

SOCIETY OUTINGS 2011

Organised and Reported by Sylvia Ladyman *et alii*

Goldsmiths Hall – 14 March

Members of the Society visited this building at various times in small groups as it was not possible to book a large group. Another visit was scheduled for the 17 October. We waited in the foyer and admired modern silver pieces displayed in showcases while another group assembled. Our guide then ushered us through to the Staircase Hall, a huge chamber sheathed in marble of different colours and with a gilded dome from which was suspended a massive electrolier. She explained that when the building had been opened in 1835 commentators had remarked that it had “an air of palatial splendour”. It was the third hall on the site and had been designed by Philip Hardwicke a liveryman who had been apprenticed in 1810 to Samuel Beckley, a relative of the former surveyor.

Our guide took us through several rooms. Most sumptuous was the Livery Hall which has formed an opulent backdrop for several films. It had a minstrel’s gallery and huge chandeliers whose complex manufacture delayed the Hall opening date. It was so heavily gilded that its refurbishment in 1990 caused a market shortage of gold leaf. Large oil paintings hung from the walls and lavish silver gilt pieces were on display.

The most historical room was the Court Room which had oak panelling and ceilings retained from the 17th century second hall. At one end was a Roman altar (found during building) and in one corner hung a picture of Sir Thomas Vyner, uncle to Sir Robert Vyner of Swakeleys House. The room was a venue for 108 meetings a year including those where apprentices (there are currently 24) are bound to masters and present their masterpieces to Wardens to obtain the freedom of the Company.

It was explained that the Goldsmiths’ Company received its first Royal Charter in 1327 and still fulfils the roles of promoting crafts and performing assay duties.

In 1478 an Assay Office was established in the Hall so that people could take their wares there to be marked and it is thought the term ‘Hallmark’ thus originated.

The guided tour was equally of interest for the continuing traditions as for the building architecture and contents.

Robert Trease

West Stow and Ickworth – May 21

The reconstructed Anglo-Saxon village at West Stow was opened in 1999, with the help of the Heritage Fund and St Edmundsbury council. It is on the site of an early Anglo-Saxon village, occupied from 450 - 650. Over the centuries it was covered by windblown sand and disappeared from view. In the late 19th century some Anglo-Saxon items were discovered, but most of the excavations took place between 1969 and 1972.

Seven buildings have been reconstructed using methods and materials believed to have been used by the original builders - experimental archaeology. This was clearly explained in the short video we saw on our arrival. We were shown around the site by Hannah, a very knowledgeable archaeologist. Her commentary, as we walked around was most interesting and informative. It provoked many questions about the Saxons - but she never hesitated to give a full explanation.

We had difficulty in passing the small ‘farm’ as we were all fascinated by the antics of the Gloucester Old Spot pigs, and many returned there after the tour - including Hannah!

The sunken house was one of the first to be reconstructed. A large pit was dug and covered by a roof which came down to the ground around it (no walls). It was believed that the people lived in the pit, but later research showed that a floor was placed over the pit and that the roof was supported by wooden walls and oak posts.

The oldest house, the farmers’ house and the living house all had six oak posts to support the roof over a wooden floor on top of a pit, surrounded by wooden walls.

The Hall however, was of similar construction but without a pit. It was the custom to have a separate building for a separate function, e.g. the living house was used as a living and sleeping space for up to ten people, the weaving house had a loom and spinning wheel.

The people of the village made their own clothes, simple pots and baskets. They had small 'farms' with pigs, sheep and some cattle, so they were self sufficient for meat, milk and cheese. Wheat, barley and rye were grown and the villagers probably hunted wild deer and hares, went fishing and gathered fruit from the hedgerows. While there is some evidence that they kept hens, geese and ducks, it is likely that they ate wild birds such as herons, swans and teal. Leather, bones, antlers and horn were used to make tools and implements.

An interesting museum completed our visit.

