Mere Historical Society

UNLOCKING HISTORY

Newsletter
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DUNSTERFORCE: from Baghdad to Baku (and back again)
by Peter Landymore
5 March 2019

When Peter Landymore was looking into his grand-father's war record, he discovered that along with his other medals his grandfather had been awarded a North West Persia Clasp, a somewhat unusual medal from an unsung campaign in the Great War. And so he began to research the Hush Hush Expedition, led by the un-famous General Lionel Charles Dunsterville. Born in 1865, the son of an Indian Army General, he joined the British Army in 1884 and later transferred to the Indian Army. At the outbreak of the Great War he was a very middle-aged Colonel, unable to find any significant command in France, but eventually being promoted in India to Major-General.

But what of Peter's grandfather? Named after two great figures in classical history, Alexander Augustus grew up in a tiny Suffolk village where he faced a dull future as a farm hand. Instead, at the age of 16, he joined the Royal Field Artillery; and, with his understanding of horses, became a driver. At the start of the Great War, he already had had 15 years' service. He then went through the BEF campaign in 1914, the retreat from Mons to the Marne and the advance to Ypres, with the 14th Brigade RFA: and was one of the few that survived it.

By 1917 he was in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq). The British had taken Baghdad from the Turks in March that year and were hoping to link with the Russian armies to the north of Mosul. However, with the Tsar having fallen, and after the Kerensky Offensive in June, the Russian army began to retreat; and in November came the October Revolution, leading to Russia pulling out of the war. This was not only a problem for the British but also for Persia, which had tried to remain neutral. Northern Persia had become part of the conflict zone, with each

side trying to arm local nationalities and tribes, notably the Armenians. The Russians had beaten the Turks back but by the beginning of 1918 their commanders had lost control of their troops; and as these troops retired to the east and north, the Turks pursued them. The Turkish leader, Enver Pasha aimed to create a new Turkish empire in his country's ancestral lands of Azerbaijan and Turkestan on either side of the Caspian Sea, and Anatolia (modern Turkey). This constituted a threat to Afghanistan and North-west India, and also the British control of the Gulf with its oil.

And then there was Baku, which after the invention of the combustion engine had become the centre of an oil-rush. It grew from a small shipping port of 2,500 inhabitants to over 200,000 by 1900. The population was made up at this time of Muslim Azeris, Christian Armenians and Russians. Who was going to get Baku and its vital oil? The Bolsheviks, White Russians, Germans or Turks?

So in December 1917 Lloyd George ordered a military mission to move to Tiflis in Georgia, tasked with reorganising the remnants of the Tsar's armies, notably the Georgians and Armenians, to defend their provinces against the Turks. The idea was to collect 200 officers and 200 NCOs to organise and train these volunteers. Thus 400 British would repel the advance of 40,000 Turks and their allies. Dunsterville, now aged 52, was summoned from the Afghan frontier, arriving in Baghdad on 18th January 2018 to be given his orders.

To quote Dunsterville's postwar memoir "it was hoped to stop this gap (450 miles of Persian/Russian territory) by re-enlisting under the British flag…..well paid volunteers from the ranks of the retreating Russians……The efforts made in this direction were a complete failure."

The journey from Baghdad to Baku (over 800 miles by road, through mountains) was to be undertaken in winter, and in early 20th century vehicles. It would take time to recruit men from every corner of the Empire to join Dunsterforce, but Dunsterville decided to "push off" with an advance party of just 12 officers, 2 sergeants and 41 drivers (one of whom was Peter's grandfather) and an armoured car. He set off on 27 January 1918 expecting to reach Baku in 12 days. Unfortunately. snow arrived and the mountain roads became impassable. By 3 February they had only reached Kermanshah, where they met a Colonel Bicherakov, the Russian commander of 1200 Cossacks. The two men found a common interest in thwarting the Bolsheviks and Turks. Dunsterforce continued North, reaching Enzeli, a port on the shore the Caspian Sea, on 17 February. He attempted to convince the Bolsheviks there to lend him ships to ferry his force up the coast to Baku en route to Tiflis, guaranteeing that he would not interfere in Russian politics and merely wanted to help stop the Turks. For 3 days telegrams went back and forth between Baku and Moscow, who eventually sent orders for the dangerous British to be arrested. The wily Dunsterville, having bribed the telegraph operators, got wind of this first, and did a midnight flit, with his entire party.

So Dunsterville retreated to Hamadan, 400 miles from Enzeli and 2000m above sea level, where he was again cut off by winter snow. All around were the Jangalis, a rebel force under Kutchuk Khan. All Dunsterville had was 41 rifles and 12 officers. To make matters worse, the people of Hamadan were starving due to the previous year's incursions by the Turks and Russians.
To begin with local suppliers were told not to sell to the British and to starve them out. Dunsterville persuaded/bribed the Governor to ignore this order. To endear the British to the locals, he started a famine relief programme - road repair jobs for the poor. Being an aid amateur, he made mistakes: work tickets went to the fittest, not the poorest, who then sold them on at a

healthy profit. Only men were fed, not women and children. Thus to begin with very little work was done. Eventually, however, soup kitchens were set up and wages given as food: Dunsterville had found the answer that modern aid has found, of getting purchasing power to the poorest.

