

# Friends of the Willis Museum Newsletter, May 2012



*Sixty years ago: Decorations for the Queen's Coronation*

*(Willis Museum Archives)*

The Friends' Association was founded in 1978 to promote, support and improve the Willis Museum. Meetings are held on the third Thursday of the month, except in August, and other events are arranged from time to time.

Annual subscription £10  
Visitor for one meeting £2  
Registered Charity no: 280406

#### **Your committee:**

*Derek Anthony, (Chairman), Ian Williams, (Deputy Chairman), Leslyanne Hatt, (Secretary), Howard Ray, (Treasurer), Bill Fergie, (Outside events), Maurice Dyer, Briony Hollands, (Minutes secretary), John Hollands, (Publicity), Cathy Williams, (Programme Secretary).*

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

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

On behalf of your committee, welcome to the May 2012 Newsletter. By the time you receive this issue of the Newsletter some "Friends" will have started training to become "Front of the House" volunteers at the Willis Museum. So, later in the year, you may well be met by a familiar face when you visit the Museum.

As well as publicising the call for volunteers to help in our Museum your committee also met with Janet Owen, the Head of Museums and Arts, to hear more about the future for Hampshire County Council's Museums Service. One piece of potentially good news for us, here at the Willis Museum, is that the Museum Service may well begin to examine the options for up-dating and refurbishing the "Time Tunnel" later this year with input from the Friends and other interested parties.

Soon after publication of the January Newsletter, the Friends submitted a bid to Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council for funding to research and produce a brochure telling the stories behind the bronze plaques on the "Triumphal Gates" which are located at the eastern end of London Street. We recently heard that our bid has been successful.

As ever, I hope to welcome you to one or more of our up-coming monthly meetings. Please note that, due to circumstances beyond our control, the order in which some of our speakers visit us has changed from the list published in our "Programme 2012". On 21<sup>st</sup> June John Hollands will continue his exploration of the archive. On 19<sup>th</sup> July Bob Clarke will talk to us about the British Newspaper industry under the title "From Grub Street to Fleet Street" and on 15<sup>th</sup> November Sally Grainger, the food historian, will tell us about "Food in Roman Britain".

In this issue we welcome Peter Buckland as a new contributor to the newsletter. I am sure you will enjoy his vivid account of working in Woolworth's' in the 1950s. May I remind you that we hope to welcome other new article writers from among you the Friends in forthcoming issues? May I also remind you that your editors would like to start a letters page, giving you the opportunity to write in brief about any matter concerning the museum or the Friends on which you would like to express a view. To be able to do this we need *letters*. Surely with so much happening and changing at the Willis, you must have some thoughts on these matters that you could share with other members.

Lastly but certainly not least your committee would like to thank all those members who provide prizes for the monthly raffle. These prizes are a very welcome contribution. They help to raise money for the Friends and add a little fun to our monthly meetings. If you would like to donate a prize please bring it along to the meeting and hand it over at the raffle table.

### **Decorating Basingstoke for Her Majesty's Coronation, by John Hollands**

Our front-page illustration depicts what the Borough of Basingstoke's 1953 Coronation Souvenir Programme described as the "centrepiece" of the street decorations, "consisting of a crown almost 14 feet in diameter erected on a single column 25 feet above ground level. This is surmounted by three spheres, and the total height of the erection is 46 feet. From the crown are suspended strings of bunting decorated with small pennants in red, white and blue".

The programme also advised that “along the main streets some 84 banners and 42 crowns can be counted”, and that “the town hall has been suitably decorated” (as you can indeed see from the photo). What were described as the “main features of the [town’s] decorations”, however, were “two triumphal arches, one erected outside Deane’s Almshouses, and the other at the approach to Winton Square. These are of lightweight construction on tubular framing covered with rayon cloth in drapes and festoons. The top part of the arches is suspended on wires strung between the frames. Those interested will like to know that the arches are 20 feet high and have been designed so as to reduce to a minimum interference with passing vehicles and also any obstruction of the footpath”.



