



Margrave Of The Marshes

John Peel , Sheila Ravenscroft

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Through nigh-on forty years of laconic brilliance on Radio 1, a musical taste which defined a culture and his widely popular Radio 4 show, Home Truths, John Peel reached out to an audience that was as diverse as his record collection. He was a genuinely great Briton, beloved by millions. John's unique voice and sensibility were evident in everything he did, and nowhere is that more true than in these pages.

Margrave of the Marshes is the astonishing book John Peel began to write before his untimely death in October 2004, completed by the woman who knew him best, his wife Sheila. It is a unique and intimate portrait of a life, a marriage and a family which is every bit as extraordinary as the man himself - a fitting tribute to a bona fide legend.

Margrave Of The Marshes Details

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From Reader Review Margrave Of The Marshes for online ebook

Shane says

A dissapointing read, as much as I admire the man his rambling style annoys after a while.

Andrew says

Memory is a funny thing, but I can remember sitting on my bed with fingers poised on the 'play' and 'record' buttons on my tape recorder and my parents' old wireless as close to the microphone as possible taping The Stranglers' song "Something Better Change" recorded as a session on the John Peel show. This should be 1977, but I remember it as 1979 because the first record I ever bought was The Stranglers' "Five Minutes" and that would have been November 1978. I don't recall listening to the radio much before that time, but then I would only have been 11 so my memory can't be trusted.

The important point is that listening to John Peel would have been the first time I heard music outside of the box on the radio. One of the first songs I remember taping was called "Creative Waste" by a band that I vaguely remember as Linx/Lynx(?). It's a testament to the diversity of obscure material on the show that I've never heard the song anywhere since (nor can find it with the luxury of the internet). I also remember hearing "Oh Look There Goes Concorde Again" by the Native Hipsters and feeling I'd tapped into something weird and wonderful, which, in fact, I had.

These are just a few recollections of the John Peel show which I confess I never listened to as much as I wish I had. This autobiography perfectly encapsulates the essence of how I percieved Peel as a person - both from his own recollections and latterly from his wife, Sheila. Interesting factual anecdotes interspersed with the family life which was obviously so important to him, mixed with self-deprecating good humour, and above all warmth. The book would have gained five stars if it wasn't for my lack of interest in football (but seriously, had John been able to complete the book himself I am sure I would have given it five stars. This is no disrepects to Sheila, simply a sadness that John was unable to conclude it).

Strange to believe next year will mark ten years since Peel's death. I remember playing The Undertones "Teenage Kicks" on the day I heard the news (probably the most unoriginal thing I've ever done) and it feels like yesterday. Such is the passage of time.

I realise I haven't said much about the book itself in this review, but anyone coming to this autobiography will enjoy it. You know who you are.

Nic Margett says

John Peel is somewhat of a hero of mine, and i like to think he would approve of about 99% of my taste in music. Although, apparently he wouldn't have liked me due to my taste in football teams. Gutted. Anyway, this is a superbly enjoyable book, part one reads just like Peel's trademark delivery, i could just hear his voice lilting from the page the whole time. It's quite sad when it just stops abruptly, but Sheila does a great

job of carrying on where he left off. In fact, it could possibly have made it better to have the second person's view of Peel's later life. I really rather enjoyed her viewpoint and i'm glad she decided to carry on where he left off.

I was pretty surprised at how traumatic his earlier life had been. For such a happy-go-lucky person he experienced some pretty horrific things. My memory of him is as a very positive person. It's quite surprising to hear that he was very shy, and completely humbled by the people he most admired yet couldn't see why anyone would be nervous to meet him. Shy or not, he had a pretty incredible life, full of celebrities and musicians, and i'm glad he enjoyed his time as well as being an important part of the national culture.

This book goes through the full range of emotions, laugh out loud funny, joyful in the love he and Shiela shared, sad and shocking in parts, reading about his funeral at the end made me cry like a baby. There's not much doubt or debate as to Peel's status as a national treasure, his influence on British music is still being felt today nearly 10 years after his death, and his legend will live on in the hundreds of sessions he recorded over his career.

