

Walter Charles Davey 1925–2010

Walter Charles Davey, known to Members of the MPRG and to all his friends as Wally, died following a long battle with Lymphatic Leukaemia, on 17th January 2010.

Walter was born in Bristol on 6th October 1925, to Elizabeth and William Davey. His father, who had been a regular soldier in the first decade of the century, was recalled to the Colours in 1914. After the Great War he became an active trades unionist and it seems likely that Walter's political views had their foundation in the seven short years before his father died in 1932. Walter, his mother and the rest of the family then moved home a number of times, finally settling in Islington, north London.

Walter was a bright child and although he was offered a place at grammar school he was denied this small advance in life due to family circumstances and attended the Sir Hugh Middleton Central School instead. On leaving school Walter was sent to work in an engineering factory, which he hated, but soon found work as a plumber, which better suited his temperament. During this time he became active in politics and joined the Young Communist League which, on one occasion, took him to Spain with a convoy carrying food to comrades fighting in the Spanish Civil War.

When the Second World War broke out Walter immediately volunteered to 'do his bit.' He became a stretcher bearer in the (civilian) ARP and joined the Home Guard. He twice volunteered to join the RAF but was turned down both times. Eventually he was called-up into the Army where he realised his ambition to fly by volunteering for the Glider Pilot Regiment of the 1/4th Airborne Division. He was then, ironically, sent to train with the RAF where he got his pilots 'wings' on the Tiger Moth and then converted to the Horsa Glider. After training, Walter's Army service was spent entirely in Palestine during the run-up to the formation of the State of Israel.

On leaving the Army in 1948, Walter was awarded a place at Teacher Training College where he specialised in pottery and sculpture. It was also while there that he met and fell for another student, Enid Hoddy. They were married at Caxton Hall, Westminster on 4th April 1955 and Enid was to remain his much loved wife until her death in 2007. For some years following graduation both taught in inner London schools but, in 1957, moved to take up posts in the 'New Town' of Harlow. Walter and Enid were, unfortunately, unable to have children of their own but, when established in Harlow, were successful in adopting two daughters through the International Social Service. Rachel arrived from Hong Kong, aged six months, at Christmas 1963 and Miriam, aged seven, joined her in 1966.

It was during his time at college that Walter began to be interested in archaeology which was to become



a life-long consuming passion. In the late 1950s he joined the newly formed West Essex Archaeological Group and participated in many of its excavations, notable among them the years of digging on the site of Harlow Romano-Celtic Temple and at the medieval pottery production site at Mill Green near Chelmsford. However it is for his work on 17th century Metropolitan Ware that he is most well known. When Walter arrived in his new teaching post at Brays Grove Comprehensive School, his class began to bring him sherds of Metropolitan Ware which he recognised from excavations in London. The source proved to be the remains of a seventeenth century kiln within the school grounds. In those days archaeology was very much down to the dedicated amateur as there were no professional archaeological units, and even if there had been, they probably wouldn't have been interested in anything later than Saxon. Walter had the foresight to see the significance of this pottery at a time when no one was particularly interested in the past let alone the 17th century. We now know that this pottery is important to archaeological studies because of its wide trade pattern throughout the British Isles and even reaching to the New World. In the years following, although he maintained his interest in field archaeology, and his other hobbies, such as gliding, Walter concentrated on his researches into Metropolitan Ware. Far from concentrating simply on the archaeological evidence, he carried out much documentary work to back it up. He became almost a fixture at the Essex Record Office, gleaning information from wills, court rolls and other manorial records which involved him in learning to understand Latin and teaching himself to read the troublesome scripts in which they were written.

At that time, the early 1960's, others archaeologists were becoming interested in study of the pottery of the Medieval and later periods. Two such were Kenneth Barton of Bristol Museum and John Hurst of the then Ministry of Works who, noting the poor state of current knowledge, called a meeting to discuss the formation of what we would today call a focus group. Walter was, of course, one of those attending. The group was duly brought into being as the Post-Medieval Ceramic Research Group, PMCRG. As a potter, Walter naturally had an understanding of the technology of pottery and

the art of potting which some archaeologists, in those early days, did not. Thus was set a pattern which was to long continue as he used his remarkable knowledge and experience to bring the pots and potters to life and to educate his peers in the use of correct terminology of pots and potting. When the PMCRG metamorphosed into the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology, SPMA, he continued his membership, attending its twice-yearly conferences. However he became disillusioned as the focus of study shifted away from pottery, pure and simple, and finally ceased subscribing in 2003 when 'they began to publish too many Victorian warehouses.'

Casting around for a suitable alternative to fill his time and exercise his intellectual capacity, since 72 was much too early an age to retire, Walter became a member of the Medieval Pottery Research Group, MPRG. This was another of those minor decisions which one makes throughout life, almost without consideration, but which change that life entirely. For it was through the MPRG that Walter made the acquaintanceship of other pottery specialists including Helen Walker of Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit. In Walter's funeral Helen address Helen recalled making several visits to him at Harlow Museum when she first started at the county council and was researching into the medieval pottery made at Harlow. Helen noted that Walter was always

helpful and informative, as he was with other pottery specialists who consulted him.

Helen amply repaid Walter's help and encouragement to her when she undertook to help him to write the definitive book, *The Harlow Pottery Industries* which was recently published as MPRG Occasional Paper no 3, funded by English Heritage. One can only imagine how the enormity of the task of bringing together the results of fifty years of excavation and research must have played on Walter's mind as his health and sight began to fail and his delight when he realised realise that, with Helen's help, his life's work would not be lost.

Walter was very much a fixture at MPRG meetings and conferences and continued attending and sometimes speaking at conferences and meetings even when his health was fading. He even managed to make it to a recent conference in Sienna in Italy. Because he was such a constant and senior figure in medieval and post-medieval pottery studies he will be much missed especially by members of the Medieval Pottery Research Group. But of course it is for his major contribution to the study of Harlow post-medieval pottery that Walter will go down in History.

In addition to his two daughters Rachel and Miriam, Walter leaves four grandchildren in whom he took the greatest delight.

Albert Storey . 24th Feb 2010