

Newsletter

M Shed welcomes Aardman's Early Man



This edition packed with

- news and photos of Bristol's museums, galleries and archives including developments at our historic houses; exhibitions on Natural Selection and Magic; the return of the Wildlife Photographer of the Year; and a chance to meet characters, visit sets and step behind the camera with Aardman and discover how they made their feature film 'Early Man'
- reports of trips to the Isle of Wight, Nothe Fort, the Van Gogh exhibition at the Tate, St Mary on the Quay and the Old Police Station in Bedminster
- news of upcoming events, talks and visits you can join

**September 2019
Issue 206**

From the Chairman

Some of you will have heard that I had a cardiac arrest on 5 June. I feel pretty good now, and very lucky to be here at all as it happened while I was visiting a nursing home, with a defibrillator and plenty of trained staff - the average survival rate for cardiac arrests outside hospital is just 10%. I have been prescribed medication to reduce the risk of it happening again, and I have had a tiny defibrillator implanted in my chest just in case. And it has certainly highlighted to me how many friends I have.

Bristol Harbour Festival

Our annual 2-day books and home-made cakes sale at the Harbour Festival – which raised over £1,000 – was as ever great fun, and an opportunity to chat to fellow volunteers, members, and visitors. My thanks to the Events Group organisers – especially Mary Bailey and Gary Gostelow – the volunteers for all their hard work, and to Andy King, Chris Ecclestone and their team, who again made us feel very welcome in L Shed.

Annual General Meeting and social event

You will find enclosed the details of our AGM evening on Tuesday 24 September at M Shed. As usual we will start with the formalities, and keep them as snappy as possible. Afterwards we have some interesting speakers lined up for you who will give some short illustrated talks, including stories about how the museum service has spent some of the funds we have given them during the year. Please join us for the AGM to play your part in the governance of the Friends, and for an opportunity to chat over drinks and nibbles with staff, committee members and other Friends old and new.

The Friends' Christmas Card

We have some packs of our Christmas card remaining for sale – £3 for a pack of 5 with envelopes. The greeting inside is: *Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year*. This is an excellent way of supporting Friends of BMGA and promoting our organisation at the same time. Please contact Mary Bailey on

mary.bailey@friendsofBMGA.org.uk or 0117 942 1944 if you would like to purchase some. They will also be on sale at our talks in the Studio at M Shed on 21 September and 19 October and at the winter book sale at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery on 17 November, subject to availability.



Cover photo: Still from 'Early Man' © Aardman Animations



▲ **Our sale of cakes and books at the Harbour Festival proved popular once again**

Photo by Sue Thurlow

British Association of Friends of Museums Annual Conference 2019

There is still time to book for this year's BAFM Conference on Saturday 12 October, hosted by Friends of Reading Museum. The theme is Museum Friends & Community Engagement: Challenge & Opportunity. Reading Museum is next to the railway station, so very easy to get to on the day. For anyone who would like to stay overnight on Saturday, there will be a programme of visits on the Sunday morning. If you would like to know more there are details on the BAFM website.

Sue Thurlow Chairman

Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 24 September 2019 – 6.30 pm at M Shed

Enclosed in this newsletter you will find a formal notice of the AGM, a nomination form for committee membership and a copy of our annual report. Following the business (which will be kept to a minimum) there will be short presentations from museum staff about some of the items the Friends have helped to fund this year.

Do please come along to the AGM as we like to get feedback from our members and this is an opportunity for you to express your views.

Election of Executive Committee officers and members

The current officers of Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives are: Sue Thurlow, Chairman; Katherine Martin, Secretary; Robert Walters, Treasurer; and June Hibberd, Membership Secretary. They are all willing to stand again. The remaining elected members of the committee are: Clive Burlton, Roni Edwards, Gary Gostelow, Muriel Harrison, Shirley Hodgson, Carol Lear and Toby Pinn. All are willing to stand for re-election.

We can fill up to eight places on the committee so there is one vacancy. If you are interested, please complete the nomination form enclosed and return it to the Secretary. Brief profiles of all known candidates are on the back of the AGM agenda.

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Service-wide developments

The Bottle Yard Studios have now been brought under the wing of the Culture Team, which has been renamed Bristol Culture & Creative Industries. The Studios are a very successful part of the Council and have been responsible for bringing many well-known TV productions to Bristol, for example *Poldark* and *Tipping Point*. Fiona Francombe, who manages the Studios, has joined the Culture Management team and reports to Jon Finch, whose own title is now Head of Culture & Creative Industries.

Work begins this summer on revising our plans for all museum and archive sites to give all a clear objective so as to continue to provide a first class service to Bristolians and visitors to the city. This follows a record-breaking year in 2018-19 of 1.3 million visits to our collective sites.

Staff news

David Martin, Operations Manager, (not to be confused with David Martin who used to run Bristol Harbour Railway) is moving on within Bristol City Council to become Commercial Services Business Partner for the Commercialisation Team.

At Bristol Archives, Mark Small has moved to the post of Digitisation Assistant for the British Empire & Commonwealth Collection. As a result, Eva Taylor has joined the team as our new Archives Assistant.

The Historic Houses

The 'Lab' space at Blaise Castle House Museum has been operating over the spring and summer asking visitors to let us know what you would like to see in a revamped museum. Thank you to those who made the time to come and share your ideas.

Filming has been completed at the Georgian House for the ITV drama *Sanditon* (Jane Austen's unfinished novel) due to be transmitted early in 2020, and at Blaise for Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*.