On 22 May Dunsterville asked permission to move his entire force to Baku. London replied emphatically NO. Lloyd George had taken the view that he would rather see Baku in Turkish hands than Russian, the latter being the greater threat to India. What Lloyd George did not know was that Dunsterville and his new friend, Bicherakov, were in cahoots, to resist both the Bolsheviks and the Turks. (Dunsterville had, since March, been providing 30,000 Russian troops with pay and rations - these being the only troops he had managed to recruit, having lost the chance to get to Georgia and organise Georgian and Armenian armies there.)

By mid-July Baku had been taken over by the Armenians, who immediately asked for British troops. On 4 August a handful of British troops arrived; coincidentally on the same day that a German mission landed, under the impression that Baku had already been taken by the Turks! On 10 August, Dunsterville set sail for Baku aboard the Kruger with reinforcements. At this stage there were 1,000 Brits and 6,000 or so Armenians up against a Turkish force of 17,000.

Somehow, despite Baku's dwindling food supply, the defence was maintained until the end of August. But
Dunsterville also had other problems back on the Persian front, east of Tabriz, where his supply route was being threatened by a Turkish advance. Following another assault on Baku at the end of August, Dunsterville informed the local governors that Baku was lost and the British would be leaving. The Armenians threatened to sink the British ships if they deserted. On the 11th

of September, the Turks attacked again and penetrated the line. On the evening of the12th, Dunsterville gave the order to withdraw despite being told his ships would be sunk. The Kruger slipped her moorings under cover of darkness and reached Enzeli the following morning just as the Turks took Baku.

By now both Baghdad HQ and the War Office in London were exasperated with Dunsterville and the words "loose" and "cannon" were being bandied about. It had never been a part of Britain's grand strategy to defend an oilfield on the Caspian Sea. Dunsterville was relieved of his command, fully expecting to be court-martialled on his return to London; his war was over. No such luck for Landymore, however: he became part of Nor-Perforce (North Persia Force) which remained behind to prevent the Turks from reaching the British oil concessions in South Persia. However, there was very little serious fighting in the remaining 6 weeks, as both sides were decimated by the infamous Spanish Flu epidemic. On 30 October Turkey accepted an armistice, and in early November Baku was re-occupied by 39 Brigade, the same infantry that had left ignominiously in September, together with a Russo-Armenian force under none other than General Bicherakov.

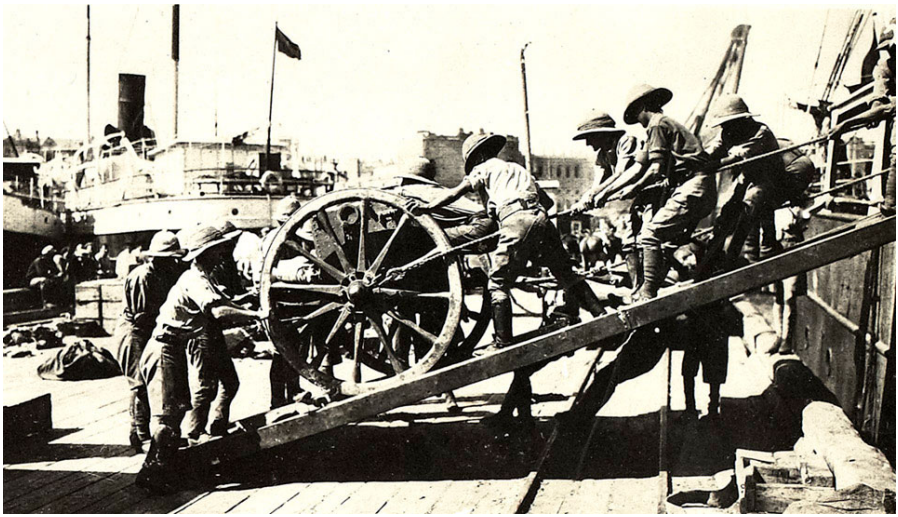
NorPerforce remained in the area after the armistice, keeping the peace throughout 1919 (while the Treaty of Versailles was being negotiated). In August 1920 General Ironside withdrew most of the British forces to Iraq, except for an unfortunate few thousand - including Cpl. Landymore of A battery RFA – once again trapped by the onset of winter: which meant that his war didn't end until April 1921, when he met his 4-year old son for the first time.

History, it's said, is written by the winners: and by then Dunsterville's book "The Adventures of Dunsterforce" had been published to great acclaim. Its romantic tale of how the Hush-

Hush expedition overcame Jangalis and Turks, snow and starvation, and dastardly Bolsheviks, successfully obscured the fact that it had achieved no useful military objective to offset its cost in British lives.

