



The Trust and The Museum

by President,
David, Lord Willetts of Havant

I always enjoy reading the Trust's newsletter. It is full of interesting material about Emsworth's history, just like the Museum itself. And it is a particular pleasure to contribute to this edition celebrating 50 years since the creation of the Trust in 1975.

Local history is sustained by local people. Emsworth Museum is a wonderful example of this. Local people find and contribute the objects – and record the memories – which add up to an understanding of the place we live. Local people are also the volunteers who help maintain and preserve these collections. They also provide stewards and do all the record keeping and accounts necessary for a properly run charity. The Trust can celebrate its fiftieth birthday because of all these volunteers – their work over the years is greatly appreciated.

The Trust was initially set up to try to preserve one of Emsworth's original oyster boats. That attempt to preserve Echo II sadly failed (though a subsequent preservation of the Terror has of course been a great success). But that first campaign to save Echo II led to the creation of the Trust to ensure local history was protected. It developed into the maintenance and growth of a collection which has been sustained in the old Emsworth council offices above the fire station since 1988.

People in Emsworth know that if they find something of historical interest they can bring it in. It could be an old hat under the floorboards. (Two rare eighteenth-century tricorne hats from a house in Queen Street are on display.) It could be an old brick at the bottom of the garden – such as one from the Rowlands Castle brickworks and the same shape and size as the bricks decorating the windows of the Museum.

It could be local fishermen finding stuff in their fishing nets. (That is the basis of a wonderful collection of old barnacle-encrusted wine bottles.) It was fishermen who found the oldest objects in the Museum. There is a neolithic flint tool from about 5000 years BCE but far more extraordinary a palaeolithic flint from perhaps 500,000 years BCE, preceding the evolution of homo sapiens.

The efforts of volunteers can be more organised as well. It was volunteers who did the hard work of excavating the Warblington Roman villa. They found another of the oldest objects in the Museum – part of a Roman amphora for transporting wine dating back to about 50 years BCE. That means it precedes the Roman invasion. The amphora was made near Naples. It shows that we were already importing wine from Italy 2000 years ago – something to think of when buying your Pinot Grigio at the Co-op or elsewhere.

Volunteers with their own distinctive areas of expertise can apply it to enhance our understanding of the artefacts and



documents too. There is a photo of the old Victoria cottage hospital, now become the local GP practice. It shows the terrace on the first floor with an awning over it. A volunteer who is a retired radiologist identified that it was for treating the TB patients.

Our volunteers with up-to-date technological expertise and software skills contribute to the displays in other ways. They help ensure the explanations around the displays are clear, modern and accessible. They have subtly re-designed the motif for the Museum.

The Museum shows how important the oyster industry was for the people of Emsworth. But then it all came to a shuddering end in 1902 when there was oyster poisoning at a civic banquet and two people died. That was the end of industry though it is reviving in different form now.

P G Wodehouse heard about the incident at the time and shortly after moved down to Emsworth to live at the prep school on the site of what is now Emsworth House, later moving to Record Road. The Museum does an excellent job of showing the connection between Wodehouse and this change in Emsworth's fortunes. He wrote some extra verses for the Walrus and the Carpenter by Lewis Carroll to include oyster poisoning. That link was discovered because of a visit to our Museum by an expert on Lewis Carroll.

Many local place names appear as characters in Wodehouse novels. The map in the Museum traces the connections between local places and his novels. The best known is of course Lord Emsworth. When I was appointed to the House of Lords, I had to go to the Garter King of Arms to agree the title I should take. Titles are often linked to places and I was proud to have Emsworth, where my parents lived, in my former constituency. I asked about perhaps taking the title 'Lord Emsworth'. The College of Arms explained very sternly that "the Queen does not approve of jocular titles". So I have ended up as Lord Willetts of Havant. But I can still take great pride in serving as President of this excellent Museum and Trust.

During a recent visit to the Museum, David left a note in the visitors' book

"Always great to visit here. Every year it is refreshed, updated, and better presented. Many thanks to all the volunteers who make it possible."



Left: Displaying an artefact



Below: Discussing an exhibition



Left: In the office

Below: Manning the reception desk



Left: Fundraising

Below: Social activities

