



Celebrating
the life of
Tim Pearce
1941-2015

Radstock Hotel
10 July 2016



Tim was born on 8th July 1941 in the village of Winterslow, near Salisbury, in his grandmother's home. He was the eldest child of Benjamin Pearce, a master carpenter and later Clerk of Works at Porton Down, and Kathleen [Kay] Holmes, a teacher at a local school.

At the time of his birth, Tim's dad was in the RAF, stationed at Cardington in Bedfordshire and also in Iceland, where he was involved in building an airport. On a visit to Iceland in 2014, Tim and I went on a tour of Reykjavik (in which we were the only participants) and the friendly guide showed us the buildings used by the RAF, no longer in use but still standing. Tim was thrilled that he got to see where his dad had lived.

Tim remembered growing up and running free in the woods around his home village, where he saw many members of the American forces who were camped there prior to their participation in the D-Day landings. He was also pleased to learn, in later life, that he had lived close to East Tytherley in Hampshire (just over the border) where Robert Owen had set up a co-operative community at Harmony Hall.



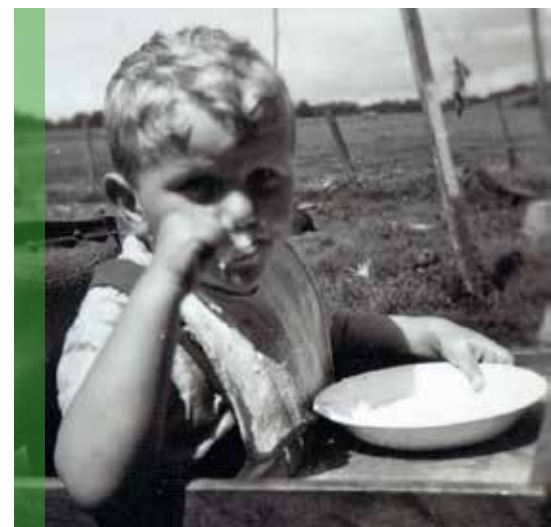
In 1943 Tim's brother Jeremy was born and, in about 1948, his parents adopted his then two-year old sister, Judith. The family owned a small plot of land in Winterslow and moved into a military hut, similar to a nissen hut, where they lived in cramped conditions for about seven years while they built their own home. Tim was proud to help his dad after school with the building work.

After attending the village school he travelled each day into Bishop Wordsworth school, Salisbury, where his mother had been a pupil many years before. I always knew of his interest in science but I have recently been informed by an old school friend that this interest tempted him to experiment with a larger amount of nitroglycerine than instructed by his teacher. The result prompted the deployment of the bomb squad. Fortunately it was his last term at school, because he was asked to leave before term ended!

The family grew with the arrival of Steve in 1955, by which time Tim was already contemplating his future. On leaving school he started work with the Post Office, riding his motorbike down to the South Coast to liaise with those carrying out the laying of the transatlantic cables.

He later moved to London, living in the YMCA at Crouch End where he made good friends with Dave, Hugh and Pete, and later shared flats with them in the Muswell Hill area. He had several different jobs at this time, including night shifts at the El Al offices, the Post Office in Judd Street, Islington, as a driver for Oxfam, and he undertook studies at Faraday House near Southampton Row.

At this stage he was social secretary for the students' group and arranged events in conjunction with Pitmans College round the



corner. He worked with, and dated, for a while, the College's social secretary, one Rula Lenska.

With his first wife, Alison, Tim moved to Newcastle, where he studied architecture at the University – another life long interest. When his marriage ended he decided to stay on in Jesmond, an area he had learned to love. He enjoyed being able to take walks in the beautiful surrounding countryside, and participating in the many varied activities in such a vibrant community.



Over the years he worked for some time at the Wallsend Arts Centre, where he made many interesting friends and was able to indulge his interest in folk music, in jazz and the arts generally as well as promoting work with young musicians and actors. At one stage he acted as a roadie for the Newcastle Big Band when it toured the South of France – one of the group at the time was a local teacher called Gordon Sumner and Tim always prized the record made by the band.

During this time he became interested in the Labour and Co-operative Movements. He was very involved in local Woodcraft activities, as a leader he was proud to accompany his groups participating in the International Camp at Malvern in 1979. He loved taking the children for early morning walks across the hills, ensuring they were tired by the end of the day, meaning that he and the other leaders would get some peace and quiet in the evening.

Tim and his friend, Nick Brown, once discussed which of them should stand for the Council one year. They agreed that Tim would be the candidate and Nick would be his agent. Apparently had great fun running a hopeless campaign, knowing the outcome from the start. Tim always kept the leaflet from the campaign and Nick recently informed me that he too had good memories of that time and had also kept his papers as souvenirs.