Heather Milligan

British guns unloading at Baku



Kew Gardens and Kew Palace
21 May 2019

On a beautiful sunny day we set off from the Mere car park and Will, the driver for Andrews Coaches, took us speedily to Kew, via a "comfort stop" at Fleet Services on the M3. We were dropped off at Elizabeth Gate and met by a gentleman who welcomed us to Kew. After his brief introduction we headed off towards Kew Palace, and while waiting for the tour to start we explored the adjacent medicinal garden. This area explained which plants had ancient medical properties and what ailments they prevented. This included masking the smell of the drainage and supposedly warding off the plague. It is interesting to see how many current drugs use medicinal plants as their base.

Tim, our tour guide, took us on a 60-minute tour around the Kew Palace, he was clad in elegant period costume. Built in the 1600's for a family of merchants it was eventually acquired as a palace by the Royal family. King George the III and Queen Charlotte lived there with their 15 children. It must have been cramped to say the least. Tim brought the rooms to life and explained their use, conservation, and the problems involved with maintaining such an old and important property. My personal highlight of the tour was our climb up to the attic. This remains much as it did during the royal occupancy, when it was used as servants quarters. One hopes it does not eventually get over restored as it clearly showed the exposed beams and construction.

We moved on then to a separate building, the Royal Kitchens and the walled vegetable garden surrounding

the building. Although the upper rooms were furnished, they and the downstairs kitchen areas were devoid of interpretation panels, and the kitchens contained very little of the utensils needed in such a place. I felt this was a missed opportunity, perhaps this is being developed still.

We then moved on through the Great Broad Walk and the beautifully planted borders to the iconic Palm House. Built between 1844-48, it was one of the first uses of wrought and cast-iron in construction. Recently restored to a splendidly magnificent state, it houses a range of different temperature zones, and a high metal walkway through the tree tops that gave a view of the foliage not normally available in the wild.

We explored the Temperate House, again a wonderful structure, but by this time we were running out of energy and decided to head for the Victoria Gate, our pick-up point, and well-earned drinks and cakes.

We looked at the Hive, a recent piece of "installation art" worthy of the Tate Modern.. Perhaps that is where it should have been! I failed to see any real relevance to Kew. There were vast numbers of bees on the various plants, especially the alliums. We also failed to be impressed by the various glass and steel "sculptures" around the gardens; the plants, trees and gardens were impressive enough in their own right.

Having no hold-up at Stonehenge we arrived back in Mere, tired but having had a thoroughly enjoyable day. Thank you Caroline for your usual immaculate organisation and guidance.

Ian and Juliet Dean

NATHANIEL IRESON of WINCANTON – Architect, Master Builder & Potter

by Peter and Sarah FitzGerald

12th March 2019

For family reasons, Sarah was unable to join her husband in giving this talk. Few people have heard of Nathaniel Ireson (master mason 1689 to 1769) and Peter gave this talk to explain why he thinks Ireson is one of the leading West Country architects of the early 18th century. Peter lives near Wincanton and has a particular interest in architecture. He has undertaken extensive research uncovering the very large number of houses, churches and other buildings on which Ireson worked. Peter's talk catalogued the architecture that could be attributed to Ireson.

Peter began by showing us a portrait and explained that it was a painting of a photograph of a painting thought to be of Ireson in 1733. Anyone who has watched Fake or Fortune will be well aware of the difficulties of authenticating some paintings. For Peter the most compelling evidence that the original painting was indeed of Ireson came from an early photograph catalogued as being of Ireson's portrait. The slide showed the reproduction Peter had made from that rather dark photograph.

Nathaniel was born in Warwickshire, and was an apprentice to Smith of Warwick during the reign of Queen Anne. She was a Tory by inclination and Tories favoured English Baroque (St

Paul's Cathedral, St Paul's church in Deptford, Blenheim Palace). So while a Tory government was in power Baroque was the favoured style. It is more ornate and elaborate than the similar Palladian favoured by the Whigs. Thomas Archer, Groom Porter to Queen Anne, worked with Smith and was a proponent of Baroque who, unlike most, had actually travelled around Europe to study it. His style is distinct and influenced Nathaniel's subsequent work. Since Nathaniel's daughters are recorded as having been born in Hale, Peter thinks that he must have been sent as Smith's Master Mason to work for Archer on Hale Park, the house on the edge of the New Forest Archer designed for himself. This would explain how Nathaniel came to the area.

Subsequently Ireson worked extensively in the South West. He worked on Stourhead House and probably lived in Stourton as he is recorded as church warden there in the 1720s. As an architect his style has been described as provincial baroque, but he also worked in Palladian style and in "wild baroque", an example of which is the monument he designed for his daughter Mary at St Peter's church, Stourton. Interestingly Stourhead is in the Palladian style favoured by the Whigs despite Henry Hoare being a Tory.

