

DEATH OF PAST PRESIDENT GEORGE WITHY



George Withy

Past President George Withy died after a long illness at his home in the Wirral on November 17.

George was President in 1975-6 but will best be remembered for his lengthy Chairmanship of the former Salaries and Conditions Board, disbanded when

- a gentle, but persuasive Mr "Fix-it"

employers ended industrial agreements and ceased union recognition some years ago.

He also served twice as Chairman of the National Council for the Training of Journalists (1971 & 1982).

A passionate believer that journalism standards must be inculcated at the beginning of a career. George had a long involvement with training, both at local level in the North East and nationally, over 35 years.

In fact the present NCTJ, now a national charity and limited company, owes much to George, who during his latter Chairmanship had to effect an immediate rescue plan when Government funding was suddenly withdrawn with the demise of specialist Industrial Training Boards.

In recognition of his distinguished

service to journalism and the Institute, the Spring 1998 Council unanimously elected him as Honorary Life Fellow, and long-time colleague and friend, Past President Henry Douglas visited his home to present the framed certificate.

George spent most of his career with the Liverpool Post & Echo Series, retiring as Assistant Editor (night) of the evening paper.

He leaves a widow Betty, two daughters and four grandchildren.

Betty was always at his side at national meetings and a popular supporter of the CJoJ.

Past Presidents Henry Douglas, John Shim, Bill Tadd and Rodney Bennett England attended the funeral service in the packed to overflowing church of St Bartholomew, Thurston, and Henry gave the panegyric.

Former General Secretary Bob Farmer who retired in 1987 writes:

I first met George Withy in 1962, shortly after I became General Secretary, when he and that other Institute stalwart, Henry Douglas, were beginning their preparations for the 1963 annual conference in Southport. The conference was a great success to which George's energy, enthusiasm, efficiency and unflinching good humour made a major contribution.

Thereafter, until the onset of his final illness, George devoted himself to the Institute. He served continuously on the council and several committees and at various times held virtually every national office, including the presidency. But perhaps his most significant work was done during his terms, covering in total many years, as chairman of the Salaries and Conditions Board directing the Institute's trade union activities.

This was no sinecure. When he took office the NUJ was pursuing an aggressive and ruthless campaign for a closed shop throughout journalism. To achieve its aims, it was willing to take industrial action, often backed by the threatened support of the print unions.

The Thatcher reforms were in the distant future and even further ahead lay New Labour's recognition, and its persuasion of the TUC, that the closed shop was an unacceptable face of trade unionism for large sections of the electorate.

It was a regular occurrence, therefore, for members to transfer, however unwilling, from the Institute to the NUJ, having been threatened with dismissal by timid or vulnerable employers as the alternative. It sometimes seemed that the Institute was doomed to die by attrition.

It is not surprising, therefore, that I can recall more than a few meetings of the Board that began in a mood of near despair but thanks to George's level head and ability to inspire confidence, ended in one of determination and hope. Alongside all this, of course, was the day to day work of the Board in negotiating on behalf of members both individually and collectively. In this George was always courteous and reasonable but firm. He did much to enhance the Institute's reputation and status in the eyes of employers and others.

George's other great enthusiasm was training and he gave unstintingly of his time and effort in furthering the work of the NCTJ.

His services, not only to the Institute but to journalism, earned our gratitude; his personal qualities inspired our affection. These qualities were particularly in evidence at annual conferences of which, so far as I can recall, he missed none until his health failed. Not only was he assiduous in attending and contributing to the working sessions but he and his popular wife, Betty, did much to brighten the other occasions. It was particularly noticeable that anyone they saw and thought to be lonely or otherwise troubled was immediately taken under their wing and cheered.

It is selfish of me but I am now glad that I had no opportunity of seeing George during his last illness because it means that I can always remember him exactly as he was when I knew him: enthusiastic, dedicated, and unflinchingly kind and loyal.

FORMER CHAIRMAN GEORGE WITHY DIES AFTER LONG ILLNESS AGED 74



George Withy

His 1982 term as Chairman proved a turning point for the old NCTJ.

Faced with a massive loss of Government funding he set about implementing immediate changes and helped ensure a viable future, although this involved instant staff redundancies and a major reorganisation.

George Withy, twice Chairman of the NCTJ (1971 and 1982) died on November 17 aged 74, after a long illness.

