

# Friends of the Willis Museum Newsletter February 2015



At the Friends' Christmas Social on December 17<sup>th</sup> special guest Janet Owen gave members a brief informal introduction to the newly established Hampshire Cultural Trust. Formerly Head of Arts and Museums at HCC, Janet is the Trust's Chief Executive Officer.

'The Friends' was founded in 1978 to promote, support and improve the Willis Museum. Meetings are held on the third Thursday of the month for ten months in the year, and other events are arranged from time to time. Registered Charity no 280406.

Annual subscription £10, visitor for one meeting £2

***Your Committee: Derek Anthony (Chairman), Ian Williams (Deputy Chairman), Shelagh le Marechal (Secretary), Howard Ray (Treasurer and Membership Secretary), Janice Bridgen, Alistair Craig, John Hollands (Publicity), Cathy Williams (Programme Secretary), Jenny Stevens (Curator, ex officio)***

Contact us c/o the museum or by email at [enquiries@friendsofwillis.hampshire.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@friendsofwillis.hampshire.org.uk)

Newsletter edited, duplicated and distributed by Derek Anthony and John Hollands.

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### **Chairman's Jottings, by Derek Anthony**

As we look forward to spring I would like to wish all of our members a rather belated "Happy New Year" and to hope that you had a most enjoyable Christmas break.

Those of you who were at the Annual General Meeting in the autumn will know that our previous secretary, Lesleyanne Hatt, retired from the committee and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Lesleyanne for all her past help. Lesleyanne's place as secretary has been taken by Shelagh le Marechal and we welcome Janice Bridgen as a new member of the committee.

The other big development in the autumn was the formation of the Hampshire Cultural Trust which has taken over Hampshire County Council's and Winchester City's responsibilities for Museums and Arts Services. You can read more about this important change in an article within this Newsletter.

By now you should have received a copy of the 2015 programme of monthly talks. If not, please telephone me on 01256 322073 or pick up a copy off the Friends' donation chest when you are next in the Museum. As you will see, our Programme Secretary Cathy Williams has done an excellent job in booking a wide range of interesting speakers for the coming year.

Two regular events, the details of which do not appear in the programme, are the skittles match against Alton's "Friends of the Curtis Museum" and the annual summer outing. I can now tell you that the skittles match will take place on the evening of Friday 15<sup>th</sup> May and the summer outing on the afternoon of Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> July. So, please put these dates into your 2015 diary. Your committee and I thank you for your support in the past and hope to see you at future Friends' events during 2015.

**The British Association of Friends of Museums:** The Friends of the Willis Museum is a member of the "British Association of Friends of Museums" (BAfM). The BAfM has an excellent website at [www.bafm.co.uk](http://www.bafm.co.uk) containing some very interesting articles and information. For example in the Winter 2014 issue of the BAfM magazine you will find an article by John Hollands, our Publicity Officer, about the "Bronzes for the World" exhibition which he curated in the Willis Museum last Summer. You may like to visit the website some time and have a look around. I am sure you will find something that interests you.

## Membership update, by Howard Ray

2014 was an excellent year for The Friends in terms of growing our Membership. A warm welcome to the following members who joined or re-joined us in 2014:

***Trish Cardy, Peter Claxon, John Cross, Edward Dawson, Barry Duke, Elisabeth Flegg, Barry Hedger, Judy Melliush, Ivor Noakes, Geoffrey Palmer, Christopher and Margaret Pollard, George Porter, Anne Powell, Ken Smallbone and Pauline Williams.***

Sadly however we bid farewell to:

***David and Betty Cawardine, Rachel Clinch, Maurice and Joy Dyer, Peter Harris and John Shirvell.***

This is a net increase of NINE in the year which takes our Membership to 94. This is extremely encouraging.

Our success as a group of Friends whose primary object is to support the Willis Museum in every way possible is very much dependent on the strength of our Membership so your Committee would like to see us reaching the 100 mark in 2015. Do you know someone who would enjoy our attractive programme of talks and might like to join us? Don't forget that as a result of the capacity limit in the Archaeology Gallery membership is the only way of being certain that you will be guaranteed a seat at the meetings, providing that you arrive by 7.20pm. Also don't forget that those joining during the January to June period are eligible for attractive first year membership fee discounts.

