REMEMBERING RON

RON YOUNG (1928-2023)

RETIRED HOUGHTON FEAST OX ROASTER



THE HOUGHTON FEAST STEERING COMMITTEE WAS SADDENED TO HEAR THE NEWS THAT LONGSTANDING COMMITTEE MEMBER AND RETIRED OX ROASTER, RON YOUNG, HAD PASSED AWAY ON FEBRUARY 16TH 2023, AGED 94 YEARS. HERE RON'S FRIEND, PAUL LANAGAN, LOOKS BACK AT HIS INVOLVEMENT WITH THE HISTORIC HOUGHTON FEAST OX ROASTING.



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REMEMBERING RON

RON YOUNG (1928 – 2023)

RETIRED HOUGHTON FEAST OX ROASTER

ARTICLE BY PAUL LANAGAN

Ron Young was associated with Houghton Feast for over 50 years. Known to many as a calm and quiet gentleman with links to numerous community organisations, you might be surprised to know that he was pictured in the first Carnival Parade at the big 'Houghton Feast Revival' of 1967, dressed as a nurse while wearing a shaggy black wig! Ron had a good sense of humour and was more than happy to support the new event in his capacity as a former chairman of the Round Table. Ron later said that his friend and fellow

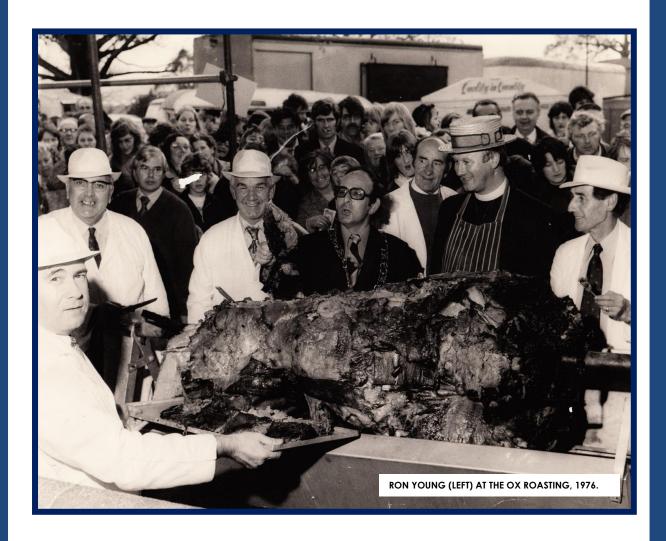


Round Tabler, Bob Hodgson, had used his referee skills to help marshal the which parade, attracted thousands of spectators to Houghton's town centre. The had parade been added to the festival lineup to bring back the fun, colour and spectacle of

pre-War Feasts – and the aforementioned photograph suggests it was very successful in meeting that aim.



Having grown 'too old' for the Round Table, Ron made the natural progression to the 41 Club and then became a member of Houghton's Rotary Club on March 29th 1972 at the age of 44 years. Later that year, as crowds of 5,000 gathered in The Broadway for the Houghton Feast outdoor community hymn singing, the Rotarians proceeded with their 6th annual roasting of a whole ox in the Rectory Field. On Ron's first shift of minding the cooking beast he was paired with retired dentist 'Major' Sam Todd O.B.E., who at the age of 87 was some 43 years older than Ron. Ron later recollected that the 2 hour stint had flown over as Sam shared 'fascinating' memories of Victorian-era Houghton.





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In 1986 Ron was made President of Houghton's Rotary Club and at Houghton Feast that year he helped the club roast their 20th whole ox, a beast which weighed 406 kilograms. A year later, the newly retired Ron was joined at the spit by his old Shiney Row school friend, Councillor John Mawston, who as the new Mayor of Sunderland carved the ceremonial first slice of ox. Ron and John kept in regular touch with each other, particularly as both were involved with the organisation of the festival for decades on Sunderland Council's Houghton Feast Steering Committee.



