

Mere Historical Society



UNLOCKING HISTORY

AGM Notice & Newsletter
March 2018

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Committee Members

Mere Historical Society

Notice of Annual General Meeting Tuesday 3rd April 2018

The next Annual General Meeting of the Mere Historical Society will be held on Tuesday 3rd April 2018 in the Grove Building at 7.30pm.

Members are invited to partake of a glass of wine from 7.00pm. Membership Subscriptions of £10 will be collected before the AGM.

Notices and/or nominations for the AGM must be submitted in writing to the Secretary or a member of the Committee at least two weeks before this date.

Agenda for the Annual General Meeting

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Minutes of the last AGM on 4th April 2017 (circulated in the July 2017 newsletter)

3. Matters Arising
4. Reports to the AGM
5. Election of Committee
6. AOB

Diane Ellis

MHS Committee Minutes Secretary

13th February 2018

THOUGHTS ON A VISIT TO TYNTESFIELD: 14 JUNE 2017

Being fortunate to visit Tyntesfield on a gloriously sunny day, my first impression on seeing this fantastically turreted and spired Victorian Gothic building was how easily it could be used as a Walt Disney backdrop for an animated fairy tale. (Though had it been a grey stormy day with lightening and howling winds I am sure it would be as well suited to being the backdrop for a 'Gothic Horror' movie with bats and vampires fitting perfectly amongst the skyline spires.) A truly magnificent building.

Having looked along the beautiful parterre gardens the time came to visit the house and all the treasures within. Once one's eyes had acclimatised to the rather gloomy interior it became apparent that there were an amazing array of architectural features and historical artefacts to be noted and enjoyed.

Understandably protection of valuable interiors from direct sunlight damage is a necessity hence the need of thicker window coverings. Sadly I felt that this did limit the ability to see with clarity some of the higher magnificent wood carvings. I found myself wishing that they had provided a torch, as they do in some NT properties, to enable one to see clearly just one or two designated sites. But that was just one small downside to an amazing visit amongst the sympathetically restored rooms and skilfully displayed exhibits.

The present house is a testament to the Gibbs Dynasty. A wealthy family whose fortune came from the trading of guano – a natural fertilizer obtained from the accumulation over thousands of years of bird droppings deposited along the arid Peruvian coastline- proving the old northern adage 'where there's muck there's brass!! The huge amount of money generated enabled the family to buy in 1843 the modest regency house of Tynte Place and transform it, complete with its own chapel, to the exuberant gothic extravaganza we see today.

The marvellous collections of valuable paintings, antiquary treasures, gold and silver work, arts and crafts, high spec examples of sophisticated

Victorian plumbing alongside homemade treasures were a feast for the senses.

For myself one of the greatest aides to the visit was the provision of a sturdy bound booklet within which was catalogued each exhibit. I found this far better than a formal guided tour.. We all have different interests and likes so to be able to focus on an article of specific interest and read up on it from the detailed booklet was an absolute joy. Thus one could spend time looking at a humble yet superbly home crafted ivory toilet roll holder giving as much time to its inspection as to the glorious silver embossed chair in pride of place in the display.

The volunteers around on that day excelled in enthusiasm and knowledge which helped bring each of the rooms to life. There was just so much to see that it was difficult to take it all in. A return visit is certainly to be recommended that one was able to visit rooms still in need of restoration really helped in understanding how much work the NT has had to put in to restore the house to its present state.

Not many Victorian houses can boast their own chapel. Designed by Butterfield it has many of the High Church Oxford movement influences and is reminiscent of several of the Oxford Colleges. It provided a wonderful tranquil space with effective acoustics.

Like many wealthy Victorian families the Gibbs engaged in many philanthropic projects and did much to improve the lives of many. Unfortunately as time elapsed the maintaining of such a building under a very different social and economic climate led, with the death of Lord Wraxall (Richard Gibb) to the house coming onto the market in 2002. Well aware that this was the last major Victorian gothic house that had survived in a largely unaltered state since its construction the NT initiated a massive fundraising campaign and on 31 July 2002 they were able to purchase the property. Today some 15 years on we are able to appreciate and enjoy the wonderful restoration so far achieved.

