

Newsletter

Delftware collection in the limelight

This edition packed with

- news and photos of Bristol's museums, galleries and archives; exhibitions of the Pre-Raphaelites, the Bristol School, Documenting Death, the Hogarth Triptych, Do You Believe in Magic?, Being Human.
- reports on trips to the Blake Exhibition at the Tate Gallery, the Gimson Exhibition at Cheltenham, the Last Supper in Pompeii at the Ashmolean and the Bauhaus at the Stradling Gallery.
- news of upcoming events, talks and visits you can join



From the Chairman

Gift Aid

I am delighted that our appeal in the last Newsletter for a volunteer to deal with our annual Gift Aid claims – worth around £3,000 a year to us – has resulted in Peter Newley offering his services. Not only is Peter a willing volunteer but he has experience of making claims when he was treasurer of the Bristol & Avon Family History Society, so he knows what he's letting himself in for. Many thanks go to Roger Zair, who has handled our claims since 2010.

British Association of Friends of Museums Annual Conference 2020

This year's BAFM Conference will be in Dundee from 9th to 11th October and will focus on the subject of Volunteering. I am looking forward to representing the Friends at the conference and, as a volunteer myself both for the Friends and for Bristol museums, I hope to pick up some useful tips. The city has many excellent museums and heritage venues including the newly-opened V&A Dundee, Scotland's first design museum, and I plan to extend my stay so I can enjoy as many of them as possible.

Winter lecture – Folk Life Collecting and Blaise Museum

The final talk in the Museum's free winter lecture series, on Thursday 5 March, is by David Eveleigh, many of you will remember him as Curator of Social History for Bristol museums for over 25 years until 2008. His subject is the origins and development of Folk Life collecting. His talk will explore how and why the study of this new area emerged in the second half of the 19th century. It will look at some of the early pioneers – such as the famous garden designer, Gertrude Jekyll – to understand what impelled them to turn ordinary everyday stuff into collectables, and ultimately museum pieces. David will also look at some of the museums that owe their existence to this movement including Bristol's own Blaise Museum. There's no need to book – just turn up. Practical details are in our Events calendar enclosed.

Trip to the George IV: Art & Spectacle Exhibition at the Queen's Gallery, London

Looking at the Queen's Gallery's online descriptions of the George IV: Art & Spectacle Exhibition, it promises to be an enthralling show. As Prince of Wales and later as King, George unarguably had style and, it seems, a budget to go

Sue Giles' Retirement

At the end of March Sue Giles will retire after 40 years of dedicated work curating the archaeology, coins and medals, militaria, foreign archaeology and world cultures collections.

Sue's massive contribution to Bristol museums and to the city as a whole cannot be underestimated. In particular, her expertise and role in addressing Bristol's slave-trading past has been very significant, curating 'A Respectable Trade', the first exhibition to reveal this murky past fully in a public gallery, followed up by other iterations at Bristol Industrial Museum and subsequently at M Shed. To dwell solely on that part of Sue's contribution would be to do her an injustice as she has contributed in so many ways to the professionalism and work across the board of the museum service. Her retirement will leave a large knowledge gap which will be difficult to fill.

Ray Barnett Head of Collections & Archives

with it. His achievements include – as designer and as client – the remodelling of Brighton Pavilion, Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle. He commissioned spectacular art, both fine and applied, from the likes of Sir Joshua Reynolds and Bristol-born Sir Thomas Lawrence, and even designed his own coronation robes and crown. He also collected many existing works of great quality from across Europe. Throughout, his choices were influenced as much by how he



▲ *Sir Thomas Lawrence's official state portrait of George IV in his coronation robes*
© Royal Collection Trust

Cover photo: Delftware charger, Bristol circa 1690, depicting Adam & Eve ©Bristol Culture

A new plesiosaur for the geology collection

The museum's geology collections have a long and rich history of important Jurassic marine reptile fossils and in October 2019 another example was added to the collection. Nine large blocks of limestone containing the fossil remains of a long-necked plesiosaur found in Keinton Mandeville, Somerset, were kindly donated to us. As with all large, heavy fossils (or heavy anything actually), collecting and transporting them safely and caring for them long term can be a challenge. With funding from the Friends, eight robust and conservation-appropriate pallets were purchased and specialist

transportation was secured that enabled the museum team to bring the new plesiosaur back to the museum. It is now safely stored – on the pallets – at A Bond and researchers have already visited the specimen to start the process of identification and study. This exciting addition to the geology collection continues the marine reptile story at Bristol and we hope we can develop the fossil further to uncover the story it has to tell of Jurassic Somerset.

Deborah Hutchinson Geology Curator



▲ **Conservator David Singleton** securing a slab containing fossil vertebra and ribs to a pallet, funded by the Friends, ready for transportation

© Bristol Culture

felt they would enhance his public image as by his own wide-ranging and well-informed tastes.

As you can see from the enclosed Events Calendar, we have a talk about the exhibition on Saturday 7 March and a trip to see it on Sunday 22 March. I look forward to seeing many of you at both.

Do you believe in Magic? Exhibition

Our museums in Bristol run a very rich and wide-ranging programme of exhibitions, and from time to time one will feel to me to be special. Of course, it's a very personal judgement, but 'Do you believe in Magic?', at BMAG until 19 April is one of them. It includes hundreds of extraordinary objects from across the globe, largely from Bristol's own collections, each explained in just the right way to prompt me to think differently about my connectedness with worlds quite unlike my own. It's fascinating, and you still have a few weeks to visit if you haven't already.

Sad News

I have to end with the sad news that Eileen Silo, a very able and willing volunteer who recently joined the Events Group, died suddenly in December and that Nicholas King, a true gentleman who served us well as treasurer from 2010 to 2016, died in January. They will both be missed, and our thoughts are with their families and close friends.

