

Friends of the Willis Museum Newsletter May 2011



Made in Basingstoke: this magnificent Wallis and Stevens traction engine was admired by the Friends on their recent visit to Bursledon Brickworks.

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), Maurice Dyer, (Treasurer), Bill Fergie, (Outside events), Briony Hollands, (Minutes Secretary), John Hollands, (Publicity), Sue Tapliss, (Curator), Cathy Williams, (Programme Secretary).

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

This newsletter was edited by Derek Anthony and John Hollands

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Chairman's Jottings, by Derek Anthony

First of all, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank Sue Tapliss for all her help and support during her time as curator of the Willis Museum. Sue will be retiring from the Hampshire Museum Service at the end of June and we wish her every success in the future.

Ever since she became associated with the Willis Museum Sue has been a great supporter of the Friends, making the Museum's facilities available to us, keeping us informed and attending as many committee meetings as her busy schedule allowed. We look forward to welcoming her successor, Jenny Stevens, when she takes over from Sue at the beginning of July.

Subscriptions for the next 12 months become due on 1st July. On another page of this Newsletter you will find a renewal form. I do hope you agree with me that membership of the Friends, at just £10 a year, is excellent value for money and that you will renew your membership. We are always keen to welcome new members so, if you have any friends or relations who might be interested in local history, do bring them along to one of our meetings as a guest so that

they can see what we have to offer.

So far this year we have listened to talks on subjects as varied as the timber framed buildings of Basingstoke, tales from the Willis Archives, treasure finds in Hampshire and the last 6 miles of the Basingstoke canal.

Fifteen Friends have also enjoyed a wonderful day out at the Bursledon Brickworks Industrial Museum. (See the article inside this Newsletter.)

Since the previous Newsletter was published in January Howard Ray and Lesley Hatt have volunteered to join the committee. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank Howard and Lesley for their generous offers of help.

Coming soon we are looking forward to talks on the workhouse system, Samuel Franklin Cody, the pioneer aviator, and English Cartography from the 16th and 20th century. As varied and interesting a local history programme as one could hope to find, I hope you will agree.

I look forward very much to welcoming you to our monthly Thursday evening meetings.

The Friends visit Bursledon Brickworks, *by Derek Anthony*



On Sunday 17th April fifteen Friends paid a visit to the Bursledon Brickworks Industrial Museum at Swanwick near the Hamble estuary on the Hampshire coast. The visit was the idea of Bill Fergie, Friends Committee member and Chairman of the Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust, which owns the Brickworks. The visit was timed to coincide with one of the museum's event Sundays (see the list of 2011 event Sundays at the end of this article).

April's event was the "Spring Steam Up and Country Fair" so that, in addition to tours of the old brickworks there were rides on a narrow gauge railway and behind a beautifully turned-out traction engine, displays of old motor cars, a static display of birds of prey and a whole host of craft stalls. Most of our party took advantage of a wide range of refreshments at very reasonable prices. (I was served

the largest piece of delicious simnel cake I have ever seen!) But the thing that made the day for most visitors must have been the wall-to-wall sunshine, a rarity at any time in England but in mid-April a treat not to be missed.

Bill had arranged for one of the museum's volunteers to conduct our party on a special tour of the old works. Our excellent guide took us on a one-and-a-half hour tour and explained each step in the brick-making process from raw clay to finished brick.

The preservation of the Bursledon Brickworks site is important because, by a happy chance, the process introduced when the brickworks opened in 1897 continued unchanged until 1974 when the site closed. The Victorian steam engine, the crushing machinery, the drying sheds and kilns are all there to be enjoyed by the public at large, admired by the enthusiast and

studied by the industrial archaeologist.

Speaking for myself I found the kilns the most interesting part of the tour. A bank of 12 interlinked kilns still exists and we were shown how each of the kilns was filled with raw bricks, fired, allowed to cool and emptied in succession, round and round, so that one of the 12 kilns was always firing its load of bricks, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. When we were taken into one of the kilns we were fortunate to meet two retired employees who used to work the kilns. They gave us a real insight into life in a working brickworks.