The great fires which swept through many towns in previous centuries caused death, misery and destruction at the time, but the legacy was sometimes a renaissance of town centres, thanks to the talents of local architects and builders. Blandford Forum's great fire, started by an accident in a tallow chandler's shop in 1731, destroyed 90 per cent of the ancient town and the Government, concerned that taxes were being lost while it was uninhabitable, set up a restoration fund. A local committee was set up to supervise the fund and the brothers Thomas, John and William Bastard were prominent members of the community who had lost much of their property, though they were insured. Thomas probably died in the small pox epidemic that followed. The Bastard brothers are credited with much of the restoration

work and they had their names placed prominently on many restored buildings. The brothers described themselves as joiners and were timber merchants, and although they sometimes described themselves as architects, Peter pointed out many features which looked like copies of Archer's work, or from his plans. An example is Archer's use of the Borromini capital with incurving volutes whereas in the standard style the volutes are curved outwards. Archer's influence is seen in many buildings and Peter thinks the Bastards must have known him and therefore also Nathaniel. The South West was largely Whig, and a known Tory such as Nathaniel might not have been acceptable to the committee as one to help restore the town. Nevertheless Peter suspects that Ireson might have been involved in the project.

There is no disputing that Nathaniel made his mark on Wincanton, where the great fire of 1707 burned most of the town centre. For himself he built Ireson House which can be seen at the top of Ireson Lane, opposite the junction of the High Street and Bayford Hill with Common Road. He restored the Greyhound Inn, Dolphin Inn and the (currently closed) White Horse Inn all enhancing Wincanton town centre. After he made his home in Wincanton, Nathaniel Ireson became a prominent employer. He opened a quarry at Wincanton, an economic proposition because of the prohibitive cost of transporting heavy better quality stone any distance, and especially if there were no suitable waterways to ease the problem.

He also set up a pottery which produced delft ware

from 1739 for 15 years. (Apparently only delft coming from Holland is spelt with a capital D). Sarah was to have told us more about this pottery, but Peter took us through his slides showing a range of plates, jugs and figures. Some of these were great fun, and Peter thinks Ireson must have enjoyed himself designing the patterns. Some of the plates were decorated with recognisable local features such as the Jack the Treacle Eater monument in Yeovil, and some of the pieces are predominantly pink. Both the V & A and the Fitzwilliam museums (pictured) have examples. Earthenware chips easily, and Sarah has become proficient at piecing together the many pottery shards that can be found in the area to establish particular patterns as definitely Wincanton delft. A selection of these shards can be seen in Wincanton museum. About this time porcelain started to be produced in the Staffordshire potteries, and demand for earthenware in this rustic style dropped. Wincanton delft's rarity makes it valuable and Dr Plaxton was generous enough to allow a couple of examples he owns to be viewed.

Nathaniel also carved church monuments in addition to that for his daughter at Stourton. Another example of his work can be found in Gillingham St Mary the Virgin's church tucked behind the organ.

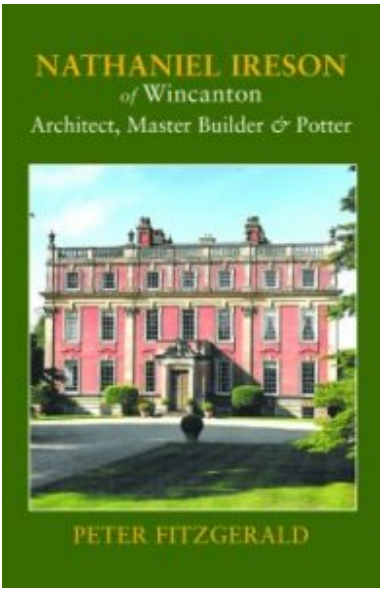
To summarise, Ireson's work is prominent in Wincanton and seen widely in the South West, for example the Ven House at Milborne Port, Redlynch and Crowcombe Court in Somerset,

Spetisbury House and Encombe, both in Dorset, and Widcombe Manor near Bath, and many more.

Peter said little about Nathaniel's family but it is recorded on the memorial in Wincanton that he died aged 83 and his wife, Mary, died in 1772 aged 85. Peter concluded by urging us to keep our eyes open for Ireson's distinct Baroque features in local houses and churches. Going into Wincanton the following day, I looked at houses in the High Street with fresh appreciation.

Peter's book costs £15 and has a detailed appendix listing the buildings on which Ireson worked. Sales of the book contribute to a restoration fund for Nathaniel's memorial statue in the churchyard. We were pleased to hear that the head of the statue that had been knocked off after it was vandalised is in safe keeping in Peter's office until restoration work can begin.

