

## SOCIETY OUTINGS 2010

Organised and Reported by Sylvia Ladyman *et alii*

### Clerkenwell with John Garrod - 1 May

It was difficult to imagine that Clerkenwell had started as a small hamlet on the eastern bank of the River Fleet surrounded by lush meadows and springs. Much of the land was owned by the Priory of the Knights of St John. To the north of Clerkenwell Green, Augustinian nuns set up their nunnery, and later in the 14th century, Charterhouse, a Carthusian monastery was established. The roads were often full of cattle and sheep on their way from the countryside to Smithfield Market to the south.

Later, at the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII, the properties of the religious communities were given to the nobility such as the Cavendishes, the Dukes of Newcastle and the Earl of Ailesbury. However at the time of the Great Plague the aristocrats fled and later waves of French Huguenots arrived, and Clerkenwell soon became a centre for watch making, printing and jewellery making. Later still, gin distillers and brewers arrived, making use of the plentiful supply of good water.

In 1683, in the grounds of Thomas Sadler's house, springs were discovered, which were of course called Sadler's Wells, a name which persists to this day. Other gardens also provided entertainment such as music and dancing, and often refreshments such as tea, coffee and cheesecake (a local speciality). By the 19th century these gardens had disappeared, giving way to alleys and small workshops. After much destruction during the Blitz new buildings and modern factories have sprung up.

The growth of London's population increased the demand for fresh drinking water. So Hugh Myddleton, a goldsmith, financed a scheme to create a New River from springs near Ware in Hertfordshire. As this was a commercial venture, customers had to pay 26 shillings per year, a considerable sum at that time. The New River channel was 38 miles long, 10 feet wide and

four feet deep, so there was great opposition from affected farmers and other land owners. The channel lead to New River Head in Clerkenwell where there were four reservoirs 10 feet deep, ranging in area from one to two acres. In 1619 the Company was incorporated by Royal Charter, half the shares being held by James I and one share to the Goldsmith's Company for 'needy brethren'. In 1946 the last of the filter beds at the River Head was abandoned and the River ceased to flow. The site is now a landscaped garden and the route of the River is shown on the footpath.

Unfortunately we were unable to visit the main church, St James, near Clerkenwell Green, as there was a wedding there. This church was built on the site of St Mary's nunnery and has a superb organ and excellent acoustics. As a result it is a popular place for recordings. There is a memorial to the Protestant Martyrs who were burnt at the stake on the Green in the reign of Mary Tudor. We then made our way to Jerusalem Passage, just off Aylesbury Street where Thomas Britton the 'musical coalman' held weekly concerts in the room above his warehouse. Handel often played the harpsichord there.

The nearby Priory of St John of Jerusalem founded in the 12th century was the headquarters of the Knights Hospitallers. Their land covered five acres and included a house of palatial size, three gardens, an orchard, a fish pond and a church. Today only the gatehouse remains, which in the 18th century became the printing works for the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Samuel Johnson was allocated a room there to give him peaceful surroundings for his writing. It later became a tavern and today houses the Museum of the British Order of St John which initiated the formation of St John Ambulance. On the surface of St John's Square was a circle of cobblestones marking the outline of the round Priory Church. Its 12th century crypt still survives.

Our walk now took us to Clerkenwell Green, which has been an open space for 900 years. It has been the site of riots, radical politics, reform movements and public meetings for centuries. Famous people associated with the area include William Morris and G.B. Shaw – not forgetting Karl Marx whose Memorial Library is housed in the oldest building here, built in 1737. Nearby, the original clerk's well can be seen through the window of an office block – the origin of the name of the area.

Following the route of those of cattle and sheep we walked through Smithfield Market. The impressive facade of this Market was designed in 1878 by Horace Jones. After noting the William Wallace memorial plaque we came to the site of Greyfriars Monastery. Unfortunately its Christchurch built by Wren was destroyed in 1940, leaving only the tower standing.

Once again, John, our Blue Badge Guide had provided a most interesting and informative tour of an area of London which was little known to many of us, and which ended with a welcome rest and cup of tea at St Paul's Café before the journey home.

