

September 2024
Issue 226

Happy 90th birthday Pyronaut!

In this edition

- celebrating 90 years of *Pyronaut* at the Bristol Harbour Festival
- visits to Dyrham Park House, Stanway House and Winterbourne House
- a look at the Truth to Nature Exhibition and the Hay Wain
- taking in Fresh Air at Quenington
- behind the Scenes at the Chinese Jade Display, Blaise Castle Museum and Blaise Hamlet and the Bristol Corn Exchange

From the Chair

Celebrations on the quayside at M Shed

The 90th birthday celebrations in June for Pyronaut, M Shed's fire float, including on Saturday the Band of the Avon Fire and Rescue Service, were very enjoyable and we had a successful sale in L Shed of home-made cakes. We held a similar sale at the Harbour Festival in July – including also jigsaws and Mary Bailey's famous orange and ginger marmalade – and again that was both fun and profitable. Many thanks to those of you who baked cakes & marmalade, donated jigsaws, and made time to come and help sell during the events – and to Chris Ecclestone and his working exhibits volunteers who supported us in setting up and packing away, and in making us feel so welcome.

Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology at Blaise

A small group of our volunteers ran a historic food stall at the event that started Bristol's participation this year in the nationwide Festival of Archaeology. For once the weather smiled on us, and we entertained over 1,000 visitors. Our historic food display starred Mary Bailey's amazing Roman loaf, complete with baked-in string carrying handle. Katie Iles, Archaeology Curator, said it was the best Roman loaf she had ever seen!

British Association of Friends of Museums (BAFM)

A small group of trustees – including me – are going to the 2024 BAFM Annual Conference, from Friday 4 to Sunday 6 October, hosted by The Friends of Wisbech and Fenland Museum, Cambridgeshire.

We have been invited by the trustees of BAFM to host the 2025 Annual Conference here in Bristol. That is an honour and enables us to show BAFM members from across the country just what a wonderful collection of museums we have here in Bristol. We can also introduce delegates to the wider delights of the city and showcase what a successful and friendly Friends group we are! In addition, it will give our members the opportunity to take part in a conference and the associated social events without the challenge and cost of travel and hotels.

It is also a lot of work, which the Events Group have decided they are ready to take on, although I am sure we will be asking for volunteers for various roles as our planning – which has already started – progresses.



At Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology at Blaise visitors to our stand were able to handle and smell fruit, vegetables and herbs that our Roman ancestors would have used

© Mary Bailey



AGM and Curators' Talks 19 October

Enclosed with this Newsletter you will find the formal notifications for our AGM at M Shed on 19 October at 2.30pm. As usual we are aiming to keep the AGM itself as succinct as possible, so that formal and essential business takes not much more than half an hour.

The AGM will be followed as usual by a less formal Q&A, some interesting short talks from the members of 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.

Subscriptions increase proposal

As I said in the June edition, at the AGM the trustees will be proposing, and asking you to vote in favour of, an increase in subscriptions, which we have held at the same level for 11

Cover photo: Pyronaut, the M Shed Fire Float, which celebrated her 90th birthday in June © Bristol Culture



◀ *The steam tug John King – which ran multiple trips on both days of the Harbour Festival – seen from the deck of Pyronaut returning to her berth with another full complement of happy visitors*

© Clive Burlton

also left us a very significant sum. There are short pieces about Ros and Martin later in this newsletter.

We were recently the beneficiaries of the collection at the funeral of Brian Toms, who died in January, and we subsequently learned that we are in line to receive a significant legacy from his estate too.

Clearly, we welcome additional funds that we are then able to use to support the museum and are grateful not just to the benefactors but also to their friends and family who might otherwise have benefited. For me, though, it is also lovely to think that people who include us in their wills really appreciate what we and the museum are doing, and often find a real sense of friendship and belonging in the events we run as a group.

Sue Thurlow Chair

years – our last increase was in 2014. We are all aware of the significant rate of inflation since then, with the Consumer Price Index having increased from 252.6 in January 2014 to 387.3 in June 2024 – i.e. by 53%. Second class post, one of our most significant costs, has risen in a similar period from 53p in 2014 to £1.55 now – almost three times as much. That means that the single subscription barely covers the cost of printing and sending out our award-winning newsletter to each member and without an increase, steadily rising prices would soon see us effectively subsidising single members, which as a charity we are not permitted to do.

The below-inflation subscription rate increases that are proposed are from £22 to £30 (36%) for single membership and from £32 to £40 (25%) for family membership.

Some members have suggested that we could significantly reduce costs by sending an electronic newsletter, but we know that many members – especially those who do not routinely use the internet – very actively support the continuation of the quality print version we have currently. A two-tier approach of producing both print and online versions, with a small discount for members opting for online, has also been considered but would create significant extra workload both to set up and to run each quarter, and we simply do not have enough committed volunteers to take that on currently.

Legacy news

Following hot on the heels of the very generous legacy we are receiving from Ros Rome we have news that Martin Davies – who many of Magpies heritage will remember – has

Annual General Meeting

**Saturday 19 October 2024 - 2.30 pm
at M Shed**

Enclosed in this newsletter you will find a formal notice of the AGM and a nomination form for committee membership. Following the business (which will be kept to a minimum) there will be short presentations from museum staff about some of their current projects. We will conclude with tea and cake.

