

KEITH & BETTY MOTT OF CLAYGATE

The story of a life time in the sport of Pigeon Racing

Introduction

I was born in Feltham, near Heathrow Airport in October 1950. I first met my wife, Betty, in late 1969 and this was through my friendship with her brother, Alfie, who raced pigeons and was a keen on 'The Impalas', the band I played drums in. Alfie North was a regular visitor to the bands Sunday night gig at the Swam PH in Kingston and with our mutual interest in pigeons and Rock music, we used to talk 'shop' during my mid-session break. From time to time he would bring his sister, Betty, to the 'Swan' gig and in the end it was mostly her and me talk about her main interest of those days, Speedway racing. I had known this wonderful girl named, Betty North, for a few months in early 1971 and I asked her out for our first date while at the big Gene Vincent gig at the Kingston Coronation Hall, when we were playing on the same bill. I knew she was there that night and I went out in to audience to find her. My life started on that night in 1971 and we got married in May 1972. We had two wonderful kids in Caroline and Mark, and in turn they have given us five brilliant grand children in Sasha, Katie, Ryan, Sophia and Connie. We are now great grandparents, with our Mason being born in August 2018! When we married in 1972 she said that it might only last about two years because of my 'Rock 'n Roll' life style and all that entailed, but here we are 47 years later and still madly in love and still happily married! Then came the pigeons! At that time I thought to myself, well she is from a pigeon racing family, with her late father, Alf North senior, and her brother racing in partnership in the Surbiton FC for many years, so she knew what she was committing to by marrying a pigeon fancier. With my massive commitment to the sport she has put up with a hundred times more disruption in her life with pigeons over the year than other pigeon fancier's wives. She had seen me go away for weeks on end on pigeon matters, sitting at a computer in the 'factory' doing pigeon articles and photos for hours on end, had thousands of pigeon fanciers phoning me day and night, and through the years the countless fancier visiting our home in Claygate to have their birds photographed, and leaving all their mess and shaving all over the carpets. A fraction of what she has put up with in those 40 odd years has finished many other 'pigeon' marriages! I will say that, I've always known where to draw the line and have always put her and the children first. We always try and get away for an annual holiday with the kids and in our marriage there has never been man's work or woman's work, we both worked full time and have always shared the household chores. I defiantly can't cook and if she ever left me I would starve to death in a week. Well, looking at me lately, maybe in a fortnight! My Betty is the greatest person I've ever met in my life and I must thank her for putting up with a 'pigeon maniac' for all those years. Love you, babe!

I was a Carpenter all my working life and worked in London for a lot of years and as you can imagine I knew my way around the capital quite well. I met a lot of celebrities through my work in those days and worked at the Weybridge homes of Cliff Richard and Bernard Cribbins, and the London homes of Leslie Grantham and Jon Pertwee. Leslie Grantham was 'Dirty Den' in BBC's East Enders in 1986 and we worked at his Fulham home for over four months, doing a loft conversation and full renovation of the house. I worked on the Decca's Sports and Social club in Tolworth in the early 1980's and the Fulham football team trained there several days a week, and I got to know the England team footballers, Bobby Moore and Alan Mullery, quite well as they both used to sit in with us on our tea breaks. Michael Aspel lived around the corner from me in Claygate and I used to see him down at our local Scout hut, when we both took our kids there for their scouting fun sessions every week. I worked on a recording studio in Greek Street, Soho, in the West End of London for several months and Michael walked in there one day to do a 'voice over', and we both had good laugh at the coincidence of meeting up there like that. Michael Aspel is a very nice man!

Memories of the swinging 1960's!

I have been asked many times to put pen to paper and record some of my best memories of the 1960's when I played drums in a rock group, but it is something that really needs a lot of thinking about and it was a very busy time in my life, a long time ago. I will try and tell you some of my personal memories of the 1960's and 1970's. I can remember my dear grandmother, Caroline, telling me at a very young age that her brother was a drummer in a dance band, but no one in the family was a pigeon fanciers. My younger brother, Phil and I started keeping pigeons in our early youth and the Mott Brother's pigeon career started when we obtained a pair of birds, 'Alma' and 'Charlie', from a school friend. After a few years of flying our pigeons around the rooftops, we had to give them up for a short while, as we moved house. I played the drums and was very involved at the time with the top rock n' roll band, 'The Impalas', and we played with many top

artists, including, Dave 'Screaming Lord' Sutch, Shakin' Stevens, Heinz Burt (The Tornados) and Gene Vincent at the London Palladium in 1969. I was 11 years of age when my parents, Fred and Iris, purchased my first drum kit and I used to practice in the back bedroom to all the old Beatles and Rollin' Stones records. I attended Rivermead Secondary School in Kingston and I did my first drum solo in public at a big school 'gang' show, when other local schools, and all the parents attended. Our next door neighbours, in Chestnut Road where we lived soon got fed up with my drums beating out to the best of the 1960's music scene in the spare bedroom and called the police in a couple of times to shut me up. My dad couldn't wait for me to join a band and was highly delighted when I finally took the drum kit on the road. I was soon sitting in on recording and television dates playing the drums, and was lucky enough to record tracks at 'Morgan' studios, which was one of the best recording studios in the UK at that time and Shakin' Stevens was recording there that same day. One of 'The Impalas' tracks was played on BBC Radio One several times at that time.

As I've previously stated, I have been asked many times by friends through the years if I would do a write up on the 1960's, but really it was all traveling up and down motorways, playing cards in the back of a van and playing. They say if you remember the 1960's you weren't there! As the saying goes, it was all drugs, sex and Rock n' Roll for some, but I not for me, I never went near or took drugs or alcohol. I still don't drink or smoke today! I played with several top groups in the 1960's, with the main one being 'The Impalas' and for most of the time, the line-up was Tony Clayden on lead guitar and vocal, 'Charlie' Chaplin on rhythm guitar, Keith Read on bass guitar and vocals and myself on drums. In the early days Tony's wife, Una Ellis sang with us and she was a 'world class' singer, but in the late 1960's she had to retire from the band, when the Claydens started a family. We had one or two changes in personnel through the years, one of note, was the classical trained pianist, Johnny Hawken, who came in and he was formally with 'The Nashville Teens', who had had a massive hit record with 'Tobacco Road'. My first drum kit was my white 'Olympic' set up and I learnt on that great set up, and used it on the road for several years after going on the road. The second kit was my big blue pearl 'Premier' kit which consisted of bass drum, snare drum, two mounted tom toms and two floor tom toms, the same as used by Keith Moon of 'The Who' at that time. That was a lovely kit and I used that one on the London Palladium gig in 1998. My third and last drum kit was a mixture of what I thought was the very best in percussion at that time, with the main kit being a light blue 'Hayman'. At that time the George Hayman were the very latest in top drum design, along with 'Ludwig', 'Rogers' and 'Slingerland', which were used by all the best in the business. The drummer who played in two of my favourite groups, Simon Kirk of 'Free' and 'Bad Company' used a 'Hayman' drum kit at that time and I first became aware of them when my ol' mate Doug Argent and I went to a 'Hayman' drum clinic and the late great Phil Seaman demonstrated them. What a great night that was! My kit was made up with the 'Hayman' bass drum and tom toms, 'Ludwig' chrome snare drum, 'Ludwig' Speed King bass drum pedal, 'Premier' lock fast stands and 'Zildjen' cymbals. I did a lot of my recording with this wonderful drum kit. We played all over the UK, every night of the week if the work load required it and we had our own club at 'The Swan', Mill Street, Kingston, where we played every Sunday night and practiced there on a Monday night. That brilliant club ran for many years and it got so packed on a Sunday night, the sweat ran down the wall of the dance hall. Wonderful days! We played at most of the big venues in the UK, including several times at the Nottingham and Swansea universalities, which were two of the biggest gigs at that time and I can remember we played on several pleasure boats on the River Thames in central London, and we played while passing all the famous landmarks, including Tower Bridge and The Houses of Parliament. I did a drum solo at every gig to a number called 'Manhattan Spiritual' and on one practice night I did a sponsored non-stop five hour marathon drum solo for charity, which raised funds for an electric disabled wheel chair. I had known a wonderful girl named, Betty North, for a few months in 1970 and I asked her out for our first date while at the big Gene Vincent gig at the Kingston Coronation Hall, when we were playing on the same bill. I knew she was there that night and I went out in to audience to find her. My life started on that night in February 1971 and we got married in May 1972.

It was a great time in my life, but as you get older you want different things. Music was my life in the 1960's and early 1970's and is still very dear to me today, and I still derive a lot of pleasure from listening to all types of music, from Guns n' Roses through to Katherine Jenkins. When I was a kid and kicking a drum kit all over the UK, I always maintained that to be a good musician you had to appreciate all types of music. The main music we played was Rock, but in our spare time our bass player, Keith Reed, and myself used to sit in on Jazz jam sessions around the London area. The best drummer I ever heard was the late great John Bonham of Led Zeppelin and he was everything I wanted to be as a musician! Another drummer I really rated from the other end of the spectrum was Brian Bennett of The Shadows; just listen to his solo on 'Little B'. A fantastic musician! I think I was lucky to be a teenager in the 1960's, because that's where it was at and bands played live in those great times, and were not 'Karaoke' singers, performing with backing

tapes running behind the stage curtain, as they do today. As I've previously stated I enjoy all types of music, but love Rock music! I really like Steve Winwood (The Spencer Davis Group / Traffic) and have been buying his albums since 1965, and have seen him play live twice. My cousin, Peter Creswell, was a top session guitarist in the late 1960's and recorded with Steve Winwood at that time and promised to take me to one of the studio sessions, but I never did get to meet Winwood. My choice in music isn't every one's cup of tea, but I enjoy listening to Guns n' Roses, Paul Rodgers (Free / Bad Company), David Gilmour (Pink Floyd), Lynyrd Skynyrd, Joe Bonamassa, Gary Moore and Led Zeppelin.

Being a busy rock drummer and playing at all premier venues all over the UK was my life for many years, but in 1970 Phil and I decided to start up pigeons again, this time to do the job properly. We obtained some good stock and start racing, which we had never done before. Phil and I acquired some Kirkpatrick and Kenyon stock from the late Johnny Winters of Kingston, which formed the basis of the Mott Brothers loft, and joined the now disbanded Molesey & District H.S. We won many firsts and averages in the early years, mostly in hard channel races, and were top prize winners in the strong Molesey club in 1975, winning 1st club Avranches, 1st club Rennes, 2nd club Nantes, 1st club Niort and several inland races that season. The premier pigeon of the Mott Brothers loft in the 1970's was our great dark pied cock, 'John Boy', winner of many good positions including, 1974: 1st club, 1st Surrey Federation (2,673 birds), 3rd open S.M.T. Combine (6,823 birds) Nantes, winning the Federation by 23 ypm, with a velocity of 995 ypm, 1976: 1st club, 4th Surrey Federation, 12th open S.M.T. Combine (4,234 birds) Niort. This wonderful pigeon was a Kirkpatrick / Kenyon cross, bred from the original Johnny Winters stock and won several premier trophies, including 'Pigeon of the Year' in the Molesey club. We never looked back in channel racing, winning in the best of company! I always considered Niort to be my personal favourite race point in the early days, winning three firsts from that race point in four seasons. Phil and I won the second longest old bird race four times in five seasons and the year we missed out, we won Bergerac (455 miles), the longest old bird race. The 1979 season saw our Mott Brother's pigeon partnership split up as Phil got married and moved out of the area, and he took the 1978 young bird team to make a start at his new address. Phil raced in partnership with his wife, Pauline, and they were very successful in the channel races with the West Middlesex Federation. Phil left the sport in 1990, but still has an interest and comes out every winter and judges at one or two top shows with me. On the split in 1979, I then teamed up with my wife, Betty in 1980 and started racing at their present address at Claygate.

The 1960's revisited.

I have re-written the above walk down 'Memory Lane' into an article on the 1960's and published it in the British Homing World. I've been blown away with response the 1960's article has generated from friend, family and the pigeon fancy in general. It all happened over forty years ago and until recently; I've never given it much thought and certainly have never been tempted to write about those great days, which I thought were dead and gone. Several people have previously said I should record it in an article, but really it was a friend on my back and chewing my ear off for months, saying I should be recording that time in my life, which got me on the job. Since I put it in my BHW column a while ago now the response has been many, many emails and phone calls from music lovers like me and many of them telling me about their memories of the great 1960's. I visited and judged at several premier shows that winter (2015) and many fanciers approach me to talk about the article and the music.

After the events of that time I thought to myself, I wonder if there was anything on the Internet about the Gene Vincent tours, but I was very doubtful as it was 45 years ago. I Googled in 'Gene Vincent London Palladium 1969' and to my utter disbelief up it all came! On YouTube there was an audio recording of one of Vincent's eight songs sets at the Palladium, which someone had recorded in the audience on a portable tape recorder. As you can imagine being recorded on a 1960's recorder it was very crude and noisy, but man, it was really great to hear! We were all in the wings of the Palladium stage listening to him that night and that old tape recording bought it all back. We played two shows with him at the Palladium and the 'Swan' PH ran a coach up to London that night, and my mum and dad were in the audience, so it was a great occasion for us all. I don't know how many people the London Palladium holds, several thousand I would think, but both shows were completely sold out. When you are on stage at that great old theatre, you can't see the audience because of the stage lights and it is like looking out at a big black screen. In our set on the night we played a slow number and the stage crew dimmed the light down for its duration, and all I could see was thousands of people's faces from the floor to the roof. I don't know if this was our biggest gig audience wise, but we played at some big auditoriums, including the open air Norwich Music Festival with Heinz Burt (The Tornados) and there was several thousand people there that day. Heinz was the blond bass player with The Tornados who had a massive hit record with 'Telstar' and he had a solo hit with

his Eddie Cochran tribute single, 'Just like Eddie'. I did session work from time to time and was on loan to another top group on the UK circuit, The Houseshakers for two weeks, with their drummer being away on holiday and played two sets at the Norwich gig, one with The Impalas and the other with The Houseshakers. I went home knackered that day! An interesting fact about the Palladium gig was they used one of the biggest PA systems on the planet that night, wattage wise and the super groups these days are ten times louder. LOL! They were asking for photos taken at the show on the Internet and I have several, including Gene Vincent and us in the dressing room, Emperor Roscoe, who compered the show and Gene waiting back stage to go on and perform. Delving further into the Internet I found all Gene Vincent's tour dates and we played with him twice on the 1969 tour and then again twice on his last tour in 1971. To my amazement I found an old press cutting advertising the Palladium gig on the Internet and had to laugh, as the most expensive tickets were 40/- (£2). LOL! The Impalas, Shakin' Stevens & the Sunsets, Screaming Lord Sutch, The Houseshakers, Wild Angels, The Rock n' Roll Allstars, all played regularly on a circuit of clubs and three of the venues were at the 'Fishmonger's Arms' PH in Woodgreen, the 'Northcote Arms' PH, Southall and the 'Gun' PH Croydon. Our second gig with Gene Vincent on the 1969 tour was at the 'Fishmonger's Arms'. I also found a ticket for the Coronation Hall, Kingston gig displayed on the Internet, which was on the 1971 tour and was the night I first asked my wife, Betty, out for our first date. After finding the ticket (number 1623) on the Internet, Betty went through her personal effects draw and found her ticket (number 1164) for the 1971 Coronation Hall gig. Just amazing! This was our last show with Gene Vincent, previously playing at the 'Northcote Arms' with him on the 1971 tour and he died in the USA in October 1971.

