

Bournemouth and Beyond Discovery Group

Annual General Meeting December 6th 2022

Secretary's Report 2022

Good Evening everyone. This is my seventh annual report as Secretary.

This is a summary of the past year, so just sit back and relax.

It was not surprising with the virus still about that members only gradually returned. It was encouraging that at the start of the Spring term, 20 members attended. However I am pleased to report that numbers have increased a little during the year.

However numbers over the years have decreased. In 2011 there were some 63 members on the register and average attendance of 54 members. In 2017 those numbers on register had dropped from 63 to 43 and average attendance from 54 to 40 members. This last year numbers on register down again from 43 to 32 and average attendance down from 32 to 22. It is perhaps a sign of the times and of course as members grow older. Any ideas to increase membership would be most welcomed.

You can see why subscriptions have to increase, when a decline in attendance is coupled with increasing speaker costs. However I still believe the fees are great value for the number of speakers we have and the many interesting and varied topics covered.

Now a flavour of past events -

Spring programme. The 202 Spring programme began on the 25th of **January** with a talk from David Warehurst. Unfortunately he could not find the intended talk on his laptop, so he entertained us with a talk all about Ashly Cross in Poole. In 1833 this was part of Canford Magna

and only later became an independent village of Parkstone. This conservation area contains a number of listed buildings, including Canford Cottage at No 27 Pottery Road. The old school was built in 1833, St Peters Church in 1876 and the Park created in 1888 and officially opened by the Prince of Wales in 1890.

February started with an interesting insight into Life on the Fairground from Kay Townsend. She explained there were three travelling community groups, Fairground, Circus and Gypsy, the first two groups moving to engine power when possible. We learnt that the first recorded fair was in 1258 at Bampton in Devon, when people sold cloth and later produce. Charter fairs were granted by the King and they had to keep to specified dates, and Mop Fairs were often where folk out of work, wearing mop hats, sought work.

The following week, Colin van Geffen entertained us with a presentation about the airfields of the New Forest. There were 13 in total, the first opened in 1910 at East Boldre. . Christchurch airfield opened as a civil airfield, home to 10 airlines, flying to 17 UK destinations, This closed in 1939, but continued in use as a temporary airfield during WW2. There were some 450 temporary airfields created in the UK during WW2. This included Hurn, built in 1940 and used as a Special Duty Flight and VIP base.

Eileen Rawlings and colleagues then took us on a tour of the Browsea Open Air Theatre. The theatre began in 1964 by chance. The Bournemouth Little Theatre Club members performed regularly at the Palace Court Theatre and as the National Trust had just taken over Brownsea Island and opened to the public, some members thought it would be interesting to try an open air performance. The members are unpaid and profits are donated to local charities. During the evening we saw many costumes, together with books and photographs of past performances.

Jean Sutton continued her story about the Russians in Tuckton. She gave the first part in March 2020, just prior to the Covid 19 outbreak closure. This second talk was the story of one family member, a daughter of a Russian

language specialist within the Tuckton group, Melita Norwood. She was very much a socialist, excelled at school, a member of the Independent Labour Party and attending many demonstrations. She eventually worked as a secretary for a company engaged in the development of tube alloys, required for the development of atomic bombs. Whilst Britain collaborated with America, Russia was excluded. For many years Melita passed many secrets to Russia and was even decorated, as the most important spy for the KGB.

This was Jean's last talk, more than 50 years from her first. As a mark of appreciation, she was presented with a bouquet of flowers.

