

## ***Denis John Piper known as Pip by Nic Piper***

The Pipers came to London from Cornwall after WW1.

Albert (?) Piper served in "the Guards" and having survived the trenches settled in Tooley Street with his family where he ran a Doss House. (shades of Orwell ?) He had a son Thomas William and two daughters about whom I know nothing other than that they both married butchers in North London. My mother recalls they turned up at Uncle Ron's wedding both wearing their hair "Gypsy Style" coils around the ears.

Thomas went on to become foreman of Burtts Lime Works living in a house at the rear of 291 Albany Rd. Camberwell. next to the canal. Though Thomas' 1959 driving licence has his address as C/O E.R.Burt & Sons Ltd. 32-5 Canal Bank. Camberwell. S.E.5 by that time the family had been rehoused in Hillingdon.

He married my grandmother Olive who is said to have come from Wales. Thomas and Olive had three sons Terry, Pip and Ron. Thomas (likely born in Cornwall) kept in touch with Cornish relatives, there's a story that he'd set off on a bicycle one summer and on his way hit an elephant dropping in Torquay and suffered concussion, not exactly quickest route to Cornwall, was he following a circus (??). This connection died with him.

As a kind of weird postscript there is a circus family here in Cork called Piper who are the spitting image of us, I periodically get people telling me I must be one of the Piper's !!

As a kid Pip built model aircraft out of scrap, they all were destroyed when the house was bombed, at the time he was sat under a Mulberry tree in the back garden, you find Mulberries and Walnuts planted in a lot of older houses in south London. Mulberry was planted in an attempt to cultivate silk worms. ! believe he got a scholarship to Camberwell College of Art as a teen. As the war progressed they kept an eye on who was being called up locally, it was done alphabetically, so you could work out whose next, as it got close to P Pip enlisted so as to get into a better regiment.

He ended up in the 11<sup>th</sup> Hussars and was sent out to Berlin, just as the war ended. Pip vividly recalled stepping off the train in Berlin, the 11<sup>th</sup> Hussars uniform was black and their cap badge was a skull and crossbones, the platform went deadly quiet and the crowd parted to make way for him, when got to where the regiment was stationed the sergeant major told him to get that f.....g uniform off and get into khaki !!

His regiment was part of Operation Stork (?) where Berlins kids were relocated out into the country to avoid starvation, also in repatriating liberated Russian PoW's by train in horseboxes back to Russia.

On another occasion the regiment was scrambled and sent out in a rush to help line the Berlin corridor, they lined the Daimlers along the top of a ridge and sat waiting, after a couple of hours there was a rumbling noise and a line of Russian T34's lined up on a parallel ridge facing them. The order was passed down the line to wait for the order and then start firing at the join between the T34's turret and body....the order never came, it was a stand-off, the start of the cold war.

Just as well, the Daimler's 2 pounder shell would have simply bounced off a T34, if things had kicked off they didn't stand chance.

I don't know that many people in the west appreciate the full horror of the war on the Russian front, one thinks of the Holocaust as something that only happened to the Jewish population but the reality is that the Germans had raped, pillaged and murdered their way to Moscow and then the Russians raped pillaged and murdered their way to Berlin. In the weeks immediate before the fall of the Third Reich Berlin had been totally flattened, the population was starving and the Russian soldiers rampaged freely. One might suspect the Allies were little better. It's been said the Party wives were favourites as they had a bit of meat left on them !!

To a young lad who probably thought living through the Blitz in south London was pretty bad, I'd imagine Berlin was an eye opener ,,, possibly one of the reasons he hit it off with Romek Marber.,,,he'd seen first-hand where he was coming from...this also seems to be when he started drinking in earnest.

On the other hand he quickly discovered that Berlin was full of pre-war Jazz 78's rare stuff never seen in the UK , and the owners were desperate to sell for cash or food, and that was the start of his collections.,,,

He said later that it was like half of Europe went missing with the Iron curtain going up and I think he was always aware that there was the whole other Europe going on behind the wall...

