

## Tom Rosser 1929 - 2011



**HE** was never plain old Tom - often, as with many notable musicians and artists, he was fondly called simply by his surname, so it was just Rosser. At other times he could be Uncle Tom or perhaps Captain Tom, and I would add another title...Gentleman Tom.

Tom Rosser was certainly all these things. Avuncular, most definitely, to so many young aspiring jazzers, quite a few of whom are, in their more mature form, shall I say, here to pay tribute to him today.

Anyone keeping an eye on Facebook, Twitter or old-fashioned e-mail these last two weeks will have seen the deep regard in which Tom was held, and read the messages of appreciation for his encouragement and advice. The thoughts of drummers such as Simon Palser, Clarence Nugent, Mike Pearce and, from the Adamant New Orleans Parade Band, Mike Kennedy I found especially moving.

Indeed, Tom was very much a father figure for generation after generation of up-and-coming musicians, a trait which, incidentally, which made him such a perfect choice to be President of the Preservation Jazz Society, a role of which he was very proud.

Then there was Captain Tom, a title earned from his years at the Gourock Rope Works and the Reardon-Smith shipping line. It was while he was at Gourock that Tom started his little cottage industry of producing bags and cases for musicians from off-cuts of canvas. Initially, I confess, it was for his own use (and Alun Jones recalls how all-embracing these bags were and how back-breakingly heavy! Tom himself called them Hernia Bags) but soon everyone wanted one and the Cardiff jazz scene became awash with enough canvas to keep the Mary Rose in full sail. And then it was on to Reardon-Smith where Tom was charged with dispatching people and objects all around the world. The capacity for things going horribly wrong was immense but Tom took it all in his stride, chuckling as he recalled the day's trials, tribulations and mishaps when we all met up with the Mike Harries band in the evening.

It's that happy laid-back approach to life, that chuckle, that is my fondest memory of Tom Rosser, the ready lop-sided smile usually accompanied by a satisfied pull on his trusty pipe.

So there he sat, at the back of the band, producing a cloud of smoke that would have done a Mississippi riverboat proud, and effortlessly laying down a drive, in combination with the likes of Howell Bines, Lynn Saunders, Eddie Williams, Kevin and John Couch, that made our jobs in the front line so easy and which contributed in no small way to the praise Ken Colyer lauded on the band in an interview.

Nothing was too much trouble for Tom, no-one too much of a burden to spend time with. All of which made him Gentleman Tom in my book.

There were other contributions to the music scene along the way - among them Tom's Happy Pals and his coming up with the name Midnight Special for another musical creation. Everyone

here will have their own special memory of the man.

But above all of this stood Tom Rosser's greatest accomplishment - his partnership with his adored Sylvia. It was always Rosser and Sylvia from the start of time, it seemed, and they were always so wonderfully loving and comfortable with each other. Having a jazzier as a husband is not the easiest of lives and Tom was so fortunate to have found her. I'm sure Sylvia would say she was lucky, too. Our hearts are with you today, Sylvia, and the whole jazz community will always be there for you.

Which brings me to a final thought. I was at Willingham Jazz Club in Cambridgeshire at the weekend and took the opportunity to say a few words about Tom on the microphone as a precursor to playing a very heartfelt Closer Walk With Thee. I observed that they would never have heard of Tom Rosser but that they would certainly know him. He was one of them, a New Orleans jazz lover. He was family. And the audience in this jazz club on the other side of the country stood and applauded Tom for a minute.

I think we can do no less today. Please stand and let's hear it one more time for Tom Rosser, the most-loved and loving of husbands and the dearest of friends...

John Scantlebury  
October 7, 2011



An early Marching Band circa 1973 Tom with 12yr old Simon Paler and Mike Pearce. Reeds Alun Jones and John Scantlebury bringing up the rear Chris Hodgkins and Eddie Williams.