M Shed

The shop and welcome desk at M Shed have been redesigned and refitted to make more efficient use of the space

By the time you read this there should be new padded chairs in the M Shed Studio due to increasing demand for use of the space. We hope this will particularly be welcomed by those of you who come to the Friends' monthly talks.

Our *You Make Bristol* display at M Shed celebrates the people that make Bristol great; from your local lollipop lady to Shaun the Sheep, from Brunel to Banksy. We are going to be adding new faces to the display this year and we are asking people across the city to make nominations. Who do you think should be celebrated on the walls of M Shed?



▲ **The Redesigned M Shed Shop**

Photo by Claudia Collins

To make a nomination, email museum.community@bristol.gov.uk, or write to Finn White c/o M Shed.

Outside M Shed, the three sets of new wooden gates are now nearly complete, defining an area of dockside and Museum Square where cycling is discouraged as the sunken rails of the Bristol Harbour Railway present a hazard to cyclists. They are designed to have a rail-crossing type feel to them and replace the rather tired temporary crash barriers previously used for the same purpose.

Working Exhibits

Work continues on the locomotive *Henbury* with plans for a test steaming towards the end of the summer.

Participation – ArtBox

We are currently designing four ArtBoxes that will include creative activities connected to the museum collections. These will be placed in hospitals and care homes for people who cannot visit the museum. ArtBox will use some of the activities that have been successful in Creative Cafés and many of the design concepts respond to the different perspectives and multi-sensory nature of the Dieric Bouts painting, *St Luke Drawing the Virgin and Child*.



▲ **Dieric Bouts, St Luke Drawing the Virgin and Child**

© Bristol Culture

Exhibitions and Events

Masters of Japanese Prints: Nature and Seasons

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery to 8 September 2019

Featuring over 60 woodblock prints from our collection, this third and final exhibition in our Masters of Japanese Prints series celebrates the Japanese fascination with the turning seasons and nature. It once again features the iconic Great Wave Off Kanagawa by Hokusai.

Natural Selection

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery to 15 September 2019. Pay what you Think

Artist Andy Holden and his ornithologist father Peter take us on a journey from nest-building to egg-collecting – or is it the other way around? The exhibition brings together Andy and Peter's personal collections of found objects with sculpted birdsong, a human-scale bower bird nest, exquisite replica eggs crafted from porcelain and two new video works.



▲ A bower bird nest
© Bristol Culture

Magic

**Bristol Museum & Art Gallery
19 October to 19 April 2020**

This exhibition will explore people's personal responses to magic, revealing the power of magic in everyday life and challenging people's perceptions of worlds beyond our own.



▲ Initial I with Witch by
Eric Gill
© Bristol Culture

Moving away from the idea of magic being based on illusions, you will travel to other worlds to explore the ways magic can be perceived – from communion with the gods; to the healing of cunning folk; to the power of the charm to protect from harm.



▲ *The Palm Foretells* by William Roberts, 1937
© Bristol Culture

Early Man

M Shed, to 3 November 2019

The exhibition goes behind the scenes of Aardman's 2018 feature film *Early Man*, in which Stone Age and Bronze Age tribes settle their differences through football. Visitors will see incredible original sets and puppets, and gain insights into the creation of visual and sound effects for the film.

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2019

M Shed 23 November— 4 May 2020

The world-renowned wildlife photography exhibition from the Natural History Museum is back with 100 new images. Wildlife Photographer of the Year is the most prestigious photography event of its kind, providing a global platform that showcases the world's most astonishing sights for more than 50 years.

Interventions/2: Films by Yoko Ono

The Georgian House 28 September – 31 December 2019

Interventions/2 is a series of avant-garde films by artist and activist, Yoko Ono. The films will play in rooms throughout

the Georgian House. This exhibition is the first time that Yoko Ono has done a solo show in Bristol.

Ten Centuries of Records Bristol Archives to 27 September 2019

With records spanning ten centuries of Bristol's history, Bristol Archives continues the long tradition of record-keeping in the city. As the custodians of Bristol's historic archives, our role is to preserve them for current and future generations and to support people who want to use them for research and learning.

This exhibition highlights the breadth and significance of the collections, ranging from mediaeval royal charters, to records that capture economic and social change, to modern photographs and films.



◀ *The Mayor's Kalendar (a history of Bristol), started in 1479 by Robert Ricart, the Town Clerk, includes this illustration of the Mayor-making ceremony.*
Bristol Archives, CC/2/7



◀ *Postcard from the Vaughan Collection showing male and female pupils of Fairfield School, 1910s*
Bristol Archives, 43207/30/5/6

Thanks to Bristol Archives for supplying these images

Being Human: modern sculpture

Exhibition at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery – from 5 October 2019

This stunning exhibition, exploring sculpture's enduring interest in the human figure, will showcase our own collection of informative, dramatic and thought-provoking modern sculptures, including work by well-known and high-profile names.

In 1956, Lynn Chadwick won the Venice Biennale sculpture prize with *Idiomorphic Beast*. Chadwick's art, along with that of Kenneth Armitage, Reg Butler and Bernard Meadows, was described as possessing the 'geometry of fear' by the art historian Herbert Read when their work appeared in the British Pavilion in the 1952 Venice Biennale. These artists who had lived through World War II produced tortured, twisted forms conveying the angst and perhaps the guilt of having survived.