*Sylvia Ladyman*

### **Wimborne and Kingston Lacey - 5 June**

On the south side of the Chancel of St Martin's Church in Ruislip there is a memorial to Lady Mary Bankes who defended Corfe Castle against the Parliamentarians during the Civil War. She was the member of the Hawtrey family of Eastcote House who had married John Bankes, Lord Chief Justice and Attorney General to Charles I. While her husband was absent from Corfe Castle fighting for the King, she successfully defended the Castle twice, but was betrayed in 1746. The Parliamentarians allowed her to escape, gave her the keys of the Castle and then destroyed it.

The Bankes family estate is at Kingston Lacey where she is remembered as 'Brave Dame Mary' – she is of course remembered in Ruislip in the name of 'Lady Bankes Junior School'.

Having discovered, quite by chance, that the Bankes's family Vault is at Wimborne Minster, and that this church held one of only

four chained libraries in England, this outing seemed an obvious choice.

A monastery was founded on the site of the Minster in 705 by St Cuthburga, sister of the King of the West Saxons. Unfortunately it was destroyed by the Danes in the late 10th century. Later a College of Canons was founded by Edward the Confessor in 1043. In 1497 Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII founded a chantry here. Her parents are buried near the altar.

The church is the only twin towered example in Dorset, the centre dating from the 12th century, the west part from the 15th century. The latter has Quarter Jack on its outside wall which strikes two bells every quarter of an hour. At first the figure was a monk, but during the Napoleonic Wars he became a Grenadier Guardsman.

Beside the tomb of the Bankes's family in the crypt is the tomb of Ethelred (c. 830-71), elder brother of Alfred the Great (c. 849-99). But the real attraction of the Minster is its chained library, which is accessed by a narrow spiral stone staircase. At the top is a small room over the choir vestry, where there are 400 leather bound volumes, all chained, of which more than half are over 300 years old. The library was founded in 1686 by the Rev. Stone for the free use of the citizens of Wimborne, so it is one of the first public libraries in England. Many volumes are of course religious (e.g. a Breeches Bible), but others are by Plato and Pliny, and on law medicine and music. The oldest is written on lambskin and dates from 1343.

In the North Transept are traces of murals from the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries which are not easy to differentiate.

After our guided tour of the Minster, some wandered around this interesting town, which included viewing handcuffs worn by those waiting execution, still to be seen in the Bar of the 'White Hart'. The Priests' House Museum attracted others, perhaps because they could eat their sandwiches in the garden! The building dates from the 16th century and has been a stationery shop and ironmongers in its time. Now it is a museum which traces the history of Wimborne.

We were anxious to get to Kingston Lacy, so time in the town was limited – indeed several folk had to run to catch the coach!

The Kingston Lacy estate, home of the Bankes's family for over 300 years, covers 8500 acres (3443 hectares). It was bought by John Bankes in 1632-6, but the House was not built until the 1660s by Ralph, son of John and Mary.

The first House was of red brick, built by Roger Pratt, with hipped roof, balustrade and inside, a great parlour flanked by four corner apartments. In the 18th century the interior was remodelled to create the present library and saloon. William Bankes in the 19th century acquired many paintings and other items on his journeys through Syria and Egypt which are now displayed in the House. The House itself was again transformed between 1835-41 to give a 17th century Italianate palazzo. In 1981 Ralph Bankes gave the property to the National Trust.

The entrance hall is modest, but it leads to a grand marble staircase to the main floors. Halfway up this staircase are full length statues of Sir John Bankes and his first wife Mary (née Hawtrey) who is holding the keys of Corfe Castle in her hand. The actual keys can be seen over the chimney piece in the library.

### **Bury St Edmunds – 17 July**

Bury St Edmunds is a busy thriving market town in West Suffolk which originated as the Saxon settlement of Beodricksworth where King Sigebert founded a monastery in 630. During the Danish incursions of 869 the good Saxon King Edmund was murdered and his head sundered from his body. Tradition has it that his head was found by a wolf and was miraculously reunited with his body, which was eventually brought to Beodricksworth and buried. His grave became a focus for pilgrims and the town changed its name to Bury St Edmunds.