Tyntesfield has many points of interest. As well as house, chapel, tea rooms, shop, there are vast parkland and garden areas to explore at leisure. I chose to spend my time exploring the house but many others in

the group did spend time in the garden areas and thoroughly enjoyed their visit.

On visiting Tyntesfield there is a need to be prepared to walk long distances. A mobility bus is available but the scale of the grounds means that there could be a long wait at stops especially at peak times.

It is certainly a property well worth visiting. There is so much to see and take in. that each visit is likely to bring more items to view and a new understanding into the life and times of that period in Victorian England

C.Marsh



DEVIZES VISIT SEPTEMBER 2017

What could be better than a late-summer drive through the glorious Wiltshire countryside? Why, that and a guided pre-lunch tour of a brewery, of course. Surely this couldn't get any better? It could: throw in an afternoon tour of the Wiltshire Museum, expertly guided by the Museum's own Director.

The Wadsworth Brewery in Devizes must be one of the few in the country still to be brewing beer in its Victorian purpose-built building, many of whose original features remain. Two excellent lady guides led us through, explaining as they went the process of producing Britain's greatest culinary cultural jewel, unique in the world to this day, the Pint of Bitter. They had us taste the very malts, the toasted barley grains, so that we could tell how they subtly alter the flavours and colours of the beers according to the degree of toasting. We saw the hops, again of different varieties. We saw the huge tanks in which the mixtures are heated and then allowed to cool, to produce the amber nectar.

At the same time we heard how the firm had evolved from its small beginnings; had taken on the challenge of expansion beyond the status of a mere local brewery; and had survived the Great Keg Beer Threat of the 1960s, that led to the creation of the Campaign for Real Ale, whose successful struggle resulted in today's happy proliferation of good, traditionally made and kept, British beers. Wadsworth's founder was an adventurous man: an early attempt at balloon travel led to his just managing to come down to earth in Lyme Regis before being carried to an early, watery grave out in the Channel. We are fortunate that he turned to more productive ventures. We also saw some beautifully preserved, if disused, early steam-driven machinery.

The tour ended, naturally, with a free tasting of Wadsworth's beers, including the remarkable Swordfish, a celebration of the Fleet Air Arm, which carries a tang of rum to honour the Navy's traditions (famously summarised by Winston Churchill as Rum, Sodomy and the Lash).

Over-indulgence was nevertheless avoided by our party, who thirsted rather for knowledge than intoxicating liquors, and so reconvened after lunch at the Wiltshire Museum. There we were taken by its extremely eloquent and knowledgeable Director through some of its main treasures, with a principal focus on the pre-historical finds: the best perhaps being the items recovered from the grave of the Avebury Archer (but not forgetting Mere Man, an important if less significant finding). For those of us who had attended quite recently the talk by Hilary Griffiths (“Jade, Amber and Gold”, April 2017), much was added that fitted in well.

Although in our short visit we focused on the Stonehenge-related material, there is a lot else in this little museum to see: it is very well-presented, with excellent explanatory notices, and would be well worth a return visit, or even visits. Given that Wiltshire’s treasures are dispersed among many centres, there is a surprising amount here that will fascinate.

Peter Landymore



1 Mere Man ?

MHS Special visit to Dents Glove Museum

On the 10th of October a party of 12 members of the Society visited the factory of Dents in Warminster. The way in to the factory took us through a very attractive and well-stocked shop in which the party browsed whilst waiting for the tour to start. The tour was conducted by a very pleasant, articulate and well-informed retired member of staff, John Roberts, former consultant to Dents. We were not, however, to see gloves actually being made, which was a disappointment.

The company was established in 1777 by John Dent, a master glove-maker in Worcester. John Dent had four sons, the eldest also named John. John Dent junior and his brother William were apprenticed to their father for the necessary seven years and then, as partners, were foremost in expanding the business in the 19th century.

Dents enjoyed great success, building factories in France, Germany and Belgium and in opening sales offices in Paris, New York, Montreal and Sydney.

Dents did not adopt mass-producing methods in the late 19th and early 20th century except to have electricity to power sewing machines. They continued to employ traditional glove-making skills. Even today leather is still selected, stretched and cut by hand, one pair of gloves at a time, and finely stitched.

