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CHAIRMAN'S JOTTINGS

Derek Anthony

First of all my thanks go to Alan Roach, Alan Fielding, and Marjorie Mott who have retired from the committee and to Doris Roach who has relinquished her responsibilities running the monthly raffle. Each of them has given years of service to the Friends of the Willis Museum (FoWM) for which we are immensely grateful.

At its meeting in November your committee voted unanimously to appoint Alan Roach as a Vice-president and to extend honorary life membership to both Alan and Doris in recognition of their many years of service to the FoWM.

Secondly, on your behalf, I welcome Ian Williams, Adrian Moring and Cathy Williams to the committee. Ian, Adrian and Cathy each bring particular skills and experiences to the work of the committee.

On a more sombre note, in October I was saddened to learn of the death of our President Dudley Keep. Borough Councillor, County Councillor and twice Mayor of Basingstoke, Dudley Keep was a founder member of the FoWM and great supporter and advocate for our town and Borough. On your behalf I sent a letter of condolences to Mr Keep's widow, Peggy.

A very big "thank you" to everyone who completed the survey seeking your views on how the museum should develop in the future. You will find an article detailing the results within this issue of the newsletter. Based on the survey results we have recently started discussions with Museum staff to determine how the FoWM might help to develop further the Museum and its services.

By now you should have received your 2010 programme incorporating the membership renewal form. We do hope that you agree with the committee that the programme is particularly varied and interesting and will wish to renew your membership for another year. If you know anyone who is interested in local history please do tell them about the FoWM and pass a copy of the programme to them. You can obtain spare copies of the programme at our monthly meetings, from the Museum or by telephoning me on 01256 322073.

I don't know about you but I thought that the "China: Journey to the east" exhibition was outstanding. It certainly brought many people into our Museum building for the first time. I attended two of the evening talks about China which were fascinating and full of interesting information. As you will see in our 2010 programme there are many more exhibitions planned for the coming 12 months.

All Friends will be interested to know that the top floor gallery is due to be refurbished in the Spring with displays celebrating Mr Willis and his interest in flint tools and Egyptian archaeology. Also on the top floor will be further displays charting the history of Basingstoke from the earliest times to the coming of the Basingstoke canal. We are assured that the central area will remain available as a space in which to hold our monthly meetings.