This brickworks museum is so important that it

recently won the Engineering Heritage Award sponsored by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers in appreciation of the important part played by bricks as one of the building blocks (quite literally) of the Industrial Revolution.

Bill Fergie tells me that the volunteers at the brickworks are always trying to improve visitor services and that he would welcome any critical comments from Friends who visited the brickworks.

If you find that you have a half day to spare you could do a lot worse than spend it learning about the techniques of brick making at one of Hampshire's most interesting, but least known, museums.

Bursledon Brickworks Industrial Museum: open days 2011

19 th June	Father's day Special & transport through the ages.
17 th July	Victorian family fun day
21 st August	Railway extravaganza
8 th September	Heritage open day - free admission
18 th September	Naughty forties & thrifty fifties
23 rd October	Halloween special & autumn steam festival
20 th November	Christmas at the brickworks

George Willis on "The Basingstoke Museum", by John Hollands

"In the course of the present year", wrote George Willis in 1930, "the foundations of a Basingstoke Museum will be laid – to embody the traditions and express the spirit of the local community, the continuity of which reaches back far beyond the dawn of history...."

This was written in a brochure that I recently came across as I slowly catalogue my way through the uncatalogued material in the Local Studies Room. Its main purpose was to persuade people to donate exhibits to the about to be opened Borough Museum. I believe the document has great relevance for us today. We have a new exhibition on George Willis in the Archaeology Gallery. Here in his excellent prose are this same man's thoughts about the museum he started. Secondly, in 2009 you were asked in a survey to indicate how you would like the museum to develop in the future; it revealed that above all you wanted the Willis to concentrate more strongly on *local* themes. A reading of Mr Willis's brochure suggests that your priorities are pretty close to his own. Assessing priorities is very much a live issue at this moment. We have money to spend on the museum, and your committee wants to spend it in a way that will reflect your priorities. Your committee has also begun what will hopefully be a continuing series of meetings with Dr Janet Owen the recently appointed head of the County Museum Service. (We are to meet her again in June). Dr Owen, who has seen the report on your survey, herself holds a clear view that the main function of museums like the Willis is to express the spirit of the place, and (without putting any date on it) she has expressed the intention of giving "The Time Tunnel" a make-over.

Mr Willis continued,

It is increasingly felt that provincial museums have a special part to play in intelligent education, not by attempting to compete with the national museums in presenting a display of “everything under the sun” that is unusual - and emphatically not by forming a collection of unrelated curios and relics, but by confining itself primarily to an exposition of the history - from geological to modern times - of the immediate neighbourhood; accepting however such other exhibits as may serve to illustrate or “place” the local materials, or such as may be of unique educational or general interest.

Here, once more, is that same emphasis on *local* material that came across so strongly in your survey responses, with at the same time a recognition that items of more general significance can have a part to play in making the local story clearer. There is a considerable amount of more general material in the Time Tunnel at present, but is it crowding out important local material? Your survey responses suggest that it probably is. If we go along with Mr Willis’s standpoint, there will always be *some* place for general material, but let us take careful note of his salutary caveat against displaying “unrelated curios and objects.”

Mr Willis then pointed out how local people can all help their museum by donating items of local significance. He gives two good reasons for doing so that are just as relevant today as they were in 1930, followed by some equally timeless remarks on provenance.

There is a perfectly legitimate pride in the personal possession of some local relic of the past which is, by its very nature, unique, but dispassionate judgment indicates that the rightful home of such objects is the local museum - both by reason of the added security of preservation in a final home and therefore not subjected to the vicissitudes of changing ownership and also of the extended use and value of such exhibits when available for public examination and not hidden away in private and therefore relatively inaccessible hands...

