REX GOOCH REMEMBERED

Rex Gooch died on Tuesday 13th March. He was 67.

I had known Rex for some 15 years and he was a good friend. His breadth and depth of knowledge, whatever the subject, was phenomenal. He was one of Cambridge University’s best and, during his time there, if anyone around him wanted to know something, it was a question of ‘ask Rex’. He worked in the Nuclear Industry and later, for many years, at IBM, hence his computing skills. His interests were wide and he had an exceptional talent for mathematics. He wrote taxing puzzles on a regular basis for several national newspapers, and also undertook professional editing of complex books.

Rex’s articles in Word Ways embraced a wide range of topics which he always explored thoroughly, so providing a legacy of useful and useable word lists covering a range of genres. His contributions culminated in the best 10 x 10 square ever produced. His skills enabled him to approximate the number of 10-letter words required for the task to be productive, about 250,000 as I recall. The building of such a 10-letter word bank took a great deal of time and patience. Then came the technical problems of dealing with the words. His first program would have needed to run for 100+ years! Finally, he achieved his goal in just under one year.

As a person, Rex was always encouraging and helpful and afforded praise where it was due. He believed in fair play and hated deceit and red tape. He strove for what he believed to be in the best interests of people and put this quality to practical use as a local councillor. He was also enthusiastic about the Arts, especially ballet.

We kept in regular touch by phone and, despite all his abilities, he told the most awful puns! Rex will be sadly missed.

Susan Thorpe

During the past decade, Rex Gooch wrote nearly one hundred articles on wordplay for Word Ways, the Journal of Recreational Linguistics. Although he addressed many different types of wordplay, he is best remembered for his remarkable study of the ten-square, a crossword grid consisting of ten ten-letter words, the same ones appearing both horizontally and vertically. This is an extremely difficult task, not least because one needs a collection of perhaps 200,000 ten-letter words to have a reasonable chance of success. There are an almost uncountable number of ways one can select ten words out of such a collection, and the systematic examination of all possibilities requires both a high-speed computer and considerable skill in programming it. Such a skill Rex possessed to a high degree, and as a result he found hundreds of such squares, including several that are generally considered to be the finest of their kind. This is Rex’s logological monument, just as Saint Paul’s Cathedral is that of Christopher Wren. Would that 100 letters were inscribed on his tombstone!

A. Ross Eckler