

Friends of the Willis Museum Newsletter, September 2013



Where the Willis used to be. See More Derek Wren pictures of Basingstoke in 1964.

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

Annual subscription £10; visitor for one month £2

Your Committee

Derek Anthony (Chairman), Ian Williams (Deputy Chairman), Leslyanne Hatt (Secretary), Howard Ray (Treasurer), Alistair Craig, Bill Fergie (Outside events), John Hollands (Publicity), Cathy Williams (Programme Secretary), Jenny Stevens (Curator, ex officio).

*Contact us c/o the museum or by email at enquiries@friendsofwillis.hampshire.org.uk
This issue 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. I do hope that you have had a most enjoyable summer and have been able to take advantage of the unusually warm and sunny weather.

Before looking forward to what is coming in the near future, I would like to say a big "thank you" to the three Friends who joined me as speakers at the July "members' 10 minute talks" evening. They were Stephen Saul, Barbara Applin and Bob Clarke.

Enclosed with this Newsletter you will find an invitation to the Annual General Meeting of the Friends in October together with a nomination paper for the election of officers and committee members. I do hope that as many members as possible will join us for this important event.

On behalf of all members I would like to take this opportunity to thank Bill Fergie, a long-time member of the committee and past chairman, for his many years of service. Bill is retiring from the committee and this means that there will be a vacancy on the committee and I would urge anyone who feels that they could make a positive contribution to consider standing for election. If anyone is interested I would welcome the opportunity to tell them about the work of the committee.

Most of you will know that, from this month onwards, we are making a couple of changes to the arrangements for our monthly meetings. In the first place, as a courtesy to our speakers, we will be closing the doors of the museum as soon as the meeting begins at 7.30 pm. Secondly, we are asking all visitors to book their places at least 48 hours ahead of the meeting. This is because the fire regulations limit the number of people allowed on the top floor of the museum at any one time. Recently the numbers attending meetings have been rising and we need to keep tighter control on numbers.

Lastly I would like to tell you about four items the Friends have bought and presented to the museum at a total cost of £529.62. They are a new projector screen for the top floor costing £186.95, additional shelving for the Resources Room costing £128.00, a modern reprint of Baigent and Millard's *History of Basingstoke* at £23.27 and an acrylic cover for the model of the Willis Museum and Haymarket Theatre costing £191.40.

Subscription reminder, by Howard Ray, Treasurer

Many thanks to all of you who renewed your subscription so promptly in July. It would be appreciated if those of you who have yet to send the Treasurer your 2013/2014 subscription would do so by return with the renewal form that was enclosed with the letter you received from the Chairman. If for some reason you have regrettably decided not to renew your membership, it would be much appreciated if you would advise the Treasurer accordingly to avoid any unnecessary postage on reminder letters.

[Howard Ray, 10 Camwood Close, Basingstoke RG21 3BL 01256 473947 h.ray@virgin.net]

Fairfields School, 1944-1953, by *David Buckland*

Part one

My first recollection of Fairfields School was on 21st August 1944. I remember it well because I started school on my 6th birthday having lost my first year's work because of ill health. My Mother took me through the rather dingy entrance and left me in the care of the Headmistress of the Junior School a kindly lady called Miss Shand.

I was quickly ushered into my first classroom which happened to be the main hall, a type of classroom not uncommon to me in future years. I was in this class until the Christmas holidays and cannot remember very much except the great thrill that was had from all the decorations and the post box where we all posted Christmas cards to each other. I cannot recall the name of my first teacher, but I do remember spending most of my first day playing with building bricks and an early plastic type of conical puzzle.

Of course the war was still on and we occasionally had to duck under the heavy wooden desks when the wail of the siren was heard.

For the second term of my schooling I was put in the very capable hands of a lady called Miss Cannings who, like Miss Shand, is no longer with us. I was rather a timid child, no doubt caused by my many weeks spent in Hackwood Road Hospital, but Miss Canning was a remarkable teacher and long before I moved on to Class 3, I had learnt to read, write, and master my tables and I could add, subtract, multiply and almost divide. I cannot recall having trouble with any of these tasks.

The winters at that time seemed endless and hard with lots of snow, and there was a permanent frost in the playground, and super slides were produced that shone like glass. Other games of the time that we played were marbles (alleys), tag, hopscotch and five stones, and many played with early dinky toys and lead soldiers. Others played trains or buses.