It cannot be too strongly urged that with [any article offered to the museum] all possible information as to its derivation and associations should be given. Without this setting the most apparently valuable contribution becomes merely a curio, of no scientific or educational significance, but on the other hand some intrinsically valueless object - coin, flint, tile or bone - if its source of origin be accurately known may prove a very important link in some local historical connection....

You may have mixed feelings, however, about Mr Willis’s next remarks on “possible museum activities”.

Among other possible activities of the museum may be mentioned- the compilation of an accurate record of public footpaths and rights of way, and information to this end will be welcomed from all sources; exhibitions of local wildlife, terrestrial and aquatic, as has already been attempted with wild flowers; special temporary exhibits of pictures, artistic objects, stamps, models, handicrafts etc, but these will largely depend on the willingness of those who make these things their hobby to bring to the common stock the interests that give them personal pleasure, and it is hoped that local enthusiasts will avail themselves of this possible extension of their usefulness.

At one time, I would really not have considered it a function of the Willis to keep an accurate record of rights of way, but having been asked at least three times to help with enquiries about historic rights of way, I now think that Mr Willis was right and I was wrong. You may feel uncomfortable (as do I) about exhibiting wild life in museums if this means displaying dead specimens, - in fact there are no longer any exhibits of this kind at the Willis - but the second half of this paragraph should remind you that we now have a Community Gallery which offers you personally or a group you belong the opportunity to put on your own temporary exhibition. (Note that Milestones has also been encouraging people to lend personal collections for special exhibition there).

No doubt you will also like Mr Willis’s emphasis on “understandable English”, of which he himself was an accomplished practitioner. His remarks on this subject are certainly very apposite today; standards of written and spoken English have, if anything, declined since 1930. Note too the reference to engaging the interest of the

younger generation, again very much a present-day concern.

Every effort will be made to render the exhibits understandable and interesting. There will be little display of Latin names or technical terms, but as full a description as possible of everything on view in plain commonsense English, which it is hoped will make the museum an irresistible attraction to the younger generation and a source of civic pride to the general Basingstoke public.

The brochure concludes with a list (in somewhat random order) of topics relating to which Mr Willis was seeking donated objects. . Most of these are indeed strongly local, though there are topics here that may serve, in his words quoted above to “place the local materials”, for example household items and farm implements. (He would therefore have probably approved of the museum’s 1950s “kitchen”!). Note the strong emphasis on documents. Those of us, (myself included), who think the Willis should make more use of documents have a supporter here. Yes, the Record Office is the best place for valuable documents, but nowadays getting good copies is no great problem technically. Now read on and see how much of Mr Willis’s list you agree with as proper material for the museum that bears his name.

Anything relating to:-

Basingstoke Canal: documents, tariffs, accounts, notices, etc

Coaching: timetables, schedules, accounts and general documents; any articles or contemporary records

Railway: anything connected with the building and opening. Early documents, views, etc

Newspapers: pre-Victorian press, references to Basing and Basingstoke. Contemporary accounts of Basing House siege.

Coins: found in the district, especially hoards of coins, with details of sites where found. Tradesmen’s tokens of town and neighbourhood.

Trades: details of obsolete or extinct local trades. Tools, machines, products, catalogues, billheads, advertisements

Civic records: old election posters, pamphlets, controversial publications, official notices, national celebration programmes and reports, details of public functions with illustrations, portraits, letters, autographs of past public townsmen. Pictures of past Basingstoke.

Holy Ghost ruins: Records and relics of the Guild of the Holy Ghost and its chapel.

Sport: Relics of old local sports, details of the races on Basingstoke Down, etc.

Police, etc: Early details, documentary or otherwise of watchmen, town police, volunteers, etc

Books: All books and similar publications printed in the town. Old technical and medical works etc, used by old inhabitants. Early directories of town and country.

Parchments: Documents, legal and otherwise, containing early local references.

