

## Register

## Melvyn Pignon

England women's hockey star with a penchant for fashion who was dropped suddenly from the team after a divorce scandal

Melvyn Pignon, under her maiden name Hickey, was arguably one of the most famous hockey players of her generation. Undoubtedly she was the most glamorous. Her dazzling runs down the left wing and skills in the circle made her one of the most feared forwards in the game, while her penchant for resplendent hats and accessories ensured she made her mark off the pitch.

In her book *Hockey for Women*, published in 1962, she revealed a schoolgirl dream of taking her hockey stick to an international at Wembley so that if any England player was injured she would rush on to the pitch and play. When she fulfilled her dream to represent England on Wembley's hallowed turf, her contemporaries remember shouting, "Hickey for Hockey".

Her international career, however, ended in heartbreak and controversy when the England selectors — without a word of warning — dropped her from the 1968 team, after she agreed to be named as co-respondent in Laurie Pignon's divorce (obituary, April 23, 2012).

Her relationship with the veteran British sportswriter was not widely known. Once she was cited and it became public knowledge, the selectors took a dim view of her circumstances, brutally axing her after selection trials. She never played for England again.

Team-mates were incredulous at her omission as she had captained the team in the previous two years.

Val Robinson, who was chosen to replace her, said that all the players were "absolutely stunned" and that "no one said a word when the team was announced".

"She was up there with the best I've ever played with. Always so gracious and vivacious, with never a bad word to say about anyone. She was the first to come over and wish me luck, and I can still see her nudging off with her suitcase."

Pignon kept the dozens of letters of support she received from the public and fellow players for the rest of her life.

Variouly described as combative, formidable, supremely elegant and highly intelligent, Hickey attracted

Pignon's attention when she arrived at Wimbledon with Rita Bentley, a Federation Cup player and hockey international, wearing an eye-catching hat. He set up a blind date and after the romance blossomed they were married in July 1968.

Her stepdaughter, Suzanne, described Melvyn as "a wonderful, wonderful friend". A shared love of horses had helped her and her younger sister get to know their stepmother during a difficult time for the family.

Suzanne added: "She had a horse called Winston Churchill, 'Winchill', and we all loved spending time with him. Melvyn was never judgmental and always willing to go that extra mile." She and Laurie "absolutely adored each other, and after meeting it very quickly turned to a romantic and enduring love affair. She worshipped the ground he walked on and agreeing to be co-respondent was an indication of her devotion to him."

### Wearing an eye-catching hat, she attracted Laurie Pignon's attention

Melvyn Mary Hickey was born in Stourbridge in 1930, the youngest of two children of Seymour Yorke Hickey, a civil servant in the Department of Pensions, and Madge (née Raymond). Her older brother, Raymond, died in 1995.

She excelled in all sports and first played hockey at Kidderminster High School for Girls. After training as a PE teacher at Lady Mabel College of Physical Education, near Rotherham in South Yorkshire, she began her teaching career at Joseph Leckie Comprehensive School in Walsall.

Playing for Kidderminster HC, she represented Worcestershire and from 1955 became a fixture in the Midlands team. She won the first of her 62 England caps against Ireland in 1957, also representing England on tours to South Africa in 1954, Australia in 1956, the Nether-



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lands in 1959, and the USA in 1963.

She moved south in the late 1950s, living on a houseboat on Taggs Island, where former team-mates recalled numerous late-night parties.

Taking up posts at St Teresa's RC Convent in Sunbury and Ashford

Grammar School, she frequently honed her shooting skills against the first XI goalkeeper.

A tenacious real tennis player, she was a long-time member of the Royal Tennis Court, Hampton Court Palace, playing in numerous tournaments. She

served on the executive committee of the Ladies Real Tennis Association (LRTA) for 13 years, as well as editing the LRTA newsletter and contributing a chapter in Lord Aberdare's book on tennis and rackets.

Widely acknowledged as a witty and brilliant writer, Melvyn Pignon often wrote for *Hockey Field* magazine and the All England Women's Hockey Association. She was president of Wimbledon Ladies HC, the oldest ladies hockey club in the world, for 21 years. In 1985 she drew on her famed charm to persuade the all-male members of the Wimbledon Club to amalgamate with the ladies.

Life with Laurie was never dull, and they enjoyed an idyllic existence at their cottage in Sunbury. A wonderful cook and hostess, Pignon also made all her own curtains and bedspreads, and when Laurie was away on one trip she thought nothing of redecorating the whole house.

Driving Laurie uncompilingly to tennis tournaments all over Europe meant that the couple could never have pets, but the dogs in the village always stopped at the cottage gate on Rope Walk waiting for Melvyn to give them a biscuit.

She wrote a delightful account of how she once rescued a duckling close to death, revived it and set it off down the towpath to find its mother. On successfully reuniting the family, she was amazed to witness it swim off apparently none the worse for its ordeal.

