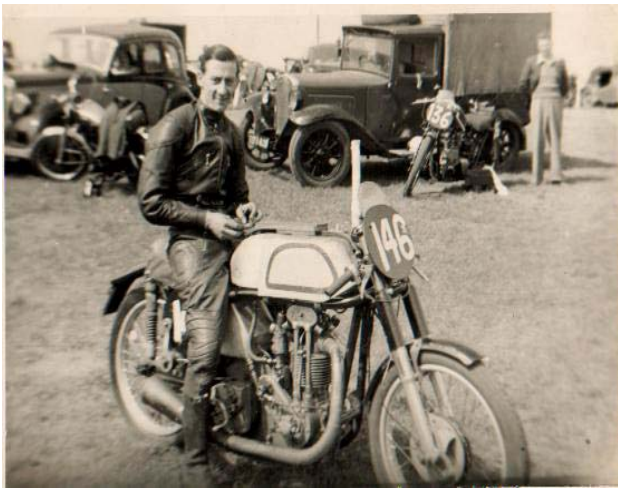


# Dennis Young – an appreciation

## Early Days

Throughout his life Dennis had an extra drive! He had a youthful obsession with motor cycles which led to motor cycle road racing in the early 1950s at about the same time that Geoff Duke became world champion. He raced at several tracks, including Brands Hatch (his favourite circuit), Silverstone, Snetterton, Thruxton, and Crystal Palace. His highest achievement was in the 1957 Isle of Man TT races where, as the sidecar man to his brother Ted he finished in 7th place, quite an achievement considering nearly all the other outfits were factory sponsored.



In 1955 at Oulton Park, Cheshire, he crashed during a practice session on his solo machine suffering a fractured skull. In hospital he met Ann, a nurse who became his wife in March 1956. They first lived in a bungalow alongside the River Lee, in Essex, but then in 1960 he got wind of a house for sale, in Brentor. He moved to Devon, and arrived on a dark winters night

*The following article by Dennis - originally published in the Brentor News in January 2003 - gives a flavour of the change in lifestyle they encountered when they first moved to Brentor.*

## The winter of 1962/63 in Brentor.

Sunday the 30th December and Monday the 31st December 1962 were spent digging out. Single line working had then been achieved on the railway. More men and troops arrived. Still bitterly cold. On Thursday 3rd January 1963 the snow returned. By afternoon the wind rose and with it came the second blizzard. In Burn Lane we remained huddled inside the house. I cannot

remember if power had returned. The now released snow ploughs were kept busy running up down the single opened line to keep it open. In the night the wind dropped. Between Friday 4th January and Tuesday 8th January, calm conditions but colder with more snow on the way.

Wednesday 9th January saw another severe blizzard arrive suddenly. The lines again became blocked with the two snow ploughs plus two other trains part derailed buried. In Burn Lane we were still cut off from the outside world.

Thursday 10th January and the blizzard, the third, had gone, but some more very heavy drifting during the night. Colder still. We could hear the many men and troops down on the line. By evening even they had stopped, still falling temperatures and moving deep drifts had brought them to a halt. Next day they carried on, we could hear them as they kept striking the line. Calm conditions came to stay, possibly even colder, still way below freezing in the day. It was even colder at night.

With the railway partly open, we could move at last. As I recall I travelled to Plymouth each day (no snow there) for about three weeks, then driving there in my A35, by way of Bowden Down and Westcott. The road past Brentor was blocked for some time. The three weeks travelling by train I remember clearly, also driving my A35 with no chains proved interesting, if a little hairy when I kept sliding on the ice. Happily there were not many other vehicles out.



Lack of space prevents me from doing anything more than outline the fourth blizzard, which struck on Tuesday 5th February 1963, together with a force 9 gale causing enormous drifts even deeper than before. The lines were again blocked for days. Trains were buried under the drifts and troops returned once more.

Slowly life returned to normal, thanks to the railway and the many men and troops who worked so hard out in the wind, cold and snow, often badly protected. Somebody told me many years ago that it had cost many millions of pounds to keep the line clear between Mary Tavy and Meldon. If the blizzards come back, God knows what we will do!

## The Brentor Years

Dennis made many and varied contributions to the life of the village over nearly half a century. He was actively involved in the Village Hall, Brentor Playing Field (organising of the Brentor Sports Day and family night for many years), Brentor Commons Association, Brentor Parish Council, and the Parochial Church Council. He was a Bingo caller, he wound the clock in Christ Church for thirty years and he organised the planting of many trees around the Parish and the Playing Field. In 1985 he helped establish the Jean Whitfield Memorial walks which continue raising funds for leukaemia treatment facilities in Plymouth. In 1989 he helped organise the beating of the parish bounds.

Dennis had a strong social conscience. He was politically active and always said what he thought - not always an easy task. Nevertheless, his great knowledge, compassion and commitment meant that he had the respect of all who knew him and he had friends from all walks of life.

He always stood up for those in most need and believed strongly in the ideal of equality. He influenced his daughter's ideals so that she became not just a teacher, but a teacher of children with special educational needs.

He was an avid reader and self educator. He believed that education was the corner stone of life and never ceased learning himself. He read, listened and thought about the world and wrote extensive notes about the multitude of subjects that interested him. The library, bookshops and book stalls were firm friends. Faced with a choice between buying a drink or a book, Dennis always chose the book. Amongst his many interests were astronomy, sundials, space exploration, chess, violins, classical music, art, Dartmoor archaeology, local history, family history, motorbikes, zeppelins, woodturning, spinning wool, goats, designing and making things.

## Acknowledgements

*This brief appreciation has been compiled from notes written by Dennis' & Ann's children Stephen and Penelope (Penny) and by Dennis' brother Clifford.*

As an **endnote**, the following verse from a beautiful poem written by Penny in April 1997 about a walk on Dartmoor paints a memorable personal picture:

By the edge of a seeping patch of bright green moss  
You prod your stick.  
Then push it deep down, down again,  
Until its top is level with the springy surface  
And to push it further would render it lost  
Amongst the ever swirling brown of peat bog water.  
The child that watches you with wonder, raises a hand to push back  
The wisps of her long brown hair, blown now across her eyes.  
Your eyes.  
The bright green is deceptive. The moss dips and bounces  
Back, suspended like the taut surface of a trampoline  
Under your bending knees.  
You blink.  
Then look again to see your daughter.

My father was a wonderful man, who chose to lead a quiet contemplative life. He lived in a house he loved, with a wife he loved very dearly. He certainly used his time on earth well.

**Penny Newman (nee Young)**