

Friends of the Willis Museum Newsletter

September 2012



Wendy Ray at work, see Volunteering at the Willis Museum

The Friends was founded in 1978 to promote, support and improve the Willis Museum. Meetings are held at the museum on the third Thursday of each month except August with other events throughout the year.

Annual membership £10 Visitor for one evening £2

Registered charity No: 280406

Website: www.friendsofwillis.hampshire.org.uk

Your committee: Derek Anthony (Chairman), Ian Williams (Vice-Chairman), Leslyanne Hatt (Secretary), Howard Ray (Treasurer). Bill Fergie (Outside events), Briony Hollands (Minutes Secretary), John Hollands (Publicity), Jenny Stevens (Curator, ex officio), Cathy Williams (Programme secretary)

Contact us c/o the museum or by email at enquiries@friendsofwillis.hampshire.org.uk

This newsletter was edited and distributed by Derek Anthony and John Hollands

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CHAIRMAN'S JOTTINGS, BY Derek Anthony

Welcome to the September issue of our Newsletter. In the last issue, published in May, I mentioned the fact that a number of Friends were training to become "Front of the House" volunteers at the Museum. The volunteer programme is now fully operational and within this issue you will find an article, written by Wendy Ray, about her experiences as a volunteer.

This is one of a number of contributions in this Newsletter written by Friends and I would like to thank all of them for responding to my appeal in the May issue. Please keep sending your articles and letters to the editor. We will publish as many of them as we can.

Members of the committee are grateful to all those Friends who have renewed their membership for the coming 12 months. We would be very grateful if anyone who intends to renew but has not so far done so could make arrangements to pay the treasurer as soon as possible.

Enclosed with this Newsletter you will find an invitation to join us for the Annual General Meeting of Friends in October. I do hope that as many of you as possible will join us for this important event.

I have recently returned from holiday in the United States, spent for the most part in Virginia and North Carolina. Important events within the American War of Independence took place in this part of North America. Indeed the last battle of the war took place at Yorktown in Virginia. If anyone knows of a Basingstoke connection to the American struggle for independence I would love to hear about it and maybe publish something in the next newsletter.

Finally, and still on an American theme, Alan Roach provided us with a free news-sheet picked up in a Florida coffee-shop which contains an article about the Willis Museum's "oldest wedding cake". The article reads as follows:-

"The Willis Museum in Basingstoke, England, is home to what is believed to be the oldest complete wedding cake in the world. The cake was made in 1898 and still holds its shape, though it's browned with age. Topped with a floral display, its only flaw is a crack in the icing caused by a bomb blast during the Second World War. "A syringe once inserted into the cake revealed the center to be moist" says museum curator Sue Tapliss. The cake was donated to the museum by the daughter of the baker who made it and displayed it in his bakery shop window."

News travels around the world in a flash these days of electronic communication. The wedding cake can be seen in its special case in the Time Tunnel on the first floor of the Museum.

AN APOLOGY, by John Hollands

In the June 2012 Newsletter, I mistakenly attributed the article entitled "Store 107" to Peter Buckland. It was in fact written by his brother, David. My apologies to both Peter and David for this error. In this issue we have an article entitled "Sixty plus years ago", that really is by Peter Buckland

VOLUNTEERING AT THE WILLIS MUSEUM, by Wendy Ray

As a Friend of the Willis Museum I was, like others, worried about the fate of the museum with all the cut-backs. So I decided to try to do my bit and, again like others, applied to be a volunteer 'Welcome Host'.

I filled in the necessary form and had an interview, which was very friendly and relaxed, and I came away full of enthusiasm. A while later I received my email confirmation accepting me as a volunteer, along with a rota of duty days and a training day. I had agreed to do a morning every other week, but in fact there have been other days that required cover so I have actually done several consecutive weeks.

The first morning I was quite nervous when I reported for duty, but everyone was so friendly I soon forgot about being the 'new girl' and got into the swing of things.

