

Newsletter

The Rise and Rise of the Film Archive

Soon after the acquisition of the three telecine transfer machines funded by the FBMGA, Bristol Record Office inherited additional film viewing and telecine transfer equipment from the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum, along with a further 1,000 reels of film and thousands of photographs from BECM's 'Images of Empire' collection.

The extra capability provided by the equipment funded by the Friends, coupled with the inheritance of the BECM collection, has meant that the film archive project – conceived over a pint of cider and volunteer-led since 2006 – is now too large a beast for the film volunteers, John Penny and Clive Burlton, to manage on their own.

To bolster resources, Mark Knights has joined the Service on a six-month contract as Archive Film Officer based at the BRO. Mark previously worked at BECM, where he ran the 'Images of Empire' film and photographic archive. Mark is currently establishing a business plan for the Film Unit. This will examine the commercial potential of the collections, the digitisation of the remaining reels of film, and the development of access arrangements to both collections.

The plan will also include an assessment of what additional volunteer resources are needed. Mark is currently bolting all the kit together and has already received enquiries and orders for external work. Thanks to the funding of the three telecine transfer machines by FBMGA and the inheritance of the BECM equipment, the Service has a wonderful opportunity to develop a Film Archive facility unrivalled in Museums in the South West. How things have grown from those cider roots!

As the infrastructure is being put in place, John and Clive have continued to digitise material held on other formats and, once the cataloguing is complete, a further 50 films will be made available for viewing in the Search Room at the BRO. Recently uncovered gems include snapshots of how Bristol celebrated the Festival of Britain in 1951 and the Coronation in 1953 – including terrific images of a range of sports on Durdham Downs.

Some of the fruits of John's and Clive's labours will be on show in another film evening for the Friends at the Apostle Room on 23 November in 'Friday Night at the Cinema'. As this event has already sold out, an additional film show will be held on Friday 26 April 2013.

Clive Burlton



▲ John and Clive trying out the new 16 mm telecine transfer machine

Photos © BRO

▼ The BRO Film Room which is currently undergoing transformation.



From the Chairman

The British Association of Friends of Museums

Many of you will know that Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives is a member of the British Association of Friends of Museums. BAfM is an independent organisation established in 1973, for Friends, volunteers and supporters in museums, galleries and heritage sites. Its membership includes over 400 separate Friends groups across the country, and many individual members – I am one myself – so that it represents 200,000 Friends and Volunteers across the UK. It exists to offer a practical network of support from people with first-hand experience of running similar organisations, acts as a clearing house for common problems and their solutions, and is a central source of information about Friends for Friends.

The annual conference season for BAfM, as for the political parties, is the autumn, and in the last 3 months I have been to both the national BAfM and the BAfM South West conferences in Eastbourne and Exeter respectively. The main theme of the national conference was volunteering, a hot topic given the pressure on funding that almost all the heritage sector is feeling in the current climate. We were also fortunate to have as a keynote speaker Sam Younger CBE, Chief Executive of the Charity Commission.

The SW conference at the newly reopened Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter was more informal, and we were treated to some very interesting talks and a variety of gallery tours by the Museum Manager, curators and volunteers – all of them clearly excited by the wealth of their collections and the success of the new interpretations and displays. If you haven't yet seen RAMM, I would recommend that you go: there is an opportunity to visit it on 6 February 2013 – see enclosed booking form.

What are Friends groups for?

One topic which came up in discussion and conversation at both BAfM conferences, although it was not on the agenda for either, was 'What are Friends groups for?'. The consensus was clear, and you might think obvious – we are there to act as a friend to the organisations we support, to the individuals who make up that organisation, and to their audience. Being a good friend – as an individual and as a group – means sometimes raising uncomfortable issues and difficult topics, but it always means doing that in a supportive rather than an adversarial way, and valuing the continuing relationship as far more important than any particular issue. We hear stories from time to time of Friends groups which lose sight of this important principle, leading in some cases to the relationship breaking down completely. Fortunately breakdowns are rare, but at the BAfM national conference I came across representatives of a handful of Friends groups from across the country who clearly do not enjoy the genuinely Friendly links that I believe we have both with Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives as a whole and with so many individuals within it – and it made me appreciate our mutually supportive relationship all the more.



▲ The Friends sponsored Summer Walk at Ashton Court

Trust Status for Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

I have already mentioned the thorny subject of funding, and you may have seen in the local news that the Cabinet has agreed in principle to our Museum Service progressing towards becoming an independent charitable trust. Key to the success of that will be to secure a long term commitment to funding from the Council, but becoming a trust will open up many additional sources of funding not currently available to them as part of a local authority. The service is at the very beginning of its journey to trust status, and you will see updates in this newsletter as progress is made over the next couple of years.

Charging for Exhibitions

One source of funding already open to the service is to introduce charging for some of the excellent temporary exhibitions, to offset the costs, although many will remain free to all. The current exhibition at M Shed – *Real and Imagined Lives* – is the second charged-for exhibition in recent times. As you would expect, we have asked if there could be some discount offered to our members, but with the ongoing need to generate income to enable such wonderful exhibitions to be brought to Bristol we have been told that is not possible. In the current climate that response is understandable, and I for one am happy to support the

museum by paying the modest £5 charge. In any case there are days when the exhibition is free to all: Wednesdays 5 December and 2 January.

