

THE A. G.M. & 119th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL, AYNHO ON WEDNESDAY 27th November 2019

Present:- Peter Cole – Secretary & Treasurer, also Acting Chairman & Speaker

Keith has sent apologies as he has had an operation, and Ted is unable to attend as his wife is unwell.

Aynho History Society Annual General Meeting 2019

So far as the A G M is concerned Peter said the Committee originally was Ted Sutton, Keith McClellan, Doug Ward and Himself. Jill Wightman was co-opted later. Peter said that he wanted to thank them for their support during the year, mostly Keith who had arranged speakers for 2019 & 2020.

He further suggested that the Committee should be re-elected en bloc. This was agreed.

As Treasurer he said that there should be no need to increase subscriptions this year.

He had spoken to Carol that afternoon, and she was of the opinion that Keith would not be able to give a talk in January. Knowing the difficulty of getting speakers in January, he had been thinking of this for several days. He had given a talk about the history of canals soon after the Society had been formed. In those days Rosa and he had only covered a part of the country, so he could easily include photos of places since then, and of course of his Barrow Boat as well. So unless anyone present had a talk they would like to present, that is what he could do. This was agreed.

20 Things you don't know about Peter Cole

Peter said that he was born in Worthing in 1939. He showed a 1946 School photo, which included him & the girl who later became his wife. A photo when he was 12 showed him and his father on a Norfolk Broads holiday, which led to his love of boating. He went to a Sunday school and youth club. His mother was captain of a Church tennis and badminton club. He joined when he was old enough & became captain on her retirement. Age 17 playing on a hard court when the grass ones were being repaired, he caught his foot in a loose net loop & fell on his right elbow. The hospital was very close by, and his arm was put in plaster. When removed he had to go daily to bathe the elbow in hot wax. He can only bend it a few degrees, but it didn't stop him playing tennis and badminton. The accident was useful. Called up for National Service he couldn't salute so was unfit for the Army! He got good O and A levels, but being a very reserved only child he wasn't good enough for a University interview, so he took a Civil Service exam and got a job as Executive Officer in the Ministry of Pensions & National Insurance in Victoria. This meant travelling by train daily. As compulsory National Insurance had only come in ten years before, all the staff were over 30 and some resented an 18 year old as a supervisor. He gradually won most of them over. With his 3rd month's salary he bought a reel-to-reel tape recorder, with the speaker in a detachable lid. Much later on he bought a stereo cassette recorder, and even later one of the very first slim-line MP3 players.

Age 19 cousin Mike and he cycled to Newhaven, got a boat to Dieppe, and then to Rouen and Fontainebleau, using pre-booked French youth hostels. The next day they went to Laroche-Migennes, with a main-line railway station. They took a train to Marsailles, and cycled along the coast, having a swim wherever possible in pre-Brigitte Bardot days before it became popular with British tourists. When near Cannes they had a swim there, took a train to Nice, had another swim and then a train to Monaco and Monte Carlo, looking at the outside of Prince Ranier's Palace, and the Casino. Then it was the journey home, with a day in Paris, to visit the Eifel Tower, Notre Dame and the Arc de Triomphe.

After 3 years David and Mervyn from the Youth Club both started working in London and after 6 weeks they all rented a flat in Earls Court. An Inspector got a posting to an office near his home, so Peter asked the manager if he could become an Inspector. After training he started in Pimlico, then the slum part of Westminster. On his 3rd day alone he visited a house where the front door had a large frosted glass panel. An apparition appeared in a tiny black bikini. By the time she reached the door she had put on a fur coat. Peter thought "Cor! I'm really going to enjoy this job." In 7 years as an inspector nothing like that ever happened again! Most cases were collecting money from self-employed people, but there were exceptions: A woman phoned for help. He found her rooms, surrounded by cats, with a terrible stench. She pointed out a chair to him, but he politely declined, put