“Triumphal arches” in roughly the same or nearby locations were also a feature of the decorations for the coronations of George V, and George VI, so the “Triumphal Gate” (the subject of our Heritage Bid to the council) at the entrance to London Street was not the first triumphal structure to be seen there, albeit that these earlier arches were not permanent fixtures. I have not found a photo of the arch for the Queen’s coronation, but if you have one, please let us copy it, so that we can reproduce it in our next issue. This is a photo from the archives of the arch erected there for the coronation of the Queen’s father.

A small display of photos and other archive material from the Local History Room to commemorate Her Majesty’s Diamond Jubilee will be on show in the Archaeology Gallery from June 2 to June 9.

### **Store 107, by Peter Buckland**

I joined F W Woolworth’s & Co as a stockroom assistant in the autumn of 1953, a few months after the coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. I had failed to join the more prestigious firm of Marks and Spencer, as recommended by my careers advisor at Fairfields School, based partly on the fact that I had been a Stock Prefect at school, so I had to settle for ‘second best’ at Store 107, based at 5-7 London Street where the Post Office is situated today.

I was met at the door by the Manager Mr Jack Sturmeay, a tall thin man with greying hair and spectacles. He had not been long at Basingstoke after moving from a store in East Grinstead, Sussex. With him was the Assistant Manager, Mr Hobbs, a much younger dark-haired man who rode a Royal Enfield motorcycle.

My first task was to light all the gas lamps on the shop floor which provided the back up for the main electric lighting. This wasn’t an easy task; for I had to stand on a pair of old rickety steps and light the pilot lamps with a long wax taper. The gas mantles were incredibly delicate and would often blow with a loud pop and had to be replaced very carefully.

The shop floor layout was in two sections, the upper and lower floors connected by a short staircase. At the far end of the upper floor was the cash office, manned by Sheila Purdue and Elsie Harrington, and beyond that was the door to the stockroom area, a dark and gloomy place that had formerly belonged to Cannons, the butchers. The rusted, worn old blocks and pulleys were still in position above.

At the end of the aisles was the notorious “Bag Room”, a small room where sacks of bath salts and various sixes of paper bags were kept. (No plastic bags in those days!). The main aisle led through to the stockroom which was equally uninspiring. I noted an old tradesmen’s bicycle with the basket and small wheel at the front – no longer used.

At the far end of the upper floor section was the stairway to the upper sections of the building. On the first floor were the canteen and the main cash office, and round the corner was the grocery cupboard, managed by a dear old lady called Louie Rhodes. The staircase became really narrow and curved past the men's washroom and up to Annie's room at the top. Louie Rhodes called this room "Annie's room", and once told me that a young girl had been murdered there many years previously – a little room where, of all things, the horticultural glass was kept, just about the heaviest thing that we had in stock. There was a little window in this room where we could squeeze out on to the roof and look down onto London Street and the market place. Brooks, the grocer's, was opposite, and we used to hang bunting between them and us on occasions such as the annual Carnival held in July.

Back on the first floor could be found the conservatory, a low place with a glass panel roof. I always thought it was ridiculous that the Easter Eggs were stored there in the springtime, because if the sun shone it was hot up there and the chocolate would melt.

I recall that once when Mr Sturmeay was on holiday I was given the task of painting the outside glass with green cool glass paint. The paint roller was attached to a long broom handle and to paint the panels I had to stand on the glass roof. All went well until suddenly one of the panels gave way and I threw myself sideways to avoid dropping into the conservatory. I was unhurt; however it was too late in the day to get the glaziers to replace the glass so a colleague and I cut some cardboard to size and wedged it into the gap.



Next morning, to my horror, I was told that there had been a break-in, and of course I expected the worst. However the thieves had taken the trouble to cut the iron bars on the canteen windows to gain access. If only they knew they could have walked in through the conservatory with no trouble which was almost next door to the canteen. We had a laugh.

My main task in those early days was to operate the bailing machine. This was a monstrous metal instrument of torture which was used to compress the cardboard into tight bales. It consisted of a metal frame in two sections that was opened by a lever at the front. I had to receive the cardboard and cartons in a little open front shed opposite the rear entrance to Woolworth's in Petman's Yard. The shop girls would bring out resin sided bins, and I would tip them into the machine. Any complete cartons had to be ripped apart by hand, quite a feat in the case of the New Zealand Fernleaf Butter cartons. When the machine was full I had to lift the lid and position it on the top. The lid had two chains that were attached to a ratchet

device at the bottom. I then had to take a long handle which was placed on the ratchet and physically pull towards me until the cardboard was compressed. Then the ratchet was released and the whole process continued until the bale was large enough. At that point, with the bale still compressed, I opened the two halves to reveal three slots top and bottom through which a metal wire was pushed, pulled tight, secured with a pair of pliers, and then the surplus cut off. When both wires were secure, the ratchet was released which allowed the cardboard to expand and the bale was ready to be humped into the shed to await collection by the Southern Waste Paper Company on Fridays.