Being Human takes their work as its starting point and includes fellow British sculptors Frank Dobson, Hubert Dalwood, Ralph Brown and Elisabeth Frink to focus on the way that sculpture actually embodies the human form. Providing a backdrop of European modernism is an earlier generation of international artists who worked in Rodin's studio: Robert Wlerick and Antoine Bourdelle, as well as Jacob Epstein and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, who were deeply influenced by the French sculptor, even as they reacted against him. Epstein and Gaudier-Brzeska sought influences beyond European art to look at the Middle East, India, China, Japan and beyond. Basing themselves in the UK, with their discoveries they influenced the British artists whose work forms the core of the exhibition. *Being Human* examines changing attitudes to beauty, identity, emotions and sexuality and features new acquisitions by Yeessookyung, Wood and Harrison that hold a mirror to contemporary attitudes to humanity and selfhood.

Julia Carver



▲ *Girl by Reg Butler (1953-54)*
© Bristol Culture

The Isle of Wight

Monday 6 – Friday 10 May 2019

Monday 6

Thirty-four bleary-eyed Friends met at 6.30am to board our coach to catch the 11.00am ferry from Lymington. We were all shocked by the mountains of litter in Bristol city centre left by the previous night's revellers and looked forward to a slower pace of life on the island. The roads were almost empty despite it being a bank holiday and we caught an earlier ferry, allowing a bonus hour to investigate Yarmouth Town.

Eremue, meaning 'muddy estuary', was the original name of the town as recorded by Ethelred the Unready in 991. The Isle of Wight was subject to regular raids by the French and Henry VIII determined to improve its defences after once such raid in 1544, when the church bells were reputed to have been stolen. This resulted in the construction, in 1547, of Yarmouth Castle as a gun platform overlooking the Solent to protect Henry's fleet moored in Portsmouth. The significance of the defence of the Solent in more modern times would become more apparent later on the day we visited the Needles. For some of us a stroll along Yarmouth Pier (opened in 1876 and Grade II listed) was a delight in the sunshine. The pier is now 609 ft long and is the longest timber pier in England open to the public. After a simple sandwich lunch, the party re-boarded the coach under the direction of our excellent driver Del, for the transfer to the Needles Old and New Batteries.

On arrival, our expected National Trust guide did not appear and we were left to find our own way around. A bus took us to the Batteries up a steep road along the top of the chalk uplands. Then it was a short walk to the Old Battery overlooking the Needles. Built in the 1860s to protect the naval dockyards in Portsmouth, the battery was part of a chain of forts guarding the eastern and western approaches to the Solent. The French did not invade as had been expected and the battery is, therefore, classed as one of Prime Minister Palmerston's many follies. We explored the bridge and winch chamber, shell stores and gun emplacements. The more adventurous went underground via a spiral stair into a 200 feet long tunnel to a searchlight and spotting platform built around 1885 which controlled a system of anti-ship mines.

A 15-minute walk then took us to the New Battery, which was built in 1895. This housed larger guns and continued in use during World War I and II when anti-aircraft guns were added. These successfully downed several enemy planes in 1944. There is very little left that is accessible from this battery but more fascinating is the use the site was put to in the 1950s cold war period, when the ICBM Black Knight was assembled before being sent to Woomera Rocket Range in Australia for flight testing. Three underground display rooms explained how this was then developed in 1971 into Black Arrow, the launch vehicle for the Prospero Satellite which is still in orbit around the earth today.

After a stimulating visit in bright sunshine and bracing winds we were glad to get back on the coach for transfer to The Royal Hotel in Ventnor, our base for the next 5 days. Founded in 1832, the Royal is one of the oldest hotels on the Isle of Wight, with a well-deserved reputation for excellent food. Originally built as a coaching inn called Fishers Hotel, it became known as The Royal Hotel after enjoying Queen Victoria's patronage.

David McGregor



▲ Yarmouth Pier and Wightlink ferry. The Pier is the last remaining wooden pier in Britain.

▼ The Needles and the computer-operated lighthouse



▼ Old Battery Guns in the Gun Emplacements - 9 inch Rifled Muzzle Loader Guns installed in 1873





Tuesday 7

The Isle of Wight Steam Railway

The day started fine as we set off for the Isle of Wight Steam Railway. Haverstreet Station is the Railway's focal point, unusually in the middle of the line and in the depth of the countryside and, as usual for a rural station, half a mile from the village.

The platform and station buildings, incorporating the signal box, were constructed by the Southern Railway in 1926; the station becoming the passing place for all trains between Ryde and Newport. A water tower, brought from Newport Station in 1971, is located alongside the Up platform; all trains in the Smallbrook direction take water here before they depart. The impression was of a 1940s backwater.

Our coaches stood at the platform ready to board. We had our own personal coaches for the group, an 8-compartment 3rd class built in 1903. It was beautifully fitted out, with bench seats for four on either side of the compartment, luggage racks, advertising pictures, a gas-style lamp and best of all, sliding windows on the doors operated by a large leather strap.

Our locomotive for the trip was an 0-6-OST Austerity Tank WD198 Royal Engineer built in 1953 - the last steam loco to be operated by the British Army. As the train waited for departure time the leisurely panting of the Westinghouse Air Brake Pump on the locomotive could clearly be heard; this provides compressed air to operate the brakes on the locomotive and coaches. The railways of the Isle of Wight fitted air brakes in 1892.

With a blast of the whistle the engine was underway and immediately encountered a stiff 1-in-68 climb towards Bridesford Bridge. The evocative smell of a steam engine soon percolated into the coach. The end of the line was Wotton Station, a recreation of an Edwardian country terminus station. On the return journey to Havenstreet, the countryside was at its best with fields and woods all in their early greenery.