Caroline Cook



MONTACUTE HOUSE

At 9.30 am on Thursday June 2019 about twenty members of the Mere Historical Society departed from Salisbury Street car park for the forty minute journey to Montacute House, the most beautiful Elizabethan house in England. The sun was shining but umbrellas and raincoats were at the ready.

After so much rain the verges and countryside were looking green and lush with an abundance of Oxeye Daisies and Poppies, seen at their best from the elevated view from our Andrews coach. In a short time we were driving through the lovely Montacute village and squeezing through the gates into the car park.

We had time for a coffee before joining the 11am tour of the outside of the house by an excellent guide, Chris. He explained to us why the house was built, by whom and what special features we should look out for.

It was like being transported back to 1601, the year the house was completed. He explained that at that time the front of the house and main entrance faced east and ran parallel to the old Roman road between Ilchester and Dorchester. Privacy for the family and guests was important so unlike today high walls surrounded the courtyard. He pointed out the position of the old orchard and the vegetable garden. There is one oak tree that would have been there over four hundred years ago. He described the formal garden by imagining a giant snowflake placed on the ground with the lines as paths and the spaces filled with scented and bright flowers. There were pavilions for the ladies to have a quiet time reading or doing embroidery, a pastime very popular in the 16th and 17th century as shown by the delightful exhibition of old samplers in the house.

In the 16th century London was, as today not only busy, but much polluted. The heat of the summer months increased the stench so

much that anyone who could afford it would build a summer house in the country.

This was what Sir Edward Phelips decided to do. Not only did he have family money from the Montacute estate, made from wool sales but he was an accomplished lawyer, becoming Master of the Rolls, the second highest office in the land next to the Lord Chief Justice. He was involved in the prosecution of Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder plotters. He became a Member of Parliament in 1584 with many of his descendants following in his footsteps. He was appointed Speaker of the House of Commons in 1604. He was knighted by James I in 1603.

Despite his obvious success it was still important that the house should make a statement about his fashion sense and good taste. Montacute House is built in an H shape, and (unusually for the time) is three stories high. The stone was quarried from Ham Hill near Yeovil. It has faded over the intervening years but at the time would have been a glorious honey gold. The front was decorated by nine statues representing The Nine Worthies. Sculpted in Roman dress they would still have been recognised by discerning visitors. They were brightly painted for additional effect.

Glass was expensive at that time and the effect of the many deep mullioned windows with Dutch stained glass panels would have been awesome. Edward Phelips's association with and knowledge of European architecture showed itself in the shape of the bay windows and the chimney pots. It was a truly magnificent family home.

At that time the medieval Montacute village was poor, with mainly wooden houses and only footpaths to connect it to other places. By the mid seventeen hundreds things had changed. The village was more prosperous, with stone buildings and roads connecting it to other villages. The Roman road at the east facing the front of the house had fallen into disuse. This was a problem

for Edward Phelips (1725-97). The west side of the house was plain with the smelly stables nearby, so that the new driveway from the village side did not provide a suitably impressive view of the house. The stables were relocated to their present position and now house the tempting second-hand books store.

By chance the family owners of Clifton Maybank, a mid-16C house near Yeovil, had fallen on hard times, and were happy to sell their ornamental stonework. This was dismantled brick by numbered brick and reassembled at Montacute House

The interior of the house has been furnished by the National Trust with the aid of numerous loans and gifts. There are of course many teasels strategically placed to prevent anyone sitting on the antique chairs. However sitting is allowed on the window seats in the bays where the information cards and files can be read in comfort.

There are many 16th and 17th century Portrait Paintings in the rooms and in the long gallery on the 3rd floor. In 1975 the house became the first outstation of the National Portrait Gallery. We plan to return to examine these portraits more closely after researching the images.

In 1911 the family left Montacute to live in London and the house was leased to a series of tenants, the most illustrious of whom was Lord Curzon, formerly Viceroy of India. He lived there with his mistress, the novelist Elinor Glyn. A selection of her books can be seen in Lord Curzon's bedroom along with a large bath that he had installed, in a cupboard!

Elinor Glyn's romantic fiction was considered scandalous by Edwardian Society and had tremendous influence on early 20C culture, and possibly the careers of Rudoph Valentino (adored by my mother), Gloria Swanson and Clara Bow. Valentino and Swanson starred in the film version of her book "Beyond the Rocks." A DVD of this film is surprisingly available on a popular

Internet buying site along with old copies of her books. The Fifty Shades of Grey of her time.

I'm not sure what Edwardian Society made of her being the lover of Lord Curzon, who went on to become Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs under David Lloyd George and Leader of the House of Lords. She is commemorated in the clerihew:

Would you like to sin

With Elinor Glyn

on a tiger skin?

Or would you prefer

to err

with her

on some other fur?

Visiting the house, the lovely gardens, the Victorian Orangery and the café made for a happy day out. The raincoats were needed towards the end of the day but it was only a small inconvenience. We will certainly return.

