

Working at Stoke Mandeville Stadium

Rob King ; Events Manager 1972 - 1990

When I was introduced to Sir Ludwig , the first thing he said to me was ' Forget you were ever a Civil Servant' ! 'Poppa' ,as we came to call him, hated red tape - I had joined the staff, after working for the Ministry of Technology at the Rocket Propulsion Establishment at Westcott ,so I could understand his concern, working for a charity was going to be a new life for me.

Building the Stadium in 1969 needed someone with influence and drive, and 'Poppa' had both - he didn't bother with junior officials, he often rang Harold Wilson or Jim Callaghan when he needed help

International Games were held each year. Sadly the games following the Munich Olympics hijacking in 1972, changed everything. I remember my wife and I went to Heathrow the following year to welcome the teams, The Israeli team were understandably very 'jumpy' and insisted the coach that we arranged to meet them, did not stop. So we drove around the perimeter road with the coach full of Israeli security staff, until they felt safe to continue their journey to Aylesbury Agricultural College where they were staying, and were guarded night and day.

During the 1984 Paralympics 40 plus countries took part. We had to arrange for the visit of representatives from the Embassies. The opening and closing ceremonies gave me plenty to think about. I remember Mavis and I laying the seating plan for the opening ceremony on our dining room floor. It was rather a large piece of paper, computers were not available in those days !. All sorts of diplomatic problems arose. Each country was asked to supply a flag to be flown next to the athletics track, and as can be imagined, countries found the largest they could find so, it was decided to buy a flag the same size for each country, and a business in Chesham was able to supply these at short notice. Prince Charles officially opened the games. One of my tasks was to liase with the RAF, to fly the prince in by helicopter. We used the playing field at Bucks County sports club and special security cover had to be arranged. I can remember sitting in the helicopter during a 'trial run' and listening to the complex things that have to be solved for a Royal visit and thinking, thank goodness I don't have to do this too often.

I remember staff and students from Aylesbury College worked in the kitchens and dining rooms. Prisoners from Grendon and Springhill Prisons helped in the kitchens, and were employed on site clearing. Most prisoners said working at the games was like 'a holiday made in heaven'. One of the groups that volunteered their help during the games was the Crusaders. They were a Christian organisation of young people and they came from all over England . They arrived with kit bags and worked all over the site , and at night found a corner, and slept !.

The town of Aylesbury supported the games, and everywhere you went people were interested and enthusiastic. Lots of people in the town put up friends and relatives from the teams. I think we had five tents in our garden !.

We were one big family - everybody mucked in - in 2012 - wow - wouldn't 'Poppa' be chuffed !!!