

Robert had been battling a serious illness for many years. Whilst his passing was not unexpected it was still a great sadness to the very many SMOC members who had come to call him a valued friend.

He first started orienteering in the mid 1990's when Peter, his son, was doing it as part of his Duke of Edinburgh Award. Robert was a competent orienteer but it wasn't his passion. All that running meant that he couldn't have time to fully grasp the outline of a contour. No, Robert loved the maps themselves. And he gained a passion for SMOC and its maps that he continued until, literally, his last days.

We have been asked to write an obituary as we were friends and colleagues with Robert for so many years.

It would be easy to say that Robert was devoted to SMOC and mapping; that he made a major contribution to the club, was excellent at what he did, was ultra-reliable and was ever there to help. In short, a true friend and colleague. All so very true. But so short of the full story.



So what follows is our tribute to our friend. It will be a short trip down memory lane for many and an insight into our history for newer members. We cannot remember Robert without looking back through the development of SMOC as he was a central and essential part of the club's growth.

SMOC is a relatively new club and was founded in 1986. Around 20 years ago a core group of members, of which Robert was at the centre, thought it time to move forward and host larger and even national events. To do so SMOC needed to dramatically improve its skill base, most especially the maps. Up until then maps were drawn by hand and bulk printed in the hope that they might last for a couple of events, usually surveyed and drawn by somebody from outside the club. At the time SMOC's map collection was poor and improvement appeared a daunting task.

But the computer age was catching up with orienteering and software such as OCAD was becoming available. SMOC needed a man for the job and up stepped Robert. And in doing so he discovered a new love in life.

To put his master plan in place Robert put together a supporting team. Many helped but the initial core of the team was John Lewis, David Rose (sadly, no longer with us) and John Shaw. It was a great time, every Wednesday taking a packed lunch and upgrading our maps. As we progressed Robert learnt more and more and led by him, we produced some very good maps. For Robert was a perfectionist.

In the early 2000s the club began to put on a series of quality events using these maps. Everyone chipped in but the usual team consisted of your authors alternating planning and controlling, Helen Nisbet on entries, Richard Pownall providing equipment and Neil Carter logistics.

Robert saw his job as more than just mapping. He checked every course, the position of numbers, circle cutting and the quality of the final printed map. If the planner thought the vegetation might have changed, the mapping team was dispatched and an updated map promptly produced. A planner's joy – Robert made it that much easier a job.

The long-term project, quality events and maps began to pay off and SMOC caught BOF's attention. As a result, the 2006 British Sprint Championships were awarded to SMOC, initially in Twywell Country Park. Sprint racing was in its infancy and expectations and standards were not clearly defined. Urban areas using a new standard of mapping were evolving but SMOC could not wait, 2006 was getting ever closer. Campbell Park in Milton Keynes was identified as the venue followed by a frantic year with Keith, Robert and John attending BOF national event training weekends to understand some of the requirements. With Simon Errington as the event's controller, SMOC pulled it off.

The International Standard for Sprint Orienteering Maps (ISSOM) had been developed but few events had used it for their maps, let alone a championship. Robert played a key role in developing the application of the new standard to reality on the ground. Good organising and planning and even quality prizes (thanks to Don Nisbet and Argos) along with miserable weather led to the event being recognised a big success, contributing to the major growth of sprint and urban orienteering. However, the star of the show was Robert's map. At the 2007 JK, Rosie, Karen, John and Steve had the great pleasure of seeing Robert awarded the Chichester Trophy.

The Trophy is awarded annually for the best amateur cartography. Robert's map was described as a model of clarity. The trophy itself is both interesting and appropriate. It is the compass from Gipsy Moth, the yacht in which Sir Francis Chichester made the first single handed circumference of the globe. Robert joined the BOF national mapping committee and help develop the concept of map advisors to improve the consistency of mapping for major events.

That was a major highlight and enough for many, but not Robert. A list of great maps and events followed - a YBT qualifier in 2008, the East Anglian Championships in 2009 and 2017, the Midland Sprint Championships in 2010 and Rushmere in 2014. Keith and Robert then contributed to the success of the next British Championships hosted by SMOC when the Trail-O champs were held at Twywell Hills & Dales in 2014 using Robert's intricate contour detail and map clarity to their maximum. Robert continued his production of Championships maps when the Sprints returned in 2017 to Campbell Park. He didn't only focus on major maps however, producing numerous smaller maps for local and regional events, always to the same exacting standards.

Fresh planners and organisers came along, Richard Pownall, Steve Hardy, Karen Vines, Ros and Dorien James, Rachel Edwards and latterly Freya Askham. They will all echo the comments about Robert's mapping standards and great assistance he gave them.

And, of course the mapping team changed over the years. And they were every bit as good as the early team as Robert was highly commended for his map of Rushmere in the Chichester Trophy section of the 2014 Map Awards. As Robert said "Many thanks to my fellow mappers Steve Hardy, Ian McDonnell and Antonio Franco who played an important part in the survey and initial drawing."

Sadly, Robert will not be with us for another great SMOC event – the British Middle Distance at Rushmere. But the core of his mapping will be there.

By any orienteer's standards this is an impressive body of work and dedication. Using Robert's work SMOC went from being a new small club to one entrusted with British championship events. Would SMOC be where it is today without his efforts? That cannot be answered but one certainty is that he was at the very centre of everything that we have achieved. He will be greatly missed.

Robert, rest easy on a job well done. We'll always remember you in a sun lit forest.

*John Shaw and Keith Downing*