Post war the Piper family were rehoused in Hillingdon. 67 Sutton Court Road. And I imagine that's where he returned to after getting out of the army. The paintings sold in Chelsea seem to reflect this.

At some point he moved out into one of the famous St. Pauls Studios in Talgarth Road overlooking the great west road, convenient for Nine Elms/ Battersea where he worked in the coal shunting yard.

However by 1954 he'd met and married Mary Elizabeth Twiston Davies and had moved to the top floor flat at, I think 23 (?) Colville Square just off the Portobello Road. My brother Martin (who was sometimes known as Jonathan) was born in September of that year, and I followed in 1956.

I think for the first time he was able to pursue his art full time. I have memories of him spending all his time in his studio, a cupboard like room full of paint and canvas's.

Guinea pigs on the balcony. I remember it as a fairly rough neighbourhood, you'd wake up in the night to the sound of breaking glass and Irish accents cursing the west Indians who were coming over for the work. When 78's were going out of fashion I remember the guys from the Jamaican record shop on the corner of the Portobello Road using old stock like clay pigeons for shotgun practise in the street (one way of saying don't mess with us, were here to stay !!).

Portobello Road was a good location food wise, rationing continued into the fifties, but the market had goodies like whale steaks, pigeon, rabbit and sprats that were not rationed. Sprats were tiny little fish that you deep fried and ate whole ..scrummy.

It would have been during this period that Pip was getting lecturing work and at some point he'd met a publisher who taught him graphic design in exchange for painting lessons and he started doing covers. I don't know who the publisher was.. Whilst Pip was totally working class and indeed remained so for the rest of his life, Liz was upper middle class, her father had volunteered in the first world war and got into the RFC at fourteen, when they guessed he was under age they gave the job of delivering planes to the frontline. Memories of castor oil from the engines giving them the runs constantly (hence the wicker seats) Managed to survive getting repeatedly shot down, and went onto to Cambridge to study Latin first then medicine. By the time Liz and Pip were getting together he had a practise in Harley street .

Pip was able to hone his social skills, he always had the most impeccable manners, first to stand when a lady entered the room, became expert on etiquette and table manners, his accent more "London" than "sowth Lundun " albeit with a lisp.

Around 1955/6 Pip did a series of record sleeves for Melodisc Records new 7" EP catalogue plus some 10', 78's were starting to be replaced by 45's and LP's and the new vinyl's were starting to get bespoke covers. I remember the Jamaican record shop on the corner of the Portobello Road using old stock like clay pigeons for shotgun practise in the street !!

Think around 1958 he started doing covers for Penguin, another friend Germano Facetti was to become Art Director. Germano had survived Mauthausen as a teen. I'm also thinking this would have been around this time that Enzo Appicella became a lifelong accomplice in design ideology with a shared interest in restaurant design....I'm kinda thinking that this was the start of their involvement with the Economist, Peter Dunbar also from Albany Road becoming Art Director and commissioned Romek to do covers before Pip took over the covers and stood in for Peter who had other fish to fry.

Around 1961 we moved into a house on the other side of the Portobello, 34 Elgin Crescent and they had the ground floor for family use and the second floor for Pips studio, studio in the back and front room for the records and entertaining and things really swung.

Number 32 belonged to Coleridge and Gertrude who had a picture of their daughter Sandy as a baby in the arms of Django Reinhardt, Django wanted Coleridge to play bass with him on a tour of America but Coleridge wouldn't go as he'd seen how Americans treated blacks (Pip would have said spades) whilst entertaining troops on American bases. Sandy became our baby sitter and they in turn rented a flat to Shake Keane a trumpet player who knew how to make things swing. Shake was married to a French girl called Crissy....

It would have been during this period that Pip did the Secker & Warburg covers. I remember when he got the Madame Tussauds/Planetarium work he went out bought this industrial gadget like a big green metal cupboard with a light table in the middle and I think a projector above which allowed him to scale up and down and try out layers using gels.

This was a good time for Pip, his work was taking off, but similarly he was spending more time out socialising, I remember us kids hanging out on street outside Frenchie's for hours packets of crisps and glasses of lemonade would appear periodically.

