

THE STUFFED ANIMALS WILL HAVE TO GO': ALDERMAN JACOB, WILLIAM CHALKLEY AND MR COTTRILL

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ABSTRACT

This article outlines the inception of Winchester's City Museum and traces the story of its first fifty years noting how changes to the collection reflect the balance between local interests and a wider academic context. The civic pride generated in Winchester by the celebration of King Alfred's supposed millenary in 1901 resulted indirectly in the construction of a purpose built Museum near the Cathedral. The leading campaigner for the new Museum was Alderman William Henry Jacob. By 1903 he had appointed local taxidermist and sports shop proprietor William Chalkley (1842–1922) as the first caretaker or curator. Chalkley's career exemplifies the role of taxidermy in provincial museums in the early twentieth century. As well as providing natural history specimens from his own collection, Chalkley renovated and conserved donations, including wild and exotic creatures, from local sportsmen and collectors. His own speciality was the mounting and display of Hampshire birds. Photographs suggest that, although increasingly moth eaten, William Chalkley's birds and animals survived the Second World War. Then in 1947 Frank Cottrill arrived as Curator and, inspired by new concepts of collection and display, he initiated a complete update of the Museum which was not universally popular with more traditionally-minded visitors.

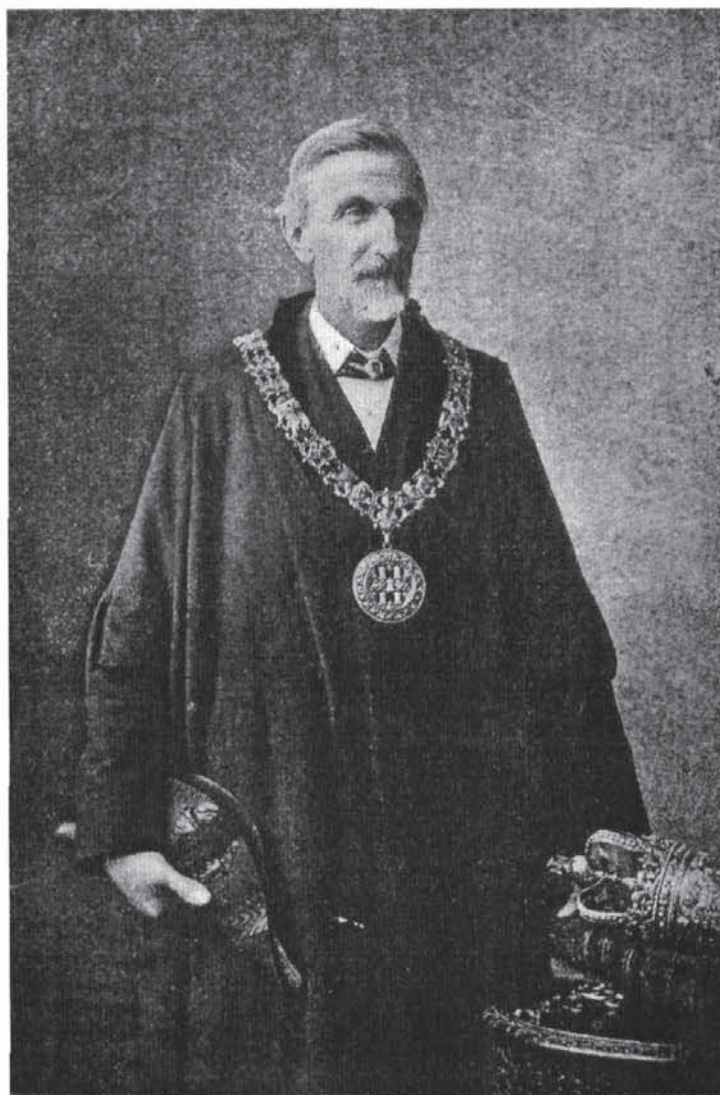
Between 1897 and 1908, the city of Winchester was on a roll of civic pride. In 1897/8 the young, handsome and upwardly mobile Mayor Alfred Bowker had led commemorations of a thousand years of civic government, and Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee had also been enthusiastically celebrated (Yorke 1999, 1–2). Bowker next inaugurated a campaign for a national celebration of the Millenary

