

June 2016

Notes of the Tour of Milton Abbey House by Chris Fookes and of Milton Abbey Church by Helier Exon, 1 May 2016

The Milton Abbas Local History Group had another great turn out with 27 members and their guests being treated to a guided tour of the Milton Abbey House by Chris Fookes, a guided tour of Milton Abbey Church by Helier Exon, followed by an exhibition of the research done by history group members over the past year, and a buffet. Even for those who have been round the House and Abbey before, this was a revelation, with personal anecdotes and features normally unobserved pointed out. Some even remembered dancing in the ballroom, which must have been quite an experience in days gone by..

The interior features of the house, such as door frames, ceilings, and fireplaces, which were noted and photographed by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments in the 1950's are still preserved in fine condition, and were available for us to photograph. Thanks to Milton Abbey School for permission. The wrought iron door bells and lamps in the quadrangle are of exceptional quality, the much earlier stone and wood carvings in the Abbot's Hall are superb, including Abbot William Middleton's rebus.

The tour of the Abbey did not disappoint. It is good to see that some refurbishment has started and we will be able to record some of the findings, such as close ups of the stained glass which includes signatures. I thought that the Norman Abbey had been entirely destroyed by the fire of 1309, yet I was excited to see a tiny section of chevron decoration exposed by a deliberate niche, reused stonework is clear to see from the mason's marks which would have been hidden in the original. Also it is clear where the gas lighting once was. We know the location of the gasometer since it is marked on the 1902 County Series maps, and we have a photo of the lorry used to collect coal from Blandford railway station. It is only when these details are put together that one can truly understand the history of these places.

The exhibition of our recent research was in the south aisle of the Abbey. Thanks to the Street Fair Trustees for the grant for our display stands - these proved to be easy to use and just what we wanted to show off our work. Sandwiches, drinks and cream teas finished off the day nicely!