

## THE LIFE OF TOM PICKARD

Tom Pickard was born in Wingate, Co Durham on March 28th 1913, the 3rd of 4 children. His parents ran a drapery and tailoring business in Wingate, however, when his father died in 1928, the business was forced to close, because the bank refused to transfer the loan to Grandma. Dad and his brothers, Steve and Jim, hawked the remaining stock around Wingate and the surrounding villages on their bicycles. Dad attended Henry Smith School at Hartlepool from which he graduated with a distinction in Physics and credits in English, French, Pure and Applied Maths, Chemistry and History. His mother was able, with a struggle, to send him to Teachers Training College and in 1931 he became a student at St John's College in York. There he studied English, Physics (another distinction), History, Music, Maths and Gardening (!); graduating in 1933. Following his graduation he taught in several local schools including Fencehouses, Shiney Row and Houghton.

Dad was called up in 1940 into the army and saw active service in Egypt and North Africa, driving trucks and looking after the distribution of stores. He was in Tobruk when it was captured in 1942 and spent the rest of the war in prison camps in Italy and later the German camp near Leipzig. He used his time in the camps as Theatre Manager for the 'Empire Theatre', producing musicals and writing satirical songs - much of which would have been considered 'treasonable' by the Germans and for which he could have been severely punished had the real meaning been discovered. He was also part of a small group of prisoners who made a crystal radio set, which was concealed in the props department of the theatre, which, had it been found, would have led to him facing the firing squad. This radio enabled them to listen to the BBC and find out the 'real news'. When the Germans capitulated. Dad and some of his friends decided to leave the prison camp before the Russians came to take over. They left, just after Cossak horseman rode in, and travelled over land, living off it, even stealing where necessary, until they reached the American lines 3 days later.

He was subsequently repatriated into the arms of his beloved Jessie, of whom, more shortly. Dad returned to teaching at Hetton Lyons Junior School and in 1952 was appointed Headmaster at Waterhouses Junior and Infant School, a position he held until his retirement in 1974. A special highlight of his tenure was the celebration of the centenary of the school in 1963, for which he wrote a play for the students to perform.

Our Mum, Jessie, joined him at Waterhouses, initially as a teacher and later as Deputy Head, at the time an unusual and significant appointment, and when they retired, they did it together, as they did most things in their lives.

The love of Dad's life was Jessie, who he had met at Henry Smith School. Family folklore has it that on their first date they played truant and went to the pictures; however the folklore does not record what film they saw! The courtship continued during their college days, even though they were apart - Mum being a student at Kenton Lodge Teacher's Training College in Jesmond and Dad at York. They saved hard, not only to repay their parents for their college education, but also to plan for their marriage and home. Mum even forgave Dad for splurging some of those savings on his first car! They were married in Wingate on Christmas Eve 1939. All through the war Mum kept their home (and his car) going, even though for a long period of time she had no knowledge of his well being or whereabouts. Their wartime correspondence, which we have in the family archives, is testimony to their loyalty and enduring love for each other.

In 1946 they bought their first home in East Herrington where Geoff was born in 1946, shortly followed by me in 1947. Their family was complete. In 1962 they built

'Overhoime' at Kaysbum, their home for the next 26 years - they just loved it and spent many happy years there, building and cherishing the garden. They had a brief flirtation with living in Australia, where both of us had settled, between 1988 and 1992, but spiritually. Dad had never left England and they returned 'home' to live at Brancepeth. They were active members of the congregation here at St Brandon's and Mum's funeral service was held here just three weeks before the Church was devastated by fire 1998. While living at Brancepeth, Dad suffered his first stroke in 1995 and when his greatest support and *raison d'etre*. Mum, died, his health gradually declined and he spent the last 6 years of his life at Ashwood Park Residential Home.

Dad was a practical man and he built the first caravan for the family in the back garden at East Herrington. Caravanning became a way of life, first of all at Saltburn and later throughout the UK and Europe. The family joined the Caravan Club and would go to local rallies. National rallies and even an international rally at Stuttgart. Every summer school holidays we would take off to explore new places and later, revisit old favourites. Mum would pack the van with food and clothing; Dad would have studied maps and places of interest and, as soon as school finished, we were off, returning just in time for school reopening. The first 'expedition' to Europe was in 1956 and that was pioneering stuff in those days.

Dad's other 'love affair' was with the motor car, gradually increasing the size as the family and caravanning requirements demanded and the quality as affluence permitted. His last car, his beloved Mercedes, accompanied them to Australia and came back again! It became a family joke that the car had done more miles on water than it had on land! His indignation was unparalleled when he could no longer drive because of failing eyesight.

In retirement Dad and Mum travelled extensively: all over Europe, America and they had many visits to Australia, often annually to escape the British winter. They shared many common interests: walking, especially in the Lakes District; sequence dancing, often as many as five times a week and the garden - Dad growing his roses especially for his adored Jessie. They were a self contained couple, loving each other absolutely.

Dad also had an enduring love of English History and the English language - he loved the classics and poetry, much of which he could recite from memory with expert articulation. Nothing would raise his ire more than the abuse of the English language, and he would rant and rail against the abusers, particularly if, in his opinion, they should know better. He was well read, well travelled and well informed. He devoured the daily papers and had an opinion, mostly considered and usually substantiated, on a wide range of issues. He loved music, sang with the Durham Light Opera Society, enjoyed Gilbert and Sullivan, choral works and music of 'his' heyday -the 30's and 40's.

The only sport he was really interested in was tennis. He had an above average skill level and was on the college team. Even at close to 80 years of age he could challenge me to 3 sets and be more than competitive.

His favourite and frequent maxim to Geoff and me was 'get your priorities right'. He was a man of principle and maintained a high moral stance throughout his life. Dad saw his life as a learning experience. Every place he visited was a source of new knowledge and more history; every person he met was a fund of information for him to mine. His legacy to Geoff and me is an outstanding education, a thirst for new knowledge and inquiring minds. His legacy to others: his staff, his students, family

and friends is that of a dedicated professional educator, a passionate, inspiring teacher and a loyal and faithful friend.

His life has enriched us all