

A brief biography of Sir Paul Greening.

Paul Greening's connection with East Farndon is that he lived with his grandmother Rosa and other relatives in Farndon Hall during the Second World War and he married a Farndon girl, Monica West.

He was born in 1928 in Sussex. His father was a distinguished naval officer who served right through the 1920s, the 1939-45 war and finally was awarded the D.S.O. for service in the Korean War. Paul attended Mowden Preparatory School in Hove (now a prep school for Lancing College). As war became likely and the buildings were requisitioned for naval training, the school moved from the south coast to Oxendon Hall, so his mother moved the family to the area and rented East Farndon Hall. Clearly Paul intended to follow his father into the navy, for he went on to the Nautical College at Pangbourne in Berkshire. This seems an odd inland location for a naval school, but it had been founded in 1917 at a time when German submarines were making the sea unsafe for trainees. All students had naval uniform and the status of cadet in the Royal Naval Reserve.

Paul joined the Royal Navy in 1946 as a special entry cadet. This meant that after six months' training, he would become a midshipman. Although the Greenings moved away from Farndon in about 1943, Paul had formed a sufficient attachment to Farndon girl Monica West to return in 1951 and marry her in Farndon church.



Paul and Monica's wedding in East Farndon church in 1951

Included in the family group during their time in East Farndon was Paul's niece Sara Upton, then just a child. Sara later in life became Lady Sara Grayson and her memory of her time in Farndon appears on another page (World War 2) of this website. She wrote to me that she remembered being much amused as a child when, as part of Home Guard training, Monica was lowered from a window in the Hall on a stretcher.

In the navy he served on several ships before his first command, which was of HMS Asheldam, a minesweeper. He was steadily promoted and by 1963 he reached the rank of Commander. He was

further promoted to Captain in 1969 and the last warship he commanded was the frigate HMS Aurora in 1970-71. From 1971 to 1976 he held a number of administrative positions, including being in charge of Naval Drafting and responsible for Officers' Appointments at the Ministry of Defence. In 1976 he moved to take charge of the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth. Then in 1978 he became Naval Secretary, a role which entails advising the Minister of Defence on naval matters.



Paul Greening with Charles and Diana on the Royal Yacht

In 1981 he was appointed commander, officially called 'Flag Officer', of the Royal Yacht Britannia. From then to 1985 he sailed many thousands of miles on board this famous ship. One of his tasks was to arrange the travel details for the honeymoon of Prince Charles and Diana in 1981. Following this command, which he carried out very successfully, he was knighted, being made a Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order. This is an honour which is entirely at the monarch's disposal. Sir Paul, as he now was, retired from the navy after this command in 1985.



Paul Greening (in uniform) with the Queen and some former Flag Officers of the Royal Yacht

This was not the end of his illustrious career, however. His success on Britannia led to his appointment as Master of the Queen's Household. The mind-boggling complexity of the Household is shown by the diagram on this website: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master_of_the_Household. It's too large to include here. In 1992, at the end of his time in this post, the Queen upgraded Paul's KCVO to GCVO, Knight Grand Commander of the Royal Victorian Order. This was a splendid finale to an exceptionally dazzling career.



Paul and Monica in Farndon Village Hall in 2000 with daughter Jane and her husband Michael

It was a great pleasure when Sir Paul and Lady Monica came to the village in 2000 to see the exhibition in the village hall telling the story of East Farndon's history. Sadly, since then they have both died – Monica a few months before Paul, in 2008; he was 80. Sadly, Jane, too, died when she was only 61, in December 2020.

Some memories of Paul and Monica by Paul's cousin, Sara Grayson, are on the following pages – so please read on!

Alan Langley
July 2021

A memoir of my cousin Paul and his wife Monica from Sara Grayson



Paul (11) and I (2) just before we settled in East Farndon 1939

World War 2 produced some very lucky moments for the Greening family. Firstly it caused my grandmother Rosa Greening to move to East Farndon, where she rented the Hall so we could all be near to her grandson's (Paul And David) prep school, Mowden, which had been evacuated from Hove in Sussex to Oxendon Hall. As an only child I had the benefit of 'almost' brothers who nobly tolerated their small cousin.



The future admiral (!) (right) with his brother David in Hong Kong

The second piece of luck was to meet Paul's future wife Monica West, a local girl who became a great friend of us all. Paul's father, Charles, was a Naval Officer, who, of course, we saw seldom at that time and Paul, from a very early age, wanted to join the navy too and after Mowden he and his brother went to Pangbourne Naval College. He grew up to be a very kind man with a great sense of the ridiculous.



My uncle Charles Greening RN with sons (l to r) David and Paul when both boys were at Pangbourne Nautical College.

He told Monica when he was fourteen that he planned to marry her! She didn't take him seriously of course, but he persisted, and the wedding came about and they married in Farndon Church with the reception at her family home at Grey Walls.



Me as chief bridesmaid with best man David, we were trying as I recall, to hurry the two little ones along!

Monica had learned to drive off road when very young so passed her test with flying colours and during their long engagement would drive down to Alverstoke (near Portsmouth) to see us all, especially Paul when on leave, in her racy MG sports car. Before her marriage she

used to breed Norwich Terriers. She really was an ideal naval wife. Tremendously capable, she could turn her hand to most DIY and was great at entertaining and bringing up their two children, often while he was away at sea.



Monica employing her Norwich terriers as huskies

As Paul's career went on, it meant time living in London and while he was Master of the Queen's Household they had a house in the St. James's Palace precincts. I enjoyed visiting them there and having been nodded through the gates by the on-duty policeman could leave my bike unchained outside their house knowing it would be safe! A rare treat in London. One of Paul's loves was cricket. He followed it devotedly. Our grandmother used nobly to take him as a small boy to Lords and the passion never left him.

We had a great family lunch on board Britannia while he was still in command and when she was moored up by Tower Bridge. We were given a tour and the immaculate engine room with its gleaming copper pipes was a thing of beauty and stays with me still.



Paul takes a family group on a tour of the Royal yacht. His daughter Jane is on the extreme left and I'm on the extreme right.



The Britannia's bell and me.

Paul and Monica celebrated their golden wedding, another happy family gathering, but sadly Monica's health was declining and she died soon after. Paul followed a few months later. They are buried together in their local village. Paul's memorial service in Portsmouth Cathedral was attended by representatives of five members of the Royal family, a fine tribute to a very special man. They are still much missed.

Sara Grayson
July 2021