



*Friends of
Birmingham
Museums*

Friends of Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery Newsletter - September 2021

Chair's Report

Peter Miles, Chair of the Friends of Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery

90 years ago, on the 1st July 1931, the Committee of the Association of the Friends of the Gallery met and voted to provide funds for the purchase of three items totalling £61 15s. 0d, which included the Portrait of Mumtaz Mahal (see below). Somewhat different from the amounts we now vote on to spend supporting Birmingham Museums Trust!

Since that first meeting, the Friends have survived the Second World War, many other tribulations and now, bringing us up-to-date, this COVID-19 pandemic.

One has to admit that it looked difficult for the Friends at the start of the pandemic. We are the Friends of Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery. Our objective, as outlined in our Constitution, is 'to support and assist the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery and to promote their use and enjoyment by the public' and we meet, operate and thrive in support of this objective. This, as we all know, became very difficult in March 2020.

But as you read the news in this E-newsletter, a new innovation in itself, you will see



*1932P240, Portrait of Mumtaz Mahal, 1840-1890;
Artist unknown; (*Also known as Queen Arjumand Banu);
Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0*



that that we are beginning to stir. In addition to the other news below, we are looking at planning a weekend away next April. Fingers crossed!

Your Committee thanks you for your continued support during this most difficult period – it is VERY much appreciated and we are very grateful.

We look forward to seeing you at the Birmingham and Midland Institute on 4th November for our AGM!



News from the Office

We are pleased to announce an additional Benefit of Friends Membership: the Birmingham and Midland Institute's Coffee Lounge is now offering Friends 10% off on production of a valid Friends Membership Card.



Artefacts

Melissa Hughes, Friends' Administrator and Editor of *Artefacts*

I am delighted to let you know that *Artefacts*, our glossy A4 quarterly magazine, will be returning again! I am currently working on the next edition which will be published at the end of October and should appear on your doorsteps at the beginning of November. Do look out for it!

Dates for your Diary

Thursday 4th November, 11am: The Friends of Birmingham Museums' AGM

Saturday 11th December, 4-8pm: The Friends Christmas Party

The Friends AGM will be held at the Birmingham and Midland Institute on Thursday 4th November at 11am. We would like to invite you to join us for tea and coffee from 10.15am. The AGM will be held in the Lyttelton Theatre to enable social distancing, and we ask that all Members wear masks. We shall ensure that hand sanitiser is available. We want to ensure that you feel as safe and comfortable as possible.

Please make sure to put this important date in your diary. It will give you the opportunity to hear the latest news from the Friends and to ask any questions you might have. It is vital that as many Members as possible attend in order to ensure that we are quorate!

More details about the AGM will be appearing in the Friends Committee Report and Financial Statements, which will be sent to you by post shortly. And more details about the Friends Christmas Party will be appearing in the next edition of *Artefacts*.

Changing Birmingham - its people and places: Aston Hall

By Jim Wells, Friends Trustee

Using Birmingham Museums Trust's excellent online Digital Image Resource, we continue our exploration of *'Changing Birmingham - its people and places'*.

Looking out over the Aston Expressway and adjacent to a famous football ground is a magnificent piece of Jacobean architecture, Aston Hall. There is also a connection with the Hall in the naming of 'The Holte End', one of the largest football stands in



2007.0616.2, Portrait of Elizabeth Holte (nee King), 1636; Cornelius Johnson; Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0

the country, which can be found in Villa Park. The Holte family association with Aston Hall dates from 1631 when Sir Thomas Holte moved into the new Hall he had commissioned, until 1817 when the Hall had to be sold to pay debts.

The Holte family would make a fitting topic for a TV mini series with all its dramas! One individual stands out for sheer aplomb and that is the previously mentioned Sir Thomas Holte, Baronet (1575-1654). Knighted by King James I on his procession through England, procuring the new honour of Baronet, Sir Thomas Holte was a major figure amongst the gentry of Warwickshire in his new grand residence of Aston Hall. A number of scandals are associated with Sir Thomas, including an allegation of murder relating to his cook, but one for which we do have documentary evidence is Sir Thomas' bitter rift with his eldest

surviving son, Edward (1600-1645), over his marriage. Edward had a position at Court, secured by his father. Whilst he was there Edward met and married Elizabeth King (presumably for love), a Bishop's daughter with good social connections but no wealth. Sir Thomas did not approve and was unforgiving, writing him out of his inheritance and denying him any support. Such was the notoriety of this family dispute that King Charles I intervened personally and wrote to Sir Thomas: 'We consider that a blessing and many comforts will follow the daughter of soe reverend and good a man'. At one point in the drama Sir Thomas was put under house arrest in London by Charles I for continuing with the vendetta against the express wishes of the King. Tragically the conflict remained unresolved when Edward died of a fever at Oxford having fought and been wounded at the battle of Edgehill on the Royalist side. The sad circumstances are summed up by his brother-in-law's elegy to Edward:

*'When the tough root becomes unnatural,
And to his branches doth that sap deny
Which them with life and verdure should supply.
For parent's shame, let it forgotten be,
And may the sad example die with thee.'*

To see where this drama of love and strife was played out, along with many other historic events including a civil war siege, why not drop by and visit Aston Hall, with its delightful café in the restored stable block – but not, of course, on a match day!
<https://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/aston>



*1979P137.4, Aston Hall The Long Gallery, 1847;
Katherine Muirhead; Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust,
licensed under CC0*

Friends need friends

We are delighted to have had a number of new Trustees join the Committee, but we would still like to recruit some more! If you are looking for a new and rewarding challenge, if you are passionate about Birmingham Museums and what they have to offer and if you would like to work with like-minded people on a shared interest and commitment then please do get in touch to find out more about joining the Friends' Committee.

We are also still looking for an Honorary Treasurer and so if you have a solid accounting background and would welcome the chance to support us with financial oversight, specialist information and advice, then please do contact us.

If you, or one of your friends or acquaintances, might be interested in filling either of these roles then please let us know. For more information please contact Peter Miles: email chair.fbmag@gmail.com or ring 07443 825459.

Please do share this Newsletter with your friends and family to let them know what we are up to and to encourage them to join!

If you have received this newsletter in the post then we have not got an email address for you. If you have an email address please email Lynda at fbmagmembership@gmail.com so that we can save paper and postage.

Please visit the Friends' website - www.fbmt.org.uk.