

GRDM FRIENDS NEWSLETTER 4



On the 13th September an intrepid band of Friends went forth from Broadway to Buscot Park. Sadly, last minute illness reduced our numbers from 16 to 13.

Unexpectedly, Pulhams Coaches sent a 45 seater coach instead of the 22 seat minivan we had requested. This was to have unexpected consequences.

At Buscot we were met by the consultant curator Roger Vlitos who was to be our guide. Mr Vlitos was a tidal wave of enthusiasm and boundless knowledge. He reminded me of the actor Simon Callow in appearance and energy.



The weather was largely clement though after a brief tour of the walled gardens a passing shower hurried us on our way to the House. Once inside Mr Vlitos concentrated on the quirky. We heard stories of the Henderson family who purchased the estate in 1889 and became the Lords Farringdon in 1916. Always interesting and occasionally salacious Mr Vlitos held our attention throughout.

In particular we saw the magnificent Legend of the Briar Rose paintings by Burne-Jones, the leading pre-Raphaelite painter. Mr Vlitos alleges that Andrew Lloyd-Webber, a noted collector of the pre-Raphaelites, visits regularly to gaze upon that which he can never own.

After a tour which was all too brief [though it lasted an hour and three quarters] we made our way to the Olde Swan Public House on the Thames near Farringdon. On my reconnaissance I had foreseen no difficulty in a mini bus negotiating the two ancient bridges by which the pub is approached. Not so in a coach. Our departure delayed traffic on the bridge for 15 minutes as our driver battled to cross. There was a good deal of crunching of body work but finally we were over.



And then to the Great Coxwell Tithe Barn. This is a wonderfully preserved medieval barn with a cathedral like interior. We arrived home after 1615 and almost precisely on schedule.

Report by Christopher Hotten, Friends Organiser

Friday 13 October 2017 at 6pm. Talk on Lewis Foreman Day (1845-1910). Arts & Crafts Decorative Artist and Designer



'A man proves himself a designer, not because he has somehow arrived at a design, but in as much as out of unpromising material and untoward circumstances he can shape a thing of beauty'

Helen Larner will talk about the life and work of this prolific designer who wanted to push the boundaries.

The talk will take place in the Edinburgh Room, Lygon Arms, High Street, Broadway WR12 7DU. Tickets free for volunteers, £5 for Friends and £10 for others (includes a glass of wine and nibbles).

My Favourite Piece - Laurie Wolder, former Joint Managing Director, Gordon Russell Ltd

How does one choose when there are so many fine objects - Paris Cabinet (obvious)? Murphy radio cabinets....no, I will settle on the most modern piece in the museum, the Coventry Cathedral chair. Why? Perhaps because I have a personal involvement with this piece of furniture as you will understand if you read on.

The architect for the rebuilt cathedral was Sir Basil Spence, who commissioned work from a number of British designers whose work was to be integrated, among whom was Dick Russell who designed the chairs, nearly 2000 of them. Following Coventry, another substantial order was placed by Winchester Cathedral. There was also another version with a different back rail which was installed in Bath & Wells Cathedral. The chairs in each of the three places of worship are still going strong despite considerable wear.

The publicity on Coventry cathedral went around the world. This in turn resulted in further orders for two large installations in America, both in Michigan. The first for a very modern building for the Diocese of West Michigan and the second for a synagogue whose name I must admit I've forgotten. Before my retirement I obtained a small order of 60 chairs for a chapel in Greenwich Village, New York. This was in the late 1970s. It is interesting to note the passage of time and its effect on costs. The selling price of the chair made in English oak in 1962 was £7 10s. When I received the New York order in the late 70's the price had escalated to £70 per chair. Of course the fact that they only required 60 instead of 2000 had a bearing on this.

However that is not the end of the story. In 2012 Luke Hughes, a designer maker from London, who was known to Ray Leigh became involved in a discussion with the University of Valparaiso in Indiana, USA who were building a new 'chapel' on their campus.

This eventually developed into an order similar in size to the Coventry order 50 years earlier. Installation of these chairs took place in November 2015 and you can see a large photograph of the interior of this building in the upper floor of the museum, together with one of the chairs alongside the original. This later version has been modified to suit the American market. Interestingly the price is now in the region of £200 per chair.

Regretfully we did not make these chairs but we still own the copyright to the design. This produced a royalty in excess of £20,000 for the museum.

Hopefully the story may go on.

