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Ray Warner 1914-1989

RAY WARNER 24 November 1914 - 15 December 1989

Ray was born in Folkestone and educated at Harvey Grammar School. He joined the photographic firm of Lambert Weston before serving as a photographer with Bomber Command, R.A.F. After the war he returned to Lambert Weston to run their Dover branch, later taking over the business in his own name. In 1958 he became a freelance cameraman for BBC TV and later also taught photography at the Adult Education Centre.

When the Dover Society was formed Ray was delighted to be elected a Vice-President. The Society's tribute to him comes in the thoughts and memories of some of his many friends.

Our President, The Countess of Guilford, writes:

When trying to express these thoughts about Ray I find it necessary to reach for the essence of the man. For me he was firstly a gentle man of God with all the simplicity and completeness that this commitment implies. He was a man with a profound love of beauty. This appreciation and sensitivity for all forms of beauty gave him great joie de vivre, he loved life. The joy with which he perceived light, a sky, a flower or a landscape, the drama of a rough sea under those great white cliffs or his enjoyment of a good theatrical production were all illuminated by his faith in God.

He understood and loved Dover unequivocally and with a constant sense of new discovery which gave his remarkable films and photographs a freshness and topicality so enjoyed by us all and always allied with his innate sense and appreciation of its special place in the history of this island of ours. Through his films and photographs he was able to document and interpret every day events and give them perspective and context in history and this made his documentation unique and very special.

On a personal note he was a constant and unfailing friend during the 33 years we knew him. He supported us and our beloved Waldershare through thick and thin. He made, with great skill, a film of life here on the Estate and captured many of the lovely characters of people who lived and worked here making it a precious record of life at Waldershare in the 1970's. He photographed our son, Piers, many times during his 18 years and these photographs are greatly treasured.

Few people could have had as many really good friends as Ray. He was very much part of the community and life of the Town and he always had time for everyone. He was enormously kind and caring. He was a real family man. He and Kay were a wonderful couple and so complete in their happiness and their pride in their children and his tender loving care during her last illness was an inspiration to witness.

Ray loved life and relished its every facet. He was a great respecter of persons and he was always a gentleman and, with all this, he had a great sense of humour and a lovely chuckle. I like to think of his dear face breaking into that wonderful smile. He made the World a brighter, nicer place.

Historian, Ivan Green:

I knew, and cooperated with, Ray Warner on a number of projects over the last quarter of a century. He was a fine photographer, a good organiser and a most loyal friend with an enormous circle of personal and business contacts which kept him in close touch, not only with local events and happenings, but also with local feelings, needs and concerns.

He worked right up to the end and only a month before his death, when he was desperately ill, he telephoned me concerning details of the next Film Festival which, in addition to his wonderful series of yearly Dover Films, became one of his major preoccupations.

He leaves behind him many happy memories and friendships, but even more important a rich store of historical and sociological records of enormous value to future generations.

Ray Newsam remembers Ray as a professional colleague:

My memories of Ray are mainly as a colleague teaching photography at Westmount. Ray took the beginners' classes which usually, because of his name and reputation, had such high numbers that they in fact could not all be accommodated. The students would then be fed into my classes, and we found that with Ray's enormous experience, particularly of portraiture, and my technical knowledge of modern equipment, we complemented each other's skills. The students often benefitted from Ray's numerous friends and contacts in Dover. These would allow us, on the summer location courses we taught together, to take students into places not generally accessible to the public and the evenings often finished with the whole class going for a drink together, and provided some of my most enjoyable photographic memories. Ray jokingly referred to me as 'my young colleague' when introducing me to the students, in spite of my forty-some years and greying hair, but he in fact often left us wishing we had his seemingly endless enthusiasm and energy. Although Ray retired from business in 1977 he never retired from photography. He would often say that he must cut down on his commitments but we all knew he found it almost impossible to say "No" to a request. He has left a legacy of films and photographs of Dover that is unique and historically important, and memories of a kind and dedicated gentleman.

Journalist, Terry Sutton, writes:

Ray Warner loved Dover and nothing was too much for him when it came to helping the community. He was a reliable businessman who, through his camera skills, became a respectable media man - and there's not many of them about.

He could mix well and seemed as at ease with Royalty as he was with the man in the street of his adopted town.

Ray had a keen sense of history, as witnessed in his series of life in Dover over the years. This link with yesteryear was also evident with his active work for St Mary's Church, Dover.

He loved the beauty of nature, be it the flowers blooming on the sea front, the sun throwing its reflected light on Dover Castle, or the tranquility of his subjects in his days as the town's premier portrait photographer.