of Alfred, the Queen's Anglo Saxon ancestor who had made Winchester his capital. Some argued that as a 'dead alive' enclave Winchester's path had been downwards ever since, but the Alfred Millenary, celebrated erroneously in 1901 (scholarship has established that he died in 899, so they were two years out) brought the city to brief international fame: much funding for the four day Fred Fest came from American universities anxious to celebrate the shared racial and linguistic roots of the supposedly Anglo Saxon nations. Bowker, now in his second term as Mayor, led delegates through a series of events culminating in the unveiling of Hamo Thornycroft's monumental statue of Alfred which still dominates Winchester today. The figure purported

'to show the Anglo-Saxon at his best and noblest' supporting Frederick Harrison's statement that 'Alfred represents at once the ancient monarchy, the army, the navy, the law, the liberty, the poetry, the art, the enterprise, the industry, and the religion of our race' (Bowker 1902, 5).

A series of tableaux vivants held during the festivities almost certainly inspired the 1908 Winchester National Pageant, which involved many of the citizens and aimed at increasing tourist visits to Winchester.

While the charismatic Bowker was undoubtedly the star of the Millenary show, rivalled only by Sir Henry Irving's Tennyson reading in the Great Hall, many other less glamorous Winchester notables took part in the events. One of these was Alderman William Henry Jacob, who had been Mayor of Winchester in 1889/90.



MR. COUNCILLOR W. H. JACOB,
(EX-MAYOR OF WINCHESTER.)

Fig. 1 Alderman Jacob (Hampshire Record Office)

Born in 1829, proprietor of *The Hampshire Chronicle* and active journalist, Jacob was an enthusiastic amateur antiquarian (Fig. 1). In 1898 he had been the prime mover in the creation of a museum in the tiny room over

the city's surviving Westgate and with his fellow Alderman Thomas Stopher, he had sorted through the mass of documents from the civic archives which had been dumped there throughout the century. Many of these

documents were sent to be bound by the firm of Zaehnsdorf. Others were stuck rather randomly into a series of scrapbooks now held by the Hampshire County Record Office, who comment that

'Whilst it is undoubtedly fortunate that Alderman Jacob took measures to preserve these records, it is perhaps unfortunate that archival and conservation skills had not been developed sufficiently at the time for the documents to have been classified and repaired more fully before they were pasted into the scrapbooks' (Hampshire Record Office Archives Catalogue, W/K5).

As the acknowledged expert on the Westgate, Jacob conducted a party of delegates there on Wednesday 18 September 1901. According to Mayor Bowker's somewhat patronising account

'Alderman W H Jacob, Vice President of the Hampshire Archaeological Society ... wore a copy of the Alfred Jewel suspended from his button hole ... The party was so large that in order to enable as many to hear as possible, a chair was brought and placed in the centre of the roadway, and the worthy Alderman discoursed from that eminence to the concourse around him' before taking 'as many of his listeners as possible into the little museum above the Gateway' (Bowker 1902, 56).

One of the objectives of the Millenary organisers had been to set up a Museum of Anglo Saxon History, but funds had been difficult to raise from the start and by the time the £5000 statue had been paid for, not to mention hospitality for the delegates, including a mayoral luncheon and banquet, plus an ox roast for the adult and cakes (unburned) for the junior citizens of Winchester, also follow up events like the Mayor's visit to American President Theodore Roosevelt, nothing was left for the specialised museum.

In fact Winchester had boasted a subscriber-supported museum since 1847, being one of the first cities to take advantage of the 1845 Museums Act. From the first, Natural History specimens had been prominent exhibits:

'Already the ornithological department presents a goodly display, and the beauty exhibited in the graceful forms and varied colours of the feathered tribe, and the wonderful adaptation of their structure to their peculiar habits and mode of living, cannot fail to strike the most casual and inattentive observer of nature's works' *The Hampshire Chronicle* (Cottrill 1966, quoting from *The Hampshire Chronicle*, July 15, 1847).

