

March 2013

Issue 31

A somewhat belated Happy New Year to all our Members. The University of Warwick Retired Staff Association (WRSA for short) have introduced a few changes to help keep costs down and to make sure more Members take an active part. The Questionnaire, sent out with the last Newsletter, has given the Committee many ideas for different activities, hoping to appeal to a wider audience.

Many of the Members are well aware of the various activities of the WRSA but for those who are less familiar the following provides a brief outline. The Committee and Members of the WRSA arrange a number of events throughout the year allowing Members to meet with friends and keep in touch with the University. The best attended events are the lunches arranged in the Spring and Autumn, and the Christmas lunch. There is usually a guest speaker at both the Spring and Autumn lunches and this allows the Members to hear about the work being carried out at the University.

The website is another source of information:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/assoc/rsa>,

The walking group activities were co-ordinated by Malcolm Wilding who also led the majority of the walks. For health reasons Malcolm stepped down from the Committee and resigned from his role. Walkers past and present will I am sure join the Committee in thanking Malcolm for his hard work over many years and wish him all the best for the future. We are fortunate in having Kay Rainsley take his place. If you wish to join the walking group please contact Kay, her details appear at the end of the Newsletter.

Colin Brummitt also resigned as Treasurer and Steve Van Toller as Chair of the WRSA, we thank both of them, they gave valuable service and will be hard acts to follow. We wish them all the best for the future. Joan Cole takes over the role of Chair and Terry Kemp is the new Treasurer.

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## Dates for your diary

Spring lunch on 29th April, 2013 in Scarman House

Speaker: Roger Boxall, Univeristy of Warwick Head of Landscaping

Walks see Page 7 for details

Spring Visit: Liverpool, 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2013

## **AGM and Lunch and talk, September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012**

Fifty nine Members attended the AGM and were informed by the Chairman of the work carried out by the Association during the year. He commented on the lower numbers attending and thought this may be due to the difficulty with parking. This has now been addressed and the Spring Lunch will be in Scarman House. He thanked those members of the Committee who were stepping down after years of valued service. He announced that Colin Brummitt as Treasurer and Malcolm Wilding as walks co-ordinator were giving up their membership of the Committee. He added that he would be stepping down as Chairman but staying on the Committee for a further year. He was delighted that Joan Cole had agreed to take the role of Chair and Terry Kemp the role of Treasurer and Kay Rainsley as Walks' co-ordinator. Other Members of the Committee also gave brief reports. The new Chair introduced herself to the Members and thanked Steve for the work he had done whilst in the Chair. After a hearty buffet lunch the attendees settled down to a presentation by David Coates one of the students awarded a Bursary in 2011-2012. David kindly produced the following article for the Newsletter, and may be contacted for comments or further information at D.J.Coates@warwick.ac.uk.

### **A Peep Behind the Curtain: Aristocratic Private and Amateur Theatricals in the Nineteenth Century**

#### **In the Beginning – Amateur Theatricals from 1500 to 1820**

While the debate continues over whether it was the chicken or the egg that first came into existence in 'the beginning', in the grand narrative of British theatre history, it is now well documented that the amateur performer appeared far earlier than the professional. We understand that the professional theatre of the Elizabethan age developed out of medieval religious performance forms which gradually moved beyond the church and into the streets, and into civic buildings. Professional performers then emerged in the shape of troupes of travelling players who were patronised by royalty and the aristocracy. Soon afterwards, purpose-built theatre spaces were constructed, including perhaps the most famous playhouse on earth, The Globe, which was erected in Southwark in 1599 and is celebrated thanks to you know who!

Despite the emergence of a professional theatre, amateur performing continued into the seventeenth century. Arguably the most fully researched amateur performances are the sumptuous Elizabethan and Jacobean Court masques, in which Queen Anne of Denmark famously performed. Besides these, performances occurred in the houses of the wealthy classes and in civic buildings such as the guildhalls. Later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries private and amateur theatricals could also be found on naval vessels, in army encampments around the world, in universities and schools, and in hospitals and mental asylums. Also in this period, amateur clubs and societies began to be established and these groups hired out professional theatre venues to perform in; they set up their own subscription theatres; and, later in the early twentieth century, these various groups were pulled together to resemble the interconnected amateur theatre movement which we see today. However, beyond the Jacobean court masques the amateur theatre has largely failed to be recognised as a significant field of study.

One of the few works to have been published on the study of amateur theatre is Sybil Rosenfeld's *Temples of Thespis: Some Private Theatres and Theatricals in England and Wales 1700 - 1820*. Rosenfeld, describes numerous theatricals arranged and performed by the aristocracy, nobility and landed gentry in their homes in the eighteenth century. Her case

studies include those at Blenheim Palace, Seaton Delaval and Woburn Abbey, and those hosted by the Margravine of Anspach at Brandenburg House, the Earl of Barrymore at Wargrave, and Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn at Wynnstay House in Denbighshire. In the Introduction to this book, Rosenfeld writes, "...the craze [for private theatricals] reached its climax in the 1780s, declined somewhat in the 1790s, increased again slightly in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, after that, petered out..."

### Why the Nineteenth Century?

Profuse evidence survives to counter Rosenfeld's chronology, suggesting that the craze for private and amateur theatricals continued throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century. My PhD thesis will explore examples of private and amateur theatricals in this neglected period and will recognise the importance of this form of entertainment in our understanding of social, cultural, theatrical, political and even economic histories.