The trouble was that the machine was old and worn, and sometime when hauling the handle downwards it would slip and send me sprawling backwards on the uneven surface. A few months later another machine arrived which was less worn, but the handle was so heavy it took all my strength to operate, so not a great improvement.

Another hazard was that Curry's was next door, and access to their rear entrance was gained by driving past the entrance to Woolworth's. Petman's Yard wasn't very large and consisted of some old garages and sheds. The road led from Southern Road down to the market square past the Royal Naval Association Club, and then to

Kingdon's shop and store on one side, and the Hole in the Wall pub on the other. The road deviated to the right in front of the RNA Club which led to Woolworth's rear entrance and on to Currys.

Woolworth's rented one or two of the old garages wherein were stored Tunbridge Wells fizzy drinks, and all returnable items such as drink crates, bottles, vinegar crates, jam and marmalade crates, bleach crates, etc. So much came into the store in 'returnable' cases in those days, and as they held 24 at a time, these were pretty heavy. Also in another garage were all the returnable biscuit tins for Elkes, Cadburys, Crawfords, etc. Savoy Biscuits, our main supplier, was the only firm to send their biscuits in non-returnable cartons.

We also kept various seasonal items in the garages, including seed potatoes which came in 1 cwt sacks and were sold loose. This was fine until the winter frosts, (which I can tell you were severe in the 1950s) got into the potatoes and frosted many of them. Our job as stockroom boys was to empty out the sacks and remove the rotting frosted potatoes which wasn't a pleasant task because the smell was awful.

Another daunting task came in the springtime with the arrival of the bedding plants. These were delivered by a local nurseryman in a beautiful old Bentley car. Boxes were in the boot, on the rear seats, on the floor and along the running boards of the car. Our task was to take them to the open flat roof above the stockroom which meant taking them two at a time through the shop and up the stairs which took ages, so I devised an easier way. My friend and colleague, Johnny Walker, was detailed to stand on top of the roof, and I would toss the trays up to him from ground floor level. This proved to be a great time saver, but sadly, occasionally a tray of plants was dropped and had to be 'adjusted'.

Ice cream was a big seller in those days, as now, and was delivered by Lyons. We had a large chest freezer in the stockroom where the product was stored. This freezer was old and not always reliable, and would sometimes break down without warning, ruining the ice cream. On these occasions we were detailed to throw the melted ice cream away down the drain in the yard. However, I hated waste, and always filled myself with ice cream whilst carrying out this process.

The drain in the yard was a real problem because it always got blocked up in heavy rain and flooded the whole yard. Of course I was the one who had to wade out up to my knees in water, locate the drain, remove the grill, and just poke away at it (no Dyno Rod in those days) until I hit the right spot and it ran away. I have an old photograph of this in my collection.

As I have previously mentioned the RNA Club was situated in Petman's Yard run by a steward called George Austin. I used to take him unwanted wooden crates, and in return he would reward me with peppermint drinks. I can still taste them now. Another gentleman who had a garage in Petman's Yard was Mr Pearce, a very gifted man who built a complete caravan from an old chassis in the garage, and then proceeded to build and varnish a lovely boat. Another garage provided a weekly rendezvous for a man and his girl friend. We could only imagine what went on in there.



Every morning the railway goods lorry called with much of our deliveries. He backed his Scammel three-wheeled lorry and trailer down from Southern Road right to our back entrance in Petman's Yard which was no mean feat in itself. Sometimes he would meet Mr Kingdon in his chauffeur driven Humber Snipe halfway down, and there would be angry words exchanged before one or the other retreated. Our driver's name was Harry Stockhill and others were Les and Peter Savage. Harry's daughter, Pearl, worked at Woolworth's at the time.