Temporary Exhibition: Real and Imagined Lives

The core of this National Portrait Gallery exhibition is the 16th and 17th century portraits of sitters whose identities have been lost or misattributed. They are entertainingly brought to life by audio recordings of fantasy character sketches and fictional biographies written by internationally renowned authors. The combination is fascinating, with cosy two-seater audio booths facing the portraits to create an enthralling experience. This is complemented by a collection of contemporary photographic portraits of people with a Bristol connection, including Tony Benn, who was reportedly very impressed with the exhibition as a whole.



▲ Friends book sale at M Shed

Photos by Sue Thurlow

Behind the Scenes Tours of M Shed

Tuesdays & Thursdays at 11.30am
Wednesdays & Saturdays at 2.30pm

Join a tour of M Shed's collection stores and encounter treasures from the city's industrial and maritime past. Tours are suitable for age 12 upwards. Sign up at the information desk on the day or in advance. Suggested donation £2.



Discover hidden treasures lurking in the stores including packaging from a local chocolate producer and this old forme containing letterpress type

Photos by Ann Wood

From the Membership Secretary

We welcome the following new members who have joined us in the last few months:

**June Hibberd,
Membership Secretary**

Ms Joan Bessell
Ms Valerie Chowen
Mrs Mary Hudson
Mrs Sue Price
Ms Belinda Price

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Quarterly Report

Governance

The 2009 Select Committee Report considering the future of Bristol Museums Galleries and Archives (BMGA) highlighted the need to consider different governance options so that the service could maximise its potential. Over the last 9 months work has been undertaken through extensive stakeholder consultation (including with representatives of both Friends groups) and a wide-ranging comparator analysis. This has recommended that the best form of governance is one that allows more flexibility, more focus on strategy and more freedom to act – a model based on a charity managed by a set of trustees but tied to Bristol City Council through its funding, which is crucial to the future.

In October the Cabinet agreed in principle that the collections and buildings should stay in the ownership of the council but a new form of organisation be set up to which staff would transfer under TUPE arrangements, therefore harnessing their skill and knowledge for the future development of the service.

Much work is needed to refine the detail over the next couple of years. In the meantime, it is business as usual.

Grant

The Arts Council England has awarded the service a grant of £90,000 from its new Designation Development Fund. This will pay for storage equipment for the geology collection, two display cases for the Chinese ceramics, a temporary assistant to help with capturing information on Bristol's history and replacement of environmental telemetry equipment which monitors temperature and humidity.

Staff news

This has been a very busy few months in terms of staff changes, with too many to list in detail. We have welcomed back from maternity leave Lisa Graves (World Cultures), Katie Harding (Development Manager), and Claire Royall (Marketing and Communications). New to the service is Mark Knights (Archive Film Officer) who worked previously at the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum.

Naif Pierre has been appointed as Volunteer Coordinator, supported by new apprentice Alex Hardy. Kerrie Dodd's contract has been extended to August 13 so she can continue her work in Marketing and Communications.

We have said goodbye to Harry Metcalf (Collections Officer, Paper Conservator), who has left for a year's placement at Harvard, and to Talei Masters (Bristol Record Office), who has taken a post with the New Zealand National Archives. Becky Sheppard (Design) has moved to Cornwall and Amelia Tubelli has come to the end of her one year British Museum placement with World Cultures.

Recruitment is in progress for posts in Natural Sciences, World Cultures, Documentation and Conservation.

Butter-making at Blaise, Doors Open Day, September 2012 ▶

© Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives



▲ **Locomotive Henbury, M Shed Doors Open Day, September 2012**
© Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

The new lift is due to be opened very shortly, making the top floor art galleries fully accessible for the first time in the building's history. The gallery space created on the first floor will open with a display of some of our modern art, and the Bristol Tapestries will move to the new ground floor lift lobby. These changes, and many others associated with the lift project, will greatly enhance the museum, and will make the considerable disruption and temporary gallery closures worthwhile.

M Shed

M Shed is at the centre of a growing network of communities and organisations. The public programme has involved hundreds of people from Bristol and beyond in many different activities. M Shed is now one of the key venues used by citywide events and festivals.

Blaise

This year's Blaise Doors Open Day was probably the most successful ever, with butter-making in the beautiful Thatched Dairy attracting 600 visitors.



Georgian House & Red Lodge

After a busy summer, Red Lodge & Georgian House will close from November 1 and re-open Saturday, 30 March 2013.

Events & Exhibitions

M Shed, Temporary Exhibition Gallery

Real and Imagined Lives

Until Sunday 6 January 2013

On loan from the National Portrait Gallery, this exhibition looks at identity through fame and anonymity, reality and fiction and how people will be remembered. It brings together 16th and 17th century portraits and contemporary photographic portraits of people with a Bristol connection, including Damien Hirst, JK Rowling, Stephen Merchant, Iris Murdoch and Banksy.

£5 standard. £4 concessions. Under 16s Free.

Special Offer: Free entry days – Wed 5 Dec and Wed 2 Jan

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

Stitch & Think

Until Sunday 7 April 2013

This exhibition explores the values and current contemporary thinking about hand-making skills reflected through the discipline of stitch.

Admission free.

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

Veolia Wildlife Photographer of the Year

Until Sunday 17 February 2013

The Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition, owned by the Natural History Museum and BBC Worldwide, is an international showcase for the very best nature photography. Each year, tens of thousands of entries are received and judged by an international jury of photography experts, and the best are shown here.

