



OBITUARY

JOHN WILFRED CECIL COOK

John was born in Finchley, North London on 7 October 1932.

He moved to Watford in 1940 after the family home was bombed during the Blitz and his mother decided to move out of London. According to John, his mother took him to the train station and they bought tickets on the first train which happened to be going to Watford!

John attended Watford Boys' Grammar School where he met Brian Lanham, brother of his future wife Brenda who attended Watford Grammar School for Girls. After completing his studies, John joined the stationery company, Royal Sovereign, and remained there all his working life rising to the position of Sales Director before retiring.

Almost as soon as John left the Grammar School he joined its alumni, The Old Fullerians' Association (OFA) along with The Old Fullerians' Cricket Club (OFCC) – he would go on to be a stalwart of both becoming the OFA's Chairman on five occasions in 1966, 1980, 1991, 2002 and most recently in 2007 as well as its lifelong Honorary Social Convenor. In this role he organised countless of the Association's now legendary Annual Dinners (his last being in 2019) held in the iconic School Hall doing so with military precision and their continuing success is directly attributable to his endeavours and the passion he had for the occasion. This passion, along with his charm and personality, were used to engage some notable guest speakers including Sir Stanley Rous (former WBGS pupil and President of FIFA), Terry Scott (former pupil and actor starring in many Carry On films and the TV comedy series Terry and June) and Josh Lewsey (former pupil and England Rugby World Cup Winner in 2003).

In more recent times, John became more eager to ensure that the OFA would continue and thrive well into the future; to this end, as one of the elder statesmen of the OFA General Committee and ever mindful of the need for succession, John took it upon himself to identify potential future candidates within its ranks for pivotal roles. His diligence and endeavours have already borne fruit and the Association's continued success will be his lasting legacy.

As well as all his work with the OFA, John's huge contributions to the OFCC were, if possible, even more impressive. Having joined the Club not long after its foundation in 1947, John (also known affectionately as Wilf, Cookie or Rommel!) went on to become Captain for many seasons and, by the time he finished playing at the end of the last century (!), he had comfortably made more than 1,000 appearances for the Club - almost double that of any other player. The New Field was his second (and some would say first!) home and it was there that he met his wife to be, Brenda, as she, and Brian Lanham's wife, Anne, and mother (known to some as Auntie Gladys) would often make the teas.

In addition to playing for the OFCC, John served for many years in the position of Fixture Secretary, Team Secretary and Chairman, and was the only member to be awarded the position of Life Vice-President in recognition of all the time and effort he had dedicated to the club. As Fixture Secretary, John took immense pleasure in arranging annual games against some particularly impressive opponents and at some equally impressive venues – not least The Royal Household, who played in the grounds of Windsor Castle. It was here, and much to John's delight (which was evident whenever he retold the story), that he managed to shell a straightforward catch while none other than H M Queen Elizabeth II looked on from the boundary.

John's regular appearances for the OFCC made him a friend and mentor to generations of younger cricketers, all of whom held him in the highest esteem; such was his stature within the club that the current committee has founded an annual fixture in his memory - "The John Cook Memorial" - where players can spend the afternoon playing the game they love followed by that infamous beer on the boundary at his beloved New Field.

John and Brenda were married on 4 June 1958 at St Michael's Parish Church in Watford and made their home in Baldwins Lane, Croxley Green. They did not have any children but John thrived on being a mentor to many young boys whom he encouraged to join the OFCC. These boys would otherwise have stopped playing cricket after leaving the School and their gratitude for his efforts was evident by some of the tributes paid by current and former members of the OFCC such as:

"John was Mr OFCC – he was a mentor for so many young lads";

"He took us to some of the finest cricket grounds, and some of the finest watering holes before, after and often during play";

"He was at the other end which I scored my first ton – I don't think I would have got there without him guiding me, run by run";

"One of the finest moments in cricket was to be invited to take a stroll around the New Field boundary with him, accompanied by his faithful "Shep"";

"John stood for everything decent about the game and the School";

"An absolute gent of a man";

"A friend to all".

John was passionate about everything Watford – his old School, its Old Boys' Association and Cricket Club and, of course, Watford Football Club whom he supported (albeit as his second team – his first being Arsenal) from the time he moved to Watford in 1940. He was a season ticket holder (fittingly in the Rous Stand) and loved to discuss anything and everything but often gravitated towards the OFA and OFCC. John loved to talk cricket!

He was a true raconteur and bon-viveur – he always took great delight in telling a true or funny story, joy from seeing people laugh and enjoying themselves and pride in holding court at the various OFA

functions such as the VP Luncheons, Committee Suppers and his now legendary quiz evenings which have become elevated into folklore by those of us privileged enough to have attended them.

John enjoyed the finer things in life and always took such great delight in finding, and then recommending, hotels, pubs and restaurants – none of which ever failed to live up to his glowing comments and high standards.

He was always grateful for what he had, always thinking of others and always thinking of ways in which he could give something back. He was a true friend to everyone who knew him and stood for traditional values – honour, decency, respect, integrity, modesty, sportsmanship and tradition itself – and was adamant that these qualities should not only be upheld but upheld for the benefit of all.

John passed away peacefully on 4 February 2021 after a short illness and is survived by his wife, Brenda.

He is missed by so many but remembered so fondly by us all.

Michael Groves
Chairman, The Old Fullerians' Association
12 May 2021