

*Mere Historical Society*



**UNLOCKING HISTORY**

**Autumn Newsletter  
And Reviews**

**September 2014**

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# CONTENTS

	Page no.
Chairman's Comments	1
AGM Minutes 4 <sup>th</sup> March 2014	2
Reviews : 2014	
1. Morning Talk 18 <sup>th</sup> February 'Bringing the Past to Life' by Julian Richards	3
2. AGM Evening Lecture 4 <sup>th</sup> March 'From Field to Feast' by Jenny Peat	6
3. Morning Talk 18 <sup>th</sup> March 'Hanging Chads and All That' by John Burrough	9
4. Summer Visit 21 <sup>st</sup> May 'Wareham and Moreton' by Madelaine Morris	12
5. Summer Visit 10 <sup>th</sup> June 'Edmondsham House & garden' by Janet Way	16
6. Summer Visit 10 <sup>th</sup> July 'Portsmouth Historic Dockyard' by Joseph Wigley	18
7. Autumn Visit 7/8 <sup>th</sup> September 'Hanbury Hall and Chatsworth' by Tony Grinyer	20
Programme of Activities	28
Committee 2014	

## Editorial

Once again it's time for the Autumn Newsletter and Reviews of lectures, talks and visits. A few more innovations along the way, such as page numbering and the programme in chronological order, so I hope you are still happy with the format. So far I have only received positive feedback so I am encouraged to continue, although I do feel that I should give up the Morning Talk organisation if any one would like to volunteer! We really do rely on members to give these talks or recommend others, so do not hesitate to suggest anyone you think might be suitable.

Tony Grinyer  
Tel. 861545 / [awyethg@me.com](mailto:awyethg@me.com)

## **Chairman's comments.**

Dear Members,

The 'outdoor programme' of visits has ended and the 'indoor programme' of lectures and talks is about to begin! I can say without fear of contradiction that the Visits were a great success; enjoyable, informative and memorable. We owe Caroline our thanks and congratulations for her splendid organisation and unfailing cheerfulness. I wrote last year 'when will she run out of ideas?' clearly not yet! I know that she appreciates suggestions from members, so keep them coming.

The Evening Lectures and Morning Talks have given a wealth of interest and the current programme promises more of the same and deserves your support. My thanks to Chris Alberry and Tony Grinyer for arranging the speakers for these meetings. Hurrah, our web site is up and running, simply type in 'Mere Historical Society' or go to [www.merehistoricalsociety.org.uk](http://www.merehistoricalsociety.org.uk) ; it is worth a visit. Do tell your friends about it and hope that it will encourage them to come along to our meetings. Thanks are due to Steve Hoffman who did the technical work and Jenny Wilding who organised him and the content. Do make use of it to keep up to date with our activities.

On a different note, Ruth van Sloten feels that she is unable to continue as our President as she cannot give the role the time she feels it deserves. Ruth has been very gracious and efficient both as President and Chairman of our Society and I am sorry that she is stepping down. I am most grateful to her for all her hard work on our behalf and I am sure I speak for you all. It is also with sadness that I record the death of Norah Rutter who was one of the Founders of the MHS and was an active member almost to the end of her long life. I know from comments how much affection many of you felt for her; her funeral was held jointly with her husband Fenton in Wincanton Parish Church, for they died at almost the same time after a long and happy married life.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our Autumn meetings, do please encourage friends to come as well.

Peter Lewis

**Mere Historical Society**  
**Minutes of the AGM held on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2014 in the Grove Building**

**Present:** Committee members: Christine Allberry, Caroline Cook, Gerald Cook, Diane Ellis, Tony Grinyer, Peter Lewis (PL) (Chairman), Ruth van Sloten, Jenny Wilding; plus approximately 40 members.

**1 Apologies:** Peter Platt-Higgins;

**2 Minutes of the AGM of 5<sup>th</sup> March 2013** had been circulated in the AGM News/Review 2014 booklet and were approved by those present and signed by the Chairman. Proposer Madeleine Morris; Seconder Tony Grinyer.

**3 Matters Arising:** None

**4 Chairman's Report:**

- The Chairman, Peter Lewis, referred the meeting to the Chairman's Remarks printed and circulated in the AGM News/Review 2014 booklet.
- He went on to reflect on an interesting year with wonderful speakers and outings. However, he expressed disappointment at the relatively low numbers supporting some events. He reported that the sound system had caused some problems, but he looked at this with Peter Napp and it is working well.
- He thanked the committee members for their hard work behind the scenes. Particular thanks were offered to Jenny Wilding for her work on the forthcoming website. The website will need photos to make it interesting and vibrant and Jenny would welcome photographic contributions.
- Further thanks were expressed to Jenny for her considerable efforts in gaining funding for the Archive Project which is now proceeding.
- The Chairman announced that Ruth van Sloten would be stepping down as President. The meeting thanked Ruth for the expertise and knowledge she has contributed to the Society.
- Special thanks were given to Joan Slight and to Mike Hannon, both of whom have resigned from the Society's committee. Joan served as Membership and Minutes Secretary and Mike as Chairman and their contributions are much appreciated.