Household: Pre-Victorian utensils now obsolete

Farm: Obsolete implements and utensils

Costume: old local articles of dress, wigs, needlework-Victorian and earlier

Pictures: Local sketches, prints, photographs

Maps: All manuscript maps, estate or street, help in making a contour map of the district

[The request for a contour map was taken on board by Mr Willis’s friend Mr Rainbow. What a pity this no longer exists].

Structural materials: Fittings, carvings, iron work, fire-backs, sign boards from old Basingstoke houses.

Industries: Specimens illustrating old and modern town industries

War: local records of the Great War, ration cards, and local and official documents.

Geology: local fossils from chalk pits and especially brickfields.

Flora and fauna: exceptional examples of wild life of the neighbourhood.

Mammoth tusk returns to the Willis after conservation work, by *Claire Chope, Archaeology Conservator for HCMAAS*



The mineralised tusk of a male mammoth – larger than average and measuring 2.8m from end to tip, has just been returned to the newly re-opened Willis Museum Archaeology Gallery after a lengthy process.

The mammoth tusk was found at Lodge Farm, North Warnborough, in 1973, and had previously formed part of the old Willis Archaeology Gallery display. Historic restoration work – well intentioned, but carried out with non-sympathetic materials - had begun to age and fail, causing damage to the remaining original tusk material.

In order to re- conserve the tusk, the damaging old fills and surface coating had to be removed. They had been inflexible, and actually stronger than the tusk itself. As the tusk had flexed with changes in humidity and temperature, the fills and surface coating had not. This had caused lifting of the surface, and pulled away small fragments from the edges of the cracks – which were now much larger than before.

Removal of the fills and old coating was carried out using hand tools, with some solvent to remove stubborn residues. It was decided to also remove the old painted plaster fill at the tip of the tusk, which actually covered up several inches of original material, and had been an aesthetic addition rather than a structural necessity.

The cracks in some cases were very deep, and full of dirt, dust, old fill and loose fragments of ivory. The fragments were removed so that no loose material remained to affect the application of new fills. Where the original positions of fragments were known, they were bonded back in place with reversible, conservation grade adhesive.

Once clean, it could be seen that the tusk was structurally quite fragile. However, the condition of the remaining patinated surface – though bare in places – was reasonable, and the true colour and texture had been revealed beneath the thick, yellowing coating.

The fills needed to be replaced, but this time with a sympathetic material that would be flexible, yet supportive. Fills also needed to be conservation grade, easy to apply and remove, and – particularly given the size of the object - cost efficient!

Various tests showed that the most appropriate fill was a sort of conservation-grade papier-mache, using acid free tissue paper and a very flexible, low tack adhesive. Using paper as the bulk of the fill meant costs could be kept down, and the advantage of the papier-mache meant it could be packed down in the voids easily, providing complete support within the tusk.

Space was left for a thin skim of the same flexible adhesive, mixed with a bulking agent of glass micro-spheres and acrylic paint, to be added. Though these fills are detectable on close inspection, they are sympathetically matched in colour and finish, so will not draw attention away from the object itself.

The tusk has been returned to a newly made, bespoke case, with inert foam supports.

The Wootton St Lawrence helmet, *by Ian Williams*

The Wootton St Lawrence helmet is a rare and important North European armet of about 1500 probably Flemish which was converted to funerary use in England in 1677 with a spike for the attachment of a funerary crest. It hung until recent years over a bracket in the church marked with the initials T. H. of Sir Thomas Hooke who died in 1677, whose monument it formed. He acquired Tangier Park in 1660 and built a house there in 1662 which his son sold in 1710.

It was on loan to the Royal Armouries H.M. Tower of London and Leeds, where it was on exhibition.

Although broadly conforming to the Italian fashions of about 1440-1520 the Wootton St Lawrence armet' like all other examples of its kind preserved in English churches' lacks the marks usually found on Italian-made armour of that period. It further differs from its Italian counterpart in having ventilation-slots pierced in the right of its visor and hearing-holes in each of its cheek-pieces. As such slots and holes are a common feature of Flemish armets and close helmets of the early 16th century, mostly deriving from English churches, it seems probable that the Wootton St Lawrence armet, like much armour used in England in its time, would likewise have come from the Low Countries.

