
Obituary

Evan Rutherford

WRITER, POTTER, LINGUIST, political activist and retired college lecturer Evan Rutherford, a long-time Wirksworth resident, died peacefully in hospital in Derby on January 28, having been admitted with pneumonia following a fall. He was 89.

Details of his early life are sketchy, but he claimed to have been born on the day that the communist poet John Cornford was killed in the Spanish Civil War: December 28 1936. He attended Alnwick Grammar School in Northumberland, and went on to do National Service in the RN Fleet Air Arm and as a temporary midshipman in the RN Volunteer Reserve.

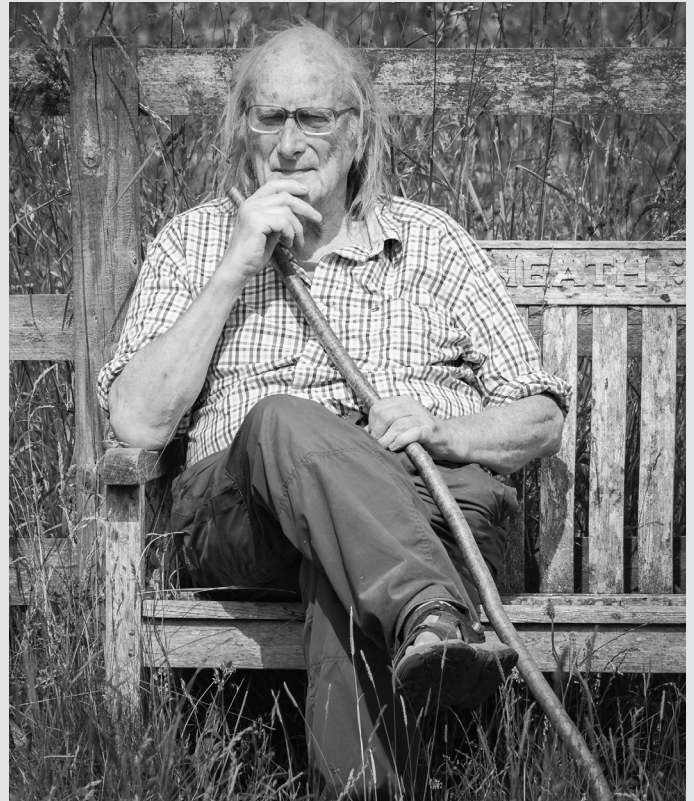
He won a place at Trinity College Cambridge, and the 1962 Cambridge electoral register records him living on a houseboat listed as 'c/o The Plough' – presumably the Plough Inn on the Cam at Fen Ditton. His PhD dissertation *The Nuclear Problem 1958-62* was published by the university's Department of Economics and Politics in 1972, but only as a single copy held at the university library.

He stood for Labour in the Cambridgeshire constituency in the 1964 General Election, against the incumbent Conservative (and later cabinet minister) Francis Pym. It was hotly contested, with a turnout of 79.8%, and although Pym retained the seat with 24,883 votes, Evan got 17,636, ahead of Richard Moore (Liberal) with 9,347. Despite this strong performance, he doesn't appear to have sought selection as a parliamentary candidate again.

He went on to become a liberal studies lecturer at Derby Lonsdale College, which was created in 1977 by merging Derby College of Art and Technology with Bishop Lonsdale College, a former teacher training college, and which was a precursor to the modern University of Derby. He resigned in 1981, disagreeing strongly with the college authorities about the course syllabus. He had followed an eccentric path of asking his students what they would like to know more about and presenting material next time; now he was being asked to teach them practical citizenship matters like how to obtain a mortgage. He wrote a scandalous resignation speech describing himself as "ridiculously overpaid for teaching nothing", earning coverage in the *Daily Mail*. While working as a lecturer, he donated a large part of his income to Oxfam.

In the 1980s, having banged his head in a cycle accident in West End, he moved to the right and formed the pressure group called Conservatives for Conventional Defence, which had at its peak about five members. Nonetheless he would hand out literature at party conferences, and in 1988 he published a slim volume *Nuclear Weakness: A Conservative Case for Conventional Defence*, which can be found in some university libraries.