The subsequent 1850 legislation came opportunely at a time when the museum was in financial difficulties and in 1851 the collection was transferred to the City Corporation and a Museum, Library and Reading Room Committee appointed. The museum remained in the former Governor's House of the old city gaol in Jewry Street for the next twenty years before moving to two rooms on the top floor of the newly built Guildhall in 1874. The 1853 Catalogue shows the Natural History section, including a stuffed Persian lion, as the largest holding, while a sculpture collection loaned to the city by Mr Thrupp was housed in the Mayor's official residence, the Abbey House.

Although plans for the Museum of Anglo Saxon History had been shelved, Jacob and others were now backing a less ambitious project, a purpose built museum funded by the rates to become 'one of the most important and highly treasured municipal buildings of the city' (*Hampshire Chronicle*, August 2, 1902.) The architect chosen was Norman Clayton Hadlow Nisbett (1860–1918), partner in a well established Winchester firm which built and restored local churches and provided survey services for the Cathedral. A local construction firm sent in a tender of £2649, only to be beaten by a Southampton outfit estimating £103 less for the late gothic style structure in flint rubble with stone dressings (*Hampshire Chronicle*, May 3, 1902). There were, and still are, a ground floor, two upper floors and a basement; the original plans had been lost by 1950, but the then curator gave the room dimensions as GF 39.9 × 32; 1st F 44.6 × 31 and 2nd F 41.6 × 31: quite a small structure.

The laying of the Foundation Stone on July 30th 1902 must have been rather low key,



Fig. 2 The Square with Chalkley's shop and the Museum (Winchester City Museums)

since the *Hampshire Chronicle* described it as 'an interesting little ceremony' but it was the occasion of a significant speech by Councillor Frederick Morshead, a master at Winchester College and himself a former Mayor (*Hampshire Chronicle*, August 2, 1902).

Striking the Millenary's combination of local, national and racial themes, Morshead stressed the value of a local collection, not least as a tourist attraction and one which would celebrate Winchester's role in 'the making of England as it is now.' He then went on to stress the value of 'a collection of Hampshire birds' and he obviously had a specific collection in mind:

'The Corporation had lost an opportunity which the College had secured, for when such a collection of birds was offered to the Corporation they did not think it worth their while to accept them. It was then offered to the College (who took it). He personally wished that another such a collection could be got for the building; it would be far more useful and advantageous than a collection of odds and ends ...'

The bird collection Morshead referred to was the one bought in 1900 by Dr Fearon, headmaster of Winchester College, from local taxidermist William Chalkley. Fearon published a catalogue of the collection prefaced by a Latin motto (*Benedicite omnes volucres coeli*

Domino) and a tribute to 'the life long devotion and poetic imagination of Mr Chalkley' indicating the combination of scientific accuracy, manual skill and artistic creativity required for the mounting and positioning of taxidermic specimens. Since 1888 William Chalkley (1842–1922) had run a business in the Square known as The Sports Depot (Fig. 2). Much of its trade involved sale of fishing tackle for use on the Hampshire Itchen and sports equipment for Winchester College; including catapults, a favourite with the pupils. His trade card suggests the range of his taxidermic activities:

W.Chalkley
Taxidermist etc.
The Square, Winchester
All kinds of Natural History Specimens stuffed
and fitted up in Artistic Style
Skins dressed and made into Rugs
Heads and Horns mounted for Halls
Hoofs polished and made into Inkstands, etc.
Old Cases of Specimens freed from moth and
renovated.

Later he added the information that he was also a Fishing Tackle Maker and an agent for Brock's Crystal Palace Fireworks (Contracts taken for DISPLAYS of Fireworks and Estimates given). This range of practice puts Chalkley in touch with all the major uses or meanings of nineteenth century taxidermy: the scientific preservation and identification of wildlife in the days when the only sure way of identifying a rare bird was to shoot it first; the creation of ornamental and useful household items; the celebration of aristocratic hunting shooting and fishing at home and abroad; and finally the commemoration of beloved animals, in this case via the use of hoofs as 'Inkstands etc'.