Admission Free. Recommended donation £2.

Learning

The fairs, family days, workshops and outreach events under the Royal Academy of Engineers Ingenious programme have been very successful, involving over 1,600 students from Key Stage 2 up to age 19 and over 3,800 visitors of all ages at the four family days. The Learning Team was supported in this by over 2,500 hours of engineers' time.

Working Exhibits

Despite the unpredictable weather, the working exhibits have generally had a good end to the season. There is a continuing need for new volunteer team members to help with the operation and maintenance of the big exhibits, and any Friends members who would like to get involved would be very welcome. In addition to public open days the cranes have played a role in entertaining new and potential supporters for the museum's Development Trust.

Awards

Paul Sullivan, Learning Officer, won the Bristol Performs Innovator Award for his pioneering work using PenFriends to provide audio description for visually-impaired visitors.

Jim Noonan was posthumously awarded the Rob Lines Award for his service to BMGA over many years, his fairness and equal approach to all people, and his willingness to get M Shed open whilst very ill.

Marketing & PR

Marketing has continued to achieve great coverage for the service, and specifically for the exhibition programme, including print, advertising, press and media (both local and national), website content and e-news. The service's free monthly e-news bulletin now has 3,000 subscribers, and work is under way to redesign and update the style.

There is work under way to improve the way that visitor information can direct marketing spend so that the team can focus on activities that deliver against targets for the museum.

Dates for your diary

Here are some forthcoming trips to whet your appetite for next year.

Visit to Highclere Castle

Tuesday 9 April 2013

Explore the setting for Downton Abbey with the added interest of a new Egyptian exhibition.

Visit to Castle Drogo

Saturday 4 May 2013

Visit this imposing 'mediaeval castle' built for the grocery millionaire, Julius Drewe, by Edward Lutyens. Started in 1911, surrounded by impressive gardens, the castle harks back to a romantic past.

Pompeii and Herculaneum Exhibition at the British Museum

Tuesday 4 June 2013

An exhibition, never seen before in Britain, that looks at the lives of people who lived in these ill-fated cities.

5-day trip to Liverpool

In early September we will be going to Liverpool. The programme is yet to be finalised but, with so much to see, it will certainly be full of variety and interest.

Application forms for these events will be with the next newsletter.

Visit to the Baltic States

Sunday 16-Sunday 23 September 2012



▲ Trakai Castle

It was not an auspicious start. The coach to Gatwick had a puncture; two members failed to board the flight; and we spent an hour and a half driving through the suburbs of Kaunas to find our hotel (major roadworks rendered the satnav useless). Happily, none of this hampered our overall enjoyment: we arrived at Gatwick in time, the two members caught up the following day, and we found our hotel in time for a belated evening meal. The only other unpleasant experience was that three members of our group were burgled in their hotel rooms on our first night in Riga – an unsettling incident but, happily, no-one was hurt.

Our experience of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia on this interesting whistle-stop tour (billed by the tour operator as 'Mary Bailey's Baltics-in-one-go') emphasised how strongly these nations value their recent independence and membership of the EU and NATO. Our charming Latvian guide, Ieva Strengē, gave us a flavour of their colourful history and culture. My thanks go to Pam Roper of the Unpackaged Travel Company in Wells, whose efficiency and meticulous attention to detail ensured that the week was a success.

Mary Bailey

Monday morning

Tour of Kaunas, Lithuania

Our tour began in Kaunas, second city of Lithuania, which is sited near the confluence of the Nemunas and Neris rivers. We enjoyed a walking tour in the old town along the mediaeval streets to the Town Hall Square, which has a mixture of Baroque, Classical and Gothic architecture, to the imposing Town Hall. This has been a prison, palace, theatre and a church. It is now a Marriage Hall and also houses a ceramics museum.

The square is lined with 15th and 16th century Hansa merchants' houses, a pharmacy museum and St Francis monastery – all decorated in ice-cream shades and very picturesque. On the corner, the St Peter and Paul's Cathedral, an austere redbrick building dating back to 1408 and the largest Gothic structure in the country, contains a breathtaking array of brightly-coloured frescoes, plaster cherubs and nine different altars. The impressive remains of Kaunas Castle lie a short distance away.

The pedestrianised road from the square, said to be the oldest in Lithuania, contains speciality shops and open-air cafés – ideal for a coffee break!

Sarah Roberts

Monday afternoon

The Lithuanian Open Air Museum

On our way to Vilnius, we visited the 400 acre Folk Museum in the village of Rumsiskes on the river Nemunas. There are over 140 buildings, most moved from their original locations, and made mainly from Baltic timber. We saw homes and farm buildings set in flower and herb gardens and apple orchards. Much use is made of carving and painting, and paper decoration over windows. Inside are displays of furniture and personal possessions including wooden toys.

In the open market area were wooden buildings typical of a small town including a school, a church, public house, houses for weavers and craftworkers, and wind and water mills. There was an interesting bread museum with exhibitions of harvesting, milling, kneading and baking. In the woodland area we saw beehives, and stores for woodland harvests of berries and mushrooms as well as game. There was also a bear trap! We visited a glade set up as a memorial to Lithuanians deported during the 50-year long Soviet occupation.

