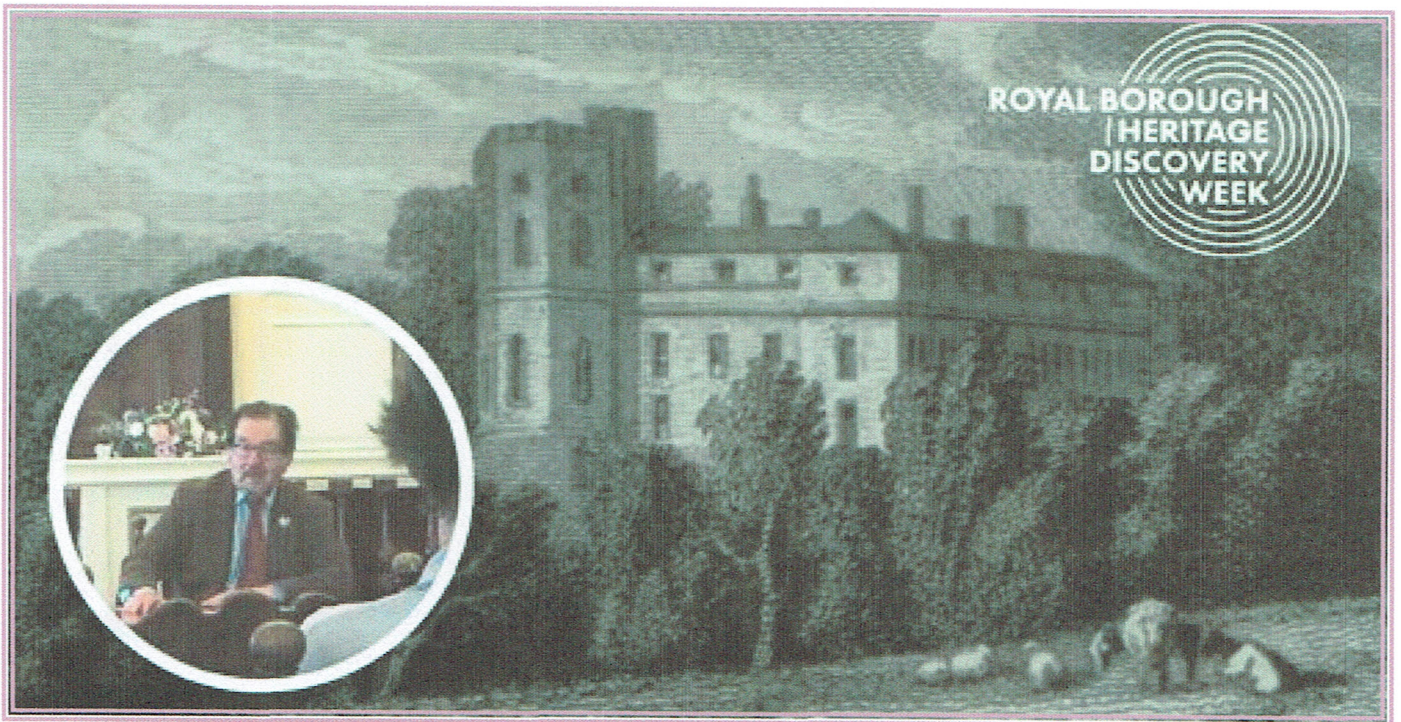


**Friends of the  
Windsor & Royal Borough  
Museum  
NEWSLETTER 103  
Spring 2023**





## CHAIRS' REPORT.

Well, here we are into a new year and a new Royal era with a Coronation to look forward to.

Sadly I have to report the passing of two stalwarts of the museum and local history. Firstly Elias Kupfermann known to many of you as an expert in local history, author and giver of many excellent talks. It was very poignant to watch his appearance on the latest 'Digging For Britain' programme shown just a few days after his passing.

After a long and brave fight against cancer one of our long-time volunteers, Penny Russell, also passed away.

Our sincere condolences to both of their families. You can read their obituaries in this issue.

After long discussions about the future of our meetings the committee have decided to reduce the number to three per year. Of these one will be held at a major venue, (like the Guildhall), and the other two at Dedworth library as usual.

