

Newsletter

Bristol's incredible picture collection showcased at The 'Opulent Origins' Display

In this edition

- 200 years of displaying fine art at the Museum
- Detailed looks at the Bristol Tapestry and the Chinese Textile Collection
- Reports of trips including The Merchants' Hall, Clevedon Beach, Longford Castle and The Mount Without
- How you can help the Friends and the Museums
- News of upcoming exhibitions and events

From the Chairman

'Chairman' becomes 'Chair'

You will no doubt have spotted that this usual first section of our newsletter, normally headed 'From the Chairman', is now titled 'From the Chair'. That is because a majority of our Executive Committee voted in favour of bringing the title up to date, to align it with what is these days the most accepted usage. We will be reflecting that change wherever 'Chairman' currently appears, most notably in our constitution and throughout the newsletter.

Royal Visit to Bristol Museum and Art Gallery

I was delighted to be invited to represent the Friends in helping to host a visit to BMAG on Friday 30 June by their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester. The Duke and Duchess followed two different routes round the museum, and I was introduced to the Duchess in the context of our financial support for the purchase of the two Lund porcelain vases recently acquired and now on display in pride of place in the Ceramics Gallery.

New volunteers needed to help run the Friends

I am pleased to say that since the last newsletter we have recruited two new volunteers. One of them, Giles Woodward, has volunteered to take the minutes at the Executive Committee meetings, meaning that we have been able to relieve Katherine Martin, our Honorary Secretary and current minute-taker, of that part of her role. As a result, Katherine has agreed to continue as Honorary Secretary for another year.

However, if we are to thrive in the future we still need more members to step up now to take an active part in running the organisation. The Events Group is particularly in need of a couple of new and enthusiastic members who would initially work with existing volunteers, with a view to running some of their own events once they are up to speed. Is this something that you would be prepared to consider? For new members in particular this would be a great opportunity to get to know other active members better.

Perhaps you were thinking that you would hold back from volunteering to give others a chance. If so, now is the time to step forward and let us know you would like to be more involved in ensuring the success of our organisation for the foreseeable future.

I shared a long list of some of the opportunities available in the June newsletter. If you are interested in any of those, or have ideas of how you could help the Friends in other ways, please email me on sue.thurlow@outlook.com.

Cover photo: Edward Villiers Rippingille, c.1790-1859, detail from *The Recruiting Party*, painted 1822.

© Bristol Culture



▲ *Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Gloucester is welcomed to the refurbished Delftware displays at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery by Friends' Chair Sue Thurlow with Kate Newnham, Senior Curator – Art, Amber Turner, Curator – Applied Art (behind the Duchess), and the Lund vases*

© Barbara Evripidou

Online Booking for Friends Events

It is good to see that the proportion of Friends using online booking to reserve their places on our events is steadily increasing. It saves time for the organisers, and for the members it simplifies the process and saves the ever-increasing cost of a stamp.

An added bonus is that it will allow us more easily to share places on undersubscribed events with members of the Museum's 1823 club and Patrons' Circle.

Harbour Festival

The Friends' sale of cakes, preserves, books and jigsaws was particularly successful this year, raising over £1,200 thanks to Mary Bailey and a handful of other enthusiastic volunteers. Cakes and preserves were particularly popular. We may have been helped by the weather, with short sharp showers across both days delivering the public to us in their attempt to escape the rain. Many thanks to everyone who contributed including to Chris Ecclestone and his team, who did a great job of clearing a space for us among the large exhibits in L Shed.

Museum Summer Party – Celebrating 200 years

I was pleased to see so many of you at the Museums' very special summer party at BMAG on 3 July. The opportunity



▲ *The Harbour Festival cake stand at a rare quiet moment*

© Sue Thurlow

came too late for the June newsletter, so we used email to pass it on to as many members as possible. If you are happy to be contacted by the Friends by email but did not receive an invitation please contact Richard Avery, our Membership Secretary, on rchrdrvry@gmail.com so that he can update our records. We send emails only a few times each year, and only on subjects directly related to the Friends or to the museums we support.

We never share your personal details with anyone outside the small number of Friends volunteers who might need to communicate with you.



▲ *Museum partygoers gathered under the Bristol Boxkite to listen to the speeches*

© Sue Thurlow

AGM and Curators Talks

23 September at M Shed

This year's AGM will be as succinct as possible – we aim for a maximum of 30 minutes to be spent on formal, and essential, business. It will be followed as usual by a less formal Q&A, some interesting short talks from the museums team, and some tea and cake. It is an opportunity for you to contribute to the inner workings of the Friends, learn more about what is happening at the museums, and meet up with Friends old and new. I look forward to seeing you there.

Historic Maps

Some of the museum's historic map collection (including designs of the suspension bridge etc) are now available as custom prints on demand in the online shop. They come in a choice of sizes, framed or unframed, starting from £25. If like me you are fascinated by the wonderful maps gallery on the first floor of BMAG, this is a chance to put a little bit of Bristol in your home.

British Association of Friends of Museums annual conference

There are just a few weeks now to what will be BAFM's 50th annual conference on Saturday 30 September, on the theme of Regeneration in Challenging Times. Full details are now on the BAFM website. His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester is the Patron of BAFM and is expected at the conference, so I am looking forward to reminding him of his visit to BMAG in June. The only downside is that the timing clashes with Docks Heritage weekend – one of my favourite museum events – which I will miss for the first time.

Sue Thurlow Chair

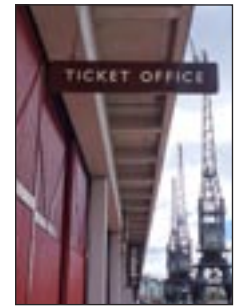
Museum volunteering opportunities

The museums are recruiting for some interesting ongoing volunteering roles. If you would like to learn more about them please contact Chloe Little, Volunteer Coordinator at Bristol Museums, at museum.volunteering@bristol.gov.uk. Whichever role is of interest, there will be tea and coffee available and somewhere to eat your lunch.