Still delving even further into the Internet, I Googled 'Morgan Recording Studio'! We worked at several recording establishments, but the main one was 'Morgan' in Willesden, North West London and I can remember Shakin' Steven & the Sunsets were also recording there that same day. I can remember, after we had all put our tracks down we had a couple of hours in the studio bar with them, before they went home to Wales. I personally always thought 'Shaky' was a major talent and of course he went on to have a string of hit records in the 1980's, and it was funny then to see my kids, Mark and Caroline going out and buying his records. I still have a copy of the first Shakin Stevens and the Sunsets 1960's vinyl album, 'Legend', and still enjoy seeing the ol' boy singing his Christmas hit on the TV every year. Trevor Hawkins was the piano player in The Sunsets and later on he joined us in The Impalas. I played at Trevor's wedding and I will never forget that day, he wore a bright red drape suit and his best mate, Graham Fenton singer with The Houseshakers, was his best man on the day and he wore a drape suit and wellington boots! LOL! Graham Fenton went on to have a major hit record, 'Rockabilly Rebel' with a group called 'Matchbox'. We were produced by Donnie Marchard that day at Morgan Studio and he was a top man in the USA, producing many top artists, including Bobby Darren. We were there at Morgan in 1970 and although it was still a young establishment, being opened at Maybury Gardens in 1967, it was one of the best in the UK at that time. Looking at the history of the studio on the Internet, I was amazed to see the list of people who have recorded there over the years since, including: Blind Faith (Steve Winwood and Eric Clapton), Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd (David Gilmour), Gary Moore, Cat Stevens, Paul McCartney and Rod Stewart, but to name a few. I can remember the Morgan Studio was a white building on the corner of two roads, but I see the building has now been greatly modernized, including a loft extension. I still have a copy of the vinyl LP and they took photos of us in the recording studio, one of which appeared on the LP sleeve. I have included the old black and white photo of us from the record sleeve, which shows us in the studio and you can see my drum kit miked up ready for recording. The second picture is of Shakin' Stevens and The Sunsets taken in the Morgan Studio bar. The photos are 45 years old, black and white, and very grainy, but they are priceless to me. Great days!

All the lads I played Rock n' Roll with in The Impalas were in main a lot older than me, in fact Shakin' Stevens is about two or three years older than me, so my favourite music was 1960's. As a musician the late 1950's music was far better to play and from that era I enjoyed the music of Eddie Cochran and Buddy Holly best. I played in a 1960's pop group called 'Ram Rod', but it was never as good as my seven years playing at the top level with The Impalas! I finish my playing days with Tony Collick, ex Rock n' Roll Allstars singer, in a group called 'Rockmobile' and that was a brilliant trio. Although I kicked a drum kit around the UK for many years and loved listening to great drummers like John Bonham and Brian Bennett, it was and still is great guitarists who 'blow' me away. I love the Rock music of Steve Winwood (Blind Faith / Traffic), David Gilmore (Pink Floyd), Gary Moore (Thin Lizzy), Paul Rodgers (Free / Bad Company), Joe Bonamassa, Guns n' Roses, Led Zeppelin, Lynyrd Skynyrd and so on'.

A lift time in the sport of Pigeon Racing.

My younger brother, Phil and I started keeping pigeons in our early youth and the Mott Brother's pigeon career started when we obtained a pair of birds, 'Alma' and 'Charlie', from a school friend, which we housed in a small rabbit hutch in the mid-1950. This pair of pigeons was bred at the loft of Terry Smart, who was in partnership with the Groombridge family of Kingston and it is common knowledge that Terry with his wife Carole, became the secretary of the London & South East Classic Club some 25 years later. After a few years of flying our pigeons around the rooftops, we had to give them up for a short while, as we moved house. I played the drums and was very involved at the time with the top rock n' roll band, 'The Impalas', and we played with many top artists, including, Dave 'Screaming Lord' Sutch, Shakin' Stevens, Heinz Burt (The Tornados) and Gene Vincent at the London Palladium in 1969. Being a busy rock drummer and playing at all premier venues all over the UK was my life for many years, but in 1970 Phil and I decided to start up pigeons again, this time to do the job properly. We obtained some good stock and start racing, which we had never done before. We acquired some Kirkpatrick and Kenyon stock from the late Johnny Winters of Kingston, which formed the basis of the Mott Brothers loft, and joined the now disbanded Molesey & District H.S. Phil and I won many firsts and averages in the early years, mostly in hard channel races, and were top prize winners in the strong Molesey club in 1975, winning 1st club Avranches, 1st club Rennes, 2nd club Nantes, 1st club Niort and several inland races that season. The premier pigeon for Mott Brothers in the 1970's was our great dark pied cock, 'John Boy', winner of many good positions including, 1974: 1st club, 1st Surrey Federation (2,673 birds), 3rd open S.M.T. Combine (6,823 birds) Nantes, winning the Federation by 23 ypm, with a velocity of 995 ypm, 1976: 1st club, 4th Surrey Federation, 12th open S.M.T. Combine (4,234 birds) Niort. This wonderful pigeon was a Kirkpatrick / Kenyon cross, bred from the original Johnny Winters stock and won several premier trophies, including 'Pigeon of the Year' in the Molesey club. Phil and I never looked back in channel racing, winning in the best of company! I personally considered Niort our personal favourite race point in the early days, winning three firsts in four seasons. Mott Brothers won the second longest old bird race four times in five seasons and the year we missed out, we won Bergerac (455 miles), the longest old bird race. The 1979 season saw the Mott Brother's pigeon partnership split up as Phil got married and moved out of the area, and he took the 1978 young bird team to make a start at his new address. Phil raced in partnership with his wife, Pauline, and they were very successful in the channel races with the West Middlesex Federation. Phil left the sport in 1990, but still has an interest and comes out every winter and judges at one or two top shows with me. On the split in 1979, I then teamed up with my wife, Betty in 1980 and started racing at our present address in Claygate.

At the start of the 1984 season, most pigeon fanciers in the British Isles were glad to see the back of 1983, with its paramyxovirus ban on channel racing, which left the racing and show programme in total disarray. Despite the ban, I enjoyed a brilliant season racing and showing. We won many major positions in the Club, Federation and Combine, including ten times 1st club and lifting fourteen trophies. All this won with a very small racing team of eighteen birds! Betty and I were premier prize winners in the Surbiton F.C. and third highest prize winner in the London Columbarian Midweek Club, flying only half of the midweek programme. We raced our team on the natural system to our smart 15ft x 6ft loft. The basic loft was a 'Kidby', but with me being a self-employed carpenter, I made my own alterations, including a small stock section.

The main families kept in the 1980's were Alex Fleming of Esher, Denys Brothers of Belgium and Dordins from Ron Wasey of New Addington and Mr. & Mrs. John Hopwood of York. The Mott pigeons were paired up on 14th February, as this usually meant the birds were laying their second round in time for the first Federation race. Pairing on this date, the birds are good up to 350 miles, but were normally over the top for the longest old bird race from Bergerac (455 miles). With such a small team of pigeons it was very hard to win right up to the end of the old bird programme. The Dordin pigeons from Ron Wasey and John Hopwood were brilliant racing and in the show pen from the outset, with the main one being a Mealy late bred named 'Ronnie', which was gifted to the our loft by Ron Wasey. This handsome cock won on the road and bred many good winners, including the ace racer, 'Gold Strike', winner of: 1st club, 3rd Surrey Federation, 9th SMT Combine, 21st open Amalgamation (8,614 birds) 1st London Coly Nantes, winning five trophies including the 'Brooker Gold Cup' and was the grand sire of a 1st open SMT Combine winner for Mrs Annette Boyd of Tolworth. The best pigeon of the 1980's was our famous Champion 'Kenny' and this Denys Brothers grizzle cock won 37 positions in the first six, including thirteen times 1st club, also 3rd, 5th, 9th, 11th and 24th in the Surrey Federation. This 'once in a life time' pigeon was eventually put to stock, breeding many winners and his daughter bred 2nd open Up North Combine for a fancier in the north east of England. Champion 'Kenny' had several outstanding brothers, the best one being another grizzle named 'Warrior', and he won seven times 1st club, also 2nd, 3rd and 15th in the Surrey Federation. These brilliant cocks were raced on the natural system and never raced further than Plymouth (180 miles). The third brother, 'Double Top', won three times 1st club, including 1st club (by 75 minutes), 5th Surrey Federation, 7th open S.M.T. Combine Penzance. The 1980's were a golden decade for the Keith and Betty Mott loft, winning up to ten firsts in most seasons and

were the premier prize winners in the Surbiton F.C. three years consecutively. Being one of the sport's workers, I was secretary of the Surbiton and Esher clubs for several seasons and was also at one time chairman of the London Columbarian. Two important pigeons of the early 1990's were the Denys Brothers blue chequer pied cock, 'Apollo' and his mate 'The Besant Hen', which was bred by Kenny and Bobby Besant of New Malden. 'Apollo' won several races and was 'Pigeon of the Year' in the Esher club, also he was an outstanding breeder, being the sire of many winners with 'The Besant Hen'. A late bred from this pair was gifted to Paddy Kelly of Harlow, which bred a bird to win 1st open London North Road Combine Lerwick (600 miles) in the 2003 season. It also bred 2nd open London N.R. Combine and a 'Hall of Fame' winner. 'Apollo' was featured on Sky News TV in the November of 1994. A wonderful pigeon!

Pigeon wise the year of 1995 was a very bad one for and Betty and me. I kept having constant bouts of flu and coughs which got more and more frequent, to the point where I was having time off work, sometimes twice a month with ill health. After months of visits to the doctor, I was referred to a specialist at Kingston Hospital and they concluded that the problem was my pigeons. After discovering that I had the dreaded Pigeon Fancier's Lung, I had to give up my beloved pigeons, after 25 years in the sport. Giving up the pigeons was the hardest thing I had to do in his life, not only did I feel sorry for myself but was shattered for my daughter, Caroline, who was a very good pigeon fancier and new member of my pigeon partnership. After the clearance sale in 1995 I stepped up the writing and video side of my participation in pigeons and became even more involved in the sport.

In 1997, whilst at the British Homing World Blackpool Show, I met a pigeon lung suffer, Tony Grinsil of Wakefield and he told me that he had overcome the problem by using a 'rabbit hutch' type loft. You do not have to walk into this type of loft to look after the pigeons and on my return from the Blackpool trip; I built myself some rabbit hutches, so I could keep some old timers as pets. In 1998 I obtained a few choice youngsters from my good friends Eric Cannon and Tom Gilbertson, with the view to racing in the NFC Pau Grand National event, which I think is one of the premier races in the sport. With such a small team of pigeons, I couldn't hope to enjoy weekly Federation racing with the same success as I had in the past, so it was more realistic to have a go at one good race like the Pau National. **In the winter of 1998 I built my eight section 'rabbit hutch' loft, with natural long distance racing in mind. The loft was 10ft long, 2ft deep, and 6ft high, or height of the fancier and had six spacious sections to house six pairs of long distance racers. It was made of 3/4in ply and was set on a nice 3in x 2in timber stand. Each rabbit hutch had a bob wire trap and all wire doors were fully removable so they don't flap about and damage the birds as they flew out. When not in use the bob hole trap was blocked off with special 'gravestone' shut off boards and the stand had a nice shelf to store the pigeon bath and nest bowls etc. Each old bird section was kitted out with two 'V' perches, fixed to the right hand side and back walls, a nest bowl, sited at the left hand back corner, and a small drinker, sited on the floor at the front opposite side to the bob trap. After building the old bird rabbit hutch I constructed a new matching 4ft double to house ten young birds each season.** The loft set up at Claygate had again been increased, as in the Christmas period of 2000; I built an aviary type loft to house the stock birds and his small team of young birds. As I've stated my rabbit hutch loft system was brilliant for racing the old birds but, although the hutches are very roomy; the youngsters tend to fight a lot and dominant cocks hold the floor and stop the others feeding and drinking. I always wore a mask when cleaning out the rabbit hutches, which was a very quick job, carried out at least once a day and the whole set up was kept spotlessly clean.

I only kept 14 pairs in our 'rabbit hutch' loft set up, including stock birds and the main family kept were the very best of Eric Cannon's champion 550 mile family. I did say at the time, I had only been in long distance racing for a few seasons and loved it! I was not interested in any other type of pigeon racing and I wished we had started long distance year ago. The Claygate loft housed the Brian Denney of Strensall lines which had crossed with Eric Cannon's pigeons successfully. The loft normally had five pairs of stock birds which were paired up in January each season and I was very proud of the fact that I owned probably one of the best Brian Denney and Eric Cannon stock teams in the sport. The stock section housed several direct children of Brian Denney champions, including 'Tuff Nut'. All the main pairs in the stock loft had bred several pigeons to score well up in Classic and National results in long distance events. One of the early star racers at the Claygate loft was the red chequer cock, 'The Gilbertson Cock', and was bred by Tom Gilbertson of Carlisle, being one of the original gift pigeons to start me up again in 1998. This wonderful pigeon went missing for two months as a young bird, but went on to win: 2000: 2nd clock station (beaten by a loft mate), 305th open NFC Nantes (9,074 birds), second bird clocked on the winning day NFC Pau (552 miles), 2001: flew nearly 1,000 miles north road in three weeks, 90th open L.& S.E.C.C. Perth (very hard race), 1st clock station, 51st open L&SECC Thurso (516 miles), scored in 500 mile cocks class at BHW Blackpool Show, 2002: 2nd clock station, 204th open N.F.C. Pau (552 miles), 3rd in the B.H.W. Pau Sporting

Challenge, 2003: flew Dax (528 miles), won Best in Show at the Esher open show. This wonderful cock was bred down from Tom's 'Red Alert' bloodlines and bred several good 500 mile racers, including the mealy hen, 'Foxwarren Javelin', winner of several premier positions from 550 miles, including 20th open L&SECC Pau. 'The Gilbertson Cock' my first great racer, flown to the 'rabbit hutch' loft system!

Betty and I only raced a very small team in the 500 mile plus National and Classic races and achieved a fine record over those first five seasons racing to the 'rabbit hutch' loft:

2000: 1st and 2nd Godalming clock station, 276th, 305th open N.F.C. Nantes (9,074 birds), a very hard race, sent three birds to Pau N.F.C. race, clocked two birds on the winning day recording, 5th Godalming clock station, 311th open (3,941 birds). The third bird was home next morning.