It will be a long time before Dover finds someone willing to devote the hours of voluntary work to the town that Ray enjoyed contributing.

"It is my way of returning some of the happiness that Dover has offered me", Ray told me one day during his final year.

From the President of The Rotary Club of Dover, Reg Burrows:

The motto of Rotary is "Service above Self". Ray joined the Dover Club in 1952 and we have probably never had a member with a better record of living up to that motto.

We remember Ray particularly for his years of service to the RNLi which culminated in the stationing in Dover of the lifeboat "Rotary Service", to the building of which the Rotary movement in Britain contributed substantially.

Ray was for many years responsible for organising the Rotary Christmas Tree outside St Mary's Church. Unhappily we were unable to tell him before he died that this year's collection, over £1700, was the largest ever. He would have been so pleased for he had great faith in the kindness and generosity of the people of Dover.

From the thoughts of Ken Farmer, former Head of Astor School:

His manner was quiet, I never saw him ruffled or pricked to anger or petulance. Small towns such as Dover are fortunate in that from time to time they allow the flowering of many small talents which can enhance the value of the lives of their people. Ray's talent was not so much as a film-maker but as an archivist, a careful selector and recorder of the days of Dover's years. In this he had no equal and I know of no other town which has been so well and lovingly portrayed on film.

And from Ken Ruffell, formerly of Dover Grammar School for Boys:

My very special memory of Ray is derived from the autumn of 1959 when we jointly made a colour film of the Christmas story. We called the film 'Nativity' and I believe it was Ray's first work in colour. A farmer at Martin provided a daughter to play Mary as well as a stable, horses for the three kings, cattle, sheep and a donkey for Mary to ride in her journey to Bethlehem. The film was in part a farewell Christmas card to Mr Booth, the headmaster who was about to retire. The film went into the KEC Film Library and we continue to receive pleasant notes from schools who have enjoyed it.

Janet Young, Dover Players producer:

I remember Ray as the one to whom I could always turn when a crisis arose in a Dover Players' Production. No matter what it was, Ray was always on hand to help and not just with advice or even reference to one of his many contacts in the area, but by giving me his time and treating my difficulty as if it really mattered to him to help - as, indeed, it did. I remember Ray as always enthusiastic and cheerful and fun to be with. Who else but Ray would have been working away as the Gravedigger in Hamlet and, forgetting the words of Shakespeare's song, have chanted clearly "I've forgotten the words tra-la-la. I've forgotten the words tra-la-la" - Cue for Prompt!

And Ray as the Demon King! Impossible - nothing could disguise his kind face and manner. I remember Ray as the friend who, for more than forty years came to all our Family celebrations. The friend who brought his camera with him and who left us with happy and serious and poignant photographs which now form the visual memory of our Family life.

We will always remember Ray.

Maggi Waite, Area Schools and Childrens' Librarian, writes:

With death of Ray Warner, the Library Service has lost a very good friend whose unfailing courtesy and helpfulness will be sadly missed by all of us who have worked with him over many years.

Along with Ivan Green, he gave time tirelessly to awaken interest in local heritage particularly amongst young people in Dover. Always flexible, patient and kind to anyone who asked for help, his passing will leave an unfillable gap in our community life.

Peter Johnson, Vice-President, writes:

I couldn't believe Ray was 75 when he died, I knew it was true but all the time I had known him he'd been such a young man. I met him first when I moved from London to Dover in 1953 and, photography being one of my hobbies, it was not long before I found myself in Lambert Weston's shop on the seaward side of Townwall Street next door but one to Frank Vickery, an old Dover character who was proud of having sold crabs to Queen Victoria. We talked photography for a bit and Ray took me through to the studio at the back of the shop. It was a ramshackle old building, timber and corrugated iron I think, and the River Dour flowed close by. Ray showed me some of his recent portraits and I was amazed at the high standard. In both composition and quality they would have held their own in comparison with the portraits I had so often looked at in the windows of the famous and fashionable photographers in Bond Street and Baker Street. I made some comment to that effect but Ray did not reply, he just smiled.

Happily for Dover Ray never aspired to join the ranks of the fashionable and the famous. He loved his adopted home town and he loved the people and he expressed that love over the years by giving his time, his talent, his energy and his enthusiasm to the wellbeing of Dover and the surrounding district. And he did all those things with the same gentle smile I had seen when I first met him.

When I saw him a few days before he died I asked how he was feeling and he replied "Better today, Dover 1989 has come back from being edited and they're going to show it to me in the morning." And although he was suffering much pain and discomfort he looked up at me - and smiled.