After lunch we set off for Ickworth where the contrast could not have been greater. Ickworth is an imposing stone building, dominated by a rotunda 100 feet high, and a frontage which extends 300 feet on each side of it. The building was begun in 1795 for the 4th Earl of Bristol, Frederick Hervey, but was unfinished when he died in 1803. However, the building was completed for the 5th Earl, Frederick William, who became the 1st marquess in 1826. The rooms of the east wing were used by the family of the marquess, and those of the west wing were used to display his treasures from his continental travels. The west wing passed to the National Trust in 1956 and the east wing is now a 27 bedroom hotel. All this is set in 1800 acres of gardens and parkland designed by Capability Brown.

Inside the central part of the house were paintings by Titian, and family portraits by Gainsborough, Reynolds and Hogarth. There is also a fine collection of Georgian silver, regency furniture and porcelain. The library was the largest, and to me, the most impressive room with five wall windows in the great curve of the outer wall. The chandelier was over 10 feet long with 30 lights in two tiers. Here too were more paintings. Another room I remember is the

Pompeian Room painted in 1865 by John Grace with classical subjects and motifs taken from the Villa Negroni near Rome.

A short stroll in the gardens, and the essential cup of tea and cake ended a most pleasant and informative day.

Sylvia Ladyman

Docklands - 18 June

We met our Blue Badge Guide, John Garrod, at Tower Hill Station, all arriving punctually despite some rail closures. Our guide began by telling us briefly about the rise and fall of the London Docks, which commenced with the West India Dock, built in 1802. The Docks traded widely with the Empire and much of the rest of the world, but suffered badly in the blitz during World War II, and were all but abandoned during the 1960s.

John then took us to our first 'port of call', St Katherine Dock, designed by Thomas Telford and opened in 1828. The Dock was given a new lease of life in the 1970s, with the warehouses converted to apartments, cafés, shops and restaurants, set around a bustling marina – still home to traditional Thames sailing barges. We walked on to Heritage Basin, once a holding area for ships, and the old Pump House, dated 1914, formerly under the Port of London Authority. Our walk continued alongside a tranquil stretch of water surrounded by residential buildings. This was a filled-in area of former dockland, all that remains of the old London Dock. We then reached Tobacco Dock, now a development of factory shops, fronted by two life-sized replicas of historic ships.

Our walk then took us to Wapping High Street (and the Thames Path), passing a Blue Plaque to Captain Bligh of the 'Bounty'. We were suitably impressed by the conversions of warehouses into luxury apartments and cafés, while retaining historic features such as the original hoists and pulleys. The High Street now includes the modern headquarters of the Thames River Police, close to the historic public house 'The Town of Ramsgate', named after the fishermen of that town who used to land their catch at nearby Wapping Old Stairs.

A plaque on the pub wall describes how the infamous Judge Jeffreys (of the Bloody Assizes) was captured in the pub after his 'master' James II was overthrown by the Glorious Revolution of 1688. A brief detour down Scandrett Street took us to the site of the Church of St John, built in the 1760s and later to become a Bluecoat School. It has now been restored as town houses and only the church tower remains. We continued along the High Street to the Waterside Gardens at Wapping New Stairs. This is thought to be the site of Execution Dock, where captured pirates were chained to a stake until three tides had washed over them. This fate befell Captain Kidd, naval officer turned pirate, in 1701. The nearby public house, located in a converted warehouse is named after him.

After a lunch break in one of the local historic pubs or in the Waterside Gardens we continued through Wapping, past the 'Prospect of Whitby', reputedly the oldest inn in the area and once famous for cockfights and bare knuckle fights. The artists Whistler and Turner also painted some of their famous riverside scenes from here. The next stop was the Shadwell Basin, originally built as a holding area for shipping, and then on to the King Edward VII Memorial Park. The ornate rotunda in the Park disguises the ventilation shaft for Brunel's Rotherhithe Tunnel.

Our route then took us to Limehouse Basin through which barges can still sail into the intricate network of inland waterways. We crossed the bridge at Limehouse Marina and soon passed 'The Grapes' public house, made famous by Charles Dickens in his novel *Our Mutual Friend*. Continuing along the Thames Path, around the distinctive U-bend in the river which defines the Isle of Dogs, we could see ahead of us the towering sky scrapers of Canary Wharf which defined the end of the walk.

