

Roger Malcolm Locke

1945 – 2018

Roger was born near the end of the Second World War, on 15th September 1945. He was the eldest of five children to Hilda and Alf Locke, growing up in Shelley with his sisters, Hilary and Gillian, and his brothers, John and Andrew. School was never particularly high on Roger's agenda; his mum used to stand and supervise him getting on the bus in the morning, but he would simply get off again at the next stop, and much preferred spending his time helping his grandparents and uncles on the family farm. All his life he loved farming, and by choice would have lived on a smallholding. Roger also developed an interest in hunting and shooting, though I'm not sure his early efforts firing marbles at sheep using his homemade sugar-based gunpowder really qualified as either sport. His brothers John and Andrew spoke of his trips to Anglesey shooting with their Uncle Lawrence, said he would come back with sacks full of pigeon, rabbit, pheasant, hare and fish. Andrew looked forward to seeing the fantastic colours of the birds' plumage, while John remembered more the aftermath, when Roger would turn the kitchen into an operating theatre as he skinned, plucked and gutted everything; 'feathers, fur and fish guts all over the place.'

Roger was a keen sportsman in his younger days. He played football for Shelley FC, and, being a resourceful kind of guy, avoided having to pay for shin pads by using copies of his mum's Women's Own magazine, carefully folded and tucked down his socks; he said they worked just as well, and certainly didn't slow him down on the wing. He would occasionally go to watch professional games with John and his friend David Broadbent, travelling to Leeds, Sheffield and Manchester, paying in on the gate and having a little flutter on the goal scorers.

John remembered in the seventies their aunt having some of the Huddersfield Town players lodging with her; one night Jimmy Lawson said, 'I'm off to watch the second team play,' and invited Roger along. When they arrived at the ground Jimmy was mobbed by supporters wanting an autograph, one of whom asked him, 'Who's your mate?' Jimmy replied, 'Our new signing, haven't you heard?' so Roger duly inscribed the autograph books as well. So, someone somewhere has his autograph and must always have wondered, 'What did happen to that player?'

From being a rather mischievous lad, Roger had to grow up very quickly, as his dad died when he was just 17. Roger stepped up to his new responsibilities, changing almost overnight, and helping to look after both his mum and his siblings; Andrew said he was like a dad to him. When their sister Gillian became ill in her twenties, Roger did all he could to help his mum nurse her, even devising a doorbell on a wire that he ran from Gillian's bed downstairs to his mum's room, so she could ring for help in the night. It was incredibly difficult, for the whole family, when Gillian died.

For a while after leaving school Roger helped his mum run what is now The Three Acres, and was then called The Plough. On one memorable night his mum stepped out of the bar for a moment and returned to find the till empty and the only customer vanished; she shouted Roger and he set off like an Olympic sprinter in pursuit. After vaulting a wall and two wire fences he caught up with the man half a mile away, and escorted him back to await the police; needless to say, they didn't see that customer again! Andrew said his earliest memory of Roger was at the age of four, when he caught Andrew taking pop and chewing gum from behind the bar and gave him a right telling off.

Roger began an apprenticeship as a joiner, before going to work at Hey Royds Colliery. He started off helping at the pit top, but worked his way up to become deputy; his approach to the exams was similar to his approach to school, and he engraved the crucial facts and formulae on the ruler he took in there with him! But while bookwork may not have been Roger's strong point, he was so incredibly practical, and could come up with a novel solution to any problem. He was incredibly committed to his job, and to the pit, eventually taking redundancy and retiring fifteen years ago. He made many good friends there, loved the sense of camaraderie that came with the job, and was gutted to leave.

Roger was always happy to work hard, to help support his family. He met Anne in his twenties, at a party; Anne told me their eyes met across a crowded room, and she thought, 'I'm going to marry him.' And she did, at Holmbridge Parish Church on 3rd July 1976, a date which it has to be said stuck in Roger's mind much better than Anne's; he was always the one to remember their wedding anniversary. Anne and Roger didn't actually invite anyone to the wedding, but more than eighty people turned up anyway.

The two of them used to enjoy the folk nights over at The Stanhope Arms in Dunford Bridge, and spent many hours out on foot hunting, up on the moors with the Pennine Fox Hounds or later following the Rockwood Harriers, or over in the Lakes with the Lakeland Packs. When they first met, Roger had a Spaniel/Labrador cross called Blackie, a great gundog who looked more like a seal.

