

Professor Peter Quilliam OBE (The Prof) 1915 - 2003

Paglesham and Sailing

Peter saw a holiday cottage (No 2 Barn Row) advertised for rent at Paglesham in the early 60's so, as a family, we spent our holidays in the village and the surrounding countryside. After having watched the sailing activities down at the water, Peter decided to resuscitate the old racing sailing dinghy in storage in London (Tinker) that he had bought after the war. (Tinker is now in the possession of Simon Joel and hopefully sailing again this year).

After a lot of varnishing, we towed her down to Paglesham and, on the advice of the Boatyard - still owned by Frank Shuttlewood in those days, put her in the rill where Irma is now, She promptly sank as she had dried out so much. A few days later she had taken up and we were able to go sailing. Apart from Peter, this was the family's first sailing experience.

Although Tinker is only 12 foot long, all 4 of the family proceeded to start sailing on the Roach and occasionally venturing out into the Crouch. The yard would keep a careful eye on us to ensure we were not being too stupid and would supply useful advice and support (I think they thought we were more than a little mad!). We explored the creeks and rills on the Roach, slowly learning about sailing by the best method, in a small, very tender, sailing dingy, making and learning from our mistakes as we went along and eventually taking part in some of the Paglesham races.

After a few years, Peter realised that a 12 foot boat for a growing family was too small so he started to look around for a larger boat and purchased Gypsy from Heybridge Basin. Gypsy was a 22 foot, clinker built, centre board Estuary 3 tonner, (similar to a Dauntless but with less beam and freeboard)

Peter very wisely decided, that, as this was a new boat to him and much larger than anything the family was used to, to ask Fred Elliot (Anthony's father and then foreman of Shuttlewoods) to come along as skipper on the first voyage. So on a cold Whitsun Bank Holiday, with Fred in charge, we proudly set off down the Roach in our first cabin boat. Then the fun began !!!

The wind started to increase and among other faults, we discovered that the roller reefing on the mainsail would not work so we turned round and headed back to Paglesham with a vigorous breeze behind us. As we were passing Quay Reach, we gybed and then discovered that the boom was too long and if it lifted during a gybe, it did not clear the backstay, Result - capsized on our first outing.

Luckily we were all wearing life jackets and towing a dingy, so, as the boat settled on its side, the family slipped into the water (I trod on Baa's head and she disappeared below the surface - she was not amused) and Fred calmly stepped into the dingy - keeping 100% dry, (why did we not think of this) .

We all hung onto the side of the dingy whilst Fred choose a suitable boat to rescue us (comments along the lines of - This one was going too fast therefore they did not know what they are doing and that one was too small). Fred eventually settled on a very nice Camper & Nicholson 30 footer who took us on board, supplied us with dry cloths and helped recover Gypsy. She was towed back to the Yard and promptly underwent a number of modifications.

We cruised up and down the East Coast in Gypsy for the next couple of year, taking advantage of her 11 inch draft - leaving the Crouch for the first time and learning about navigation and cruising. Being masochists we also removed all her paint and varnished the hull. This now left us with 2 rowing dinghies, Tinker and Gypsy to varnish every season.

However after the capsized episode we never really had full confidence in her afterwards so in 1968, Peter

sold Gypsy and bought an all varnished Hungarian Folkboat which we named William Blyth after "Hard Apple" Blyth, the Church End church warden and local smuggler.

In the next 10 years we were able to spend a part of the summer taking part in the occasional Paglesham race, cruising the East Coast and occasionally frightening ourselves by being out in weather we had not encountered before. Being a Folkboat, the boat got us home in spite of ourselves. During this period, we cruised occasionally with Jack Coote - a great friend of Peter's and as a result of Jack's photography skills, ended up on the front cover of Yachting Monthly, and in/on more than 1 edition of East Coast Rivers.

William Blyth continued to cruise and race under the command of various members of the family until after nearly after 30 years in the family, Peter sold William Blyth in 1997. He continued to sail with me on Triumphant and with my sister on Corrente.

Peters Burnham based activities

Peter was the commodore of the United Hospitals Sailing Club for 27 years. He believed in the necessity of providing hard working medical students with the opportunity to relax sailing and he also thoroughly enjoyed taking part in many of the festivities at Burham week

Peter was also a member of the Crouch Harbour Authority and Crouch Area Yachting Federation for many years and served as chairman of both. Drawing on his experience in other fields, he worked hard at achieving the formation of the Harbour Authority and ensuring that it's effectiveness and it's profile were communicated to the users of the Rivers Crouch and Roach. At CAYF he represented the sailing community's interests within the Crouch area and ensured that their voice and opinions were heard and taken into account on the CHA

Peter's Professional life

Peter was educated at University College School and won a scholarship to study medicine at the age of sixteen. He qualified in 1941 with honours and distinction in forensic medicine and hygiene and then became involved with government research.

In 1943 he volunteered for the RAFVR, where he served of both Coastal and Fighter command. He combined his medical duties with research into the problems experienced by aircrews on long-range sorties, and was involved in the development of anti-G force suits, sunglasses, aircraft early ejection seats and jungle escape packs. During the war he also developed an interest in sailing and bought Tinker from a fellow RAF fellow officer.

After the War he returned to the academic world as a lecturer at Kings College, and married Melita, who tragically died in a road accident in 1957. In 1949, he obtained a travelling fellowship to the John Hopkins Hospital Medical School in Baltimore USA. It was here that his interest in electro-pharmacological techniques started which would set the direction for his future research work both at King's and then Barts.

In 1956 he was invited to head the new Department of Pharmacology at Barts as a senior lecturer, and was appointed Professor in 1962. There, he designed and equipped the department and pioneered the use of CCTV & Video recording as a visual aid in teaching. His chosen research field of electro-pharmacology attracted many post graduate research students, of which 24 subsequently became Professors, others gained DScs and some even achieved F.R.S. - a tribute to his mentoring, teaching and guidance skills,

Peter's public service

In addition to his academic career and life, Peter gave a large amount of his time to public service until very recently. Peter focused his efforts into being innovative, identifying changes that were needed, shaping the solutions and then taking an active, hands on, role in delivering the solutions and in motivating the people amongst whom he worked.

Peter was a member and chairman of London University Convocation and the BMA Board of Science. He co-authored many influential BMA reports, including reports on the medical effects of nuclear war, boxing, and alternative therapy. Despite not being an optician, Peter also served as deputy chairman to the General Optical Council and as chairman of 2 of its key committees and went on to be its longest serving member (1975-1988).

In 1983, the BMA expressed great concern that the care of the dying in the UK was inadequate and that there was no authoritative national voice to speak on behalf of the hospice movement. Peter became a Co-Founder and a Co-Chairman of the charity "Help The Hospices" and assisted in bringing together the necessary fund raising skills, the key members of the Hospice movement and the medical profession to address these issues.

The above covers Peter's public achievements for which he was awarded the OBE; he was also a very kind, humorous and private man. One of his special skills was to be able to communicate with and motivate anyone regardless of age, background and topic.

His second wife Barbara always supported him and he showed great interest and pride in the activities and achievements of his children, and of his 3 grandchildren.