Sue Thurlow Chairman

Date for your Diary

Tuesday 14 July 2020

Summer lecture and lunch: Trinity College, Bristol

Kate Newnham will talk about Chinese and Japanese landscape painting, followed by a delicious buffet lunch. The booking form will be in the June newsletter.

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Service-wide developments

Stephen Peacock has joined the Council as Executive Director for Growth & Regeneration, the overarching team within which Culture resides. The new version of the One City Plan includes greater recognition of the importance and role culture plays in all our lives, contributing to health and well-being.

Staff news

Claire Simmons has left the Participation Team to join English Heritage. Jo Vietzke has left her post of Senior Archivist to return to the North East.

Catherine Littlejohns has returned after maternity leave to her post of Senior Curator Historic Houses. Aseye Negedu has joined us as the new Volunteer Coordinator. Within the Digital team, Jack Evans has been appointed as the Assistant and Caroline James is the Apprentice. Michael Dow has been seconded as Project Manager supporting Jon Finch until end December 2020.

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

Thanks to funding from the Friends, 'Henry' the taxidermied orangutan is now reunited on display with his life companion 'Ann'. Henry and Ann were the first pair of orangutans to live at Bristol Zoo, arriving from the wild in 1947, and are reported to have been inseparable in life.

Henry has been in store for many years due to his poor condition - his taxidermy seams were splitting, and his orange hair had been painted brown at some point. With funding from the Friends, we were able to commission a specialist conservator to clean and mend Henry and bring him back to look like the beautiful animal he once was. He is now on display with Ann in the World Wildlife Gallery, helping to engage visitors through this story from the past with the plight of now-critically-endangered orangutans today.

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

The three houses will re-open for the new season on 1 April, giving an opportunity to see some recent changes at Blaise. For opening hours, please see the museum's website.

Bristol Archives

Through funding from the Paul Mellon Centre for British Art, the British Empire & Commonwealth Collection team recently completed cataloguing and digitising 12 photographic collections on the theme of Britishness in the empire. The images are now available for research, both online and in our searchroom.



◀ **Specialist conservator Bethany Palumbo cleaning Henry the orang-utan**
© Bristol Culture

Delftware collection

Bristol's delftware collection is one of the largest and best of its kind in the UK. With over 2,100 pieces, it rivals that of the V&A and is four times larger than that of the British Museum.

Within that, we hold the world's leading collection of delftware made in Bristol and Brislington. This distinctive blue and white tin-glazed earthenware represents some of the best delftware ever produced in the UK. The museum has recently received nearly £90,000 from Arts Council England for a two-year project to raise the profile of this collection and to take the lead in delftware studies in the UK. The funding will allow us to hire a curator for two years to capture knowledge from retired Applied Art curators, archaeologists and experts around the country and stimulate the exchange of skills and knowledge between museum staff in the UK and abroad.

Project outcomes will include a full online catalogue of Bristol's delftware collection informed by new research into archaeological material from local kiln sites at Redcliffe, Lime Kiln Lane, Brandon Hill and Brislington, together with display improvements, and a programme of events for local people, students and museum and heritage sector staff.



▼ *Delftware posset pot, 1690-1710, Bristol, Brislington or London*
© Bristol Culture

Japanese Dolls Festival

The Dolls Festival - Hinamatsuri - is a popular event in the Japanese calendar, celebrated on 3 March when girls set up dolls representing the Emperor and Empress accompanied



by their maids, musicians, soldiers and townspeople. The dolls, clothed in silk, are displayed on bright red cloths on stepped displays, along with exquisite miniature lacquer furniture. The custom is believed to safeguard the health and happiness of young girls.

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery looks after four sets of these dolls, the largest group in any UK museum. This year there will be a small display featuring two of the sets in the Eastern Art gallery until 5 April.

◀ *Dolls from the museum's collections on display at BMAG to celebrate the Japanese Dolls Festival*
© Bristol Culture

14-18 NOW Art Fund gifts

As part of the Art Fund's 14-18 NOW programme marking the centenary of World War I we have been awarded two



major contemporary artworks, both reflecting a critical postcolonial perspective on the war: *End of Empire* by Yinka Shonibare CBE and *Mimesis: African Soldier* by John Akomfrah CBE.

By two of the most renowned artists of their generation, the works will form centrepieces in the contemporary collection and enable the museum to reflect on its historic collections and interpret the city's history in an unflinching manner. They will enable Bristol to discuss difficult aspects of our history in a new programme of exhibitions and displays in our galleries in the coming year.

Working Exhibits

Good progress is being made on Henbury's refurbishment and also on Mayflower's boiler. Both are hoped to be back in action this spring. You may have noted new sleepers deposited at the Create Centre end of the branch line; they are part of our preparation for the reopening of the railway – and the Chocolate Path – alongside the New Cut, which is dependent on the completion of significant major engineering work by the council.

Exhibitions & New Displays

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2019

M Shed, until 4 May

Now in its 55th year, the world-renowned exhibition from the Natural History Museum is back with 100 new images presenting the most arresting and spectacular photography of our natural world. This year the competition received 48,000 entries from 100 countries with the winning images selected for their creativity, originality and technical excellence.

▲ **Mimesis: African Soldier** by John Akomfrah
© Bristol Culture

▼ **End of Empire** by Yinka Shonibare
© Bristol Culture



21st Century Kids: Bristol through our eyes *M Shed, 19 March to August 2021*

What is it like to be young in Bristol today? Hear young people from across the city reflecting on their experiences, challenges and hopes for the future.

