

## **HASLEMERE HERITAGE VOLUNTEERS.**

1992-----2008.

### Volunteering in the Haslemere Museum.

The Curator Diana Hawkes was approached in 1991 about help from the H.D.F.A.S. Volunteers, she was very interested about having some help and suggested we might start working after the new roof had been completed and the attics were water-tight. We commenced our volunteering in January 1992. The six attic rooms were totally full of museum items and even the stairs had boxes piled up on one side making it difficult to get past them all!! It was a mammoth undertaking for all the Museum staff.

The team of 32 H.D.F.A.S. Members began to help with the Fine Art Collection and it lasted for 6yrs [1992----1998].

Pictures were brought down from the attic, some were large oil paintings in heavy wooden frames, these took two men to move them and many of the paintings had damaged frames and some broken glass. The larger items were handed over the gallery in the lecture hall to an assistant or two below and laid out on the tables for work to start on sorting them all out. The volunteers removed the broken glass, broken frames and all old wires and metal hooks etc; Damaged frames were numbered, labelled, and put into bags noting which picture they belonged to for future reference.

All the pictures were sorted ,lightly dusted, measured and details of the painting,the artist, the medium used were recorded on specially printed forms and all were given an individual number which was pencilled on to the back of each painting. This information was later used to catalogue and put onto the Museum data base.

Finally all these paintings were wrapped in bubblewrap and put upstairs into a prepared store room all labelled and numbered.

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Cataloguing of all the other Fine Art work began in earnest. Teams of our volunteers worked regularly each week under the direction of the Curator or her deputy. Sketches, sketchbooks, pictures in oil, pencil, pastel, and watercolours, etchings, lithograms, and brass rubbings were all cleaned, measured, and every relevant detail of each work was recorded in a specific way on the specially printed forms. Later on, all this information was sorted into categories and put into various cabinets, cupboards, and drawers etc; everything labelled and numbered. Eventually all the information acquired was put in to the Museum data-base and different storage arrangements were made once the new purpose built Storeroom was ready, in the old Bird gallery.

Volunteers continued to work on different projects all dealing with the Fine Art collection. Some were trained to clean and repair brass rubbings using a soft rubbery cleaner which took off the dirt but did not remove the pencil marks, and a special tape was provide for repairing torn paper. Some members helped to sort and clean the huge collection of magazines, data, and periodicals in the upstairs Library plus a vast collection of cuttings on every subject imaginable.

The Art collection was finally completed in July 1999. Later on more help was given by some of the computer literate members with recording information on the museum database. Other members spent a number of weeks helping to place items in their new places allotted to them in the brand new storeroom.

### **January 2001**

A new team set to work to clean, check, sort and look for damaged books in the Library. Every book was moved and the entire contents of the library were inspected and a special vacuum cleaner was used to remove the dust. All the reference numbers on each book was checked with the Records and every one was put back on the correct shelf and in some cases on to special shelves for safety under the new Health and Safety rules!! This involved 22

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volunteers working a rota of two and a half days per week and it took about five months to complete.

In January 2005, a small team checked the Library books again to put them all back into their correct places and put in new books which had been given or acquired since the last check.

The Museum was closed for a period of three months from January – March 2002. During this time the Galleries were completely stripped of everything, all the displays were dismantled and as far as possible items were stored in the laboratory. An enormous amount of cleaning, repairing, sorting, and then a great deal of conservation was needed to preserve and maintain the Collections. During this time many volunteers were employed in various departments doing a wide variety of jobs and working under the guidance of the staff. A job could be painstaking, - cleaning each spine of a porcupine or cleaning wooden Peasant artifacts with tiny cotton wool buds and special H<sub>2</sub>O. There was also a 1922 collection of African animal bones which were cleaned and then sorted outside the laboratory, in the garden, not everyone liked this job!! Eventually, the bones were put into plastic bags and placed in the large freezer to sterilize them. The Museum finally reopened in July 2003 with a Grand opening and lots of local dignitaries attended to celebrate the magnificent refurbishing and reorganization of the three Galleries & much of the public areas of the building.

### **August 2003**

18 Members of H.D.F.A.S. offered to join the new H.V job in the Museum. Work started with 3 Teams cleaning all the glass and perspex boxes and display cabinets with special cleaning fluids, and dusting the shelves etc; The galleries are cleaned once a fortnight with the teams working on a 6 weekly rota . This is continuing to work happily and is all set to continue into 2009. Long may this last , it is giving regular help to the Museum and is much

appreciated by the Curator Julia Tanner.

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Heritage Volunteers and members of H.D.F.A.S. have and I hope will continue, to assist with stewarding at the Museum for all the large Exhibitions , like the Myles Birkett Foster, where a great number of stewards were needed to cover the opening times for security reasons. If the help had not been forthcoming the Exhibition would not have been open all day. So our support was much valued.

In 1995 the Volunteers set up an Exhibition of watercolours and oil paintings all relating to Haslemere that they had discovered during their work on the Fine Art collections.

The volunteers have continued to help in the Museum in a variety of ways with the Collections, setting up Displays and with Reception duties. Two members have worked steadily for three years on the collection of Sir Archibald Geikie's work.

As well as working in the Museum a number of members help out the National Trust at both Petworth House and Uppark mainly guiding and stewarding. These volunteers are looked after by the N.T. but we just keep a tally of the numbers working in these properties for our own interest. ( 2008 ----11 at Petworth and 1 at Uppark )

Roscelin Rees

Haslemere D.F.A.S Heritage Volunteer Representative.

November 2008.