His other publications include a 1977 A4 pamphlet, *Wirksworth: A Third World Guide* – there is a copy in the Local Studies Library at Matlock. He was also the author of *Palestinians And Israelis On Peace*, self-published in 1978, based on his visits to Israel and Lebanon. The title page described him as taking up "a position which Israelis might call that of a dove with hawkish tendencies, and Palestinians that of a Zionist with a conscience." There are copies in UK and Irish holding libraries; it seems to have received little attention.



During the early 1970s he frequently featured in the *Derbyshire Times* as he resisted local authority pressure to update the plumbing in the Green Hill cottage that he had bought for about £100. The District Council threatened to declare it unfit for human habitation, but he insisted that generations of Wiksworthians had lived satisfactory lives without full mod cons, and that millions in the third world still did so. In the end he had to put in the minimum required, but he prided himself on leaving the cottage just as it had been, even occasionally opening it to the public.

More recently, his contrarian nature inspired him to start an anti-Green campaign, claiming "The Greens are climate-change deniers". He gave a series of talks during the Wirksworth Festival regarding the failures of the green movement, but attendance steadily diminished.

His interests were many and varied: he was a long-standing and enthusiastic member of the Wirksworth Community Choir, the Fishpond Choir, and the Twinning Association, and at some point he was also the warden of a youth hostel at Glen Affric in the Scottish Highlands.

He leaves a nephew, a retired train driver who lives in London. His friends are planning the wake he specified, to be held at the Red Lion – the date had not been confirmed as Community Fayre went to press.

Evan in personal reminiscences

"A friendship that lasted almost 50 years – Evan was a frequent visitor to my flat in Holloway, and then my cottage in Enfield. His visits included trips to the Cervantes Library, a Spanish language lending library in central London – he intended to write a reassessment of the problematic period of the Counter-Reformation and Inquisition, which has, in some historian's eyes, given the Spanish an undeserved reputation for evil and brutality. We also visited London's art galleries, and I decided that in order to be acceptable to him, a work of art had to be disliked by everyone else."

Ian Wilson

"A friend remembers going to Evan's house for a cup of tea – he boiled the water in a biscuit tin over a Bunsen burner."

Fishpond Choir member

"In 1998 Evan presented some mugs to our MP Patrick McLoughlin, with inscriptions condemning the reforms to the welfare state as 'humbug'. He wanted the mugs to be given to Tony Blair – I wonder if he ever got them."

Fishpond Choir member

"His friend Vaila Cochrane said he was 'never knowingly understood', and I would add 'never possible to agree with' – any attempt to reflect back his views would almost always be rejected as a mis-understanding of what he meant."

Dave Mitchell

"He didn't seem to have a clue about historical research or philosophy, but had acquired the Cambridge mannerism of looking as though he had. I tried to explain the difference between primary and secondary sources, but was hampered by his opinion of the Open University and other 'dumbed down' sources of knowledge. But we all loved him for what he was."

Ian Wilson

"We can smile at all this as he was so eccentric – but he was a highly principled person and totally unmaterialistic, for which he was admired by many. He was very much part of Wirksworth life – music, heritage, history, the Twinning Association, the Festival. He contributed a great deal to the community, and will be much missed."

Kathy Mitchell

"Such a contradiction himself, a lovely but contrary man! Both brilliant and purposefully useless at the same time."

Olivia Punnett

"He was very clever, with an actor's memory for conversation – stopping irrelevant quotations, and speaking or reading Latin, French, German, Anglo-Saxon and, in the last decade, Spanish."

Dave Mitchell

"Evan never understood why age or disability should stop him doing things. I'll never forget his mesmerising recitation of the Anglo-Saxon poem The Battle of Malden – in Old English."

Fishpond Choir member

Many people contributed their memories of Evan, and there wasn't space to include everything. Thanks to all who helped, and apologies to those whose contributions couldn't be fitted in to the Spring issue of Community Fayre – Editor.