David Carter says

Like John Peel I am a Wirral boy, I like football too, albeit belonging to a different tribe, I also know Suffolk well, having been educated there at boarding school, and I worked for a cotton broker in the Cotton Exchange in Liverpool, albeit 10 years after Mr P, so all these things made Margrave of the Marshes of particular interest to me.

Biographies and reminiscences are always far more interesting when they take you down the same or similar roads that you have travelled yourself.

The pity is that only about a third of this book was written by the man himself before his untimely end. His wife Sheila has striven manfully, or should I say womanfully, to complete the book, though perhaps inevitably one is left with the constant thought as to what John would have thought about this, or that.

John Peel enjoyed a reputation of being in the right place at the right time, but that was not always correct. When the biggest ever one city music explosion happened in Liverpool in 1962, when one might have imagined John standing in the corner of the Cavern Club sipping a coke and admiring the music and the girls, Mr Peel was in fact in the deep south of the USA, helping to establish the Dallas County Cricket Club, photographing and shaking the hands of Presidents Kennedy, Nixon and Johnson in the presidential campaign of 1963, and actually being in Dallas when Kennedy was assassinated, ringing the Liverpool Echo and offering his on-the-spot story by a "local" man. Shaking the hands of such iconic politicians aside, how he must have regretted missing the whole Liverpool thing, and maybe that affected him more than we know.

John was finally able to get on the Beatles bandwagon when they broke in America and he gained some minor fame through being the resident "scouse" Beatles expert on Texan radio stations, no doubt putting on the thick Liverpool accent to sound just like the fab four, an accent that he surely would not have been allowed to utter at Shrewsbury school, for fear of (yet another) utter thrashing.

Some people think that John then came back to Britain and joined Radio Caroline, but he never appeared on that station at all, but on the more, we always thought, slightly more conservative and mainstream Radio

London, where he presented a progrock show called the Perfumed Garden where he gained a big following and showcased the talents of up and coming bands, a talent and feature that he would pursue relentlessly until his death in 2005.

One always imagines one's friends, and I, like most of his listeners, always imagined John to be my friend, shared the same taste in music, though of course, friends never do, not exactly. I was never with him on the whole progrock scene and was eternally grateful when the punk explosion came along and swept most of that pretentious rubbish away.

But through his love of progrock he became a close friend with, while promoting at every turn, Marc Bolan's Tyrannosaurus Rex, yet once that (shallow and lightweight) band found fame, Bolan treated Peel terribly by refusing to take his calls, something that Peel couldn't quite believe, something that hurt him, and something that may have changed his thinking thereafter about becoming too close to some of his heroes.

Of course, it didn't stop him championing little known bands and artists, occasionally years before anyone else, like Bob Marley, the Smiths, the Wedding Present, Blur, White Stripes, Manic Street Preachers and the Strokes to name but a few from a very long list.

I have a small confession to make, I always slightly preferred to listen to Dave Fanning on RTE from Dublin, which, being Wirral based, I was always able to do, the Wirral being closer to Dublin than it is to London, and somehow Fanning's musical selection was more in tune with my own, and maybe included less of the frankly outrageous bands (and occasionally boring ones) that simply didn't cut it, but who would never have gained any national airplay whatsoever without Peel there to do it for them, and for that Mister Peel will, quite rightly, be remembered very fondly forever.

One of the things about biographies from people who are no longer with us, is that we are forever thinking about what "he" or "she" might have thought about subsequent events and developments.

For example, John was a lifelong supporter of Liverpool Football Club, and yet he never knew of that amazing night in Istanbul when the reds came back from three down to win the Champion's League in 2005. How he would have enjoyed that, especially after living in the shadows of the other red tribe from along the East Lincs Road for so long, something that clearly rankled with him, as it would. It still seems barely credible that he didn't get to know about that, and enjoy it too.

It is such a shame that only around a third of this book is written by the man himself. The remainder is compiled by his wife and family, from notes, documents, diaries, and shared memories, tender and touching and interesting as those are, they are not from the man himself, and perhaps inevitably, are not the same, and not quite as interesting.

I would so liked to have known his opinions on the Smiths for example, and why, quite astonishingly, there is not a single mention of Joy Division in the book at all; they don't even make the comprehensive index, and that's very weird and I wonder why.

