



# THE BERKELEY BUTTRISS

## SPRING 2026

FRIENDS OF BERKELEY CASTLE NEWSLETTER

### From FoBC President, Charles Berkeley

A warm welcome to all Friends of Berkeley Castle as we move into our 20th Anniversary of the Friends. 2025 has seen various Friends' projects completed such as the Textiles in Drake's Room for the Bed and Windows, which look fantastic, and add hugely to the room. The Conservation of the Gilt Table that is in the Long Drawing Room looks good, and I have to say is testament to the skilled craftsmen that there are and always have been in relation to conservation and artwork.

The Lighting in the Kings Gallery has already brought out the quality in many of our portraits and this will continue into 2026 and probably beyond when funds are available. Many of our paintings are not always seen under the best light, and along with some of them being cleaned we are beginning to see the best of them.

The family are so grateful to have the Friends' membership, and to have seen what you have achieved over the years is remarkable and a visible reminder of the skilled and dedicated work undertaken that has saved some of our most important chattels.



*Our President, Charles Berkeley, with (l-r) Daisy Berkeley, Mary Berkeley and Mrs Georgina Berkeley.*

There are many exciting events during this 20th Anniversary Year including a talk after the AGM by my brother Henry on Spetchley Park and how he is planning to create a legacy. There will also be a trip to Spetchley in June, which will be a fascinating tour of the garden, looking at the ongoing changes and how investment is bringing it into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



I hope that many of you will attend our 20th Anniversary Lunch in the summer. This is sure to be a great occasion, looking back on what the Friends have achieved and what is planned over the year and ahead. I look forward to seeing you all throughout the year at many FoBC events and during our open season.

*Charles Berkeley*

## **Castle stories: The Gatehouse Approach Bridge**

***“It is possible that the bridge to the gatehouse was destroyed in the Cromwellian siege”.***

*Interesting tales can come to light when researching almost any part of the Castle. This one is taken from a Landscape Conservation Management Plan undertaken in 2009 by Teasdale Environmental Design and refers to the Approach Bridge leading to the Outer Gatehouse on the west side (the private drive).*

Date(s) Medieval origins. Altered in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Designations: Part of Grade II\* Registered Park and Garden.

Brief description: The walls to either side of the gatehouse approach bridge are an amalgamation of several sections dating from a number of periods. The oldest parts are of rough stone and may have been the support structures to a drawbridge. Camstone alterations date from c. 1586 when the western approach causeway was built using stone brought from Longbridge Hospital.

It is not known when the bridge immediately outside the gatehouse ceased to be a



drawbridge. John Leland's description of c.1540 states that, '*The ward at the first gate is mitey strong and a bridge over the ditch to it.*' Leland does not describe the bridge as a drawbridge, and it may have still been a simple timber bridge by this date. Several references in the castle accounts between 1591 and 1601 record timber work relating to the castle bridges.

It is possible that the bridge to the gatehouse was destroyed in the Cromwellian siege. Two paintings of c.1676, attributed to Jacob Knyff, show a timber-decked approach to the gatehouse but the moat beneath appears to have been filled in (*detail of painting below*).



By 1708, the bird's eye view by Kip indicates that this section had been filled in with masonry, the south wall being aligned with the south wall of the gatehouse. A door and small window suggest that there may have been either a tunnel or possibly a chamber beneath this part of the causeway. The gatehouse itself also appears to have been altered. To the immediate south of the outer gatehouse are the buried

remains of strongly built rough stone walls. The 8<sup>th</sup> Earl suggested that these may have been part of an earlier gatehouse. However, the illustrations of the late 17<sup>th</sup> to early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries indicate that the upper storey of the gatehouse was removed and its southern extent reduced.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the gatehouse approach was altered again opening it out to form a tunnel through the causeway with gothic arches at either end. Alterations to the stonework around the arch suggest that the whole section was opened out and re-built



to create the new arch. Internally, the tunnel walls appear to be of older coursed stonework of a good standard, which may be part of an earlier structure. The ceiling is brick-lined but, again, may predate the in-filled gothic arches at the tunnel entrances.

