

MEMORIES OF A REMARKABLE MAN

JOHN CLOAKE AND THE MUSEUM OF RICHMOND 1985-2014

The Museum of Richmond is sad to announce the death, on 9th July 2014, of John Cloake (1924-2014), founder of the Museum and first Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

Plans for a museum for Richmond had first surfaced in 1843 but came to nothing. It took another 140 years for the right man to come along to make it a reality. When local historian, John Cloake retired from his diplomatic career in 1980, he put considerable efforts into establishing a museum representing the historic town of Richmond.

He formed a working group of eight local people, amongst them were Pat Astley-Cooper, curator of Orleans House and myself, who had just done a year's research into museum education. Pat and I still have a close connection with the museum and are currently both on the Board of Trustees.

We vividly remember the meetings held at John's historic house on The Terrace Richmond Hill, where his wife, Molli, took the notes and made sure we were supplied with enough wine to stimulate our imaginations, but never enough to dull our senses. Plans for a museum were formed.

Later, at a meeting chaired by Bamber Gascoigne, John got his 'starter for ten' when he became the Chairman of the Museum Project.

After much hard work, fund-raising, gaining support from the Council, and experiencing some set – backs, the Museum of Richmond finally came into being. It was located in the Old Town Hall, Council premises which had become part of the, 1987 Riverside Development, where it still has its home in the very centre of the history which it reflects.

The Museum was opened officially by H.M. Queen Elizabeth II in October 1988. John became the first Chairman of the Board of Trustees bringing all his energy and ingenuity, to the creation of a museum where Richmond's past could be communicated through it's permanent collection, a schedule of temporary exhibitions, and, further, providing a high quality education service to for all residents of the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.

Retiring from the Board in 1995, happily John kept up his close association, always on hand with advice and, even though in failing health, loaning objects for the Museum's forthcoming exhibition which will commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War.

Without John Cloake there would have been no Museum of Richmond. The local community has much to thank him for and he will be sorely missed.

Valerie Boyes, Trustee and former chair of the board, Museum of Richmond, 10. 07. 2014