

A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE

The Fantastic Bricoux team of Jim and Jean Jones of Fleet, Hampshire – 20 years on

by Paul Stowell

Firstly I would like to thank the editor for allowing me to pay tribute to a very good friend of mine of almost 30 years who, through the cruel fate of contracting acute pigeon lung back in the mid 80s, had to part with one of the finest Bricoux teams in this country and arguably anywhere at that time.

Whilst I refer to Jim throughout this article this was a partnership, Mr & Mrs Jim and Jean Jones, a partnership in every sense of the word. Jean even now remembers all the pigeons they had and many was the time that she clocked them in for Jim. She is without doubt one in a million and I apologise for giving the 'old man' all the glory because she is part and parcel of all that I am writing about. I am sure most of the people who come into contact with Jim at the National marking do not realise that in his time he was one of the very best racers and breeders of pigeons, especially the Bricoux and Ko Nipius strains, a team of pigeons bred and selected, mostly based on eyesign and body type formation. Jim's main love is the study and judging of eyesign and he has been judging at shows since 1958 and even to this day he is still in demand, although his appearances are limited to one or two shows a year and then almost exclusively at the Lion Brewery at Ash. I always remember the day, not so long ago, when I was in conversation with the ace fancier Eric Higginbottom of Sandhurst and the conversation turned to Jim's Bricoux and Eric told me about the day he went around to view the team. It left Eric speechless, all those reds and mealies sitting there on their perches like peas in a pod, beauty, elegance and above all brains, a sight he can still vividly recall.

The first contact Jim had with pigeons was when he was four or five years old in India, where he spent most of his childhood. His father was serving in the army and in the Royal Horse Artillery there were two Yorkshire lads who had some fancy pigeons, which kindled Jim's interest. When the lads were posted overseas

Jim had four pairs off them and soon had his own team of young ones flying in and out. When he settled in Fleet on his return to England in March 1954 he first kept chickens and geese and then he converted a chicken house into a pigeon loft where he kept some fancy pigeons. One day after losing one of his fancy pigeons he called in at the home of the late Billy Wright of Fleet to see if the pigeon had gone into his loft. Now I remember Billy well, a smashing old boy with a tremendous sense of humour and a team of Bricoux built around the Doctor Anderson stock, which he had direct from the Doctor. I suppose to the young Jim it was a bit like Eric Higginbottom's reaction, speechless, however he soon recovered and the next season he was flying a team of young birds from Billy's loft. On one occasion he stood in for Billy whilst waiting for birds from the longest race on what proved to be a very hard racing day. Jim's eyes missed nothing and he knew that a pigeon affectionately known as 138 was something rather special and that pigeon would be there on the day no matter what. Sure enough, as the day got longer and evening approached, Jim saw in the distance the silhouette of 138, who landed and was promptly clocked in. Jim could see that whilst this pigeon had had a tough race he did not show it and the race for this bird had been easy. Jim decided there and then that this pigeon would be his yardstick which all others were measured against. Even to this day he can remember and recall in infinite detail 138 and his eye. Now Billy did not have lot of spare cash and what he had went on giving his birds the best he could afford. Billy needed his kitchen decorating and Jim struck a deal with Billy that he would decorate the kitchen in exchange for 138 - the most important decision Jim ever made.

In the early days Jim's mentors were such household names as Baden-Pope and Brian Thornton of Basingstoke, Mickey Walker of Camberley and the start of the Bricoux family from Billy Wright of Fleet, all great fanciers sadly no longer with us but fanciers that I too was lucky to know personally. I am always amazed at Jim's memory which is still razor sharp when he recalls certain pigeons and



Blacksplash.



Mister North.

especially their eyes; he can recall even my past top breeders and racers as well as the younger stock in precise detail. Over the years he culled a lot of pigeons in his search for the ultimate pigeon to join that elite team, which is why they looked so good and were such top breeders and racers. 'The eye is the brain,' he has always told me. Jim never kept a lot of pigeons: five pairs of stock, 16 pairs of racers and 30 young birds. The birds were always kept on open hole and when Jim got up at 4.45am all the birds including the young ones were gone, sometimes for hours, the young birds sometimes all day. For this reason young bird training started at 20 miles and, whilst some were lost, the best returned. Jim is a firm believer in line breeding. He says this does produce a high number of duds but when you get a good one it goes on to be a very good one indeed.

In his younger days Jim was a very keen sportsman, cycle racing being his main sport, also cross country running and swimming. From his sports background he knew how to get fit, not to over do it and how to maintain peak condition and he applied the same standards to his racing pigeons. When it came to preparing pigeons for distance events Jim was always prepared to play a waiting game and get them just right, not push them through every race, and gave them plenty of time to recover properly. Jim thought nothing of cycling 18 hours on low gear to train for a 12-hour event and this knowledge was applied to the pigeon's preparation.