Remnant gate hinges exist in masonry of the northern arch, indicating that, probably in the C19<sup>th</sup>, the archway was gated.

The causeway deck has been replaced by a concrete slab, possibly during the 1930s by the 8<sup>th</sup> Earl. The parapet walls above have been rebuilt, probably at the same time. The report describes the whole as being of very important significance and in fair condition.

## FoBC Quiz and WI Afternoon Tea by Eleanor Garratt-Taylor

We had great fun wandering around the Castle looking for the answers to some cleverly set clues, a cross between a picture puzzle and a crossword, it certainly got us talking.

We began, where? The beginning of course, Drake's Room and worked our way through the Castle as far as the Great Hall where we turned the sheets over and carried forward letters to make up the answer to the treasure hunt. Does that sound complicated? No not really, well done Valerie for testing us so well. We found ourselves saying "have you found this one?" and "what do you think this means?" and "I hadn't noticed that before".





The afternoon had the effect of throwing everyone together and making us work as a team, sometimes we laughed and wondered why we hadn't seen it before or learned a name or were reminded of something we did know but had forgotten.



Then tea; thank you to the Berkeley WI who provided us with a fabulous variety of sandwiches and cakes, served in the Long Drawing Room.

It was friends together, smashing.

## **The Anarchy: A talk by Professor Stuart Prior**

### ***A report by Eleanor Garratt-Taylor***

A gentleman from Lower Hazel approached Bristol University with the suggestion that on his property he felt there was archaeology to be found. Having secured Lottery funding the University set up a dig led by Professor Stuart Prior, at what was found to be a medieval site of the Anarchy period. The dig lasted five years.

Stuart entertained and informed us and set out his presentation which fell into three categories: Lower Hazel and the Hunting Lodge, eighteen years of Civil War and fortress building, and then Berkeley.

The archaeological dig exposed a hunting lodge where dated coins, pottery and missiles were uncovered. The lodge came under attack at the time of the anarchy.

1138 – 1153: Henry I had a son who was drowned when the White Ship went down with all hands. Matilda, Henry's daughter, became his heir and Henry I required the Barons to take an oath of allegiance to Matilda, announcing her heir to the throne.

On the death of Henry I, Stephen, cousin of Matilda and also grandchild of William the Conqueror, felt himself the natural heir of the Monarch and seized the throne. Matilda by this time had become a widow and is fighting not only for herself but for her son the future Henry II. During this time Stephen, Matilda and the Barons are minting coins.

Matilda, asserting her position, eventually found herself in control of the west. Stephen controlled the east. The anarchy lasted 18 years and during that time the development of fortified buildings began.

During the eighteen-year period, it is recorded that 270 fortified buildings go up, villages are made to abandon land and are forced to build. Buildings were positioned against banks, built within a huge circular boundary where modern weapons couldn't reach them. Berkeley is surrounded by marsh. Churches were fortified, built without windows. Norman Castles are being designed to be safe from modern weapons, this is the age of new designs, the siege engine and catapult.





This is also the age of the Crusades and a time when Berkeley supported both Stephen and Matilda. (Understanding the conflict became difficult when the wife of Stephen, also named Matilda, entered the conflict when Stephen had been captured and imprisoned).

In the west, Robert Fitzharding, a wealthy Bristol merchant, supported Matilda and her son Henry, who became Henry II. Robert received acclaim and acknowledgement.

As a thank you Henry II gave the Estate of Berkeley to Robert; Fitzharding children marry de Berkeley children and the families united.

Thank you, Stuart, for an informative and entertaining glimpse into a significant time in our history.

