specimen is in two pieces, part and counterpart, revealed after millions of years after the rock was split in two. It was donated to Bristol Museum in 2018 by local geologist Simon Carpenter. Simon had a feeling this fossil was important and special, and he was right.

Earlier this year a researcher specialising in fossil insects visited the geology collections. She was very interested when she saw this fossil and contacted an international expert on fossil dragonflies for their opinion. After several months of study by a research team including me as Bristol Museum's Geology Curator, a scientific paper describing the fossil's significance for the first time has now been published in the scientific journal *Historical Biology*. The research team have assigned the fossil to the genus *Liassophlebia*, a type of dragonfly that is currently known to have lived from the Late Triassic to the Upper Jurassic (approximately 209 million years ago to 190 million years ago). The wider family that *Liassophlebia* belongs to (*Liassophlebiidae*) is found in the rocks of Europe, Asia and Antarctica. Whilst this family is well represented by Lower Jurassic aged fossils, their appearance in the older Late Triassic rocks has until now only been suggested by three fragmentary and incomplete specimens.

This new fossil is important as it confirms the presence of this family of dragonflies in the Late Triassic and enriches our knowledge of dragonfly diversity during this geological period. The fossil itself is also special as it is currently the best-preserved example of this family.

To be able to share this amazing fossil and its story with our audiences, a reconstruction of *Liassophlebia* was commissioned from the palaeoartist Julian Kiely. Julian is specifically a palaeobotanist and palaeobotanical illustrator, specialising in Mesozoic age plants and therefore has a good understanding of the environment, vegetation and plant/insect interactions during the Triassic. To ensure accuracy their illustration was informed by the research scientists and Bristol Museum's Natural Science team who advised on the colour of this *Liassophlebia* using modern extant dragonflies for reference. This reconstruction will help interpret this fossil for our audiences, promote the work of the museum more widely and has also been included in the new paper. The image has had attention on the social media platform 'X' since the paper was published, further celebrating this beautiful fossil.

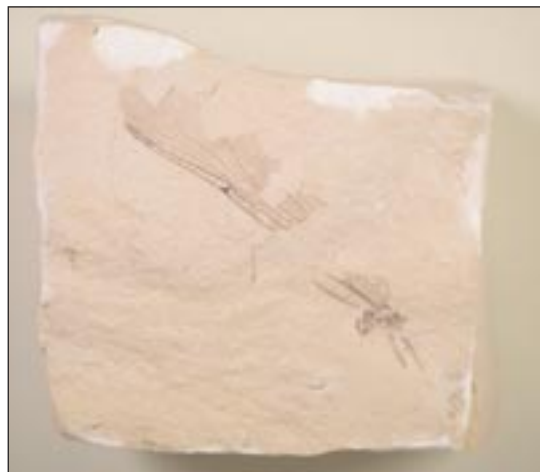
The reconstruction was only possible through funding made available by the Friends of Bristol Museum, Galleries & Archives.

Deborah Hutchinson Curator, Geology



▲ *Reconstruction of Liassophlebia sp., sitting on a Phlebopteris muensteri frond by palaeoartist Julian Kiely, made possible by support from the Friends. The dragonfly would have had a wingspan of around 4 inches (10cm*

© Bristol Culture



◀ *Fossil part and counterpart of Liassophlebia sp., a 205-million-year-old dragonfly from Somerset*

© Bristol Culture

Friends on the Western Front

Last October, ten Friends joined a group tour to the Western Front battlefields and memorials in France and Belgium run by myself and military historian Jeremy Banning.

As well as visiting iconic sites such as the Thiepval Memorial and Tyne Cot Cemetery, and a tour to In Flanders Fields Museum, we were told the amazing story of how Bristol 'adopted' Béthune in 1920 under the British League of Help. This was a charitable organisation established to provide aid to communities in Northern France that were devastated during World War I.

Bristol funded the cost of building homes for some of the widows and families of French soldiers killed in the war and resident in Béthune. Although fundraising was slow, by 1924 £5,800 (£555,000 at 2024 prices) had been raised and Bristol architect, W H Watkins, was commissioned to draw up plans for 16 houses and maisonettes.