## The Hampshire Cultural Trust, by Howard Ray



On 1 November the Willis Museum entered a new era. This was the date when the Hampshire Cultural Trust was launched as an independent charitable organisation to operate and fund the arts, gallery and museum services previously managed by the Hampshire County Council and

Winchester City Museum Services. The Willis Museum is one of twenty three locations to be operated by the Trust. Many of you will already have noticed the new purple branding inside and outside the Museum.

As an independent charitable company it will enjoy a higher degree of autonomy plus benefits not previously available to the public sector organisations. In particular it is anticipated that the Trust will be able to generate significant additional investment from external sources such as grants and donations, as well as from gift aid and rate relief.

Those of you with internet access will have read that the Trust's Vision and Mission is to champion world-class culture and to showcase, connect and empower Hampshire's creative economy whilst working collaboratively to bring organisations, people and ideas together for greater impact.

The initial Trustees of the new organisation are:

**Alan Lovell (Chair); Rachel Bebb; Yinnon Ezra; Helen Jackson; Roy Perry (Hampshire County Council); Mike Southgate (Winchester City Council)**

During the first three years the amount guaranteed by the two principal councils will be fixed. In addition these two Councils are funding a significant part of the initial Trust set up costs. For Budgetary purposes the Trust is working on the assumption of having a core income of £5million per annum.

The venues which will be operated by the Trust currently welcome over 600,000 visitors a year. The Trustees each bring to the role considerable and highly relevant experience and a variety of expertise. Their personal credentials are detailed in full on the Trust's new web site. In the coming months six further Trustees will be appointed. It is also envisaged that additional Trustees will be required for a separate trading arm which should provide a further income stream.

One of the Trustees' major tasks will be to manage the funding required. For the first five years Hampshire County Council and Winchester City Council have pledged a fixed sum of money, as have some of the smaller District Councils in whose patch some of the venues are located. The venues under the Trust's care are:

**Aldershot Military Museum ; Allen Gallery, Alton; Andover Museum; Ashcroft Art Centre, Fareham; Basing House; Bursledon Windmill; City Space at Winchester Discovery Centre; Curtis Museum, Alton; Eastleigh Museum; Forest Art Centre, New Milton; Gosport Gallery; Hampshire Wardrobe, Chilcomb; Milestones Museum; Museum of the Iron Age, Andover; Red House Museum and Gardens, Christchurch; Rockbourne Roman Villa; Search, Gosport; The Gallery at Winchester Discovery Centre; Westbury Manor Museum, Fareham; West End Centre, Aldershot; Westgate Museum, Winchester; Willis Museum & Sainsbury Gallery; Winchester City Museum.**

All the collections remain in the ownership of the existing owners, including the public sector organisations, but have been lent to the Trust under various twenty-five year loan agreements. Responsibility for their maintenance remains with the owner. Likewise the ownership of the buildings and other fixed assets, including responsibility for their maintenance, remains unchanged with the Trust paying a nominal rent for the facilities under a multitude of lease and licence agreements.

On a day by day basis the Trust's Executive team will consist of the Chief Executive (Dr Janet Owen), a Chief Operating Officer, and a Director of Communications and Development. These posts, together with the other senior positions, should be filled by April so by the time of the next Newsletter we should be able to provide you with a full Who's who.

The headquarters for the Trust, where the senior management team will be based, will be Chilcomb House just outside Winchester.

For an initial period the Trust will receive administration and technical services such as Accounting, Human Resources, Payroll and IT from Hampshire County Council and Winchester City Council but progressively will be required to establish their own independent facilities.

With effect from 1 November one hundred and forty five of those based at the above locations and previously employed by one of the Councils became employees of the Hampshire Cultural Trust.

