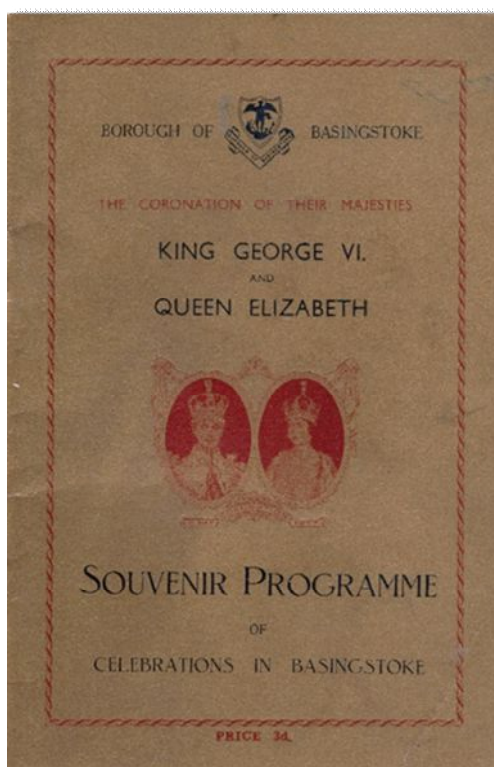
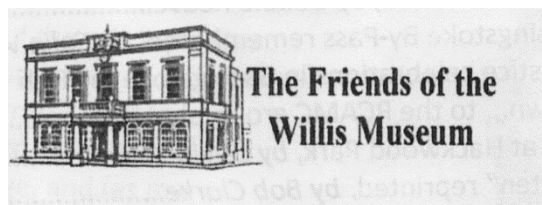


Friends of the Willis Museum Newsletter, May 2023



**Basingstoke Coronation Festivities programmes in the Willis Museum archives.
See "Your attention is drawn..."**

'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 £12. Visitor for one meeting £3

Your committee: Derek Anthony (Chairman), David Wickens (Deputy Chairman and Programme Secretary); Ian Scott (Treasurer); Isobel Archer (Minutes Secretary), Steve Crudge (Publicity) John Hollands (Publicity and Newsletter); Barbara Johnson (Membership Secretary); Jenny Stevens (Venue Manager, ex officio).

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

Newsletter compiled and edited by John Hollands and proof read, printed and distributed by Derek Anthony

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From the Chair, *by Derek Anthony*

Welcome to the Spring issue of our "Friends" Newsletter. I do hope that you had an enjoyable Easter break and were able to join in the celebrations for the coronation of our new King.

Before anything else I must record the sad death of Ruth Cairns, a long-time member and supporter of the Friends of the Willis Museum. Ruth died in late January and I had the privilege of representing the "Friends" at her funeral on 14th March.

I do hope that you were able to join us for the first three of our monthly meetings in 2023 – Tim Craven talking about the cartoonist Thelwell, Ian Porter on "The Real Downton Abbey" and Nick Saunders on "Special Operations in WW2 and the training of secret agents at Beaulieu".

As I write we look forward to Alan Turton talking about "The Willow of Basing – Sir William Paulet" in May and Paul Stickler on "The Murder of Sydney Spicer" in June.

In the meantime, our Programme Secretary, David Wickens, is working hard to develop an interesting and varied programme of talks for the twelve months from July 2023 to June 2024.

Before signing off I would like to remind you of the Museum's programme of Sunday afternoon talks which take place at 2.00pm on the last Sunday of each month. The cost is £6 per person for which you get the talk plus a cup of tea and a slice of cake. Please book ahead on the Museum's website or by telephoning the Willis Museum on 01256 465902. The May talk on Sunday 28th May, entitled "What did the Romans ever do for us" will be given by Terri Reid and the June talk on Sunday 25th June entitled "The good old cause, Part 2" more about the twists and turns in the aftermath of the English Civil War will be given by Tim Craven.

Stop press: We have arranged a summer visit for Thursday, August 10. It's a follow-up to the excellent talk at our meeting on February 16. See the highlighted section on page 13 for more.

Your attention is drawn... to an archive from May 12, 1937, *by John Hollands*

As a rule, this running article draws your attention to a museum object on display. This special month seemed a good time to highlight the archives collection instead, specifically archives relating to Coronations. Here I am pinpointing one of the three programmes in the collection illustrated on the front cover, that for the Coronation of our King's grandfather, King George VI, plus a few other items relating to the same event.

Priced at 3d compared with 2d for the George V programme and one shilling for the Elizabeth II programme this 24-pagebooklet has photos of the Mayor and Mayoress, Councillor and Mrs WH Musselwhite on the inside front cover, and on page 3 an outline of the day's celebrations, including the ringing of the bells of St Michael's Church at intervals during the day.