Royal Theatricals 1852, in the Rubens Room at Windsor Castle  
From D J Coates collection

Instead of private theatricals petering out in the mid nineteenth century, we find them being patronised by Queen Victoria and the Royal Family and filtering down through all echelons of society. Queen Victoria was a patron of the arts and she and her consort, Prince Albert, frequently went to see performances at the professional theatres of London. She also invited the best of the London theatre companies to perform in her houses and palaces, and these events were enjoyed by all of the family and their guests. Sadly, these entertainments came to an abrupt end when Prince Albert died suddenly in 1861 and Queen

Victoria went into a period of mourning which lasted for the rest of her life.

Interestingly, although Queen Victoria never came out of mourning to return to the *public* playhouses after Prince Albert's death, she did continue to show her passion for the arts. In later life, in the 1890s, she once again invited theatrical performances into her homes. At Balmoral in Scotland and Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, the royal family put together their own amateur productions, which included the Queen's youngest daughter, Princess Beatrice, in the cast. The professional theatricals at Windsor Castle were also reinstated in the late nineteenth century and the court was invited to see productions there, including Gilbert and Sullivan's, *The Gondoliers*, in 1891.

Queen Victoria's renewed interest in private theatricals in the 1890s no doubt influenced the most spectacular of all of the nineteenth century's private theatricals - those arranged by the eighth Duchess of Devonshire at Chatsworth House in Derbyshire. The Duchess of Devonshire was one of the greatest society hostesses of her age. After witnessing a series of successful theatrical performances produced by local amateurs in Chatsworth's Carriage House in 1895, she made the decision to transform her Ball Room into a state of the art, fully functioning private theatre, to add another dimension to her entertaining capabilities. The

theatre's conversion began in January 1896 and was completed a few months later. From 1897 onwards performances were held in the theatre almost annually to celebrate New Year and Twelfth Night. At these entertainments, Prince Edward and Princess Alexandra were the chief guests, first as Prince and Princess of Wales, and then as King and Queen.



The Chatsworth House Theatre, Photographed in 1907  
© Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth.  
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In my research I've come across over one hundred and fifty houses in Britain that hosted private and amateur theatricals in the nineteenth century and I believe that this list is merely the tip of the iceberg. Beyond this, I've found evidence of theatricals across Europe - in Paris, Madrid, Vienna, Florence, Rome, Geneva, St Petersburg, Moscow and numerous other cities which were fashionable destinations in the nineteenth century. It is also important to realise that private theatricals were not only a European phenomenon, but in fact a global one, with my findings including a sketch titled 'Dressing for Private Theatricals' from nineteenth century Japan. Private theatricals were a common social activity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and were the equivalent to a ball or a dinner party, but for some reason this form of entertainment has been brushed under the carpets of Britain's great country and town houses. The surviving evidence to prove their existence has lain dormant in copious collections and archives. Dormant, of course, until now!

### **Why is it Important to do this Research?**

My passion and enthusiasm for this wonderful field of research cannot be doubted. Nor can it be challenged that there is a vast amount of fascinating, untapped evidence which survives from the widespread popularity of private and amateur theatricals in this period. However, what people constantly struggle to understand is why this research is important. At first, I too found this difficult to comprehend. It was only when I had my very own 'Eureka!' moment, not too long ago, that everything seemed to fall into place and I was able to answer this quite daunting question. Now, each time I find an exciting photograph or manuscript hidden away in an archive, I am faced with the wise words of an inquisitive former lecturer – "and so?".

There are numerous reasons why I believe private and amateur theatricals need greater recognition in theatre studies and in theatre history. First and foremost this is because amateurs by definition perform for their own enjoyment, and have no drive for commercial success. Without this pressure, they therefore have the potential to be revolutionary. Whilst

in today's society very few private or amateur groups attempt to push boundaries, amateur theatre in the nineteenth century could, and occasionally would, create a stir. We find that numerous plays that had been banned from public performance by the Lord Chamberlain, under the strict censorship laws that governed the theatre in this period, were instead performed by amateur clubs in private. At the *fin de siècle*, for example, when the campaign for female emancipation was gaining pace, plays which challenged Victorian gender norms and had been given the red light by the Examiner of Plays, instead made their way onto private and amateur stages.

Private and amateur theatricals then could also be political. Audiences at Chatsworth House's Christmas pantomime in 1904 (*Cinderella and the Magic Slipper* by Leo Trevor) saw a very modern adaptation of the well known story of Cinderella, filled with topical allusions. *The Derby Mercury* reported that: "Mr Trevor's Cinderella evinced no desire whatever to go to a ball, but, with the aid it is true of a magic silver-slipper, found her way to a public hall, where she took part very acceptably in a political meeting and entertainment, promoted by a cryptic organisation known as the 'Cowslip League'."

As Chatsworth's audience included the Prime Minister, numerous politicians, members of the Royal Family, various members of the peerage and the local gentry, it is fairly significant that issues such as the New Woman, economic difficulties and foreign policy were addressed in performance.