Looking to the future the Trust has a bold vision and highly ambitious plans for putting the county on the world map in terms of Hampshire based cultural events. In achieving these objectives the

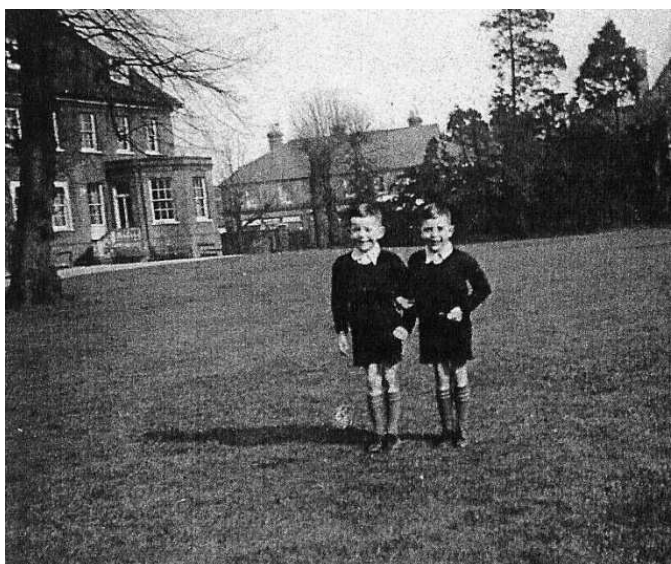
Trust will however continue to be reliant on the enthusiasm of their volunteers (of which there are currently 400) and the various Friends organisations, in addition to their dedicated staff.

### **From the war time Basingstoke diary of Evelyn Bailey, by Judy Melliush**

*My great aunt Evelyn Bailey worked for Archdeacon Anthony W Chute at Basingstoke Rectory for 20 years until his death on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1958. She always spoke fondly of her time there. Afterwards she went on to become Housekeeper to Rev David Howe at Hook Rectory and then at Broughton Rectory near Stockbridge until the retirement of the Rector there. Evelyn continued to live at Broughton until shortly before her death on 4 January 2005.*

#### **1939:**

*Thu 24 Aug:* Crisis. Anxious days. ARP preparations at the rectory. *Sun 27 Aug:* Peace service at St Michael's. *Mon 28 Aug:* Hectic times, Crisis hanging on. Busy with ARP preparations. *Thu 31 Aug:* Busy preparing for evacuees.



*Fri 1 Sept:* Awful day. Poland declares war. Children evacuated. 3 tiny boys here. Gerald called up. [Gerald, my grandfather] and Archie were Evelyn's brothers] *Sat 2 Sept:* Little boys very good. Busy nerve wracking week. *Sun 3 Sept:* England declares war. Sad day. Arch called up. *Wed 6 Sept:* LWH [Toc H League of Women Helpers] further meetings cancelled. *Fri 8 Sept:* Took Mickey [Mickey Delaney was one of the evacuees] shopping and home to tea with me [Evelyn's mother lived in Burgess Road] *Sat 16 Sept:* Saw Gerald off. Trains full of troops. Troops teeming through town all past week. *Sun 24 Sept:* Gerald went through with

#### **Evacuees at the Rectory**

troops going abroad.

*Sat 7 Oct:* Soldiers to use Toc H HQ as recreation rooms.

*Sat 11 Nov:* Arch Lance Cpl now.

*Wed 6 Dec:* Dr to Peter [an evacuee] unsuccessful. Visit to dentist with him. *Thu 7 Dec:* Took Peter to clinic to have tooth out. Successful this time. *Thu 21 Dec:* Peter and Mickey gone home for Xmas. Saw them off at station.

#### **1940:**

*Wed 10 Jan 1940:* Very jolly evening at LWH. Most interesting talk on America by Mrs Chesterfield.

*Tue 16 Jan:* Mickey knocked down by car. Not badly hurt. [An effect of the blackout perhaps?]

*Tue 6 Feb:* Mickey's birthday. Aged 7. *Mon 12 Feb:* Gerald home on leave from France. *Thu 29 Feb:* Toc H dance at Town Hall very successful.

*Wed 17 Apr:* LWH Mr Willis speaking on the history of Basingstoke.

*Fri 10 May:* War news bad. Germany invades Low Countries. *Mon 27 May:* Peter's birthday. His mother and Joan [sister?] to tea. *Thu 30 May:* Evacuation of Dunkirk. Very dangerous conditions. *Fri 31 May:* Loads and loads of BEF returning. Great anxiety for Gerald's safety.

