

## **Bournemouth and Beyond Discovery Group**

### **Annual General Meeting November 28th 2018**

#### **Secretary's Report 2018**

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

Well, once again I can report on yet another successful year of discovery for the Group, with very informative Spring and Autumn speaker programmes. Very many thanks to the programme organisers, John, Val, Ann and Audrey for the Spring programme and Ros (I don't know how she does it!), for the Spring programme. From their reactions, I know members have enjoyed a very wide variety of speakers, covering diverse topics. If that wasn't enough, members were also treated to quite a few half day and coach visits between April and July.

Now just sit back and relax, as I refresh your memory of talks and outings through the past year!!

**Spring programme.** The spring programme began on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January with a talk from Steve Roberts on the Selfridge family. We learnt that although the television series was part fact and fiction, both Harry and Gordon's real lives were far from dull. Harry, born in 1858, left school in America aged just 14. He worked in various retail stores and was able to retire at the early age of 41. Bored with retirement, he travelled to London and invested £400,000 to build his own unique store. In 1916 the family leased Highcliffe Castle and his wife, Rosalie, helped at Christchurch Hospital. Had he not squandered his wealth, he would have built a private castle type property on Hengistbury Head. What a loss that would have been to the area!! Harry died aged 89 and on hard times. As for his son Gordon, well he was just as flamboyant, flying to each store within the Provincial Stores empire, which included the Bon Mache stores.

The following week, we had a replacement at short notice, Kathy McNally, talking about pirates. They were so very different from that portrayed in films. In reality they were a blood-thirsty bunch of rouges, killing, plundering and joining any country prepared to pay for their services.

At the end of January, peace and tranquillity returned, as we were taken on a leisurely trip down the Hampshire Avon, looking at places of interest, flowers, insects and birds.

**February** started with a talk on World War two, looking at the local role preparing for D Day. We were given a pictorial view of operation "Smash", the D Day trials at Studland. The trials were watched over from the safety of a bunker, Fort Henry, by King George VI, Churchill and Eisenhower. We learnt that the Americans built Blandford Hospital and the fuel depot at West Moors, how they tried to perfect "floating tanks" and also the remarkable feat of operation "Neptune". Neptune involved the design and laying of some 177 miles of fuel pipeline from the fuel depot to the Isle of Wight and then to France, to service the invasion force.

The following week, Stuart Morris, gave us a summary of the Royal Navy from Henry VIII to World War One, and in particular the importance of Weymouth Harbour to the Navy. With ships initially dependant on wind power and with Spanish and Dutch wars, in 1850 it was decided to build a breakwater to protect the harbour. Ships gradually moved to steam power and iron clad hulls and the harbour was fully enclosed in 1894. The harbour could shelter some 200 ships and became a large training area for boys aged 14 to 16. However, we were told that boys could not join if they suffered fits. Later Blandford naval base and the cordite factory at Holton Heath were established. With the arrival of submarines in 1901, many merchant ships and sailors were lost and this was eventually prevented with the discovery and development of sonar, enabling the detection and location of the submarine.

February continued, with a talk about buses by Chris Harris, entitled, "a transport of delight". The Royal Blue story started in 1887 with horse drawn vehicles and in 1920 Hants and Dorset Motor Services was born. This was a very progressive company, with a services across the new Sandbanks ferry in 1927, a Poole depot built in the following year in Wimborne Road, next to The George Hotel and the Exeter Road bus station built in 1931. Chris took us through many and varied bus body types and explained that the Tilling Association bought Royal Blue and Hants and Dorset together in 1935, with state control taking over later and the formation of the National Bus Company in 1969. However, parts of the national service were privatised in 1987, with a Management buyout of Hants and Dorset.

The company was sold to GoAhead in 2003 and now we have More Buses. However with current bus service cutbacks, somehow the name "More Buses" doesn't seem right!!

