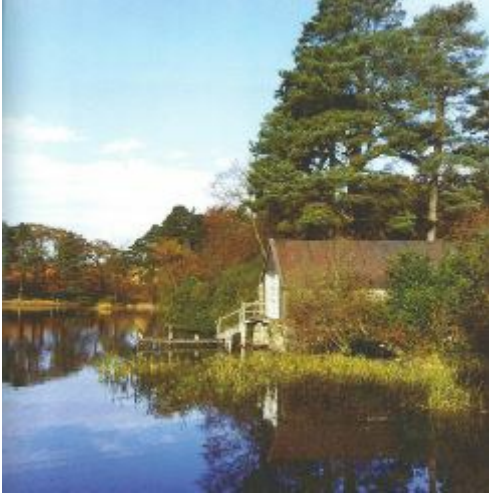


James Leigh Roslin Williams.

5th February 1939 - 4th February 2014.

James was born on 5th February 1939. Son of Glenton and Mary Roslin Williams. His father was deputy master, and the Huntsman, of the Kendal and District Otter hounds. His mother was very well known for her Mansergh Labrador retrievers and author of several books. His sister Anne is also an author and equally well known for her Mansergh border terriers.



Born into a world of working dogs; gundogs, terriers and pack hounds, James was brought up in the Lune Valley, moving in 1948 from Mansergh to a home with a beautiful lake, woods and little grouse moor at Lilymere, near Sedbergh. It became an ongoing excitement for James to help his parents restore the wildlife to its right place and levels. Clearing and maintaining the spawning beck to assist the trout population in the lake and deterring predation by otters with the use of a swinging paraffin lamp. It was a perfect place to start his lifelong interests in wildlife, dogs, otters, hunting, fishing and shooting.

James became joint master of his fathers' pack of otter hounds, which disbanded voluntarily in the 1970's. On the death of his father in 1957, when 18 years old, James took over the cockers, later breeding, training and handling them in field trials. His first was Caroline Of Mansergh, winner of nine field trial awards.

James was educated at Harecroft Hall preparatory School and then Sedbergh School, going on to St Andrews University to study English, accompanied by his spaniel, Caroline. After graduating with an MA (Hons) James taught English at his old prep school and then Strathallan School in Perthshire, before moving to Somerset in 1967 to teach English at Taunton School.



Lilymere with Caroline and Dulcie.



In 1968 James married Elizabeth Stansell, an architect recently emigrated to Canada who was preparing to return, until she met James. They lived in a thatched cottage outside Taunton when their two children, Robert and Scarlett were born.

Elizabeth shared James's interests in shooting, fishing and gun dogs.

In 1976 James became housemaster of Fairwater and Elizabeth assisted in running the domestic side for more than 50 boarding boys. During his years at Taunton School James was also the careers master, took on training of pupils for Ten Tors and orienteering, and after retiring as housemaster, the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. In 1991 he started a Taunton School Otter Group, to run as part of the 6th form general studies programme. The aim was to monitor the resurgence of the otter population of the River Tone and the Somerset Levels, to test sampling techniques and to assist with national population surveys. The group participated in the Vincent Wildlife Trusts Survey of pollutants in fish, and collected spraints for

Essex University's National Survey of PCB's. James retired from Taunton School in 1994 after 27 years there, and 34 years in teaching altogether.

James's son Robert has followed in his fathers's natural history footsteps. He did a Zoology Degree and then a doctorate in Owls. Amongst his varied conservation work is the study of Giant Otters in Peru. James's daughter Scarlett did a Business Studies Degree and has a job with a development company. James had two grandsons, Alec and Oliver. Anahi, James's daughter in law gave birth to another grandson, James Lawrence, on 14th March.



James took a gun at the Triscombe shoot and was shoot captain for eleven years. He once ordered, "No Woodcock on the next drive because one of them isn't, it's a Great Snipe - a refugee from Siberia." He would organise the Beaters Day every year, the beaters hut has photos of James, together with a letter from him on the wall.

