

PEOPLE WHO HAVE SHAPED HUNSTANTON Number 2 of the series.

THE ROLE OF THE IMAGINATION IN THE LIFE OF BRIAN HOLMES by Margi Blunden

Albert Einstein wrote:

'Knowledge is limited to all that we know. Imagination embraces the whole world.'

Brian Holmes shared this quote with me when we spoke on the phone recently. For him, and indeed for many others, this saying has been pivotal in shaping his life.

In Hunstanton we are very fortunate that Brian chose to retire here. The story behind that statement lies in what Brian has created for the town in terms of reflecting back to residents and visitors alike what started it, what led to its growth and what we have lost, besides what we still have today to cherish and respect.

Brian is a man whom Albert Einstein would have recognised simply because he is a man of great imagination and creativity.

Born in Norwich in 1932, his family line is from Norfolk. But when Brian was four, the family moved to Wolverhampton. His father worked for Boulton and Paul, a well-known and general manufacturing firm founded in Norwich. The company sold its aircraft manufacturing component in 1934, relocated in 1936 under the name of Boulton Paul Aircraft, and Brian's father went with them to Wolverhampton.

Aeroplanes and locomotives are in Brian's blood. His father had been an observer in the Royal Flying Corps in World War One planes, and later he had helped build the locomotive 'Flying Scotsman'.

Although Brian failed the 11 plus (which was an exam all children took in those days aged 11) his father believed in him and paid for him to go to grammar school. But it wasn't academic learning that interested Brian – it was creating and making things. With the perception of a truly thoughtful parent, his father took him out of grammar school and got him enrolled as an engineering apprentice with Boulton Paul, which led Brian to technical college.

Having first qualified with two certificates in Production Engineering over five years while an apprentice, he later taught Engineering Drawing, Maths and Mechanics two nights a week for ten years. Here he taught the rudiments of design and how to build and make. He encouraged the students to follow their innate creativity, to be inventive, to work hard just as he himself was doing.

But first came national service with the RAF, which gave Brian a very different experience. Here he learned the value of comradeship in a military organisation. The sense that the men were all in it together gave them a particular bond. It also gave Brian some new skills as an armourer. He learned to load guns, rockets and bombs into aircraft. Whilst on duty in Malta (his first foray abroad) he became command armourer. His natural interest in planes and people made him someone for leadership wherever he was.



These qualities meant that in all his subsequent jobs in engineering, he ended up managing and organising. He is a great believer in wealth creating industries and this is what he put his heart and soul into. Once out of the RAF he worked as Technical Manager designing chemical plant; eventually becoming a self-employed consultant, and throughout his career Brian kept some of his design drawings. They represent homage to a man who was part of an industrial Britain, which he has seen disappear. For Brian, witnessing national decline

Brian kneeling on top of one of his designs
in the manufacturing industries has been a saddening process. He is one of the generation who kept Britain's name on the stamp:

'MADE IN BRITAIN'

Brian's imagination never stops simply in a job. He has always created and built models –



Brian's dolls house



usually to his own design for his three sons, and then for his grandchildren he built a small caravan they could play in.

In addition he made a full-size sleigh on wheels for Lions International. Dressed as Father Christmas he took it around the town of Retford, where he lived at the time, for the Lions distributing small presents to children. As far as he knows the sleigh is still in Retford.

His crowning achievement was building his own plane. This full-size replica plane was modelled on a Boulton and Paul 1919 P6 biplane. It was put in a (former) museum of which he was a founder member in Wolverhampton.

After the museum was forced to close, his plane was transferred to the Norfolk and Suffolk Aviation museum in Flixton, near Bungay, Suffolk. But back in 2003 it was transported from Wolverhampton to appear in the Paris Airshow. A proud and well-deserved moment for Brian.



Full sized replica modelled on a 1919 Boulton & Paul P6 biplane

If his father influenced his interest in planes so he encouraged Brian's interest in locomotives. The knowledge Brian amassed, and the care he has taken to record and store his research into, not only planes and locomotives, but of the environment, surroundings and buildings of the places he has lived in, has been to Hunstanton's great benefit. Watching the final death throes of Hunstanton Pier when fire took hold of it, his enquiring mind started to ask questions. The inner journey he began that day led to the many benefits he has bequeathed to this town.

Brian is a man who does things thoroughly. He knows his stuff. He has followed his imagination into the many corners of Hunstanton history to build a picture of the vision of one man – its founder, Henry Le Strange.

