

Newsletter Number 6 for September 2015



Building your collection

Do you have a hobby or passion for building a personal collection? What do you collect? When did your collecting start? For many of us it began during the Junior School years when we discovered postage stamps. Others collected flowers and carefully pressed them between soft paper and card. Some have collected Action Man and all his military equipment, for others it was the Barbie doll and a range of clothing outfits. Star Wars was a big favourite and maybe, for some, the Smurfs. Later perhaps football programmes, dolls, music, celebrity autographs, postcards, trophies, photographs, teddy bears, poetry, clocks, jokes, glass wear, thimbles, silver and works of art. Today collecting is big business with large sums of money changing hand as that vital missing item is found. One estimate puts the number of people collecting in the United Kingdom at one third of the population.

Why do we build these collections? Some psychologists suggest that building a collection can help people develop their identity, build confidence and become part of a community with a common interest. For others the activity opens up a world of associated ideas perhaps of loyalty to a football club or make of car, maybe a way of holding on to loved ones and ideas. Whatever the reason there is the thrill of organising the collection and the wow factor as a new addition is achieved.

Now in Winchcombe we have one of the best collectors you could wish to meet. His name is Ross Simms and over a period of 40 years he has assembled a collection of some 28000 items. There are 2709 police uniforms from 300 countries and 3000 caps and helmets. The oldest item is a tipstaff carried by an Aberdeen parish constable in 1430, and the oldest uniform is from Paris dated 1760. English memorabilia includes a pair of George III truncheons, a William IV truncheon from 1760 and a Peeler's uniform of 1829.

Ross Simms is a retired Metropolitan Police Inspector whose career ended in 1974 when he was seriously injured during the course of his duties. In the early part of his career, as a police constable [PC] in North Yorkshire, Ross had exchanged his helmet badge with another PC. During one of his long stays in Stoke Mandeville hospital Ross hit on the idea of maintaining his link with the police by building a collection of uniforms and other memorabilia. As news of the collection spread Ross received donations from families and forces all over the UK. These included several police cars. When Ross made his collection widely known internationally gifts arrived from the USA, Russia and many other countries.

Now your collection may not take you all over the world but Ross has been able to meet international leaders including the Clintons and Gorbachev and receive a Papal Knighthood from the Vatican. Then there was the meal at 10 Downing Street and 28 appearances on television. Mrs Putin came to Winchcombe, complete with bodyguards, to view the gifts from the Soviet police. Today parts of the collection can be found in 11 other countries as well as Nottingham and Winchcombe in the UK.

Your collection may never get to the size that Ross Simms achieved and you may not be vetted by the security authorities or smuggled out of foreign embassies but you never know. Do come to the museum and enjoy this fabulous collection.



Two examples from the massive Ross Simms Collection. Handcuffs and a county police badge.[Photographs by Alistair Robinson]

Answers to the questions in Newsletter 5

11. Lloyds Bank, Winchcombe used to be located in the premises of the current Sue Ryder shop.

Yes this is true. The bank was at one time in the premises now occupied by the Sue Ryder shop.

12. The MEB had a show room in what is now Lady Jane's tearoom. [Information on the MEB shop is held in the museum in a piece by Gwynneth Mills. In the piece Gwynneth describes the town she grew up in during the 1920s-40s.]

13. There was a police lock-up down near the footbridge.

Yes the 1841 Census shows that Winchcombe's first constabulary was in Rushley Lane so it is reasonable to assume a lock-up was there. George Greening remembers the lock-up in his memoirs though he locates it in Stancombe Lane which goes off Rushley Lane. [See Nineteenth Century Memoirs in the museum.]

14. Pat Smith's Anchor garage and cycle repair premises were opposite the old police station.

Correct. Pat Smith ran the famous 'Hell of the North' off-road cycle races from this site. The race continues today. Any more information on the garage would be welcome? We have a lead on this from Anne Crow which we plan to follow up in a future edition.

