

## Frank "Lofty" Stretton. 1910 - 2006.



**Former SGS teacher Frank Reginald Stretton, known affectionately as "Lofty" died in Swanage on July 19, 2006 aged 95.**

Frank Reginald Stretton was born at 172 Moorland Road, Burslem in Staffordshire on December 29, 1910, where he lived with his father Frank, Rebecca, his mother and his sister Lillian. Burslem, the "Mother of the Potteries" was one of the original six pottery towns that now make up Stoke-on-Trent. Coincidentally, the six towns were united under the name Stoke-on-Trent in 1910. Apart from the birthplace of our revered master, Burslem is famous for being the place where, in 1640, Gilbert Wedgwood, great, great-grandson of John Wedgwood of Horton was reported as being the first Master Potter of the famous family. In Frank's day the town was peppered with bottle kilns.

After attending the Central School in Burslem Frank left when he was 14 to follow the family tradition set by his father and grandfather by following them into Parker's Brewery where he became indentured as an apprentice cooper, manufacturing and repairing wooden beer and wine casks. In 1932, now aged 21, Frank became an indentured journeyman cooper at Parkers, remaining with the company until the outbreak of the Second World War. During the years up to the war, Frank enjoyed ballroom dancing and travelled around in his Morris 10 car, often with his good friend Frank Bellfield. During this time Frank met Mary and they were married at St. Chad's church at Longsdon, near Leek in Staffordshire on June 22, 1940. A few days later Frank joined the Royal Navy.

In July Frank was drafted to the shore-base at HMS Collingwood, Portsmouth, to train as a Seaman Gunner. After training Frank joined the MV Marsud in Liverpool and picked up a Glasgow convoy north of Ireland to sail to Calcutta. At about 2000 hours the Marsud collided with the Cunard ship MV Euripoyles and the Marsud had to return that night to Glasgow for extensive repair work.

From this auspicious beginning Frank went on to serve with distinction supporting vital Merchant Navy convoys in Europe, Africa and the Americas right through until VE-Day in May 1945, news of which reached him during a return voyage from New York.

Petty Officer Stretton was de-mobbed that year at Swansea and returned to the Potteries. There, with Mary and daughter Christine, who had been born on September 1942, he picked up his pre-war occupation. Shortly after returning to Parkers, Frank left to join Joules Old Brewery in the High Street at Stoke-on-Trent where he remained for six months before enrolling at Drake Hall College in Staffordshire to train as an emergency woodwork teacher. While there, non-smoker Frank kept the class in tobacco, which he had saved whilst in the Navy and demonstrated how to make Watery Wine, made from dissolving the residue in used wooden wine casks.

In 1947 Frank began his teaching career at Garden Hill Secondary School at Stoke-on-Trent. Four years later, in 1951, he moved to Dorset and Sturminster Newton School before moving further south to Swanage Grammar School, where he succeeded Bert Marshall as head of woodwork. Mary and Chris soon joined him and for a while the family lived in the first house on the left coming down Oldfeld House drive.



Frank Stretton pictured during his time at HMS Collingwood.



Later, in his Royal Naval career as a Seaman gunner.

At the grammar school one of Frank's first successes was to get his first student, Ian Collingwood, an "A" Level pass in the subject. Not all Frank's pupils were boys. His first female student was Maureen Joslin in 1952. She became so successful that she subsequently went on to make bookcases, violins and even her own garden shed at her home in Taunton. Another of Frank's pupils was SGS Domestic Science teacher, the late Hilda Rawlings, sister of former Maths, Games and Art teacher Gwen, who died in 2004. In 1960, Frank's daughter Chris left the grammar school and home to take up teacher training at Worcester College. There she met Tom James and Frank gained a son-in-law when Tom and Chris married at St. Mary's church in Swanage on April 2, 1964. In 1968 Frank and Mary became grandparents with the birth of Simon and in 1971 granddaughter Nikki was born.

