

Report to the Town Assembly 29th April 2009

Embargoed until
7.30pm 29th April 09

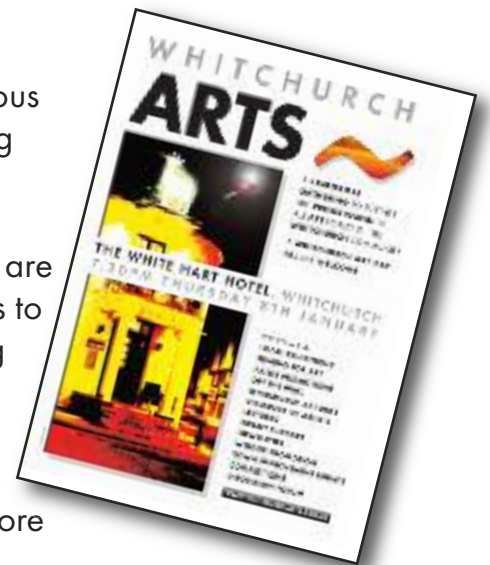
It seems amazing that *Whitchurch Arts* has only been in existence for eight months yet here it is making a detailed presentation to the Town. A meeting in the White Hart led to the creation of what I think is one of the Town's success stories, with the success coming from one basic premise – that *Whitchurch Arts* will always remain positive, outgoing and above all friendly and inclusive in all its activities. To emphasise this, the word 'group' was banned right from the start as that assumes boundaries, and *Whitchurch Arts* has none. Instead it uses ~ !



Whitchurch Arts encompasses anything and everything which is creative, from sculpture and textiles to computer art and music. As such it acts in partnership with others in the town and is a *Forum for the Progression of all Creative Art Forms in the Whitchurch Community*. From enthusiastic beginner to established professional, all are welcome.

Being a non-profit making organisation, anything raised at its various events, or through grants and donations, is invested into supporting further artistic events and activities for the benefit of Whitchurch.

Its meetings, or gatherings, in line with its philosophy of inclusivity, are held around the Town using a wide range of venues from the pubs to member's houses to the new coffee shop. These become a melting pot for ideas, some wacky, some more traditional, but they have a buzz of excitement and anticipation that few organisations can claim these days. Members and friends can bring along works or ideas or even a song or poem and this in turn encourages even more creativity, although there is no pressure to do so.



In its first eight months a wide variety of events and activities have been held and throughout that time the buzz has remained.

Firstly there was the **ALDO GALLI EXHIBITION**. Held in the excellent venue of the Gill Nethercott Centre, this young Italian artist brought along his wonderful paintings based on *Watership Down*. Our guest of honour Richard Adams signed copies of his books; our MP and Mayor and Mayoress graced us with their support; and visitors came from far and wide.



The **PUB LIFE** exercise followed with photographs taken in and around local hostelrys being displayed both in the pubs and at the local beer festival. Little did any of us know that this was soon to develop into an idea for a project that could grow into something much bigger, but more of that later.

Christmas saw the first of what is hoped to be an annual **CHRISTMAS FAMILY WINDOWS COMPETITION**. Windows throughout the Town were decorated in themes ranging from a Knitted Nativity to Snowflakes, with the winner being the wonderful Santa in Space. The Competition attracted the support of local businesses with a staggering £500 worth of prizes being provided! A packed White Hart was used for the prize presentations. This helped members Andrew and Katya receive a Community Award.