**5 Financial Report:**

The Treasurer's Report was circulated in the AGM News/Review 2014 booklet. Attention was drawn to a minor printing omission in the loss column for 2012 figures. This did not affect the overall figures showing that the Society is solvent at the end of 2013. Acceptance of the report was proposed by Ruth van Sloten, seconded by Ros Castro and approved by the meeting. (Note: Treasurer to confirm figures correctly recorded in the Society's accounts.)

**6 Election of Officers:**

No new nominations had been received. The Chairman asked for the meeting to re-elect the current committee as shown in the AGM News/Review 2014 and this was agreed. Proposer Dr Longbourne; seconder Rose Cox.

**7 AOB:** None

Signed as a true record:

# 1. Morning Talk Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2014

## “Bringing the past to life; a personal view” by Julian Richards

Dr Julian Richards, writer and broadcaster, has been primarily an archaeologist for the past 45 years. His interest in archaeology started in his Grandmother Parker’s home in Nottingham and as a child he was fascinated by history. He did not, however, fit in at school and it wasn’t until he went on an archaeological dig in Nottingham that he became keen and eventually got into University there to read archaeology.

His first public event came when a winter storm blew down a large tree exposing a human skull embedded in the tree roots. Julian explained to the police it was accompanied by Roman remains and took over the investigation. His ‘ureka’ moment came when the skull and bones took on human form and he realised he was looking at a person from the Roman period.



Julian became involved in Stonehenge in the 1980's, studying the Stonehenge landscape, which led to a lot of teaching various classes at Bristol University with Nick Aston and then to the BBC.

Bit parts in BBC programmes followed and popular images including cartoons showing Stonehenge being constructed by dinosaurs were hard to debunk, even though they had died out long before Stonehenge was built. Others of Stonehenge as a building site were depicted with famous faces on mediaeval workers were amusing but not accurate.

Then in the 1990's for another BBC film, involving the re-enactment of the building of Stonehenge using massive concrete blocks. These weighing many tons to form a full size replica of the "tri-form" in a farmers field nearby, requiring over 140 volunteers pulling ropes to move them. A picture at the time showed a couple of people pushing at the back with very doubtful effect.

Bringing the past to life by re-building ancient dwellings and structures and more importantly its people, resulted in "meet the Ancestors" on BBC and subsequently in 1998 a small crew from the BBC filming all over the country of people digging up local burial sites. This highlighted the difference between pre-historic burials where the bodies are usually bent up in a small a space as possible and Roman burials, where the bodies are more laid out, often with their boots on leaving nail deposits behind whereas the boots have long since disappeared.

Recently also the study of bones by X-ray can show signs of illness and starvation, also diet and either land based or sea food. Carbon dating can show the age of all matter and how long ago it stopped living, such as dating from 200 BC or 200 AD. A stone coffin from the Monastery at Malmesbury indicated a fish diet and hence a Monk; Richard 111 and DNA testing proved hereditary but needed a living relative. Hence the programme on Alfred the Great is doomed to failure.



A grave of 4 people all jumbled up was thought to be a mother and 3 children, but DNA tests showed that the adult mother was not the parent of 2 of the children, but they were brother and sister. People movements can also now be deduced,

very rich artifacts in a carsophigus with a lead internal coffin proved the body within had been born in Rome. The 'Amesbury Archer' from abroad had been thought to be German and hence 'Steinhenge', but was actually Swiss from long after Stonehenge was built and was probably a travelling salesman bringing new goods to Britain.

Studies of bone remains can show reconstructed images of skulls for instance and plaster casts with the thickness of flesh added can give an image very true to life and a very good indication of what our ancestors looked like. The 'Blue Stones' at Stonehenge were not shown to be from Wales until the 1920's, but there is to date no evidence of how they got there although there are various theories. We also cannot say what ceremonies took place there.

The 'History is fun' project involved 40 schools in 'what s under your school' and excavated sites down through various levels. The study of the architecture of a school can indicate the history of the building; Spetisbury school had a fantastic exhibition and Roman re-enactment with pits of clay, 'firing' pots and a burial ground with a skeleton and jubilee mug.

Other ways to bring the past to life led to an excavation at Bourton in the Vicars garden and finds back to Domsday with mediaeval pottery and stone age flint implements, these 7-8000 years old dug up by a young girl student much to Julians disappointment. Elsewhere the Army at Larkhill dug up 1943 ammunition cases..