Ron took over from Reg Harrison as the Rotary Club's Houghton Feast ox roasting co-ordinator in 1988 and successfully oversaw the Club's 22nd whole ox roasting. He carried out that role for 30 years but it was not all smooth sailing: no ox roasting took place at Houghton Feast 1996 as the purposemade ox roasting oven, which had been in use every year since 1968, disappeared from the Council's depot in Houghton. A new oven was



purchased in 1997 and Ron managed the roasting of the Rotary Club's 30th and final whole ox at Houghton Feast, for the U.K. Government's Beef Bones Regulations came into force 3 months later. As roasting a whole animal was now not permissible by law, the creative members of the Rotary Club instead cooked large boneless joints of beef to get around the ban and had to use extra strapping to keep the meat on the spit. 1,600 sandwiches were served up to visitors at Houghton Feast in October 1998. The government relaxed the regulations in November 1999 however, the Rotary Club decided, for convenience, to continue roasting large boneless joints of beef at Houghton Feast instead. The then-traditional Houghton Feast weather proved challenging too: for the first time the ox roasting event was not a sell out owing to the atrocious weather which blighted Houghton Millennium Feast in October 2000.



Challenges aside, Ron carried on with the practice of ox roasting throughout the 2000s, and not just at Houghton Feast; he was joined by fellow Rotarians Bob Hodgson and Derek Moss to oversee the roasting of a whole ox at the 18th birthday party for the Honourable Frederick Lambton (now Viscount Lambton) on June 28th 2003 in the grounds of Lambton Castle as an historic echo of the ox which was roasted there in April 1962 for the baptism of



Edward Richard Lambton (7th Earl of Durham). The Rotarians gave their services freely and the Lambton Estate kindly donated £500 to the Rotary Club's charity fund.



At the Houghton Diamond Jubilee Feast in October 2012, Ron was made a 'Hero of Houghton' and was presented with a certificate by Houghton Heritage Society upon his 40th anniversary with the event. A record was set at that year's Feast when the Rotary Club sold 1,339 beef sandwiches in less than two hours!

As changes to Sunderland City Council's organisation of Houghton Feast were underway in 2016, the Council's newly appointed Executive Director of Enterprise Development suggested that McDonald's sponsor the traditional ox roasting, to which Ron jokingly replied: "It's help with the weather we need!"





The Rotary Club's 50th anniversary ox roasting event went ahead in October 2017. Joan Nicholson, Margaret Douglas and Jean Campbell, regularly at the front of the queue for beef sandwiches, were treated to a celebratory drink with table, chairs, flowers, cards and balloons provided by supporter Paul Lanagan and Houghton Heritage Society, while Ron was given a large 'The Big 50' pin badge to wear. He was justly proud of the event's impressive milestone.

At Houghton Feast 2018, Rotarians served up 1,300 beef sandwiches and Ron later said it was the biggest queue he had ever seen in his time, as he stepped down from his role as ox roasting co-ordinator at the age of 90 years. Fellow Rotarian Alan Dickinson took over in 2019 and Ron still played an active part, taking a shift to watch the cooking joints of beef. After the event, the Rotarians voted unanimously to discontinue their ox roasting practice in light of growing costs and the aged membership of the club, however The Houghton Feast Trust agreed to take on the event, ensuring the ancient Houghton Feast tradition would continue.



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In 2020, Paul Lanagan became the ox roasting co-ordinator for The Houghton Feast Trust and in light of the Coronavirus Pandemic, adjusted the Trust's plans to roast a whole ox in The Broadway; instead take-away beef sandwiches were offered from the Beehive public house. Ron came along to offer support and said: "I'm so pleased it can carry on even in a different way." Ron and Paul were photographed together at the pub - albeit at a social distance, such were the rules during the Pandemic.



When the social distancing restrictions were lifted, ox roasting practices resumed and successful whole ox roasts took place at Houghton Feast 2021 and 2022, but Ron was unwell and unable to attend the events. Ox sandwiches were set aside for him to ensure he did not miss out and he showed great interest later when shown photographs of the preparations. Ron was pleased that the historic event was continuing.