We travelled across the city visiting youth groups, schools and colleges. We spoke to over 200 young people from all walks of life and recorded over 70 interviews. They talk about Bristol, their loves and hates and what they wish older people would understand. We gave eight under-19s a disposable camera to document a week in their lives.

The stories that emerge tell a complex story of what it's like to be young in our city. They are at once funny, tragic and hopeful. Above all, they explode many preconceived myths about our young people.

Documenting Death

Bristol Archives, to 1 May

Through documents and images held in Bristol Archives, this exhibition explores how death has been represented in different ways across the centuries, from official documents to personal commemorations to community memorials.

The exhibition will be accompanied by archival material from the Arnos Vale cemetery collection, telling the story of this Victorian burial ground, where over 300,000 people have been laid to rest, from its creation to its decline and regeneration in the 20th century.

Do you believe in magic?

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, until 19 April.

Our major winter exhibition, Do you believe in magic? features over 200 fascinating objects and stories that reveal how magic has been used to heal, hunt and harm across the world.

The exhibition provides an introduction to the lives of those who practise magic, the objects that embody magic and the beings that exist between the natural and the supernatural. From ancient uses of witchcraft to the role superstition plays in the modern mind, this exhibition explores the complex intersection between magic, science and religion.

Being Human: An exhibition of modern sculpture

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, until 4 October

Sculptural works by artists grappling with how to express the human form.

Presenting work from Bristol's collection, this exhibition is a powerful visual feast by a significant group of artists. Their work focuses on themes of beauty, identity, sexuality and existential angst in the aftermath of war.

Being Human features early modernist experimentation by Antoine Bourdelle to 20th century modernism from Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Jacob Epstein and Wilhelm Lehmbruck.

At the heart of the exhibition are the so-called 'Geometry of Fear' sculptors: Lynn Chadwick, Ken Armitage, Reg Butler and Bernard Meadows. These artists lived through the Second World War and produced tortured, twisted forms conveying the angst and perhaps the guilt of having survived.

Reflections on the Bristol School

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, 2 May to August

25 paintings in our Bristol School gallery are being loaned to the Musée des Beaux Arts in Bordeaux, France. While they are away we are displaying new work by local wellbeing art groups.

The Bristol School was a creative group of professionals and amateurs who worked in the city during the early 19th century. They made a unique contribution to the history of British art.

The new works are all contemporary responses to the works of the Bristol School, on the same themes of life, nature and people.

Wellbeing art supports positive mental wellbeing through art. Across the city, groups come together to tackle social isolation, improve mental health and explore their creativity. Most have been prescribed the courses by their GP or health worker.

Five different groups are currently working on their own Bristol School reflections. New visions of the city are emerging from paint, collage and fabric, and you will be able to see these new works displayed alongside the remaining Bristol School masterpieces.

Pre-Raphaelites

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, 16 May—27 September

This exhibition takes a fresh look at the Pre-Raphaelite movement and focuses on paintings of knights and mediaeval heroines.

In the 19th century, British artists and audiences developed a taste for themes such as chivalry and the Middle Ages and introduced mediaeval romance and courtly love to the Victorian art scene. At the time, there was a thirst for historical knowledge and an overwhelming desire to escape from the Victorian present day. The reality of 19th century life could not compare to an idealised mediaeval world where men were honourable, women chaste, and contented peasants worked the land.

The Pre-Raphaelites were fascinated by the stories, objects and colours of an imaginary mediaeval world. They rebelled against academic conventions and searched for new means of artistic expression by choosing entirely new subjects and portraying them in shockingly heightened realism.

The Victorian obsession with the Middle Ages echoes current social anxieties where other worlds always seem happier, morally more sound and desirable.

Along with highlights from our own collection, the exhibition will feature loans from around the UK, including the Tate, and will show works by Edward Burne-Jones, Frank Dicksee, William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Hogarth Triptych

St Nicholas Church – Saturdays 14 March, 16 May and 11 July from 12 to 2pm.

William Hogarth's largest known work resides inside St Nicholas Church in Bristol where it was installed in 1756. The painting was commissioned as a new altarpiece for Bristol's St Mary Redcliffe church and depicts Christ's Ascension on a central canvas flanked by The Sealing of the Sepulchre and The Three Marys at the Tomb.

During the Victorian era, Hogarth's work was no longer thought to be suitable for St Mary Redcliffe and attempts were made to sell it. Eventually, it was given to the Bristol Fine Art Academy, which became the Royal West of England Academy, in 1859. The work continued to present challenges for public display, not least due to its size. It was eventually rolled up and stored in the basement.

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery officially acquired the triptych in 1955 from the Art Collections Fund and it has been housed in St Nicholas Church since the 1970s.

The Wilson, Cheltenham

Tuesday 14 January 2020

Pat Walker, who organised this visit, explained that the name of this museum honours Cheltenham born Edward Wilson (1872-1912). He was a medical doctor who was one of five intrepid explorers, including Captain Scott, who set out to find the South Pole. Sadly they all died, primarily of starvation. Wilson, Scott and one other were later found dead in the tent, whilst the other two had ventured out into the Antarctic snow.

This diverse modern museum, over three floors, has much to offer including an Arts and Crafts Movement Gallery and an Edward Wilson Gallery, commemorating his ill-fated trip to the Antarctic. However the focus of our visit was the temporary tribute to Ernest Gimson, Arts and Crafts Designer and Architect, in the museum's Monument Exhibition Gallery.

The exhibition curator, Kirsty Hartsiotis, gave us a guided tour of this fascinating display and told us about the life and career of Ernest Gimson, who was born in Leicester in 1864 and came to the fore in the 1880s and 1890s. Kirsty described Gimson as one of the foremost designers of the Arts and Crafts movement but, sadly, not one of the best known. She hoped that this exhibition and the meticulously-researched new book about him, his life and works, will right this wrong.

