

Peter Rex RIP

Peter was born in Bristol in 1930. Despite being left-handed, he was coerced by his junior school to write with his right hand and by the age of 10, still unable to write, was branded as educationally subnormal! At that point, his parents wisely insisted that he should write with his left hand and progress was so good that they sent him to the independent St Brendan's from where he went on to Bristol University. It was therefore with pride and experience that Peter taught two of his left-handed grandchildren to write correctly!

Peter's initial foray was into the primary education sector before trying secondary. With twelve years or so experience, Peter and Christina arrived at Princethorpe in Warwickshire from Huddersfield in the late sixties and were two of the College's first lay staff. Christina taught English and Music and Peter, History and Politics. He later became Examinations Secretary. Christina inspirationally introduced me to Rossini, the novels of Evelyn Waugh and also corrected my grammar, which I was not very good at. Sorry, I should have said "at which I was not very good!"

Peter had a deep love of history and was politically very astute. I'm afraid that I was not really one of his model pupils, though we got on famously. Peter and Christina lived initially in *St Joseph's* next to College Farm, where their home-produced Crème de Cassis was greatly appreciated by all of the clergy. There was both sadness and gnashing of teeth when the blackcurrant bushes finally had to be uprooted because of disease! The family moved from there to Warwick and then to Leamington, ending up in here in Ely, greatly appreciating the clearer air of the Fens and being nearer Richard.

Peter had a couple of rubs with authority in his role as of Head of History. In response to being asked why he didn't go on any courses, he took an MA at Coventry and there was a similar "last word" outcome when he was encouraged to organise more outings. He did and this time the excursion was to Moscow!

Peter had always been enthusiastic about writing and it was retirement in 1994 which gave him this marvellous opportunity, seeing him produce a total of seven books, all of which have become revered texts. On *1066 A New History of the Norman Conquests*, published in 2011, reviewer Steve Donoghue writes "With little fanfare and no excessive rationalizing, Rex has produced a volume to join the very best. His *1066* is very highly recommended. Incidentally, a quick commercial here for Peter! *William the Conqueror* will be published by Amberley in paperback at the end of this month.

Peter always earned himself a bit of a reputation as a disciplinarian and not one who liked to be tussled with! It was a bit of a popular myth to be frightened by Peter, but I quickly learned that his bark was much worse than his bite. He enjoyed good

conversation, was engaging, exceptionally well-read and gave me a very warm welcome, treating me very much as an equal, when I returned to teach at Princethorpe in 1979. Overnight, he turned from Mr Rex into Peter!

Los Angeles radio presenter and Old Princethorpean, Mike Halloran, comments:

A true legend is he. Long Live Rex!

Even after all of the years which have passed, I can still hear his dulcet voice banging to and fro in my head. He loved to correct my Americanisms. We colonials drove the man batty.

I can still recall the stories he would regale us with about the evolution of the English language. Dunsmore Heath anyone? Hill Hill Hill to those of us in the know!

Halloran continues: I will admit with some certain glee and snobbery that I probably learned more from that one man than I learned from anyone since then in the subjects which he taught.

At the time I had no idea about the massive imprint he was having on my small childish American brain, but when I make comments on various websites across the vast electronic world, I post as if I were Mr Rex himself. In fact I have used "pusillanimous prig" more than any human being should be allowed, not only in posts on the web, but in everyday conversations. It still works as a very sharp dagger so much that most people will never ever try to argue past the point at which this two-word weapon is brandished.

If I still drank, I would raise a goblet of mead in his honor. (Needless to say honor here has the American spelling!)

OP Chris Hopley adds:

In Year 7, I was a very nervous child and Mr Rex found me upset and sitting on my own at lunchtime. I felt rather alone as most of my friends had gone to different schools. Despite his reputation, I fondly remember his kindness and calming words. I jumped to my feet and never looked back! I don't think he ever realised my appreciation.

Peter's health setbacks never got in the way of travelling, writing and doing those things about which he was passionate; he was an absolute survivor and had a wonderfully dry sense of humour.

It feels as though a little bit of Princethorpe has gone, but we will all be sustained by each other and by good memories of him; I am so pleased to have remained in touch for over forty years.

Old Princethorpians send their deepest sympathy to Peter's family, but particularly to his wife Christina, son and daughter-in-law Richard & Bettina and their gifted grandchildren Ed, Henry, Seb, Oli, Max and Ferdi. Peter was extremely proud of Richard and his grandsons, but was definitely thrilled to know that Oliver is to read history and so carry the historian label into a third generation.

Peter leaves a great legacy, not only of all of our splendid memories, but also an indelible record of his scholarship which will grace bookshelves and prompt lively debate amongst historians for many years to come.

Be not sad that he is no more, but glad that he was.

Alex Darkes
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