

Bettys

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Obituary: Victor Wild of Bettys and Taylors



Ex-Bettys boss Victor Wild, right, pictured with son Jonathan, has died at the age of 96.

Man who did so much to create Bettys' success

By DAVID BEHRENS

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Victor Wild, who has died at 96, was a business leader and entrepreneur who helped launch Yorkshire Tea and make Bettys Tea Rooms world famous.

He was the nephew of Frederick Belmont, a Swiss confectioner who created the uniquely Yorkshire chain of Bettys cafes upon his arrival in England in 1919.

Childless and anxious for an heir to take on the business, Belmont asked his sister, Ida, back in Switzerland if he could "borrow" one of her three teenagers to bring up as his own. Victor, the youngest at 13, volunteered.

He had been born Carl Viktor Wild in St Gallen, Switzerland, in May 1923.

When he arrived in Yorkshire, Bettys had branches in Harrogate, Leeds, Bradford and York, and its own Harrogate bakery.

By the time he retired in 1996, the firm had become a Yorkshire institution and Yorkshire Tea, launched in

the 1970s, a growing national brand. Like his uncle before him, Victor arrived in Yorkshire unable to speak English.

He was packed off to be educated at Sedbergh, returning to Harrogate in the holidays where he worked in the Bettys bakery and used his artistic talents to design advertisements for the tea rooms.

Taking another lead from his uncle, who had been born he was born Fritz Bützer, he also anglicised his name.

With his schooling complete, he spent a year training in Claridges' kitchens during the Luftwaffe's so-called Baby Blitz of London in 1944, before returning north to work at the York branch of Bettys.

After the war, Victor returned to Switzerland to train in hotels and restaurants.

He came back in 1947, became a British citizen in 1949 and married his wife, Kay, the following year.

In 1952, Frederick died suddenly, in his office above the Harrogate tea room.

With Frederick's wife, Claire, installed as chairman, Victor assumed, at 29 years old, the managing directorship. By his own admission, he was unprepared for the task,

Bolstered by a sense of fairness, coupled with intellect and creativity, within ten years he had pulled off a masterstroke - buying another Yorkshire family business, CE Taylor and Co, a tea and coffee importer with a number of tea shops whose prize asset was the beautiful Cafe Imperial on the corner of Parliament Street in Harrogate, which is today Bettys' flagship branch.

By the time he retired in 1996, he had been with the firm for five hugely successful decades.

Recognising that prosperity was not the only indicator of business success, Victor turned down several offers over the years to sell the business.

"My objective was to have a business one enjoyed working in," he said.

He was succeeded by his son, Jonathan Wild, who had joined the business in 1975, himself retiring in 2011. Until last month, Lesley Wild, Victor's daughter-in-law, was chair of the board.

Kay Wild died earlier this year and Victor is survived by three children, five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

Victor Wild - A tribute

by Peter Brown

Since the turn of the year we have lost two of Harrogate's most distinguished residents, Kay and Victor Wild, both good friends and loyal members of the Civic Society.

Victor, Swiss born, moved to England in 1936 to live with his aunt and uncle who had founded Bettys in 1919. Victor was only thirteen but the long term plan was for him to become part of the business. I think we can safely say that the plan worked. After completing his education at Sedburgh School Victor went through an intense training course at Claridges and then, in 1943, joined the Bettys business. Initially he worked in the York restaurant which narrowly missed being requisitioned by the War Ministry but survived due to its growing popularity, especially with servicemen.

After the war Victor returned to Switzerland for a year to gain the practical experience needed to take a bigger role at Bettys, both in the kitchen and front of house. He arrived back in Harrogate in 1947 which turned out to be a pivotal year for him since, as well as becoming a director of Bettys, he first met Kay who was to become his wife and lifelong companion. In due course he became chairman of the family company, finally retiring in October 1996 while continuing his close involvement in the business. Throughout, he enjoyed his outside interests - his love of art (a talented artist himself), singing with the Choral Society and membership of the Dramatic Society - and of course playing his part as a committee member of the Civic Society where he was Treasurer until 2010.

Victor at the unveiling of the plaque commemorating the centenary of the opening of the first Bettys premises.

17 July 2019



This tribute to Victor can only scratch the surface of his extraordinary life and Annie Gray's recently published book *From the Alps to the Dales* brilliantly chronicles the story of the family and the business.

As for the person, all who knew Victor will remember him as man of high principles, generous and, certainly in my own experience, with never an unkind word for anyone. He was understated and modest, with a keen sense of humour, especially concerning his own mishaps, and most of all, he was a family man who enjoyed seventy years of blissfully happy married life with Kay and the family that grew up around them - three children, five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

Without Victor we are all diminished and the world is a poorer place. He was truly a remarkable man who enriched the lives of all who were close to him. He and Kay will remain in our memories forever.

Victor Wild: 30 May 1923 - 11 April 2020