Ticket sellers for the M Shed working exhibits

When I first started volunteering on Bristol Harbour Railway this was always a role carried out by members of what was then Bristol Magpies. Back then the ticket sellers were either exposed to the elements or sitting in a tiny standalone ticket office. In the last couple of years, a lovely smart ticket office has been created inside L Shed (the east end of M Shed) evoking the days of the old GWR, so the ticket sellers and the purchasers have a much more comfortable and secure location.

To support the smooth operation of the Working Exhibits, Chris Ecclestone and his team are looking for volunteers who are happy handling cash and dealing with members of the public. Training will be given in the operation of their basic digital payments system. Ticket sellers are needed on most weekends from spring until October, but each volunteer will be able to choose shifts that suit them best. It is a great opportunity to be part of the very friendly Working Exhibits team and get the occasional free ride on a train, boat or crane.



▲ *The entrance the Working Exhibits ticket office in L/M shed*

© Chloe Little

Front of House support at the Historic Houses

The museums are looking for more volunteers to help the Visitor Experience and Operations Team. The role is to provide general support to the Visitor Experience staff members, including making visitors feel welcome and answering their questions. The Houses are open from spring to December, Saturday to Tuesday for Georgian House and the Red Lodge, and Thursday to Sunday for Blaise. Volunteers can choose their own days on a rota, as many or as few as they choose. It is an opportunity to work with the Visitor Experience team, and to learn much more about the house of your choice and explore areas not open to the public.

Sue Thurlow

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Staff news

It has been confirmed that Genevieve Adkins will not be returning to the role of Head of Culture. The service will shortly be recruiting for a permanent Head of Service and our Interim Head of Culture, Dan Feeney, has extended his stay to support that process. It is hoped that this role and the Head of Public Programmes role will both be out for recruitment by September.

Amy Raphael, curator in the Visual Arts team, has left after three years in the service. She has a great new job at the V&A, in the Asia department. Amy has contributed a huge amount to the museum during that time including the very popular Japanese netsuke exhibition and the newly-updated display of Japanese porcelain. We have also kept her busy cataloguing over 1,000 pieces of Japanese porcelain and two collections of Chinese textiles. She has brought her expertise in Asian cultures as well as awesome organisational and design skills to the museum and much enjoyment to our visitors. We will miss her hugely but hope that the Bristol/V&A axis will be even stronger as a result!

Royal visit

On Friday 30 June Bristol Museum & Art Gallery welcomed some very special visitors. Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester toured the museum galleries and took in multiple exhibits, including the new display of delftware that the Friends have generously supported. The visit marked two important anniversaries: Bristol 650, a year-long celebration of all things Bristol, and also the bicentenary of Bristol Museums. They met with local people, artists and supporters of the museum, including some of the stitchers of the Bristol Tapestry. This extraordinary piece depicts nearly 1,000 years of Bristol's history from the earliest settlement to the first flight of Concorde and was produced by a group of over 90 local people from the late 1960s until its completion in 1976.

Sue Thurlow, Chair of the Friends committee, attended to represent your support of the museum and it will come as no surprise to you all that she did you proud!



▲ Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Gloucester reviews the *Opulent Origins* display at BMAG with curator Emma Meehan
© Barbara Evripidou

Summer party

We held a Summer Party at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery on Monday 3 July. This was an opportunity for our Friends, supporters and partners to enjoy exploring the museum after hours. All our current exhibitions were open and staff were dotted around the museum engaging visitors in our work. We also enjoyed music from our friends the Fitzhardinge Consort, who filled the halls with their beautiful singing. We have had some lovely feedback on the event, with people loving the opportunity to talk 'to curators and looking at the exhibitions with wonderful choral sounds in the air.' If you were able to attend, I do hope you enjoyed it.

Temnodontosaurus

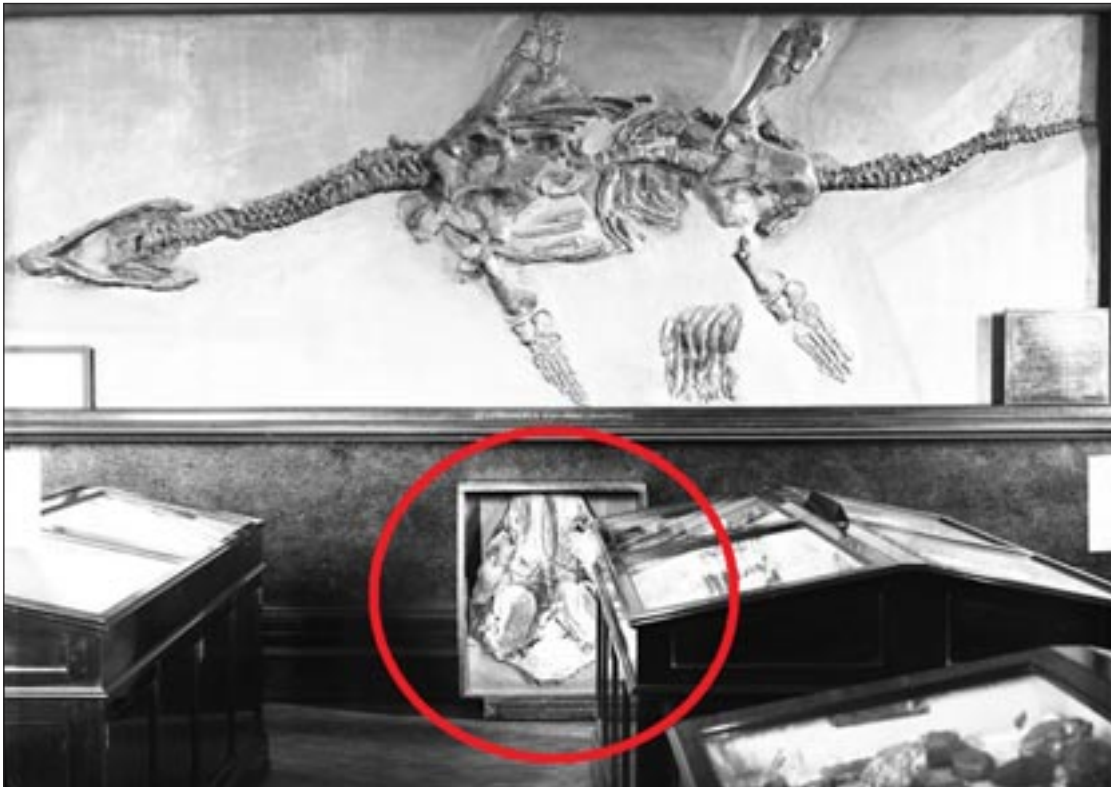
Visitors with keen eyes may have spotted a group carrying a large and heavy box out of Bristol Museum & Art Gallery on Wednesday 14 June. This was not an Indiana Jones-style heist but a painstaking effort by skilled conservators, curators and scientists to safely relocate an incredible specimen over the summer months.