One of Jim's main comments about the modern day fancier is that most keep too many pigeons and in his opinion 90% kept are of poor quality since the fanciers do not know the difference between poor stock and good sound stock. When asked which of the partnership's many champions was the personal favourite it had to be the mealy cock 'Mr. North', 1st Federation Thurso 517 miles, only bird on the day; 1st Retford; 1st Elgin, only four birds in race time; 1st Selby; 1st Weymouth; 2nd Federation Elgin; 2nd Federation Northallerton, etc etc. including Bordeaux twice, Pau in race time and at his first attempt was 38th Open Palamos and later 78th Open British Barcelona Club Palamos. It would be impossible to reproduce all the partnership's results over the years and it would not be appropriate to do so in this article, suffice to say that his big love was always Palamos and his results from there were second to none, the nearest he came to achieving his dream being 6th Open. The worst experience he recalls is when he sent a team of five of his best pigeons to Palamos and never ever saw any of them again. Jim was also very keen on showing his pigeons in local and national shows and his biggest ever showing achievement was in 1966 at The People Show in London when he won the breeders' class and as a result appeared with Jean on the World of Sport TV programme with Eamon Andrews. It was at this time that he met Bob McDonald of Fraserburgh and a great friendship was formed between the two fanciers. Birds were exchanged and eventually Jim built up a very successful team of Ko Nipius to share the loft with the Bricoux.

My favourite story (apart from the trip to the Isle of Wight which I cannot print) was when Jim used to cycle from Fleet to Dover and back in the days before we had motorways. Jim not only prepared himself well physically, but he planned his route so that Jean was waiting at strategic public houses en route with his beloved pint. How he ever manage to stay in the saddle and find his way home is beyond me! When asked the big question, who does he consider the best distance fancier in the country today? Jim replies, without hesitation, Dave Goddard (R. J. Goddard & Son) of Reading. He sends only a few birds but every year he is in the Palamos result and always in the first few, and that takes some beating. On the question of who is the best all round fancier Jim makes his number one Mike Armitage of The Lion Brewery Public House in Ash, Surrey (should get you a few free pints Jim!!). Some of the fanciers who Jim has helped and started off have gone on to be good fanciers in their own right: his late stepfather-in-law Jack Henderson of Warminster, Barry Partington of Farnham (who now lives in Canada), John Farrer of Fleet and Paul Stowell of Basingstoke. Jim was, or I should say still is, no ordinary fancier and there was no better example of his special pigeon genius than when he used to visit, on a



Jim & Jean.

regular basis, the lofts of the late great Eric Cannon of Godalming, Surrey. On one occasion he was in discussion with Eric and he was invited to try and pick out Eric and Pat's best pigeon based on eyesign selection. He managed to select the their best stock pigeon Pat and also picked her son out of approximately 50 young birds in the young bird section. This pigeon later became known as the great Saint Swithin.

Jim is a very direct person who calls a spade a spade and is as honest as the day is long. He sticks to his beliefs and principles and no one will ever get him to change his mind. You always know where you stand with Jim and, whilst you may not always agree with him, you have to admire his straightforward honesty. It was in 1986 that Jim's pigeon career was to be so cruelly curtailed when after a week in Sully Hospital he was diagnosed with acute pigeon lung. It took him two weeks to speak about it and even tell me he had to let all the pigeons go. Dr Reynolds at Sully Hospital told him that if he did not give up the pigeons in less than five years he would be confined to a wheelchair. I know even to this day just how much it hurts him. I then took a major decision to buy all the birds, a decision I never regretted. I had some of the favourites like 'Silver Wings', Ko Nipius x Bricoux, five times Palamos 673 miles; 'Fleet Lady', Bricoux, 1st Weymouth, 2nd & 3rd Dax 522 miles; four times in the Palamos result 673 miles and Perpignan 618 miles and awarded a Spanish Diploma in the British Barcelona Club.

Jim's main pleasure these days are his greenhouse converted from the bottom storey of his loft, the odd trip to see Mike Armitage at The Lion Brewery in Ash, or a visit to the National marking although he says the comradeship is not what it used to be. Gone are the days when you could spend all day in the pub with fellow fanciers. I know he takes great pleasure in going round to see our good friend John Farrer in Fleet and to my lofts, to see birds that remind him of past great pigeons he bred and that marvellous unique Bricoux team, never to be forgotten by all who saw them.

This is my way of thanking him and Jean for the help, support and advice and for the pigeons that have given me so much pleasure, success and reward over the years.