Not only could private theatricals be revolutionary in content, but also in the way they were presented. At Chatsworth, for example, there was a fully-functioning private theatre which was essentially a miniature London playhouse. The main difference was that the Chatsworth House Theatre held around 300 people in its audience, whereas in some cases the London theatres could accommodate well over 2000. Thus, the Chatsworth House Theatre was almost unique in being small scale but able to afford the best in all of its facilities, from costume design and scenery, to state of the art electric lighting equipment. The result of this was a fantastically equipped intimate venue which created a very different theatrical experience from the public playhouses and other entertainment venues of the period. Leo Trevor, the stage manager at Chatsworth, wrote in an article for the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1903, "The effect 'from the front' is excellent. I sometimes think that our footlights are not so strong in proportion to the headlights as they are in bigger theatres, and the light distributed by this arrangement renders those terrible red-cheeks, coal-black eyes, and alabaster foreheads of musical comedy unnecessary. For I am told that this primitive method of colouring is employed to prevent the face looking sallow and dirty in that fierce light which beats upon a stage." In W. G. Elliot's book of 1898, *Amateur Clubs and Actors*, Trevor writes, "Of course in very large houses, such as Chatsworth, Craig-y-Nos, West Dean, or Tranby Croft, where you have perfect bijou theatres fitted with electric light, with scenery painted by excellent artists, where you can get night and morning effects, and where properties and furniture are of the best, the amateur is in clover, and really gets a fair chance of showing what he can do. If with all these assistants to his art he cannot make a hit before one of those friendly audiences, let him give up acting and take to manly sports - say spillikins or dominoes."

While private and amateur theatricals arguably pushed boundaries and experimented with new technologies in intimate venues, they also had the potential to pose a genuine threat to the professional theatre and to damage its economy. Rosenfeld tells us in *Temples of Thespis* that in the late eighteenth century, "...so popular were theatricals ... in high society that winter bookings at Bath were seriously affected by those at Blenheim [Palace], Hinchinbrook [House] and Richmond House". Similarly, *The Era* of 9 January 1842 says

that at some theatres, "...the directors complain[ed] that they have at present some of the high nobility for competitors".

Although this may suggest that private and amateur theatricals harmed the theatre profession, it is actually more likely that the profession benefitted from the popularity of amateur theatricals. On the one hand, those who took a keen interest in amateur acting were frequent visitors to the professional playhouses, often using these visits to study their favourite performers. On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, my research has revealed that the same costumiers, perruquiers, lighting assistants, scene painters, dance mistresses and stage hands that worked in the theatre profession were hired out for assistance with private theatricals. Many of these sectors of the theatre profession seem to have not only provided for private and amateur theatricals but were in fact reliant upon them for survival. In the nineteenth century private and amateur theatricals were so fashionable that some businesses specifically targeted the affluent market who indulged in them. The publisher Samuel French, for example, made his fortune by gearing his business towards amateurs, churning out cheap play texts primarily for the amateur performer to use at home. Later, his business began to hire out scenery, make-up, an entire fit-up theatre and other theatrical apparel.

Numerous other arguments have emerged from my research to answer the 'and so?' question, but I have not the space here to talk about each of them. In brief, private and amateur theatricals:

- 1) were an opportunity to trial new plays;
- 2) were a training ground for performers;
- 3) gave a voice to women, often in situations which were not as 'private' as they may at first seem;
- 4) were a British export which were taken around the world on the grand tour and performed by and for the armed forces and on board naval vessels; and
- 5) created a circle of what I term 'professional amateurs'; a group who could not tread the boards as professional performers due to their given rank and status, but were well known and celebrated for their talents.

## The Now

I firmly believe that the study of private and amateur theatricals has a huge amount to contribute to our understanding of nineteenth century social, cultural, political, theatrical and economic histories. It is a huge privilege to have found such a fascinating field of research which can be understood by and engages with scholars in numerous disciplines. However, the work also has appeal outside of the University environment.

In the initial stages of my PhD my topic caught the attention of the National Trust and they were keen to use the findings of my work



The Chatsworth Theatre 2012. The Chatsworth Players on stage.  
Photographed by David Screen

to reignite lost histories in their houses. The WRSA very generously awarded me a bursary to allow me to fulfil one such project at Chatsworth House. This project is a dream of mine, to see the Chatsworth House Theatricals of 1903 re-staged in all of their glory with the original plays, music, scenery and replica costumes inside the Chatsworth House Theatre in 2013 (110 years after they were originally staged). In the last few months, the likelihood of this dream becoming a reality has finally increased.

I ultimately think myself very lucky to find that my research is not restricted to the world of academia, but in fact can permeate into a more popular history which I hope that the public at large will very soon be able to interact with and enjoy.

*David Coates*

## **Walking group news and walk reports**

### **Walks – March to June 2013**

<b><u>Day/Date/Area of walk</u></b>	<b><u>Walk Leader</u></b>
<b>Wednesday, 20th March</b> Stratford upon Avon	Richard Morris
<b>Tuesday, 9th April</b> Castle Bromwich	Frances Halstead
<b>Monday, 20th May</b> Hatton	June Clarke
<b>Wednesday, 12th June</b> Coventry town walk to take in religious buildings	Eleanor Nesbitt

For more detailed information about the walks please contact Kay Rainsley.

## **Walks reports**

### **Report on Burton Dassett Walk, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

I could not believe the lovely morning that greeted us on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> July – “SUN”.

That was something that was in short supply the month previous when we researched and altered the walk. The rain had encouraged growth on the nettles plus the rape seed crop. At one point Derek and I stood at the edge of a field where the farmer had planted straight across the public footpath! We could not see over the rape due to its height. With Derek behind me taking a compass bearing I separated the crop in front of us. That was how we crossed the field, which was hard work and time consuming. I realised a new route needed

to be found as this experience was not a pleasure. Our WRSA walks should be an enjoyable day out.