The school meals were a strange mixture at the time and I hated cheese, lettuce and grated carrots, and had to bring notes from my parents to be excused from eating them. Incidentally in later life I came to love all these foods. The potatoes had a strange earthy smell, peculiar to school meals and the cabbage was a black-looking mass. However, I enjoyed the mashed potatoes and fish mixture that was often produced, and I even managed to enjoy the beetroot and swede when mixed in well. I always enjoyed the puddings, treacle, spotted dick, plain etc., that steamed in the long round tins.

The caretakers name was Mr Barnes; he was well liked.

The toilets were very primitive and at the far end of the playground reached by walking through a peculiar little building filled with coat racks and hooks.

We had the usual one or two school bullies, and I became the prey of one big lad called Tony Bane who travelled to school on the same bus as me. He came from the Tunworth area, I believe, and soon I had to hand over sweets and anything else that I had. I also had to provide him with chestnuts and conkers in season, which grew in abundance in Hackwood Park where I lived. I am afraid that he died tragically in a swimming accident in later years.

I didn't have many close friends, but those that I did have were very loyal and I had quite a happy time really.

Memories are rather dim for the next year or two, but I think that my fourth term was spent in Miss Knight's class where I learnt about 1066 and all that. Prior to this my class had the unusual experience of spending a term in May Place Hall on the top floor where we had a grand view of the surrounding countryside. We were lined up in the morning and marched from Fairfields School across Southern Road, down Castons Road, along London Street and finally to May Place. Once again it was wintertime

and I remember one unfortunate boy slipping on the ice where Castons Road joined London Street, or rather the Market Square and getting very wet and muddy.

Early in my school life I was introduced to the little tuck shop just outside the school gates in Southern Road. Mr Clemson's shop stood across Southern Road and was rather out of bounds. More popular was the shop of Mr Hailstone which stood where the Chinese Take Away is now. He did a roaring trade every lunch-time selling lemonade powder, sherbet dabs, Oxo cubes (sucked like sweets), rather watery ices, and his famous 1d drinks which I discovered years later were really watered down Tizer.

We were not allowed to leave the school grounds during the lunch-break, but a friend and I often used to slip away for a walk down Beaconsfield Road and back via Fairfields Road. However, on one occasion we almost walked straight into Miss Shand as we turned one corner. I am sure she saw and recognised us, but we ran hard back to school and heard nothing more that day. Next morning at Assembly, though, Miss Shand gave a lecture on children leaving school during the dinner break and said that she had seen two boys out of bounds the previous day; we felt her gaze rest on us although we were not named. Needless to say we didn't take any more illegal walks at lunch-time.

Very soon I was old enough to move up to the top school, Fairfields Junior, but I wasn't there long before a very exciting period entered my life. Rationing ended as we were able to buy chocolate for the first time. Children today just couldn't imagine how wonderful this was to actually buy and eat chocolate, and to have Easter Eggs.

When I was ten years old a brand new school was built at the Shrubbery. I was put into the class of Miss E Gould and we were the second class to be installed in this school. She was a wonderful teacher whom I liked and respected.

After drab old Fairfields the new school was marvellous. I remember very well Miss Gould's opening address to her new class. She said that the new school was only temporary, but she would bet that it would still be going in 20 years time - how right she was. She also stated that if any child gave her any real trouble, they would receive the cane on their backsides - boy or girl. She had two canes one of which she called "Jiminy Cricket" and I well remember an amusing incident when she went to the cupboard to fetch her cane to administer punishment to a boy called Humphries. Not wishing to be caned, he locked her in the cupboard to the cheers of the whole class. Somebody soon released her of course, and the unfortunate Humphries received his caning, but Miss Gould had a big smile on her face.

At this time we took the dreaded 11 plus examination, and although I could do pretty well at most subjects, my glaring weakness was my maths, and I failed so it was back to old Fairfields Senior School again and into Class 1A under the influence of Mrs Newman and my first encounter with that legend of Fairfields, Headmaster J.L Littlefair, commonly known as Johnnie (when he couldn't hear you). What a colossus he was! I know that he was much disliked by many people, and some even questioned his academic ability, but times were very hard then, and he commanded respect, and he had some very hard cases to handle. We called them the South View Boys and they were war orphans and pretty tough, but Mr Littlefair demanded and got discipline, and most of these boys have grown up to be decent honest members of society and I think that a lot of the credit must go to him for this.