March started with an intriguing story, told by Phillip Browne, which split Dorchester society. This was the trial of farmer John Brake, accused of killing William Allen in 1850. Up until 1846, the “Corn Laws” applied, whereby foreign produced corn had a tariff added, making it dearer than home produced corn. Indeed the farmers had a monopoly, charging high prices. Sir Robert Peel was successful in persuading the Government to adopt free trade and repeal the Corn Laws in 1846. It was at an open meeting held in Dorchester to discuss the issue, chaired by the High Sheriff, with over 1,000 people attending, that got out of hand when William Allen, a young lad, was struck on the head and died. The coroner's hearing sat all night, but could not determine a clear verdict, so a trial was arranged. The trial lasted some 14 hours, with 13 witnesses, mostly labourers, giving evidence that they saw the event and John Brake was guilty. His defence team called even more witnesses, mostly landed gentry, who said John Brake was elsewhere. The jury took less than 5 minutes to give a not guilty plea. This caused uproar and it appears John Brake then left the county of Dorset for good.

Due to Covid we had to change speakers at short notice. Hattie Miles came to our rescue with a talk entitled “Licence to Thrill”. As the title suggests, this was all about Ian Fleming and the James Bond stories and the many

links to Bournemouth & Dorset. Ian wrote 14 Bond novels, the first published in 1953. Ian had a rotten younger life as he lost his Father at age 9 and hated his boarding school at Langton Matravers, with poor food and a sparten routine. However all experiences were helpful, as the estate next to the school belonged to the Bond family. In 1933 he worked for the writers news agency, spending some time in Russia and in 1946 had a holiday home in Jamaica. In 1950 he lived at St Margarets Bay in Kent and his coach service to London was the 007. However to show he loved his son, Ian wrote a book especially for him about cars. It was entitled “Chitty Chitty Bang Bang”!

Another substitute talk as a result of Covid. Steve Roberts gave a very interesting talk about Southampton. A city (granted in 1964) with over 250,000 inhabitants and covering some 28 square miles. In history it was a Roman fortress and in Saxon times called Hamwich (hence Hampshire) and then Medieval Southampton. It has been an important port since the Norman Conquest with a 13th Century Town Quay. As for important events, the town boasts the oldest bowling green, established in 1299 and still holding a “Knighthood” competition every year. In 1620 the Mayflower sailed to discover New England and in 1740 the town was advertised as a spa town, with West Quay baths filled from sea water. Then in 1912 the RMS Titanic sailed from Southampton and over 500 households lost someone as 1517 local people lost their lives. During the war, the spitfire aircraft was designed locally and many troops departed from here on Dday. Finally Southampton boasts the only city with a Geothermal power station, opening in 1981 and of course this year the city applied to become the City of Culture.

The programme concluded with talks about the Digby Family by Jane Ferentzi-Shephard and then an update of local hospitals from Keith Mitchell. We were away during this period and so missed these talks.

April 22. In April we started our outings. First with a visit to Russell Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, originally a family home. We were allowed to

explore the various rooms and levels at our own pace and this was followed by a welcome array of refreshments.

A little further afield, we visited Woodgreen Village Hall, which is near Fordingbridge. A most interesting hall with murals painted around the walls of country scenes. These were painted in 1931 and includes many village people resident at the time. Members also enjoyed a video explaining the history of the murals and of course afternoon tea.

Two weeks later we had a coach outing to Bradford-on-Avon. We left a coach at the Canal Basin on a rather cold day. Whilst some went for a walk, most sort shelter and hospitality for coffee and lunch. Afterwards we had a most enjoyable trip on the Canal, again with some welcome refreshment.

This was followed by a visit to the Arts University Bournemouth's Plastic Museum. Everybody seemed surprised by the range of objects on display and this was supported by very knowledgeable staff. We even learnt about making drinking cups out of old chewing gum!!

Then it was back to the coach for a visit to National Trust Properties, Winchester City Mill and Hinton Ampner. Two completely different properties. Whilst the Mill was compact, Hinton Ampner, in addition to the building had extensive gardens. It was a hot day and members sought the shade and refreshments. Unfortunately the lunch menu was sparse, which was disappointing. I have complained but did not even receive a reply.

We then took to the water with a trip by boat from Poole Quay to Wareham and back. There was time in Wareham to explore and or eat. Whilst windy on the water, across Poole Bay, several members embraced the breeze, travelling on the open top deck.

