

Tribute to David Jonathan Rudkin

by James David Rudkin

On the occasion of the Trust's 25th anniversary, David Rudkin's son, also David, was invited to say a few words about its founder, David Rudkin, from the personal perspective of a son.

This speech was adapted for the 30th anniversary of the Trust in 2005 and a shortened version is republished here on the occasion of the 50th anniversary.



The Museum as we see it now is manifestly a flourishing enterprise, multifarious, ambitious and of significance in the local community; but it had its beginnings in something very rough and simple – way back in the mid 1970s the quest for somewhere to house a few pieces of wood. But these were no ordinary pieces of wood. They were all that it had been possible to save of a craft that never sailed, and had come to be known as Echo II, for she had been designed as a sister to the Echo herself, queen of the Emsworth oyster fleet. Where 'queen' Echo's fate was to be destroyed by fire in the early 1960s, the fate of her sister, Echo II had been, if anything, more pitiful.

Launched around 1903, she was never completed beyond the rigging stage, and lay rotting away for some 70 years, tied up to the so-called ARK, the oyster storage tank, in the Emsworth fairway. Today, the Museum houses what few fragments of Echo II survive, and that it does so, by common consent is thanks mainly to my father – though he was helped by many individuals of good will. For instance, our Secretary Dorothy Bone remembers keeping for years a section of mast in her back garden. And I remember bits and pieces of the timbers around my father's house in Westbourne. It is not for me to claim that my father was an inspirational man, but I may fairly describe him as a persistent man. It is reasonable to say that he nagged this Museum into existence. So this is an appropriate occasion on which to write a few words about him.

As we stand already five years into the 21st century, it shocks me somewhat to reflect

that it's almost a century itself since my father was born. The records give his place and year of birth as Bosham, 1907. He came from a different world. And it's a melancholy reflection too that in the nature of things there are now among us fewer and fewer who knew him. Did I know him? Do sons know their fathers? It's a common human experience that we don't come to know our parents until very late; often, we've left it too late. I was fortunate; though I do have to be honest and acknowledge that, when I was a younger man, mine was not a good relationship with my father. I felt a great difference between us, a distance. But, in his later years, I did begin to come to know him as a man.

You would expect him, as a non-conformist pastor, to be pastorally skilled – and he was good with people, equally genuine with people of high station and humble. And there was a jocular character to him; he had the clergyman's line in appalling jokes – Where in the Bible is the game of cricket played? Acts II xiv, where "Peter stood up with the eleven and was bold"...

After his first wife died, Cathy's mother and mine, he retired. He had, on his return from Texas, for some 20 years or so been a Free Church minister, then a schoolmaster in Birmingham, and on his retirement he came back down here, to the landscape of his own beginnings. Here he was to enjoy some years of happiness with his second wife, until she too was tragically taken. But, if I say he retired, I can mean that only in a formal sense. In fact, for him a new career – careers indeed – began. First, there were

his endeavours to save Echo II, of which, as I have said, only a few fragments was he able to preserve. But those few pieces of her timber began more than this Museum. He had first set out in professional life as a qualified carpenter. He became an accomplished model-maker, as you can see from his model of the original Echo in the main room of the Museum. And he was always a skilled draughtsman and water-colourist too. But, in his 70s, he found himself mastering yet another skill, that of a writer. For, side by side with his efforts to save Echo II, he was researching and writing a book on other aspects of Old Emsworth that were then beginning to disappear, under new road-schemes and building developments. This book, *The Hermitage and the Slipper*, published in 1974, was to prove the first of a sequence of seven such books that he would write, the 'Emsworth Series', on one or other aspect of local geography or history. *The Hermitage and the Slipper* would later fall for a long time out of print, and I decided, for the 25th anniversary of its original publication to re-edit it and arrange for its re-printing by St Richard's Press. (Subsequently, I have done so.)

And, as though that were not enough occupation for him – the research, collection and collation of drawings, photographs, maps and the anecdotal material for these seven books, the writing of them and seeing them through publication and into sale – to the very last his horizons were expanding. One of my more touching possessions is his Hebrew primer. In his last years, he began teaching himself the language of the Old Testament too. The page he had reached in it is bookmarked still with a leaf of exercise paper, on which he had been practising various forms of Hebrew script in the last days of his life.

There's an old Latin quotation: *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice*. If you're looking for the memorial, look around you. In Emsworth itself we see his visible legacy: the Museum, and in bookshop windows the sequence of his Emsworth Series, now

an invaluable source for those researching into local social history. To end on a forward-looking note, I have with St Richard's Press begun the process of preparing a second edition of the last of these still needing to be brought back into print – *Emsworth: Echoes of the Past* – which I intend to have ready and available in time for the opening of the Museum, Easter 2005, the Trust's 30th anniversary year.

Today, all the books in the Emsworth Series are still in print and can be purchased either in the Museum or from Bookends of Emsworth.