

Reg Ward - so much more than just the gaffer

By Jackie Sadek on January 10, 2011 8:41 AM | [No Comments](#)



Oh dear. Over the weekend we received the very sad news that Reg Ward has died. Reg was the legendary first chief executive of the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) and one of the biggest figures to ever strut the stage in British regeneration; this really does mark the end of an era.

Reg had reached a fine age but there is no doubt that this is still a body blow for the Docklands diaspora, he ruled the roost from 1980 to 1987 and he established a can-do culture from the outset. And it was his vision and chutzpah which set the tone, and from which flowed so much of what you see in Docklands today. He was more than just the gaffer, he was our mascot and touchstone, and remained so long after he had moved on. He empowered his people and he allowed the notion that anything was possible. A truly great man has been taken from us. A force of nature.

I have no doubt that there will be much outpouring of affection and emotion for Reg over the next few days and weeks in the property press, as he was so very much larger than life and he touched so many peoples' lives. And he was the living proof that every dog has its day: although he had enjoyed a fairly distinguished career in local government before taking up post at the LDDC, it was his six or seven years at the helm of the London Docklands renaissance which represented his finest hour.

Even those of you who have never heard of Reg Ward should keep a careful look out for the obits, you are in for a treat when the stories abound. I'm not sure it really is true that he started the shadow LDDC office sitting on an upturned bucket with a tea chest for a desk (although it certainly would have been in character), however, I'm pretty sure it is true that at one point he dodged the secretary

of state's telephone calls for several days (oh, the days before mobile phones!) in the sure and certain knowledge that, if he didn't, one of his road schemes would be blocked. While Michael Heseltine was a great admirer (and, bizarrely, Reg got on fabulously with the Duke of Edinburgh) sadly Nicholas Ridley was not a huge fan.

It is also certainly true that he was once kidnapped - I kid you not - in New York by a certain developer (I leave others to tell that particular tale) and that, once, in the very early days, when he was offered a new bus route (under the old "predict and provide" regime) he firmly retorted that he was trying to effect transformational change and, thanking you kindly, Department of Transport, he'd take nothing less than a light rail system (the DLR) and an airport (London City) instead. And as we know, he got them too.

One wonders whether it would have been possible for London to win the bid to stage the Olympics Games in 2012, had not Reg Ward been there and bigged it up for infrastructure in the East End. I know where my money would be.

What a hitter he was. After Reg left the LDDC he undertook a number of other regeneration projects around the world, including gallivanting around with David Donoghue in St Kitts in the West Indies for some years (I guess somebody had to). What a pairing! Bless. But the name Reg Ward will forever be associated with London Docklands and the greatest city expansion scheme of our age.

There are a number of Docklands types who are incandescent with rage that Reg never received even a minor gong in recognition of his extraordinary achievement and, yes, that is something of a scandal. But our Reg broke all the rules and that's why we all admired him so much. Call me a simple soul, but I would hazard these last two facts are connected.