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## GRDM FRIENDS NEWSLETTER NO.19 Corrected

March 2021

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Apologies. Please disregard the previous version of this newsletter as part of the piece on Axel Munthe was omitted. Please see full story in this issue.

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### News

As matters stand, the Museum will re-open the week commencing 17th May 2021. Quite why gyms can open on the 12th April but not Museums has been the subject of some heated discussion but at the time of writing the Government's position is unchanged.

On a positive note, I anticipate that most of our volunteers will have received both doses of their vaccine by May and so we hope that we will be able to re-open a full 6 days a week, particularly as we have recruited some new (and very enthusiastic) volunteers!

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### Zoom

Two Zoom Talks have taken place since the last Newsletter which went out in December, a third is planned for the end of March. Details of talks with links to book tickets via Art Tickets appear in our emails to Friends.

### Jon Cannon

Jon eventually gave his Talk on 'English Medieval Cathedrals as Time Machines' on Friday 12th February. It was very pleasing that we sold 109 tickets for his interesting talk which, together with donations, represented a contribution of £705 to the Museum's funds.

Jon gave us a fascinating insight into a 1,000 years of medieval cathedral building and all

who joined clearly very much enjoyed his Talk. The one Cathedral which Jon suggested we should all ensure we see is Wells – no doubt most of you have visited.

This Talk should have taken place two weeks before but at the appointed time Jon's internet connection failed. We learnt some valuable lessons that night!! A recording of his talk is available at this link:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BhRQSPnG\\_2BAf8fpFNFBzARXdWRQ-FbN/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BhRQSPnG_2BAf8fpFNFBzARXdWRQ-FbN/view?usp=sharing) for the next 6 months.

### **Jill Sinclair**

Jill gave her Talk on Friday 26th February on the Arts and Crafts garden designer, Percy Cane. Once as well-known as Capability Brown he has disappeared into obscurity. We hear that perhaps Cane's most bizarre commission was to design the gardens for Haile Selassie's palace in Addis Ababa. Jill showed us a photograph of the Emperor in this garden accompanied by two leopards.

Jill, who tutors for the Oxford University department of continuing education on landscape gardening, enthused about his work in a knowledgeable and stimulating way and we hope to make a recording of Jill's Talk available online in the next two weeks.

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### **Upcoming talk on Friday 26th March 2021 at 18.00hrs**

Design historian Megan Aldrich will consider 'The Gothic Revival and the Development of the Arts & Crafts Movement'

Gordon Russell was a twentieth-century practitioner of Arts and Crafts design, a highly influential movement that originated in Britain towards the end of the nineteenth century. The theories of William Morris and John Ruskin, who greatly influenced the development of Arts and Crafts design, are well known, but it is less well known that the writings of the Gothic Revival architect and designer Augustus Welby Pugin(1812-52) were also highly influential on later Arts and Crafts designers. This lecture will explore the roots of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the ground-breaking work of A.W. Pugin.



Megan Aldrich is adjunct Professor at Richmond the International American University and a part-time tutor at the Department of Continuing Education, University of Oxford; she lectures, writes and teaches aspects of architectural and design history, including interiors and furniture, and consults in the heritage sector. Recent publications include *Antiquaries and Archaists: the past in the past, the past in the present* (Spire Books, 2009); *Art and Authenticity* (Lund Humphries, 2012); *Thomas Rickman and the Victorians* (Victorian Society, 2019); and articles in the journals of *Garden History* (2016), and *Furniture History* (2018). She is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.

**Tickets £5. Book via this link:**

<https://gordonrusselldesignmuseum.us15.list-manage.com/track/click?u=d2a148beeb5f33ed4c61aca58&id=9344660aef&e=63d83842dd>

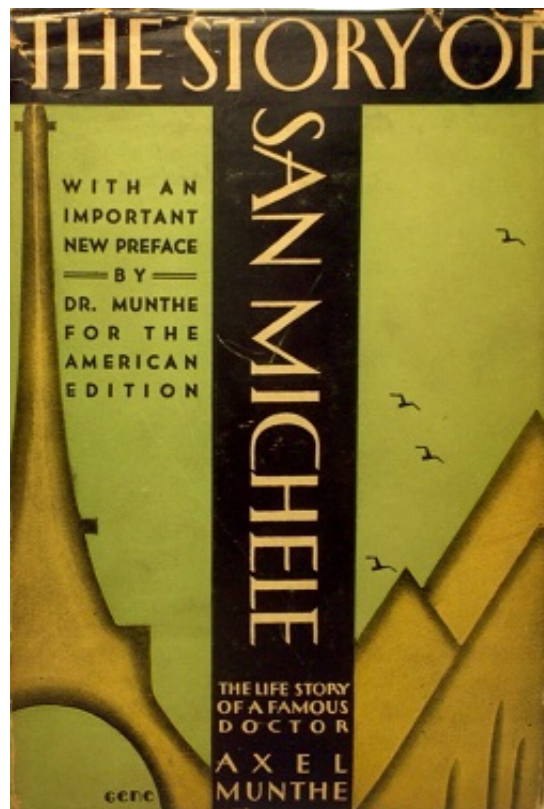
## Axel Munthe

This quarter's exploration of the nooks and crannies of Broadway's past brings us to another now obscure figure, Axel Munthe

Many well known people have washed up in Broadway over the years, among them the Swedish medical doctor and psychiatrist Axel Munthe who was personal physician to Queen Victoria of Sweden from 1890.

Munthe is best remembered, if at all, for his autobiographical memoir *The Story of*

*San Michele* which was an international best seller after its publication in 1929. At its heart is Munthe's life long affinity with the island of Capri which he first visited as a lad of 17 in 1874 and where he restored and resided in the ruined chapel of San Michele. The book is notable as much for what Munthe omitted as what he included - he says nothing of his two (or possibly three) marriages, or his children. Indeed he described himself as single. Nor does he mention the time he spent in England.



