

TED DYER – CELEBRATION OF HIS LIFE Thurs 24th March 2016

Ted was never one to talk too much about his personal life or history: I've been going to a number of these funerals in recent years and it's a revelation to learn just how much more there is to someone than what we think we know about them. I'm going to talk about Ted and will touch on the role he's played in our community.

Around 35 years ago I was a Cllr on Northchurch Parish Council – the village at the Tring end of Berkhamsted. In those days residents didn't have the right to speak at council meetings, but we had a regular who patiently waited until the end of the meeting when he made his pithy observations on what had been discussed. I realised then that all councils would benefit from someone like Bert Hosier.

When I became a Town Councillor little did I realise that Ted was going to be our own Bert – the difference being that we now had 'public participation' and at most meetings Ted would have his say. Often with good humour, generally droll and sometimes he'd be quite serious. Once he got stuck into an issue or a problem he could be stubbornly tenacious until it was resolved.

I was casting my mind back to when I first came into contact with this side of Ted's character – around 16 years ago – and I believe it was when plans were being laid to demolish the old Coopers buildings to build what are now the apartments between Manor St and Ravens Lane. At first, like many others, I was in favour of retaining the buildings, but after reading the detailed environmental study which detailed the extent of arsenic contamination, I voted for demolition. Ted left me in no doubt that he was quite cross with me.

During the site clearance, Ted sat on the Committee that was to oversee the contractors who were demolishing the structure and remove tons of soil to eliminate the arsenic contamination within the site. In between meetings it would be Ted who kept a close eye on the site to see that corners weren't being cut. A method statement was there to be followed and we weren't going to be short changed. That was an example of where his tenacity came to the fore.

Arising out of this period was his great interest to retain as much as possible of the old part of the Town – the Conservation Area. He played a key role in setting up and contributing to the local conservation body CARAB – which kept Councillors on their toes when unsympathetic planning applications came up. A pretty thankless task when our Boro planners seem to have a different agenda.

Then there was his Traction Engine – which took a major role in the Festival of Lights event – in early December when the Xmas lights in the High St would be switched on. Even on the wettest evenings I'm not sure who got greater enjoyment – the children climbing over the Engine or Ted showing off his pride and joy. These days it's only a normal Fire Engine that the children climb into.

I wouldn't do justice to Ted if I didn't mention his great interest in our Allotments – a stronger defender you'd be hard pushed to find. He'd be willing to take on any Councillor who had wrong-headed ideas on how allotments should be run, or what should happen if the rents led to any surplus. Ted and us councillors had some interesting discussions when

Railtrack agreed to pay a not insubstantial rent for access off our allotments – but at least Railtrack left our allotmenters with an on-site parking area that has hard standing.

The allotments have some very upmarket neighbours, one of whom had extended their property to such an extent that rear access could only happen via our Allotment. I recall Ted being pretty incensed when the resident attempted to abuse a right of way adjacent to their rear garden: he and the Sunnyside allotmenters pretty well insisted that the Council should get stuck in to see them off. Which after some fairly tough legal letters we did: a good outcome - they sold up and moved away.

Ted made a huge impact on the allotment community – from mowing the paths, building sheds and compost bins. He made sure leaking pipes got repaired, and played a major part in getting the Loo built - not a mere earth closet, but a proper plumbed in WC connected to the mains. There can't be many allotments with such a good on site loo!

He took care to invite Cllrs to the regular Allotment opens days – and I hope the tradition will continue as the cakes, tea or mulled wine at Christmas is a great way of bringing the wider community together.

Ted was also a member of the Crime Prevention Panel for a number of years.

Over the years Ted has been a regular feature at our council meetings – not just the main council but also the sub committee meetings – where he could be relied upon for a comment on something that he thought the Councillors should be considering or following up – he was making sure things didn't fall through the cracks. He had become our Bert Hosier, [and then some] with an attendance record better than most councillors.

When Ted was having trouble with his knees I took to giving him a lift home as it was on my way. This developed into my collecting him as well. We got to a stage where we had a game – on who'd make the Monday evening call first – and our arrangement continued even after his knees had been replaced.

We'd chat on the journey and Ted would sometimes tell me what he was intending to say during Public Participation or on a hot topic. Sometimes he'd give me a strong hint on a topic that he'd like me to pick up on if he'd not said it. In another place that might be 'lobbying' – but all in a good cause.

I never ceased to be amazed that Ted was regularly travelling all over the country meeting his old railway buddies – and says something for the comradeship that working for British Rail brought to its staff. They seemed to be Ted's wider tribe or even family - and I'm sure he would have been amazed to have many colleagues at this celebration.

There is some unfinished business that I know Ted would like us to sort out – No 11 Bank Mill where the developer has built 2 semi that are not to plan – it is on the route to the allotments so you can imagine what passing this on his daily visit to the allotments did to his determination to get this put right.

So there it is – Monday evenings at the Council will not be the same without Ted's humour and comments to keep us on our toes.

Garrick Stevens