One of Julian's favourite objects is an Anglo-Saxon bread bun from 950 AD, preserved because it had been burnt and 'carbonated'. He is now involved in a scheme to be announced later this year at Blandford, to get people and schoolchildren looking at their own locations and to get digging

A heartfelt vote of thanks for a fascinating talk was greeted with much applause.

Tony Grinyer

## 2. Evening Lecture Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2014

(Following the Annual General Meeting)

### “From Field to Feast” by Jenny Peet

‘Tudor food from sowing to banquets with table manners and courtly behaviour’.

Jenny Peet came from Hertfordshire and always loved history. When she arrived in this area she was amazed at the number of Manor Houses and Castles in the locality. From field to feast in Tudor times means Henry VIII and all that, but the reality is that the nobility lived in very large and expensive houses and had expensive tastes in all things. Henry’s diet was 80% meat and he was vastly overweight.



War was endemic in this period and soldiers were recruited from the countryside, probably glad to get away from abject poverty. The poor in fact lived in tied cottages and were expected to contribute a proportion of their produce to the Lord of the Manor. So when Henry turned field into arable land and pasture for cattle, the peasants lost their lively hood and were evicted from their homes. Peasants found it

very difficult to provide for their family through winter and some quite often starved to death.

Farm ovens existed in all houses for cooking and baking. The poor, however, lived in hovels with a central fire in the only living room and eat wholesome brown bread. The wealthy required white bread from thrice sieved flour. In towns there were communal ovens for all to share. and pilfering led to. The expression ‘upper crust’ comes from the practice of baking bread on the floor of the oven and slicing

the loaf horizontally to give the burnt bottom to the staff and the top best half to the Master and family.



In Tudor times the countryside was mainly downlands with few hedges and little horticulture. Milk was vastly important for cream and cheese, which

was the staple diet for ordinary people. No shops so markets were essential for all produce, from vegetables to livestock to live chickens etc. It took 5 hours to cook from fresh to table.

Fish markets were also important as it was the law to eat fish on a Fridays and Saturdays and all through Lent. Elizabeth 1<sup>st</sup> actually extended this to include Wednesdays as she was keen to promote fishing harbours as a defensive shield. Dried cod from Scandinavia became a staple diet of the poor who couldn't afford fresh fish.

Butchers also sold mainly to the rich, with the scraps being made into "humble pie" for the poor. Manor house kitchens were staffed mainly by women, as they were cheaper than men. Large joints were cooked on spits in front of the enormous fire, rotated by small boys. Large cauldrons on the fire contained various jars, joints and vegetables in one-pot meals. Wine was very expensive and mostly imported. Drinking cups were either silver or putter goblets, while commoners drank ale out of wooden tankards. Hops were sometimes added to ale to make beer to make it last longer. Wooden 'trenchers' were used instead of plates with a small recess for the salt; they were cleaned by bunches of 'nettles' which contains silicon.

Cutlery was only spoons and knives, forks came much later. Meals were quite simple, except in court circles. Cleaning hands and mouths was by using napkins, not by washing.

Banquets were elaborate and costly affairs and took a lot of



preparation. Summoned by musicians, guests were ushered up to the richly furnished main hall, which was laid with a long table with displays of silver and glass. The central ‘ornament’ was the large and very ornate salt cellar, with

important guests at the top of the table and lesser people below, hence the term “below the salt”. A banquet could take many hours and have many courses, with entertainment in between. Fed in ‘messes’ of four people at a time, they eat with their fingers from large communal platters; hence the naval ‘mess decks’ and army ‘officers messes’.

Food often included ‘peacocks’ roasted on a spit, swans with boars heads sown on and birds in a pie. Puddings were for the rich only, but cheese was very plentiful. Salads and fruit were seen as opportunities to pass messages, strawberries meant ‘please come again’, which echoed our sentiments to Jenny Peet after such an informative and interesting talk, which was met with hearty applause.

Tony Grinyer

### **3. Morning Talk on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2014**

**“Hanging Chads and All That .....**

**“the American Presidential Elections”**

**By John Burrough**

So what are Hanging Chads? What have they got to do with American elections? For those as mystified as I was, they are the pieces of a punched card where the punched piece fails to detach completely and so is left ‘hanging’. On such technical issues, it seems an election result can turn!

