

PETER DAY – A Tribute



PETER – AS CHILD AND YOUTH (Eric Midwinter)

Peter Day was the human being I had known for the longest time. As we lived back to back, I was aware of him from our school days, which is over 80 years ago. Born with typical drama on the very steps of the Sale Cottage Hospital on 15 February 1931, he lived at 11 Oldfield Road with his parents, Lilian and Jack Day and his younger brother, Billy. His grandparents lived further down the road and his granddad, Mr Smith a tough and uncompromising bread-man, was sometimes requested to dole out condign punishment, should the boys be disobedient. A pathway ran along the back of these terraced houses and we could hear Peter or Billy returning distraught having been subject to this indignity. During war-time air raids, we could call across to one another from our respective shelters, although the Days singing in their air raid shelter was not much of an improvement on the sirens.

Most of our playing together was in alliance, sometimes in battle against the Wharf Road gang, one of whose specialties was arrows tipped with dog dirt, after the fashion noted at Saturday afternoon children's matinees for tribesmen to use poisoned darts. We often played on the Yatesey, as the land, now built over, between the canal and the railway on the way to Dane Road station, was then named. We approached it by way of the footbridge at the end of Oldfield Road. It was the scene for much martial action.

On one occasion, always recalled by Peter, there had been some kind of *detente* and a minor skirmish broke out. Peter had the brainwave of obtaining some small white bags from a local sweet shop and filling them with soil, usable as grenades, hurled from his back garden into ours. Unluckily, the second such missile – the first having dropped harmlessly in our solitary tree – scored a direct hit on the sports pages of the 'Manchester Evening News' which my father was browsing over. The rapidity with which hostilities were ended suggests my father might helpfully have been engaged by the United Nations.

Peter and I both went to Springfield Council School and, although he was almost exactly a year older than me, we spent his final year there in the same class. We were also in 7th Sale Presbyterian Wolf Cubs, an early showing of Peter's delight in 'club-ability'. Once at Springfield he demonstrated another of his qualities, namely, the telling of the tall tale. A group of us was hauled before the headmistress for some collective misdemeanour. Explanations were demanded. We shuffled, heads down, hopeful of a quick end to these judicial proceedings. Peter launched into a

melodramatic fable of betrayal, treachery and conspiracy. We were spellbound, not least because we did not recognise ourselves in this colourful plot. Mrs Hovell, far from being spellbound, felt it did not suggest leniency on her part.

Peter passed what was then called the scholarship and went to Sale Grammar School in 1942. In his second year he was placed in the 'L' (for language, that is, German added to the French already underway) as opposed to 'M' for manual, that is wood and metalwork. In other words, he was in the top thirty of his year but, although bright and sensible, he never took readily to stern scholarship, whilst, characteristically, very much enjoying the *camaraderie* of the boisterous classroom. He never looked back on the all-round experience with immense affection. He obtained an average school certificate and left school in 1947. These were the days when just nine or ten of the 1942 entry of sixty stayed on for the sixth form, so there was nothing untoward about this, especially as Peter passed the not to be sniffed at Manchester Corporation exam for work in local government.

To be honest, Peter, at that time, was as interested in work-work as he had been in school-work. His mentor in the Manchester City Treasurer's office, Mr Gradwell, a man who might have passed for an actor playing the role of a typically dull, pompous municipal official, asked him in some despair what his ambition was – “to play badminton for Cheshire” was Peter's unhesitating response. Peter concentrated his attention rather on the City Treasurer's football team, for whom he was a hard-running outside left. (On leave from the army, he persuaded me to play for this team when they were one short; for the only time in a blameless career, I had my name taken – for excessive debate not malign destruction - and was obliged to consign the innocent under whose title I was masquerading to the criminal annals of the Manchester FA for ever)

Peter moved on to banking and also did national service, unusually in those times, with the Royal Navy, although, like Joseph Porter, First Lord of the Admiralty in *HMS Pinafore*, he never went to sea. Later he found satisfaction and security for many years in the rented properties business. Incidentally, he was a very accomplished badminton player – and, although this was outside my own perspective, a most active and knowledgeable ornithologist, a hobby he pursued with lifelong dedication.

PETER – THE NETWORKER

It is not unjust to suggest that, his private and family life apart, Peter reserved his chief energies to practise the skill, even the art, at which he excelled; that of building linkages and chains of people and sustaining such collectivities. He was the wireless operator for human souls. Not the most literary of men, he may not have come across the quotation from E.M.Forster's 1910 novel, 'only connect', but it was Peter's constant text. He was the ultimate net-worker.

