

SOCIETY OUTINGS 2006

Organised and Reported by Sylvia Ladyman

City of London Walk - 20 May

John Garrod, a Blue Badge Guide, who had given us a talk on Fleet Street earlier in the year, gave us a most interesting tour of the city. After seeing the last remnant of Bridewell Prison (the gate with a keystone of the head of Edward VI), we wandered through Middle and Inner Temple grounds, noting their symbols, lamb and flag, and Pegasus respectively. The Temple Church, recently seen in the film of the Da Vinci code, is a round church founded for the Knights Templar, and finally given to the lawyers by James I - the southern part to the Inner Temple and the northern part to the Middle Temple. Passing the tomb of Oliver Goldsmith, and having had a quick look into the magnificent Hall, we came to the legendary home of Little Nell - the Olde Curiosity Shop, said to be the oldest shop in London, built in 1567. So on to Fleet Street, with its buildings recalling its former glory as the newspaper centre of Britain. Most of us will remember the narrow alley leading to Gough Square to see Dr. Johnson's house and the statue of his cat, Hodge, ('a very fine cat indeed').

Salisbury and Old Sarum - 24 June

When we arrived at Old Sarum we discovered that we were not the only visitors to the famous Iron Age fort. There were actors in medieval costume and knights demonstrating their archery skills, giving us an unexpected bonus. Old Sarum is one of the most enthralling historic sites in southern England, combining evidence of a royal castle and a cathedral within a massive Iron Age fortification. The oldest part dates from about 400BC. The royal castle was built in the middle of the old earthworks on the orders of William the Conqueror in 1070. It was here in 1086 that all landowners swore oaths of fealty to him, thus establishing William's right to the loyalty of his subjects. The first cathedral was consecrated in 1092, thus it was one of the earliest cathedrals in

England. However, by the end of the 12C Bishop Poore decided to move the cathedral to a new site, which had a better water supply and was less windy, since at times the singing in the cathedral could not be heard above the sound of the wind. The new cathedral, in present day Salisbury, was consecrated in 1258 by Archbishop Boniface in the presence of Henry III. We found the Chapter House particularly interesting as it contains one of only four original copies of the Magna Carta. In the north aisle was the oldest working clock in England, built in the 14C, it has no face and was originally in the bell tower. Of the many memorials in the cathedral, particularly noteworthy are the tombs of William de Longespee, a crusader, and St Osmund, the second bishop at Old Sarum. The monument to the artist Rex Whistler (1905-1944) takes the unusual form of a revolving glass prism set in a blue and gold lantern engraved by his brother Laurence. After a most interesting day we returned to Ruislip.

Oundle, Fotheringhay and Prebendal Manor - 29 July

In July we travelled to the Northamptonshire market town of Oundle where two guides showed us the architecture and history of its 17C and 18C buildings of Jurassic limestone with roofs of Collyweston slates. We were able to enter the grounds of the famous public school founded by William Laxton, a member of the Grocers' Company. After lunch we were met at Fotheringhay Church by Ms. Wilson, the church warden, who gave us an introductory talk. Inside the church were explanatory panels describing the church, the York dynasty and the life of Mary Queen of Scots. Today one can see the York chapel with its stained glass windows depicting royal coats of arms. Apart from a nearby grassy mound, nothing remains of the castle in which Richard III was born in 1452, and where Mary Queen of Scots was beheaded in 1587.

At Nassington, Mrs Banto welcomed us to her home, Prebendal Manor, which she bought in 1968 as a Georgian farmhouse. It was derelict, and nothing was known of its history. However, she started removing wallpaper, removing walls, ceilings and floors bit by bit. Eventually, with the help of experts and 'Time Team', she discovered that she was the owner of a medieval manor house, with strong evidence that a Saxon aisled hall dating from 850AD had existed on the same site. Later she discovered that King Cnut had owned the property. In medieval times the manor house was home to Prebendaries, officials of Lincoln Cathedral, from 1110-1846. The gardens, described by Titchmarsh as 'a shining example of a recreated medieval garden' were most disappointing due to the very hot weather we have had this year. It is in fact the largest recreated medieval garden in Europe, with rose arbours, turf seats, trellised enclosures, a dovecot and fishponds. In the fields there were sheep and poultry of ancient breeds. After browsing in the small museum we enjoyed home made cakes before returning home.

City of London Walk – 12 August

In August, City Blue Badge Guide Yasha Beresiner met us on the steps of the Royal Exchange. This building, with its Corinthian columns, opened by Queen Victoria in 1844, is the third building on this site. The first, set up by Thomas Gresham for the exchange of contracts and commerce, was completed in 1567. The present building ceased to have its original function in 1989, and is now offices. As we passed the halls of several livery companies Yasha told us of the customs and traditions associated with them. As a past Master of one of them, he is well qualified to do so. I was surprised to learn that within the square mile of the city there are 76 miles of alleys, and that there are more Japanese banks than in Tokyo! We walked to the Guildhall, completed in the 15C, and saw the new art gallery opposite, designed by Scott, built in 2000. From there it was a short step to the Barbican, an area of 35 acres which was completely destroyed in World War II, and is now a maze of high buildings, flats and high

level walkways. We had lunch in a Pizza Express, located in a building constructed over two main roads where one can see springs in the structure to counteract vibration due to traffic. We passed the tower of St Alban's Church on an island in the middle of Wood Street – the sole remnant of the church destroyed after bombing in 1940. It is now a private residence, next to Wood Street police station.

We saw a building designed by Richard Rogers with conspicuous large red and blue pipes on the pavement for air circulation. Nearby was an all glass building typical of Norman Foster's designs. In spite of these 20C buildings, here and there one can still see alleys, sections of ancient walls and old churches, which recall the fascinating story of London's history.

In Postman's Park there was a wonderful display of flowers in what was originally the churchyard for three churches. It got its name as it was near the General Post Office and postal workers spent their lunch breaks there. As we sheltered from a shower we read the sad plaques on the walls dedicated to those who had sacrificed their lives to save others from drowning, fire or other accident. This was the result of an idea by George Frederick Watts the sculptor and painter in 1887. We then made our way to see St Bartholomew the great church, London's oldest, founded 1123, but unfortunately it was closed. As we walked by the memorial to William Wallace, outside Barts hospital, Yasha told us stories of hangings, grave robbers, and of prisoners in nearby Newgate gaol.

Finally we reached Paternoster Square to see the recently re-erected Temple Bar. This gateway to the city was removed to Theobald's Park, Cheshunt in 1878 because of traffic congestion. It has been cleaned and makes a magnificent gateway to the square. The central sculpture of 'Shepherd and his Sheep' commemorates the fact that the square was the site of Newgate meat market where 600 sheep were slaughtered each day. Visitors to the Museum of London may remember this sculpture, as for a number of years it was on the walkway between the museum and the cafe.