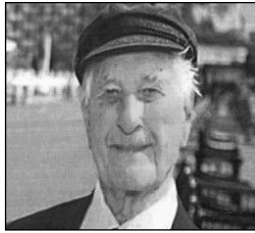


Terry Sutton a Personal Appreciation

Peter Sherred

During the early days of April 2024 tributes were made to one to whom the Dover Mercury referred as “a legendary journalist”, a member of the Dover Society and its former Chairman, a certain Terry Sutton MBE. On 11th April, the Rotary Club of Dover organised a celebratory dinner at the Holiday Inn Whitfield where several tributes were given by people who were dubbed “Team Terry”. I was privileged to be one of them. Others included John Angell, Honorary Freeman of the Town, Derek Leach, former Chairman of the Dover Society and now its President, Graham Tutthill, also Honorary Freeman of the Town and former colleague (and competitor) of Terry in the local journalistic world and James Rouse of the Rotary Club of South Foreland,



Terry Sutton

The tributes covered differing aspects of Terry’s life although inevitably much overlapped. The next day, 12th April, a memorial service was held in St Mary’s Church where those attending heard tributes given by Councillor Gordon Cowan, Chairman of Dover District Council and former Mayor of Dover, Sue Jones, the current Town Mayor of Dover, Mike Field, a former work colleague and friend of Terry, and Deacon Barry Barton of St Paul’s Roman Catholic Church in Maison Dieu Road who spoke of Terry’s engagement with ‘Christians Together in Dover.’ Such tribute events marked out Terry as a very special person in the life and history of Dover and recognised that with his death the Town had lost a premier supporter of Dover, the town into which he

had been born in March 1929.

I do not know if Terry had subscribed to the view that journalists, writers, and artists (creative people) pray that work will last to the end but what I do know is that in his case it did. Not long after he retired (so called) I was chatting with him and said

“Terry, shouldn’t you now stop producing articles for the Dover Express? After all, you are retired.” His reply was “Peter, when I am gone the Dover Express should have at least six months’ worth of material from me in its possession so it can continue to print articles for at least that period of time after I have gone”! Time will tell if we continue to receive thoughts from Terry beyond the grave!

But that response seemed to sum up the man I was privileged to call a friend, for Terry let his work do the talking. He did not follow the route of self-promotion and self-importance to which so many attach significance in our current age. Terry had two important factors that worked to his advantage – longevity and a great memory. Little wonder people consulted him and when they did, they were assured of an authoritative response.

Our paths crossed so often over fifty plus years -- so that we became friends. I guess what truly cemented our friendship was the fact we both harboured an abiding love for this town of our birth, and, in our differing ways and individually or collectively, we took every opportunity to promote its interests and endeavoured to protect its history for posterity. Both of us were born in Dover, both worked in Dover,

both lived in Dover, both loved Dover. It seemed inevitable we would become friends. Interestingly, we both spent some time away from Dover during our lives: Terry when he was evacuated as part of Barton Road School to Ynysddu and Pontllanfraith in South Wales during the Second World War and I when I first found paid employment in London. We both returned to Dover to contribute to the life of the town.

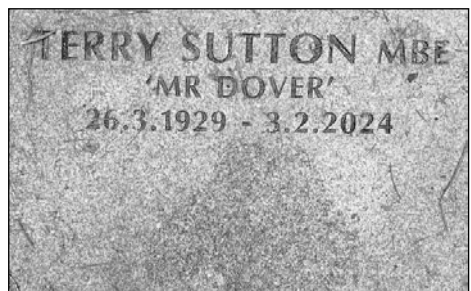
In addition to being Rotarians together in the same club over many years (as well as being members of other organisations and bodies including the Dover Society) three areas of activity, during the decades we knew each other, stand out. When I was the Deputy Director of Legal Services of Dover District Council one of my tasks was to attend committee meetings and occasionally, when the director was absent, council meetings. In the corner of the meeting rooms would be a table with two chairs one of which would be occupied by Terry the other by his competitor, Graham 'Scoop' Tutthill. I often wondered just how much, if at all, people appreciated the work Terry undertook (and the sacrifices he made) so that they could be properly informed about the civic life of the district and town and its implications for them. He sacrificed so many evenings to his profession and the people of Dover were the beneficiaries of his commitment and diligence. His wife Danielle and their daughter Josephine were deprived of his presence when he was out at various evening meetings. Sacrifice was made by all three family members.