*Sun 2 Jun:* Saw heaps of BEF trains. *Wed 5 Jun:* Heard of Gerald's safe return from Dunkirk. Thank God. *Sat 15 Jun:* Very grave war news. *Tues 18 Jun:* Gerald home on leave. Cheers.

*Sun 21 Jul:* Peter gone away to Warminster with his mother to live.

*Fri 2 Aug:* Tommy Darling [evacuee] arrives. *Tue 13 Aug:* Sirens. Sheltered 1 ½ hours. *Thu 15 Aug:* Sirens. Tommy has poisoned hand. *Fri 16 Aug:* Sirens 3 times. Bombs dropped Burgess Road, Church Street, 6.10. Terrible time. I was home. *Sat 17 Aug:* Time bomb explodes Church Square and one dropped on Burgess Road. Windows at home all broken and ceilings damaged. St Michael's and the Methodist church badly damaged. *Sun 18 Aug:* sirens at 1.15. *Mon 19 Aug:* Sirens at 11. Gunfire. Busy times. *Tue 20 Aug:* Peaceful day. *Wed 21 Aug:* Sirens at 10 and 1.10. Lasting an hour.

Evelyn kept this letter from her brother Gerald, Judy Melliush's grandfather who was stationed at Newcastle Under Lyne, Staffs,

Fri Aug 23

*Well, you certainly have had your share of sirens and bombing. Yes, it was much too close to be comfortable, and I thank God that you are all safe. It was a good job you were home with Mum. She is wonderful, isn't she? I'm very glad it didn't affect her too badly. The sirens seldom go before the damage is done in spite of all the precautions. I often wonder why they are allowed to get through so far, but I suppose they come over in such numbers some are bound to get through and we still haven't a large enough air force to cope with them all. It's a damned shame, all the damage they do and the terrible loss of life. I'm sure they must have had a terrifying time at the Rectory, and it's a great shame about St Michael's. I expect Mr Chute is greatly put out. I expect they were after the railway or Thorny's. Anyhow I'm glad you told me all about it, for, as you say, I might have heard rumours and worried myself.*

*They appear to have dropped bombs all around Basingstoke and I believe some places have suffered very badly. It's a good thing to know that you are all safe, but it must have been draughty with all the windows out. I hope, please God, you won't have any more raids, and haven't had any since you wrote.*

***Left: Evelyn with her brother Gerald, Judy's grandfather***

*Sat 24 Aug:* Siren. *Mon 26 Aug:* Siren.

*Sun 8 Sept:* Siren, 8.30. *Wed 25 Sep:* Sirens. *Sat 28 Sep:* Bad night. 2 sirens. *Mon 30 Sep:* Sirens.



*Tue 8 Oct:* Sirens. *Thu 24 Oct:* high explosive bomb dropped at Cliddesden Road. Lots of damage done.

*Sat 9 Oct:* [November?] Bombs dropped at Solby's Road and time bomb at May Street. *Sat 23 Nov:* Bombs dropped in rectory grounds, town and Penrith Road. All evacuated as thought to be time bomb. Boys home with me. Damage slight considering. All safe at Rectory. Casualties at Penrith Road. *Wed 27 Nov:* Started clearing debris at Rectory with Norah.

*Sat 14 Dec:* Busy clearing up. Rectory full of workmen. *Sun 15 Dec:* Patrick [evacuee] went home to Portsmouth. *Fri 27 Dec:* Gerald returns. I return to Rectory with Mrs Creed and Norah. [Norah was Norah Cottrell, who became Norah Holt. Mrs Creed was believed to be the cook replacing Mrs Kettle who left with her husband on Fri 9 Aug.]

***Below: Bomb crater in the Rectory Garden***



**Quakers in North Hampshire: putting the record straight, by Susan Hawkins,  
Farnborough Quakers, with John Hollands**

I am a late comer to Basingstoke. My son settled in Whitchurch and this opened up the beautiful Hampshire countryside which can be reached on public transport from Basingstoke. I knew that Tommy Steele was at Basingstoke in the 60s playing football, but that was it.