Sixteen members met at Burton Dassett Tower, 15 to walk the other member joining us at



“The Avon” for lunch. The conditions under foot had dried up considerably due to the four dry days preceding the walk. Large areas by gates of bog and water, due to cattle, diminished greatly. Even the bull in the field paid no attention to us, not wishing to expend energy in such heat.

We had many stops to take on liquid and soon everyone was wearing the minimum of clothes. Sun hats and sun screen were being applied. Flowers were appearing in the meadow and a muntjak deer was resting in the shade.

At Hill farm were some giant steam tractors, the kind with a cable that stretched across the field ploughing the land between them. A tall square caravan that could be towed behind the steam tractors was also stored nearby; reminders of a bygone age.

The group was extremely hot when it reached “The Avon”, the real ale provided by the landlord was said to be extremely good, as too was the food. After a leisurely lunch we set off to walk the uphill stretch back to Burton Dassett. On reaching the lovely Burton Dassett church all of us were so glad to find it open. The shade provided inside was very welcome by all. The stonework and lovely stained glass windows were admired by the group as we sat dripping in its pews.

Ever resilient we set about the final half mile to the cars. An ice-cream vendor was pleased to see a large group, we added to his queue of children and parents. A taxing walk in such heat, but lovely scenery of English villages, country side, cattle and beautiful gardens, more importantly great company.

*Janet Dale*

### **Report on Berkswell Walk, August 29th 2012 - Soggy and Boggy**

Numbers had been rising steadily for the planned August foray into the Berkswell countryside. The Bear Inn, formerly known as The Bear and Ragged Staff, is a Grade II listed 16<sup>th</sup> Century Tavern ideally placed for exploration of the surrounding farmland having once been part of the Berkswell Estate. However, as the rain fell steadily so did the number of participants. My list of 26 dissipated to 13 diehards.

The fields were dripping, so much so that tiny rivers of water ran down the ridges and collated in pools of red ooze. Gamely we marched past the sodden ears of golden corn which should have been swaying gently under a summer sun. The route took



us via a large number of cows with their calves, one lone bull although I'm not sure that he was lonely, some ponies and a horse which was accompanied by three cheery looking alpacas. I decided to pause at this point to take a couple of snaps, one of said alpacas and one of dripping walkers before they became too saturated. Our songbirds were strangely silent, only the sound of boots squelching and the occasional expletive was discernible against the constant backdrop of falling rain. We broke out of the bog and crossed the road to Berkswell Station before descending into yet another set of miry fields.

We covered a considerable distance along part of the disused railway line before veering left towards two fishing pools. Here we were treated, if not greeted, by a number of anglers enjoying themselves huddled beneath their signature umbrellas and staring into the depths of the dark water. On previous walks my nostrils had been assailed by the scent of frying bacon from the café perched on the edge of the pools. Today I was disappointed, either the chef was not working or the rain had rendered it ineffective. I then considered that it might have been too much of a temptation for the dripping walkers and plodded on.

The Berkswell sheep grazing outside Ram Hall, famed for their sheep's milk cheese, fared no better. Their woollen coats, whilst affording them protection from the, by now, incessant deluge looked heavy, like their udders. But we were on the last leg of our ordeal and the ensuing trudge through water logged grass soon led us on to the tarmac.

I did ask whether anyone would like to go the extra mile, well 30 yards to view Berk's Well, cited in the Domesday Book, where allegedly people were immersed to baptise them but my reception was low key. Obviously everyone thought that there had been more than enough immersing for one day. One group member commented that mine was 'the wettest walk that had ever been undertaken by the group' – a dubious accolade. We all agreed that the sense of achievement from having stayed the course far outweighed the discomfort of having done so before there was a discernible stampede for the shelter of cars or the pub. Those of us who had either packed spare clothes or who had managed, against all odds, to remain dry partook of tasty meals before heading home. I pondered on the title of my write up. Ah well, at least it wasn't foggy.

*Kay Rainsley*

### **Report on Hatton and Budbrooke Walk, October 29<sup>th</sup> 2012**

This 5 mile walk, which started at the Hatton Arms, attracted 23 walkers for a route that,



despite the weather and time of year, only had a few sections of muddy footpath. More importantly for the overall speed of the group, there were no stiles to negotiate. The walk began with a stroll along the canal towpath past several of the canal's cascade of locks before diverting under the Birmingham to Warwick railway to open fields and then minor country side roads. The path then led to St Michael's Church at Budbrooke, whose cemetery has many graves of First World War soldiers in the Royal

Warwickshire Regiment. After skirting the Warwick Parkway station complex the return leg of the walk took us through several arable fields behind the old Hatton Central Hospital with the

autumn colours of the trees adding to the attractiveness of this walk. Finally we returned to the Hatton Arms for an eagerly anticipated lunch.

*Malcolm John Cooper*

### **Report on Stockton Walk, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2012**

Leading a walk can be great fun, but the weather always introduces a note of anxiety as the day of the walk approaches. This was especially so on this occasion, as there was almost an inch of rain on the day before, and it was decided on the evening prior to the walk that a length of road might be substituted for a part of the route that, running along field and woodland boundaries, was known to be soft except in very dry weather. On the day itself, checking the web at 7 am revealed that the A423 was closed by floodwater at Marton, but by 8:30 am it was open again. There was still some water on the road there at 9:15 am, and rather more near the Blue Lias Inn on the Long Itchington-Stockton road, but not deep enough to bar our progress. A quick inspection of one end of the problematic section of the walk showed that it looked very wet, and the alternative route was confirmed.

