

## TIMBER WOOD – SPORTS & SCOUTING

Larry Smith (Timber's nephew) spoke of his childhood and also his most recent memories of his Uncle, both in Scouting and Sport, two areas of Timber's world that were of paramount importance to him all his adult life.

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### SPORTS :

Last season, my Uncle Tony – 'Timber', as most of you knew him – and I were watching Margate play football. It must have been one of those not-too-entertaining 0-0 home draws that Margate was prone to for a while, because we were talking about other things, as we often did. It was a time when Tony was beginning to be unwell. He was going through the traumas of moving from Alpha Road with all its memories, still trying to sort out the effects of his late wife Jo, and although he was getting help from some truly great friends, he was finding it all a bit daunting and complicated. He was feeling a bit low and he said, "You know my problem is that I never really had a proper education." What he meant by that of course was that he grew up during the war years and, because of that and problems with illness as a child, he was never able to attend school regularly and he often thought he had perhaps missed out.

I am sure you agree, this evening confirms that what he sometimes worried was a lack of formal education did not prevent him from having a lifetime of quite outstanding achievement.

We grew up in a house next door to Tony in Garlinge and, although he never forgot his Garlinge roots, it was as a Birchington man that he became world renowned – well, an exaggeration perhaps – but certainly one of the best known personalities in Thanet and Kent. It is perhaps appropriate that it was in this building that he started his life-long association with Birchington, when he became a choirboy here back in the 1940s.

As a young boy, I soon became aware of Timber's great love of sport, by the neat rows of football shirts that would appear on the washing line beside our house. *He* must have realised from an early age that he did not have a particular talent to play games, but his enthusiasm and amazing organising skills, together with the ability he had of involving people, enabled him to leave a legacy for which local football, in particular, should be forever grateful.

It may have been with the encouragement of the Vicar of this church at the time, the Rev. Granville Sharp, who was also a sport lover, that at the age of just 20, Timber, to satisfy his and his friends' love of sport, decided to start a club, which had its base in the, then, Old Church House, just down the pathway. The club was called 'Minnis Bay Sports Club', probably to avoid a clash with the Birchington Football and Cricket Clubs that were already well established.

As he was always to do, Timber did things in the right way, with the early records showing that a proper committee was formed, with Granville Sharp as Chairman and Denys Jeston named as the President. Timber Wood is listed as the Manager.

It is recorded that the first football fixture 'Minnis Bay' played was on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1949, against the Royal School for the Deaf at Margate. A, no doubt very young Johnny Hutchings captained the side to a 1-1 draw. Timber initially entered the team in the Thanet Saturday League, with also a Junior under-18 side playing, significantly, on Sundays.

The Sports Club, meeting every Friday, soon became very popular and it wasn't long before Timber was organising other sporting activities for the club, including Cricket matches, Hockey, against teams like the Old Woodfordians, and even a Netball match, when they were challenged by a top girls' team from the local clothes factory, 'Peter Black's'. I believe this was the most competitive game of them all.

One of the difficulties at the time was financing the club's activities. There were, of course, no grants or sponsorships in those days and money was always tight. To help, the Club would run Whist Drives, which a Mr Bunny Hudson, father of Eileen, would M. C. Timber even started a small Dance Band, with himself on drums, called 'Timber Wood and the Woodpeckers'. He was hoping to earn some cash for the Club (he certainly was a man of many talents), but it was always a struggle to get the kits for the teams to play in. However, by using the contacts he was already beginning to develop and with no little guile, he managed.

One season his marvellous, understanding wife, Jo, bought some material and actually handmade a set of Football shirts, because it was the cheapest option. Unfortunately, by trying to get the warmest, most durable material, she had misjudged the weight they would be when it rained, and it felt as if we were playing in overcoats. On another occasion, when the club was desperate for shirts, Timber somehow persuaded the manager of 'Villet's Outfitters' in Cliftonville to let him have a set of shirts that had been ordered by Cliftonville Hockey Club. Eventually, another outstanding Birchington man, Dave Dallas, kindly allowed the Club to have the old sets of shirts of the much wealthier Birchington Football Club and the problem became more manageable.

In spite of the other sporting activities of the Club, it was always football that dominated Timber's thoughts and finding that his unaffiliated Sunday team was becoming the main strength of the Club, he got together with others playing Sunday football, to try and form a League. With Timber as the main driving force, and in spite of some major opposition at the time, they fought for and finally got official recognition as the Thanet Premier Sunday League, with Timber Wood as its first Chairman. His Minnis Bay Team was to go on and be one of the dominating forces of this very successful league for some twenty years.