At Smallbrook Junction Station, the other end of the line, the railway links up with The Island Line, run with former Northern Line underground stocks, dating from 1938. This was bought in after flooding in a tunnel in 1967, meant the track-bed had to be raised which lowered the running height. The station was built in the early 1990s by Network South East and is one of the few examples of Network Rail working with a preserved line.

We waited for two trains to arrive, one from Ryde pier and one from Shanklin, so passengers could exchange and then set off back to Havenstreet. The ride was extremely smooth, a credit to the Permanent Way Team.

On arrival, after a long trip with no trolley service, there was a general exit to a fine refreshment room. The other facilities at Haverstreet included a Museum; visits to the Loco, Carriage and Wagon Works; the Discovery Centre; and, of course, the shop.

The general impression was of a clean and well-maintained railway run by some excellent staff. It was well worth the visit.

Trevor Mussett

▲ *Isle of Wight Steam Railway Austerity Class WD 198 Royal Engineer - ex Army: the steam engine which pulled us from Havenstreet Station via Wootton Station and Smallbrook Junction Station*



▲ *Isle of Wight Steam Railway – Friends enjoying 3rd Class travel*

Carisbrooke Castle

Crossing the castle bridge, the first thing we saw was a swarm of bees on the wall, guarded by an English Heritage volunteer. Although I have visited here before, I still enjoyed seeing Jill the donkey turning the 16th century wheel to pull up water from a 161ft deep well. I think she has a better life than her predecessors.

Carisbrooke started out as a burial ground and was governed for 30 years from 1263 by a woman – Countess Isabella de Fortibus. However, the most famous inhabitant was Charles I, who was, initially, a contented guest and then an unhappy prisoner who tried to escape twice. His second daughter, Princess Elizabeth, died in the castle aged 14. Beatrice the ninth child of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert owned the castle for 25 years and she set up the museum, which houses, among other items, an ornate 17th century chamber organ which had been presented to her as a birthday gift.



▲ *Carisbrooke Castle – entrance to the Castle*

MEMBERS' TOUR

I liked the museum very much, particularly an ancient clock with its workings on show and which struck the hours, and a working seismograph hidden under the stairs. This instrument was invented by John 'Earthquake' Milne, a celebrated seismologist, who moved to the Isle of Wight in 1895 and died there in 1913. This seismograph had recently recorded a tremor in Java. There was also an ancient Chinese earthquake detector with dragons whose mouths held marbles that drop into waiting cups when there are any seismic movements. Kept under special conditions was a painting of the castle by JMW Turner from one of his first sketching tours.

Views from the walls are spectacular, but with steep steps, so I am told! This is a lovely place to immerse yourself in the past as long as you do not forget to give the bees a wide berth. Thanks to Gary Gostelow for a wonderful study tour of the Isle of Wight.

Catherine Dixon



▲ *Carisbrooke Castle from the Wall Walk showing from R to L the Shell Keep, Well House, Apartments and Lodgings, Great Hall and Chapel of St Nicholas with Princess Beatrice's Garden (Queen Victoria's daughter) in the foreground*



▲ *Freshwater Bay – Dimbola House comprising two cottages joined by a later central tower, home and workplace of Julia Margaret Cameron, 1815-1879, pioneering Victorian photographer*



▲ *Alfred Lord Tennyson, who eventually 'sat' for JMC in 1865. Tennyson called this photograph 'The Dirty Monk'*

Wednesday 8

Wednesday was a roller-coaster day, full of contrasts. Both properties visited had been the homes of major figures in the Freshwater Circle of Victorian Bohemian artists, writers and poets. The houses were very different though, as were their storylines. The group was split in half to make more manageable numbers for the tours although this created much ferrying for the coach driver. This account reflects visiting Dimbola first.

Dimbola

This rabbit warren of small rooms was the home of Julia Margaret Cameron, a close friend of Tennyson. She was a pioneer of photography as art, producing dramatic genre photographs and portraits. Her life story was told alongside examples of her work and an explanation of the skill and labour involved in producing it. A room displaying vintage cameras added background and context.

Dimbola had other treasures on offer, not least a tea room. The temporary exhibition room held recent photos by the Nonpareil Group. Yet another room had a display of photos and posters of the Isle of Wight festival, particularly in 1970. This fitted well with the laidback hippy feeling that pervaded the entire house.

Did the presentation style affect the impression gained of Cameron's life? Attention was drawn to her great nieces: Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell. Did the unconventional mores of the Bloomsbury Set have their origins here? This was an enjoyable, thought-provoking visit.

Sue Pettit

Farringford

After a relaxing lunch in the sun we were picked up by the coach to go to Farringford, the home of poet laureate Alfred Lord Tennyson. By road the distance was much further than it would have been for Tennyson to walk over the fields to see his friends at Dimbola House. It is a long two-storey house (listed grade I) which sits on rising ground surrounded by parkland with views of cliffs and sea. Tennyson and his wife Emily had found Farringford in 1853 when they were looking for a new family home. After many solitary years of depression Tennyson's life had turned around: he loved his wife and his two boys, and family life suited him.



▲ *Farringford, Tennyson's house, built 1802 in the Gothic style*



was via well-written audio guides. The house is furnished as it might have been in Tennyson's time, and we were given a real feel for Tennyson himself: 'entertaining' his friends after dinner by long readings from his own poetry; romping around with his young children, to an extent that they became rather a challenge for those employed to look after them; escaping out of the back door to walk on the downs; or to visit Dimbola to avoid guests who did not interest him.