Happily, all those who had signed up for the walk turned up at the Crown, some having had to make detours around flood-blocked roads to get there. Having ordered our lunches we set off a few minutes late in sunshine and a stiff breeze, and headed northwards out of the village. Having crossed a grassy field we turned



along a track around a disused quarry which eventually brought us to a bridge over the Grand Union canal. This we followed westwards as far as the bridge close to the Blue Lias pub, where we paused for a time and watched the cars and vans negotiating the flooded section of road which was as deep as it had been a couple of hours earlier. Then along the substituted road section until the A426 which we followed briefly before picking up a path over a hill with extensive views. We stopped for a photograph and then headed back down into Stockton and to a warm welcome in the pub. After enjoying our good-value lunches we departed still in sunshine, with the next threatened band of rain still some hours away.

*Chris Hall*

### **Report on Kenilworth walk , Wednesday 23rd January**

This was the rescheduled December walk, cancelled because of lack of numbers. This January walk had a much better response until two days before, when the wintry weather took its toll and cancellations poured in. However, the seven survivors departed from St Nicholas's church in bright weather, walking on cleared roads or compacted snow north up Hollis Lane, past The Spring (where Miss Martin lived), to join the Greenway. This is a new shared use pedestrian-cyclist-bridleway on the route of the Kenilworth to Berkswell branch of the old London to Birmingham Railway, closed in 1965. We followed it back into Kenilworth, making a diversion up part of the very new Sustrans NR52 spur towards the University, to see the 'Portrait Bench' (see photo). The scenery was winter wonderland all the way, especially the snow on the trees in Crackley Wood. A convivial lunch was enjoyed at The

Virgins & Castle, High Street, Kenilworth. We hope to offer this walk again in more clement weather – before part of it may disappear under the route of HS2!



Walkers at the 'Portrait Bench', with ghostly representations of (L to R) Miss Helen Martin, major University benefactor; Edward Fardon, Stoneleigh cycle pioneer; and John Starley, inventor of the first recognisable modern bicycle.

*Richard Morris*

### **Summary of Questionnaire responses**

I would like to thank the 37 Members who completed the questionnaire sent with the last newsletter. The number received was rather disappointing bearing in mind there are over 200 Members. To those who offered to organise an event I send a special thank you.

The results are not totally unexpected. It seems that 1 day outings are the most popular but there is reasonable support for 2 or more days. The Floriade trip was cited as an example of a successful longer trip. Suggestions for 2 day trips included a London visit, attending a matinee theatre performance, and a visit to Buckingham Palace, an Art Exhibition or Museum. Accommodation in London may be too expensive so this may need to be outside the city. Some other multiple day trips could be to the Eden project and neighbouring gardens or Stately homes; a trip to Stoke on Trent to the Wedgewood museum and Trentham gardens possibly ending with a bit of shopping at some Outlet stores; a seaside

**Table 1: Summary of Responses to Questionnaire**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>No of responses</b>
Walking	28
Garden Visit including garden shows, e.g. Chelsea, Malvern, Hampton Court.	27
Stratford Theatre	25
Visit famous houses	23
City Visit	22
London Theatre	22
Coventry Theatre	18
Skittles	18
Music (classical, jazz, light)	15
Book club	11

theatre visit with an overnight stop. A summary of the top 10 suggestions is shown in Table1.

It seems a variety of walk types would be welcomed; pavement walks and walks without stiles in particular were mentioned. Information about walks is no longer circulated to all the Members. Those interested in joining a walk of any kind or just wishing to be kept informed should contact Kay Rainsley and give her your email address.

Theatre visits seem very popular and it is envisaged that a theatre trip to Stratford to attend an Understudy performance will be arranged (Seats cost £5). Those who have attended such performances have found them to be excellent. Other theatre venues will also be considered including Coventry and Birmingham.

Many of the Stately Homes and gardens mentioned have been visited by the WRSA but it may be time to revisit some popular ones. This also applies to the cities mentioned. Two frequently cited cities which will be considered are Chester and Liverpool.

There is some interest in a Book Club but it would depend on the type of club and if there are other Members, who did not respond, who would be interested in joining.

As there was a willing organiser for a Skittles event there is an article in this newsletter to seek information on how many would participate.

There are plenty of ideas but finding a Member willing to spend the time and effort in planning an event is far more difficult. Thanks to all who have put their names forward. If any member has a specific event they would be willing to organise please contact me and let me know how we can proceed.

*Liz Prichard*

## Visit Reports

### Report on a four day visit in June to the 6<sup>th</sup> Floriade, 2012 held in Venlo, Holland

This is a longer report than usual for a visit but this is the first foreign trip and it was 4 days long.

**Day One:** This involved us all having to get up very early in order to meet the coach at 5 am on the Warwick campus. We congratulated ourselves that we had selected a pickup point outside the Costcutter shop, which affords overhead shelter, just in case it was raining, as it was. Sheila, our coach driver, arrived on time and after loading our bags and making sure that all 24 of us had boarded, set off for Rugby to pick up the remaining passengers. In order to avoid the M1, we took a winding country road from Rugby to the M40. Once on the M40, we became aware that the window on the main door of the coach had begun, alarmingly, to flap about. Sheila decided that, rather than stop to await assistance, which would have involved getting all 48 of her passengers to disembark in the rain, she would drive on the hard shoulder at a slow speed. This was an 'interesting' 20 miles or so experience for us all and we were relieved to reach the Oxford Services without police intervention. Sheila subsequently proceeded to 'patch up' the window quite adeptly, whilst passengers had a welcome 'comfort', coffee and breakfast break. We arrived without further incident at the service area outside the Eurotunnel terminal in Folkestone. Here help awaited us, as Sheila, who was fast proving to be considerably resourceful, had telephoned ahead for assistance, regarding our situation as an emergency. Once the window had been made fully secure we sped on to the terminal but, sadly, we were informed we had arrived too late for our scheduled crossing to Calais and would have to wait for a later train.