Do please come along to the AGM as we like to get feedback from our members and this is a good opportunity to give us your views.

Election of Executive Committee officers and members

The current officers of Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives are: Sue Thurlow, Chair; Katherine Martin, Secretary; Robert Walters, Treasurer; and Richard Avery, Membership Secretary.

The remaining elected members of the committee are: Lucy Bailey, Mary Bailey, Clive Burlton, Susan Hibberd, Carol Lear, Toby Pinn and Steve Sparks.

All are standing for re-election.

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

Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives

The past few months – including the school summer holidays – have been a busy time across all our sites.

We have seen a wonderful events programme delivered to support the 'Truth to Nature' exhibition, sponsored by The National Gallery, which ran from May until 1 September. This varied series of talks and events included Solstice (the museum's late opening), workshops for Home Educators, an awe-inspiring choir performance, curators' talks, a play at Blaise inspired by the Hay Wain, and a programme of multi-sensory accessible tours and storytelling for adults and families. Congratulations to all the team involved in delivering this programme!

A popular family-friendly interactive exhibition 'Dreamy Place – Sea Shanty' ran at M Shed for the school holidays, exploring Bristol's maritime history from the perspective of space and time travellers from the year 3024.

Room 13 Hareclive is an independent artists' studio co-run by children, based in the playground of Hareclive E-Act primary school in Hartcliffe, South Bristol – an area where children face huge disadvantage and inequality. For 2 weeks in July Room 13 Hareclive took over the Studios at M Shed and invited visitors to come and explore art and creative work by children and young people, expressing the things that matter to them; to learn about Room 13 Hareclive's internationally respected approach; and also have their say about the importance of creativity and art in education.

We also held the popular Festival of Archaeology in July at Blaise – thank you again to the Friends for their support! This was well attended as always, and we have had great feedback from visitors.

Life has been busy down on the docks with the 90th birthday for Pyronaut in June and the Bristol Harbour Festival in July. Pyronaut returned from the boatyard to M Shed for her birthday with just hours to spare and once again wowed the crowds opening the Festival on the Saturday. Huge thanks to the Friends for their support for the recent vital repairs to her.

Staff news

We sadly bid farewell to several colleagues. Amy Shapiro (Learning Assistant) has secured a role in the charity she has been volunteering with. Martha Robbins (Fundraising Officer) moves on to be Fundraising Manager at St Werburgh's City Farm. James McNeill (C&CI Project Officer) left in June for pastures new after several years with the service. Anne Lovejoy (Senior Archivist) also left in June and has now taken a new role with the Theatre Collection at the University of Bristol. Allie Dillon (City Archivist) has taken ill health retirement after an extended absence from work for health reasons.



▲ Room 13 Hareclive, an independent artists' studio co-run by children, took over M Shed Studio for 2 weeks in July

© Bristol Culture

We thank them for their contributions and wish them all the very best in their next chapters.

Political Changes

The past few months have seen several changes in both our local and national political landscape.

After several years with an elected mayor in post, Bristol City Council now operates under the committee system following the decision of the 2022 referendum. After the local elections in May, for the first time in its history, the authority is led by the Green Party who now have 35 councillors, with the remaining 36 councillors representing a spread of the other parties. Over 50% of those elected are first-time councillors and have benefitted from a wide-ranging programme of inductions to which Phil Walker, Head of Culture and Creative Industries, has contributed.

Culture is overseen by the Strategy and Resources Committee, chaired by the Leader Councillor Tony Dyer. As of late July, the arrangements at a more detailed level are being finalised.

In the General Election in July Carla Denyer (Green Party) became the new MP for Bristol Central. As the Museums' main sites are in Bristol Central Phil Walker has made contact with Carla and invited her to visit us to understand the work we are doing.

Museums Estate and Development Fund (MEND)

Vital building repairs continue at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery following a successful bid to the Museums Estate and Development Fund in 2022, underpinned by 10% seed funding from Bristol Museums Development Trust.

The building has had its first winter heated reliably and efficiently with the newly-installed boilers, part funded by the project. All the exploratory work for the Natural History



▲ **Clive Brain** aboard *Pyronaut* at the Harbour Festival. *Clive is one of the Working exhibits volunteers at M Shed. In his working life he skippered Pyronaut when she was a working fire boat, and now as well as skippering Pyronaut on visitor trips he organises regular successful fundraising events*

© Clive Burton

Office, Conservation Workshop windows and switchgear replacement is now complete. This was a substantial undertaking due to structural investigations and complex access issues. A contractor was appointed at the beginning of August, with activity on site starting in October.

We are delighted that we have been invited to submit a further full application to the final round of MEND, following a successful expression of interest. This was submitted on 15 August, and we are hopeful for a positive response. The total value of this new bid is almost £2m (including 10% match funding). It is focusing on 3 areas: replacing our temporary exhibition space air handling unit, resolving the reliability issues we have with both the public lift and the goods lift, and repairing our main roof.