2001: This season saw our loft compete in only two old bird races and with only eight old bird racers recorded, 3rd, 5th Guildford clock station, 77th, 80th, 90th, 91st, 92nd and 94th open L&SECC Perth (370 miles), 1st, 2nd and 5th Guildford clock station, 51st, 52nd and 69th open L&SECC Thurso (516 miles), only six birds sent, all south road pigeons.

2002: Sent four pigeons to the Pau NFC race, recorded 2nd and 3rd Guildford clock station (only three birds clocked), 204th and 252nd open (4,071 birds), 7th National Yearling and 3rd. in the B.H.W. Pau Sporting Challenge.

2003: Sent eight birds to Dax (528 miles) L&SECC race, clocking five on the winning day and recording 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th Guildford clock station (very hard race only two clocks returned in clock station), 32nd, 121st, 154th, 155th, 174th open.

2004: Sent eight birds to San Sebastian (560 miles) in Spain with the L&SECC, clocked five on a this very hard race and recorded 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th. Guildford clock station (only clock returned), 23rd, 29th, 37th, 43rd, 69th open, with only 79 birds clocked in race time. I returned from the clock station to find the sixth bird, 'The Allwright Cock', was home and had been badly hawked. The first bird clocked from San Sebastian was the two year old blue hen, 'Foxwarren Express', and she was sent due to hatch on the day of liberation, to win 1st clock station, 23rd open. This was her first race from over 500 miles and she is a daughter of my number two Eric Cannon stock pair, being a granddaughter of Champion 'Culmer Marion', 1st open N.F.C. Sartilly, 'Culmer White Flight', 1st. sect A, 14th open N.F.C. Pau and 'Culmer Channel Queen', the N.F.C. Pau Merit Award winning hen. 'Foxwarren Express' flew through to Nantes as a yearling and won B.O.S. in the Esher open show the following winter. My second pigeon from San Sebastian, to record 2nd clock station, 29th open, was his good blue chequer hen, 'Foxwarren Complete', and she is a Cannon/Denney cross, being a daughter of that fantastic Brian Denney stock hen 'Pathfinder'. 'Foxwarren Complete' was sent to San Sebastian sitting twelve day old eggs and in 2003 was clocked on the winning day from Dax (528 miles), to win 1st clock station, 32nd open.

2005: Sent eight birds to Pau (552 miles) with the L&SECC and clocked three birds on the hardest weekend of the 2005 season. The team recorded 2nd, 7th, 8th Guildford Clock station, 20th, 116th, 119th open, with only 119 birds clocked in race time. First bird on the clock was the mealy hen, "Foxwarren Javelin", and she has plenty of previous good form having flown 550 miles four times, winning: 2005: 20th open L&SECC Pau, 2004: 69th open L&SECC San Sebastian, 2003: 155th open L&SECC Dax, plus 3rd 500 mile hens at the B.H.W. Blackpool Show. She was a daughter of the ace 500 mile racer, "The Gilbertson Cock", when mated to the premier Eric Cannon hen, "Pat's Girl". The same weekend as the Pau classic, three yearlings were sent to the B.I.C.C. Tours smash race and a Cannon blue cock was recorded to win 111th open.

I was told that moving house is one of the most stressful things you can do, but he thinks changing pigeon lofts comes very close! After several months of thought I decided that my old 'rabbit hutch' loft was getting on a bit in years, with a lot of it needing replacement because of rot and so decided in October 2009 to replace it with a new 'L' shaped structure of my own design. Our garden at Claygate is the size of a postage stamp and the new loft had to be small, so a lot of thought had to go into the design to make it workable for what I had in mind for the coming seasons and of cause with his 'pigeon lung' problem in mind. My good mate, Bobby Besant, invited him around to his home in Worcester Park to have a look at his new loft that he had made in the winter of 2008 by Park Hall Lofts in Derbyshire and on viewing it I knew that was the loft for me, and I needed to give Andy at Park Hall a phone call to discuss my design. Bob's smashing 26ft long loft, which is very inconspicuous in the garden and is made of tanalised Loglap timber, and never needs to be painted. He races on the roundabout system so the front is made up with obscure Perspex doors and is fully kitted out with a trapping system for the ETS. My main problem was my pigeon fancier's lung and the new loft had to be ultra-well ventilated. Although I clean out twice a day with a mask, I never spend much time inside the loft, doing any observing of the inmates from the outside in the garden. The Park Hall's buildings are very well ventilated so I was half way there anyway! The new loft has the same spec as Bobby's, with tanalised Loglap timber, which is nice and thick, and with Perspex windows

and a trapping system for the ETS. I designed the loft so I can race long distance on the natural system, and included a section for eight racing pairs, one for 15 young birds, a nice big section for eight natural pairs including flying out stock birds and a small section for one or two pairs of prisoner stock birds. The new structure is the same lay out at one end as my old loft and has cupboards built in under the nest boxes to store nest bowls etc.

I think it is common knowledge throughout the fancy that I packed up racing my pigeons three years ago because of my heavy commitment elsewhere in the sport and only keep about 12 pairs of birds down the garden to play with. I sell a very small number of youngsters for some corn money and give a lot of youngsters to Charity Sales and friends, so they can race them. In fact I gave away 55 youngsters in the 2018 season! Our racing record has been pretty good over a 50 year period, but I do enjoy the breeding side of our sport. 'Foxwarren Lofts' have a wonderful record of breeding countless top class winners for ourselves and other fanciers over many years. As I've stated, the Keith and Betty Mott loft in Claygate has gifted a lot of youngsters to our friends and charity auctions over the years, and in the 2013 season our birds produced several premier prize winners including 1st open Combine, 1st open Amalgamation, 1st Federation (twice), and 2nd Federation (twice) in that season. The loft has recently produced 1st open Combine two years on the trot and our birds have also produced 1st open Amalgamation Bourges (581 miles) two years on the trot. To be quite honest I am 'chuffed' that my little team of birds have been involved in the production in recent seasons of pigeons to win: 1st open National (twice), 2nd open National (twice), 1st open Amalgamation (twice), 1st open Combine (twice), 1st open International and the NFC Tarbes record holder, being clocked at 748 miles on the day of liberation. We had several outstanding reports of fanciers winning with our birds in the 2018 racing season, including 1st, 2nd, 12th, 33rd, 60th open National and 9th open Combine. Just brilliant!

For many of my early years in the sport I was successful in Federation and Combine racing, from 80 miles through to 450 miles, and really enjoyed it. Being a good friend of Eric Cannon, Tom Gilbertson and Brian Denney for many years, I always had an interest and admiration for long distance pigeon racing. I started long distance racing to my 'rabbit hutch' loft set up in 1998, on my re-start in the sport, after three years without pigeons because of my 'pigeon lung' problem. I restarted with gift youngsters from Eric Cannon and Tom Gilbertson and never looked back! I clocked Eric's blue chequer cock, 'The Cannon Cock' who was a grandson of Champion 'Culmer Sam', on the winning day in my first ever NFC Pau Grand National racing to the 'rabbit hutch'. He won several premier positions from the Pau (552 miles) and was the sire of probably my best ever all-round pigeon, 'Foxwarren Complete'. Another of my best original 'Rabbit Hutch' racers was the red chequer cock, 'The Gilbertson Cock' and he was bred by Tommy. This handsome cock won a rake of long distance positions racing to his 'rabbit hutch', including top prizes racing from Pau, 550 miles south road and Thurso, 550 miles north road. 'The Gilbertson Cock' won BIS at the Esher Open Show and was the sire of several outstanding racers, including the mealy hen, 'Foxwarren Javelin', the winner of four premier positions from the South of France and Spain, including 20th open L&SECC Pau and 69th open L&SECC San Sebastian. I love long distance pigeon racing!

Over the 50 years I have been in the sport we have bred and owned some really great racing pigeons and here is a summary of the absolute 'best of the bunch'. When Phil and I raced as Mott Brothers to the loft in Kingston in the 1970's we many first prizes, mainly from France and at that time 'John Boy' was our best pigeon, and he was bred from Kirkpatrick and Kenyon pigeon obtained from the late, Johnny Winters of Kingston. 'John Boy' was brilliant on hard days, being the winner of many good positions including, 1974: 1st club, 1st Surrey Federation (2,673 birds), 3rd open S.M.T. Combine (6,823 birds) Nantes, winning the Federation by 23 ypm, with a velocity of 995 ypm, 1976: 1st club, 4th Surrey Federation, 12th open S.M.T. Combine (4,234 birds) Niort and won several premier trophies, including 'Pigeon of the Year' in the Molesey club. The best pigeon of the 1980's was our famous Champion 'Kenny' and this Denys Brothers grizzle cock won 37 positions in the first six, including thirteen times 1st club, also 3rd, 5th, 9th, 11th and 24th in the Surrey Federation. This 'once in a life time' pigeon was eventually put to stock, breeding many winners and his daughter bred 2nd open Up North Combine for a fancier in the north east of England. Champion 'Kenny' had several outstanding brothers, the best one being another grizzle named 'Warrior', and he won seven times 1st club, also 2nd, 3rd and 15th in the Surrey Federation. These brilliant cocks were raced on the natural system and never raced further than Plymouth (180 miles). The third brother, 'Double Top', won three times 1st club, including 1st club (by 75 minutes), 5th Surrey Federation, 7th open S.M.T. Combine Penzance. The 1980's were a golden decade for the Keith and Betty Mott loft, winning up to ten firsts in most seasons and were the premier prize winners in the Surbiton F.C. three years consecutively.

I think our best all-round pigeon was our champion hen, 'Foxwarren Complete', who was a great 550 mile racer and has now proved to be a champion breeder. 'Foxwarren Complete' was the winner of 2003: 32nd open L&SECC Dax (530 miles), 2nd East Grinstead CC Dax, 2004: 29th open L&SECC San Sebastian (560 miles), 2005: 116th open L&SECC Pau (552 miles), 2007: 109th open L&SECC Pau. A real class hen! Her sire was 'The Cannon Cock' bred by Eric Cannon and this cock was the original pigeon Eric bred for me on me restarting after 'pigeon lung' in 1998 and was a grandson of 'Culmer White Flight' and Champion 'Culmer Sam'. The dam of 'Foxwarren Complete' was the brilliant blue cheque stock hen, 'Pathfinder', bred by Brian Denney and her dam was Champion 'Blue Pau' winner of 41st, 201st open NFC Pau (738 miles) and dam of many premier long distance racers including Champion 'Classic Lad' winner of 1st open Northern Classic Saintes (573 miles on the day of liberation). 'Pathfinder' was lightly raced before being put to stock and in 2001 flew 900 miles in three weeks to record 91st open L&SECC Perth, 52nd open L&SECC Thurso (520 miles). 'Pathfinder' was a champion breeder, producing many premier 550 mile racers, including 'Foxwarren Complete' and 'Foxwarren Pretender' dam of Champion 'Brian's Blue', the winner for Brian Denney of : 2008: 1st section K, 61st open NFC Tarbes, being clocked on the day of liberation flying 748 miles, 1st RPRA UK Long Distance Champion 2008. 'Foxwarren Complete' proved to be a 'gold mine' stock hen breeding many top 550 mile racers, including Bob and Anthony Besant's champion stock hen, 'Half Crown', dam of Champion 'Noble Dream', winner of 1st open International Agen (10,000 birds) in the 2015 racing season. She is great grand dam to Bob and Anthony's, 'Hypo', the winner of 2nd open BICC Cholet National (3,410 birds) in 2019, plus 27th open BICC Alencon National and 43rd open BICC Alencon National, being bred from 'Return', a sister to 'Half Crown'. 'Foxwarren Complete' is also the dam of the fantastic stock hen, 'Foxwarren Northern Complete', dam of many premier 550 mile racers including: 2nd Federation Bourges (581 miles), 3rd Federation Bourges, 4th Federation Bourges, 5th Federation Bourges, 8th Federation and is grand dam of 1st, 1st, 3rd, 4th, 4th Federation, 1st, 1st Amalgamation, 8th open NEHU (2,355 birds) Bourges (581 miles) in recent seasons. She is the dam of Fred Dickson's champion cock, 'The Five Times Bourges Cock'. 'Foxwarren Complete' is the dam of Ronnie & Jim Young's premier stock cock '48' who is sire of many top racers, including their champion racing and breeding cock, 'The Wee Cock'. This wonderful cock is responsible for many National prize winners, including being the sire of: 'Jack's Legacy' winner of 2017: 1st open EDC St. Malo National and grand sire of 'Shallas Lass' winner of 2018: 1st open EDC St. Malo National and 'Our Lass' winner of 2016: 16th open EDC St. Malo National. The fantastic 'Foxwarren Complete'!

Champion 'Foxwarren Fred' is the best 550 mile stock cock we have ever owned and we bred him from the very best of Eric Cannon's wonderful long distance family. 'Foxwarren Fred' is the sire of many premier long distance champions, including: 1st Federation Bourges (581 miles), 2nd Federation Bourges, 2nd Federation Bourges, 2nd Federation Bourges, 3rd Federation Bourges, 5th Federation Bourges, 8th Federation Bourges, plus 2nd Amalgamation Bourges and is grand sire of 1st, 1st, 3rd, 4th, 4th Federation, 1st, 1st Amalgamation Bourges (581 miles), 8th open NEHU (2,355 birds) in the 2012 and 2013 seasons. He is the sire of Fred Dickson's champion cock, 'The Five Times Bourges Cock', winner of 3rd, 5th, 8th Federation Bourges and sire of 1st, 1st, 3rd, 4th, 4th Federation, 1st, 1st Amalgamation Bourges. Sire of 'Foxwarren Fred' is 'Culmer Sam's Lad' bred by Eric Cannon, the last son of Eric's Number One stock cock 'Culmer Sam', who was the product of Eric's Fear Brothers cross. Champion 'Culmer Sam' was the ultimate stock cock and was the sire of Eric Cannon's highly successful 550 mile family in the last years. Dam of 'Foxwarren Fred' is 'Culmer Fantasy', bred by Eric Cannon and she is a daughter of the stock cock, '93177', a half-brother to Champion 'Culmer Channel Queen'. The parents of '93177', are the champion stock cock 'Culmer Producer' when mated to a daughter of 'Culmer Expected', winner of 22nd, 27th, 103rd and 231st open NFC Pau. The dam of 'Culmer Fantasy' is Champion 'Culmer Bess', winner of 6th, 26th and 170th open N.F.C. Pau (540 miles), 47th open N.F.C. Pau / Saintes, winning the NFC Pau merit award. This brilliant hen was top priced pigeon at Eric Cannon's dispersal sales, sold for £2,300. Champion 'Culmer Bess' is a daughter of the premier Mike Spencer stock cock, when mated to 'Culmer Joan', winner of 1st section A. 12th open NFC Pau, who is a daughter of 'Culmer Rose' winner of 30th, 56th, 131st, 389th and 541st open NFC Pau. 'Culmer Rose' was a premier daughter of 'Culmer Sam'. 'Culmer Fantasy' is a full sister to the dam of Champion 'Night Flight', winner of 1st open Saintes / Pau Grand National in 2003, for Mark Gilbert. 'Culmer Sam's Lad' and 'Culmer Fantasy' bred many good winners, including 20th open BICC for Gordon Marsh and this great pair are grandparents of Brian Batchelor's 35th open L&SECC Pau (550 miles on the day of liberation) in 2007. 'Foxwarren Fred' is the also grand sire of 'Charlotte', the winner of 2nd open NIPA St. Malo National (1,835 birds) in the 2018 racing season, 'Our Lass', the winner of 16th open EDC St. Malo National (450 miles) in 2016 and great grand sire of 12th open National in 2018. 'Foxwarren Fred' the champion breeder!

