

# **OBITUARY.**

## **Lt.Col Lawrence Frederick Ball**

It is with great regret that we record the death of our former Chairman and Immediate Past President on Tuesday 10th March 2009.

His funeral was held at St. Andrews Church, Leicester Forest East and the Ramblers were well represented at the service.

He gave many years unstinting service to the Ramblers and will be sorely missed. I first met him when we were on the National Forest working party representing different organisations and in later years when I took over the reins as Chairman of the Ramblers he was full of encouragement and always there for advice.



Lawrence Frederick Ball was born on 27th June 1920, one of four children. He attended the local Primary School and then Wyggeston Grammar School. He enlisted in the army on 29th August 1940 and during the war was involved in the famous code breaking activities at Bletchley Park.

He married Margaret on 26th June 1943 but not in a white dress due to war time rationing. Larry and Margaret last year celebrated 65 years of married life together.

After the war he enjoyed a distinguished army career that included developing and installing battlefield radar into tanks and later having a military representational role at NATO where his French speaking skills came to the fore. His army career took him to many exotic places around the world but the nature of his work often involving situations of military conflict usually meant that his family were left in the UK. Quoting from one of the many military reviews he received, "Lt Col Ball was specially selected to progress a radio system designed for tanks and armoured vehicles being supplied to Libya ... His task was carried out with the utmost efficiency and technical skill ... I cannot speak too highly of his enthusiasm and determination ... Invariably cheerful and good natured ... "

Whilst still in the army, Larry was licensed in Aden in 1958 as an Anglican Lay Reader by Oliver Allison, Lord Bishop of the Sudan. On return to England he continued in this role in both Blandford and Leicester. He certainly knew how to deliver a good sermon.

Larry was also a Scout leader. He was only 29 when he was appointed as a Commissioner and later awarded the Long Service Decoration for scouting.

After an intensive period of part-time study he was awarded an MSc in Telecommunications Systems and then embarked on his second career as a lecturer in Information Technology at Watford College.

Once he had retired, Larry was very active in the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme while living at Mountsorrel and devoted a lot of his time to enjoying the outdoors and walking, and it was then that he took a great interest in the Ramblers Association. As Area Chairman and later as President he always felt it a great honour to be working for us, a feeling that was reciprocated.

Twenty-five years ago Larry was active in the Watford and Three Rivers Ramblers Group and was headhunted by HQ to chair the steering committee that led to the formation of the Herts and North Middlesex Area. He was chairman from 1984-1989 and then elected President when he moved to Leicestershire for family reasons. He held the post for 14 years and throughout that time kept in close touch with the Area's work, chairing their AGMs.

They comment that Larry had all the qualities needed to get a fledgling organisation well established: authority, drive, great organising ability and the knack of putting people at ease. Among his many talents was diplomacy: seeing any friction develop he could pour oil on the troubled waters. He somehow persuaded Herts County Council to expand its rights of way staff, then arranged regular meetings between them and the Ramblers committee. This resulted in, among other things, Herts and the Ramblers cooperating in a survey of Hertfordshire's definitive paths.

Always keen to recruit new members, Larry had a hand in forming new Groups in the North Middlesex Area.

Kate Ashbrook, National Chair of the Ramblers, recalls working with Larry on the campaign for access to High Sharpley, that splendid granite outcrop near Whitwick in Charnwood. He helped us to organise a rally there on the morning of general council which was held in Loughborough in 1997, as well as arranging many other events to demonstrate the importance of this special place for public access. She comments that we were all devastated when High Sharpley failed to be included on the access maps and that we owe it to Larry to continue the campaign at the decadal review of access land.

She goes on to say that whilst a determined campaigner, Larry was always courteous and diplomatic. He was respected and people listened to him, and through these qualities he achieved much for the walking public in his former home county of Hertfordshire and latterly in Leicestershire. She concludes by stating that Ramblers have much to thank him for.