In the late 1970s, Tim began work in the Member Relations Department of the Co-operative Society, Gateshead – he worked with another good friend, Nigel Todd.

It was at this job that he was first sent to a course at the Co-operative College, Stanford Hall, in Leicestershire, where he and I met in July 1979. Fortunately for us he was, by this time, a member of the Community Arts Panel of the



Arts Council of Great Britain and would be sent around the country visiting community groups who had applied for grants – this would subsidise our long distant relationship. It would also provide an embarrassing moment when we went to a performance at the Washington Arts Centre to see a play performed by a group he had visited and turned down for a grant as they were already very successful. During the performance the lead player wandered through the audience and spotted Tim. He came over and reached in Tim's pocket, removing his diary and said that he was checking to see who else wouldn't be getting any money from the ACGB this year. The rest of the audience realised it was an 'in' joke, but found it quite amusing – though I didn't.



I moved to Newcastle and we married in March 1980, the date decided after Tim realised that the original booking clashed with a Woodcraft Folk social at which he had signed us up to work behind the bar – the first of many events which took priority in our lives. We then moved to Wiltshire to be nearer to his parents, his mother having suffered a severe stroke about ten years before and his father having given up work to look after her.

Accommodation was scarce locally and we started our life living in rooms on a potato farm outside Westbury while Tim was employed as Director of the Warminster Athenaeum Arts Centre and I worked at Stourhead for the National Trust.

The following year our daughter, Eleanor, was born and we moved into a bungalow in Warminster. This was a run down place, condemned many years before and due for demolition (Sainsburys now occupy the plot) – but we enjoyed it there. In the garden were two cider apple trees and we hired a press and then filled every possible receptacle, including the baby bath, with apple pulp and produced some tasty cider, as well as elderberry champagne – some of which exploded in the larder and caused a minor avalanche of food from the shelves above. Although it was necessary to scavenge wood to keep the fires in the bungalow burning – the place was damp and cold – it had other advantages. We were right next to the town car



park where the Assembly Rooms were situated. When Margaret Thatcher came to visit the local constabulary were very keen to see that there was no trouble planned. So our place became the centre of activities and we had



a lot of visitors with various bits of timber, etc. Banners were produced and stored in the living room and as MT drove into town the demonstrators came in through the back of the house and out over the wall running into the car park carrying the banners directly to form a greeting party.



Sadly the job at the Arts Centre did not work out. Tim wanted it to be a place to be enjoyed by the general



public. To this end he organised a variety of events including school performances (Captain Swing was a particular success), concerts, film society and tried to involve local people.

However, the committee who officially ran it were more interested in black tie events attended by the great and the good. At the time of the royal wedding in 1981, Tim and I were invited to judge the window dressing competition in town. We tried to get out of it, but were told it was part of his role. So, after lunch with Chair of the Chamber of Commerce, we donned our 'Don't Do It Di' and 'Stuff the Wedding' badges – which we insisted were a 'disguise' so that we would not be recognised

as judges – we set out to do our 'duty'. We had been told only to check the shops in the High Street, not bother with the ones in the back doubles. That put our backs up and we proceeded to visit them all – after all they had all paid their entry fees and made an effort, eventually awarding the top prize to a baker who had produced bread in the shape of the plume of feathers, and the second prize to a toy shop with Action Man as Charles and Barbie Doll as Diana. All shops containing photos of the engagement were immediately disqualified. We passed on the news of our choice and took off on holiday till the event was over.

On our return we were almost run out of town and told we hadn't taken things seriously. The prizes were awarded but without any ceremony and obviously the job did not last much longer. We later found out that there had been a series of 'short stay' directors for similar reasons.

Jobs were hard to come by in Wiltshire and we eventually moved to Kingston-upon-Thames when I took up a role as warden to sheltered tenants



on the Cambridge Heath Council Estate. Tim helped me to settle in and took care of Eleanor while he searched for another post. Fortunately, as always, we were able to immediately make friends and contacts by joining the local Co-operative and Labour Party groups.

In 1984 Tim became an organiser for the London Co-op Political Committee based in Maryland Street, Stratford and he was very happy to be back in the Movement. His boss was Jim Layzell, a great character with a strong history in the working class movement – he had been a participant in the Spanish Civil War, and he and Tim became good friends. At this time Tim's area was London and Essex, and he visited his many branches, took part in elections and was very pleased to be able to say that he helped Pauline Green at her first election.