Ron Young passed away on February 16th 2023 at the age of 94 years. Over 120 people attended his funeral in St Michael & All Angels Church, where family and friends were joined by representatives of the many community groups Ron supported, including The Houghton Feast Trust and the Houghton Feast Steering Committee. Paul Lanagan read a tribute to Ron for his many decades of community service and in particular his contributions to the Houghton Feast ox roasting. Later, mourners were not surprised to see beef sandwiches as part of the buffet at the wake!

Ron's good deeds continued after his passing; almost £1,000 from donations given in memory of him were shared equally with Ron's chosen good causes – the YMCA, The Kepier Trust and The Houghton Feast Trust.

Paul Lanagan

PAUL LANAGAN BA HONS., PHF LOCAL HISTORIAN HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING HERITAGE SOCIETY



RON YOUNG: TIME LINE

1928 – Ronald Young was born at Mill Terrace, Shiney Row, and was the youngest of three brothers. He attended the local infant and junior school and was classmates with John Mawston who later became a local ward councillor and Chairman of the Houghton Feast Steering Committee.

1937 – Ron attended his first Sunderland football game at the age of 9 years old when the team brought the FA Cup home. He was a lifelong fan of the club and football in general.

1939 – Ron passed the 11 Plus examination and was to attend Houghton Grammar School, however his first day was the day that the Second World War broke so he had to attend at nearby Herrington School for a while.

Circa 1944 – Ron left Houghton Grammar School in 1944 and started work as an audit clerk at Squance Accountants, Sunderland.

V.E. Day, May 8th 1945 – 17 year old Ron was walking from Houghton back to Herrington via Newbottle. When he reached the village green he encountered lots of people singing and dancing around an upright piano. When he asked what was going on big cheers went up to say the War had ended. As he was underage, he couldn't join in the celebrations in Newbottle's pubs sadly.

1946 - Ron was called up for National Service and he joined the Royal Ordinance Logistics Corps (RAOC) at the age of 18 years old. Ron was posted to Donnington in Shropshire and he was involved with auditing supplies at army bases around the country. Other responsibilities involved organising the repatriation of prisoners of war to Germany and the repatriation of the bodies of servicemen to the United States. Ron was quickly promoted to Corporal.

Circa 1949 – Ron completed his National Service and despite having been offered an officer's commission, which he politely declined, took up employment as an assistant accountant, working for several timber companies in the north-east. These positions afforded him the opportunities to regularly travel to Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland and meet with other colleagues from around the world.

1955 – Ron married his girlfriend, Noreen, who he met in Houghton's Broadway 2 years earlier. Several years later they became parents to daughter Alison and son Neil.

1961 – Ron, aged 33 years, became a member of Houghton's Round Table. The new club had been formed only 3 years earlier.



1965/66 - Ron was Chairman of Houghton's Round Table.

Circa 1967 – At around this time Ron became a member of Fencehouses YMCA. When he was a youngster he would attend the YMCA at Herrington Burn and later recollected about the sports and other activities on offer.

1969 – Ron moved on from the Round Table and became a member of Houghton's 41 Club (Round Table rules stated that membership was for those aged 40 years and under).

1972 – Ron, aged 44 years, joined Houghton-le-Spring's Rotary Club and was a member for over 50 years.

Houghton Feast 1972 - As crowds of 5,000 gathered in The Broadway for the Houghton Feast outdoor community hymn singing, Houghton's Rotary Club members proceeded with their sixth annual roasting of a whole ox in the Rectory Field, helped by new member Ron Young, who joined the Club on March 29th 1972. On Ron's first shift of minding the cooking beast he was paired with retired dentist 'Major' Sam Todd O.B.E., who at the age of 87 years was some 43 years older than Ron. Ron later recollected that the 2 hour stint had flown over as Sam shared 'fascinating' memories of Victorian-era Houghton.







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1985 – Ron became President of the Timber Trade Federation.



1986 - The Rotary Club roasted their 20th ox at Houghton Feast, this one weighing 8 cwt (406 kg). The President at this time was Ron Young and this was his 15th year of involvement with the event, some two years before he became the main ox roasting co-ordinator.

1987 - Ron took early retirement but continued with his voluntary work in the community, including becoming a trustee of The Kepier Trust, a position he held for 35 years.

