

# Dick Hibberd remembered

- fond memories of the 'can do, will do' founder of the GTC, a true gentleman with a twinkle in his eye

In September last year all in the GTC were greatly saddened by the death of the organisation's Honorary President and Founder, Dick Hibberd (GTC member 0001). In this issue of Zerb we pay tribute to the man responsible for dreaming up the GTC and making it happen, then steering its course with a sure hand over more than four decades. This article will hopefully 'introduce' Dick to many GTC members who didn't have the pleasure of meeting him, while at the same time jogging pleasurable memories for those who knew him personally. Based on a thoroughly enjoyable conversation with Dick's widow, Jean, and his three children, Melanie, Steven and Richard, Zerb Managing Editor **Alison Chapman** recalls Dick as the inspirational, courteous, humorous and immensely likeable person many in the GTC knew so well.

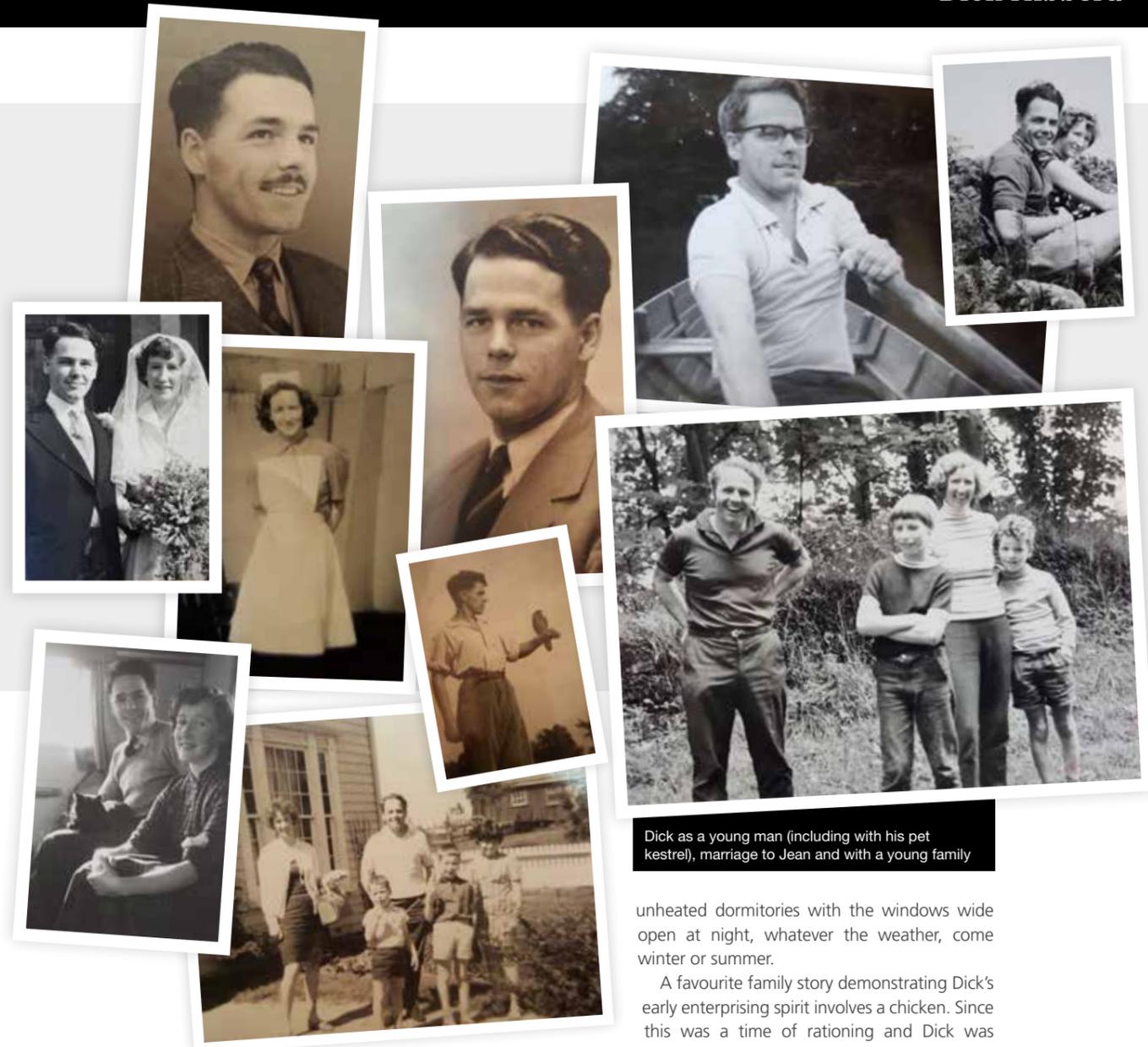
I was lucky enough to know Dick as my supervisor (at Thames TV), colleague (on the GTC Council), mentor and good friend for nearly 30 years. As I got to know Dick better through the GTC Council, he became one of my most trusted friends, to whom I knew I could always turn for great advice. No matter what the issue, Dick would always listen carefully (a trait also mentioned several times by his children) and give a sound opinion on the subject – and, since Dick was very definitely not afraid to speak his mind, you knew that whatever he said was what he truly believed. Always engaged with life, attentive to the people both close to him and in his wider circle, and keen to carry on learning and embracing new ideas right until the very end, there is far too much to tell about Dick for this short piece, but here goes, a potted history, peppered with as many hopefully revealing anecdotes as we have room for.

