

A Life Lived Well: Jim Roberts (1947-2023)

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James (Jim) Roberts was born into a working class-family in Liverpool in 1947. By 1948, his family had relocated for work – moving to Sutton-in-Ashfield in Nottinghamshire when Jim was one and then again to Leicester when he was fourteen. From the age of fourteen, Jim went to Alderman Newton's School in Leicester after which he moved straight into work for Dolcis shoes and then, by the mid-1960s to Fenwicks and a number of other Leicester stores using his gift for design and making to create window displays, picking up a number of awards for his work. It was through this work and the social group of young people working in Leicester city centre in the 1960s that, in 1967, he met his future wife Marea. Jim and Marea moved into a bedsit in Stoneygate together in early 1968, keeping it secret from their parents for months before marrying in December 1968. Early adventures included a period working in the Bahamas as a Display Manager for a large store – Marea joining him to run the cosmetics department.

Once back in the UK, Jim's move into museums began in the early 1970s with a role he took up at Belgrave Hall in Leicester, creating displays for the Schools Service. In 1973 he applied for a job as a Technician at the still relatively new Department of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester where he worked alongside Raymond Singleton and Geoff Stansfield. During this first phase of his time in what is now the School of Museum Studies, Jim drew on all his creative skills and expertise to work with students on photography, making casts, supporting conservation and collection care sessions and taking study trips in the School of Museum Studies' bright orange minibus. Throughout an almost 50-year career in and with the School, Jim's role changed shape, particularly as the use of digital technology grew and some of the practical techniques that Jim taught and supported fell away. In 2009 Jim's idea for an online, free to access resource to support people developing their careers in the sector, came to fruition. Jim's idea transformed approaches to recruitment in the sector – 100s of people credit Jim and the Jobs Desk with supporting their museum careers and this was recognised in 2010 when Jim and his colleagues won the prestigious Times Higher Education Award for Outstanding Departmental Administration Team. Retiring from his full time role in the School in 2011, Jim continued, until very recently, to work as Production Editor on the online, peer reviewed journal *Museums & Society* and the University of Leicester Jobs Desk. Characteristic of all of the projects that Jim felt so strongly about, on *Museum & Society* Jim worked consistently and tirelessly, ensuring that hundreds of scholarly papers were published. Jim played a key role alongside colleagues in the School in ensuring that neither the Jobs Desk nor *Museum & Society* were placed behind a paywall.

Closely intertwined with his work in the School, were his politics and political life. Marea recounts an early experience of attending a talk by Edward Heath with Jim in Leicester in the early 70s - Jim shouting back to Heath, calling him out on his policies and the economic decline that was causing such hardship at the time. In this context, Jim's political views grew

stronger. Jim joined the Labour Party in 1973, becoming Chair of the local Labour Party branch within months. He unsuccessfully stood for election to a local District Council seat in 1979 and, in 1981, was selected for a County Council Seat, taking up that role for Belgrave District in 1982. From 1986 Jim represented Stoneygate as a County Councillor, working in this role for the next 12 years. In 1995 he became Vice-Chairman of the County Council and in 1996 Chairman of the County Council. Committed to his socialist principles, highlights that mattered to Jim over this time included his work to rewrite the County Council's Equal Opportunities Policy. Whilst Chairman of the County Council, Jim visited Mablethorpe with the Leicester Children's Holidays charity – a charity that sends children from low income families for a holiday at the seaside. An area of work close to his heart, Jim would later join Marea on the Board of the charity becoming a very hands-on Chairman.

Jim's political life connected very directly with his interest in culture and his work in the School of Museum Studies. In 1995, he was elected to the MA Council (as the Board was then called) and remained a Local Authority Institutional Councillor until 1997, stepping in for a period as vice-Chair. He worked tirelessly as a Trustee of the Haymarket Theatre and closely with the Bardi Symphony Orchestra, working for a time on plans to create a new Concert Hall for Leicester. Always opinionated, always creative and always practical, Jim's commitment to his work life and his public life, leaves a lasting legacy.

Jim leaves behind his wife Marea, his sons Ben and Toby and his beautiful grand-daughters Ruby and Wren.