## Being a Guide at Berkeley Castle

by Jane Handoll

I hated History when I was at school, and gave it up as soon as I could – which doesn't augur well for becoming a Guide at Berkeley Castle later in life! This all changed, luckily, when I was introduced to Medieval Art and Architecture at university. I have always been interested in Drama and Performance, which is one of the pre-requisites for guiding, I think; and I have always had a loud voice, which often got me into trouble when I was young, but is extremely useful when trying to organise and communicate with a group of tourists.

What we have to remember is that we are not teachers, we are guides, and our job is to open the visitor's eyes to what Berkeley has to offer. It's often a shared exploration and a two-way exchange, where we can learn as much from the visitors as they can from us. Just as the best way to learn is to teach, so we are constantly increasing our knowledge the longer we do the job! I found myself in the Great Hall one day, chatting to a chap who was very interested in the tapestries – and then I discovered that he was Curator of Textiles at the Metropolitan Museum in New York!



Tour guiding is all about performance and drama, the telling of stories and the encouragement of interest, in history generally and Berkeley Castle in particular. You have to be able to 'read' your group, just as an actor needs to read an audience, and to be



able to adapt your tour to whatever you think they want. Mixed groups with adults and children can be tricky; switching and mixing levels of information without talking down to one group or being too highbrow for the other. Children are great receptors, stretching their imaginations and soaking up all the stories. School tours were devised by a couple of our ex-teacher guides and are a huge part of our visitor base today, now led by a small, dedicated team. The castle also plays host to many adult groups, whether on a national coach tour or a local U3A group, WI ladies

or Round Table gentlemen, university reunion groups or even the Canadian Ladies' Rugby team.

Whatever the tour, balance is essential. On the whole visitors don't want to hear just a list of dates and a catalogue of painters. The wonderful thing about Berkeley is that its centuries of history warrant endless stories, though we have to be careful to distinguish between fact and hearsay; quite how some stories arose is anyone's



guess! That of the Godwin Cup, for instance, which can be seen in the Housekeeper's Room. A very beautiful silver gilt chalice which never can have belonged to Earl Godwin, one of the greatest and most powerful of the Saxon lords of the 11th century, and father of King Harold of the Battle of Hastings fame. It has been dated from the Tudor period, late 16th century, although stories abound of it having belonged to Earl Godwin when he was Lord of the Manor of Berkeley before the Norman Conquest. And then there's Mary Cole



whose portrait hangs above the fireplace in the Long Drawing Room – so many stories about her secret marriage to the 5th Earl, her illegitimate children, the splitting of the castle estates from the title – but how can we be sure how many of them are true? Stories and speculation surround Berkeley's most infamous prisoner, Edward II, too; was he murdered here or did he escape? How did he really die? So little was written down in the very early days that all we can do as guides is suggest possibilities and perhaps stir the

visitor's imagination and encourage further exploration.

Life in a medieval castle bears very little resemblance to what we can see today – Berkeley has been adapted, extended, modernised and restored for its many inhabitants over the years. But at least it has survived, almost completely intact, which makes it such a special place to visit. If only its walls could talk, what stories they could tell! As Guides, all we can do is share what we know with our visitors; the castle speaks for itself!



## 2026 FoBC Events

Prices for non-members are in brackets. Prices for members' guests are specified.

An Events order form is enclosed with this edition of The Berkeley Buttress.

Please ensure that your membership is current and  
that your membership number is included with your bookings.

### **Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> April: Annual General Meeting Followed by a talk by Henry Berkeley 'The Spetchley Estate, a legacy.'**

*"Nothing should ever stand still! A look into creating a legacy of Spetchley, ensuring its future whilst battling against the myriad issues facing a modern-day estate". Henry Berkeley.*

The Great Hall. Gates open at 7pm. Cash Bar  
£12 (18)

### **Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> June: Private Tour of Spetchley Park Gardens with Henry Berkeley**

Light lunches are available at Spetchley Garden Café from midday  
followed by the escorted private tour at 1.30pm.