## School days

Dick's childhood as described by the family has something of an Enid Blyton or Just William quality to it, full of scrapes

and character-building incidents. Born in 1929 in Dorking, Surrey, he was school age during the Second World War. Initially, Dick went to a local primary school and would cycle to school. Those who knew him later on as typically punctual to the minute may be surprised to hear that at this first school he was habitually late – almost every day. Displaying from an early age another trait that would remain characteristic (an intense interest and curiosity about everything around him), Dick would set off for school but almost invariably be distracted by something fascinating he spotted or some other adventure along the way. When it came to the end-of-term report, it was noted that Dick had been late for school a staggering 136 times! The family speculate that he only got away with this because his father was at the time headmaster of a neighbouring school.

Alongside his teaching career, Dick's father was also in the RAF Reserve and so was called up as soon as the War started, meaning Dick was sent away to boarding school to Dauntsey's in Devizes. Dick's mother would travel with his father as he moved around the country from base to base, so



Dick as a young man (including with his pet kestrel), marriage to Jean and with a young family

unheated dormitories with the windows wide open at night, whatever the weather, come winter or summer.

A favourite family story demonstrating Dick's early enterprising spirit involves a chicken. Since this was a time of rationing and Dick was well-placed in a country area, his mother had

sent him 2s 6d and tasked him with procuring and bringing home a chicken for the family's Christmas dinner. Spotting an opportunity to pocket the 2s 6d to spend on something more exciting, Dick decided to help himself to a chicken from the school farm, wringing its neck and keep it in his locker until time to pack up for the train. Unfortunately, when he opened the locker door, the chicken burst out and proceeded to run around the changing room, frantically flapping its wings. Even then undefeated, he managed to catch the poor bird and finally put it out of its misery. Although a little puzzled why the family's dinner appeared a bit 'bruised', his mother never found out the true story!

Despite this apparently rather callous attitude to birdlife, Dick was actually very fond of birds and even nurtured a 'tame' jackdaw and later had a pet kestrel. The young boy would take the jackdaw for walks on his shoulder and one day met a gypsy who offered him 2s 6d (seemingly the price for everything in those days) for this remarkable jackdaw. When Dick refused, the tinker placed a curse of 'Seven years' bad luck' on him – fortunately this doesn't seem to have resulted in any connected misfortune in the years to come! This early fondness for birds led to a lifelong enjoyment of birdwatching.

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the young schoolboy would never quite know where he was going 'home' to at the start of the holidays. From as young as 10 this entailed travelling alone on the train, often in the blackout, to wherever his temporary home was. Dick's family joke that this early need for self-sufficiency led to his later on being pretty scathing about overly fussy parents!