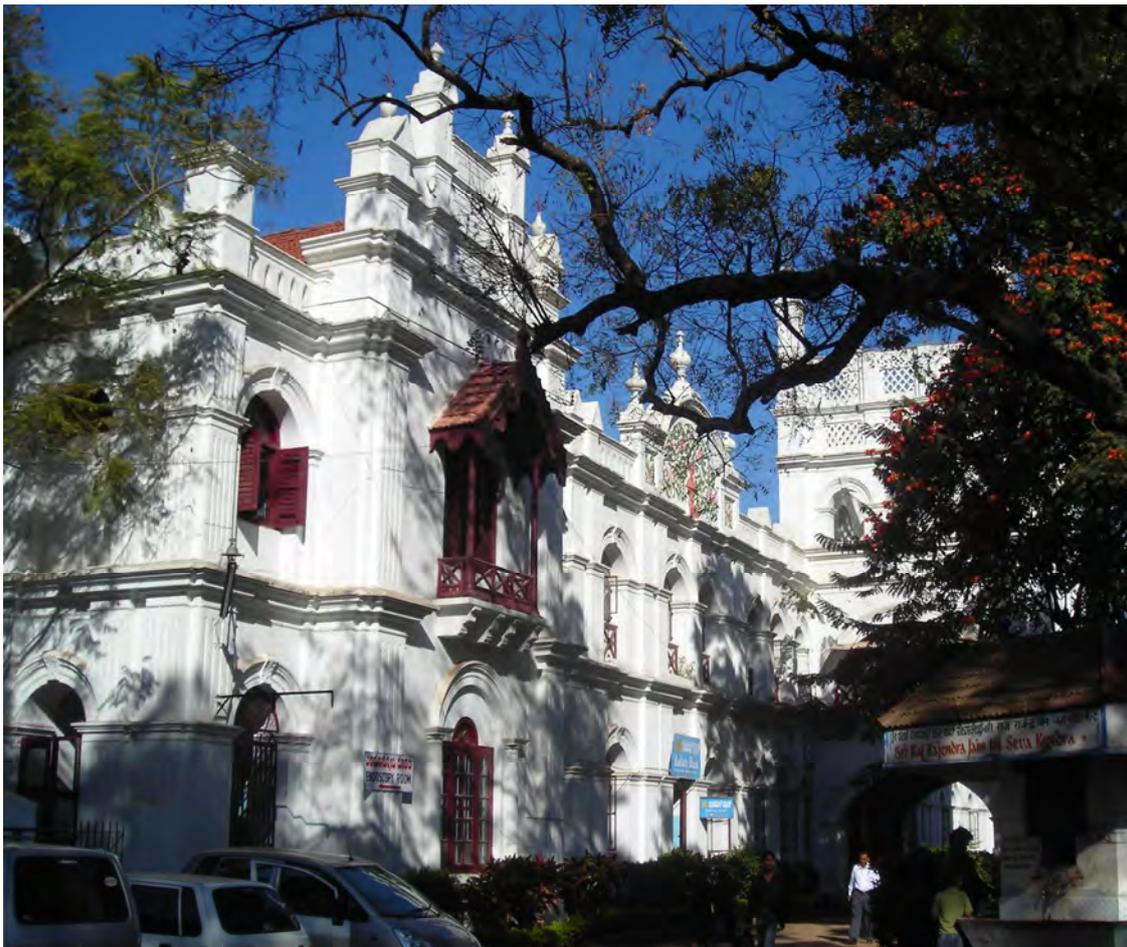
During 2009 Derek Anthony (Chairman of the FOWM) and his wife, Elspeth, paid a visit to the Holdsworth Memorial Hospital in Mysore, Southern India. Derek is also Chair of the UK Association of Friends of the Holdsworth Memorial Hospital and his visit was to see how funds raised in the UK were being spent to improve the hospital and to learn about plans for future developments at the hospital.

In this article Derek outlines the history of the Hospital and tells the story of two remarkable women who were visiting the Hospital for the very first time in search of their roots.

THE HOLDSWORTH MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - A HISTORY

DEREK ANTHONY

The Hospital was established in 1906 and named in memory of Mary Calvert Holdsworth, wife of the Superintendent of the Methodist District, who had started to raise money to build a hospital for women and children before she died in 1902. At the time, there was only one other hospital in Mysore and because it was staffed exclusively by male doctors it was not suitable for Hindu and Moslem women.



The Holdsworth Memorial Hospital in Mysore as it is today

Practical support came from the government of India and from the Maharaja of Mysore and his family. Dr Elsie Watts, the first doctor, came from England along with Sister Campbell, a nursing sister. At that time nursing was not an approved occupation in India and the first local recruits were illiterate village girls.

Over the years the Hospital grew in size and new buildings were added. By 1950 it was a 300 bed hospital with a widespread reputation for its care of women and children and the training of nurses.

In 1951 the Men's Department opened and the Holdsworth became a General Hospital. Then, in 1956, a separate Children's Hospital was opened on an adjoining site.

Even 50 years ago the only other hospital in the city was the Government Hospital. Since then more than 20 private hospitals have opened, providing a wide range of medical services but at a price that only the wealthiest citizens of Mysore can afford. The Holdsworth is still unique in providing medical care at an affordable cost to a large number of poorer people and with a School of Nursing known throughout southern India for its high standards of training.

