

PLACES TO VISIT

Guy Sjögren



1 THE CRYSTAL PALACE MUSEUM



The Crystal Palace Museum

When the Great Exhibition closed in October 1851, public opinion clamoured for the 'Crystal Palace' to

remain in Hyde Park, but to no avail. However, a consortium of businessmen bought the building, removed it to Sydenham in south-east London and opened it to the public in 1854. A catastrophic fire burnt the Crystal Palace to the ground in 1936. However, a small museum, tracing the history of the building and displaying a variety of artefacts, was opened in June 1990. The museum is housed in the last structure built by the old Crystal Palace Company 130 years ago, the purpose of which was to house the offices and lecture room of the Crystal Palace School of Practical Engineering. The website below provides details of opening times, guided tours and, most importantly, the museum's limited facilities.

Crystal Palace Museum, Anerley Hill,
Crystal Palace, London SE19 2BA
Website: www.crystalpalacemuseum.org.uk
Phone: + 44 (0) 20 8676 0700

2 THE WEDGWOOD MUSEUM



©Wedgwood Museum/WWRD

Josiah Wedgwood founded his fine-china business on 1 July 1759. After almost a century of phenomenal success, the company, then under Frank Wedgwood's control, exhibited at the Great Exhibition. A medal-winner, Wedgwood demonstrated that the firm was at the very forefront of ceramic manufacture, exhibiting the necessities of modern Victorian life while reviving the essence of neo-classical taste. The Wedgwood Museum is nothing less than a celebration of the work of this famous West Midlands business. It was opened in July 2015, and displays a stunning collection not just of ceramics but also of a huge range of documentation, manuscripts, correspondence, factory equipment and models. It also features associated paintings and artwork, such as the Wedgwood family portrait by Josiah's friend, George Stubbs.

The Wedgwood Museum, Barlaston,
Stoke-on-Trent ST12 9ER
Website: www.wedgwoodmuseum.org.uk
Phone: +44 (0) 1782 282986

3 THE PEN MUSEUM



The Pen Museum

The official catalogue for the Great Exhibition, Class 22 - 'General Hardware and Locks and Grates' - included 112 Birmingham exhibitors, eight of whom were manufacturers of steel pens and pen holders: businesses such as Gillot's; Hinks, Wells & Co; and William Mitchell. The weekly output of the Birmingham pen makers alone was measured in millions. Birmingham's Pen Museum opened in 2001 and houses a collection of over 5,000 objects related to the Birmingham steel pen trades and to the history of writing. The collections include William Mitchell's highly imaginative and decorative exhibit from the Great Exhibition, items of factory machinery and other hands-on objects. There are plenty of activities for families including a Victorian school room, special museum, trails and interactive machines.

Pen Museum, The Argent Centre,
60 Frederick Street, Birmingham B1 3HS
Website: www.penroom.co.uk
Phone: + 44 (0) 121 236 9834

4 THE HERBERT ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM



© Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry

The growth of the Coventry cycle and motor industries from the late-nineteenth century onwards tends to mask the city's industrial past. In the 1830s, Coventry was the centre of a silk-weaving

area of 13,000 looms supporting 30,000 people. 'The ribbons of Coventry have acquired a universal reputation', noted the Great Exhibition catalogue, 'and are well represented here in number and variety'. Coventry was also renowned as a centre of the watchmaking industry, some 2,000 people being employed in the trade by 1851. The Herbert Museum holds extensive collections relating to both the ribbon and watch industries. These include ribbon sample books from the early 1800s as well as several thousand individual pieces of ribbon, dating from 1760 onwards; and over 150 pocket watches and a collection of watchmaker's tools.

The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum,
Jordan Well, Coventry CV1 5QP
Website: www.theherbert.org
Phone: + 44 (0) 24 7623 7521

5 THE CIDER MUSEUM



The Cider Museum Trust

Neither smoking nor the consumption of alcohol was permitted inside the Crystal Palace. This would obviously not have worried teetotallers (some 15,000 of

whom held a demonstration in the building during August 1851). On the other hand, visitors with a penchant for cider may not have been satisfied with Schweppes soda water available in the food court, but would have looked longingly at the bottles of their favourite drink temptingly exhibited by a Montreal firm. As well as the cider itself, there were displays of cider mills and cider presses. These can now be seen, along with other related exhibits such as advertisement memorabilia and bottles, at Hereford's Cider Museum. In addition to the exhibits, the museum also holds events throughout the year, details of which can be found at the website below.