It wasn't until I read *A record of dissent in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries*, by Ken Smallbone, one of the Friends' speakers in 2014 that I realised that George Fox, founder of the Quakers, had come to Basingstoke twice in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and that a strong following grew here and in Basingstoke. One of Ken Smallbone's own forebears, James Potter was a leading Quaker, but to my disappointment Ken did not mention him in his talk; some Whitchurch Quakers *were* mentioned in Bob Clarke's talk on the false Messiah of Overton, but these Quakers were not shown in a good light. I would like to put the record straight and give credit to Quakers in North Hampshire for their part in the elevation of the peasant from a feudal tool to a respected free-thinking human being.

In the seventeenth century the parish Church was in effect a devolved layer of government, and all landowners were expected to pay one tenth of their income as tithes towards the upkeep of the church and the clergy. Fox maintained that it was out of order to have to pay for a service you did not believe in and could do without, and to be taxed by people who were no better than you. He resisted the power of the church in his ministry and encouraged Quakers to withhold the tithe payments. James Potter, who owned Brown's Farm in Bauthurst, was moved to follow Fox's teaching and did this, and in 1657 he was imprisoned for five years in Winchester Gaol, though initially this was for criticising the preaching of Bauthurst's Calvinist Parson Benthall.

Whilst he was in gaol, Parson Benthall proceeded against Potter's sister Anne, also a Quaker, intending to make her pay tithes that he had refused. She, too, refused and was imprisoned. A claim was then made against his brother Richard. He was also a Quaker, but had paid tithes on his own behalf in order to maintain his freedom in the Quaker cause. Not content with that, whilst Richard was away, Parson Benthall, accompanied by a bailiff and other officials raided his farm and seized livestock to cover Anne's debt. The debt was £5 but the sale realised £17, none of which was returned.

In prison James Potter discovered that he could act for others in the Quaker community – he was imprisoned five times in all - and with his encouragement Quaker neighbours helped in practical ways to rebuild the lives of other Quakers who had been partially ruined by their beliefs. Neighbours helping neighbours in this way was a first, and this help was given graciously, unlike parish relief.

In due course Parson Benthall was replaced by the gentle and outstandingly tolerant Parson Musgrave. This allowed James Potter to make Bauthurst a haven for Quakers. The Five Mile Act had been passed in 1665; intended to make dissenters return to the Church of England, this banned non-conformist worship within five miles of corporate towns. As a direct result Quakers from many parts of North Hampshire - and further afield journeyed to Bauthurst to worship according to their own beliefs at what became one of the largest dissenting meetings in Hampshire. Potter also became a leading advocate for the Quakers at the Winchester Assizes.

After Potter's death in 1703 the Bauthurst community dwindled, and although Brown's Farm and another Bauthurst building, Rose Cottage that were both used as a Quaker Meeting Houses survive, no trace can be found now of the Quaker burial ground that was once there.

However, thanks in no small measure to Potter's influence other strong Quaker communities grew up elsewhere in Hampshire, Basingstoke included, and notably in Alton which also had both a Meeting House and burial ground. You can see a Quaker burial plan for Alton in the Hampshire Record Office. It is very moving. My family name is Hawkins, and from my research I know that most of the burials at Alton are my own forebears.

Our country owes much to the Quakers: they have played a prominent part in prison reform and in the abolition of slavery and child labour, as well as in promoting free education and the Welfare State.

This was a perfect society, but sadly George Fox died, and even on University Challenge, no one could answer the question "Who was George Fox?" I hope you don't mind my redressing the balance with regard to the two talks referred to above.

