

Avoncroft Study Visit – 06-10-17.

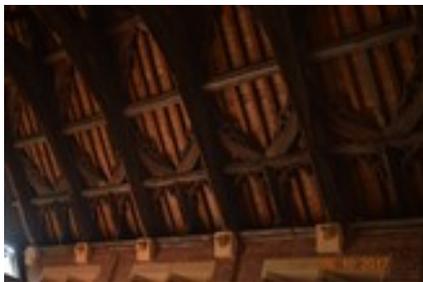
Although Avoncroft Museum is very close to the Wyre Forest, situated near Bromsgrove, for many members of the History Group this was their first visit to this venue.

Avoncroft Museum was opened to the public in 1967, following the rescue and reconstruction of a Medieval Town House from Bromsgrove town centre. Avoncroft's priority is to retain historic buildings in their original location, but where this is not achievable the Museum now displays and cares for over 30 historic buildings and structures on its Bromsgrove site.

On arrival at the Museum, we were met in the New Guesten Hall, with welcome refreshments and a comprehensive introductory talk by a Volunteer. He explained the reasons behind the founding of the Museum and highlighted the importance of preserving old buildings, especially in the light of the Sixties' and Seventies' municipal desire to sweep away old town and city centres. The New Guesten Hall roof had originally covered the Old Guesten Hall in the precincts of Worcester Cathedral.

The Guesten Hall was originally built in the 14th century as part of the complex surrounding Worcester Cathedral; crowned by this superb wooden roof it survived until the mid 19th century when, owing to its dilapidated condition, The Guesten Hall was abandoned and the roof transferred to the nave of the new church of Holy Trinity in the Shrub Hill area of the city.

The church of the Holy Trinity was demolished in the late 1970s leaving the roof homeless for the second time in its history. It was thus carefully dismantled and stored for some years whilst a new structure was built to support it at the Avoncroft Open Air Museum of Buildings near Bromsgrove where it remains to this day. Inside the roof is now supported by brand new carved wooden corbels decorated with portrait heads.



The 14th Century Guesten Hall Roof

In his presentation the Volunteer showed us many photos of the buildings, both in their original locations and in their present positions in the Museum. He carefully explained the relocation process of these buildings, often with contemporary photos, which made us realise the exacting and fragile nature of the operation. He also explained their historical or cultural significance, which helped us appreciate why they had been chosen.

After this illuminating presentation we were provided with a generous buffet lunch, following which we were free to wander round the Museum site at our own pace, to see all the exhibits. A number of Volunteers had come in specially and enhanced the visit by explaining their areas of expertise. For instance, there was a Volunteer in the old **Post Windmill**, who explained the granary process to us in detail, in situ, high up in the roof of the building.

This striking building comes from Danzey Green, Tanworth-in-Arden. It is typical of a West Midlands post mill, with 4 sails, and a wooden upper structure which pivots around a central post. The sails are 18m wide and turn the millstones through a system of gears and pulleys. The mill was built around 1830, and the post timber, purchased from another mill that had fallen out of use, has been dated to 1784. The mill remained in operation until 1874 when it was damaged in a storm. It was dismantled in 1969 and re-erected at Avoncroft. The mill is fully functional, and Volunteer millers give demonstrations of how the mill functions.



The Danzey Green Post Mill



Interior of the Mill, showing some of the workings.

The Volunteer in **The 1940's Prefab House** talked to us about post-war austerity and why the 'prefab' was so necessary to rehouse bombed-out citizens. She told us about the design of the building, the furniture used and the heating systems which were installed among other topics. The prefab came from Moat Lane, Yardley, Birmingham, one of 157,000 built to provide cheap, quick housing in the post-war years. The Emergency Housing Programme put out a very simple design brief for the project; houses had to last 10 years, be made of cheap and readily available materials, avoid using bricks, be easy to transport by road, and be quick and easy to assemble. There were 13 designs created, and the one on show here is the Arcon Mark V. It comes complete with a fitted kitchen, sitting room, bathroom, separate toilet, and two bedrooms. It is built on a steel frame with prefabricated asbestos panels. It was occupied from 1946-1981, and given by Birmingham City Council to Avoncroft in 1983.

A quirky but familiar sight at Avoncroft is the **National Telephone Kiosk Collection**. This fascinating Collection comprises many different call boxes, from BT boxes to AA and RAC emergency phones, and the ever-popular blues 'Tardis' police call box made famous by Dr Who. There is also a UAX13 telephone exchange building, and we had a wonderful tour of the exchange with a Volunteer, a retired telephone company worker who showed us how the exchange worked and gave us a chance to place calls using old handsets. The telephone kiosks are set up so that you can place a call direct to any other box or phone in this collection.



Using the phone system in the Collection.



View of the Collection.

Medieval town house

Perhaps the 'signature building' at Avoncroft, this lovely 15th century timber-framed medieval town house stood at the corner of Worcester Street and Station street in Bromsgrove. It is typical of town houses in the late medieval period, with a central hall and several small family rooms. It originally had another block with a pantry and buttery. There was no kitchen; this would have been located in another building to minimise fire risk. The house was occupied as a family home for over 400 years. Some time in the 16th century a second storey was inserted. Then in 1896 it was split into 3 cottages and the family's solar wing was used as a shop. The house was due to be demolished in 1962 to allow for road widening. A local philanthropist, the Founder of Avoncroft Museum, intervened, and was given just 2 weeks to completely dismantle the building. This important building was the first exhibit at Avoncroft.



The Medieval Town House. Note how low the door is.



View across the Museum from the Medieval Town House.

Mission Church

This 'prefab' church was erected in 1891 to serve the residents of Bringsty Common, Whitbourne, Herefordshire. It was bought from a catalogue published by the JC Humphries Company, at a cost of £70. The entire building came as a prefabricated kit which was bolted together on site to provide a place of worship for 100 people. The impetus for the new church came when the Church of England became concerned that locals were attending the nearby Methodist Chapel. Wealthy local benefactors contributed the money to purchase the church, which became known locally as the Tin Church, or the Iron Church. It was declared redundant in 1988 and moved to Avoncroft in 1996, where it was rededicated in the presence of the Bishop. The interior is complete and original, with the font, pews, lectern, pulpit, and vestments. The Church is still licensed to hold services.



U3A History Group Members at the Tin Church.

These are just some of the highlights of this most interesting venue.

For more information about this unique museum visit <http://www.avoncroft.org.uk>

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