

# Laurie Kenneth Barnard

Puppet Master, Artist,  
Poet and Carver

November 1921  
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*His space is empty you will find  
He's gone and left us all behind.  
No longer can we share a joke  
That surely fascinates the folk.  
We remember his shape; and what he said  
Clutches our hearts and affects our head;  
And this community that loved him so  
Can't believe he had to go.  
But memories when they come to hand  
Will always remember the Bum Note Ceilidh Band.*

by  
**MALCOLM  
KNIGHT**

This poem was written as a tribute to the Scottish puppeteer, Gordon McRae in 2006. The legacy of Ken Barnard also clutches our hearts and affects our head. At the grand old age of 94 years Ken finally passed away in his flat at Friary Court in Peterborough surrounded by his family and loved ones. It is now a good time to remember his shape and what he said and did. His expertise as a puppeteer, painter, sculptor and poet have left a distinctive and original legacy.

Ken was born in Kings College Hospital, Denmark Hill, Camberwell in London 22nd November 1921. His father was a member of the famous *Barnard Marionettes* and his mother was the manageress of the restaurant at the Kursall Concert Hall in Harrogate.

Ken started experimenting with painting and drawing around the age of 7 years by way of inclination rather than through any formal training. He attended Lyndhurst Road School and Peckham Central School leaving at age 15 years to join a small advertising agency in

Bromley. At this point he became very interested in traditional jazz music. He lived in London putting out fire bombs during the Blitz. At that time he was trained by the Government to do instrument-making and then in 1942 he joined the RAF.

He married Martha McKenzie "Matt" from Bridgeton in Glasgow at the end of the War and attended Camberwell Art School for two years. He was then employed as a commercial artist and typographer before going freelance as an illustrator. Matt and Ken had two children, Anne and Lynn, and after they had grown up they moved to Northampton.

At around the age of 40 Ken joined The British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild and eventually became the Editor of *The Puppet Master* and Vice-Chairman.

Ken found his first workshop space in Lillford Park near Oundle in 1972 and continued to make puppets during the following years. After this time he moved his workshop to Woodnewton, Northants, above a pottery in an old chapel. The figure of Mr Punch features strongly in his puppet making from this period: *"I stick a bit of extra wood into his face. It's a larger piece than I'll need in the end. I plug it into a squared socket in the face and glue it. Then I carve it into the shape of the nose and nostrils so it's flared against the face. The grain of the nose goes against the grain of the head. It gives strength to the nose because his head gets such a constant bashing."*



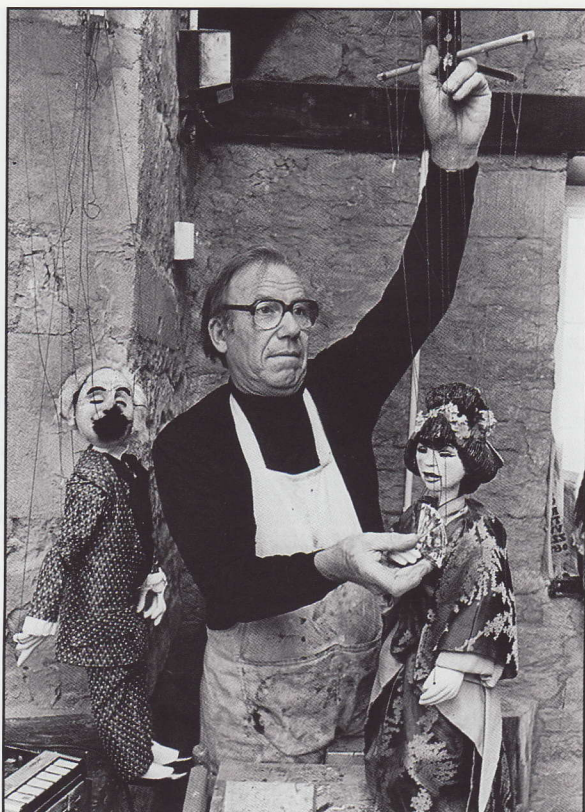
*The actors all hang upside down  
Which gives Punch his awful frown.  
His wife is there, his baby too  
And the show begins at half past two.  
The boxers hanging in their gear  
Are quite good friends is what I hear.  
The Beadle looks with eagle eye  
Which makes poor Joey heave a sigh  
The Copper is on watch too  
The poor old chap has not a clue  
And the Crocodile with evil smile  
Knows that in a little while  
When he's had his lunch  
He'll tantalise poor Mr Punch.  
Now all these puppets one by one  
Will on their gallows soon be hung  
While the Professor safe inside  
In his booth will safely hide.  
But I reckon its rather funny  
When the Bottler runs off with the money*

Ken's family had been involved in the puppet trade since the nineteenth century as *The Barnard Mannequins* and toured the world with their string figures before the First World War. His grandfather Richard was a master puppet maker, and his father and brothers travelled the



*Richard Barnard's three sons and a daughter who carried the show on after his retirement▷▷*





△Ken holding Madame Butterfly with his union official lurking in the background

Ken receiving his Guild Lifetime Achievement Award from from president Peter Baldwin▷▷▷

How long before the deckchair collapses?▷▷

world with the company. But he didn't take up the strings until late into his thirties. "They all died away before I started doing it, so I worked it all out for myself as I went along." The marionette became his chosen metier or trade. He inherited two special palm-sized carving gouges from his grandfather – the old steel of which retained a nice sharp edge. Usually he would carve the head first from lime always leaving a piece on top to clamp firmly into the vice. "It's about the balance of the carving. You've got to think about how they'll be used in entertainment." The hands would be carved to match the character and the soles of the feet were never flat but curved. Often he used jelutong and sometimes pine for the chest, hips and limbs. He painted all his own faces with undercoat and while still wet put in details of cheeks and eyes using oil paint. Similarly he dressed and costumed all his own figures.

