

# A celebration of life

# Ernest Walter Powell

18<sup>th</sup> July 1931 – 28<sup>th</sup> January 2020

1.30 pm Pidgeon's Funeral Home, Cowbridge Rd East, Cardiff

2.20pm Western Cemetery, Cardiff

*a personal goodbye*

Humanist  
*Ceremonies*

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Walter was born in St David's hospital on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July 1931 and was the eldest of Walter and Queenie's three children. His first home was with his grandparents in Mynachdy, but his parents soon moved to rooms in a relative's house in Cathays Terrace, and from there to their first house in Kenyon Road, Tremorfa.

In 1939 when Walter was eight the family moved to Storrar Road in Tremorfa, a house that was to be the family home for many years. Shortly after they moved in, as the Army built up for the Second World War, his father, who had previously been in the army, returned to his regiment. He was a Sergeant Major and served abroad during the war including in India.

Walter, his brother Trevor and sister Barbara grew up in a world very different from the one we know; their father away for years, their food and clothing rationed, carrying gas masks to school and as their house was near the Cardiff Airfield on Pengam Moors and on the flight path used by German bombers targeting Cardiff Dock, they had an air-raid shelter in their back garden.

Walter told how on one occasion he left the air-raid shelter during an air-raid and went to play football in the street. He saw a German bomber flying low with its bomb doors open and watched as bombs fell from it on to the Docks. Queenie having realised he was missing, came running out of the house, shouting at him to get in the shelter waving a shoe in her hand ready to back up her orders.

He was a free spirit loved being out of doors and was fascinated with the planes and the ships he saw in the docks. He went to bomb sites on the airfield and the docks collecting pieces of shrapnel. He and his friends went where they wanted, doing things that would turn modern parents' hair white, riding the

wild horses on Pengam Moor, swimming and fishing in the Rumney River and playing on the railway tracks.

He attended Splott Road School where he enjoyed himself and did well earning a place at the Howard Gardens Grammar School for Boys where he particularly enjoyed Art. He left school aged fifteen and initially worked as a labourer, then a mechanic before starting his apprenticeship as a gas fitter with the Wales Gas Board.

This was interrupted when he was called up to do his National Service and joined the Royal Signal Corp in November 1949. He was trained as a radio operator and was shipped overseas to Singapore and then Hong Kong and the New Territories. He enjoyed his National Service and often said he would like to go back to Hong Kong. Deborah showed me some pictures of him at this time and she also showed me his discharge book which had the following testimonial written in it.

Military Conduct: Very Good

“He is a good operator both on a radio wireless and line and a very pleasant man to deal with.

Slow speaking, he appears to go through life wearing rose coloured glasses, completely unworried. He is a good worker if a bit slow and uses his intelligence.”

I am told the word “unworried,” just about sums up his attitude for the rest of his life. At the end of his National service he returned home to complete his apprenticeship and joined the Territorial Army, stationed at Maindy Barracks.

Deborah wasn't sure when Walter met Beryl, but knows they met on the circular bus which used to travel around Cardiff in the evening. Both had been on a night out with friends and were on their way home to different parts of

Cardiff when they happened to sit next to each other. Beryl later wrote in her diary "I met a nice boy on the bus tonight."

They arranged to meet again a few days later and Walter was standing at the meeting place when he heard her saying his name and turned around looking for her, then looking down he saw her. As they had been sitting down when they first met he hadn't realized how short she was, just four foot ten inches. Indeed, when he took her home to meet his parents for the first time his father was concerned and took Walter to one side and asked him how old Beryl was.

Beryl was a very keen dancer, appearing on stage in concerts and pantomimes in Cardiff and the Valleys. As they courted and got to know each other better it became apparent that Beryl's dancing and Walter's Territorial Army involvement was stopping them spending as much time together as they wished, and so they both gave them up.

They were married in the fifties and first lived in rooms in Canton. Beryl was part of a large, close family, which welcomed Walter in and he was always close to her brothers and sisters.

They were still living in rooms when Deborah was born in 1959. Six months later Walter's father died and the three of them moved back to Storrar Road to live with Queenie. Vincent was born in 1968 and their family was complete

Walter was a gas fitter and at first Deborah can remember him cycling to work and then all over Cardiff to his calls, carrying all his tools and pipes on his bike. Eventually he got a van, but the family were never allowed to travel in it. When Deborah was about six Walter bought his first car and after that the family started to travel regularly.

They often went to Devon and Cornwall in the car, travelling overnight and arriving in the early morning. They also went on lots of holidays to Butlins,

usually to Minehead, in May and September each year. They went with Beryl's family as part of a group of about twenty.

Beryl used to love the competitions, making sure that they all joined in. She was a very outgoing, social and very popular person. Walter was a much quieter, reserved gentleman and was very much a home bird. Their house had a large garden and that was where he liked to spend his time growing vegetables.

Beryl organized coach trips for the street and took the children while Walter stayed home. When Beryl wanted to go and do something in Cardiff he would drive her and the children there and pick them, up but preferred to go home in between and work in the garden.

Beryl had never wanted to go abroad on holiday but gave in to persuasion and they took the children to Alcuria in Spain in 1978. This changed everything and from then on, they went on many foreign holidays, visiting Italy and Portugal as well as many places in Spain.

As the children grew older and more independent Walter and Beryl were less tied to the home. They were members of the St Albans Sport and Social Club, had a good social life, many friends and Walter played bowls and skittles at the club.

In 1984 Deborah presented Walter and Beryl with their first grandchild, Matthew. A new chapter started in their lives, and they enjoyed being grandparents. Walter had some more time for the role as that same year he retired aged fifty-three from British Gas and worked part time.

He worked for various companies and only gave up work completely when in 1990 Beryl died very suddenly.

This was a terrible shock to Walter and everyone. Beryl's was a very big funeral, showing, as everyone knew, how popular and well thought of she was. Knowing this helped Walter through this incredibly difficult time for him, as did his close relationship with Beryl's family and particularly her sister Shirley. The many friends he and Beryl had made and the social life they'd had also helped him, as he continued to play bowls and skittles.

The arrival of Vincent's children Samantha, Ben and Josh gave him more family to think about and having given up work altogether he was able to spend even more time with them.

He was very close to his children and grandchildren, especially Sam, and was always there, willing to help whenever asked. He often went on holidays with them. For many years he visited an apartment in Benalmadena with Deborah and Matthew and in later years went on cruises with Vincent and his family.

As he got older Walter continued to play skittles with his son for a number of years as well as going regularly to the Moreland Community Centre for lunch and to see his friends. He was a proud and independent man, able to look after himself until about eighteen months ago, when it became apparent that he was showing the early signs of Alzheimer's and needed more support and care. He moved into Danesbrook House, where he was very well looked after by Jo and her staff.

He was taken ill last autumn with pneumonia and spent two and a half months in Llandough Hospital. He left hospital just before Christmas, but his health deteriorated. He died at the age of eighty-eight on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January, having lived a long and full life.