

# Melville Watts OBE: 1923 - 2010

## Tributes

**Forest of Dean MP Mark Harper:**  
When I think of Melville Watts, I think of Lydney Hospital and the Friends.

He was a tireless champion of the Hospital, the Friends and indeed of the town of Lydney itself. Our community was truly a better place for his presence and his loss will be keenly felt.

At what will be a difficult time for them my thoughts and prayers are with his family and close friends.

**Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire Sir Henry Elwes:**

Melville was a Forester through and through and his contribution to the welfare of Forest people was outstanding. He not only gave years of service to Lydney Hospital and as a magistrate and Forest Verderer but he also faithfully recorded the history of the Forest for future generations.

We will all miss Melville's genuine interest in and care for other people and his enormous humour and zest for life. I send Jane and his family my deepest sympathy.

**Councillor Marilyn Smart OBE, chairman of Forest of Dean District Council**

Melville Watts will be very sadly missed. He was a pillar of the community and a very successful businessman. I was delighted to be able to present him with the Ambassador of the Year award in the 2008 Pride of the Forest Awards.

He has put so much wonderful work in during his long involvement of over 50 years with Lydney Hospital for the benefit of the people of the Forest of Dean. I feel very privileged to have known Melville. He was a true gentleman. My thoughts and prayers are with Jane and his family at such a sad time."

**Health champion John Hale:**  
As a caring man I have never known his equal and I have told him this. His kindness, his gentleness, his concern for the people of Lydney and the Forest radiated from his own personality.

I was so pleased when on July 30 when in his presence Jan Stubbings dedicated the Melville Watts OBE Outpatients' Department at Lydney Hospital. How fitting he ended his days on this earth, in the hospital he has done so much for. My word, like so many other folk I shall miss him. His parting words when he would come to see me were always 'on to go'.

**Marie Fraser Griffiths of FW Harvey Society:**  
Melville - Thank you so much for your support of the FW Harvey Society and for your caring and thoughtful consideration of others, including me! You have taken a piece of my heart with you.

**The Rev Patricia Pinkerton:**  
A part of Lydney history has passed on into the future. Melville was truly the Man of the People. He was not only a gentle man, he was a gentleman. Always he tried to make people feel a part of something good, and he worked towards making, that good. He was a humanitarian, being born into class, but never did he make someone feel less than another.

All men were equal unless they did the dirty on one another, and then Melville would be there to see what was right and just. Tirelessly he visited the sick and lonely, made each Lydney organisation feel they were the one he belonged to, and most of all never forgot what it had cost to keep Britain free.

**Mayor of Lydney Councillor Bob Berryman:**  
What can you say about Melville - he is simply irreplaceable? He was Mr Lydney and knew everybody in the town. The workers at the factory thought the world of him.

He was a fantastic person who was such a strong supporter of everything that was Lydney.



**SMALL BEGINNINGS:** John Watts, left, and his brother Arthur outside their father's Lydney Ironmongers.



**VIP VISITORS TO WATTS 1996:** From left, MD Industrial Tyre Division Doug Pearson, Mr Melville, PM John Major and Paul Marland MP.



**WATTS GROUP BOSSES 1990s:** Melville, seated, with his twin brother Cecil and nephew John Thurston.

# The boss they called Mr Melville



by Janet Hughes

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**TO hundreds of workers he was simply 'Mr Melville'.**

There were so many members of the family working at the Watts tyre factory in Lydney that office staff used their first name over the tannoy. But like the workers on the shop floor, Mr Melville started out by learning a trade.

His father Arthur, a practical inventor, insisted his sons learned the family business from the bottom up.

Melville started work "on the tools" as an apprentice with Watts (Factors) soon after leaving Wycliffe College in Stonehouse which was evacuated to Lampeter during the war.

His twin brother Cecil recalled: "While still at school, Melville had wanted to join the Navy but his father had given him four reasons why he should not: there would not be a war, promotion would be difficult, he would have to retire early and the pay was terrible."

He joined the Home Guard but felt unable to stay at home in a reserved occupation while his brothers Geoffrey and Cecil were away at war.

Against his father's wishes he volunteered for the RAF and was stationed at Portage la Prairie in Canada as a trainee pilot.

After returning to England he was sent to

Burma as an engineering fitter.

Cecil said he was brave when faced with difficult situations and recalls him calmly writing notes in the back seat when the throttle got stuck as elder brother Geoffrey piloted a private plane.