When we had finished our guided tour the walled garden was the next stop. It is still being developed, using a planting plan which will return it to what Tennyson called his 'careless-order'd garden'. We could not end with a welcome cup of tea because a café is only a gleam in the owner's eye at present. This added to the contrast between the two properties we visited today, one relaxed, slightly shambolic and very welcoming, the other very organised and efficient but not so comfortable. Overall the two visits had given us a brilliant insight into the lives of some famous Victorians, and it had made a memorable day.

Katherine Martin

◀ *Farringford Walled Garden memorial sundial – Arts and Crafts terracotta designed by Mary Seton Watts, wife of G F Watts. The Watts and the Tennysons were close friends and the Tennysons are depicted on the stand*

Thursday 9

Osborne House

Osborne was designed by Prince Albert and built between 1845 and 1851, replacing Norris Castle as a summer holiday home for the young Victoria. The house is huge, surrounded by attractive formal gardens, vegetable plots and fruit trees, all set in a landscape of meadows and trees. It was designed for the royal children to use as their playground, a museum to house their collections, and space in which they could play. The extensive gardens, views over the Solent and a private beach, gave the royal family a place to enjoy away from the responsibilities of London life.

We explored the house, trying to imagine how the Royals lived in this vast building. There were long corridors, their walls lined with shadowy paintings of people and landscapes; rooms following on from one another; colourful patterned floor tiles and attractive table-tops.

The nursery rooms were crowded with visitors, enthralled by the memorabilia of the royal children including drawings, photographs of them at all stages of their lives, with their parents, spouses and families. Victoria and Albert's bedroom was close by, just along the corridor.



▲ *Osborne House as it is today, having been rebuilt between 1845 and 1851*

Photos of the Isle of Wight trip taken by Judith Jones



▲ Osborne House Durbar Room, built for state functions. Note the carpet from Agra

Prince Albert's room, kept as it was when he was alive, was clearly a workroom, crowded with furniture and objects which provided insights into his interests. Two paintings of the children performing in a play, painted by Victoria herself, had pride of place. In the room where Victoria worked there were the two desks, set side by side so that Albert could work alongside her, an arrangement which continued after his death. It was most interesting to see their rooms cluttered as they were in Victorian times but with evidence of daily use by the royal couple. We could even gaze upon the bed in which Victoria died.

The final corridors were hung with exotic and colourful paintings of people from India, providing a welcome change of atmosphere. The rooms leading off were ornate offices crammed with gifts received from officials from different parts of the world but principally from India. This had been a most interesting day leaving us with much to think about.

Peter and Shirley Hodgson

Osborne House beach – Queen Victoria's bathing Cabin ►



Friday 10

Our last visit, after a serene crossing from the Isle of Wight, was a brief drive to Buckler's Hard. A hard is a hard (mainly natural) standing for mooring ships and the name derives from the Buckle family who lived there. The 18th century shipbuilding village consists of two facing rows of red-brick cottages, with reconstructed rooms and actors in period costumes. The houses are separated by a wide expanse of grass which leads down to the beautiful Beaulieu River, which was dotted with gleaming sailing boats. Before we reached the cottages, we passed through a charming and elegant maritime museum which set out, with great clarity, the history of the town and all the details of ship-building which took place there. It was almost impossible to believe that this tiny hamlet on the Beaulieu estate of the Lords Montagu was once the scene of the frantic building of large war-ships such as the *Agamemnon*, Nelson's favourite ship, the *Euryalus* and the *Swiftsure*, which all accompanied him to Trafalgar. It was on the *Agamemnon* that Nelson lost an eye and an arm, and went to Naples to woo Lady Hamilton.

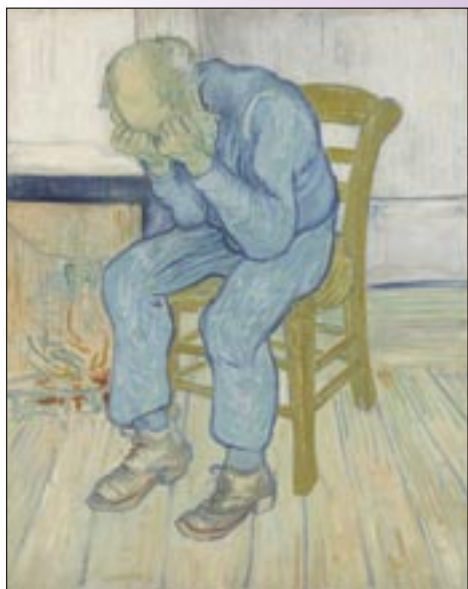
The village has a long and distinguished history. In World War II the town was involved in the construction of floating docks known as Mulberry Harbours, which they built in the oyster beds. In more recent times, Sir Francis Chichester sailed from here at the start of his round-the-world voyage.

One of the cottages, formerly a school-house, has been converted into a chapel but, to the right of the altar, one could peer into a cellar which was once used for another occupation of the townsfolk – smuggling. Those whose thirst surpassed their sense of history were able to sit in the sun outside the modernised pub and enjoy the view. We are very grateful for Gary for taking us there on our way home to Bristol.