We got on well with our neighbours. Kingdon's was on one side; the storeman's name was Tug Wilson whom I liked. Then came the rear of the National Westminster Bank and on the far side was Currys. Their driver was always passing me whilst I was baling. He used to call me Chunky, I recall. I bought my first pedal cycle from



him, a Humber Royal Cob Tourist for £23, as good as the Raleigh Superb. I still have the cycle 52 years later and it is still in working order.

Another occasional job was to take money to the National Provincial Bank which was situated in Winchester Street where the Indian restaurant is now. I had to take banknotes and bring back change in an old Gladstone bag. No escort was provided, but I never thought anything of it in those days. Villains were few and the police knew most of their names anyway.

Woolworth's paid an annual bonus to their staff at Christmas which I used to look forward to, as my wages were only £2 10 shillings per week. Another exciting event at that time was the Christmas Dinner

and Dance which was usually held at The Station Hotel or the Town Hall (now housing the Willis Museum). Mr Bearne, a well-known photographer, always took photographs. Now and again coach trips were organised to London to see shows. I recall seeing The Crazy Gang twice at The Victoria Palace, and also Kismet at the Stoll. We also visited Waller and Hartley's factory at Slough and watched them making sweets and rock for all over the country.

Waller and Hartley's sweets always came to us by rail in unmarked long cartons containing either four metal tins or four cartons of sweets. However the railway workers were not fooled by the lack of labels, and pilfering sometimes took place by making a strategic hole in the side of the cartons and removing some of the sweets. We always checked these boxes carefully of course, and one day whilst unloading, I felt that one of the cartons felt too light despite there being no visible dents or holes. After removing the metal band and pulling our four tins, one of them was found to be completely empty.

Every so often we received a visit from the Area Manager. Mr Sturmey always got quite worried over these visits, and always wanted us to be at our best and on top of our jobs. Cheeky Johnny Walker once said to him that the best thing about the 1950s was that they were over.

Under- or Assistant Managers came and went over the five and a half years that I was at Woolworth's. After Mr Hobbs came Mr Tony Hesseltine who liked amateur dramatics; then we had Mr Seymour who seemed very efficient, but at the time of the rebuilding came Mr Sheppard whom I didn't like because of his sarcastic ways. He was one of the reasons I decided to leave Woolworth's, but in the meantime I had to work with him.

It was at that time that I bought a BSA Bantam motorcycle with the help of another colleague, John Bray. We hitchhiked to Hook, and bought the motorcycle for £18.

When I first joined Woolworth's I was the third member of the stockroom staff for a while. The 'main man' was Ken Lamden, a short, smart young man who rode from Tadley every day on his sports cycle. He was awaiting his call-up for National Service and had a high opinion of himself, and used to fantasise about being a secret agent. His assistant was a lad called Bob Harris, a Whitchurch boy who had been moved from Andover to Basingstoke, FWW107. We got on immediately and have been friends from that day to this. I am proud to have been Best Man at his wedding in 1965.

Within a few weeks of my joining Woolworth's, Ken Lamden left for the army, and Bob Harris was transferred to the West Country, so at the age of 15 I was left in charge with a team of ten stockroom girls. This was only meant to be a temporary measure, but of course it was several weeks before a young fellow called Colin from the Isle of Wight took over. Every stockroom boy is also classed as a trainee manager by Woolworth's, and I had to do my stint of floor walking from time to time, but I knew, even then, that I was not cut out for this life. My greatest interest was playing cricket, and working at Woolworth's greatly restricted this activity.



Mr Sturmev was a kind man and did his best to encourage me to go for a career in Woolworth's. He even took me to see the Farnborough Air Show one year.

However everything changed dramatically in about 1956 when it was decided that FWW107 would be completely rebuilt. The contractors moved in, and the two men in charge were called Bob and Roy who were very popular with the staff, especially the middle-aged women. One half of the shop floor was re-done followed by a new stockroom. A breezeblock annexe which was used as a warehouse was quickly built at the end of the alley on Webber's ground, and all the stock was transferred to it.

