

JOHN BENNETT

A lifelong journey with fireworks

By Moya Bennett

John began Fireworks Magazine 47 years ago and, over a period of almost half a century, it grew into a magazine enjoyed and respected by enthusiasts and the industry. It began as a hobby newsletter for the few enthusiasts that John knew in those days and he had time to do it because he had contracted glandular fever and was on sick leave. From that very low key beginning it grew into the glossy colour publication of today. It was sold across the world from the USA to Australia and John and I made many friends over the years.

For 25 years John fired the annual firework display for, what was then, our daughter's junior school, raising funds for the PTA. It was a very popular event, not just with members of the school. A band of willing volunteers helped with the hole digging and post erecting and John dealt with the fireworks, firing them manually at first. Later, our daughter gained her firing qualification, and they went over to electronic firing.

John loved fireworks from a very early age – choosing them with his father and letting them off in the back garden, with all his family. He loved them so much that he couldn't bear to throw them away afterwards. His mother was, understandably, very reluctant to have spent fireworks stored in the house so he began cutting off the labels and pasting them into scrapbooks. And that is how his collecting passion began.

He also began supporting Charlton Athletic Football Club when he was very young. Nobody knows why it was Charlton – it was not his local team as he lived in Barkingside in north London – but over his lifetime he attended most home matches and very many away matches. He took our daughter, her friends and our nephew and spread his fervour to them as well. Our nephew now takes his daughter to matches and our grandchildren have been as well! Before she had children, our daughter went to every home game with him getting as excited as he did!

He was a member of Surrey County Cricket Club, which gave him somewhere to go outside the football season! And he was absolutely thrilled when our eldest granddaughter began playing cricket for her school team and then for a local cricket club and he was able to go and watch her.



JOHN BENNETT

John was a very keen cyclist, cycling all over London to watch football matches and going on long distance trips as well. He once cycled from London to Bristol to see Charlton play – only to find the match postponed due to bad weather when he arrived. He went on long distance cycling holidays with his father and later by himself, packing all he needed into two small pannier bags! He was still cycling 15 to 20 miles a day last January.

John loved reading and books, which he also collected, and writing. He wrote poetry for his own enjoyment, articles for 'Fireworks' and the Journal of Explosives Engineering. He also wrote and published four books of short stories which he was very proud of. Many of his stories are quite creepy and sinister, which surprises a lot of people who didn't know him well!

In his professional life, John was a qualified librarian and a Fellow of the Library Association. He ran a local government information department for East Sussex County Council, providing bespoke information to members of the Council and staff. He was a very early adopter of IT to produce newsletters, bibliographies and other information resources.



With granddaughters Chloe & Lucy at Wembley Stadium.

We were married for 52 years, and he was a loving family man, devoted to our daughter and our two granddaughters and very proud of all their achievements. He was very involved in their lives – always ready to help them with maths or English homework – playing games and telling them, "Grandpa jokes". He loved going to see them at school events, music concerts and sports matches and was thrilled when they came to Charlton matches.

He was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease last March which progressed very aggressively, and he sadly died in September. He has left a very large hole in all our lives.



The proud author in 2024.



Labels from John's Scrapbook – 1960.



John with family and friends.



Personal Tributes and Memories of John



BILL DAVIS

Dear John, we miss you RIP... We go back to the beginning of 'Fireworks' and my Sultan Fireworks Co! We both shared a love for 'Those Fireworks' and all that goes with it; 'playfulness', curiosity etc. We enjoyed those Wessex Pinups (see pictures), you gently crafted a super product 'The Magazine' but you had many talents and I had great respect for you. It was good to work together Judging Plymouth shows and we found so much to talk about. I so enjoyed your letters too. We both shared a love for our families and the joy of seeing it all unfold. You deserve the Tributes here my dear Friend.

Love Bill & Jan Davis plus Sara & Louisa xx

TONY CARDELL

During my long career in pyrotechnics, I have been lucky enough to meet many outstanding people, but I am particularly proud to have known John Bennett as a good friend and massive inspiration in my life of fireworks.

