

Richard John Hodson.

Born, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire, 30 August 1940.

Died, 16 March 2010, Provence, France.

Richard, the eldest of six children, had a quick mind and the fastest legs in Lancashire. His cousin, Christopher Hodson, born just 3 weeks earlier, remembers that he, Christopher, was the fastest runner at St Winifred's RC Junior School in Heaton Moor, Stockport, until Richard, aged 5, started at the school. Being a late summer baby, Richard started school early and throughout his schooling was one of the youngest in his class. He ascribed his quickness to the need to escape bullying from boys a year older, who Richard, an early developer, helped to teach to read; but his mother told many tales of him "being able to run before he could walk" and being "as quick as a ferret" at two years old. So his legendary speed came from both nature and nurture.



Hodsons - in The Morning Room at Birch House, Mauldeth Rd. Heaton Mersey - Circa 1957

Richard was born in a small semi-detached house, on cinder surfaced Slate Lane, Audenshaw, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire, opposite a cotton mill and a canal with a stone footbridge.



**Richard aged 65 revisiting Slate Lane,
Audenshaw, Ashton-under-Lyne.**

He was the first child of his mother Winifred and father Edwin, who married as World War Two (1938-45) was declared and Hitler started his invasion of Europe and his insane slaughter of the Jews.

Edwin, whose father, Francis, left home when Edwin was 12, had no education, starting work at 13. Edwin was an accounts manager at the local Gas Board. Winifred, always very well informed and highly intelligent, was educated at Loreto RC Convent School. She became a comptometer operator – an early form of office calculator with a fiendishly difficult and heavy keyboard used for calculating reams of orders and invoices.

Her father, Joseph Neale, a professional soldier, died in the Great War when she and her sister Margaret were little girls.

In Memory of
Private JOSEPH NEALE

35509, 21st Bn., Manchester Regiment
who died
on 24 October 1917

Remembered with honour
TYNE COT MEMORIAL

Winifred's mother quickly remarried, to Colour-Sergeant Sauce, a retired professional soldier. They owned a corner tobacconist store in Rusholme, Manchester, and had a son, Bernard, who became a fighter pilot in the war.

In Slate Lane, until he was nearly 5 years old, Richard lived next door to Winifred's sister Peggy and her husband Patrick Munden who had three children, the eldest being Ursula, the same age as Richard, then Bernard, the

same age as Noel, then Margaret, the same age as Peter. The Munden family migrated to Perth in 1957. Richard stayed in touch with his childhood friend Ursula.

Family mythology tells of Noel, at 18 months, nearly drowning in the canal in the week that Peter was born, only saved by Richard's quick action – and of Richard, at 2 years old, fearlessly running along the tops of high new-house walls – left unfinished because of the war.

Edwin's mother, Kitty Merone, who had a degree in music from Edinburgh University, was a pretty woman with Italian and Irish antecedents, whose grandfather, who came from Milan, was a wealthy shop owner in Market Street, Manchester, operating the first National Lottery licence. After her husband, Francis, left her for another woman, Kitty declined into long term illness, living in a small house, opposite a Catholic Church by Wythenshaw Park, with her unmarried daughter Margaret. Edwin's older brother, Alban, moved to London in about 1950. His children, Christopher, Trixie and Andrew are "The London Hodsons". Richard and Trixie were friends and kept in touch.

In 1941, Winifred had a still-born baby and then in December 1942, gave birth to Noel.

Edwin Hodson
1914-1980

Sportsman – cycling
& swimming.

Lieutenant in The Fleet
Air Arm 1939 - 45

Stockport Councillor.
Parliamentary Candidate.
FCCA Committee Chairman
Justice of the Peace.

Car racing & rally driver.
Leader of Triumph cars
works rally team.
"The fastest man on ice" in
the 1962 Monte Carlo Rally



In these war years, from 1939 to 1945, Edwin volunteered and, after training in Aberdeen, became an officer in the Fleet Air Arm, first serving on the Atlantic ammunition convoys and later posted to Ceylon (Sri-Lanka), as the war spread to the Far-East. On leave, Edwin sired two more sons, Peter born in 1945 and Martin born in 1946. Stephanie (1949) and Jeremy (1952) were both born in Heaton Mersey. Winifred always maintained that she did not like children – but nobody knew if that was true, as she was at least a dutiful mother.

