

Former Chairman John Prean passes away

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Former Chairman of the ETTA and of the Isle of Wight Table Tennis Association, John Prean, sadly passed away this week.

Mr Prean, born in Vienna, Austria in 1924, was the son of a well-known theatre and opera administrator and an actress. He was educated in Austria, Germany and Switzerland and completed his studies at the Silesian college in Chertsey after his arrival in England in 1938.

In 1940, at the age of 16, he was interned on the Isle of Man but released after a few months – eventually helping the war effort by working shifts in a munitions factory.

In 1955 Mr Prean became Managing Director of Columbia Products Limited, a cosmetics factory, which was then based in London. Under his leadership the company rapidly grew and, in 1961 he took advantage of an Isle of Wight scheme to attract business, opening new premises in Binstead and employing 200 local people.

In early 1968 a major fire destroyed the factory and all the stock. As shocked employees gathered early the following morning, Mr Prean, standing on a box outside the smouldering remains, reassured them that their jobs were secure and that they would be back to work quickly. Just a fortnight later production restarted in various halls and temporary sites around the Island including the former Somerton works, while the factory was rebuilt, reopening just eight months later.

A passionate sportsman and a talented footballer, he played in local leagues in London until he was 37. At 40 he took up table tennis and represented the Island's men at inter-town level and veterans at County level. He encouraged sport at Columbia, sponsoring works teams in the local table tennis league and ensuring that the rebuilt canteen had excellent sporting facilities.

John was both a coach and manager throughout the long career of his son Carl who became an England international and highly regarded world-class player, ranked world number 18.

John was responsible for building the table tennis centre at Smallbrook, working tirelessly for more than two years to raise the funding from the Sports Council and local government while guaranteeing the building costs from his own savings as the Isle of Wight Table Tennis Association had no money.

He served as Chairman of the Isle of Wight Table Tennis Association and was also Chairman of the English Table Tennis Association from 1986 to 1991 and manager of the GB Olympic Table Tennis Team at the 24th Olympiad in 1988 in Seoul, Korea. He was elected Life President of the Isle of Wight Table Tennis Association in 2012.

He leaves his wife, Erica and two sons, Duncan and Carl.

John Prean born 14 May 1924 – Died at home in Ryde, Isle of Wight 29 April 2013.

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