Before parting company John gave us a few facts and figures about Canary Wharf, such as that 90,000 people work there, and that four underground shopping malls serve the community. We were suitably impressed and agreed that it had been a most enjoyable and informative outing.

Anne Lamb

Mansion House – 5 July

Thirty-five members of the Society met with our Guide, Charlie de Wit, outside the Mansion House, which is situated in the centre of the City of London's financial district in close proximity to the Bank of England and the Royal Exchange.

The Mansion House is the Residence and Office of the Lord Mayor of The City of London during his official year. The Architect was George Dance the Elder and the house was constructed between 1739 and 1752 in the Palladian style. We entered through the Walbrook entrance into an area which was originally eight stables and a coach house but was redesigned in 1846 as a new entrance with a reception area and cloakrooms. After a peek into the Gents' toilet to see the original 1753 fireplace we ascended the stairs, distracted by paintings of high quality displayed on the walls, and into a room which had formerly been used by the Lord Mayor, who is also Chief Magistrate, as a Law Court. The room is now used for meetings.

We followed our Guide along an aisle between two richly decorated rooms, the one on our right having been originally a courtyard. This was roofed over many years ago and now a very splendid chandelier hangs from a small dome. All these rooms were hung with lovely paintings, mostly Dutch, which were given to the City of London in 1987 by Lord Harold Samuel a former Lord Mayor. This collection of 84 paintings is estimated to be worth more than the Mansion House itself.

We entered the Banqueting Hall which was being prepared for a function. It was very ornate with the Mace and Sword in a central position near the wall. We were told that the Lord Mayor has to give five banquets during his year of office. Our attention was directed to the barrel vaulted ceiling, the 19th century statues and the carpet which had been woven in a pattern to mirror that of the ceiling. From here we walked through the two Drawing Rooms which are interconnected and furnished with a suite of chairs and sofas made in the middle of the 19th century to commemorate Nelson's victories.

These rooms had impressive fireplaces, two 20th century chandeliers, and many Dutch paintings. On the Upper Floor are the Old Ballroom and two State Bedrooms. The rest of the house is not open to the public.

Our Guide was very interesting and added to our enjoyment of the visit.

Jessica Eastwood

Fishbourne Roman Palace and Chichester Cathedral – 16 July

We were welcomed by heavy rain as we walked from the coach to the modern entrance to the largest Roman home this side of the Alps. A short ten minute video with computer-generated images to show how the Palace may have looked 2000 years ago, with a commentary by Tony Robinson, was an excellent introduction.

As we were looking at a model of the Palace, David Sharp was able to tell us about the excavations. Although Roman items had been found in 1805 and 1812 they were badly recorded and no one was aware of the existence of the large Palace. However in 1960 while laying a water main trench a mosaic floor was exposed. So between 1960 and 1968 much of the north wing was excavated by members of the Sussex Archaeological Society, financed by the Sunday Times. Unfortunately the south wing and parts of the east and west wings remain undiscovered to this day as they lie under a main road, modern houses and gardens.

Originally the Palace had four large wings with colonnaded fronts surrounding formal gardens. It covered an area 500 ft. by 450 ft. and was probably home to over 100 people.

Inside the modern protective building we walked on wooden platforming to look down upon about twenty mosaic floors. The most memorable was the spectacular Cupid on a dolphin, but I also spotted seahorses, scallop shells, parts of two fish, a medusa, wine vases and vine tendrils. Other floors were of black and white geometric designs. In one room was grave containing the skeleton of an adult male, which may have been placed there at the end of the Roman period or after the arrival of the Saxons.

Braving the rain, it was well worth walking through the gardens, carefully restored by volunteers, to the Potting Shed. Here in a small museum was a model of a Roman gardener who told us that Britons were good farmers but 'poor gardeners'. An exhibition illustrates plants brought to England by the Romans. We just had time to wander in the small but interesting museum of exhibits and posters showing the history of the buildings on the site. Once on the coach we were soon in Chichester.

Chichester is an interesting city, occupied by the Romans from 40 - 410 and then by the Saxons. The Roman cross-like street plan can still be seen today. After lunch, and a quiet wander around the city we met at the west door of the cathedral for our guided tour.