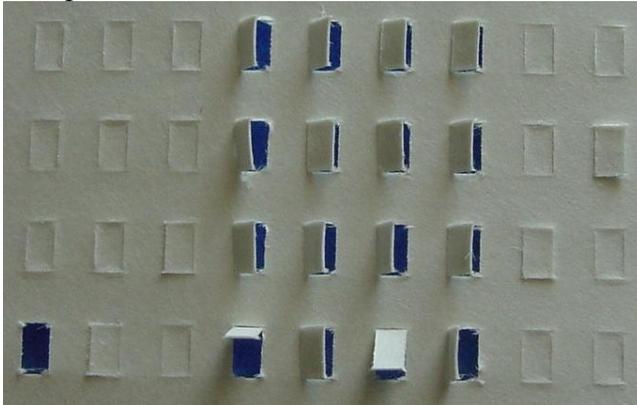
Although neither a historian nor a psephologist, John Burrough has a fascination with American elections that he traces back to watching TV coverage of the election of JFK as a child. Having followed many an election since, the focus of his talk was the notorious election of 2000, when Republican George W Bush beat the Democrat candidate, Al Gore, in a contest beset by controversy. The outcome of this election was ultimately determined by the votes cast in the state of Florida and specifically the disputed counting of so-called ‘Hanging Chads’.

Before exploring this, John set the scene by taking us through the historical evolution of America’s 50 ethnically diverse states, from the original 13 east coast colonial states of 1775 through the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867 (Alaska’s rich natural resources then unknown) to Alaska and Hawaii statehood 1959.

Following independence in 1789, the United States Constitution was founded and America’s electoral system was established, with the biennial election of members of the House of Representatives, the election of members of the Senate every six years and the 4-yearly election of the President.

With clarity and enthusiasm, John explained the intricacies of the American Presidential election. In the United States polls, citizens

do not vote directly for the President but, instead, they vote for representatives in a separate body, the Electoral College, to vote on their behalf. These representatives usually (but not always) stand for a given Presidential ‘ticket’ – the combination of President and Vice-President chosen through Republican and Democrat party primary elections and party caucus meetings. It is thus the Electoral College that ultimately decides the Presidential election. Within that College, the representatives of the four most populous states have considerable influence: California, Texas, New York and Florida. Add to this complexity, the multiplicity of different state rules and different voting mechanisms and it is not hard to see how quite unexpected and controversial outcomes could occur as in 2000.



In the election of 2000, Al Gore famously won the popular vote across the USA. Crucially, however, he failed to get more Electoral College votes than George W Bush, who was thus duly elected President. The decisive factor behind this seemingly unfair outcome was the result in the hugely influential state of Florida. Here a number of the voting cards failed to punch through properly as voters cast their votes using unsatisfactory punch card equipment.

After the poll, counters had to scrutinise the ‘Hanging Chads’ (see picture) to decide if the vote was valid or not. Much deliberation and legal wrangling followed, going right up to the Supreme Court, which ruled by a 5-4 split that the Florida vote should stand. Despite allegations of malpractice, George W’s wafer-thin majority, thus declared in Florida, gave him the Presidency when the Electoral

College in turn cast their votes. He was inaugurated in January 2001 and the rest is history.

As John reminded us, it is a sobering thought that the foibles of the voting system used in one state (Florida) could have such a profound effect on the outcome of the election of one of the most powerful people in the world. In the end, George W was elected after thousands of likely Democrat voters had been removed from the polls by dubious decisions, regarding the counting of the 'Hanging Chads', and after the subsequent intervention of the ruling by the Supreme Court.

Our thanks go to John Burrough for a thought-provoking talk that demonstrated how much political systems of a country are bound up with its history and left us wondering how democratic the American electoral process really is.

Diane Ellis

## 4. VISIT TO WAREHAM AND MORETON

### 21st MAY 2014

Our meeting place was by a tiled map of 18th century Wareham conveniently placed by the public loos. Our guide, Ben Buxton from the museum told us that essentially Wareham was a Saxon town between 2 rivers, the Frome and the Piddle, although Roman and Iron Age remains had been found, the former on the site of the



uniquely named, Lady St. Mary Church. This was the first stopping point on our tour.

The church dates back to the 7th century and there was a nunnery there in circa 700. The knave was re-built in the 17th century.

The is an unusual

display of burial stones from the 6th-8th centuries with latin inscriptions, typical of stones more often found further west in Devon or Cornwall. The organ, played for us by the organist, dates from the 1880's and has 2,500 pipes and 3 keyboards, in addition to the pedals, and sounds wonderful. There is a unique sextagonal lead font portraying the 12 apostles on a Purbeck marble base, dating from the 12th century. A stunning modern stained glass window, by an Exeter artist, shows the two rivers symbolically joined and then separating.

We then walked to St. John's Hill, a square, where there is a house called Mint House, believed to be the site of a coin mint. There were 2 mints in the Kingdom of Wessex in the 10-12th centuries, one of which was in Wareham.

