

(Francis) John Coffin, 22.07.1932 to 03.02.2015

John Coffin (at Walden 1942-48) was the eldest of three, and the first of his family to go to Friends School, enabled to do so partly by Essex County Council offering to pay the educational fees of children who had passed the 11+ scholarship exams. He was not particularly academic but achieved his school certificate. He was an enthusiastic swimmer and a keen cyclist, but his main enthusiasm was for trains.

Family pressure dissuaded John from applying to join British Rail as a train driver and he compromised by applying for a clerical position first at Kings Cross – this involved him cycling through London each day from his home in Peckham - and later, following the family's move to Romford, to work at Stratford. A benefit of railway employment at that time was free travel in Britain and one return ticket a year to a European destination. He took full advantage of these opportunities, made affordable by his use of Youth Hostels.

One of his recreational activities was folk dancing and it was through this that he met Mary Lindsey. Courtship in a small Austin 7 was followed by marriage in 1959 and this led to parenthood – three daughters and later, three sons-in-law, 10 grandchildren and (to date) four great grandchildren.

Enjoying his young children, John left the railways to train as a teacher but this was not his forte and he was pleased that the Education Authorities offered him a post administering salaries: work he enjoyed first in Essex, then Bedfordshire, and finally back in Essex.

When moving back to Essex from Bedford he felt fortunate to find a house backing on to the railway line at Marks Tey, and was pleased when for his fiftieth birthday the family gave him his own train set. He could be a train driver at last! And in retirement he was pleased to volunteer at the Colne Valley Railway Museum which is where he chose to celebrate his eightieth birthday.

Sadly, John's last years were blighted by Lymphoma and Parkinsons, but he fought hard to get the best out of life during this difficult time. His funeral was in the woodland burial ground at Wrabness, close to the railway line from Colchester to Harwich; passing trains sounded their sirens in salute. May he enjoy the trains passing by for years to come.

Christopher Coffin