

STREET NAME PLATE SUBMISSION

Reference: CYRIL HOBBS (1938-2025)

Cyril was born and bred in Kenilworth, and for decades had become a well-known face around the town for a variety of reasons. This included his carpentry/joinery skills, drawings and paintings, metal detecting, and street photography. He also did scenery painting at both the Priory and Talisman theatres in Kenilworth. Another of his passions was making historic wooden toys, which he eventually turned into a job.

Unwelcome Call-Up

In 1956, at the age of 18 he was called-up for National Service, which he hated with a passion. Not one to hold back his opinions, he referred to the posting as being 'Kidnapped by the Queen'. What annoyed him most was that he was in the middle of his apprenticeship as a carpenter/joiner. After his initial training, he spent 20 months in Northern Germany and trained as a wireless operator/tank driver with the 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards. One footnote to his call-up, he should never have been passed-fit due to his bad eyesight. The army optician claimed he was 'faking it' to avoid recruitment. But he had worn glasses since he was a youngster.

Return to Civilian Life

On his return to Kenilworth he went back to his old job of carpentry and joinery. He worked at two local firms, J. H. Lawrence in Warwick Rd, and Inchbrook Woodworkers in Common Lane. If he could, he always liked working alone, as he preferred doing things the - 'Hobbs Way'.

One encounter in his carpentry days would change the course his life. One day he was working alone on a heavy fire door at Millbrook Grange (a special school for girls) in Park Close. One of the girl residents offered him help by passing screws and tools to him when needed. She became very chatty, but she was being observed by members of the staff. Cyril was later told that since she arrived at the school she had hardly spoken to anybody, and was uncooperative. After this experience Cyril became a volunteer at the school, one or two evenings a week. But this would lead him to the next chapter of his life.

Cyril the Social Worker

In 1973, Cyril saw a job advert in the Kenilworth Weekly News. Emscote Adult Training Centre in Nelson Lane, Warwick was looking for a Craft Instructor. The Day-Centre catered for around 75 severely disabled teenagers and adults. Cyril got the job, and eventually qualified as a Social Worker, and also became deputy manager. However, after 15 years there, Cyril had become disillusioned, the job was changing drastically. So he made the bold decision to resign.

A New Beginning – In Toymaking

Cyril became a self-employed researcher, and re-creator of historically accurate wooden toys, dolls and games. Overnight his salary had dropped from a very comfortable County Council wage to zero.

After a slow start in the toymaking world, business picked-up and he created toy-making courses for Infant and junior schools. This was part of the then National Curriculum. He also became Tudor Toymaker to English Heritage and Victorian Toymaker for the National Trust.

In 2006 he published a book - *Traditional Wooden Toys: Their History and How to Make Them*.

Disney Calling

But the high-point in his career came in 2009, when he was invited as a VIP guest to Hollywood by none other than - Disney Home Entertainment. He took part in the launch of the two-disc DVD/Blu-Ray Platinum edition of the remastered film, Pinocchio. This was after a film crew from Pinewood Studios had spent a day filming him at his workshop. Some of this footage appeared on the second disc. For two days during his week-long stay in Hollywood, he gave numerous press interviews and toymaking demonstrations. During his visit he was privileged to meet 91-year-old Dickie Jones, who was the voice of Pinocchio on the film during its original production in 1938/9.

Out In The Streets

Many Folks around Kenilworth knew Cyril as, 'The Man With a Camera', he was rarely seen without one. Using his artistic skills he became a Street Photographer, shooting anything or anyone of interest, it is a recognised photography genre which began soon after the invention of portable cameras. The best of his edited shots, are submitted to an International Photography Forum for display, comment and criticism. His online portfolio is very large and varied.

Local History

Cyril was an active member of the Kenilworth History and Archaeology Society (KHAS) and during the 1980s/1990s became a committee member. He also gave many talks to the society at their monthly meetings. At this time he had also taken-up metal detecting, and surveyed places like Parliament Piece, where he found a variety of artifacts, including coins going back to 1750. In 1986 his joinery skills came in useful when he volunteered to restore the Tumbledown stile that was falling apart. It now resided in the 'Barn Museum' in the Abbey Fields. In tribute to Cyril, the society have decided to place him on the front cover of their 2026 Kenilworth History magazine. It's an AI colourised black & white photo of him in his workshop, he would have loved that.

The 'Hobbins Way'

Material mainly sourced from: *Cyril The Artist* and *Cyril's Snippets* (Both self-published Biographies)

Submission by

Nick Green
11, Woodcote Ave
Kenilworth