

REPORTS FROM THE BRANCHES
THE NIGERIAN FIELD SOCIETY (UK BRANCH)

Report for 2012

Chair: Professor Rob Oldham, Treasurer: Mr Geoff Partridge, Secretary: Miss Sheila Everard.

The Branch continues to flourish in spite of an ageing membership. Three meetings in 2012 were all well attended. They are, for obvious reasons focussed on the UK but it is hoped that in addition to our symposia, held every two or three years, meetings will also include lectures on Nigerian based subjects when lecturers can be found.

The Spring meeting and AGM was held in the Danford room of Birmingham University on 13th/14th April 2012. This room houses a collection of African art, collected by John Danford who worked for the British Council in Ibadan in the 1940s. A discussion of the objects took place after the meeting, followed by a presentation by our organiser Brian Hopkins, of an old stone grinding dish, found on the Ibadan compound during building excavations.

The following day, the group visited Winterbourne House, former home of John Nettlesford, a local manufacturer. Built in the Arts & Crafts style in 1903, the house is an interesting example of domestic architecture of this era. The splendid garden included, 'geographical beds' celebrating famous plant collectors and a magnificent sandstone rock garden full of spring colour.

On Sunday we visited the Barbour Institute of Fine Arts, housed in an elegant Art Deco building. The benefactor, Dame Martha Constance Barbour had left her fortune to the University 'for the study and encouragement of art and music'; the art gallery, music rooms and concert hall have entertained and informed not only students but the general public for generations since. We are indebted to Evelyn Murphy and to Brian Hopkins for an entertaining and worthwhile weekend.

The Summer meeting in Chichester, was also organized by Brian Hopkins on 14th/15th July 2012. Some members attended a play 'Heartbreak House' by Bernard Shaw on Friday evening at the theatre. On Saturday Chichester experienced the heaviest downpour of the month and our walk through the city had to be curtailed. St Mary's Hospital and Alms Houses proved to be a refuge to us as well as generations of elderly Chichester residents of limited means, over the last 800 years. The gardens were well maintained and the mediaeval building has been adapted to hold several self contained flats. The chapel featured a fine screen and 24 stalls each with its

original misericords, some carved with grotesque human figures and foliage.

Chichester Cathedral was begun in 1076 and dedicated in 1108. The building has survived two major fires in its long history; Our guide gave us an introduction to its many interesting features including a window designed by Marc Chagall. Throughout, mediaeval splendour is combined with more modern works of art: a beautiful copper font (1983), the magnificent Benker-Schirmer tapestry, and in the Chapel of St Mary Magdeline there is a painting by Graham Sutherland of St John the Baptist.

On Sunday morning, the group gathered at Itchenor harbour to board the Solar Heritage. This is a pollution free solar powered catamaran on which we toured the harbour. Like most of Chichester, this too is ancient and dates from Roman times. King Cnut is reputed to have had his famous encounter with the sea at Thorney Island and the Bayeux Tapestry depicts King Harold praying at nearby Bosham church before the Norman Conquest.

Finally on Sunday afternoon those with the energy and stamina, visited Kingley Vale. This is a Nature Reserve of chalk grassland, scrub and an ancient yew forest. There are the remains of Bronze age tumuli on the hills and a memorial to Arthur Tansley, a pioneer ecologist whose foresight and energy ensured that the area has been preserved.

Our last meeting of 2012 took place in Conwy North Wales on 8th/9th September. John and Maggie Hall hosted the committee for a meeting on Friday, followed by a splendid dinner for members and partners. The following morning the group gathered at the RSPB nature reserve for a talk on this remarkable site by the site manager, Julian Hughes. When the first submersible – tube road tunnel was built 23 years ago to carry road traffic around Conwy, the three million tons of excavated spoil was deposited up river from the site behind a sea wall, creating 150 acres of Crown Land. This has become the RSPB Conwy Nature Reserve.

In the afternoon, the group visited Plas Mawr (The Great hall) built between 1576 and 1585 by Robert Wynn a local landowner and wine importer. Now owned by the Mostyn family, it is in the care of the State. Fully restored, it is 'the finest surviving town house of the Elizabethan era to be found anywhere in the British Isles'. Both Robert Wynn and his wife were descended from princes of Gwynedd and this is celebrated in the elaborate and colourful plaster work.

On Sunday a guided tour of the castle gave us an insight into the power exerted by the English over their unwilling Welsh subjects. Such was the brilliance and efficiency of the design and the fear of retribution from the conquerors, that it was garrisoned by only 30 soldiers. After lunch at the Dutch Pancake House some

members proceeded to Bodnant Garden now run by the National Trust. The house is private and still lived in by the family of Lord Aberconway but eighty acres of the garden are accessible to visitors. These present a magnificent spectacle, varied and well maintained, with a backdrop of the mountains of Snowdonia providing a dramatic contrast.

Programme for 2013

Spring meeting and AGM – Bristol 19th/20th April 2013, organisers; Barbara Ryder and Janet Kirk.

Summer meeting –Durham 20th/21st July 2013; organiser, Sheila Everard

Autumn meeting – Faversham Kent, 14th/15th September 2013; organisers, Geoff & Dinah Partridge.

Programme for 2014

Spring meeting and AGM – Guildford Surrey, 26th/27th April 2014; organisers, Ray & Lilian Coe.

Summer meeting – Killin, Aberfeldy, Stirling, 28th/29th July 2014; organiser Avril Simpson.

Autumn meeting – Cambridge 13th/14th or 20th/21st September 2014; organiser Philip Allsworth Jones.

The UK Branch extends a warm welcome to all NFS members travelling to UK. Please contact the secretary for further information; the address is elsewhere in the Journal.