

2017 Annual Report

Bournemouth and Beyond Discovery Group **Annual General Meeting November 28th 2017** **Secretary's Report 2017**

Good Evening everyone. This is my third annual report as Secretary.

Well, what an interesting year it has been for the Group, with once again very successful Spring and Autumn programmes. Very many thanks to the programme organisers, as I know members have enjoyed a very wide variety of speakers, covering diverse topics. If that wasn't enough, we also enjoyed many interesting half day and coach visits between April and July.

As is my customs on these occasions, I invite you to sit back and relax, and let me take you on a journey through the past year, to jog your memory about the talks and outings!!

Spring programme. The spring programme began on the 10th of January with a very apt talk, given the imminent closure of the Odean Cinema on Westover Road. The talk was on Bournemouth cinemas, from 1840 to the present day. As Patricia and I had only moved to the area in the 1960's, we did not realise the many cinemas there had been in Bournemouth! The following week the Director of Salisbury Museum helped us to find Pitt-Rivers and he explained just how much of an avid collector Pitt-Rivers was, everything from army rifles to archaeological digs. Not only did he establish and fill the Pitt-Rivers museum in Oxford, but continued collecting and there now exists a large collection at Salisbury museum, which we later visited. We then took a leap forward to the present day and heard about the very valuable work of the Dorset and Somerset air ambulance. We were told there had been some 675 callouts in 2015 at an annual cost of £2 million and that staff are now on duty for 19 hours every day. That is very reassuring!! January concluded with a very detailed tour of the art work and furniture within Kingston Lacy house.

During February we continued the Kingston Lacy theme, with a talk about the Bank's family archives. This three year project, at the Dorset History Centre, is examining some 800 cases of material, covering four centuries of the family history, from 1634 to 1982 when the house and large estate was taken over by the National Trust. It appears that some interesting facts are emerging which challenge some aspects of history. This talk was followed the next week by an "angel", so she said, but one without wings! This was a talk about the work of the Mission to Seafarers. We heard many accounts by Julie of how she was considered an "aunty" by many seamen, covering the ports of Southampton and Poole, providing both gifts and comfort, in health and sickness. The following week, we heard all about the Bournemouth Parks Foundation. We had a pictorial canter through the parks history and the creation of the Gardens, which following advice from Decimus Burton in the mid 19th century, to create a green space for gentle exercise and health benefits. The original planting was supplied by a local company, Stewarts, the oldest commercial nursery. In 1876 the Gardens were leased to the Town Council and are now important seaside gardens, being Grade 2 listed. February concluded with a talk by the "tile lady", Jo Amey, with stories about the tiles on some local buildings.

In March Mike Andrews entertained us with stories about smuggling in Christchurch during the latter part of the 18th century. The following week we travelled to Portland, with a very professional presentation in pictures and sound, about the history and folk of the Royal Manor of Portland. It is alleged that in the 8th century the Vikings carried away many young maidens from this island. Indeed Portland remained an island until 1839, when the first bridge was built, linking Portland to the mainland. The main industries were fishing, farming and quarrying and we also learnt that the harbour was man made and at that time was the largest Government building contract. The harbour was built as a defence for the island and has played an important role ever since, not only during the war but as a safe haven for shipping and as a successful sailing centre during the Olympics. With our next talk, we continued our discoveries of Portland and south Dorset, learning about the many industrial tramways and railways in the area. Colin Stone gave us a detailed insight into the many lines, some of which can still be traced, serving the vast quarrying activities in this area. The final talk was given by Dr Phillip Coward entitled "The Tolpuddle Martyrs and Their Times". This was a fascinating insight into the historic events that led up to the deportation of the six individuals. There were riots through the country, from 1800, about reducing workers wages and higher basic food prices. The riots, Luddites breaking machines and the sending of "Captain Swing" letters to employers, were also about the introduction of machinery, including threshing machines, which restricted the need for labour. At the same time, in 1799 and 1825 the Government brought into effect the Combination Acts, which restricted workers joining in any activity. It was against this background and the inability of farm labourers to provide for their families that resulted in the Tolpuddle Martyrs forming a Friendly Society and members swearing an oath, which led directly to their conviction and deportation. He left us with the thought, are we again seeing a widening of incomes and will history be repeated in some form?

The final meeting, at the beginning of April was a Members social evening. This was an interesting and varied evening from members, sharing their stories and items that related to past generations. We also enjoyed tea or coffee and a wonderful spread of light bites, prepared by Audrey and David V. Many thanks to each and every one of you for making a good social evening, extra special.

Visits.

During the period from April to July, a number of coach outings and half day visits were arranged, something for everyone. It is difficult in this Annual Report to do justice to each visit, but I hope you find my summary will give those members who attended, happy memories, apart that is, from one or two unfortunate experiences!

We started with a visit to Salisbury Museum, a follow up from the talk last January about Pitt-Rivers. Unfortunately our guide was a late substitute and we spent a long time standing, as he explained about the objects on display. This, combined with the warm temperature inside, resulted in not one, but two members fainting. This was unfortunate as not all the group were then able to continue the tour behind the scenes and handle some artifacts in the stockrooms. However the seats at the end, with tea and home-made sponge were very well received!