After more than two years at war he returned to Lydney where he became one of the first salesmen in the Watts Tyre and Rubber Company and he was put in charge of Watts Metal Industries in 1953. In 1958 he was appointed managing director of Watts Factors Ltd.

He was devastated when his father sold Watts Metal Industries, the boiler works, to AGA in 1960 to raise money to expand the tyre side of the business.

In 1960 he was made managing director of the Watts parent company and served as chairman between 1997 and 1998.

He became honorary president in 1999 and only recently resigned as a trustee of the pension fund.

Last year the tyre group was bought by Premia Group Limited which is made up of senior Watts management.

Watts Group chairman John Thurston says the sale enabled the group to concentrate on more successful sectors such as UK truck distribution, polymeric sheet production and Lydney-based Urethane manufacturing.

But he said Melville was always concerned about the impact of such restructuring on the hundreds of staff from the Forest who have



**THE BOARD OF WATTS OF LYDNEY:** From left, back row, Cecil Watts, BS Horspool, Melville, EG Wallace, front, from left, Frank Williams, Arthur Watts, John Watts, John James.



**ENTHUSIAST:** Melville with his 1914 Daimler Lorry.

## The charity worker

From Page 2  
Legion.

He served in Burma during the war but also served 27 years as a local magistrate.

But he is best known for his charity work and often dressed up to perform at community events and would

sometimes bring a fairground organ or fire engine.

He leaves a second wife Jane and children Sarah-Jane, Andrew and Simon. He also leaves twin brother Cecil, sister Joyce.



**AT HOME 2008:** Melville Watts is pictured at his home Priors Lodge in Bream.

worked for Watts over the years.

"Melville was an extremely fair and generous person who had a huge feeling of ongoing responsibility towards his staff and employees," said Mr Thurston.

"If ever there was a setback in trade or we had to change the business by closing factories or making people redundant, Melville would find that very, very difficult.

"He visited ex-employees if they were ill and kept in contact with many of them until their dying day. I've lost count of the number of eulogies he has given at funerals.

"I think one of the characteristics of a family business is that employees become part of your extended family and Melville was one of the most caring bosses anybody could have."



**TAKING THE PLUNGE:** Melville raising funds for Lydney hospital complete with duck.

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### Lord Bledisloe, Rupert Bathurst:

I felt a sharp sense of loss upon learning that Melville had gone, both on behalf of Lydney and also as a personal friend.

Throughout my life at Lydney, Melville has always felt like the backbone of the community, and came to represent for me all that was kind, selfless, caring and tireless, especially around Lydney Hospital, which he fought for and nurtured over more than 40 years with a fierce passion.

I am extremely proud of my family's close connection with Melville and was very touched, when we moved here seven years ago, to be sought out and included in matters involving the Friends of Lydney and District hospital, The New Zealand Trust and many other local concerns. Watching him at work, I was awe-struck by the intense devotion he fostered in those around him, the depth and breadth of his knowledge around local history and his heartfelt and action packed personal concern for many, many local families, whose lives are going to be emptier now that he has gone.

A couple of months ago, I asked him to sit for a portrait, and we had three long sessions in my studio where we chatted happily about a huge range of subjects, the epic parade that he modestly organised for the 75th birthday of John Watts "Transport Pioneer, my great grandfather's 90th birthday celebrations through Lydney town, his films on a broad range of Lydney history to name but a few; and through our gentle uninterrupted time together we became really good friends, and I feel deeply saddened that this new relationship has ended so suddenly.

In a very real sense, it is truly the end of an era, and Lydney has lost a very, very good friend.

### President of the Royal British Legion Lydney Branch Mervyn Rudge:

He is going to be a big loss and should have had a knighthood for everything he did, not just for Lydney, but for the Forest.

The words sadly missed could have been written for him. He was irreplaceable. His energy and his enthusiasm rubbed off and that is why he was such a good figurehead for the Friends and the Legion. He inspired us all and people would put their hands in their pocket because of the way Melville was.

He tried to make it fun. He was a magician and a comedian and had collection of Victorian mechanical toys which he used to collect money. If ever you raised any money for the Friends, you would get a handwritten thank you letter back.

He never had a bad word to say about the young people and supported all the youth groups, if not financially by going to their dining nights.

I know he used to send out Christmas cards with donations to local groups like the ATC and the sea cadets.