Never particularly academic, Dick nevertheless loved his time at school, in particular taking full advantage of the fact that he had ended up at a school with a farm, partly due to it being situated in a rural area but also because this was wartime. The boys were made to work on the farm, with spells of treading sileage interspersed with their lessons. To further encourage a 'healthy' lifestyle they were made to sleep in



The HTV days: carrying an early-generation handheld (top left); with the first female member of the GTC, Val Sawdy (top right); and operating a Marconi Mk VIII

Typically making the best out of things, even in wartime, Dick managed to enjoy life, constantly finding things to entertain him, whether that be collecting shrapnel, watching the planes go overhead on Salisbury Plain or observing fights between the GIs and Tommys stationed in the local town. There was always something of interest to occupy his active and enquiring mind.

### Germany, post-War and National Service

At the end of the War, Dick's father was offered a job with the Control Commission in Germany based near Hanover. This was a prestigious post, representing the Queen and involving liaison between the German locals and the occupying forces. Leaving school at 15, Dick joined his family and basically had a lot of fun there (his father's job brought with it a very nice house in a good neighbourhood), making friends with the local boys of his own age and learning passable German.

While they were there, the Crown film unit came to make a documentary about the work of Dick's father in the Control Commission and it was this that first fired up the 17 year old's interest in film-making. Fascinated by the whole process, from this point on Dick resolved that this was what he would like to do for his career.

At age 18 the 'good life' in Germany came to an end for a while as Dick had to return to England to do his National Service, mostly served in the UK, although he did manage to get posted to Germany towards the end of the stint.

### Early film-making and meeting Jean

With his National Service complete, Dick came back to the UK to try to get his career as a documentary film director going. This proved not to be as simple as he had hoped. However, he went to live with his sister in Edinburgh, who it just so happened had a neighbour who knew people who ran a small film production company, Campbell Harper – and sure enough the company took him on as a trainee film director. This was a great place to learn a range of film skills, everything

from loading magazines to operating the clapperboard and even at times 'acting' when some narration was needed for these public information films.

When space in Dick's sister's house became tight as her children grew up, Dick moved into digs, where he shared with a man called Peter. Also in Edinburgh by that time, training to be a nurse at the Royal Infirmary, was Jean. In 1950, when the annual hospital ball loomed, some of the trainee nurses found themselves without partners, so Jean suggested to Peter (a friend of her brother) that some of the men from the digs could come along to make up the numbers. One of those young men was Dick – and this was how they first met. Dick and Jean were together from that point on – for more than 60 years. They married in 1954.

### Ferranti and Decca

When the job at Campbell Harper came to an end, Dick secured a job at Ferranti, also near Edinburgh. Ferranti was hoping to get a contract for an aeroplane gunsight and Dick's job was to film the plane as it swooped down towards him, with Dick effectively doubling up as cameraman and 'target'. However, Ferranti didn't get the contract and so that job also came to an end.

By then Jean had relocated to Woking to train in midwifery, so Dick followed, managing to get a job with Decca Radar. By now, Dick had realised that employment as a film director by its very nature tended to be transitory, with each job ending when the particular film was completed. Someone had



An important function of the GTC has always been communicating with camera manufacturers, something appreciated by Bill Vinten, seen in the bottom image with current President John Henshall (l) and Dick (r)

suggested that work as a cameraman might be more secure – so, as a stopgap, he decided to give this a go. Some 40 years later, after many fulfilling years behind camera, Dick would recall that this was only ever supposed to be a temporary stage until he became a director!

The reason for taking the job at Decca Radar was that Dick had been advised that in order to get into the BBC as a TV cameraman he would need to have done an apprenticeship first. By now Jean and Dick were living in a caravan in Leatherhead. Dick would cycle every day to Decca's base in New Malden, and then on some days even further to Wimbledon for an evening class to study for the all-important City & Guilds qualification; then he would cycle all the way home again (some fair few miles in the dark).

### Starting at the BBC

Having obtained the City & Guilds qualification, Dick was taken on by the BBC in 1955 as a trainee cameraman at the next attempt at applying. His father was so proud of his son that he insisted on telling all and sundry, including complete strangers in shops, that his son had got a job at the BBC! Once at the BBC he cut his teeth on such iconic shows as *What's my Line?* presented by Eamonn Andrews, with Gilbert Harding, Isobel Barnett, David Nixon and Barbara Kelly as panellists, as well as many live dramas.