In 2011 Dents moved into a new architect-designed factory and distribution centre in Warminster – the site of our visit.

After our guide's introduction, the party was shown into a room which displayed a large variety of curious, historic and special

gloves. This museum included gloves worn by the famous and we saw gloves that were designed for and used by H.M. the Queen at her coronation in 1953. A plentiful selection of photographs of special people, special gloves and occasions was also on display. Finally, we were invited to see and handle all sorts of leathers and linings used in glove-making, to hear about their various qualities and to be shown the various intricacies of design.

This was a most interesting and well-organised visit. Thank you,
Caroline

David Longbourne

THE HISTORY OF DESERT ISLAND DISCS

by Ralph Jerram

3 October 2017

Ralph kindly stepped in at short notice to replace Peter FitzGerald, the previously scheduled speaker, who was unwell.

Desert Island Discs (DID) is now a staple of BBC Radio Four's output, with 42 programmes each year. Candidates for appearance are carefully assessed, and those selected are visited personally by a senior researcher in order to construct a programme outline and to ensure that the presenter asks the right questions, and the star has prepared answers; however, there is no script, nor any rehearsals. This was not how it started.

Roy Plomley, who conceived and began the show, was born in 1914 to a wealthy family and educated at King's College School, Wimbledon. Initially he became an actor, but finding modest success he moved into broadcasting, with the International Broadcasting Company which operated in both France and Britain. On the outbreak of war all commercial broadcasting stopped; Plomley stayed in Paris with his family, but they were chased out in June 1940 by the Germans, losing all their possessions in the process. Jobless, destitute and living in a cottage in Hertfordshire, he came up in 1941 with the concept and persuaded the BBC to take it on, with himself as presenter and script-writer.

He was paid 10 guineas for the programme concept, and 5 guineas for each script (about £400 and £200 in today's money), selecting the subjects himself. Subject and presenter would rehearse each programme before broadcasting; discs would be played in gaps carefully left in the script. At this time, there were no books or luxuries for the castaways. A first series of 15 programmes went out in the winter of 1942. Among the celebrities of the time were Arthur Askey (comedian), Anna Neagle (actress), Vic Oliver (comedian and

actor) and Noel Coward (playwright, actor, singer, and all-round star). The first interviewee was Vic Oliver – coincidentally, he was Winston Churchill's son-in law, although Austrian-born. Others featured in the first series were Ivor Novello, Jack Hylton (band leader) and Arthur Askey; in the last of the series, Plomley interviewed himself!

The programme continued regularly until January 1946. Others appearing included Leslie Howard (actor, killed less than a year later when German aircraft shot down his Lisbon-bound airliner), Guy Gibson (Dambusters Commander), Michael Redgrave, Celia Johnson, Deborah Kerr and Stewart Granger (actors), among other names less remembered today. But there ensued a five-year gap, before the programme was revived in 1951: since when it has run continuously. Luxuries began to appear towards the end of that year, though were not invariably mentioned; as yet, there were no book selections. Among those appearing in the decade were Joyce Grenfell, Tommy Trinder, Gracie Fields, Arthur Askey and Vera Lynn – who chose as her luxury her curling tongs. George Formby chose his first ukulele. Freddie Mills, the British world champion boxer, appeared: he was later murdered, having fallen into the London gangster world.

Others who appeared in the 'fifties included Trevor Howard, Norman Wisdom, Richard Attenborough, Celia Johnson, Arthur Askey (again), David Nixon (magician) and Stirling Moss, the racing driver, whose requested luxury was hair restorer; 3 of the Goons (Peter Sellers, Spike Milligan, and Harry Secombe); David Attenborough, and Moura Lympany, the pianist, all 8 of whose records were of herself playing (a record later almost matched by the soprano Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, who chose 7 of hers).

