

Spanish Written Conversation for September.

Our September topic of my favourite museum was fascinating, covering some interesting and unusual museums, that I will now have to go and visit..... one day.

The Black Country Living open air museum in Dudley with its reconstructed streets of houses, showcases the areas industrial history, the importance of metal and of steam engine designers like Newcomen, Bolton and Watt and the local underground canals too narrow for horses, so that two men had "to leg" the narrowboat containing limestone through them by lying on their backs at the top of the boat and walk on the ceiling of the tunnel. For one member it brought back the sights, sounds and smells of his youth.

The Museum of Brands in Notting Hill, London which traces life since early Victorian times to today through products used daily, using adverts, cartons and packaging, games and toys. It's set out like a time tunnel through the years, showing our changing attitudes to moral, social and national issues, women's rights, gay liberation, black lives and shows how we were influenced by publicity and products. How many of us remember early adverts like the Bovril Kids, the Ovaltineys and "For hands that do dishes"? It made a member question whether everything new is really better and whether our more sophisticated lifestyle is actually an improvement. This pandemic has made it even more important to remember and learn from our past.

Another favourite was our wonderful local treasure the Bowes Museum, our almost fairy tale French chateau, so generously set up for the people of Barnard Castle by John and Josephine Bowes, with their extensive art collections at its heart- great paintings, ceramics, furniture, textiles and the Silver Swan as well as many great temporary exhibitions like the recent Norman Cornish mining paintings. The lovely gardens, tennis and bowling club, gardens and its popular café are all well used by the locals. We are very lucky to have such a splendid museum in our little town.

Another members favourite museum was one not designed by a professional architect and not containing any rich treasures or art, but two working men's 18th century cottages in his home town in Scotland, lovingly restored by the local community and showing the poverty and simple life led by those with few possessions and even less money. It also contained that dreadful instrument of torture the tawse, a thick leather belt one end of which split into two tails, designed to burn the hand of any naughty pupil in school. A punishment meted out to our friend on many occasions! So although the building is much humbler than say the Guggenheim in Bilbao its history is closely intertwined with his life.

The Petit Palais, designed by Charles Girault, on avenue Winston Churchill in Paris was built for the 1900 Universal Exhibition along with its neighbour the Grand Palais. The heart of it was the collection of paintings and sculptures acquired by the City of Paris since 1870, an ensemble of French art from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the second major part is formed by the collection of pre-modern art bequeathed in 1902 by the brothers Auguste and Eugène Dutuit, reflecting the 19th-century passion for European history and its curiosity about other civilisations. Their bequest includes an impressive number of ancient (Greek and Roman) works, art objects from the Middle Ages and Renaissance, Flemish and Dutch paintings from the 17th century, manuscripts

and books from the 15th to 17th century, with 12,000 engravings, including complete sets of Rembrandt, Dürer and Callot, as well as Islamic, Chinese and Japanese artworks. Part of its appeal to our member, who lived in Paris for many years, was that it had a certain cosiness which they found comforting,

The Jeu de Paume in Paris in 1975 had an amazing collection of Impressionist art and was the favourite haunt of one impoverished student spending 6 months studying in Paris. The building is only 80 x 13 metres and was a lovely warm, cosy space to sit and stare at a Van Gogh or Monet for hours. Sadly, the collection moved to the Musée d'Orsay in 1986 and the Jeu de Paume itself became a café, shop and occasional exhibition space, but it will always be there as a very special memory in her mind's eye..

Our October topic is "A new hobby or skill learned during lockdown"

The Spanish PDD - 5 words a week group continues to function, and we have now covered at least 160 words. Someone asked me whether I would make it to 1,000 words, but my reply was completely unprintable in any language.

Cuidense. Stay safe everyone. Venceremos. We shall overcome.

Lusia