After the war, Edwin qualified as an accountant, opened a practice in central Manchester and became successful; became active in politics, a Justice of the Peace, a local Councillor in Stockport and, from the age of 40, took to winning trophies as a racing and international rally driver – captain of the Triumph Works Rally Team and earning the accolade in the 1962 Monte Carlo Rally of *"The fastest man on ice"* and being interviewed on television.

In 1946, the family moved from Audenshaw, to a large semi-detached house in Derby Road, Heaton Moor, and then in 1948 to a twenty-five roomed detached Victorian home, Birch House, in Mauldeth Road, Heaton Mersey, Stockport; where Richard spent his formative years. He and Noel shared a bedroom until Richard left home aged 20, to marry Sylvia Williams, who lived just a hundred yards away, in Priestnall Road, opposite Fylde Lodge School for Girls.

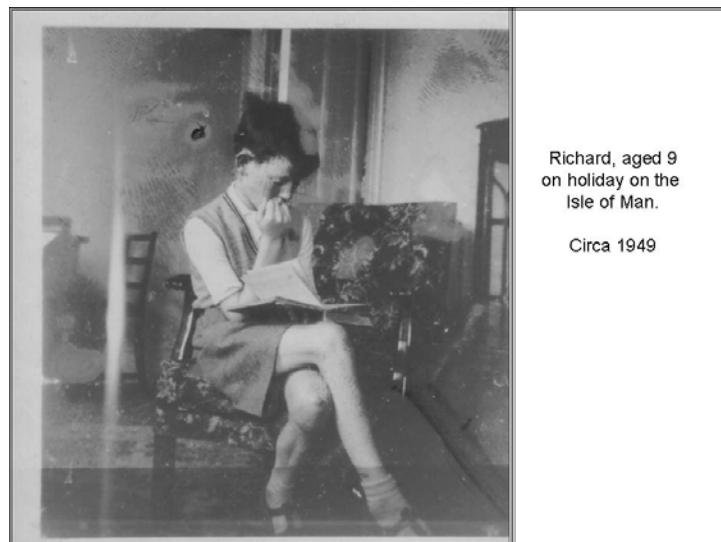


Richard's mother,
Winifred, with
sister, Stephanie,
and Brutus.

Circa
1952

BIRCH HOUSE
MAULDETH RD.

From St Winifred's, Richard passed his Eleven Plus to go to Saint Bede's, where he stayed till the age of 16, and where he realised his aptitude for card games – winning enough from school chums to pay for an 8 week hitch-hiking tour of Europe. Richard, like his father, had a natural talent for mathematics – and could effortlessly card-count; a profitable skill in poker, three-card-brag and blackjack or pontoon, at which he excelled. He had no difficulty with studies. When he joined the Boy Scouts, he quickly grew through the ranks to become a Queen's Scout – festooned with badges. He sailed through his "O" levels at 15 and though still younger than the other students – he passed all his Chartered Accountancy exams aged 19 – first time – missing only one of 13 subjects by oversleeping – robbing him of any further qualifications as he then joined his father's practice, in which Edwin was tacitly determined to be the only qualified person, married and never sat the exams again.



Edwin was a successful athlete, having won cups and medals in road and track cycling – and as a short and long distance swimmer. Richard inherited his father's sporting ability, which emerged when he was about fifteen, at St Bede's Grammar School, Longsight, Manchester; where the sports master failed to persuade a suspicious Richard to train to run for Lancashire – having incidentally and easily beaten the best that St Bede's had. Richard could sprint at competition speeds – later realising that had he co-operated with the sports master, he could have run for England – just a little below Olympic standard. His speed was valued by Heaton Moor Rugby Club, where Richard learned the game and became a high scoring winger. One of the club buildings still bears his name.



**Richard at Heaton Moor Rugby Club:
& with his oldest friend David Hall.**

Throughout his life, Richard made and retained loyal friends. A very sociable person, he was infamous for always being late to arrive but the last man to leave a party.

