

The Nikolskys of Northney

Last May, in a saleroom in Crewkerne near my Somerset home, I spotted a watercolour of the unmistakable windmill tower at Langstone, viewed through trees and millponds from the north. Closer inspection revealed that it was painted in 1968 by Afanasy Nikolsky, father of my Portsmouth Grammar School 1950s contemporary, Anton Nikolsky, now known as Alexander Anatol Nicholls, one-time solicitor in West Sussex and Hampshire. I bought the picture and there began a trail of discovery of whose findings this article (and a second to follow in the next issue) are but fragments.

Pic.1 1968 Nikolsky watercolour of the back of Langstone Mill

Nikolsky was a painter of distinction of whose work an overdue second retrospective exhibition is planned for summer 2018 at the Tearooms and Barn at Northney Farm where he worked on arrival in England in 1947. His wife Elena Nikolsky was an acclaimed sculptress and it is hoped examples of her work will accompany some 30-40 of her husband's paintings. This exhibition could not be mounted without the active participation of the Hayling Danbys, Nick and Paul, who assisted Afanasy Nikolsky to exhibit all his remaining works at an earlier exhibition which sadly took place just three weeks after the artist's death in 1984. Northney farmers Mary and Stan Pike are also playing key roles in the arrangements, together with other residents of Hayling and Langstone who are lending their treasured paintings for the occasion.

Pic.2 2017 Langstone foreshore, mills and Royal Oak

Afanasy (b.1909 in Kiev) and Elena (b.1907 in Russia, d.1979) had managed to escape from Kiev, location of their first marital home, when the Nazis invaded Ukraine in WW2. They travelled through Europe with Maxim (b.1939), Anton (b.1944) and Afanasy's mother Angelina, ending up in the British zone in Germany, before opting to move on to England in 1947. Conscious or not that Hayling Island had, since 1931, been the sanctuary of compatriot Princess Catherine Yourievsky (see article in next issue), they came to a UN camp for displaced persons at Bedhampton, soon relocating to 18 Northney Road, their happy home for the next 37 years.

Pic.3 2017 The Nikolsky family home

