

Eulogy

James was born on May 25th 1933 at the family farm just off Swaffham Road where, as a boy he made the most of the surrounding 15 acres. Life had many advantages but being a somewhat remote property did not, at that stage, have the advantage of mains water or electricity. Water was pumped from a borehole and lighting was provided by oil lamps and candles. Schooling started in the Guildhall later crossing the road to the upper primary. He passed the scholarship to Soham Grammar school and at the age of fourteen was one of the first members of the small boarding house which was set up during his time there by Mr and Mrs Armitage. James stayed at Soham until he completed his time in the Upper Sixth.

While at primary school he spent some time staying with his grandfather at Ramsey Manor in the High Street, where he had the benefit of having electricity. It may have been, at this point, where his initial interest was established. At any rate when starting at Grammar school he wired up the main rooms of the farm with a series of small torch sized bulbs running off dry batteries. They did at least give an illuminated pathway to the rooms at night.

From an early age he became fascinated with trains and spent many hours on Saturdays and during the holidays in the signal box at Burwell station under the watchful eye of Nelson Saunders and the Station Master Gates. In 2005 he wrote, 'I did most things in the signal box under supervision and also became friendly with the engine crews and was rewarded with footplate rides and an occasional pleasant ramble through the countryside in the guard's van of a meandering goods train. It is doubtful whether a ten year old boy would be allowed such freedom today. It taught me to accept responsibility at an early age, the discipline engendered in railway operation remaining with me to this day.'

After retiring he became a part time writer for magazines and published several articles about railways and the 'lost lines'. He also had published features on the Fens.

A further interest lay in photography, and James, in his tradition of getting every detail correct, not only took the photographs but developed and printed them as well.

On fine days – forgetting the winter of 1947 and the other numerous occasions we had to dig our way through the snow to reach the main road - James enjoyed going on long cycle rides and joined a local club.

His other great love was music, especially playing the organ, though he was also a chorister for many years being choirmaster for a time as well as giving many years of service on the PCC. At 17 he started playing the organ in this church as assistant organist and played here for 60 years. His skills were appreciated during his national service in the RAF based in Germany as a Radar Operator. He played for services in the chapel and later told tales of managing to avoid various chores by maintaining he needed to practise for the Sunday service. His best opportunity came when the annual AOC inspection was to take place and he was to be the organist for the service – so MUCH time was needed for practice as an alternative to being on duty!

After being demobbed, James worked for Pye (latterly Philips) in Cambridge from around the end of his National Service until about 1990. Initially, his work on specialist radio systems involved considerable travel. This included work on the famous BLUE STREAK rocket system in Northumbria, the Dinorwic hydroelectric plant in Wales and a military radio system in Londonderry. Much of his work was top secret.

At home while studying, mainly by correspondence, for graduating as a Chartered Electrical Engineer he made his own tape recording machine. This was at a time when none were readily available for the general public. It contained three heavy electric motors and took a strong person to lift it. However, it was used on many occasions, often to record our family 'discussions' over Sunday lunch. I hope the tapes are no longer around as they covered a range of subjects and people from the wider family and village!

James and Audrey married in 1967 and soon afterwards moved into the newly built bungalow in Mill Close where he stayed until last year. Their son - another James - was born in 1971 the sixth James in a row; the name being given through the generations to the first born son of the first born son. James was a devoted father and instilled in Jamie both his Christian faith and his love of railways.

He was also a devoted husband to Audrey and fully appreciated all her home making skills. He was a very caring son to his mother and to Violet, his mother-in-law, as well as being a major support to his many aunts. In fact, he organised social service care for so many of these relatives that he once declared he must know more about the workings of the social services than anyone else in the village.

In his latter years he sadly suffered from Alzheimer's but generally kept a broadly positive outlook and said that he had lived a happy life. He kept involved in Church activities to the extent that his health permitted. Following Audrey's death in 2017, he lived for 4 years in the bungalow with live-in carers. In his final year, he lived in Oaklands Care Home in Bottisham where he received excellent care and during the early part of his stay was able to go out on some trips in the mini-bus.

This particular line of the Faircliff family will be absent from Burwell for the first time in many centuries.

One can say with confidence he lived a full and Christian life.