

## W.B.J. (Joe) Higgins 1918-2011

Joe joined our society in 1954 when it was known as Bristol Cine Society. A quick look into history will reveal that Joe was a leading light during his 50 years of active membership. He did a brief stint as chairman (1964-66) preferring to look after our finances as treasurer (1969-81) and promoting our society as publicity officer (1966-76). Upon his retirement from a long teaching career, he set about the task of writing a history of our club; this is now archived on our website.

Joe's main love was the art of film making, leaving the techie stuff to others. In particular Joe was an editor. He loved film, and was justifiably proud of his involvement in our society when it was winning many national and international awards during the latter part of the fifties. In the early seventies Joe was the Bristol Evening Post amateur films correspondent, and also wrote quite extensively for amateur film magazines.

His other love was a small group of like-minded film making friends who got together and called themselves the Golden Unicorn Film Unit. This group was hugely successful with titles such as "The Dong" (an Edward Lear poem), "The Monks of Prinknash", and a beautifully crafted dramatised documentary about Edward Jenner, the local doctor who discovered and popularized a procedure to protect against infection from smallpox.

Joe moved to Spain for a while but kept in touch and in 1992 returned to the UK. The last time we saw him was in September 2004 when, to mark his 50th year of continuous membership, we presented him with a Lifetime Honorary Membership.

Joe died of a heart attack at home in Histon, Cambridge on Saturday 26th February 2011.

Mike George  
March 2011

Roy Marshall writes...

I first met Joe many, MANY years ago at Bristol Cine Society. I think we then met at St. Thomas church hall, just behind the Robinsons building. His exuberance was obvious from the very start when he made us all stand up as he played some famous march, often used, I think to introduce films or acts on stage - the name escapes me. He called it "The Anthem" and we all had to stand as a mark of respect.

Later, I made films with Joe as part of the Golden Unicorn Film Unit. We both did research and then co-wrote the script for *Edward Jenner*. Reg Middle was

the leader and producer. Reg seemed to have contacts everywhere! Joe was usually camera-man and Ron Elson did all the technical stuff. Editing was carried out by all three. I made stills as a record and for continuity, and I also recruited actors and actresses, including Jenner the child and Jenner the young man. Jenner the old man was an old boy of my school.

Joe was supportive to me when I was a student teacher. I remember spending an afternoon in his classroom at Knowle and wondering if I would ever achieve his wonderful discipline, which was carried out in a firm but humorous way. He told me once that one of his pupils had called a dinner lady a cow. Joe did not hit the roof, he merely asked the boy questions:-

Joe: "Does she have four legs?"

Boy: "No Sir."

Joe: "Does she have horns?"

Boy: "No Sir."

Joe: "Then how can she be a cow? Is she a cow?"

Boy: "No sir."

Joe: "Then you had better go and apologise."

Then there was the famous story of Joe's divorce. ( I met his second wife but did not know his first). Apparently Joe and wife number two were at the registry office, with all the guests ready for the wedding but he had judged things a bit fine and found out that he would not be divorced until 1 o'clock that afternoon. So everybody had to wait around until he could be legally married.

I am sure there must be a multitude of stories about Joe Higgins – a real character and a sad loss to us all.

Roy Marshall  
March 2011

Bob Bennett writes ..

When I joined the club Joe was one of the elite. He was a member of the Golden Unicorn Film Unit, made his own films, gave talks at meetings and was on the committee.

He was always very friendly, enthusiastic and helpful to a new boy and had a great sense of humour.

He also 'starred' in *The Nautical Novice*, a film I made for the club back in the 1980's. This involved much paddling around in a small boat at Saltford and

getting soaked in a fish pond in a members back garden. All this with not a word of complaint. He was a true gentleman.

BobBennett  
March 2011

Don Smith writes ..

When Joe joined up to do his bit for King and Country he wanted to go into the cavalry so they gave him a gun, put him in a tank and sent him off to North Africa. Happily he survived and a lifelong interest in tanks remained with him.

Joe could entertain with long and interesting stories and was very popular with the residents of the Windmill Grange Care Home with his fortnightly video chats and entertainment.

A lot of people will miss my friend and travelling companion. Together we regularly visited the War Cemeteries in Belgium.

Don Smith  
March 2011

Footnote:

At the service of thanksgiving at Cambridge City Crematorium on Friday 11th March 2011 a printed tribute to Joe was included in the service sheet. With the permission of Joe's family it is included here ..

## **Joe Higgins**

**Joe was born in Griffithstown near Pontypool. He never knew his father, who was killed in the first world war. It was at this time that he was taken under the wing of Madge's family. Many of you will have known Marjorie Rowland, or Madge as she was also known. Her father, a schoolmaster, took a keen interest in the formative years of Joe.**

**Educated at Monmouth school, Joe's early training for the medical profession was interrupted by the outbreak of the 2nd world war. He considered that his country took priority over his studies and joined his Father's old regiment, now the Royal Tank Regiment, where he served in North Africa & Italy. Joe maintained his interest in tanks and the RTR throughout his life, hence the tank regiment coffin drape.**

**After the war he became a teacher and taught in and around Bristol until he retired.**

Meeting up with Madge again on the death of her husband, they renewed their childhood friendship and bought a house together near Crickhowell in South Wales, before deciding that the warmer climate of Southern Spain would be more to their liking. Joe had spent time as a student studying Spanish in Barcelona and welcomed the chance to put his language skills to good use.

A spell in hospital convinced them that a return to the UK would be wise. Cambridge seemed an ideal location as Madge's eldest son lived nearby and the lively art scene and excellent facilities suited them well.

Joe was always on the go, it was always easier to wait for him to ring you as he was never in. In his lifetime he was; a deacon of his local church in Wales; a member of the Bristol Cine Society, making award winning films; a keen photographer, as a teacher he ran school summer camps and after school activities; he was an active member of Toc H, a lifelong supporter of Welsh rugby and at various times was treasurer, chairman & secretary for numerous local societies wherever he was living; not to mention being a good friend to many and always willing to help.

The list could go on indefinitely and he will be sadly missed - even his long, oft repeated tales of times gone by.

We will exit the chapel to the rousing tune of My Boy Willie. The first tanks were known as Big Willie and Little Willie and the Royal Tank Regiment adopted the tune as theirs.