

## Obituaries

### Eleanor Stanier RIP by Tim Catchpole



Eleanor joined MESS soon after its foundation in 1969. There were many issues to be addressed including the plans for the Sheen Lane Centre, proposals for a supermarket called Waitrose, the expansion of the Brewery, the transformation of a riverside depot into what became Jubilee Gardens, the designation of Conservation Areas.... Eleanor was living in Mortlake at the time and became much concerned about proposals to widen Mortlake High Street. In 1972 the first Secretary of MESS resigned and Eleanor seized the opportunity to take his place. She continued in this role until 1978 and then left the Committee in 1982, during which time she moved from Mortlake to East Sheen.

In 1990 Eleanor returned to the Committee, took over as Chair and stayed in this role for a record five years. The late 1980s had been a fretful four years for MESS because it had become heavily involved in a campaign against the Government's determination to improve the South Circular Road either by widening it through East Sheen and Kew or by building a relief road alongside the Barnes-Chiswick railway. Eleanor took over as Chair at the time when the Government abandoned its dream leaving the MESS Committee exhausted. She realized instantly that she had to bring in a new committee and focus on a new role for MESS.

Her first task as Chair was to organize the 21st anniversary of MESS and she did so with gusto in the Sheen Lane Centre. She must have enjoyed doing this because she then had the prospect of the 25th anniversary four years later. In between these two events she spent time developing the social side of MESS and expanding its membership. She organized walks, talks, quiz suppers, wine tastings, book stalls at fairs, concerts, visits to the Richmond Theatre, local art galleries, the Poppy factory, and so on. She organized fund-raising at these events for good causes such as the Mortlake Almshouses, Barnes Hospital and the Lamplugh Trust.

The MESS 25th anniversary celebration took place at York House (Twickenham) in 1994 and it must surely have given her a taste of what was to come because in the following year she decided to quit being Chair in order to return to York House as a Councillor. She stood as a Lib Dem not in East Sheen where she did not rate her chances as high but in her previous homeland of Mortlake. She successfully won a seat there in 1997 and served as a Councillor until 2010. The Leader at the time must have recognised that Eleanor was both energetic and inspirational and clearly had a talent for organizing social events, ergo she not surprisingly became Deputy Mayor in 1999-2000 and finally Mayor in 2001-02.

Eleanor's year as Mayor has been recorded for posterity by her husband Tom who worked for the BBC and had a talent for making videos. What emerged was a 1-hour video entitled the A to Z of being Mayor which contained 2-minute clips of her brief encounters with people and/or places starting with the letter A and finishing with the letter Z. 'A' was for Prince Andrew whom she met when he, as Admiral of the Sea Cadets, came to open a new boathouse at Ham.

After her stint as Mayor Eleanor stayed on the Council for another 8 years. She was on the Scrutiny Committee. She was also on the board of RHP, the Orange Tree theatre, the Museum of Richmond and the Richmond Music Trust and she was governor of two schools. In her last year on the Council she was at the forefront, alongside Susan Kramer MP, of the campaign to get a new post office in East Sheen following the closure of the previous post office whose sub-postmaster was found guilty of covering up a deficit of £83,000 (due to Horizon?) and Eleanor apparently fought to prevent him from going to prison – and succeeded.

Following her retirement from the Council Eleanor became Chair of the Barnes and Mortlake History Society. She also returned to MESS as Chair of the sub-committee on the Air Raid Shelter at St Leonards Court. MESS had saved this remarkable air raid shelter from extinction and managed to get it spot-listed by English Heritage. The sub-committee was tasked with cleaning up the shelter, opening it to the public on Open House Day every September and to primary school visits throughout the year, and negotiating alongside its partner, Habitats & Heritage, with the landlord of St Leonards Court in getting emergency repairs carried out. She also led a walk around the bombsites of East Sheen, and husband Tom made a video about the shelter and the bombsites which has been shown to primary schools as part of their visit for the past ten years now and will continue to be shown.

Eleanor was in poor health during the recent three years of lockdown. She briefly had a new lease of life when lockdown finally ended but was then diagnosed with cancer. She died on 8 January 2024 leaving Tom and their three sons and their families bereft. At the same time Tom had also succumbed to a massive stroke. He has likewise made a huge contribution to the life of Mortlake and East Sheen by making numerous videos about our local heritage. We are all greatly indebted to this extraordinary couple and our hearts go out to Tom and to their three sons Alex, Toby and Rev Robert.

Eleanor was a force of nature, vivacious, somewhat outspoken, indeed highly opinionated, but at the same time very welcoming and always considerate. She will be sorely missed.

## Jack Parker RIP

Jack died on Saturday 20 February 2022 of heart failure at the age of 94. He was a founding member of MESS in 1969 and its second Chairman from 1971 to 1973. Prior to this he had already risen to fame in the East Sheen community as an Olympic athlete in the high hurdles first at Helsinki in 1952 and then at Melbourne in 1956 – and he was at his peak in 1954 winning a silver medal at the European Championships at Bern. Not surprisingly he became known to many as Jumping Jack Flash.