February concluded with a talk about another mode of travel, the Flying Boats of Poole Harbour from 1939 to 1948. Initially established on Southampton Water, the flying boat service was moved to Poole in 1939, as with the prospect of war looming, Southampton was considered a target with important aircraft building and repair facilities. What an important role the Flying Boats, and Poole Harbour, played in linking the UK with the British Empire, although at that time it took ten days to reach Sydney with Imperial Airways. In 1934 all mail was sent this way to all parts of the British Empire, at the same rate as internal UK mail. No wonder the mail service flourished!! In January 1940 Imperial Airways and British Airways merged and BOAC was born. Initially passengers were transferred by launch from Sandbanks to the aircraft moored in Poole Harbour, but later embarkation was transferred to Poole Quay, with part of the Poole Pottery factory used as a passenger base, housing customs and immigration services. From 1942, with the build up to the war, military flying boats and other craft arrived in the harbour and the BOAC service moved to Wales. After the war the Poole flying boat training and boat service had to compete for space with increasing leisure sailing and other shipping. This presented many safety issues and the service moved back to Southampton in 1948, before finishing in 1950. It was remarkable to learn that more than 5,000 flights were made, using Poole Harbour, with over 34,000 passengers.

In March we moved away from transport and war, as we took a leisurely tour through New Milton with Nick Saunders. What an interesting talk and series of photographs, as we moved down Station Road, viewing the many original buildings and their present state. We saw how the town was to be developed with the land sale map of 1894. We also learnt that the "new" in New Milton came about by accident. The word "new" was added to the local Milton post office after they kept receiving mis-directed mail. The word "new" was then adopted by the railway, as they named their Milton station, New Milton in 1897.

The last talk for the term did not disappoint, as we delved into the fragile history of Poole Pottery. You will recall that the firm started in 1851, as the Patent Architectural Pottery, using local red Canford clay, which was transported to the factory by railway. The only remaining local example of this is the frontage of The Swan Inn, now boarded-up. In 1873 Jessie Carter purchased all the local factories, producing white tiles, fire surrounds and mosaic floor tiles. Later it started producing pottery, but the business struggled from time to time. In 1964 the business was bought by Pilkingtons and in 2006, with debts of £1 million, it was bought by The Life Style Group and continues to this day to produce pottery, but from Staffordshire. Howard also provided information for members on the variety of Poole Pottery they brought along that evening.

The last meeting of the term was a member social evening, where members enjoyed an active beetle drive, organised by Ros. This was followed by a railway quiz, prepared by John, based on Devon and Cornwall. For this quiz you definitely needed a map and some knowledge of railway stations! We also enjoyed tea, coffee and a wonderful spread of light bites, prepared by Audrey and David. Many thanks to each and every one of you, for making a good social evening, extra special.

During the period from April to July, a number of coach outings and half day visits were arranged. These were quite varied and offered something for everyone! In this Annual Report I hope you find my summary will provide some happy memories for those who attended!

In April, we started our visits with a trip to Holme Gardens, located to the west of Wareham. This is a garden centre plus, as it includes a farm shop and several acres of planted gardens, with thousands of tulips which were on display in April. Unfortunately, the weather turned, with light rain when we arrived and a cold chill. However the cream tea and hot drink seemed to hit the spot!!

Our first coach outing, on May 1<sup>st</sup>, was to Stratfield Saye House, near Basingstoke, the country estate of the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Wellington and which remains the family home of his descendants. We were guided through the house and the local guides were excellent. The house was full of pictures and photographs, with some rooms decorated with numerous black and white prints and even a very decorative papier-mache ceiling. After lunch and a walk to see the grave of Wellington's horse Copenhagen and the American garden, we entered the elephant house! Well didn't everyone have an elephant house!! Here we viewed the massive 18 ton funeral carriage, built onto captured gun carriages in just 18 days, quite a "wow" sight. Finally, after an unexpected mystery coach tour, thanks to the driver, we had a light tea in the Wellington Farm shop and then journeyed home.