A four-wheel manual trolley was provided to move the stock back and forth. It had steering so Johnny and I had great fun driving it from the warehouse to the shop, as it was all downhill. However over the two years that the rebuilding took place, the brakes failed one day and we came hurtling down the alley and couldn't stop. We usually rammed into the dustbins to effect this, but for some reason Johnny who was driving at the time took a different course and headed for the RNA and on towards the Market Square. I jumped off and left him to it, and luckily he survived with the aid of one of Kingdon's garages, which we rammed. We never rode on it again after this incident.

We had a lovely new store, but for me it had lost its individuality and although the stockroom continued for a while in the breezeblock annexe, it eventually became a workshop for Webber's Garage.

For me FWW107 was no more, and I left soon afterwards.

### **“The Bounty” – The Early Years (and Annie Strong), by Bob Clarke**

The *Bounty* was originally called the *Cattle Market*. It was built during the 1830s to serve the drovers and dealers who attended the Cattle Market which moved from the Market Place to the land to the east of the cricket field wall on Wednesday, 7 October 1829. The pub was later extended in 1903 and 1927.

The earliest reference to the pub that I can find is an account in the *Reading Mercury* for August 21, 1841 of a cricket match played on Basingstoke Common between “eleven gents of the upper part of the town” and “eleven young men of the lower part.” After the game, the players “repaired to the Cattle Market Inn, where a supper was prepared for them, and the evening afterwards [was] spent in harmony and conviviality.”

Harmony and conviviality were absent on 19 November 1862 when a fight broke out in the pub between George Boswell senior and George Boswell junior, cattle dealers from South Warnborough, and a pig dealer from Hartley Wespall.

Like many pubs in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *Cattle Market* was used for Coroner's juries to “sit on the body of the deceased” to determine the cause of death. In 1869 an inquest was held in the *Cattle Market* “on the body of Charles Thumwood” who cut his throat with a clasp knife. He lived in the flint cottage next door to the pub with his widowed sister, Amelia Pollard, and her three sons, the youngest of whom was called Thomas (of whom more later).

Another example was the inquest into the death of Arthur Baldwin of Phoenix Green. In 1897 he travelled to Basingstoke to watch a cricket match. He got as far as Bounty Road, where he fainted, got up, and fell down again. He was carried into the *Cattle Market* and laid down. By the time the doctor arrived, he was dead.

The first landlord of the *Cattle Market* was John Leavey who remained landlord until around 1860. Other publicans included Thomas Griffin, his successor; Mrs Sarah Cooper who was the landlady in 1865; George Saunders to 1872, when William Sayers took over the licence. James Strong took over from William Sayers in

1880. When James Strong relinquished the licence in early 1882, James Heath became the landlord. He lasted ten years to 1892, when he lost his licence for being drunk in charge of a pub.

Those familiar with the phenomenon of psychogeography, whereby the atmosphere of certain locations influences particular human characteristics down the ages, e.g., centuries of left-wing radicalism in a part of Clerkenwell, and are aware that the *Bounty* seems to attract a disproportionately large number of characters with a deep knowledge of American blues, may be interested to learn that the landlady in 1911 was one Bessie Smith, though unfortunately not the Bessie Smith, Empress of the Blues, whose many recordings included *Gimme a Pigfoot and a Bottle of Beer* in 1933. The landlord in 1915 was Luke Kilhams, who sounds like a cowboy, and probably was.

Basingstoke in the 1880s had 54 pubs, competing to serve a population of less than 7,000. In order to make a living, many landlords had other occupations, leaving their wives to serve in the bar and effectively run the pub. John Leavey was a sawyer; Thomas Griffin a saddler; William Sayers was the local gunsmith; and James Strong was a boot repairer.

James Strong came from Devon. Annie, his wife, was born in Freefolk. Annie was in her early twenties and had two young children. One day in May 1881, John Wakeham, a journeyman tailor, came into the pub. He had been on the tramp, looking for work. As he also came from Devon, James took pity on him, and allowed him to lodge at the pub. Wakeham managed to find work with James Williamson, the London Street tailor, but developed a reputation for returning the work he was supposed to do uncompleted. He had only paid Annie two weeks' rent during the six or seven weeks he stayed there.