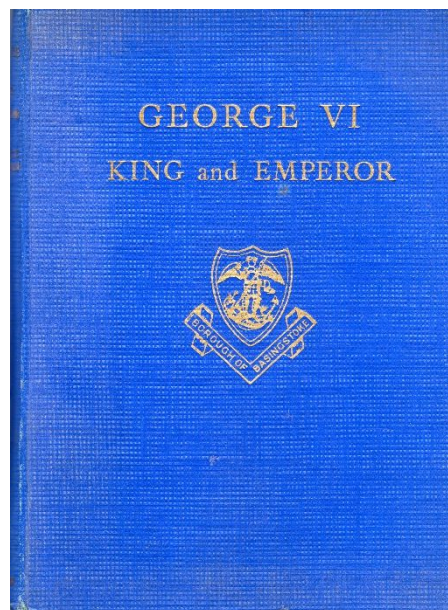


Turning the page, you find an introduction by Councillor Musselwhite, (owner of then very well-known local building firm), followed by a list of the ten committees tasked with preparing for the great day, ranging from the "Executive Committee" and "The Finance and Public Subscriptions Committees" to the "Illuminations and Decorations" and the "Ladies and children's tea" Committees – an interesting list of the great and the good of the town in 1937.

Next comes details of a grand procession. Preceded by the Band of the 1st Battalion Worcester Regiment, and a contingent from B Company 4th Battalion, Hampshire Regiment, police and fire brigade officers and magistrates, the Mayor, Councillors and members of the above committees set out from the Market Place at 10 am to process to St Michael's Church. Before that the Mayor had entertained all the Committee members to a Mayor's breakfast, a repast that a Gazette report described as "excellent and expeditiously served." Picture them all ascending and descending the stairs to the first floor you use when attending our meetings.

A second procession led by a contingent from the 377th (Hampshire Yeomanry) Battery Royal Artillery and the Sarum Hill Methodist Band formed up outside the British Legion Club in New Road. Local British Legion Members followed behind the band, and after them members of other local organisations such as the Red Cross, the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides. They marched to the Market Place to join the end of the first procession en route to the church. Beginning at 10.30 am, the Service of Thanksgiving at St Michael's

was one of thousands of concurrent services held at churches throughout the land. It was relayed to people gathered outside in Church Square by loudspeaker, courtesy of Mr Willis, not our Mr Willis but an electrical engineer with a business in Winchester Street.



Meanwhile the town's school children were at free cinema entertainments, 840 of them at the Waldorf, 390 at the Savoy in Wote Street, and 670 at the Plaza, formerly John May's Drill Hall, on Sarum Hill.

At 12 noon the military participants fired a "Royal Salute and Feu-de-Joie" in Memorial (Now "War Memorial") Park. By this is meant a rifle salute in which each of a line of soldiers fires into the air in rapid succession. Once used to celebrate victories it is now normally used on royal occasions only. Perhaps we shall see it performed to honour King Charles III.

At 1 pm there was a dinner [lunch] in the Thornycroft Canteen for the more mobile of the town's "aged and blind" with "radiogram music" by Mr EC Lewis (wireless engineer of Mark Lane) Those too infirm to attend had meals delivered to their homes. At the same time guests at the Mayor's breakfast sat down to lunch in the Town Hall to radiogram music by Messrs HJ Gifford Ltd (ironmongers, electrical & radio engineers of Winchester

Street and New Road).

In the afternoon there was to be a tea in the park followed by inter-school sports for pupils of Brook Street and Fairfields Elementary schools, the Girl's High School, and Queen Mary's Boys Grammar Schools, 2100 children in all . For this the children set off in procession from Victoria Street " headed by the Sarum Hill Methodist Band accompanied by specially decorated cars kindly arranged by the heads of the schools." In the words of the Gazette, the streets along their route were decorated with " banners, fluttering flags and streams of pennants. At the Market Place all the shops and businesses were brightly draped. Along London Street the decorations were as varied as they were gay up to and beyond the Triumphal Arch." Erected close to what was then Burberrys' show room (now Knight Franks) and the James Dean alms houses, this "substantial erection of most pleasing design had been put up by the Master Builders' Association and gave an impressive appearance to this end of the town." There had been arches royal celebrations there before, and there was to be another for the coronation of Elizabeth II. Today's Basingstoke Triumphal Gateway is close . A second archway at the Hackwood Road entrance to the park had been voluntarily erected by "employees of the Corporation". Having presented a souvenir at the bandstand to all the town's pre-school age children, the Mayor took a salute from the scholars as they passed through this gateway and then the National Anthem was sung.

Two days previously the Mayor and Mayoress had toured the schools presenting a souvenir book "George VI. King and Emperor" to each child aged over 9 ½ and a coronation mug to each younger pupil. A gift label inside a copy in the archives tells us that it was presented to a Doris Cooper.

Written by Major J T Gorman this 56-page book with black and white prints, must have been printed in millions for children throughout the land in customised editions. This copy is customised with the borough crest on the cover and a Foreword that begins "The Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors and Burgesses of the Borough of Basingstoke are presenting you with this gift book which is the story of the first citizen and head of our Empire, written particularly for his younger fellow citizens..." It is signed off with the names of the Mayor, WH Musselwhite, and the Town Clerk, Meirion O Jones. It's a real period piece. Maybe you have seen customised for another borough.