My morning shift starts at 9.00am and we spend time cleaning the building. I had never thought before about who does the cleaning but I now know that it is the staff and volunteers who keep the place in such good shape. It is not the same cleaning every week, Mandy and Marion keep a note of what has been done and what needs doing. It might be dusting, polishing, Hoovering, floor washing, toilet cleaning, taking out the rubbish - all the normal things that would require doing in your own home. We spend about 45 minutes doing that then we all gather in the café area for a quick coffee before we open at 10.00am.

From 10.00am to 1.15pm I spend an hour or so at a time between the front Welcome Desk and the desk in the café. On the Welcome Desk I have to click in all those who come into the museum, whether to see the exhibitions or just for coffee, dividing them into Male, Female and Child thereby giving the museum accurate visitor figures. I am also meant to ask people if they mind telling me their postcode, but lots of people rush in and then rush out again, not really giving me a chance to ask them. Of course there are plenty of others who stop for a chat, maybe about the weather, or the exhibition or whatever, and they are quite happy to give me the information. Some people just come in for coffee, the café being a great place to meet friends and others come in to pick up some leaflets from the leaflet stand.

My duties on the café desk entail taking money for café sales and shop sales - I am not always very good at the till, though it is becoming easier. I clear tables and take the bucket of dishes upstairs to the dishwasher (machine not person!), bring down the clean dishes, and sometimes have to answer the phone. We do a lot of coffee sales, but not so much in the way of shop sales - there are lots of Basingstoke books and items which make good gifts, so don't forget to come and take a look when you want a present for someone.

Some days are, of course, busier than others, and some days are really quiet, but the museum is not a place that I think I should look busy all the time - it is so friendly and relaxed and that is what the public should be able to pick up on as they pop in for a visit. I hope I give them a friendly face and a cheerful 'good morning', so that they will be encouraged to come back for another visit. I tell them what exhibitions are on the different floors and tell the children what they can 'make and take' that day and what quizzes there are to do. I was lucky enough to be on duty when the Olympic Flame came through Basingstoke and the museum was buzzing. There were people in and out all morning and the number of people I clicked in went up about seven fold. We all went out to see the flame go past and then there was a reception on the top floor of the museum so all the invited people crowded in giving

the museum a real party atmosphere.

I am thoroughly enjoying volunteering at the Willis. When the afternoon volunteer takes over at 1.15pm, I feel I can leave having done a good morning's work. I would recommend that anyone with some time to spare thinks about giving a helping hand as well.

RESEARCHING THE BASINGSTOKE UNION WORKHOUSE, by Barbara Large

As a recent volunteer for the rewriting of the Victoria County History for the Basingstoke area, it was suggested that I might like to research Basingstoke's Workhouse. I recently moved from the Midlands and have always been interested in poor relief, and was intrigued to find that very little has been done on this particular subject locally, and it was a challenge!

The building itself, and its associated early 20C Infirmary, have gone now – under the Hampshire Clinic in Basing Road – and there is very little remaining of records which would be easily accessible to the family historian or casual researcher – which is probably why it has never been done. However, there are two immensely useful archives – the Minute Books of the Board of Guardians in Hampshire Record Office, and the correspondence with the London Poor Law authorities in the MH12 archive at the National Archives in Kew.

There are some other tantalising small documents in both places, including some plans buried in general workhouse files at Kew, together with a few contemporary news articles and, of course, the census and Hansard. The Willis local history room also has some interesting fragments and copies about Basingstoke Workhouse and general workhouse rules, to which John Hollands very kindly gave me access to photograph.

The two main archives together enable the piecing together of a very comprehensive history, with the correspondence backing up the minutes and fleshing them out with more personal stories, comments and descriptions from real people and a few names. Unfortunately, they are difficult to research, with no useful indexing, both being compiled by date – the process requires trawling through pages of tedium to suddenly arrive periodically at gold! I find the best method, rather than wasting most of a precious day at Kew trying to transcribe a 12-page, turgid (Victorian prose!), barely legible letter, is to photograph it and do the work at home, allowing the time to be spent on the main “trawl”. Photography is free at Kew, but there is a charge at the Hampshire Record Office.

