



**ASSOCIATION OF OPEN UNIVERSITY GRADUATES (AOUG)  
in the SOUTH WEST (03)**

**Newsletter 6**

**Spring 2013**

I'm writing part of this Newsletter in Nice, where I've escaped for a few days in the sunshine. I should have known better, as it's pouring with rain today (just like Grande Bretagne, say the locals!) Yesterday was sunny though, for a trip to Monaco to see the Royal Palace and the hairpin bend on the Grand Prix circuit.

First of all, may I apologise for changes to Diary Dates. The STEAM event at Swindon will be on May 15<sup>th</sup>, not the 8<sup>th</sup> as advertised in OMEGA. The date of the Handshake event in Monmouth has been changed from Monday, April 29<sup>th</sup> to Monday, 10<sup>th</sup> June.

Included in the Newsletter is an article about Corsham Court (visited by the Bath and Wiltshire Group in February). Thank you to James Methuen-Campbell for giving me permission to publish it. Kate Macve has added some interesting facts about A la Ronde and Justin Olver has written about the Norman Lockyer visit (see more in his blog <http://classicaljourneyphonic.blogspot.co.uk/2013/04/open-university-graduates-observe-night.html> ). I hope to include another extract in the next Newsletter.

**Pam Pearce**

**CORSHAM COURT, REPTON AND NASH**



Visitors to Corsham Court cannot fail to admire the rich collection of paintings displayed there. The original house was bought by Paul Methuen in 1745, so that he could display the pictures left to him by his godfather and cousin, Sir Paul Methuen. Corsham House was a large, Elizabethan mansion with adjoining estates, completed by Thomas Smythe in 1582. It had suffered under a succession of short leases. The drawing to the left shows how the front elevation appeared before Paul Methuen's first alterations. Nathaniel Ireson was commissioned to re-model the North Front, but none of the rooms were suitable for a Picture Gallery, 'Capability' Brown, the architect and landscape gardener, was appointed in 1760 by Paul Methuen to carry out alterations to the Park and the House. His Picture Gallery (designed as a triple cube) and Cabinet Room occupied the ground floor of the extended east wing.

However, there was still not enough room to house the entire collection, part of which remained in the family's London house in Grosvenor Street. When Paul Cobb Methuen succeeded to the Estates in 1795, he set about commissioning further alterations. Following Brown's death in 1783, Humphrey Repton had been asked to continue his unfinished



Parkland. He convinced Paul Cobb Methuen that he should reject James Wyatt's designs and employ John Nash (see left) to reconstruct the North front. Nash and Repton formed a partnership in 1795, building or remodelling houses and country seats in landscaped settings. Corsham Court was an important project for both of them, as their first Gothic undertaking. Nash put forward

pages of detailed proposals, but his increasing popularity meant that he had little time to ensure that his plans were being carried out correctly or to settle accounts. At Corsham, it seems that he did not appreciate that the Elizabethan foundations could not bear the load of stone, iron and timber needed. Problems with roof materials led to water penetration and subsequently dry rot. Costs escalated - in December 1778, his estimate was for £5,647, but by completion in 1805, the final bill was £25,500. The friendship and business association of Nash and Repton ended in 1800. Nash's work on the North Front continued to deteriorate, so to preserve the collection of paintings, Thomas Bellamy was commissioned to re-model it (for the third time in one hundred years) in 1846. Only a few traces of Nash's work remain at Corsham Court, notably the dairy and some Gothic embellishments over the East Front, riding school and bath house. Bellamy's work is still intact.

Nash went on to design Brighton Pavilion, large parts of central London, including Regent's Park and Buckingham Palace. He also designed lodges, dairies, and cottages such as Blaise Hamlet in Bristol. However, his later years were spoilt by an accusation of fraud (he was exonerated) and escalating costs at Buckingham Palace, the project which ended his career. He retired to the Isle of Wight and died there in 1834.

Sources:

Corsham Court: a brief history [Internet] Available from: <<http://www.corsham-court.co.uk/Court%20history/Commentary.html>> [Accessed 3 April 2013]

Great British Architects: John Nash [Internet] Available from: <<http://www.countrylife.co.uk/news/article/395048/Great-British-Architects-John-Nash.html>> [Accessed 3 April 2013]

Harcourt, L. (1977) *Corsham Court: A Gothick Dream*. London, Gothick Dream.

**Pam Pearce**

## **A la Ronde**

Those of you who joined the Exeter group's visit to A la Ronde would have enjoyed a recent meeting of the Exmouth Historical and Archaeological Society, where Brenda French, one of the volunteer stewards who showed us round the National Trust Property, spoke about the house from the point of view of a steward. These are just a few of the things she told us about.



A la Ronde, I am sure those who visited with us last year would agree, is a place you can visit again and again and always find something different and new. Living quite near, I certainly have. For instance, did you notice the hearts carved into the chimneys, that Brenda pointed out in her talk? As I have heard several people say, it is a quirky place - and that is one of the quirks. Harry Potter fans will also notice the windows set in the angles of the house, these were the inspiration for the windows at Hogwarts.