TWO PEOPLE WITH A VERY SPECIAL REASON TO VISIT MYSORE

Susheela and Aragana are two sisters with a very special connection to the Holdsworth Memorial Hospital. Their mother, Manikam, was born to Hindu parents in 1916. On their way to a shrine the parents left baby Manikam, who was sick, with Sister Ethel Tomkinson and the staff of the Holdsworth Memorial Hospital to be looked after until their return. Three years later, with no sign of the parents returning and with the unwelcome attentions of temple priests who wished to take Manikam to perform South Indian temple dances leading possibly to a life of prostitution, Sister Ethel decided to bring Manikam to Britain. Travelling on a passport signed with a thumb print and described as "under the protection of the British Raj" Manikam arrived in Colwyn Bay, North Wales in 1919. After a short stay Sister Ethel returned to her work in Mysore, leaving Manikam in the care of her younger sister Ida.

The Tomkinsons were Methodist printers enjoying respect and status in their community and little appears to have been made of their having adopted an Indian girl. Manikam grew into a popular and happy child who loved North Wales. As a young woman she was introduced to and married a South Indian man who was also living in Britain. They had four daughters, including Susheela and Gani who were raised and educated in North Wales.

Now in their sixties, married with grown-up children of their own Susheela and Aragana were paying their first visit to Mysore and the Holdsworth Memorial Hospital where their mother had been abandoned more than 90 years before. Imagine the mix of feelings for someone brought up and living their lives in the UK to be "coming home" for the first time to the colour, the sights, the sounds and the smells of southern India. As Aragana put it, I felt as though I was taking part in the TV programme, "Who do you think you are?"

Anyone wishing to know more about Mysore and the Holdsworth Memorial Hospital please contact Derek on 01256 322073.

THE WILLIS AND YOU: WHAT YOUR SURVEY RESPONSES REVEALED

JOHN HOLLANDS

Having personally developed your survey questionnaire from an initial outline by Alan Roach, I then found myself analysing your responses. This is a **brief report** on what I found. I have also compiled a more detailed version and you can get a copy of this from the museum reception desk on request. I have quoted some of your remarks, (anonymously as promised), in both the full report and this article, and added further inferences and comments. These are my own views and must not be taken to represent those of the curator, her staff or the Friends' Committee.

Thirty-nine of you returned a completed survey, more like a 45% response than the 100% hoped for. However the sample was enough to form a picture of what you, The Friends, really think of the Willis Museum and what you would like to see done there in the future.

The first two sections asked what you thought about the structural changes made to the museum to make it more secure and to uncover original features of the building, and secondly what you thought of the new Sainsbury Gallery. In both cases your responses indicated a high level of satisfaction, and it was thought that the latter set a standard that ought to be matched throughout the museum. Reactions were not uncritical however. For example two members expressed their dislike at having to use the side entrance whilst exhibitions were in preparation in this gallery. One of these pointed out that this is unsuitable for the disabled. The reduced area for displaying notices, including information about Friends' events, was also regretted, as also was the loss of small temporary exhibitions in this area. An interesting suggestion was that a drinking trough for horses that once stood at the foot of Station Hill should be placed outside the museum if it is still available.

On the subject of the Mayor's Parlour Coffee Shop one member commented that it was an "improvement but not substantial", and this seemed to sum up your feelings overall. Its location within the museum was not reckoned to be as good as that of the original café area, and it was also seen as less cosy with something of a mismatch between the modern furniture and the period décor. It seems that anything done to soften its image would be appreciated. The display of goods for sale seems to have been generally liked, though the display area is rather small. It was suggested that the craftwork sold should be locally sourced and clearly identified as such, and that it should not be necessary to enter the coffee shop in order to see the price tickets on the items in the glass display case. Much of our present "wealth" comes from the sale of the "Making of Basingstoke" DVDs and it was felt that these should be much more prominently displayed.

Enthusiasm for the Community Gallery for the use of clubs and societies was also a trifle muted. Its potential was acknowledged but there was some feeling that the temporary exhibitions here had been "too specialised" and insufficiently marketed. One member commented rather archly that we had "gained an art gallery but lost a museum". To me the Gallery seems excellent for art work etc that can be mounted on the wall or on display boards, but not so good for exhibitors who want to display objects under glass as there is only one display case there. There was a strong feeling that the Town Gallery/Time Tunnel inadequately covered many aspects of the history of Basingstoke and the suggestion was made that this area could be used to cover some of these, when not otherwise needed, in rotating temporary exhibitions.