Basingstoke Union was established in May 1835, being one of the earliest ones, and the third largest in Hampshire with a population of 15,500. The Assistant Poor Law Commissioner from London, a military officer, Colonel Charles Ashe A'Court, had already scanned the area, approached Lord Bolton for a suitable piece of land, and established the main “movers and shakers” in the town to run the Board. We know this from his report to his head office in early 1835. The Chairman was William Lutley Sclater, the local magistrate from Hoddington House, the Vice-Chairman was Edward Walter Blunt of Kempshott House, and the Clerk was lawyer George Lamb, the founder of the present firm of solicitors in the town.

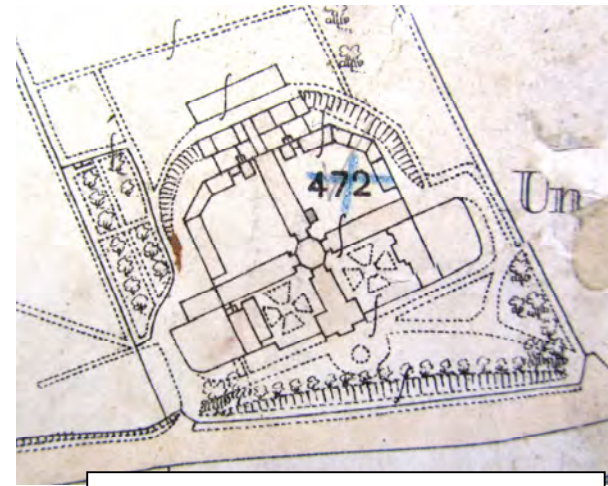
Each one of the 37 parishes making up the union had an elected Guardian, nearly all of whom were yeoman farmers in those early years; the Board of Guardians contained some very well-known local names as time went on, businessmen, traders and clergy. Things moved amazingly quickly, £7,500 was borrowed from the Exchequer, the Workhouse was opened in October 1836, and then began the process of selling off poor cottages and allotments to help pay for it.

The detail gleaned is so rich and fascinating, and so much part of the history of the town, that it has turned into a book, hopefully to be completed in the next couple of years. An experimental logging of pauper names has yielded interesting, and often moving, stories about families of people struggling with Victorian poverty, both the unfortunate and the rogues, the people who stayed, moved elsewhere or emigrated to Canada or Australia.

Constant squabbling among members of staff, investigations, letters and reports about their lives and work provide insight into life in the workhouse itself and the surrounding countryside. There are medical reports about the awful living conditions of the poor in the parishes, and notices of wealthy marriages (the first Registrars of births, deaths and marriages being Officers

of the new Poor Law Unions), There are lists of purchased goods, from candles to coal to coffins, and who supplied them.

One conclusion I have already drawn – Basingstoke Workhouse was a well-run, clean and orderly place, by the standards of the times, one of the better ones in a system perceived as cruel and heartless. Most people were supported outside the workhouse here, with admission being a last resort – it was very rarely full. Unlike the infamous Andover nearby, and almost certainly thanks to the humane and vigilant Chairman Sclater and the Board, nothing cruel or demeaning was allowed, and any misdeeds were quickly stamped upon. There was later to be a new Infirmary, opened in 1900, and the buildings became a hospital, a nursing and convalescent home, an orphanage, a nurses residence - I am about halfway through my huge task at the moment, and looking forward to the remainder....



Taken from the First Edition 1873 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map covering Basingstoke, Chineham and Old Basing area, XVIII, surveyed in 1877

A FEW THOUGHTS ABOUT WORDS . . . , by Barbara Applin

At Bob Clarke's talk **From Grub Street to Fleet Street** someone asked where the word GAZETTE came from, as well as BROADSHEET and TABLOID. So I looked them up in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (which isn't as short as it sounds).

GAZETTE: This is first recorded in 1605 and comes via the French *gazette* from the Italian *gazetta*, which in turn has its origins in the Venetian *gazeta de la novita*. The Shorter OED compares this with the phrase "a ha'porth of news", and says this newsheet was sold for a *gazeta*, a Venetian coin of small value.