A splendid abbey was built after the Norman Conquest which dominated the town and the surrounding area until the dissolution in 1539, when the townspeople used the buildings as a quarry. Today only the flint cores are still standing, except for the Norman Tower which houses the bells, and the Gatehouse rebuilt by the townspeople

William Bankes's 'Golden Room' (or Spanish Room) is the most lavish surviving example of his decorative taste. It was created between 1835-55, as a setting for his Spanish pictures. There is a gilt and coffered ceiling and painted leather wall hangings from a Venetian palazzo. It is here that the paintings by Velazquez are displayed. Elsewhere in the House are paintings by Titian, Rubens, Murillo, Romney and Van Dyck. The Tent Rooms on the attic floor were memorable, as some of us had never heard of them before. It was apparently the fashion for rooms to be decorated as if they were tents in the late 18th century.

The original housekeeper's room is now filled with William Bankes's Egyptian collection, including a male god with the features of Rameses II, copies of the wall paintings in the temple of Rameses II at Abu Simbel and tomb inscriptions.

There are 43 acres of formal gardens to wander in, also a fernery, parterre and a Japanese garden. Further away is a 300 acre park and a large woodland area. However, there was not time to explore the gardens and woods, so rather tired, after an interesting day, we climbed on to the coach for the return trip to Ruislip.

after they destroyed it in riots against the Abbey in 1327. The Abbey grounds are now a beautiful garden leading down to the River Lark.

We were given a guided tour around the Cathedral, which had originally been a small church dedicated to St James within the Abbey complex. It became the Cathedral for the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich in 1914. The nave was built in the Perpendicular style by John Wastell in about 1503 although it has had Victorian modifications to the nave roof, and the windows are Victorian. The rest of the Cathedral has been built since the 1960s but in a style which blends in well with the Tudor nave. The new Tower completed in 2005 is very attractive. It was interesting to tour a comparatively new Cathedral where some parts are still unfinished, and many of us ate our lunch in their modern refectory.

After lunch we had guided tours around the town. I went on the slow leisurely trip, although all of us visited St Mary's with its original hammer-beam roof with eleven pairs of angels. We saw the very plain tomb of Mary, Henry VIII's sister, who was Queen of France for a few weeks, and the cadaver tomb of John Barat a wealthy benefactor of the town. There is a connection with Ruislip in this church as it contains the tomb of Sir Robert Drury (died 1536). He was Speaker of the House of Commons and Privy Councillor to Henry VII. He also owned land in Ruislip and it was he who ordered the construction of Manor Farm.

We walked down Honey Hill and noted the houses. Most appeared to be Georgian but we were told that they were Mediaeval houses which had been updated in the eighteenth century. We passed only one Georgian house built by Elizabeth Hervey wife of the first Earl of Bristol for entertaining her friends at gambling parties. The oldest house in the town is Moyses Hall which dates from 1180 and is one of the few houses built of stone.

Finally back to the town centre and the Athenaeum centre of town life for three hundred years. Charles Dickens gave readings there and the Adam-style ballroom is its main feature.

We left Bury St Edmunds at 5pm and returned to Ruislip at 7pm after a splendid history excursion.

*Jessica Eastwood*

### **Churches and Gardens in the City Walk with John Garrod - 5 August**

We met outside St Paul's Cathedral on a sunny morning and walked down Ludgate Hill to visit our first church, **St Martin within Ludgate**. This is unusual in being one of the few Wren churches which has not been restored. Despite being so close to St Paul's Cathedral it was not damaged during the Second World War and the interior still contains original pews, bread shelves and a very rare double churchwardens' seat from 1690. The building is wider than it is long but a gallery along one side gives the correct symmetrical effect.

Continuing down Ludgate Hill we passed a blue plaque commemorating the site of *The Daily Courant* the first daily London newspaper, published in 1702. With St Bride's church clearly visible we turned into Farringdon Street, then Stone Cutter Street and St Andrews Street to reach our next church, **St Andrew Holborn**, which had a very attractive garden. This Wren building was almost completely destroyed during the war and rebuilt in the early 1960s to give a light airy interior with very little stained glass. Above the outside entrance are two figures of charity children in Coade stone, probably because inside there is a monument to Thomas Coram the founder of the Foundling Hospital; in fact the organ case came from the chapel of the Foundling Hospital. The surgeon William Marsden is also commemorated here. After he found a woman dying on the steps of the church in 1827 and could not get her admitted to any hospital he founded a hospital later to be known as the Royal Free Hospital, an offshoot of which became the Royal Marsden Hospital.