This was followed by a morning visit to Kimmeridge to view the new Etches Collection Museum. This museum houses over 2000 specimens of fossils from the Jurassic Coast, discovered by Steve Etches MBE over a 35 year period. The Group watched a video of Steve Etches removing fossils from the ground and we were very fortunate that he was also our guide around the museum, explaining in detail the exhibits, some small and some very, very large. Members were free to explore the museum on their own and later invited to sit and enjoy a buffet lunch before leaving.

April concluded with a visit to the Milestones Living History Museum at Basingstoke. Members were given an audio guide around the museum, which is laid out as cobbled streets with period shops, vehicles, replica houses and room interiors. It was just amazing, as we recognised many items on display with cries of "I can remember those or my Granny used to have one". After lunch members travelled through the Hampshire countryside to Jane Austen's house and garden in Chawton. There were many interesting Austen memorabilia on display and yes, the trip ended with tea and cake at Casandra's Cup café.

In May we had a coach trip to Waddesdon Manor, near Aylesbury Buckinghamshire. Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild built the manor in 1874. The splendour of its' facade showed his wealth and the Manor displays all his art treasures. The surrounding Victorian gardens are wonderful and said to be the finest in Britain. Having seen them, I would not disagree. The estate is extensive and minibuses were on hand to take you around and I know many of our members found their way to the Stables for some refreshment.

This was followed by a visit to Minterne House & Gardens, near Dorchester, which has been in the Churchill and Digby families since 1620. This is now the home of Lord Digby. We were very fortunate that Lord Digby met us on the lawn and from the comfort of his electric scooter, well he is in his 90's, he gave us a detailed account of the house and family history. This continued inside, with an account of Sir Henry Digby, captain of HMS Africa during the battle of Trafalgar. Yes, we had another fine afternoon tea in the house and were able to explore the extensive gardens and indeed the adjacent church.

Due to insufficient numbers, the visit to St Giles House was combined with other groups. There was a delay in meeting together and the Earl of Shaftesbury had already started his talk in the library when members arrived. The Earl spoke about the house and showed the extensive grounds, including the replica Eros statue, the original being in London. As usual the visit ended with tea and cakes.

June started with a visit to Stock Gaylard House, in North Dorset, off the A3030 on the way to Sherborne. This Georgian house stands in a Deer Park, within an estate of some 1800 acres. A house has existed here since the 13th century. The surrounding gardens contain a small church, which was open to view and is still regularly used today. The owners split us into two groups and gave us a most interesting tour of this family house. After the tour we were treated to a lovely spread of tea and cake.

They served tea on a beautifully crafted and very long oak table, which was made from wood felled on the estate. To give you an idea of the length of this table, when extended, the table can seat the local hunt! The owners hope to pass it onto the next generation, as part of the house furniture. However we were most surprised that the large tea pot was placed directly on the table surface and any spills were largely ignored!!

Our next visit was something different, a visit to the Solent Sky aviation Museum in Southampton. The museum had a special focus on the Supermarine aircraft company and many aircraft were displayed in

the very large hanger type building. This included a flying boat (which you could enter), the spitfire, designed by R.J. Mitchell and various planes which challenged for the Schneider Trophy.

June continued with another coach outing, this time to the Willows and Wetland Centre at Stoke St Gregory, on the Somerset Levels. Our coffee stop was at a public house, on Ham Hill, a country park past Yeovil. The weather and location were wonderful and to add to the enjoyment, we were met by a relative of Ros, who acted as a guide and took us on a tour of the hill and monument and take in the many views. We then travelled on to the Willows Visitor Centre for lunch and afterwards a most interesting and detailed guided tour of the works. We saw the willow in its raw form, prepared by hand and machine, used to create charcoal and finally watched them weaving baskets and yes, coffins to order. Certainly the health and safety gang hadn't caught up with this company, as we toured the works across very uneven ground, over willow strewn floors and stood close to working machinery, it was a great tour.

June concluded with a follow up visit to the earlier talk we had on the paintings and furnishings of Kingston Lacy House. Unfortunately the weather was rather wet as we arrived and waited for our Guide in the car park. Our intended guide eventually arrived, very late, after we had walked to the house and made a number of enquiries. However we eventually toured the house and some of the room guides were very knowledgeable. Afterwards we adjourned for a warming drink and some even seemed to manage a cake!

Our last coach outing was in July and took us to Saville Gardens in Winsor Great Park and a Hindu temple at Neasden in north-west London. We arrived at Saville Gardens and were able to explore some of the 35 acres of very different interlocking gardens and of course time for coffee and lunch. In the afternoon we arrived at the Temple and Mandir, what an impressive sight. A very ornate temple, full of carvings and gold. We had a most interesting introductory talk and were then able to explore the temple and exhibition explaining Hinduism. Unfortunately photographs had to wait until we were outside and then we retired over the road to the Hindu shop for some refreshment. Finally, after a very busy day, we then boarded the coach and relaxed for the journey home.