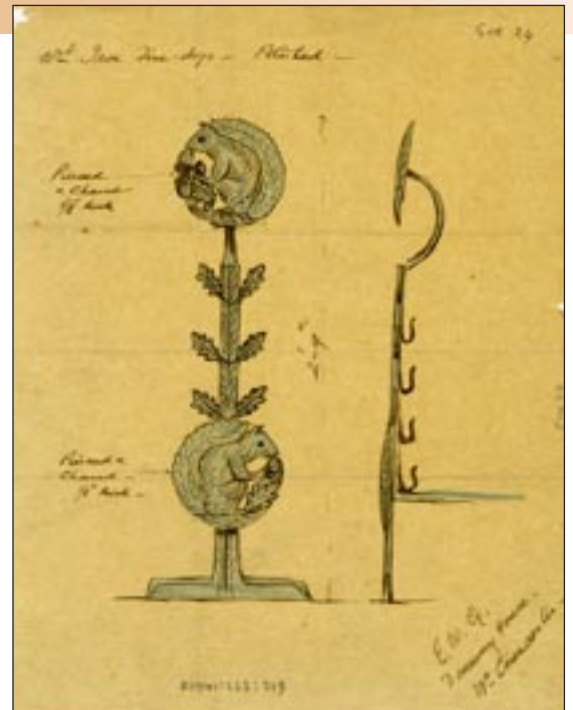
Gimson was born into a prominent Secularist family. He was one of twelve children and his father was a local industrialist. He was always, throughout his life, interested in nature in its natural setting. Whilst he lived in Leicester, he spent a lot of his young life in his mother's family farm in Lincolnshire. He wanted to become an architect and was apprenticed at 16 to the local firm of Isaac Borrowdale, at the same time as attending Leicester School of Art.

William Morris, founder of the Arts and Crafts movement, was invited to speak at the Secular Hall in Leicester. He was to stay with the Gimson family, so Ernest and his older brother Sydney were sent to collect him from the station. During this stay a firm friendship developed between Morris and the Gimson family. Morris was particularly impressed by Ernest Gimson, thirty years his junior, and from then on helped to foster his career.

The Arts and Crafts movement believed in a holistic approach to designing a building. He thought that everything in the fabric and interior must be understood by the architect and everything must harmonise. Morris encouraged Gimson to move to London and gave him an introduction to John Dando Sedding, a prominent Victorian church architect who was interested in Gothic architecture and church restoration. Gimson stayed with Sedding for two years.

While in London, Gimson went to lectures at the Art Workers' Guild and joined the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. He became friendly with the brothers Ernest and Sidney Barnsley. Gimson visited many places in and outside London seeking inspiration. These places included Berkeley Church in Gloucestershire, from the wall paintings of which he gained inspiration.

Eventually Gimson and the Barnsleys settled in the Cotswolds and set up business together, but the partnership did not last. It is thought that this was because the wives did not get on. Gimson was primarily a designer, employing others to carry out his ideas. His main interests were furniture-making and plasterwork, with embroidery as an additional one. These latter designs were carried out by female members of his family. There is no evidence that his wife, Emily, did any of this work, but she did often help with his plasterwork and became interested in hand-weaving.



▲ Drawing of firedogs



▲ Finished firedogs



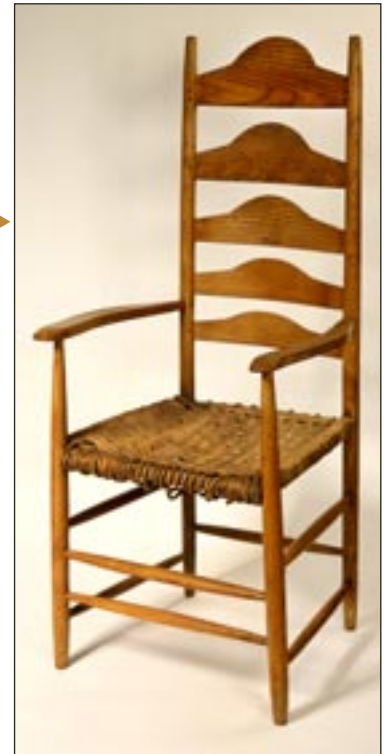
▲ *Brass candle sconce, designed by Ernest Gimson and made by Alfred Bucknell*

Writing Cabinet, (no. 1094-9) ▶

Photos by kind permission of
Cheltenham Borough Council and
Cheltenham Trust



▶ *Chair
designed
by Ernest
Gimson*



Kirsty also told us that Gimson did not allow himself a large profit from his work, merely adding ten percent onto the cost of production of an item. He did however have some private income from inheritance from his family, so he did not need to make a huge income.

Kirsty took us to look at various examples of Gimson's work on display. Notable among these was the prototype for the clergy chairs he designed for St Andrew's chapel in Westminster Cathedral. We saw many of his designs for chairs and cabinets spanning his career: a beautiful box for holding a lady's handkerchiefs and gloves, two examples of his plasterwork and several embroideries.

This was an inspiring exhibition, beautifully explained by Kirsty. Many thanks to Pat Walker for organising this excellent visit.

Pat Gregory

Quiz Evening

Friday 7 February 2020

The details said we would eat at seven but when we arrived at ten to, everyone else had arrived and was already tucking in! They must have had inside information that the ploughman's supper provided was delicious. We enjoyed fresh bread, salad and very good cheese, ham or quiche, followed by a wide choice of tempting home-made desserts. Luckily there was plenty to go round and we soon caught up!