Leslie's previously postponed talk will now be held on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> March. For details see later in this issue. The A.G.M. will be on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June at Dedworth library including a talk by Brigitte on 'The Streets Of Windsor'.

The new display cabinet has been ordered and we thank Brigitte for a most generous donation of £1,000 to allow an upgrade of the specification to include a much needed secure storage unit under the display area.

The Dedworth Christmas Fair was a great success. Although we only broke even financially there was plenty of interest shown in the museum and the Friends which will hopefully generate some new members.

We would still like one or two more committee members so if you would want to help run the Friends please contact any committee member. The job is not particularly onerous or time consuming and we always welcome new inputs and ideas.

Finally I must apologise to our Treasurer Chrissie for omitting her from the committee list in the last issue – ooops!

Belated Happy New Year.

Len.



## TONY VANDERVELL

For many years one of the largest employers in this area was Vandervell Products, (later G.K.N. Vandervell). At its peak it had a workforce of over 1,500. The factory was situated on a large site in Norreys Drive, Maidenhead producing bearings and bushes for the automotive industry.

The man who founded and ran the company was Guy Anthony Vandervell, usually known as Tony or, to those who worked for him, 'The Old Man'.

Tony was born in 1898, the son of Colin Anthony Vandervell who owned C.A.V., a very successful manufacturer of automotive electrical components. By 1913 Tony was competing in motorcycle races and took part in the Isle of Man T.T. several times.

In 1932 he opened his first factory on Western Avenue Acton making bronze bearings and bushes under the trade name 'Thinwall'. Very soon he was supplying many of the car and truck companies of Europe. Consequently the second, larger, factory was opened at Maidenhead in 1949.

Tony Vandervell was an old style entrepreneur who ruled the company with an iron hand and an unpredictable temper. He would sack anyone on the spot regardless of position if they upset him but he also treated the workers well. An annual 'Families Day' and frequent free outings to the seaside or motor racing events were typical.

He had two passions, his 'Vanwall' grand prix team and the casting lines in the factory.

The racing began in 1949 when he purchased a car from Ferrari, painted it British Racing Green and called it 'Thinwall Special'. He also wrote a long letter to Enzo Ferrari criticising several aspects of the car's design and what he should do to improve it. The result being that Ferrari refused to buy any Vandervell products ever again!

By 1954 Vandervell was building his own cars which, in various forms, were campaigned with a little success until in 1956 a beautiful new car was unveiled and showed much greater promise. In 1958 with a team of four cars Vanwall won the Formula 1 manufacturers World Championship. This was the pinnacle of Tony's racing ambition. Never a well man he collapsed with exhaustion. A few half-hearted attempts were made latterly but with no real success.

However the casting lines were his pride and joy. As far as Tony was concerned the rest of the production process was a necessary encumbrance in which he had little interest.



The basic casting technique consisted of molten bronze, with a percentage of lead, being continuously poured onto a moving steel strip. The bronze was then quenched to solidify it and the resulting bronze/ steel strip coiled up for later milling to size.

There were three lines running 24 hours per day on a three shift pattern with a crew of 5 or 6 on each shift. The work was hard, hot and potentially dangerous and Tony laid down strict conditions as to who was allowed to work in the shop. They had to be ex-guardsmen, at least 5' 11" tall and have worked for the company for a minimum of two years before being permitted to transfer to the casting lines. Wages were significantly higher than in the rest of the factory. Females were banned from entering the shop at any time.

There are many tales concerning Tony that have been passed down from old 'Vandies Hands' including my mother who worked there for several years in the mid-fifties. Here a few of the more printable ones.

Tony was subject to abrupt mood changes, possibly brought on by his various ailments so on his regular tours of inspection at any time night or day, everyone was on tenterhooks as to 'The Old Man's' disposition. He had an eye for detail and little escaped him. My mother recalled that on one occasion he spotted one of the girls in her department not working and staring into space. He walked up behind her and said, "Get on with your work woman or get out!" followed by a smack round the head. The girl screamed, rushed out and was never seen again!