St Wilfrid (634 - 709) built a small cathedral at Selsey to the south, and became its first bishop. William the Conqueror decreed that all bishoprics should be in the large centres of population, so in 1075 the Selsey See was moved to Chichester. The present Cathedral was begun in 1100 and completed in 1108. Later in the 12th century a fire damaged the wooden roof, which was then replaced with stone vaulting. In the 13th century chapels were added. Since Bishop Sherburne accepted Henry VIII's changes of the religious system, the Cathedral was not damaged unlike so many others. During the 19th century the spire collapsed and extensive restoration work was carried out.

After this short introduction, Helen, our guide, showed us the unusual font (1983) designed by John Skelton in a Cornish black stone with a bright copper bowl. Nearby on the wall was the model for the font with a large baptismal candle on it. Looking up to the ceiling, it looked as if it had recently been restored with sixteen green squares bordered in brown and gold.

In the south aisle, we passed the chapel of St George dedicated to the Royal Sussex Regiment, and the chapel of St Clement. In the south transept 16th century paintings show St Wilfrid receiving a grant of land from the King of Wessex on which he could build a Cathedral at Selsey.

Next to it Henry VIII is seen giving assurance of the rights of the Cathedral to Bishop Sherburne.

12th century stone carvings on the south aisle wall showing the 'Raising of Lazarus' and the 'Arrival of Christ at Bethany' are perhaps the greatest treasures of the Cathedral. They were originally coloured with jewels for eyes. Behind the altar is the John Piper tapestry woven in France in 1966. It has vivid modern colours and illustrates the theme of the Holy Trinity.

Walking along the south aisle we looked through a glass panel at our feet to see a fragment of 2nd century Roman mosaic that was part of a Roman building under the Cathedral. Passing the Graham Sutherland painting of Christ appearing to Mary Magdalene we came to the Chagall (1887 - 1983) window which for many of us was the highlight of the visit. The bright colours of the modern glass illustrate the theme of Psalm 150. The window was unveiled by the Duchess of Kent in 1978.

In the north transept were 16th century Lambert Barnard paintings of the Bishops of Chichester - all showing the face of Bishop Robert Sherburne! Also here set in the floor is the Gustav Holst memorial. Holst (1874 - 1934) had strong connections with the city. Nearer the west door is the tomb of the Earl of Arundel (d.1378), the inspiration for a poem by Philip Larkin.

Finally, passing a statue to William Huskinson, MP for Chichester (and the first person to be killed by a train in 1830) we made our way to the Cloisters café for a cup of tea before boarding the coach for home.

Sylvia Ladyman

Brixworth and Boughton House - 20 August

All Saints Church Brixworth, Northants., is believed to be the largest structure to survive from the Anglo-Saxon era. It has of course been altered over the centuries, but traces of its late 7th century past can still be seen.

Walking up to the church from the village street you notice two rows of round arches which pierce the south wall, the Saxon stair turret and the tower with its clock at the west end. Inside, one is immediately impressed by

the size of the church, and its white walls with Roman tiles forming the arches on each side of the nave. The nave and the choir were once separated, and you can still see the remains of the Saxon dividing wall. The Lady Chapel was added in the 13th century and is entered by a 15th century screen which used to divide the nave from the choir.

The church has colourful 19th century windows with historical biblical scenes. On the right of the south door you can see an Anglo-Saxon St John's eagle carved into what remains of a Roman stone cross. The church has a relic of St Boniface - his throat bone (hyoid) which was discovered in the Lady Chapel. It is no longer on view due to the activities of vandals, whose presence was confirmed by a damaged stained glass window.

After coffee and biscuits in Brixworth Museum our coach took us to Boughton House, which was originally a 15th century monastic building, but 250 years later had become known as the 'Versailles of England'. Sir Edward Montagu bought the estate in 1528 and built a Tudor manor house and added courtyards to the Great Hall of the monks. More building took place in the 1600s with the creation of the north front in French style by Ralph, 1st Duke of Montagu (1638-1709) who had been Ambassador to Louis XIV.