All in all, a mind-stretching exhibition displaying not only the lives of the rural people, but also the hardships they suffered through their subjugation by other nations.

Harry Hibberd



▲ Interior of the Cathedral, Kaunas



▲ Wooden house in the Folk Museum with carved details and paper window decorations



▲ Lithuanians deported to Siberia lived in turfed yurts similar to this home for 40 people

Photos by Elly Chapman and Martin Bailey



▲ Church of Sts Peter and Paul, Vilnius

Tuesday morning

Vilnius, capital city of Lithuania

Our third day started at the Church of Sts Peter and Paul. It is a 17th century replacement of an older, simpler church, decorated with stucco (reminiscent of Wedgwood porcelain in its colours and decoration). The interior told New Testament stories in an almost overwhelming riot of Baroque stucco decoration.

Vilnius Cathedral seemed austere in comparison, with its separate bell tower in the main square. Outside is a small, square tile on which is written 'miracle', marking one end of the human chain formed by some 2 million people protesting against Russian occupation in 1989. The chain stretched from Vilnius to Tallinn and our guide, Ieva, was proud to have been part of this event as a young child. To make a wish, one stands on the tile and turns through 360 degrees. I did notice some of our party trying this, but no-one knows if their wishes came true!

A walk through the Old Town took us to the University and its famous library founded in 1573 by the Jesuits. Here we saw instruments made for the Observatory by Jesse Ramsden, an 18th century English instrument-maker. In the heart of the building was a display of books on exploration, together with samples of spices. These were the spur for the journeys which eventually led to the discovery of the Americas. I was pleased to find a reference to John Cabot in the notes attached to a book on Amerigo Vespucci.

Then off to lunch, for yet another delicious meal.

Ruth Welch



▲ Interior of Trakai Castle

Tuesday afternoon

Trakai Castle

Tuesday lunchtime saw a bunch of hungry, thirsty people descend on a restaurant with stunning views of Trakai castle and Lake Galve. Following a splendid repast we embarked on our visit to Trakai Castle in warm sunshine. The castle sits on an island and is accessed by two bridges. Viewed from the mainland it resembles a fairytale castle with towers capped by pointed roofs. I was reminded of the castle in the film *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. Dating from the 14th century, the castle was at one point the centre of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, holding great strategic importance. In its heyday it comprised a ducal hall, a prison and barracks. Wooden staircases in the inner courtyard led to the museum. Exhibits showed various aspects of castle life and its reconstruction. At the end of the tour those brave enough descended to the courtyard via the original stone spiral staircase.

Zena Mussett

Wednesday

The Hill of Crosses and Rundale Palace

Ieva explained that Christians had placed crosses on the Hill of Crosses for centuries. But in the 1830s, locals began a silent protest against the Russian occupation of Lithuania, and over the

years the number of crosses grew. Aware of its significance the Soviets burned the crosses, levelled the hill and covered the area with waste. The Lithuanians immediately returned to place fresh crosses. In 1993, after the Soviet withdrawal, Pope John-Paul II planted a huge cross, thanking the Lithuanians for their testament of faith.

It is an amazing place. There are now hundreds of thousands of crosses of every size, mostly of wood but some of stone or metal. Many are hung with rosaries. Tributes are added daily. In these days of Lithuanian independence they are more for personal reasons; for a prayer to be answered; or to commemorate a life. Great houses are sometimes confused in the memory but the Hill of Crosses is unlikely to be forgotten by those who have seen it.

▼ Hill of Crosses



MEMBERS' TRIPS

In contrast the Rundale Palace in Latvia is a 'mini Versailles' designed by Bartolomeo Rastrelli, designer of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. Most of the interior decoration was completed between 1765 and 1768 - the elaborate plasterwork by Johann Michael Graff; the magnificent painted ceilings by Francesco Martini and Carlo Zucchi. It has been a summer palace, a school and now the Rundale Palace Museum. Over 50 rooms have already been restored and a new room is added every year. The colour palette is rich and varied. The plasterwork and painted ceilings are stunning.

Lesley Pugsley

Thursday

Exploring Riga, capital city of Latvia

We first glimpsed this mediaeval city (about the size of Bristol) as we drove along the eastern embankment of the Daugava River, passing four massive Zeppelin hangars housing the Central Market, said to be the biggest in Europe. Ieva steered us around the more impressive buildings ignoring anything Soviet and embellishing her descriptions with amusing, romantic tales from Latvian culture, of which she was fiercely proud.

We were surprised how ornate the houses in the Art Nouveau district were; if ornamentation was a crime, these were a capital offence! In the Art Nouveau Museum we wore contemporary hats while inspecting a fine collection including an early flushing 'thunderbox' known as 'The Incomparable'.

Every corner of the Old Town contained lovingly restored buildings, most related to commerce, as Riga was part of the Hanseatic League, or the church. St Peter's church impressed, particularly its wobbly spire (it seemed to fall down regularly - about once a century). Guilds played a large part in Riga's early life: the Great Guild for merchants and the Small Guild for shopkeepers and artisans. We visited the Black Cat house, built by a boycotted guild member (he pointed the cat's backside towards the Great Guild) and the 14th century House of the Blackheads, a boozy bachelors' club with a rather unfortunate name. The Swedish Gate on the outer city wall had an amusing folk story: it was said that every time a naughty lady went past the bell rang; it rang constantly during our passing!

