

A Proper Hero

GILBERT ROBERT POWELL

Gilbert died peacefully at Northwick Park Hospital aged 75 years on March 20th. As a youngster he was educated at Whitefriars School and became a member of the former 10th Harrow Scout Group, which became the 6th Harrow in 1955. Gilbert had a knack of getting into trouble, but on 8th October, 1952, he excelled all expectations for a 14-year-old at Wealdstone Railway Station when he was on his way to Willesden Technical School for his lessons. It was foggy and as the bus he was on passed the station he heard "a great big smash" as three express steam trains collided in the station almost simultaneously.



Gilbert immediately jumped off the bus and ran into the station and on to the platform, calling out to the station staff: "I am a Scout...I know first aid, I may be able to help." He was not expecting to see the carnage that he did.

"There was a woman who had been scalped. I can see it now. She was on top of the mound of crash debris and she was lying on top of a bit of railway line or carriage that had been thrown up."

Gilbert first of all helped first aiders and was then asked by the Fire Brigade if he would squeeze into small holes in the wrecked carriages too small for adults to enter and alert them to where injured passengers could be rescued.

"Being small I was able to get to places where they couldn't. I shouted out to them 'there's one here, there are two there' and they came and moved the rubble."

Gilbert was thought to have been the youngest person to have helped with the rescue work, staying there for four hours. He went home to get changed and go to afternoon school, and said nothing to anyone as to what he had done that morning. He was told off at home and at school for missing morning lessons and put on detention. When he reported for this after school he found that the whole school had been assembled and his Headmaster, having read details of the rail crash in the first editions of the evening papers declared Gilbert to be a hero and that the detention was cancelled!

Gilbert never talked about details of the railway disaster until he broke his silence to me and journalists at the time of the 60th anniversary of the crash which killed 112 people and injured more than 300.

In the years that followed Gilbert served as an Assistant Scout Leader with the 6th Harrow, and 'Casualty Union' first aid instructor. He worked as a planning construction draughtsman, and finally as a postman. He was a bachelor. Following a stroke in 2008 and a long period of recovery, Gilbert lived happily in Watkins House in Harrow. His health gradually deteriorated during the last year and he died peacefully on March 20th.



The funeral took place at Breakspear Crematorium on April 4th and was attended by relations, fellow residents of Watkins House, Scout colleagues and close friends. Gilbert was a 'good Scout' and the Scout hymn was sung during the farewell service.

Bernard Archer Chairman 6th Harrow



Your Editor remembers him as a great provider of first aid 'incidents' He had a glass eye and would exchange it with a small arrow or splinter with lots of gore !