On the night of Thursday, 14 July, Wakeham went out drinking round the town, and when he returned to the *Cattle Market*, he was so drunk that Annie refused to serve him. The following day, he came down to the parlour with a cut-throat razor, and said, "Mrs Strong, look here, look here, look here", and immediately cut his throat. Annie screamed, and as she rushed out of the room, she felt the floor tremble as Wakeham fell. James rushed in from the garden on hearing Annie scream, "just in time to see Wakeham roll his eyeballs and expire." At the inquest, Charles Frère Webb, the local surgeon, testified that he had found John Wakeham lying in a pool of blood on the parlour floor, with a gash that extended right across his throat, dividing all the structures, including the right carotid artery.

Since I read about the Wakeham suicide in the *Hants and Berks Gazette* for July 27, 1881, I had often wondered what happened to young Annie, the *Bounty* barmaid. So I did some research and found that James and Annie gave up the pub shortly after the Wakeham incident, and moved to Bracknell where Annie had another child in 1883. Sometime in the 1880s they moved back to Basingstoke where James died in 1888. In 1891 Annie was living with her children at 2 Oxford Terrace, just round the corner from the pub, where the car park behind All Saints Church is now. Her next door neighbour, at 1 Oxford Terrace, was Amelia Pollard. Some time in the 1890s, Annie married Amelia's son, Thomas, who was an ostler. In 1901 they were living together at 10 Castons Road. Thomas Pollard died in late 1901, and Annie remained in Basingstoke where she died in 1931 aged 73.

Some time in the 1950s the pub changed its name to *The Bounty*, in a belated acknowledgement of Colonel May's "bounty" in buying the Folly for cricket matches in 1880. My guess is that they changed the name from the *Cattle Market* because the women thought it referred to them!

### **Beaurepaire Revisited, by Bill Fergie**

Friends may recall a visit to Bramley that I led on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2009, and which was subsequently written up for the Newsletter by Anne Fisher. One of the highlights was the visit to Beaurepaire House, where the owner had offered us very welcome refreshments on a warm evening.

Beaurepaire was originally a medieval moated site, the moat providing both a degree of defence in turbulent times, but also having the further advantage of providing a well-drained site for a house in the heavy clay soils of the area northeast of Basingstoke. An additional benefit of a moat was its ability to act as a fishpond at a time when the eating of fish on a Friday, and on other religious occasions, was strictly observed.



Perhaps our forebears were also partial to shellfish, because some Friends will recall that, at the end of the visit I collected some empty freshwater mussel shells from the edge of the moat. Although I knew of the existence of freshwater mussels, and had found them in a stream near my home as a child, I was impressed by the size of these particular shells. The saltwater mussels some of us like to eat measure perhaps 5 or 6 cms in length but the ones at Beaurepaire were at least twice this size. With the permission of the owner I took a few home with the intention of finding out a bit more about them.

After a little bit of internet detective work I eventually tracked down the Rev. Graham Long, of the United Reformed Church at Fordingbridge in the New Forest, an amateur ecologist who is Hampshire Wildlife Trust's "correspondent" for molluscs. Although an amateur Graham is extremely knowledgeable and quickly identified the shell I eventually sent him as that of the swan mussel – *Anadonta cygnea* – which can commonly grow to 15cms in length. I also learnt that they depend on the presence of fish for their breeding cycle and have an ability to filter stagnant water as part of their feeding process. This ability has proved to be a threat to their future, because they are caught and sold as fishpond cleansers in garden centres. Graham was very interested in following up my find, and said that he and a colleague, Dr June Chatfield, would be very keen to pay Beaurepaire a visit with the intention of looking for other varieties of freshwater mussel, which apparently total 5 species. Dr Chatfield is a professional rather than an amateur, and is a Past President of the Conchological Society of Great Britain and Ireland.

