

BRANSCOMBE VOICES FROM THE 1940s

4. Kingsley Squire (1937-2015) Journalist

Kingsley was born on the morning of Sunday April 11th 1937 at the schoolhouse Branscombe when the church bells were ringing for the morning service. Our mother told us this later adding that she regarded the bells as a good omen. She was right and his birth was a great event for us with so much going on in the house.

Mercifully, our mother survived a threatening medical condition which arose at the time of Kingsley's birth. It was attributed to germs in the polluted water supply from the pump outside our backdoor. It's worth recording that he was born into a house with no running water, no taps, no flush toilet, no telephone and certainly, no television! Electricity arrived at the house in the latter part of 1937. There is more about the insanitary conditions at the schoolhouse and school at that time in my piece 'Evacuees'.

We know that by the morning of Wednesday May 12th 1937 my mother had recovered sufficiently to be nursing Kingsley, one month old, on her nursing chair in the living room. She was listening to the BBC broadcast of the Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, probably dandling Kingsley on her knee while keeping an eye on me. I have no memory of the broadcast but I do remember her little nursing chair. In later years she recalled the day - nursing Kingsley and hearing the commentary about the crowds of people on the streets of London, the ceremonial procession, the scene and service in Westminster Abbey. She told us about what she called the miracle of broadcasting which brought it all into our living room in remote Branscombe. Heralded as a landmark in broadcasting, the Coronation was transmitted live across the world to distant corners of the Empire - an aspect which continued to fascinate my parents. Without doubt, this was a memorable national celebration for them and they had to wait eight years for another one - the WW2 victory celebration in the Spring of 1945.

Kingsley became a cheerful, outgoing schoolboy and during the dark days of WW2 the two of us ran wild in the valleys, woods and fields of Branscombe, building tree houses, playing with bows and arrows, looking for adders in the hedge banks, finding birds' nests..... Kingsley liked to talk to me about those days and up to the last his recall was quite remarkable. There is more about what we got up to in my piece 'The Natural World'.

In 1954 at the age of 17 he began his long career as a journalist. I think he gained part of his motivation from my father who wrote a monthly Branscombe column for Pulman's Weekly News. Kingsley's early pieces were about notable Branscombe people and events and his pieces became the basis for his application for a post on the Express and Echo in Exeter. It turned out that Mr Hoare, the Editor, liked his writing and after a successful interview he was accepted as a trainee journalist on the Express and Echo.

Just before he died, Kingsley showed me his letter of appointment - boldly signed 'MCB Hoare, Editor'. In it Mr Hoare asked Kingsley to write more about Branscombe and he emphasised the importance of shorthand skills, telling Kingsley that shorthand at so many words per minute is an essential skill for a journalist. Mr Hoare added that he would be pleased to receive a phone call or letter from Kingsley's father, should there be any questions about his son's appointment. I don't think there was a response, but it was a nice thought. Three of his Branscombe pieces from the Express and Echo March 31, 1955, are reproduced in 'Branscombe Shops, Trades and Getting By' Edited by Barbara Farquharson and Joan Doern. The Branscombe Project 2000. Some of the people he interviewed at that time had memories of Branscombe going back to the latter part of the 19th century, for example his interview with Alfred Perryman (1871-1966).

By the time Kingsley had perfected his shorthand and settled into his role on the Express and Echo, I was a student a couple of hundred miles away so you can imagine my surprise when I picked up a National newspaper with the headline "Journalist crashes his car and is found at the bottom of a railway cutting". The piece named Kingsley and gave the location - near a bridge somewhere close to Exmouth. What on Earth was this about?.....By then there was a phone in the schoolhouse so I rang my parents. "Oh, he's all right, just a little incident - a few scratches". What a relief - a lucky escape, but I never found out what really happened!

A successful apprenticeship on the Express and Echo was followed by time on the Bristol Evening World. Kingsley made many friends in Bristol, where he married Monica in March 1963, towards the end of the severe winter of 1962-63. For 52 years he enjoyed a happy family life with Monica, their two children and five grandchildren

Meanwhile, Kingsley's career continued to flourish. Promoted to Express Newspapers in Birmingham, he reported on the 1966 Aberfan disaster and the 1974 Birmingham pub bombing and then, after a move to Fleet Street, he became an Assistant Editor of the Daily Express.

Retiring to Sidmouth he continued to write, this time for the Sidmouth Herald, becoming involved with local charities, causes and events. So his writing career took him from East Devon and back to East Devon via Fleet Street and during the course of it he became well -known, especially in Sidmouth. A Journalist to the end, his final pieces about his own experience of pancreatic cancer were written in support of the charity Pancreatic Cancer Action. Kingsley died in Sidmouth on November 26th 2015

Geoff Squire April 11th 2018