▲ Nigel Larkin, David Singleton and Amelie Drewdun carefully manoeuvre the *Temnodontosaurus* skull onto the lorry
© Bristol Culture



◀ A job well done – the specimen is ready to go! Pictured left to right: Nigel Larkin, Deborah Hutchinson, David Singleton and Amelie Drewdun.
© Bristol Culture



◀ *Temnodontosaurus* in what is now Browns Restaurant, photographed on display in 1935 (ringed in red). Above it is the specimen of 'Plesiosaurus' *megacephalus* (Stutchbury, 1846), now *Atychodracon megacephalus* (Smith, 2015) which was destroyed during WWII bombing.

© Bristol Culture

Mary Anning's *Temnodontosaurus* skull has been part of Bristol Museum & Art Gallery's collections since 1845. It was one of few specimens to survive the World War II bombing of our previous site (today's Browns restaurant) and has been kept in storage for decades due to its complex conservation needs. Now, we are launching an exciting project which hopes to bring this 180-million-year-old sea dragon 'to life' again for our visitors.

Deborah Hutchinson, Curator of Geology (Natural Sciences) at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, says: 'This project has been a dream of ours for so long, it is wonderful to finally have it underway. We hope to unlock this amazing story for our visitors to enjoy and inspire the scientists of the future through Mary Anning's legacy.'

Along with conservators David Singleton and Amelie Drewdun, Deborah's team safely sent the *Temnodontosaurus* skull away on its summer holidays with conservator Nigel Larkin, who will be undertaking the highly skilled conservation and mounting work.

Rediscovering Black Portraiture at Georgian House

The Georgian House Museum re-opened this season with a series of images and installations by artist and performer Peter Brathwaite. Part of the Rediscovering Black Portraiture exhibition showing at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, in the Georgian House it marks a further step in a new direction, examining some of the uncomfortable histories that underpin its existence.

The house was built for John Pinney, the wealthy owner of sugar plantations worked by enslaved people on the Caribbean Island of Nevis. As a museum, it was originally set up to show how a wealthy Bristol merchant family lived during the late eighteenth century. Visitors may still wander through



▲ *Modern-day Antiguan doll included in the displays at the Georgian House*

© Bristol Culture



▲ *Barbadian carnival costume, Peter Brathwaite. A Barbadian carnival costume awaits visitors to the Georgian House*

© Bristol Culture

the rooms which are dressed with beautiful furniture and paintings, imagining how it might have felt to live in these grand spaces....and then notice the bright colours of the Caribbean dolls and the striking figure in carnival costume. Why are they here? Why is there Caribbean food in the kitchen, and African Caribbean hair products on the dressing table?

The modern material culture from the Caribbean sits alongside images created by Peter in response to the Getty Museum lockdown challenge: to recreate historic paintings

from items found at home. This process led Peter to an examination of his own family history, and to his considered re-workings of historic portraits featuring black people.

The works displayed at Georgian House have enabled visitors this summer to step into an uncomfortable juxtaposition of space and objects, confronted by images and material culture that would never have been seen here when it was the home of the Pinney family. More than 200 years later, they speak of where the wealth came from, giving some voice to the people whose suffering thousands of miles away allowed wealthy Europeans to live in genteel comfort.

During the planning stages, both Peter and the museum team were keen to explore the opportunities of exhibiting within the Georgian House. We hoped that the tangible stories of the family and building would create impact, drawing out the history and legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, while emphasising that this family and this house were just one of many.

Feedback has been extremely positive, with many visitors embracing the duality of the experience:

‘Conflicting – it’s lovely to look around the house, but hard to think about where the money came from.’

‘Lovely house, but very sobering’

‘Thank you, thank you – wonderful visit, assistant so helpful and knowledgeable. Living in Bristol with ancestors from Nevis makes it an illuminating visit.’

Beth Cutter (co-Development Manager with Caroline Booth Morris)

Exhibitions and Events

Wildlife Photographer of the Year

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, from October

The 59th Wildlife Photographer of the Year will be coming to Bristol Museum & Art Gallery in October, after almost a decade at M Shed. For nearly 60 years the Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition has continued to champion truly brilliant, honest and ethical wildlife photography. Bristol Museum & Art Gallery is very much looking forward to welcoming back this truly diverse and moving exhibition, which promises to be one of the most exciting and popular shows of the year.

Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology

Blaise Museum, Saturday 16 September, 11am to 4pm,

Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology is back at Blaise this year and looks set to be bigger than ever.

Throughout the day, there will be tours, demonstrations, displays and stalls from a whole host of local societies, re-enactors, field archaeologists and heritage organisations. There will be plenty for mini archaeologists to do too with Roman myths retold by storyteller Michael Loader, mini excavations, Iron Age coin hammering, pot-making, face painting and more. Blaise Castle, Blaise Community Gardens and Henbury Church will also be open for the occasion.

As ever, this event is supported by the Friends and if you would like to help volunteer at the FBMGA cooking table, dressing-up space or information point, please contact sue.thurlow@outlook.com.



