

REMEMBERING ALBERT LINACRE

Albert spent the last thirty-five years of his very full life in Pilton, much loved and admired by all who knew him, but the first fifty years of his life were spent elsewhere, culminating in a very prestigious catering career - but to begin at the beginning.....



Albert Linacre was born in Birmingham on 27th June 1930, the youngest of four sons to Thomas Albert Edward Linacre, an accountant, and his wife Elizabeth Sarah Constance nee Ellis. He was nicknamed 'Ob' by his brothers from an early age, a name which remained throughout his lifetime. *'Ob was notable for his kindly, strong optimism. Honest, forthright, gentle. An actively good-hearted man; the sort of person you could rely on – with good taste aesthetically. He was a creative individual with clear views on matters of importance.'* These words were written by his eldest brother Eddie living in Australia, on hearing of Albert's sad death, which occurred on 3rd September 2015, and were included in a typescript with other contributions offered to friends and family at the very moving Quaker funeral held in his own home on the 16th September.



By the time Albert was ten years old the family were living in Edinburgh, where he later attended George Heriot's School (left), leaving in 1948 to do his two years national service in the Army Catering Corps in Scarborough, which was where he first 'dipped his toe' into catering as a career. Then followed training from 1951 at the Mont Cervin Hotel in Zermatt, Switzerland for two years, and a return to Edinburgh, where he was employed as a receptionist at the George Hotel in George Street (below left), and witnessed the very first Edinburgh Festival – an event which he remembered for the rest of his life. This became an important milestone, introducing him to the magic of the stage, which he took to like a duck to water.



By 1955 he was Assistant Banqueting Manager with J. Lyons in London, where he joined the outdoor catering team. This was a very varied and exciting time as soon afterwards Albert was employed by Trust House Forte and seconded to Vickers Armstrong of Barrow in Furness to cater for the crews on ships undergoing sea trials in the Irish Sea in 1958, and in the following year to Greenock where he and his staff catered for the crew testing the first nuclear submarine.

Back in London in the 1960s, he was much involved with society events, officiating as Banqueting Manager at Henley Regatta, Ascot, Derby Day, Oxford & Cambridge Boat Race and other similar outdoor venues, also grand events at No:10 Downing Street. At this time, in 1964 he bought his first house in Choumert Square, Peckham, and a few years later when he married Maggie Bioletti, they settled there.

He was seconded to the Foreign Office in the 1970s to organise the catering at Lancaster House for various important international conferences, which resulted in a caterer's nightmare, recorded in his own words:

'Albert, sitting in his office at 3.30pm. The phone rings 'Mr. Linacre, you are organising a Dinner Party this evening for Mr. Kissinger. Well, he has missed his plane, so please cancel the Dinner and arrange Breakfast for twelve at 8 am at No 10 tomorrow. Please phone me back as soon as possible with your menu suggestions so that I can have it printed.'

Albert thought 'Henry Kissinger – it will have to be 'Kiwi fruit, Kelloggs, Kippers, Kedgeree and Kidneys'. Only Albert could have thought of that! His comment afterwards was 'They all ate it – so did I!'



This was just one example of his attitude to life – utterly professional and always in control, but with a lightness of touch and a sense of fun. Left, is a photograph of Albert with his mother, Constance (née Ellis) on his motorcycle.

By 1977 Albert and Maggie were ready to give up their life in London and move to North Devon, where they had been in the habit of spending their holidays. They bought a vacant shop and house in Pilton Street, which became in time a wholefood shop and coffee bar run by Maggie, while Albert went to North Devon College to teach the art of catering to students hoping to find suitable posts in the numerous hotels in the area. He also set up his pottery kiln in one of the rear rooms and began making his very distinctive pottery as a hobby, as he had in London. However, this gradually began to grow and by the late 1980s he had left the College and was employing several teenagers, teaching them to throw the pots. Steven Squire, David Gilbert, Ian Bluett, Rachel Petch, Jamie Trawin, Lynda Mock and Nicky Juniper were among his assistants, and in the 1990s he took on the contract of making thousands of aromatic vaporisers, which kept him and his young workforce hard at work for some time.