James maintained an average of 6 Cocker Spaniels. His Mansergh strain of Cockers has 81 years of unbroken existence since his father "bartered" in the foundation bitch, Fuss, in 1932 for 5 shillings from a Cornish butcher. James only had need for 3 or 4 working dogs, but to maintain the strain he needed about 6 bitches. In 1993, in an article published by the West of England Cocker Club, entitled 'Maintaining the Strain', James wrote, 'Not that I am too keen on a lot of outcrossing. When in the pub, I like a whisky, thank you and yes, I will put in an outcross of water, but if you are feeling properly generous I am going to linebreed back to the whisky bottle, not the water tap; you can never be certain where the water has been, nor what unseen substances it contains. My best bit of luck over this was that one night on the dreaded Ester Ranzten show was a cocker doing antics at a riding stables, so I rang up and found it was from a long line of keepers dogs all bred from Manserghs and sold into Yorkshire many years ago. So I was able to outcross to some workers that were linebred to substrain on my own line. Ideal'



2002. A party for Mansergh Cocker owners, held at James's home. In celebration of 70 years

James was successful in field trials, winning many awards with several of his dogs. James records having won awards with 17 different Cockers and having exported dogs to 7 different countries. The first dog he ever trained won him his first prize of a silver wine coaster engraved, *Cocker Spaniel Club second in the novice stake at Milton -1965*. Elizabeth won a certificate of merit with the first gundog she trained. James having a young family and being a housemaster put paid to further trialling, but the Cockers continued to pick up regularly on shoots in Somerset. The team were in demand picking up 3 days a week most weeks through the shooting season, handled by both James and Elizabeth, who sometimes divided forces going to different shoots on the same day.

James loved otter hounds, although he never owned one, and on the cessation of hunting he became a founder member of the otter hound club, with his sister Anne. He judged otter hounds at shows including Crufts. He also had a keen interest in Beagles and was secretary of the Beacon Beagles, whilst judging otter hounds at Honiton show he was keen to take the opportunity to watch the beagles in the neighbouring enclosure. One of his articles, 'A day on the Lune', in the otter hound club magazine of 1999, is currently on the American otter hound club website. Another later publication in the Otter hound Observer in 2005, 'A typical day with the otter hounds', gives nearly 4 pages of James's recollections of the excitement and pleasures of following hounds. 'I still hear Regent's tree-trembling roar in my dreams, and often see Deacon throwing his great skull at the sky to give full vent to his enthusiasm for a swimming hunt.'





Terriers; Vic, Crib and Smuts
With James and Anne.

James formed a Lilymere Rat Hunt whilst still at Prep School. Using a half dozen of the family's assorted terriers James hunted and Anne, his sister, was Whipper in. Supporters were charged a subscription and proper meets were held. They hunted around Lilymere and lots of rats were killed.

Terriers; Judy, Smuts, Bea and Vic,
Crib at the back.

Anne with James displaying the rats.



James with his hounds on the Rawthey with Tommy Harrison, huntsman (right), and Wilf Atkinson, whip (left).



In 1965 James became joint master of the Kendal and District otter hounds, (KDOH). When he moved to Somerset he naturally hunted with local packs. In Summer he came out with the Culmstock otter hounds, often still wearing the distinctive blue coat and grey collar of the KDOH, and in Winter he followed the Beacon Beagles. In 1970, when Mike Milburn became Master and Huntsman, James became secretary of the Beacon Beagles. Although never a regular huntsman James did, on occasion, step in to hunt both the KDOH and the Beacon Beagles. One day, hunting the KDOH from a meet in Sussex by invitation of the Crowhurst, it was suggested to James that he might like to finish soon as the hounds had been hunting for five hours. James received the news with astonishment; such was his absorption in his hounds he had no idea he had been out for so long.

In 1986 following the death of Brian Vincent, James became chairman of the Culmstock Hunt, which by this time had become a mink hunting pack, a position he held until the year 2000, he was proud to have been chairman when they celebrated their second centenary. During the 1980's James was also the hunt's Conservation Officer, representing the Culmstock Hunt on such matters to the Masters and Mink Hound Association.