After lunch, when yet again the humble potato was raised to noble stature, we had a jolly sail up the canal and out into the port. Riga was voted an outstanding success.

Campbell and Liz Mackenzie

Friday

Visit to Turaida Castle, Latvia and Parnu, Estonia

On the journey from Riga to Estonia, Ieva, told us of the 'Festival of John' (Jāni). Each Midsummer's Eve city dwellers travel to the country to join in singing, dancing and story-telling around a fire in the open air until the sun rises in the morning. Washing your face in the early morning dew is then beneficial; jumping into a lake (men only) possibly not.

Arriving at Turaida we found ourselves in the beautiful Gauja Valley on a perfect early autumn day. The air was cool and almost drinkable; the maples beginning to change colour.

Turaida Castle was a mediaeval stone and brick construction, the stronghold of the Archbishop of Riga from 13th to mid 16th century. Reduced to rubble when its gunpowder magazine was struck by lightning in the early 18th century, some halls and the main watch tower have been reconstructed.

After a long drive over the border in Estonia we reached Parnu, once a Hanseatic League port, now a seaside resort with long sandy beaches. We all visited the beach and the hardest paddled in the Baltic.

Don and Pat Walter

Turaida Castle, Latvia ▶



▲ *The Rundale Palace, Latvia*



▲ *Suitably hatted in the Art Nouveau Museum*



▲ *House of the Blackheads, Riga*





▲ Russian Orthodox Cathedral, Tallinn

Saturday morning

Tour of Tallinn, capital city of Estonia

Seasoned and intrepid Baltic tourists, we embarked on our Tallinn tour. Circumnavigating the Old Town we met Fat Margaret and Tall Herman (towers on the mediaeval walls). In the Upper Town near the castle, now the seat of the Parliament, we entered the Orthodox Cathedral where a priest burst through the iconostasis to administer communion. We were intrigued by the service of apparently sacred tea and cake following the sacrament. Negotiating the deep cobbles of the narrow streets, quite a challenge for elderly ankles and a trial for Gary and Hilary with her chariot, we arrived at a look-out point with extensive vistas.

Descending to the Lower Town, some were tempted by the tourist shops. At the bottom of the hill we passed through the Gate Tower and arrived outside the Church of the Holy Spirit. Alongside were Guild Houses, the largest of which now houses the State History Museum.

A narrow street (White Bread Passage) with a highly recommended coffee house led to the central square. Dominated by the Gothic Town Hall, the square was alive with a colourful ethnic market and dancing displays. Goods, food and drink from many eastern European nationalities were on sale. Tucked away in a corner was the oldest pharmacy in Europe, selling current medicaments and displaying many bizarre and dubious ancient remedies. And so to lunch...

Graham Pegg



▲ Market in central Tallinn

Saturday afternoon

Kadriorg Park and KUMU Museum

Kadriorg Park, just a few minutes from the city centre, is a truly beautiful park of green trees and grass, crossed by patterns of paths and enlivened by statues and ponds. The park contains some interesting villas including the famous Kadriorg Palace. This was established by Peter the Great in 1718. Its hall is one of the best examples of Baroque architecture in Eastern Europe. The palace opened as the Kadriorg Art Museum in 2000.

Nearby is the amazing KUMU Art Museum, a dramatic modern building. Opened in 2006 this is the main building of the Art Museums of Estonia and won European Museum of the Year award in 2008. We were met in the foyer and taken through the permanent collections of Estonian Art. Paintings from the Soviet occupation had to show that life was good, people were happy and workers were presented in a realistic way. The artists who actually painted real life at that time met in secret. Their paintings are now on show for all to see. Women artists in particular produced some very dramatic work in that period. There was so much to see that members lagged far behind the guide while they admired the works on show.

Shirley Hodgson

▼ Kadriorg Palace, Tallinn



Sunday morning

Under the fortifications of Tallinn

Our last outing was to the underground passages below the walls of Tallinn. Starting at the 'Kiek in de Kok' (English translation 'peek into the kitchen') Bastion, we descended some 18 metres into a long corridor of rooms, and travelled back in time as far as 1553. Displays depicted their use, starting in the 20th century as a refuge for the homeless and young rebels from the punk era; and various periods of occupation of the city by Danes, Swedes, Germans and Russians. The tunnels included prisons and storerooms in the early years but from the mid-1930s were used as air raid shelters during the Soviet and the German occupation. At that time, they had electricity, ventilation, running water and telephones. After this visit it was on the coach, pick up the luggage and off to the airport!

Peter Hodgson



◀ *Eastnor Castle: the grounds include an arboretum, lake (under the waters of which lies the original ancestral home), and official Land Rover test track.*

Photo by Ann Wood

▼ *The family coat of arms in the terraced gardens*

Photo by Ann Wood

Eastnor Castle

Tuesday 4 September 2012

Although Eastnor Castle looks genuine it is actually a mock castle built between 1812 and 1820 by John Cocks, the First Earl Somers. It is now the home of James Hervey-Bathurst, grandson of the Sixth Earl Somers. Outside it appears to be a Norman castle. Inside it is an impressive, if draughty, residence.

