

Lieutenant-Commander Bill Boaks

An Utter Nutter Or A Walthamstow Eccentric?

He Stood For The Wrong Constituency



If you were voting in the 1951 General Election in Walthamstow East, you may have come across the name of William George Boaks on your ballot paper. He was standing on behalf of *ADMIRAL* which stood for the Association of Democratic Monarchists Representing All Women. Actually, Bill (William) Boaks was the only member and had completely mucked it up. He had intended to stand against the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, but stood for the wrong seat (Attlee's constituency was Walthamstow West). In the event, Bill Boaks received 174 votes out of 40,001 cast.

Education & Career

Bill Boaks without doubt (Unless of course, you know better) was Walthamstow's foremost eccentric citizen. Yet, there was nothing in his

birth and career to suggest this. He was born in 1904 in Walthamstow to William and Annie Boaks. His father was a Sales Clerk for a fruit merchant and young Bill lived with his parents and his four younger siblings in Rensburg Road, Walthamstow.

He was educated at the Royal Naval College at Greenwich and left school and joined the Royal Navy when he was 16 years old. He was a sixpence-a-day boy, second class. In his 30 years service he rose through the ranks and took part in the sinking of the *Bismarck* while he was a gunnery officer on board HMS *Rodney*. He was a qualified submarine officer, a flying officer in the Fleet Air Arm, and a qualified deep-sea diver and he won the Distinguished Service Cross at Dunkirk. When the war ended he had attained the rank of

Lieutenant Commander. After the Second World War he was an executive officer of the Building Apprenticeship Training Council.

By the 1960's he had moved to Streatham and he later moved to Wimbledon.

Road Safety, All Roads Should Be Treated As Zebra Crossings

Sometime between leaving the Royal Navy in 1945 and 1951 Bill Boaks became a fanatical exponent of road safety. He was a major advocate of pedestrian and non-motor vehicle traffic rights, and a need for additional care in road safety. He did not object to all motorised transport - he used a car painted with zebra stripes before switching to his armoured bicycle - but he did object to the increased volume of road traffic at the expense of other forms of transport.



He favoured having all freight carried by rail and was an advocate of helicopters as a potential means of alleviating traffic congestion. He also noted and highlighted the problems caused by pollution and the damage caused to properties beside roads favoured by heavy goods vehicles. Boaks's central campaign point was simple - he wanted the inversion of the law concerning Zebra crossings, so that all roadways would be treated as if they were Zebra crossings except those parts painted as such, thus giving pedestrians the right of way at all times. The idea was that it would save countless lives by increasing drivers' sense of responsibility, and would cause such chaos in urban areas as to force people back onto public transport rather than using private cars.

To reinforce his point, Boaks would sometimes deliberately hold up traffic at crossings. He later took to pushing a trolley or pram full of bricks back and forth repeatedly, at Zebra crossings. Occasionally he would sit in a deckchair in the overtaking lane of the Westway (A40) in North Kensington, reading *The Daily Telegraph*. Perhaps his crowning achievement was when he stopped his van at a Wembly zebra crossing just before an England/Scotland match and refused to move until all 100,000 fans had crossed.

Summons The Queen

Demonstrating his fanaticism about road safety issues was that he In the 1950s, he



became involved in a series of legal cases in which he launched private prosecutions of public figures who had been involved in road accidents, particularly those involving drunk driving. Clement Attlee relied upon his wife, Vi, to drive him when campaigning, but Mrs, (later Lady) Attlee was a notoriously bad driver and Boaks would attempt private prosecutions whenever she crashed. He also tried to prosecute the Home Secretary.

When Prince Philip drove his Rover into a privately owned Ford Prefect, Boaks issued a summons against the Queen, who was his passenger, for aiding and abetting him. He said

" I don't care whether the driver is a Duke or a bloody dustman "

Fighting 40 Elections

Bill Boaks candidacy in the 1951 General Election was to be the first of his standing for Parliament in 40 elections up until 1982. In fact, in one election he stood simultaneously for 3 different constituencies! The 1982 election in Glasgow was the lowest point in his electioneering when he only received 5 votes. This was interesting as he needed 10 constituents to nominate him as a candidate and the implication is that half of them didn't vote for him! He lost his £150 deposit at every election.

In order to publicise his candidature at the elections Bill Boaks would ride a around the constituency on bicycle kitted out with a large cardboard box in which he sat. The outside of the box had the current party name that Bill Boaks was using and his current messages to the electorate. In the early years, the names of parties that he claimed to represent changed until he settled on the name '*Public Safety Democratic Monarchist White Resident*'.

The Official Monster Raving Loony Party

An interesting spin-off from his campaigns was the influence he had on David (Screaming Lord) Sutch and the formation of 'The Monster Loony Raving Party' who adopted a number of his campaigning methods.

In view of his long term campaigning for road safety, It is ironic that Bill Boaks died at the age of 81 of head injuries that he sustained getting off a bus.

Bill Bayliss

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