Ann and Colin Grout

DEATH AT PORTON DOWN – its investigation and inquest

By David Masters

2 April 2019

David Masters became the coroner for Wiltshire – having been Deputy Coroner for East Somerset – in 1992. Late in 1999, he learned that Wiltshire's police had re-opened a 'cold case': the death of one Ronald Maddison in 1953. The leader of the re-investigation – code-named 'Operation Antler' was D.I. Jerry Luckett. 'Antler' began after a former National Service soldier, Gordon Bell, claimed in 1997/8 that his health in later life had been ruined as a result of being "duped" into acting as a guinea-pig at Porton Down in 1959-60, on the false pretext of assisting research into the common cold.

Operation Antler looked into complaints over the whole period between 1939 and 1989, and interviewed over 700 service personnel or their relatives. However the case they brought to David, in late 2000, was not Bell's but that of Ronald Maddison, the only one of the cases that had actually resulted in death – the Coroner's business.

There had been, of course, a previous inquest, in 1953. This was held in camera – i.e. with press and public excluded – and the verdict was recorded as 'misadventure'. But the actual cause of death was experimental exposure to a nerve gas: Sarin.

On the basis of Luckett's dossier, David was persuaded to apply to the Attorney General, in February 2001, for a second inquest. In April 2002, the AG gave his consent. However, the government of the day (Blair's) contested the decision, and only in November 2002 did a High Court judge – Lord Woolf – confirm it. This led to the longest-running inquest in English legal

history, until that concerning the deaths of Princess Diana and Dodi Fayed.

David emphasised that an inquest is an inquiry, not a trial; the Coroner, acting for the Crown, himself selects the witnesses (over 100 appeared) and the evidence to present to the jury. This inquest actually began on the 5th of May 2004, and was concluded on the 15th of November, having spent 64 days in session. Not only did David preside, but he also had to make special arrangements, for a bigger courtroom for example. He also introduced a real time IT-based record of evidence, so that transcripts were available the next day. The jury of 10 (not 12) was drawn from Trowbridge: their ages ranged from 20-something to early 60s. One member was a judge's wife, another a surfer. Inquest juries can ask questions, and not just about the case. They included "how much longer?" and "What about my holidays?" David had to refuse an adjournment for a week, requested by the surfer to go to Newquay. The jury's foreman was, throughout the inquest, ill with cancer, but soldiered on: and sadly died not long after the inquest ended.

Sarin was first developed in WWII by Germany, and found by Allied forces when they invaded. In the 1950s, the UK was co-operating with the US and Canada in Sarin research: including the questions of its lethality, the effectiveness of protection afforded by clothing, and possible counter-measures. This was the Cold War: the USSR was known to possess Sarin, and might use it. But very little was known about it at the time. Maddison, a RAF man, was brought over from his Northern Ireland base as one of 140 'volunteers' sent by the RAF to Porton Down that year. (The question of how voluntary was a volunteer was a major issue at the inquest.) He was one of 6 men, all of whom had 20 drops of Sarin, 10 mg per drop, applied to two patches of cloth taped to their forearms: one flannel layer (shirt material) and, over that, one serge (tunic). (Before Maddison's experiment, a soldier called Kelly had been one of 6 who received the same

dose on only 1 layer of clothing: he was hospitalised for 9 days, but recovered.) After 20 minutes, Maddison became obviously unwell and the contaminated cloth was removed; but soon he began gasping for breath. Within 30 minutes of exposure he had lost consciousness, and despite rapid interventions and injections of antidotes, within the hour there was no pulse. Two hours later he was pronounced dead. The Defence Minister of the day, Duncan Sandys, then suspended all Sarin experiments at Porton Down (although there was some later evidence of their continuation in a mobile laboratory.)

None of the other subjects of the same experiment died, or even suffered serious consequences. The verdict of the original inquest, of misadventure, was based on a view that Maddison had been a victim of "personal idiosyncrasy", in that he was unusually susceptible either to the effects of the poison or to rapid transmission through the skin. But the 2004 jury returned a verdict, unanimously, of unlawful killing, and this was the basis for the Coroner's findings.

The story did not end there. On 6 occasions a Judicial Review was called for to overturn the conclusions, either by the Government or by the families: 2 were actually held. The main verdict stood, although a minor part of the findings was later set aside by the High Court. As David said, this was a significant moment in legal history, and opened the door to considerable amounts of compensation being paid to various ex-servicemen. It was held by the jury that 'volunteers', in the lower ranks of national servicemen in the 1950s, were either misled – e.g. the allegations that they were told that this was research into the common cold – or just did, as usual, as they were told.

Wiltshire police (who spent over £2 million on this enquiry) offered evidence for the prosecution of 8 Porton Down scientists;

but after review, the DPP –where Kier Starmer was involved – decided, in 2006, that no prosecutions would be brought.