That aside, if you have any interest whatsoever in indie music, broadcasting, the history of pop music, and on how Britain changed so completely from 1960 to 2000, then "Margrave of the Marshes" will be essential reading for you, but then again, if you have an interest in these things, you will almost certainly have read this book already. If not, the question has to be asked, why not? Where have you been?

Do I recommend it? What do you think? This is a super book and I could not put it down.

Andrew says

In honesty this book has languished on the bookshelf for far too long and was overdue being read...I'm pleased I took the time to do so..there was a time in the mid eighties to early nineties where Peel was an important figure for me in regard my musical education..it was from him I first heard the likes of the Smiths,the Pogues,Terry and Gerry plus genres such as Grindcore and early Thrash metal..in fact his show was a real mix with hip hop and stuff with strong pop sensibilities being present and correct too.

This is a book of two parts...The Peel is like the man himself seemed numerous ,understated and reflective..his half deals mainly with his formative years and had he continued writing I suspect due to this(unless heavy editing occurred) this would have been a much longer book.

His wife Shelia's half is far more reflective on his career and offers an outside insight into the man as John in his part didn't seem to be one who reflected much on his own psyche.

It's an interesting book and although there are luminaries along the way you never lose focus that this is a book about John Peel.

I suspect the rise of internet radio stations means there is a possibility that there are D.J.s out there now who offer an eclectic mix..I do think the loss of Peel however still hits as they are on the fringes where he was always at the centre and on a commercially astute station.

For all that this isn't a sad book it's a book that celebrates John Peel and does this well.

I do like the two distinct voices in this book it does round off the character better than just the person's first hand account of things.

Gemma collins says

I'm not usually one for biographies, tending to stick to novels only but John Peel is something of a hero of mine and his unfinished autobiography was a must read. I am aware that a lot of non Britishers don't know of Peel, but all the more reason to read this. Peel was THE most influential radio DJ in England who singularly changed the face of British music and introduced numerous bands that otherwise would have had no chance of radio coverage. He died sadly in late 2004 and anyone in England who grew up with his affable charming manner and absolutely incredible knowledge of music is still mourning him as there has been no one then or since who can replace his unique style. He became quite an institution in England and my love of music, discovering new bands and gigs is largely due to his radio shows and passion for the weird and wonderful. For anyone who saw the film 'The Boat That Rocked'(not a good film) , Peel was one of those on the boat DJ-ing until the last hour when the authorities kicked them off.

Margrave of the Marshes was in process when John died so his wife, Sheila (known loveably as The Pig by Peel) finished his story for him. Anyone who is at all interested in music will be interested by his life, which spanned Beatle-mania, the introduction of American Rock n Roll through the beginnings of Punk and grunge, indie, electronica with Peel there at the forefront encouraging and launching countless bands.

Barry Cunningham says

I still miss him on the radio, his introductions of new bands and different music had an impact on me for many many years. This book says it all. A broadcasting legend, one of the best the BBC have ever had.

I did meet him once, all too briefly at a Rugby 'do', a disco in a marquee, in a field near Hull in the late 60's, I

said "Now then John, great music" he said "mumble, mumble Piss off mumble mumble" so I did, a riveting conversation I must say.

Sar says

I've always known about John Peel, but it is only now having read this book that I really appreciate just what a brilliant, legendary man he was. I think above all, he was human and could be related to - he wanted to do what he loved & he wanted to share what he was passionate about; music, and for that he will be remembered.

This book is actually the best autobiography I have ever read. John made me laugh throughout the book & the saddest part was the end of part 1 in the event of his death in 2004. Sheila continued it on fantastically, however, and the diary entries & other snippets from John through the rest of the book made it seem like he was there telling his story as she was.

I thought this book was brilliant & it made me want to be a radio DJ myself; to do what he did and spend his days surrounded by music and the people he loved would be pretty fantastic. When I shut the book for the last time, I was fairly emotional & very sad not to have been born earlier in order to properly appreciate him & what he did for music when he was around. God bless you, John Peel, & RIP.

Edmole says

A lovely book, really good to remember John Peel and why he was so loved. Also very evocative of the pre-digital age where there were only so many seams from which to mine culture, and how rich a seam Peel was.

Very sad halfway through when he dies and The Pig takes up the story, you don't get any sense from the first half of the book that this is an old man approaching his end. A really sad death.