Wareham had been a significant town before this time, being one of three Wessex towns fortified against the invading Vikings who attacked England in the 790's moving west to try and conquer the country in the 860's, at the time of King Alfred. Wareham's grid system of roads dates from this time as do the walls surrounding most of the town which formed its main defences, both still exist.

We moved on up North Street, stopping outside Lloyds Bank which in 1712 was the Bull's Head Inn where the town fire started, allegedly by hot ashes being thrown out of the back door. Most buildings at the time were built of wood, including houses in the middle of the road, so the town burnt quickly, stopping at the thatched pub, the King's Arms, which still survives and serves excellent crab sandwiches! As a result of this fire, the majority of the town was re-built in Georgian times.

Further up North Street, on top of the wall is the church of St. Martin which dates from the early 11th century, circa 1020, pre-dating the arrival of the Normans. It is the best preserved Saxon church in Dorset. There may have been a timber church on the site before this time, but this is not known. There are wall paintings inside from the 12th century, discovered in the 1930's, one of St. Martin as a Roman soldier giving his cloak to a beggar. There is a chimney on the roof which was from the time of the fire in the 18th century, when people who had lost their homes were housed in the church. There is an effigy of T.E. Lawrence, whose house, Clouds, is nearby. He contributed financially to the renovation of the church and hence his effigy, which was destined for Salisbury Cathedral, ended up in St. Martin's Wareham.

We then set off to walk along the north wall and down the west wall. There were 3 gates into Wareham, the north one believed to be south of St. Martin's Church. The north wall was formed by a natural river cliff, whereas the east and west walls were dug out creating ditches. Originally there were timber pallisades which were replaced with stone walls in the 10th century. Much of the stone has been removed over the years to build houses, much like Mere and the castle! The flood plain surrounding the River Piddle was also a good barrier.

And finally, based on the discovery of a 10th century sword, Wareham in Bloom decided to feature a golden sword in their display on the roundabout as you enter the town. The sword was embedded in a rock, borrowing from the tales of King Arthur, and hence caused much controversy - the sword was stolen!

We then moved on to the village of Moreton where the church of St. Nicholas features the stunning engraved windows created by Laurence Whistler. Carol Gibbens gave us an informative talk about the history:

The first church on the site was built in 1190 and was re-built in 1410 when it became St. Nicholas. The landowners since 1376 were the Framptons and James Frampton re-built the church again in 1733.

It was also a James Frampton who had the Tolpuddle Martyrs transported in 1769. T.E.

Lawrence was related to the Framptons and his funeral and burial took place in Moreton. The bier used to carry his coffin now acts as a table for cakes in the cafe!



The tiles on the floor of the church and the candelabra date from the 18th and 19th centuries, whilst the inner part of the font was restored from the 12th century church. In 1940 a bomb was dropped nearby causing considerable damage to the church, which took 10 years to re-build. Laurence Whistler was asked to design the windows and did so over a period of 38 years, starting in 1953. Initially the windows were to replace the damaged ones, but later other windows were commissioned, funded by memorials or fundraising.

The engraved windows let in an extraordinary amount of light and can also be seen from outside as well as inside. The last window

designed was the Forgiveness window, featuring Judas hanging and pieces of silver dropping to the ground and turning into flowers. This window was completed in 1993 was not put in until 2013, as the subject matter caused some considerable controversy.

Many thanks to Caroline for a fascinating day out, and a sunny one too.

**Madelaine Morris**

## **5. Joint Visit of Mere Historical Society and Mere Garden Club. June 10<sup>th</sup> 2014**

### **EDMONDSHAM HOUSE, WIMBORNE**

Although the weather looked doubtful, the rain kept away to enable thirty four members to enjoy a wonderful afternoon at Edmondsham House. After picnicking in the gardens, we were treated to a tour of the Tudor House, with its stately Georgian additions, and a wonderful display of family treasures by the current owner Julia Smith. The House has been in the same family, sometimes through the female line or nephews, since the Middle Ages and so every item had a connection to Julia's family and were obviously very precious to her. They were still finding treasures today, a Top Hat made specially for her Great Uncle in an outhouse and some beautiful Victorian parasols used to keep the sun from their owners' delicate complexions! Julia has worked with many conservationists in order to preserve her heirlooms and we obviously only scratched the surface of what was in her care.



The Library contained a first draft of ‘Alice in the Underground’ in Lewis Carroll’s own hand, 8 beautiful Volumes of Maund’s Botany with illustrations hand-painted in inks and a wonderful Family Bible with a map of the world as was known at the time in 1683. Two fascinating and exquisitely executed, dioramas, made from papier-mâché, hung on the Jacobean staircase depicting West Indian Life dating from 1806 and possibly made by French Prisoners of War.