▲ Visitors start to arrive for last year's Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology event at Blaise Museum

© Barbara Evripidou

Docks Heritage Weekend

M Shed, SS Great Britain and Underfall Yard, Saturday 30 September and Sunday 1 October

Docks Heritage Weekend, generously sponsored again this year by the Port of Bristol, is a celebration of Bristol's maritime past with events and activities for all ages at M Shed, Underfall Yard and SS Great Britain. This year there will be a particular focus on Underfall Yard, following their serious fire, helping them to raise both awareness and funds to support their rebuild.



▲ Steam loco Portbury and the electric cranes on the quayside at M Shed, with MV Balmoral alongside

© Chris Ecclestone

Trains, boats and cranes

M Shed, various dates until late October

For the rest of the summer/autumn season there are opportunities most weekends to take a ride on Bristol Harbour Railway or the diesel tug John King, or to visit the cab of one of the electric cargo-handling cranes. There is also a variety of themed historical walks including Temple and Redcliffe, The Old City and the 1831 Riots. Check with the museums' What's On page for specific dates and times.

The Merchants' Hall, Clifton

Thursday 16 May 2023

The Friends' visit to Merchants' Hall on The Promenade in Clifton was blessed with sunshine, enhancing the splendour of the setting of the Hall, surrounded by the grandest group of semi-detached houses in the country. The Society of Merchant Venturers ('The Merchants') developed this building after their more traditional baroque headquarters in King Street was destroyed in the Bristol Blitz. They acquired, one after the other, two of the grand semi-detached houses on The Promenade, converting them into one building. Our group looked keenly to detect how the amalgamation of the two houses had been achieved, and noted the blend was admirable.

Our speaker, Francis Greenacre, a member of the Merchants, a former curator of fine art at our museum and art gallery and one of our Patrons, illustrated his talk with paintings, historic documents and artefacts, carefully selected to enhance his history of the Merchants as it was intertwined with the Port and City of Bristol. The challenges of operating a commercial port from mediaeval times in an estuary with nearly the greatest tidal rise and fall in the world spawned co-operation and ingenuity over the centuries.

Paintings by artists of the Bristol School illustrated the various stages of port improvement, particularly the development of the Floating Harbour and the Cumberland Basin. A later view of Broad Quay showed how the tidal reach diminished the impression of the size of the ships, with only their masts visible at ground level at low tide. It also illustrated the mix of homes and walkways for the elegant with business premises at that time. This view, like so many others, is now lost to the modernisation of the city.

We were shown the framed and formally decorated Royal Charters and Ordinances granted to the Merchants empowering them to operate the Port and noted the particularly impressive record of Edward VI's grant in 1552. We were told how the city was protected against fire as the Merchants restricted the unloading of inflammable cargoes to a downstream location. The co-operation between the Admiralty, influential ships' captains and the Merchants was illustrated by items brought out of store to show us, which included a magnificent silver gilt cup by Peter Archambo II, London, 1747, which was presented by the Society of Merchant Venturers to the Captain of HMS Chesterfield for 'his great care of the Port of Bristol'. The Merchants ran the Port of Bristol until 1809.

The Merchants acquired much of the Manor of Clifton, together with commoners' rights to Clifton Down, in the late 17th century to be followed by the acquisition of Durdham Down by the City Council. As we know, the Downs had long been a great recreational resource for the people of Bristol, with regular horse races and fairs, as well as prime locations for walking and horse riding. Through the Downs Act of 1861, the Merchants together with the Council continue to manage that magnificent public park. It is interesting that early experimental flights took place from the Downs, as Bristol developed a thriving aviation industry.

The involvement of the Merchants in the life of Bristol continues and not just as custodians of tradition and heritage. Stemming from their historic sponsorship of those sciences and skills needed for seafaring, the Merchants are now supporting the education of over 4,600 pupils in nine Bristol-based schools. Their support, both financial and in expertise, is seen today in many charitable, social and commercial enterprises.

Thank you to Francis Greenacre for a most interesting talk, which for me, as a newcomer to Bristol, was inspirational for further study, and to Carol Ouvre for organising the visit.

Andrea Langfield



▲ *The silver gilt cup by Peter Archambo II, London, 1747, presented by the Society of Merchant Venturers to the Captain of HMS Chesterfield.*

Photo by kind permission of the Society of Merchant Venturers

▼ *The Friends visit the Merchants' Hall*

Photo by Roni Edwards



Opulent Origins

200 Years of Displaying Fine Art

In June, we opened the display 'Opulent Origins: 200 Years of Displaying Fine Art' at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. This display, marking our bicentenary year, examines our institutional origins while reimagining the splendour of the first exhibitions of pictures hosted by our forerunner, the Bristol Institution, in the 1820s.

The title of the show suggests both the incredible opulence of Bristol's Georgian picture collections, and the unequal distribution of this enormous wealth amongst Bristol society at that time.

Bristol Archives' resources as well as the original 1820s catalogues in the National Art Library have helped us restage elements such as crimson walls, a Salon-style hang, and a reimagined catalogue. Throughout the catalogue are the names of the original members of the Bristol Institution, and the other local businessmen who loaned pictures to the first exhibitions. An index of these proprietors' sources of wealth is included.

By reframing and restaging the 1820s exhibitions, we seek to investigate the sources of wealth in the collection. We also consider what 'Fine Art' meant in the past, means now, and could mean in the future.

'Opulent Origins' is supported by events such as lunchtime talks and summer walks. Please consult our website for more information. This display has been made possible through the National Gallery's Curatorial Traineeship programme, supported by the Art Fund and the Vivmar Foundation.

I have picked out three of the paintings on display in Opulent Origins which I think you may find particularly interesting – but please do come and visit the display to see the others and read about their stories and those of their patrons.

The Recruiting Party by Bristol painter E.V. Ripplingille shows a theatrical scene which criticises British militarism and the army's recruiting methods. An active member of the Bristol Institution, Ripplingille was considered 'a pleasant fellow over the bottle and a strong dealer in puns.' He co-curated the First Exhibition in 1824 alongside his patron Daniel Wade Acraman c.1775 – 1844. *The Recruiting Party* was loaned by Acraman to the Institution's 1826 Exhibition of Pictures.

