

# Gang Show pioneer

THE much-loved chairman of the Sarratt Horticultural Society, Mr John "Flight" Cracknell, 79, of Greenacres, Dimmocks Lane, Sarratt, died on Friday morning.

His funeral for close family will take place at West Herts crematorium on January 5 at 2.30pm. There will be a memorial service at Sarratt Parish Church on February 17 at 3pm.

Mr Cracknell had said that he did not want a big funeral



and that a memorial service would be a more appropriate place to say farewell.

Mr Cracknell was a Squadron Leader in the Royal Air Force for many years and was closely linked with the famous Gang Shows.

He was a friend of legendary organiser, Ralph Reader, and was responsible for recruiting promising RAF members into the shows.

Among those he spotted were Peter Sellers, Tony Hancock and Dick Emery. He remained friends with them all and they often visited him at his Sarratt home.

On leaving the RAF he resumed an involvement with the Scout movement that had started in 1916 and it is for this that most people will remember him.

He was warden at Phasels Wood, Kings Langley, for 18 years and negotiated with the Forestry Commission over Lees Wood at Chandlers Cross, helping to develop that into the Scout camp. The Scouts recently raised enough money to buy the lease and one of the buildings has been named "Flight" Oak by way of thanks.

Twenty years of the Watford Gang Show owed its existence to Mr Cracknell who helped produce the shows in the 1950s and was instrumental in them moving from the Town Hall to the Palace Theatre.

He was most closely associated with the 2nd Bushey and Oxhey Scouts. He was made the troop's president some years ago.

Five years ago he was granted Freedom of the City of London.

He referred to his Scouts as "my old boys" and it is with them that some of his fondest memories lie.

His nick-name, Flight, came about when he and one of his old boys were at an art exhibition. A painting of a Spitfire, one of his great passions, had the word "flight" in the vapour-trail. The young Scout suggested that it would be a good name for him and he agreed, adding that it should just be between the two of them.

There will be no flowers at the funeral and donations should be sent to Lees Wood, c/o 67 The Ridgeway, Watford, WD1 3TJ.

Invitations to the memorial service will be sent out in the near future. To help with the organisation of the service however, all those who wish to attend are asked to register their names with the executors as Sarratt Parish Church holds only 150 people.