After feasting our eyes on so many treasured items, we were then given a tour of the Walled Gardens by the Head Gardener, Andrew Haynes, to absorb the beauty of the Perennial Border, a riot of colour, texture and form, buzzing with bees and insects and the scent of old roses. The garden is managed organically on a no-dig method with continual mulching. After a demonstration of how he made his quality compost, we returned to the dining room to be served by Julia with tea and a wonderful selection of home-made cakes before making our way back to Mere.

What a delight and privilege to have been able to share in this historic family home, so lovingly cared for.

**Janet Way**

## **6. Visit on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> July 2014**

### **PORTSMOUTH HISTORIC DOCKYARD:**

The trip to the Portsmouth historic dockyard was very informative and a real eye opener, from finding out about life on a Tudor ship to seeing how the modern day navy copes with a wide variety of tasks. The trips main feature was the brand new £35m Mary Rose museum, it takes you through the boat's history from the start of its construction in 1510 to its sinking in the Battle of the Solent on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1545. The building was built around the ship itself, 3 floors housed viewing windows onto the boat and well-presented finds from the wreck. The boat is now drying having spent over 400 years on the sea bed and been coated by a wax like substance for nearly 10 years to seal the wood. There's a surprising number of artefacts recovered from around the wreck site ranging from cookery pots to long-bows and arrows, all presented brilliantly to give you a feel of how they would have looked/been-used.

Having visited it before I chose not to go on Nelsons flagship: HMS Victory. Instead I visited the National museum of the Royal Navy. The museum covered the history of the Royal Navy and some of the key battles it fought in. There was a large Nelson gallery which showed you the actual man and his character behind his hero status. A large interactive display showed you about the living conditions on board modern warships and how the family's coped with having loved ones going away for long periods of time. Another exhibition was about the WWI naval race to arms between Britain and Germany, also the triumphs and disasters under Winston Churchill's leadership.

We also went on HMS Warrior which was constructed in 1860 and was fascinating, it was a real insight into the life aboard a Victorian warship. The boat is an interesting combination of relatively modern technology such as ammunition lifts and deck mounted guns and older concepts like sail power and cannons. Warrior was the first iron-hulled warship, making it heavier but far stronger than any previous boat. It was also the fastest, largest and most powerful of all the ships of her day, capable of being deployed anywhere in the

world. However, this very advanced ship did her job without firing a single shot in anger and was never challenged. See picture below.

We also went on a harbour tour, which was very informative and was an insight into the working parts of the harbour including the military and commercial sectors. It was great being able to get up close to some cutting edge navy tech and see the huge container ships arriving from the continent.

Over all it was a great, well organized trip.



**Joseph Wigley:  
Combwich, Somerset  
(Replaced my Granny who wasn't  
able to attend) reported by a very  
capable 14 year old boy, well done!)**

## **7. Visit to HANBURY HALL & Gardens and CHATSWORTH 7/8<sup>th</sup> Sept' 2014**

Having left Mere at 0930 with 27 members and guests on board Andrew's very comfortable coach, stopping for a brief pit-stop on the M.5, we arrived at HANBURY HALL at around 12 noon. Well prepared by splendid insights en route firstly by Hannah (our newest and probably youngest member) who gave us a potted history of Hanbury, which was built in 1701 for the Vernon family who lived there for 251 years; secondly by our chairman Peter Lewis, who expounded on the 3 artists of note whose work will be seen at both Hanbury Hall and Chatsworth, namely Antonio Verrio, Louis Laguerre and most importantly, Sir James Thornhill.



Hanbury hall, set in 20 acres of re-created 18<sup>th</sup> Century gardens and 400 acres of parkland, is a splendid early 18<sup>th</sup> Century house. Originally within the boundaries of the Royal Forest of Feckenham, which lost it's royal status in 1629, the estate was bought by Thomas Vernon, a lawyer and whig MP for Worcester. The Vernon family survived in this magnificent Mansion House until 1953, when the National Trust finally took over after receiving an anonymous donation for the future preservation of Hanbury. However, the family story was not smooth, with tales of love, scandal, bigamy and excess. Emma Vernon inherited Hanbury aged 16 in 1771, married Henry Cecil later Earl of Exeter and ran off with the local Curate. The

Victorian Vernons, Sir Harry and Lady Georgina appear to have been truly happy. But the last of the Vernons, Sir George who farmed in Argentina, finally committed suicide in 1940.



We started our tour by way of the ‘Parterre’ formal garden with a visit to the Servants’ Hall, which is now a splendid tea room, for a welcome bowl of soup before visiting the beautiful surrounding gardens and outbuildings. In

particular, the long gallery detached from the main body of the house and now used as a picture gallery, has fine paintings by local artist David Birtwhistle.