Before their tea and whilst the Mayor was planting a commemorative oak tree in the park, High School girls performed a programme of folk dancing on the lawn of Municipal Buildings “under the training of their teacher Miss Welch... by permission of the Headmistress, Miss KM Stanton MA”. A second tea for the town’s blind, followed whilst the children got ready for their sports. (They had previously run heats at their own schools). The events included flat races, sack races (boys only) and skipping and needle and thread races (girls only). Prizes were presented to the successful competitors.

Two concerts were given in the bandstand enclosure (deck chairs 3d), one by the Band of the 1st Battalion the Worcestershire Regiment in the afternoon and the other by the band and pipers of the 2nd Battalion, the Cameronians in the early evening. The numbers played in the first concert included the *Knightsbridge March* by Eric Coates, (written in 1933), gems from Gilbert and Sullivan Operettas, *Bells across the meadow* by Albert Ketelbey, (I have it on an old 78), Melodies from *Swing time* by Jerome Kern, and in the second more Gilbert and Sullivan, Highland Dances, and the *March of the Cameron Men*. On a platform on the Municipal Lawn a third more light-hearted “Koncert” was performed by the Toc H Krazy Gang featuring “talented juvenile performer, Little Miss Joan Batten.”

For those who preferred something more macho there was a two-hour Grand Boxing Tournament and Display arranged by the Basingstoke Amateur Boxing Club, beginning with a display of training exercises by FJ Simpson Amateur Lightweight Champion of Great Britain, a competitor in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. The show included 10 bouts between members of “Basingstoke’s Brilliant Boys’ Team who are always Bright, Clean and Clever”. There were also cycle races arranged by Basingstoke Cycling Club, three heats each over quarter, half mile and one-mile distances with finals after the children’s sports had finished.

Another attraction throughout the afternoon was a miniature railway 50 yards long by Mr RH Coupe of 185 Winchester Road, its locomotive made entirely by himself able to pull about 12 passengers, whilst at 4.30 pm aircraft of the no 4 and 13 (Army co-operation) squadrons from RAF Odiham roared over the park in a grand fly past. (The planes were obsolescent Hawker Audax bi-planes, two seat light bomber with a maximum speed of 170 mph.)

From 5.30 to 6.30 pm the sports arena was the scene of a gymnastics display including pyramids by the Eastrop Gymnastics Club whilst from 6.00 to 6.30 pm the football field hosted a “jet ball match” between the Basingstoke and Messrs Thornycroft Fire Brigades. The ball was propelled by jets of water from the players’ fire hoses and everyone got a soaking in the process. A “sack or comic football match” from 7 to 8 pm rounded off the days’ sporting fixtures.

The second band concert had to end punctually as at 7.30 pm loud speakers erected on the bandstand by the aforementioned Mr Willis, started to relay an “Empire Broadcast” including a speech by His Majesty the King. Community singing led by Mr V Tyler followed finishing at 8.30 pm. Now it was the turn of the Dance Band of the 2nd Battalion the Cameronians to provide the music for dancing on the lawn until 9.30 pm.

The late evening’s festivities also included a combined torchlight procession and parade of decorated vehicles, with individuals in fancy dress, “tableau cars” and vehicles ranging from heavy lorries down to decorated bicycles. After judging, the cavalcade set off from Crossborough Hill to the music of the Sarum Hill Methodist Band and the Silchester and District Temperance Prize Silver Band via Eastrop Lane, Basing Road, Wote Street, the Market Place, Church Street, Brook Street, Essex Road, Sarum Hill, Winchester Street, London Street, and Hackwood Road and back to Memorial Park at 10 pm.

Participants must have marvelled at the Town Hall as they passed it, now with illuminations by The Basingstoke Corporation Electricity Department.

The clock tower was flood-lit with "Philora" mercury discharge lamps and there were two illuminated pillars near to the balustrade above the main hall besides illuminated signs. The upper half of the front and sides was outlined in colour strip lighting with suspended lighting in the centre of the Market Square. The total candlepower of the lamps employed was 40,000. (Hants and Berks Gazette)

The Electricity Company had also gone to town in lighting up in red their own showrooms just round the corner in Wote Street (5000 candle power), St Michael's Church (45,000 candlepower), and the Municipal Buildings, the London Road entrance to the Park and the bandstand (10,000 candlepower).

Some local businesses illuminated their premises on their own initiative. One that the Gazette singled out for special praise was Mr Thornton's Bakery in Flaxfield Road.

... strip lighting was not only around the building but also over the roof. His adjoining house was also beautifully floodlit in red, with a crown on the edge of the roof above the porch illuminated in white lights.

The cavalcade was by no means the end of the day's festivities. A night time fire-fighting display followed, and then at 10.30 pm a second fly past by aircraft from Odiham, this time lit up by Mobile searchlights from the 1st Anti-Aircraft Batt. Royal Engineers, Blackdown, Aldershot. Did the onlookers, I wonder, speculate about whether these searchlights might soon be deployed in earnest?