During his time at the BBC, the first of Dick and Jean's children, Melanie, came along and – just to prove his readiness to turn his hand to anything – Dick delivered the baby (probably made a little easier by the fact that Jean was by then a fully trained midwife). Mel was followed by Steven in 1959 and Richard in 1963 – but the boys' births were more traditional with Dick not playing quite such an active part!

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From the BBC Dick moved to ATV in the early 1960s, essentially because the pay was better in commercial TV. This gave him the opportunity to work on such shows as *Sunday Night at The London Palladium* and drama series including *The Plane Makers* starring Patrick Wymark as well as the long-running *Emergency – Ward 10*.

After ATV came a very brief stint at Midlands-based Alpha TV and then it was on to TWW (which subsequently became HTV) in Cardiff, where Dick was appointed Head of Cameras in 1965. The time in Cardiff began a love of all things Welsh that the whole family was to share – something that was only too evident at Dick's memorial service at which you could have been forgiven for thinking that the family was Welsh by birth (the service included not only a reading from Dylan Thomas but also 'Land of my Fathers' and 'Cwm Rhonnda' as entrance music). While at HTV, Dick learnt to speak Welsh, as did the children at school, and the family as a whole embraced the local culture, enjoying being part of the community in the village of Dinas Powys where they lived.

### Founding the GTC

It was while at HTV that Dick had the idea of starting the GTC, having hooked up with BBC cameraman John Henshall, our current President, who through his lens effects company, Teleflex, was able to provide a long list of contacts, to whom Dick then wrote in order to gauge support for his brainchild, the new Guild. The full story of the foundation of the GTC has been told fairly recently in *Zerb* (issue 75), in the year of the GTC's 40th anniversary, so we won't retell it here, but GTC members can log into the GTC website and view the digital edition if they would like to read the whole story in more detail.

Jean recalls Dick's enormous enthusiasm for the new Guild and how the whole family got sucked into the project, with Jean and Mel tasked with writing envelopes for the piles of initial contact letters Dick sent out. In those pre-PC days, this was indeed a labour-intensive process, and Steven mentions how, to this day, Dick's office is stacked full of papers and address books listing literally thousands of contacts around the UK and further afield. Dick's enthusiasm was contagious and Jean remembers how exciting it was whenever any of these contacts replied in a positive way to the letter they had received. In paying tribute to Dick at the memorial service, John Henshall pointed to the enormous effort involved in bringing the GTC to fruition (often in the face of substantial hostility from wary TV managers who thought this might be some form of new trade union) as the shining example of Dick's indefatigable "vision, determination and 'can do, will do' attitude".



**Clockwise:** Larking about with colleagues at Thames TV - teasing Mike Solomons, aka 'Mr Moustache', Thames Teddington Head of Cameras and former GTC Chairman; with great friend John Henshall; Dick and Jean enjoying a visit to current Chairman Keith Massey's home; passing on piano skills acquired late in life; on a solo glider flight; and visiting his friend Bill Vinten in 2015.

Always possessed of a strong sense of justice and never afraid to speak up for what he felt was right, one of Dick's key motivating factors for establishing the GTC was his belief that cameramen were not always treated fairly, particularly in not being credited at the end of programmes, something Dick would continue to campaign for throughout his life. He also particularly wanted to provide a channel enabling TV cameramen to communicate directly with camera manufacturers as it struck him as ludicrous that in organisations such as the BBC decisions about camera investment and design were taken by engineers and managers, usually without any input from the end-user cameramen. Mel reminds us that Dick was also the ACTT shop steward for a while – and the family laugh that on occasions he enjoyed being a bit of a 'troublemaker' in meetings, something he would invariably get away with because he always managed to do it "with a twinkle in his eye".

