

## **Mr. John Edward Brigham. 1912 - 1997.**

The following tributes were first published in the Swan Newsletter of 1998. The first of these was written by John's wife Pat Brigham, who sadly passed away at her home in Cambridge on June 18. 2001.



**John and Pat Brigham outside the south side of Oldfeld House in 1952.**

John Brigham was born on June 1, 1912 at Darlington, the fifth child and only boy of Quaker parents; he had four elder sisters and one younger. John's father was a bookseller, specialising in old books - first editions etc. When John was eight or nine he went to Ackworth School, remaining at this Quaker boarding school until he was 16, when he moved to Bootham School in York. There he took London Matriculation and in 1930 went to Bede College at Durham University. While he was there he did a teaching certificate and a degree - French was his main subject. We met at Durham when I was at St. Mary's College doing an English degree. In 1933 John went to Paris for a year and studied at the Sorbonne. From 1933 to 1937 he taught French at Wigton Friends' School, living in as it was a boarding school.

John and I were married on March 27, 1937. He had secured a post at Romford Intermediate School teaching some French and some music and we moved to Hornchurch, Essex where we had bought a bungalow. Our son John was born in September 1938 and in June 1939 my husband was appointed headmaster of Newtown School, a Quaker boarding school in Waterford, Eire. We moved there ready for the September term. Although John was only 27 he had no difficulty in establishing his position. We spent nine years at the school during which time I acted as Mistress of the Household in addition to doing some teaching. The school this year (1998) celebrated its bicentenary and is still very well known in Ireland. In fact a book detailing the school's history includes a chapter about John. While at Newtown our daughters were born - Mary in 1941 and Eleanor in 1945.

We left Ireland in July 1948 to live in Sibford in Oxfordshire. John taught at Sibford Friends School, another boarding school run by the Quakers. From 1950 to 1954 John was housemaster of Oldfeld House, teaching French and some music at the Grammar School. After Oldfeld John was Deputy Head at the newly-opened Bassingbourn Village College in Cambridgeshire and remained there until 1964. In that year he was appointed secretary of the Friends' Education Council and worked at the Friends' House in Euston Road, London for the next ten years. John used his sabbatical year, 1974, doing a Dutch course at St Edmund's College, Cambridge University. He had become interested in Dutch and taught himself the language. He took School Certificate in Dutch and became a translator, translating several books from Dutch into English. The best-known books were about the Dutch artist M.C.Escher. John's work, *The Magic Mirror of M.C.Escher* is still well known in many countries. At the end of 1974 John worked part-time in the Catalogue Department of the Cambridge University Library, finally retiring after three years there. John died in Cambridge on November 12, 1997. By Pat Brigham - 1998.



**John Brigham doing the first cut of the season on the irascible Oldfeld Dennis motor-mower, circa 1952. Behind John can be seen daughter Eleanor and son David "Nobby".**



**Pat and John Brigham with Chris James.**

I got to know John and Pat in later recent years and began to appreciate what a lovely man he was. Always considerate when we called for coffee he waited outside his cottage to make sure we did not miss the turning. He was a man of many interests; reading, history, music and the creative arts, to mention a few. His mosaic works of art were given pride of place in his charming cottage and each year a hand-made Christmas card always arrived in very good time. How like him to write to celebrities in all fields with words of encouragement and support and produce an anthology of their replies. John's curiosity in everything and his lively interest in everyone gave him a keen mind full of compassion, understanding and integrity. John's death is a sad, sad loss. The world would be a much better place if there were more John Brighams in existence. I shall always remember him with great affection.

**By Chris James (nee Stretton)**

I was fortunate to arrive at Oldfeld House during the Brigham era. Before I came to Swanage Grammar School I went to a primary school in North London where I was particularly unhappy. It got so bad that I ultimately refused to attend and in desperation my poor mother packed me off to live with my grandmother at Wimbourne. For a little over a year I attended Broadstone Primary school, where I was wonderfully happy. I somehow managed to scrape through the Eleven Plus and Swanage Grammar School was one of my choices for my next school.

I remember being not a little anxious on arrival at Oldfeld, having heard all kinds of tales about boarding schools, mostly from people who had never been near one! I need not have worried. During the early fifties Oldfeld was very much a large, happy family, thanks to John and Pat Brigham. Their task was not easy - Oldfeld was one of the very few mixed boarding schools in the country and was a very bold experiment, an interesting cocktail of 24 boys and 24 girls with ages ranging from 11 to 18. Thus John and Pat's jobs were not the easiest in education circles! John and

Pat went out of their way to make Oldfeld a home for its inmates, many of whom came from broken homes and single-parent families. John was an endless source of home-made entertainment and the Oldfeld diaries, some of which are in my possession, record all kinds of games, concerts, competitions and so forth designed to keep everyone occupied. John also had an endearing habit of reading to first-years before lights out; he always had an endless fund of funny stories.

When they left us in July 1954 those of us left realised that we were going to miss John and his family. How right we were. He and Pat gave a lot of young people a home and stability and in his gentle way John guided us by example, not the rod. I shall never forget him. By Dick Riding