His school motto "To see and admire, not harm or destroy" was drummed into us at every opportunity as was his poem:-

I hear a sudden cry of pain.
There is a rabbit in a snare,
Etc.

He loved poetry and had his favourites in every class who were asked to recite on his frequent visits to the classroom. He gave an address at assembly every morning and often boasted of never missing a day's

work walking to Fairfields from Worting and home again every day. He was rather eccentric, and often appeared not to be wearing socks. After his address and morning prayers at assembly, we marched away to our classrooms usually to the music of The Washington Post March played by Miss Brown or Mr Banwell.

I didn't make much progress in 1A, and Mrs Newman said that had I worked harder, I could have got to the Technical College, but once again maths was the great mystery to me and let me down. The following term I was in the class of Miss de Souza in 2A and then into Miss Russell's class 3A which was held in the upstairs hall. I had my best ever examination results whilst in this class and even got fair maths results.

Whilst I was there the school received its very own radiogram which was a great event at the time. The records that we had were limited and consisted of "Song of the Morning", "Tubby the Tuba" and "Sparky's Magic Piano".

Part two will follow in the December issue.

Isaac Septimus Nullis and the Silchester villages, by David M Young, MA

(The author is currently doing research with Chester University into the coming and spread of Methodism in the northerly parts of Hampshire. Some of his research was done at the Willis.)

If you look in the 1851 census for Quick's Green, Berkshire, you will come across a household consisting of Thomas Street, aged 68, and his wife Ann, aged 60. They were so poor they were receiving parish relief. Even so, Ann had once said to a needy man, "I have a shilling; you can have that." That same man was, or later became, a Primitive Methodist minister, and was able to leave her £50 when he died. His name was Isaac Septimus Nullis.



Despite Ann Street's poverty, and no doubt obscurity in the eyes of society, if you look in H. B. Kendall's *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church*, you will see a photograph of her in front of their cottage on page 337 of Volume II. It seems that the little white thatched cottage has since been demolished, but that it stood in the garden of an existing larger house, behind the now closed Primitive Methodist chapel.

If you read the biography of Isaac Nullis you will learn that when Ann was 'ripe in years, and in great part confined indoors'; she was still 'full of faith and the Holy Ghost'; and her praise was 'in all the churches who know her.'

The biography is by Jesse Herbert, and is called *The living Sacrifice: the life of Isaac Septimus Nullis* (two editions, 1870, 1888), and being contemporary with Nullis, gives a good feel of the times. But why should Ann Street, this poor elderly saint, be included, not only in it, but also by Kendall, in the biggest denominational history the Primitives Methodists ever produced?

The story goes back to the coming of John Ride and his co-workers into Berkshire. Ride was a Primitive Methodist minister, whose ministry was so powerful and so successful, under God's blessing, that he eventually became known as 'The Apostle of Berkshire'. He also preached in villages of northern Hampshire. When Ann came under his ministry, she told:

I saw and felt my state as a guilty sinner; my feelings were at times almost intolerable; I prayed and wept - wept and prayed, and at last I ventured to believe that what was told me was true - namely,

that Christ died for me, and that God would pardon me if I believed in His Son Jesus Christ; and glory to his name, as soon as I trusted in the promise, peace flowed into my heart.

At once she made her home a house of prayer. And what a pleasant home it was, despite the poverty!

...that cloth, as white as driven snow; the chairs and table reflecting back your features, so bright are they; and the 'old dogs' [irons used to support the fire], which look you in the face as you turn towards the fire-place, with bright and shining faces, 'welcome'; in short, all is bright, and mostly cheerful. In this home a little has been made to go a great way.

Her religion was “emphatically practical”, and was characterised by strong, ardent, enduring love, and by hope:

We had almost said she is all hopefulness, the hearty grip of the hand, the earnest “Look up, my brother,” and even the sparkling tear-drop starting from her upturned glistening eyes, speak of Hope, strong, bright and blooming.

In 1849, revival came to the parish of Ashampstead (which includes Quick's Green) and to the surrounding area, by means of the Primitive Methodist evangelism. Meetings were held in Ann's home, and, as the Nullis biography continues, “Many a captive has ‘leapt to loose his chains’ under her roof; many a tempted and struggling soul has been cheered and encouraged on their way by her advice, sympathy, and prayers.” One such soul was Isaac Nullis himself.

