

# Society Outings

⊗ BANK OF ENGLAND AND TATE MODERN ⊗

Thursday 12th August 2004

— reported by Adeline Reidy —



We arrived in London with plenty of time before our timed visit of 11am. We were able to have a quick preview of the museum before being called into a very modern comfortable room for the presentation about the Bank of England. A cheery lady welcomed us to her first presentation with slides of many rooms that the general public do not see. There was a short question time.

The Bank of England, in the heart of the City of London, was established

in 1694 to provide William III with finance to fight the French. The Museum tells the story of the Bank of England from its foundation as a chartered joint-stock company to its role today as the United Kingdom's central bank.

Having been in existence for more than 300 years the Bank of England has, unsurprisingly, accumulated a considerable number of items associated with its history. These items are grouped into 'Collections'. Some of them, such as



bank notes and furniture, represent the survival of tools used in the everyday working of the Bank while others, such as the cartoons, have been acquired over the years either by purchase or presentation. Items from the Bank's collections are displayed in its Museum where they are used to illustrate the history of the institution and its role today at the centre of the UK economy.

Over the years the bank grew to become Britain's central bank, with the authority to print and issue currency notes. The Bank of England also has the responsibility for storing the country's gold reserves, managing the National Debt and safeguarding the value of British currency.

When the Bank moved here 1734 it acquired the nickname, 'The Old Lady of Threadneedle Street'. Sir John Soane designed the building in 1788; the original plans can still be seen in the Sir John Soane Museum, Lincoln's Inn Fields. However, only the exterior of Soane's building has survived; the rest of the building was replaced between 1925 and 1939 when the Bank was enlarged. The museum centres on the reconstruction of Soane's Bank Stock Office of 1793, complete with waxwork figures in period costume. The Bank Stock Office is considered to be the finest neo-classical interior in Europe. The museum illustrates the work of the Bank of England and the story of England's financial system using interactive videos and displays, including a modern dealing desk. Other exhibits include silver plated decoration,

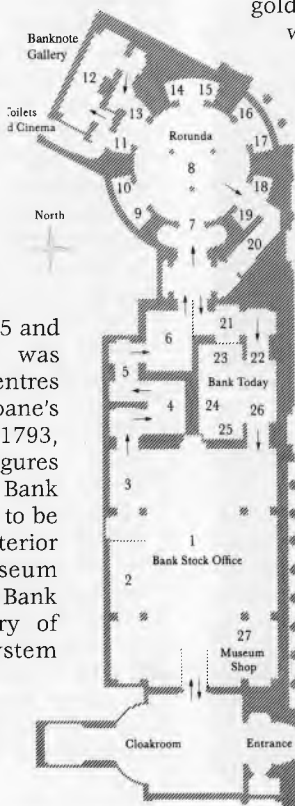
coins and the banknote gallery, displaying a complete collection of Bank of England notes. There are also pieces of Roman pottery and a Roman mosaic floor discovered during the rebuilding.

The Museum is housed within the Bank of England itself, right at the heart of the City. Sir Herbert Baker's Rotunda contains a display of Roman gold bars as well as a modern 281b, 13kg, gold bullion bar which you can

actually try and pick up. There are gold bars dating from

ancient times, to the modern market coins and a unique collection of bank notes, as well as many other items you might not expect to find - such as the pikes and muskets once used to defend the Bank and the Roman pottery and mosaics uncovered when it was rebuilt in the 1930s. On display are documents relating to famous customers such as the Duchess of Marlborough, George Washington and Horatio Nelson.

The Bank Stock Office, a late 18th century banking hall by the great English architect Sir John Soane, has been reconstructed and new DVD



systems allow visitors to look behind the doors of the nation's central bank and inter-activities allow them to examine the intricacies of bank note design and production. Live information on gilt-edged stocks and securities and the foreign currency and money markets is given at the Dealing Desk, similar to those in everyday use at the Bank. You can even try your hand at dealing on the US Dollar/Sterling Exchange by pitting your wits against a computerised simulation. Our time was soon spent and by 12.30pm we were on our way to the next treasure.

After a leisurely lunch along the Thames walkway, we arrived at the gigantic awesome Tate Modern, which stands in the heart of London, linked to St Paul's Cathedral by the new millennium footbridge. The building is a remarkable combination of the old and the new. The original Bankside Power Station was designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott who was also the architect of Battersea Power Station, the Liverpool Anglican cathedral and the famous British red telephone box. Located along the banks of the River Thames, Tate Modern opened to great acclaim in 2000 and has since welcomed over 6 million visitors through its imposing doors. Housed in the former Bankside Power Station, the gallery pays homage to modern and contemporary art from 1900 to the present day. The collection includes works from Matisse to Moore, Dali to Picasso and Rothko. The incredible turbine hall creates a stunning entrance and a vast space in which to display temporary installations.

The building consists of a brick-clad steel structure, constructed from more than 4.2 million bricks. The height of the central chimney was limited to 325 feet (99 metres) in order to be lower than the dome of St Paul's Cathedral. The building has been converted by the leading Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron, whose plans have highlighted the building's new function while respecting the integrity of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's original design.



The Tate Modern

The most noticeable change to the exterior of the building is a new two-storey glass structure or light beam spanning the length of the roof, which not only provides natural light in the galleries on the top floors, but also houses a stunning cafe offering outstanding views across London.

My views on the visit.

1. Modern Art isn't as silly as some people think. But some exhibitions are easier to understand than others. On actually seeing and experiencing modern art firsthand there is something that is not obvious, which is that it is VERY IMPRESSIVE. Works of art are very big, or shocking, or of strong impact on the mind. It's like a funfair of the MIND
2. Even if you don't like Modern Art you should visit Tate Modern (in fact it is especially worth visiting if you DON'T like it)
3. Preconceptions about an art gallery being by necessity an ancient classic building with fine but unexciting paintings on the walls can be DISPELLED on visiting the Tate Modern
4. For ME the experience opened my mind to alternative art, design and colour.

With the clock ticking away it was soon time to saunter along the riverbank and take in the views of this wonderful city and to hear her call for us to return soon. With our thanks to Joan for another successful day, we were back in Dover by 7.45pm.