Margaret and the family have been touched by the many tributes that have been afforded to him by his many friends and ex-colleagues in the Ramblers.

Quoting from just one card Margaret received,  
"one of his chief memorials will be the success of the National Forest in Leicestershire - he had the courage to fight the cause of public access for the public money, in spite of strong opposition from the landowning interest at the time."

As an appreciation of Larry's time with us Mike Statham, Vice President, writes:

"Larry as he was affectionately known to many of us, was Area Chairman and later Area President for many years. He came to Leicestershire with his wife Margaret in 1982 when he retired from a distinguished Army career. A keen walker, he had previously been actively involved with the Hertfordshire Area of the Association as their Chairman and on coming back to Leicestershire he wasted no time in getting involved with our Area. He was soon co-opted onto the Area Executive Committee and later was unanimously elected Chairman and eventually President.

He arrived on the local scene at an important and formative stage of our Area. It had just been formed, after a rather shaky start, from the splitting up of the old East Midlands Area. Larry brought to the new Area Executive Committee a wealth of experience and knowledge on footpath and access matters and the RA generally.

Although his really active walking days were coming to a close, he put in a great deal of work behind the scenes. He drafted the Area constitution and helped to put the Area on a sound administrative and financial footing. The present strength and success of the Area owes much to Larry's founding work. He chaired the committee meetings firmly and briskly, but always with great courtesy and politeness, even if he strongly disagreed with something or somebody. He visited all the Area's groups regularly and always tried to attend their AGMs. He addressed the Area rallies and other Area events that were held in those days. Along with Sue Marlow, he did much of the planning and organising for our successful hosting of the RA's National Council at Loughborough University, where he also made the opening welcoming speech. In all these ways, he soon earned great respect from the local rambling fraternity.

This authoritative knowledge, yet courteous approach also earned him considerable respect from the many other individuals and organisations with whom we dealt, such as County Hall officials, farmers and landowners and the many affiliated clubs and organisations. Larry ably represented the Association on the Leicestershire Rural Community Council, and the county Rights of Way Advisory Group. He was a regular Area delegate to the Ramblers national Council in the 1980's and spoke ably on a variety of matters. He campaigned vigorously and forcefully to gain public access to High Sharpley and had personal meetings with the landowner, Squire de Lisle over the issue.

But perhaps his best and lasting legacy was in connection with the new National Forest. He joined the campaign enthusiastically to get the NF to come to Leicestershire, and when the county's bid was successful, he became very involved with the project. He represented the Ramblers on the Forest Forum and the Access & Recreation Working Party. There he kept a sharp and watchful eye on the provision of public access on the various NF sites as they came on stream, even though this led on one particular occasion to a good deal of unpleasant and intimidating abuse from one farmer, which Larry dealt with in his customary dignified and gentlemanly way.

Larry, greatly assisted by Margaret, was a generous ambassador and charming host to a variety of people in connection with Ramblers matters, including Kate Ashbrook as the Ramblers National Chairman, Alan Mattingly former Ramblers National Director and Sir John Johnson then Chairman of the Countryside Commission. All this ensured a very high profile for the Leicestershire Area of the Ramblers.

It was Larry too, who privately provided and paid for all the drinks at the Area AGMs held at Maplewell Hall in the 1980's. Typically, he did not want that known, but it was his way of thanking the many local members for their work and contribution to the RA.

As Area Secretary for many years during this period, I personally found him a great source of help, support and encouragement and his wise counsel was invaluable on many occasions. Typically, his IT and computer skills and knowledge were exceptional for that period in the 1980's and he dragged the Area and some of us kicking and screaming into the computer age.

What was even more remarkable was that this considerable involvement and commitment to the Ramblers was carried on with Larry's many other interests and activities in the wider community as well as a rich and strong family life.

Every inch the officer and gentleman, he led a fine life which enriched all those around him. Local ramblers in particular owe him a great deal.”