She is survived by her two stepdaughters: Suzanne worked as a PA, and Jacqueline is a horticulturist.

Her sense of adventure never dimmed. She celebrated her 60th birthday with a hot-air balloon flight over the Surrey countryside.

When Pignon was diagnosed with dementia in 2010 it was a terrible blow to someone with such a lively mind; she fought it tooth and nail.

**Melvyn Pignon, England hockey international, author and editor, was born on July 13, 1930. She died of a chest infection on September 4, 2016, aged 86**

## Eduard Luedtke

Last of the German prisoners of war who worked on English farms during the war and then settled here in peacetime

A quiet and courteous man, Eduard Luedtke made his home in Widford, a small rural village in Hertfordshire not far from where he was imprisoned. He attended Mass regularly at the Catholic church in Much Hadham, walked his dog every day and, in a softly German accented English, would order the occasional half pint in the Green Man pub. Few of the regulars knew about the extraordinary journey that had brought him to these shores.

Eduard Wendelin Luedtke was born in 1924 in Schulzendorf, a small village in Pomerania on the Baltic coast. He was the last of ten children born into a family who farmed a smallholding. In 1942, at the age of 18, he was conscripted into the *Wehrmacht* — the German army — and after initial training as an infantry private was sent to the Eastern Front. He not only survived the cruel winter of 1942-43, when temperatures fell to minus 30, but also the chaotic German retreat from Russia that followed.

A year later he found himself in the line of fire again, this time when his unit was sent to Duren on the Belgian-German border to await the Allied forces advancing across France after D-Day. It was there in September 1944 that he was seriously wounded by shrapnel.



Eduard Luedtke in German uniform

Luedtke spent the next three months in hospital in Brunn, Czechoslovakia, before being sent home to convalesce, only to find himself caught up in the rapid approach of the Red Army. His mother urged him to escape the village and, travelling south through the snow on horse and sleigh, he rejoined the German army and was returned to the Western Front. There in Belgium he was involved in more heavy fighting

before being captured, exhausted in a barn, by US soldiers in April 1945.

After being taken prisoner Luedtke was marched under escort with other PoWs from Belgium to Marseilles, a distance of more than 700 miles, and there he embarked on a troopship bound for the US. After nearly a year of captivity in Maryland, West Virginia, he again found himself on a troopship, this time, he thought, heading for Germany. However, the ship docked in Liverpool and he was transported with others to Wynchos PoW camp near Much Hadham.

The war was over and farm labour was in short supply so the prisoners were sent to local farms to work the land. In April 1947 he was sent to Harrods Farm where he lived in a simple wooden hut. He was treated well by the farmer and, for the first time in years, he felt settled. Not only that he fell in love with Eileen Coffey, a land army girl originally from London.

In December 1948 Luedtke was finally discharged from the *Wehrmacht* and given a travel warrant to return to Germany. There he found the family farm was now in Poland, which had been swallowed up by the Soviet Union, and his remaining family had moved to Darmstadt near Frankfurt. Thinking

about his land army girl he decided his future now lay in England and he returned to marry her and work once more at Harrods Farm.

He enjoyed his life in England and, despite being a former enemy combatant, felt accepted. Even with rationing still in force, he said, conditions were much better than in the war-devastated ruin that was the former Third Reich. He didn't have any memorabilia with him — no uniform, medals or photographs — but he did have some German friends, three other former PoWs who had decided to settle in Britain as well (and who he was to outlive). The single possession he kept from the war was a mandolin that one of his fellow PoWs had made in the camp and presented to him as a parting gift.

In 1950 he and Eileen set up home in a Victorian cottage in Widford, where Eduard remained for the rest of his life. They had one daughter, Annette, a retired civil servant. He would try to visit Germany once a year, sometimes with Annette. Her partner, Richard, recalled an awkward moment when he first met Luedtke. The television was on and, with what seemed like unfortunate timing, the comedian Freddie Starr was on screen standing up in an open-top Morris Minor, dressed as Hitler. Every-

one turned nervously to see Luedtke's reaction. There was a pause, then he roared with laughter.

He had more cause to laugh when he went to Harlow hospital for routine tests and the doctor took an x-ray only to find, to his astonishment, that there were still lumps of shrapnel in his body. Though Luedtke always kept his German citizenship and passport, he accepted with good grace the decision of the British authorities to anglicise his name, changing the unlauted ü to a ue. There was a reason for it, after all, the British typewriters in the 1950s had no unlaute key. In retirement Luedtke devoted himself to his garden and allotment. He followed the Brexit debate with keen interest, being particularly intrigued by Boris Johnson, whom he considered to be "quite a character".

After such an eventful early life he died peacefully at home in the cottage he had lived in for 66 years, cared for by Annette and her partner, Richard (Eileen having died in 1984). The church was packed for his funeral, a community paying its final respects to a former enemy of the realm.

**Eduard Luedtke, German prisoner of war, was born on August 23, 1924. He died on July 24, 2016, aged 91**