It took a great talent to understand what was going on at some of these local authority meetings. But then to condense it and produce it in a coherent form so people could understand matters that related directly to them required great

journalistic skill. Interestingly, Terry never felt the need to dramatize his reports (unlike some journalists of today) preferring to produce lucid and readable reports for the Dover Express. If there was something Terry did not understand or did not follow, he would telephone me to seek clarification to ensure his report was, as far as possible, factually correct.

A second area where we frequently connected was when I was President of the Chamber of Commerce. Again, he would attend chamber meetings, (along with 'Scoop'), and afterwards we would meet to go through the issues, so he was armed with the correct detail for his excellent and impartial reports – all for the benefit of the people of Dover.

The third area of engagement between us was when in private practice I undertook a significant caseload of court matters. When attending the magistrates' court in Dover in the Town Hall the press reporters would sit just below the magistrates' bench and ahead of the advocates' seats. Terry has spoken about his engagement with the court process many times. He would faithfully report on the proceedings but, and this was important, he knew where and what he could report without challenge. If he had doubt, he would telephone me afterwards, so his report was



Terry Sutton Plaque

factually correct and within legal boundaries. He admitted to the fact that his name (rather than just his initials) was inscribed on the surface of the table he worked at, as was his father's name. It simply confirmed my suspicions that his initials, at least, were engraved into the wood of the table at which he was sat! It seemed to be the tradition at the time and no doubt such activity passed the time in quiet moments!

Terry, of necessity, had to engage with many people in his role as local journalist and, of course, a variety of people came within the scope of his radar. A couple are worthy of mention as they highlight the character of Terry Sutton. He was not afraid to stand up to those in power when need arose. Those who remember the days of James A Johnson, Town Clerk (as well as Coroner), will know he could present as a quite intimidating and authoritative character. Certainly, London barristers were apprehensive of a rough ride in any coroner's case over which he was presiding. James A (as he was known) was just one individual with whom Terry came into contact. Terry told me James A once told him "I walk around with a writ in my jacket pocket specially prepared - with your name on it"! Possibly this was said to impress Terry and perhaps to keep him in line but when Terry told me this, I remember asking him how it made him feel and whether it influenced his work. His response was it did not concern him, and it most certainly did not influence how he approached his work at all!

Another individual who challenged Terry caused him more than passing amusement. A member of the business community of the town sailed very close to the wind on many matters. Terry contacted me to say he had received a complaint from this individual about a

report he had written for the Dover Express. When I asked the nature of the complaint Terry said he had written a report, if memory serves me right, about candidates in a local election and had referred to the complainant as an 'entrepreneur'. This person had taken such umbrage at this that he threatened to sue Terry for defamation of character! He clearly did not know what an entrepreneur was!! Terry was tickled pink by this.

Terry was rightly made an Honorary Freeman of the Town of Dover and well deserved his MBE because, in addition to his local focus of work, many national papers were indebted to him for work he submitted to them. He was 'a legendary journalist'. I have no doubt his name will crop up many times in conversations well into the future when people talk about aspects of the town's life, and particularly its history and many in such conversations will not have had my privilege of meeting or knowing him. Dover Society members will no doubt remember him from his attendance at general meetings of the Society when, invariably, he would sit at the front row from where he could make meaningful asides, particularly if someone had said something about the town that was incorrect! Only a year or so ago I was delighted when, as a close friend, this nonagenarian accepted my invitation to join a celebratory family occasion together with Danielle. A lovely group picture was taken of the occasion, and this could possibly be one of the very last occasions when he and Dany were photographed together in public. It is a picture and a memory I treasure. Wrapping up this personal memory I end with these words: 'Rest well Terry, you good and faithful friend, and a person who truly did love Dover.' A legend indeed. Condolences to Danielle and to Josephine and thank you for letting Terry out to play!