By now Ken had become an established puppeteer and children's entertainer but also a fine maker of carved marionettes and puppets. He was also teaching at the London College of Furniture for twenty years on

the puppet module of a Toy Making Course. His output was prolific and although he would in old age complain that he had not done enough with his life, it's fair to say that he would leave most of us in the shade. He could carve a hand in 15 minutes using his grandfather Richard's palm gouge and chisels; and some of his carved heads are amongst the best ever produced. His solo marionette variety show and reminiscences about the Barnard Troupe are recorded for posterity in Brian Hibbitt's Guild video *Barnard on Barnard* and his *Search for the Schichtl's* video filmed at the Theatre Museum which illustrates Ken's knowledge of special stringing and trick marionette operation. Ken's marionette cabaret was a lyrical affair; the spangled Dizzy singing *I can't stand the sight of her face*; the Cleaner who dreamed of becoming a ballet dancer; the Baby surprised by its own reflection in a mirror; the Opera Singer piping out Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*; Fagin from Dickens' *Oliver Twist* who has no heart and is only made of wood; the Old Man at the Seaside in his deckchair slurping from a bottle while the sea swamps him; and Pierrot carrying a red rose for a lost love while turning on a miniature gramophone player.



In 1991 he walked into the Scottish Mask and Puppet Centre in Glasgow and began a lifelong friendship with Malcolm and Sarah Knight. He called the Centre *Mecca*. For more than 10 years he ran a series of summer masterclasses in marionette

carving and manipulation called *Tricks of The Trade*. He proved to be a patient, generous and humorous teacher and an inspiration to his many students – amongst whom were Anna Ingleby, Shane Connolly, Ailie Cohen and Alice Peasgood. His figures are on permanent display at the Centre and also form part of the SMPC touring exhibition *The Magic of Masks & Puppets*. One of his most poignant creations is a puppet version of a prisoner from Auschwitz dressed in blue and white stripes that was performed on a stark bench with a puppet butterfly to klezmer music. Visitors can also view his workbench in our carving shop and a selection of his tools and work in progress. During this period he assigned some of his grandfather's figures to Stuart Slade of BPMTG including a finely carved Negro. Others that formed part of the Lanchester Collection, were bought from Richard Gill of *Polka* by Ian Purves of *Biggar Puppet Theatre*. Ken was deeply moved to see that Ian had placed his grandfather's Grand Turk on permanent exhibition and delighted that it was in such good condition.



In 2003 Ken was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by the British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild. This gave him great pleasure and always occupied pride of place on his window sill. After the death of Matt he lived independently for a while in the picturesque village of Kingscliffe near Peterborough. In 2005 he moved to his sheltered





△ A musical masterpiece

Ken's iconic wooden hearted Fagin▷▷

housing flat at Friary Court in Peterborough where he maintained his craft workshop and painting studio. His door was always open, music would drift from his living room into the hall, and the walls of his flat were festooned with puppets, paintings and memorabilia.

Ken had a very active mind and an observational capacity second to none. He had a particular interest in sailing ships and boats of all kinds and applied his eye for detail to constructing miniature models.

Equally he retained a life-long interest in the Great War and sculpted in red clay many versions of soldiers in the trenches. Wilfred Owen was one of his favourite poet's.

Ken at one of his Glasgow workshops ▽



At the grand age of 86 years he held his first exhibition of puppets, paintings, prints, poems and pottery at The Scottish Mask and Puppet Centre from 7-14 November 2008, sponsored by his friend Joanne Ridout. He did a remarkable series of paintings of flowers and musical instruments on chessboards. Another series was dedicated to his responses to specific composer's music and their signatures – jazz and early twentieth century classical – which he painted in gouache, applying collage to create abstract images depicting the work of Vivaldi, Wagner, Prokofiev, Stravinsky and Gershwin. *"In my paintings I have tried to illustrate the rather special feelings that you get when listening to music. As you will see I have in the main used abstractions rather than the shapes of instruments themselves – beautiful as they are."*



*It's their pleasure the holding of hands  
To feel their love through twenty nerve ends  
To know "he's mine and I am his"  
This holding of hands which leads to a kiss  
This gesture that one gives the other  
This public yet delicate union of souls  
A tender action between two lovers  
Who's silent words are heard and understood  
Which give them joy throughout the day  
Until touching fingers once more prove  
Their affection and love.*

He continued to study life-drawing in pencil, pastel and clay honing his observational skills into old age and maintaining what the Japanese would describe as the flowering spirit. His 90th birthday celebration at Friary Court was a joyful affair and he was surrounded once again by family and friends. Thereafter, through Chairman, Peter Charlton, the BPMTG organised a special event in his honour and later Professor Clive

Chandler, Chairman of PUK performed his world famous Punch and Judy for Ken and the other senior residents. During the past 25 years there has barely been an occasion when the regular Sunday morning and mid-week phone calls did not occur. Ken was a great puppet master and an accomplished visual artist whose kindness, warmth and sense of humour were quite unique. His life marked all whom he touched with love and affection. Sarah and I will miss him beyond words but he has truly left us holding hands with memories of Laurie for tomorrow.