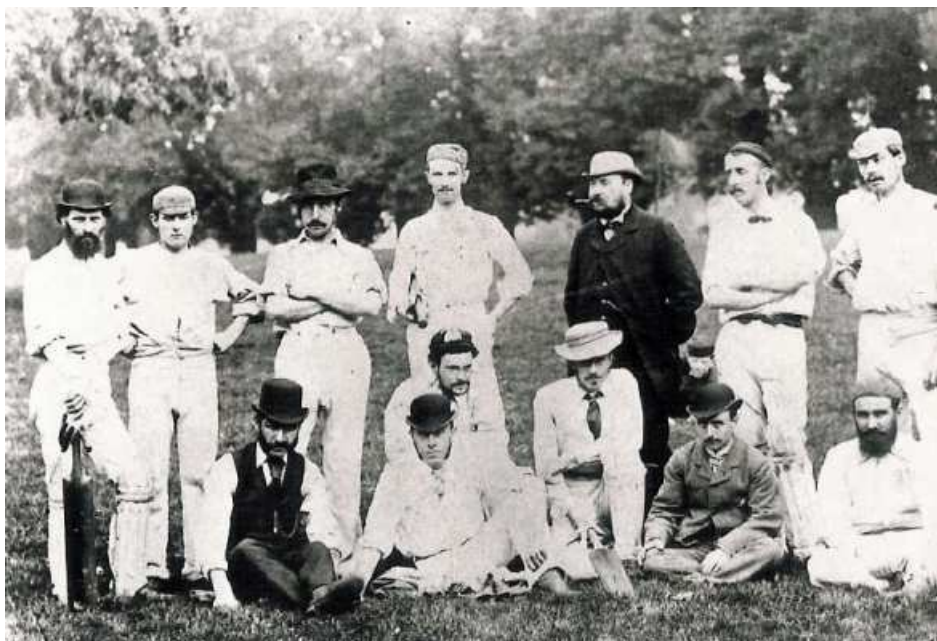


## The night they called it May's Bounty, by Bob Clarke

2015 sees the 150th anniversary of the Basingstoke Cricket Club (now the Basingstoke Sports and Social Club). The club was founded on the evening of the 4th of May 1865 at a meeting in the *Wheatsheaf*.

Since at least 1855, when Basingstoke played Newbury on the 14th of September of that year, cricket has been played on the piece of land that was known as the Folly. In 1880, Thomas Burberry, who owned the land, gave the Club notice to quit, so that the land could be sold for building plots. It looked as if the Club would lose its ground. However, the President of the Club, John May, the brewer, saved the day by buying the land with his own money. May had to pay around £500 more than the market price in order to beat off the building speculators. Buying the Folly and laying a cinder cycle track cost him £1,800.

On the 17th of May 1881, after a match on the Folly against the K Company Rifle Volunteers, the Club held its first annual dinner since May bought the Folly. The dinner was held in the Town Hall. Judging from the number of toasts, each of which was followed by a speech, which gave time for



people to refill their glasses, and the number of songs that were sung, it is unlikely that anybody went home sober that night.

**Left: Basingstoke Cricket Club members in the 1890s**

After the meal was over, the loyal toast was given, followed by the National Anthem played by the K Company's

band. Edwin White, who owned the timber yard at the Canal Wharf, proposed a toast to the Bishop and clergy of the Diocese and ministers of all denominations. The magistrate, Richard Knight proposed a toast to the Army, Navy and reserve forces. The former Mayor, Henry Allen, proposed the toast, 'Success to the Basingstoke Cricket Club.' John Lamb of Lamb and Brooks, solicitors, proposed a toast to the committee and officers of the club. Rev. Arthur Ruty, Headmaster of Queen's Grammar School proposed a toast to the Mayor and Corporation of Basingstoke. John Wheeler, saddler and harness maker of Church Street, proposed the town and trade of Basingstoke, Steward Webb, the Cross Street solicitor, proposed the health of the Chairman (Henry Allen), and George Lear, another solicitor, proposed the health of the Vice-Chairman (Rev. Ruty). There were also a toast to "The Ladies" and one to "The Press", both of which were also drunk and responded to.

As part of his response to the toast to the Mayor and Corporation, Councillor George Tubb, landlord of the *Black Boy*, summed up the mood of the evening by saying,

'We wants a good song or two, and enjoy ourselves, and I shall thank you all for the honour you have conferred on me and the Mayor, and I shall drink each of your jolly good healths.'