Acquisitions

With your funding support, we have continued to acquire some interesting and historically important items over the past few months. There will be more detailed articles in future Newsletters. One of the acquisitions is a William IV brass ball-headed truncheon, a rare survivor dating from the time of the 1831 riots in Bristol. Another successful bid at auction in July saw us acquire a rare sign dating from 1947-1957 listing the health and safety rules for Port of Bristol crane drivers. That timespan links directly with M Shed's electric cranes, built by Stothert & Pitt in 1951. Many thanks to Friends trustee Toby Pinn for his continued help and support during the auction process.

Caroline Booth-Morris and Beth Cutter

Co-Development Managers

Martin Davies, 1924-2023

Martin has left us a substantial bequest in his will. Mary Bailey remembers him fondly and has written this tribute.

Sue Thurlow

Martin Davies's true passion was Egyptology, although his day job was as a leading solicitor with Burgess Salmon in Bristol. He was interested in ancient Egypt from an early age and became a well-respected figure in Egyptology circles, taking an active role in the Egypt Exploration Society - the principal body responsible for UK fieldwork in Egypt - and supporting the Egypt Society of Bristol. As a member of the Friends, he led two trips to Egypt for us, the second one in conjunction with Professor Aidan Dodson of Bristol University in March 2007, when his knowledge and experience of visiting Egypt before the building of the Aswan dam was particularly enlightening. Interested in music and the arts generally, he was charming company with a host of amusing anecdotes and is much missed by his wide circle of friends.'

Mary Bailey Events Group Lead

Freda (Ros) Rome

Ros left the Friends a very generous bequest in her will. Robert Walters remembers her well and has written us this brief tribute:

Sue Thurlow

It came as a surprise to me that the Friends should receive such a substantial legacy from Ros Rome. She first became one of our babysitters about 55 years ago through her husband, Brian, who as a law lecturer was one of my colleagues at Bristol Polytechnic but unfortunately, he died young. In middle age she attended Italian classes with my wife and enjoyed Italian holidays with Brian.

Ros lived close to us in Old Sneyd Avenue and was often encountered dining in the Italian restaurant, Ciao, in Stoke Bishop. She was a regular user of the Friends' trips and other events and a particular friend of Monica Freeman of FoBAG,

She ended her life in St Monica's Cote Lane. She was a sharp-tongued lady and quite often drew swords with me. Which I gladly forgive.'

Robert Walters Treasurer

Blaise Castle House Museum and Blaise Hamlet

Wednesday 3 July 2024

The weather was not kind when 14 of us assembled for our visit to Blaise House and Hamlet. It was chilly and damp with occasional gusts of wind trying to blow us off our feet. I had to wear full wet weather cycling gear for my bike ride over to meet with the others at the main Blaise Castle House in the village of Henbury.

We were met by Catherine Littlejohns, Senior Curator Historic Houses. She told us of the long history of the estate, pointed out the landmarks and gave us interesting insights into the social times in which the existing house and hamlet were built.

Standing on the terrace of the house so that she could point out the landmarks of the estate, she told us that the original owner was Thomas Farr, a sugar merchant. Farr used some of his fortune to build pleasure gardens in the park. The public would walk or drive from Bristol and pay to enter the gardens. Thomas Farr went bankrupt following the American revolution so the estate was sold and eventually bought by the Harford family, who paid £11,000 for the entire park.

The Blaise Castle House we know was built for John Harford, whose family lived there for over 100 years. Set in 650 acres of parkland, it was built in 1796-8 to designs by William Paty, an eminent local architect. It was built in a neoclassical style to reflect Harford's Quaker principles. The last Harford family member died in 1919 and the estate was then sold to Bristol Corporation to prevent development of the estate for housing. The park became a public amenity once more. In 1949 the house became a branch of Bristol Museum - initially as a folk museum but now as a setting to display art, archaeology and social history.

We moved on to the part of the garden that contains the thatched dairy building and a deep pond, probably of a later date. The dairy was designed by the fashionable architect John Nash and built in 1803-5, now Grade II* listed. It is so stylish that as well as providing butter and cheese for the house and staff, its looks were very much a fashionable amusement for its wealthy owners as it was built close enough to the house to be easily viewed from the windows.

From the house we could see Blaise Castle among the trees. The castle was built in 1766 and was used by the family for dining and entertaining. Although it is described as a folly, that description is not strictly correct because the building was created for a purpose and used regularly until recently.

The weather had slightly improved as we walked to Blaise Hamlet. This small collection of nine rustic cottages in the picturesque style was built in 1809 and the architect was again John Nash, who had designed the dairy. The cottages were built to provide retirement homes for estate staff. It is now owned and run by the National Trust. The public can visit the hamlet, but the houses and gardens are private.

We then walked back to Blaise House where we were able to see the



▲ *Blaise Castle House*
© Sue Thurlow

▼ *Blaise Castle House thatched dairy*
© Bristol Culture





◀ Drawings of Blaise Hamlet Cottages
© Bristol Culture

house and its artworks and get answers to our questions. Catherine's tour gave us a fascinating look at the long history of the various houses and the estate that predated the house we know today. We were treated to intriguing glimpses into the lives of the estate dwellers who lived there during the last two and a half centuries.

Thanks to Carol Ouvry for organising the trip.

