

The Richard Jefferies Museum

It was a wet evening in June when the Swindon Society de-camped to the Richard Jefferies Museum for this year's summer outing. The rain didn't deter a good number of members from attending though and most of us began the evening with a ride on the Coate Water Miniature Railway, leaving from the Richard Jefferies Halt. Although we were all a little damper after our trip, the circular journey of around 10 minutes was well worth it and I'd recommend anyone to have a ride on the railway if they get the chance (opening times below). Many thanks to the volunteers who ran it that evening for keeping us entertained whilst getting increasingly soggy themselves.



After the train ride, it was definitely time for a cuppa and slice of cake, served up by the museum director Mike Pringle himself. Both were delicious and I look forward to visiting again on a drier summer's day to sample a cream tea in the garden. Having dried off a bit it was time for a wander around the museum. It's an understandably compact museum, being the house that Richard Jefferies grew up in. On the ground floor there was the main Richard Jefferies room, which introduces you to the writer and his work. Also, on the ground floor is the library. It may be a museum, but the library is full of books that can be read by visitors and caters for young visitors too, with several baskets of good quality children's books for them to choose from whilst their adults have a look around.



My personal highlights were on the first floor: the OS map lino of Swindon in the Victorian period on the floor of the cabinet room, the Unfrequented Paths exhibition in the gallery and a peek into "Mission Control" aka the staff office, where we were able to see a scale model of the museum complete with the proposed cowshed renovation which would accommodate the astonishing increase in visitors the museum is now seeing. The top floor houses the cheese and lumber room and Richard Jefferies' boyhood bedroom.

I wouldn't want to enter the cheese and lumber room in the dark, as there is an unexpected, life-size mannequin arranged on the bed, reading a book! The boyhood bedroom of Mr. Jefferies has a gun on display, which was also somewhat of a surprise (it's pretty big!), but he grew up in a different era in what was a very rural part of the town so in context this makes perfect sense.

For those that missed the outing, I would definitely recommend a visit – under the direction of the museum trust it is a very different visitor experience to the last time the Society visited.

The website (richardjefferies.org) has further information, but the opening hours are:

10:30 - 12:30 Tuesdays and Thursdays

10:00 - 16:00 Second Wednesday of each month

13:00 - 17:00 Every Sunday (from the beginning of May to the end of September)

The Coate Water Miniature Railway is open every Sunday 11:00-17:00 (or dusk in the winter months), with the exception of some events. It is also open at other times check here for further details:

<https://coatewaterailway.wixsite.com/swindon/events>



Kelly Blake - June 2019