James joined the Taunton Fly fishing club in 1968, becoming chairman in 1993. He was a highly respected Chairman for 14 years. When he decided about 6 years ago to give up the Chairmanship and 'give someone else a go', the committee were reluctant to lose his guiding influence, consequently deciding to create a new position of President and appointed James accordingly. He continued to give advice to any member who asked him. James was an extremely keen fisherman and together with Elizabeth they regularly fished for Trout and Salmon on the River Tone, Axe and the Taw in Devon, travelling every year to Scotland. They both braved the cold to fish in Alaska, Russia, Norway and Iceland. Their current house is on a tributary of the river Tone. When they moved there in 1987 James set up an otter loo to monitor otter signs daily. Elizabeth ran a small trout hatchery on the same stream, until regulations changed preventing this.



If otters had become extinct James would have turned his attention to Peregrines. He kept careful records of all his observations. James wrote an article published in *The Raptor* in 1993 describing three days of watching peregrine behaviour on a tour of Andalucia, led by his good friend Martin Jacoby. It was Martin, a fellow teacher at Taunton School, who introduced James to Dick Treleven. James would enjoy visiting the



Cornish coast to watch Peregrines with Dick, it was on one such visit he briefly met Bruce Pearson, who later provided the illustrations for James's first book, James would also visit the North Somerset coast to watch Peregrines. He was a very keen bird watcher and had recorded seeing over 3000 species, it was almost always 10 times the number of mammals he had seen. He was keen on birds but, 'few were as good as a good mammal'. James was extremely well travelled and had been birding in Ecuador, Peru, Costa Rica, Alaska, Canada, Israel, Spain, Nepal, Botswana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Russia, Iceland and Norway. James's father had a Sparrowhawk and later a Merlin. James was a member of the Hawk and Owl Trust.

James first began helping the Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation (the former name of Somerset Wildlife Trust) 45 years ago, when he started work alongside Ernest Neal at Taunton School. He wrote his first article on otters in Newsletter 14 in 1969; Otters and Mink-another view. James had started recording wildlife, and otters in particular since a child. His regret was that in a fit of 'teenage intellectual arrogance', he threw away these priceless notebooks. He realised his mistake and began them again, his journals and records are a lesson in themselves in meticulous recording, a unique archive of surveys and research. In October 2013 James received his MBE from Prince William at Buckingham Palace, awarded for conservation of Somerset Otters. James was chair of the Somerset Otter Group, a uniquely large group of dedicated otter surveyors, who adopt a stretch of river or stream to survey monthly, and once a year co ordinate their efforts on the same weekend to show a County wide snapshot of otter presence. He was the Otters and Rivers Project officer for Somerset.

The current Somerset Otter Group under James's chairmanship evolved from an original small group of surveyors from the Vincent Wildlife Trust, (VWT). The VWT was formed in 1975 and Libby Lenton was the regional officer for the South West, running the Otter Haven Project. In 1980 Rob Jarman from the existing Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation, invited Libby Lenton and James to locate breeding areas. The following year Libby Lenton called for assistance and held a consecutive day survey where 8 surveyors including James took part. With the start of an otter recovery the VWT disbanded the otter project and turned its attentions towards bats and water voles. This small group of surveyors formed into the Somerset Otter Group to continue Libby Lenton's research, James then built the Otter Group into its current form with over 100 members. His enthusiasm, charisma and generous heart enabled him to keep a group of people dedicated enough to survey for a creature some of them will never see, and he has ensured Somerset has the most surveyed and recorded otter population. James has instigated, personally funded and supported numerous research projects ensuring the Group has remained the research group it was initially formed as.



James with a dead otter recovered for the post mortem programme.