We moved to the 'Sixties (social reforms, moon shots and pop and rock music). Guests included Mary Wilde and Adam Faith; Fanny and Johnny Craddock; Noel Coward and Marlene Dietrich, Julie Andrews (luxury: a piano) and Margot Fonteyn. Politicians remained few: Jeremy Thorpe was one (his book: Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire). Among Shirley Bassey's choices was the Chipmunk's Song. Then the 'Seventies: miners' strikes and

the oil crisis, inflation at 24%. DID brought us, among others, James Stewart and David Niven, Judy Dench and Omar Sharif, Joan Bakewell, Graham Hill and Fred Trueman, Michael Palin and John Cleese. The latter's luxury was a life-sized model of Margaret Thatcher, and a baseball bat (even though at the time, 1971, she was merely education minister) Thatcher herself appeared in 1978, but didn't request a model of John Cleese...but a photo album of her children.

In the early eighties, guests included Princess Margaret and Princess Grace of Monaco. Then, in May 1985, Roy Plomley died of a heart attack, at 71. Among his last guests were David Steele and Jimmy Saville. An interval ensued, including a negotiation with Plomley's widow; and in 1986 broadcasts resumed, with Michael Parkinson (a former guest) in the chair. More politicians appeared: Roy Hattersley, Shirley Williams, Geoffrey Howe, Jim Callaghan, Michael Heseltine, Neil Kinnock and Arthur Scargill among them. Parkinson, however, did not enjoy the role and quit in 1988, when Sue Lawley succeeded him (having been herself a guest in November 1987.)

The guest list continued to be eclectic in the 'Nineties: from Bob Geldof to Desmond Tutu, Glenda Jackson to Kate Adie, Kenny Everett to Julie Andrews (again). Buzz Aldrin (the astronaut) agreed to appear, but after dragging Sue Lawley all the way to America, flatly refused to take part. John Major made the only appearance by a serving prime minister; Tony Blair and Gordon Brown both followed, the latter while in office as Chancellor. Major asked for a replica of the Oval cricket ground, but was (infamously) denied – as we learned from an intervention from our Treasurer.

Sue Lawley left in 2005, after 18 years: her final subject was Jane Goodall, the Chimps expert. Kirsty Young took over, with Quentin Blake, the illustrator, as her first. The BBC podcast site retains almost all the catalogue, available on demand, after the BBC agreed royalty payments to the Roy Plomley estate. It comprises a social chronicle of some 75 years of British life, accessible to us all.

Peter Landymore

POPHAM: A 16TH CENTURY LAWYER WHO MADE GOOD!

By James Bradnock

Tuesday 10th October 2017

‘Has anyone heard of John Popham?’ This was the question James Bradnock put to us by way of introduction to his talk. It seemed that only one member of the audience had and that was through a family connection to the Popham family. What followed revealed that Popham was an Elizabethan man with many qualities and huge influence that is still felt hundreds of years later and yet whom history has largely ignored.

John Popham was from the west-country, born in 1531 in Huntworth, near Bridgwater. According to varying accounts his family may have been of gypsy origin and may be traced back to the Norman Conquest. It is clear that his parents were of some repute, although as a young man, Popham’s alleged enjoyment of fencing, dancing and bear-baiting might not reflect that. It is even said that he was a part-time highwayman. However following studies at Balliol College, Oxford, he eventually married and settled into a legal career that rapidly became stellar and saw him achieve great power and influence. Starting out as Recorder for Bridgwater and Bristol, he was to become MP for Bristol, then in turn Sergeant at Arms, Solicitor-General, Attorney-General, Treasurer of Middle Temple and Speaker of the House of Commons. He subsequently became Lord Chief Justice and member of the Privy Council, and ultimately served a brief period as Lord Chancellor. His career took him into the most privileged inner circle of both Elizabeth I and James I.

As a judge Popham had a reputation for severity and his approach to the law was meticulous and serious. His legal work included the drafting of statutes that encompassed every aspect of life and some of these Acts have endured to this day. A man of principled beliefs, he felt that laws should firstly be to the honour of God and the advancement of his true religion, secondly to the safety of the

Queen and finally to the public benefit of the people. A protestant by faith, Popham became staunchly anti-catholic. In public office, he had to contend with serious political threats to Elizabeth's reign. These included assassination plots such as those led by Ridolfi and Babington, the question of control of Ireland, the Spanish Armada of Philip II and Pope Pius V, who issued a Bull encouraging Catholics to rise up against the Queen. He also had to deal with arrogant feudal lords such as Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, who mounted an attempted coup and even held Popham captive for a while along with three others. As judge, Popham presided over major trials including that of Sir Walter Raleigh, the Jesuit priest Henry Garnett and Guy Fawkes.

