

AHS Study Tour 2015 Oxford Area

This year's four day tour was based in the Oxford area with accommodation at the De Vere Archer Hotel Heythrop Park. Coach travel was arranged daily from the hotel to each venue.

Snowhill Manor

Monday 14 September. Commencing on the afternoon, our first visit was to Snowhill Manor and Gardens. After a short walk to the manor house, our tour guide explained how the collection of items was formed by the previous owner Mr Charles Wade. Wade, originally an architect and illustrator, was a collector of artefacts from an early age. His lifelong motto was 'let nothing perish' and he was delighted by finding things that had become unfashionable and unwanted. He bought the house in 1919 and gradually spent a considerable time in restoring the house and gardens and added to his obsessive collection of items. These ranged from Japanese armour, tools, furniture, farm implements and musical instruments to many items of the crafts from each period that displayed good colour, workmanship or design, including many clocks.

Our guide explained that Wade kept most of the clocks running at different times because he liked to hear them chiming as he walked through the house, but he kept the correct time by his pocket watch. Wade collected so many items that the Manor house became so overcrowded that he moved into the adjacent Priest House. In 1951 the property was handed over to the National Trust, and five years later Charles Wade died.

The Manor has no bright lights or descriptions of items and is dark and mysterious, encouraging the visitor to search each room. The total collection consists of over 22,000 miscellaneous items spread over twenty rooms. Numerous clocks and horological tools are displayed in unlikely places, no descriptions are provided which encourage the visitor to have discussions at each item found. The diverse range of clocks observed were: English longcase, Act of Parliament, bracket and wall clocks, Dutch clocks, numerous Black Forest



External striking jack at Snowhill Manor. Photo Robin Hutchinson.

clocks and two visible but inaccessible turret clocks. One of these clocks operated an external striking jack on the gable end of the Priest House.

Oxford

Tuesday 15 September. After an enjoyable breakfast our coach arrived promptly to take the group to the Ashmolean Museum Oxford where we met David Thompson who gave the group a talk on early watches in the museum. The group split into two parties due to limited space in the study room. One group took the opportunity to examine the exhibitions on show, view the clock and watch collection and enjoy refreshments in the museum tea room. The other group met up with David who had removed most of the interesting watches from the collection for his talk.

David commenced with the early history of watch development which originated from Southern Germany and gradually spread across Europe to the Low Countries and France. There was no watchmaking in England before 1570. The religious persecutions in the 1680s and arrival of Huguenot watchmakers and engravers spurred the development of



Ellicott watch in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Photo Paul Tuck.

watch manufacture during the late seventeenth century in England.

David selected over thirty watches from the collection for examination and discussion. These watches were selected for decorative features, historic period or technical features and passed around in a wooden tray for visual examination. Only a few of the watches are described in this report.

One of the earliest watches was a South German tambour case and dial dating from 1560–80. The movement, originally with stackfreed and iron wheels, is missing,

Another watch was an astronomical compendium by Hans Koch also dating from 1580 in the form of a book with watch, alarm, two sundials and a lunar volvelle. Spherical watches also appeared during this period. Moving on to the 'form watch' which appeared in the early 1600s a magnificent silver cased verge octagonal watch was examined, made by David Ramsey and dated 1615 but having an unremarkable movement. A similar styled watch by Pierre Combret dated 1615–20 was also examined. Important watches by Quare, Ellicott (illustrated), Graham, Tompion and Dent were just some of the watches examined during this talk. A small book written by David Thompson containing the description of these watches can be obtained from the museum shop; see also David Thompson's richly illustrated two-part article 'Watches in the Ashmolean Museum Oxford', in *AH* 25/5 and 6 (September and December 2000).

After a light lunch in the Ashmolean cafe our next visit was to the Museum of the History of Science. Commencing in the Entrance Gallery we were met by Dr Stephen Johnston, the assistant keeper, who took the group around each floor in the museum describing the history and application of the many rare scientific instruments. In particular various orreries, astrolabes, an equatorium and a Roman sundial. Other exhibits included the decorative and extravagant George III silver microscope. In addition various clocks are exhibited, one being the small Ahasuerus Fromanteel longcase clock dating from 1665. This clock is one of the earliest English pendulum clocks that is exhibited in original and unrestored condition. Other remarkable clocks are the Antide Janvier 1798 astronomical clock with armillary sphere and the small wrought iron framed turret clock dated 1670, originally from Wadham College. On the stairs to the basement various horological tools and two seventeenth-century timber framed church clocks are displayed.