From St Bede's he joined a small firm of chartered accountants and then went into his father's solo-partner practice, Edwin Hodson Sons & Co, in central Manchester - where Richard honed his top flight skills at betting on horse races. So accurate were his highly detailed notebooks & analyses of horse racing that he consistently won - and he was banned from two central Manchester bookmakers, as a young man who won too much. Younger brother Noel was the office manager, sharing a room with him, providing Richard with solid cover for illicit telephone betting and for regular excursions to the betting shops. In the process, Richard was noticed as a consistent winner by Jack Shasha, a Manchester business man from a wealthy textile family, who used his family's fortune to gamble in the commodities, metals, currency and futures markets. Within a few weeks, Richard aged 23, earning £750 a year, married with children, was phoning into the international markets two or three times a day for margin-trading, or derivatives as the world now knows them; buying and selling contracts worth tens of thousands of pounds - making (and sometimes losing) a year's salary in five minutes. His late nights were spent glued to BBC World Service to hear the Gill & Duffus market reports, while his increasing progeny lay or sat gurgling at his feet on the threadbare rugs at their first home in Cleveland Road, Heaton Mersey.

Sylvia famously intervened in Richard bringing his financial speculating work home and ignoring his family. She walked into a meeting convened in her lounge, attended by David Hall, and poured a large bowl of cold water over Richard as he sat on the settee with a group of colleagues. Quick as ever, Richard dodged the water – but David did not.



1 Richard's & Sylvia's Wedding – Stockport 1960

Richard was so successful at trading that he formed a consortium of Manchester businessmen, including his father Edwin and senior bank managers – who made so much money, via Richard, that they determined to move the trading base to Tax-Free Switzerland. The trusted kid brother, Noel, was hired on a peppercorn and despatched with his family to live in Lausanne and look after the immense funds. In less than a year, Richard's luck changed and in one fateful week the Markets closed "the limit" down, day after day, locking in speculators and eventually incurring massive losses – worth at 2010 values – about £10 million.

Edwin Hodson - 1962 Monte Carlo Rally - TR4 A - Engine Number 1
"The fastest man on ice"



In 1968 the Consortium broke up and fled, pursued by bailiffs; some found their hair turned white overnight. Edwin, managing his part of the debts, lost most of his hard earned assets and had to sell his home at Upton Fold Farm. Noel and family escaped from Switzerland with an ounce of Gruyere cheese and went to live in Oxfordshire. David Hall recalls that at the zenith of his financial speculation boom, Richard lived the high life in Manchester night clubs – drinking and sports training with George Best – who may have owed his fabulous football abilities to Richard’s influence – or maybe not.

After the catastrophic gambling losses, Richard stayed for a short time at the family accountancy firm; then started a small building company with David (Goulash) O’Hanlon; later working with Eddie Ryder at Tompkin & Ryder - Builders and Shop Fitters ...and from there he moved into property development.

Within a few years, now in his early thirties, Richard was a successful new homes developer. He moved Sylvia and the children to Lower Cobden Edge Farm, Mellor and started to speculate in housing development land. His partners were friends of old, who became wealthy and Richard became a millionaire, on paper – in 2010 terms it was many tens of millions – as a large tract of Mellor farmland slowly proceeded towards winning Planning Permission for house-estate building.



Lower Cobden Edge Farm – Richard & Sylvia's home in Mellor, Cheshire – circa 1976

Richard, an asset rich millionaire, then decided to take a year out and tour the world alone, with nothing but a leather waistcoat, a guitar, long hair, beads and an unlimited American Express Card. His partners kept the business running and the bank manager sweet. On the last leg of the tour – when he reached the east coast of America, the UK economy started to rock – and rock – and crumble. Mortgage funds disappeared. Land values started to plummet. Richard's partners, including Johnny Clinch, tracked him down, disturbed his Tantric, new-age twanging and pleaded with him to sell the land-bank. He delayed his return to England and vetoed any actions. When he did return it was too late. The land value had plummeted and the overdrafts were rising.