During the sixties, probably finding an evening when he wasn't actually doing anything, Timber thought that an indoor five-a-side competition would help the local teams. He was soon in discussion with Mr Iles, the General Manager of the 'Dreamland Complex', about using their indoor skating rink as a venue. The Indoor League ran successfully for several years, giving enjoyment to many young footballers. Timber was also one of the prime movers in establishing the All Kent Sunday Cup competition, in which Thanet teams have had success over the years. Last year, we, with Timber, attended the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Thanet Premier Sunday League. As Derrick Wells, the present chairman of the League said to me at Timber's funeral, "This really does mark the end of an era."

Many of the Sunday League footballers went on to play for Ramsgate and Margate, some becoming professional or semi-professional, and this was an indication of the standards achieved. Timber enforced this connection with Thanet's Senior sides when he was asked by the Club Chairman, Sonny Miles, to join the Margate Football Club Committee, which he duly served with distinction in the years when Margate was one of the most feared non-league sides around. He continued as a supporter of Margate through the bad, as well as the good, years. Les and I always knew where to find him at his favourite spot on the terraces, when Margate was playing at home. It is probably just a coincidence that now he can no longer be there, they have decided to knock down and hopefully rebuild the Hartsdown stadium.

Timber was, of course, a lifelong Arsenal supporter (but then nobody's perfect, I suppose!) I believe one of the reasons for his early devotion to Arsenal, was that his great sporting hero, Denis Compton, played on the wing for them. I still remember, as a small boy, being taken with my brother Punch by our Uncle Tony (Timber) all the way to the Oval to see Compton play cricket in a Test Match. Unfortunately, after queuing for hours in the rain, the game was abandoned and we never did see the great man. But it was typical of Timber that at an expense he could barely afford, he wanted to encourage our interest in the sport.

Apart from some matches in the early days in his newly formed Minnis Bay Sports Club, when he featured as a low-order batsman and, by his own admission, was just making up the number, Timber never really played cricket. But, as always, he wanted to be involved and served the game as a dedicated umpire for Birchington Cricket Club, particularly in the 1950s, when Birchington had one of the strongest teams in Kent. As you would expect, he was a scrupulously fair umpire, showing no bias, as Les and I often found out to our disappointment, when we got our pads in front.

## **SCOUTING:**

A few days after Timber had died, I was talking to the Landlord of my local Pub and mentioned Timber, because I knew that John had played Sunday football and would have known him. I thought that would be our topic of conversation, but he said to me, "You know, he was my first Arkala" and immediately went on to talk about the great times he had as a Cub and Scout. He related how he and others had the job of taking their badges made much more pleasant, by being invited to the garden of Timber's bungalow at Minnis Bay, where his wife Jo would provide sandwiches and pop and the usual daunting task of passing badges became much easier. He said, "You know, Timber had a great influence on my young life." This, from a much travelled, businessman, recalling events of over forty years ago.

And, of course, Timber was an outstanding and committed Scouter for many years. Again, as a boy, I recall being taken to the annual St George's Day parade, to see my Uncle Tony playing the big drum in the 1<sup>st</sup> Westgate Scout Band. Timber went on to lead Cub and Scout troops in Westgate and Birchington and undoubtedly had a very positive influence on many young lives.

It was also as a Scouter that he was to be one of the prime movers in bringing another institution to Thanet. Back in those rather austere early 1950s, Timber and Jo, along with others like Tubby and Jean Spicer, would go to London to see the Ralph Reader Gang Shows and I am sure they believed that the glamour and fun of those shows was something that Thanet could do with. It wasn't long before they had convinced the relevant people that they could do justice to the name and were given permission to stage the show. Following hard work and intense rehearsals, the 1<sup>st</sup> Thanet Gang Show opened to great reviews. I still remember, after having been encouraged by Timber to be part of it, my own feelings and the thrill of 'treading the boards' for the first time at the old Lido theatre, and I know many others had the same experience. Some have gone on to a lifetime's involvement in theatre or music, while others, like myself, are just happy to recall the excitement of briefly 'Riding the Crest of the Wave'. The Thanet Gang Shows are also about to celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Another legacy of a most amazingly influential man, who is much missed.