

# Changes at annual exhibitions but all of them welcome

THIS year has seen a number of changes in the presentation of the Alton Art Society's Annual Exhibition, all of them welcome.

Firstly the decision (assisted by sponsorship from Messrs. Engelmann & Buckham) to extend the duration of the show from one week to two; secondly a major rethink about the layout of the exhibition, using a different entrance and a cleverly thought out arrangement of the display screens that gives a much greater feeling of space to view the exhibits, and thirdly a change in selection of work that does not give an automatic right to exhibition to

anyone submitting a sufficient quantity.

So, no longer having to grab time in a crowded mid-week period, my first impressions were of a significant improvement in the overall standard of the show, which is important. A closer look showed fewer changes in detail — not surprisingly, as most of the exhibitors remain the same. But the changed layout gave the more outstanding works greater emphasis, effectively lifting the whole show.

Oils and acrylics were, for the most part, displayed around the edge of the room; watercolours, prints, collages, and w.h.y., in the centre; sculpture and craftwork makes little more than a token appearance at Alton Art Society

shows, though the little there is, was welcome enough. And, of course, there was the display of children's art on the stage, now separated from the main exhibition by the organisers' table.

As previously, and with some noteworthy exceptions, I thought that the general standard of the watercolours was higher than the oils and acrylics; the medium is, at least for the less experienced (or able) artist, a more direct one, and certainly technique seems to get less in the way, enabling the painter to concentrate more on what he or she is depicting, and to be more free, more experimental in his or her approach.

Works that, for a variety of reasons, caught my attention,

included a good, very simply designed watercolour of Ben Lawers (no. 138) by M. Sixsmith, a rather more stylised landscape of Hampshire Fields (no. 143) by Arthur Farrow, and a well-drawn Boats Keyhaven (no. 146) by Stanley V. Riddell. Arthur Farrow had also essayed abstraction in two Quartets (nos. 153 and 155) and, although they perhaps hovered a little uneasily between one genre and another, I commend the attempt. Pamela E. Pell was abstracting pure areas of colour more successfully in a study of Apples (no. 160), whilst further experimental work, in collage, was being tried by Patricia Lesley Smith in Viewpoint (no. 162).

In more traditional vein the

inimicable Viola Peacock came up with a couple of characteristic groupings of plants, superbly detailed, Autumn Gatherings and Autumn in the Hedgerow (nos. 167 and 169) as well as a bolder study of Magnolia Soulangeana (no. 95); Jean Greaves made effective use of the magenta outlines of leaves against grey-green in Begonia Rex (no. 46). I noted, too, GM Carter's Vanishing Provence (no. 106), M. W. E. Walker's pen and wash drawing of Domme (no. 100) — nice feeling for place, and Molly Dinwiddie's Beaulieu '85 (no. 85). Mary Biggs' painting of Tesselated Rocks, Australia (no. 90) was interesting, given scale by the crucial inclusion of two figures. P. Dorling's large and colourful pictures could not but help grab attention. I thought the Life Class Study of a seated male nude particularly good (no. 10).

Each year visitors vote for an Exhibit of the Year Award, and my guess is that this year it is a two horse race. Guy Vaesen's work I have always enjoyed, particularly his screenprints with their strong use of gentle colours, if that is not a contradiction; Folegandros Square and The Parthenon 1985 (nos. 163 and 165) continue that tradition. But his painting of Antiparos, Greece (no. 73) is a show-stealer. The approach is similar, the effect of linking thick paint textures to whites, pale greys, pastel greens and browns, is very particular and much to be admired.

Last year's winner was Mary Towsey, and she is clearly reluctant to hand back the trophy! Indian Summer (no. 23) is a large painting, far and away the largest in the show; but its use of that scale is splendid, detailed grasses in the foreground, an enormous expanse of sky with clouds, a vapour trail, distant flying birds; the whole overlaid with a warm glow of autumnal sunshine. A very fine painting indeed, and should it win, it will be well deserved.