Such tasty food (accompanied by whatever we had brought with us to drink) set the tone for a convivial evening. The quiz began as soon as we cleared away. This was serious stuff, with a couple of picture rounds already on our tables and everyone issued with a pristine pencil sharpened to the pointiest point. After a few questions we relaxed because it was not one of those quizzes where you have no idea what the question is talking about, let alone the answer. We did not get everything right (understatement!) but we could have a go at most questions. People revealed mis-spent hours watching TV in the 70s and 80s by being experts on TV theme tunes in bygone times. I found the round where we had to complete the first line of a song to be the hardest. Our neighbouring group rescued themselves from complete failure by completing the line, 'Does your chewing gum lose its flavour...'. You can see the heights of sophistication to which we rose!

Our question master, John, thinks up all the questions himself, and told us he really enjoys doing it. He passed on his enjoyment to us, and we ended the evening with a raffle, and then applause and prizes for the winners and runners-up.

Many thanks to Gary Gostelow for organising the evening at the Apostle Room, Clifton Cathedral; Mary Bailey, Carol Lear and Carol Ouvry for organising the food; and everyone who came and took part.

Katherine Martin

William Blake at Tate Britain

Sunday 26 January 2020

This was the fourth major exhibition of William Blake's work to be held at Tate Britain. In 1913 Blake's work was shown in the first loan exhibition to be held at what was then the National Gallery of British Art. This was a surprising venue since the National Gallery was established to exhibit works by modern artists working in oils, a medium Blake declined to use as he preferred to work in water colour.

Blake was regarded as an exponent of Romanticism along with Turner and Constable. However, Blake despised their work and was very critical of them. These contradictions are typical of Blake, whose work cannot be slotted into any particular movement.

We know Blake as a visionary and a mythical poet, but we learnt that Blake predominantly made his living as a copy engraver. Blake invented the technique of relief etching (where the printing surface stands out in relief). He used it to create what he called a 'woodcut on copper' which allowed him to print text and images from a single plate. His legacy, as seen in this exhibition, included not only commercial engraving and original prints but also illuminated books and paintings. He often used Indian ink, graphite and water colour, and experimented, as in his painting *The Horse*, where he used tempera (glue-based paint) and ink on a copper engraving plate. He produced books which dealt with moral and political questions, using images in experimental ways, sometimes without words.

Blake's themes were on a grand scale, being derived from history, the Bible, literature including Shakespeare, as well as his own invented mythology with characters having such resonant names as Orc, Los, Brama and Urizen. Figures appear in abstract settings giving them strong visual and emotional impact. However, it was surprising to see that, on the whole, his paintings and engravings were extremely small; some smaller than a postcard. An exception to this was *Vision of the Last Judgement*, which was somewhat larger and exhibited a dizzying amount of detail, including innumerable tortured figures. Another, even larger, was his *Virgin and Child in Egypt*, which used tempera on linen.

Blake was influenced by such artists as Raphael, Dürer and Michelangelo, as well as Gothic artists such as Henry Fuseli and James Barry. But Blake's work is unique, with extraordinary designs, sweeping lines, areas of grey-washed ink and water colour, and unusual use of colour. He demonstrated mastery in representing musculature. He learnt this when, as a pupil of the Royal Academy, he had to draw classical statues. Memorable examples of this are *Joseph of Arimathea among the Rocks of Albion*, and also his engraving and colour print, *Newton*.

The first exhibit was *Albion Rose*, an engraving and etching, showing a naked young man on a rock with outstretched arms. Behind him

**Graphite, ink and watercolour
on paper painted 1824-27
showing Cerberus**



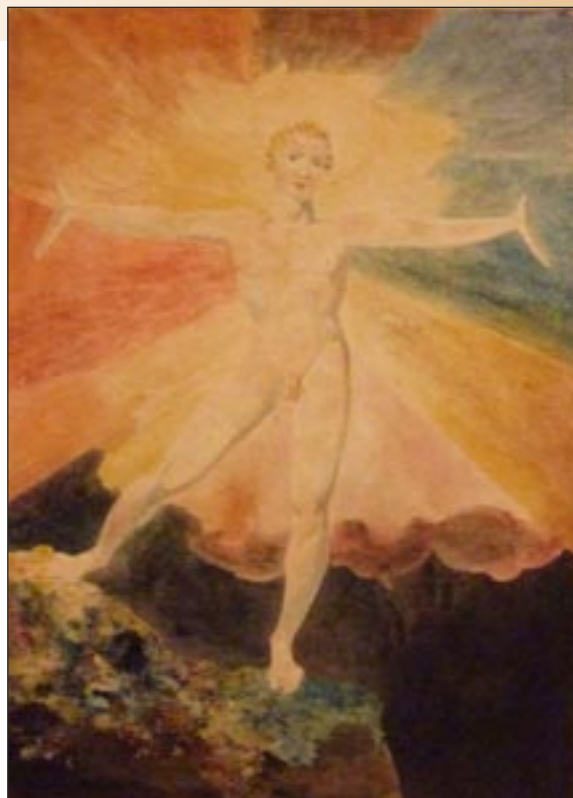
▲ *Self portrait painted when Blake was in his 40s presenting him as a visionary*



▲ *Etching with painting, watercolour and ink on paper illustrating a scene from the First Book of Urizen*



Photos by Ann Wood



▲ Colour engraving and etching on hand-coloured paper c 1793 showing Albion Rose presented as a symbol of youthful rebellion, spiritual freedom and of creativity

is a prism of colour, symbolising individual freedom and encapsulating Blake's view of life. As this demonstrates, Blake was interested in the role of Art in Society. He was radical in his thinking, using his art for political purposes. We were asked to remember that this was a time of global unrest, as Britain was at war with France and America. It was also a time of rapid industrialisation. Such a background was instrumental in his depiction of Pitt and Nelson as anarchic warmongers guiding biblical monsters, bringing death and destruction. Similarly, his thoughts on slavery were dramatically depicted in his etching and engraving of A Negro hung alive by the Ribs to a Gallows, a comment on slave labour in Dutch Surinam, but also a comment on Britain's involvement with slavery. Such anti-establishment portrayals would never gain Blake support from the state.