Robert Walters

► Buckler's Hard High Street with the remaining 2 rows of cottages and, at no 82 with the red front door, the Chapel of St Mary. The Beaulieu River, site of the shipyard, is in the distance





▲ **Sorrowing old man (At Eternity's Gate), 1890**

© The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow

Van Gogh at Tate Britain

Sunday 28 April 2019

This exhibition is the first major showing of the works of Van Gogh at the Tate since 1947. That show was visited by over 150,000 people, when its bright colours brought life and joy into the lives of British people after the period of post-war drabness. Most of us are aware of the story of Van Gogh's ear and his self-inflicted demise. Fewer know of his connection with Britain and this new exhibition, with visitor numbers exceeding 500,000 sought to remedy this.

Vincent Van Gogh lived in Britain from 1873 to 1876, not as a professional artist but at first as a dealer for Goupil (a leading French art dealership) and later as a teacher and preacher. In a letter of 1874 he wrote 'Things are going well for me here, I have a wonderful home and it's a great pleasure for me to observe London and the English way of life'. He often visited exhibitions and galleries including The National Gallery, The V and A, The Royal Academy, and his signature at The Dulwich Picture Gallery confirms a visit there. He was inspired by

many of the artists whose works he saw. Constable confirmed his love of landscape, especially trees, and a Scottish painting by Millais, *Chill Autumn*, also stimulated his interest; he later painted an autumnal scene capturing the same light and colours but including a solitary character to emphasise the lonely and melancholy atmosphere. A solitary character walking along a road was one of Vincent's signature pieces, affirming his view of life as a journey.

Although he did not paint while living in Britain, Van Gogh did draw as an amateur. He was attracted by the illustrations of Gustav Doré and, while in Britain, had a collection of over 2,000 such prints. One print in particular by Doré, titled *Exercise Yard in Newgate Prison*, was a direct stimulus for Van Gogh's oil painting of 1890 – *Prison Courtyard*. This view of prisoners exercising in a large circle has an almost identical format to the Doré print he owned.

Starry Night, one of his most famous paintings, was also based on one of his Doré prints (*Evening on the Thames*) that showed the reflection of the street lights on the water near the Houses of Parliament. He also admired Whistler's *Nocturne: Grey and Gold*, a similar painted view of Westminster Bridge with lights. However, while Doré's and Whistler's works showed only the reflection of street lights, possibly due to London smog and mist, Van Gogh's, drawn in the clearer air of France, includes starlight as well. The influence of these and other artists on him caused him to write to his brother: 'When I was in London, how often I would stand on the Thames Embankment and draw as I made my way home'. Van Gogh's *Empty Chairs* seem to

have been partly based on an engraving done by an English artist, Luke Fildes, who represented Dickens' empty chair in his study after Dickens' death.

Van Gogh also immersed himself in English literature. He had read everything by Dickens and works by Carlyle, George Eliot, Christina Rossetti, Keats and Shakespeare amongst others. It is interesting to note that, in his portrait of *The Arlesienne* painted in 1890, he included books written in English – Dickens' *Christmas Stories* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Van Gogh also read *The Graphic*, a social reforming paper, in which the heads of people, such as *An Old Man with a Watch*, were drawn from life. He said, 'I want to make figures from the people for the people'. This led to his many portraits of ordinary people, such as *At Eternity's Gate*, a seated elderly man with his head in his hands.

This exhibition also highlighted how Van Gogh influenced British artists. For example, his famous *Sunflowers*, acquired for the nation in 1924, was inspirational for Christopher Wood, Winifred Nicholson, William Nicholson, and even Jacob Epstein, who imitated his subject matter and style. Others said to have borrowed ideas from him included Walter Sickert and Harold Gilman, while Van Gogh's lost painting of *The Painter on the Road to Tarascon* surprisingly encouraged a series of paintings by Francis Bacon.

Van Gogh's greatest legacy was his use of vibrant colour, and audacious brushstrokes. He learned most of these skills later in life when he moved to the bright sunlight of Arles. But his time in Britain started his restless search for meaning and purpose that developed him into the celebrated painter we know and love.

Rita Bolwell

▼ **Avenue of Poplars in Autumn, 1884**

© Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



St Mary-on-the-Quay

Tuesday 25 June 2019

At the start of our visit we were treated to a comprehensive talk on the church's history by the Parish Administrator, Dr Robert von Hawrylak. We learned St Mary is the oldest Roman Catholic church in Bristol and the first one constructed after the Reformation. It was built for the Irvingites, an evangelical sect that believed the world would end in 1868. Building began in 1839 and consecration took place in 1843. The name 'on the quay' was coined because the church originally stood on the quay beside the river Frome. This meant the church was popular with sailors and dockworkers although the river was covered over in the 1890s. Today the church, rightly one of the most popular in the city, is open every day to locals and tourists, and has a Sunday Mass attendance of several hundred souls.

Because of its central city position in St Augustine's Parade, St Mary featured in planning proposals produced for the post-war development of the city. For example, in 1969, plans were made for its demolition and replacement with a new design similar to the present-day Clifton Cathedral. But the portico – 'a distinguished piece of civic ornament' – caused these plans to fail. Later in 1976, plans were made to create a huge car park beneath it, with the floor of the church raised by about 4m so that parking could be accessed from Colston Avenue. Other schemes all seem to have involved major adaptation behind the retained portico but were all abandoned. However, the church itself has funded its own preservation and was fully repaired by 1983.

St Mary has a really impressive front portico with Corinthian columns built in the 'Greek Revival' style and a very finely decorated interior. Some of the church's treasures were on display for us to see, including two pictures which were of special interest to me: an early photograph of the frontage showing the water-front with a boat moored at the quay; and a drawing from the 1960s showing the proposed rebuild of that era.