Own transport.

Maximum group number is 22 and  
the Head Gardener will take a second group if our number exceeds 22.

Friends and their Guests only.

Cost: £17. Or £8 when using your FoBC complimentary ticket.

Ticket order deadline: Wednesday 3 June.



This lovely 30-acre Victorian paradise has an enviable collection of plant treasures from around the globe. There are many different themed areas in which plant enthusiasts can discover unusual species, plus the lakeside lawns.

A substantial walled garden and fabulous borders are a real delight, with something new round every corner.

## **2026 FoBC Events (cont.)**

**Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> July:**

### **FoBC 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Buffet Lunch with Charles Berkeley**

Come and join us for a celebration of 20 years of the founding of the Friends.

Friends and their Guests only.

Great Hall. Complimentary drinks on arrival.

Gates Open: midday

Friends: £42    Guests: £52

Ticket Order Deadline Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> July

**Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> September:**

### **Portrait of a Lady: do we have the missing Lely? A talk by Research Historian Richard Asquith on 'A mystery worth knowing; an accidental find'.**

Great Hall                  Cash Bar

Gates open 7pm              £12 (£18)

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**Information and booking details about the following events  
will be included in your Autumn Buttress:**

**Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> October:**

### **Berkeley Castle Hidden Gems in Plain Sight; a tour of things that are seen but not explained.**

*Followed by Tea in the Kitchen Garden Restaurant.*

**Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> December:**

### **20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Christmas Drinks Party, with Carols.**

**A sociable evening with the Castle's traditional Christmas tree,  
mulled wine and a selection of festive food.**

# Being a volunteer Steward

by Helen James

What is it that makes one want to volunteer at Berkeley Castle? It's most certainly a love of history which many people have but I think it goes much deeper than that for me. I remember my own childhood visits to this beautiful and historic castle and my fascination for so much of what it offers the visitor. I also brought my own children here as often as I could and never tired of doing so, bringing a picnic to enjoy on the lower lawn on a hot summer's day.

I moved out to the Berkeley area during the Covid pandemic and, as soon as I was able to, I brought two of my grandchildren to visit on a spectacularly warm and sunny day. We did a guided tour and the enthusiasm of Catherine, our guide, gave me the courage to ask about volunteering; I have to say it's one of the best things I have ever done.

During my time as a Steward at the castle I have learnt so much, made many new friends and met some amazing and interesting visitors from all over the globe. It also gives me the opportunity to really appreciate what the Friends of Berkeley do to help preserve, conserve and improve the visitors' experience by raising money to fund the projects necessary to maintain the precious artefacts housed in this magnificent castle.

I'm proud to say that I play a part in ensuring that the castle continues to be one of the best preserved and loved castles we have in the UK and recommend anyone who is interested in joining our team to give it a try. One of the most rewarding aspects of volunteering at Berkeley Castle is the opportunity to work in a living historical environment.



Unlike many heritage sites, the castle is still occupied by the Berkeley family, which gives it a distinctive atmosphere that blends history with everyday life. Volunteers often find themselves surrounded by ancient stone walls, beautifully maintained gardens, and rooms filled with artefacts that tell powerful stories from different periods of British history.

Volunteers take on a variety of roles, each contributing to the smooth running of the castle. Some assist visitors by answering questions, offering directions, or sharing fascinating historical facts. Others help with events, school visits, or seasonal activities, which bring the castle to life for people of all ages. There are also opportunities to support the upkeep of the grounds and gardens, allowing volunteers to work outdoors in a stunning setting.



# Drake's Room Textiles - FoBC Project

by Eleanor Garratt-Taylor

The committee consider all projects proposed by the Custodian, Josh Nash, and look for items themselves around the Castle. Drake's Room is the only bedroom that is on view in the Castle and because it comes so early in the tour has often been forgotten by the visitor, and so sometimes at the end of the tour guides are asked, "Are there no bedrooms to be seen?". For this reason, consideration was given to the bedroom having a face lift.