In fact Chalkley was a self taught taxidermist and most of his surviving birds are mounted within relatively simple cases, the backgrounds in muted pastel shades suggesting morning or evening and with careful rather than inspired arrangements of twigs and grasses. His sparrowhawk, shown apprehending its luckless prey, follows a standard pattern of arrangement (Fig. 3). At the same time his 'poetic imagination' is

shown by the single anthropomorphic group which survives from his hand. These displays were often undertaken by taxidermists to show off their skills in handling very small delicate animals and became very popular at the time of the 1851 Exhibition. Chalkley's The Card Players, which once belonged to the Bowker family, was supposed to feature baby rabbits but actually they are brown rats minus their tails. The four debauched rodents are seated at a table, surrounded by evidences of smoking, drinking and gambling and each has a different though equally racy character (Fig. 4).

Chalkley was about to become a key member of the Museum team for the next eighteen years. Alderman Jacob was named as Honorary Curator a post which he retained until his death in 1918 and although no longer young in 1903, he undertook much of the 'extremely dirty' physical work in preparing the Museum interior for the opening on October 15th, helped only by the Guildhall Hallkeeper Mr Grant, for whom he managed to obtain an Honorarium from a rather reluctant Town Council (*Hampshire Chronicle*, September 5, 1903). Clearly a permanent caretaker/Curator: the terms were used indiscriminately in the Committee reports: was needed. The curator of the collections in the Guildhall was a Miss Fitt, who apparently did not live up to her name since it was decided that as the new Museum extended over three floors, it was an unsuitable place of work for 'one of the gentler sex'. Accordingly Miss Fitt was relieved of her duties. William Chalkley's application was warmly supported by Councillor Morshead who stated that 'from his knowledge of Mr Chalkley he should think him admirably suited to the purpose, especially as far as the natural history department went. Mr Chalkley had done some work for the college museum, and it was extremely well done' (*Hampshire Chronicle*, October 3, 1903). After interview, Chalkley was appointed to a post whose duties were to:

'include answering enquiries [and] giving general information; when not engaged in that capacity, on wet or dull days, he should be willing to stuff birds, arrange butterflies, moths and



Fig. 3 Sparrowhawk mounted by Chalkley (Winchester City Museums, photograph by J Courtney)

other specimens and to do many other things which would want doing, and which would be well within his ability and willingness to do he being allowed a free hand to clear out stuff or destroy very dirty birds.'

He would be required to

'undertake the management of the museum and to keep in order the various exhibits; to arrange the natural history specimens; to stuff, clean and arrange the birds; to keep the furnace going after it has been lighted; to report any work of stuffing, mounting etc required to be done from time to time at a cost to the corporation, and not to undertake such work without first obtaining instructions from the committee. No work to

be done in the building after closing hours' (*Hampshire Chronicle*, September 27 and October 3, 1903).

His salary was £1.1s per week. It was stipulated that this appointment should not have any connection with Mr Chalkley's private business, which he handed over to his nephew Edward Chalkley who kept it running until the 1960s.

The civic opening of the City Museum took place on October 15th 1903. While it was not attended by the Great and the Good who had thronged Winchester for the Millenary events, local dignitaries and clergy turned out in force (Fig. 5) Inside, relics of ancient Winchester vied for space with an extensive geological section,

