

These are the words spoken by Amaryllis Elphick on the 19th of September 2015 as an introduction to the 'Memorial' to John Powlesland which formed a key part of the 2015 Kirkdale School and Camps Reunion held at the Ivy House Pub, Nunhead, London.

Intro by Amaryllis – a bit of scene setting.

Thank you all for coming today.

During the next part of the day we are going to take some time to celebrate the life and work of John Powlesland and in particular his fundamental role in the establishment and running of Kirkdale School and Kirkdale Camps.

There are many ways to tell the Kirkdale story and there are of course many other people whose contributions to the school, the camps, and often both, also deserve acknowledgement. They will be returned to later. For now the aim is for the focus to be primarily upon John.

To set the scene for what follows it would be helpful to know:

John and Susie both trained as teachers.

They met through Forest School camps where they became camp leaders.

They married and set up home in Gillingham in Kent.

Susie worked as a primary school teacher and John as a secondary school teacher.

In due course they started a family and their first child, Stephen, was born in September 1961. It was their combined experience as mainstream school teachers together with Stephen's arrival that galvanised John and Susie to start taking practical steps towards the establishment of a school where their own and other people's children might be happy and thrive.

They decided to run a summer camp to bring together like-minded parents and others and form a group to take forward the establishment of a school.

The camp which took place in either 1963 or 1964 was advertised under the heading "Progressive School and Camps Association"

After the birth of their second child, Helen, in May 1964 the Powlesland's advanced their plans further. They gave up their jobs, sold their family home and drew down on some of their pensions. A large proportion these assets were used to buy a five year lease on 186 Kirkdale and purchase equipment for the school.

In 1965 the family, John, Susie, Stephen and Helen, moved into 186 Kirkdale together with their cats Minnie and Collette and their dog Sasha. The school opened later that year.

John was the school secretary and dealt with the executive and administrative side of running the school and was directly involved in turning the school into a Limited company and an Industrial Provident Society (or co-op). This process was completed by 11th of June 1965.

Francis (Frank) the Powlesland's third and last child was born in April 1967.

Despite them becoming known as Kirkdale School Camps and latterly Kirkdale Camps John and Susy retained ownership of the camps and John carried on leading or co-leading them with Susie for many years.

John died suddenly and unexpectedly in 1977 at the age of 54.

His family was shocked.

The wider Kirkdale community was shocked.

News of John's death hit people like a sudden and unexpected physical blow to the head.

John's funeral was conducted by Christian rites in large part out of respect to his mother who was a Christian and was present on the day. The service took place at the Honour Oak crematorium but was not followed up by a gathering on the day or by a memorial gathering of any kind once the initial shock had passed.

For this reason we are using today, Kirkdale School's 50th birthday party as an opportunity to reflect on John's life. To say the things we want to say, hear the things we want to hear and think whatever thoughts we need to think.

Amaryllis Elphick

September 2015