Acraman was an iron founder and a dedicated member of the Institution's Sub Committee for the Fine Arts. His generous patronage of local artists and notable collection of old masters had led Samuel Taylor Coleridge to deem him 'the father of the Fine Arts' in Bristol. The Acraman family business had grown quickly, developing from publicans in the 1760s to heavy engineering and allied trades only a quarter of a century or so later. The boom lasted until the country-wide trade depression of the 1840s which led to bankruptcy, forcing Acraman to sell his extensive art collection at a Christie's sale in Lower Crescent, Clifton, in 1842.

The Cutting Out of the French Corvette by Philip James de Louthenbourg is a crowded dramatic scene depicting a well-known incident when British forces captured a



▲ Curatorial Trainee Emma Meehan and the Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Gloucester standing before the '1820s Recreation Wall' of the *Opulent Origins: 200 Years of Displaying Fine Art* display

© Bristol Culture



▲ Edward Villiers Ripplingille, c.1790-1859, *The Recruiting Party*, painted 1822. Oil on mahogany panel

© Bristol Culture



French warship off the coast of Brittany. British history paintings featured prominently in the 1820s exhibitions, often with detailed explanatory notes in the catalogue. Charles Hare, c.1784 – 1840, bought this picture (The Cutting out of the French Corvette) for £200 in 1824, from the engraver James Fitter, who had toured it around the country. Hare was a wealthy floorcloth (carpet) manufacturer and a member of the Bristol Institution who supported local artists. He was a particularly generous contributor to the Institution exhibitions, including this picture to the 1826 Exhibition of Pictures.

Frances Reynolds painted the *Portrait of Hannah More*. More was born in Fishponds, Bristol, and was a writer, educator and anti-slavery campaigner. She was about 35 years old when the portrait shown here was painted. She is depicted in a pose usually reserved for 'men of letters'; in the act of writing with her hand on her temple, indicating her thoughtfulness and intellectual respectability.

Frances Reynolds was the younger sister of Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A. Despite paintings portraits of some of the most important women of the day, Reynolds only publicly exhibited a flower piece. She was also a writer, publishing an essay on taste in 1785, as well as keeping her brother's house in London.

More attended the Institution's lectures and donated money and objects including books and 'an inkstand made from Shakespeare's mulberry tree.' In 1825, the Sub Committee for the Fine Arts submitted a 'special application' to Thomas Acland to loan his portrait of Hannah More by Henry Pickersgill R.A. (1782 – 1875) for that year's exhibition. The Pickersgill portrait is now in the National Portrait Gallery. This portrait represents the involvement of well-to-do women in the Bristol Institution. Women artists, such as Rolinda Sharples, received free season tickets along with her male counterparts, and sold paintings at the Bristol Institution shows.

▲ **Philip James de Loutherbourg, 1740 – 1812, *The Cutting out of the French Corvette (La Chevrette)*, painted 1802.**
© Bristol Culture

▼ **Frances Reynolds, 1729 – 1807, *Portrait of Hannah More, 1745 – 1833*, Oil on canvas, painted c.1780**
© Bristol Culture



The Mount Without

Wednesday 19 July 2023

The church of St Michael the Archangel on The Mount Without is now known more simply as 'The Mount Without'. The church was called 'Without' as it was built outside the old Bristol City walls. A church was originally built on the site in 1147 by Robert Fitzhamon. It was rebuilt in 1460 with a new clock tower, which remained even after the main Church was rebuilt in 1775 by Thomas Paty and is still a feature of the building today.

In World War II during bombing raids, two bombs caused major damage to the church. In 1940 one bomb fell a few feet from the church. In 1941 an incendiary device set fire to the roof. Due to dwindling congregations the building stopped being used as a church for religious services in 1999. Squatters took over the site in 2016 and seemingly deliberately caused a major fire causing more damage to the roof. Luckily many of the fittings and plaques survived the last fire despite there being no complete roof for over three years.

On our visit to The Mount Without we were welcomed by Norman Routledge, who, jointly with Michele Midwinter of dance company Impermanence, set out their plans for restoring the church. Norman had previously organised the restoring of Kingsweston House. We were shown the new ceiling in the main part of the church with an impressive sun and clouds design and large bronze-effect sculpture. We were also shown the new sprung dance floor. This area is now used for dances, civil wedding ceremonies and work gatherings.

Clive Burlton then took over part of the talk and told us of the involvement of the Gloucester Regiment. The Regiment was based at the large house at the top of St Michael's Hill. That building was itself bombed and ruined and the site was later used to build St Michael's Hill Bristol Maternity Hospital. During World War II, 842 members of that regiment were injured or died, and 6 wooden wall plaques were then installed in the church listing all their names. A stained-glass window was installed to commemorate the Regiment.

We were then taken down to the crypt. We were told how this area had contained tombs and family vaults from 1450 until 1775 when the church, but not the tower, was rebuilt. At that stage the old tomb stones were used as under-slabs for the new tombs.

Norman's team lowered the floor in the crypt after all the tombs were removed. The tombs were then relaid in their original spots under the floor area. The crypt is now used for smaller social functions. It has a bar area and toilets. Access to the toilets for people using the main hall is only via the outside of the building. Permission for interior access via a lift has so far been refused.

Clive then showed us where the wooden Gloucester memorials are fixed on walls in the corner of the crypt. It had proved hard to locate where the panels had been stored until someone at the Diocese remembered they had been sealed in some wooden packing in an area in the main hall of the church.

Norman then took a few of us up the clock tower. The clock is not working and is probably beyond repair. The bells, cast in 1664 and recast in 1739, are regularly rung by Bristol University students and sometimes at social functions. There are 107 steps to the top of the tower: wooden steps at the base and stone steps towards the top. It was a clear day with views to St Michael's Hill to the north and Bristol Cathedral and beyond to the south - well worth the climb.

In the church Norman explained that all the restoration work had been achieved without any grants, donations or large bequests but it had been an uphill struggle, despite - not because of - the Bristol Planning Department. Many thanks to Carol Ouvry for organising such an interesting visit.