The following week we drove to Hamworthy to visit the Boat House. The house, which appears unexceptional as you approach, was built in 1936. However it was built specifically to house the Second Class drawing room and Officer's cabins salvaged from the great Cunard Liner, the RMS *Mauretania*. The house was designed and built as a weekend sailing retreat, overlooking the water. During the war, we learnt that the house was part of the Coastal Defence Zone and from here landing craft commanders received their orders for the D-Day invasion. The house is now listed and still contains all of the original features. A real gem on our doorstep.

Well, sad to say that concluded our programme of visits. What a programme, one that provided some surprises, interesting information and leaves many good memories. Very many thanks to Ros, Denise, Val, John and Ann. for making all the arrangements. They were all well planned visits and from the many comments made, enjoyed by all.

Autumn Programme.

The Autumn programme started in September with a talk entitled "Life and travels of a Bridge Engineer". Ralph Freeman was the engineer and his wife gave a most interesting talk of how the family travelled the world, as Ralph worked, designing and construction bridges. Unfortunately the talk had a very sad end as during one experimental bridge lift, the section of bridge collapsed and Ralph and several colleagues were killed. This was followed by a talk about HMS *Wagner*, which was sunk in Patagonia in 1741. The ship was a former East India company trader, converted to navel use to support the navy when fighting the Spanish. The tale was all about unfit sailors, mutiny and their fight to reach home. The speaker Shirley Critchley joined the expedition to find the wreck, which with the numerous earthquakes over the years and the inevitable earth movement and displacement, was no easy task. However it was found, surprisingly at the waters edge and very close to the surface. The remains are now displayed in a museum in Patagonia.

October commenced with sound, the History of Sound Recording. We listened to a number of old recordings, Belina Records of 1860, the racing and flying exploits of Mrs Bruce as recorded in 1928, three track novelty records and we even learned about the choir recording of our very own Audrey in 1951. This was followed by a photographic tour of Thailand, Japan and Korea, as the speaker, David Warehurst travelled as part of his work establishing international standards. We then went back in time to the Hanoverians. This was an informative and amusing resume of the Kings and Queens of England, from Elizabeth 1 to the present day. We traced the progression from the rule by Divine Right to our modern constitutional monarchy. October concluded with the Romans. John Smith took us on a fascinating journey through roman life, their establishment of coins and measurement and taxes. Indeed

their rule was very forward thinking and full of innovation. This included the wide movement of goods, trade, all of which had a big influence over many parts of this country and other parts of the world.

In November we were transported to South Africa. The presentation by Rosemary Legrand was excellent. The vibrant colours and range of flora was indeed spectacular. We learnt that table mountain was older than the Rockies, that the estate purchased by Cecil Rhodes is now a wonderful botanical garden and we were introduced to the designer of their award winning Chelsea Flower Show entries. The following week we were in the Australian Outback with Tony Bates. We saw the changing landscape, trees and plants as we moved away from the urban areas and visited some remote settlements. The last talk was on the Woodland Trust. We heard about the formation of the forest, from the Ice Age, the use of timber through the war years and more recent times. The Woodland Trust was started by Ken Watkins, when he and others purchased Averton Wood in Devon and now has over 200,000 members.

Thank you Ros, for another excellent autumn programme of wide-ranging and very interesting topics and speakers.

On the 3rd November we also celebrated the 45th Anniversary of this Group with a lunch at the Mayfair Hotel in Bournemouth. The lunch was attended by 38 members, past and present and friends. Given the level of chatter and the comments made to me, I think it was a success.

As with any organisation, this Group requires people to take on tasks on a voluntary basis, to ensure the Group can continue and make it a success. So thank you to all members of the Management Committee and the Sub-committees for continuing to find interesting programmes of speakers and for arranging the many visits. Also to Audrey and David and their team for the supply of refreshments every week and to Hugh for managing the technical equipment and ensuring we can hear the speakers.

I must also thank our joint chairpersons Ros and John for another successful year. Thanks also to John, for arranging the hall for us, liaising with the Caretaker and for kindly hosting the committee meetings at his home.

There has been a decline in membership during the year. Whilst some of our regular members do not attend during the autumn, we should try and attract new members wherever possible, so please spread the word, particularly when attending other groups, as I am sure others would find the varied content of talks and visits both interesting and rewarding.

Finally, on a lighter note, I like to include a quote or two. The first could be made for our co-chairmen:

From an American Executive – **“Guidelines for chairmen, when in charge ponder, when in trouble delegate and when in doubt, mumble!”**

And, this time perhaps some advice for me:

From an American journalist – **“The less you talk, the more you are listened to”.**

So taking that advice, I will end my report now. However, I hope my report provided some good memories of the past year and I look forward to seeing you all, and hopefully some new members, in January 2018 for the Spring programme and yet another year of discovery.

Thank you.

Dave