The wait was not too long but it made a considerable difference to our travelling time through Belgium because we arrived at the Brussels's infamous Peripherique during the evening rush hour. The congestion was similar to that on the M25 and other UK motorways at almost

any time! We arrived at our destination, the Hotel Riche, situated in the attractive town of Valkenburg and, although later than expected, we were speedily allocated comfortable rooms and offered a welcome drink with the evening meal that awaited us.

**Day Two:** After a night's sleep and breakfast we walked a short distance to the town centre to pick up our coach and set off to the Floriade Festival site in Venlo. Our coach was allocated a parking lot a considerable walk from the main Floriade entrance. We stayed in our group whilst Sheila went off to collect our entry tickets. It was very crowded around the immediate vicinity of the site but once inside the crowds quickly dispersed.

The huge exhibition site was set in the main Dutch horticultural area, covering a much larger area than that of Floriade 2002. Many of us traversed diagonally across the entire park on what was described as 'the longest cableway in the Netherlands'. This afforded us an aerial view of the site, thereby enabling us to choose which areas we wanted to visit on foot, since it would be impossible to cover the entire site of this World Horticultural Expo, staged only



once every ten years in the Netherlands, in one day. We viewed a large lake and extensive areas of woodland with broad pathways through them where, later, we heard recordings of bird songs and animal sounds from hidden speakers as we walked through the woods. An amphitheatre, where various daily performances were

staged, had been built into a hill and there were many international gardens, a vast orchid and indoor plants house, dazzling displays of exquisite flowers, plants and trees from around the world and numerous eating places and coffee stops offering visitors very welcome refreshment.

Once on the ground, we were able to explore the international gardens which surrounded traditional buildings from each country represented. The overall effect of these was spectacular but somewhat spoilt by the fact that the buildings were being used primarily to sell rather poor quality trinkets.

The orchids we saw in the vast indoor display of plants and flowers were spectacular with their incredible shapes and colours and we noted that this section was maintained by volunteer Japanese women dressed in colourful kimonos. During part of the afternoon a group of us spent time listening to a local choir performing traditional pieces from different



countries. This was entertaining and also provided us with a welcome rest. All too soon it was time to return to the coach and it was at this point we discovered just how far it was to walk across the front of 76 coaches before sinking wearily into our seats for the return journey to our hotel.

After dinner a group of us walked around the town where groups of Holland football supporters, dressed mostly in the national Dutch colour, orange, although somewhat subdued (the Dutch had just lost their opening match in the Euro soccer tournament) were still showing good humour and enjoying drinks and food at the town's many pavement bars and cafes. It was a great atmosphere and we wondered whether England supporters in similar circumstances would have behaved so well.

**Day Three:** During the drive back from Floriade on Day Two, our coach driver, Sheila, had pointed out that if we were to make the planned trip to Maastricht the next day, it being a Sunday, everywhere would be closed. She suggested that instead she could take us to Monschau, a small town in Germany set in a valley with a river running through it; this was a favourite tourist spot which would not be 'closed.' Having agreed to this plan, we left our hotel after breakfast on Sunday and drove to Monschau, taking in a somewhat disappointing, not to mention underwhelming, sighting of a section of the Siegfried Line along the way. After pointing it out to us Sheila amused us by breaking into the song, 'We're going to hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line.'

The lovely hamlet of Monschau is said to have been a spot favoured by Hitler who banned development in the town; it was used as a convalescent area for German officers during the Second World War. The town had a glass factory selling a vast array of glass ornaments, jewellery, scarves and other items likely to be purchased by tourists and within this complex



there was also a cafe where some of us had lunch and a marvellous exhibition of sand carvings. A pleasant walk over a bridge, along the river and through woodland took the tourist into a delightful area of small shops and cafes and most of our party, if not all, enjoyed browsing until it was time to return.

Arriving back in Valkenburg to a gloriously sunny afternoon we found that a Living Statues competition was taking place throughout the town. A novel feature was a children's section

in the local park and the whole event, involving so many and various entrants, was very impressive. Some of our Members took a chairlift located next to the hotel up to a church set high above the town whilst others managed a little more shopping as, despite it being a Sunday, many of the town's shops were open because this was a day that attracted crowds of visitors to the town. Interestingly, this part of Holland, protruding into Germany, is not as flat as most of the other areas of the Dutch countryside.

**Day Four:** After an early breakfast we set off for home. On the coach drive back to the Eurotunnel we stopped for lunch and the chance to buy chocolates at a large Belgian chocolate outlet and later we stopped at a wine warehouse and were given the opportunity (and a very generous allowance per passenger, given the coach was full and luggage capacity was limited), to bring wine back with us. As we got near to the coast we drove into rain for the first time since we had left the UK. Arriving at the Eurotunnel terminal we just had time for tea and cakes before the coach boarded the train for our return journey under the Channel. Back in England we did not escape the rain which, at times, was very heavy, making it a difficult drive for Sheila. We arrived back at the University outside the Costcutter Shop by 9 pm to find our various means of transport home awaiting us.