John Bennett made my interest in fireworks infinitely much richer by his own passion for fireworks and his total dedication to the publication of "Fireworks" magazine. John was a gentle, patient, supportive and talented editor, encouraging many of us fireworks enthusiasts to write articles to reflect the important history of the UK fireworks industry.

In the mid-1980s, following the good advice of David Watts of Edenbridge Bonfire Society (we were both firing for Phoenix Fireworks under the critical eyes of Ian Craig!) I applied to John Bennett for my first copies of his bi-annual magazine "Fireworks". Immediately, I could see that this was a unique publication and an important resource during the decline of UK fireworks manufacturing as cheaper imports became available.

John wrote in his introduction for "Fireworks" Issue 1 (February 1982) "It is difficult to explain to most people that one has an obsession with fireworks; that the sight of them in the shop; that photographs of long gone items in a very old catalogue; that even the names – Jindivik, Night Rider, Gremlin, Wild West Shooter, Pathfinder can cause such emotion in a reasonably normal librarian approaching middle age."

Well thankfully, many of us fully understood those passions related to "Light Blue touch paper. Retire immediately" and we waited with excitement and anticipation for each issue to come through the letterbox twice a year! Little did John know in 1982 that he would still be publishing "Fireworks" 43 years later as a very high-quality international magazine.



Wessex Labels



John and Bill at Plymouth.





This is a favourite photo of me and dear John taken at Fawkes Fireworks Ltd magazines at Cowden in June 1994 (What better subject than two old friends giving each other some stick with a rocket!). It is a special scene as it underlined the international links of "Fireworks". It was taken by Larry Crump of Mineral Wells, Texas, and had it not been for John Bennett I would never have met Larry and indeed so many other fascinating people from across the world with a passion for fireworks. Larry was a regular contributor to "Fireworks" including his article "Letter from America" along with many other very talented international writers. Very sadly, Larry, suddenly and without warning, passed away at the untimely age of 54 in June 2002.

John Bennett published his last issue of "Fireworks" in Summer 2025 – a total of 87 Issues spanning 43 years. As I look through all my precious copies of the magazine, I can see that due to John's total dedication the content has widened to cover all possible aspects of fireworks and is supported by high-quality colour photographs. I believe that the most important part of John's immense legacy is his careful and detailed research of the fascinating history of the British Fireworks Industry.

In the last Issue of "Fireworks" 87, there is a cartoon by Sturtz depicting "John Bennett, Fireworks Editor", under the overall title of "Leading Lights of the Firework Industry" John certainly was a leading light and I am certain that his shining contribution to the beautiful world of "Fireworks" will always be remembered and will never go out.

BARRY STURMAN

For as long as I can remember I have been fascinated by fireworks. Back in the 1980s I used to visit the library from time to time and check the references to see if there were any new publications about my favourite subject. On one such visit I found a reference to a periodical called "Fireworks", with an address at Bexhill-on-Sea, England. I wrote to the Editor (in those days there was no email, of course) and very soon received a lovely letter from John. I took out a subscription and bought all the back issues. That was the beginning of a long-distance friendship. Over the years I became a regular contributor to John's magazine; it was amazing to see how John took "Fireworks" from a rather humble beginning to the beautifully produced, colourful publication that informs and delights firework enthusiasts around the world. A wonderful achievement!

Twice I had the good fortune to visit John in England and to meet his wife Moya and daughter Claire. On one memorable occasion I assisted John with a firework display for the local school. I recall pleasurable hours viewing John's collection of firework memorabilia and the two of us going through the albums in which John had carefully pasted labels from fireworks he had fired on Guy Fawkes' Nights, going back to his boyhood. It was surprising how many of those labels brought back memories of my own Guy Fawkes' celebrations, on the other side of the world. In those long-gone days English fireworks were sold worldwide, just as Chinese ones are today. John made sure that the glory days of British fireworks are not forgotten but will be preserved forever in the pages of "Fireworks" – a publication of record, kept in the British Library.

Quite recently I learned of another side to John – he was an accomplished writer of short stories, with four published anthologies. John was a multi-talented, modest, and kindly man. He will be very sadly missed and fondly remembered.

Further Tributes to John and the opportunity to donate to The Motor Neurone Disease Association can be found at <https://john-bennett6.muchloved.com/>

