

Michael Legg (1929 -2011)

The Society has lost its Vice President but, much more than that, the members have lost a genial friend whose irrepressible enthusiasm and practical knowledge were an inspiration to us all and an invaluable part of every RFS event.

Michael's abiding love of fine furniture, indeed quality in every field, began in the restoration workshop of his father, Ernest Legg, whose business in Dorchester, Dorset, specialising in Regency antiques, was widely known between and after the wars. His grandfather had been a carriage smith there before him, who turned to the restoration of metalwork. From the age of 10, Michael began to learn at the work bench, particularly from the foreman Mr Purseglove. A more Dickensian name you could not wish for, and indeed much of the story of the Leggs, with their links to times past and ways of living and trading in a rural community, could well have been penned by Thomas Hardy himself. Michael's own interest in Hardy and his notable collection of books on Dorset reinforce this connection. But most important to us was the way that Michael's intellect transcended these local traditions in a unique manner, so that he became widely known and respected in the realms of scholarship in the Furniture History Society, the Regional Furniture Society, the Antiquarian Horological Society and beyond.

After he left school at 14, he rented a room from his father and began to deal on his own account, in time taking over the running of the workshop. He did National Service in the Royal Artillery from 1947 - 49 before returning to Dorchester and his lifelong career. Michael's experience at the work bench was crucial to his practical knowledge and his constant fascination with discovering how and why things were made the way they were and how they were used. He was a man of rare memory and his generosity in sharing his knowledge was legendary. If he was uncertain about something he would always offer an informed opinion ('flying a kite' as he called it) and hope for a 'free and frank' discussion, the outcome of which he would modestly accept with good grace while often not giving up

his original stance. Later in life, gaining confidence despite his dyslexia, he discovered his considerable talents for lecturing, always delivered in his charming Dorset burr, and for offering invaluable advice on interior decoration and furnishing, based on historic principles.

Michael may not have been the most practical person in domestic life, but he was always proud of the way he had single-handedly looked after his two sons, Philip and Christopher, until he started courting Miss Winstanley, and so began nearly 40 years of inseparable companionship with Polly - a 'dream team' if ever there was one. He was a man of great honour and principle, which sometimes may have appeared rather old fashioned in the modern world, but one could not help admire. He loved life to the full, particularly over a home-cooked meal with friends, and a good bottle of wine or port. His fund of stories and anecdotes about the trade and life in general was second to none and, remarkably, never seemed to bear any malice.

What do I miss most about Michael? Not so much the companionship of lying under some side table looking at an esoteric point such as the remains of packing straw on an undisturbed tack; not the snoring emanating from the front row of that afternoon or evening lecture; but the unparalleled schoolboy sense of punning humour which some may have groaned at, but which could keep us rolling in our seats for hours on end. Yes, Michael, you are a truly irreplaceable friend.

Christopher Claxton Stevens