Giles Woodward



▲ Church interior showing the cloud ceiling and bronze sculpture

Photo by Eric Albourne



▲ Old timber from church has been used as edging in the garden

Photo by Catherine Dixon



View from the top of the tower

Photo by Giles Woodward

Clevedon Beach

The Geology and Natural History

Wednesday 5 July 2023

Almost blown away, we assembled on Clevedon Pier on a very windy morning for Phil Curme, chair of the Clevedon Pier Trust, to give us a brief resumé of the remarkable story of the saving of the pier – and how its ongoing maintenance is being funded and managed. This is quite a challenge: for example, scaffolding is currently allowing detailed examination of the structure's condition. Our leader for the visit, Professor of Geology Sir Stephen Sparks, then outlined the wider geological landscape for us, including the Mendip Hills, after which we adjourned to the beach in two groups with Stephen and Deborah Hutchinson, Curator of Geology, to look at the rocks beneath the toll house at the entrance to the pier. This outcrop, in a space of about 100 metres, tells a massive geological story – hence its national importance as Clevedon Shore Site of Special Scientific Interest. Steve briefly summarised and demonstrated this to us clearly.

Our first astonishing discovery was that about 360 million years ago Clevedon was situated south of the equator in one of the two large continents on Earth at that time. Subsequently the continents collided and reformed, leaving Clevedon in the northern hemisphere. The geology at Clevedon Beach represents this time from about 360 to 220 million years ago and thus includes four geological time periods: the Devonian, Carboniferous, Permian and Triassic. Steve showed us the layers of rock remaining from these periods and an ancient geological fault within this rock series, which both contorted the material and allowed hot molten rock from deep in the earth to flow into them. This cooled to form minerals (containing metals or other valuable resources) now to be seen in rocks on the shore, several of which are rare.

Steve later explained that the flatter rocks along the beach were formed in the Triassic period by fast-flowing rivers bringing sand and silt into a vast salt lake (while dinosaurs still roamed on the land). We examined the traces of sand ripples left in these ancient rocks. These are remarkably similar to the marks left in the mud in the Severn Estuary today.

Re-invigorated by lunch, we reconvened for a fossil hunt led by Steve and Deborah in the Carboniferous rocks further along the shore, finding many traces of burrowing soft-bodied creatures, armour plates from the heads of fish and crinoids (sea lilies). Once we realised what we were looking for, we could see there was an abundance of tiny fossils of marine creatures in these rocks.

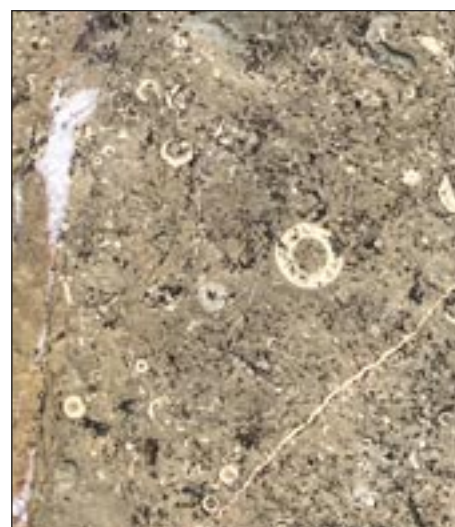
To finish the afternoon we sat in the sunshine while Rhian Rowson (Curator of Natural History) and Ray Barnett (former Head of Collections) showed us some of today's marine creatures and plants which they had found on the sea shore: sand hoppers, a sea slater (a marine woodlouse), spring tails, shore crab, winkles, many different kinds of seaweed (bladder wrack, egg wrack, sea wrack) and sea lettuce. Rhian regaled us with tales of first sightings in the 19th century of whales and dolphins in the Bristol Channel. The skeleton of a whale found at Littleton-upon-Severn is in M Shed.

There was a wealth of interesting information given to us during the day which was almost too much to absorb, although communicated in a clear and comprehensible way. The information panels alongside the toll house summarise some of the geological story well and are worth looking at. We are very grateful to the four experts who opened our eyes to the amazing geology and fascinating natural history of Clevedon Shore.

Mary and Martin Bailey



▲ Looking at sand ripples in Triassic rocks



▲ Crinoid fossils in Clevedon carboniferous rock



▲ Porthole view of the structure of Clevedon Pier

Further details at www.clevedonpier.co.uk/the-geology-of-clevedon-pier-beach/

Photos by Martin and Mary Bailey

Pixels and threads

Digitising Chinese Minority Ethnic Textiles

Back in March 2023, the Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives, generously supported the digitisation of 103 objects from two large and beautiful collections of 267 Chinese textiles the museum recently acquired.

Following the recent retirement of our in-house photographer, we commissioned the services of Jamie Woodley Photography for the project. Although we had funds for four days of photography, it quickly became apparent that this would not be enough time to digitise the whole collection. Thus, we turned to the Friends to support an additional four days of work and generously the Friends obliged. I am delighted to share a selection of the high resolution photographs the Friends helped fund and to introduce you to several objects from the collection.

The two collections primarily represent the fashion and textiles of Miao people in southwest China, but also of Dong, Sui, and Bouyei ethnic groups. Miao people are one of the largest minorities in China and are recognised by the government of China as one of the 56 official ethnic groups. (Miao is a Chinese term that is widely used but does not reflect the self-designation of all the peoples within this cluster, many of whom prefer Hmong or Hmu).

Textiles and embroidery are particularly significant to Miao people. Traditionally they have no written language, and the stories of their ancestors are encapsulated in the fabric of their clothing. Embroidery designs and techniques are imbued with deep symbolism and have been passed down from mother to daughter for generations.

There is a saying: 'When you meet one hundred Miao people, you will see one hundred types of traditional costumes.' This is because the geographical distance between mountainous villages have resulted in distinct styles forming over the centuries. Common aspects in the fashion are the use of indigo dye, wax-resist decoration, and embroidery.

