

IN MEMORIAM - DAVE MEAD

Widow pays tribute to leading light in Sawbridgeworth community David Mead

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David Mead, one of the leading lights in the Sawbridgeworth community, died on September 24 at the age of 81. Here, his widow Hazel pays tribute with a heartfelt obituary, outlining his life and many achievements, from his involvement with the Scouts to setting up of the town's Nostalgia Day.

Born in Ongar in 1942, David was a mischievous child, to say the least, who stuffed a baby duck into a cocoa tin, put plasticine in a girl's hair at school and wandered off from his older sister and fell down a septic tank!



David and Hazel with their Second World War jeep. Pic: Vikki Lince

He had many changes of school and always said his education was rubbish and realised later in life that he was dyslexic. This had caused him great problems, but he learned practical subjects like woodwork and metalwork quickly.

David became part of a skiffle band, playing the tea chest, which he made a trailer for to pull behind his bike. He joined the Army cadets, went on camp and used 303 rifles.

His parents were now living in Leaden Roding, where his father owned a garage. David spent hours there and at 15 rebuilt a smashed-up James motorbike which had been found in a ditch.

After leaving school his dad persuaded him to work in the garage with him and he learned many skills in mechanics. On Sundays, when the garage was closed, he would fiddle with his motorbike there and if somebody turned up asking for a puncture to be mended he would say he could help them out – charge 4/6d put 2/6d in the till and keep 2/- for himself!



David helped to build a memorial at Sawbridgeworth airfield

He was told off by a local policeman for riding his motorbike with his dog sitting on the seat with its front paws on the handlebars. From an early age he had driven cars around the garage forecourt, but when it came to taking his test, it took three attempts to pass.

Various places of employment followed, and when we met in 1961 he was working for an engineering firm in Ongar. David waited until my 21st birthday in 1963 to get engaged so he would not have to ask my dad anything!

David had a Ford 8 car and had sprayed it bright lilac, which was rather outlandish for those days, and he was asked not to drive it up to the end of the Rowney Wood cul-de-sac but park and walk up the road!

Married in 1964 at St James the Great Church in High Wych, we had a small cottage at Pye Corner, Gilston, where David helped with the youth club in the village hall.



after his sons joined

*David became
Group Scout Leader*

We then purchased our first house in Sayesbury Road, where sons Simon and Lloyd were born – who between them now have seven children: Bailey, Harvey, Amy, Ellie, Beth, Nate and Ethan.

Many very happy years were spent there and David was so proud to be a dad, helping to teach his sons many things in life, whilst coping with all their trials and tribulations, at times naturally getting exasperated.

Going camping was always enjoyed, covering most areas across the country – from visiting the Isle of Arran and travelling by train with all our gear to towing a boat down to Cornwall. When our sons were at Mandeville Primary, David always helped with fundraising and social events, and also when they attended Leventhorpe School.



David and Hazel were RHSO committee members and in August accepted a cheque for £500 for funds from housing developers

As soon as Simon and Lloyd joined the Cub section of the 1st Sawbridgeworth Scout Group, David was involved firstly with fundraising, jumble sales and wastepaper collection just to help out on a night or two – which then lasted for 35 years. As a leader of Pioneer Troop, he took the Scout name of Issy after pioneer Isambard Kingdom Brunel and some people still use this name. Although he had not been a Scout himself, he enjoyed learning all the practical skills to pass on to the many young people in the group – planning, packing and camping in all areas of the country and further afield.

When, in 1987, a new Group Scout Leader was needed, David decided after some thought he could take this on. In 1993 an expedition to Russia of Scouts and Guides was decided upon which eventually took place in 1995, which was quite an undertaking, with great co-operation between all

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leaders and many fundraising events as the group were to pay for everything for the Russian Scouts as well. All camping equipment had to be taken and was left with the Scouts there as they did not have a great deal. Our young people stayed with families for a week – this was before CRB and DBS days – changing currency into hundreds of roubles for pocket money, although not a lot to spend it on, and then camping in the remotest of forests, learning Russian campfire songs, sharing meals – an experience some Scouts and Guides may never forget. Poland was another country where the group camped.