I was fortunate enough to be involved with two of his major investments in human connection; I am sure there were others that deserve mention. About 1946 or 47, with a degree of ecumenical sensibility, Peter transferred his loyalties from the Presbyterian (cubs and scouts) to the Congregational church where his mother worshipped. There he was prominent and central in the formation and progressive life of the Montague Club (the church was located in Montague Road) at a time when the youth club was *de riguer*. Meeting every Monday evening, it became the centre-piece of the social life of many teenage girls and boys, with talks, games, outings, theatre visits and all the fun of the fair. We had a football team and, notably, we organised shows. In one of the first, a revue based on historical epochs called *Pastymes*, Peter, Duncan Mercer and I played three suffragettes. Indeed, long after the Montague Club had folded, the Montague Players, concert party style, survived and prospered, appearing for example at Sale Grammar School on the evening of the Parents Association annual fetes.

Peter was active, administratively and practically, in every conceivable aspect of this enterprise. I am pleased I can remember that Duncan Mercer's mother wisely said to us at this time: 'you will always remember the Montague Club' – and we did and we have.

Thus it came as little surprise that, as we grew a little older, Peter turned his attention to the Old Salians. He was the fulcrum for its splendid rugby heritage for a long generation, as player – a stalwart wing forward – and organiser. He was to enjoy several heady days when Old Salians' rugby was powerful and victorious. The annual Old Salians' Rugby Dinner, first held in the Pelican Hotel circa 1953, became a gala occasion, much looked forward to and much enjoyed. There were Old Salians' dances and other occasions. Peter also, first as umpire, then as a slogging batsman, impossible to set a field for, as Peter was the last to know where the ball would be going, served the jolly travels of the Old Salians' cricket team with his usual *bonhomie*. He ensured that, oftentimes, there was a newsletter

distributed and did everything possible to keep the Old Salians compact and active. He was largely instrumental in the success story of the Old Salians' merger with Sale Cricket Club. Overall, he maintained, in excess of half a century, a most remarkable grasp on the detail of score of Old Salians. Towards the end of his life, when our contact was mainly long telephone conversations, he always had the latest tit-bits of news of dozens of the *alumni*, demonstrating the most amazing contortions of memory to fuel our laughter-filled conversations.

It is no coincidence that it was 'boys' from the years in and around Peter's time at SGS who figure so exceptionally in all this. At dinners the most well-represented year – and there were one or two strong contenders from other years – was Peter's 1942 gang. Only last year, in one of our phone chats, he rattled off the 2L of 1943 in that alphabetical order which dominated our scholastic existence.

Nor is it a coincidence that several Old Salian notables of that vintage had been Montague Club members as well. At one Old Salians' dinner, much to Peter's delight, I suddenly realised that all those who had performed a sporting version of 'if I was not upon this stage' at the Montague Club in the mid-1940s were present. I persuaded them (like old fire brigade horses when the alarm bell rings, they didn't need much persuasion) to come forward and perform this song-sketch. They were all well-nigh word perfect. The line-up beginning with myself on the left was Peter, Derek Moody, Duncan Mercer, Colin Pickard, Stan Whitehead, Ronnie Barratt and Billy Hughes...

How many dozens of people have had their social, and by that token, their private, lives touched by Peter's determination to 'connect' is difficult to enumerate. What satisfaction Peter drew from this rare ability, never forgetting the energy required to service it. And what satisfaction it brought to we dozens who so benefited.

I can only repeat what I wrote at the time of the school's fiftieth anniversary. Peter is 'the salient Old Salian.'

Eric Midwinter (SGS 1943-50; Montague Club 1946-1953; Old Salians 1950-)

A CLUB MAN THROUGH AND THROUGH – (Dave Walmsley)

I joined what is now Sale Sports Club in 1962 and even as a 15-year-old I was aware of the tensions which pertained between the existing sections of the club and the Old Salians who were in the process of cementing their partial merger with the hockey, cricket and tennis club. I remember a heated argument about whether the Old Salians in their new upstairs club room were involved in nefarious exploitation of the coal store which shared common space with the showers in the club cellars. There was a story – probably apocryphal - of Peter emptying the contents of a coal scuttle down the stairs, allowing the coal and coal dust to cascade towards the then club secretary, Edwin Brockbank, who had accused Peter of grand larceny in his attempts to lay a fire the frozen clubroom with the contents of said scuttle.

It was probably just a coincidence that Peter's looks led to frequent comparisons with the England fast bowler, Fred Trueman – but there was a telling cross-reference in that the England paceman was nicknamed 'Fiery Fred.' Peter too was passionate about the things he cared about and he, like his Yorkshire alter ego, did not shirk conflict. Herein lay Peter's greatest strength and greatest weakness – he worked and fought like a Trojan for his causes – his rugby, the club, his tennis – as well as his bird watching and his allotment.