The competitive edge he showed as an athlete continued thereafter when he became a distinguished highway engineer on projects worldwide culminating as a project director with WS Atkins and ultimately as Chief Highway Engineer in the Department of Transport and President of the Institute of Highway Engineers.

Jack could be described as the Godfather of MESS. His contribution to the Society has been immense. For 53 years he has given wise counsel to successive MESS Committees on all transport matters including the Government's options for the streamlining or realignment of the South Circular Road in the 1980s, the Red Routeing of the same road in the 1990s and most recently the widening of Chalkers Corner associated with the Brewery redevelopment; not to mention Heathrow Terminals 4 and 5 and more recently the third runway including the traffic implications for the South Circular and the potential Southern Rail Access from Waterloo to Heathrow via Mortlake.

In our 50th anniversary year Jack, aged 91, made two memorable appearances – at the showing of Tom Stanier's film about his athletic career in the 1950s and at the 50th anniversary lunch held at All Saints Church where our audience of 120 heard him make a short speech from his wheelchair.

Jack married Shirley in 1955 and our sincerest condolences go to her and to their family.

## **Peter Hames RIP**

### **by Bridget (and Alastair) Grant**

Peter Hames died on 5 December 2021. He had been in hospital for about a week and pretty much unaware of what was going on. Until a couple of days before his admittance, he was his usual energetic, remarkable self. We last saw him on Remembrance Day when Alastair reported that he and Angela had ‘worked the room’ of the Home Guard Club, chatting to the cadets and assorted people who had been on parade. When I spoke to him about this and how appreciated his and Angela’s attentions had been, his response was ‘Well that was what we were there for wasn’t it?’.

When Peter was in command of a RN warship (any naval officer’s finest time), he told me that his ambition had been ‘to make it the happiest ship in the Navy’. I bet it was too. His was a life of service, doing and enjoying.



Our community will be all the poorer for the loss of Peter. The MESS defibrillator was in large part down to his effort and will be a bit of a testament to him. I will give it an appreciative and loving pat as I pass from now on. He’d like that!

## **Prudie Mennell RIP**

### **by Mireille Stanton**

Prudie Vansittart (Mennell) , a former member of the MESS committee sadly passed away on 24 March 2021, exactly a week after her 97th birthday. Many of us thought she would be with us for years to come, so “alive” was she!

She was a 15 year old school girl when war broke out, but within a few short years, she had left school, done a course at secretarial college and found herself in the heart of the secret war effort. Through her father’s contacts she had taken up a junior post in a government department, off Whitehall. This turned out to be the London end of the Bletchley decoding operation. Raw messages just decoded into clear English were sent to her department to be passed on to the relevant decision makers. Prudie loved the book the Bletchley Girls , by Tessa Dunlop, which describes the way young

women, initially mostly recruited among well-to-do families, were assigned to incredibly sensitive tasks without any training to speak of and, even more surprising for us in view of the torrent of indiscretions we have become used to, none of these young women ever broke their silence about what they did. To be fair, the fragmented information she was privy to, was not in itself very revealing, but on the 5th June 1944, Prudie knew that a huge operation was programmed and in severe contravention of all the rules she had smuggled a little wireless set in the office to follow its progress. The poor weather caused the date to be put back one day and she never heard any of the actual D-day reporting!

Shortly after the Allied landings, work became very routine and Prudie, still too young (at the age of 20) to be allowed to join the intelligence service abroad, was enrolled in the women's transport services ( quaintly known by their old name of FANY). She was posted to Delhi with other young things, working hard, living in luxury compared to war time England and with their own individual bearer to serve them! Later she flew by seaplane to Cairo, to join the services Liaison Department, which was really the British secret service in the Middle East. The young people worked hard, played sport in the long afternoon breaks and managed to find the energy to party the night away. It was at such a party at the Tank Corps Mess that she met Peter Mennell.

Peter and Prudie were married in 1947. When Peter entered the Diplomatic service, they started a long career of foreign postings and a very varied life in somewhat complicated circumstances. Her description of her traveling alone with her two eldest children by boat and train in the midst of the Russian winter to join her husband at the Moscow embassy was hair raising and featured freezing carriages, unobtainable food and endless Soviet-era bureaucratic delays. Peter Mennell served in many places, including the USA, Ecuador, Spain etc. Prudie recalled the pleasure of meeting interesting people and the incredible tedium of entertaining awkward ones!

After Peter's death, Prudie bravely determined to live as full a life as she could. She was particularly good company. She entertained friends frequently and travelled avidly, resolutely ignoring the assaults of age on her body. On a trip to Poland with us in her late 80s she walked down the hundreds of steps into the salt mines uncomplainingly! She wanted to be of use. She served for many years at the Missing People charity. By the time she joined the MESS committee she was less physically able but she still found a role as the person who took bookings for events, efficiently and in her usual courteous manner.