

## **Fred Millett Murals at St Crispin's School**

Robin Cops, a member of the Board of Governors of St Crispin's School, gave a lecture in the Town Hall about the three Fred Millett Murals there.

In 1950, 200,000 school places per year over 5 years were needed. At the same time the Dept. of Education costs were to be cut by 43%. The solution was a child-friendly, flexible design, focussing on an interior to inspire children's imagination. St Crispin's School was a flagship building, the first of five such schools over those five years, and the most influential and most visited British school built since the war, with visitors from all over the world.

The building was mostly single storey and modular, with abstract panels hand painted by Oliver Cox, the ergonomic furniture and fittings designed for children by David Medd, including rubber floors to minimise noise, curtains with Shakespearean motifs designed by Gerald Holtom, and murals by Fred Millett. The only brick wall is in the gym.

Every element of the building and its contents was carefully considered, from the light fittings to the chairs, from the colours to the heating system. The school was finished in April 1953, 5 months early, at a cost of £192,000, 10% under budget and 25% under Government target. There were 360 pupils and 19 staff initially, with a vocational syllabus to serve Wokingham's rural and agricultural area of the time. Moving with the times, the first 'A' levels were held there in 1974.

Fred Millett was born in 1920 and died in 1980. He lived in Birkhampstead and his first mural was at Morley College in 1950. The following year, he painted a rural scene at Oaklands Primary School, Barnet, and many murals for subsequent schools and pavilions across Britain. His artwork was very varied, with abstract sculpture at the University of York, London's NatWest Bank and Wakefield Water Board, illustrations of street scenes, decorated ceramic tiles and plates, posters and sketches. He also taught architecture.

The three murals at St Crispin's show "Summer", "Autumn" and "Winter". They were the brightly lit focal points of the long, dark corridors leading to the classrooms. In 1976, thinking he was moving with the times, the Head spent a weekend painting out the murals! He painted emulsion over "Summer", which was followed by 4 layers of gloss over the years, plus a noticeboard. "Autumn" and "Winter" fared much worse – gloss paint straight on to the pictures.

"Summer" was restored in 2011 and "Autumn" more trickily in 2012, with repairs undertaken by Saskia, a local artist. Sadly, "Winter" is irreparable, but Saskia plans to recreate the painting in the style of Fred Millett. All the restorative work has been funded by the Wokingham Society and the Town Council. If you would like to see the murals, just call into St Crispin's School and they will be happy to show off these remarkable works of art.