It happened that mum loved motor racing and keenly followed the fortunes of the 'Vanwall' team. On one of his factory tours just after a Grand Prix success she bravely remarked to Tony, "The cars did well last week didn't they, sir" He stopped and said, "Oh, you're interested in the cars?"

"Yes, very much so."

There followed a long chat about motor racing and subsequently each time Tony's tour coincided with mum's shift he would stop and update her on all the happenings with the team. The outcome was that mum and I had a conducted tour of the workshops and I was even allowed to sit in one of the cars. Little did I know then that many years later I would actually get to drive one!

On another occasion he spotted a foreman he didn't recognise. "Whose he?" Tony asked. He was told that the man was newly promoted. "Well I don't like him. Demote him now!" With that the man was duly returned to the ranks and, later, quietly moved to another department.



Beneath the furnaces on each line was a large underground room generally known as the pit which held all the hydraulic and electrical equipment to run the line. The pits were also very handy for all sorts of nefarious activities, especially during the night shift. There was even an illicit still in one for a number of years!

Tony often suffered from bouts of chronic insomnia and would arrive at any time during the night and wander around the casting shop either chatting to the men or grousing at them depending on his mood.

One night one of the crew had trouble with his motorbike on the way to work so with the help of some of the crew he took it down into the pit to work on. Almost inevitably, at about 2.00a.m. 'The Old Man' arrived dressed in his customary old Trilby, tattered Macintosh and carpet slippers, (he also suffered from bad feet), and for some reason decided to go down into the pit where the bike was being repaired. Everyone was expecting fireworks and at least one sacking but to their surprise, all was quiet.

Over an hour later they saw Tony and the bike owner, both covered in oil and grease, manhandling the bike up the steps from the pit. When they finally reached ground level 'The Old Man' leapt onto the bike, started it and careered off down the shop at break-neck speed. He turned at the end, (the shop was almost a quarter of a mile long), and raced back. Stopping by the owner he had a broad grin on his face, (almost unknown!), and said, "There! That's fixed the \*\*\*\*\*! Goodnight men." and left.

Tony was also very philanthropic. During his life he endowed a lecture theatre at the Royal College of Surgeons which is still in use. He donated a large 'Arun' class lifeboat to the Weymouth branch of the R.N.L.I. and helped many smaller, local charities. When a scheme to clean and renovate the statue of Edward VII at Windsor hospital was announced he donated the scaffolding and a team from the maintenance department to erect it. He was certainly a complex character!

In 1967, shortly after his third marriage, Tony died and the company was purchased by Guest, Keen and Nettlefold to become part of the huge G.K.N. empire of automotive component manufacturers. But that, as they say, is another story and one which I was proud to be part of for 25 years.

Len.



## Leslie's Piece

### The Big Freeze of '63

January has so far been pretty mild, but I'm sure quite few of you remember what the weather was like in January 1963.

The Big Freeze had begun just after Christmas and lasted until March. The Thames froze over, and the landlord of the Bells of Ousley put tables out on the ice and served drinks, an echo of the Frost Fairs that were held in London two hundred years earlier.

Living in the Great Park, we put food out for the birds. One morning there was a moorhen on the table, unable to find food at Great Meadow Pond which had completely frozen over.

Sports like horseracing and football could not take place because of the frozen ground, while at the Boys' School there was no rugby — a bonus as far as I was concerned.

However, the Daily Mail, wishing to encourage some physical exercise in the bleak midwinter, distributed a large number of inflatable balls to schools. These were about five feet in diameter with 'Daily Mail' clearly printed on the side and could be pushed across a frozen field by opposing teams, with less risks than football or rugby might have posed.

Does anyone remember having one of these balls at their school?

Leslie Grout



# Museum Update January 2023

## A year in statistics

We reopened our doors to the public after the pandemic on 3 February 2022 as a combined service offering heritage and information to visitors. It has certainly been a busy year with lots of events happening – we witnessed a royal opening in March, Platinum Jubilee celebrations in May and June, a royal funeral in September and a couple of busy Christmas events in November and December, plus much more.