Charborough Park, which was open at weekends, from April 28<sup>th</sup> to May 28<sup>th</sup>, has been in the Drax family for many generations. Although not an organised visit, some members enjoyed the gardens during this period, entering through the Lion Gate on the A31.

Hinton Admiral Gardens were open in May. Some 20 acres of gardens to explore, renowned for azaleas and rhododendrons and nine members took the opportunity to visit on Saturday the 12<sup>th</sup> May. Although the 18<sup>th</sup> century house was not open, members were able to walk around the gardens, admiring the beautiful colours and also purchase plants and visit the church. Although I was not present, I understand they also enjoyed the plant stall and of course the afternoon tea and homemade cakes!!

Our second coach trip was to the Poppy Factory at Richmond-upon-Thames. The weather was kind and the sun shone as members enjoyed free time and lunch by the River Thames. This was followed by a guided tour of the factory. We were surprised to learn that whilst this operation made poppies and wreaths, it was a separate charity to the British Legion and also had a separate team placing ex service personnel and others with disabilities, into employment in their communities. Members were able to make a poppy and saw the machines cutting out the separate items prior to assembly.

The following week we turned to drink, with a visit to the Hall and Woodhouse Blandford Brewery. The visitor centre includes a shop, bar and restaurant, which are open daily to the public. The tour guide was excellent and we heard about the family generations and were pleased to hear that the brewery is still family owned. In 1771 Mr Hall started the brewing from his home, now The Fox public house at Ansty. We saw the walls decorated by the many awards and then visited the state of the art factory, where we followed the brewing process. After a full tour we settled down in the restaurant for a well-earned drink and lunch. My plowmans platter was just amazing!! As the restaurant is open daily and available to the public, it is definitely worth a visit if you are passing!!

Although I was unable to attend, in early June, we arranged a visit to the Heavy Horse Centre in Verwood. There were talks about the heavy horses and Romany life. This was followed by a demonstration of harnessing and a ride around the farm in a horse and cart. Members saw smaller animals and goats being fed and the centre also contains static exhibitios,n including a WWI trench. There was a light lunch in Smokey Joe's Café.

The village of Cerne Abbass opened their gardens for the weekend in mid-June. Patricia and I visited on the Sunday with our family, having stopped at Dorchester on the way for lunch. We viewed many different gardens with a wide variety of flowers and veg. The weather turned wet during the afternoon, but we persevered to visit most of the gardens and were rewarded with tea and cake in the church.

June concluded with a visit to Breamore House near Fordingbridge. The afternoon started with an interesting guided tour of the Elizabethan Manor House, by the present owner!! This magnificent house was completed in 1583 and purchased early in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century by Sir Edward Hulse, a physician at the Court of Queen Anne, and remains a "Hulse" family home. After the tour, members went on to explore the extensive Countryside Museum, which contain many machines and tools, as well as recreating the village, a time when it was largely self-sufficient. Although I was not present, I am reliably informed that some members even found the restaurant for afternoon tea!

July started with a coach trip to Southwick House, near Portsmouth. Having passed security, as the building lies within a military establishment, we enjoyed coffee & biscuits within the splendour of the main house, or on the comfortable terrace, very relaxing, watching men sweating in front of us putting together a temporary marquee floor!!, We then moved to the Map Room. The D-day mission was planned here and one wall is covered with a map. The curator took us through the events leading up to D-day and explained the importance of weather forecasting to the success of the mission. There was time to explore the village of Southwick and have lunch before travelling onto West Dean Gardens, north of Chichester. The gardens and parklands are extensive, some 100 acres in total and surround a lovely period mansion, now the West Dean College of Art and Design. After a stop for refreshment in the tearooms, we returned to the coach for the journey home, making a stop on Portsdown Hill for a sunny panoramic view towards the coast. It was a long hot day, but most enjoyable.

The following week we met in Lymington and joined local guides for a walking trail through the churchyard, past the former school, army barracks, coaching inn and along the High Street to the Quay. The guides were most informative and at each location showed photographs of how the frontage used to look. From the Quay, we then walked and walked, some distance to the Royal Yacht Club, where a very welcome afternoon tea was awaiting us, with scones and cakes.