Saturdays Pip would watch the wrestling on TV and we'd practise our moves on the carpet. Sundays he'd go out and buy all the newspapers so he could catch up on the latest news ready for work. Monday was Economist cover day.

He resumed making model aircraft around this time, albeit from Airfix kits and he started Johnny and me doing likewise, he set a high standard to follow his attention to detail was immaculate, colours had to be spot on and his brushwork was amazing, try painting the tyres on a 1/72<sup>nd</sup> scale biplane and you'll get the gist of it, he'd even put in the wire rigging with cotton thread. Top Class. Our pocket money became tied to the price of models and Johnathan got also really good at it. Pip then invented a war game for us, Airfix soldiers and models and matchstick firing model twenty-five pounders, the three of us each had our own army, Pip's was the German army we were the Allies it'd go on for hours and hours across the floor..... His other pastime was knocking up geodesic structures out of matchsticks and glue which he'd paint gold. I don't think any have survived..

He wasn't a conventional parent by any means but us kids adored him. Then out of the blue it all ended, around 1965(?) Liz had had enough and one day packed us kids into the Morris traveller and we went to live in Buckinghamshire in a tied cottage on her father's farm.

Pip moved out to 11 Finborough House, Finborough Road. Fulham with his records, books and clothes and everything else went into storage. He was there until his death. Liz rented out Elgin Crescent. His flat was a single good sized room with adjoining kitchen and a small hallway with bathroom of it. Filled with shelves full of records, room for a single size bed he used like a chaise longue. Next to it a round oak ex-garden table with a lamp made from a replica colt forty-five. Bottom of the bed a soft chair next to a trestle table with angle poise and a stool. The hall and

bathroom were lined with books stacked floor to ceiling , there was an airing cupboard where he kept his clothes neatly folded. Double windows floor to ceiling facing onto Finborough road with a pen and ink by Peter Collins (?) hung between. By 1967(?) we were living in Totnes.

(In the late Sixties) Pip got us a summer job as office boy for Ballantine books in Charlotte St, I'd sleep on the floor of his flat and catch the 52 bus into town, at the time Pip was designing Purnell's history of WW2 for another friend Editor Barrie Pitt who had an amazing/horrific archive of war photos housed at Ballantine's. After work we'd meet up in Frenchie's or the Colony rooms if I could find him !! There was also a gentleman's club in St. James full of leather armchairs but I wasn't known there, felt kinda out of bounds for me to check in on.

Heady times. Muriel Belcher was terrifying sat on her stool by the door barking at strangers and welcoming to regulars and Ian behind bar who weaned us onto tramways/blood on the tracks (White/red wine in lemonade) I was only 13 albeit 6'3", I had to be inconspicuous and ready to tuck in behind the mirrors if plainclothes appeared... Frenchie's was more laid back.

Muriel's you'd never know who you'd find yourself sat next to, another artist or a cabinet minister they all knew Pip.

If I caught up with him it'd either be out to some fancy restaurant with business associates out on the tiles 'til midnight or back to flat where he'd instruct us on cooking steak and chips.

At that time he was off the vodka (it'd stripped the enamel off his teeth) but went through about six bottles of white wine a day. You'd catch him at work in the Economist hand drawing a bit of typography that looked like it had been printed, steadying his hand with a glass of wine. He never seemed to actually get drunk as such, he did get hung over but the hair of the dog soon fixed that, amazing stamina. Remember travelling up to London one time, he was supposed to meet us off train, but usual story so I'd called around Economist building and he'd gone out to lunch, caught up with him in a very fancy Italian restaurant, the whole gang were there, Romek Marber, Peter Dunbar, Germano Facetti, Dennis Bailey, Bobby Hunt et al dozen or so people all work connected having a great time, bottle after bottle disappearing and exquisite food being demolished....followed by brandy and coffee and more brandy, eventually it was time to leave and Pip got the bill, refused to share it and the best part was he simply signed it. I was sat next to him and saw it was well over a thousand quid, a colossal sum in those days. I was gobsmacked. He thought nothing of it, easy come easy go. He was well known throughout the best of the Italian restaurant scene in London and his credit was always good he also had a side line designing restaurants and menus etc Great friends with Mario and Franco at the Trattoria to the point of going on holiday to Italy with them..