Our volunteers have spent 1,665 hours physically in the Museum and Information Centre welcoming 62,023 visitors and they have conducted 78 tours of the Guildhall to 254 people. To put this into context, for the same period in 2019 to 2020 we welcomed 8,497 paying visitors to the museum.

Thank you for all your hard work, enthusiasm and support to help run the Museum and Information Centre as smoothly as we can, we really appreciate it and couldn't operate effectively without you all.

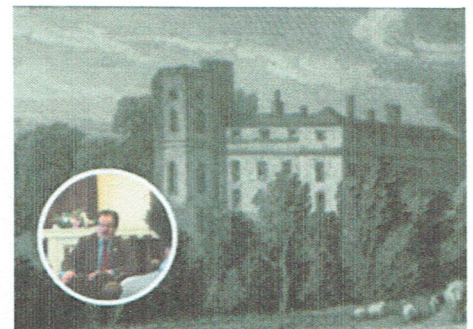
This next year will be just as busy. We have the Coronation of King Charles III coming up in May which will see thousands of visitors' flock to Windsor and the Museum has been invited to renew our Accredited status by the Arts Council by June 2023. This involves updating our many policy documents so this will be a priority project for the whole team this year.



## Secrets of Cranbourne Tower – Talk by Leslie Grout

We are delighted to be able to reschedule this talk by Leslie for Tuesday 7 March 2023. Guests will be welcomed with a glass of fizz in the Windsor and Royal Borough Museum at 6.30pm and will have the opportunity to see items on display in the museum before proceeding to take a seat upstairs in the Council Chamber at 7.30pm.

Ticket prices are shown on the last page of this Newsletter and can be purchased from the Museum or online here:



<https://tickets.windsor.gov.uk/sales/arts-and-events/the-windsor-guildhall/events>

For those of you who purchased your ticket for the postponed event in September, you will be contacted by the Royal Windsor Information Team.



## **Volunteering at the Museum & Information Centre**

We were very sad to lose a valued volunteer Penny last year and our thoughts and prayers go to her family whilst they continue to grieve. You can read more about how we very much loved having Penny volunteering for us by reading her obituary.

Over the last six months we have welcomed a number of new volunteers, namely Maryam, Imogene, Matthew, Nicholas, Lucy, Karen and Heather. They are settling in well and we are extremely grateful to them for giving up their time to support our service.

We still have more spaces to fill to cover all of the two hour shifts available in the museum & information centre so please do spread the word and ask anyone to enquire by emailing us at [museum@rbwm.gov.uk](mailto:museum@rbwm.gov.uk).

## **Windsor Guildhall Guided Tours**

We have reduced the price of our Guildhall Guided tours to £5 full price and £2.50 advantage card holders for the winter months. It's a great opportunity to show friends and relatives where King Charles III was married, so please do either book online at <https://tickets.windsor.gov.uk/sales/guildhalltour> or email us at [museum@rbwm.gov.uk](mailto:museum@rbwm.gov.uk) to arrange an alternative time.



**Stephanie Lewis**  
**Museum Manager**

**Louisa, Alex, Becky**  
**Museum, Arts & Local Studies Officers**

[museum@rbwm.gov.uk](mailto:museum@rbwm.gov.uk)



## Obituary

# Elias Kupfermann

April 1966 – December 2022

Elias was a member of the Windsor Local History Group, and a Friend of the Windsor and Royal Borough Museum; these were just two of the many local and national Groups he was involved with. He was a passionate historian and archaeologist, and an ardent researcher who regularly contributed to the journal *Windlesora*. He was very excited about starting a PhD at Reading University on ancient Thames river-crossing, and was recently seen on Digging for Britain, showing Alice Roberts some artefacts found at the dig in Cookham.

He died tragically young at 56 of a sudden heart attack.

Brigitte Mitchell



Elias promoting his books and WLHG publications at Waterstone's.



## Obituary

# Penny Russell

Windsor & Royal Borough Museum Volunteer (2016-2022)

We sadly lost one of our wonderful museum volunteers; Penny, who passed away in November 2022 after a period of illness. All the team at W&RBM would like to extend our condolences to the Russell family – Penny's husband Gordon and her son Alex.