This first overseas trip for the WRSA, we felt, had overall met our expectations; our hotel was comfortable, providing good wholesome food and helpful staff, our excursions had been

interesting and enjoyable and Sheila, our innovative driver/courier, after a somewhat shaky start, had done us proud. Judging by the expressions of appreciation we have since received or heard indirectly about the trip, it was a great success and it is to be hoped that it is not going to be the last. Indeed, we have already received requests to organise another similar trip; some people have even suggested we make the next one slightly longer!

In the light of this apparent demand for another trip abroad, we are thinking along the lines of a visit to Amsterdam, taking in the Keukenhof Gardens, possibly in the Spring of 2014. If anyone is interested in this or has any other ideas about a future trip, please email Sam Van Toller, email address, [sandra.vantoller@ntlworld.com](mailto:sandra.vantoller@ntlworld.com).

*Steve and Sam Van Toller*

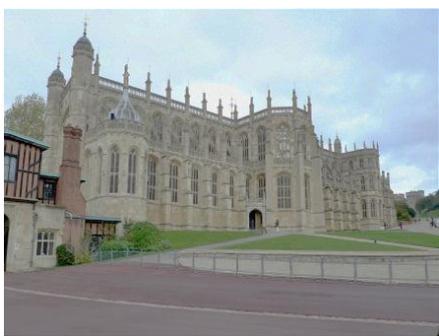
### **Report of visit to Windsor Castle, 7<sup>th</sup> November, 2012**

Take a group of WRSA Members, a sunny day and a brand new Harry Shaw coach, that's all you need for a great day out. Once *en route* we could sit back and enjoy the autumnal colours of a changing countryside. On arrival I dashed to the castle to collect the pre-booked tickets whilst our Members enjoyed a welcome drink or a stroll in the November sunshine. After distributing the tickets we all dispersed making our own way to the main entrance.

The castle originally a wooden structure was built by William the Conqueror in 1070 the guard to the western approaches to London. The site was chosen because of its elevated position. Successive monarchs have made considerable changes to the original design, the most recent after the fire in 1992.



Our first visit was to the magnificent St George's Chapel the architectural highlight of the castle built between 1475 and 1528; this is one of England's finest late Gothic works. Here ten monarchs are buried in the Chapel vaults.



At this point we made our way to the State Apartments, first viewing the Queen Mary's Dolls' house. This is a superb example of a building in miniature, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1924 on a 1:12 ratio. From here we entered the main rooms containing many treasures including fine furnishings, works of art, tapestries and an excellent array of armoury. The jewel in the crown is the magnificent St George's Hall, fully restored after the disastrous 1992 fire.

Leaving the hall we were able to enjoy the fabulous views, from the battlements, of Windsor Great Park and beyond.

After three hours it was time to exit and head for a local hotel for a much needed luncheon break. Finally we all assembled for a relaxing journey home.

This was another most enjoyable day out.

*Alan Foster, Events Organiser*

## **Report of visit to Chatsworth House on 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2012**

The main reason for visiting Chatsworth at this time of year was to see the house decorated for Christmas. Our coach left the University around 9 am and we were so lucky to have a most wonderful winter day for our trip. There were 46 retired staff members and friends on the visit. Our route was via the M69 and M1 and took us about 2 hours. We had a timed entry to the house for 11.15 am.

Chatsworth House is situated in North Derbyshire, 9 miles west of Chesterfield. It is the seat of the Duke of Devonshire and has been home to the Cavendish family since Bess of Hardwick in 1549. It stands on the banks of the River Derwent in beautiful parkland. The present Duke, Peregrine Cavendish, is the son of Andrew, the 11<sup>th</sup> Duke who married Deborah, one of the famous Mitford sisters. Andrew died in 2004 but Deborah, the Dowager Duchess, is still alive and very active in promoting the estate and increasing its visitor income. This is evidenced by the number of shops and catering outlets. The original catering facility was an outdoor tap 'for dogs'.



The theme for Chatsworth at Christmas was nursery rhymes, my favourite being the figure of the Wolf in Red Riding Hood lying snuggled into bed. Several of the room stewards were dressed in costumes representing various nursery rhyme figures. Captain Hook was threatening to 'remove the gizzards' of some visitors. There were Christmas trees in various parts of the house, decorated in different colour themes, the most lovely, I thought, being decorated totally in white. In the

Library toy mice were set amongst the shelves of books. Decorating the house must have been great fun. Children from local schools had produced some really interesting decorations, giving the effect of stained glass.

Although we had a timed entry to the house we were not pressed to 'move on'. It seems that for most stately houses the tour route finishes in the shop. However, most of us were ready for lunch and some wise people headed for the restaurant rather than looking around this shop. The refreshments were, from the comments I heard, good, and certainly mine were very enjoyable. There was plenty of time to take a walk in the gardens or around the parkland. The weather was very cold but the setting sun over the Derbyshire hills was quite spectacular.

This trip was most enjoyable; good company, no driving, no navigating, and no organising - Jean (Norman) had taken on this duty – thanks Jean. Many of us are looking forward to the next trip.