I subsequently wrote to the owner requesting permission for a further visit, but received absolutely no response. Although this was not at all in character with the very kind owner who had looked after us so well on that very hot summer evening I declined to pester her and, with some disappointment, let the matter drop. Had it not been for the Graham Long following up our unfinished email correspondence a few months ago the story of the Beaurepaire mussels might never have been finished. However, prompted by Graham, I wrote again to the owner and received an immediate apologetic response. My earlier letter had apparently not reached its destination, probably because the family was new to the house and was still partly resident in their old house. This sometimes entailed unopened post being moved between the two, and my letter was never opened. There is a lesson here in these days of junk mail. If you write a personal letter it is likely to get better attention if the address is hand written and not typed on the inside of a window envelope so that it can be mistaken for a circular! Anyway, all's well that ends well, and on a fine warm day at the end of March (remember the summer?) I returned to Beaurepaire with my two ecologists and we had a wonderful time investigating the moat, two fishponds in the field to the south and the River Loddon a little further to the south. Altogether my new colleagues identified at least 25 aquatic mollusc varieties, 3 or 4 of them mussels. Although it appeared that the moat only supported the swan mussel, and the former fish ponds apparently none at all, they found at least two additional species in the Loddon. The final story will not be told until the ecologists have completed their research on some empty shells they took away for further study.

If there was a slight question mark over the day it was a degree of concern from my colleagues that they only found *empty* mussel shells in both the moat and the river. This could possibly point to a problem with pollution, to which mussels are very sensitive, but might merely reflect the fact that despite a warm sunny day the live molluscs were still safely hidden in the mud where they tend to stay during the winter months. We hope this explains the absence of live examples. There might yet be a third instalment to this story, when the ecologists have written up their research and put Beaurepaire firmly on the mollusc map.



Left: Two ecologists enjoy an *al fresco* lunch at Beaurepaire in March. Right: a freshwater mussel from the R. Loddon.

## What's on at the Willis

### **Now until May 23. Tea Tales. Sainsbury Gallery**

*A comprehensive and highly entertaining look at everything to do with tea production and tea drinking.*

### **Now until May 26. Photographic Basingstoke. Community Gallery**

*Photographs by students at Brighton Hill Community College and Cranbourne Business and Enterprise College. A joint schools and EDGE production.*

### **29 May to Sept 1: Dave McKean: a retrospective. Sainsbury Gallery**

*The work of an acclaimed illustrator, photographer, graphic designer, film maker and musician, noted for his graphic novels, his conceptual art work in two "Harry Potter" films, and his album covers.*

### **June 2 to July 7, and 16 August to 15 September: Inspire! Hampshire's stories of the Olympic Games. Community Gallery**

*Discover the history of the Olympic and the Paralympic Games and find out about the sporting heroes who are the stars of these iconic events.*

### **June to September: You joining in!**

*Lots of drop-in family activities relating to the **Inspire** exhibition. Look out for details at the museum and on the Willis's website.*

### **June 2, at 11 am: Community Museum Open Day**

*Combined celebration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and launch of the **Inspire** exhibition. Couples celebrating their 60<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversaries will be special guests!*

### **June 2 to June 9: Right Royal Fun! (during opening hours)**

*Jubilee themed drop-in half term family activities. Free, but £1 donation towards materials requested.*

### **June 2 to June 9: Royalty greeted and celebrated. Archaeology Gallery**

*How Basingstoke has received royal visitors and celebrated royal occasions over the years.*

### **June 7, 11 am, 1.30pm and 3pm: Kings and Queens storytelling day, with Mike O'Leary**

*Spell binding tales of Kings and Queens, Princes and Princesses. Ideal for families with younger children. £3 per person. Book in advance and pay on the day.*

### **June 21, 7.30 pm: A fourth dip into the archives, by John Hollands. Archaeology Gallery (Friends' talk)**

*Yet more fascinating glimpses into our local history from the Local History Room collection. Free to Friends, Visitors £2.*

### **July 14 to August 11: A sporting chance. Community Gallery.**

*Photographic portraiture focusing on local people who take part in sports represented in the Olympic Games, celebrating the community and reflecting the importance of sport in people's lives.*

### **July 19, 7.30 pm: The story of the British newspaper to 1899, by Bob Clarke. Archaeology Gallery (Friends' talk).**

*Bob will use examples from his collection of 1000 historic newspapers to explain how they developed from the broadsides of the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the broadsides of the nineteenth. Free to Friends. Visitors £2.*

### **September 20, 7.30 pm: The Empress Eugenie and Farnborough Hill, by Diana White. Archaeology Gallery (Friends' Talk).**

*Wife of the deposed French Emperor Napoleon III, this fascinating woman lived the last 40 years of her long life in Farnborough.*

**DETAILS OF A SUMMER VISIT FOR FRIENDS WILL BE ANNOUNCED SHORTLY.**