

Rob Spowart passed away on 9th April. His 'friend and comrade in arms' Jim Christophers has paid this tribute.



ROB SPOWART

So, Newquay is saying a fond farewell to one of its own. Robin (Rob) Spowart passed away on 9th April aged 78 years. There will be a 'Celebration of Life' ceremony at St Michael's Church at 11.00am on Tuesday 28th April and there is much to celebrate. Rob was well known to most of the indigenous population of Newquay. He left his considerable mark in whatever he did and wherever he did it. But what Rob will you remember?

Will it be the young Rob growing up in the town in the 1950s and the heady days of the early 60s? Rob himself has commented, It was the sporting activities, rather than the academic life which provided the attraction and focus as I grew up in Newquay. As well as being a proud member of both Newquay Hornets RFC and the winning Cornwall Schools 7-a-side rugby team, growing up in Newquay in the early 60s meant that there was a keen focus on beaches and water activities. Dinghy sailing became a passion and swimming, mackerel fishing, surf life-saving and gig-rowing were all part of my agenda.

Perhaps it is the slightly older Rob who set off to make his fortune in London by taking up a teacher training place at the College of St Mark & St John? Incidentally this was not his first choice of career but it set him onto a career path along which he excelled. Rob adopts his well-known self-deprecating style when he comments that he made the most of the social & sporting life offered as a student in Chelsea in the 60s. I went on to become Vice President of the Students' Union and Captain of Rugby as well as Vice President of ULIESA (University of London Institute of Education Students' Association). Returning to Newquay for college holidays, I took on a number of holiday jobs including deck-chair attendant, assistant greenkeeper at Newquay Golf Club, detergent distributor at Newquay Railway Station (in the wake of the Torrey Canyon environmental disaster) and I was appointed as Fistral's first surfing instructor in the summer of 1967. In 1968 he supplemented his income from beach jobs by working on Sundays at Newquay Boating Lake and it was here that he met Linzee!

On the other hand your fondest memories of Rob may be as a teacher. He started his teaching career in 1970 in Kent as 'Head of Biology' in a boys' school but in 1978 he made the move back over the Tamar to become head of science at the new Penair School in Truro. Even here sport was never far from Rob's mind. Again he comments, I was delighted to coach a very successful school rugby side and I introduced & arranged the popular annual ski trip to the Alps. Family fishing and sailing trips in the Carrick Roads and Falmouth Bay

were also highlights of life at this time. Significantly, but more of this later, it was in 1979 that Rob joined Chacewater Male Voice Choir.

How about Rob the Headteacher? Certainly there are many in Newquay today who can thank him for everything he did for them while Headteacher of Treviglas School. Rob was probably destined to be a Headteacher and occupied the role with considerable aplomb and success over a period of time in education that presented some enormous challenges. In 1984 Rob was appointed to the Headship of the Isles of Scilly School. I think that it is fair to say that he loved it as he rose to the particular challenges of living and running a school on a set of remote islands. He also helped to form the islands' male voice octet, 'Force 8,' as well as joining Choral Society members for their Summer Concerts. Eventually he was persuaded to join the Isles of Scilly Round Table and as well as chairing the group, Rob was responsible for carnival appearances including 'The Red Barrows'.

The family lived on Scilly for 6 years until Rob was appointed to the Headship of Cape Cornwall School, taking up the post at Easter 1990. Rob was quickly 'rounded up' to join the fledgling Rotary Club of Mounts Bay. He went on to chair a range of committees before taking the position of Club President. He was also delighted to join Mousehole MVC.

In 1996 Rob was invited to apply for the Headship at Treviglas. Rob has offered this reflection, The challenges at secondary schools like Treviglas in the late 90s and early noughties were considerable but with a fresh team of staff who were appointed to replace a number of retiring staff, the school moved forward and with specialist college status achieved through links to business and at the same time maintaining a wonderful reputation as a caring institution, the confidence of the local community was shown and both results and pupil numbers increased significantly, bringing additional staff and more exciting 6th Form courses including a 'Surf Academy' (something Rob, himself, might have benefitted from in the early 60s) and a Technicians Academy to further develop information technology courses. All were delighted when Treviglas achieved the Ofsted 'Outstanding' rating.

In every case Rob led schools who gained great respect from their local communities and colleagues and from national organisations and agencies.

1998 saw Rob elected as Chairman of Cornwall Association of Secondary Headteachers (CASH) and he represented colleagues on a range of different groups and committees. He was also Chairman of SWASH (the South-West group) and was frequently interviewed as a local representative voice on education by the media. At this time Rob took on a real focus on victim support. He was instrumental in establishing the Victim Support Cornwall Group.

Let's quickly acknowledge 'Rotarian Rob'. Already, on several occasions his involvement in Rotary activities has been mentioned, and coinciding with the move to Newquay in 1997, Rob also joined the Rotary Club of St Columb, where he later became President.

Then there is Rob the choirman. As we have seen Rob had sung in male voice choirs for most of his adult life and in 1997 he joined Newquay Male Voice Choir, recapturing his father's (Jim Spowart's) former membership. It was inevitable that he would take on the role of Chairman, which he did for two years in 2010. He was well known and well respected in male voice

choir circles, always giving back more than he ever received. He was a life member of the Cornish Federation of Male Voice Choirs, a former member and Director of the Board of the Cornwall International Male Choral Festival and a Bard of Gorsedh Kernow, with the bardic name, Dover Dragon, Dragon Slayer!

However, within Newquay MVC he has to be lauded especially for everything he put into Oll an Gwella, the choir's a cappella subgroup. Rob was a founder member of the group in 2009 and it was Rob that led and shaped the nature of the group as it developed into one of the best known and most accomplished groups of its kind in the Duchy. Again, it was Rob who championed and developed Oll an Gwella's charitable focus, leading from the front as it raised a total of something over £100,000 for local organisations, including establishing a really close link with Cornwall Blood Bikes which has accrued donations totalling £50,000 over the last 9 years.

Finally there is St Piran's Rob

It is just over 10 years ago that Rob gathered a group of local people together and floated the idea of putting on a festival to mark St Piran's Day. Since those early days when events spanned just a couple of days the festival has grown to accommodate events and activities for at least a week. It uniquely offers a range of opportunities for local community groups and organisations to come together and celebrate their Cornish heritage.

From the start Rob insisted that all events should offer a tangible and unambiguous reflection of Cornish culture and heritage and should be free to access to all the community. This, of course, required funding and Rob was a fierce campaigner on behalf of the Festival, accessing funding from a wide range of local sponsors ranging from FEAST to Newquay Council and from local Lions Clubs to local councillors.

Given his background in education, Rob was also adamant that opportunities should be available for young people to participate. In particular was his tireless work engaging with local primary schools where he organised a programme of workshops offering children the opportunity to learn Cornish songs, Cornish dance and to learn about Cornish heritage. This forms the central spine of the Festival as manifested in the parade and the children's ceilidhs which are such a feature. Significantly, the choral workshops ensured that the children learnt parts of the songs they sang in Kernewek.

Part of Rob's legacy in the town is that the Festival continues and there are plans to make it even bigger and better next year.

London Cornish Rob? Here lies the source of a great many more tales. Perhaps for another time.

So, farewell to a proud and passionate Cornishman. In many ways Rob was larger than life and he certainly enjoyed life. He led from the front and inspired others in doing so.

Jim Christophers (April 2026)