He always had a dog; Blackie was followed by Bracken the chocolate Lab, then Sally, a Chesapeake Bay Retriever who was definitely not cut out to be a working dog. The first time he took her out with his gun, he fired a single shot and she ran straight home! During the early years of their marriage, Anne and Roger kept hound pups, each pup for just one year. They regularly showed the dogs at the Lakeland shows, washing them in the lake and rinsing them in Dolly Blue. Every show their dogs entered they won for best condition. Roger did less hunting in later years, and by the time Jym the black Lab came along he was rarely expected to be anything other than a pet.

As newly-weds Roger and Anne moved into Wheatley Hill Lodge; Roger had fallen in love with the place as he walked past on the way to the pit every day, and was determined that it would be their home. They rented initially, but Roger's persistence paid off when he eventually convinced the pit owner, Mr Flack, to sell the property to them. Anne said when they moved in all they had were three leather chairs and a silver tea service. The place needed a huge amount of work, and Roger set to willingly, though his priorities may not have been quite the same as Anne's; the very first things he decided to build were the

swings on the trees outside. Though he did then spend very many happy hours sitting on those swings with his cup of coffee on an evening, so maybe he did have the right idea.

Roger did much of the house renovation himself, from converting the roof space to putting in wardrobes and cupboards, and even helping with the wiring, though perhaps the less said about that the better. He and John replaced all the soffits with wood, and Roger even made his own scaffolding out of trees from the woods, a brave move considering he was scared of heights and wouldn't go more than two rungs up a ladder. He gradually furnished the house, sometimes with things he gained in exchange for goods or labour, other times saving for a quality piece that he knew would last, and he turned the lodge into the home he had wanted, a home he was rightly very proud of.

Roger always remained very close to his mum and siblings throughout his life, frequently calling round to see them all and happy to help with anything that needed doing; when John and his wife Diane moved house, Roger turned up with his industrial strength lawn mower; three hours, and a three foot high pile of grass cuttings later, the job was done. Hilary said how much she will miss seeing her brother walk past the window, and her husband, Selwyn, saying, 'Roger's here, put the kettle on.' Andrew said Roger would come up to his and Sally's first house in Shepley every Thursday night, and bring their mum up too. They would have a coffee, then Roger would promptly fall asleep, only to be woken when it was time for Hilda to go home. If he stayed awake, he would tell his gossip, and they would tell him some. Andrew said you could see he was taking it all in to pass on; he filled in the gaps as only Roger could. Roger thrived on knowing the local news, and wherever he went he had the knack of getting to know people and building friendships quickly, so he was always well up with the local knowledge.

Roger and Anne became delighted parents to Martin, Helen and Clare, and all three of them remember their childhood holidays in the Lakes, Roger making sure they were well-supplied with ice cream every day. The family had a caravan on a little site near Lake Windermere called Strawberry Gardens, tucked away amongst the trees and barely twenty metres from the water's edge. The family would head over there at Easter, and Whitsun, and in the summer holidays, packing pretty much the entire contents of the house each time, plus fishing rods, canoe, windsurfer and three bikes. The only things Roger really managed to catch there with his rods were eels, which he handed out round the campsite as Anne and the kids were not keen on them for tea. He encouraged the children in all their aquatic pursuits, but much preferred not to get his feet wet himself; he may have been put off by an early experience with Anne, when she took him sailing and capsized the boat! He was certainly happier in a boat with an outboard motor, and would head across the lake to pick up fish and chips for tea or go and explore the islands in the middle of the water; though on one occasion he did have to be towed back by the warden after running out of petrol.

Roger loved being outdoors, and sharing his knowledge with his children, and the others on the campsite. Some of the boys there still remember the time they found some dead rabbits and Roger offered to give them all a lesson in anatomy, and the skinning and curing of pelts. He and Anne were pretty good at fending for themselves in the wilds; on one of their many expeditions to Scotland they found themselves marooned on Arran due to bad weather, but managed to survive quite happily by catching salmon and foraging for wild raspberries. On another trip, over on the east coast in North Berwick, Roger made friends,

as usual, with the local fishermen, and one of the lobster men, Jack, invited him out on the trawler with him. This was during the Icelandic Cod Wars, and Roger ended up radioing in with the message, 'We'll be back in half an hour, if the navy don't get us!' The navy didn't get them, and they came back with an impressive, if illicit, haul of salmon, most of which was then lashed to the roof of Roger and Anne's car for the drive home.