Part of Popham's legacy is to be seen in the buildings with which he is connected. His main residence was Wellington House, Somerset, which he had constructed but which was unfortunately destroyed in the civil war. He also had almshouses built in Wellington and, whilst ironically this building was to become a catholic church, the legacy lives on in new almshouses built in his name. Wellington still has an impressive memorial to John Popham which can be seen in Saint John's Church. Amongst Popham's other estates are Littlecote House, Wiltshire, and Hemyock Castle in Devon. He also lived in Kimbolton Castle, now a school in Cambridgeshire. A friend of Peter Blundell, Popham founded Blundell's School in Tiverton in accordance with Blundell's final wishes. This Elizabethan building is now owned by the National Trust. Popham even attempted to colonise New England and had a privateer sail to the state of Maine where there is a Popham beach to this day.

Popham died in 1607 riding on his Wellington estate where legend has it he fell and disappeared into a 'zoggy' pit, still known as Popham's pit. Although a relatively unknown figure in history, his story is one full of interest and importance. Our thanks go to James Bradnock for enlightening us on this man of such talent, intellect and influence.



Old Blundell's School



Portrait of John Popham

Diane Ellis

PEACE WITHOUT VICTORY: COULD THE GREAT WAR HAVE BEEN ENDED IN 1917?

By Peter Landymore

7 November 2017

Forget what you know about ‘who won the Great War and when’ was Peter’s opening remark as he proposed to explore the fallacy that the end of the war in 1918 was inevitable. He went on to argue that there were in fact four failed attempts to achieve a Peace without Victory between November 1916 and November 1917, one of which had even been initiated by Germany. Had one of these succeeded the course of history might have looked very different.

At a time when few people had access to news other than by word of mouth, it was all too easy to promote an enthusiasm for a war that in fact many on all sides were against. The idea of securing a Peace without Victory for the mutual benefit of all was not new in the history of war but had not been experienced since Napoleon’s time.

Peter went on to describe and analyse the four lost opportunities for peace, namely:

- Lord Lansdowne’s Memorandum of 13 November 1916
- Bethmann-Hollweg’s 12 December 1916 ‘offer’
- President Wilson’s 1917 attempt, and his 14-point proposal
- the German Parliament’s Peace Resolution of July 1917, and Pope Benedict XV’s appeal in August 1917.

In 1914 it was clear that the war was not going to end quickly as all parties suffered heavy losses of men and resources. It was at this early stage and with some uncertainty about the exact aims of Germany, that the German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg first considered a plan for peace with an exchange of territories amongst France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Russia, Poland and

Germany. However, a disagreement of territorial objectives with the German military command meant that this was not pursued.

As losses mounted through 1915 and 1916, it was Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, Lord Lansdowne, who saw how draining the war was on lives and economic resources. He was Minister without Portfolio in Asquith's cabinet and became convinced that the war could not be won by either side, and was destroying the progress that had been made in Europe in the last 50 years. He was the first to propose consideration of a Peace without Victory in November 1916. But Asquith could not countenance ending the war without a decisive victory after such heavy human cost and refused. Subsequently both Asquith and Lansdowne were replaced by the more bellicose Lloyd George and the peace proposals were rejected.

Another pivotal point came at the very end of 1916. The Germans had agreed a new strategy of unrestricted sinking by U-boats. The aim was to bring about the quick destruction of British naval power. However this had the effect of bringing the US into the war. Despite Woodrow Wilson's support for a Peace without Victory solution, the US was forced to enter the war as an independent belligerent in April 1917 when 5 US merchant ships were sunk in March of that year. This in turn led to Pope Benedict XV launching a Peace Appeal in August 1917 but events in Germany were to militate against this succeeding too.

By 1917 all parties were suffering extremes of hardship, starvation, and huge financial and human losses. With the prospect of facing the mighty US forces, Germany's parliament was under great pressure to pass a Peace Resolution. The new Austrian Emperor Karl was also pushing for peace. However, the Kaiser's top military advisors believed that victory was possible before the Americans became too involved. The Kaiser had to choose between his military advisors and his Chancellor, Bethmann's, proposal for Peace without Victory with the support of the Pope. In the end he chose continued aggression.