In fact at least 14 songs were sung during the proceedings, most of which, probably thankfully, have not stood the test of time. They included: *The Rose of Alabama*, sung by Arthur Toomer, shoeing smith from Sarum Hill; *The Gay Photographer*, sung by Mr Neville; *In the dell where the violets grow*, sung by George Cooper, the Hackwood Road florist; and *John Barleycorn*, sung by Edward Adams of the Victoria Brewery, who, earlier that year, with his brothers Charles and Valentine, had led the Massagainian Army against the Salvation Army in the Battle of Church Square, which prompted headlines in the national press and questions in Parliament.

During the evening Henry Allen presented John May with a 'beautifully illuminated address' signed by 79 members of the Cricket Club. Later, John Lamb, during his speech, as reported by the *Hants and Berks Gazette*, said:

'It had been a source of great pleasure to him to witness the presentation that evening to Captain May, because one seldom heard of such generosity as had been displayed by that

gentleman. Up to the present time the cricket field had been known as the Folly, but he thought that it would be known now by the name of "May's Bounty" (laughter).'

The name stuck. It is now the name of the cricket field. The road that runs alongside was later re-named Bounty Road, and the *Cattle Market Inn* is now called the *Bounty*. And this was all due to a half-drunken jest made in the course of a merry evening.



### **The end of the empire, by Derek Wren**

Seventy years ago last April when I disembarked from a troopship at Bombay (Mumbai) I didn't realise I was going to see India, and other countries, in the last years of British rule. As the train left the station, on its way to Delhi, we were all appalled to see the people living in hovels alongside the track, a situation I understand sadly still exists. In time sympathy among the troops gave way to disgust when they realised the size of the problem. I don't remember that personally I ever shared this contempt for Indians.

In July I was posted to Kandy in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Conditions here were much better. I was soon able to take advantage of an introduction I had to an English tea planter. I was warmly greeted when I stayed for the weekend as I was at other estates or when he took me to his club where they all met in the evening. They all had comfortable homes, a staff of servants and gardens filled with flowers the whole year. Unfortunately almost every time we sat talking I was told 'never make friends with the Ceylonese'. As this was a view I couldn't accept my contacts ceased. It wasn't true of other British groups. The Vicar of St. Paul's Church in Kandy had a Ceylonese curate who when he became a bishop introduced changes in the services to make them more

appropriate for his country. Ceylon had excellent schools at all major towns, often with British or American heads, but staffed with local people as well.

The Baptist church in Kandy had a local pastor and it was here that I met Earle Schockman who with his wife Clarice became very good friends. Their home was always open to me and other friends. They were Dutch burghers, descendants of the Dutch settlers who occupied the country before it was taken over by the British. Some still claim to be pure European although I am sure intermarriage had always taken place. Earle regarded himself as a bridge between East and West. More than anyone else he helped me make friends wherever I went.

My impression of the British rule was that it was good and impartial. The Government Agent for Kandy was Tommy Dyson. He was the senior political office in the area. Every Friday he and his wife opened their house to the troops. They became good friends of mine. I was told that he spoke Sinhala fluently and when on tour would sit down on the floor with the elders of the village to discuss their problems. Tommy and his wife made no distinction between the people they met. One evening when called I was invited to stay for dinner and sat down at the table where they had entertained the Supreme Commander Louis Mountbatten for lunch.

On another occasion I was telling a Colonel who lodged with them that I had been reading 'Towards Freedom', a book Nehru had written while in prison. The colonel said Nehru should be kept in prison. I am sure he was quite sincere in his belief that India could not be ruled without British help. Whether the Colonel realised that the young man in civilian clothes, arguing with him, was only a private in the army I never knew.

Not all the Government Agents were from Britain. When I told the Dysons I was hoping to visit Jaffna they gave me an introduction to the Government Agent there. When, on one of my journeys, I did call I found he and his wife were Tamils, an appropriate choice for the one part of the country where the Tamils predominate.

I found that young Ceylonese were impatient for independence. I believe the British administration was respected but all the top jobs went to foreigners, blocking their chances of improvement. They lived in a country with a history and civilisation older than ours. They had no wish for the British way of life to be imposed on theirs.