We now know that the library will become a discovery centre much sooner than we were given to believe a year ago. Could it be that this will be a better venue for some of the functions envisaged for the community gallery, freeing it as a space for displaying aspects of the history of the town not adequately covered in the Town Gallery?

There was disappointment that the archaeology gallery did not get re-established on the top floor during the time allowed for completing the survey. There is a bigger space which might allow for some coverage of the geology and natural history of the area as well as its archaeology, and perhaps there could be a continuous showing of the "Beneath Basingstoke" DVD there. Probably many Friends would agree with the suggestion that this gallery should include temporary displays of recent archaeological discoveries. The duties of the museum staff are mainly "front of house" and administrative, and there is scope for voluntary work on the re-display of the archaeology exhibits (and perhaps other exhibits too), by Friends with suitable skills and expertise. You will probably like the suggestion that something should be done to make the top floor more comfortable for meetings on hot days.

Regarding the Time Tunnel there was widespread agreement with the view that it was “well overdue for a make-over”. Many of the items on show here are not specific to the history of Basingstoke; it was recognised that many museum visitors like to see social history exhibits of a more general character – these often have a nostalgic appeal - but the message came across very clearly that, to most Friends, Basingstoke specific items were more deserving of the space. There was limited support however for the suggestion that the Willis should concern itself with the whole area administered by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council; this was seen to be “too large and too disparate to be covered in one small museum”, with some parts historically more orientated towards other towns.

There was also a feeling that the current displays are not seen to the best advantage, with poor lighting in places and a lack of captions. There was also a call for a review of the signposting. Which end of the Time Tunnel are you meant to start at? Should visitors be clearly offered the choice of either a past-to-present or a present-to-past route? And why, some asked, did the Time Tunnel purport to concern itself only with the last 200 years when the town has such a long history? (In fact a number of key exhibits are much older.) We seem to have a case for better coverage of the town’s earlier history, with more chronology panels, and closer linkage with the archaeology exhibits.

Some members thought that any re-planning of the Willis should be done with an eye to Milestones where it seems more appropriate to have social history exhibits. Several thought our 1950s kitchen exhibit should go there and join that museum’s other kitchen exhibits, thus making more room at the Willis for items that really told the story of Basingstoke. Remember that when the Time Tunnel was created, Milestones had not yet come into being.

There was support for seeing what items collected by Mr Willis and subsequently removed to Chilcomb or elsewhere might reasonably be brought back, and also for the greater use of documents removed from the museum to the Record Office, or in the keeping of the council. (Mr Willis made considerable use of displays of documents.) However there was also a feeling that their use should not be overdone, and that good copies should be used rather than original documents, which were best kept by the experts in conserving them. In fact the council has just sent a number of historic documents to the Record Office.

In section 13 you were asked if you thought nine suggested themes specific to Basingstoke deserved greater coverage. In every case there was more agreement than disagreement, though the strength of the support varied considerably. The three most popular were “Basingstoke as a communications centre”, “the gradual industrialisation of the town,” and “local buildings of note”, though “the life and achievements of George Willis” and “local people of note” were not far behind. A number of additions were suggested to the examples given, and not everyone agreed with all the names in the suggested list of notable local figures. It was felt important to commemorate the life and achievements of George Willis, but it was also suggested that the space given to this objective need not be large. A member thought that Mr Willis should be seen “in the context of his time and in relation to other people”, whilst in my view his philosophy of museums could be more strongly reflected in what is exhibited, thus showing clearly that the museum itself is his memorial. I expect you will like the proposal that a copy of the illuminated scroll presented to Mr Willis when he was made a freeman of the borough should be prominently displayed.