David with his beloved jeep - his love of military vehicles began when his dad bought an American jeep in 1954

David, with the help of other committee members, steered the group through the rather uncomfortable times when there were difficulties with the landlord until eventually the new Scout

hut was built. He thoroughly enjoyed his Scouting days and was very proud when he knew that some of his Scouts had become leaders in other parts of the country.

There was always great co-operation between Scouting and Guiding in the town. For the Millennium celebrations, David and Jean Beeching, the then Guide Commissioner, decided to make a mosaic of the Scout and Guide badges and had to go away for a weekend to learn how to make mosaics – or at least that's what we were told – but one was made and is in the labyrinth on Jubilee Green outside the doctors' surgery. Although currently in a state of disrepair, we will work to have this repaired with the new forthcoming design of the area.

David's arranging of fundraising rock 'n' roll evenings at Leventhorpe and the Memorial Hall were always enjoyable and successful events. He was proud to go to Windsor Castle to receive his Silver Acorn Award for his service to Scouting and friendships made through Scouting have lasted until this day.

He did not want to see the Rivers Heritage Site and Orchard (RHSO) become overgrown and derelict, so he became involved in the group set up in around 1998 to start clearing to uncover rows of trees and continued with the maintenance groups, going on training courses for pruning and hedge-laying.

Apple Day grew from small beginnings in Church House to the huge event it is now. When the wassail was introduced in around 1999, David thoroughly enjoyed being in charge of the bonfire and could be seen sitting happily by the embers when the crowds had gone home. An original Rivers orchard wassail was written that year with the help of Roger and Jean Beeching after some tasty cider had been consumed.

Time spent renovating our house in France was a real adventure, with many friends coming to stay – free board and lodging. There was work to be done cementing floors, painting walls, mending doors and windows, but everyone joined in and enjoyed relaxing in the evening with a glass or two of wine after a day's work.

Entertainment was always on hand when our nearby neighbour Roland came to see what was going on. He could not speak any English and David not being fluent in French made for some very interesting conversations, which were hilarious to say the least, but always seemed to be understood by them both – if not anyone else! He was so pleased to achieve driving along Arromanches beach in our jeep on the 65th anniversary of D-Day.

His faith was important to him and he played his part in helping to look after Great St Mary's Church, joining the churchyard working party with weeding and mowing, helped with some rewiring, was a sidesperson, cut and sorted the used stamps which people brought in, supported all fundraising events. When watching the statue being hoisted to the top of the wooden screen he said – "I think his feet would look more real if they had some bunions on like mine!"

His interest in military vehicles started in 1954 when his dad obtained an American jeep. When we had our house in France there were many people commemorating D-Day who had jeeps. A Hotchkiss jeep was purchased and, after joining the Hertfordshire Memorial Group, he helped with the building of the memorial for Sawbridgeworth Airfield at Shingle Hall. From this he started to form Nostalgia Day in 2012, which has now become a popular and established annual town event. This is also his contribution to our local history society, plus many ideas for speakers for the group.

Help was given with fundraising for the Hailey Centre and, when opened, he drove the minibus to collect people to attend bingo there and also take them on shopping trips. He was also a town twinning association committee member, helping to organise visits to France and fundraising events.

David would always lend a helping hand in Sawbridgeworth Memorial Hall, supported many events and had a view on the new extension.

He enjoyed growing vegetables and fruit on the allotment at Southbrook and was part of the social group organising barbecues and looking after the machinery. David helped with the autumn gardens show and entered many exhibits.

Always wanting to be eco-friendly and not waste anything, he would always try to mend things and so got very frustrated with the digital world as he could not undo a mobile phone with a screwdriver and replace a few nuts and bolts.

Although not in good health for the past few years, he always supported the Essex & Herts Air Ambulance and would arrange great social evenings to celebrate a birthday or anniversary to raise funds for this cause.

David was always thankful for the many friendships he made through Scouting, from belonging to the many groups he enjoyed and would always happily just stop to chat. He loved nature and was expert in spotting bird species.

A life well lived by a loving husband, dad, granddad, and friend.

Note from David Royle: *to this we can add that he was a long-standing member of the History Society and supporter of its events as well as of the WW1 Commemoration Group hosted by the Town Council; that he had a great sense of humour, was very knowledgeable about the Sawbridgeworth of his younger days, especially the pubs, and was always ready with a story or two. He and Hazel were a formidable pair of community champions (Hazel still is!). He will be greatly missed.*