

ROUND AND ABOUT IN THE PARISH...

In June this year I featured Janet Brown at a ceremony to mark the 100th centenary of Parish Councils, and it seems only fair to feature her husband, Peter Butterworth.



Janet and Peter came to live in Danehill in about 1960 and their property required considerable renovation, which Peter did completely himself. He also tackled the garden doing the renovations, even hand-making the stone slabs used on the patio, a strenuous job which Janet was convinced would send him to an early grave. But that didn't seem to deter him and he then moved on to do the wiring. Janet and Peter's son, Tyler, has told me that some years after Peter's death (nothing to do with the patio!), Janet had the house rewired by a professional electrician who said that whoever wired it before had created a "death trap just waiting to go up." They could have all ended up in early graves!

This photo is of Janet Brown, Peter Butterworth and their children, Tyler and Emma. at their renovated cottage, the photo was taken in about 1966.

Peter took part in many village activities and in July 1978 he opened the village fete and he is shown here with Alison McNamara and Janine Pipe who were both contestants in the Best Decorated Bicycle Competition.

A Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony takes place each year at Chelwood Gate Village Hall and the proceeds are donated to charity. As a local celebrity Peter was asked to perform the ceremony and all was going well until someone saw him coming up the path in darkness. Without giving too much thought to their actions, they hurriedly switched on the lights so that Peter could see, frantic actions then ensued and the lights were swiftly switched off again so that Peter could do the honours. Eventually the funny side was seen, no doubt helped by Teddy Burnham's mulled wine which was always available at these functions Peter was well known for his roles in the very successful Carry On series of films and at Christmas time he would often be starring in pantomimes, such as at the Eastbourne Theatre. Michael Virtue has told me that he and his wife, Jenny and one of their daughters, Nicola went to see him in the Theatre in about 1974. Towards the end of the performance Peter encouraged young children to come up on to the stage to meet him, and Michael persuaded young Nicola to climb on to the stage. Peter was asking each child their name, and where they came from. All went well until he came to Nicola who said she lived at Furners Green. Michael said you could almost (but not quite of course) see him hesitate before recovering his composure. Peter was clearly wondering who on earth might live at Furners Green, which was 'just round the corner from where he lived' it was such a small hamlet - there couldn't be that many people from the area!



Peter loved the village and the people in it. Tyler remembered that as a child Peter would take him and his sister up to the Stone Quarry Pub (now gone) in Chelwood Gate because the landlord, Reg Newnham, would organise a bet when it was the Grand National and Tyler and his sister would each be given a penny to put on a horse. Tyler said his father would also given them sixpence each and take them to the jumble sales in the Danehill Memorial Hall which he loved to explore.

Near to where Janet and Peter Butterworth lived was a children' nursery. Tyler had told me this started when Peter asked a near neighbour, Aileen Stevens, who was a retired teacher, if she might think about opening a little school. She did, and Tyler and another local boy were the first pupils. Michael Virtue has told me that his two daughters also went to this school, which was for children aged between about 5 and 7 and they were very happy there. The school was very successful. These schools were known as 'Dame Schools' - an early form of a private elementary school. The pupils were usually taught by women and these schools were often located in the house of the teacher.



Despite being known for his acting, and the Carry On films in particular, Peter had had a hard time during WW2, being shot down over Holland and then being incarcerated in Stalag Luft III for most of the war. Every morning Tyler would watch his father walk right round the garden, still in his dressing down. Janet said it was a reaction to the intense confinement of prison camp and it was believed that his decision to live in Danehill, to be on the edge of the vast Ashdown Forest, to be a part of the village he loved in whichever way he could, and eventually be buried in the cemetery, was all part of his way of soothing the stress and trauma of that terrible time. And now, Peter Butterworth, Janet Brown and their daughter, Emma, are all in the Cemetery at Danehill, forever a part of the village they loved so much.

My thanks to Tyler Butterworth and Michael Virtue.

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