Ever the stubborn fighter, Richard hung on determinedly to the land – for several years – raising and carrying the costs of the battle with ever more expensive mortgages on his family home. As the tenth or eleventh mortgage piled on – Richard eventually relented and took a salaried job at the London office of an American international trading company, based in Philadelphia, who sent him to Abidjan to set-up and manage their West African interests in water drilling equipment. The bank took the land. He moved himself, his

wife, seven children, two cats and a dog to Cote D'Ivoire. Richard went to Africa in 1978, aged 38, and Sylvia and the family followed in 1981, and rented out the house in Mellor.

Despite seismic international business conditions, he was soon successful in West Africa. He learned to fly a light plane, to speak and work in French and took the whole Gold Coast as his sales territory. Daily, he ran in the equatorial heat to keep fit enough to play rugby and in doing so drove up his blood pressure to unprecedented heights. Richard loved the life, where every day was a party, and he made many new friends both among the indigenous and the expatriate communities. Richard, keeping the local customs, claimed he did not drink before sundown, as he and his friends only drank beer during the day. After sundown, good Scotch was the beverage of choice.

Chinese competition defeated the Americans who retreated, leaving Richard, after a period of business in-fighting, with his own water engineering equipment stocks – to which he added agencies from De La Rue plc for security printing, supplying passports, licences and banknotes to several nations. Life was good and parties were many. Most winters he skied in Austria and most summers he made trips back to Europe.

One year – Richard, whose favourite film star was Charles Bronson, proved his manhood by swimming in an African river and for his boldness caught a liver fluke which had to be treated at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, as his weight halved and visiting friends passed by, failing to recognize him. But he recovered and carried on.

Sylvia sold the house in Mellor and moved back to Europe in 1989 to live in the warmth of Provence. Richard stayed on in Abidjan alone. In about 1996, ignoring warning about high blood pressure, large steaks, alcohol and running, he had a major heart attack and was treated at the French Hospital in Abidjan. The expatriate community rallied round and organised his emigration to France, but Richard declined their offers and decided to stay; he recovered and carried on as before.

Eventually he was driven out of the Cote D'Ivoire by the civil war, which started in September 2002. As Richard's local friends started shooting at him and at any other Europeans in the streets, he took the hint and fled, leaving his assets behind and rejoining Sylvia at their home in Provence.



A year or two later, in about 2005, travelling from France, he visited his daughter Karen in Australia, played golf with son-in-law Wayne – in sandals not boots as advised – was bitten by a white tailed spider and nearly lost a leg – flying home with suppurating wounds and falling, exhausted, down metal steps at Heathrow. But he recovered from the spider poison and also from surgery for Deep-Vein-Thrombosis in arteries behind one of his knees.

Eventually, in 2008/09, Richard suffered a major heart-attack and was admitted to Aix-en-Provence Hospital where he was fitted with an internal defibrillator and given the very best of surgery and post-operative care. Recovering on his sick-bed, he worked out that the French Government had spent more than €250,000 on keeping him alive – and challenged family, friends and all-comers to beat that. None could claim more personal bodily state investment than could Richard.

In the next months, he recalled two dreams, the only dreams he had had in his life. The earliest was an infant's recurrent nightmare; where he had seen a giant, cold, limitless, grey, flat plain – in the middle of this vast plain was an igloo – alone in the igloo was little Richard. Maybe his mother really did not like children.



Richard & Sylvia with sons John, Mark, Robert, Benjamin, Christian & William - and daughter Karen.

His second dream was a near-death experience in 2008, which he had as he was taken into hospital in Aix. He was transported to a pebble beach, one side dark and the other bright light. He was on the dark side and all the friends he

knew who had died were in the light. They joyfully beckoned him across to join them, and though tempted, he opted to stay alive. Richard said this near-death-experience was more vivid and real than real-life – and it banished his fear of death.

The rest, as the frequency of heart attacks increased, is, as they say, history.

A complex man – with many friends – fantastic talents – a zest for life – an indefatigable spirit – and he leaves a huge legacy in seven children – many grandchildren and, doing the maths, millions of descendants who will one day cover the planet. A careful and thorough collector, he also leaves a valuable stamp collection and other albums which will be of great interest to later generations.

A life lived hard and thoroughly spent. The world will be a less exciting place without him.

