



Michael Kennett

by Richard Kennett

My father Michael Kennett was a proud Emsworthian. He loved the village (as it was) and town (that it became), and one of his proudest achievements was playing a significant leading role in the creation of our much-loved Emsworth Museum.

Dad grew up in Emsworth in a house in Warblington Road. His grandfather was Jack Kennett, the oyster merchant who is pictured in the oyster industry exhibition at the Museum. He was clearly so proud of his family's heritage that he named our house on Tower Street 'Oysters'. It was built on land that had been a boat yard and stables in the late nineteenth and well into the twentieth century. Dad inherited dozens of moorings on the foreshore, and while he was never into sailing, we spent many hours maintaining the chains and painting the wooden mooring numbers. Several of them became unchained and loose during the 'Great Storm' of October 1987 and washed up outside our house.

Community spiritedness ran through my father in his committed support for all aspects of Emsworth. He was a proud founder member of the Emsworth Maritime & Historical Trust who attended that first meeting back in the summer of 1975 where the ambition had been to preserve Echo II. That instead turned into a plan to develop the Museum, and it was a proud day in summer 1988 when these ambitions turned to reality and the Museum opened. It has gone from strength to strength ever since.

Dad was Vice-Chairman of the Trust for many years before becoming Chairman in 1990. I remember the many annual dinners he would organise with the committee at the Post House Hotel in Langstone (now Langstone Quays) back in the day when it was quite an upscale setting. Dad would spend hours poring over the table placings to ensure that the guests were happily seated. Being the 1980s there was plenty of prawn

cocktail, coq au vin and black forest gâteau on the menu, and it was always a lovely and well-attended occasion.

One of my happiest memories is filming the reopening of the Museum at Easter 1989. Lord Bessborough, the Trust President at that time, attended with his wife and they were, even then, of a lost and much-loved gentler time. The following day I filmed Dad as he toured around Emsworth providing a commentary on the history of the buildings and roads. It is lovely that this film is on the Trust's YouTube channel, and I have been able to show my children their grandfather whom they have never met and share his knowledge of Emsworth.

A further memory I have is of the Trust committee meetings that were held at our house in Tower Street. My mother and I would be banished elsewhere but were always on hand with teas, coffees and plenty of biscuits. There was always plenty of laughter and I imagine that the harbour view was also an attraction for committee members to regularly show up, much as it is now at Trevor Davies's house just along the foreshore.

In his day job Dad was a Police Officer. He worked in Brighton, Scotland Yard, then Special Branch (supporting the likes of Ted Heath and Harold Wilson in the 1970s, and walking the course at Goodwood with Princess Anne). He moved to Chichester Police Station, before ending his career as Inspector at Bognor Regis. Alongside this he found time to be a prolific writer. He had an article published in every monthly edition of the *Hampshire Magazine* from its first

edition to the month after he passed away, as well as producing the What's On column. He would travel across the county with his trusty tape recorder and microphone, interviewing people from across the community about their lives, working or otherwise. He wrote several articles about Emsworth, copies of which are kept at the Museum. I fancy that had he been allowed, he would have written about Emsworth far more regularly.

As well as the *Hampshire Magazine*, he wrote for *The Cricketer*. He was a massive fan of Hampshire County Cricket Club. We spent many happy days at the grounds, including Bournemouth, that he was disappointed had moved into Dorset but where Hampshire still played back then. He also proposed me, with my godfather, for MCC (Marylebone Cricket Club) membership when I was 18, and I only had to wait the small matter of 25 years to achieve this. Whenever I am at Lord's, Dad is always there with me.

I never found out how he got into it, but for many years in the 1980s Dad also wrote a restaurant review column for the *Portsmouth News* titled 'A Matter of Taste'. It was pretty much advertorial and introduced Mum and Dad to cuisines (often curry) that had hitherto been undiscovered. Many was the time that he would extol the virtues of a curry house in the likes of Drayton or similar. When he wrote a similar column for the *Hampshire Magazine*, it was sponsored by Hildon Spring Water, a hint that the restaurants were rather more upmarket!

It was my father who developed my love of writing and community. When he moved into Tower Street in 1982, he was delighted to live in the centre of Emsworth, able to watch the harbour as the sky and tide changed by the hour. Quite simply, Emsworth was the centre of his world and had he not been taken far too soon at the age of 61 I have no doubt that he would have taken his community endeavours even further.

One of my reasons for wanting to represent Emsworth as a borough councillor was that I was sure Dad would have been brilliant in that role. He saw the value of public service, giving back, and making a difference to the community. I am so proud that 50 years on from the founding meeting that Dad and others attended, Emsworth Maritime & Historical Trust continues to flourish. Emsworth Museum is a fitting testament to those people who had the vision and ambition to provide such a valuable resource for (hopefully) generations to come.

Richard, who lives in Emsworth with his family, was the Emsworth Ward Councillor from 2017-2024. He has continued his father's commitment to the Museum.