He was always very working class. He never wanted to save or own his own place, he was happy to rent what he needed and spend his earnings as fast as he could ...

Lived for the present, never planned ahead, very London. Happy to live north of the Thames and mix it with the most interesting people.

At some point in the early seventies his drinking got the better of him, his doctor feared for his life and didn't think he'd survive another Christmas, she had him committed and he underwent ECT, fortunately he had been training up an understudy from Ravensbourne to carry work on at the Economist (He'd had a mild heart attack previously).

It was pretty devastating, it destroyed his memory and it took a while for him to come back from it but it did make him give up the booze. And he did come back from it.

Fulham kinda suited him, the Economist was his bread and butter, on a Monday morning they'd send a driver to roust him out and get him to work, he enjoyed a mix of work and leisure, simply didn't do anything he didn't want to. he never went by public transport only by walking or taxi. Once they'd gone to press he basically had the rest of the week to himself.

The Chelsea Arts Club became a favourite haunt, he'd meander down the Fulham/Chelsea Road from café to record shop to café ending up there. He'd always sit in a corner back to the wall facing the door so he could clock who came in. He'd talk to anyone he met, always interested in where they might be coming from/up to. Whilst he never drank again he had no problem being in the company of people who did, he loved the way it sharpened the brain and got good conversation going. During this period he overhauled his record collection, his 78's had gone years before to John RT and he methodically replaced old for new, reckon he must have been one of Doug Dobell's all-time best customers. Though having said that some of the classic modern jazz is on mint first editions, that attention to detail again ... important stuff he wanted the original pressing !! He even upgraded the old fifties mono valve amp and Lenco deck for a fancy new one, albeit only because the drive wheel kept slipping, it had a great sound I don't know who put it together for him? Possibly built by Coleridge who had a degree in electronics, Coleridge's own sound system was something else again. The replacement wasn't the best but did the job, it also allowed him to put stuff on tape. At about this time I built him a new set of record shelves so he could get them all across one wall floor to ceiling...freeing up a bit of space in the bedsit.

He never remarried, but always seemed to have a girlfriend lurking. Think my favourite was Annie the admirals daughter who desperately wanted to marry him but he wouldn't, sadly she finally gave up and married someone else. Krisha saw him out, really nice Polish woman (that East European thing again) she really doted on him and was totally devastated when the cancer did for him.

At the time of his death he was trying to get a record project together, looking to demonstrate his ideas on music, I don't know who with. I really never properly understood where his music theory was at, all a bit beyond my comprehension, he

understood what was going on and the references being made in a piece that I'm simply blind to.

Jazz wasn't his only interest he devoured books of all types, and was really well read, he really knew his history, hence the work with Ballantine's. He could discuss tactics with a general or recipes with a chef, amazing mind.,...

How would you describe him? Lean, tall 6'2' jet black eyes and black hair swept back, Mediterranean complexion, he'd say there was a "Spanish" uncle way back... spoke with a distinctive voice and bit of a lisp. Gently spoken but not one to tolerate bad behaviour and he'd tell you like it was ! Not someone you messed with, was able to handle himself.

Favoured Suede shoes (no polishing required) Denims or Chino's, smock style shirts (less buttoning) bomber jackets and lamb's wool jumpers, predominately black (can't go wrong) never ironed anything simply hung out night before to lose the creases ..and always looked fashionably smart.,...

His priorities in life were firstly work and the social life that went with it, clothes, records, books and keeping up with the news and cultural developments. Exclusively. He was not about to remember anybody's birthday or indeed to pay the bills it simply was not on his radar, but similarly he wasn't expecting you to either, kinda kept himself to himself, but if you'd turned up on his doorstep and told him it was your birthday he'd have probably taken you out to a good restaurant and ordered champagne !!

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