15. The Granby House is named after an ale house called the Marquis of Granby.

Yes there was a pub/ale house in North Street called the Marquis of Granby. It closed in 1915 and is marked by the presence of Marquis House and Granby House.

16. In the 1950's Winchcombe had a Department Store called Dunkins.

Yes Dunkins' Store occupied a long frontage on the site currently of Mercia Fine Art, the picture frame shop and until recently by Anton & K next door. Originally called Mitchells Emporium the store moved to what is now the Wesley Tapas Bar and then into North Street. Dunkins' site received a make-over when Haywards came to Winchcombe. [There is a very clear photograph of Dunkins in the museum collection.] One correspondent remembers Haywards because it sold sheep redde for fastening to rams before putting them amongst the ewes. Hayward's stored some of their goods in the covered space in front of what is today the museum entrance and tourist office.

17. The swimming pool and bowling green were at the bottom of Vineyard Street.

They were reached via Castle Street. The entrance was beside the stream along a path that is now built over with houses belonging to Sudeley Castle. [The museum holds a folder with the names of the bowling green members in the 1920s and 1930s.]

18. Wherry & Martin were motor and cycle repairers at 21 North Street with a telephone number Winchcombe 151.

Yes Wherry & Martin had workshop premises opposite the entrance to Delavale Road, next to the stream that goes under the road. Their site ran right through from Gretton Road to Crispin Road, so they had two addresses. Mr Wherry was a trustee of the Town Trust as was Harold Greening. Two private houses were built on the site, one on Gretton Road and the other in Crispin road. [The museum holds copies of their advertisements and a photograph.]

19. Winchcombe Fever Hospital was in Langley Road.

This is correct. [The museum has a photograph of the isolation hospital at Giles Piece in the 'Local information folder' taken when it was in a poor state in its last days. In addition the museum holds the sales particulars for when it was first bought. The hospital was a timber building and has been replaced by a large new house. It was used by the Workhouse for treating patients with infectious diseases as well as for the local population. The father of Louisa Bingham, the Hailes St. murder victim, was working there in 1904.]

20. One local estate agency was Royles.

Yes this is true. Mr and Mrs Royle had run the County Outfitters in what is now The Cats Whiskers for many years. Around 1976 they moved the outfitters to the current premises of the Cotswold Eye Care Centre. The Estate Agency was opened by Mrs Kathleen Royle in 1963. At that time Mr Peter Royle was working as a journalist for the Evesham Journal. In 1964 Peter joined his wife in the estate agency. The family lived in Abbey House. The office was in the premises currently occupied by Hair Styles UK. Around 1976 George Dunkin moved over the road from his shop [now the Wesley Wine Bar] to work for Mr and Mrs Royle. Also in 1976 the Royle's younger son Vincent opened a pet shop in what is now The Cats Whiskers. In the late 1980s the estate agency was sold to Lloyds Property Partners. One resident has written to say she recalls Mr Royle being very helpful when she moved to Winchcombe. The agency is marked by the naming of Royle Mews in Back Lane. [The museum holds copies of advertisements by Royle Estate Agents.]

I hope you enjoy Newsletter Number 6. Maybe you will want to dig out your collection and begin planning its better organisation and expansion during the coming winter months. The

answers to questions 11 to 20 from Newsletter Number 5 will perhaps stimulate a brisk winter walk around the town or maybe a glimpse from the new half hour bus service we have to Cheltenham.

In Newsletter Number 7, our last for this year, we will be following up on some of the leads we have had from previous issues. In addition we will be looking at letters and some curious spelling!

My thanks to Winchcombe experts Anne Crow, Carol Harris and Barbara Edward for guiding me close to the straight and narrow path through the mists of Winchcombe history. Special thanks are due to Ross Simms for sitting patiently through all my questions with such good cheer and to Alistair Robinson for introducing me to Dropbox and his splendid photographs. Finally to Vincent Royle for his splendid help with question 20.

John Hancock
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[The Winchcombe Town Trust, Registered Charity No. 234734]