Life after the 'Pigeon Fancier's Lung'.

February is the time of the year when fanciers receive their results from pigeon lung blood tests taken at the BHW Blackpool Show, by the British Pigeon Fancier's Medical Research Team. Some will be pleased to see a reduced reading of their pigeon lung count and many will be shocked and puzzled to be told that they are now suffering from the dreaded pigeon fancier's lung. I think it's common knowledge that I suffer from pigeon lung and I get countless phone calls, especially at that time of the year, from fanciers who are very worried and want to know the facts about the dreaded 'lung'. The first thing I tell them is **don't** get rid of the pigeons as I did, to take their time and try better ventilated accommodation for the birds and this will reduce their pigeon lung blood test count drastically. My own pigeon lung problem came to a head in 1995, although I think I had probably had it for years but wouldn't admit it, for fear of having to pack up my beloved pigeons. 1995 was a very bad year for me. Firstly I discovered that I had pigeon fancier's lung after 25 years in our great sport. It was the hardest thing I have had to do in my life, when I had to get rid of my team of pigeons on doctor's orders. Not only did I feel sorry for myself, but was shattered for my daughter, Caroline, who was a very good pigeon fancier and my partner. On giving up my birds I decided to carry on as secretary of the Surrey Championship Club, an office I had held for 9 years at that time and increase my hobby in pigeon journalism. My second bit of bad luck that year was an accident at my work as a carpenter. I fell head first 10 feet through a rotten roof smashing my nose and right elbow on the concrete floor below. I had a stay in Queen Mary's Hospital, Roehampton, and had two screws inserted in my shattered elbow. This set-back meant a year off work and I wouldn't write. They say when one door closes another one opens and from the sale of my small team of birds I could afford to purchase a professional standard camcorder which I had always wanted, and the time off meant I could make some pigeon videos. Well, four camcorders and two cars later we had produced 18 highly successful 'Many Miles with Mott' videos, which in turn producing articles on premier fanciers for the British Homing World.

While I was in Scotland shooting 'Many Miles with Mott' Number 12, I visited the Stobhill Hospital in Glasgow, home of the British Fancier's Medical Research Unit, for a one to one video interview with Dr Gavin Boyd, the pioneer of research into pigeon fancier's lung. In my interview I asked Dr Boyd what were the symptoms and he replied, 'Well I think the classic symptoms are flu-like aches and pains with a temperature, shivering, feverishness, sweating, and coming on 4 - 6 hours after fairly heavy contact with the birds.' I then asked him if it could be cured with drugs and he said, 'I think the real treatment is to avoid heavy exposure to bloom and get exposure to the pigeons to a level below that which triggers of the clinical problem'. My next question to Dr Boyd was, 'So would you be saying that fanciers should be using an open aviary type loft?' His reply was, 'I'm not going to tell pigeon fanciers how to race their pigeons but the truth is, if you are sensitised and then you have to be able to adjust the way you make contact with the birds to limit the amount of bloom that you are exposed to. In 1997, whilst at the BHW Blackpool Show, I met pigeon lung sufferer Tony Grinsil of Wakefield and I had a chat with him about the problem. He was in a bad way with pigeon lung and had to pack up the sport under orders of the specialist at Mexborough Montague Hospital, where he had various lung function tests and x-rays, much the same as myself. Tony had the idea of having a loft that you didn't walk into, so didn't get exposed to the bloom. The result was that the loft was 7ft long, 3ft wide and 3ft high and was set up at waist height, almost like a rabbit hutch. The loft worked so well that in December of that year he was discharged by the specialist, but had kept four pairs of pigeons since early October. As I previously stated on my return home from that Blackpool trip I was offered a pair of my old pigeons back, which had gone past their sell-by date and I built two rabbit hutches, so I could have them as pets, and the result was no bad effect! When the birds were taken out in the car they were carried in reeded widowhood baskets in the car boot and the driver's window was always kept open. The baskets were cleaned out every time after use, and re chipped regularly, always with a mask on.

There is pigeon racing after pigeon fancier's lung and prizes can be won racing to rabbit hutches! The 1999 season saw me race 5 yearlings and 11 youngsters to my rabbit hutch loft. I won several good positions in the Saturday Club and 56th and 116th open in the London & South East Classic Club Guernsey Young Bird Classic in a strong east wind, lifting £500. It's a wonderful way of keeping racing pigeons and the birds keep so well in the rabbit hutch type loft. We housed only about 15 young birds and in 2001 we started racing with 14 youngsters, flying the programme, including two Channel races, and finished with all 14 birds. The youngsters scored several times in the very strong Esher Club, including 1st Club Blandford (160 birds) and in the London & South East Classic Club won 2nd, 4th and 5th clock station, 107th, 126th and 132nd Open Guernsey recording 2nd and 4th Futurity and lifting £1,300. My champion 550 mile racing hen "Foxwarren Complete" was born in and raced to a rabbit hutch and she laid the egg in that 'rabbit hutch' that produced Bobby Besant's "Half Crown", the dam of Champion 'Noble Dream', winner of 1st open International Agen (10,500 birds) in the 2015 season.

I had nine really enjoyable years as chief convoyer for the London & South East Classic Club, which may sound horrendous for someone who has pigeon fancier's lung, but most of the work was done in the open air and I always wore a mask and coat when feeding, watering and liberating the birds. I loved driving through France to places like Bordeaux and Pau, and I never had any real ill effects from my conveying work. Over the years I have made thousands of pigeon loft visits all over the UK, for my video and writing work, and if I said it hadn't affected me I would be a liar, but my pigeon lung attacks are much milder and less frequent because I don't go into a dusty, closed in pigeon loft every day. Not everyone who has suffered will be able to keep pigeons, but I believe that modern enclosed lofts are a major factor in encouraging the problem. Few fanciers had the allergy when racing 30 years ago to the old type dowel fronted lofts, and generally fewer pigeons were housed in them. I have been amazed at the number of fanciers I have spoken to who say they have the symptoms but have not been tested. However, if I'm honest, I think I had it for about 15 years, before it peaked in 1994, when I was very ill. I get many phone calls from all over the UK asking me about the problem and I'm always happy to have a chat about the allergy, but the two people who really knows about the problem is Dr Gavin Boyd and Dr Philip Lynch, at the Research Centre in Glasgow. I can't praise these two wonderful doctors enough for their excellent work. I am amazed at the great interest which has been shown in my old 'rabbit hutch' loft system. I've had countless phone calls and letter from pigeon lung sufferers from all over the world.

Eric & Pat Cannon of Wormley

My close friends, Eric and Pat Cannon of Godalming, gave me youngsters every season to build up my long distance team, which are performing brilliantly in the long distance National and Classic events. When Eric passed away in the July 2000, I lost my mentor and my best friend, and the sport of pigeon racing lost one of it's greatest fanciers. He was always there for advice, putting me right, not only on pigeon matters but on life in general and was a true friend. I like to think I have a very good knowledge of Eric's wonderful long distance family of pigeons, being close to Eric and his pigeons for well over 25 years, I had the sad job of arranging and running his dispersal sales in the winter of 2000. Here we are nearly 20 years on and there have been many reports of fanciers putting up premier performances with Eric Cannon's pigeons, including two National Flying Club winners. In my opinion the name, Eric Cannon, will live on in the list of racing pigeon greats forever!

The Cannon loft has won countless positions in the NFC through the years, but the highlights have been: 5 times winner of the Langstone Gold Cup, for best average of three N.F.C. races, 16 times 1st section in NFC races, 1st open Sartilly, 2nd open Pau, 4th open Pau, 5th open Sartilly, 5th open Avranches, 6th open Pau (twice), 8th open Sartilly and so on. The Cannons had 74 positions in the first 100 open positions in Pau Grand Nationals and lifted the 3 bird Average from the Pau National six times. At the 1999 National Flying Club prize presentation held at Bedford, Eric and Pat Cannon, were presented with their fourth NFC Pau Certificate of Merit, which is won by a pigeon that has taken three positions in the first 100 open in the Pau Grand National result. Their fourth certificate winner was the blue hen, Champion 'Culmer Bess', whose record reads, 1996: 4th section, 47th open Pau / Saintes, 1997: 2nd section, 6th open Pau, 1998: 170th open Pau, 1999: 2nd section, 26th open Pau, to lift the Certificate of Merit. 'Culmer Bess' proved to be a wonderful breeder, being the grand dam of Champion 'Night Flight', winner of 1st open NFC Saintes / Pau Grand National in 2003, for Mark Gilbert and the two champion breeding cocks, 'Foxwarren Fred' and his brother 'The Old Cannon Cock'. A wonderful hen! If the NFC Pau Certificate of Merit had started a few years earlier, Eric would have won three other awards, with the three hens, 'Culmer Julie Girl', 'Culmer Beauty' and the great champion blue hen, 'Culmer Blue Bird'. Betty and I were good friends with Eric and Pat for nearly 30 years and out of all their many champions through the years, 'Blue Bird', was my favourite. She was perfect in the hand and in the late 1970's she recorded 6th, 28th, 57th, 118th and 251st open NFC Pau, winning 1st section twice and was the grand dam of 'Culmer Lass', winner of 1st SMT Combine Bergerac.

Eric once remarked that he enjoyed Combine racing years ago, but in later years all his energy was spent on the National races. In spite of that, the loft won the Combine four times, with the blue chequer hen, 'Pat', winner of 1st open London S.R. Combine Bordeaux, grizzle cock, 'St. Swithin', winner of 1st open London S.R. Combine Bordeaux, dark chequer cock, 'Evil Eye', winner of 1st open London S.R. Combine Le Mans and the champion blue hen, 'Culmer Lass', winner of 1st open S.M.T. Combine Bergerac, only bird on the day of liberation in the Combine. The Cannons won the Surrey Federation's longest old bird race shield outright for winning it three times. Eric's most recent Combine winner, 'Culmer Lass', went on to win 1st section, 12th open N.F.C. Pau the year after her Combine win and this game hen also won two more positions

from the Pau National, plus 49th open N.F.C. Nantes, and was the grand dam of Champion 'Culmer Marion', 1st open N.F.C. Sartilly in 1990.

The great Champion 'Culmer Gold' was rated by many as Eric Cannon best ever champion, but he was certainly one of Eric's favorites. He was always flying up on to Eric's hand for a tit-bit! Over the years many premier winners have been reported through the 'Culmer Gold' line, including 1st open NFC Saintes and 1st Amalgamation Bourges (580 miles). This great old cock must have rate as one of the greatest long distance racers in the world when he was alive by recording 1st club, 2nd Surrey Federation, 9th open SMT Combine Niort (340 miles); 1st club, 3rd Surrey Federation, 11th open S.M.T. Combine Bergerac (440 miles); 21st, 70th, 83rd, 103rd, 111th open Pau NFC (540 miles) winning the NFC Pau Merit Award and in one season recorded 163rd open Nantes NFC to win the best average from Nantes and Pau in the NFC. 'Culmer Gold' one of the best that I have had the privilege to handle.

I used Eric Cannon's natural racing system. Being a close friend to a fancier like Eric for over 25 years, something must rub off, and I cannot remember ever having a conversation with Eric, when Eric didn't say 'Pau National'. The racers were paired up in mid-March, with date being worked back from the Pau National and every pair reared youngsters to kick off their season and develop a bond between mates and nest box. I trained at all points down the A3 to Portsmouth, with the odd toss from Worthing (50 miles) on the south coast. The basic feeding was 'Breed & Wean' mixture; with a 50% extra maize added to the feed three weeks before the main event and was fed on the hopper. Eric Cannon was a great bean feeder, sometimes 100% right through the season, but I preferred a mixture of 'Breed & Wean' and Maple peas. The birds were well trained off the south coast, then into Nantes (300 miles), which I used as a stepping stone for Pau, hoping they have a good fly of at least eight hours to tighten them up. The nests were broken down on their return from Nantes and the whole loft was set up on twelve day old eggs for the Pau or now Tarbes race. The yearlings were given two or three channel races up to Nantes and then stopped, although I have sent the odd yearling to 550 miles and scored with them.

Brian & Thelma Denney of Strensall.

My good friend Brian 'Mr Long Distance' Denney, has one of the best long distance lofts in the world today. He flies 748 miles from the NFC Tarbes Grand National and has won Section K many times, including 3rd, 4th, 5th, 5th, 6th open. Brian clocked Ch. 'Brian's Blue' on the day of liberation from Tarbes (748 miles), to be the longest flying pigeon clocked on the day ever in the NFC. A brilliant fancier! Brian and I have exchanged youngster over the years, since 1999 and he has been really good to me, giving me children of his best birds, including Champion 'Blue Pau', Champion 'Tuff Nut', Champion 'Brian's Blue' and Champion 'Dark Charm'. One of the favourites here in Claygate was my good dark cock stock cock, 'Sasha's Boy', bred for me by Brian Denney in 2007, and he is a full brother to Champion 'Dark Charm' and Champion 'Dark Dancer', being bred out of the Champion stock pair, 'Maxi' and 'Dark Jan'. 'Sasha's Boy' has bred several outstanding 550 mile racers, including Federation winners and a late bred from him was donated to the 2010 BHW Blackpool Charity Auction and raised £740. 'Sasha's Boy' is the sire of 'Half Crown' the dam of Champion 'Noble Dream' winner of 1st open International Agen (10,500 birds) in the 2015 season for Bobby & Anthony Besant. This champion stock cock bred Federation winners mated to 'Lady Tuff Nut' in the later seasons and she is a daughter of Champion 'Tuff Nut', one of the best long distance racers and breeders of all time. 'Lady Tuff Nut' bred several premier racers, including Federation winners and is grand dam of 2nd open National and 16th open National.