Giles Woodward

One member of the group asked about the longcase clock in the hallway at Blaise House which has only one hand. Catherine did some research on this, and members may be interested in her reply below.

Longcase Clock at Blaise House

It is a 30-hour clock, made by Thomas Tudge of Frome (Frome, as inscribed). The brass dial is 17th century, and the single hand was common in early pieces. As time keeping was not precise there was no need for anything more than an hour hand (there was no shared time across the country, and many cities – Bristol included – ran on their own time. It was only with the coming of the railways in the 1830s and 40s that a more joined up approach to time keeping was needed!) Minute hands were a later 17th century invention, but like many new ideas they took a while to catch on, so single handed clocks were still made well into the 18th century, especially in more rural areas. The case is later, dating from the mid-18th century.

Catherine Littlejohns

▶ The Blaise House longcase clock face
© Sue Thurlow



Chinese Jade Collection at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

Thursday 22 February 2024

Beauty and scholarship, myths and marketing, human virtues and the power of nature, not to mention roughly 7,000 years of history ... all within one cabinet showcasing around 20 Chinese jade objects. Many could fit in the palm of the hand, such as the river-worn pebbles some originated from, or, as we discovered during our enlightening tour with curator Kate Newnham, some would sit rather handsomely on your desk, projecting your status and personal qualities to fellow connoisseurs. This would not be just any desk though, as the raw material's rarity and the breathtaking skill of the carver ensured such pieces commanded a price tag only within reach of the higher echelons of Chinese society.

Such clientele were particularly attracted by jade's many cultural resonances but originally it would probably have been its lustre and translucence that appealed in a prehistoric world of wood, woven fibres and rough earthenware. Even then, this hard stone signified longevity and, with magic more universally accepted, possibly even immortality. Therefore, it was fashioned into striking high-status burial items, perhaps intended to bring protection or preservation to deceased loved ones.

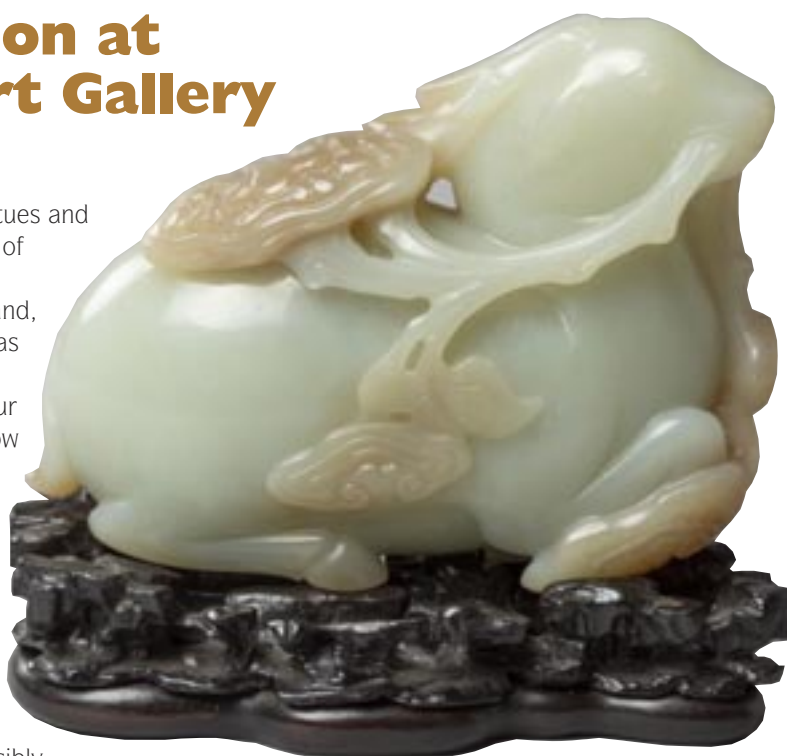
Furthermore, the scholar Confucius had described jade as reflecting human characteristics such as benevolence, intelligence, loyalty and righteousness, exactly the attributes members of China's vast 18th century civil service should embody. Therefore, a trend grew amongst the wealthiest of these for jade desk accessories embellished with ornamental motifs drawn from myths, puns or popular culture. Who knew that a peach was also a potent representation of longevity, because of its associations with good health? Yet think about our modern 'five a day' slogan and it makes perfect sense. Another exceptional piece showed a boat, steered by a woman, with a man fishing from its bow with their dog. This could have been a very special wedding gift because, spoken in a different tone, the symbol for boat becomes the word 'complete', while dogs were associated with fertility.

But it did not pay to get carried away. Dragons were a sign of power often linked to the emperor, so making sure yours appeared more docile, for instance with fewer claws, was essential lest you be deemed to harbour ideas above your station!

Equally fascinating was comparing these pieces to some of Bristol's examples of Chinese glassware, which form the biggest collection outside of China itself. Under Kate's expert guidance, we saw how cheaper, more accessible glass was used to mimic not only jade but tortoiseshell, lapis lazuli and porcelain too, and experienced for ourselves the distinctively cooler surface of a genuine jade handling piece. Now alert to popular themes, we could appreciate how skills and craftsmen transferred between media to satisfy a market eager to emulate those with considerably greater funds at their disposal.