Frank's interests and reputation in Swanage and Dorset grew as the years passed. As a member of the Dorset Craftsman's Guild he exhibited work all over Wessex with outstanding success. He built period furniture and repaired antiques and, since his 80th birthday, has built six long-case clocks. House nameplates made by Frank now abound in Purbeck and his personalised drinking tankards have proud owners throughout the world.

All these interests stood Frank in good stead when he retired from SGS in 1974. However, few people are aware that he carried on working after retiring from teaching. From 1974 until 1976 he worked as a delivery man for local butcher Peter Strickland. Peter recalls Lofty as hardworking, well organised and a perfectionist. He also said that Frank was quite bossy and very quickly could have run the business himself! Lofty was very popular with both staff and customers and was greatly missed when he left.

After Mary Stretton's death in May 2005 Frank remained in the family home at King's Road West but illness finally brought his visits to his work shed at the bottom of the garden to an end. In May this year (2006) Frank fell and broke his hip. the operation to repair it was unsuccessful and Frank went downhill from then on and did not get to his feet at all. He died peacefully in Swanage Hospital on the morning of Wednesday, July 19th.

Frank's funeral was held at Swanage Methodist church at noon on Friday, July 28 - and such was his immense popularity a very large contingent of former SGS pupils attended. Afterwards a buffet lunch was provided at the Mowlem and later in the afternoon a small party of family and friends saw Lofty off at Poole Crematorium. During the funeral service at the Methodist church SGSA Chairman Iain Kidson read out the following eulogy.....

"It is an enormous privilege for me to be asked to speak about Frank Stretton. Some of you will know that I speak as Chairman of the Swanage Grammar School Association, so I am conscious that I must try to express the thoughts of hundreds of pupils who, like me, remember him with great kindness.

In the woodwork classroom, Lofty used to have on the wall various advice. Who can forget, in particular, "measure twice, cut once" and "always cut on the waste side of the line". It really is true that when a boy made an error and cut wrong he was sent to get the putter onner tool - which, of course, the miscreant could never find - but the lesson was learnt. I still cherish the pen and ink stand on which I started to cut a mortise from the wrong side because of careless marking. Frank's apparently heartless refusal to give me a new piece of wood has meant that the part cut mortise has reminded me about attention to detail for the last 47 years - and a very valuable life lesson it has been.

Despite his omniscience, when the Almighty made Lofty he clearly made a cutting error, obviously failing to "measure twice and cut once" with the result that Frank was short of physical stature. I like to think that when the Lord realised his mistake he sent some unfortunate boy to the tool cupboard for the putter onner tool. On this one occasion it was actually there to be fetched, but what was put back was not height, but rather an overdose of kindness and compassion, with just a smidgeon of cantankerousness, and of course, a mischievous sense of humour.

There were memorable teachers at Swanage Grammar School but Frank stood out as different. The Boss, our Headmaster James Turner, who sat for many years in the chair now laid up in this Church, showed great foresight when he appointed Frank. For many of us who knew Frank as a woodwork master or a sports teacher, he was a beacon of robust common sense and pragmatism, whether in his no nonsense style of teaching or on the rare occasions when he felt the need to unzip the document case and get out his "whacker" and administer discipline. A lot of his students have told me that, like me, the thing they now use and value most from the School is not the power of the differential calculus or a fine understanding of English and Latin but the sound rules and style he taught us in our woodwork, with many little asides which we belatedly realised were key lessons in life.

In recent years, lovingly supported by Chris and Tom who have been the most dedicated of children, Frank and Mary coped with deteriorating health. Now they are together in a better place. If Frank could speak today, I hope he would say, paraphrasing the Good Book, "Well done, thou good and faithful children, go now and enjoy the life you have given up to care for us in recent years" but he might just say "Flipping heck, now go and have fun".

Physical memorials may have their place. However, I believe that the best memorial is the memories we leave behind us with those we love and those who have loved us. In Frank's case the memories are good and the memorial will be huge because so many share the happy memories. We should remember Lofty with joy and gratitude and celebrate a long good life, well lived".  
Iain Kidson.