I wonder what would have happened to John. 6music exists in his image to an extent, but I wonder how much that would be the case if he were still alive, and if he would have been pensioned off to the Friday night slot on 6 that his son now inhabits, or whether he would have maintained a presence on R1?

Lord Beardsley says

Though not a musician, John Peel was an artist in his own right. He was responsible for introducing lesser known bands to a wide audience, the likes of which hasn't been seen before or since. For him, listening to music was an art form, and we're all the better to have had him in this world.

Not only was he an incredibly enigmatic figure, he also embraced life, love, and kindness to the highest degree. That being said, I wish he was my dad. He would've been an awesome dad. And if you like Dad Humor, welp, this book has that in spades.

His wife Sheila (lovingly nicknamed 'Pig' by John for her tendency to snort when laughing) took up the writing of this book after his untimely passing in 2004, and her voice is as full of humor and wit as his. They were truly a pair meant to be together, and after reading this, I think I'll always have a deep abiding adoration for the both of them.

Not only was it nice to read about some groups I am a fan of, but also was an exhilarating musical education wherein I discovered at least 20 groups/musicians that I am now a devoted fan of.

I was so taken with this, that I made a (reeeeeeaaalllllyyyyy long) John & Pig inspired mix on 8 tracks that you can listen to (if you want) here:

<http://8tracks.com/thatbeardgirl/down...>

Thank you John & Pig!

Carole Tyrrell says

When I saw on the internet in October 2004 that John Peel had died I really felt that I'd lost someone important in my life. Although I hadn't been an avid listener to JP I had always enjoyed listening to his distinctive voice, laid back humour, and being introduced to bands and singers who I might never otherwise have heard.

John Peel, or John Ravenscroft as he was actually born, was born on the day before the outbreak of the 2nd World War and throughout a 38 year career he refused to be categorised. You literally didn't know what he would play next. In an era of constant, and increasing, segmentisation i.e. if you like this, then you might like something similar, as if there was only one box to put yourself in. As the man himself said 'I want to hear something I've never heard before.' He loved music, he was genuinely enthusiastic about it instead of seeing it as a stepping stone to something else and there's been no-one to replace him.

Margrave was initially his project and he began writing it earnest. He had a wonderfully humorous style – at times I was laughing out loud – and this section which covers his childhood, his education, National Service and his supposed friendship with the Beatles which is how he acquired his mock Liverpudlian accent. He started out in America in the '60's which must have been really exciting and the photos he took of JFK in Dallas prior to assassination are included. He doesn't gloss over his disastrous 1st marriage to a 15 year old who neglected to tell him her true age.

Then, after his untimely death, his wife Sheila, or the Pig, as she was always affectionately known, takes over. This covers their family life with their 4 children and various cats and dogs in Suffolk intertwined with tales of the various musicians that JP championed over the years. I'd noticed that his show was being moved back further and further and it was difficult to find. I never did listen to Home Truths but I got the impression from listeners comments that it was like Marmite – you either like it or you didn't.

Margrave is a fitting tribute to a much missed man whose influence on music has been acknowledged and cherished. You might not have listened to him that often but it was always comforting to feel that he was still there. He came from a time when music was important in peoples' lives, a bookmark not a backdrop, when the Saturday afternoon trip to check out the new releases was a much anticipated ritual and you would actually listen to an LP in its entirety instead of just cherry picking bits. And album covers were something to admire and decode. It's harder to find new music now/

Margrave is a book about a man who was genuinely lost in music and it made such a change to read a biography about someone who's actually lived a life that was interesting and full instead of the usual drivel destined for Poundland. It was very touching reading that he was looking forward to seeing his grandson, Archie, on his return from his holiday and that it wasn't to be.

It sounds like a cliché but we will not see his like again.

Pete daPixie says

Not many moons back I had read Michael Heatley's biog on John Peel, 'A Life in Music'. You wait for years then two come along at once. So this was picked up in a charity shop by my better half for 50p. Published in 2005, a year after the Heatley biog, part autobiography from Peel himself and completed by his wife Shiela Ravenscroft, aka the Pig.

Peel writes in similar manner to his presentations on radio, dry humour and sardonic wit, that is taken up equally well by the 'Pig' in Part II of 'Margrave of the Marshes'.

