

Family memories of John Pinder

Angus Sladen, Cousin

John Pinder was born in 1924 and took great pride in his parents and background. His father was Harold Pinder and his mother Lilian Murray. His father was a brigadier, a professional soldier from the Leicestershire Regiment who fought in both World Wars. His father was wounded in East Africa during the First World War and later served in India in the 1930's. John remained in the UK in boarding school during this time, with holidays often spent in Scotland with his Murray and MacGregor relations. It was feared that John's father had been drowned in the sinking of the "Lancastria", in 1940, but he returned safely to his wife and child from service in France, wearing a borrowed uniform and ready to take on a liaison job with the Free French Forces in Britain and North Africa. John later recalled that his father had enjoyed working with de Gaulle's subordinate officers, but found it much more difficult to work with the General himself. According to John, his father had somewhat the appearance of a "Colonel Blimp", but was in fact an easy-going and liberal-minded man, whom John resembled in many ways.

John's mother was Lillian Murray of Taymount, in Perthshire, who used an unexpected inheritance in the early 1920's to allow the family to buy a house in Manchester Square, near the Wallace Collection. This was sold after bomb damage during the Second World War and the Pinders then bought in the early 1950's Burghclere Grange near Newbury. John's inheritance from his mother allowed him throughout his life to make substantial donations to charitable work by organizations such as the Federal Trust, the James Madison Trust and the European Movement.

I first worked closely with John when he asked me to join him as a trustee of the Pinder Centre and Pinder Trust which was set up by his sister Margaret, who suffered from rheumatoid arthritis when she was young. The Trust and Centre provided hydrotherapy at a centre at Avington, near Winchester. After John's wife Pauline died in October, 2012, I became increasingly involved in the administration of John's personal affairs, and ensuring he was well looked after in his declining years. Everyone found John gentle and unassuming, never complaining even in the difficult latter years of his life. Dignity and self-control were among his most obvious characteristics, characteristics that undoubtedly came at least partly from his upbringing. I think everyone will remember his welcoming smile.

He was a man who avoided argument or confrontations. If I said something he disagreed with, he would not contradict me, but stare meaningfully into the distance until I realised that I had to suggest another way!

His great friend from Cambridge days, Ralph Clark, said that it seemed to him that it was what John was not that was important. He was not egotistical, he was not vain, he was never bombastic, anger was very rare in him and he was not materialistic. He lived frugally and was careful with money. He was not one for small talk and tended to compartmentalize his existence. He rarely spoke about his work to family and friends who did not share his interests. Ralph Clark said he "would have made a good monk". However, there were things that were important to him and about which he felt strongly, particularly his much-loved wife Pauline, whom he married in 1964. He loved his work, he loved music (particularly Bach and Haydn) and opera, Mozart being his favourite in this area. He loved literature and walking holidays, and was a life-long cricket enthusiast, having seen Don Bradman play cricket at Lords in 1938.

He attended Marlborough College and then read maths and economics at King's College Cambridge, his study being interrupted by military service from 1943 until 1947. He served in the Royal Artillery

and West African Artillery. During the latter stint in Africa, he learned Hausa. He was invalided out of the army with TB and claimed to have shared a hospital ward while being treated with Eric Blair, also known as George Orwell. His learning of Hausa was typical for the linguist he later became. He spent three months in both France and Germany after graduation and was fluent in both French and German. He spoke Italian and Russian, and could “get by” in at least four other languages.

In 1952 John joined the Economist Intelligence Unit, the consultancy operation of the Economist magazine, of which he became International Director in 1957. The Unit was also the place at which he met his future wife Pauline. In 1965 he became Director of the think tank “Political and Economic Planning”, which organized jointly with Chatham House in the 1960s a number of studies on the European Economic Community (as it was then called.) In 1978 John’s institute merged with the “Centre for Studies in Social Policy” to create the Policy Studies Institute, which had 50 researchers and 25 support staff. At the same time John was an active member of Federal Union, for which he wrote extensively and was a Council member from 1957. For many years he was an Honorary Professor at the College of Europe.

In his professional career, John wrote some 15 books, including “Britain and the Common Market” and “Europe against de Gaulle,” a book written soon after de Gaulle had vetoed British membership of the European Community. His last book was a paperback “The European Union: a very short Introduction”. It was on offer beside the till at Waterstones for many months, and the Arabic version of it arrived at John’s house ten days after his death.

For all his apparent reserve, John liked, when in the mood, to share his favourite anecdotes. He had a particularly amusing story about being quizzed in the Austrian mountains by a fellow walker regarding the meteorological conditions on the mountain and later realizing that he had been talking with Arnold Schwarzenegger. A meeting between those two polar opposites would certainly have been worth seeing. John was also a great admirer of Harold MacMillan and often quoted MacMillan’s remark at a major anniversary dinner that a group of former Prime Ministers should not be called a “gaggle of PMs,” but rather a “lack of principals”. Not entirely jokingly, John used to like to refer to his OBE as the “Order of Britain in Europe.”

John’s abiding preoccupation was his concern about Europe and the contribution it could make to world peace. He had been much affected by a book of William Beveridge, “The Price of Peace”. For Beveridge, that price was the sharing of national sovereignties. John profoundly agreed with Beveridge that dangerous nationalism was the root cause of many wars, and had in particular caused massive destruction in the 20th century. He wished above all to contribute to the avoidance of any similar catastrophes for the future.