In my 50 years visiting premier lofts all over Europe and doing pigeon articles in the fancy press, my favourites and most memorable were his two visits to my friends, Brian and Thelma Denney of Strensall. I first visited Brian and Thelma Denney in 1999 when I went to the Yorkshire loft to video 'Mr Long Distance' for my 'Many Miles with Mott' video series and since then have become good friends, meeting up at the BHW Blackpool Show every year, and I kept saying, 'I will pop up and see you both this summer'. Well ten years had flown by and I still had not been back to Strensall. In late April 2009, me and my best mate, Peter Taylor 'bit the bullet' and headed north armed with my pigeon photography box and a battery of cameras, including the video units. The weather was brilliant and the thought of looking at one of the best long distance lofts of pigeon in the sport excited me and Peter! After some tea and a chat I set up my pigeon box in Brian's garage and photographed 13 of the current 'Bri-Den' 750 mile champions. I took over a hundred photos of Brian and Thelma, and the lofts, which brought my file up to date on this fancier, who is one of our greatest long distance champions of all time. I shot nearly an hour of video and just like those ten years since my last visit, the time flew by and after a nice lunch put on our Thelma, it was time to make the 240 mile drive home. What a great day they had!

After our visit in April, Brian and Thelma enjoyed a brilliant 2009 season racing in the National Flying Club. The month of June saw Brian's favourite race take place, the NFC Tarbes Grand National, and the Denney's enjoyed a brilliant race of a lifetime! The 3,800 birds were liberated at 13.45hrs on the Friday in no wind situation and with adverse weather in northern France that evening, the convoy experienced a very difficult race, with many members not clocking in on the Saturday. Brian and Thelma sent a team of 20 birds and flying 748 miles in to Yorkshire, clocked seven of their entry on the Saturday, to record a fantastic 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th, 8th, 11th section K, 3rd, 4th, 12th, 19th, 30th, 56th, 153rd open NFC and 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th, 9th open North East 700 Mile Club. The Denney's first two birds were on the clock within three minutes, with the 1st section K, 3rd open winner being the five year old widowhood blue chequer hen, 'Northern Lady', and she is a daughter of the sire of the Brian's loft, Champion 'Tuff Nut'. I always laugh and reminds those who were present on that visit to the Strensall loft in April 2009, that on handle her on the photo session I picked out 'Northern Lady' as my fancy and I'm happy to say she hit the jackpot in the very hard Tarbes Grand National that same season! Brian and Thelma Denney are two of the nicest people I've ever met in pigeon racing.

The winter pigeon shows

Although I am a keen pigeon racer, I also love showing my birds. I can't turn off in September, as soon as we finish racing, I switch into show mode! If I had a big garden and not the postage stamp we have now, I would defiantly have a second loft for Show Racers as well as my long distance racing team. I have won hundreds of prizes and trophies through the years showing my birds, and have won at all the National Shows. I am well sort after ever winter as a judge and travels hundreds of miles carrying out the duty, and have judged at most of the big Show Racer Society Open Shows countless times, four times at the BHW Blackpool Show, twice at the RP Old Comrades Show at the NEC Birmingham and three times at the NEHU Peterlee / South Shields Show in Newcastle. I have been associated with the RPR Southern Region Show for many years and derived great pleasure judging at this great annual show through the years. This great event is one of his favourite one day shows and have attended the show most years, since it started at Ascot Racecourse over 35 years ago and for many years have booked the judges for his good friend and show secretary, Ron Lacey. Years ago I used to show and won many firsts with my racing pigeons, which I always considered a good achievement, with the 'red hot' competition at the Region show.

I defiantly think there is a massive decline in 'bread and butter' showing at local club level and to see this in recent years is very upsetting. For me true exhibiting of Racing Pigeons and Show Racers is when they are handled and in our Surrey area, most of the club and open shows are through the wires. Fanciers these days seem to like to grab their birds out of the loft, with no preparation, and put them in the pen to be judged through the wires. They almost seem to be frightened to have them handled and at our local show they seem to prefer fancy colours classes. When I'm showing a lot of time is spent in preparing my pigeons for the pen and we have won the local 'Open Show Points' cups about 18 times, but I don't show at local events anymore, because of the lack of quality competition. I think the whole thing comes down to 'pounds, shillings and pence' and the people who run the club shows are looking to make money for the club, which can't be wrong, but they are not really interested in quality pigeon showing, the like of which we enjoyed years ago. I think it is a bigger achievement to win a handled class competing against 25 birds, than it is winning a through the wire class against 50 entries! The National show scene is still brilliant and getting better every year, and that's where you have to exhibit to get the quality competition these days. Look at the great old RPR Southern Region Show, still going after all these years and even bigger and better this year! I think the fancy should be very proud of our mother show, the British Homing World Blackpool 'Show of the Year', a wonderful spectacle and raising thousands of pounds for charity every January. I get my buzz at the Nationals events these days and very rarely attend the local club shows, only on the odd occasion to judge handling classes.

Back in October 2013 I received a letter from the RPR, inviting him to judge at the British Homing World 'Show of the Year', Blackpool in January 2014 and I was delighted to except, as I have always loved do the job and consider it a great honour to be asked. This was my third time judging at the premier show in the UK and the last time I judged was in 2007 when the BBC sent a film crew to the Winter Gardens to film me and Peter Taylor for the 'Inside Out' programme. I then received a phone call in December from the Blackpool Show committee inviting me to take on the premier judging job in the show world, to judge the specials and Blackpool Show 'Best in Show'. I have been judging at top National and Show Society shows for 45 years and to judge 'Best in Show' at Blackpool was the crowning glory of all those years doing the job. I was highly delighted and accepted the invitation immediately. My ol' mate, Peter Taylor, has travelled

all over the UK as my steward for many years, but in recent times has not travelled because of his 'dodgy' knees, but I managed to get him to Blackpool to steward for me, on this great occasion. We knew the Friday of the show was going to be a hard day, with the 250 mile drive up to the Hilton Hotel in Blackpool, then attend the RPRA dinner that evening and after that the late night judging in the Winter Gardens, so we left Claygate early that morning. After a good run up to the North West, we arrived at the Hilton Hotel on the North Promenade that afternoon in fine weather and managed to get a couple of hours rest in our rooms before we attend the RPRA 'do' in the evening. The dinner was a very grand event held in the hotel and was attended by several premier pigeon parties from Europe and Mr. & Mrs. Eddie Collett, the Lord Mayor of Blackpool. It was nice to meet up with some ol' friends at the dinner, including Steve Richards and Helen Edwards of the BHW, John and Pamela Robilliard and former RPRA General Manager, Peter Bryant, there with his wife Glenys. John Robilliard introduced me to David Trippett, the Blackpool Show committee chairman and David was to take Peter and I to the Winter Gardens in a taxicab after the main judging had finished, to do our final judging job. It was late when we arrived at the Winter Gardens, just before 23.00hrs I think, and we were greeted by chief steward, Dora Pounder, and what a nice lady she was! Dora has been doing the job at the Blackpool Show for many years and was so efficient, directing us to all the pen numbers to sort out the show specials. I spent quite some time judging the 29 class winner and needless to say I went through them with a fine tooth comb! From the outset of judging there was only one winner of Best in Show, a wonderful Show Racer red hen and she was medium appled bodied, with good balance and brilliant feather quality. I loved the hen as soon as I picked her out of Pen 4 and from then on she was the one the others had to beat! A beautiful mealy was her runner up, but I found a major fault in her on her second handling and Reserve Best in Show went to a stunning looking Show Racer blue chequer hen. I gave Best Racer to a handsome pencil blue pied cock and although it wasn't confirmed, I was told it might have won at the Blackpool Show in 2013. It was a great judging session to remember and we finished just before 01.00hrs, after which we jump in a taxi and went back to the Hilton Hotel. It was a very long day and I finally got to bed just after 02.00hrs! We got up on Saturday morning and after breakfast I was keen to get down to the Winter Gardens to see who owned the red hen and it was finally confirmed that John Robilliard owned that wonderful Show Racer and had won his second Best in Show at the BHW Blackpool Show. I was so delighted to hear that great news as John has given a life time's work to our sport and deserve every success he has with his wonderful Show Racers. Talking to John after the event, he said, the hen is now called 'Rocquaine Queen' and she won as a young bird, and won a first at the Duchy Show in November 2013. She was bred from a pair of stock birds that John obtained at the Ken Jeffery of St Ives dispersal sale. That Blackpool Show in 2014 and judging 'Best In Show' was my greatest judging experience.

The Pigeon Fancy Press and the Media

I have been writing in the pigeon fancy press since 1972 and still enjoy doing my regular pages every week in the British Homing World. The very first article I did in the BHW was the prize presentation, in the winter of 1972, for the old and now disbanded Molesey club and very soon after that had my own regular page in the Weybridge based Pigeon Racing 'Gazette', then run by Roy and Audrey Bishop. Later in the 1970's I was judging at the Inter Counties Federation show in Hertfordshire and met Mike Shepherd for the time. Mike worked for the 'Racing Pigeon' newspaper at that time and invited me to submit some articles and photos for inclusion in the 'Pictorial', which was then and still is today the premier glossy monthly pigeon magazine. Really at that time Mike was the man who took me to the top level of pigeon journalism and set me up for what I do in the fancy press today. Mike is my mentor and we have been good friends all through those many years! I have got many good friends in the pigeon racing journalism world, but another man I respect and consider a good friend is the former British Homing World editor, Cameron Stansfield. Cameron is a nice guy and his knowledge of long distance pigeon racing is second to none. I made my first pigeon photography box on a building site on a cold winters day at the end of the 1970's, with the sole purpose of enhancing my pigeon article and it is a practice I still carry out today. Nothing looks better than an article with plenty of quality pigeon photographs! I think I must have been the press office for every organization I've belonged to and in the 1990's I was press officer for the National Flying Club. Writing is what I do and still enjoy it, even after all those year. In recent years, with my big involvement in the writing and photography side of the sport has prevented me from racing his birds properly, but have enjoyed the breeding side of pigeon racing and producing winners for others. Whatever I do, I will always have a few pigeons at the bottom of the garden to play around with! I admit my competitive edge has diminished over the years and I get my enjoyment from other aspects of the sport these days. My work in the fancy press over many years has been a gate way to me meeting some of the all times greats of the sport, which I've always considered a wonderful privilege that I have enjoyed very much. I met all of my oldest friends, Peter Taylor, Terry Haley, Steve Howard, Eric Cannon, Ronnie Wasey and Brian Denney, through my writing and all these great pigeon racers are family friends. I have made many good friends through my writing and some

of the nicest people I has met in the sport work in the fancy press. I have worked with all the fancy press editors through my 45 years doing articles and thinking back they were all quite fair when it came to putting red lines through lines in my work. I put my first article in the British Homing World in 1972 and one of best editors I've worked with is current editor, Steve Richards, as he is really nice guy and he has kept the BHW 'ship' steady for many years, and has only steered it in one direction, forward. Steve, his wife Nettie and his girls are all smashing people! Another smashing person I have known for many years at the BHW is our Tracy and when I first met her she hadn't long left school, and now she is grandmother!

I have my own YouTube channel and that is going great, and still attracting a lot of world-wide interest, including nearly 9,800 subscribers (April 2019). When my son, Mark, suggested that I put my massive archive of pigeon films on the Internet he didn't know what he was starting and to be honest, neither did I. It now hosts over 400 pigeon films and gets between 3,000 and 5,000 views worldwide every day. I have a long list of new pigeon visits lined up for YouTube filming and articles, for after the moult has finished. At the time of writing this article (April 2019) the channel has had well over 4.4 million views since we opened it in March 2016. Every film is tagged and if you go on to YouTube, type in my name or the name of the fancier you want to look at (lower case) it should all come up. At the time of writing this article my top film on the channel is Video 38: Ron McCarthy of Wales and this Show Racer legend's loft visit has had a massive 560,000 views. Just brilliant! I remember received the phone call, a few years ago from my good friend, Colin Carter, to inform me that the 'master', Ron McCarthy, had packed up his pigeons the week previous because of one or two health problems. Ron, then 81 years old, was going to retire from the Show Racer scene a year or so previous, but was persuaded by the lads to carry on, but then decided to call it a day! Ron McCarthy a true gentleman and one of the best show men I ever met. On the article and photo front, the situation since my retirement from pigeon racing has gone through the roof with all the visits I've made in recent months and I have a very big stock pile of article waiting to be published. I love being mega busy and after the family time, now spend most of my time playing in the pigeon loft, writing, taking photos and editing the films for the YouTube channel. Some say I have become a recluse! I don't race pigeons anymore and breeding world class winners, my pigeon fancy writing, website and the YouTube channel is my main hobby now. I get a massive amount of phone calls, emails and comments from fanciers interested in my work and I spend at least an hour every day answering them, which has always been par for the course.

I have appeared on television once with my band the 'Impalas' in the 1960's and eight times promoting our great sport of pigeon racing, with the first time being in 1984 and have made countless appearances on the radio. My favourite appearances on the TV were two of my most recent, BBC 'Inside Out' in 2007 and Channel 5 'Extraordinary Animals' which was screened in June 2008 and then repeated in February 2009. I have fond memories of the time I went to the Sky studios in Isleworth, to appear live to the UK and Europe on 'Sun Rise' and taking my two children, Caroline and Mark, who were only young at that time, and the buzz they got seeing the TV studio and sitting in the 'green' room. I was always willing to front up to the media, to promote and enhance our great sport, but hated and will never get involved with what I call the 'Trafalgar Square' element of the media, who want to insult pigeons and the people who keep them.