The pieces now in Bristol's collection were acquired by two Bristol-based embroiderers, Sally Sparks and Vivien Young, during their trips to China in 1997, 1999 and 2006. With their eye for embroidery, their collections include a wide range of examples illustrating different techniques, patterns, and designs from villages in Guizhou and Guangxi Provinces in southwest China. Star pieces include a complete woman's outfit from Machang village, a panel from a baby carrier from Shidong, and a skirt with appliquéd designs from Yarong village.

Particularly stunning are the examples of the folded silk technique, where thin, tiny rectangles of silk are starched with tree sap, folded into triangles, layered, and stitched into place. This creates thick textured patterns with detailed and intricate designs, often featuring birds, dragons, fish, faces, and other talismanic symbols which offer the wearer protection from mishaps and evil spirits.

There are also wonderful examples of satin-stitch work. Here, stitches are made over a paper-cut stencil that is glued to the fabric. For split-thread embroidery, a strand of silk thread is split into thinner threads and softened with a lubricant of honey locust tree seeds to make the threads smooth and to give the threads a silky finish.

Pleated skirts are also a distinctive feature of Miao dress. Pleats are made by hand, by draping the cloth over the curve of a barrel and carefully folding tight and even pleats from one end until all the fabric is used up. The pleats are tied into place with rope,



▲ *Jamie Woodley photographing larger objects.*

Images © Bristol Culture

All textiles pictured were donated in 2022 by Sally Sparks and Vivien Young.

▼ *Documentation assistant, Roisin Daly assigning temporary numbers to objects.*



treated with rice starch and left to set. The skirt in Bristol's collection is made from 8 metres (26 feet) of hand-woven fabric!

The complete collections are available to view on our Collections Online webpage by searching the terms 'Sally Sparks Collection', and 'Vivien Young Collection' (<http://museums.bristol.gov.uk/>).

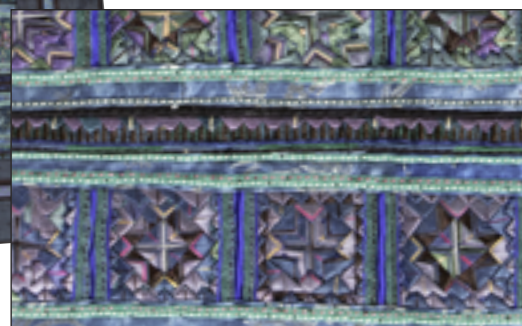
Thank you to the Friends for your support. We are delighted that work like this enables us to share such large and beautiful collections with a global audience.

Amy Raphael Project Curator



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

▼ Close-up of baby carrier. The thickness of the folded layers can be seen.

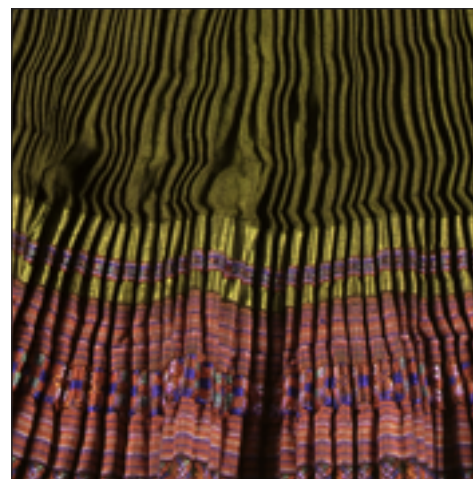


◀ Sleeve cuff for a woman's jacket. From Benli village, Guizhou province, 1999. Dong ethnic Group.

▼ Close-up of satin-stitched details on sleeve cuff.



▼ Pleated skirt from Maoping village, Guizhou province, 1997. Miao ethnic group.



▲ Close-up of pleats in the skirt. The green dye can be seen unfaded in the creases of the pleats.

The Bristol Tapestry

Thursday 15 June 2023

Having enjoyed Carole Tapper's introductory lecture on the Bristol Tapestry in May, I was delighted to have the opportunity to study it in its present home in Bristol Museum. Our expert guide was Sheila Dawkins, who was one of the volunteer embroiderers.

The 'tapestry' lines both sides of the area near the lifts. It was the inspiration initially of Jean Tanner and Marjorie Bleasdale in 1966, who decided that Bristol should have its own 'Bayeux Tapestry'. The Bristol Tapestry is not a tapestry as there is no weaving involved. Like its Bayeux inspiration, it is embroidery at its most imaginative, created with stitching, appliqué and screen-printing techniques. Eventually more than 90 local people were involved in its creation. They completed it in 1976. The whole project was worked on strong Irish linen, paid for by donations.

There are four panels, which total 22 metres in length. They depict events and places which reflect the time the Tapestry was made. The techniques used are delightfully idiosyncratic, with pieces of evening gowns, silk scarves, and other scraps being incorporated into the work.

When a completed panel was shown at Bristol's 600th centenary on the Downs in 1973, the marquee under which it was protected was blown away in a storm overnight! The resulting wet and muddy panel was handed to the museum conservators, who machine washed and dried it. Unsurprisingly, it shrank! That panel was stretched tightly for 8 years and today there is no hint of the mishap.

The four large panels contain many scenes depicting historical events or buildings, in roughly chronological order, with friezes along the length of each, top and bottom. The individual pictures show scenes from the early Middle Ages, right up to the 1960s, and many events in between. I particularly liked the picture of Bristol Cathedral, with its windows glinting with stained glass (done with pieces from a sparkling evening dress!). The waters of the river Avon, passing under the Clifton Suspension Bridge, shimmer with light (a blue silk stole). The fighting, fires and fear of the Bristol Riots in 1831 are shown in a vivid scene. There is the mediaeval Bristol Bridge complete with shops and a chapel built on it. The detail is extraordinary. Under each scene is embroidered a description.

The friezes contain delightful vignettes of historical people or items, often linked to the adjacent scene. For example, above a view of Broad Quay where barrels of rum and packets of tobacco are being unloaded, there are pictures of cocoa beans, a sherry bottle, a tobacco leaf, the Matthew, Thomas Chatterton on his deathbed and there is even a lady in a corset (corsets were manufactured in a factory in Kingswood in the 1920s). The beautiful red flower, the Nonsuch, which became very popular in Bristol after merchants brought it from the Eastern Mediterranean, is repeated at intervals. The vignette of Isambard Kingdom Brunel is unmistakable, with his top hat and a rather wicked look on his face!

