

TIMBER WOOD – Sue Ellsmore [spoken at Timber's funeral : July 2002]

An article from the Thanet Times, dated 15 / 03 / 60, starts thus:

'Anthony Lionel Wood, of Minnis Bay, Birchington, producer of the All Saints Guild of Players' successful pantomimes for the last two years, was rather embarrassed when I asked him his name. "Call me 'Timber'; no-one will recognise me otherwise," he said.'

So began a lifetime's issue about names: 'Tony' to his family, 'Timber' to his friends, 'Tim' to his wife Josephine, who gets a mention in the same article, and to his five month old baby daughter Susan, also mentioned – 'Dad'. Going through Dad's things to find his birth certificate started a voyage of discovery. He was a faithful archiver – some would say, hoarder – and I was reminded of so many things he had been involved with. I can only give a brief mention of them now.

Born in 1929, the youngest of eight children, (seven still living), Tony spent his childhood in Garlinge and at the age of 13 joined the first of many organisations he would be involved with – the 1st Westgate **Scouts**. Not only did he play the drums in the **Scout Band**, he was also drummer in the '**Woodpecker Sextet**'. In 1951 he took over as **Cub Leader** at Birchington, and then as **Scout Leader** six years later.

In 1946, Timber joined the **All Saints Guild of Players**, producing his first pantomime for the Guild in 1958. This was followed by many more pantomime productions, plays for the Kent Festival, and Holiday Capers, put on to entertain visitors to Margate. He was vice-chairman of the Kent Drama Association for a time and in 1991 was presented with the '**Dover Award**' for his services to drama.

For several years, Timber was the chairman of the **Thanet Arts Council**, during which time he organised the Thanet Arts Festival, a three-day event at the Winter Gardens. He also oversaw the entertainment for the visit of the late Queen Mother when she came to Thanet to celebrate Margate's 250th anniversary.

In Birchington he was one of the main organisers of **Quexpo**, a three-day steam rally event, held over the August Bank Holiday for sixteen years (1970-1985) the proceeds from which helped to raise money to build the Village Centre. He was also involved with Birchington **Carnival Association** and **Birchington Week**. As Jim Hunt, one of the players for **Minnis Bay Football Club** – another of Dad's involvements – wrote in his card, Timber was 'Mr Birchington'.

I think it would be fair to say that it was the work with the Guild of Players that gave him the most enjoyment, allowing him to utilise his love and knowledge of the theatre with successive generations of members. He was the Guild's chairman for thirty-two years, and was very proud to have been made a **Life President** in 2000.

In 2001, he was awarded a certificate of merit, to mark the **United Nations' 'Year of Volunteers'** for outstanding service to the community. When I lived at 95 Alpha Road, it was rare to find Dad in of an evening, and it is my observation that this is the image of Tony / Timber we all remember – out and about, always involved in something. It is therefore not surprising that people found it hard to come to terms with what happened to Dad in the last months of his life.

Just a few weeks ago, when Dad was re-admitted to hospital, my cousin Larry (who, with cousin Les stood on the terraces with Dad at **Margate Football Club** on a regular basis) wrote to me pinpointing Dad's – at first – slow decline from when Jo/Mum died in July 1999. I am sure Larry was not alone in noticing this. Jo and Tim married in 1956 and during the 43 years together, a bond had formed, which, when it was suddenly broken, left him unable to cope without her.

Bereavement, one of the most stressful life changes, was coupled with another, that of retirement, albeit at the age of 70. Having left school at 14, Dad had worked for over 50 years – for the **Montgomery Farm**, then running a **greengrocer shop** in Birchington Square, moving to a brief career in **double-glazing**, before enjoying fourteen happy years at **Piper's**. He came from an era when early retirement was not on anyone's personal agenda. He subsequently moved to Minnis Bay, where he became well known in the community.

Right to the end of his life, Dad kept those around him on their toes. I think it is fair to say that none of the medical staff involved with him came up with a satisfactory physiological reason as to what the trigger was that accelerated his decline. Breaking his hip in a fall in mid-April and his subsequent immobility led to further complications and eventually his body had had enough.

I realise it is a bad idea to single out people for thanks on any occasion – and particularly one like today – but I am sure no-one will object when I offer, on behalf of Dad, myself and my extended family, my sincere and heartfelt thanks to Wendy and Eileen for all they have done for Timber / Tony / Dad, and in particular for caring for him whilst he was in hospital. I have valued their love and support far more the words 'thank you' can convey. I also want to thank Brian for being there for me through two bereavements within the last three years.

So much in a lifetime warrants much more time than we have available now, to celebrate Tony's / Timber's / Dad's life, which is why it is hoped to hold a civic service in September, which will provide another opportunity to remember events I have only had time to gloss over now. Tony / Timber / Dad will be respected, loved and much missed by all those who came into contact with him – the man people called '**Mr Birchington**'.

Susan Ellsmore: July 2002