Also worth a mention is the Orangery added circa 1775, 66 ft wide it was heated by a hot-flue system along the back wall to grow various citrus fruits. The fruit trees are placed outside in the summer. The gardens also contain a grove, bowling green, fruit garden, orchard, walled garden as well as the Sunken Parterre. The Deer Park to the north-east forms part of the 162 hectare Hanbury estate, which includes some 20 ponds and many veteran oak trees, remnants of Feckenham Forest.

Hanbury Hall is best known for the wall and ceiling paintings commissioned by Thomas Vernon and painted by Sir James Thornhill. These did not disappoint. Our visit to the house commenced at 1300 and we were quickly impressed by the imposing Main Hall, the heart of Hanbury and originally used as a dining hall for grand occasions. The Great Staircase rises in three flights from the left hand side of the Main Hall and Thornhill’s magnificent paintings depicting the story of Achilles, occupy the walls and ceiling of this very large space. The only British large scale painter of his generation, Thornhill was later commissioned in 1707 for the Painted

Hall at Greenwich Hospital and in 1716 he began his most famous work on the cupola of St Paul's Cathedral.

Continuing on the ground floor by way of the Smoking Room to the fine Dining Room with ceiling by Sir James Thornhill, we were impressed by the silver cutlery and place settings for dinner and paused to take a photo of our Chairman keeping a watchful eye over two of our ladies admiring the table decorations. On into the Drawing Room with beautiful and rare 18<sup>th</sup> century Axminster carpet, an equally beautiful Broadwood piano of 1817 and rosewood break-front bookcase.



And so to the first floor and the Blue Bedroom, wherein lies the 'flying tester' bed, also known as an 'angel bed', which was purchased in 1977 from our own Zeals House. The damask hangings date from the 1730's and are remarkably well preserved and so the levels of light in the room are kept low. The far end Cedar Bedroom was Lady Georgina's when she married Sir Harry in 1861, the 1911 photograph is of their Golden Wedding attended by 400 Hanbury villagers.

By way of the Gothic Corridors, so named after the 1830's wallpaper copied and re-hung in 1991, one comes at last to the Hercules Bedroom, Closet and Dressing Room, so named after the figure of Hercules on top of the corner chimneypiece in the dressing room. Here also one reads of the death of Sir George.

Back on the coach at 15.30, we departed tired but happy to go north on the M25 and then the M42 to Derby and to our Hotel for overnight stop, the Best Western 'Stuart' Hotel. Dinner at 7pm was well received and all had their chosen courses, recorded by Caroline

to avoid argument, the final touch of her splendid organization of a very rewarding day. And so to bed!

Next day, Monday, dawned bright and sunny and buffet breakfast partaken, we had time for a short walk to view the neighbouring 'Nightingale' Nursing Home with a fine sculpture of Florence over the side door. On the coach by 0915 as requested, we departed for further north and on via Chesterfield to Chatsworth, arriving at 10.30 for a group photograph in front of the gates. As the house did not open until 1100, we took time for a coffee in the sunshine.

Entering by the North Entrance Hall, once the kitchen, as the West Door is now the Duke and Duchess's private entrance, we followed the designated route around this magnificent palace.

Built by Bess of Hardwick and husband Sir William Cavendish in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Chatsworth was rebuilt by the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl and 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Devonshire, the great grandson of Bess, as a Baroque Palace in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. He was awarded the Dukedom, after helping to



bring King William 111 and Queen Mary to the throne, in 1694.



In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke married Lady Georgina Spencer and Devonshire House in London became the centre of Whig party politics and Georgina reigned as queen of society and fashion. Later she and the Duke lived in a ménage-a-trois with Elizabeth Foster. Their pictures are in the portrait gallery.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the bachelor 6<sup>th</sup> Duke modernized Chatsworth and built a new wing for his collection of books, minerals and sculpture. The 10<sup>th</sup> Duke in the 20<sup>th</sup> century invited a girls boarding school to use Chatsworth during the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war. The present 12<sup>th</sup> Duke and Duchess look after Chatsworth with the Chatsworth House Trust and pay rent to live in the house while restoring and enhancing Chatsworth for the future.

The tour continued to the Painted Hall, which was the first step in the journey to the State Apartments. The magnificent murals by Lois Laguerre show scenes from the life of Julius Caesar. From there we were directed by way of the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke's Grotto and Chapel via the corridor which brings together paintings, minerals and sculpture collected by several generations of the family. The Chapel itself is breathtakingly beautiful with figures of Faith and Justice on either

side of the alterpiece carved by Caius Cibber and the painting of 'Doubting Thomas' by Antonio Verrio above the alter table. Opposite the windows is the image of Christ healing the sick painted by Louis Laguerre. In front of the alter is an amazing 8ft bronze sculpture of 'Saint Bartholomew, Exquisite Pain' by Damian Hirst in 2006.