**A visionary**

Something that Dick couldn't have known at the time was that his desire to provide a network whereby cameramen could communicate with colleagues from other organisations, and in different parts of the country and even the world, would predict in many ways the kind of communication that is so commonplace now through social media. It is no wonder then that one of the things he was most proud of was the GTC Forum, which he viewed as being the pinnacle of the GTC's success in putting all manner of camera personnel everywhere easily in touch with each other. Until the very last weeks of his life, Dick would read every single post on the GTC Forum, frequently taking the time to reply to the person who had posted, either publicly through the Forum or by following it up with a private message or phone call. An early adopter of email and social media, Dick remained fascinated and impressed by the way digital technology had opened

up the world of information and communication. In his very last days, he was delighted with the iPad that the GTC gave him as a gift in hospital to enable him to stay connected and engaged with others, even when very ill. One of the last acts of communication Dick managed was to dictate a letter to his old friend Bill Vinten, using the GTC iPad. He had particularly wanted to have one last contact with Bill, not knowing, probably fortunately, that Bill himself was also now terminally ill, with just a few weeks to live. The family laugh that the two of them have probably since reconnected in Heaven and are up there playing together on the very best cameras and camera mounts – a joyful vision that pretty much sums up the upbeat way they seem able to talk about Dick. Their attitude seems completely in tune with that of the resolutely positive and fundamentally happy man we are remembering so fondly and is living proof that they are keeping their pledge to Dick that they should not be sad after he had gone. As a lovely symbol of this, the family released colourful balloons after the private funeral service.

**Technical Supervisor at Thames TV**

Eventually, after an enjoyable and successful time at HTV, Dick reached the point where he felt he had done as much as he could in the camera department and it was time for a new challenge. In 1978 he applied for a post as Technical Supervisor at Thames TV. This led to his working on programmes such as *The Kenny Everett Show*, *The Benny Hill Show*, *George & Mildred*, *Chance in a Million*, *Rumpole of the Bailey* and the children's show *Rainbow*.

When he first started at Thames there was a strike and, having just relocated and bought a new house, this meant the family finances on no pay were a bit of a struggle – so, along with many others from Thames, he joined the band of 'painters and decorators' (operating under false names) who suddenly hit the streets of Middlesex and Surrey. The team would queue up for their pay each week, giggling as they tried to remember what name they were working under!

The family also recall how Dick always liked to 'recycle' and would keenly scrutinise the content of skips. When they



As a tribute to Dick's habitually happy nature, the family released colourful balloons after his funeral

first moved to their eventual family home near Farnham, there was no way of getting to the upstairs of a derelict barn so, spotting an opportunity, he brought home a discarded staircase from the set of the *Benny Hill Show*. Apparently the house is still littered with surplus props no longer required in the studios!

Dick retired very reluctantly at the age of 60, according to the terms of his contract, but was definitely not ready to stop. For a while he worked with John Henshall's company Teleflex, before throwing himself into a wide range of voluntary activities, many of which he remained committed to for the rest of his life. He joined Probus (and became Chairman), volunteered for Care Farnham, a charity that organises transport for elderly people (the family laugh that Dick would typically drive people much younger than himself), and became involved with the local Coronary Care Club (Dick had suffered a heart attack – at the age of 58 – from which he made an excellent recovery by radically improving his diet and introducing regular exercise).

He kept his film-making hand in through regular productions with the Surrey Borders Movie Makers and was a keen member of Thames ARTS (Association of Retired Thames Staff) as well as a proud 'Old Dauntseian'. Never one to stop learning, Dick also decided to take up the piano and even took some gliding lessons (reaching the level of successfully undertaking a solo flight).

Alongside these varied enthusiasms, Dick still found plenty of time for his family, by now including four grandchildren, Rhiannon, Owen, Karen and Ryan, who loved to spend time with their 'Bopa' as they called him. There were numerous happy family gatherings at the lovely riverside home, where in an echo of his early days in which he had shown such a love of wildlife and nature, Dick threw himself into planting numerous trees and working with Jean to develop a beautiful garden.

Of course, he also remained actively engaged and involved with the GTC, even driving himself to the GTC Awards event in May 2015 and taking to the stage alongside John Henshall, even though he was by now already suffering with his final illness.

At Dick's memorial service, attended by more than 200 people, there were very many fond memories of this vibrant, inspirational, and yet modest and kind man, who had the vision and strength of will to achieve so much on behalf of cameramen and camerawomen. Above all else, one term kept being used, as indeed it was in the literally hundreds of cards the family received after his death – Dick was a true gentleman.

**Fact File**

Campbell Harper films:  
<http://movingimage.nls.uk/biography/10034>

Formation of the GTC:  
Zerb, issue 75, 'Forty years young: the GTC is 40!'



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