In the basement area which originally was the chemical laboratory and high up on the wall is Einstein's blackboard, containing equations from his second lecture on relativity dating from 1931. The adjacent galleries in the basement area contain an interesting collection of longcase and bracket clocks.



John Richards explains a clock by Gosselin dating from c. 1760. It depicts Europa being abducted by Jupiter in the form of a bull, a popular subject at the time. Photo Paul Tuck.

Blenheim Palace

Wednesday 16 September. Today's visit was to Blenheim Palace the family home of the 12th Duke of Marlborough. On arrival we were met by John Richards, the resident clock restorer, who has been looking after the clocks for over 48 years. John led the group into a lecture room where a welcoming treat of coffee and biscuits was awaiting. This was followed by an enjoyable and amusing introductory talk on the history of the palace and clocks. The Duke's policy is to keep clocks running if possible, two people are employed to wind the clocks.

John took the group on a tour of the principal State Rooms. Each clock was described with numerous anecdotes of how the clocks were maintained and looked after.

In the entrance hall a fine Negretti and Zambra wind indicator dial is displayed, unfortunately the connecting drive rods are missing; on the opposite wall is the matching large N&Z clock dial with a plated brass movement and pendulum accessible from behind one of the hall pillars. Further along the hall corridor is a large tavern clock with a 40 inch dial. On display almost hidden in niches in the hall pillars are two magnificent mahogany regulators, one by Holmes of London, of month duration and dating from 1790, the other by John Shelton London, again month duration dating from 1760. A little further is a mahogany musical longcase



The group on the steps at Blenheim Palace, with John Richards, the resident clock restorer.

clock by John Kay dating from 1780.

Numerous French clocks are on display in every room of the palace, journal space does not allow for a full description of some of these important clocks.

After lunch the group was free to re-visit the palace, formal gardens and park, unfortunately heavy rain precluded any major outdoor visits but opportunities were available for a re-visit around the palace to look at the general items on display, including the Churchill Exhibition commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of his death.

Waddesdon Manor

Thursday 17 September. Our tour guide began with a very informative history of the origins of a German family which took its name from the red shield on their house, which in German is Rothschild. The five of the sons of the family became bankers and their father sent each of them to the principal capitals in Europe to set up a banking business, and the

rest is history. In 1874 work began on Waddesdon Manor to display the Rothschilds' extraordinary art collection to modern society. In 1957 Waddesdon was bequeathed to the National Trust.

Our guide took the group through each room of the house and explained the history of the many priceless artefacts and fittings, some of which are described in small handbooks aptly called *Beyond All Price* and *Riches of The Earth*. The typical theme of gilt French mantle clocks and fine porcelain is set out in most rooms of the house, almost on every available flat surface. Some very important French clocks are included in this collection. At the moment a total of twenty-seven clocks are kept in working order.

Items of particular interest were the large gilt and chased bronze automaton in the shape of an elephant, originally a gift from the East India Company to an Indian official. The case is by Martinet and the movement dated 1768–82 is attributed to James Cox.



Orpheus Organ Clock. Photo Paul Tuck.

Unfortunately the movement is now only played on special occasions. Currently a video recording shows visitors the mechanism working. In an adjacent room we were shown an exquisite gilt clock depicting Aurora, Venus and Cupid dating from 1748–49. The case maker was Cafferi and the movement is by LeRoy. In another room and situated in a corner was the Pedestal Clock, which is made in two matching halves from veneered ebony and tortoise shell. The case is by Boulle and the movement by George Graham. Further along the corridor was the Clock Organ, featuring a figure of Orpheus playing a flute besides a marble effect tree supporting the clock, all supported on a marble base containing the organ mechanism. No manufacturer's



Goyer and Dubois desk. Photo Paul Tuck.

name is given but the name Imhof and Muckle London is pencilled on the base. Upstairs another room contained a magnificent combined drop front desk c. 1770 by Goyer and Dubois incorporating two clocks built into the desk.

Although this study tour trip only lasted four days, our tour organiser presented the group with the opportunity to examine a vast amount of information relating to some magnificent clocks and watches, but perhaps it was only just scratching the surface of this subject. On behalf of the group members, many thanks must go to Susan and Jack Knight for organising this year's enjoyable trip.

Robin Hutchinson