Penny had volunteered with us since retiring from her role as Learning Manager for the Royal Collection Trust (based at Windsor Castle) in 2016, becoming a valued team member - leading tours of the Guildhall, researching the collection, or enjoying helping with our now-annual entry for Windsor & Eton Living Advent Calendar.

She will be greatly missed for many reasons; not least because of her keen eye for detail (which came in handy during the museum refit as Penny read through many draft interpretation panels), passion for history (both local and wider), her desire and ability to help others learn at all levels, combined with a positive 'can do' attitude and a brilliant sense of humour.

She was an unofficial mentor to the museum team and a great sounding board for all things museum and culture related (and pretty much anything else you could think of with her years of working at the highest levels of her professions).

Penny was always on hand whenever we ran family activities or education sessions, and we felt the benefit of Penny's vast experience, knowing that she was a very safe pair of hands in any situation. She was an integral part of the team and remained active until very recently, having written a factsheet for our Platinum Jubilee "*Know Your Crowns*" activity which was very well received.

Rest in peace Penny, we miss you.

Stephanie, Louisa, Alex & Becky

Windsor & Royal Borough Museum

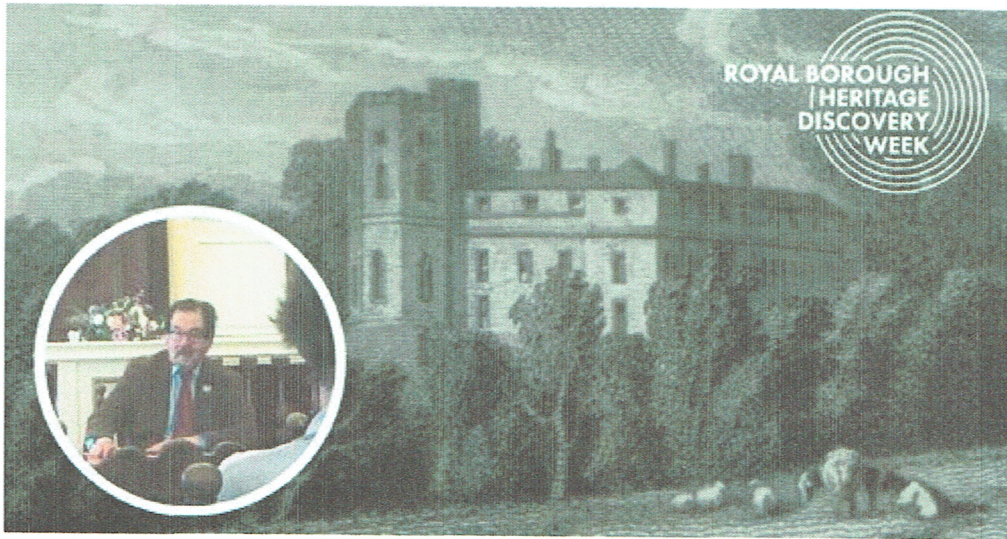




Left to right – Stephanie Lewis, Louisa Knight, Alex White (Front), Chris Brown (Rear), Penny Russell, Judith Patton

This photo is from December 2019 taken at the Living Advent Calendar event at the Guildhall.





## The Secrets of the Cranbourne Tower

A talk by Leslie Grout

6.30 pm Tuesday 7th March

At Windsor & Royal Borough Museum

To book visit <https://www.windsor.gov.uk/whats-on/secrets-of-the-cranbourne-tower-talk-by-leslie-grout-p2084001>

Tickets £10/£8 Advantage Card or Armed Forces/£5 Members

This Newsletter is published by

**Friends of the Windsor & Royal Borough Museum**

Charity No 1115540

Edited by Pamela Marson

Email [pamela.marson@btinternet.com](mailto:pamela.marson@btinternet.com)

Chairman: Len Nash email: [lnash2@sky.com](mailto:lnash2@sky.com)

To contact the Museum email: [museum@rbwm.gov.uk](mailto:museum@rbwm.gov.uk)

Printed by Top Print 11 William Street Windsor SL4 1BB

[WWW.topprint.co.uk](http://WWW.topprint.co.uk) Windsor@topprint

"For all your Printing requirements"