A Tribute to Professor Peter C. Lewis

delivered at his funeral by his cousin David

Peter

He lived a full varied and interesting life for 80 years. His career subject PHYSICS.

Relaxing; Classical music, theatre Opera and latterly painting.

A caring kind man.

Born of hardworking parents his mother had a Corn chandlers shop, his father eventually had the greengrocers two doors down. The family can all remember using what are now old fashioned scales to weigh dog biscuits and chicken food and he, along with his brother, would occasionally be called upon to leap on the delivery bicycle. I lived in one of four cottages just across from the corn chandlers and many years later my mother told me how Peter and I used the settee in our living room as a trampoline - you can imagine how popular we were.

His academic career started at Epsom grammar school just up from the top of the village. Music started around this time. Strict mum insisted on half an hour at the piano practicing scales before school. There was briefly, a mercifully short period, when a Cello made noises in the tiny living room, not going to be a Lloyd Webber.

In 1949, he went off to the then University of the South West. Now Exeter University. At that time I joined the Royal Navy but we were in touch via the family that was close. When I came back from my first commission at sea in 1954, Peter brought my mother down to Portsmouth to meet me. Another kindness.
Around this time he acquired a Douglas motorcycle probably what many students aspired to in those days. The following year he invited me to Exeter where he was doing his Ph.D. and showed me some of his work. I also watched him rowing, which he had taken up, there and in Southampton. Where he and his friends kindly looked after me. My pockets were pretty bare in those days.

After his doctorate in 1957 he went to work at Aldermaston and later that year was an usher at my wedding.

It seems he was not happy with the moral issues that must have arisen at Aldermaston where they were checking the results of the Christmas Island Atomic bomb tests. Understandably nothing was said but he was not to remain there for long.

He joined the University of Malta’s Department of Physics in the Faculty of Science of which he became Dean. He was eventually closely involved in the development of the new purpose-built University opened by the Queen. In a twist of fate, I was sent for a two year posting in 1967 to Malta with my family. He introduced us to the local ways of Malta and quiet charms of Gozo along with his colleague Bill Edwards. Special pork chops at the Marsalforn Hotel never to be forgotten.

Another delight was his piano recital, he rarely played privately for us.

In the early Seventies a certain Mr Dom Mintoff decided that all of us Brits should leave and along with the armed services most of the English lecturers eventually left too.

After some indeterminate employment, he took up the post of Head of the Physics Department at Kings College School on Wimbledon Common where he stayed for some 26 years. Another twist of fate - I had lived for the duration of the war on the Common. He talked many times of the events there and quiet obviously enjoyed what he was doing.
He was a lecturer and teacher of great skill and understanding, having seen and watched him in action. As they say, there is more than one way to skin a cat. His ability to offer different approaches to solving a problem to a student, were brilliant. He was obviously appreciated and was quite proud of some of the cartoons and odes that came from his classes.

Retirement? He was well known in the village, was in the ratepayers association and on the committee of GLYN Hall along with Pam Bradley who had known him for many years. Visits to the library, had many a tea there, the health centre and frequenting local restaurants where he took my wife and I for Sunday lunches when we came to visit. Still in the physics world marking papers for the International Olympiads, visiting Iceland at one stage.

On returning two books he had borrowed from the library, I was told he was in arrears by £4.!! They waived the charge. They and his doctor told me, he will be sorely missed.

Many of his former colleagues and friends have told me how kind, understanding and caring he was. This was the man I knew throughout my life, this is how he was. He cared for his mother, other friends of hers and still kept an eye on the former shop managers wife, a widow living in Bexhill and still drove down there until relatively recently. When my wife died he invited me to lunches and we went on holiday to Madeira. Sadly many of those he kept in touch with are too elderly to be here with us, or live too far away but have all said they will be with us in spirit.

He made many friends in Malta, Marie and Rose in particular and during his short illness there whilst on holiday, they did all they could for him and myself, I having flown out to be with him.

We shall always miss his riddles, his sometimes eccentric ways. His kindness.

Quite simply a lovely man.