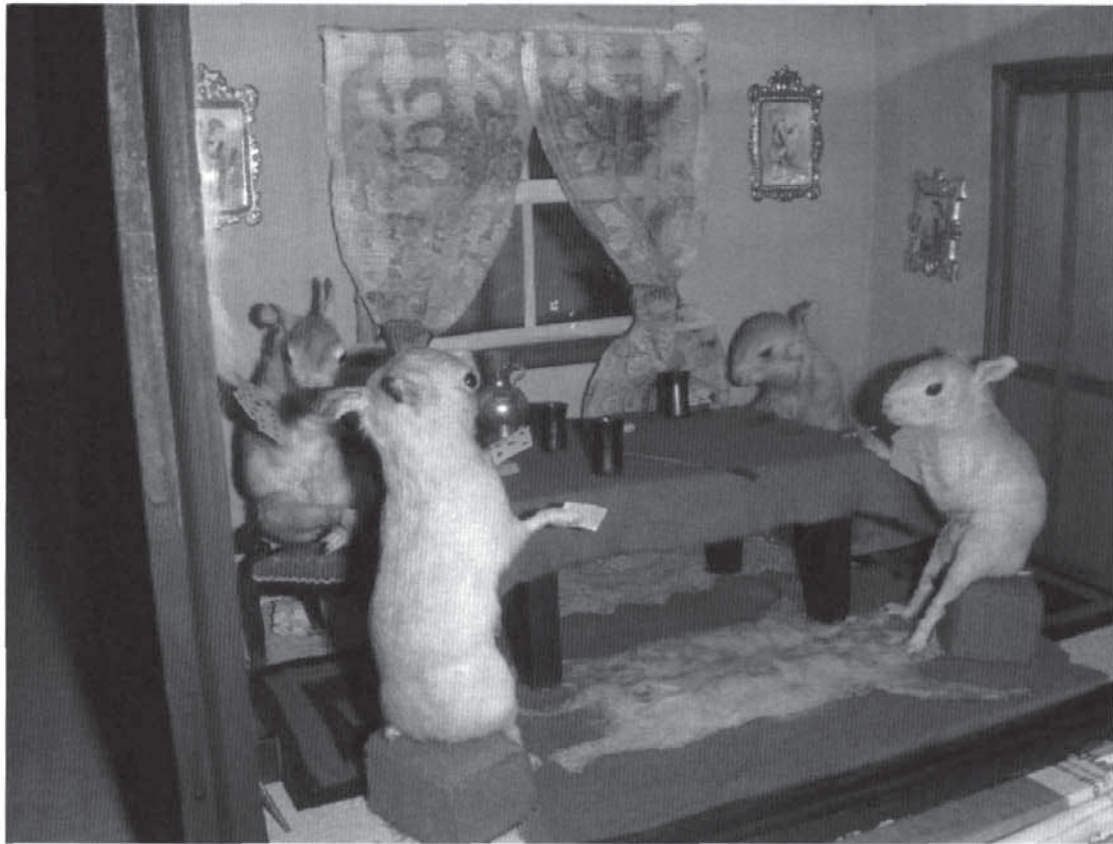


Fig. 4 The Card Players (Winchester City Museums, natural history reserve store, photograph by J Courtney)

arranged by local geologist Reginald Hooley (Reginald Walter Hooley, 1866–1923), for a payment of £20; a rich melange of items from China and Malaya and what was later described as ‘a veritable zoo of stuffed animals’ (Cottrill 1952). Chalkley’s notebooks (described as *The Old Square Books*, kept by Chalkley between 1903 and 1920 in his deteriorating handwriting) not surprisingly concentrate on the natural history side of the museum. Entries include ‘steel comb (for animals)’ 1/–, and ‘mixture for washing animals’, 7/6. Many of Chalkley’s own collection found their way into the museum as did Bowker’s Card Players, but some of the prize exhibits, including a stuffed lion donated in 1905, had little connection with Hampshire

wildlife. There was very little storage space; for some reason the basement housed a public lavatory which was not dismantled until 1950.

By 1914, with both Alderman Jacob and William Chalkley advancing in years, Reg Hooley and his wife were working regularly at the Museum and Mr Hooley became Honorary Curator on Alderman Jacob’s death in 1918. As has been explained, his main interest and expertise was in the geology of the area but in 1914 he wrote of the Museum as a whole that there was need for an entire rearrangement of the exhibits which were in ‘a woefully chaotic condition’. He advised that ‘many should be ruthlessly discarded’ and a more local focus encouraged (Hooley 1914). At the time of



Fig. 5 Opening the Museum (Winchester City Museums)



Fig. 6 The Natural History Section in the 1940s (Winchester City Museums)

Hoooley's death in 1923, one year after that of William Chalkley, he and his wife had begun a programme of reclassification and rearrangement. Hoooley's plea for a more streamlined, less cluttered, more accurately labelled collection indicates lack of action since 1903 but also a forward looking policy on Hoooley's part.

