



*A Celebration of the Life  
of*  
***Raymond Alexander Ward***  
*5<sup>th</sup> January 1924-28<sup>th</sup> May 2018*

Woking Crematorium  
29<sup>th</sup> June 2018, 2.45pm

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## The Tribute

I'm now going to tell Ray's story as best I can in the time allowed. In doing this, I've been helped by many members of the family, and by friends such as Barney.

Ray was born in January 1924 in Lewisham, the only son of George Sopp, who travelled in textiles, and his wife Louisa. He later changed his name to Ward. Although there were happy memories, like his toy train carrying the jam pot round the table at tea-time, his father was often away working and his mother was sometimes ill. So though he got a scholarship to Beckenham Grammar, his parents did not particularly encourage him to make use of this and he left school at 16 and became a clerk which bored him stiff.

It was the war which changed his fortunes – he was assigned to teaching radar to the ATS, and he travelled from camp to camp, all over the country. On being demobbed, he was sent to Regent Street Poly, where he met Hazel on a physics course, and on the hockey field. Originally she went out with him for a one shilling bet, but once she'd got to know him, she was hooked, and they married in the late '40's. They started married life with 2 chairs with no seats, and a plank of wood across them, as their only furniture.

Ray built a successful career with the British Iron and Steel Research Association, and with Dunlop, where he once discovered that the cause of a burst plane tyre was a worker's packed lunch which had got incorporated into it. He then did postgraduate work into operational research, and was involved in setting up the Local Government Operational Research Unit. Later he became a Reader in Operational Research and Statistics at Thames Polytechnic, and found a real passion for teaching. He continued there until he retired.

Well, "retired" in inverted commas. One of his students had written software for crematoria – there's probably still some of it behind the operations here today – and they set up a business together, which Hazel and Ray later took

over, and they worked all over the country with the technology which was becoming increasingly available.

Ray and Hazel had their first house built in the Midlands – Robin's Barn, whose building was delayed by a nesting robin - then lived with Hazel's parents in Egham for a while, when they bought a piece of land in Virginia Water and had another house built, Patches, which remained Ray's home for the rest of his life. In the meantime their 3 children, Mary, Mike and Tom were born.

The children recall enjoyable though sometimes challenging holidays with their parents and Tesni, including one on the Norfolk Broads when Ray, who'd never sailed anything much bigger than a dinghy before, hired a 40 foot yacht. It was Easter, and it snowed. On another holiday they ended up herding cows off their campsite in the middle of the night, finding them by the whites of their eyes.

He gave the children advice on everything they needed to know – unless the subject was biological, in which case they were directed to Hazel as he was somewhat squeamish. Mike described Ray as having “no anger, no impatience, no grouching or grumbling, never a drama queen. So it was an excellent and safe environment from which we could develop our personalities.” They were all encouraged to experiment and try things, whatever interested them, even the explosions Tom produced in his bedroom from his chemistry set, which left him turning up in the kitchen saying ‘The bang was a bit bigger than I expected’!

Hazel died in her sleep after 44 years of marriage. Ray was devastated, and for a year he was at a complete loss. He did manage to learn to cook – a recipe book, after all, was just a set of instructions like any other.

Then, being a practical man, he joined U3A, and it was there, in a Creative Writing group, he met Jean, who was his partner to the end. Together they enjoyed holidays, badminton, dancing, swimming, and more U3A courses on a variety of unlikely subjects, and published 2 books of oral history. Ray also developed and taught a modern economics course, which had a very rational basis in land values.

Ray always loved big practical projects, particularly if they involved water. Whether it was providing a functioning moat for sandcastles on the beach, or fitting the central heating on Mike's farm, Ray was your man. He did a lot of woodwork, like the carved and inlaid miniature chest of drawers he made for Mary, the coffee table and lamp he made for Frankie and Becky's first house, and the rocking horse he made for the grandchildren. These are objects which will be handed down through the generations and will form a tangible legacy. He interpreted Vogue patterns and made clothes for Hazel and kept items from skips and beachcombing expeditions in case they came in useful. He became a great hoarder.

He had an incredibly sweet tooth. Any walk you did with Ray was bound to end at a tea shop. In fact, the fondness he and Jean had for the Isle of Wight was partly based on the fact it had so many of them. Tripadvisor lists over 100. He also kept bees, which is a pretty good way to cater for a sweet tooth, and made his own jam and marmalade. Milly recalled "A few Christmases ago we were all sitting round the breakfast table at Staunton. Grandpa and Jean had already had their morning coffee and toast (with half a jar of marmalade) and we were all relaxing with coffee and teas. Unbeknown to us, Grandpa had managed to locate some left-over profiteroles from the night before and was quietly tucking into his third breakfast. We quickly realised that if any sweet confectionery was in sight it was not safe around grandpa, whether he had just had a large Christmas meal or not!"

And he loved gardening, though sometimes he got distracted from it by feeding slugs to the pet duck, Quackers, for a whole afternoon.

What could he not do? Well, he couldn't spell reliably, or teach Mary how to catch a ball, and occasionally he got things completely wrong, like the time he put an arrow through a picture window at Patches. And he was very, very untidy.

He had a great sense of humour, and loved Dad's Army, Fawlty Towers, The Navy Lark, Monty Python, and the Tom Sharpe books. People described his

humour as “slightly devilish”, “not PC”, and remarked on his “cheery twinkle”. And he never missed anything. As Barney said, “You’d be a fool to think he wasn’t listening or paying attention.”

He was enormously proud of his children and grandchildren, and Kate as the firstborn grandchild, was loved right from the time that he and Hazel made tiny bespoke outfits for her when she was in the premature baby unit. Later he supported her when she decided to train as a Humanist celebrant. She says of him “For me, Grandpa showed me infinite kindness and patience, a fiercely rational mind, and was a calm and contented emotional presence; as a natural born worrier, being around grandpa was such a pleasure”.

He would set up treasure hunts for the grandchildren, and Frankie once got a metal-detector and he scattered coins all over the garden. He adored his first great-grandchild, Felicity, but sadly never got to see Harriet.

Ray was able to enjoy life right to the end. He loved life, and wanted to make the most of it. Just a week before he died, Mike got a panic call from Meals on Wheels – they had arrived with lunch but could not find Ray or Jean. As they were on the phone, a taxi pulled up and Ray and Jean got out, returning from lunch at the local wine bar. Mary and Dave have fond memories of their last picnic with Ray and Jean in the garden, on a lovely sunny day. He had a stay in hospital in December, but spent most of the time there saying “get me out of this bloody place”, and so he died at home, with family around him.

Kate will now read us an excerpt from Kenneth Graham’s, *The Wind in the Willows*, a favourite of Ray’s, and therefore of his children and grandchildren.

*“The weary Mole also was glad to turn in without delay, and soon had his head on his pillow, in great joy and contentment. But ere he closed his eyes he let them wander round his old room, mellow in the glow of the firelight that played or rested on familiar and friendly things which had long been unconsciously a part of him, and now smilingly received him back, without rancour. He was now in just the frame of mind that the tactful Rat had quietly worked to bring about in him. He saw clearly how*

*plain and simple—how narrow, even—it all was; but clearly, too, how much it all meant to him, and the special value of some such anchorage in one's existence. He did not at all want to abandon the new life and its splendid spaces, to turn his back on sun and air and all they offered him and creep home and stay there; the upper world was all too strong, it called to him still, even down there, and he knew he must return to the larger stage. But it was good to think he had this to come back to; this place which was all his own, these things which were so glad to see him again and could always be counted upon for the same simple welcome."*

Thank you, Kate