Maybe there are some among you who take part in veteran cycle rallies? No, I thought not. But some people do, and one place they traditionally include in their itinerary is A la Ronde,

and Brenda shared a photo of last year's rally, with the cyclists in period dress, apparently unhindered by their bicycle-chain-clogging finery.



The first monkey puzzle trees in Britain were those planted at nearby Bicton; these were closely followed by some at A la Ronde. The specimen that some will remember is surely a much younger tree, but at the time of our group's visit, there was a fruit on it, the like of which I have never seen. Apparently - and surprisingly, from its appearance - these fruits are edible, and among the treasures found in the kitchen are recipes using monkey puzzle fruit.

Records pertaining to the house and family were stored in Exeter during the war and were destroyed by firebombs, so it is only now research is being done and many facts are coming to light, new information is being found month by month.

**Kate Macve**

### **Open University Graduates observe the night sky**



At 7.15pm on Wednesday 13th March 2013, when it was much darker than shown in this photo, a group of ten Open University Graduates gathered for a tour of the Norman Lockyer Observatory at Salcombe Hill above Sidmouth. Despite occasional showers, the sky was generally very clear. As a result, the temperature on top of the hill was bitterly cold. Everyone had come wrapped up warmly, and some even had the foresight to bring torches. There is special 'red' lighting on the site, which

is intended not to interfere with observers' night vision. However, it doesn't help much with normal vision, and it was quite easy to stray off the paths.

The first thing to see was the observatory's subject matter - the night sky. Looking south from the main building, Jupiter was clearly visible in the constellation of Taurus - or rather, in line with Taurus. The Earth was on the opposite side of the Sun from Jupiter in March, and our line of sight to the Sun pointed towards the constellation Aries. (Of course it did - it was March!). As the Sun was slowly obscured by the Earth's horizon, so was Aries, but Taurus became visible near the horizon as darkness fell. There was Jupiter behind the Sun - and six times as far away - in line with Taurus.

In the Kensington Dome we were transported back in time - about a century. There was the beautiful telescope Norman Lockyer had used for his solar observations at the Kensington Solar Physics Observatory. In order to observe the Sun, Lockyer used his telescope to project the Sun's image onto a screen - or through a spectroscope. By spectroscopy, he discovered a previously unknown element in the Sun's outer layers - helium. For night-time observation, the telescope is not used to project images. It is safe to look through the eye-piece of the telescope. Observatory volunteer, Vic Papai, had set up the telescope to focus on a very interesting object - Jupiter. Each visitor, bundled in scarves and overcoats, took a turn to peer through the lens. Initially, most people saw nothing. Then, when they discovered how to align their pupil with the axis of the telescope, the planet came into view.

The whole post is published on my blog:

<http://classicaljourneyphonic.blogspot.co.uk/2013/04/open-university-graduates-observe-night.html>

**Justin Olver**

## **DIARY DATES**

### **Handshake event with Wales (Region 10), Monday 10<sup>th</sup> June 2pm (NEW date)**

Monmouth. Visit the Castle followed by tea and chat in a local cafe.

Friends and family are very welcome - please contact Pam or Violet Rook (AOUG Development Officer) if planning to attend

### **Bath and Wiltshire Group:**

#### **Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> April 12 noon**

Lunch at the Royal Pavilion Restaurant, Victoria Park, Bath BA1 2NR. (Roger and Pauline Galea)

#### **Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> May 12 noon**

STEAM: Museum of the Great Western Railway, Kemble Drive, Swindon, SN2 2TA. Meet in the Museum Café at 12 noon for lunch. Adults entry fee £6.60, Senior Citizens £4.40

#### **Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> July 12 noon**

Wells - Meet in the Bishop's Palace for a tour of the palace and gardens. Standard admission charge Adults £6.35, Seniors £5.45. Members, friends and family from Somerset and other AOUG Groups also welcome.

#### **Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> July 12 noon**

Lunch at the Royal Pavilion Restaurant, Victoria Park, Bath BA1 2NR. (Roger and Pauline Galea)

### **Bristol Group:**

#### **Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> April. 12.45pm tour (Arrive no earlier than 12.35pm)**

BBC Bristol Tour

Limited number of tickets available, advanced booking through Pam Pearce essential. Adults £8, Concessions (over 60s) £7.25.

#### **Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> June. Meet at 12 noon**

AOUG Bristol Group Anniversary Lunch, San Carlo Restaurant Bristol

[www.sancarolo.co.uk/bristol](http://www.sancarolo.co.uk/bristol) (tbc) 12.30pm. AOUG members, friends and family welcome.

### **Cornwall Group:**

A Garden Visit, Book Club and Lunch take place every month. For details of events, please contact Liz Ashcroft 01872 862425.

### **Exeter Group:**

#### **Friday 31<sup>st</sup> May**

AOUG Exeter Group Anniversary Lunch and visit to National Trust property (to be arranged). AOUG members, friends and family welcome.

#### **Friday 26<sup>th</sup> July**

Bi-monthly lunch at 12.30pm at the Countess Wear Beefeater Restaurant, 398 Topsham Road, Exeter, EX2 6HE.

### **LOCAL CONTACTS:**

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**Pam Pearce, Executive Representative**