

Roger Farnworth (29th October 1937 – 22nd January 2013)

Roger was born in Truro, Cornwall. His parents, Edna and Reg, came from Lancashire. Roger well remembered travelling to visit his grandparents towards the end of the war, seeing Manchester in ruins, and the blackouts. His maternal grandfather, Thomas Wolstenholme, came from a Kearsley mining family but entered the cotton trade, moving from rags to riches twice over. He was famed for testing a bolt of cotton by simply fingering it with eyes closed and at one time took almost all the cotton from Mauritius. Roger's grandmother, Effie, was a Primitive Methodist and had worked in the cotton mills before training as a dressmaker. The hardworking, strict lives of the Wolstenholmes were part of the weave of Roger's life.



Roger went to board at Taunton Boys' School when he was seven years old. He was desperately unhappy there. He then went to Probus School, where he was known as 'Brainbox' by all the boys. Later, he studied philosophy at the University of Bristol and then took a social work diploma at the University of London. In 1963 Roger became one of seven interviewers employed by the Central Council for Health Education for a completely new kind of investigation at the time into the sexual lives of young people (the results are in a book by John Schofield). One of the team members was Laura Renouf, from Jersey. He was immediately struck by her, recalling that he defended her views on Nabakov in a heated group discussion, upon which she turned to him and kissed him square on the lips. Only very recently Roger was recalling how he went to Selsey marshes with Laura. She was an ardent birdwatcher and flower lover, and he was stunned how she called the landscape from drab browns and greys into a throb of life. It was with Laura that Roger built his fundamental understanding of the world as 'Miracle' for a mystery that can be seen in wild nature but also goes beyond.

With Laura and their Latvian friends, especially Monika and Guntis, refugees from the war, life changed utterly for Roger. He was no longer a conventional boy who had never read for pleasure. Worlds opened up suddenly – drinking, dancing, the impassioned poetry of the Latvian diaspora. This joy stayed with him always as Roger's friends will most certainly remember.

In 1964 Roger and Laura, together with Cathy, their six month old daughter, travelled to Zambia to work as English teachers. They stayed there for four years, working in three schools in the remotest parts of Northern Province near the Congo. These were huge experiences at a time when post from home took weeks and the skies and vistas in Zambia seemed endless. Tristan, their son, was born in the last year of their stay. Laura and Roger shared the birth of Zambia as an independent nation, and when they went for further training to Rhodesia they soon got involved in demonstrations against Ian Smith. At one hustings, together with some African students, they prevented Mr Smith from speaking. Roger called, 'Beware the Ides of March' and both Laura and Roger were arrested. Laura's face was on the front page of the nation's newspapers the next day, a never-ending source of pride to Roger. Their demonstration resulted in a court case and deportation back to Zambia. Roger



Laura

fought all his life for the cruelly oppressed, supporting Survival International, a small Ethiopian trust and many more charities working in developing countries. About ten years ago he became an Observer with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) for several months, working at the barbed wire walls to ensure the Palestinians could cross to tend their olive groves. Upon his return Roger gave over sixty talks all over Britain to encourage new observers to come forward. He cared passionately about the freedom of the Palestinians and of all peoples.

For two years or so after returning from Zambia (via Afghanistan and India in Roger's case), Roger and his family moved around Cornwall and Ireland seeking a new life, and they spent a year in Saudi Arabia, too. Their aim was to do up an old, remote property and enter the tourist trade. In 1970 they found a most beautiful dilapidated rectory in Cornwall amid tall beeches. The Rookery, Warleggan became their home and a place they loved passionately. Roger developed a new skill, building and decorating. For years he worked as a teacher during the day and on the house till late at night. The Rookery was let to holiday makers in the summer and then to quirky, wonderful hippies during the winters. After Laura's death on January 2nd, 1980 the meaning of the Rookery changed. Roger came to see it as a haven for people harmed in some way and for this reason rented out flats to people with sometimes very difficult lives, and of course, he continued to seek out tenants with a wild unconventional understanding of the world. Throughout his life, Roger supported his friends in every way possible, including in their darkest hours.

Roger was profoundly affected by Laura's death and grieved for her deeply all his life. It took him years to build a new life that held true to the poetry, painting and love of the wild world that he had shared with Laura together with new interests. Roger was a founding member of the North Cornwall Seven group of artists which exhibited widely. He joined the Liskeard Poets and other poetry groups, writing poems with few words that went to the beauty and ache of the world. He loved going on retreats at Dartington Hall and Sharpham, and spent many years with the Julian Group and other religious study and meditation groups. He worked closely with Oxfam to teach school children across Cornwall about developing countries and was a member of the local United Nations Association. In his work for the Bethany Trust, he greatly valued taking people with HIV/AIDS on days out to the sea and pub at a time when this illness was not curable. An early association was with the Fotsbarn Theatre company. He was on their management committee for many years, and following their fantastical shows, drank and danced many a night away. Roger loved world music and festivals, and delighted much younger festival goers as he joined in their revelry. Roger also had a profound interest in astronomy. He loved the vastness and mystery of the heavens, and took a huge interest in the latest scientific research into the galaxy.

Over the last decade or so, Roger started to study the archaeology of Bodmin Moor and further afield. Very recently he gave a talk to the Cornwall Archaeology Society and was to give a talk on cliff castles in May. Roger developed new ideas about the meaning of Neolithic monuments across Cornwall which came to be recognised by professional archaeologists as profound and significant, and he discovered many new cairn platforms, other archaeological

features, and also view frames centred on Rough Tor above which the cosmos revolves with the North Star. Landscape for Roger was holy. The way the Neolithic monuments called to each other across Cornwall and the heavens meant everything to him. Roger loved nature's unknowable unpredictable hand on the landscape, the shifting light and trees bent down by the wind. Roger fought against wind turbines in remote locations, including in Warleggan Parish, whilst spending much time researching other forms of renewable energy and advocating community managed energy schemes. He said regarding a proposed wind farm on the slopes of Rough Tor, 'I feel we will have let down future generations who will never again experience the wild isolation and rugged beauty of Rough Tor's archaeology. Their insights into the earliest Neolithic will be dominated by energy generators. I fear that some think knowledge filleted from the past is all that matters. It is the quest to imaginatively recreate Neolithic experience that will irrevocably be harmed by the wind farms.'



September 2011, with friends from the Cornwall Archaeological Society

Roger was very active in Mensa, working with them for many years on the programming of their Arts and Science Days. He organised Think at Oxford and compiled the Think magazine. He was recently appointed Intellectual Events Officer for Mensa and was preparing ten major conferences around the country this year. Mensa says: 'Roger was a man with a huge intelligence but also a man with a wonderful sense of fun. And most of all he was a man with a great aim – to widen the scope of the intellectual side of Mensa. To that end he set about organising a series of events which would provide food for thought – a menu for the mind. Roger was a great character and a thought challenger. He enjoyed encouraging group discussions and watching where people went with their knowledge, imagination and interpretation.'

Roger leaves two children, Tristan and Cathy, and two deeply loved grandchildren, Rozelle and Katinka. He will be missed terribly. It is profoundly true to say the world will miss him also, for it is less of a place without his deep perception and consciousness of it.