It was against this background, that Peter offered us his speculative ideas of what a German peace offer from Bethmann and the Pope might have looked like in July 1917. He argued that the terms of such an offer could have achieved some of Britain's objectives in restoring Belgium's neutrality, avoiding German domination of the West, and allowing France to regain her occupied territory. Russia too could have regained most of her lost territory, America would have appeared strong and influential on the world stage and Germany would have been seen as the magnanimous peace-maker. Sadly Bethmann and the Pope's Appeal were ignored. So it was that the final steps to peace were not achieved until late in 1918 with Wilson's 14-point plan and the change of regime in both Russia and Germany.

Peter concluded his talk by saying that there were 2 critical factors that dictated the failure of Peace without Victory in 1917. Firstly the invasion of Belgium triggered a mind-set that only a Victor's Peace would be acceptable and that the German militaristic regime could not be trusted. Secondly the German policy of unrestricted U-boat sinking brought the US into the war and led Britain and France to believe that they would ultimately achieve peace with victory in the end. Perhaps the manner in which the war ended in 1918 was inevitable after all. But it was fascinating to think what could have been the outcome of a Lansdowne Peace. Peter led us to conjecture that many lives would have been saved, perhaps there would have been no Bolshevik Revolution and with a different peace treaty, even WWII might have been avoided. It was particularly thought-provoking at this time of Remembrance to reflect on what might have been if any one of the opportunities to broker peace in 1917 had succeeded. Our thanks to Peter Landymore for giving us such an interesting perspective on the ending of WWI.

Diane Ellis

Paul Maze: A Frenchman in Khaki, the Last Impressionist.

By Philip Schofield

14 November 1917

Paul Maze (pronounced as in Mars) was born in Le Havre to a prosperous middle-class couple in 1887, and (unusually) was sent to finish his education in a British boarding school in the south of England (near Southampton): an experience which, perhaps surprisingly, failed to prevent his contracting a severe case of Anglophilia which coloured his whole life and career. His father, having so expensively invested in his education, pressed him to work for the family firm in shipping, exports and imports; but Paul preferred to work a passage to Canada, sketch pad in hand, to explore the New World (and its young ladies). Faced with a threat of the termination of paternal income support, he returned as far as Italy in 1913, by now 26 years old.

The July Crisis of 1914 finally brought him back to Le Havre where, in August, he found himself witnessing the disembarkation of the Scots Greys, landing with the rest of the BEF. Having for some reason been turned away by the French military authorities, he employed his fluent English to persuade this cavalry regiment to enlist him as a liaison officer – wearing khaki instead of the French ‘bleu horizon’, but distinguished by a poilu’s helmet. However, his irregular status almost led to his being shot out of hand as a spy, when German prisoners, after having been interrogated by him, waved him a friendly greeting in front of British military police.

So valuable did Maze’s services prove that he remained as liaison officer to the Grey’s Brigade Commander, Sir Hubert Gough, as the latter rose to army command and eventual dismissal after the defeat of his 5th Army in the German Spring Offensive of 1918. Maze’s skills included the ability to make very rapid, but also vivid and accurate, pastel sketches of the layout of German trench lines and the topography of their positions: almost a colour photograph for the planners of attacks. That his was no comfortable staff job in the rear was underlined by his being wounded three times, and winning the

DCM, and the MM and bar, as well as the Croix de Guerre (and ultimately the Legion d'Honneur, but perhaps more for his art). He met Winston Churchill on the Western Front in 1916 when the statesman, disgraced after Gallipoli, commanded an infantry battalion; and Maze taught him to paint.

After the war Maze came to England, and married a war widow, Margaret Wilson; but he found her home in Scotland “too cold, too barren and too dull”, and so they moved first to the Chelsea Embankment, and then to Midhurst in Sussex, where he earned his living as a painter in pastels in a post-impressionist style. As artists are prone to do, he fell in love with his model, Jessie; and Margaret left him. He lived sometimes in Paris, sometimes in England, where the onset of war in 1939 found him. Optimistically, perhaps, he returned to Paris, but had to leave hurriedly in June 1940, with Jessie, and his household goods, piled up in and on top of their car. A Dutch freighter was found to take them to England, Maze himself inducing a Royal Naval officer to make sure that the Dutch captain dropped his idea of calling first in a Dutch port (!) – and Maze was promptly, as an alien, interned in South Wales. Luckily a letter to an old friend, a certain W. Churchill, set him free.