Towards the end of the exhibition, there was a recreation of a room from Blake's family home at 28, Broad Street, Soho, where in 1809 Blake held a disastrous one-man exhibition. It was poorly attended, as patrons were charged 1/- for entry and 2/6d for a catalogue, a lot of money for those times. It did not help that it was in a very unfashionable part of London. In this reconstruction of the dingy room were eight of his original works, and the effect was not impressive.

Fortunately, the current exhibition was far more substantially attended, and a lot more impressive.

Rita Bolwell

▼ Silent as Despairing love... an illustrated poem from America. A Prophecy (1793)



There is an excellent 8-minute film describing Blake's printing techniques on <http://www.williamblakeprints.co.uk/how-the-prints-are-made>

▼ Frontispiece from Ancient of Days. Urizen is shown measuring the world with golden compasses symbolising a threat to Blake's cornerstones of human happiness - freedom of thought, imagination and creativity



Wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs

Saturday 1 February 2020

This illustrated talk by Mandy Leivers, Biodiversity Education Manager with the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project was full of delightful anecdotes, slides, history and information about all aspects of the area known as the Avon Gorge and Downs (AGD). Mandy delivered it with such enthusiasm that she held us all enthralled!

Described by David Bellamy as 'the jewel in Bristol's crown', the Avon Gorge area is protected by numerous conservation designations. The Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project (AGDWP) was set up in 1999 and is supported by many organisations, both local and national. It manages surveying of the area's wildlife, with many of the surveys being undertaken by volunteers. It is also responsible for habitat monitoring and organises a very varied education programme.

The Avon Gorge is a unique environment, with many plants and trees not found anywhere else. It is the most important site in the world for sorbus trees (rowan, wild service trees and whitebeam) including the Bristol whitebeam. Plants include the Bristol onion and Bristol rock cress amongst other rarities. Even Brunel got involved when he moved a patch of rare autumn squill in the process of building the Suspension Bridge. Part of the gorge consists of a very steep valley called the Gulley controlled by 'extreme gardening' and Kashmir goats!

The limestone grasslands of the Downs are mostly unimproved and one of the top three calcareous grassland sites in the country. The meadows are cut in July to give the best chance for the plant life to flourish. Plant 'twitchers' come from far afield to spot 30 rare plant species in the area, including the honewort (*trinia glauca*). This takes 16 years to reach maturity and has to be pollinated by a specific species of ant; it is remarkable that it is still thriving.

There are many varieties of insects, including 35 of the 59 species of butterfly in the UK. The small blue butterfly, absent for 50 years, has now returned, as has the Chalkhill Blue after a similar absence. The caterpillar of the very rare Silky Wave moth feeds on the common rock rose, overwinters as a caterpillar, then pupates and becomes the adult moth before mating and dying 10 days later: a short but, hopefully, sweet life! Apparently butterflies 'taste with their feet', enabling them to lay their eggs on the correct food plant. The Downs are a Grade A site for invertebrates such as the purse web spider, looking like a mini tarantula.

There are some 65 species of birds in the area. Most iconic must be the peregrine falcons, giving delight to the public as they nest in the gorge. Mammals also abound; there are greater and lesser horseshoe bats, badgers (who apparently walk over the Suspension Bridge from Leigh Woods in the middle of the night!), roe deer (who swim across!) and hedgehogs, the latter sadly becoming rarer.

There are many research projects in progress, from analysing square metres of meadow for plants, to counting ants in green woodpecker pool! There is a huge and active educational programme, reaching out to schoolchildren and adults of all levels and abilities, and from diverse backgrounds. Recently the GDWP worked with a group of Asian women introducing them to many aspects of flora on the Downs. They gathered, pressed and painted flowers, eventually putting on a display in the museum. The GDWP organises public lectures, rare plant displays, leaflets, and publicity on local television and radio. How fortunate we are to have such an interesting wild habitat in the middle of our city which we can all enjoy.

Sue Black

Find out more (and there is lots more!) at their excellent website: www.avongorge.org.uk



▲ *Conservation on the Bristol side of the Gorge*

© Angus Tillotson



▲ *Silky Wave moth*

© Mark Parsons (Butterfly Conservation)

▼ *Avon Gorge goats*

© Chris Westcott (Natural England)



Last Supper in Pompeii

Tuesday 12 November 2020

Statue of
Bacchus
the Roman
god of
wine and
fertility



▲ Terracotta pot for fattening dormice



▲ Plaster cast of pig

▼ Silver dish showing the sacrifice of Princess Iphigeneia by Agamemnon



I arrived home from this wonderful exhibition – The Last Supper in Pompeii at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford – to see the terrible floods in Venice on television. One cannot help but think that Italy gets more than its fair share of bad luck. However, would you choose to live near a volcano?

Pompeii lies in the shadow of Vesuvius, its destroyer. It was quite obviously a glorious place to live and Romans visited for holidays not only because it was hot and picturesque but also because, as the home of skilled craft workers and artists, it was prosperous. This beautifully-displayed exhibition was based on preparations for a banquet that took place on the fateful day, 24 August AD 79, when Vesuvius erupted.