The first Pilton Festival was held in 1982, inaugurated by the vicar, Anthony Geering, with a month of events culminating in a medieval market and pageant. It is not quite clear what involvement Albert had in this initial event, and it is also certain that in this form it was not repeated on each successive year, but at two or three year intervals, and with differing themes. At about this time Albert also started making costumes for other events – village pantomimes, school plays, fancy dress events of all kinds, never making any money at it and lucky if he got the costumes back in good order. However, in 1995 the first Green Man Festival was held, and this time Albert was definitely very much involved with the costumes for the pageant and the procession through the town, as he was in all succeeding years until this year - 2015,

when in spite of failing health he still had his sewing ladies in the kitchen making the costumes under his supervision until he could no longer manage to do this.

At this point I must write of the immense debt of gratitude I and many of Albert's other friends owe to Toby Joslin, but for whom Albert's life in his last years would have been very different. Toby came to live at Albert's house in 2002, initially as a lodger, but they soon became firm friends in spite of an age difference of several decades. Albert made him feel welcome in his home, and Toby in turn, helped in many ways in the house. Gradually in the last five years or so Albert became more frail and needed a certain amount of support, which Toby certainly give willingly. Eventually Toby gave up most of his other activities and became Albert's full-time carer, where nothing was too much trouble and an even stronger bond grew between them.

After several stays in hospital, Albert determined to come home to his own bed, where Toby tended him lovingly by night and day until Albert died peacefully in his sleep on the morning of 3rd September. Toby was desolate, but at the same time, knew that this was what Albert would have wished. He then began to make all the arrangements exactly as Albert had discussed with him, and did it with such love and consideration. The Quaker funeral, which was held in Albert's home, was attended by his brother Vivian and his family, by Brian and Lallo, who were Albert's long term friends from London, some local Quakers and invited friends. All agreed that it was a most moving funeral,

with Albert in our midst in a coffin prepared by Toby – beautifully painted with flowers on a pale yellow background.

Everyone was affected by the sense of peace and serenity which pervaded the room – and an overwhelming sense of gratitude to Toby for his care of Albert in his last months and years, which made Albert's precious time so much easier to bear. We will always bless him for that.

To end on a positive note, Albert Linacre was quite simply the one person who has made Pilton what it is today – a vibrant community. Pilton could have virtually died with the departure of the Post Office and most of the shops, but instead we have the Green Man Festival, the pantomime, the Cinema, the Big Quiz, a Church Hall buzzing with activity six or seven days each week, Rotary Gardens and other sources of activity to inspire local people of all ages. While it is not claimed that Albert started all the above, he certainly kept the ball rolling and inspired others. His enthusiasm for anything theatrical was boundless – in no time costumes were planned, weekly sewing sessions began, and suddenly there was a stage in the skittle alley of the 'Chich'. That was just the start. Over thirty years later his legacy is as strong as ever, and we should never forget that Albert's gift of organisation and making everything seem easy was behind it all. We owe it to him to ensure that this work continues.

Margaret Reed

Elisabeth Eveleigh has noted her memories of when she made costumes for Albert's productions, together with Carol Smith and Barbara Vercoe. There were many others over the thirty odd years, including Abigail Winfield and Brenda Westacott, so I hope any omissions will be forgiven.



'Here are a few of our memories of Albert and his great contribution to the joy and fun he gave to the community of Pilton. As well as Pilton productions, he lent costumes to The Landmark for 'Fiddler on the Roof', 'The Crucible' staged at West Buckland School, village pantomimes, 'Light Quest' at Castle Hill, Filleigh, amongst others. Albert never did anything on a small scale – he had grand ideas, everything was done in his words 'wholesale'! When we needed 100 yards of bunting, Albert asked us to make 200 yards, just in case (left, making bunting in 2009)! If we needed six waistcoats, we made twelve.

Wonderful materials, velvets, silks, braids and ribbons would magically appear at Albert's place. His imagination knew no bounds and he was the inspiration in the making of fantastical creations for the Pilton Festival Procession. The light would burn late into the night at Festival time, Panto time and whenever anyone needed something done. Albert could be seen in the glow of the light sitting over his machine just getting it done until it was finished. His strength was inspiring, never tiring until the end, and still planning the next production. A great planner and organiser.

Without Albert the Festival would not be the wonderful magical spectacle it is today. What a way to remember him each year.'

Elisabeth Eveleigh