Houghton Feast 1987 – Ron was joined at the Houghton Feast ox roasting spit by his old Shiney Row school friend, Councillor John Mawston, who as the new Mayor of Sunderland carved the ceremonial first slice of beef.

Houghton Feast 1988 - Ron Young took over from Reg Harrison as the ox roasting co-ordinator and oversaw the Rotary Club's 22nd whole ox roasting at the Feast in October 1988.

1989 – Ron became one of the founding members of the new Durham County Cricket Club in March 1989. He was proud of his membership number (No. 38).

1990s – Ron worked with other trustees and management committees to raise funds for the restoration of the Kepier building and its work in supporting the Houghton community. In August 1991, the Bishop of Durham, Dr David Jenkins, laid the foundation stone of a new hall which was added to the rear of the Kepier. Ron utilised many of the business contacts he had established in the timber trade; indeed the sprung wooden floor from the old YMCA building in Fencehouses was recycled in the new hall.





1992 – Ron became the Sunderland Echo's correspondent for the Houghton 'Down Your Way' column and he went on to keep the community up to date with local news and details of events and special occasions for more than 25 years. On Wednesday November 25th 1992, His Royal Highness, Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, was welcomed to the Kepier by Ron and other trustees from the Kepier Trust where His Royal Highness unveiled a silver plaque at the renovated building.





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Houghton Feast 1996 – No ox roasting took place at Houghton Feast 1996 as the purpose-made ox roasting oven, which had been in use every year since 1968, had disappeared from the Council's depot at Houghton.

Houghton Feast 1997 – A newly constructed ox roasting oven was unveiled at a cost of around £4,500 plus VAT. It was made by Alex Young of CWR Fabrication, maker of the original. Members of Houghton Rotary Club roasted their thirtieth and final whole ox at Houghton Feast.

Houghton Feast 1998 – Ron Young oversaw the first boneless ox roasting at the Feast as the U.K. Government's Beef Bones Regulations 1997 had come into force ten months earlier; as roasting a whole animal was now not permissible, the creative members of the Rotary Club instead cooked large boneless joints of beef to get around the ban and had to use extra strapping to keep the meat on the spit. 1,600 sandwiches were served up to visitors and the first ceremonial slice of beef was carved by the Mayor of Sunderland, Councillor Wally Scott.

Houghton Millennium Feast 2000 - Despite the U.K. Government's Beef Bones Regulations 1997 being and the sale of beef on the bone now being allowed, Houghton's Rotary Club decided, for convenience, to continue roasting large joints of beef instead of a whole ox at Houghton Millennium Feast. For the first time the ox roasting event was not a sell out owing to the atrocious weather which blighted the special Millennium festival.





2003 - Houghton Rotarians Ron Young, Bob Hodgson and Derek Moss oversaw the roasting of a whole ox at the 18th birthday party for the Honourable Frederick Lambton (now Viscount Lambton) on June 28th 2003 in the grounds of Lambton Castle. The Rotarians gave their services freely and the Lambton Estate kindly donated £500 to the Rotary Club's charity fund. Later in the year, the Club once again roasted joints of beef at the Houghton Feast event.

Mid 2000s – Ron was Chairman of Fencehouses YMCA. When it became apparent that the out-dated building on Lambton Lane was not fit for purpose, Ron oversaw the change of the way the charity operated in the village; the land was sold and the YMCA was re-established further up the road at Front Street. The nearby Harvesters building was later acquired and converted into specialised and supported accommodation with space for seven young people.

2006 – Ron was given a Paul Harris Fellowship, Rotary's award for service to the community, in November 2006.

2009 – Ron narrated a short documentary about the heritage of the Houghton Feast ox roasting. It was released on DVD and was very popular.

2010 – On Monday July 26th 2010, Ron and the other trustees of the Kepier welcomed the building's second Royal visitor; Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester and the youngest grandchild of King George V and Queen Mary, was shown around the parish church and nearby Almshouses before he officially opened the Davidson Suite in the former Royal Grammar School. The Prince was President of the Society of Architect Artists so likely found the story of the Kepier's restoration of interest

Houghton Diamond Jubilee Feast 2012 – The Houghton Feast ox roasting event saw 1,339 beef sandwiches sold in less than two hours and ox roaster Ron Young was made a 'Hero of Houghton' and presented with a certificate by Houghton Heritage Society upon the 40th anniversary of his association with the event.