To conclude July we visited Serles House in Wimborne, near the hospital. From the outside it appeared a quite normal late Victorian house, but once inside, a real mixture of interesting period features and other memorabilia. It is impossible to describe the garden, as everywhere you looked there was something quite different to see, historic artefacts, unusual plants and many unusual items, ranging from glass eyes added to driftwood to represent snakes to shop dummies hanging from a tree!!

Whilst I was unable to attend, I understand that members also enjoyed a most interesting visit and tour of Byngley House in the heart of Poole. The house, one of the oldest properties remaining in the town, is near the Guildhall in Poole and is a handsome Grade II Elizabethan private residence. Over three floors its features include inglenook fireplaces, stone mullion windows, solid oak staircase and dumb waiter. Oliver Cromwell is rumoured to have spent time there during the Civil War. Today it is usually a holiday-let!

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. Indeed with all the teas, it is difficult to keep the weight in check, but it is bad form to refuse!! Very many thanks to Ros, Val, John and Ann for making all the arrangements and I must not forget the assistance of my wife, Patricia with our own visits. All the visits were well planned and from the many comments made to me, enjoyed by all.

### Autumn Programme.

The Autumn programme started in September with a talk entitled "Romsey Prisoner of War camp". Unfortunately for the speaker, Phoebe Merrick, her slides were as much a surprise to her as they were to us, as they did not appear in the order expected! We did learn that the camp in Romsey was named "Ganger" and was one of some 500 camps throughout the UK and North America with an overall population of some 170,000 by 1947. The Italian prisoners were soon allowed to work outside the Romsey prison on the land, but it was only after 1944 that the Germans were allowed to follow. This was after a period of re-education, as democracy was a new concept for the young Germans. The Romsey prison closed in 1948 and became local authority housing for families.

The following week, we had a talk that was full of humour, as Rob Curtis took us on a journey down the toilet from 200BC to the present day. He gave us a social history of sanitation, from the common man to royalty. I will avoid the obvious dead pan jokes, so will move swiftly on!!

October commenced with one family's insight into life at Bletchley Park during the war. Valerie Young, who originally came from Bletchley, said that her Father ran a hairdressing business in the town. Her Mother and Sister-in-law both worked at Bletchley Park, but never spoke about their work, having signed the Official Secrets Act. The workers were moved from hut to hut every 9 months and work was very much on the basis of "need to know". Valerie explained that Bletchley was well placed, mid-way between Oxford and Cambridge, on the cross country rail route and also on the main rail line from London to the South and also the Midlands. This was an ideal position to benefit from brains at top universities and within easy reach of London, Westminster and the various ministries. Bletchley Park was acquired by the Government, prior to WW2 from the Leon family and by the time WW2 ended, some 10,000 people were employed there and at local outstations.

We then moved country, with a talk entitled "Letter from America – How Washington Works". This was a professional and well-illustrated talk. Tony Bennett told us that Washington was built as the capital city, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries and he took us on a visual tour. The American Government is divided into three parts, Congress (which makes the laws), The President (as head of Government) and The Supreme Court (which interprets the law and constitution). He went on to explain that all of these parts are separate and you can only be a member of one part. However, nine members of the Supreme Court are appointed for life and the Chief Justice is the second most powerful man in America, after the President.

Another week, another country, as this time we were able to enjoy the natural beauty of Cyprus. John Coombes, a nature photographer, took us on a colourful tour of the south west part of the island, with some stunning slides of birds, wild flowers, insects and even a large spider, that had crept into his holiday home!