A fitting conclusion to this in-depth tour, thoughtfully co-ordinated by Carol Ouvry and Catherine Dixon, was an exquisite 2014 desk set, made in glass, but with many parallels to the jade items with which we began the tour. Just as the materials themselves endure, this emphasised that, thankfully, so too does the tradition of inspirational artisans.

Keira Stobie



▲ *Deer with fungus, jade (nephrite), China, 1600–1800*

© Bristol Culture



▲ *Belt plaque with flute-player, jade (nephrite), China, 1600–1800*

© Bristol Culture

Dyrham Park

Tuesday 14 May 2024

This was another enjoyable trip organised by Richard Avery to follow up on our Wiltshire trip last year. We were collected by Richard, who was again suitably attired in period bus driver's uniform. He took 32 of us with him on the trip - nearly a full coach.

We were taken in his 1960 Bristol MW (Medium Weight) diesel coach. She was built in a joint venture between Bristol Commercial Vehicles of Brislington, who built the chassis, and Eastern Coachworks of Lowestoft, who built the body. She was in service with Royal Blue from 1960 to 1975, based mainly in Bournemouth. The weather was not as bad as was originally forecast. We were dropped by the narrow, stone-pillared gates just off the busy A46. We were able to walk down through the park or catch the shuttle 7-seater to what is now the 3-storey front of the house. This used to be the rear of the house when the main road took a different route.

Dyrham was looking splendid. It is my favourite local National Trust House. So much has been done to the gardens and the main house in recent years. Eight years ago, there were major works with a new roof. Now there is scaffolding for major window work at the front of the house.

Staff at the house were friendly and helpful. Sally Dore, who is a member of our Events Group has been a volunteer at the house for 30 years. As there were so many in our party she gave two separate tours showing us the history over the last 1,000 years of the location, house and occupants. This involved walking to the neighbouring church and seeing the brass carving and the splendid, massive tomb. We were able to learn so much about the family and its change from being important national figures to more traditional local squires. Our progress after our visit to the church on the first tour through the churchyard to see graves was thwarted by a female pheasant who thought we were getting too close to her 'nye' of youngsters and blocked our path.

We heard the house was purchased by the Ministry of Works in 1956 as a war memorial, then transferred to the National Trust and opened to the public in 1961. We were able to take coffee and eat in the well-stocked tea rooms and also had time to see the inside of the house with self-guided tours as well as guided garden tours. Amber Turner from our museum would be impressed by the amount of splendid delftware including tiles and bulb display pots on show. William Blathwayt and his wife Mary Wynter and the family had very close Dutch connections.

We left at 3.00pm following a brisk walk or shuttle ride up the hill to our waiting coach. She started first time and we were able to cruise at up to 50 miles an hour on the M4 homeward bound. We are looking forward to our next trip. Thanks so much to Richard for organizing this one.

Giles Woodward



▲ *Richard Avery's 1960 Bristol MW coach*
© Giles Woodward



▲ *The courtyard at Dyrham*
© Giles Woodward

▼ *The cascade water feature at Dyrham*
© Giles Woodward





◀ *Front of Stanway House showing the gate house*
© Mary Bailey

Stanway House, Gloucestershire

Tuesday, 9 July 2024

Our lunchtime stop at Broadway set the scene for the afternoon at Stanway House, a nearby Jacobean manor house. In both, the yellow stone of the Cotswolds and the architectural style are indicative of the rural prosperity of the Cotswolds in a bygone age.

The Manor of Stanway was owned by Tewkesbury Abbey for 800 years, then for 500 years and currently by the Tracey family and their descendants, the Earls of Wemyss and March. The current house was originally constructed in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The principal rooms are in a long south-facing range forming an L shape with the hall, unlike earlier Tudor houses which used a central hall. The Gatehouse is particularly impressive with its three gables and huge wooden gates.

It was explained that the manor house was regarded by its owners as their summer home, as opposed to the vast estates they owned in Scotland. Parts of the house are still occupied by the family from time to time. It is open to the public on a limited basis each summer. An eclectic mix of contents depicting the history of the house and the interests of the family were on display, ranging from family portraits and photographs to painted porcelain dishes and records of the more recent use of the house for costume drama productions. J. M. Barrie, creator of Peter Pan, was a frequent visitor after World War I.

In all the rooms there were books on display, some lining shelves, others left as if the reader would shortly return to them. Many were early 20th century coffee table books which begged to be perused, but there was, of course, a 'No Touch' policy. Explanatory notices and helpful volunteers explained how the building had been re-worked to the fashions of the time over its history. Overall, there was an air

▼ *The Pyramid at the lower fountain reservoir*
© Richard Avery





▲ *Stanway Estate is known to have had four watermills in 1291. The last remaining one, fully restored as a working flour mill, was re-opened by HRH The Prince of Wales in 2009*

© Mary Bailey

of gentle decay, indicating that maintaining an historic home of such proportions might well be a burden as well as a pleasure.

Interesting water features in the grounds were added through the centuries, reflecting advances in engineering and the changing needs of the estate. A fulling mill used for processing wool from estate sheep was converted in the late 17th century to grind corn and is now the Stanway Watermill, which still produces flour for sale. A canal in the grounds was filled in around 1850 but was restored in the early 2000s to create the current fountain for which Stanway is famed. This was opened in 2004 and the single jet fountain, which rises to over 91m, is the tallest in Britain.