James's records of dead otters go back as early as the 1970's, but obviously increase during the otters recovery in the mid 90's, caused mostly by Road kills. James has worked hard to mitigate areas where otter deaths clustered, organising the placement of reflectors at black spots, ledges under bridges and steps by weirs. He has invested enormous effort, expense and time recovering dead otters, and securing them for research. He persuaded the Environment Agency to include Somerset otters in the post mortem contract with Vic Simpson and by doing so opened up the research into the liver fluke. In 2007 this contract was given to Cardiff University and James has worked closely with Dr Elizabeth Chadwick and her team, supporting their projects, both with time and advice to students and with funding to support their research into the otter. The otters used to be sent fresh down to Vic Simpson, but are now sent frozen to Cardiff, resulting in James's wife Elizabeth having to share freezer space with dead otters. For the last 10 years James has tried to get substantial research and funding to investigate the fluke *Pseudamphistomum truncatum*, a bile fluke infecting Somerset otters, believed introduced through ornamental fish from Russia. He assisted Ellie Sherard-Smith from Cardiff University in her research and encouraged another student to complete a dissertation on the prevalence of the fluke eggs in spraint. In November James engaged with other researchers and appeared to have secured enough interest in the fluke to secure more research, he was both excited by the prospect and frustrated because he was not well enough to travel back to London.

His letters show the depth of concern, involvement and foresight James had in the recovery of the otter in Somerset. Two examples amongst the box files: In 1988 he was corresponding with Philip Wayre expressing his misgivings about the otter release programme and highlighting the dangers to the Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation. In 1991 he had picked up on the fact that fish farms were about to need planning permission and had written that this consent should be, *'dependent on there being some form of anti-otter device, at least in those areas where there are known to be an increasing number of otters, I believe such a fence is compulsory in at least one of the Scandinavian countries.'*

In 2000 James published his first book, *'The Otter Among Us'*, short listed for the BP Natural World Book Prize. His second book was published in 2010, *'The Otter'*. He has written and published almost 60 articles, over 160 pages, mostly about the otter but also about birds, dogs and fishing. His correspondence, yearly journals, diaries and copious notes must be the most unique record held in one place about the Otter, mammals and birds. His precious Cocker Spaniels have the same meticulous records spanning 81 years, accompanied by photograph albums. His talks on the otter always drew large crowds. His last was to the Natural History Museum in London on 8th of November 2013, to the London Freshwater Society. James shared all and any information for the benefit of the otter. He had remarked that he would have liked to study biology at St Andrews University, but the path he took has ensured that the records of his scientific field work will endure forever and be a source of study for many students in the future.



Book signing for *The Otter Among Us*.

James had a love of music and was on the Forde Abbey Concert Society committee. Forde Abbey is host to one of the country's most prestigious chamber music series. The Great Hall has ideal acoustics and is a wonderful venue for concerts which take place during the summer months. Each season Forde Abbey attracts artists of an international level for a varied programme of music. The only time James was involved in anything musical himself was during his University days. He was forcibly recruited into the officer training core cadets of St Andrews University. The queen gave him £2 a



morning to take part in rifle shooting competition. James calculated that £2 in those days was about 9 gallons of petrol, so it enabled him to have access to the countryside and fishing in the evening, in exchange for enjoying himself shooting.

He was made a base drummer in the pipe band which had to rehearse often. The base drummer being the conductor of the whole orchestra James had to be at all the practices. The money this gave him enabled him to spend his summer holidays looking for otters, doing bird watching and going fishing. James related this story during one of his interviews on local radio, his choice of music for the programme was bagpipes. He loved a variety of music, Beethoven, Mahler, Haydn, Brahms; if he had any favourites it would be pieces conducted by his cousin Daniel Harding.

James's last year was a very special one, in June he was not only awarded the MBE in the Queen's birthday honours but he became a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London, the world's oldest extant biological society which remains a leading modern forum for debate and discussion of natural history. This meant as much to James as the MBE he received at Buckingham Palace on 17th October 2013. On 24th October, having given a talk on otters and met up with friends at the Devon mammal group, he had expressed surprise that so many people had been genuinely pleased for him.



James and Elizabeth at Buckingham palace.



The enormity of his loss will be felt by so many for years to come. We will never again see the like of such intellect willingly and generously shared with so many. He was a sane voice spanning the gaps between conservationists and countrymen. A rare charisma, depth and breadth of knowledge and command of language.

James was a man who lived life to the full, achieving so much and influencing so many.



James's Otter visiting his camera trap the night he returned from receiving his MBE.

He did not download the camera so was unaware of the second honour he had been paid.