Peter's contribution to Old Salians' rugby was enormous. Although not one of the most gifted or long-serving players – he was a capable flank forward – his contribution off the field was monumental. In the days before everyone had a telephone – and long before emails – Peter was the match secretary and general secretary – and each week wrote out and posted to all players details of their selection and the match for which they had been selected. Later, he would hand write and then have duplicated the weekly team selection newsletter and results sheet before posting that out. He served the Old Salians in a number of capacities on the committee and was at the centre of its social life in the clubroom and was well known on the circuit – witnessed by the presence of a Whitchurch contingent at his funeral. He ran the 200 club and was a key driver in revenue raising ventures. Meanwhile he was the key figure in the organisation of the highly successful and much renowned Old Salians' dinner before he passed the mantle to Russ Wyatt and Bob Remond. After the end of his playing career, Peter supported the team in all weathers, home and away – and in those difficult times after the professionalisation of the game he – with Stan Whitehead – continued to support, put out the flags, carried the bucket and took up key administrative roles and

encouraged the officers and the players until the Old Salians sadly was no more. Others had walked away, but Peter was there to the end of the club he loved.

But it was not just about rugby and Old Salians. Peter played a full and active role in the life of the whole club. He was a fine tennis player and played on Sale Tennis Club's first team for many years until his knees finally forbade it. He served the sports club (cricket, rugby, hockey and tennis) as president twice, the second time a six year stint, and as house chairman – and he was rarely off the committee in some guise or other. He was a tireless worker – and was at the club most Sunday mornings through the 70s and 80s with Duncan and Harry, emptying the fruit machines and checking the bar takings – as well as seeing to the PAYE of the staff. Peter stated his opinions forcefully and with conviction – he was entitled to do so because no-one did more to keep the club functioning effectively and prospering – on and off the field. He was not always right – and could be stubborn – but his opinion was always valued and often tempered what may have otherwise been poor decisions by others.

Away from the club Peter was a great badminton player and enthusiast. He was also a very keen bird watcher and a long-serving warden at Rostherne where he could be found early on Sunday morning before going down to his duties at the club. He had a number of close friends with whom he went bird watching all over the world. And somehow he found time to keep his allotment going and serving for a while as a governor of Sale Grammar School for Boys and as a director of Sale Ground Company Limited.

Towards the end of his life, Peter's activities were restricted by illness but he still met old comrades – Jack Barrett, Alf Hulme and Tony Roberts – for lunch on a regular basis. He also kept in close touch with his life-long friend, Eric Midwinter, whom he cajoled into speaking at the dinner on numerous occasions much to the delight and advantage of those who were loyal attendees and despite the fact that he was often the butt of Eric's stories.

Peter's life was one of service, commitment, lively involvement and sociability. He was the beating heart of Old Salians and of Sale Sports Club for over fifty years. They are not made like him anymore.

Dave Walmsley (SGS 1958-65; teacher at SGS 1968-1989; former president of Sale Sports Club and former Chairman of Old Salians)

A POST SCRIPT FROM MAX WEIR

So many memories but the first one is perhaps the best--- 1957 I was in the 6th form and just got onto the first fifteen!

One Friday night the phone rang and my mother answered and said " a Mr Day " would like a word with you.

“Pete Day here Max -- how would you like to turn out for the old boys thirds tomorrow pm. Arthur (Seddon) is playing!”

How could I refuse -- Pete was legendary as the Svengali of the Old Salians and nobody ever refused his call.

He mentioned in passing that we would be playing Orrell .On coming down to earth I asked dad where Orrell was and he said somewhere off the east Lancs Road.

I arrived at the old school well before the kick off and slowly my team mates arrived.

The only problem was we totalled 13 players-- which might have been apt if rugby league -- Orrell of course declined to even things up so by half time which came curtesy of the ref blowing up after 30 mins. Score by then was 30 odd nil!

Duncan Mercer had nightmares under the frequent “up and unders” which somehow Orrell had sussed out as a tactic.

We finished 10 minutes early with the ref once more taking pity on us when the score passed 55 points to nil.

Some debut! I then went on to play for another 10 years for the Old Boys mainly on the lower teams and having the pleasure of attending selection meetings on Sunday mornings with Peter in the Chair--- trying to outfox him became a game in itself.

Great times with a great guy!

Max Weir. – Holder of the 440 yards school record; 51.8 secs in 1956; Head Prefect 1957-58