The least popular themes were “Basingstoke as an administrative centre”, and “Basingstoke as a town of the motor car age”, though even here there was considerably more agreement than disagreement that they deserved greater coverage.

“Housing, education, public art”, recurring topics in the “Talking History” recordings produced by BAHS, and “major events in the town” were also proposed as themes that deserved better coverage, and thought was given to ways of squeezing this quart of additional topics into the pint pot that is the Willis Museum. As noted above, removing some items to Milestones is one way some of you would be happy to see, and again, as noted above, more use might be made of the Community Gallery for this purpose. Other ways suggested were “building up the existing folders and providing comfortable accommodation for their perusal”, and the use of touch screen display units. Existing printed material that could be adapted for a touch screen unit might include the Town Trail, the booklet on public art in Basingstoke, and the recent material produced for the Heritage Day event at the Holy Ghost cemetery. Such equipment could also be used to put people in contact with the valuable and currently under used collection of recordings deposited in the museum by the BAHS “Talking History Project”.

Recommendations arising from this report will be discussed with the Curator, and outcomes will of course be reported in future newsletters. Rest assured that your committee is keen for the Friends to have a say in future developments at the Willis, particularly as we are in a better position than we have ever been to put our money where our mouth is, thanks largely to Derek Wren and the “Story of Basingstoke” DVD. In the meantime don’t forget that copies of the full survey report are available for your inspection.

SOME RANDOM THOUGHTS

DEREK WREN

The chaos the snow caused in Basingstoke before Christmas reminded me that Miss Muriel Pink once told me that in hard winters she and her sister had to walk to Hackwood Park with their father to see Mr Willis skating on the lake. This would have been in the 1920s. How was it possible to walk from Richmond Road, which was then on the northern edge of the town, to Hackwood Park long before we expected great lorries to come round spraying grit on the road? Was it the case that, when no one expected the Council to do it, everyone got out with their brushes and shovels and cleared the snow he or herself as this picture, which was painted in 1908 shows?



With the death of Miss Pink two days before Christmas, Basingstoke has lost a link with the past. Her father, who had been Deputy Chief Constable of Hampshire, moved first to Odiham and then Basingstoke. He then worked for John May and attended the Colonel's funeral. She herself was a much loved person who never forgot her 'boys', as she called the pupils whom she taught for their first two years of schooling in the front room of the house in Richmond Road where she and her sister lived from the 1920s.

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People of my generation probably remember Field Marshal Montgomery as one of the most successful generals of the Second World War so I was surprised to read in Roy Jenkins' biography of Winston Churchill that he was about to put General Gott in charge of the Eighth Army when that general was killed while flying into Cairo on the same flight path by which Churchill had come the day before. So Montgomery was appointed instead. By contrast Churchill survived unscathed after travelling many thousands of miles by land, sea and air attending summit meetings as far apart as Washington and Moscow and visiting his general in North Africa.

I found another fact that was new to me in this biography. For years the Churchills were in danger of having to sell their beloved home Chartwell until 1946 when Lord Camrose bought it and gave it to the National Trust with the provision that Churchill should occupy it for the rest of his life for a modest rent.

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My generation often wonder what life was like for the troops serving in the trenches in the First World War. Our fathers and uncles rarely spoke of their experiences, or if they did it would be about some amusing incident, so I can thoroughly recommend a new book *Sapper Martin*, edited by Richard Van Emden and published by Bloomsbury in November.

Jock Martin kept a secret diary from September 1916 until he reached home after being demobbed in February 1919. It was a 'secret diary' because it would have been a serious offence if he had been caught. I don't think anyone could have written a better account of life in the trenches for an ordinary soldier than this. After the war Jack Martin trained as an accountant and in 1965, when he retired after his wife died, he moved with his son Peter to Basingstoke. Here Peter re-established the practice but it was not until he had retired and moved to Bournemouth that he discovered the diary among his father's papers.