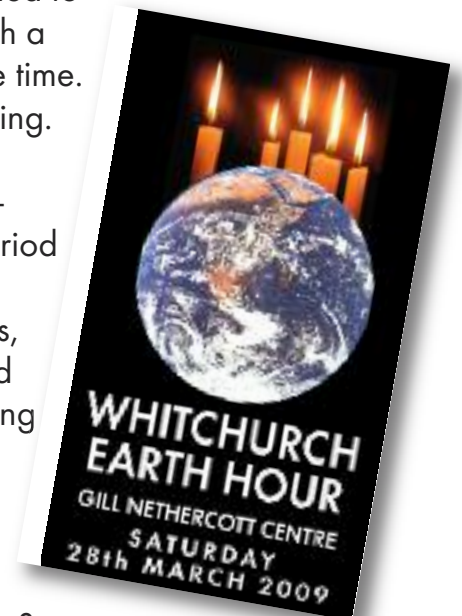


This year opened with the **FISHING FOR ART EXHIBITION**, opened by our Carnival Queen. Dozens of local artists gathered and displayed hundreds of pieces of work from watercolours and embroidery to photography and even graffiti. One large oil painting was still wet, as several small young fingers discovered! But it was not just static display. The day also encompassed local dancing, music and poetry, and became a great social occasion for everyone to meet and exchange ideas. There was a competition for young people – *Hunt the Sardine Can* – and children from local playgroups provided much of the hall's decoration.



On a more technical theme our first **PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKSHOP** was held in March when we brought expert photographer Tony Worobiec to the Town for a day of advice and hands on assistance to all who wished to improve their skills. Held at Testbourne the event made use of the computer suite and linked today's use of digital wizardry to the traditions of the past, while developing creative thinking. More workshops on other subjects are planned.

When Beth Wright mentioned **EARTH HOUR** the imagination started to spark and *Whitchurch Arts* saw an opportunity to mix creativity with a serious environmental message and to have some fun at the same time. It became a real meeting of minds as creativity flowed into everything. From children creating paintings to the collection of old CDs and candles for recycling; from the home-grown puppetry to local musicians; from local organic beer and real sausages to the moving period of candlelit silence for the World – it all just came together in a wondrous evening that joined so many people. Schools, businesses, and individuals, and again our MP and councillors, all participated in a creative evening that culminated in the fun and magic of sending messages on sky lanterns high into the heavens! It is an evening that will not be forgotten, not least by our Carnival Princess who made the Big Switch Off along with Sir George!



So, other than trying to reduce global warming, what is in the future?

Back to that early 'Pub Life' exercise. From this came the idea for an exciting new project that has become known as **OFF THE WALLS**. Restaurants, pubs, and hair salons are just some of the places that will be showing local artists' works. The art will be sold 'off the walls' – a truly public art gallery. A small part of the proceeds will go to the 'Wall Owner' and *Whitchurch Arts*, with the majority going to the artist. In leading the way in taking creativity to the people, *Whitchurch Arts* is pleased to announce that it has received a grant of £1000 from Basingstoke & Deane to run this project for local people.



Meanwhile out of the Town Improvements Project another long-term idea is being supported by *Whitchurch Arts*. It is hoped that the rusty **BOLLARDS** decorating our Town Centre can be painted with different artistic designs. By working with community groups, businesses and individuals it places a high profile artistic feature into the heart of the community ~ ridding the Town of its drab moniker while providing a stimulating attraction for visitors.

At other levels *Whitchurch Arts* was asked to judge a highly successful children's **EASTER COLOURING COMPETITION** at the White Hart, while even more recently work has commenced on giving the **PORTA LOOS** on the Millennium Green an artistic makeover! *Whitchurch Arts* has also, in the last few days, been asked to participate in the **CULTURAL OLYMPIAD** and ideas are already bouncing around. There are also plans for greater liaison with local businesses and community groups, further exhibitions and workshops, an artists directory, discounts from suppliers, and development of its website at www.whitchurcharts.org.uk.



This lively dynamic **WEBSITE** has become a fantastic resource for the whole Town, being regularly updated with news, events and links to other creative sources as well as providing space for local artists to publicise their services and event organisers to promote their activities. Take a look.

Finally so much would not have been possible without the support of so many individuals, businesses and organisations that have donated prizes, offered advice, provided premises and just put up with some of our funny ways. It is this support that adds vibrancy to the Whitchurch community of which we are proud to be part. The *Whitchurch Arts* Coordinators, Eric, Graham, Andrew (and myself), along with all the members, pass on their utmost thanks.

Throughout all this the original philosophy has been maintained – negativity has no place, positivity rules, everyone is welcome, and support is given to anything however wacky it may at first appear.

Just try to avoid saying "but..." or "can't".....

Those, like the word 'group', are also banned. 😞

John Buckley
For *Whitchurch Arts*

FUN COMPETITION

How many *Whitchurch Arts* Logos ~ can you find in this Report?

See the answer tomorrow on

www.WhitchurchForums.org.uk