The B.B.C. television producer, Ray Hough, sent a camera crew to the B.H.W. Blackpool Show to film me judging, which was planned to be linked up with a filming session at my loft in Claygate. The eight minute film, which also featured an in depth interview with my good friend Peter Bryant, general manager of the R.P.R.A., was for the popular B.B.C. 1 show 'Inside Out' London. The programme went out at prime time on a Friday evening and featured many items of interest from the London and South East of England area. Ray Hough and I had two meetings at my home in Claygate and a Monday in February was the day set for the film crew to visit and film my loft. I must say we were very lucky with the weather; it was brilliant, but a bit cold. The programme presenter, Mirander Sawyer, turned up about 30 minutes before the crew, as her taxi had had a good clear run from her home in South London, which was great, as it gave us a chance to have a cup of tea and get acquainted before our days' work together. Mirander originally came from Manchester, moving to London about 15 years previous and was a regular writer for the 'Observer' newspaper. Ray Hough, his assistant, Jane Brookes and the crew knocked on my front door soon after and my house was very soon full with their equipment. The lighting seemed to fill the back garden, which must have impressed my next door neighbours and I was amazed at the time and effort the lads put into getting the light right for different shots. The cameraman, Mark, was a big lad and he like all the T.V. cameramen who have visited my garden in the past, was soon in the loft kicking over all the water fountains. I must remember to leave them empty next time! My filming lasted all day and was light hearted, being more about the racing and showing side of the sport. Miranda started by asking me about the time I got my first pair of birds in the 1950's and it finished that evening with them filming me photographing pigeons in the 'factory', my spare

bedroom where I do all my pigeon work. In those many hours filming we talked about most of what I've done in my 40 years in pigeon racing, writing, pigeon photography, video production, conveying and the normal racing and showing things. Ray Hough was at the very top of his profession and is a great Director, who knows exactly what he wants. I found Ray a very friendly and down to earth guy, but was a perfectionist when it came to his film work. He had been in the industry for many years and had won many Royal Television Society Awards for his films. Ray invited me to go to the studios at Boreham Wood to see them edit some of the programme, which I must say was a great experience and when the 'Inside Out' programme was finally aired I was highly delighted with the end product. In the May of 2008 I had just returned from France after conveying the London & South East Classic Club birds to Alencon and I received a phone call from the Channel 5 TV producer, Aneeta Chana, asking if they could come and film me with the birds for the long running 'Extraordinary Animals' series. I'm an ol' boy now and it took me about a week to get over my conveying trips to France with the Classic birds, but I told Aneeta that I would agree to do it as long as they could make my eyes up to hide the black tiredness rings! Only joking! The lads turned up on the Wednesday for a full afternoon shoot and I must say, I really enjoyed filming, especially when they dragged my wife, Betty, in for a shot. They asked me questions on the history of the sport, pigeons in the war, record speeds and distances, and we talked in great length about my work with the British Homing World and London & South East Classic Club. Mike Reilly was the Director on the day and he originally comes from Glasgow, although his family comes from Ireland. He had been working in television for 12 years at that time and had been involved in the Generation Game, Fifth Gear, and had worked with Lenny Henry and Ali G. 'Extraordinary Animals' was a new series of ten programmes starting on Channel 5 at 7.30pm on Tuesday 20th May. Mike told me the pigeon programme would be number eight or nine and when he let me know the date we published in the BHW. I was talking to the camera man, Luke Atkinson, and he told me his camera costs £25,000 and the super duper lense cost another £25,000. Luke originally came from Ealing, but had only lived about five miles from me in Molesey and he has been television for 17 years in 2008. He was a freelance cameraman and had worked on many premier programmes including the highly successful Bad Girls series. Our sound man for the day was Lisala Dolo and in his nine years in the job had worked on Tonight with Trevor McDonald and Life of Grime. As usual I was busy in between takes with taking my photographs and own personal filming. They were very interested in the pigeons and were very pleased with their footage.

Another enjoyable filming session was for the Sky programme 'World Business' and I received a phone call from T.V. reporter, Alex de Jong, of NCBC Europe television asking me if he could bring a film crew to my loft in Claygate and interview me with the pigeons. The recording was for a five minute sports slot on his 'World Business' programme, to be screened on Sky and the programme was also screened on 18 channels globally and on 20 International airlines. The interview covered every aspect of our sport including, long distance and sprint racing, and of course I gave a good account of our problems with Hawks and the recent 'bird flu'. After the filming, I joked with Alex saying that the media have nick named me 'One Take Keith' and he said after the filming had finished that he would have to book more editing time, because I talked too much. What could he mean? LOL! I'm always happy to appear on the national media, to tell them what a great hobby pigeon racing is and it's not all Trafalgar Square, dirty street pigeons under the railway arches and pigeon droppings. It seems to me that most times I see pigeons featured in the national media, whether it is Television, Radio or in the Newspapers, it's detrimental to our sport. I've now appeared on national T.V. eight times and on several occasions have turned down an appearance on national T.V. because I knew it was going to be a 'micky take' and detrimental to pigeon racing. I feel very strongly about this and I hate to see anything adverse about pigeons in the national media. I have made many films on pigeon racing and showing, which have been used by the major television companies and I think I might have the biggest archive of pigeon articles, photos and films in the pigeon world.

DEFRA visits Keith Mott's loft in 2008

Since the outset of the 'Bird Flu' problem in Europe several years ago the sport of pigeon racing and showing has had to suffer several crippling restrictions and temporary 'blanket' bans to its general functioning, in some cases with catastrophic affect. We have seen out breaks of 'Bird Flu' in the UK and Europe, and had major races and shows cancelled at a last minute. Everybody has their own opinion if these restrictions are too strict or in some cases even necessary, but the main factor is our government body dealing with the virus, DEFRA, think they are necessary. Peter Bryant, the general manager of the RPRA at that time, had been in constant contact with DEFRA in one form or another since day one and had been our 'champion' on this major problem of restrictions on our sport and in some cases had gained us races we probably would not have had, especially from France. Peter had represented us, the pigeon fancy, brilliantly and the fancy in general must be grateful for his wonderful efforts! All through the 'Bird Flu' campaign, Peter, had

been asking DEFRA to make a visit to a pigeon loft, so they could see first-hand how we keep our birds and talk to a fancier to gain information on how our sport operates. DEFRA decided a loft visit and a chat with a fancier would be a good idea and Peter Bryant emailed me, and asked if I would host the meeting. As always, I was more than happy to help! If I could say or do something to get the restriction eased and improve our present state of racing and showing, it would be great. After several emails and phone calls between Peter, DEFRA and me, the visit was set for Thursday, 8th May 2008.

The day arrived and it was perfect for viewing racing pigeons, being nice and warm, with a blue sky and sunshine. My front door bell rang and on opening the door, I found two lads in their early thirties standing there with smiles on their faces and not the expected suited government types. My first words to them were, 'Hi lads! It nice to see you are human. I fully expected to see two little horns sticking out of the top of your heads'. They had a good laugh and that really broke the ice for the very important loft visit. I have visited thousands of pigeon lofts in my 50 years as a pigeon scribe, but this one must rate as one of the most important of them all! The officers were David Middleton, who corresponded with Peter Bryant over our pigeon restrictions most of the time and Balazs, a DEFRA vet who came from Hungary. They had a short chat in the Claygate back living room, and then the officers got dressed up in grey hooded suits and plastic bags on their feet, for the viewing of the pigeons in the loft. David said this protected clothing was very necessary, as they didn't want to risk bringing anything in to the Mott's loft.

David and Balazs were at the Mott home for just under two hours and they never stopped talking about pigeons for the duration of their stay. I assured them that all the information I gave them would be accurate and I had done nothing special to the loft or pigeons for their visit. Everything was as normal. At that time I cleaned my loft out twice every day and it had been scraped that morning, and the birds exercised as usual. They covered every aspect of racing, including the widowhood system for sprint racing and the natural system for the long distance events. They did talk in length about racing from the continent and in particular my experiences as convoyer for the London & South East Classic Club. They asked if all the birds got home on the day from Pau (550 miles) and I told them the 2007 Pau Classic was one the best races in the history of the L&SECC and they had about 100 birds recorded on the day of liberation. I also explained that most of the birds worked home over the next couple of days. David asked me about the feeding and training of the racers, and seemed to enjoy looking at the youngsters in the nest bowls, in the stock loft. They appreciated the performances of one or two of the better racers, in particular the my good blue chequer hen, 'Foxwarren Complete', which had scored well four times in Classic races over 550 miles. Balazs asked me about our Paramixo vaccination programme and told me there had been a recent outbreak of Newcastle's Disease in Germany. In our conversation I kept bringing up the DEFRA seven day rule on pigeons that fly from the continent and told them it was very detrimental to our pigeon racing and clubs were suffering badly with it being in place. Pigeon racing clubs were losing out on their sport and it is affecting them with big financial losses. I told them if it could be reduced, even to six days, it would be a great help to our sport. I also told them about all the activities of the pigeon year, from pairing up in January, racing in the summer, the moult period in October, through to the winter shows in November and December.

We spent a lot of time talking about the winter shows and how they had suffered financially and activity wise. Many major shows had to be cancelled at the last minute in recent years, including the RPR Southern Region Show, NEHU South Shields Show and the 'Old Comrades' Show, and the organizers had incurred big financial losses. The previous winter I was booked to judge at the two major West Country events, the Duchy Show and the Devon & Cornwall Show Racer Society open show, and both these were cancelled because of the 'Bird Flu' outbreak at the Turkey processing firm in Norfolk. All these societies had booked hotels for the travelling judges and big halls to stage the events and when their shows were called off at the last minute, they incur big financial losses, which they could ill afford. The financial loss was one thing, but the Show Racer lads had a very short season, with only a few Classic events, and missed out on a lot of their sport with these cancellations. On my meeting with the DEFRA lads he reminded them of the many thousands of pounds these winter Classic shows donate to charity every year. I mentioned to David that the situation seemed to be getting better with less 'blanket' bans accruing with the recent 'Bird Flu' outbreaks and more localized zones being set up around the affected areas. He told me the containment procedure for say the Turkey farm in Norfolk and the Swan sanctuary in Dorset were different, with a shed full of Turkeys being easier to handle than Swans flying loose.

After looking at the pigeons and loft they had a nice cup of tea on the patio. I presented David and Balazs with three of my own pigeon DVDs each, so they had additional information on the sport. One of the DVD's was my favourite, the BBC's 'Inside Out' programme on pigeons, which I think is a brilliant advert for our sport. David took several photos and I supplied him with several others for his information. The DE-

FRA lads appreciated the skills of racing our birds out of the short and long distance, and they witnessed the great affinity we have with our birds. I for one would like to applaud DEFRA for their efforts to find out how our sport clicks and familiarize themselves with the 'grass root' of pigeon racing and showing, in an attempt to help us with our 'Bird Flu' restrictions. The two officers, David and Balazs, were really nice people and Betty and I enjoyed their visit very much. I did an article on the DEFRA visit to my loft, which had to be approved by the Government Press Office, after which it appeared in the fancy press the following week.

50 years working for the sport

Being the mad man I am, I was secretary of the Surbiton FC, Esher & District RPC and Surrey Championship Club at different times over the years and Chairman of several clubs, including the London Coly in the 1980's. I was on the National Flying Club committee and was the NFC Press Officer for two years. I have run lots of successful fund raising auction sales for pigeon clubs, Federations and Charities through the years, which I have found to be very satisfying. At the 2010 A.G.M. of the London & South East Classic Club, I was given the great honour of being elected in as the new President. The Classic was very close to my heart and I had put a lot of work in to the club over my near 20 years as a member, and had run many Phone-In fund raising squeaker auctions, which had realised well over £20,000-00 for the transporter fund. Being elected as President of the Classic had presented me with an exciting challenge which I enjoyed and relished! The main thing I admired in Gordon Marsh, the previous L&SECC President, was that he was a great working President, which is something I think is very important and I carried on in that same vein. I had served on the L&SECC committee for about 15 years and had been Press Officer and a Life Vice President for most of that time. Reluctantly at the end of the 2008 season I retired after eight good years as chief convoyer of the London & South East Classic Club, which took me to all the major race points in France, including twice Tarbes and six times to Pau. I loved convoying and could write a book about my experiences while driving the pigeon transporter on the continent, but I would never go to Guernsey for a holiday as I took the Classic young birds there 15 times and have had enough of the place. I have served all my pigeon racing life on committees and been at the cutting edge of pigeon politics all that time and on most occasions I have finished up getting my 'arse' bitten. I felt very honoured and really enjoyed my three years as President of my beloved London & South East Classic Club. Now that I've hit 68 years of age (2019), I keep clear of pigeon clubs and pigeon 'politics' and do what I have really enjoyed doing for the last 50 years, keeping a few pigeons, photography and writing quality articles in the pigeon fancy press.

A racing pigeon convoyer's story

On one cold winter's night in the mid 1990's my phone rang and it was my good friend, John Tyerman, who at the time was the President of the London & South East Classic Club. After a few minutes 'chewing the fat' about the sport in general, Johnny asked me if I fancied joining the Classic's convoying set up and assisting Doug Went, who at that time I considered to be one of the best convoyers in the country. Although it was a job I had in the back of my mind, that I would like to have a go at, I had to think about it long and hard, because at that time I was suffering badly with 'Pigeon Fancier's Lung', and pigeon convoying was not the obvious thing to do. I decided that with a bit of common sense, using a mask and coat, and with all the feeding and watering being carried out on the outside of the Classic's lorry, I should get away with it, and if it did affect him badly I could resign at the end of the season. My first race was when Doug Went and I convoyed the first Classic of the 1997 season from Alencon, which had a record entry at that time of nearly 2,400 birds. Doug Went was one of the greats of convoying racing pigeons, with many years' experience on the South and North roads and I must say, working with him for 18 months taught me a lot about being on the road with the pigeons. I took over as chief convoyer for the young bird Guernsey Classics in 1998 and I think at that time the best liberation site we visited was Bordeaux. It is very spacious and has full facilities for the pigeons and convoyers. This site is the main lorry drivers stopover car park in Bordeaux and has a truckers hotel and petrol station, so it's easy to water the birds and for the convoyers to get a meal and shower. This site is very near to a river and, like Pau, is prone to early morning mist.

I loved convoying the pigeons through France to places like Bordeaux and Tarbes, but it is very hard work, and is a young man's game! After eight great years I retired from convoying at the end of the 2008 season, as I thought at 58 years of age I was getting to old for the pressure and sleeping rough in lorries. I had no intention of ever doing 'big time' convoying again, but the Central Southern Classic Flying Club chief convoyer's job was offered to him at the end of 2009, which involved no driving and the prospect of the luxury of the use of one of the premier transporters in the country. I had convoyed South and North Road inland, but the main enjoyment for me was convoying the pigeons to France and it gave me a great buzz to pro-

duce good Classic racing from over the English Channel. It must be the 'gipsy' in me that made me except the CSCFC job in the 2010 season, which gave me the opportunity to visit some new liberation sites in France, including, Messac, Carentan and Bergerac. I must say that in my time as a convoyer, I've never seen a perfect pigeon transporter or been to a perfect liberation site. We don't live in a perfect world and we can always find something to criticize! I personally like the old fashioned baskets, the like of which we used in the London & South East Classic Club for many years and were used by Catterells Pigeon Transport of Blackpool who served our sport so well for many years, before packing up a few years ago. When you are in France with the pigeons it's nice to know you have a good team behind you at the home end and I was lucky enough to have my good friend Steve Appleby doing my weather for me! I think convoying racing pigeons, whether it is for a big Classic or small club race is the most responsible and demanding job in the sport! The only advice I can give to any youngsters who have dreams of becoming a racing pigeon convoyer, is when you are away with the pigeons in France be your own man, with your utmost priority being the bird's welfare and producing the best race possible, with the situation you are presented with that weekend. Do not be influenced by outside voices or follow club rules if I think it will be detrimental to the welfare of the pigeons in your charge. Your paramount priority when convoying is the welfare of the birds!

