REMEMBERING ROGER

Roger James Hands 1937 - 2024

Above Image: *L to R – John Nichols, the first Chairman of Dacorum Heritage Trust (DHT). Roger Hands and Peter Clayton, former Vice Chairman of DHT. This picture was taken when Roger was first appointed Chairman in 1999. Image from the Dacorum Heritage collection cared for at The Museum Store, Berkhamsted.*

It is with great sadness that we heard earlier in the year that Dacorum Heritage had lost one of our great heritage champions.

Roger passed away peacefully at Watford General Hospital on 14th May, aged 86.

Roger was devoted to the history and prosperity of the communities in Boxmoor, Hemel Hempstead and Dacorum as a whole.

It could be said that Roger was known as ‘Mr. Heritage’ because of his continued passion for the history and heritage of the area.

***Above Image**: Roger dressed as King Henry VIII, a publicity event in January 2005 when DHT was under threat of closure whilst Dacorum Borough Council considered our future funding. Image taken outside the old council office building (now demolished) in Marlowes, Hemel Hempstead. Image courtesy of his family.*

He was a leading light within a group of local heritage enthusiasts who were the driving-force in the creation of The Dacorum Heritage Trust Ltd. just over 30 years ago.

As many of you will remember, Roger worked tirelessly for the local causes and organisations that were dear to his heart.

Roger was also well-known for his long association with the Box Moor Trust, and this is their tribute to Roger's life and his work with Box Moor Trust.

The following article was published in Boxmoor Direct, dated 9th June 2024.

> **June News From Box Moor Trust**
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> We are sorry to report the passing of Roger James Hands, Emeritus Trustee, on 14th May 2024.
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> Roger was elected as a Box Moor Trustee in 1979. His determination that future generations should be able to enjoy the local environment was the motivation for him seeking election. He enjoyed the challenge of serving as Chairman of the Trust from 1988-96 and remained committed to the principles of the Trust's historic foundation. In 2020, the inaugural status of Emeritus Trustee was conferred on Roger, in recognition of his long service to the Trust.

Roger was born in Edmonton in 1937 and attended Enfield Grammar School. He and his wife, Joan, moved to Boxmoor in 1964. He was a founder member of a nursery and landscape gardening business that won numerous medals, including the Silver-Gilt at the Chelsea Flower Show.

Roger was a keen fisherman and a founding member of the Boxmoor Trout Fishery. Indeed, the natural springs that feed the lake brought a lifelong passion to protect the local chalk water streams. This led him to chair the Dacorum Environmental Forum's Water Group.

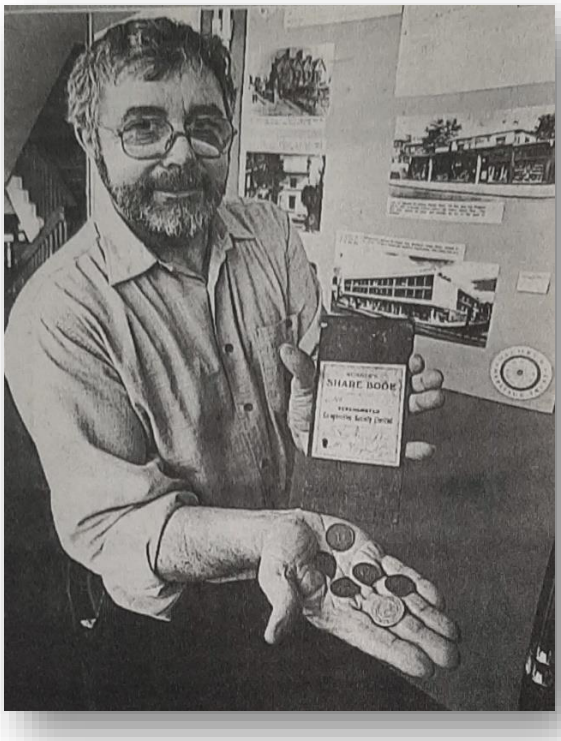
Roger also wanted to tell the story of Dacorum for future generations, which led him to act as Chairman of the Dacorum Heritage Trust for many years, and to become a founding member of the Dacorum Museum Advisory Committee.