The Cider Museum, Pomona Place,
Hereford HR4 0EF
Website: www.cidermuseum.co.uk
Phone + 44 (0) 1432 354207

6 BANTOCK HOUSE MUSEUM



Bantock House Museum

Among the myriad exhibits at the Crystal Palace were items of japanned ware. Japanning involved the use of specially developed varnishes applied to a base of metal, wood or *papier mâché* to create a wide variety of products, from buttons and trays to beds and vases. Many pieces were highly decorated, and the plentiful use of gold leaf, mother of pearl and coloured paints was much loved by the Victorians. In the mid-nineteenth century, the ownership of japanned ware conferred a certain status on the household. Wolverhampton was a notable centre of England's japanning trade, and displays of japanned ware can be seen at the Bantock House Museum in Wolverhampton. The museum is set in 43 acres of parkland, and is open six days a week.

Bantock House Museum, Finchfield Road,
Wolverhampton WV3 9LQ
Website: www.bantockhouse.co.uk
Phone: + 44 (0) 1902 552195

www.historywm.com



7 CHATSWORTH



Chatsworth House

As Jim Andrew's article explains, it was Joseph Paxton who was ultimately responsible for the design of the 'Crystal Palace'. During the 1830s, Paxton - then the Duke of Devonshire's head gardener at Chatsworth - developed an interest in greenhouses, and in 1837 he began work on the Great Conservatory. Sadly, this vast construction of cast iron and glass was demolished in 1922. However, visitors to Chatsworth can still see a surviving example of Paxton's work in the Conservative Wall (also known as the Case). This glasshouse, constructed in the 1840s, was built against a pre-existing hot or forcing wall. It is some 330 feet long but only 7 feet in width, its original function being to protect the peaches and nectarines that were trained against the wall.

Chatsworth House, Bakewell,
Derbyshire DE45 1PP
Website: www.chatsworth.org
Phone: + 44 (0) 1246 565300

8 THE MUSEUM OF CARPET



The Museum of Carpet

Situated in the South Central Gallery of the Great Exhibition were extensive displays of tapestry, carpets and floor cloths. Among the carpets were those from Turkey and India, from Halifax and Glasgow and, of course, from Kidderminster. One of the Kidderminster exhibitors was Woodward & Co, whose display included a 'velvet pile carpet decorated with ivy leaves and stems, lying on moss and wild weeds'. Four years after the exhibition, Stour Vale Mill was built as a carpet factory and, until recently, was occupied by the firm of Woodward Grosvenor, successor to Woodward & Co. It now houses the Museum of Carpet, an award-winning attraction located in Kidderminster town centre. Note - if you visit at midday on Tuesday or Saturday, you will have an opportunity to see the power looms in action.

The Museum of Carpet, Stour Vale Mill, Green
Street, Kidderminster DY10 1AZ
Website: www.museumofcarpet.org
Phone: + 44 (0) 1562 69028

9 THE COALBROOKDALE MUSEUM OF IRON



Museum of Iron

During the nineteenth century, cast iron was a popular choice for architectural fittings and for street furniture, and the Coalbrookdale Iron Company at Ironbridge was one of several British manufacturers specialising in the casting of such fittings. The company was also experimenting with techniques for casting pieces of sculpture and statues in iron, rather than in bronze, as a way of reducing production costs. It was clearly successful, for its statue of the Fountain of Cupid and the Swan was among exhibits that earned the Coalbrookdale Company a Council Medal, the highest award given at the exhibition. The statue now stands outside the Museum of Iron, which, among other fascinating displays, houses sculptor John Bell's Deerhound Table exhibited at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1855.

The Coalbrookdale Museum of Iron,
Ironbridge, Shropshire TF8 7DQ
Website: www.ironbridge.org.uk
Phone: + 44 (0) 1952 433424

10 BILSTON CRAFT GALLERY



Bilston Craft Gallery

It is not often that the smaller museums find a spot in this section of the magazine. It is therefore a pleasure to include the Bilston Craft Gallery. The purpose of the Gallery is to bring the best of contemporary craft to the West Midlands, and explore the rich heritage of skilled industrial design and production in the region. Bilston, like its larger neighbour Wolverhampton, was also a producer of japanned ware. However, it was not just the size of the towns that were different. In 1865, there were some 1,600 people employed in the Wolverhampton trade, whilst in Bilston it occupied around 400. One impressive exhibit at the Great Exhibition, now among the Bilston collection, was a huge decorated tray, more than a metre wide.

Bilston Craft Gallery, Mount Pleasant,
Wolverhampton WV14 7LU
Website:
www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk/visit/bilston
Phone: + 44 (0) 1902 552507