The architect, Robert Smirke, used the latest technology, including a steam-powered engine to cut the stone and cast iron beams to hold up the roof, to create this 97-room residence costing £85,000 (£28 million in today's money). Each room is styled differently creating fresh areas of interest. Perhaps the most spectacular is the Gothic Sitting Room designed by Augustus Pugin. Here Parliamentary-style gilded columns, spectacular faux fan vaulting, six massive tapestries and a Bavarian chandelier of epic proportions (it made a guest appearance at the Great Exhibition and its twin now hangs in the Palace of Westminster), threaten to overwhelm the visitor but somehow do not by virtue of the warm, welcoming colour scheme.

Naturally, the rooms are stuffed with valuable collections of pictures, porcelain, books and objets d'art too numerous to describe. A highlight was the huge collection of armour (the largest in private hands) among which were complete suits originally belonging to the mounted bodyguard of Charles V. My eye was continually drawn to the incredibly elaborate lock mechanism of a bullion chest and the massive proportions of a windlass crossbow that looked too heavy for a single person to lift let alone load and aim. I was also fascinated by a shooting diary open at a page showing that 1039 birds were killed on one particular day although the 'king shot only in the morning'. The carnage over the five-day shoot was impressive.

Unusual cast-iron banisters overhung by a fearsome dragon chandelier led upstairs. This was a complete contrast, where we were able to wander freely through a selection of bedrooms – some impressive period rooms enjoyed by various monarchs and others attractively modernised rooms for visiting wedding parties.



Read more at <http://www.eastnorcastle.com/history.htm>



◀ *The Gothic Sitting Room by Augustus Pugin*

Photo by kind permission of Eastnor Castle

I was greatly taken with the wooden panelled 'thunderbox' in original condition complete with a doomsday handle flush.

Special treats on this tour were the great number of comfortable chairs and sofas in which we could relax as we went round and listen to the best ever guide, who was a mine of information and a source of many amusing stories. After a very good sandwich and cake lunch (always a great favourite) we perambulated around the lake and got lost in the excellent maze. Well done Wendy for organising this fascinating, entertaining and highly recommended visit.

Tim Wood

Visit to Oxford Castle

Saturday 13 October 2012

Luckily our trip to Oxford Castle got off to a great start with sunshine after a night of rain.

Our group was greeted by a young man dressed as a prisoner named Isaac Darkin, a highwayman who died in 1761. This character was noted for his good looks, charm and debonair dress. His claim to fame was that he chose to fasten the noose around his own neck and hang himself rather than wait for the hangman to despatch him.

Isaac told us that the original wooden motte-and-bailey castle was built by one of William the Conqueror's barons, Robert D'Oyly, who was bequeathed land in Oxfordshire as a reward for the important part he played in the Norman invasion. Oxon-ford, as it was known in Saxon times, was a thriving market town with easy access to London. As the town prospered, the castle grew. Over the years it was improved until it became a great stone fortress, one of the largest castles in the realm, even larger than Warwick.

Over the years the castle was attacked several times. It played an important role in the war between Stephen and Matilda, and became the headquarters of the Royalist army in the Civil War. At that time, much of its mediaeval stonework was pulled down to create emplacements for cannon. The castle never recovered and after the civil war was used as a prison, which it remained right up until 1996.

After its long and often dark history, the prison was opened to the public in 2006. Modern visitors can discover all about prison life, the experiences of real prisoners and staff, and events from the prison's turbulent history. We stood in the cells and imagined how dreadful the prisoners must have felt with the prospect of hard labour and little hope of salvation.

For my part I was pleased I could leave those dark horrors behind me and go off to explore the exciting city of Oxford in the sunshine. Many thanks to David and Wendy for giving us plenty to think about, and a lot for which to be thankful.

Hilary Cleeve



▲ *The Debtors' Tower, Oxford Castle*

Photo supplied by Oxford Castle Unlocked

Read the life story of Isaac Darkin at
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Darkin

A visit to Hartlebury Castle

Thursday 27 September 2012

Built in local sandstone, Hartlebury Castle does not look at all militaristic because it was used principally as a splendid residence for the Bishops of Worcester, who moved in during the 13th century. With a history that goes back to 845, Hartlebury has been much altered over the years and now includes a South Wing with rooms and the present day chapel, and a North Wing which was modified into the County Museum in 1964. The middle range of the building houses mediaeval state rooms and the famous Hurd library.

Our entertaining guide Alison Brimelow, chair of Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust, told us that Hartlebury received numerous Royal visitors, including Edward I on his way to subdue the Welsh Princes, Queen Elizabeth I (at great expense to the then current bishop) and Queen Elizabeth II. Both Charles I and II may have called here during the Civil War. Unfortunately the original mediaeval defences were 'slighted' in 1650 after the Royal garrison was defeated in just two days. The surviving mediaeval structure is hidden within the symmetrical works of subsequent 17th and 18th century bishops.

In 1781 Bishop Hurd removed the last vestiges of the mediaeval keep and began building the now famous library to house his collection of rare books. We were treated to an opportunity to view some of the original works of Spencer, Pope and Dryden and learned that a copy of the *Iliad*, from which Pope's translation was made, is here. The room had a beautiful aspect and in the late afternoon sunshine had a wonderful, evocative atmosphere.

In 2008, the Bishop's residence moved to a house adjacent to Worcester. A Trust was formed by the locals to acquire and manage the Castle and its delightful parklands, which until only relatively recently still contained deer. The castle and estate is currently for sale by the Church Commissioners. The £2.4 million required to save it, with lottery funding pending, seems imminently attainable.

