

An Appreciation of Doug John Pembury

I first met John Douglas Pembury (known as John to his family & Doug to his many business friends & colleagues) almost 30 years ago when we frequently came across each other at various HVCA & contractors meetings. He was working for Crown House at the time & we were I suppose competitors although it never quite felt like that. Little did I realise at that time that we would later become colleagues & such good friends.

However, John's working life started at G N Haden & Sons back in the late 40's, a training ground that so many others in the Building Services trade first 'cut their teeth on' including me & perhaps many of you here today. After serving his apprenticeship & becoming a qualified engineer, he became disenchanted with Haden's & moved on to the company now known as Crown House Engineering. He joined them initially as a project engineer but after a number years, someone there had the foresight to see that he had other unforeseen qualities, namely in his great ability to be able to communicate with people & he became Crown Houses Business Development Manager - (in those days he was probably called their sales rep!!).

In this position he became the mouthpiece for Crown House & became known throughout the local construction mafia, by property developers, architects, consulting engineers & even building contractors. He knew them all at both the highest & lowest level & had the wonderful ability to be everyone's friend which was always sincerely meant. He was blessed with an easy going & relaxed manner that didn't appear as though he was trying necessarily to represent his company to sell their services. This of course was somewhat of an illusion although he was never a hard sell guy. I don't think it would be an exaggeration to say that John Pembury was synonymous with the building services trade & he could open doors that probably no one else could. He was known by all as a jovial friendly man who never had any enemies & never spoke ill of anybody, which was quite an accolade in the cut & thrust of the construction industry. If you didn't know John Pembury - you probably hadn't yet made it.

Although we continued to meet on regular basis, time moved on & one occasion that I can clearly remember seeing him, was when I was leaving HAT Engineering & he turned up at my leaving presentation function at our offices in Clifton. In questioning him some time later, he said that he had just been passing by & he thought he would just pop in to see what was going on. - Just typical of John!!.

When joining what was to become MITIE Engineering, I can remember trying to persuade Paul Williams to join us. He was not quite sure, as we were a new company & he was quite concerned that we didn't yet have much legitimacy within the trade. He suggested that if we had someone like John Pembury on board, this could kill two birds with one stone, gaining Paul & also John. To cut a long story short, John joined us & spent the rest of his days, working at MITIE. I think he loved his time with us & he naturally brought the same qualities to us as he had previously with Crown House, but I think with renewed vigour although by that time he was in his mid fifties - so he was taking quite a risk in moving jobs at that age. It was wonderful to have someone with us who knew the trade inside out & also all the people that mattered. His influence was to help the company move forward rapidly to where it is today, one of the biggest & most successful M & E companies in the Bristol area & also nationally.

John was also a great family man who always spoke with pride about son Stephen & daughter Michelle & he would regularly update me with their various exploits in life. Sunday nearly was always a family day out with Viv & they would invariably go south deeper into Somerset or Devon to sightsee as well as have lunch & tea often meeting up with daughter Michelle or Stephen.

One of John's great leisure passions was his love of golf. He was a long standing member of Long Ashton Golf club where again he was also known by everyone - almost part of the furniture. Whenever I played with him he was always stopping for a chat with one or other member. His golf was never **quite** up to Ryder Cup standard but nevertheless he loved the game. He played every Saturday morning at a minimum - usually with his great buddy, George, the man from the Inland Revenue, so goodness knows what they hatched up between them during their 18 holes. At the 19th hole as well as a few drinks, it was customary to play a few frames of snooker with George in the afternoon. It was almost a disaster if the course was closed on a Saturday but he would still go to check things over - and play some more snooker - but I'm not sure whether he ever told Viv.

He was also a keen gardener & would often bring produce into the office for the staff, he loved his classical music, some of his favourites you hear today & Viv & he were great cat lovers - at the last count I think he told me they had 3 - all strays.

I often asked John when he was going to retire but he was always evasive with his reply, with the usual suggestions that he did not want to get under Viv's feet whilst she was doing the housework etc. I remember when he was 65, we held a retirement party for him complete with presentations etc - but he still just kept coming back. When I retired a few years ago I think he thought about it then, but he carried on although only on a part time basis. His latest thought was that he would finish altogether when Paul retired. I'm sure he continued working because he just loved the camaraderie of people in the office as well as all his other friends in the trade & he felt that he still had something to offer, which he clearly did.

He always kept in touch with me & we spoke on the phone every couple of weeks when he would keep me up to date with what was going on at MITIE as well as his other exploits, such as his great enthusiasm for life. It was always a joy to meet up with him again as we did at the golf club every 3 months or so, for lunch when we would reminisce about the good times we had together & people we had known.

He had some health problems 4/5 years ago which he seemed to have overcome, afterwards leading a normal active life & still playing a bit of golf. However he was taken ill again a few weeks ago & spent his last couple of weeks in hospital. During this period I visited him on several occasions when he seemed as bright as a button & was looking forward to returning home & getting back to work. He was still so enthusiastic about the future but - unfortunately this was not to be.

Today his family, many friends & colleagues pay tribute to this lovely, lovely man who we will all miss so much & whom I felt so privileged to have known as a true friend - the likes of John Douglas Pembury do not pass this way very often.

Tim Lewis