By way of light relief in a rather tragic tale, David recalled the (mis)reporting by BBC West: that the case involved Sarin being dropped “on the bare foreskin of a soldier”. That should have been “bare skin of the forearm”, Mr. Brody.

Peter Landymore

MHS VISIT TO THE AMERICAN MUSEUM AND GARDENS 17 July 2019

The museum and gardens are located at Claverton Manor, on high ground on the southeast outskirts of Bath, and overlooking the beautiful Avon Valley. The Manor was built in 1820 for the influential Vivian family and subsequently had a chequered history until it was purchased in the 1950s by four notable men for the purpose of collecting and housing American artefacts, particularly original hand stitched quilts and rugs. The museum was finally opened to the public in 1961 and is the only museum of its kind outside of the United States.

On arrival it was suggested by a member of staff that we might wish to commence by visiting the exhibits in the Manor house first. The exhibits cover 3 floors. The quilts and rugs are located on the first floor. About 50 out of a total collection of 200 are exhibited on runners and protected from hand touching as some date back from the late 18th century and are very fragile. Those displayed are, therefore, rotated on a regular basis, and have a variety of designs. Quilts were primarily used as extra bed coverings during the cold harsh winters but also as wall displays for the more upper class population.

Moving down to the ground floor, room settings have been installed to show how the different classes lived from parlours, bedrooms and living rooms through the 18th and 19th centuries ranging from the simple Shaker movement with very simple furniture to the more elaborated city rooms.

Further exhibits are shown in the Folk Art Gallery and include Native American artefacts, statues, pictures and photographs.

In the basement, corridors and small rooms gave further insights into the ways of life such as railway workers extending westwards through virgin territory, and a 19th century “ale house” with its shuttered bar and bullet-riddled walls! Life was hard for very many

during the early years. Also a wall panel indicates the history of America from the time of discovery by Columbus (although he never set foot in America), through to the present day. One incident noted that that soon after the first colony had been founded lack of eligible females resulted in ninety prospective brides setting sail from England to Jamestown where each female could, on arrival, be purchased for 120lbs of tobacco!

A separate building houses exhibitions. This year there is a display of machine stitched quilts by Kaffe Fassett, an America who settled in the United Kingdom, renowned for his designs in knitting, needlepoint and patchwork. His designs in this exhibition reinterpret some of the very old hand-stitched ones and can be seen together so one can compare.

A visit is not complete without a stroll through the gardens. The East lawn continues into the attractive American garden together with a grassed banked amphitheatre, both of which were only completed last year. At a lower level lies the separate Vernon Garden which contains a mixture of flowers and vegetables (which works well), and is overlooked by Magnolia Grandiflora trees with their large scented, cream flowers.

We were blessed with fine weather which enabled us to enjoy sitting on the East Lawn Terrace.

All in all it was a very enjoyable and instructive day out and well worth the visit. Thank you to the organiser.

Roger and Carol Boxer

Photographs: Mel Mouncer.

THE MERE MAN – A BEAKER WARRIOR BURIAL

by DAVID DAWSON

16 April 2019

Some Mere people (like the author) are incomers, others are Meremen born and bred, others yet have been here for generations. But then again – who was here 4,500 years ago? The answer seems to be: the Beaker People.

David began with a brief reminder of the wonders of the Wiltshire Museum, his home base, in Devizes, which some of us had the good fortune to visit on a summer MHS trip in September 2017. Among its many wonderful, and cleverly presented, exhibits are objects retrieved from the excavation, over 200 years ago on White Sheet Hill, of the first 'barrow' or burial mound in Britain whose excavation was recorded as an archaeological exercise: giving Mere Man a claim to be at the origin of British archaeology.

The barrow in question lay in the lee of White Sheet Hill, in a dip overlooking Mere: its position is known precisely, even though the land is now under the plough. As with other barrows on the hill, it looks to the West: as with the Egyptians, it seems the prehistoric Britons looked for an afterlife beyond the sunset. The bodies found in barrows are often crouched, in a foetal position – why? David outlined some of the possible explanations, including an intriguing idea that, for preservation, the bodies were first squeezed into bags

and then suspended, like hams, from the rafters to be smoked.

Mere Man's skeleton probably still lies in the barrow; only the 5 objects found with him were retrieved. They indicate that he was a warrior – very probably a prominent man – of the Beaker people, who arrived in Britain in about 2,400 B.C. They brought not only the style of drinking vessel from which they are named, but also bronze – bringing the Stone Age in Britain to its end.

The man who found them was William Cunnington, a self-educated merchant from Heytesbury, whose enthusiasm for investigating barrows and other ancient relics had attracted the sponsorship of Sir Richard Colt Hoare, the plutocrat of Stourhead. Together they dug up Mere Man in 1805: and it was Sir Richard who made the notes of what they found, and recorded them for posterity – unlike whoever had preceded them (antiquarians or treasure-seekers), for the barrow had been opened before.