*Pat Scott*

### **Christmas lunch**

Eighty eight members and friends attended the Christmas lunch on 13<sup>th</sup> December in Scarman house. It was a good opportunity to catch up with friends and meet some new Members. Many enjoyed a festive drink in the bar before sitting down at the tables set with the starter and crackers with party hats for all. As usual the meal was excellent with plenty of choice for all tastes and the wine flowed freely. Following the

meal we relaxed in the lounge area where coffee and mince pies were served. The plates were frequently replenished. The picture shows Jean Norman the WRSA Secretary (on the right) relaxing with other members after her hard work in organising this excellent event. This was a very good start to the festive season and I am sure you will join me in giving a big thank you to Jean and to the Scarman House staff.



### **WRSA Student Bursaries 2012-13**

This year the WRSA Committee approved four awards totalling £1250, which were presented on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The projects receiving support are shown below.

The winners are shown with three members of the WRSA Bursary Committee; the 4<sup>th</sup> member (author of the article) is shown at the end.



Left to right: Joan Cole (Chair WRSA), Michael Hale, Jamie Goodhart, Alun Rhys Williams, David Levesley, Cathryn Turhan, Georgie Hale, Steve Van Toller.

#### **David Levesley (3<sup>rd</sup> Year English and Comparative Literature)**

David is a co-author with Cathryn Turhan of a play 'The House Beautiful'. David has written a number of stage works including 'FML: The Musical' which has been performed both at a number of local venues and the Victoria and Albert Museum. The aim is now to stage the play at the Edinburgh Fringe, and the application sought funding for the costs of registration, marketing and production. The award was £350.

#### **Alun Rhys Williams (PhD English Literature)**

Alun's project is a monthly magazine 'The New Pamphleteer' of wide coverage, e.g. the 2012 Olympics, Afghanistan, the Eurozone crisis, authored by both early career researchers and established academics and specialists. The articles are aimed at a generalist rather than a specialist audience, and a number of leading academics have already offered their support. Initially, the magazine will be free of charge, the production costs being met by advertising and patrons. The award was £500, made in two instalments, initially £100 and the second of £400 being subject to progress.

### **Jamie Goodhart (2<sup>nd</sup> Year Medical Student)**

Jamie is planning a mountaineering expedition with six colleagues to Antarctica for which funding has been secured. The request was for £300 to mount a photographic exhibition based on his experiences; this will be shown to the University, schools and the wider mountaineering community. The award was £250.

### **Michael Hale (3<sup>rd</sup> Year Medical Student)**

Michael has recently acted as workshop co-ordinator for the 'Peer Support and Debate Day' at Warwick Medical School. Debate is seen as a useful skill for individuals competing for jobs, working in a competitive environment, and 'arguing' for the rights of patients. The application was for funding to allow Michael to attend the first 'Medical Debating Congress' to be held at Oriel College, Oxford, on December 14-16, 2012. Michael plans to organise similar events at Warwick in the future. The award was for £150 to cover registration charges.

*Terry Kemp*

WRSA Bursary Committee member



## **Possible Future activity**

### **Skittles Evening**

Following up on recently submitted ideas for future WRSA activities, Steve and I thought Members might be interested in a skittles evening at the Westwood Club, which is very close to the University, in Westwood Heath Road. We both play regularly at this club and have recently hosted a family party there, which proved a great success.

Tickets would cost £6 per person and this would include use of the function room, skittles alley, which is a full size long floor alley with 9 pins and 3 solid balls, full playing instructions (we have a brilliant MC) and buffet. There is also a cash bar in the function room. We usually play in teams of 4 but it is not necessary to come as a team; forming teams on arrival is a great way to get to know each other and the MC would assist and explain exactly what is required. Therefore, people would be invited either to come alone or with others. This particular form of skittles is great fun and we feel sure everyone would have a great night.



Having made enquires about cost, I am asking at this stage for members to contact me if they would be interested in attending such an event. I am not able to offer any dates until I know if people are interested but we were thinking that an evening around February/March 2013 would be good and the club would be very happy to host an event for us then or at any other time to suit us.

**Anyone who is interested in attending such an event, please contact Sam Van Toller, telephone: 01926 748327; email: [sandra.vantoller@ntlworld.com](mailto:sandra.vantoller@ntlworld.com)**

*Sam and Steve Van Toller*

## WRSA Membership

At the end of 2012 the membership of the WRSA was 257, during the year 14 new members joined and there were 21 who either resigned or who did not renew their membership. Sadly 3 of our members died during the year.

In spite of effort from the Committee and the Members, staff are retiring from the University unaware of the existence of the Retired Staff Association.

I would like to thank the 234 Members who have already responded to the Renewal of Membership request; in addition, since Christmas, we have 7 new Members. For those who put the renewal notice aside for dealing with later but cannot now lay their hands on the form, just contact me and I will send you another by post or by email. Closing date for renewals is 31 March 2013. I hope we all make an effort to get the membership up to 300 in 2013.

Membership of the Association keeps you in touch with the University and gives you many concessions; use of the Library, reduced membership fees for sporting activities, discount in the Book shop and invitations to many social events throughout the year. For Library usage only there is no charge but should you require the use of the Swimming Pool and/or play Racket Games there is an annual charge for Members of £49 and for each nominated family member the charge is £68. If in addition to these facilities you wish to use the Fitness Centre, the annual charge is £180 per Member and £204 for each family member. These fees are set at the start of each academic year.

For those who already have membership of the Sporting facilities please note that the renewal date for this may not be January (it depends on the date your subscription started). For those wishing to join please contact Esther Zaccarelli (Personnel Services, telephone 024 7657 4467).

*Bill Prichard* Membership Secretary

### COMMITTEE 2012/2013 CONTACT DETAILS

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