Axel Munthe in later life

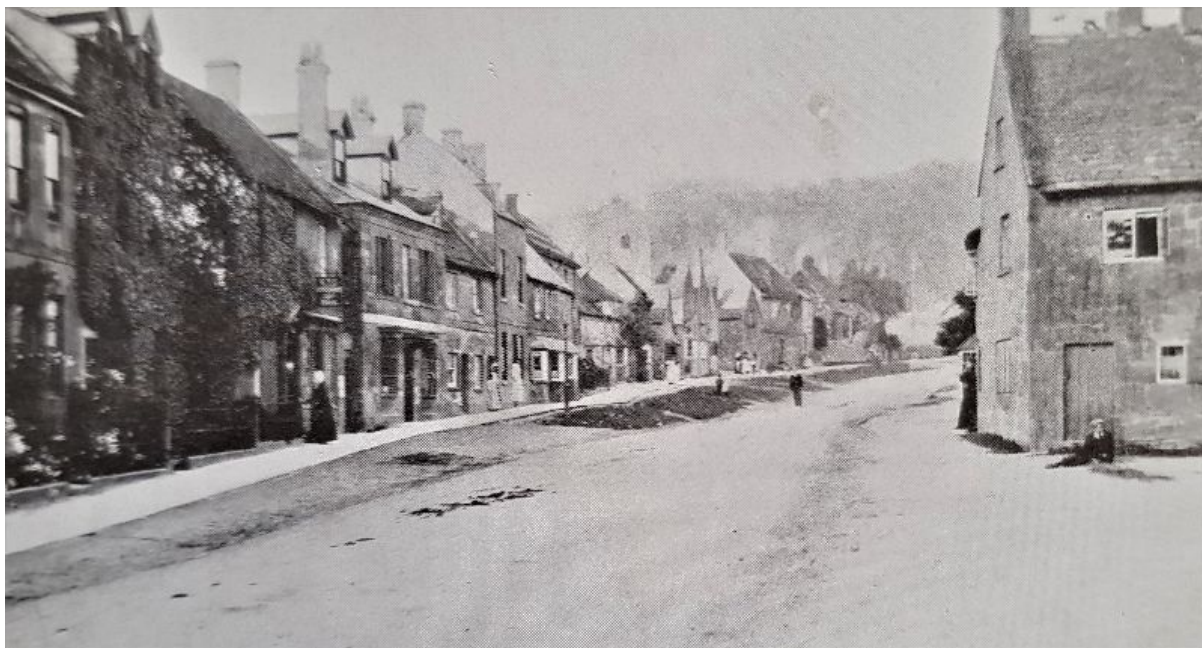


Munthe at San Michele with his pet dog and monkey

In 1907 Munthe married an English aristocrat Hilda Pennington-Mellor. He was then 50 and she 31. They spent their honeymoon in Broadway, chosen perhaps because Munthe was a friend of Henry James who himself had a close association with Broadway, and had doubt spoken about the delights of Broadway.

The story is then taken up by Sid Knight in his autobiographical account of his childhood in

Broadway, *Cotswold Lad*, published in 1960 after Sid had emigrated to South Africa. As a schoolboy Sid had a part time job at a boarding house, then called 'Sunnyside', on what is now the upper High Street (and now my home).



*Sunnyside is the ivy covered house second up on the left*

The house was run by Mrs Charlotte Kendrick *"a gentle and kind lady"* who paid Sid a shilling a week. A general servant, Daisy looked after the place and *"received the usual pay of the time, £6 per year, "live in".*" Mrs Kendrick had bought Sunnyside in 1889 and lived there until her death in 1913.

Sid takes up the story of Dr. Munthe's arrival: *"Presently the rumbling of wheels disturbed the quiet of the High Street as into view lumbered the station fly owned by the Lygon Arms Hotel, the top piled high with luggage bearing railway and hotel labels from all over Europe. The horse drawn four-wheeler came to a sedate halt alongside the grass verge and two imposing figures alighted. One was a woman who to my boyish mind was of unbelievable beauty and charm...followed by a tall, well-built man, a menacing figure in black...A black Homburg shaded his black spade beard, and down his face ran a deep scar (which) rumour said was caused by a falling chimney pot in Stockholm one dark, windy night..."*

After a period lodging at 'Sunnyside' Sid relates that Munthe and his wife settled at the Malt House towards the top of the High Street *"a few houses down the street from the home of the accomplished California-born actress, Mary Anderson, who was a great friend of his."* When work was slack at 'Sunnyside' Sid worked as houseboy for the Munthes: *"Every morning I had to clean the doctor's boots...with some evil smelling liquid blacking that must have been the same as Charles Dickens packed in his young days at the blacking factory"*, he recalled.

Michael de Navarro, the grandson of Mary Anderson confirms that she recorded the Munthes living in the Malt House before WW1 in her second volume of memoirs.

Axel Munthe remained in England for much of WW1, became a British citizen and served in the ambulance corps in France. Sid records his last memory of the Munthes. Towards the end of WW1 his father, the village postman, was sweeping his yard when an *“elegant, richly attired lady leading a little boy, stopped and called out to him... “you probably won’t remember me but for sentimental reasons I have just come for the day to have a look at the dear old village and its happy memories. I am Mrs Axel Munthe, although (her eyes filling with tears) we are now separated.”* The boy was most probably her younger son Malcolm, who would work for the Special Operations Executive during WW2 in occupied Scandinavia, and then in the invasion of Italy at Anzio where he was badly wounded.

Christopher Hotten  
March 2021



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