BROADSHEET: As you'd expect, this is a large sheet of paper, the term first recorded in 1706. What surprised me is that the OED says this was printed on one side only.

TABLOID: This was first recorded in 1926 as "a newspaper of small format which gives its news in a concentrated form". The word itself was registered in 1884 by Messrs Burroughs, Wellcome & Co as a trademark "applied to chemical substances used in medicine and pharmacy and afterwards for other goods". As I thought, it was also an adjective relating to the compressed or concentrated form of such drugs, and I suspect it was formed as an adjective from the word *tablet*, which is defined as "a small, flat and comparatively thin piece of stone, metal, wood, ivory or other hard material, artificially shaped for some purpose" So eventually *tablet* came to be used for "a small flat or compressed piece of some solid confection, drug or the like", but what I found particularly interesting was its use in 1611 for "a small smooth inflexible or stiff sheet or leaf *for writing upon*, usually one of a pair or set hinged or otherwise fastened together".

SIXTY PLUS YEARS AGO, by Peter Buckland



I was born at Hackwood Park, an early war time baby, at no 2 in the Stable Block, a luxurious home for the time with coal fired central heating radiators, large rooms, two feet thick walls, and of course roller blackout blinds, the accommodation provided as my father was chauffeur to Lord Camrose who owned the Hackwood Estate, having moved there from Barrow Hills in Surrey in 1936.

I believe my Auntie Freda was acting midwife, as my Auntie Gladys was for my elder brother David. My sister Beryl, who was 14 when I was born, was proud to push us around in a pram, much better having a real live baby than a doll.

I can remember when my mother took me for my first day at school to Fairfields Infants. We waited in the main hall outside the office of the Headmistress Miss Shand. This was where the nurse would also check the children's hair for "nits".

As we lived more than three miles from the school we were entitled to be picked up by bus, although this did mean a half mile walk from our home to the Basingstoke Lodge where we caught the bus in the mornings at about 8.30 am. The service was operated by Odiham Motor Services coming first via the villages of Upton Grey and Tunworth. It was a Bedford with wooden slat seats. If the bus didn't run due to adverse weather we would walk the three miles to school, often being there when children from the town did not attend. I can remember the snow drifts of 1947 where we were able to stand underneath with the snow being blown off the fields and hedgerows. All the telephone poles were blown down.

We had school dinners in the main hall, good old-fashioned stodge such as the usual jam roly-poly or spotted dick cooked in the long split tin cans. Mrs Kelly and Mrs Escott worked in the school canteen for some time, and later my sister also helped there.

One day a child brought in a couple of kittens seeking a home for them, and being fond of animals I said I would have them. However when I got home my father was furious as he didn't like cats and would not have them in the house. They did get a suitable home, however, being housed in the actual stable yard.

The new junior school was built in Cliddesden Road. It consisted of a number of single storey concrete bright classrooms around the large playground with a grassed area behind. I was among the first to move to the new school. Miss Burge was the Head Teacher and Miss Blake was our teacher in Class 2A. Once a month after Friday lunch playtime when we returned to our classroom there was a cake for us on our desks. I liked Miss Blake!

I didn't have any pocket money unless I did a particular chore at home, but mum would give me half a tube of Rowntree's Fruit Gums to take to school. Mr Blake was caretaker at the school but no relation to Miss Blake and I was at school with his son Barrie. The school also had periods when we would look after the school flower beds.

We had a RSPCA collecting box at the school, the sort where you put a coin on the begging dog's paws which then tipped the coin into the kennel. At the end of each term because I knew where to go I would take the box accompanied by a girl selected from the school to Mrs Montague at Skippetts House. It was about a mile each way. When we got there and Mrs Montague came to the door she



would give us a Penguin Biscuit from a box on top of a large tall cupboard in the hallway.

