

*A Tribute to John Reger M.B.E., MA. (1926 — 2006)*  
*Local Historian*

When John Reger arrived in Emsworth in 1955, he did not expect to remain here all his days. His appointment at Warblington School after graduating MA in History from Cambridge was followed by an appointment at Portsmouth Grammar School, where he continued to teach History until his retirement in 1989. So here he stayed and became well known as a local historian and as a Councillor and Conservator as well as a teacher. He was a Committee member of Emsworth Maritime and Historical Trust in its early days and gave constant support and encouragement to its work.

Teaching was not John's first choice career. From the age of thirteen, when he started at the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth, he had planned to follow in his father's footsteps as a Naval Officer. His first posting as a Midshipman, when he was not yet eighteen, was to HMS *Frobisher*, which was stationed in Trincomalee in Ceylon. His midshipman's log contains a detailed account of his journey out to Colombo by troop ship via Suez, Aden and Bombay, whilst under threat of enemy action. It gives insights into the culture shock for a young man, in the age before cheap long haul flights and television, in arriving in these faraway places and the sights, sounds and, especially, the smells that he encountered. John always retained a particular fondness for "the paradise of Serendip, whose warm, spicy aroma you could smell even before it hove into view over the horizon", and in later years, a genuine concern for the impact of the conflict with the Tamil Tigers.

However, *Frobisher* was shortly recalled to take part in preparations for D-Day; a different world!

John passed his Lieutenant's examinations in 1945 and was looking forward to pursuing his love of the sea for many years to come. But it was not to be. He contracted a severe case of polio whilst in Malta, probably from swimming in Valetta Harbour, and later also succumbed to tuberculosis. His convalescence in Scotland had one redeeming feature, in that it was there that he met his future wife, Joyce.

Having been invalided out of the Navy, John had to look for a second career. The medical profession advised that he should study something "gentlemanly and not too strenuous". So he selected history and secured a place at Selwyn College, Cambridge. History, in all its guises, then became John's life long enthusiasm.

He adored teaching, no matter what the academic abilities and aspirations of his pupils, and he inspired them with his love of history. He made them think; teasing them with his literary quotes, verses and references; applying his acerbic wit with threats of unspeakable punishment for late or lazy work. He did not just teach the minimum to get people through exams. He taught what he thought was important about history; what it told us about the world we live in and what we might learn from it to guide our thinking and actions about current political and economic situations. Fuelled by his admiration for figures such as Disraeli and Brunel and

his enjoyment of Kipling and Gilbert and Sullivan, John was regarded as something of an expert on the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. He also became an authority on the history of this local area and remained engaged with the network of like-minded enthusiasts in Havant and Emsworth until the end. His books, articles and lectures were extensively researched, with hours spent gathering and interpreting information from primary sources and records offices. He was not afraid to challenge myths or accepted wisdom, such as in his review of the evidence for the lost church of Hayling, and would deploy the full power of his inquiring mind and his logic to seek out the truth. When he retired he won formal recognition for his research skills in English Local History with the award of a Diploma, with Distinction, by the University of Portsmouth.

Despite an already full and busy life, he decided that there was room for one more area of endeavour and in 1970, building on his growing interest in politics, he was persuaded to stand for election to Hampshire County Council. He served as Councillor for Havant and Emsworth from then until 1981, greatly enjoying being able both to represent the interests of local people and contribute to many areas of policy development, particularly those relating to the local environment. He remained active in the local Conservative Association after he left the Council and counted many friends among its ranks. He became the County Council representative on the Chichester Harbour Conservancy on which he served for twenty-five years, chairing it from 1981 — 84. This contribution was honoured, firstly with the Freedom of Chichester Harbour in July 1988, and then with the award of MBE, which John was very proud to receive from the Queen in person.

In the last few years mobility became an increasing problem due to post polio syndrome and he was less able to indulge his passions, whether for history research, lecturing or travel. But he kept right to the end his sharp intellect, his love of books and political debate and his keen, and occasionally earthy, sense of humour. His three major works, *A Short History of Emsworth and Warblington* (1967), *Havant and Bedhampton Past and Present* (1975), and *Chichester Harbour* (1996) are all publications revealing true scholarship and have surely been a source of inspiration to others to pursue similar study. It is poignant that one of John's final contributions, to the 2005 edition of the *Emsworth Echo*, concerned the history of the three Manor Houses at Warblington for it was there that he chose to be buried, in the shadow of the remains of the gatehouse.

News of John's untimely death has been received with great sadness by his many friends and acquaintances but his wife and family can take great pride and pleasure in the contributions he made to the lives of the people he taught, to this community and to the exploration of the history of this part of the country.

*Frances Saunders, Daughter*  
*Walford Davies, EMHT member*  
*and friend of 40 years*