

WOKINGHAM ART SOCIETY

Newsletter

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Editor: Rod Jones

CHAIRMAN: Sue Smith chair@wokinghamartsociety.org.uk

SECRETARY: Madeline Hawes Tel: 01189 783898

TREASURER: Sylvia Lynam Tel: 01189 018291 (treasure@wokinghamartsociety.org.uk).



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Paul Banning

It is with extreme sadness that I tell you that our very dear President, Paul Banning, has died rather suddenly within 3 weeks of a devastating cancer diagnosis. He died on May 4th at the age of 86. Two of his children were able to live with him for those last weeks so that he could be at home where he died peacefully surrounded by flowers and listening to Mozart.

Only a handful of you will remember a time before Paul became our President, on taking the reins from Tom Coates. I don't actually know when that was but it was long before my time!

We couldn't have been luckier that he agreed to take us under his very generous wing. I first met him when he hosted a weekend workshop for us at the Holt School. He brought along some of his sketches and watercolours and I was blown away. What an artist! He was a superb draughtsman and then brought those fabulous drawings to life with wash after wash of delicate transparent watercolours until they glowed with a special pearly light. Stunning. A true master.

He always painted what he saw, working from life whenever he could. He was so energetic. Even in his eighties he could run a course at Dedham Hall for a week (my absolutely favourite place!) for umpteen 'pupils', taking us all over Essex and Suffolk (he especially loved boats). He would keep us inspired, entertained, motivated and thoroughly 'helped' and still find time to do at least one fabulous painting a day himself.

He was so generous with his time, money and expertise. He really cared about our society and took a deep interest in our activities. We all flocked to his wonderful President's evenings every February and many of us were lucky enough to attend one of his workshops. He contributed to our annual exhibitions and often both opened and judged the show: a daunting task! He was really interested in everyone's work and gave valuable feedback. A few years ago he set up another prize, the 'Paul Banning award for drawing'. I'm so glad he did that as we now have something special to help us remember him.

I can honestly say that he taught me to draw. He taught me to really look at what was in front of me and not to let my mind make assumptions. I will always be grateful for that.

He was very generous in helping us with a large donation to enable us to buy new stands when ours were stolen. He never expected any payment for all the time he gave to the Society. The only thing he would ever accept was a bottle or two of red wine; preferably from the valleys in France, and flowers for his delightful wife Margaret who died a couple of years ago.

He was a great storyteller having had an interesting life. He was born in Trinidad and visited, painted and exhibited there all his life. Wherever he went he made good friends and was a member of numerous prestigious art societies including the Wapping Group and the RI (the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolour). He loved painting alongside other leading artists, especially en plein air and will be greatly missed. Prestigious galleries will feel the lack of his paintings on their walls. He won lots of prizes for exceptional work; too many to list. He was unbelievably prolific and many of us are lucky enough to treasure his paintings on our walls.

Through Paul's contacts with other artists, galleries, institutions and societies he broadened the outlook of our own society, encouraging us to visit exhibitions and appreciate the work of other artists. He suggested great artists for us to invite to demonstrate for us. He was really supportive in so many ways.

Personally, I will miss his quiet, distinguished voice, his sincerity, his generous advice, his beautiful paintings and those he didn't get round to. I will miss his friendship, companionship and his stories and his incredible eyebrows ! I will treasure the many memories I have of all of these things and be forever grateful for his influence in my life and in my artistic endeavours.

Paul loved his own wonderful family dearly and we send them our very best wishes as they grieve the loss of this totally remarkable artist and thoroughly wonderful man.

- *Susie Smith*

Paul Banning - a personal reminiscence by Rod Jones

I first met Paul in the late 1980s shortly after he had taken redundancy from his job as a furniture designer and before he replaced Tom Coates as our President.



The occasion was a plein air painting session at Bearwood College which had been organised by our then Chairman, Stella King with Paul as our tutor for the day.

On looking through my library of paintings for this article, I came across my effort that day. Paul had caught me deliberating about whether to paint the windows and persuaded me that less was more. He certainly helped me to imbue the painting with a freshness that, without his advice would have been lacking.

When I rejoined WAS in 2008 after a fourteen year absence working in Malvern, Paul was well established as our President and, as the then camera and tech geek, it fell to me to set up several of his talks on my laptop.

This means that I have been able to select some of his works which reflect the diversity of his work.

At his last President's Evening, the theme was drawing and Paul showed us his sketchbooks. One example shown here shows his love of a messy room - a particular theme which features in many of his paintings of boatyards and workshops.

This is a clog-makers workshop...



Here are two of Paul's many pictures of boatyards where the disorder adds to the sense of busyness and helps to heighten the atmosphere.

Seeing Paul demonstrating over the years, I formed the impression he always wanted to push his drawing and sketching skills to the limit and seldom resorted to photography.

These scenes would have been a supreme test!



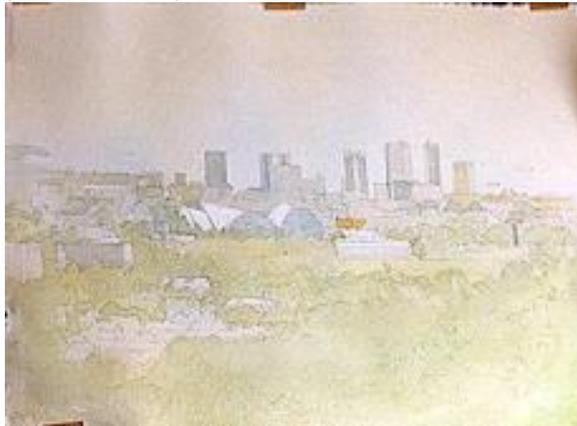
I can actually *smell* these places!

