

Bucks Open Studios June 18th – July 3rd 2011

Exhibition of Miniatures

Dolphin Cottage, 68 Altwood Road, Maidenhead. SL6 4PZ

Open: Saturdays and Sundays 12 – 4pm; Wednesdays 4 - 7pm

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About the exhibition.

This is an exhibition where you can see beautifully crafted furniture and models made for film sets in the puppet animation series ***Willoughby Drive***. Animation films go too fast to appreciate individual bits of furniture or models. This was the incentive to have exhibitions where people can see the detail of the work and the dedication of the craftsmen.



Willoughby Drive is a series of 13 ten-minute puppet animation films about the adventures of three families who lived next door to each other in Willoughby Drive. The series is based on *Simple Stories*, published weekly in *Punch* in the twenties. Each episode took about a year to make and the whole project fourteen years to complete.

The film sets are a quarter of life size, so the puppets are 16 to 18 inches (one quarter of a 6 ft (72") man). Nearly everything had to be specially made.

In the films there were as many outdoor sets as indoor ones. In our garage you can see the three Willoughby Drive houses and their front gardens. This will include some garden furniture, a mowing machine, the tricycle, milkfloat and bus. Past the houses you can see The Talking Horse and Binkie, the little dog. And don't miss, above the deep freeze, bicycles and mowing machine (real) the rolling scenery of Venice,

painted for the Happy Prince we used in our puppet theatre (1975) and later filmed in the Arabian Prince (9th episode of Willoughby Drive).



For the last two episodes I found a wonderful prize winning wood turner who welcomed challenges and had a lovely sense of humour. Sometimes he left me little jokes, too small to be seen in the film but perfectly visible at the exhibition. One of these jokes you can see in the doctor's consulting room, on the blood pressure gauge, made for *The Diet*. On this he wrote for very high blood pressure "Oh dear!" but when it fell dangerously low "RIP".



Often I got carried away when poking about in bric-a-brac or antique shops and found something the right size. One day, much to my excitement, I found a tiny set of Shakespeare plays, 5 by 3cms, bound in black leather. Imagine my disappointment when I filmed them they could hardly be seen while the little red raisin packets I had covered and titled as pretend books were far more convincing. Notice too the Meissen looking glass, wickedly extravagant but so right for the Gumble Bumps' ornate sitting room. It appears often in the films but probably is seldom noticed.

The magic carpet was a different story. I had searched in vain for a carpet special enough to use. No luck, until one day I found in our attic, a carefully wrapped packet with a beautiful piece of embroidery inside. It had been made with meticulous care and love by a great-great-great aunt well over a hundred and fifty years ago. It was perfect. Now, its flying days over, it hangs on the wall as part of the exhibition.

In three of the sets you can see the neighbours: Mr and Mrs Barraclough in their dining room; Horace and Amelia Wotherspoon with their little girls Susan and Ella in their kitchen and Mr and Mrs Gumble Bump in their sitting room.

A warm welcome to anyone interested

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**To make a special appointment outside the times of the exhibition please
telephone 01628 627387**

Visitors' Book for Bucks Open Studios Exhibitions 2007 – 10

Before they leave visitors to the exhibition are asked for their remarks.
Here are a few:

What an experience - so very grateful

Film made me laugh

Amazing to find something like this still around.

Could spend the day here! It's fabulous.

What a revelation! One visit is not enough to take all this in. I'll be back!

Remarkable. A great piece of film history that should be preserved for future generations.

DOES THE FILM MUSEUM IN BRADFORD KNOW YOU? (sic)

Absolutely brilliant. Loved the film.

These sets are so extraordinary: They must eventually be in a museum.

Landed in my kind of paradise. Thank you. ...Totally awakening.

Amazing and interesting. Captures your mind in a whole new world. (Written by a child)