

Roland Pugh – An Honest Man

The sudden and untimely death of Roland Pugh has left his family and friends reeling in grievous shock, and his loss will be devastatingly felt in every area in which he was involved.

Roland was a craftsman in every aspect of his life – a much sought-after carpenter in his working life who could easily work 7 days a week, but his passions for harness racing and wildlife ensured that he found precious time for both. Following in the footsteps of his father, Roy, Roland became recognised as an expert on owls, and together they established the now-popular initiative for installing owl boxes on farms, almost forty years ago. Roland even gave a talk on the subject on Radio 4.....as he would quote in his good-humoured way ‘not a lot of people know that.....’ (Though his Michael Caine impersonation left a bit to be desired!) Checking and monitoring bird populations and nesting boxes in his surrounding counties was a significant part of Roland’s life, and the collation of such data helped in turn to monitor the precious ecology of those regions.

Horses, racing, and very particularly harness racing were Roland’s other obsession. Before the advent of BHRC, Roland partnered his father’s runners both in the sulky and under saddle, and then, being both talented and light, got regular ‘catch’ rides and drives, notably for Gwynne Higgins, and enjoyed plenty of success. Win or lose, Roland had the greatest talent of all – to take pleasure – and knowledge - from all that he did. In the early 80’s, when the fore-runner of the BHRC, the National Harness Racing Club, formed to be the governing body of ‘trotting’ in the UK offered ‘amnesty’ to race with them, new associations such as Wales & West HRA, and Amman Valley Trotting Club were formed, and Roland and Roy were founder members. With their precise minds, they were much in demand for helping to set up grass circuits, and became official time keepers and track measurers. In later years, Roland became so adept at setting up a half-mile track in a previously unmarked field, that he could do it by eye, and when it was officially measured, his judgement was spot on. He liked things to be *right*.

For over a decade, Roland, who now no longer competed, was official race-framer in Wales & West, and the copious records he kept meant that the racing was always fair and competitive, and *every* horse went to post with a chance – he was determined that every participant should enjoy their racing.

For the last two decades, Roland was a BHRC Regional Steward, originally an appointed and paid position with an honorarium, until such things became taxable, when BHRC paid them as expenses. Such things did not trouble Roland, who never took a penny. Even as he was asked to travel further, and the demands became greater, he did it all for the love of the sport. This time, **I say**, ‘Not a lot of people know that....’ And what a good regional steward he was. His knowledge of the rules was extensive, but best of all, his common sense in applying them was first class. He always did what he believed to be right, politely, firmly and fairly.

What you saw was what you got with Roland Pugh, an uncomplicated, genuine, compassionate, loyal man, who was never afraid to express his emotion. You would see tears in his eyes after great performances, but also when he knew a victory meant much to someone in lesser races. He so wanted people to *enjoy* their lives, as he so enjoyed his, and took great pleasure in seeing new drivers take their driving tests, then progress.

Robert Burns encapsulates the very essence of Roland in his poem 'Epitaph on my own Friend'

An honest man here lies at rest

As e'er God with his image blest:

The friend of man, the friend of Truth;

The friend of age, the guide of youth:

Few hearts like his, with virtue warm'd,

Few heads with knowledge so inform'd.

If there is another world, he lives in bliss;

If there is none, he made the best of this.

May your God bless you, Rol. You were such a nice guy that you never realised how many people held you in high esteem. You have left a gaping hole in many lives that could never be filled. I am privileged that I am one of them. My heart goes out to Roland's sister Karen and the rest of his family. An Independent, irreplaceable, gentle man.....

Stella Havard.