The evening was finally rounded off with a grand display of fireworks and a bonfire built by the Rover Scouts, whilst on the following Saturday there was dancing in the Market Place from 9 pm to midnight. No doubt there were street parties, too.

As I write this in late April, I am wondering what will be seen in Basingstoke on Saturday May 6th Some decorations, I guess but nothing to compare with May 12th 1937. Most residents will be at home in front of their TVs. It may be a different matter on "Coronation Big Lunch Day" on Sunday and "Big Help Out Day" on Bank Holiday Monday.

How have you celebrated the Coronation of King Charles III? Do you have family memories of past Coronation that you can share. What coronation – or royal jubilee – souvenirs have you collected or had passed down to you. Please think about writing something around these subjects for the September newsletter.

Memories of Queen Mary School, by John Crowther

I was at Queen Mary School for Boys from 1964 to 1971, the year it merged with Charles Chute School next to it and became The Vyne Road Comprehensive School. This was a simple matter of removing the dividing fence and letting war commence, which to a certain extent for the first term is what happened. Up to here I seem to recall the school population was just under 600. The Charles Chute part was then demolished years ago and is now a housing estate on Arlott Drive. John Arlott was a famous cricket commentator who went to Queen Mary School.

I wore the school uniform, a black blazer, grey short trousers, and grey shirt for the first year, long trousers from the second (or possibly third) year, and a white shirt for the sixth form. The black blazer had a white on black shield shape on the breast pocket with a descending dove (the "diving duck") and "QMSM" below it. The dove was a reference to the Holy Ghost School that QMSB was descended from. The school tie was pale blue and navy-blue diagonal stripes. Boys in the lower school, up to 4th form, wore a black peaked cap with a cast silver "diving duck" (descending dove) sewn on the front of the cap. This cast bird cost eight shillings



and sixpence, plus the cost of the cap from Butlers in London Street the local monopoly holder, where parents were forced to buy the uniform. Not much changed there then? The caps disappeared from the uniform in later years. Unfortunately, mine disappeared rather sooner, when it was hurled out of the bus window during a bit of a melee on top of the Wilts and Dorset 137 bus taking us home. My parents were very **Not Impressed** indeed. Much searching of undergrowth along the A340 at night produced nothing. They were even more **Not Impressed** when a year later I lost the diving duck which became detached from the cap unnoticed.

At 8/6d a throw Butlers were making a mint. They had a whole drawer compartment of these things when we went buy another so it was obviously a fast-moving item.

I used to cycle from Silchester to Tadley, leave my bike at the petrol station on Mulfords Hill and catch the bus to Basingstoke, (population then 37,000). The bus in those days went from Sherbourne St. John over the hills in open country past the Soldiers Return pub, (also in open country) into Sherbourne Road where the town became apparent. This is mostly all under the ring road and Popley now. Two years later Wilts and Dorset introduced the 137A at school times which went from Basingstoke to Silchester through Little London. This saved me six miles on my bike every day. When the school day ended, my friends and I would

THE SONG OF QUEEN MARY'S SCHOOL

Hail! To the School where our boyhood is fleeting
Hail! To the comrades whose pleasures we share.
Hail to the masters whose faithful exactions
Render us ready life's burdens to bear.
Hail! To our School: Queen Mary's School,
Spiritum Nolite Extinguere

Soon will the hours filled with pastimes and studies
Pass into days fraught with business and care.
Soon will the years bring the stress and the conflict
Bravely and well may we take our place there.
Hail! To our School: Queen Mary's School
Spiritum Nolite Extinguere

Hail! To the men who have gone out before us
Hail! To the lads who will soon follow on
Strong is the tie that should bind us together,
When we remember the days that are gone.
Hail! To our School: Queen Mary's School
Spiritum Nolite Extinguere

Hands joined together we'll pledge to each other
True to our School, and our comrades to be
Helpful and friendly as brother to brother,
Basingstoke School, we give honour to thee
Hail! To our School: Queen Mary's School
Spiritum Nolite Extinguere

QUEEN MARY'S SCHOOL

OLD BOYS' ASSOCIATION



ANNUAL DINNER 2018

Basingstoke Conservative Club
Bounty Road
Basingstoke

Saturday, November 17th 2018

walk from the school to the bus station (the Wharf) rather than wait at the bus stop on Sherbourne Road, and to get there we went under the station underpass and emerged at the top of Station Hill. This was by the old Wallis and Stevens site and the back of the Fred Smith Motors building. From here in 1966/7 you saw the whole of the demolished town centre, just a mass area of rubble and bonfires stretching across to

London Road with the St Michael's Church complex standing alone somewhere. It looked very like parts of Ukraine look at the moment.

The school when I arrived there had a bit of a bad reputation, but a new headmaster, Wilfred Rhodes, arrived that year and the school reputation soared over the next few years. Robes were still worn by the masters but not mortar boards. The robes did tend to make the masters seem rather more authoritative and intimidating. The cane was still used but fairly rarely by this time, and only by the headmaster.

On the whole I remember good times at the school. I never in my time there heard anything about a school song and I don't believe that there was one.