Houghton Feast 2016 – Beef joints, weighing 235 kilos, were roasted by the Rotary Club at Houghton Feast. The ox roasting tent soon became a hive of activity, quite literally, when a swarm of wasps invaded. The heat and carbon monoxide from the gas burners soon killed them off and the lid of the oven was covered in the dead insects! Earlier in the year, Andrea Winders, Sunderland City Council's Executive Director of Enterprise Development, attended her first Houghton Feast Steering Committee meeting in May 2016 with an aim of getting the festival to be self-funding, including a suggestion that McDonald's sponsor the traditional ox roasting, to which ox roast co-ordinator Ron Young replied: "It's help with the weather we need!"



2017 – In acknowledgement of Ron's 50 years of involvement with the YMCA, the training room at the YMCA's Harvesters building in Fencehouses was named 'The Ron Young Suite' on February 24th 2017. Ron also became a Life President of the YMCA Wearside. Later in the year, at the Rotary Club's Christmas social gathering in the Chilton Country Club on December 13th 2017, Ron was presented with a Paul Harris Sapphire Award in recognition of his many years of service to the Rotary movement. Ron was the only member of Houghton's Rotary Club to have received two Paul Harris awards in the club's 76 year history.

Houghton Feast 2017 - The Rotary Club's 50th anniversary ox roasting event in October 2017 went ahead as the Club roasted large joints of beef on the Rectory Field overnight. Joan Nicholson, Margaret Douglas and Jean Campbell, regularly at the front of the queue for sandwiches, were treated to a celebratory drink with table, chairs, flowers, cards and balloons provided by Paul Lanagan and Houghton Heritage Society, while event coordinator Ron Young was given a large 'The Big 50' pin badge to wear.

Houghton Feast 2018 – 1,300 beef sandwiches were served up at the Rotary Club's ox roasting event and co-ordinator Ron Young later said it was the biggest queue he had ever seen in his time, as he stepped down from the role after an impressive 30 years as the main organiser.





2019 - Ron's wife, Noreen, passed away. They had been married for 64 happy years.

Houghton Feast 2019– Alan Dickinson became the Rotary Club's ox roasting co-ordinator while his predecessor, Ron Young, aged 91 years, still played an active part, taking a shift to watch the cooking joints of beef. Later in the year, the Rotary Club decided to step down from organising the event and The Houghton Feast Trust agreed to keep the tradition going.

Houghton Feast At Home 2020 - Paul Lanagan became the ox roasting co-ordinator for The Houghton Feast Trust and, in light of the Coronavirus Pandemic, adjusted the Trust's plans to roast a whole ox in The Broadway; instead take-away beef sandwiches were offered from the Beehive public house. Retired ox roaster Ron Young came along and offered support. The Mayor of Sunderland, Councillor David Snowdon, attended with the Mayoress where he carved a slice of beef for the second time as Mayor owing to his term of office having been unexpectedly extended during the COVID-19 crisis.





2021 – Ron retired as a trustee of Kepier Trust at the age of 92 years, but managed to persuade his daughter Alison to become involved with the charity.

2023 - Retired ox roaster Ron Young passed away on February 16th 2023 at the age of 94 years. Over 120 people attended his funeral in St Michael's Church, where family and friends were joined by representatives of the many community groups Ron supported, including The Houghton Feast Trust and the Houghton Feast Steering Committee. Paul Lanagan read a tribute to Ron for his many decades of community service and in particular the Houghton Feast ox roasting. Later, mourners were not surprised to see beef sandwiches as part of the buffet at the wake! Ron's good deeds continued after his passing; almost £1,000 from donations given in memory of him were shared equally with Ron's chosen good causes – the YMCA, The Kepier Trust and The Houghton Feast Trust.





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With grateful thanks to Ron's daughter, Alison, for time and help in compiling this article about her father's involvement with the Houghton Feast ox roasting and other community organisations.

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