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Advocate for Epsom’s underdog remembered

3 November 2023

Roger Bristow was by a long stretch one of Epsom and Surrey’s most successful criminal court defence advocates, dedicated to ensuring that all his clients received fair justice regardless of their guilt. He plied his profession at the Epsom Magistrates Court and many others in Surrey and the South East. Due to his prowess, he had many repeat customers.

A Law graduate of Bristol University where he met his wife Eileen, who survives him, he served his articles with the firm Lloyd and Davy and later became a partner in the (now demised firm) Kirkwoods. Both firms had offices conveniently located close to the centre of Epsom and a short walk from the local hostelries where he met many clients. He then became an independent advocate acting for several local firms of solicitors until he retired.

As a former client Martin Knight (author and local historian) remembers, “Roger was the ‘go to’ solicitor for Epsom youngsters who got into trouble with the law, helping them to find in court the best way through or out of the situations in which their behaviour or bad luck had landed them, whether the result was an acquittal or a fair sentence.

“I recall an incident when I and a few rowdy friends were passing the house of an off duty police sergeant en route home from the Plough Pub in Ewell. In the belief we were vandalizing his garden, the policeman charged out of his house in his pyjamas brandishing a truncheon, and pinned me to the ground. After arrest I was charged with attempted criminal damage (there was none). When asked by Roger in court why he had not shown us his police ID, the sergeant stated that he had not had time. Yet as Roger pointed out, he had found time to pick up his truncheon. The case was dismissed.”

Roger was a well known local character in Epsom and invariably the soul of every party. He could hold court with his anecdotes, humour and sideways look at life. Roger served as a Conservative Councillor in Richmond on Thames for 4 years and later became a supporter of UKIP. Never one to hold back his views, he was yet much loved by all who knew him, whether they agreed with his politics or not.

It was my good fortune, as his articled clerk (1984 – 1986) to be inspired by his advocacy. He had genuine compassion for the ‘mad and bad’ who are so often trapped in circumstances somewhat beyond their ability to control. Many clients continued to contact him for informal advice long after their encounters with the courts had ceased.

A fan of local pubs, the Surrey countryside, his cat, Mahler, Noel Coward and the Daily Telegraph, in retirement Roger enjoyed long holidays and cruises with Eileen until Alzheimers exerted its limitations. He died suddenly on 9th September 2023.

Roger John Bristow 19th October 1944 – 9th September 2023.

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