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# The artist who would be Newbury's mayor

## Celebrating the life and work of the late Christopher Hall



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*NEWBURY TODAY celebrates the life and work of the late Christopher Hall whose spacious Newbury studio regularly doubled as the Lib Dem campaign HQ. Slides: Kimbers Corner, Christopher Hall at a Putney opening in 2013, as mayor in a cutting from 1968 with pantomime producer Francis Belk, Enborne Road railway bridge, Cricket game with cottage, The Old Bell, Warminster, Vale of Ffestiniog-Irg, Court Oak Farm Leckhamstead, Via Mazzini Recanati, Piazzale Paci Montelupone, West Mills Allotments, Gliders Over Combe, Weir Vale House Old Burghclere, Christopher in his Newbury studio, Crown and Garter Inkpen, Wildlife Hospital, Hungerford Bridge.*

A RARE benefit of living under lockdown or a restrictive tier system is a renewed appreciation of the great outdoors. West Berkshire and neighbouring county regions are blessed with many characterful towns, villages and beautiful surrounding countryside. Someone who always captured this and brought it home to us was the renowned artist Christopher Hall RBA, RCA (1930-2016). He lived, worked and served the community in the Newbury area for most of his life, an association that was very dear to his heart.

1950s. And it was to live in their own cottage in The Street, in Aldermaston, that Christopher brought his young Italian bride, Maria, in 1957.

But soon the young couple moved, first to Monastery Farm on Wash Common, and then to Porchester Road in Newbury for many years, to have the space to raise a family. It was while living here that Christopher began his long service as a councillor, including the honour of being elected mayor in 1967. Both his council duties and concomitant political campaigning for the Liberal party he so proudly represented, took him out and about the residential streets and outlying communities he grew to know like the back of his hand. All artistic work ceased during election periods and his spacious studio regularly doubled as campaign HQ.

This association also provided Christopher the opportunity to revive another great passion, his love of cricket. Having played much village cricket through the 1950s, at Inkpen, Aldermaston and Falkland in particular, he was now able to enjoy the sport first hand again with the local Liberals in the 1970s. But his political life, his family and his painting often combined to take him much further afield. Attending party conferences or helping out in by-elections allowed him to explore and paint new places the length and breadth of the country. But it was his family connections to Italy, through Maria, and North Wales, where his parents settled in retirement, that stimulated the two great bodies of work for which Christopher Hall is perhaps most associated. The National Library of Wales holds a significant collection of his landscapes of rugged mountains and mining communities, and last year a major and hugely successful retrospective of his Italian paintings was staged in Recanati, Maria's home town in Italy.

Newbury Museum has also staged two retrospectives in tribute to his place in local life.

Among the numerous institutions and public bodies that hold collections of Christopher's paintings is Reading Museum, which includes fine examples of his fascination with gritty urban back streets as well as the countryside.

In what would have been his 90th year, an exhibition had been planned at Reading's Turbine House for June last year. But Covid and the first lockdown put paid to that, so it is hoped to stage it this year, along with bringing out two books on Christopher's Italian and Welsh paintings.

In the meantime, the family has unveiled a new website where an expanding archive of older paintings can be enjoyed and many others can be purchased, <https://christopherhall.pictures>. Well worth browsing when cooped up indoors and dreaming of fresh air and wide-open spaces.