In 1953 for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, Lord Camrose obtained a special back projecting television from America, and we were able to sit at the back of the cinema and watch the event on a large screen. Colonel Julian Berry, Lord Camrose's youngest son, was in the Royal Horse guards and rode immediately behind the Queen's coach. We were able to

watch the FA Cup Final between Blackpool and Bolton Wanderers on the big screen with Stanley Matthews and Nat Lofthouse.

Although I was always among the better pupils in my class, I failed my 11 plus exams and then went to Fairfields Senior School. However after a year I was allowed to re-sit my 11 plus and passed, and with a couple of other school friends I moved to the second year at Queen Mary's Grammar School (now The Vyne).

I then became a teenager which is another story.

THE MYSTERIOUS EVENT AT MYSTERIOUS MISTLEY, BY Colin Williams

Glancing through the Sunday Telegraph book reviews a mention of Basingstoke in a most unexpected context caught my attention: a reference to "a crucifixion experience" being experienced in Basingstoke [*'of all places' the reviewer gratuitously added*]. Not quite accurate as a check of the book [Aleister Crowley: The Biography by Tobias Churton] revealed the location of this singular event was recorded as being at Mistley, near Basingstoke.

Wikipedia summarises Crowley's extraordinary and eventful life [he was known as The Great Beast and changed his name to Aleister from Edward Alexander] as occultist, mystic, ceremonial magician, poet and mountaineer.

In the BBC's 2002 poll of Greatest Britons he came seventy third! His family's wealth was derived from Crowley's Brewery at Alton [now the site of Sainsbury's] although they sold their interest shortly before Crowley's birth in 1875. [An advertisement for Crowley's Ales can still be seen at Colt Hill in Odiham.]

The crucifixion experience occurred in 1906 when Crowley was visiting an adherent, George Cecil Jones, who apparently worked [and lived?] in Basingstoke.

Two questions invite speculation: firstly, what is a 'crucifixion experience' [I think we can hurry over that one; and, secondly, where is 'Mistley'. A Mistley can be found in Essex and a connection with Minley; Yately, is possible but that can scarcely be described as being near Basingstoke. An enquiry to the biography's author remains unanswered so can Mistley be identified?

Have you a solution to these mysteries? We will publish any suggestions received in the next newsletter.

WHAT'S ON AT THE WILLIS

Now until September 29 daily during opening hours. Ellaway Room. **Challenge you!** *Family fun challenges. Triathlon challenge, design trainers or running shorts and much more.*

Now until November 10th Sainsbury Gallery: **Katagami Exhibition.** *Over 100 framed carved paper patterns from the collection of Maxine Hullock, plus a range of beautiful Japanese objects, including intricately carved Netsuke miniature sculptures.*

October 18, 7.30 pm Archaeology Gallery **Friends of the Willis Museum AGM followed by “Basingstoke Memories, 1939 to 1945” by Owen Blissett.** *Owen was born in Basingstoke and grew up during the war. You will be welcomed to add any memories prompted by his pictures.*

20 October to 17 November. Basingstoke Gallery. **Is it art? A collection of mixed media GCSE art entries from The Costello School.** *“The art work never ceases to surprise me. One piece may be a traditional painting (but often of a non-traditional subject), and then turn a corner and a photograph treated in ways you never knew existed will take your breath away. I shouldn’t be, but I’m still amazed and inspired by the work of our students.”*
Helen Ward, Learning Resources Centre.

27 October to 3 November. Ellaway Room. **Family half term activities.**

27, 30, 31 October. **Halloween half term “make and takes”.** *Bats, cats and all things spooky! Join us as we get into the mood for Halloween Night. Drop in during opening hours. No charge for this family activity, but donations towards materials are much appreciated.*

1-3 November. **Egypt!** *Make and takes inspired by Ancient Egypt as we commemorate the 90th anniversary of the discovery of Tutankhamun’s Tomb in November 1922. (No charge, but donations towards materials are much appreciated.)*

15 November, 15th November 7.30 pm Friends’ event in the Archaeology Gallery. **De re coquinaria,** by Sally Grainger. *Food historian Sally Grainger, a world-renowned expert on Roman food, who has made many TV appearances and published widely on the subject, will talk about her research into the flavours and spices of Roman cuisine. There will be replica utensils to pass round, and some food for you to taste.*