He was born in October 1828. When he was a young man, he attended meetings, both in the chapel and the cottage at Quick's Green, and after a meeting at Ann Street's home, in March 1850, back at his own home he came into the assurance that God had forgiven him for his sins and accepted him as a brand-new child of God. Nullis immediately sensed a zeal for the conversion of others.

One of the places he preached at was Silchester, in Hampshire. The first Primitive Methodist chapel there was built of poles from the forest, and furze gathered from the common. It was a primitive structure (with a small “p” as well!) and it began to fall into decay. In March 1839 the Reading Circuit quarterly meeting resolved to gather money to buy a house and garden at Silchester, and to build a new chapel. The chapel was opened on Sunday 27th October 1839, with George Wallis and John Coxhead as preachers. It is still in use as the Methodist church hall, with a newer chapel built on to it.



On 25th February 1855 Nullis recorded: “Salvation Meeting at Silchester; had a mighty time, while preaching from the 25th verse of the cxviii Psalm, ‘Save now’ etc.” That February he was very active in services there, at which about twenty people professed faith. The 1855 Circuit Report records that “lately the work of the Lord has broken out on that side and we are enjoying a gracious outpouring of the Spirit.”

Left: The Primitive Methodist Chapel, Silchester.

On 8th April Nullis recorded, using spellings of the time:

Glory be to God! The work is moving all round Silchester, Tadley, Baughurst, Chatter Alley, Upper Wootten, and East Sherborne.

On Sunday 27th May he attended a camp meeting at Baughurst, “when five souls were brought to the Saviour”. The following day he went to a camp meeting at Silchester, and six persons professed faith. The following day found him at a tea meeting in Baughurst at which about two hundred people were

present. This was followed by a powerful prayer meeting at which some 15 or 20 people came to faith. "The speaking was most mighty... Glory! O, it was a victory, we did shout. Br. Symonds was in his glory, he is a fine fellow in meetings of this kind." (James Symonds was one of the circuit ministers.)

In August 1855 he went to Silchester for a fortnight to take services in place of James Symonds. These found him at Tadley, Silchester, Charter Alley, with conversions at each place, including at Silchester four young men on 7th and three young men and a woman on 14th.

After serving elsewhere, he returned to the area in September 1864 and held revival services at Silchester, Charter Alley, Pit Hall and Wootton St Lawrence. Again he saw people come to faith in Christ, "and one or two received the deeper baptism." He recorded:

At Chatter Alley on the Sunday there were several penitents, among whom was a woman of profligate habits and disreputable character. At the Baughurst missionary meeting two were saved, one of them nearly seventy years of age. Last Sabbath evening eight or nine were crying for mercy. On Thursday night I attempted to close the meeting, three or four times, but failed to do so, till one in the morning; seven found peace, one of them a man nearly seventy-five years of age.

On 28th November he wrote that "Four more obtained pardon... the place seemed filled with the sweetest influence of the Holy Spirit." On Sunday 4th December "the chapel was crowded, numbers could not gain admission. The following week ten were saved; two of them very strong young men, who had become very hard drinkers; and two old men... This work continued till over seventy were brought to Jesus."

In 1866 he was back in the area, taking meetings in places which included Charter Alley, Silchester, Wootton, Hannington, Mortimer.

I was born in Basingstoke in 1946, and my early Christian life was spent in the churches of the Methodist Basingstoke Circuit. It is where I began to preach. In about 1964 I met elderly men in chapels, including Wootton St Lawrence and Charter Alley, where Isaac Nullis had preached with such effect a century or more previously: men probably born in the final decade of the 19th century, who looked back to those days which they probably heard of in their youth. The quality of their conversation attracted me to their faith, and I reached a decision which might have been expressed in the words of Ruth in the Bible: "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God." It set the direction of my life till now.

Isaac Nullis died in April 1868. In 2012, I visited the chapel in Quick's Green and spoke with a lady walking her dog along the path beside the chapel. She knew approximately where Nullis's grave is in the chapel burial area, and took me to find it. I transcribed as much of it as I could easily do; here is what I read:

IN MEMORY OF ISAAC SEPTIMUS NULLIS WHO WAS BORN AT ASHAMPSTEAD OCT 9TH
1828. HE WAS BORN AGAIN OF THE SPIRIT MARCH 31, 1850. AND PASSED FROM EARTH TO
A LIFE BEYOND IMMORTAL LIFE APRIL 8TH 1868.
FOR SO HE GIVETH HIS BELOVED SLEEP – PSL 127:2.