There is an interesting World War I memorial on the front of the church. It is visible from the pavement and the first name on it is George Archer-Shee, who was killed at Ypres in 1914. He was once known as the 'Winslow Boy', and was the subject of the notoriously controversial play and film of that name. These are recommended viewing with constitutional content still relevant today. When next in Colston Avenue, do walk up to the church, admire the columns and examine the memorial. These interesting examples of Bristol history are worth a second look.

Harry Hibberd

High Altar with dome tabernacle
– J F Bentley 1900

Photos by Judith Jones



▲ Facade - Greek Revival style of the order from the Lysicratic Monument in Athens - designed by Richard Shackleton Pope 1839 Grade II* listed (World War I war memorial set into the bottom front of the facade)



▲ Monstrance - commissioned on the centenary but not finished till 1953, H W Greatrex Birmingham. Beaten silver jewellery surmounted by a cross of pure gold with rubies and diamonds, modelled upon the throne in St-Mary-on-the-Quay



▲ Gele (headtie), buba (blouse), iro (wrap skirt), made in Nigeria (Yoruba people) in the 1960s. This outfit was tailored to reflect the 1960s post-Independence trend towards European style necklines and using lightweight, machine-woven cloth.



▲ Detail of a wedding dress on loan from Audrey Migot, made in England in 2016 for Audrey's wedding in Kenya. Sheila Madoka added the beadwork, echoing a Kenyan tradition.

A selection of the colourful fabrics on display in the Fabric Africa exhibition ▶

Fabric Africa – Stories told through Textiles

Behind the scenes: Friday 3 May 2019

'... half a dozen men and women from somewhere in Africa ... made all the others look members of inferior races, so tall and graceful and majestically dressed were they: the folds of their robes, their earrings...each knew its role. And what authority even the creases in a suit can convey....' Doris Lessing's words from her novel *The Summer before the Dark* conveyed the nub of this modest exhibition, tucked away in a corner of the museum: what messages do clothes communicate?

Lisa Graves, the curator of the exhibition, took us on a verbal tour of the exhibits, which displayed a mixture of fabrics and clothing from many African countries. Some came from the collection inherited from the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum, much of which is still waiting to be unpacked, and some were items loaned or purchased specifically for the exhibition.

Lisa began by considering the messages about status which the wearers intended to communicate with their clothes. Some messages were covert but others were blatantly obvious, expressed in the 'no expense spared' yards of fabric with silk and gold threads in the Kente cloth from Ghana and the Hausa robe from Nigeria.

Rectangular cotton cloths called Kangas are popular in Kenya and Tanzania. They are either worn on the head or body or used for practical purposes such as tablecloths or baby slings. They often communicate overt messages with printed slogans, proverbs, stories (usually in Swahili), and often pictures of politicians in a gesture of support which may, perhaps, turn out to be an insult when the head occurs on a skirt just where the wearer sits!

There were interesting audio commentaries from three lenders, one of whom loaned not one wedding dress but three! All for the same marriage, I hasten to say – three ceremonies in three different countries. We are truly global nowadays. There was a video of a trip to the market by an African designer who lives in Bristol to buy the fabric for an outfit for herself and to find a tailor to make it. I was reminded of Elspeth Huxley remarking in her book *Four Guineas* how she had noticed that the work which could be done sitting down in the shade was all done by men while the women sweated in the sun. Sure enough the tailor was a man!

The exhibition appeared small and modest but when time was taken to study it a wealth of interest, sly humour and sheer joie de vivre was revealed. Thanks to Carol Ouvre for organising the visit.

Ruth Stanton



Nothe Fort

Tuesday 4 June 2019

Nothe Fort occupies a strategic position at the entrance to Weymouth Harbour. It was a 'Palmerston Fort', built by soldiers under the supervision of the Royal Engineers to provide a front-line defence from attacking ships. It was completed in 1872. Huge timber gantries were used to lower immense blocks of local Portland stone and bricks into position to create a three-level fortress. By the end of the 19th century the threat from France had diminished, the great guns were out-dated and the building was little used. However, it came back into service during both World Wars and was actively involved when the US troops embarked for the D-Day Landings. We were aware that along the coast at Portsmouth preparations were being made for the memorable 75th anniversary to take place the next day. Despite the U.S. connections Mr Trump did not pay a visit.

By the end of 1956, coastal gun batteries such as the Nothe Fort were considered obsolete. The fort was eventually sold to the local Council in 1961 for £6,000. Many people had shown an interest in its conservation and restoration and, in 1980, the Civic Society was asked to work with volunteers to restore it.

The fort is now professionally managed but, like many other places, relies on volunteers who obviously enjoy working there. Over forty years the place has changed out of all recognition and is now an award-winning museum which uses the authentic building to house a fascinating history of warfare in Victorian times and during the two World Wars. We were given a tour which took us round the three-level fort built to withstand just about any attack. Visitors can enjoy stunning views of the Dorset Jurassic Coast from the top level before taking a lift to discover the usual facilities on the courtyard level. There was an excellent café, shop and loos, where one was greeted by a life-size model of a (clad) soldier enjoying a shower. Most of the models started life in shop windows such as Hepworth's and have been redressed as soldiers.