Editor's note: Not surprisingly John thought there was no school song as it was never sung and virtually forgotten in the 1960s, but there was one. It was sung at prize-givings in the 1950s and at a re-union dinner in 2018, as the above illustration shows. We have Barry Hedger to thank for the copy.

A Tale of Two Heads, by Simon Downham

I never went to Queen Mary's Grammar School. I failed the Eleven-Plus.

Even so, I somehow already felt familiar with life at the Grammar School. My father, Malcolm Downham and the three Uncle Rays; Ray Downham, Ray Prowting and Ray Partridge were QMS Old Boys. There was also my cousin Mark Prowting as well as friends of the family such as Nobby Oliver and many that played with the QMS Old Boys cricket team. QMS anecdotes, jokes and intellectual banter became a feature of my childhood.

Two figures that stand out from that era (1950's – 1960's) are legendary and both were headmasters.

The first of the legends was the final headmaster at QMS before the grammar school system was abolished. This was Mr W.H. Rhodes M.A. (Oxon.) (ca. 1924–2005).

I never actually met the distinguished Mr Wilfred Harry Rhodes, but I can vouch for one of his personal habits. The knowledge of this foible of his was revealed to me in way that I suspect "William Brown" (of Richmal Crompton fame) would also have experienced it.

Like William, I was privy to an adult conversation over coffee. Most of the discussion went over my head but one thing caught my attention and made my ears prick up. Afterwards, I learned that Mark (my older cousin) had been chastised by my Aunt Rita for dipping his biscuit in his coffee. In the debate that followed, I was fascinated by what I thought was the name of someone cited in his defence for soaking his biscuit. With naive curiosity I asked excitedly, "who is Wilf Dunks?"

My question, "who is Wilf Dunks?" caused much mirth and it had to be explained to me that Wilf was my cousin's headmaster (Wilfred Rhodes) and that he also indulged in the same unsociable habit. My cousin's defence was a good one, "but Wilf, dunks!"

The second legend was never a master at the Grammar School (as far as I know) but he did teach many future QMS pupils in primary school at Fairfields. Later, he became Headmaster at Charles Chute Secondary Modern School for boys which was situated right next door to the Grammar School. We are talking about the infamous Mr J L Littlefair, a rather eccentric man who reportedly never wore socks, never missed a day's work, and literally walked everywhere.

While all due respect and fear demanded the honorific title of "sir" when speaking to him face to face, some called him "Johnny" when out of earshot, whereas my parents simply referred to him as "Littlefair".

Mr Littlefair taught both of my parents at Fairfield's and some years later my father joined him as a colleague, teaching at Charles Chute.

Gleaning from adult conversations I gathered that Mr Littlefair was a somewhat strict and unpredictable disciplinarian, someone to be feared and avoided. Whenever my young ears encountered the name "Littlefair" it only reinforced Dickensian images in my child's mind. Specifically, "Oliver Twist" (the 1948 film version) and the adults who ran the workhouse. I must have witnessed scenes from that film several times in my tender years. According to my mother, Mr Littlefair had the habit of suddenly entering and interrupting a class and then picking on someone to stand up and recite a poem off by heart. The stuff of childlike nightmares.

I met Mr Littlefair just once. I'm unsure of the occasion but it was in Charles Chute and there were no pupils around at the time. I was about 4 years old and accompanying my parents. They said to me, "Oh there's Mr Littlefair, let's go and say hello to him." I felt rather threatened and fearful (a bit like Oliver Twist having to go and ask for more). My defence was to remain still and quiet. Surely that was the best thing, must avoid provoking him. I braced myself and stonewalled Mr Littlefair as best as a toddler could and thankfully it seemed to work.

Looking back, it seems clear that J.L Littlefair was poorly understood, and his eccentricity was probably an obstacle to some in connecting with him. He had endearing qualities. Judging by his favourite poem - "The Snare" by James Stephens – the man was sensitive and had a core of goodness.

Failing the Eleven-Plus didn't matter much to me. I went to the new Cranbourne Bi-Lateral School that only opened the previous year. Two years after that in 1970, Queen Mary's Grammar School was no more. Government policy led to it merging with Charles Chute and the two schools then became a single school, the Vyne school.

Memories of Basingstoke County High School for Girls (1963 – 1968), by Lynn Martin

I was encouraged to write this article for FWM members by John Hollands following his request for contributions to this newsletter. His original request was for the words to the school song at Queen Mary's. The High School song was *Steadfast and Glad* written by Mr W E Lefroy of Goldings Park who taught music to the girls at Brook House in Brook Street, the forerunner of the school at Crossborough Hill. The High School opened to pupils on 24th September 1912.

Steadfast and Glad was thankfully only sung at the end of term meetings and, along with inexplicable lyrics, musically it rose ever higher until only a bat could hear the top note. It was not a successful song. I fully expect Old Girls to respond and add their memories to mine. My memories, as with most people, are selective and may not agree with theirs so I ask your indulgence when reading what follows.