During the nineteen twenties the Museum was largely maintained by two women, Mrs Hoooley and Mrs E E Wilde, the Honorary Curator. Mrs Wilde was swift to admit that she relied greatly on the knowledge and expertise of Mrs Hoooley but she was clearly a committed and active publicist for the Museum. In March 1925 Mrs Wilde gave local worthies a conducted tour of the Museum in conjunction with a talk titled: What's the use of the Museum?, a

question to which many citizens had apparently replied 'Not Much.' The Museum was, she said, 'the essence of history', explaining that 'The younger children naturally went to the natural history museum to see the lion, the crocodile or the little rabbits playing cards, which so many people said she should put on the fire.' Incidentally she had

'no intention of doing this ... the rabbits were not only interesting to children, but they were also a little bit of the history of the country, because some 70 years ago it was the habit of taxidermists like Mr Chalkley, to get very young delicate animals and to set them up in funny little parties to show how well they could stuff the animals and therefore not only were the little rabbits interest-



Fig7 Frank Cottrill excavating (Winchester City Museums)

ing to children, but they were also interesting to people who studied the habits and customs of the years of their forefathers' (*Hampshire Chronicle*, March 7, 1925).

I owe Mrs Wilde a personal debt; as one of the last generation of Winchester children to remember the Card Players and the lion in situ, I am living proof that early museum-going may lead to a career as a cultural historian.

Throughout the nineteen thirties and early forties, the Museum had a series of Honorary Curators and latterly, only a paid Warden. After the Second World War, the Museums Committee decided that the Museum could not continue in 'its present dragged on state'

(*Hampshire Chronicle*, February 4, 1950); they voted for reorganisation spearheaded by the appointment of a paid, professional curator, familiar with the new principles being introduced into the post war museum world by D.A. Allen, President of the Museums Association. Allen wrote in 1946 of the need to 'show less and teach more' urging 'firm convictions strong enough to overcome the inertia of things as they have so long been' (Cottrill 1947, 10). One of Allen's disciples was Frank Cottrill (1908–1984). Cottrill held a first degree and an MA in archaeology and had worked on almost all the major British excavations of the period. He came to Winchester from the Leicester museum where he had been Keeper of Archaeology with the

opportunity to study, rearrange and display the collections. An appreciation of his career suggests that 'it was here, in one of the country's most advanced regional museums, that his philosophy and practice as a museum professional evolved' (Lewis nd, but after 1984).

Mr Cottrill's appointment in 1947 brought a new kind of Museum person to Winchester. In the building which was to be his place of work until his retirement in 1973 he found three sections; archaeology on the ground floor and part of the first floor, with bygones (defined as 'old farm implements, hearth accessories etc') on the stairs; geology on the remainder of the first floor and natural history on the top floor (Fig. 6). Unsurprisingly, given his background he declared that 'for importance and variety the archaeological collections come first' (Cottrill 1947, 8). He deplored 'a general lack of clarity and elegance' stemming from 'the days when museums put on show everything they had, whether good, bad, or indifferent, appropriate or inappropriate' (Cottrill, reported in *Hampshire Chronicle*, 26 January, 1952). He asked 'What of the future? How, in the light of modern ideas and experience, can the museums of Winchester be made to give the best possible service to the citizen, the school child, the student and the tourist?' (Cottrill 1947, 9). He envisaged 'Maps, plans, diagrams and large aerial photographs' as part of a new layout in which 'viewed as a whole each room could appear dignified and orderly, restful to the eye while stimulating to the mind' (Cottrill 1947, 12). There was also to be a sales counter, selling postcards priced at 4d and copies of Cottrill's booklet celebrating the Museum's 1847/1947 centenary: *Treasures of Winchester in the City Museum*, price one shilling. Incidentally none of the Treasures featured in the booklet was a stuffed animal, perhaps because by now 'Many of the large animals were faded and worn, and the plumage of some of the birds was dirty and faded' (Winchester City Council meeting *Hampshire Chronicle*, October 7, 1950). Although at first even Cottrill admitted that 'One would hesitate to banish the lion' (Cottrill 1947, 13), the days of the 'veritable zoo' were numbered, and as a later member of the Museum staff