Built by French contractors, Hoebeke and Flitz, the homes were completed in 1925. Families moved in and on 24 March 1925 a formal opening ceremony took place, attended by civic leaders and dignitaries from Bristol and Béthune. In the centre block of houses was a stone panel. Below Bristol's coat of arms were inscribed the words:

'Given by the citizens of Bristol, England, to the town of Béthune, in memory of true comradeship during the Great War, 1914-1918. Erected 1925.'

Surprisingly, in 1967 the Maire de Béthune wrote to his opposite number in Bristol seeking permission to demolish the houses and to move the residents to another municipal location that would forever be known as Cité de Bristol.

We were keen to discover what had become of the original site. Our first stop of the tour, 'fresh' from the ferry crossing, saw us drawing up next to a car park in the middle of Béthune. Once the story had been recounted, we were then taken to see if there was anything left. All that remains is the stone panel, fixed to a wall, on a grass verge, among the parking places. You can research Béthune in Bristol Archives Online for some excellent photos of the houses and the opening ceremonies.

Some of the Friends joined the trip to follow in the footsteps of their ancestors and Jeremy revealed many detailed accounts as the four-day tour progressed. Another connection with Bristol was revealed during the day when we studied the Battle of the Somme. At Longueval several hundred of the 'Bristol's Own' battalion (12th Gloucesters) were killed or wounded. We visited the battlefield, heard some amazing stories and gathered by the Bristol Cross, first erected by an Old Comrades Association in the 1930s to commemorate their fallen colleagues.

Jeremy and I will be running another tour later in the year on 5 to 8 October 2024. Friends of BMGA can again sign up for this tour by using the booking form enclosed with the newsletter. A donation to the Friends' funds will be made for each member joining the tour.

Clive Burlton



▲ Friends of BMGA in front of the Bristol Cross at Longueval on Sunday 15 October 2023

© Western Front Footsteps

▼ The opening ceremony for the Bristol-funded homes at Béthune on Tuesday 24 March 1925

© Bristol Archives



Opulent Origins

Wednesday 18 October 2023

One of the ways Bristol Museum and Art Gallery marked the bicentenary of its forerunner, the Bristol Institution, was with the display *Opulent Origins: 200 years of collecting Fine Art*. Lunchtime talks and summer walks supporting the display had already taken place and this 'Behind the Scenes' talk was one of the last chances to learn about it in depth.

Emma Meehan, curatorial trainee, began by talking about the wealthy individuals who formed a learned society in Georgian Bristol. In time this led to the opening of the Bristol Institution in 1823 in a building at the bottom of Park Street. A Subcommittee for the Fine Arts was formed the next year which staged a series of Temporary Exhibitions of Pictures, the majority of the pictures being loaned from private collections. The subjects of these shows were paintings by either Old Masters or contemporary British artists.

These early exhibitions provided the inspiration for the *Opulent Origins* display, from the pictures on show to the crimson walls and informative reimaged catalogue. An article in the FBMGA Newsletter, Issue 222, Summer 2023 has already discussed several of the paintings in the display in depth.

The Institution's founders, their backgrounds and artistic interests were also covered in the talk. This provided an insight to the period and two of them will be explored in more detail here:

Philip John Miles (1775-1845). Member of the Subcommittee for the Fine Arts, Bristol Institution. He had an extensive art collection considered to be of national significance but refused to lend any pictures to the exhibition held in 1824 though did so by 1825. He was a landowner, banker and involved in the Transatlantic traffic of enslaved Africans. His family was based at Leigh Court and had sugar plantations in Jamaica. He became the first recorded millionaire in Bristol.

John Scandrett Harford (1785-1866). Vice President, Bristol Institution. Considered to be a connoisseur of Italian Fine Art, he loaned paintings to the exhibitions. He was a banker, art critic, amateur artist and writer. The Harford family had purchased Blaise Castle estate in 1789. One of his watercolour paintings *The Avon Gorge and Bristol from Leigh Woods* was purchased recently by the Museum with the assistance of the Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives and was on display.

This session gave much to reflect on about the changes over the last 200 years in what is viewed as Art and the provision of public access to it. Thank you to Emma Meehan for an engaging talk and to Carol Ouvry for organising the visit.