A rare exception from the 'poptastic' radio dj, listening to Peel was essential listening for me on Sunday afternoons in the late sixties and his late evening shows in the seventies and eighties. I was unaware of John's adventures in the U.S. prior to reading Heatley's biog, so was interested to read his own version of events. Fantastic to read of Peels appointment with destiny in Dallas with JFK, along with his blagging into the DPD HQ for the press show with Lee Oswald and Jack Ruby. John said, "Oswald looked so convincingly bewildered that he was either a damn good actor or he was innocent. The boy didn't seem to have a clue what was going on." A life of being in the right place at the right time continues through Radio London and Radio One, all the way to Radio Four, so that he became to many, a well respected man.

Not sure why the front jacket has 'Jesus wasn't made of fish' printed across it. Wisely, this seems to have been removed, as my 50p copy is free of it.

Rae Gee says

Sadly, I only really came to know John Peel in the latter years of his life. I have vivid memories of being lulled to sleep by his dulcet tones, smiling at his dry humour as I fell into a slumber.

I'm not normally one for biographies, but when this was published, I HAD to get it. It will have you laughing and crying in equal measures and, if you're a fan of music in any shape or form, then this is a must read. John championed bands from a wide range of genres, helping millions of listeners to discover bands they would have never ordinarily have heard. Even in the latter parts of the book (which are written by his family. In true style, John left the book on a cliffhanger!) you can hear his voice.

Whether it's for the memories, the music or John, this is an all round great book. You'll never regret adding it to your book shelf!

Silvio111 says

I know that John Peel was a highly revered and much loved figure in the radio/music world because of his enthusiasm for and knowledge of the contemporary music of his time. He "discovered" and publicized numerous musical acts by featuring them on his show and playing their records.

The photos in this book show his wife, four children, and many other people he interacted with.

Unfortunately, this is a difficult book to read. The first half was written as a memoir by Peel himself before his death. After he died, the other half of the book was pieced together in the voices of his wife and children. However, there is no indication in the Table of Contents who wrote which chapters, and each chapter, as you read it, does not clearly identify who is speaking. This drives me nuts! The book is just a ramble, in no particular chronological order of reminiscences. I gave up after reading the first couple of chapters and then scanning various parts of the book.

One of the most surprising revelations of the parts of the book that I did read was Peel's insecurity about being seen as a "hanger-on" by musicians, rather than the statesman of music that he was. His humility and down-to-earth character did come through loud and clear.

I know Peel's fans probably appreciate all these anecdotes, but it just was too distracting for me to make any sense of. I think I would rather just listen to Peel's many archived radio shows, including those of the Beatles, to get a sense of who he was.

Heather Landy says

This is one of my favourite biographies. I remember getting this as a Christmas present and running away to find a quiet spot so I could read it!

Nicole says

One of the single best compliments I received about my radio program came from a Brit I worked with at the library. He said that he enjoyed my program; it introduced him to new music he wouldn't have heard otherwise, and reminded him of listening to John Peel. Yes, I was blown away!

Even more so now after reading this autobiography/biography. The part Peel (or Ravenscroft his true surname) wrote was like sitting in a room with him, listening to the wandering memories of someone who has led a full life. And the biographical remembrances laid down by his wife to round it out were an interesting way to get another take on events and finish out his legacy.

Which, for me, is what he did in life: turn people on to music and people that we might otherwise not have been exposed to, and we're the richer for knowing. Simply reading through this book has given me a nice sized list of scribbled bands and songs and references to check out!

Here's some quotes and such that I marked out:

"It may not sound like much today, but [Elvis'] 'Heartbreak Hotel' had the effect on me of a naked extra terrestrial walking through the door and announcing that he/she was going to live with me for the rest of my life."

re: bringing music to a meeting - "...believing that in this I had found a record that would bridge the gap between us."

re: promising cooperation, changing nothing, and having it taken as having cooperated - "What had changed

was his perception of what he heard issuing from his radio."

"For my 45th birthday, an important anniversary for the old-school DJ, along with 33 1/3 and 78..."

"Right Time, Right Place, Wrong Speed."

"...and I knew that I would never forget the perfect conjunction of place, mood and music."