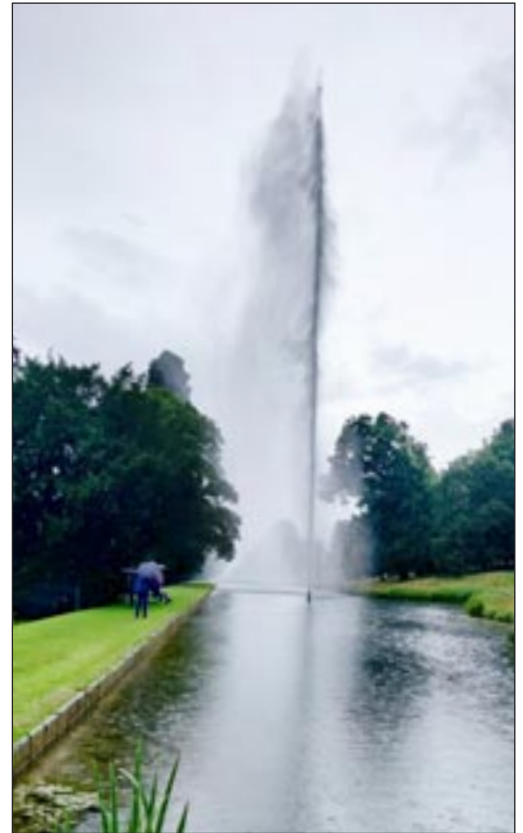
We were also able to view the huge tithe barn, dating from about 1370, and the estate church, both indicative of the size of the estate in the past. Respite from the rain was provided in the converted stables, which functioned well as a much-appreciated café. Drinking tea there from beautiful china cups was very in keeping with the magnificent grounds and gardens of an English country estate.

Thank you, Richard Avery, for arranging this most enjoyable and interesting visit.

Andrea Langfield

Below, the tithe barn and, right, the amazing construction of the interior of the tithe barn roof

© Mary Bailey



Bristol Corn Exchange

Thursday 23 May 2024

We are so often encouraged to look up when out and about, but I was completely amazed to find what lay beneath my feet during our fascinating tour of the Corn Exchange, arranged by Carol Ouvry and Katherine Martin.

We began above ground, looking towards Castle Park and back to the start of Bristol's history as a Saxon settlement. Fast forwarding through a few centuries, we then considered its rise to become a premier port and trading centre, largely fuelled by the 'white gold' of imported sugar and the inhumane treatment of the enslaved Africans involved in its production. The visual reminders carved into the Exchange's decoration reflected a very different focus though, and I was completely unaware of the elephant watching from above, one of the motifs representing the continents to which Bristol's commercial links reached.

Moving uphill just a few metres to the crossroads, our guide used photographs and other images to help us visualise the elegant 17th century timber framed building known as the Dutch House that would have stood directly in front of us in a bustling area densely packed with amenities and businesses. All that changed during the Bristol Blitz in November 1940, when thousands of incendiary bombs reduced the thriving Castle Park area to rubble.

Thankfully, for some there was welcome shelter close at hand, now accessed through a nondescript door inside the Exchange and down, far further than most of us imagined, to what had become the City Valuers' Bar. Beyond this, through brick walls backfilled with concrete, lay the much less glamorous air-raid shelter itself. The entire complex felt untouched for decades, with none of the polished presentation of a museum, but all the more atmospheric and authentic for it. Brimming with artefacts and stories, it vividly linked us to those spending long and anxious hours there during World War II. It was no surprise to hear that our guide was on a mission to preserve this heritage gem, and we all agreed it held so much to be learned and shared.

Alongside the graffiti and original signage, one of the objects on show was a copy of the Bristol Evening Post from the day after the catastrophic raid, its front-page report containing no mention of Bristol whatsoever. Remarkably, the whole event was covered up because of the government's censorship rules, a decision that would cause much indignation amongst Bristolians.

As we climbed up from this basement treasure trove, we travelled in time again, hearing about the Exchange's more recent life as a music venue, hosting the likes of the Rolling Stones, before now taking on a new starring role as a location for films and TV productions. In keeping with its long tradition of soaking up mementoes of the events which shaped it, the final object we saw, other than a fabulous hidden view of the nearby church spires, was a set of forgotten filming notes, another unintentional record left for us and all the future generations who come to discover the tales hidden within those walls.

Keira Stobie



▲ Entrance to Corn Exchange, built 1741-43



▲ Exhibits in the WWII air raid shelter

◀ View of church spires over Corn Exchange roof

Photos by Katherine Martin

Truth to Nature Exhibition

Monday 17 June 2024

A group of Friends visited Bristol Museum on 17 June to see the 'Truth to Nature' exhibition featuring *The Hay Wain* by John Constable (1776–1837). Julia Carver, the curator of this fascinating exhibition, set the scene for us. The National Gallery is celebrating its 200th anniversary and to mark it they are lending out iconic paintings to other galleries around the UK. *The Hay Wain* was selected for Bristol and is the centrepiece of this exhibition.