Sue Pettit



▲ *Opulent Origins* display, with the speaker, Emma Meehan

Photo by Sue Pettit

▼ *The Avon Gorge and Bristol from Leigh Woods* c.1830 by John Scandrett Harford, 1787 – 1866. Pencil, Watercolour & Gum Arabic on Paper

© Bristol Culture



Unlocking natural science data

Bristol's natural sciences collections are amongst the largest and most significant in the UK, containing more than 1.35 million specimens. At a time of climate and ecological emergency the data these specimens hold offers urgent insights into the changing natural heritage of our city over the past 250 years, helping inform ecological recovery today. However, much of this data is not widely accessible as only 5% of these vast collections are available digitally.

To help unlock the collection's data for research and engagement, the team at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery is collaborating with the Natural History Museum (NHM) London to innovate our processes of digitising these specimens and sharing their data.

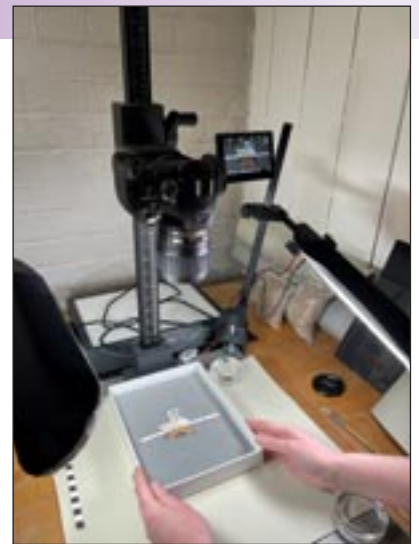
The NHM's Digital Collections Team have been supporting us to develop new methods that speed up the digitisation of plant and insect specimens. This has traditionally been a lengthy process, involving manually writing detailed data on a specimen's scientific identification, and where, when and who found it, into the museum's computer database. The new methods automate time-consuming parts of this process using barcodes. Individual barcodes are generated for key information, which is then automatically read and added to our database from a photograph.

The new methods have been used to digitise moths and butterflies collected between 1932 and 1969 from Avon, Somerset and Gloucestershire by Douglas Gordon Gibb. Gibb worked for the BBC and was a member of the Bristol Naturalists' Society. The records from this collection are supporting the University of the West of England to revisit and monitor populations around the Patchway area where there is a lot of modern development. They are also contributing historic records to the West of England Combined Authority's project on pollinators.

Our work with the NHM is part of a UK-wide project to develop a new national research infrastructure for natural science collections, recognising their importance in helping answer urgent questions facing humanity today. As well as work on our own collections, the Bristol team have collaborated with Southwest Museum Development on a pilot project that seeks to understand the opportunities and needs of this emerging infrastructure for wider regional organisations. In turn, this helps the Culture team contribute to Bristol's leadership role in responding to environmental emergency by being able to advocate nationally for joined-up regional impact.

This pilot work has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, as part of 'DiSSCo UK' or the 'Distributed System of Scientific Collections UK'. You can see a short video about DiSSCo UK online at: dissco-uk.org.

Isla Gladstone Senior Curator, Natural Sciences



▲ **Digitising moth specimens**
© Bristol Culture



▲ **Baby blue eyes (*Nemophila menziesii*), a species originating in west USA and Mexico, collected in 1939 from Ashton Gate.**
© Bristol Culture

FRIENDS OF BRISTOL MUSEUMS GALLERIES & ARCHIVES

**Bristol Museum &
Art Gallery,
Queen's Road,
Bristol,
BS8 1RL**

Tel: 0117 922 3571

**bristolmuseums@bristol.gov.uk
www.bristolmuseums.org.uk**

FBMGA committee

Patrons

Sir George White Bt
Max Hebditch CBE
Francis Greenacre

Chair

Sue Thurlow
07836 693589
sue.thurlow@outlook.com

Secretary

Katherine Martin
07891 547624

Membership Secretary & FBMGA website manager

Richard Avery
0117 329 6656
rchrdrvry@gmail.com

Treasurer

Robert Walters
0117 9682639

Events Group Chair

Mary Bailey
0117 942 1944
events@friendsofbmga.org.uk

Members:

Lucy Bailey
07518 396207

Clive Burlton
01934 832113

Susan Hibberd
01934 833544

Carol Lear
0117 942 3610

Toby Pinn
0117 2517251

Sir Stephen Sparks

FBMGA website

www.friendsofbmga.org.uk

**Newsletter designed and
edited by Tim and Ann Wood**

NB: editor's email is now
timothywrwood@hotmail.com
07917 331810

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

**Next issue: copy deadline
23rd April 2024 for early
June publication**