"...we were accompanied by our battered eight-track of Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere, which John considered one of the greatest albums of all time (though this top-ten list contained anything up to two hundred albums)."

"The programmes with which I'm involved are aimed at turning y'all onto some musicks that you might not otherwise investigate."

"He taught me that there was nothing shameful in getting things wrong from time to time, provided you remained true to some sort of ill-defined but genuinely held principles - and popped around the corner for a beer if time permitted."

"It was a real pleasure to feel again that feeling that comes only when a band is really hitting it right, when it seems as though some unseen hand is reaching right down inside you and dragging out all the hang-ups and inhibitions in there and flinging them away...Being an over-emotional sort of twerp and being a dark, whirling mess of inhibitions myself, I was dancing quietly in the corner of the backstage area with tears streaming down my cheeks and an idiot grin on my face."

"I prefer to remember those who have died, whether relatives, friends, rock stars or a combination of the three, in their proper context, filling some greater or lesser niche in everyday life, rather than distorting my memory of them in a welter of terminal sentiment."

"He had determined beforehand to play different kinds of music...not just dance music, but music people could dance to."

Steve Erickson says

I've just finished John Peel's memoir MARGRAVE OF THE MARSHES. Unfortunately, he died in 2004 before he could complete it, and first-person passages alternate with third-person accounts of his life written by his widow Sheila Ravenscroft. It is really amazing to me that a man whose introduction to pop music was a concert by skiffle musician Lonnie Donegan as a teenager (that Billy Bragg and Roger Daltrey also attended) could go on to embrace grime and play it on his radio show just a few months before his passing at age 65. He was also one of the few prominent figures who managed to be equally identified with the hippie and punk countercultures (for an example of the former, he reads a faux-Tolkien story on the first Tyrannosaurus Rex album) and go on from there to embrace hip-hop, rave culture, grindcore and the White Stripes! The anonymous "Vibracobra 23" has done us a great service by posting about 900 Peel sessions to YouTube, with recent additions including a great 1978 one from Elvis Costello featuring punchier production and louder guitar than THIS YEAR'S MODEL. There are a huge number of sessions up featuring artists I've never heard of. But this book is frustrating in ways that make me wonder if a professional editor worked on it. It leaps about strangely in time. Rather than sticking to music and Peel's work as a DJ, it delves

into his childhood and teenage years, where he experienced sexual abuse in school. (I have the impression this was far from uncommon for teenage boys in British schools in the 1950s and 1960s, not that it's gone away anywhere now.) He actually got his start as a DJ in Dallas in the early '60s, where he explored his passion for blues and saw the Shangri-Las play in a bowling alley. But the book never delves that far into why he liked his favorite bands - the Undertones' "Teenage Kicks" was his all-time fave song, and a line from it is engraved on his headstone, but apart from mentioning his delight in receiving that band's debut indie single, he does not talk in detail about why they clicked with him. He says that Lightnin' Hopkins and the Fall are the artists he owned the most records by, and the Fall recorded enough Peel sessions to fill a 5-CD box set, but just what attracted him so much to Mark E. Smith's vision remains elusive. This is not a work of music criticism. There are plenty of interesting anecdotes, including how he gave up his minimal interest in drugs after getting unwittingly dosed with LSD-laced ice cream, and a lengthy passage about how Marc Bolan abandoned a seemingly close friendship after becoming a superstar with "Ride a White Stan" and "Bang a Gang (Get It On)" and started treating him like a stranger. That led him to be a bit more stand-offish with musicians in the future. Football (soccer) intrigued him more than it does me, but obviously he had interests beyond music. As one might expect, he received about 400 demo tapes a week at the peak of his radio show's success and he had certain rules for things to avoid, like citing the NY Dolls or Stooges as an influence (I guess he thought this equalled bad garage-punk). I know there are at least 2 other books about Peel available, one of which lists the playlist for every show he did. (By 1975, the pickings got pretty dire, something he acknowledges here and which shows why punk was necessary.) I kept wishing there was a similar figure in the late '70s U.S. who could've popularized punk and all the worthwhile music that came from it on a national level, but we didn't have a national radio station till MTV came along and became our de facto version of it.