The diners would use Roman domestic ware, well designed and beautifully made from natural materials such as clay, glass and bronze. But this banquet was planned to be extra special. The summer garden would have looked gorgeous and the banquet included Mediterranean food and wine identical to the very healthy diet that people enjoy today. Unfortunately, Vesuvius, the volcano which had lain dormant for 1800 years, erupted with a cataclysmic explosion that spoiled the party but preserved much of the city and many of its inhabitants.

In AD 79, the local people were apparently unaware of the danger that overshadowed them. Even today, 3,000,000 live dangerously close to the volcano, partly because the volcanic soil is so fertile. It is estimated that thousands died, caught by the deadly pyroclastic flow of lava. This spewed down the sides of the volcano, moving at 450 mph with a temperature as high as 999 degrees centigrade. The cloud descended on the city burying everything under 14 to 17 feet of hot gas and rocks. The city and its inhabitants remained covered until workers building a palace in 1748 stumbled upon it, well preserved in the ash and pumice. It was an

archaeologist's paradise. Pompeii attracts over two million visitors a year nowadays but the site needs an astronomical amount of money to conserve it.

The cases on display contain rare artefacts discovered, retrieved and restored from the ruins. Some are objects preserved in the debris; others are plaster casts. Decayed corpses left voids in the hardened pumice. Archaeologists poured plaster into these hollows to create casts of the victims. In this way many people and animals, such as pigs, have been 'brought back to life'.

Other remains included earthenware pottery similar to that which people use today. There was a whole kitchen area with cases displaying dates, vegetables, fruit, sea urchins, nuts, olive oil and a special fish sauce, called garum, which Romans enjoyed all over the Empire. The skill of Roman craft workers, especially those working with glass, was incredible. It is hard to describe a small carafe of thin glass with no flat base to enable it to stand freely. It had a small tapered funnel which could have been put into the mouth. What was it for? How did it function? How did it survive?

The whole banquet would have been enjoyed by the wealthy of Pompeii but, sadly, their reliance on slavery was normal at that time. The success of the feast would have been entirely dependent on the skills and service of slaves. However, on that fatal day Vesuvius dealt with owners and their chattels, both human and animal, with equal cruelty.

To have found and retrieved such wonderful artefacts is remarkable and the idea of showing preparations for the banquet was a great idea. The Ashmolean provided a magnificent showcase. I enjoyed the whole exhibition and it certainly has created a desire to find out more.



▲ Mosaic panel showing sealife

Sue Stops

Photos by Ann Wood



Ashton Gate Stadium

Monday 11 November 2019

We met up in the café at the Stadium. It is worth remembering that, if you need a coffee in the Winterstoke Road area, you can park free for one hour in the Stadium car park (although not on match days!).

The Stadium has recently been redeveloped and, as well as being home for Bristol City football club, 'The Robins', it now also hosts Bristol Bears Rugby. It is planned that the stadium will eventually become an all sports centre. We were taken round by Daniel of the Robins Foundation, the club's charity, which is funded by the English Football League and the club itself. The Foundation goes into schools to encourage football courses for disadvantaged children.

Football has been played here since 1894. The first game was played in fog and the crowd could not see across the pitch, but the players managed to play on somehow. The Stadium can currently accommodate 26,000 spectators

The tour started in the concourse of the new stand which must look and feel very different on match days when all the fast food outlets are open and it is crowded with supporters going through to the stands. In addition to the many meeting rooms which can be used by the general public, we visited the Directors' suite with lounge and private boxes overlooking the pitch.

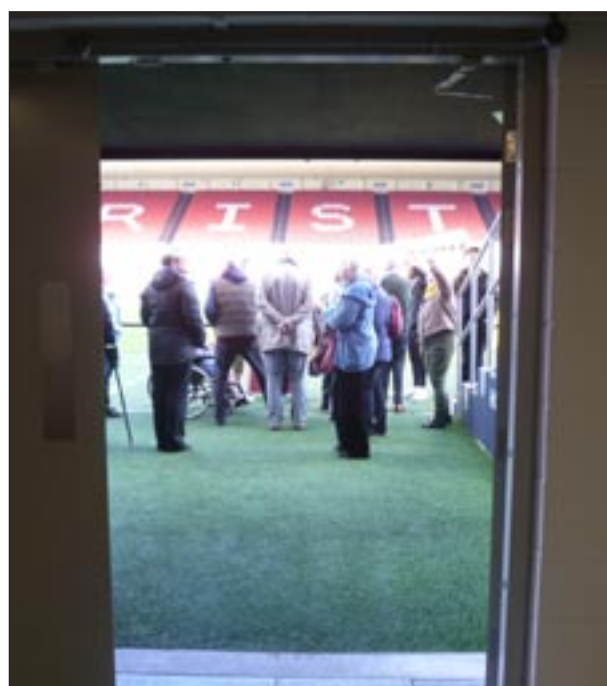
We were interested to learn how different the facilities were for each team. The home team enjoys a good lunch in the players' own dining room and uses spacious changing rooms with designated lockers for each player. The away team has to make do with a packed lunch en route in the coach and their changing room is decidedly cramped compared with the home team. This is apparently standard practice, and not particularly mean on the part of Bristol City.

We went into the press room where the after-match interviews take place. We also looked into the physiotherapy and trauma rooms (complete with mobile stretcher) and hoped that this would not be needed too often.

Lastly we trooped through the tunnel into the ground. We could almost hear the roar of the crowd as we looked across the pitch. All along the corridor leading to the tunnel were posters with encouraging slogans - when we went they were for the rugby players but these are changed to football posters when the Robins are due to play.

Thanks to Carol Ouvry for a very interesting visit.