Life became easier when we moved to Highbury in North London, living in a sheltered accommodation scheme where I was again the warden. He was much closer to Stratford, and his office transferred to the offices above the Co-operative Store. Slowly his patch grew and his work busier as he became more involved. Holidays were fitted in around meetings, conferences and elections, but he became proud of what he helped to achieve.

On the eve of the Labour Party conference each year he would run a concert/rally with speakers from all parts of the movement, including Fenner Brockway, Tony Benn, Tam Dalyell, Ken Livingston and many others.

The speeches would be interspersed with folk singers from around the world, many of them visiting to lobby for their causes. We were very pleased the day he arranged for Palestinian and Israeli singers to share a platform. There was always a great demand for tickets at these events and they tended to run well over time. It was a great shame when things changed and there was no longer time to include this in the programme of events at Party conference.

Things changed, as they always do, and Jim retired, to be replaced by Andy Love, and the job slowly changed too. Eventually the London Society merged with CRS and the London Political Committee became part of the national Co-operative Party. The offices transferred first to Hoe Street, Walthamstow and later to Leicester Square. With Peter Clarke in charge the office was not such a happy place – work increased, but recognition of the part played by staff members was not always appreciated, and eventually the problems were noticed and the General Secretary moved on.

In the meantime, Peter Clarke had insisted that Tim should take over the role vacated by John Blizzard, based in Bristol. And so we moved once again.

office was next to Colston Hall, sharing with the CRS Member Relations Department and here he worked with his excellent secretary and friend, Ann Clarke.

He worked hard to further the aims of the Movement, despite so many changes happening at the time, not all for the better. When the General Secretary changed again and Peter Hunt took over, it became possible to concentrate on co-operative ventures once more. Tim was responsible for pushing the venture which resulted in the mutualisation of so many football clubs – even though he was never a football fan himself. Cricket was nearer his mark, though not a great passion.



Tim was delighted with the formation of Mutuo and with any activities which furthered the principle of co-operation. He promoted some interesting conferences, including one on the future of the railways at the Steam Museum in Swindon. This reflected his own personal interest in railways and his part in the formation of Go-op, pushing for the provision of more local railway coverage run on a co-operative basis.

Outside of work he was also actively involved in the Labour Party, as well as acting in a personal capacity in the local Co-operative Party. All his interests and activities followed on his convictions of the importance of promoting co-operation and socialism. Holidays involved visits to any places of interest in the history of the movement, shopping in co-op stores, and generally following through his own beliefs.

When Tim retired, he was overwhelmed to be invited to so branches to say goodbye to old friends who showed their appreciation of all that he had done over the years. And he has been pleased in the years since to have kept in touch with so many of them – as well as meeting up at conferences and courses. He was thrilled at how many of you visited and contacted him during his long bouts of illness – he thought at times that he would be forgotten when he gave up his various posts and we moved to Cornwall, but was delighted that it was not so.

His interest in co-operation did not end on retirement and we have many photographs of places visited on holiday in Scandinavia, Canada and various parts of Europe which had some connection to co-operation and he continued to keep in touch with old friends made over the years.

In keeping with his interest in the future of the railways, we made many long journeys by train to Sicily, to the Arctic, to Gibraltar, to Prague among others.

I was overwhelmed by the response to news of his untimely death – letters, cards, texts, emails, phone calls – all flooded in for a very long time, and

there has been a great deal of interest in events to celebrate his life – so much better than merely lamenting his passing.



*Maggie Pearce
July 2016*



PROGRAMME

Welcome: Chris Dando, Labour & Co-operative councillor for Radstock

'Ere Whacks (4pm-ish)

Novelty trio with scrumpy overtones, "performing a mixture of traditional West Country songs, parodies and general rudeness".

Reece Hughes (5pm-ish)

Acoustic folk/alternative – a local young talent with a great voice, his influences include Xavier Rudd and Nahko & Medicine for the People.

The White City (6pm-ish)

Manchester-based trio: "put Royal Blood, Paloma Faith, Hiatus Kaiyote and Larry Graham into a pot, mix them all up and that's us."

Cold buffet supper from 7pm, with live music courtesy of Gypsy Nik – the man who put the busk in busking...

Sam Evans Band (8pm-ish)

Where did all the feel-good music go? Here – a five-piece band based in Bristol, their blend of reggae, funk & blues will get your feet, fingers and toes tapping.

Radio Banska (9pm-ish)

An instrumental jazz/world quintet fusing Levantine mystery, Balkan passion and Latin rhythms in unique and powerful compositions.