EXHIBITIONS AT THE WILLIS

STITCHED INSPIRATIONS – BASINGSTOKE THEN AND NOW

9 January to 6 February 2010
An exhibition by Basingstoke Embroiderer's Guild

Varied textile interpretations of both the Willis Museum's collections and views around Basingstoke by Basingstoke Embroiderers' Guild



ECLECTIC BY PETER DAVIS

13 February to 13 March 2010
An exhibition of local artist Peter Davis

Peter Davis a local Hampshire artist has produced a substantial body of modern, expressive work inspired by isolated beautiful seascapes and paradoxically bustling cityscapes

MADE TO FIT

20 March to 17 April 2010
An exhibition by local organisation Women's Work

Local organisation, Women's Work, is holding their 14th exhibition to celebrate International Women's Day.

This year the art, selected from female artists in the UK and beyond, covers many topics and techniques but each artist presents work as small as a CD case. Wonderful things come in small packages! There will be an artist in residence and a chance to get involved, please check the website nearer the time for details

HOLOGRAMS

3 April to 19 June 2010
A special exhibition in the Sainsbury Gallery

A celebration of more than 60 years of holograms. Meet some famous faces and find out how 3D images have been used in books, comics, toys and packaging. See how far they have come since the 3D glasses and cereal packet stickers!



GET UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL AT THE WILLIS

23 January to 27 March

Fans of film and music are in for a treat when Up Close and Personal comes to Basingstoke! This exciting collection of personal belongings from the world of showbiz is on display at The Willis Museum from 23 January.

Come and see a *Dangerous Tour* jacket once worn by the legendary Michael Jackson. Remember the coat worn in the Hollywood cult movie: *Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey*? Now visitors have the chance to see these and even more amazing belongings and iconic showbiz props.

The star attraction on the exhibition has to be Marilyn Monroe's favourite Little Black Dress. Fans of the golden days of Hollywood can also see Fred Astaire's shoes and Doris Day's exquisite rhinestone bracelet, as well as the earrings once owned by Elizabeth Taylor.



There's also a cast of the mask worn in Jim Carey's film *Mask*, while for sci-fi enthusiasts the electromagnetic boots from the hugely successful film *Face Off* are on display.

Younger filmgoers might prefer the Austin Powers props, including the flaming orange shirt and the groovy baby go-go hat. Batman's beautifully engineered spear gun and the *Star Wars* memorabilia are sure to fire their imagination.

But visitors of all ages will instantly recognise props from some of the most famous movies of all time: from *Titanic* to *The Flintstones* and *The Addams Family*.

EVENTS

WALK OF FAME

15 to 19 February 2010 10am – 4pm each day

A family friendly and free make and take at The Willis Museum

Family friendly and free make and take drop-in activities. Make your own celebrity handprint and footprint sugar paper paving slab to add to our walk of fame or take it home to impress your fans

CELEBRITY QUIZ NIGHT

Thursday 18 February 2010 7pm

A special event at Basingstoke Library

You've seen the Celebrity – Up Close and Personal Exhibition, now come along and answer questions on 'A' and 'B' listers and you could become one of Basingstoke's newest celebrity masterminds! Teams of up to six people, £2 per head to include refreshments

PROGRAMME FOR 2010

21 JANUARY	Development of the British sword from Civil War to Great War Ian Williams
18 FEBRUARY	From cream teas to clapperboards: a local's view of Lacock Sue Tapliss
18 MARCH	Living with Jane Austen Richard Tanner
15 APRIL	Sign Posts, Milestones and Village signs Brian Locock
20 MAY	Updating the Victoria County History for North Hampshire Jean Morrin
17 JUNE	The work of the Wessex Film + Sound Archive David Lee
15 JULY	The Basing raised work embroidery Ruth Smith
16 SEPTEMBER	Home Truths? A closer look at domestic technology Stephen Hoadley
21 OCTOBER	AGM Developments in domestic lighting Derek Anthony + David Carwardine
18 NOVEMBER	The history of Thornycroft, part 2 Chris Tree
16 DECEMBER	The Friends' Christmas party