▲ When we visited there were rows of lamps slowly moving across the pitch to encourage the grass to grow.



▲ The light at the end of the tunnel

Photos by Catherine Dixon

Bauhaus in Bristol

Tuesday 7 January 2020

Our visit to the Stradling Gallery was far more than a viewing of the current 'Bauhaus in Bristol' exhibition, but that is where we started. The curator, Chris Yeo, told us about the friendship that developed in the 1930s between Bristol furniture-maker Crofton Gane and Marcel Breuer, head of furniture at the Bauhaus. Both were keen advocates of the Modernist style. Gane commissioned Breuer to design furniture for his business and family home, which also served as a showroom for these items. Several of the original pieces were on display in this exhibition along with photos, articles and contemporary ceramics.

Ken Stradling inherited the Modernist Design mantle and carried it forward at the Bristol Guild. He is a keen collector himself and over 500 pieces of studio ceramics and more than 200 pieces of studio glass in his collection are now accessible to the public. Some choice items are displayed in the upper gallery, which is where we went next. Having an item and some of its background explained added much to understanding of its significance. Life stories of the makers also kept the attention focussed. The explanation for the obvious repairs in the large charger, Three Spinsters by Sam Haile, was particularly riveting. Haile tragically died in a road accident in 1947 driving his jeep back from London to Dartington, carrying lots of his work. The charger was the only item that could be rescued. It was subsequently repaired by Sam Haile's widow, Marianne de Trey. That must have been a deeply-moving task for her to accomplish.

The final stage of our tour was downstairs to the newly-refurbished basement store and the Design Study Centre, which has an accessible hands-on resource of objects and documentary material for students and others interested in design. A school outreach programme is being developed and some of the children's work resulting from this was shown to us. By the end of the session it was very clear why Ken had received an MBE for services to the arts in Bristol in the New Year's Honours list.

Thanks to Carol Ouvry for arranging another fascinating visit.

Sue Pettit



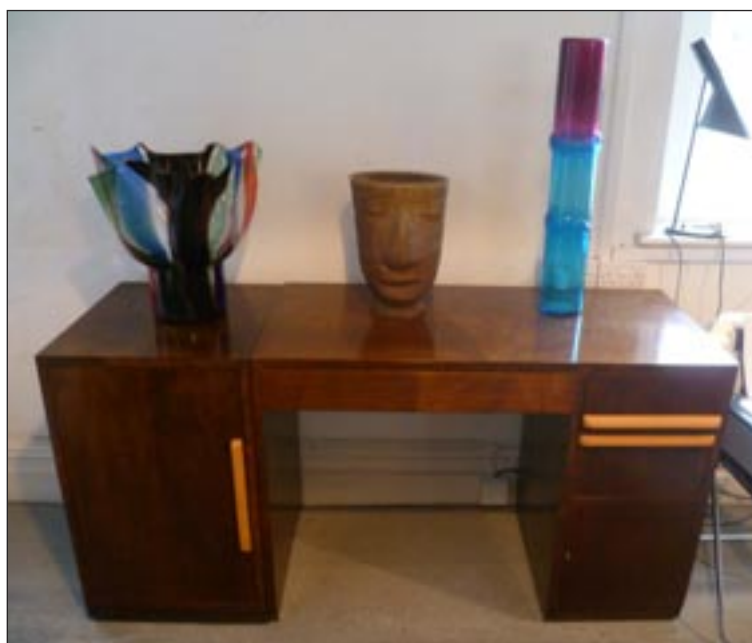
▲ *Table with what some of us thought looked like a dog/cat basket underneath*

You can find out more about this fascinating collection at <http://stradlingcollection.org/>

You can see more of Sam Haile's work at Tate Britain on display as part of the Walk through British Art

Photos by Catherine Dixon

▼ *Desk with interesting ornaments. The tall bamboo vase was designed by Oiva Toikka for the famous Finnish glass company Nuutajarvi Notso (1960-79)*



▼ *Detail of Bathers by Sam Smith made in 1961 (wooden box with four doors which open by knobs on the top to show bathers)*



Magic Lantern Show

Saturday 23 November 2019

As we entered the Apostle Room at Clifton Cathedral we were unsure what to expect, other than the delicious array of mince pies, flapjacks and a cuppa or two that were ready and waiting for us.

In the middle of the room stood the huge, venerable and magnificent brass-trimmed Magic Lantern. With the arrival of the pianist Richard proceedings commenced. We were right royally entertained by Richard (piano), Keith, Jennifer and Paul (lanternist and narrators), and Darren and Beverley (singers).

The slide show used original beautifully-painted glass slides, some almost 200 years old. We were first given a brief history of Charles Dickens' life, including his time in Marshalsea Prison, where his father was incarcerated for debt. His life experiences influenced him hugely and this, together with his love of theatricals, led not only to his 15 novels but also to many performances with his theatre company. These included one piece about the mean sexton Gabriel Grub, with which we were next entertained. It had a definite moral, as do so many of Dickens's novels. One of these, of course, was A Christmas Carol which was our next entertainment. This was followed by the hilarious story of The Wakes and their unfortunate escapades. Finally we watched Charles Dickens' story of The Life of Our Lord written for his own four children, the last of whom died in 1933, when the story was finally released. We sang appropriate carols to the slides, led by the wonderful singers.

The evening finished with a magnificent Christmas medley on the piano, accompanied by stunning kaleidoscopic images from hand-painted lantern slides. What a finale! Thank you to the Travelling Light Magic Lantern Company for a truly enchanting evening and to Gary Gostelow for organising it.

Sue Black



▲ *The Magic Lantern in all its glory surrounded by admirers*
Photo by Catherine Dixon

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