Crossing Holborn Viaduct, a major feat of Victorian engineering built in the 1860s, we came to **Holy Sepulchre without Newgate**, the largest parish church in the City. This is the National Musicians' Church and in the Musicians' chapel there are memorials to Sir Henry Wood, the founder of the Proms, the composer John Ireland and Dame Nellie Melba the famous Australian singer. As an interesting aside there are some peaches in the corner of the stained glass window dedicated to Dame Nellie. Even the chapel hassocks are embroidered with musical notations. In the main body of the church there is a stained glass window as a memorial to Captain John Smith the seventeenth century founder of the state of Virginia. On a more gruesome note the hand bell rung outside the condemned cell at the nearby Newgate Prison (now the site of the Old Bailey) by the bellman of the church on the eve of executions is on display. This custom was discontinued in the early nineteenth century.

Our final church in the morning was **St Bartholomew the Less**, off Smithfield Square, which is unique in being the only surviving parish church solely for a hospital. It was founded in the twelfth century and after surviving the Great Fire of London it was rebuilt by George Dance the Younger in 1789. Later in 1825 it was again rebuilt with an unusual octagonal nave.

It is hard to believe that the centre of Smithfield Square used to be an execution site where now there is a peaceful garden, **the Winkle Garden**. This garden contains two specimens of a rare tree, the Caucasian Wingnut.

After a welcome lunch break at the Barbican we walked through its very attractive public gardens on our way to **Finsbury Circus Gardens**. Unfortunately only half of the area of these gardens is open at the moment because of extensive excavations for Crossrail but it is planned that the bowling-green and other facilities will be reinstated.

Our next church was **St Botolph without Bishopsgate** with its tennis courts and garden dwarfed by a new City development, the Heron Tower. The church, despite surviving the Great Fire, was demolished in 1724 and rebuilt four years later by George Dance the Elder. During the nineteenth century a glass dome was inserted in the nave roof to give extra light. Although the church was spared from Second World War bombing it was damaged in 1993 by an IRA bomb which destroyed the nearby Baltic Exchange.

The nearby church, **St Ethelburga the Virgin within Bishopsgate** was completely destroyed by that same IRA bomb and it stood as a ruin for many years (Fig.1) while various schemes were discussed. Finally, in 2002, it opened as the St Ethelburga Centre for Peace and Reconciliation (Fig. 2). It has an interesting circular tent in the garden designed to facilitate cooperative meetings.

We were only able to view the outside of the next church, **St Helen Bishopsgate**, which is dominated by that icon of the modern city 'The Gherkin'. St Helen has an unusual double frontage because originally the parish church had a nunnery adjoining it but



Bill Black

Fig. 1



Fig. 2

after its dissolution the buildings were amalgamated. This church too was damaged by the IRA bomb.

Passing Richard Rogers's Lloyds Building we turned into Cornhill, the highest point in the City. Here we viewed our last two churches from the outside, **St Peter upon Cornhill** and **St Michael Cornhill**. The former is the oldest place of Christian worship in the City and was rebuilt by Christopher Wren. Nowadays it is a Christian Aid centre. The latter was also redesigned by Christopher Wren, although the work was completed by Nicholas Hawksmoor.

We then walked through the Royal Exchange to finish a fascinating and informative walk at Bank Station.

*Susan Toms*

### Thames Path - 25 September

We had a perfect day for our walk from London Bridge and as a bonus saw dozens of small boats competing in the annual Great River Race from Millwall to Richmond. We passed City Hall and HMS Belfast and crossed Tower Bridge to St Katherine's Dock, then on to Wapping, haunt of pirates such as Captain Kidd, and historic inns such as the *Prospect of Whitby*, favourite vantage point for the artists Whistler and Turner. The nearby site of Execution Dock was where pirates were once hanged. We admired the converted warehouse developments and apartments along the river front, which took us through to Limehouse (our lunch stop), which gets its name from the lime kilns around the once adjacent Dock, and finally to the dramatic architecture of Canary Wharf.

*Anne Lamb*