Paul Banning Remembered (Continued)

Paul was a member of the Wapping Group of artists and so boats and boatyards feature strongly in his portfolio.

(It is no coincidence that, over the years, we have enjoyed demonstrations by fellow "Wappers" Robin Mackervoy, Geoff Hunt and, most frequently, Roger Dellar, who gave Susie Smith the sad news about Paul's death.)

Paul grew up in Barbados and, in one of his President's Evenings for us, he demonstrated a painting of a Barbadian landscape which was to form part of an exhibition in Barbados for which he was preparing. A particular feature of Paul's demonstrations was that, unlike other demonstrators, he never actually finished the painting on the evening in question - mainly because of the complexity of the scenes, the size of the painting and the fact that his paintings were composites of very carefully planned transparent washes.



Here is where Paul got to by the end of his demonstration...

...and here is the final result after a lot more work. - it almost goes without saying that the painting sold.



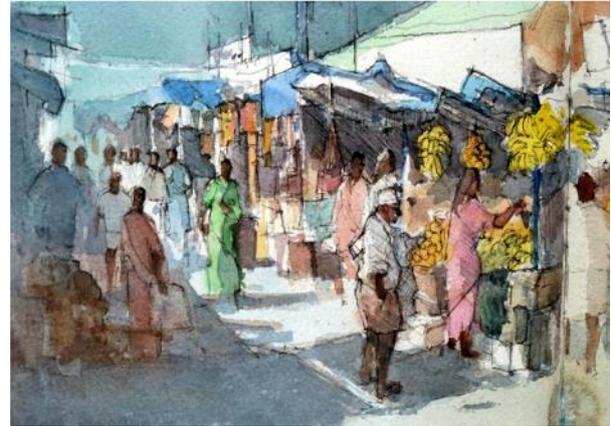
Here are two more paintings set in Barbados



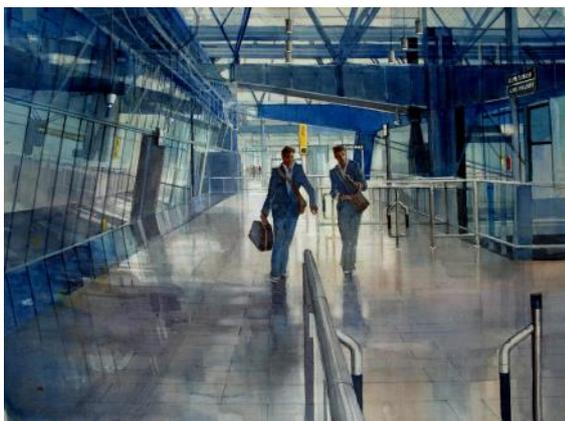
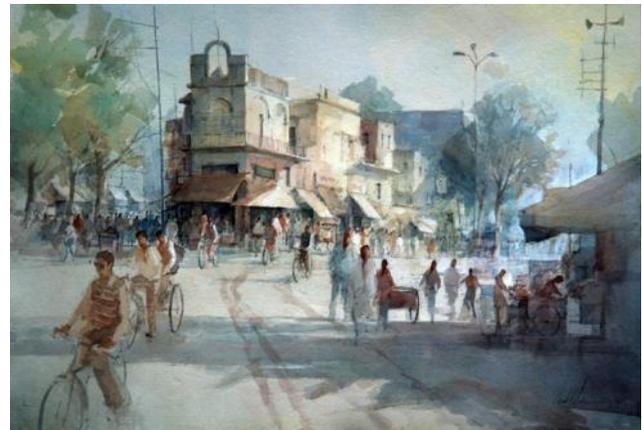
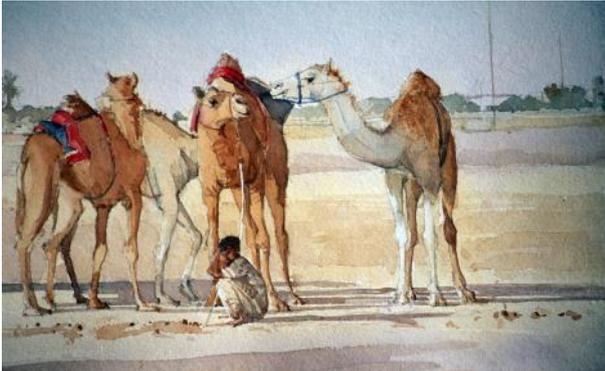
When Paul was telling us about the importance of developing our drawing skills, he showed us this page from his sketchbook where he had kept his pencil to the paper for as much of the image as possible.

This is called "taking a line for a walk".

In this case he took it for a crawl! The baby's fingers are particularly well defined.



Urban sketching is an increasingly popular art activity. Here Paul's mastery came to the fore and formed the basis for many more detailed works.



As a world traveller, Paul was no stranger to airports. He exhibited an airport picture at one of our summer exhibitions and here is another one.

Some people didn't "get" them but the outstanding feature was that you could *hear* the echoing footsteps and the announcements in the same way that you can *smell* the varnish, cement and old rope in his messy boatyard scenes.

Paul Banning Remembered (continued)



A really beautiful conclusion to this reminder of Paul's mastery of drawing and watercolours.
You'd think he had been a furniture designer! - Oh! Right - he was!

- Rod Jones