Finally we came to the Great Stairs and the State Apartments, the most important rooms in the 1st Duke's House, built for a Royal visit which never came. The painted ceiling over the stairs by Verrio flows into the carvings on the upper part of the walls leading into the Great Chamber, the largest room in the house and originally the audience room with painted ceiling by Verrio, now displaying a magnificent pyramid buffet of silver-gilt and porcelain dishes. Next door the State Dining Room with superb 17<sup>th</sup> century tapestries was used as a dormitory by the school during

the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and has been restored to its wartime appearance for the 2014 exhibition.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> withdrawing room was renamed the Music Room by the 6<sup>th</sup> Duke after the violin 'trompe l'oeil' painting by the Dutch artist Jan van der Vaardt, brought from Devonshire House in London.

The following State Bedroom with yet another painted ceiling by Laguerre, has magnificent wall hangings and paintings with a canopied bed with crimson silk hangings. On into the State Closet where only the very best were allowed and then the Old Masters Cabinet with Rembrandt's painting of an Oriental King amongst others. There are over 3000 drawings in the collection, the greatest

private collection in the country after the Royal Collection, by artists including da Vinci, Raphael, Rembrandt and Guercino.

The south Sketch Gallery is filled with objects collected by the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke and his Duchess Georgina, who was a friend of Marie Antoinette. The west Gallery celebrates the collection of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Burlington, who's daughter Lady Charlotte Boyle, married the 4<sup>th</sup> Duke of Devonshire. The north Gallery has an installation of 659 ochre handmade ceramic panels by Jacob van der Beugel depicting the DNA of the Devonshire family, rather bizarre. And so to the guest bedrooms with hand-painted Chinese wallpaper and downstairs to the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke's long gallery, now the Library housing the majority of the over 30,000 books at Chatsworth.



The 6<sup>th</sup> Duke's North Wing was next, starting with the truly magnificent Great Dining Room which held the first dinner for the young Princess Victoria when 13 years old. Finally into the very ornate Sculpture Gallery with mainly 18<sup>th</sup> century

classical sculptures by Antonio Canova.

Then by way of the Orangery Shop into the magnificent gardens and up to the Stable Yard for an excellent and very welcome lunch in the Cavendish restaurant .

After lunch a walk in the Park was called for to take photos of the famous Cascade and Emperor fountain in the Canal pond and long views of the House.

Back to the coach for a 4 o'clock departure and the long drive home, broken by a couple of pit stops, to return to Mere almost exactly on schedule at 5 minutes to 10 pm, much to Caroline's relief and our acclamation for a job well done and the end of a fantastic visit.

Chairman's thanks to Caroline with a bunch of flowers were greeted with a round of applause by all. Well done Caroline! Where to next year?



-- **Tony Grinyer**

# **Programme of Activities 2014/15**

Evening Lectures & Morning Talks in the Grove B'ldg.

- 1. Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2014, Lecture at 7.30 pm**  
**‘Archive Fever- Modern research’**  
by the Hon Victoria Glendinning CBE
- 2. Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2014, Talk at 10.15 am for coffee**  
**‘It was the best of times, it was the worst of times’**  
by Janet Way
- 3. Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> November 2014, Lecture at 7.30 pm**  
**‘Shaftesbury - King Alfred’s Legacy’**  
by Rob Curtis
- 4. Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2014, Talk at 10.15 am for coffee**  
**‘Occupational health hazards, post industrial revolution’**  
by Rose Cox
- 5. Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2014, Lecture at 7.30 pm**  
**‘The First World War - Tunnelling and Mining Warfare’**  
by Phillip Robinson
- 6. Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2015, Lecture at 7.30 pm**  
**‘A Vey Fair Castle - the Changing Face of Corfe Castle’**  
by Judith Teasdale
- 7. Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2015, Talk at 10.15 am for coffee**  
**‘A History of Bruton School for Girls’**  
by John Burrough
- 8. Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2015, Lecture at 7.30 pm**  
**‘Rural Temperance 1880 - 1908’**  
by Canon Andrew Evans
- 9. Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2015, Talk at 10.15 am for coffee**  
**‘Paradise Lost : Stourhead Gardens Lost Features’**  
by Julia Mottershaw
- 10. Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2015 at 7 pm for A.G.M followed at  
7.30 pm ‘A Blast from the Past’**  
by Jonathan Weeks
- 11. Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Talk at 10.15 am for coffee**  
**‘Fossils Rocks and Dinosaurs - local content’**  
by Gerry Cook

## Committee Members 2014

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**Nominations for committee etc and notices for AOB for the AGM must be submitted to a member of committee by 28<sup>th</sup> February 2015**