I think International racing is the ultimate challenge for the UK fanciers and I was highly delighted when my good friends, Bobby and Anthony Besant, won 1st open International Agen with their wonderful Champion 'Noble Dream' in 2015. The main club in the UK for the International enthusiast is the British International Championship Club and one of the men who has put in years of good work into that origination is their President, John Tyerman. John and I have been good friends for many years and we have been through several pigeon campaigns together, including serving on the National Flying Club and London & South East Classic Club committees and convoying pigeons together. We roomed together in the B&B when we travelled for the National Flying Club committee meetings in the midlands and in 2003 we convoyed the NFC Dax International birds to the waiting train in Belgium, when Brian Sheppard of Trowbridge won the race with his wonderful blue chequer cock, Champion 'Legend'. When the members of the NFC sent their birds to their first International, no one really knew what an outstanding success it would be and that British pigeon racing history was in the making. John and I were in the NFC delegation that went to Belgium to negotiate our NFC taking part in its first International race and then we convoyed the birds to the train in Belgium after marking. On the day after the race, as National Flying Club Press Office, I drove the 200 miles down to Trowbridge to film and do an article on Britain's first ever International winner, Champion 'Legend'. That Dax International marked the start of a new era in British long distance pigeon racing and John and I were very proud to be a part of it!

Peter Taylor of Solva in Pembrokeshire.

Peter Taylor formally of Guildford has been one of my best friends for over 30 years and everyone who knows him will tell you, he is a great out spoken guy, who 'shoots from the hip'. Peter is a bit like myself, there is no 'bull shit' with our Peter and he tells how it is. Years ago, he raced in partnership with his later friend, Jack Hedges, at his home in Burlington Road, New Malden and in 1998 moved to South Wales, to start his retirement from work, racing his pigeons in the valleys. He soon got fed up with that, when a pair of Peregrine Falcons living about a mile behind his loft, took his young birds every day until he had none left. He returned and set up home and pigeons in Guildford. Peter's best pigeon was his good natural blue hen, 'Selina's Express', who won 4th open London & South East Classic Club Bergerac (450 miles), with only half a dozen birds home on the day of liberation. This beautiful pigeon was bred by David Williams of Chessington from a son of Eric Cannon's 1st open NFC Sartilly winner, Champion 'Culmer Marion', which he purchased as a youngster at Eric's dispersal sale in 2000, and a Janssen hen. This mating certainly clicked, as Peter Taylor has a full brother to 'Selina's Express', which won: 71st open L&SECC Guernsey, 63rd open NFC Guernsey as a young bird in 2002 and he was called 'Orlando's Express'. 'Selina's Express' was sent to the Bergerac Classic sitting four day old eggs and she has some good previous racing form, winning: 2003: 87th open L&SECC Guernsey, 2005: 31st open L&SECC Pau. A wonderful hen! Peter loves Pembrokeshire and moved back to South Wales in 2016 to give it another go!

Other interests in sport

I love sport, so much so, I would watch two fly's race up the window pane! I could not survive without BT Sports and watch a lot of sport on the television. Before my best mate, Peter Taylor, moved to Wales, he use to come up to my house ever Wednesday evening for our regular 'boy's sports' night and we drink tea, and watch mostly Speedway, Boxing, Athletics, Rugby and Darts. My wife, Betty, introduced me to Speedway when I first met her 50 years ago and at that time she was really into the sport, having visited several

European countries to watch world champion meetings. Our second date was on a Thursday evening at Wimbledon Speedway and we used to watch all the great riders, including Ole Olson, Barry Briggs, Ivan Mauger and of course the 'Dons' wizard Ronnie Moore. It was great to see Tai Woffinden become the Speedway world champion for the third time at the Torun FIM Grand Prix, Poland in October 2018, previously winning at Torun FIM Grand Prix, Poland in October 2013 and again Melbourne, Australia in 2015. His championship wins have been a good 'buzz' for Peter and me, as Woffinden is the first British world champion for many years! I enjoy boxing very much and my all-time favourites are Mike Tyson and Nigel Benn, win or lose, when those two guys were in the ring you always saw a great boxing match. I have great admiration for the Smith Brothers of Liverpool, with the four lads all winning British titles. A fantastic family achievement! The eldest brother, Paul, has had a couple of cracks at the world title and of course he is a Racing Pigeon enthusiast up there in the north west of England. I have been very keen on Rugby since my school days and I played a lot when I was young, and when I was in my second year at school, I played for the fourth year 'colts'. I don't live too far away from Twickenham Stadium and have been there many times through the year and seen some great matches. I can remember, all those year ago, the school Rugby team use to have an annual outing to Twickenham to see the Oxford and Cambridge Universities match, and we all used to go by train to see some really great Rugby. When we went to see that match in the early 1960's, Twickenham wasn't the world class stadium it is today, the stand were big sheds painter green. Great days! One of my sporting heroes is the late great Eric Bristow of the darts world.

I enjoy a bit of fishing, but I'm just a pigeon fancier who enjoys 'tiddler bashing' on the local club lake. I'm not an expert on angling, but I have caught one or two decent fish, the best probably being my 5lb. 9oz. Chub, caught on the River Mole at Molesey. Angling has been a great hobby for all our family, especially when the kids were young, as it was something we could all go out and do together at the weekends. On packing up my pigeons, because of the dreaded 'pigeon fanciers lung', in the mid 1990's, we hit the bank every weekend and enjoyed some great success fishing our local River Wey, and local club lakes. If I'm honest, I have to confess that my wife, Betty, is the 'ace' fisher person in the Mott family and has shown many an angler we have met on the river bank how to catch good fish on none productive days. Fishing is like pigeon racing, or any other sport come to that, you get good days and you get bad. Betty always seemed to pull something out of the bag! I can recall an evening session on our favourite stretch of the River Wey at Jacobs Wells, called the Swift, and no one was catching a thing. It was as dead as a door knocker! There were many anglers sitting on the bank for several hours, with thousands of pound worth of poles and equipment around them, and they never got a bite. Betty had her beloved Centre Pin reel set up and she trotted down small pieces of sprat, on a 2lb bottom and size 18 hook, and landed several big Chub. On another occasion, I can remember her landing a 10lb Mirror Carp on a 3lb bottom and a size 16 hook, which took her a good while to land it, but she did! She always likes to fish away on her own in a little quiet place on the fishery and hates having fish out of the water for photos and looking at. If she had her way she wouldn't bother with photos and would release them back, straight out of the landing net.

My son, Mark, is a very good angler, but never a pigeon man, although he convoyed the London & South East Classic Club birds in France with me a couple of times. He really enjoyed the work and the travel with the pigeon transporter. He has been a very good angler from a very young age and I can remember when he was ten years of age he caught a 10lb Pike, which was nearly as long as him. His mum took him fishing, as I was working and he landed, unhooked and returned the big Pike on his own. When he was very young, he used to sit on his fishing box ledgering for Chub and hooked some beautiful fish, but lost them at the landing net. That little boy got so frustrated with that, he just sat on his big box and cried! Mark has caught some very nice fish through the years, including double figure Carp and Pike, and some big Barbel, Chub and Tench. He has been a keen angler all his life and has met many of our present day fishing champions including, Bob Nudd MBE, Tom Pickering, Jan Porter, Clive Branson and the great Ivan Marks. In May 2004 Mark went to Cancun in Mexico for a holiday and fished for game fish in the Caribbean. He fished with his friend, Chris, and three other anglers off a boat, ten miles of the coast of Mexico. They fished dead bait and lures static off the side of the boat and trawled, with the best fish of the day being a 100lb Marlin. Mark bagged up with many quality fish, including three Barracuda to 20lb, three Yellow Finned Jacks to 25lb, three Red Jacks and five big Tuna. Mark has always had a big rivalry with his dad over the years, comparing who catches the biggest fish, but I can't compete with Barracuda and Yellow Finned Jacks! I've probably had the slightly bigger English course fish, but my best catches have been quality, but not world beaters and as I have stated previously, I enjoy sitting on the bank, catch good fish is a bonus. I have had double figured Carp and Pike, 4lb Tench and probably my best fish was my 5lb 9oz Chub caught on the River Mole.

Main achievements breeding winners for others

'Foxwarren Lofts' have a wonderful record of breeding countless top class winners for themselves and other fanciers over many years. The Keith and Betty Mott loft in Claygate has gifted a lot of youngsters to their friends and charity auctions over the years, and in the 2013 season their birds produced several premier prize winners including 1st open Combine, 1st open Amalgamation, 1st Federation (twice), and 2nd Federation (twice) in that season. The loft has recently produced 1st open Combine two years on the trot and their birds have also produced 1st open Amalgamation Bourges (581 miles) two years on the trot.

2008: One of Brian Denney's greatest champions was 'Brian's Blue', winner in 2008 of 1st section K, 61st open NFC Tarbes Grand National (4,035 birds), NFC record holder being clocked at 748 miles on the day of liberation. He also won 1st North East 700 Mile Club, 1st RPRA UK Long Distance Champion, plus RPRA Region Long Distance Award. A fantastic performance! The dam of Champion 'Brian's Blue' was 'Foxwarren Pretender' bred by Keith & Betty Mott at 'Foxwarren Lofts' and she flew the English Channel twice as a young bird, recording 4th club Guernsey and then as a yearling flew Bergerac (455 miles) on the day of liberation to win 151st open L&SECC. 'Pretender's' nest sister, 'Betty M', was gifted to Brian Denney out of the nest and she bred several top performers for the Strensall loft including: 'Elton' winner of 30th, 182nd open NFC Tarbes (748 miles) and 'Class Blue' winner of 2nd section K NFC Fougères. 'Foxwarren Pretender' was loaded to Brian for a season when she bred Champion 'Brian's Blue' and she was a half-sister to our champion racing and breeding hen, 'Foxwarren Complete', being a daughter of 'Pathfinder' who was bred by Brian Denney out of the wonderful racing and breeding hen, 'Blue Pau'. Champion 'Brian's Blue' proved to be a great breeder of winners, including: 'Blue Boy', winner of 12th, 130th open NFC Tarbes (748 miles).

2011: After Clive Turner's great success in 2011 when he won 1st open London & South East Classic Club Alençon (1,811 birds), he repeated his very high quality performances the following season, winning 1st Horsham RPC, 1st South Coast Federation, 1st Combine Saintes (374 miles), 1st, 2nd Horsham RPC, 1st, 3rd South Coast Federation (800 birds) Fougères (192 miles), plus many other premier prizes in the club and Federation. Clive won the Combine from Saintes with his good widowhood mealy pied cock, 'The Saintes Cock', and he was bred by Keith & Betty Mott of Claygate from two Busschaert / Staf Van Reet stock birds bred by Richard and Ken O'Connor of South Norwood. The Saintes Combine winner was latish bred in 2010 and had very little racing, but as well as winning the Combine he won several top positions inland in the strong Horsham club that season. His sire was the mealy pied stock cock, 'Young Roman', who was the sire of several good winners and is son of the champion Busschaert, 'Roman Nose', winner of four times 1st Federation, when mated to the Paul Arnold / Staf Van Reet hen, 'Dawn', winner of 1st Combine. The dam of 'The Saintes Cock' was a daughter of the O'Connor's 'Champion of Champions', 'Batman', winner of 17 first prizes, including five times 1st Federation and 4th open Combine. Champion 'Batman' was a Busschaert and half-brother to Champion 'Roman Nose'. A fantastic family of winners! Clive's 3rd South Coast Federation Fougères winner in the 2012 season was also bred from Keith & Betty Mott blood line

2013: Keith and Betty's small team of Mark and Dick Evans / Gaby Vandenabeele stock birds have really been breeding fantastic and have produced some brilliant racers, including 1st open Combine and 2nd Three Borders Federation in 2013. The key pigeon has been the blue WF, 'Myrtle Exile' and she has produced premier winners with two of Keith's M. & D. Evans stock cocks. The partner's Gaby Vandenabeele stock birds were mostly bred by Mark & Dick Evans of Whitley Bridge and 'Myrtle Exile' is a granddaughter of the world famous Champion 'Golden Gaby', winner of 1st open National Orleans (12,875 birds). What a fantastic breeding hen! 'Myrtle Exile' produced, being paired to Keith and Betty's grandson of 'Pre-Olympic', a cock they gifted to their great mate, Terry Haley of Watford and he recorded as a young bird in the 2013 season: 14th Spelthorne open Yeovil (650 birds), flew the L&SECC Guernsey Young Bird Classic (a really bad race), was then clocked from the NFC Garentan (France) Young Bird National to record 415th open (3,330 birds) and seven days later was turned 205 miles North Road to Aycliffe to win 1st club (by 20 minutes), 1st Thames Valley Federation, 1st open North Thames NR Combine. The 2017 saw Terry Haley win 1st club, 1st Thames Valley, 1st North Thames NR Combine again from Aycliffe (205 miles) with his good blue hen young bird, 'Misty Missile' and she is a granddaughter of the 'Watford Wizard'. 'Myrtle Exile' and their grandson of the two 'Myrtle Lofts' legends, 'Shadow' and 'Lord of the Rings', 'Myrtle Supremacy' was their original pair of stock birds from Mark & Dick Evans and they have been mate together for most of the time Keith and Betty own them and they have proved to be a champion pair of breeders. 'White Tail', a daughter of 'Myrtle Supremacy' and 'Myrtle Exile' produced 2nd, 5th, 5th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 24th Federation in recent seasons for Colin Crook and Andy Iddenden. A fantastic Gaby Vandenabeele stock pair!

Fred Dickson of Cramlington sent four birds to the Bourges (581 miles) race in 2013 and with the race turning out to be a very hard push home, the birds clocked in the Combine on the day of liberation could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Fred lives at the top end of the NEHU and clocked his good Eric Cannon blue chequer cock, 'Northern Expected', at 06.03hrs next morning to record 1st club, 1st Federation, 1st New North Amalgamation and 8th North of England Homing Union open result (2,355 birds). This wonderful round about cock has flown Bourges (581 miles) three times and won 1st, 3rd and 4th Federation. A fantastic achievement! 'Northern Expected's' half-brother, a 100% Eric Cannon blue chequer cock, recorded 1st club, 1st Federation, 1st Amalgamation Bourges in the 2012 season and his dam, 'Foxwarren Northerner' was bred by Keith & Betty Mott. 'Northern Expected' is a son of Fred's champion 'Five Times Bourges Cock' which was killed by a Sparrowhawk in front of the Cramlington loft and was the winner of 3rd, 5th, 8th Federation Bourges and sire of 1st, 1st, 3rd, 4th, 4th Federation, 1st, 1st Amalgamation Bourges (581 miles). 'The Five Times Bourges Cock' was bred from 'Foxwarren Fred', a red chequer cock bred by Keith and Betty at Claygate and he has proved to be one of the best 550 mile stock cocks they have ever owned and was bred from the very best of Eric Cannon's wonderful long distance family. 'Foxwarren Fred' is the sire of many premier long distance champions including: 1st Federation Bourges (581 miles), 2nd Federation Bourges, 2nd Federation Bourges, 2nd Federation Bourges, 3rd Federation Bourges, 5th Federation Bourges, 8th Federation Bourges, plus 2nd Amalgamation Bourges and is grand sire of 1st, 1st, 3rd, 4th, 4th Federation, 1st, 1st Amalgamation Bourges (581 miles) in the 2012 and 2013 seasons. 'Foxwarren Fred' is the grand sire of 'Charlotte', the winner of 2nd open NIPA St. Malo National in the 2018 racing season and 'Our Lass', the winner of 16th open EDC St. Malo National (450 miles) in 2016. Later in the 2013 season Fred Dickson won with a yearling blue chequer cock bred by Keith and Betty, and he recorded 1st club, 2nd Federation, 12th New North Amalgamation Arras (377 miles) in a strong north east wind. This game cock was a son of the good Eric Cannon stock hen, 'Foxwarren Katie' when mated to a son of the Number 1 Brian Denney stock pair, 'Sasha's Boy' and 'Lady Tuff Nut'. 'Foxwarren Katie' is a granddaughter of the Eric Cannon champions: 'Culmer Marion' winner of 1st open NFC Sartilly and 'Culmer Channel Queen' the NFC Pau Merit Award winner. 'Sasha's Boy' is a full brother to 'Dark Charm' and 'Dark Dancer', with 'Lady Tuff Nut' being a daughter of the champion of all champions, 'Tuff Nut'. This Brian Denney stock pair have produced Federation winners and 'Sasha's Boy' is grandsire of 1st open International Agen (10,500 birds) in the 2015 racing season. There were several other good winners bred from Keith and Betty Mott's birds in the 2013 season including: Clive Turner who recorded 2nd open London & South East Classic Club Bergerac (450 miles) with a pigeon bred from K.& B. Mott birds.