This impressive residence, lovingly tended by the volunteers of the Trust who really pulled out the stops on the day, provided us with a fascinating and informative visit. We greatly enjoyed our gentle meander through history. The soup and fruit cake in the café in the old kitchens in the North Wing were pretty impressive as well!

Julie Lang

Read the complete history of Hartlebury and a description of the Hurd Library at <http://hartleburycastletrust.org/>



▲ The Great Hall (1390), contains arched brace trusses erected with timbers from forests near Malvern – a gift from King Richard II. It is one of the last surviving non-Royal Great Halls in the country and would once have been free-standing.



▲ This magnificent and nationally important library is a unique example of an Anglican working library. It contains 5,000 volumes, many still on the original shelves, ranging from 1476 to the early 19th century.

Worcestershire County Museum

Thursday 27 September 2012

This museum was full of delights. Outbuildings housed a fascinating collection of vehicles from fine carriages to a milkman's cart; from penny-farthing bicycles to a three-wheeled car made in Kidderminster. Inside, finds on display included coins from a local hoard discovered by a metal detectorist. One area was devoted to Worcestershire's rich agricultural history evoking memories of Worcester Pearmain apples and Worcestershire sauce. Pitchforks and scythes decorated the walls.

Retired teachers in the party greatly enjoyed sitting at the teacher's desk in the schoolroom with no children to control. Others were relieved that the scullery bore little resemblance to a modern kitchen however attractive it looked. Technology has certainly improved the lot of the scullery maid.

Apple crusher ▶





◀ A penny farthing and other early cycles

There were sections about canals and spas with terrifying references to so-called 'water-cures' which could have done nobody any good at all. A Victorian section displaying artefacts associated with life's journey from birth to death included christening robes and black-edged mourning cards.

It is said that three things remain rooted in the memory after such a visit. I will always remember the hearse, which lacked only a couple of horses with plumes, not that I fancy being carried off in one, but it was magnificent. Then there was a gentleman's jacket in the Georgian Room embellished with exquisite embroidery. Finally there was a quotation on the wall, also in the Georgian room which stated 'Georgians pollute their minds by reading widely'. This made me laugh.

Hartlebury Museum contains many well-displayed, fascinating gems that appeal to all ages, and is well worth a visit.

Sue Stops

Photos by Elly Chapman



Kenilworth Castle

Wednesday 8 August 2012

Kenilworth Castle in Warwickshire, which is now administered by English Heritage, had an association with the royal families of England for more than five centuries. Although Geoffrey de Clinton, Henry I's treasurer, began the construction of the large Norman keep in the 1120s, in due course Henry II acquired the castle for himself. Between 1210 and 1215, King John set about enhancing it. One major change he made was having the low land to the south of the castle wall flooded to create a mere. This mere gave added protection from invasion and, during a six-month occupation in 1266 by some rebellious barons, proved very effective against Henry III's siege engines. In the late 14th century, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster (the fourth son of Edward II and father to Henry IV), made major improvements, transforming the castle into a palace. He constructed the great hall and staterooms in the inner court. Kenilworth became a favourite residence of the Lancastrian and early Tudor monarchs.

Kenilworth enjoyed its greatest period of fame during the reign of Elizabeth I. In 1563 Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and favourite courtier of the Queen, took possession of Kenilworth. At enormous expense he converted the castle into a fit residence to entertain the Queen. A splendid exhibition told of Elizabeth's relationship with Dudley and her visits to Kenilworth during her royal 'progresses' around England (she never actually travelled further north than Stafford). During the last and most sumptuous of these visits in 1575 she and her large entourage stayed for 19 days. The entertainment (music, hunting, bear-baiting, dancing and plays) was lavish, and Dudley even had a special garden created for her. This was 'lost' for centuries but has now been restored by English Heritage, more or less to its original design, including the fountain and aviary.

Kenilworth was virtually destroyed by Parliamentary forces in 1649 to prevent it being used again as a military stronghold. Nevertheless, the castle remains became a tourist destination from the 18th century onwards, being much visited in the Victorian period following the publication of Sir Walter Scott's novel *Kenilworth* in 1826.

Brian Vincent

▲ Although largely in ruins, Robert Dudley's palace remains spectacular



▲ Windows and hall cellars in the John of Gaunt's Wing – built in the late 14th century

Photos by Gundula Dorey

Visit to Horton Court

Tuesday 14 August 2012

The Horton Court estate was mentioned in the Domesday Book as a substantial holding belonging to Ulf, believed to be an illegitimate son of King Harold. The house, dating to 1180, is thought to be the only remaining non-fortified Norman manor house and the oldest surviving rectory, given by William I to Robert de Tosney, who later passed it to the Cathedral at Old Sarum.

For much of its life, Horton Court was tenanted. Residents included a Chancellor of the Exchequer, a Cardinal, an Ambassador to Rome and an Archbishop of Canterbury. At the time of the Dissolution, the property passed to the Dukes of Somerset, before eventually being sold to the Pastons, the East Anglian Roman Catholic family known for the Paston letters, who lived there until the middle of the 18th century. One important tenant, William Knight, added a Tudor Hall. Knight was Henry VIII's ambassador to Rome playing a central role trying to persuade the Pope to legalise Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn.