More Derek Wren pictures of Basingstoke in 1964

Our cover picture

Our museum's first home in New Street was originally the Mechanic's Institute that opened in 1870. When the Institute closed in 1928, the building was bought by the Corporation. In 1931 Basingstoke's first free public library opened on the ground floor there, and a new Borough Museum opened on the first floor with George Willis as curator. Renamed *The Willis Museum* in 1956, it moved to its present home in 1984. The New Street building was acquired by a property developer and demolished. Verum House which has a replica of its predecessor's façade now stands on the site.

Upper Wote Street



The Immanuel Church was built in 1802 for the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion and demolished in 1969. The site is marked by a sculpture officially known as *The Church Stone* by Michael Pegler.

Lower Wote Street



On the left you see part of the hanging sign of the Barge public house, the last reminder that the Basingstoke Canal had once ended at a wharf on the opposite side of the road. The tree on the right was popularly known as the “Reformers’ Tree”, because it was a popular meeting place for gossips putting the world to rights. Ahead is the junction with Reading Road, and beyond

that Station Road with the Wallis and Stevens factory on the right. Everything in this photograph disappeared in the 1960s apart from the Railway Station in the distance.

Wallis and Steevens

This is a closer view of the sign that proudly adorns the façade of Wallis and Steevens, manufacturers of agricultural machinery and road rollers. The works were built in 1856. From here the firm moved to Daneshill in 1967 where it shut down in 1981. There is a replica of the façade at the Milestones Museum.



The photo below is of the interior of the main assembly shop. Here you see diesel road rollers being assembled, where steamrollers and traction engines had been built before them. The only shops on this site now are those of The Malls!



What's on at the Willis

Basingstoke Gallery: Recreation
21 September to 28 October

Bi-annual exhibition of Basingstoke Art Club with the theme of Recreation.

**Sainsbury Gallery: Japanese treasures: cloisonné enamels from the V&A
5 October to 9 November**

Edwin Davies OBE donated one of the world's finest collections of Japanese cloisonné to the Victoria and Albert in London. This touring exhibition showcases a superb selection of exquisite objects illustrating elegant metalwork of the late 17th century through the Golden Age and into the twentieth century.

Japanese Treasures is a stunning exhibition of decorative masterpieces from a historically significant collection.

**Archaeology Gallery: Our AGM followed by 'My family and other setbacks' by Mel Rees
17 October 7.30 pm**

Mel is a full time speaker and writer. His talk is a light-hearted look at life: children who won't leave home, coping with an elderly parent and coping with a rescue dog – with a bit of snobbery thrown in for good measure!

**Basingstoke Gallery: Abstracts and portraits
2 November to 23 November**

An exhibition by Ron Peplow combining his two styles: as an expressionist artist who employs mixed media, developing a process of combining various materials, chance control and analysis in his work; and running alongside this process his portrait work, mainly images of people he knows, working from photographs and combining and manipulating images in order to catch the atmosphere, light and intensity of the act.

**Archaeology Gallery: Friends' Talk: A window on 18th century country houses, by Nicola Pink
21 November 7.30 pm**

Nicky works part-time as a customer services manager at Hampshire Record Office and also one day a week in the Wessex Film and Sound Archive. She has worked part-time for the National Trust as Assistant House Manager at Clandon Park in Surrey and has just completed a Masters in Eighteenth Century Studies at Southampton University, focusing on country houses. She is a freelance tour guide at the Tudor House Museum in Southampton and lectures privately to local groups and societies.

**Sainsbury Gallery: LEGO models by Duncan Titchmarsh
30 November to 8 December**

An amazing display of custom made LEGO by the country's only certified LEGO builder. The models on display will include Danebury Hill Fort (complete with round houses, fires, people and even a goat!), a Roman feast (on a full size LEGO table), a giant size sedan chair, the Floating Bridge from Southampton, and Portchester Castle. Other models from the LEGO range will also be on display, and visitors will have the chance to buy LEGO sets, Minifigures, and branded LEGO items in the museum shop. If you know someone who loves LEGO, why not bring them along.

**Basingstoke Gallery: The Gaze, by Carlamaria Jackson
30 November to 20 December**

Work inspired by the female form in western art history, and the dichotomy of views within a feminist discourse.

**Archaeology Gallery: Friends' Christmas social: plate party and quizzes
19 December 7.30 pm**