The children's art forms a miniature exhibition in its own right. Prizes are awarded, by age. In the 5 years and under class the winner was a large composite work Mummy in the Garden by the Reception Class at Four Marks Primary School; 6 to 8 years old was won by Stephen Jones of Alton with his drawing of a Chinese Boat. All the remaining prizes went to portraits, and comparison between them says a lot about the process of growing up! Timothy Allison, again of Four Marks Primary School, won the 9 to 11 class with his pencil portrait of (I presume) a school friend; Karen McBain of Eggar's School had a distinctly more aggressive pastel portrait to win the 12-14 years group; and in the 15-17 Sean Stanley, Eggar's again, moved into profile for his sophisticated pastel. A special award went to a group of six 1st Medstead Guides, aged 11 - 13, for an unusual group of Corn Dollies.

An interesting exhibition, overall; the innovations are welcome and will, I trust, remain: I look forward to next year's show. Meanwhile the present, the 54th Annual Exhibition of the Alton Art Society, stays open until tomorrow (Saturday) 10 to 7 daily.

Peter Sanger



Lady Charlotte Bonham Carter, president of Alton Art Society, with Peter Deshon, a director of the Engelmann and Buckham Group, who opened the society's 54th annual exhibition on Monday evening at the Assembly Rooms.

## Plenty of local talent evident in art society's show

LOCAL talent is currently on view at the Assembly Rooms in Alton with hundreds of exhibits to catch the imagination and delight the eye.

Alton Art Society's 54th annual exhibition was opened on Monday evening by Peter Deshon, a director of the Engelmann and Buckham Group who are sponsoring an extra week so that, this year, the event will run until Saturday, October 12th.

Running concurrently for the first week but in another room is Alton Camera Club's annual exhibition which features this year a special national display of photography by disabled photographers.

The art society's show features the pictures in a new display arrangement which seemed on Monday to be generally agreed an improvement, showing off the nearly 200 various works of art to additional advantage.

At one end of the hall is a section where members display items of pottery and wood for sale but not as exhibits. Elsewhere pottery and sculpture is on exhibition, with items — like most of the pictures — for sale.

### CHILDREN'S EXHIBITION

On the stage is the ever popular children's exhibition with five local schools — Alton Convent, Eggar's, Amery Hill, Four Marks Primary and St Lawrence Primary — and some individuals taking part.

Mr Deshon, who was introduced by art society chairman Pat Edwards, spoke of it as an important and beautifully laid out exhibition and, recalling how the Society was founded in November 1925, said the 60th birthday would be quite a landmark.

On everyone's behalf, he thanked the organisers of the exhibition for their hard work, the selection committee, those who had hung the pictures and, in particular, the joint exhibition secretaries Mr and Mrs Robert Bickerdike.

Although there were about the same number of exhibits as in previous years, the method of selection this year had been different with every picture judged on its merit. Previously any Society member who submitted two or more pictures had been guaranteed that one was hung.

It was felt that this had lifted the standard.

And, once again, the general public is being invited to judge their own "exhibit of the year" for the award sculptured and presented by R. Briton Riviere.

Each catalogue includes a voting slip.

Amongst Monday evening's visitors was a panel from the East Hampshire District

Council's leisure services committee who included chairman Barry Hopcraft, Alton's town mayor Cecil Smith, and Jim Challen. They were accompanied by committee secretary Valeries Ferns and bought two pictures for display in the East Hampshire district.

Prizewinning exhibits in the children's section were: five years and under: 1. Four Marks Primary School with "Mummy in the Garden"; six to eight years: 1. Stephen Jones (six years) 2. Debbie Caira (7) from St Lawrence School; nine to 11 years: 1. Timothy Allison (10) Four Marks Primary School; 2. Nichola Tidy (10) of St Lawrence School; 12 to 14 years: 1. Karen McBain (14) Eggar's School; 2. Karen Birchall (12) Alton Convent; 15 to 17 years: 1. Sean Stanley (15) from Eggar's School; 2. Damien Atkinson (15) from Amery Hill School.

There was also a special award for corn dollies by 11 to 13 year old 1st Medstead Guides.

And to add to the general enjoyment of the public, there are flower arrangements by Alton & District Flower Arrangement Society.

The exhibition is open daily, including Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. until 7 p.m.

ALTON GAZETTE  
OCTOBER 9<sup>th</sup>

ALTON HERALD  
11<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER  
1985

15