Another day, another coach outing. This time to Montacute House and Lytes Carey Manor, both National Trust properties. Montacute House is a late Elizabethan Mansion with gardens. Here we enjoyed coffee and lunch before departing to Lytes Cary Manor, a more compact property. It was

bought by the Jenner family in 1907 and rescued from decay.

Our final visit was to Walhampton School, near Beaulieu. We were shown an interesting video of the property history before joining our guide for an extensive walk around the gardens. Well it was mostly woodland with one or two lakes, but our guide was most knowledgeable about the trees and the preservation of the area.

Autumn programme. The Autumn talks started on the 4th October this year. I was away on holiday, but I understand members enjoyed the two talks from Joanna Gardener, entitled “Dogs Saving Lives – Super Sniffers” and “From Atlanta to Niagara” from Mike Webber.

October continued with a talk from Ian Schulz about his visit in 2019 to the Namib and Kalahan deserts. A little too hot and unforgiving for my liking, but some lovely photography of all types of creatures, particularly from within Erosha National Park.

Brian Margeton then spoke about two hundred years of channel crossings, between England and France, by plane, boats and trains. He explained that upto 1821 there were no harbours, so the trips could only be by sailing boats. This was followed by steam ships and stations were later added to allow trains to enter the ports. By 1930 cars were transported, loaded by cranes and the first car ferries entered service in 1952. Later we had the hovercraft and then the catermaran service and of course this all changed with the opening of the channel tunnel in 1994.

November started with a talk about the eventful life of the Duke of Monmouth, given by Brian & Jacqueline Sutton. Unfortunately Brian could not get the computer to work. However it was a most enjoyable history talk, during the reign of Charles 11, with a variety of hats and wigs and a very expressive Jacqueline.

The next week, Gez Mellers gave a talk entitled “Forensics – facts &

fiction”. He explained that he did not do well at school and started his working life by taking a job as a photographer, under the Government's work experience scheme. In 1994 he joined Hampshire Police as a photographer, joining others at scenes of crime. He took us through the development of forensics, detailing a “murder in a suitcase” investigation and explained the police personnel at a crime scene and also the experts who examined the various samples taken from site.

Rosemary Legrand was due to “Explore the South Island of New Zealand” the following week, but the evening had to be cancelled due to her illness.

However on the Thursday of that week some 25 members enjoyed our Annual Lunch, this time at the Escoffier Restaurant in Bournemouth. It took a little extra organising this year, but everybody attended and I understand all enjoyed the meal, although Ros was the unfortunate recipient of spilt drinks!!

The final talk this term was given by Ron Taylor and the topic, “Islands of the Western Med”. Ron took us through many islands, some French, Italian, Spanish and Independent, from the Balearics to Lampeduca, all at sometime influenced by the British. We even learnt that Menorca is the only island cooking with butter, not olive oil. Roy is a very good speaker and it was a most enjoyable presentation.

In conclusion, I must thank a number of people. To Ros for arranging the Autumn programme of talks and co-chairing the evenings. For John, Val and Ann for arranging the Spring programme of talks and for John co-chairing the evenings, for arranging the hall, liaising with the Caretaker and for kindly hosting committee meetings at his home.

Also to Yvonne for dealing with the membership, watching the finances and completing the attendance records each week. Also to Tina and her helpers for ensuring that every week, when we have an interval, we have a nice cup of tea or coffee and biscuits.

To Ann, Val and John for organising the coach and self-drive trips .Also a thank you to all the members of the Management Committee for their input at the meetings and general assistance in running the Group.

Last, but by no means least, a very big thank you to my wife Patricia, for her support and undertaking various tasks, to enable me to complete my Secretarial duties. It is important that this committee continues and the sub-committees to arrange the talks and visits. Please feel free to join us, you will be made most welcome.

That concludes my report, so now lets look forward to 2023 and another year of interesting talks, visits and, yes, even more discoveries!

Thank you.

Dave Gibb, Secretary.