Hilda Wills, a later tenant in the 20th century altered and tried to restore the house. One of our party spoke of a friend who remembered coming to a ball in the house in the 1930s. In 1945, the house came into the possession of the National Trust. Volunteers have worked assiduously to clear the house and restore the gardens, but now it requires serious money and skilled craftsmen to deal with damp and the other ills that beset a property of this age and complexity so its future is uncertain.



▲ Members gather at the front entrance of Horton Court. Entrance to the house is restricted and only the ground floor is open to the public.

Photos by Margaret Rowley

William Knight built a cloister-style walk in the grounds, probably inspired by examples he had seen on the continent.



◀ The 14th century church of St Edward the Elder.



In the nearby church of St Edward the Elder we found monuments to the Paston family who moved to Horton after their house burned down in 1708. As Lords of the Manor, they had a duty to maintain the church, which must have been unwelcome to such a prominent Roman Catholic family. Rumour has it that they built into the house a secret chapel and priest holes, although the house has been so altered that this is now impossible to prove.

While we were fascinated by the complex and dramatic history of Horton Court, we were also regaled with excellent cake and tea by volunteers in the church. All in all, this was a very enjoyable visit although the journey home was even more dramatic for some. But that is altogether another story.

Margaret Rowley

THIS IS A VERY SPECIAL PLACE
WHERE THE SPIRIT OF SCIENTIFIC
DISCOVERY, AND THE MEMORY OF A TRUE
HUMANITARIAN
IS STILL VERY MUCH ALIVE

▲ *Plaque in the Temple of Vaccinia*

▼ *Like Jenner himself, his Queen Anne house is impressive without being ostentatious*

Jenner's House and Museum

Tuesday 11 September 2012

It is thought that Edward Jenner, through his development of smallpox vaccination, has saved more lives than any other human being. But there was even more to discover about this extraordinary polymath. Jenner, who on the surface was a humble doctor living almost his whole life in Berkeley, was also a surgeon, a Fellow of the Royal Society, Royal Physician, a researcher into the natural sciences, an ornithologist (he was an expert on the cuckoo), a poet (admittedly not his greatest talent), a flautist, a viticulturist and much more besides.



Photos by Margaret Thewarapperuma and Ann Wood

▶ *Jenner's large and quirky garden shed was known as the Temple of Vaccinia*



I was deeply affected by the standing exhibition about smallpox and vaccination. What a ghastly disease this is. I was moved by hearing that Jenner did not profit personally from his discoveries about vaccination; that in his Temple of Vaccinia (his large and elaborate garden shed) he vaccinated anyone who came there free of charge; and that after his wife died he always carried a rose she had given him – it was in his pocket when he died.

Jenner had many opponents especially among London doctors and, in Britain, vaccination was not adopted immediately. In contrast, the French took up his ideas enthusiastically and very quickly instigated a country-wide vaccination programme. So revered was Jenner in France that he was able to affect the release of British medical men held prisoner by the French by appealing directly to Emperor Napoleon III.

The visit, admirably organised by Ruth, also took in the large collection of tabletop tombs in the churchyard and a short walk through Berkeley town centre with accompanying explanatory talks given by local experts. The weather was sunny and bright showing off Jenner's lovely Queen Anne house and elegant garden to great advantage. The lunch in the Berkeley Arms was excellent. I came away thinking that Jenner was a thoroughly admirable man and an example to us all. I was grateful for this opportunity to get to know him a little better.

Jenny Wright

▼ *Tabletop tombs in the churchyard. Each grave held up to 12 bodies stacked on top of each other*



Behind the Scenes

The Glenside Hospital Museum

Monday 1 October 2012

Glenside Hospital Museum, previously the chapel of the Glenside Psychiatric Hospital, overlooks the Glenside Campus of UWE. Standing on the chancel steps, beside the organ and under the curved timbers of the chapel roof, Brian Kington introduced us to the museum. Glenside was founded in 1861 as the Bristol Lunatic Asylum. In the Kaiser's War, the buildings became the Beaufort War Hospital and are the subject of Stanley Spencer's memorable frescos of war-time life in the Sandham Memorial Chapel near Newbury.

The hospital, which held about a thousand patients, was a largely self-contained community. In addition to medical services and wards it had its own farm, piggery, butcher and baker. In addition, there was a sewing room, a laundry, a hairdresser, a chiropodist, a social club, and even a fire brigade.

When Glenside closed in 1994, staff led by the late Dr. Donal Early started to collect artefacts. These form the core of the present display, imaginatively presented in settings designed by a museum volunteer who has since qualified in museum studies. Many exhibits seem gruesome to non-medical visitors but represent mid-20th century medical technology. It is harder for museum displays to help the viewer imagine the life of the patients but Denis William Reed, a talented artist, produced some delightful drawings of his fellow patients, which provide a touching insight into a patient's everyday life in the hospital in the 60s and 70s.

While the bulk of the displays are associated with Glenside Hospital, there are additional items from other hospitals, and many fossils found locally. The museum is also a central hospital archive and several publications on the hospitals' histories are available for purchase.

Our thanks are due to Carol Ouvry for arranging this visit, and to the Friends of Glenside Museum for making it so interesting and thought-provoking.

Roy Taylor

Photos by Judith Lockwood Jones



▲ The hospital museum in the old chapel

▶ A Victorian male straitjacket

▼ Machines for Electro-convulsive therapy



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**Copy deadline for next
issue: 21 January 2013**