October concluded with a reality check, as Charles Miller presented a disturbing insight into energy options for today and tomorrow, covering fossil fuels, nuclear and renewable. The speaker explained that the UK Government was still committed to using fossil fuels and nuclear. He balanced a technical presentation with some basic and hard hitting facts. Charles explained the hydraulic fracturing process, the concerns about high pressure drilling and the threat of

earthquakes, the close proximity of drill heads and the toxic mix of chemicals used in the process. On nuclear, although the UK plan to build a plant at Hinkley Point, on the coast, the world has seen that building near the coast, has been a disaster and the UK already has the highest level of nuclear waste. Against this he gave examples such as Germany where many towns are close to self-sufficiency, through citizens co-ops, using waste digestion and Scotland where tidal power turbines are being installed, utilising natural resources. The presentation concluded with a question, why not use renewables as developed in other countries? Let us hope the UK Government does get it right before we have to turn the lights off!!

November started on a much happier note, as some 30 members, former members and friends enjoyed the Annual Lunch at the Mayfair Hotel on Bath Road. This was an opportunity to renew some old acquaintances and enjoy a relaxing lunch in good company. Having spoken to many of those who attended, they all had a good time and were pleased with the menu and service, so we will repeat the experience next year!

Back to the talks. Mike Read, a wildlife photographer, took us to the Falklands Islands with a lovely slide show of his visits, showing the range of birds and animals on some of the 700 islands. In addition to the main island, we saw Pebble Island and then Saunders Island, with just two human residents. Here we saw the Falklands adopted symbol, the "Pale Maiden" flower and the conical nests of the Albatross. On Bleaker Island there were many King Penguins and on Sea Lion Island, the Elephant Sea Lions. Finally he took us to Kidney Island. Given the islanders descriptive names, such as Tall Fern, Small Fern, Sandy Beach and Long Pond, I am sure you can guess the shape of Kidney Island!.

We then had a girls night, as John Heighes presented his talk entitled "Jobs for the girls". The talk was not about the war years, as some members expected, as John showed us slides of many strong women, who against a whole raft of difficulties, became the first woman accepted in their particular professional field. The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 heralded the turning point, ensuring many professions could no longer resist an application from a woman, use the law to defend their male organisations, or interview women candidates in the street and indeed women could then hold a passport in their own name!.

The last talk of this term was from Ian Schulz, with a talk entitled "An alternative Christmas - exploring wildlife in Nicaragua". He is clearly a man who enjoys spending holidays on the wild side, amongst creepy crawlies, off the beaten track, in very basic accommodation and travelling light. There were numerous photographs of ants, colourful spiders, butterflies, birds, fungi, exotic plants and trees. He assured us that thanks to his Wife, who luckily shares his passion for wildlife, the trips are very well planned. The photographs were lovely to see, but not my idea of a holiday!

To conclude this report I must make mention of the Group, as with similar organisations, it depends on several main elements, an active Management Committee, to oversee the operation with individuals performing essential tasks, Chairmen, to co-ordinate events, committed Leaders to arrange interesting programmes of talks and visits and by no means last, members keen to support the organisation, attending talks and visits. We are fortunate at present to have all of those elements, so thank you to the Management Committee and the Sub-committees for continuing to find interesting programmes of speakers and visits. A big thank you to all the volunteers who provide a range of support for this Group. I must add a special thank you to Audrey and David, for their dedication over the years and their team, for the supply of refreshments every week. Thanks also to David for stepping in to manage the technical equipment and to Tina for taking on the Refreshment role.

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.

As always, I like to finish with a quote or two:

The first reminded me of our Group title and is from Albert Szent, an Hungarian Scientist - "**Discovery, consists of seeing what everybody else has seen, but thinking what no-one else has thought**". Certainly true, when you hear some of the questions to the speakers or to guides, when our members are on visits!

The second is a quote from Walt Disney, obviously thinking about motion pictures - "**A good ending is vital, the single most important element, because it is what your audience takes with them when they leave**"

**So the message for when you leave is as follows** - we still need to try and attract new members, wherever possible to sustain our viability. We already advertise through the web site and local publications and will continue this process

to increase awareness of the Group. However do 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.

I hope my report has provided some happy and vivid memories of the past year and I look forward to seeing you all in 2019 for another year of discovery.

Thank you.

**Dave , Secretary.**