I began at the High School in September 1963. A little girl of 11 bewildered by such an imposing school after the boisterous, but benign, years at Brookvale Primary, which had 40 children to a class divided by A, B, C gradings for attainment. No professional recognition of dyslexia at that time. I left behind childhood friends and cousins who were going to other schools in the town after taking the 11 Plus examination.

Steadfast and Glad

Steadfast in aim: looking up to the whiteness,
Spread o'er the hills for the dawn that shall be,
Face to the sunrise, athirst for its brightness. –
Lord of the pure in heart, lead us to Thee.

Steadfast in deed: when the task is the drearest
Staunch for the burden that flesh would refuse,
Darkest the night, when the day spring is nearest,
Crowned is the courage that fainting pursues.

Steadfast in joy: 'tis the message of healing,
From hearts that are child-like to hearts that are sad:
And Thou, to the simple, Thy secret revealing,
Makest and keepest them, Steadfast and Glad.

Words by William Chambers Lefroy

Music by W. H. Liddle

The first hurdle for my parents was the huge list of items of clothing and various other essential bits and pieces, some of which were purchased from Daniel Neal outfitters. Aertex shirts, gored skirt, grey gabardine raincoat with hood, grey knee length socks, grey flannel divided skirt for games and grey interlock pants for gym. I still hate that shade of grey and never wear it. My mother bought things for me 'to grow into', perhaps she was expecting another war and shortages, as I was still wearing some items at 16.

Part of a 1963 School photograph, showing the school staff and some of the pupils. The Headmistress, Miss Hilda J Wood is seated in the centre. Does this bring back memories for some? Photo courtesy of Debbie Reavell.

I did suffer at the hands of two boys when trying to get off the bus at my stop as I discovered the ties on my hood were attached to the back of my seat. A kind school prefect rescued my hood and me, but not until I was two stops further along the route. The boys thought it was very funny; of course, the most I could achieve was a haughty look as I eventually got off. I never wore the hood on my raincoat again.

The most arcane item and difficult to make, according to my mother who made it from a paper pattern, was the blue dress for Greek dancing. This garment was a short sleeveless

dress smocked at the shoulder, gathered with elastic at the waist and sides, worn with matching interlock knickers. All the garments for games went into a material bag with my name on it. Many hours were spent sewing Cash's name tags into the uniform.



Part of a 1963 school photo showing the staff and some of the pupils. Sitting in the centre is Miss Hilda J Wood, the Headmistress. Photo courtesy of Debbie Reavell.

I can remember the Greek dancing classes being held once a week in the hall/gymnasium, but I'm hard pressed to remember what we did or what physical benefit we were to gain from dancing in bare feet and then holding a pose. I only remember these classes being held for two years and was heartily glad when they ended. Previously I had always enjoyed boisterously dancing a *Dashing White Sergeant* or *Circassian Circle* to the wind-up gramophone at Brookvale. Greek dancing was ladylike, but much less fun without a boy to swing you round too fast.

We had to wear, at all times when outside school, a grey flannel beret with the school crest at the front. When I began at the school in 1963 the beehive hairdo was in fashion and the older girls pinned their beret with clips at the very back of the towering creation that was their hair. These older girls were looked at with respect, as to a child of 11 they were already adults, some wearing net petticoats beneath their pleated skirts. The Panama hat was only worn in the summer term with the maroon blazer, my blazer was my pride and joy and it did still fit when I left at 16. The Panama hat was abandoned in 1963 and became an object to be 'redesigned' in Art classes.

When I began at the High School Miss Hilda Wood was the Headmistress, the Black Huts were still in place with terrapin huts on the opposite side of the road. The terrapin huts were classrooms and still in use when I left in 1968. There were two concrete huts next to the lawn tennis courts which were used for the lunch time canteen and kitchen.

A hand grenade was unearthed by some intrepid first years close to these huts one summer. The result was that the Army arrived to remove it. It was very exciting. It turned out to be a live grenade from WWI and was disposed of quietly and without fuss. The land had been used for exercises during WWI and troops had been stationed on the Common in tents with their horses prior to being sent to the Front from Basingstoke station.

The school had two lawn tennis courts and three asphalt courts, but best of all a swimming pool. It was always freezing, but much cleaner than the pool at West Ham near Thornycrofts and Brookvale school. There were often newts in the infants' pool at West Ham - it would probably be a protected site now. Hockey was played at the War Memorial Park with a great deal of mud traipsed back to the changing rooms.

My time at the school can be divided into life before and after the building of the new Hall, six science laboratories, gymnasium and showers, domestic science and needlework classrooms, new staff room and various study rooms and, most excitingly, the arrival of lots of new girls from London schools. We also had a big chunk of the Common for hockey and rounders pitches. Mr Willis attended on one Speech Day and when Miss Everest - Miss Wood's replacement following her retirement - asked him if he remembered the school as it was before the new buildings were erected, he pithily replied that he 'remembered the hill without the school'. Basingstoke changed and it was dramatic. The developers accomplished in six months what Hitler had not during five years of war.