Seeing *The Hay Wain* up close was a surprise, a delight and a chance to appreciate Constable's brushwork (including little white splodges in the distance which turned out to be hay makers, not cows as I had thought). The treatment of clouds was stunning, developed from years of outdoor oil sketching, many examples of which were also on display. The trees up close showed the rough brush work which Constable used to such great effect.

Constable enrolled at the Royal Academy in 1879, eschewing his father's occupation as a coal merchant in Suffolk. His talents were not fully recognised in Britain until relatively late in his career. He was thought to be a 'rough' painter, just a 'copier' of nature, layering the oil paint and mixing colour on colour. He often painted 'en plein air' (in the open air), long before the Impressionists made it popular. His preference for painting in his own way, staying true to his own style, meant he did not gain general appreciation in Britain until later in his life. One exception in Britain was the Suffolk collector George Beaumont, who bought several of Constable's paintings. However, Constable was popular in France, and in 1824 at the Paris Salon *The Hay Wain* won a gold medal, which was presented to him by the French king Charles X. Constable was finally elected to the Royal Academy in 1829, sadly after the death of his beloved wife Maria.

In Julia's exhibition were works by painters before Constable, during his lifetime, and later ones, who went on to paint from nature, influenced by Constable. There were beautiful French and Dutch landscape paintings looking very smooth and arranged. Constable owned a landscape painting by Jacob van Ruisdael which he bought in 1660 for £70, a lot of money in those days. Ruisdael had wonderful techniques for his clouds, something that Constable emulated in his many oil sketches of them, which were here on display. There were artists contemporary to Constable, and many later Impressionists who copied Constable in their 'en plein air' approaches. Modern artists included the landscape painter Richard Long with his circular arrangement of slate. I particularly liked the hyperrealist painting by Julian Perry, with his depiction of tower blocks and an oak tree in *Hartcliffe* (1998), showing the same attention to light and clouds and nature that Constable does. Altogether it was a wonderfully captivating exhibition. Thank you to Carol Ouvre for arranging this visit, and to Julia for her curation and explanations.

Sue Black



▲ **The Hay Wain, John Constable**

© Bristol Culture

▼ **Hartcliffe by Julian Perry**

© Bristol Culture



Winterbourne House and garden, Birmingham

Tuesday 23 April 2024

After the obligatory stop at Gloucester Services, we arrived at Winterbourne House in time for an early lunch at the lovely café. The house is based on the University of Birmingham campus, but although only 2 miles from the centre of Birmingham seemed quite rural.

The Arts and Crafts house was built in 1903 for the Nettlefold family, who founded a small company in 1759 at the start of the Industrial Revolution which grew to become a multinational automotive and aerospace engineering company as part of GKN – Guest, Keen and Nettlefolds. The house was designed to be 'cutting-edge' with all the modern conveniences of electric lights, hot running water and a telephone. The Arts and Crafts designs used local materials and craftworkers to create an impressive home.

The garden was created by Margaret Nettlefold, who was greatly influenced by the ideas of Gertrude Jekyll. John and Margaret Nettlefold, whilst raising their eight children, were keen supporters of the local community, especially in town planning. The house was sold on to a further two families, the second time being to Professor John Nicholson, who donated the house to the University of Birmingham in 1944 for use by female students. The University used the garden for botanical studies. In 2010 it opened to the public with exhibitions on the top floor and on our visit we saw items from botanical artists, which were for sale.

Whilst the contents of the house had been sold in the past, the University had done a magnificent job of furnishing it with appropriate furniture and family items (some from the Nettlefold family). I particularly liked seeing the dumb waiter ready with tea and the company sign made of nails, which was in a room dedicated to the history of the Nettlefold companies.

Outside in an old garage was the Winterbourne Press print shop, which unfortunately was not printing at the time. Here printing techniques used in Arts and Crafts design are recreated using 19th and early 20th century presses. As the Barber Institute was still closed, we were invited to go to the Lapworth Museum of Geology on the campus, which some of our group did. However, I enjoyed being in the Grade II listed Winterbourne Botanical Garden, which has formal parts and wild areas with a national collection of anemones. The colours of the rhododendrons and azaleas were beautiful against the acer trees. We enjoyed strolling along Stream Walk, the Nut Walk and the Lime Walk and visiting the famous Gilbert Orchid House.

Thanks to Richard Avery for organising a very pleasant and interesting day out.

Catherine Dixon

Part of Winterbourne
Press print room

Photos by Catherine Dixon

To see more photos of Winterbourne House
visit its Facebook page



▲ Rear of the house with the lime walk



▲ The dumb waiter inside the house



New Zealand Conference

As a curator with responsibilities to care for and interpret material from across the globe, it is only fitting that I should sometimes visit those places! So, in early March this year I was lucky enough to get funding from the Jonathan Ruffer Curatorial Grant Fund (part of the Art Fund) to cross the globe to attend a conference in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Aotearoa is the traditional Maori name of New Zealand). This grant was generously supplemented by the Friends, which enabled me to take part not only in the excellent Commonwealth Association of Museums Triennial Conference at Auckland War Memorial Museum, but also a wealth of other cultural, historical and artistic experiences.