Although it is heavily patinated, it is in good condition for an object 500 years old. It retains substantial traces of funerary painting consisting on the

cheek-pieces of alternating foliate scrolls of gold within a linear border of the same colour on a black ground and elsewhere with foliate scrolls and flowerheads of red within linear borders of the same colour on a gold ground

Its history is well-documented, F. H. Cripps Day A List of Churches Containing Armour in Laking 1920-2 Vol. V p. 187 and Victoria County Histories (Hampshire) Vol. IV p. 242.

There is a similar helmet in St Mary's Church, Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire, lacking its visor and cheek-pieces. It has precisely the same form of skull, the same form of brow-reinforce and the same form of piercings over the ears. Other armets are recorded in the churches at Beverly, Yorkshire; Buckland, Berkshire; Hawstead, Suffolk; Aldenham, Herts; and Cobham, Kent.

It was sold by the Diocese to an American collector in December for £45,000 (plus commission). Graeme Rimer, the Academic Director of the Royal Armouries said: "It is rare for us to oppose exports but this helmet is of real historic significance."



Coming soon at the Willis

Sainsbury Gallery

May 28 to July 23: Surface by Stuart Melrose, featuring a selection of this internationally acclaimed designer's furniture and sculpture pieces, and some collaboration work with the world renowned street artist Kev Munday.

30 July to 3 September: Alien invasion: A remarkable one-off exhibition that brings together an army of famous aliens, monsters, props and costumes from some of Hollywood's biggest sci-fi block busters.

Basingstoke Community Gallery

28 May to 18 June: Artefact: Students taking the Creative and Media Diploma at The Vyne Community School proudly present an exhibition of art work inspired by artifacts from different eras.

25 June to 16 July: The Festival Makers: Art works by the children of Basingstoke and Deane to celebrate Basingstoke World Party in the Park on 2 July. Organised by The Making. www.themaking.org.uk

23 July to 13 August: Incarceration, by Lee Clift and Zoe Legg: Local artists Clift and Legg explore the restrictive aspects that different forms of incarceration place upon the individual through their sculptural and mixed media installations.

20 August to 11 September: West Country landscapes by Nigel Smith: Although he lives in Basingstoke Nigel Smith has painted all over the West Country. These selections of water colours and drawings give a flavour of the many landscapes that have inspired him.

17 September to 8 October: Photographs of distinction: Award winning work by talented members of Basingstoke Camera Club.

Specially for families

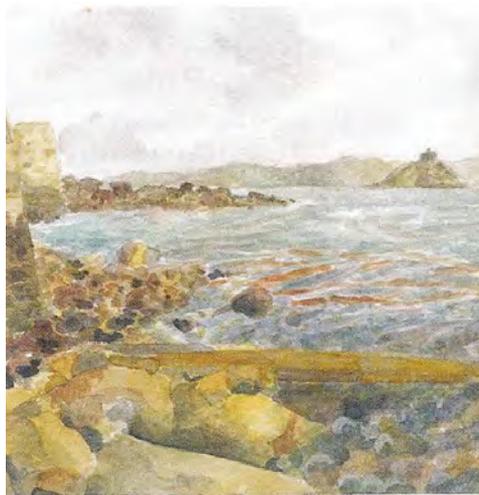
May 31 to 3 June, 10 am to 4 pm: Surface to surface: Be inspired by the smooth and lustrous surfaces of Stuart Melrose's furniture and discover how to make your own boxes, chairs and tables from origami. Free drop-in activity

Friends' meetings, all at 7.30 pm

June 16: Living on the breadline: the workhouse system, by Rosemary Rawcliffe

July 21: "That magnificent man...! Samuel Franklin Cody, by Peter Reese

September 15: English cartography from the 16th to the 20th century, by Douglas Bancroft



By Nigel Smith