Clare remembers her dad teaching her how to ride her new bike. It sounds like a rather steep learning curve; he showed her the basics, then let her go in the garden with the instructions, 'Just watch out for that spiky bush in the middle.' Guess where Clare ended up? But Roger was there to rescue her; Clare said the best thing about him as a dad was the way he held her and made her feel safe. Not that he was risk-averse; he even rigged up a zip wire in the garden for the three of them, christened The Pulley, fashioned from bits and pieces he had collected; Roger's shed was a treasure trove of random items that he hung on to, just in case they came in sometime. And others could obviously see the value in Roger's shed contents too; he and Anne came home one day to see a white van backed up to it while the blokes inside loaded up all of Roger's chainsaws. When the van took off down the road, Roger set off in hot pursuit, Anne in the passenger seat giving the police a running commentary. They narrowly missed being attacked with a metal bar when one of the criminals got out of the van to try and scare them off, and continued to follow them until the van crossed the county boundary and the police ordered them to call off the chase. It goes to show, though, living at Wheatley Hill is not as quiet as many of you may think!

Roger was willing to risk letting his three children loose on his tractor, a shiny red Massey Ferguson 35X. He used to set it running then stick the kids in the driving seat and say, 'Off you go!' across the fields. Roger had learned to drive in one of them at the age of ten, and his children all had the same opportunity. That tractor was his pride and joy, and he would spend ages in the shed polishing it, and loved taking it to shows and on tractor runs, often with his sister-in-law Sally's father Michael.

Andrew said his and Sally's lasting memory of Roger will, without doubt, be:

'Him coming to our house and meeting Michael, who he had become close friends with. They would talk for ages about the vintage tractors that they both had a passion for. We would listen to them talking about the tractor rallies and Roger would help Michael maintain his tractor. This conversation would be hilarious, and to quote them would go something like this:

How do Michael.

Hey up Roger.

What you up to, Michael?

I'm mending the tractor, Roger.

What's that for, Michael?

I think it fits in there, Roger.

Yes, I think that's right, Michael.

Think I've got that now, Roger.

Yes, I think you have, Michael.

Thanks Roger.

No problem Michael.

It was like a scene from Last of the Summer Wine, or the Chuckle Brothers.'

Driving was something Roger really enjoyed, and he was an incredibly safe pair of hands behind the wheel. Though John's tales of his early motor, a Renault 5, so more like a box on wheels, do paint a slightly different picture; John described the time Roger drove the Renault into a 30 mile speed limit sign and tipped it over. Luckily, it being the car it was, he and his mate could just push it back on its wheels and continue on their way. He stopped drinking many years ago so was always happy to be designated driver, which may have saved a few rows; the only time he and Anne ever exchanged a cross word was when she was in the driving seat!

When Roger finished work at the pit he got a job delivering alloys from the mills in Scissett a couple of days a week, but was also kept busy running the local community around. He would take the pub pools and darts teams to competitions, and everyone knew they could ring and ask Roger if they needed a lift, from Mrs Clayton, who he took shopping every week, to the great and the good who came to the area, including Keeley Donovan from Look North, and Marco Pierre White. He would answer calls day or night, even going at five in the morning to rescue people jettisoned from their taxis for being too inebriated; and he was always happy to do an airport run, though he would only pick you up from Departures, so he didn't have to pay in. He was always canny like that. In fact, another of Andrew's early memories is of one Christmas, when Roger watched him closely as he opened his Christmas presents, saying, 'Be very careful opening them, try not to tear the wrapping paper'. So Andrew was very careful, then watched as Roger took the paper and proceeded to wrap up the presents he had bought in it.

And yet Roger was so generous in so many ways, and there wasn't a thing he wouldn't do to help anyone, especially his children. When Martin set up his own business, he didn't even have to ask and Roger was right there by his side, sharing contacts, going round with the trailer and helping on jobs. Any car issue, Dad was the first person any of his kids called; even when Clare bumped her car on the ice, and was panicking about how mad he would be about the expense of repairs, the only thing Roger was worried about, of course, was that she was okay. Helen called him her knight in shining armour; he was always checking the travel news every time she had to make the journey down to Leicester, and when Clare was seven hours late on the Megabus back from Bath her dad was still there waiting for her at the station. Roger was very fond of Martin's partner Josie too, loved to hear about her latest exploits on her bike and ask about her next race.

Everything Roger did he did for his family, and did it unconditionally; the only thing that he really wanted in life was to spend time with them all. However much time he had would not have been enough, and he has left a desperate hole behind him now he is gone. Roger's family found it difficult to put into words exactly how they felt and there will never be enough words to say it all, but they did say 'Roger was and will always be one of a kind, a thoughtful character with an open heart. His presence was one which would warmly accept any situation and adapt to any environment. A man who we are, and will always be, so proud of, as a husband, a father and a friend to all.' And for all of you who were lucky enough to share your lives with Roger, you have the smiles, the stories, the warmth and love that he gave you, to help you in the dark times.

(Music heard on leaving: All You Need Is Love by The Beatles)