All projects are agreed by the Committee, the Charity and the Berkeley family and it is fair to say that our proposal met some dissent. The Friends exist to support the Charity, and it was decided that in commissioning textiles the room would rise in status.

The Boys Who Sew are based in a converted granary in the old Estate Yard and are experts in the field of conservation-grade manufacture of 'soft furnishings' and they only work within heritage buildings. A discussion took place and swatches considered, all of them of archive design, a choice was made giving consideration to the traditional feel required for the bedroom. The committee's choice of fabric was selected from swatches and ordered from a Ledbury company, Welland & Wye. However, our choice had to change because there wasn't enough fabric in stock for the project. More of the same fabric could have been ordered if we had needed over 100 metres and were prepared to wait at least four months. We made a second choice.



It is worth explaining here that the closest textile to what would have been used in history was of embroidered (crewel work) hessian. Cotton and linen fabric is grown and woven in India; as it comes off the loom it is embroidered following the sketched pattern (stencil)



on the fabric, craftspeople sit on the floor doing the crewel (embroidery) work. The finest cotton and linen fabric comes from India. The finest velvet, both cotton and silk, come from Italy. The finest plain (no pattern) cotton and linen come from the Netherlands. The finest woollen fabric comes from Britain. 'Made in Britain' woollen fabric is hugely respected around the world and Britain only makes world class 'stuff'.

We agreed the changes and the quotes and work commenced. The Boys made cushions and a bolster out of off-cuts of fabric and Welland & Wye gave us extra fabric to make a better job of the window. Because of the cost, the committee had agreed to only a skeletal dressing of the window but Welland & Wye knew better.

Only two machines were used in the manufacture of the furnishings, the loom in India and in Berkeley the sewing machine to sew the lengths 54" wide together, pattern matching. All other stitching was done by hand, and an estimated 2-3,000 stitches were used in putting the textiles together in the room. The fitting of the furnishings was all completed by hand: the valance is stitched to the bed; no wonder we were asked not to disturb them at work!

The result is fabulous.



## **Putting them on the Spot - Favourite FoBC Memories**

*The Friends' Committee has been led admirably by three people over the last 20 years,*

*Eleanor Garratt-Taylor, David Bowd-Exworth and Paul Walkden.*

*Below is an amalgamation and précis of their 'off the cuff' favourite memories from those years, many of which were put forward by more than one of them, or by all three.*

### **Interviews and photographs by Valerie Moores**

The success of the Launch evening was a delight, following the original suggestion of having a Friends' organisation by the Berkeley Estate Agent, Andrew Jardine. This was as a result of him becoming a Friend of Gloucester Cathedral, and he suggested that we could do the same for the Castle: he was therefore instrumental in our founding.



Recognising and remembering all the friends we have made as a result of a joint interest in the Berkeley family, the Castle and its history, and meeting people who have a specific interest and knowledge that they have communicated to us, has provided fascinating insights into other worlds, such as Toby Birch and the world of clocks.

Dinners/Luncheons in the Great Hall have been popular; notably the 10th Anniversary Dinner, with guest speaker Andrew Jardine who spoke movingly about the history and contribution of the Friends. Second in those memories was the Dinner held to celebrate the return from restoration/cleaning of the Poaching Affray painting, its history described by Eleanor and with the touching contribution by one of the descendants of a deported poacher in the painting.

The early visit to the Deer Park is a popular memory, and the thrill of seeing several horse drawn vehicles in the Estate Yard. The Friends' visit to the Kennels with Henry Berkeley



was an eye opener, as was his introduction to Judging the Hounds.

“A fond memory is standing on the Gun Terrace with Mr Berkeley and looking out over the Estate Yard in the distance discussing the cannon and what then became the Friends’ project to replace all the wooden cannon carriages.”