After this, his second war, Maze remained mainly in England, continuing to paint throughout the 1950s, to exhibit, and to earn his living as an artist, by now with a certain reputation. He died eventually in 1979, aged 92.

Philip was able to accompany this story with a panoply of illustrations, from a photograph of Le Havre's beautiful waterfront as it was in the early 1900s (alas, later obliterated by British and American bombing), via copies of Maze's trench sketches, to a photo of his car fleeing Paris, and - of course – some of his best-known pictures.

A far from insignificant post-impressionist, Maze's unusual life and exceptional work were displayed to us in a thoroughly interesting manner, as a Frenchman who not only became a part of Britain's art history, but was also a British warrior. We also learned – which

some of us never knew before – just exactly what is meant by painting in pastels.

As a post-script, Philip also outlined to us his interesting and varied career in the British Army, which led him through a dreadful and nearly fatal helicopter crash in Northern Ireland to, eventually, assisting in the dismantling of the Cold War system of adversarial NATO and Warsaw Pact alliances, and the inclusion of East European countries in NATO: making him a member of an elite unit known in the MoD as the Peace Artists. Other unconventional adventures included heading the UN's intelligence gathering in Sierra Leone, and handing out some £12.5 million of UK taxpayers' money to help 'resettle' redundant soldiers in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Serbia and Montenegro.

Peter Landymore



KING'S OF MUSIC

By Tom Wheare

Tuesday 12th December 2017

Tom Wheare is a former Headmaster of Bryanston School and teacher of English. He was also an early member of the King's Singers. Educated at the Dragon School and Magdalen College School, Oxford, he went on to King's College, Cambridge, where he studied History and sang in the College Choir. He then went to study Education at Christ Church, Oxford where he also sang in the Cathedral Choir.

The theme of his talk was to be his memories as a King's Singer. Indeed he flourished the first vinyl album ever made by the Singers to which he contributed, and he knew the founding members, Martin Lane, Richard Salter, Brian Kay, Simon Carrington, Alastair Hume and Alastair Thompson. However, his talk was more broad-ranging, touching on his view of history and the importance of great men and women, as well as his life with the Singers. As he reflected on aspects of his life, he recounted many anecdotes that gave a different and personal view of the past.

Born in 1944, he grew up in Oxford where his father, Kenneth, was a PPE don alongside GDH Cole and Harold Wilson and where William Beveridge was Master. Amongst other stories, he recounted how Beveridge had a Russian Secretary called Mrs Turin through whom Wilson came to learn the Russian word for milk (moloko). Thus linguistically equipped, Wilson was able to impress Bevan whilst on a trade mission to Moscow and subsequently gained entry to the cabinet.

Tom talked with affection of his family life at Oriel College, a world in which he felt his father, in particular, had a great sense of connecting to the past. He spoke with feeling about growing up hearing the different bells of Oxford; and he described their capacity

to tap into history, to evoke deeper universal feelings and symbolically to represent life. Bells, he remarked, are often unchanged over time whereas much else does change. He compared his school days at the Dragon School to now. Later, as technological recording advances occurred, he was aware of the possibility of producing 'visual records', a concept that seemed fantastical then, even before the advent of mobile phone technology and the internet.

Turning to his time as a King's Singer, Tom recalled how he auditioned for a vacancy in the King's Singers. His task was to sing tenor for a Purcell piece, a part he had never sung before, although he had conducted it. Luckily the previous applicant had forgotten his piece and Tom was able to secure his Exhibition place by a degree of good fortune. He went on to reflect on the many extraordinary experiences that followed and the numerous rehearsals and carol services he had participated in.

During his time at Christ Church, Oxford, Tom studied for a Dip Ed, going there as a lay clerk. Here the choir was bigger than at King's and composed mostly of older working people. Rehearsals were fewer and performances made memorable by an emphysemic tenor and a rather forthright Dean.