There is so much amazing detail that I will certainly make a beeline for this area next time I am in the museum and see what other delights I can find. Thank you so much to Sheila for explaining the history from her perspective. How wonderful to have been involved in such a beautiful work of art.

Sue Black



▲ *Bristol tapestry – Bristol riots*

Photos by Mary Bailey and
Sheila Dawkins

▼ *Bristol tapestry – Bristol Cathedral*



Messums, Wiltshire

Thursday 22 June 2023

Whilst the headline of this trip is to Messums in Wiltshire, the showstopper was travelling with Richard Avery in his vintage 1960 Royal Blue Bristol coach. To complete the look, Richard was resplendently dressed in black trousers with gold stripes, buff jacket with driver badge and a white peaked cap. There was a good number of us travellers and despite there being no seat belts, on-board toilet or microphone, we felt like royalty, especially when other vehicles tooted us and people smiled and waved.

Our first stop was at Flourish on the A4 Bath Road at Saltford. Here a farmyard had been turned into a café and delicatessen/health shop with ample parking. We then travelled on via Bath to Warminster where Richard supplied us with a map of suitable eateries for brunch.

After all this we arrived at Messums Art Gallery in the small village of Tisbury. Originally, this was part of a nunnery founded in 880 belonging to Shaftesbury Abbey (the largest and most important in the country). The large estate was broken up in the 17th century and the area round Messums formed Place Farm. This farm of 776 acres was sold in 1933 to James Morrison MP, a millionaire London haberdasher. The Morrison family still own the farm.

The centrepiece of Messums is a huge tithe barn. Originally a 13th century monastic barn with a floor area of over a third of an acre, it is believed to be the largest barn of its type in England. The barn has been restored and converted into a multi-purpose gallery and arts centre with an upmarket restaurant.

In the art space, we saw an exhibition of photos by Tim Georgeson entitled *The Hidden*. Unusual, calming digital sounds played as we went round. In fact, the whole site is very peaceful, set as it is in the open countryside. In the old milking parlour was an exhibition by Henry Lamb (1883-1960) with beautiful pencil sketches depicting scenes from his life. Lamb had been a surgeon in World War I and a war artist in World War II. One of the sketches that interested me most was a drawing of a factory in what looked like a cut-out dolls' house. Also sharing this space were various tactile bronze sculptures by Bridget McCrum each one hinting at its subject. I liked one of three cows with two clearly visible but just a glimpse of the third animal. All the artworks can be purchased by those with a few thousand to spare. We saw several items sporting red dots which I presume denoted sales.

After a photograph of us all in front of the Royal Blue coach, we eventually left for our stately drive home. However, when we reached the end of the Keynsham bypass at Hick's Gate, police had closed the A4 to Brislington and we had a detour through Hanham, St George and Lawrence Hill, all well negotiated by Richard and only extending the travelling time by a few minutes. Near Arnos Vale we went past Chatsworth Road which was the birthplace of the coachwork for the Royal Blue.

Thank you to Richard who maintained his smart appearance all day with some comedy turns as well (other coach companies watch out). It was a day we will not forget.

Catherine Dixon

Photos by Mary Bailey
and Catherine Dixon



▲ Richard Avery and his Royal Blue coach



▲ Albert Paley sculpture

▼ The Tithe Barn



Longford Castle

11 May 2023

Longford castle was originally triangular in shape with three great towers, one at each corner. It had been damaged by fire and was rebuilt by Thomas Gorges in about 1576. He gave it a Scandinavian appearance with square white and black patterning, to honour his wife, Helena Snakenborg, who was born in Sweden and became lady-in-waiting to Elizabeth I.

Thomas used silver salvaged from a Spanish Armada shipwreck to finance the building of Longford Castle as a 'Prodigy House'. These large, showy houses were built by courtiers and wealthy Elizabethans. Other examples are Longleat, Burghley, Hardwick Hall and Hatfield. Ben Jonson described them as 'proud, ambitious heaps'.

Longford is the family home of William Pleydell-Bouverie, Earl of Radnor, along with his wife and six children. The castle contains many family photos among an incredible array of works of art. The Bouveries were originally Huguenots who made their money through the silk trade. One had the good fortune to marry into an equally wealthy aristocratic family, the Pleydells, in the mid-1700s. His son inherited the family fortune after the death of his mother and added Pleydell to his name.

Two guides took us round in two groups for a tour lasting 2 hours. They pointed out the important details of selected exhibits such as the exceptional brush work which made skin appear translucent and textiles shine. They showed us the effect of sulphurous fumes from open fires on wall coverings which changed them from green to brown. Individual lamps helped to highlight particular features. The level of natural light was particularly good. Besides a number of small paintings my most coveted item was a beautifully decorated jewellery cabinet on a stand.

Many of the family portraits are by Reynolds and Gainsborough but there are examples of many other European painters including landscapes by Claude, flowers by Brueghel, a Velasquez and many others. One portrait was of a particularly high-spirited chatelaine who not only brought a gondola and gondolier back from Venice but also managed her own well-respected all-female orchestra, wearing her tiara back to front while conducting so the audience could admire it!

The house and gardens are adorned with modern sculptures of childlike figures which look like cloth but were actually not. Outside were well-kept gardens with clipped yew hedges.

We were given a very comprehensive booklet, written in collaboration with the National Gallery, about the castle which will help remind us of the truly wonderful contents of the property. We felt exceptionally lucky to have visited Longford Castle as only 28 groups are allowed in each year – almost as difficult to visit as Highgrove used to be. Once we had seen the treasures inside, we were even more grateful to Catherine Dixon and Carol Lear for arranging this visit – including the weather as it rained only while we were in the coach.

Marianne Pitman



▲ Longford Castle and gardens

Photo by Mary Bailey



▲ A tower showing the black and white design

Photo by Mary Bailey

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