Indeed, this shared love of history, with his late wife, Joan, led to the writing of several local history books. Most notably was their book 'Royalty to Commoners: Four Hundred Years of the Box Moor Trust', which was published in 2004. This major work was the culmination of years of research and chronicles the history and development of the Box Moor Trust from its earliest secret beginnings in 1581 up to the early years of the 21st century.

Roger is survived by his sons David and Stephen, four grandsons and a granddaughter, and one great-grandson. His family are spread around the globe, as far as Portugal, USA, Qatar and Australia.

The above article highlights his association with Box Moor Trust, as a Boxmoor resident, I believe this was his primary cause for many years before he became involved in heritage matters.

He was an enthusiastic and committed trustee for both Dacorum Heritage and Box Moor Trust, relishing his chairmanship of both organisations in equal measure.



***Above Image**: Roger displaying a selection of trade tokens and a Cooperative Society share book, these objects are from an exhibition on the transformation of The Marlowes, Hemel Hempstead. The image is from an article in the local Express newspaper dated 25th November 1997. Image from the Dacorum Heritage collection cared for at The Museum Store, Berkhamsted.*

Before the formation of Dacorum Heritage Trust, and in the early years, Roger's inspiration drove a series of very successful exhibitions and publications. He also played an enormous part in raising the public awareness of Dacorum's unique history.

***Above Image**: Publicity image of the unveiling at the exhibition in Berkhamsted Civic Centre, of the reconstruction of the last missing panels of the Bayeux Tapestry, created by Jan Messent in 1997. Image from the Dacorum Heritage collection cared for at The Museum Store, Berkhamsted.*

Dacorum Heritage also has a tribute to Roger on our website it reads as follows:

Dacorum Heritage Director and Chairman, 1993 – 2019

Dacorum Heritage were sad to hear of the recent passing of Roger Hands. Roger had been a founding Member, Director, and Chairman of Dacorum Heritage.

Roger's dedication to history was evident through numerous achievements over decades of diligent research, writing extensively on Dacorum's history including 'Men of Iron – The History of Boxmoor Ironworks', 'Bourne End & Boxmoor Old and New', 'The Book of Boxmoor', 'Railways of Dacorum', 'Paper Pioneers', and 'Royalty to Commoners', to name but a few publications.

Roger's commitment to preserving Dacorum's history was pivotal in the foundation of Dacorum Heritage, beginning first as the Dacorum Museum Advisory Committee in 1979 and then The Dacorum Heritage Trust Ltd. in 1993. Roger continued to contribute to Dacorum's ongoing dialogues on history through participating in the Hemel Hempstead Heritage Improvement Study and Hemel Hempstead Old Town Conservation Area, in addition to his membership to a number of historical organisations, the Box Moor Trust, and continuing to be a Member of Dacorum Heritage.

***Above Image**: From the Gazette dated 15th September 1999, the article was promoting DHT's Canal Exhibition. Roger is seen with a horn used on the canal boats. Image from the Gazette collection cared for at The Museum Store, Berkhamsted.*

Family was so important to Roger, and a source of great joy and pride to him and Joan. Roger now re-joins his loving wife Joan, leaving two sons, five grandchildren and a newly arrived great grandson.

Roger had a tenacious conviction to the local history and heritage of the area, and both he and his late wife Joan researched and authored numerous local history publications uncovering a range of amazing and diverse stories. These books always had a keen audience, which was reflected in the sales figures.

***Above Image**: Roger and Joan Hands pictured c. 2010. Image courtesy of his family.*

We all have lasting memories of Roger over many years, everybody at Dacorum Heritage were saddened to hear of his passing – everyone who knew him will remember him in their own special way. We all have those funny anecdotes that sum up Roger's sense of humour and unique personality.

***Above Image**: A recent photograph of Roger courtesy of his family.*

Our sincere thoughts are with his close friends and loving family. His name will always be inextricably connected with the company and his tireless work will be remembered by staff and volunteers, both past and present who worked with him over the years.

We will always remember the unforgettable Roger.

Pam Gasking
Museum Collections & Research Volunteer
Dacorum Heritage