

Patrick Frank Osborne 1914 – 1989: A Tribute

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In the last issue of the *Journal* the Secretary's Notes carried sad news of the death whilst on holiday in Portugal, of Dr Patrick 'Paddy' Osborne. With the passing of Dr Osborne the Henry Williamson Society lost an enthusiastic member and a good friend. During the last few years Beryl and I had the good fortune to be 'near neighbours' of Paddy and Hope Osborne; this gave us the opportunity to discover what a unique and remarkable couple these two special people were.

'Paddy' Osborne was born in 1914 and was educated at Dover College. He did well at school but unfortunately, due to diminished family fortunes, was forced to leave in 1928 at the age of 14. By necessity to assist the family finances, Paddy took employment as a prep school master for several years but had no real sense of vocation for the work. Following the death of his father Paddy's mother eventually re-married. Through the encouragement and generosity of his stepfather Paddy was at last able to follow his true ambition and return to study Medicine at Bart's. After qualifying as a GP Paddy took up practice in Leighton Buzzard. In 1947 he came back home to Kent as a junior partner of a practice in the village of Swingfield where he remained for the rest of his life. Paddy possessed a rare quality of compassion and real concern for all his patients. He specialized in the care and treatment of babies and young children. In fact, children and animals were Paddy's great weakness — the love he gave was eagerly returned.

The Osbornes were extensive travellers and their holidays took them all over the globe. A love of nature and the English countryside was a passion fondly shared by Hope and Paddy and it is no surprise that this deep regard for the natural world should be passed on to their son, Tim. At the time of the first inaugural meeting of the proposed Henry Williamson Society in Barnstaple, father and son were on holiday at Lynmouth. It was Paddy who encouraged Tim to borrow the car and drive over to this meeting which resulted in the formation of the HWW Society. Typical of the interest that Tim's parents took in their children's hobbies and pastimes, Paddy decided that he ought to get to know more about Henry and so set about first reading *Tarka* and then all 15 novels of the *Chronicle*.

Tim speaks with affection of the long discussions he and his father had, regarding the complex and intriguing personality Henry was, and how it influenced his writing. It was this early encouragement and empathy shown by Paddy that stimulated Tim to pursue further his interest in the books and the Society. Tim also recalls the enjoyment his parents shared at the early meetings of the Society. He remembers too, the pleasure Paddy got from reading the *Journal*. In later years holidays always seemed to clash with the dates of Spring and Autumn meetings, but that warm interest in the Society and its members was always maintained.

At Paddy's funeral on the 2nd February, a bright afternoon but with an icy north-easterly wind sweeping in from the Channel, the small ancient church of St Peter's Swingfield with its fine timbered roof, was packed to capacity, many there having to stand so great were the numbers. The whole village population seemed to be present, all had come to honour their much-loved doctor and friend. Although of Irish Catholic family origin, Paddy had for some years been the Church Warden. This prompted the Revd Forbes-Adam to remark during his moving address that the Ecumenical movement seemed to have its grass roots in Swingfield!

Our lives are signposted along the way by the contact we have with certain special people who enrich and influence us with their exceptional qualities. Paddy Osborne was one of those rare personalities and I am proud and honoured to have known him.