The House was not used as a home for about 100 years, but was filled with acquired treasures such as paintings, furniture, tapestries, carpets, porcelain, arms and silver. Every room had its walls hung with works by outstanding artists like Van Dyck, Lely, Gainsborough and Tenier. Other rooms had large Mortlake tapestries on the walls. We wandered through about twenty rooms, so it is impossible to describe them all. Most of us will recall the Boughton State Bed, on loan from the V&A after 6000 (!) hours of restoration work. Above its crimson damask hangings with gold braiding is a ceiling painting of Venus who seems to sit up from her recumbent position as one walks through the room. Perhaps the Great Hall is the most memorable room, which is the largest and oldest room in the House, with a painted

barrel ceiling and many paintings hung on the walls. The adjacent Egyptian Hall, also once part of a Tudor house, gets its name from the Egyptian Society which held its meetings there. The Chairman of the Society was Lord Sandwich, a cousin of John, the 2nd Duke of Montagu (1690-1749)

Perhaps the greatest surprise was the 'unfinished wing' of the House, started in the late 17th century by the 1st Duke. Here one sees bare brick walls and the large wooden beams designed to support floors which were never laid. Here is stored a large Chinese style pavilion of timber and oilskin which originally was situated on a terrace overlooking the Thames at the 2nd Duke's House in Whitehall. It was later erected on the Boughton House west lawn every summer until 1960.

The 1st Duke engaged Van der Meulen to design a magnificent garden for his new House. However, like the House, it was neglected in the 18th and 19th centuries, but the present Duke of Buccleuch and Queensbury has brought about remarkable changes. There is a delightful walled garden and a secret garden. The most recent addition is 'Orpheus' – an inverted pyramid descending seven metres below the level of the terraces, and so invisible from a distance. A grassed path spirals down to the bottom, where there is a large dark pool. (Is this the entry to the underworld which Orpheus is said to have entered to rescue Eurydice?)

After the essential cup of tea and cake we returned to the coach for the journey home.

Sylvia Ladyman

Richmond – 10 September

Nineteen people met our Guide, Jane Short, on Richmond Green, who told us that Richmond owed its growth and prosperity to the three 'R's – River, Royalty and Railway. Richmond is only eight miles from Charing Cross and in its early days people travelled by boat to the small cluster of fishermen's cottages and manor house. This small hamlet was then called Shene. It was not until 1501, when Henry VII rebuilt the manor house that it became known as Richmond; Henry I had owned the house in the 12th century, but it

was Henry VII who built a large Royal Palace. As a result the small settlement grew, and the railway encouraged more people to arrive and settle there in the 19th century.

The Green, in front of the Royal Palace, which covered 20 acres in 1649, was then a sheep pasture surrounded by elm trees. Today the trees have been replaced by Grade II listed buildings. The first theatre, the Theatre Royal, was built in 1760, but was replaced by the present Richmond Theatre on the Little Green in 1899. The Library, next door to the present theatre, was one of the first opened in Britain. The oldest house dates from the 17th century and further on, at No. 17, was the first Richmond coffee house. The house later became the home of Virginia and Leonard Woolf. Later in the walk we saw Hogarth House where they set up the Hogarth Press. Passing an old 17th century public house, 'The Cricketers', we came to the 'Maids of Honour' houses. These four, three storey, houses were erected for the servants of Caroline (1683-1737), wife of George III.

The Palace Gateway and one other building in the grounds of the old Palace are its only remnants. On the site of the Middle Gate of the Palace is 'Trumpeters' House, built in the early 17th century for Richard Hill, ambassador for Queen Anne (1603-1714). Both Henry VII and Elizabeth I died in the Palace.

A lane to the river took us to a fine house built on the foundations of the Palace for Sir Charles Asgill, a banker, in 1758. Ahead of us was Richmond Bridge, the oldest bridge across the Thames, built, in 1774-7, from Portland stone. Originally it was a toll bridge, but it became toll free after 1859.

The Parish Church of St Mary Magdalen still has its original Tudor tower. Henry VII had given £20 for church construction to cater for the new people coming to the town.

New developments, not always in keeping with their surroundings, appear everywhere, but the local people have resisted many unsuitable suggestions, so today it remains very pleasant to walk along the river.

Finally, we thanked our Guide and dispersed to make our way home.

Sylvia Ladyman