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Remembering the force of nature that was Reg Ward

By Jackie Sadek on July 7, 2011 9:26 AM



I'm not clear at all as to how to report back on the Reg Ward Memorial event held in the West Wintergarden of Canary Wharf the other evening, hosted by Howard Dawber of the Canary Wharf Development Company. It was quite quite extraordinary and, actually, if the truth be known, I still haven't quite recovered. I feel rather overwhelmed about it all.

They were ALL there, you know: Lords, Ladies, Knights of the Realm, ex-cabinet ministers, mayors, ex-staffers, community leaders, journalists, assorted mad people, Sue Brown and all her devoted girls, Mrs Mop, Uncle Tom Cobbly and all. And it was all so very fitting, given what an inclusive man Reg was, given his sweet nature, and his lovely manners. They were all there. And they all paid tribute. One of the organisers later described the proceedings as a "Regfest", and that is exactly what it was, really.

Here are some snaps of me at the event. In the first picture I'm with the MC for the evening, David Donoghue, ex-head of corporate communications for the LDDC (and my mucker of 25 years). In the second shot I'm with Lorraine, the former LDDC receptionist (and a proper East-ENDER) and Carl Hopkins, the man who launched over a thousand CPO orders in the Royal Docks to do the land assembly. (Was it legal? I asked Carl. He said he - a lawyer - and Reg had never bothered to find out!) Carl is also a mucker and he later helped me with CPO advice at Kent Thameside.



And we heard from this wonderfully eclectic range of speakers. Hezza was out of the country but he had recorded a remarkable piece to camera and spoke very warmly of Reg and his founding chair, Nigel Brookes and vice chair, Bob Mellish. It was clear from the way that he described the formation of this original team that he, Hezza, had a hugely hands-on role at the beginning. He also went on record to lament that fact that, despite our best endeavours, we never managed to secure a gong for Reg. ("Perhaps," said Lord Heseltine with a twinkle, "it was because the civil servants knew what he thought of them.") Richard Desmond spoke and explained how Reg had given him, and hundreds of other entrepreneurs, a leg up at a difficult economic time. Eric Sorensen spoke (but of course) and paid huge tribute to the Reg Ward culture that he inherited, as his successor. Iain Shearer spoke, both of developing out the ExCeL centre and of the extraordinary experience it was being Reg's son-in-law.

And Reg's daughter Sarah (he called her "Sally") spoke of his dedication to drawing up new schemes right to the very end. An emotional moment. Howard Dawber and Kevin Wall of Barclays Capital spoke powerfully of today's Docklands, the legacy that Reg has left. Canary Wharf speaks for itself, of course. And Barclays has enjoyed a 30-year relationship with London Docklands, with the lovely Pat Ward, the former manager of the Barclays Business Centre, being part of the organising team for the Regfest, bless him. (The resonating part about BarCap was rather poignant for me - as close followers will know, I started my career in regeneration at the LDDC and I am seeking to leave my own legacy within UKR Projects in partnership with... er....BarCap.) And they unveiled a splendid portrait of Reg that will hang in BarCap's wood-panelled office for ever more, along with the forefathers of the bank. And I will be visiting that portrait on my next visit.

But the man of the match, we were all agreed, was the lovely Stuart Innes, who spoke so movingly of his 18 years at the LDDC. Stuart was there at the beginning. And he was there at the end. Between him and David Donoghue they conveyed the real sense of the phenomenon that was Reg Ward. Reg: not so much a man, more of a force of nature. He was such a hero to so many. People who worked for Reg would do anything for him. We have not seen his like again and it seems unlikely that we will.

It was fitting and it was right.