



Hilary Shuter with her 1cm brush at the Wymondham Heritage Museum where she has painted a new mural.

# Hilary's mural means the washing is still done at local museum



Standing at an easel to paint is straightforward, but when your canvass is a large wall, where do you start? To find out, **Neil Haverson** meets a local artist.

Photographs by Nick Butcher.

In early Victorian times, The Bridewell at Wymondham was a women's gaol. In the washhouse the prisoners did not only their own laundry but also for the prison at Norwich. Today The Bridewell is the home of Wymondham Heritage Museum. What is now the garden was the courtyard where the washing was hung out to dry.

When it was proposed that a mural should be painted on one of the walls, it was the laundry that artist Hilary Shuter chose for the theme.

Apart from three A1 posters for The Otter Trust, Hilary, from Wymondham, says: "I usually do small." By this she means around A4 size, so presented with a wall 3x2.5 metres must have been a daunting task.

But Hilary has been drawing and painting for many years.

"I was always a scribbler," she says modestly. "When I was at school I was drawing Equus instead of declining it. I was told to stop or I could go and do something else. So I went and did German."

Also, art is in the family.

“My father was an aerodynamicist, the flow of air over a plane’s wings, so he did detailed drawings, and Mum painted.”

Hilary trained as a nurse. In 1963 she moved with husband Richard to Uganda. Richard was education officer and Hilary was a school medical officer looking after 700 youngsters and staff.

“I did my own prescribing and diagnosis. I did hold an exhibition of my art but it was a dismal failure!”

Nine years later they returned to the UK.

“I took the year off in 1972 because I was traumatised by Idi Amin. He drove around Kampala looking like a bull buffalo. We lived up country in a school compound. We had to transport the children to town but there was an army base in between. The soldiers would have been on drinking binges. They held us up for checks. It was terrifying; there were children as young as four.”

Following her year off Hilary returned to nursing at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital where she worked in theatre for 25 years.

“When I retired I took a City and Guilds in watercolour and joined a local art class – I still go.”

A friend suggested she should volunteer as a steward at the Wymondham Museum where she now does a weekly shift. Also a member of the art class is Pip Woodward who was, until recently, chairman of the Museum’s management team.

“Pip approached me about doing the mural. I said I would have



The mural inside the museum.



Wymondham Heritage Museum is now open for the 2017 season. From left to right are: Bruce Blackney, Bev Bevan (HMP Norwich governor) Mike Foyle and Pip Woodward outside the museum.

to discuss it with my husband. I needed his support – he’d have to do the washing up and cooking!

“It all started in Greece. I had the germ of an idea of the laundry on holiday. I found pictures of Victorian laundries and did a small work-up. I started just after Christmas with an A4 sketch. People asked if I projected it on the wall but it is in such a narrow passage there wasn’t room so I just held it and drew on the wall with chalk. I did outlines then painted the figures. I left the faces and flesh until last because it scared me! I was offered help to paint the floor but I said no. I wanted to do it all myself.”

Working three to four hours at a time, with limited colours and mostly using a brush no more than a centimetre wide, Hilary has produced a magnificent image depicting life in a Victorian laundry.

“I wanted it to be fairly dowdy. After all they were prisoners; they

were in gaol.”

Hilary spent a total of 123 hours painting the mural which included adding two coats of varnish to protect it. She is well advanced with a further smaller mural at the end of the narrow passage with clever perspective showing the passage continuing, lined with laundry baskets.

Has Hilary another project in mind?

“If someone came to me and said would you do a mural, I’d say living wage and mileage!” 



Inside the museum there is plenty to see.

You can see Hilary Shuter’s murals at Wymondham Heritage Museum, 10 The Bridewell, Norwich Road, Wymondham, The museum is open Monday to Saturday 10am-4pm; Sundays 1pm-4pm.

[www.wymondhamheritagemuseum.co.uk](http://www.wymondhamheritagemuseum.co.uk)

The Museum is run by volunteers. If you can spare time to help telephone 01953 600205 (Museum open hours only)