his brief case between his legs and did the whole interview standing up. She had at least 40 cats. She said she kept taking in strays, but they were getting too expensive to feed, so he gave her the address of the National Assistance Board. HQ referred a case of a 90-year-old man who had married. They separated and he married again and she also left him. She was nearing 60, and wanted to claim a pension on his insurance, but he had never divorced his first wife, so it appeared that he had been bigamously married. He was just like Buster Merryfield In Only Fools & Horses: "Ar, well Guv, it were like this. Me first wife woz a cafolik, but we wasn't married in church or nuffink, so I fort it didn't cahnt." He didn't have any money to pay for contributions, so it went to HQ, but we heard the wife had died, so no pension was needed. Peter went from Pimlico to the rich area of Belgravia and Sloane Square. He saw one of the Moody Blues, and a disk jockey from one of the pirate radio ships on home leave. The former Nepalese ambassador to England had retired and bought a house in Belgravia, and wanted to pay contributions. He had his wife, 2 male kitchen priests (cooks) & four concubines. There was a book in the Office listing all occupations, but no mention of concubines. Peter phoned HQ & was sent a list of questions. All were answered and HQ decided contributions were due for all, which were paid.

Next he had a real experience. An employee of a Knightsbridge gaming club had said that his employer had not sent in his card, so Peter visited one evening. The employee told him all the croupiers were self-employed, and he was the barman and sole employee. There were 3 directors, but they never turned up before 11pm. This presented Peter with a problem, as he had done many evening visits, but none after 7.30pm. He took names and addresses of the directors and established that none of them had sent in their own cards either. He sent a formal Notice to Produce their own and their employees' cards on a date at 11 pm. This clearly said that failure to attend and produce all the cards was an offence and would incur a fine of up to £50 plus costs. The day arrived, and he said to Rosa (they had only been married for 6 months and were living in an upstairs flat in Fulham) "I am doing this late visit. If it all goes well I should be home by 1am. Please set the alarm clock for 1.30am, and if I am not back by then, go to the phone just opposite, and tell the police where I am and ask them to check up that I am all right. He did the visit. The Club was Esmeralda's Barn Ltd, and perhaps luckily for him neither Ronnie Kray, Reggie Kray nor their older brother Charlie Kray turned up. He sent them each another letter by registered post enclosing cards for stamping from the week of his visit, plus a list of the contributions due, again threatening them with criminal prosecutions if the contributions were not paid within a fortnight. The case was prepared for criminal proceedings, However a Police Liaison Officer told HQ that they were expecting the twins to commit serious offences for which they would put them away for the rest of their lives, which is what happened.

Peter is one of the few people who sent threatening letters to the Kray twins & has lived to tell the tale.

Rosa & Peter had re-met when David's fiancée, Gill, Rosa's best friend at the Girls High School said Rosa had worked at a photographer's in Petworth, but he only paid her a pittance, so she left and took a year's course in colour photography, which was just starting in 1959/60. She got a diploma, so she wrote to an advertising Agency in Baker St, London who took her on to do still photos. Gill said "She doesn't know a tube from a tram, you've been working in London for years, will you show her round?" He did, they got on well and got engaged. David & Gill got married, and Derek, who worked with Mervyn joined the flat. Mervyn was engaged to Dianne, they married in June. So Peter went to a bedsit for 3 months till their wedding in September. They had a honeymoon in Jersey.

Rosa & Peter were determined not to bring up children in London, so in December 1964 they bought a semi-detached house in Southwater just 3 miles south of Horsham. Within days of moving in they were visited by neighbours and seeing his tape recorder said that the Drama Group was looking for someone to play sound effects for a play. He did this several times, and someone had to say a line off stage. He did it in a funny voice, so he was in the next play. He did over 12, playing the lead in some.

Janet & Tony were born in 1965 & 1969. They moved house in 1977. Janet became a Queen's Guide & went to London University's horticultural outpost at Ashford to study plant sciences. In her 1st year they were given a very powerful new microscope, and she became an expert on it. She met Paul Lightbody there, and got engaged. The Wedding was on one of the hottest days ever. Janet had done so much for the wedding that Peter wanted to reward her. He booked them on a Concorde Experience flight. It was very expensive, but a fantastic day. He drove to Heathrow. They were plied with champagne even before the flight. The plane took off and Tony, with Janet in the viewing area,

took a photo of it just in flight. It took off almost straight up. The first remarkable feature was the tiny size of the interior. There were only two seats on either side of the central aisle. The windows, all triple glazed, were also very small. After a sumptuous meal as they went along high above the M4 (you could see Portland Bill sticking out, but clouds made photos difficult). Clear of the west coast the plane accelerated to Mach 2 (A screen in the front of the aisle gave the speed) then all were allowed to visit the cockpit, 4 at a time to look at the controls, step forward to see down to the sea and the odd ship. Coming back the cloud thickened, preventing any views at all. Janet drove them home.

