

## Philip Lennard Stone- Obituary.

The year was 1969. The year of the moon landings, Woodstock and the Beatles release of Abbey Road. In a small village in East Sussex in the January of that momentous year Philip Stone, his wife Jo and their two children Kate and Richard, were making a new start by moving into the Victorian schoolhouse of Brede County Primary School where Philip had just been appointed as Headmaster.

For Phil (as he was usually called) this was in fact a return to the beautiful area of Sussex where he had had spent his teenage years and where his parents Frank and Val still lived. Phil had been born in Gorseinon near Swansea on the 18th May 1934 and the family had lived there throughout the war. At the end of the war, his mother Val got a teaching post at the primary school in Rye. The family moved first to Peasmarsh and then into Rye. Phil and his brother Peter were sent to the Rye Grammar School to receive the remainder of their education. For Phil however, although bright and with his lifelong love of reading already established, scholarly pursuits were eclipsed by two far more exciting pastimes; acting and cricket. Somewhere, in an old album there is a photograph of Phil as an extraordinarily impudent Puck which was a memorable beginning to his love of the theatre and performing. Cricket was already the favoured sport (he could turn his hand to any game involving a ball!) and he added a twist to being able to deliver a mean medium paced ball by batting left handed. A skill taught to him by a resourceful uncle in Wales.

After leaving school, Phil's intention was to follow his parents into teaching. However he was just old enough to be required to do National Service. Rather than this being an onerous duty, Phil loved his two years in the RAF and although his colour blindness prevented him from flying planes, he did pilot gliders and seemed to spend the rest of his time playing cricket, football,( there is even a photograph of a rugby match) and celebrating the results.

After the RAF, Phil went to Goldsmith's College in London to begin his teacher training. While he was there, he met a young student from Altrincham and in spite of warnings from all her friends they began courting. Phil and Jo married in 1960 having both qualified as teachers the previous year. Unfortunately, regular employment was difficult to come by in the early 60s and there was a period of short term, temporary situations for both Phil and Jo and in the winter of 1962/63, the year of the Great Snow, they were living in Reading, Berks. Phil had taken on seasonal work as a conductor on the Reading Corporation trolley buses. At the end of his first shift he struck up a conversation with another conductor, a like-minded young man who was a student in his final year at Reading University. They went to a local pub for a drink and the young man introduced Phil and later Jo to his friends. This group of young people were to remain life-long friends, sharing visits, family holidays and a yearly trip to the test match at the Oval, which was the highlight of their summers for over 40 years.

One of these friends became a lecturer at Brunel University. During the 1970s after an edifying evening in the King's Head at Udimore, it became tradition for this friend to organise a team from the university Biochemistry Department to come down and play a cricket match against what became affectionately known as the "Merricks XI". Phil would recruit and captain 12 men from the great and good of the local village teams on behalf of Richard Merricks and a match was held once a year. The first match was at Bodiam and subsequent fixtures were held at Udimore. Invariably, the Merricks XI won, but no-one cared about that!

In 1965, Phil was appointed as Head of English at a secondary school called Wren's Nest in Dudley in the West Midlands. It was an opportunity for Phil to inspire students with his love of literature and his knowledge of the English language. He even supported a group of enthusiastic sixth formers who with his help, set up their own school radio station. Drama played a huge part in his life at this point too as many members of the school staff were also involved with the Dudley Little Theatre and Phil took part in many productions. Phil was always grateful to a very special couple who helped him to make the most of this challenging school. Peter Jones was the Head of Art and his wife Pat was a primary School head teacher and they became very close family friends, sharing holidays over many years.

Perhaps it was Pat who inspired Phil to apply for the post of headmaster at Brede when it became vacant in the winter of 1968/69. In any case, Phil and his family came to a rural haven after the smoky atmosphere of the Black Country and for the next 20 years he taught and inspired thousands of school children and led a successful school. He threw himself with energy into local life becoming Chairman of the Parish Council and of course playing for both Brede and Udimore Cricket Clubs. The rhythm of the school terms kept pace with the seasons; cricket in the summer and a production at the Stables Theatre in Hastings over the winter. This was only interrupted when Phil became part of a self-build project in 1975 and for the next two years, carried bricks instead of taking wickets and learning lines.

During his time at Brede, Phil studied successfully for a BEd at Brighton University during a sabbatical year from 1973 and also completed post graduate studies in the 1990s. In 1988 he retired from Brede and he and Jo moved to Udimore early in 1989, exactly 20 years after they had first come to Brede. Sadly, what should have been the start of a long and happy retirement was devastated when Jo died suddenly and tragically in April of that year. Although on the surface, life seemed to carry on for Phil with continuing involvement in cricket, he became chairman of the Winchelsea Cricket Club, the theatre and the Masonic Lodge, it was not as it was. However there were still highlights. He loved having visits from Kate's two daughters and he got his pilot's licence after taking a course in flying light aircraft at Lydd, fulfilling a dream he had first during his National Service.

In 2011, Phil's increasing ill-health and frailty necessitated a move to Canterbury so that he could be nearer Kate and her family. In April this year during a hospital admission following a collapse at home he contracted Covid 19 and his health worsened considerably. Fortunately, he was transferred to the Pilgrim's Hospice at Canterbury where he spent his last few days and he died peacefully on 11th May, aged 85.

Phil is buried with Jo in Udimore Churchyard, just beyond the boundary of the cricket field. If you listen very hard you might hear the swish and thud of a medium paced ball finding the bat and a faint cry of "How was he?!" And the answer? At Journey's end, at Peace.

*By Phil's daughter, Kate.*