Kevin says

Years ago, I lived for a time in London. While I was there, I made it a point to listen to John Peel's show as often as I could. Being a lifelong music fan, it was a real treat to listen to someone with a genuine ear for music who was given the latitude to play what he liked. Add that to a singular voice and style and you have the makings of some cracking good radio programming.

I had long meant to read "Margrave From The Marshes" so, when a friend mentioned it on Facebook recently, I thought "right, no time like the present!" I admit I approached this book with some trepidation. I knew John had only been able to complete part of it before he died and the rest had been finished by his wife and family. Who wants to read a quarter of an autobiography- especially just the first quarter? To make matters worse, John's part of "Margrave Of The Marshes" is hugely entertaining. While mostly covering his early years, it's rambling enough so that there are plenty of stories from his time in the business. And his unique voice is so present in the words that it was like listening to him read an audiobook. The only other autobiography I've read that was so steeped in the author's voice was Katherine Hepburn's aptly-titled "Me". All the Peel warmth, humor and quirkiness are here in spades.

I was enjoying John's part of "Margrave" to such a degree that I pre-gave myself permission to abandon it if the second part, the part John hadn't written, didn't live up to the first part (and how could it?). Well you know what, the second part of "Margrave of the Marshes" is as entertaining as the first. John's voice is still there, from his diaries, but joining it, is the voice of his wife, Sheila Ravenscroft, who had been by his side for most of his adult life. Autobiography becomes biography and we, the readers, get insights into our subject that can only be gleaned by someone who knew him very, very well, perhaps in ways he didn't even know himself. And Sheila has a great sense of humor, as well. I finished "Margrave From The Marshes"

with a newfound understanding of John Peel and respect for the woman who stood at his side.

DS says

incredible memoir of a hero

Paul says

John Peel is something of a national treasure in Britain and in the world popular music for his unceasing promotion of new music and unknown artists. Peel (real name John Ravenscroft) was a DJ for many years; in the US in the early 60s and then on pirate radio and finally the BBC from the late 60s until his death in 2004. Peel always promoted the odd, obscure and aspiring. He famously championed punk rock on his show after hearing the Ramones and was the first BBC DJ to do so. He was also a champion of reggae, hip-hop, garage, grime; the list is endless. He worked for the World Service and went on trips around the world where he picked up local music to promote on his shows.

The list of bands that Peel supported and assisted to fame is enormous and impressive from Pink Floyd in the 60s to White Stripes in the early 2000s. He was a great supporter of live music and toured endlessly all over the country. I remember him from my university days turning up and playing stuff that you would not normally find on the radio. In later years he also had a radio programme on Radio 4 called Home Truths which was not musical at all. It gave a platform to ordinary people to talk about all sorts of aspects of their lives; funny, eccentric, poignant. Peel (despite his reservations) was a great interviewer and knew how to put people at their ease.

This is part autobiography and part biography as Peel died before he finished it and it was completed by his wife Sheila. Peel's part (by far the best part of the book) ends whilst he is in America and before his first marriage. The book does feel disjointed and the second part is rambling and overlong.

Peel is very honest about his early years. He was sent to public school (Shrewsbury) and describes (with the self-deprecating humour he is known for) the horrors he and others underwent. The sexual abuse of younger boys by older boys was routine and institutionalised and in Peel's case went as far as him being raped by an older boy. There has been a good deal of soul-searching about the various child abuse scandals in Britain recently. The origins and history must be partially linked to what we have put our children through in times past; linked, of course to the nature of male sexuality.

I must admit that Peel was a hero of mine; these days I don't do heroes as everyone has feet of clay, as we all do. That brings me to the issues I have been skirting around. Peel married his first wife when she was 15 (he reportedly said he was misled about her age). He married in Texas and so the marriage was legal, Peel was ten years older. Peel also reports that because he was from Liverpool, when the Beatles broke in America he suddenly became very attractive to local teenagers. I know that in the 60s there was a much more lax attitudes to boundaries, but some of the stories and reports I have problems with. I know Peel married again and settled down to become a national treasure. It leaves me with questions about redemption; how do you atone for past misdeeds; what about the victims. It is a pity that Peel did not live long enough to answer some of these questions himself. All in all this feels like a very unsatisfactory review partly because I don't have the answers. All I do know is that parts of this left a nasty taste and in some ways I wish I hadn't read it.