commented 'The Stuffed Animals Had to Go' (leaflet, *Winchester City Museum 1903-2003*). Cottrill set about distributing the specimens to other museums, universities and regional storage facilities and with the help of a Carnegie Grant major renovation took place with improvements including steel shelving, reinforced floors, a curator's office and 'a lecture room, suitable for lantern shows to illustrate talks to school-children' (Cottrill in *Hampshire Chronicle*, 26 January, 1952). The museum closed for a year between June 1950 and 1951 with the express intention of reopening in time for the Festival of Britain.

While the Carnegie Grant and the link with the Festival of Britain emphasised international and national themes, speeches at the Mayoral opening in June 1951 lovingly recalled the work of Alderman Jacob, William Chalkley, the Hooleys and Mrs Wilde. Although Frank Cottrill had been appointed specifically to improve and renovate the City Museum, his plans were perhaps more far reaching and expensive than the City Council had anticipated. At the same time, as an archaeologist, Cottrill was closely involved in the extensive programme of excavations triggered by the restructuring of Winchester during the nineteen sixties and seventies and there was a perceived conflict between the priorities of excavation and museum reorganisation. (Fig. 7)

The reactions of the public to the new regime were not all favourable, with a typical letter to the *Hampshire Chronicle* lamenting 'cold, impersonal and sparsely furnished rooms.' 'Gone are those personal treasures of past decades, gone are the homely instruments that adorned the staircase, gone are the galaxy of stuffed birds, animals and reptiles' (*Hampshire Chronicle*, December 15, 1951). The *Hampshire Observer* of April 7 1956 reported considerable criticism of the existing museum voiced at a Winchester City Council meeting. The promised Natural History section had not materialised and Councillor Bowker, a descendant of Alfred Bowker, complained that 'The old museum had been called a junk shop but it was a very interesting junk shop and many hours could be spent there. It was very typical Winchester

and I liked it'. Visitors now spend only a few minutes in the museum as 'there is nothing to hold their interests'. There was too much emphasis on archaeology resulting in 'a great many old pots. One can look very much the same as another.' Mrs Neate agreed: 'I do miss that original hotch potch of affairs. At least there was a great deal to see and the sparsity there is now most disappointing'. And rather wistfully Miss Edmeades added, 'I do not want the stuffed lion or fox with two tails back but I do feel that, interesting although it is for us who live in the midst of antiquity, we should put in some things which are not so specialised' (*Hampshire Observer*, April 7, 1956.)

Throughout its life, the Winchester City Museum has been intended to raise the national and international profile of Winchester while stimulating local interest in the city's past. But consistent lack of funds meant that the Museum building was too small from the start, a problem foreseen by Alderman Jacob, and especially lacking in storage space. The character of the 1903 Museum owed much to the personalities of Alderman Jacob, without whom it would probably never have existed, and of William Chalkley, 'a very practical man' (Edward Chalkley, AV12/35/51), whose taxidermic skills established the Natural History section as both a major local attraction and a

potential problem for the new breed of post war museum professionals. The Hooleys and Mrs Wilde cared for the Museum between the wars, maintaining it as a focus of affection, interest, and civic pride. Just as Winchester had been one of the first purpose built provincial museums, so it was one of the first to feel the winds of change which swept out the stuffed animals and the exotic souvenirs, remembered fondly by some of the more nostalgic museum goers. Today an attempt to reconstruct in imagination the City Museum as it was in 1903, 1914, 1947 or 1951 must see it as a site of interaction between international, national and local interests, coloured by affection for a story which is 'very typical Winchester'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the staff of the Hampshire Record Office for their assistance. Thanks too for the helpful advice and suggestions provided by Ross Turle, Christine Taylor and Winchester City Council Museums. A version of this article was presented as a paper at the 2010 Museums and Galleries History Group Conference; thanks to organisers Abigail Harrison-Moore and Mark Westgarth.

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