17 November to 12 January. Sainsbury Gallery. **Way of the warrior: epic movie arms and armour.** *Stunning arms and armour, costumes and props from some of the biggest blockbuster movies ever made including Gladiator, The last Samurai, Saving Private Ryan, King Arthur and the Kingdom of Heaven, to name but a few. A truly hands-on exhibition for all the family with replica arms and armour that can be handled and worn!*

17 November, 11 am to 3 pm: **Legio Augusta at the Willis.** *To celebrate the opening of The Way of the Warrior exhibition, members of Legio Augusta will be on site to explain Roman arms and armour. Roman inspired “make and takes” will also be available during the day. This is a free drop in family activity but donations towards materials will be much appreciated.*

24 November to 22 December: Basingstoke Gallery. **Atomic**, by Kate Findlay. *A collection of art textile pieces and large quilts inspired by the Hadron Collider at Cern in Switzerland. Kate Findlay has been working on this series for the last four years, and is continuing to develop new pieces. She is particularly inspired by the scale and beauty of the machine, and has enjoyed using textiles to create complex surface textures in response.*

1-22 December. Festive fun drop in family activities in the Ellaway Room. *Trails, colouring and quizzes to get you in the mood for Christmas.*

December 20, 7.30 pm Archaeology Gallery **Friends' Christmas party**, including *Christmas Eve, we had the singers and mummer: seasonal customs from Hampshire Archives*, by Hampshire Record Office Archivist, Sarah Lewin.

THE "TRIUMPHAL GATE" BOOKLET, by John Hollands



For some months now, I have been working on text for the small book about the Triumphal Gate to be published by The Friends with grant support from the council (as announced in the previous newsletter). Some expert local historians among you have been advising, and Howard Ray is taking photographs. We have been in touch with Peter Parkinson and Richard Quinnell, the artistic craftsmen who made The Gate, and both have been very helpful with information. One of our main objectives has been to explain the allusions made in the images on the bronze panels, some of which are a little puzzling. Peter Parkinson told me that he “wanted some of the images to be easily interpreted, while others might be more obscure. I had the idea that parents and children might enjoy puzzling over the panels to decide what they meant.” We

hope the booklet won't spoil the fun!

Howard's photo reproduced here is of one of the “more obscure” images, though **you** will probably know right away that it refers to Basingstoke's entry in Domesday Book. We plan to have copies of the book available by next March.

ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER HENRY PRANCE M.C.

Hidden away in the Time Tunnel of Basingstoke's Willis Museum are the medals and the memorial plaque to one of Basingstoke's forgotten heroes.

Arthur Prance was the son of Frederick Henry and Katherine Prance of Norn Hill House, Basingstoke. Frederick was a well-known solicitor in the town, and was Mayor in 1910.

Arthur was born in 1898.



He was commissioned in the Army in 1915. The London Gazette entry dated 13th July 1915 states: - *Gentleman Cadet A.C.N. Prance from the Royal Military College to be Second Lieutenant in the South Wales Borderers from 14th July 1915.*

He was promoted to full Lieutenant on the 1st July 1916. In August 1917 he was attached to the Royal Engineers Army Signal Service, 8th Signal Company.

He was awarded the Military Cross, Gazetted 26th September 1917, and the citation reads:-

Lt. Arthur Christopher Norman Prance, S. Wales Bord.

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in maintaining his communication in face of most adverse circumstances and under very severe and continuous shell and machine gun fire. He showed complete disregard of his personal safety, and it was entirely due to his fearless and successful efforts in maintaining communications that timely notice of hostile counter-attacks was given, and means thereby were taken in time to deal with them.

Lt Prance was killed in action, aged just 20, on the 25th May 1918 at Soissons during the well known offensive of May 1918. He unfortunately has no known grave but is remembered on the Soissons Memorial. He is also remembered on the war memorial in St. Mary's Churchyard, Basing, alongside others who gave their lives during the Great War of 1914-1918