Tom's affection for the King's Singers was evident, and he called it a 'King's fraternity', where there would always be a common chord of contact between past and present members. With this in mind, Tom went on to amend his idea of history as being more about linking up of people, sounds, overtones, and the universality of love rather than individual great men. Something for us all to ponder.

To conclude his talk, Tom played two beautiful tracks recorded by the King's Singers and rounded off by adapting a quote attributed to Sydney Smith, Canon of St Paul's: 'my idea of heaven would be eating strawberries to the sound of trumpets.'

Our thanks go to Tom for giving us such an entertaining account of his time with the King's Singers.



The current King's Singers

Julia Mottershaw

DARTMOOR MINDSCAPES

By Peter Knight

5 December 2017

Peter gave us a fascinating insight into Dartmoor and explained that Dartmoor has the largest deposit of granite anywhere in the world and covers an area 20 miles by 25 mile. People lived on Dartmoor right through the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age.

This area has never been ploughed, only grazed; and this has preserved the great wealth of prehistoric features. There are 20 stone circles, 80 stone rows, 450 prehistoric settlements, 700 cairns. Stone circles are usually placed within sight of a Tor. Cairns are placed on high ground and stone rows lead from them downhill, often to a river. Later churches were built on these ancient sites because they were places which had been revered and thought of as special for centuries.

This ancient landscape is imbued with the memory of our ancestors and the spirits and the abode of a deity. To experience nature can be a spiritual revelation and any journey across such a landscape is not only visual and tangible, but also an internal journey.

Shamanic culture is considered by some as the basis of all world religions. It is certainly a cultural foundation stone of indigenous peoples' belief systems the world over and is evidenced throughout history in many different forms. Peter showed slides of ancient aborigines and explained that the use of drumming is an important part of communicating with the spirits. High places were thought to be sacred and shamans weren't averse to having the odd trick or two up their sleeves.

It was thought that striking natural features were sacred places, and were significant places to convene with the spirits.

Cerne Abbas Giant, now proved to be 2,000 years old – Iron Age, captured a legend in the landscape and is still there for us to see today: reminding us that our ancestors also walked over and

respected this land. These ancient peoples were staking their claim to a part of the landscape and in so doing were making their mark on it. Can we stop and look and observe our surroundings and see the landscape through ancient eyes?

Landscapes hold resonances, and what the space says to you depends on who is experiencing it. Tribal cultures across the world thought that features in the landscape were symbolic. We can learn more about our ancestors through a new and growing field of archaeology which is now widely recognised – cognitive archaeology.

Although it is hard for us to understand today, if we are willing to shed our preconceived ideas and inhibitions we can begin to get an appreciation of their world view – that rocks and megaliths are wisdom holders. Nowhere is that more easily accessed than a visit to Stonehenge – luckily for us right on our own doorstep.

By walking in the landscape we can try to experience for ourselves the 'spirit of the place' or 'genius loci' (to the Romans the protective spirit of a place). Walking alone can be a transformative experience. Walking in groups – preferably in silence – can be a revelation and can induce altered states of consciousness. You never know how you will feel until you try! Wherever you walk in this country you are always walking in the footsteps of the ancestors which is quite a wonderful and sobering thought.

Peter showed us many images illustrating all these points. Rocks which looked like faces in profile, fantastical creatures - Bowermere Nose, Easdon Tor, Great Staple Tor, Hound Tor, Beardown Tor. Because these are all granite rocks there has scarcely been any erosion over the millennia and we can be sure that what we are looking at today is exactly the same as our ancient ancestors saw and revered. He also showed us photos of amazing balancing stones and propped stones. Processional ways were marked by stone rows. These pathways lead us from the living to the dead.

Rock basins on top of outcrops of rock hold sacred waters – a hallowed gift – undefiled.

Peter drew attention to the fact that today we experience so many things second hand through TV, books and the social media and encouraged us to occasionally go out into the landscape wherever you live and open your eyes to look at the world around you. Become observant – look at the shape of a leaf, the sweep of a hillside or the wonder of the night sky. Perceive the world as it really is.

A thoroughly enjoyable and thought-provoking lecture.

Julia Mottershaw



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