Understanding the cultures whose heritage we hold is a key part of my role. This trip has meant I have been able to build relationships and trust, important in most partnerships, but crucial when working with originating communities and individuals. Especially when talking about sensitive issues around sharing power and knowledge, and repatriation.

The trips, related events and serendipitous encounters that flowed from the conference organisers' well-rounded approach to timetabling activities meant that the experience was much more than the sum of the papers and talks. An empathetic connection with the people from across the Pacific whose belongings I currently look after, and an understanding of their needs (and our shortcomings in providing for these) has been enriched as a result.

Engaging with indigenous and non-indigenous curators has highlighted for me their different approaches and the need to intersect different worldviews in order to foster respect and mutual understanding. Having the opportunity to meet a wide range of artists of South Pacific Islands heritage (Pasifika), who can reinterpret collections and relationships and connect with different audiences, and seeing their work presented was one of the highlights of the trip.

As conference delegates we were given such a warm welcome and introduction to the Maori world view, through formal introductions when we entered different meeting houses (wharehau) to songs and prayers invoked at various significant points in proceedings. Our conference dinner was held in the Turangawaewae Marae (headquarters of Te Kīngitanga – King of the Maoris), a great honour surrounded by protocol and ceremony.

Before the conference started I was able to meet up with an Aotearoa/New Zealand based producer who we are working with to bring a performance piece, based on a Maori interpretation of Captain Cook's legacy, to our museum in September. After the conference I packed in as many visits to cultural venues as possible in Auckland and then down in Wellington. The Pasifika Arts Festival was a huge outdoor event showcasing crafts, performances and food from the many countries across the Pacific. It drew on the heritage of the islands but was very much a celebration of the contemporary lives and interests of a region with shared pasts and futures.

At Auckland Art Gallery, I saw portraits of ancestral Maori juxtaposed with amazing pieces from contemporary artists. Space Place Planetarium in Wellington were showing a beautiful, animated film, 'The Navigators', exploring the connections Pacific people have with the sea, stars, navigation and their cosmology. The Wellington Museum is similar in concept to M Shed, and the mighty Te Papa Tongarewa, their national museum, promoted the best in the country's bi-cultural society, highlighting the innate connection between the environment and Maori people and the lives of the settlers and immigrants who have made the place their home. There was even a Colston-inspired piece of direct action left on display in one of their main halls (just Google Te Papa Treaty of Waitangi protest for more detail).

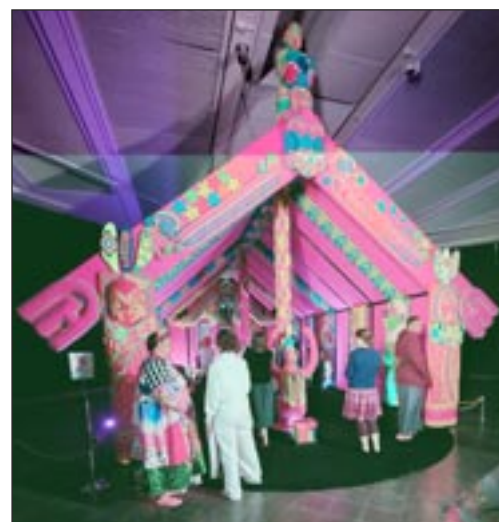
I saw so much, learnt so much, was inspired and amazed, thank you for helping me make the best of this incredible event.

Lisa Graves World Cultures and Archaeology Curator



▲ Performers on the Tuvalu stage at Pasifika Festival in Auckland Springs Park.

© Lisa Graves



▲ One of the artists, Lissy Robinson-Cole, of Lissy and Rudi, outside their creation 'Wharehau Harikoa' (House of Joy) at Waikato Museum. A full size crocheted Maori meeting house that we hope to bring to the museum in the next year or two.

© Lisa Graves

Fresh Air Exhibition at Quenington

Wednesday 26 June 2024

We set off on a lovely summer's day. Quenington is a timeless Cotswold village, whose Old Rectory has long ago been given up by the church and become a very desirable country house with gardens sloping gently down to the River Coln. Every two years over 100 contemporary pieces of outside sculpture work of all shapes, sizes and materials are brought to the gardens. The owners/organisers told us that their work includes a Taste Committee, which ensures that they do not get too inward-looking, and all styles are represented.

The sun, the gardens, the sculptures, efficiently organised refreshments and plenty of places to sit and watch others interacting with the sculptures – what more could we have asked for? If anyone could stir themselves into activity there was always the country church across the road, which has 12th century doorways well worth a detailed look – not to mention a permanent second-hand book sale laid out along the pews. We had a lovely day (many thanks to Carol Lear) and I hope that you will get a flavour of it from the photographs.

Katherine Martin

Photos by Katherine Martin



▲ **Colourcatcher** by Neil Wilkin. His giant flowers catch the eye as you enter the garden. He suggests that changing scale might help us look at familiar things differently.

▼ **The Hop Pickers** by Simon Conolly. In Victorian times working families would travel to the countryside in September to pick hops. They worked hard but were able to enjoy the fresh air.



▶ A tortoise sculpture in the churchyard of St Swithin's.



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