

## **PETER ROBERT HICKMAN TILBURY (1914 – 1961)**

### *The story of a Sawbridgeworth adventurer*

Recently, in 2017, a marine blanket, which was once owned and used by a Peter Tilbury on an Antarctic expedition was offered to the Bishop's Stortford Museum. The curator, Alex Andrijevic, made contact with the Sawbridgeworth Local History Society and wondered if we could shed any light on the subject. Unfortunately, we could not help her much at that time, but I have revisited the subject and have now produced the following article.

Peter Tilbury was born in late 1914 in Wandsworth, London. He was the only child of John G. H and Isabel May (nee Older) Tilbury. Peter came from a privileged background, his parents being very 'middle class'. His father worked as a 'stockbroker' in the City in 1911 and lived in Chigwell. Peter's parents married in the summer of 1913 in Barnet and Peter was born just over a year later.

The early life of Peter Tilbury is obscure. He did not marry and first appears again in a newspaper report of 1937. On 16 August of that year Peter was one of nine people rescued from a pleasure yacht in the North Sea. The yacht was travelling from Southwold to Lowestoft, where she was based. Peter was one of two crew on board and was recorded as the 'mate'. The other seven passengers constituted a family group outing.

With the coming of the Second World War, Peter joined the Royal Air Force. However, he did not do this until 1941, which implies that he was working at sea prior to that date. Peter was commissioned into the RAF on 7 April 1941 (Service Number 1251925), his commission being promulgated in the London Gazette of 18 July 1941. In 1945, Peter served in the 'General Duties Branch' reaching the rank of Flying Officer. This meant in practice that he was an Intelligence Officer. It is thus likely that it was at this time that he first met Lieutenant Commander R. A Lochner RN (later awarded the MBE). They both shared a love of yachting. Lt. Cdr Lochner was an engineer by trade and invented the 'Bombardon Breakwater', which was used as part of the 'Mulberry' harbours for the D-Day landings.



*Lt. Cdr Lochner at work*

After the war and demob, Peter came to live in Sawbridgeworth and resided at Sayesbury House, London Road from about 1950 until his death in 1961.

Peter's name is in the passenger log of the RMS Andes, a passenger liner of 26,000 tons plying the South America route. Peter embarked on this ship at Montevideo in Uruguay and sailed to Southampton, arriving on 6 November 1953. In the log, Peter is described as a 'Ship's Master'.



*An advertisement for Royal Mail Lines*

Between 1955 and 1958 the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition took place. This expedition was led by Dr Vivian Fuchs (who was later knighted for his achievements) and Sir Edmund Hillary. This expedition achieved the first overland crossing of the Antarctic continent via the South Pole, and was the first overland crossing to the South Pole since the time of Amundsen and Scott. It must be this expedition that Peter Tilbury joined as there was nothing else around at that time. Unfortunately, Peter is not named in the diaries of either Fuchs or Hillary, nor is he named in the crew musters of the MV Magga Dan or HMNZS Endeavour, the two main support ships, nor is he listed as a full member of the expedition. There were, however, many small players in this enterprise and it seems that Peter was one of those unsung heroes.

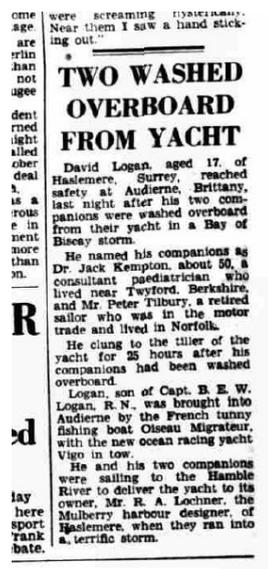


*The Magga Dan in the ice*



*Vivian Fuchs arriving at the South Pole*

After 1958 and the end of the Antarctic Expedition Peter returned to Europe. In 1961 he was taking an ocean-going racing yacht called Vigo across the Bay of Biscay bound for Hamble in Hampshire for his old friend, the yacht's new owner, Mr. R Lochner MBE. Peter was one of three on board sailing the vessel, the others being David Logan (aged 17) and Dr Jack Kempton (aged 50). Sadly, on 18 July 1961 they ran into a storm for which the Bay is famous and all were washed overboard. David Logan survived by clinging on to the tiller for 25 hours before being rescued, but both Jack Kempton and Peter Tilbury were lost, their bodies never being recovered.



*Newspaper report of the death of Peter Tilbury*

The contemporary newspaper report of Peter's death states that he was a car dealer and that he lived in Norfolk. However, the probate documents state that he was still living at Sayesbury House, Sawbridgeworth. Peter may, though, have had a rented property in Norfolk. The probate award was to a Mr Kenneth Earley (a 'Company Director') and was for the sum of £3,250 10s 6d.

It is right to have described Peter Tilbury as an 'adventurer'. Today we can travel the world in hours. Yet even in the 1950s, it would take many days or weeks to get to far-flung destinations. South America and Antarctica even today are not visited by most British tourists, and who nowadays could be part of a major expedition to unknown lands or sail the Atlantic in a yacht?

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With thanks to Alex Andrijevic.

Flt Lt Douglas Coe BSc RAFVR(T) Ret'd.  
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