2015: Bobby and Anthony Besant won 1st open International Agen (10,500 birds) in the 2015 season and they named their winner 'Noble Dream', and their wonderful champion is a two year dark cock, raced on the widowhood system. Bobby remarked at the time that he thought it was a decent time when he came in from Agen and 'Noble Dream' did his usual party trick of landing in next doors tree before coming in to the loft to be clocked. He had won several premier positions before his Agen (499 miles) International win, including 3rd Three Borders Federation, 4th SMT Combine (699 birds) Nort sur Erdre (278 miles) as a yearling in the 2014 season. The dam of Champion 'Noble Dream' was the dark pied hen, 'Half Crown' and she was bred by Keith and Betty Mott of Claygate. She was one of three sisters that the Motts gifted to Bobby and Anthony in 2009 and Keith donated a full brother to the BHW Blackpool Show Charity auction in 2010, which raised for £740 for charity. 'Half Crown' was also the grand dam of Bob and Anthony's second bird clocked on the day from the Agen International and she was crossed out with Mat Rakes and Geoff Cooper pigeons to produce this game dark cock. The sire of 'Half Crown' was the champion stock cock, 'Sasha's Boy' and he was bred by Brian Denney. He was bred for the stock loft from Brian's champion stock pair, 'Maxi' and 'Dark Jan' and is a full brother to the champion racing cocks, 'Dark Charm', 'Dark Dancer' and half-brother to 'The Chequer Cock'. 'Sasha's Boy' had proved to be outstanding at stock and had bred several top 550 mile racers, including Federation winners! The dam of 'Half Crown' was our champion hen, 'Foxwarren Complete'.

2016: The 2016 was another very successful season for our pigeons, with several premier winners being reported to us. Ronnie & Jim Young of Northern Ireland have had good success racing our birds since 2004 and they have had the very best of the Eric Cannon and Brian Denney bloodlines. The 2016 season saw their excellent blue hen, 'Bonnie Lass' record 2nd open St. Malo National, with only 17 birds home in race time and she was bred from a Eric Cannon stock bird from 'Foxwarren Lofts'. The partners also recorded 16th open National in the same race from St. Malo, with their blue chequer hen, 'Our Lass' and she was also mainly our Eric Cannon and Brian Denney bloodlines. The next two seasons saw Ronnie and Jim win 1st open National twice. The 2017 St. Malo National winner, with only two birds' home in race time was, 'Jack's Legacy' and he also contained our Eric Cannon and Brian Denney bloodlines. The partner's 2018 St. Malo National winner, with only eight birds' home in race time, was 'Shallas Lass' and she is a granddaughter of

'Bonny Lass' the 2nd open St. Malo National winner of 2016. The partners two original stock cocks they obtained from us in 2004 were '48' and '52' and both figure in the breeding of all they premier national pigeons, when crossed with the Jack Anderson pigeons. The champion breeder, 'The Wee Cock' was a son of 'The 48 Cock' and he was a son of 'Foxwarren Complete' when mated to 'Foxwarren Black Splash', who was a grandson of 'Culmer Gold' and 'Culmer Sam'. 'The 52 Cock' was a son of my champion Number 2 Eric Cannon stock pair, 'Culmer Prince' and 'Culmer Rocket Queen'. Another great hen of world class quality was the Eric Cannon blue hen, 'Foxwarren Northerner' and I bred her for Fred Dickson in 2005, with her dam being 'Foxwarren Express', winner of 23rd open London & South East Classic Club San Sebastian (560 miles) and BOS at the Esher Open Show, being beaten by a loft mate. She bred several top 560 mile racers at Fred's loft in Northumberland, including 1st Amalgamation Bourges (580 miles) and when Fred retired from the sport 'Foxwarren Northerner' came back to my loft in Claygate. Ronnie and Jim were looking for a good hen, so I sent her out to them in Northern Ireland and she is the grand dam of 'Bonny Lass', winner of 2nd open EDC St. Malo National and great grand dam of 'Shallas Lass', winner of 1st open EDC St. Malo National. What a stock hen! Another top breeding hen for the Young loft was a daughter of 'Foxwarren Fred' and 'Lady Tuff Nut' and she was the dam of 'Our Lass', the winner of 16th open EDC St. Malo National (450 miles) in 2016. Congratulation to Ronnie and Jim on their brilliant achievements!

2017: Terry Haley hit the 'jackpot' again in the 2017 racing season and finished it off in a very special fashion, when he recorded 1st Combine twice in seven days. Just brilliant! The Aycliffe young bird win, Terry's fifth Combine winner, was a great buzz for me personally, as the winning blue hen, now named 'Misty Missile', was a granddaughter of 'The Watford Wizard', the Gaby Vandenabeele cock we bred for Terry. 'Misty Missile' and 'The Watford Wizard' both won 1st Watford NR Club, 1st Thames Valley Federation, 1st North Thames NR Combine Aycliffe as young birds. Amazing! We had several other good winners reported in the 2017 season, including 2nd open National. Mick Parish's first pigeon on the clock from the very hard Barcelona race was an Eric Cannon pigeon and grandson of 'Foxwarren Ryan' and 'Foxwarren Katie'.

2018: The NIPA in Northern Ireland held its annual St. Malo (450 miles) National on the same weekend as the NFC Tarbes Grand National in the 2018 season and as everyone knows it turned out to be one the hardest weekends of the year for pigeon racing. Members of the NIPA sent 1,841 birds and only seven game pigeons were clocked in on the day of liberation. I think is fair to say that racing pigeons out of France into Northern Ireland is one of the hardest routs in the UK and to get these seven pigeon home on the Friday was a fantastic achievement! I got a phone call from David Coulter of Maghaberry in Northern Ireland on the Sunday to tell me the good news that he clocked on the day from the St. Malo National to win 2nd open and the blue chequer hen was bred from two stock birds bred at the Keith & Betty Mott's loft in Claygate. I really enjoy those phone calls and Betty and I would like to thank David for taking the trouble to let us know. When I asked the delighted David about the St. Malo National, he told me, 'the blue chequer hen is now named, 'Charlotte', after our second granddaughter and she was bred from 'Foxwarren Contraband', a daughter of Champion 'Foxwarren Fred' and 'Lady Tuff Nut' when mated to, 'Young Expected', a son of the 'Bourges Pair', 'Northern Expected' and 'Northern Star'. 'Charlotte' was not raced as a young bird, but was lightly trained. In the 2017 season as a yearling she had three inland races and a Talbenny (195 miles), plus a Penzance 305 (miles). In 2018 'Charlotte' had three inland races, one Talbenny race, where she won 1st club doing 1422yppm velocity. She was then being set up for the Bude race two weeks after, but the NIPA cancelled and had an inland race due to weather conditions. After the birds are on the channel I don't like bringing them back into Ireland, so her next race was the St. Malo National and in between she was flown at home one hour morning and night, seven days a week, not missing a day. She was sent to the St. Malo National (450 miles) sitting 14 day old eggs and after her near 13 hour fly, was clocked on the day of liberation looking as 'fit as a butchers dog'. My wife, Siobhan, and my granddaughter, Olivia, are both very interested in the pigeons and like to spend time with the birds. It was such a hard race and my family and I are highly delighted with the result'.

In the week after David Coulter's phone call I had three more fanciers phone me, telling me about more winning pigeons bred from Keith & Betty Mott stock birds. They say, when it rains, it pours! Two of our best friends, Steve and Tessa Howard of Guildford recently won 2nd and 33rd open BICC Poitiers and the sire of 'Gee Force', their 33rd open winner was bred by us. The cock was another son of the 'Bourges Pair', 'Northern Expected' and 'Northern Star'. The premier fancier, Dave Johnson of St Austell in Cornwall recently won 12th open BICC Cholet (292 miles) and the dam of that game pigeon was bred by us in Claygate. She was bred around the champion breeder, 'Foxwarren Fred'. Terry Haley of Watford has been one of our closest friends since the early 1970's and he always has a couple of youngsters off us every year, with one the 'Watford Wizard', going on to win 1st Combine Aycliffe. Terry had a youngster, '04367', off 'Foxwarren Renegade' and 'Thelma' in the 2017 season, which has gone on and proved quite handy.

'Foxwarren Renegade' is yet another son of the 'Bourges Pair' and 'Thelma' was bred by Brian Denney and is a daughter of Champion 'Brian's Blue', the NCF record holder, being clocked at 748 miles from Tarbes on the day of liberation. As a young bird '04367' flew some very hard channel races and was then turned 290 mile north road to Berwick and returned home in a very strong south wind. In the 2018 season, as a yearling, she had five hard channel races and was in the clock five times, to record: 2nd club, 5th Inter Counties Federation (899 birds), 9th UBI Combine (1,263 birds) Carentan and was first bird on the clock from the longest old bird race, to with 15th Inter Counties Federation Poitiers. Terry had another youngster off 'Foxwarren Renegade' and 'Thelma' in 2018 and this time it was the blue chequer cock, '17845'. Terry sent four babies to the hard BBC Fougères (235 miles) young bird National and clocked two in good time to record: 7th and 60th open. '17845' was second bird on the ETS to win 60th open National. The 2018 season has seen our stock breed 2nd, 12th, 33rd, 60th open National, 9th open Combine and 15th Federation in the longest old bird race. Well done to all those fanciers!

In Conclusion.

My younger brother, Phil, started up pigeons with me in the 1950's when we lived in Chestnut Road, Kingston and we started racing as Mott Brothers after we moved to Durlston Road in 1966. When we were young lads we stole our dad's tool shed and moved the pigeons in and just flew them around the roof tops of Chestnut Road. There were two other lofts in our road, Russell Blunden's and Robbin Sherlock, who kept several pairs of white fantails in an old air raid shelter. We were successful racing our birds from France at the Durlston Road loft, our best position was 1st club, 1st Surrey Federation, 3rd SMT Combine (6,823 birds) Nantes, won with our good dark pied cock, 'John Boy' in 1974. During the early years Phil did all the weekend club work because I was away playing with my band and I did a lot of the pigeon management in the week. In 1980 we were both married and we split up the Mott Brothers partnership, so we could both race at our home addresses. Phil teamed up with his wife, Pauline and had some good wins from France to their loft in Hanworth in Middlesex, before packing up in 1990. Phil is keen angler and has caught some good fish. He owned a holiday caravan at New Milton, about a five miles drive from the Royalty Fishery on the River Avon and he was always on the bank there drowning maggots, but caught some brilliant fish. In the 1980's he caught a wonderful 3lb. 11oz. Roach on the Royalty and at that time wasn't too far away from the British record. Phil occasionally comes out and still enjoys judging at one or two National Shows with me. Betty and I have now had our loft at our home in Claygate for 39 years (2019) and still wonder where all those years have gone! Our cousin, Brian, had pigeons on his dad's farm in Winkfield, Berkshire, just around the corner from Mark Gilbert in the 1960's, but never raced.

I think the decline in our great sport is down to the fact that there are no young people coming in! Firstly I think the problem might be the times we live in, with the young people being more interested in technology and not the old fashioned sports like pigeon racing and fishing etc. It might be controversial, but the first thing I would do is get rid of ETS timing and bring back the old fashioned timing clocks. When I was a kid and I won a couple of 4th, 5th and 6th race diploma cards each season I was delighted and it kept me interested. These days with the old boys clocking in 25 birds on their ETS each week, the novice can't get in the first hundred race positions; let a loan in the first six prize card positions! You take a kid fishing and if they don't catch a fish, they get fed up with it and stop going. I had ETS clocking for the later years that I was racing my pigeons and turned it off in every race after clocking two or three birds! I'm sorry to say, in my opinion there is no fix for the Raptor problem in the UK! This problem has been dragging on for 30 years now and it is killing our great sport, and in my opinion, no one has really sincerely tried to address it. The raptor problem is so serious now in this country, that I don't think it can be elevated. It has been all talk and no do for 30 years and now we have to live with it!

I'm defiantly not an expert with sick pigeons and treating them with pills! I've never really had sick pigeons and wouldn't have a clue how to treat them. One of the greatest pigeon racers I ever met was Eric Cannon and he never treated his pigeons in his 60 years completing and winning at the very top level in long distance pigeon racing. Eric never ever de-wormed his birds in that time! I might be old fashioned, but must say, we never had all these health problems before, closed in lofts, the widowhood system, the 'dark' system and pigeon treatment with pills and antibiotics. Personally, I'm not a pills person and very hard pushed to take stuff when I'm ill! I was a musician at the top level for nearly 20 years when I was a young man and never took drugs, which was rife on the music scene then. Really I'm the wrong person to ask about pills and treating pigeons!

I often get asked what my favourite pigeon article and video is and that is a very hard question to answer, after nearly 50 years writing in the pigeon fancy press there has been a massive number of articles and I've

enjoyed penning them all. For me it is the 'doing' that really interests me and I really enjoy the many hours I spend writing and working on photographs for the finished job. I rarely read pigeon books or papers! I remember the late great Eddie Cochran talking about his great record, 'Summertime Blues', which he played and over dubbed every instrument on the recording, guitar, bass, piano, drums and then the vocal. He spent so many hours layering the track that at the end was sick of keep hearing it and never listened to the finished record much after the release. I'm much the same with my films, after the many hours I spend videoing, editing and making up the finished product, I don't watch them again much.

KEITH MOTT (JUNE 2019).