

Chair of PMF Denis Wilkins, meets up with Peter Vosper

Our first 'conversation' was with Peter Vosper, a well-known business leader and philanthropist in the City of Plymouth and South West Region.

Where were you born? In the old Freedom Fields, I think, because in 1943 although my mum was running a hotel in Looe (Tremalec) it was nearest maternity ward so sadly I can never be Cornish!

Schooling? The family moved to run another hotel in Newton Ferrers (Beacon Hill) after the war and I went on to Kelly for secondary education. There I had a remarkable group of teachers who realised the only way to keep me out of trouble was to keep me occupied. In the winter I played rugby, fives and football (banned but we still played!). In the spring, hockey, fives, cross country running and 7-a-side rugby. In the summer athletics, cricket or tennis. I boxed for a while but got fed up with bashing and being bashed by my friends. Kelly was the first public school to affiliate with the Royal Marines and I was the most senior boy to volunteer so was put in charge. I couldn't keep quiet, so the English teacher forced me to join the Dramatic society and the Literary and Debating society. I had difficulty making time for study! The point of all this is to illustrate why I love live theatre, pretty much all sport, and understand that health is the most important thing if you want to feel good and be active for ever.

What about career choice? My mother was clear that if I wished to go into any business I first needed to qualify as a lawyer or accountant. Thus, in 1961 I started as an articled clerk with Whitmarsh, Edgcumbe, and Preedy at 70, Mutley Plain. Stanley Edgcumbe was a great character who did heroic things in the Fleet Air Arm during the war. He was a fair but tough boss.

How did you get into the auto business? My father started selling bicycles before the war - my mother told me she lent him the money to buy his first car for resale. When my father joined up, grandfather, who was in the radio business handled some sales during the war but in January 1946 Vospers started up in Willow Plot (off Russell Street) with a one car showroom. We became a limited company in 1951 and moved to new premises on the corner of Princess Square, with a large showroom and my grandfather sold his beautiful house in Newton Ferrers (Casa del Rio) to put in the necessary capital. He worked with his son until the early 1960s. I joined the firm in 1966 as Accountant at the end of my articles - a cashier had stolen some money so I was considered useful! I held this post for three years and became General Manager in 1970 when we were appointed Main Ford Dealers for Plymouth. My training under my father was superb and working with him for seven years brought us very close. Sadly, he suffered a stroke in 1974 and later that year succumbed to a heart attack aged 54 years. Thus, at the tender age of thirty-one, I found myself Managing Director of Vospers. My mother became Chairman. We worked hard; we took opportunities as we found them and supported by a great team the business thrived.

Successes? Over the years the firm has won many awards of which the one I am most proud is the Ford Chairman's Award, decided on the votes of its customers and awarded to the top 3% of British dealers; we have won this now over twenty times!

Aside from Family, what makes you tick? Well, obviously I am very proud of Vospers. I like people. I am a Plymothian and a passionate supporter of Devon and Cornwall its way of life, the sea and countryside, its sport, its food and many really good people some of whom I am privileged to call friends. As a Plymothian and long-term supporter, Plymouth Albion is my rugby team, but Exeter Chiefs are the stars and Cornish Pirates have the best day out! I like being busy, particularly with projects which are important and where I can help make a difference. Take for example the Theatre Royal - our firm was a founder sponsor in 1982 and it was a great honour to be asked to join the Board in 1991. I remained until 2017 and loved being a very small part of its success but mostly I am proud of what it has done for people in Plymouth and the region, from all walks of life.

Vosper's Annual Golf day is a something of a Devon and Cornwall fixture? Is that your main hobby? I wish I could say that I am an avid golfer but the only time I play is in the Vosper's Golf Day! It started as a way of

entertaining our customers but so many of them were generous people who liked a good day out with lots of fun, they were very happy to contribute and support local charities. In the 25 years since we started, they have donated over £120,000 - in fact we have a waiting list!

Why did you say 'Yes' when approached to join the PMF Board? I am one of many local business folk who lend what support we can to our community. I knew something of the local health services, having served on the then Health Authority Board and as a Trustee for the Neurosurgery Cavitron Fund. The Peninsula Medical School has already made a massive contribution to saving or improving lives so I hope I can help raise some necessary funds for the future.