After several years using the special microscope in different places, on the last one Janet got a PhD in November 1999. When only 12 Peter bought Tony a Sinclair Spectrum computer. The only thing he wanted next Christmas was a book, "Teach yourself the Spectrum Machine Code Language". Soon he could alter any bought game to give himself what was needed to win it. At Collyers School a very good maths teacher brought him out, and he ended up with 9 GCSEs, & 4 A levels. The School only gave 4 cups every year and he won both maths and physics cups that year. At Southampton University he got a good degree in electronic engineering, and worked in Chemsford at Marconi, then moved to Zarlink in Swindon. They got taken over by Intel and he designed computer chips for American computer programmers to use. He lives in a computer world, and went to America 3 times to sort out problems they had. Intel moved into games, so he works at a firm putting computers into machines for work previously done by humans.

Peter moved to the Department's Regional Office, where he prepared cases for his senior to prosecute. He went sick and Peter was invited to do his job after training. After 6 months his senior took early retirement and as he had just passed a promotion board, Peter was given the job. There were 3 other officers and each had an area with South London Courts, mid-country and some on or near the coast. The other 3 had health problems, so Peter prosecuted over 1500 cases in 50 courts and never lost one.

He moved to the Department's office in Worthing for his final years, firstly in charge of inspectors. Then he was asked to change over to existing claims for Supplementary Benefits. (DHSS & the NAB had merged many years ago) It was difficult at first, but the Government soon changed to the much simpler Income Support, and he went on a course for this. Soon after he became the senior Assistant Manager. This meant that whenever the Manager was away on holiday, sick, or boarding for new executive staff, Peter was in charge of 120 staff, and he could do the job, because he had done literally every job in the office.

Staff had tried to computerise the benefits system for years, but computers then were not robust enough to cope with 60 million people. However with the new simplified Income Support it all changed.

Every office was required to provide a Computer Manager. The other 3 in Worthing immediately said "I don't want to know about computers", but Peter said "Yes please." He went to Lytham St. Annes on 5 courses. He had to decide with the Manager where each computer would be situated, and plan for suitable wiring, plugs with no trailing wires to trip anyone up, the number of special desks, chairs, footrests, lighting or blinds needed, etc. Others were for Wordperfect, SuperCalc and Dataease, all of which he had already used at home, but these went into much more detail about the programs uses. The final course was for him personally, as he was to become the Computer Manager for all the West Sussex DHSS offices dealing with security matters. In actual fact the computer system came into Worthing without a hitch, and within 6 months instead of 24 people in his section beavering away at ongoing claims, 12 could do the work. People often talk about problems with Government computers, but this one really did very well. So well that his job was a great deal easier as he no longer had to do long calculations. HQ soon realised that they needed to get rid of a lot of staff of his grade, so a circular went out that anyone who would be over 50 on 29th March 1992 could apply to retire on that date. He discussed this with Rosa, and as they were both worried about his parents not being able to look after themselves properly, he decided to retire at the age of 54, and get a part-time job locally. A fortnight before he was due to retire a notice in the local paper announced a vacancy for a parish clerk in Southwater. Having lived there for 30 years and was known to most on the interviewing panel he got the job.

In 1986 Janet's friend was an only child. Her parents had hired a narrowboat for a holiday, and asked, if Janet would like to go as company for their daughter and to help work the locks etc. She enjoyed it so much she said "Why don't we hire a boat for a week?" Peter chose one in the centre of Birmingham. They went to Wolverhampton, Stourport, down the River Severn to Worcester, and up through the Tardebigge locks & back to Birmingham. They enjoyed it so much that the same boat was hired for the

same week the next year. This time they went north through the centre of Birmingham, to Atherstone, Rugby, Leamington Spa, Warwick, and back to Birmingham. Another good trip so Peter said to Rosa "Wouldn't it be lovely when we retire to buy our own boat and go round the country bit by bit?" "Dream on. It'll never happen" she said But it did. The 1st week of his retirement he visited Shalford, just south of Guilford. There was a long waiting list, but he was put on it. Soon they became increasingly worried about Mum and Dad. She had had 2 falls in the street. She would put on a kettle for a cup of tea, and then forget about it. Dad, almost totally blind, would feel his way around to see what she had done, including trying to check if the cooker was on, and in Rosa's words "It was an accident waiting to happen". They discussed this with Dad, and he suggested that they should go into a home for the blind in Worthing.