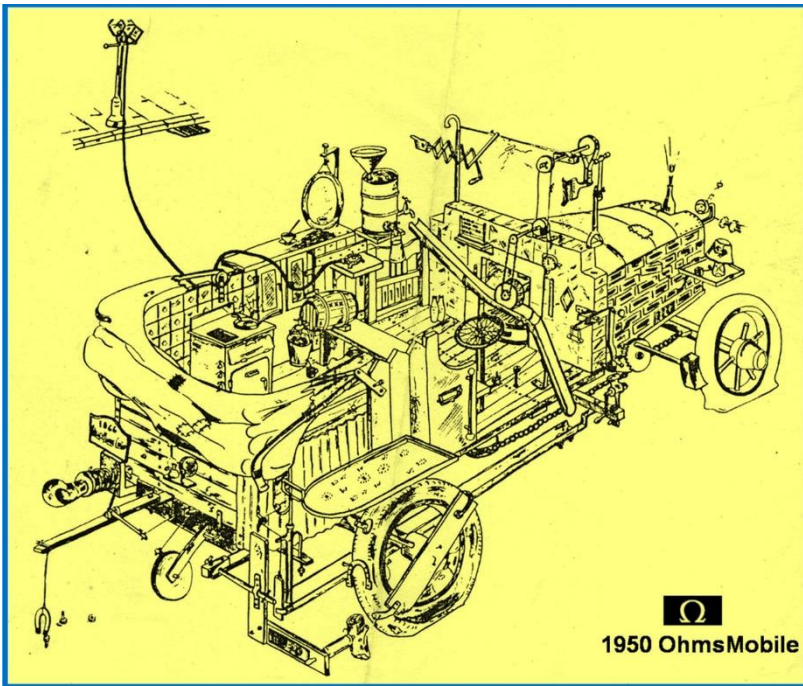
Realising just how many facilities have been lost to the town over the years, he has focussed the attention of visitors and residents on the heritage the town has. Gradually he has built up a large collection of photos and items.

One of his main focuses here has always been the railway. He has curated five exhibitions in the Coal-shed Gallery (adjacent to the railway signal he put up in the South end car park) to celebrate the history of the Lynn - Hunstanton line. When the 150th anniversary of the birth of the line arrived, he organised a larger exhibition in the Town Hall which did much to encourage rail enthusiasts, residents and visitors towards joining the growing number of voices calling for a renewal of the line. The current state of affairs on the A149 in the summer underlines the need for this, and there is now a local group which is working towards this goal.

But he did not stop there. Once a Heritage Centre became a possibility in the shop premises opposite the Green, he spent four months setting up all the material he had collected and donated to it. Watching it unfold was like watching his initiative blossom into hard copy. Others contributed to the displays such as John Smith and Norman Wye as well as Ken Arnott and Harry Croad both of whom are sadly no longer with us.

Alongside the heritage material, he has been responsible for getting a copy of the Henry Le Strange portrait hung in both the Town Hall and the Golden Lion. Furthermore he initiated the idea of getting a statue of the founder of this town made, and, with William Searle, who took on the task of turning that into reality, Brian was there to give historical advice. Over the years of the Hunstanton and District Civic Society's monthly talks - many of which he organised - at the Town Hall, Brian provided pictures on the screen of Hunstanton past and present.

Also he compiled presentations of the history of Hunstanton and the history of Boulton and Paul which, with John Maiden and David Jones, he showed all over Norfolk.



Brian's drawing in the style of Heath Robinson

The imaginative work of the renowned cartoonist and kinetic sculptor Rowland Emmett has always had great appeal to Brian, but it was the work of Heath Robinson that inspired him to create his own humorous drawings of aircraft and cars. Together with more obscure subjects he often chose to enliven his digital presentations with some wacky humour.

His themes always included showing the audience the glories of Hunstanton past, showing photos of the Blue Lagoon, the Boating Lake, the Pier, the railway, the older buildings highlighting an era when Hunstanton truly lived up to Henry Le Strange's original vision of an attractive bathing resort. This vision

of Henry's encompassing a Green which faces the sea, inspired the building of lovely houses from Victorian lodges to Arts and Crafts 'cottages' (often designed by our local architect Herbert Ibberson).

We have a town we can be proud of.

If there is one sombre note in all this, forgive me. I think Brian himself would acknowledge that whilst the efforts of himself and others have done much to preserve the heritage we have, there has been much which we have been unable to save way before his arrival in the town. The reasons for this merit another article but it is certainly true that many of us mourn the destruction and decay of parts of Hunstanton which gave it some of its wide appeal and charm.

The lesson to learn here is surely in the determination of a man like Brian. His courage in never deserting his imagination and creativity is fundamental to the flowering of the preservation of Hunstanton's heritage today. He honours the initiative of designers, engineers, and architects, all of whose imaginations have been instrumental in what has been preserved in and about our town and in the Heritage Centre today.

Now situated in the former Bank premises on Greevegate it has been attracting thousands of visitors a year. If you haven't already seen some of Brian's work, once it is open again you can call in and be ready to enjoy the fruits of his research and knowledge.

Brian is part of a creative process which he tapped into in his early life, showing that faith in following the imagination is what leads us forward to embracing our own intelligence and thereby grasping the opportunity to influence and shape our world.

This piece is dedicated to Dianne, Brian's wife, without whose understanding, patience and huge support none of his achievements would have been possible.

Margi Blunden is a member of the Civic Society as well as a volunteer in the Heritage Centre. She interviewed Brian Holmes in January 2021. The first in Margi's series was of Hunstanton and Heacham's connection to Poland published in our December 2020 Newsletter.