

Blaise Castle

Sunday afternoon, 30 July

Blaise Castle House Museum contains Bristol Museums' social history collection. David Eveleigh, the curator, kindly showed us round the cellar store in groups, where every possible agricultural machine, tool and bygone, each labelled with a local provenance, could seemingly be unearthed. These included the remains of several spinning wheels, a chamber horse, a collection of doors and a Windsor chair claimed by the Welsh contingent as from south Wales. In the upstairs rooms of the late 18th century house are to be found paintings by Müller and displays of household objects and toys (a child's close rocking chair was noted), including a kitchen placed somewhat awkwardly on the piano nobile.

As we see it today, Blaise (from St. Blaise, appropriately for Bristol the patron saint of wool combers), was largely the creation of John Scandrett Harford, a Quaker banker, from 1789 with help from Humphry Repton, William Paty and, after his death, John Nash. A gothick 'castle' summer house of 1766 survives as a ruin from the previous ownership of another Bristol merchant, Thomas Farr, but much the most important survival is Blaise Hamlet nearby which was purchased by the National Trust in 1943. This group of nine 'Old English' thatched cottages set informally round a green, each differing in form and detail to create a varied effect, proved to be an influential manifestation of the picturesque fashion in England. They were designed by Nash and George Repton (Humphry's fourth son) and built 1810-12, originally for Harford's retired servants, although they are now tenanted.

The Hamlet formed a beautifully calm oasis at which to end this varied and memorable weekend.

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