Eleanor and David were unable to join the Friends’ fabulous trip to Virginia with Charles Berkeley to help celebrate the 400th anniversary of the establishment of the state, but that trip is Paul’s favourite memory of all. “What a time the 30 of us had; made so welcome at the Berkeley Plantation, and Williamstown was quite something.”



“Another great memory was when the Friends had raised the money and we agreed that we should have the Castle Tapestries cleaned, repaired and re-hung properly. What a great effort this was as they were shipped off to Belgium for cleaning.” This became a significant Friends’ project.

“Another favourite was the Sundial project, led by Friend Bob Hunt. We are indebted to Renishaw who manufactured it to Bob’s detailed design before it was fixed onto a historic plinth discovered in the grounds.”



Many speakers have contributed fascinating talks and the list is endless - one of the most popular memories being of Tracy Borman, who has a wealth of

knowledge as Curator of Historic Royal Palaces.

Favourite memories among annual Friends’ trips included our private visits to Badminton House and to Cirencester Park with Lady Bathurst.



“So many people have been a constant, including the late David Tandy, Peter Yardley, Stuart Prior, Mark Horton and others, and we are grateful for their friendship as well as their talks to the Friends.”

***What a rewarding and enjoyable group. How many do you remember?***

***Inevitably, other memories have come to mind since collecting this information, but it was ‘off the cuff’, and The Buttress has a deadline!***

# FoBC Annual General Meeting

Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2026

7.30pm in the Great Hall, Berkeley Castle

Gates open at 7pm.

You are hereby notified that the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Berkeley Castle will take place at Berkeley Castle on Thursday, 23<sup>rd</sup> April, commencing at 7.30pm.

This is your opportunity to find out what your committee has been doing on your behalf during the past year.

There is only one nomination falling due this year for the Friends' Committee, that of the post of Secretary. Jane Handoll is willing to stand for re-election.

Voting will take place at the meeting.

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## We are looking for new Committee Members.

Please let us know if you are willing and able to join us.

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## The Berkeley Buttrass

The twice-yearly Friends' newsletter is crucial to communications with Friends.

We are looking for a new Editor

**CAN YOU and your preferred publishing package HELP?**



# Friends' Christmas Drinks Party

A selection of photographs from a festive evening



# Friends' Christmas Drinks Party

More photographs from a festive evening



***Please ensure we have your  
correct email address,  
so that we can notify you of events and any alterations  
to the published times and deadlines.***

### **2026 Membership Cards**

Membership cards will be sent out after full payment has been received.

Under-payment will result in delays.

Please check your Standing Order details and your membership renewal letter sent to you by email in January.

### **Admission and Discounts**

**You must always show your membership card.**

In addition to free admission to the Castle and gardens on normal open days, Friends have a 10% discount on most items purchased in the Kitchen Garden Restaurant and in the Castle Shop.

Friends now have complimentary access to Dr Jenner's House on production of their FoBC membership card.

Complimentary entry tickets to Spetchley Park Gardens are despatched with FoBC membership cards.

### **FoBC Website & Social Media**

Please do look at the Friends' section of the Castle website.

You will find past copies of the Berkeley Buttress and a reminder of the benefits of membership.

**[www.berkeley-castle.com/friends](http://www.berkeley-castle.com/friends)**

**There is also a Friends' Facebook group.**

Posts and contributions welcome.

**FB: Friends of Berkeley Castle**

### **Friends of Berkeley Castle**

c/o Berkeley Castle, Berkeley Gloucestershire GL13 9BQ

e: [friends@berkeley-castle.com/friends](mailto:friends@berkeley-castle.com/friends)

***Supporting Berkeley Castle Charitable Trust***

### **Current FoBC Officers**

Chairwoman: Eleanor Garratt-Taylor

Deputy Chairman: vacant

Treasurer: Mary Frost

Secretary: Jane Handoll

**Editor of the Berkeley Buttress**

*vacant*