Bob Applin has written an excellent essay entitled 'Basingstoke Before Redevelopment' with accompanying photographs explaining why this change took place in the town. It is worth reading to understand the reasons for, what seemed to me at the time and still does, the thuggish way the heart of the town was destroyed and replaced with ugly concrete structures. It was the brutalist period of architecture and by golly the town got it by the bucketful. I can remember Canon Woodhouse telling the congregation at St Michael's to look at the blasted wasteland that had been Potters Lane and the bottom of Wote and Church Streets and, to remember that view. What replaced it was an improbably high brick wall that is still there today and, it is why, despite all of the Council's efforts, the top and the bottom of the town are not integrated. It was badly done; that said, I remember an assistant in a shop in Salisbury telling me she loved

shopping in Basingstoke as we had a Primark. That is progress and it reminded me that life is not about my fond memories, but about those who are living today.

Review: Alton Papers, no 26, edited by Jane Hurst and Graham Ruffle, printed and published by The Friends of the Curtis Museum and Allen Gallery, pp 48, photos and maps

In addition to a thrice yearly newsletter, the Friends of the Curtis Museum and Allen Gallery go one better by producing an occasional compendium of longer articles under the title *Alton Papers*. No 26 came out towards the end of last year. This issue has five articles.

'The Gold Family of Chawton, (by Violet Hunt), is about a family that lived in the village in the early 1800s and must have been known to Jane Austen. In March 1823, a letter was printed in the *Hampshire Chronicle* supporting William and Sarah Gold and not believing the 'malicious and scandalous reports' that they had 'starved the poor'. William was a bricklayer who did work on Jane Austen's Cottage and Chawton House. Eventually the family moved into Lenten Street in Alton before going to London.

'Alton's Funeral Procession for King Edward VII and the Proclamation' describes the events which took place 112 years before the death of his great-granddaughter Queen Elizabeth. Illustrated with pictures of the time, it comprises edited reports from the *Alton Gazette* which follows the procession to St Lawrence's Church and then, after a service, to Crown Close. There is a list of all those who took part ending with the programme for the Proclamation of the new King. It serves as a taster for similar events throughout the country, including Basingstoke

'Did Victorian Altonians move around?' (by Steve Millar) poses a question which is often asked. The author has looked at the occupiers of dwellings along the main streets in Alton through the various censuses of Queen Victoria's reign. Different areas of Alton are considered and conclusions, which may surprise readers, are drawn for each area. Mr Millar has explained his research methods in detail and presented his findings partly in the form of diagrams thus providing a model for anyone thinking of carrying out a similar study elsewhere.

'3 and 5 High Street, Alton' (by Jane Hurst) looks at the history of these buildings from the mid-1740s (when they were erected) through almost 250 years. They were home to a variety of people including

tailors, shoemakers, Alton's first commercial photographer, and the Stoodley family - watch and clock makers in the town for over 100 years. Like the foregoing article this would be a good model or anyone attempting a similar study.

'The Donkey Ladies' (from memoir by the late Ken White) were well known in Alton for many years. Marjorie and Dorothy came to the area in about 1915 and their mother was a 'wardrobe dealer' in Normandy Street. Marjorie married Ernest Glasspool. He became disabled and so she transformed a Victorian bath chair into a carriage that could be pulled by Jenny the donkey. After Ernest's death, the sisters lived together and became known as 'The Donkey Ladies' as they were often seen with their beloved donkeys.

ALTON PAPERS



Although it will have a special resonance for you if you know Alton well, this well produced book with its generous selection of period illustrations, some in colour will interest anyone with a liking for local history, and is well worth its modest price of £3.00. Copies are on sale at the Curtis Museum, Alton (together with other books on local history) or you can get one by post from Jane Hurst, 82 The Butts, Alton, GU34 1RD, + £1.00 p&p. (Cheque to "Jane Hurst", please).

What's on at the Willis

Now until 30 Jul: Our Windrush Story: *The arrival of HMT Empire Windrush at Tilbury in June 1948 bringing 802 passengers from the Caribbean was a seminal moment in British history. 75 years on, this exhibition commemorates and celebrates the contribution of the Windrush Generation to Basingstoke. By the Hampshire Cultural Trust in partnership with the Basingstoke Caribbean Society and Friends and the Cultural Diversity Consortium. Sainsbury Gallery*

Now until 11 Jun: In our world: *Landscapes by three local artists, Viv Ballson, Annie Eagle and Pat Larking, each with a very distinctive style. Basingstoke and South West Cornwall are two of the subjects. Original paintings, prints and cards will be on sale. Basingstoke Community Gallery.*

May 27 to 4 Jun: Whitsun half term family activities: *Activities and trails throughout the week inspired by "Our Windrush Story". Watch out for further announcements.*

Sun May 28 (2pm-3.30 pm) : "Sunday tea and talk": *What did the Romans ever do for us? By Terri Reid. A locally based historian and performer takes a fun look at what it was really like to live in Roman Britain. Tea or coffee and cake are served afterwards. Archaeology Gallery. There is a charge of £6. If possible, visit website below and book on-line. Otherwise call in or phone 01256 465902*

www.hampshireculture.org.uk/willis-museum-and-sainsbury-gallery

Jun 23 to 16 Jul: Basingstoke has history: *In response to a well-known history podcast which claims that Basingstoke doesn't have any history, local schools have collaborated with Hampshire Cultural Trust staff to create an exhibition that proves this statement wrong. Basingstoke Community Gallery*