The lower level was a maze of dark and spooky corridors with displays of war-related artefacts, photographs and memories. The journey round started in a Victorian barrack room where the men slept next to the guns. A massive one was pointing out to sea. Polished boots stood to attention at the end of each bed. Scale models of ships including an enormous layout made entirely from matchsticks were all beautifully displayed. However, the emphasis was mostly on World War II and as I am ancient enough to have first-hand knowledge of this, I was fascinated to see familiar gas masks, ration books, and an Anderson Shelter. We bumped into a group of children wearing labels who quite obviously were having a learning experience about what it was like to have been an evacuee. The guide was telling them about rationing and they were suitable horrified when she talked about sweet coupons. It was rather 'out of period' to see their teacher recording everything on his i-pad!

There is so much one could say – perhaps the best thing is to urge you to pay Nothe Fort a visit. If you have children or grandchildren, they will have a marvellous time and so will you.

Sue Stops



▲ Nothe Fort – living quarters

Photos by Hilary Cleeve



The matchstick fleet ▲

The Reverend Thomas Sedgwick Whalley, Mendip Lodge and the Queen of Bath

An illustrated talk by Chris Stephens

Saturday 25 May 2019

Because of his interest in dry-stone-walling at Dolebury Warren, Professor Chris Stephens discovered the remnants of a building, once Mendip Lodge. Research led him to its builder, the Rev Thomas Sedgwick Whalley (the a is long as in whale). Chris wrote up his research in his book *The Reverend Thomas Sedgwick Whalley and the Queen of Bath*. In this lecture, delivered at a cracking pace and rammed full of facts, Chris gave a fascinating glimpse of the life of a leisured clergyman in Bath and his adventures in Somerset and in Europe.

Whalley was the sixth child of the Master of Peterhouse College, Cambridge, and of the only daughter of the Chancellor of Wells Cathedral. He went to St John's Cambridge, and probably did the world tour for three years. He was ordained in 1770 and in 1772, the Bishop of Ely, a friend of his father, gave him the living of Hagworthingham in Lincolnshire, an area so insalubrious that the Bishop forbade him ever to go there! Thomas obeyed this injunction for over 50 years, even though the living carried an income of £400 p.a.

Fanny Burney described Thomas as 'tall, thin and handsome but affected, delicate and sentimentally pathetic'. In spite of that he managed to marry Elizabeth Sherwood, a very wealthy widow, who lived in Langford Court (near Burrington). Her great wealth enabled him to buy the central house in the Royal Crescent, Bath. There he mixed with the smart set including Anna Lady Miller, Sarah Siddons, David Garrick, Hannah More and Hester Piozzi. In Bath Whalley began to see himself as a poet and playwright. One of his plays *The Castle of Montval* ran for 17 nights at Drury Lane but, apart from that, nothing much came of his literary ambitions. He and his wife also travelled in Europe, where Marie Antoinette called him 'le bel anglais'. After the death of his wife he made one other profitable marriage and a disastrous one where both parties erroneously thought the other was rich. During the good times he built Mendip Lodge, which he called a cottage, at a cost of £60,000, set in the midst of a 1,000 acre estate with stabling for 18 horses.

The reference to the 'Queen of Bath' is to his half-orphaned niece, Frances Sage, whom the Whalleys adopted. She was a clever and wayward girl who played the harpsichord with great skill when she was seven. She could sing, speak two languages and grew up to be such a beauty that she succeeded Joanna Popjoy, (Beau Nash's mistress) as 'Queen of Bath'. Her marital affairs were as complex as Whalley's, but they both ended up in *La Flèche* in France, where Whalley died and is buried. Chris gave us a lively and fascinating glimpse of life in Georgian Bath.

Robert Walters



▲ Thomas Sedgwick, aged 35 years (1781)



◀ Frances Sage, Sedgwick's wayward niece

Photos by kind permission of Chris Stephens

▼ Mendip Lodge



The Old Police Station, Bedminster

Thursday 11 July 2019

The Old Police Station is located on Bedminster Parade, a short distance from the Bedminster Bridge roundabout. It basically consists of the 1822 frontage (designed by Sir George Oatley, famous for the Wills Tower and the Homeopathic Hospital) which was adapted in 1863 for dual use as a police station and a fire station. Behind the main frontage it has recently been converted into a modern office building, currently used by two design firms – Preconstruct and Purcell.

On arrival we were warmly welcomed by Jess and Emily with refreshments of wine, fruit juice and nibbles while the group gathered. To start our tour we were given a short description of the building's history, then talks by each of the building's present occupiers on their businesses today.

The office is remarkable in that several historic features of the building have been re-used. Externally the basic stone structure and its roof have been retained with the frontage appearing as it was post 1863. Inside, the two parts are separated by the central stone-flagged 'portcullis' doorway, which now serves as an entrance hall leading to both offices. Here features of the two former users have been reformed into the two current individual offices' needs. For example the white-tiled prison cells with their fortified doorways have been incorporated into the Purcell offices as store-rooms, and the huge firehouse station doors have been retained as part of the Preconstruct office.

We were given an illustrated talk by Matthew Allen, the Preconstruct chief who described how he had taken on the building and had decided to retain significant features which were cleaned and refurbished with modern lighting and heating to create a contemporary steel and glass structure. We saw and admired similar improvements in the Purcell offices.

Altogether it was an informative and interesting visit, showing how imaginative work on substantial old buildings can be undertaken sympathetically to provide both a record of the original structures and a modern comfortable workspace.

Harry Hibberd



▲ A group of friends on their tour

Photo by Jan Packer

▼ The outside of The Old Police Station.

Photo by Catherine Dixon



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