

## **DAVID JOHN PERYER:**

11 NOVEMBER 1932 – 30 DECEMBER 2017

David's first Quaker influence came when he was a pupil at Leighton Park School. He thrived there, becoming an expert clarinetist and music scholar. On leaving school he registered with the FAU as a conscientious objector to military national service and in 1951, part way through his degree, was sent for FAU post-war service. Much of that time he spent at the Melksham HQ, becoming quartermaster before being transferred to Rosrath, Germany. Working in this residential hostel for refugees aged 7–24 confirmed his lifelong desire to help children.

David and Dinah met at an International Quaker work camp in Bristol, married in 1957 at Spicelands Meeting House and in course of time had three children, Jonathan, Adrian and Jane. Initially Dinah supported them both by teaching, while David completed his interrupted LSE degree in social anthropology. Once his degree was obtained, David's was a life of paid public and unpaid private service, both aimed at mending the world as far as his many abilities enabled him.

His began his wide-ranging career as an Assistant Governor at Hewell Grange Borstal and next went into academia, first as researcher, then tutor and finally lecturer in social work, all at Leicester University. Another move took him to Bristol University where his Social Work lectureship focused on policy and practice for children and young people's specialist residential units. 1977 took him to East Sussex County Council first as Assistant then as Deputy Director of Social Services. His last career move, in 1983, was to become Director of Humberside Social Services. Throughout this period of intensely responsible work and development the family had been active in Quaker meetings - in Leicester, in Sidcot and in Lewes.

Settling in East Yorkshire opened yet another phase of life to be embraced. Then in 1991 local government re-organisation, coupled with Dinah's uncertain health, led David to take early retirement – and to throw his energies into major new projects. Storwood, their final home, deep in the countryside and requiring considerable and lengthy renovation, was a challenge that delighted David and harnessed both his strategic and practical aptitudes. (Only weeks before his death, he could be found up scaffolding painting windows!). Beyond the domestic scene he became an independent consultant [in partnership with his son Adrian] in the management of change, advising various local authorities and also Friends House, which commissioned them to undertake a significant role in its 1995 Administrative Review.

There were other wider projects. As a trustee of the Romanian Orphanage Trust, he was one of those advising the post-Ceausescu Government on alternative ways of operating orphanages. A concern for social housing led to his becoming chair of the Anchor Trust for five years and to his joining the Joseph Rowntree Housing Committee and getting involved in innovative York housing developments at Hartrigg Oaks and Derwenthorpe. Mental health was a longstanding focus of his and he chaired MIND, the National Association for Mental Health, from 1994-2002. At the same time, his concern for children's welfare was undiminished. Two terms of service on the governing body of Bootham School were followed by chairing the Board of Breckenbrough, a Quaker- managed residential school in North Yorkshire for boys with special needs.

How did he also find the time and energy for other Quaker service and family life? The clear evidence is that he did. When big structural changes came into the Quaker world nationally, David as clerk of AM trustees was key to enabling the Area Meeting, especially Friargate, make a smooth transition into new forms of governance and into becoming a united charity. At the same time he was caring devotedly for Dinah during the protracted ill-health that preceded her death from multiple myeloma in 2010, as well as undertaking extensive house building and renovation work for each of his children. In 2011 he was once more broadening his scope of activities, with a key role in the management and strategy for major development work at Friargate Meeting, not to mention the practicality of felling trees, meeting builders, and supporting staff through frequently chaotic times. The resulting building is part of his legacy. He was simultaneously the treasurer of Yorkshire & Humberside Circles of Support & Accountability – and served as interim chair of The Retreat Specialist Mental Health Hospital. He finally retired in 2016, aged 83 and fully fit.

By then he had been sharing his life for some years with another York Quaker, Lesley [Lee] O'Neal, opening his heart to her three children and grandchildren and quickly becoming a valued integral part of their lives too. David and Lee's years together were a happy and fulfilling culmination of David's willingness to welcome new experiences and live life to the full. Both he and Lee had connections in Africa and they travelled to see friends and family there and elsewhere, besides offering Storwood's hospitality widely and generously.

David combined analytical insight and intellectual capability with strong moral principles, courtesy, kindness and a wicked sense of humour. He had a clarity of purpose that set firm parameters and positive action. If he could help he did, both practically and financially. His vision, directness and unflagging energy helped find ways through dilemmas that seemed intractable. On a personal level, people were on the receiving end of his unobtrusive and thoughtful generosity and his skills were available to anyone who needed them. At his memorial meeting gratitude was expressed for the quiet way he would provide solutions to difficulties, from running a large organization to rendering the well at Storwood safe for children and repairing a pond that threatened to overwhelm the garden. He would quietly ease one person's problem with a small injection of cash, shared his house with a family who needed a holiday and a dog who had no home, and made people of all ages feel that their opinions mattered and were taken into account. David was no paragon; laughter was never far away and he had the ability to be on occasion very confidently wrong! His idea of 'being in time' was rarely shared by his travelling companions.

Where there was opportunity, David gravitated naturally to smaller meetings for worship. He was very regular at Friargate's twice-monthly 'breakfast meeting' held prior to the much larger weekly 10.30 worship. For many years with Dinah, then latterly with Lee, he was a generous and welcoming host to the monthly Sunday evening worship group that brings together those living in villages east of York and crosses Area Meeting boundaries. David rarely ministered in worship, but his life spoke clearly to all who met him and who benefited, whether as individuals or organisations, from his combination of a warm and loving personality with the insights and clarity gained in a lifetime's professional and personal experience. He was that Quaker anomaly, a Friend to whom the concept of God was a social construct rather than an actual external force or being, but whose own life so spoke

that others saw in him an embodiment of Quaker principles lived out, 'not a notion but a way of life'. He would never have spoken of testimony or used words such as the grace of God, but for Quakers who knew him well, those words sprang naturally to mind when they saw and experienced his capacity to welcome, cherish and bring out the best in difficult situations and in people. We have seen in his life a shining witness to his adherence to the Quaker principles that he learnt at school. He died only a few weeks after being diagnosed with a brain tumour and soon after his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday.

*York Area Meeting 12<sup>th</sup> January 2019*