Thu Jun 15, 7.30 pm (Friends' talk): *The murder of Sydney Spicer, by Paul Stickler. In 1920 Salisbury taxi driver was murdered by Percy Toplis, a fare he picked up. Toplis was identified, tracked down, and killed in a gun battle with the police.*

Sun Jun25 (2pm-3.30 pm): "Sunday tea and talk": *The good old cause, part 2, by Tim Craven. On the English Civil War and the twists and turns of the English Republic. Part two is entitled "The road back to monarchy." Book as for May 28. Archaeology Gallery*

Thu Jul 20, 7.30 pm: (Friends' talk): *Goldings and the Russell Family of Basingstoke, by Debbie Reavell.*

About one of Basingstoke's most prominent houses and the family that once owned it. Archaeology Gallery

Jul 22 – Aug 13: The Arts Society Basingstoke - Keeping It Local. *Members of the Arts Society Basingstoke have been invited to celebrate our local area through the seasons by taking photographs with their Smartphones. This exhibition is a celebration of our natural world – keeping it Local. 12 images will be selected from the exhibition to create a calendar for 2024. Basingstoke Community Gallery*

Jul 22 – Aug 31 : School summer holiday activities: *Activities based on "Our Windrush Story" until Jul 30. After Gismots opens on August 10 there will be an assortment of activities with a robotic theme including bookable family workshops. Watch out for further announcements.*

Sun Jul 30, 2 pm-3.30 pm: "Sunday tea and talk": *Wessex castles, by Alan Turton, military historian, Friend of the Willis and former Curator of Basing House. £6. Archaeology Gallery. Booking as for May 28*

Thu Aug 10: Friends' Group visit to Shaw House, Newbury. Introductory talk, 1.30 pm, followed by self-guided tour of the house and grounds. £5.00

Aug 10–Oct 17: Gizmobots & Mural artists: *Gizmobots* (as seen on the BBCs *Money for Nothing* programme) are robot artworks that start life as finds from car **boot** sales, skips and scrap yards. Each robot is carefully crafted by Mark Haig so that all the parts come together to create a desirable, quirky robot sculpture, each with its own personality. A family-friendly exhibition. **Sainsbury Gallery**
Thu Sep 21, 7.30 pm (Friends' talk) : *The wit and satire of Gilbert and Sullivan, by Dr Stephen Goss.*
Archaeology Gallery. September newsletter to be issued.

What's on elsewhere

Basingstoke Archaeological and Historical Society (BAHS) www.bahsoc.org.uk
 Meetings will take place at Church Cottage starting at 7.30 pm. Admission is free for BAHS members. There is a £3 charge for non-members payable on entry.

Jun 8: AGM followed by Urban Society in Reading and the dissolution of the Abbey, *by Dr Joe Chick, University of Warwick*
Sep 14: Dummer and beyond: exploring the evolution of a chalkland village, *by Dr John Hare, Victoria County History*

Tadley and District History Society (TADS) www.tadshistory.com
 Meeting on the second Monday of the month at Baughurst and Heath End Hall, Heath End Road RG26 5LU at 8.00 pm. Free to members. Non-members £3.00.

Jun 12 : *The Duke of Wellington: his life and service, by Brigadier Michael Aris*
Jul 10: *The livery companies of London, by Lance Whitehouse*
Sep 11: *The complete history of Thatcham, by Dr Nick Young*

Curtis Museum (open Tue-Sun 1000-1630) and Allen Gallery, (Tue-Sun 1030-1600), Alton

Now until May 28: Borderlands: *varied work by a long-established group of professional artists who live on the borders of Surrey, Hampshire and West Sussex.* **Allen Gallery**

Now until May 31: Coronation display, Curtis Museum

Tues 30 May to 20 Jun 1030-1230 : *Celebrating summer: creative well-being workshop series led by Becki Clark.* No charge. **Allen Gallery.** Book on-line. www.hampshireculture.org.uk/allen-gallery

Jun 10: Botanical canvas painting workshop with artist Jennifer Flynn. £30. **Allen Gallery.** Book on-line

Jun 17-25: Alton Regency Week. *Many events including some at the Allen Gallery.* For more details see www.altonevents.co.uk

Tues 11 Jul to 1 Aug: Needle felting for well-being: handsome hare project, creative well-being workshop series with Carol. No charge. **Allen Gallery.** Book on-line, as above

Sat-Sun, 22-23 Jul: Dolls' House weekend. **Curtis Museum**

Thu 14 Sep: 7.30 pm (Friends of the Curtis Museum and Allen Gallery Meeting). Alton's C 20 Market, *by Jane Hurst.* Open to all. No charge but donations welcome. Queries: janehurst1@gmail.com 01420 86701