They deduced little from the skeletons (there were 2), and had no means of dating the finds. At the time, we should remember, it was generally held that God had only created the world in 4,004 B.C.; it was not until 1821 that the idea of a world some millions of years old became current (actually, it's several billion years old, scientists now agree.).

Among the objects were a beaker – David showed us a life-size replica –, an oblong bone tool probably used for making arrow-heads (he surmised that there are probably arrow-heads left behind in the barrow), a copper dagger-blade, and two golden discs. The copper is thought to be foreign, and the dagger a ceremonial one or an ornament, rather than a weapon or butchery tool, or even a cutlery implement.

Only some 200 Beaker people were buried in Wiltshire barrows: not many over some 700 to 800 years, indicating that they were of noble status. When they arrived, Stonehenge was already a notable ceremonial site, which continued to be used and re-developed in their time. It is likely that Beaker people co-existed with the previous, Neolithic, inhabitants. The Amesbury Archer, who was buried 30-40 years earlier than Mere Man, is now thought to have originated in the Austrian Alps. Current thinking is that Beaker people came to Europe from the eastern Mediterranean, travelling both around the north Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts, and up the major rivers such as the Danube, Rhone and Rhine. Their appearance was probably like those of modern Mediterraneans – brown skin and eyes, black hair.

Cunnington (who died in 1810, only 5 years after digging up Mere Man) and Colt Hoare would excavate a barrow in a single afternoon; today, teams of 20 would take 4 weeks. The richest find, in terms of artefacts, was Bush Barrow, near Stonehenge – also excavated by

Cunnington. Other Beaker burials include Roundway Archer near Devizes, and Monkton Farleigh near Bath.

As to the gold discs – called Sun-discs by archaeologists – 11 others have been found in Britain. In contrast to today, when gold is common – nearly everyone has some, whether a ring, wristwatch or bracelet, or a few bullion bars in their investment portfolio – 4,000 years ago it was very, very – extremely – rare: hence, possibly, a key status item to carry into the after-life, to prove one's rare distinction and worthiness to live on. What a shame that one of Mere Man's two discs disappeared, sometime between 1810 and 1884, and has never been rediscovered. Perhaps some Stourhead volunteer will, someday, find it under a floorboard in a servant's room. But Sir Richard's real legacy, for David, is "The Ancient History of Wiltshire": the founding text of archaeology in Britain.

This was a most informative talk, delivered engagingly and with a minimum of jargon, by a real expert in the field (as, I suppose, you could call archaeologists generally). It was a privilege to hear it, and to see the plentiful and pertinent illustrating slides.

Peter Landymore

Visit to Wells Cathedral

3September 2019

September 3rd dawned a typical English day, neither hot nor cold, windy or wet – perfect for a tour of the cathedral followed by a tour of the gardens of the Bishop's Palace.

As soon as we arrived we were whisked into the cathedral, to be met by our two guides, who obviously loved the building and knew it intimately, and didn't want us to miss a thing.

We started with the Jesse window and its meaning, then the painted ceiling (how did they get up there, let alone paint?), and then the amazing amount of carved stonework, including the pulpit and chapels. We moved on to the altar and admired the incredible embroidery

on the altar cloth, depicting a tank full of water and fish, so life-like that you'd expect to get your hands wet if you touched it. Our guide also pointed out the intricate carvings on the tops of the marble pillars, - not just a pattern, but people peering out, and on one a complete story, told in stone, as you walked around it. And she was watching the time so that we could see the clock, one of the oldest in the world, which has figures of jousting knights which move when the clock strikes.

In the centre of the building is perhaps the most astonishing facet of the cathedral, which is the scissor arch. This was built in the 1300s to hold up the central tower, but looks so modern in design you might think it twentieth century.

Next, we were shown the choir, then the lady chapel, with its enormous stained glass windows. These were demolished at the time of the reformation, but the broken glass was carefully stored and re-used much later to re-glaze, in part as it had been but in part in a cheerful mosaic of the pieces left over.

Our tour of the cathedral was completed with a visit to the chapter house, up an amazing curved stone staircase, very wide, very worn, very imposing.

After lunch in the cathedral cafe, we moved, via the market square, to the bishop's palace.

There we were met, (by the croquet lawn at the front of the palace), by new guides who showed us the gardens. These are centred around the natural wells, for which

the cathedral and the city are named, and which produce vast amounts of water continuously, which is pumped away to run in conduits along the roads of the city.

The gardens are full of streams and bridges and pools and artful ruins, while the beautiful planting thrives in its protected and well-watered enclosures.

Following a short break, we made a brief tour of the open part of the bishop's palace, which housed an exhibition of modern art – not at all what you might expect in such a traditional setting.

Our thanks are due for a splendid day to our guides, to all the thousands of people who built and have

maintained the cathedral and on a more personal level to Caroline for making our visit possible.

Ros Castro

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