As a boss he was firm but fair and people knew where they stood. He started out sweeping the floors and worked his way up to the top. Everybody knew him as Mr Melville and, until he was ill, he never missed a funeral. He was kindness personified and should have been knighted.

### Stan Rudge who runs the Lydney RBL Poppy Appeal:

He was the anchor of the Legion. His family donated the building so even if the club folds, the Lydney branch will carry on.

I've been the poppy organiser for six years and Melville was there to support me from day one. All I had to do was pick up the phone and he would be there.

He did everything from collecting the boxes in Bream to giving his talks and showing his films to raise money.



THE VERDERER 2004: Melville, centre, at the unveiling of a boundary stone in Bream.



HOSPITAL CENTENARY 2007: From left, Jan Stubbings PCT chief executive, the late Lord Bledisloe and Friends chairman Melville.



NAMING OF WARD 2010: Back row from left, Charles Carson, Bridget Thomas, Jane Watts, John Hale; front row, from left, Baroness Royall, Melville Watts and Jan Stubbings, chief executive Glos NHS.

# 'Service before self' was this man's motto

by Janet Hughes

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MELVILLE Watts knew he was lucky to have been born into the Watts family and was determined to put something back.

He once said: "I might have had a silver spoon but I used it for the good of the community."

He was most famous as the chairman of the Friends of Lydney and District Hospital.

He first joined the hospital's welfare committee in 1959 and is widely recognised as the driving force behind the Friends which raised over £1 million during his time at the helm.

Mr Watts inherited his community spirit from his grandfather and went on to become one of the most visible members of the Watts family.

Back in 1965 he organised a cavalcade of transport for the whole community to mark his Uncle John's 75th birthday.

A year later he was instrumental in his uncle's decision to hand over Lydney town hall to the people of the town.

Over the following decades his patronage helped raise money and

awareness from causes ranging from the local cricket team to the Royal British Legion.

He was fiercely proud of the Forest of Dean and one of his proudest achievements was being elected a Verderer in 1980.

His passion for the area led him commission professionals to make 16mm films recording ancient customs such as freemining.

His film about the River Severn won a Gold Award at the Chicago International Film Festival in 1983.

The unique archive has been screened to groups as diverse as prisoners in Gloucester Prison to the local WI to raise money for good causes.

He was also an avid collector and was often seen at fetes or other fundraising events with his fire engine or fairground organ.

In 2008 Melville was awarded the Pride of the Forest Award for his work in the community by district council chairman Marilyn Smart.

His family says he always tried to abide by the motto "service before self".

And he was never more passionate when that involved helping his home town of Lydney. "It marks a change of chapter for Lydney but not the end of a book," said John Thurston who is now at the helm of the Watts Group.



COMMUNITY SPIRIT 2010: Melville at the launch of the FW Harvey Society.



LEADING THE WAY 2007: Melville marches on Westminster to save Lydney hospital from closure.

## Father-of-three who lived family life to the full



ST GEORGE'S DAY EVENT 2008: Melville and Jane.

ARTHUR Melville Reid Watts was born at the family home Highfield in Lydney.

His parents Arthur and Louise already had daughter Frances and son Geoffrey when he and twin brother Cecil arrived in the world on 14 August 1923. Joyce came later.

Young Melville was the quiet twin but in later life he became extrovert, an entertainer and a joker who loved dressing up and playing practical jokes on his family and friends.

Although he could be quite traditional in his demeanour and manners, he liked nothing more than donning one of his collection of outfits

for a performance or arranging an April Fool. He had a collection of Tommy Cooper hats and frequently put on a false moustache to help out at dinners, concerts and community events.

But his favourite party piece was the Albert and the Lion monologue by Marriott Edgar.

Melville married Josephine Watkins in August 1963. They had three children, Sarah-Jane, Andrew and Simon, who still live locally.

Sadly Josephine died in November 1978 at the age of 48.

But he found happiness again with doctor's daughter Jane Carson and

they married in April 1984.

He now has seven grandchildren - Laura, Oliver, Megan, Amy, Beth, Holly and Katie. All remember his love of jokes and his joy at family celebrations.

Although he probably never used a computer keyboard in his life, he was meticulous about sending handwritten letters to thank people for their help or wish them well.

In his early days he was a wicket keeper for Lydney and retained his fondness for cricket.

His family remember him as a "doer" and a "fixer" who was proud of his roots.