A deep-seated interest in maintaining the highest standards in journalism, and his belief that this is best inculcated at the beginning of a career, quickly led to his involvement with the NCTJ first at local level in the Liverpool area, and over 30 years ago as an Institute of Journalists' representative on the main council.

George was of the old school. He championed the cause of journalism, was a fierce defender of its role in society, and as Chairman of the IOJ Salaries and Conditions Board, he was a tough negotiator with employers during the days of union industrial agreements.

A past President of the IOJ, George began his career with the old Birkenhead News and spent several years working for newspapers in the Midlands.

In 1960 he returned to Merseyside as a sub-editor on the Daily Post, later becoming chief sub.

He then joined the Liverpool Echo as night news editor, finally retiring as assistant editor.

In addition he was a rugby union reporter for many years, continuing to write up matches after his retirement.

It was during George Withy's second term as NCTJ Chairman in 1982 that he had to preside over a rescue package, following the demise of the PPITB and the consequent withdrawal of government funding.

This necessitated immediate staff redundancies and a total reorganisation, but he handled both with sensitivity and skill.

Whilst it also resulted in periodicals and broadcasting having to be hived off to separate and newly-created training agencies, it ensured the NCTJ's survival, and laid the foundations for the financially strong organisation which has evolved into today's charity and separate trading arm.

He died at his home in the Wirral and leaves a widow, Betty, two daughters, Carol and Kay, and four grandchildren.

NEWS BRIEFS

New York prize
Virgin Management Ltd has offered the NCTJ two tickets for a return flight from London to New York as a top prize in 2000. A decision has yet to be taken on a suitable category.

Careers video

The NCTJ careers video, "So You Want to be a Journalist", may be adapted for use on CD rom. Gail Smirthwaite of Ocean Video who produced the 22-minute documentary featuring Sheffield College students as well as the

Birmingham Mail and Central Television, is in talks with the NCTJ.

Meanwhile copies of the video, which has been popular with careers teachers and officers, as well as NCTJ colleges, students and trainees, are still available at \$16.99, including postage.

Shorthand

Nearly 2000 shorthand exams were sat in 1997/1 998 at speeds between 80-130 wpm; 1505 at the industry required speed of 100 wpm; 527 passes and 978 failures.

NCTJ goes Euro

The and NCTJ Training Ltd. have recently opened Euro accounts, and from January 1 can both receive and make payments in the new currency.

CD Access Course

Gareth Hill, head of journalism, Cornwall College, edruth, has devised a computer journalism training programme which could become part of the NCTJ distance-learning programme. Some further work is in preparation.



Liverpool
COMMUNITY
COLLEGE

The Journalism Centre



Dedication of Newsroom
Thursday 11 th March 1999



Welcome to all our guests,
former students, colleagues
and friends

George Withy

1924 to 1998

“a true gentleman of journalism”

We have dedicated the news room of the new journalism centre to the memory of George Withy, former assistant editor Liverpool Echo (nights), for several reasons.

George became involved with us at the start of journalism in this college when, as part of the former Millbrook College, then based at the Muirhead Centre, journalism courses were started in the late 1980s. He came to us through the Liverpool District of the Institute of Journalists, who were approached for help and advice on starting journalism courses.

He became an advisor, friend, mentor and eventually the external moderator for the Merseyside Open College Federation, who validated our early courses.

He loved Merseyside and was passionate about training. The most refreshing aspect of our relationship with George in those early years was his earnest belief that journalism training should flourish on Merseyside and that local talent should be exploited and given the opportunity to train. This, at a time when the journalism team, who shared his beliefs, were coming up against a lot of scepticism from the industry in general.

He gave us the will to push on and seek notional accreditation through the National Council for the Training of Journalists. It is no secret that he played an instrumental role in our gaining that initial accreditation for our postgraduate course.

On his frequent visits to the news room, George enforced his own particular brand of “quality control” - he could spot a literal at a thousand paces and woe to any young journo who wrote sloppy headlines or misplaced a comma.

He firmly believed in the integrity of journalists and in the power of good training. With George behind us we couldn't fall -and we didn't.

Many of you here this evening trained with us and are now working across the UK doing the job you love, if you trained before 1997 you will remember George, his quiet and unassuming manner, his polite corrections and his sound advice on future direction. Right up until the time of his encroaching illness he kept in touch with the college and with the students.

George Withy's contribution to journalism was immense and richly significant. We wish he was here tonight to see how far we've come he cannot be so we have done the next best thing - named the news room after him.

Thanks George, gone but certainly not forgotten.