

DAVID PAM – THE INTERVIEW

“When I was a small boy my Irish grandmother lived in Town Road. We often walked there on Sunday morning from nearby Pymmes Park. Everybody knew their neighbours” – David Pam



David Pam became one of the most respected and knowledgeable citizens of the Borough. He had published full length hardback books on the history of this area of north London following incalculable hours of research.

Dust wrapper flaps to his books have given very little away about his early life. So it was on a very sunny afternoon that I set out to find just how his interest in local history began.

My appointment was at three o'clock and I wanted to arrive on time. As I walked along Chase Side towards his abode at Borrowdale Court my pace quickened. Soon I was face to face with David and comfortably seated. David asked me to raise my voice slightly as his hearing was “not so good these days”.

As a ‘pipe-opener’ I asked David about when he first wrote for the ‘Enfield Gazette’. It was in 1999. Once an item was published he would then think about his next article and complete it within a few days.

He did not resort to poaching readymade articles from chapters of his own books. However, the editor occasionally resorted to extracting some paragraphs. After eight years he called it a day and it was then that I filled the gap with just over fifty “Timelines”.

Tottenham

Following some further pleasantries, I sought information about David’s early years.

David Owen Pam was born on Tuesday 17th February 1920 at 144 Town Road, Edmonton. That was the address of his grandparents - Henry and [Cork born] Mary Ring. David’s parents were Joseph and Ada Margaret Pam. They had married in 1917.

The David Pam toddler years were spent not far from Tottenham police station along Chesnut Road. The address was 144 Welbourne Road, but he looked forward to seeing his grandmother at Town Road and visits to Pymmes Park.

David said that his father worked near Spitalfields market in the footwear industry making ladies shoes. He added that some of his ancestors had also had the same trade working for Flatoes at Tottenham Hale and his grandfather had a nearby shoe shop.

[Grandparents David and Charlotte Pam lived at number 129 Welbourne Road].

This led me to asking David whether he had researched his family tree. He said that it is something that he had not got into but in his time as local history and museums officer had managed to assist many people by putting them on the right lines.

David then took me back to his early recollections of Pymmes Park and his joy when the family moved to 4 Pymmes Gardens South. It was a brand new council house – he liked the house and setting very much being a view shared by his brother Charles who later wrote a book about the building of the house.

Comic ban

Talking openly of his childhood, David told me that he was never allowed to read a comic and he never cheated the parental ban even in the school playground with his chums. But it was his brother who carried off all the educational prizes at Latymer [school].

I managed to winkle out of David, who finished his education at Edmonton County [school], that he did pick up a chemistry award in the [old] matriculation examination. His headmaster Mr Joe North suggested that David might consider a career in the library service.

School basement

Taking his advice, the school leaver became a librarian in 1936 at Southgate Library [under the umbrella of the Middlesex County Council] in the basement of Bowes Road School, New Southgate.

[It was to be relocated in 1938 to 269 Bowes Road in a newly built complex incorporating an indoor swimming pool and adjacent clinic]

He was to have spells of duty [for Edmonton Borough Council] at the library in Queens Anne's Parade by Bush Hill Park station and the one in Houndsfield Road, Edmonton.

David then told me about the happy hours he had working at the main Edmonton Library building that was funded by the renowned Passmore Edwards.

[John Passmore Edwards was a British journalist, newspaper owner and philanthropist.]

We spoke about the lending libraries of a hundred years ago and the financial contributions made by the American Andrew Carnegie.

[Carnegie was a Scottish-American industrialist and philanthropist]

At this point David recalled those long gone years when members of the public had to ask the librarian whether a book was available, and then had to wait whilst it was fetched. It was some years before the public were let loose to browse and takes books off the shelves.

Injured

I prompted David to tell me of his involvement in the war. He was in the Middlesex Regiment and told me about his service including exploits in Belgium, France and Holland and of how he became injured.

"Dave, how about getting rid of that load of old rubbish?"

I now tackled the question of how he became deeply involved in local history, and I got a most interesting answer.

While he was employed by Edmonton Council and the amalgamation of the three boroughs was some years away, he received a suggestion from a colleague: "Dave, how about getting rid of that load of old rubbish".

That waste matter consisted of cobweb-festooned piles of vestry minutes and local board of health documents from decades ago.

Disregarding the hint, David dusted down the documents and at the end of the day he clutched a single volume and took it home. It made very interesting reading and David took custody of some other volumes and papers.

The episode led to one of his early efforts compiling the story of the Stamford Hill and Green Lanes Turnpike Trust in two volumes [1963/4].

"If David had complied with the order years ago to destroy some council property we would not have the Archive and reference service we enjoy today: and we would also be poorer missing out on the many historical books that David has produced" Reg Hart

David explained to me the development of the archive service for the London Borough of Enfield and how every item of local historical interest was catalogued when and as they became available. These included old photographs, maps and medieval documents and he quickly rattled off so many other things that my ears just could not take everything in.

Digging deep into medieval history and palaeography he further lost me when he said he had to learn Medieval Latin at County Hall to further his explorations.

David vividly recalled his visits to the Bruce Castle Museum, Tottenham and how the existence of seven vellum Manorial documents and court rolls held there helped him research facts for his books and pamphlets.

Not all the information sought had been at his fingertips locally, so there were many excursions to such places as the Public Records Office,

Guildhall Library, British Library, Greater London Record Office, History Museum Commission and elsewhere seeking not only Vestry Order Books for facts and figures but also supportive illustrations, maps and plans.

History of Enfield

David had intended to complete a history of Enfield in two volumes but "so much material of interest presented itself each demanding inclusion" that a third and final volume became essential to complete the years 1914 to 1939.

David acknowledged the help of his brother Charles for reading much of the text and "suggesting improvements in style and punctuation and for drawing my attention to inclusive arguments and false conclusions".

Policeman

David, who has two daughters, proudly showed me photographs of his very grown up grandchildren. Looking down at us on the wall was a photograph of a police officer – grandson Tom.

At this point there was an appetising aroma drifting from the dining room. It was meal time for David and his wife Maisie.

Graham

But he would not let me leave without paying tribute a fellow historian. He was full of praise for his one time assistant and successor Graham Dalling. He said that "Graham writes in a different way but goes into much more detail". He added that Graham has an "Encyclopaedic knowledge capable of answering my most obscure and unlikely questions".



David Pam

Notes

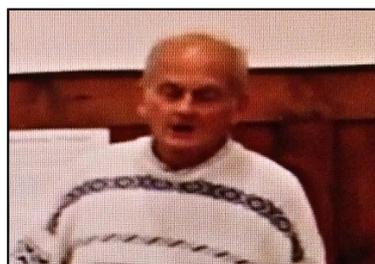
Year of interview: 2007

For two years David was in sheltered housing at Bush Hill Park.

David Pam died on 17th August 2014.

Charles J H Pam 1918-1998

Monica Smith has compiled a fourth volume of the History of Enfield.



Graham Dalling 1948-2012

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