They visited boat builder John Pinder & he had a partially completed boat 35 feet long, with the aft end almost completely fitted out, with a bed, where your feet would go over the engine and under the rear deck, bathroom with shower, loo, wash basin and galley, with cooker, water heater and sink. They made him an offer, and the next day sent off a deposit. Remarkably having heard nothing at all for 2½ years the very day they had decided on a boat a letter was on the mat from Shalford to ask if he still wanted a mooring. Rosa said: "This is meant to be!" So a completion date for the 30th September was agreed, and he set about preparations to bring the boat to Guildford. He estimated it would take 10 days. Tony managed to get a week off work to help work the locks, swing bridges, etc. Their dog, Sandie, completed the crew. He took a couple of loads of essential luggage up to the boatyard in advance. The big day arrived. He had arranged a lift with a neighbour with a big Volvo car, who was going up to Derby to visit relatives. Early in the morning they started packing the car. Then they realised just how much gear - bedding, pots and pans, etc. clothing & food is needed to stock up a boat for a ten-day trip for three people and a dog. It was too much to take up to the boat. He finally agreed to make the ultimate sacrifice and left the portable 12-volt TV behind! The car journey was uneventful, but they found that the boat wasn't ready. The name was being painted, and workers were still busy fitting cupboards, bulkheads, etc. They offloaded luggage onto the wharf & there was nothing to do but go for a towpath walk along the Tardebigge flight of 36 locks and bemoan the fact that the weather was sunny, whereas the forecast for the next day was poor. They were allowed on the boat at about 5 pm, and started stowing the gear aboard, and preparing a meal, with work still going on around them. They finished for the day at around 10pm, and the family spent a comfortable night.

They got under way at last, with Mr Pinder arranging to meet them several locks up the Tardebigge flight with the final cupboard. He met them as arranged and they had the official champagne launch ceremony for "Petrosa" and carried on quickly hoping to make up the lost day. Luckily the weather improved. By starting every day as soon as it was light enough to see anything at all, and by carrying on until it was almost pitch black each evening, they made good speed so far as one can on a canal. They passed along the Grand Union Canal and down to Oxford. Towards the end of the last day of their 7-day BWB licence they passed onto the Thames. Rosa enjoyed leading a flotilla of craft near Windsor Castle. On the Sunday they let Tony off at Staines near a station, as he had to be at work the next day. The mooring was reached after 209 miles and 184 locks.

Peter soon had rooms put in the roof and later on Janet brought Rachael, Mark & Rebecca to stay for several weeks in summer holidays. In winter 2004/5 he had "Petrosa" completely repainted with Aynho on the side. He had planned to visit Nottingham, then go up the River Trent to York and Ripon. Sadly Rosa had a scan which showed she had breast cancer and it became clear that she would not enjoy boating again. He went to the Beale Park Boat show and looked at all sorts of small boats. He chose a rowing dinghy that had a wheel on it and oars that enabled it to be pushed along. He took a photo of Rosa, not realising that it would be the last one. A few weeks later she died very suddenly. He sold Petrosa reluctantly, and got a good price as she was in perfect condition. She had covered 5,408 miles, gone through 3,765 locks and had been used on 505 days.

Peter had a great time with his Barrow Boat. Fitted out with a small electric motor, a good battery, a boat bag with all necessities and lunch and a small fishing rod, he used it for 14 years, doing 487 day trips totalling 1,603 miles, going through 308 small locks. He enjoyed going up & down several times on at least 7 Banbury Canal Days. In 2009 the theme Ghosts & Ghouls and he won a prize as Best Ghost. Musically his hero is Chris Barber, his other hobby is fishing. Best carp was 22½ lbs at Nell Bridge. Final surprise: PETERCOLE DRIVE - street seen in Bristol in 1978.

Forthcoming Meetings

December – No meeting

Wednesday 29th January 2020 – Illustrated Talk on Canals, especially the Oxford by Peter Cole