When the war with Japan ended my move to the 'sappers' came through and I was posted to a holding battalion in India, near to the princely state of Hyderabad. This was strictly out of bounds. I was lucky to end up in Lahore where I had an introduction to a student at the YWCA. The first person I met when I called was Raj Rallia Ram, the assistant secretary. Raj was an instant friend as she was for Margaret when they met in England. We last saw her in India in 1985.

In 1946 the unit moved to Singapore. After five days on the train we arrived in Calcutta to find the city in the grip of riots. I saw the other side of life in India. The streets were full of Hindus and Moslems beating each other to death with lengths of gas barrel. We were all glad when our troopship left for Singapore.

Singapore had made an amazing recovery from three years of occupation by the Japanese. It was obvious that the local population, mainly Chinese but Indians and others could take over as soon as they had the chance. I found there was an East/West Society which I joined and soon made new friends. The all-white swimming club admitted British troops. I couldn't take my friend Lucy

Lee there but at the Chinese New Year celebrations she took me to dinner at the Chinese club. In 1990 when Margaret and I were the guests in Singapore of Looi Eng Chan he took us to the Tangling Club, one of the most exclusive clubs in Singapore.

I came home from Singapore to be demobbed in the spring of 1947. This was the year when India became independent in August, followed by Ceylon in February the next year. Singapore, now one of the smallest but most successful countries in the world, didn't achieve complete independence on its own until 1965.

What, you may be asking, has all this to do with Basingstoke? I believe it has a lot. I have a blurred memory of brick walls and slate roofs when I cycled through the town in 1942. I don't believe it had changed much when we moved here in 1962. Now Basingstoke is a successful example of a multi-cultural society. Probably the first change was when Indians or Africans took over our small groceries. They are able stand up to the competition from supermarkets. Then came Indian and Chinese restaurants offering a take away service. Our excellent hospital could not survive without the help of immigrants at all levels, doctors, nurses and porters. They may be friends who are neighbours. People we meet at supermarkets, while waiting at our surgery and many other places.

Would this have been possible if Britain had not led the world in giving the empire back to its rightful owners? I doubt it.

### **What's on at the Willis, February to May 2015**

**Made in China: an imperial Ming vase, now until April 4.** How and why this iconic blue and white porcelain Ming flask represents a crucial period in China's history. A British Museum Touring Exhibition (Sainsbury Gallery)

**An introduction to Chinese culture, Tuesday February 24 7.30 to 9.00 pm** £5. Please book in advance.

**Inspired by the Ming Vase, an exhibition by the pupils of Chiltern Primary School, February 28 to March 28** (Basingstoke Gallery).

**Fun with fabrics, Wednesdays February 25 to May 13, 2.30 to 4.30 pm (except April 8 and April 15).** £95. concessions £71.25 and £47.50. (Archaeology Gallery) Please book in advance.

**Chinese brush painting workshop, Thursday March 12, 11 am to 4.30 pm.** £40, concessions £30 and £20. Please book in advance.

**Friends' Talk: The heraldry of Hampshire, by Edward Hepper, Thursday March 19 at 7.30 pm** (Archaeology Gallery) Free to Friends, visitors £2. Visitors must pre-book.

**Setting the pace: 50 years of Basingstoke Ramblers' Club, April 4 to May 9** (Basingstoke Gallery).

**Family workshop: Easter cup cake decorating, Thursday April 9, 11 am to 12.30 pm.** Cost to be confirmed.

**Trench coat: From Field to Fashion, April 11 to May 31.** (Sainsbury Gallery) How an item of military uniform evolved into an iconic fashion garment. Includes an original WW1 cavalry trench coat.

**Family workshop: button making, Thursday April 16, 11 am to 1 pm.** £5 per person. Please book in advance.

**Friends' talk: Magna Carta, the great charter of 1215, by Dr Alex Armstrong, Thursday April 16 at 7.30 pm** (Archaeology Gallery), Free to Friends, visitors £2. Visitors must pre-book.

**Animals in art and literature, an exhibition by the pupils of Fairfields School, May 16 to June 20** (Basingstoke Gallery)

**Friends' talk: The four seasons of Cyprus, by Mrs Gwen Burton, Thursday May 21 at 7.30 pm** (Archaeology Gallery). Free to Friends, visitors £2. Visitors must pre-book.