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THE HOME OF LONG DISTANCE PIGEON RACING

Patron: Mark Gilbert

The British Barcelona Club celebrating '50' years 2014

BRITISH BARCELONA CLUB'S 50th ANNIVERSARY (Part 22).

The late, great Russ Dowden of Portsmouth.

1st open BBC Palamos (650 miles) 1978.

The late Russ Dowden was a long distance enthusiast of the highest order and led a very full life, being a lifelong pigeon racer and a Royal Marine Commando in 1936. Russ was born in Rochester, Kent and his father, George Dowden, was a successful pigeon fancier, but although Russ had pigeons at the bottom of his garden all his life, he really started up pigeon racing properly in 1944 on leaving the Royal Marine Commandos. His father, George, raced in the Isleworth club, with his Gits / Thorogood pigeons in the 1920's and won many premier prizes including, 1st West Middlesex Federation La Teste in 1933. His dad served in the Royal Marines Light Infantry from 1906 to 1918 and was recalled at the age of 53 in a training capacity for Marine recruits. Russ was greatly encouraged by his father and his first birds were from the National Pigeon Service, and those days he was schooled by the 'cream' of the long distance racing world, in the form of Bill Perren, Jack Inch, George Stubbs and Vic Robinson. With fancier of this calibre advising the young Russ Dowden, it was no wonder that he would become one of the premier long distance fancier in the United Kingdom for several decades. Russ lived in the Portsmouth area with his wife, Doris, and on his death in 1990 his two grandsons, Alan and John, took over his birds and on doing so they have taken up his long distance pigeon racing mantle, and now 'Dowden Bros' are very successful members of the British Barcelona Club.

Russ won 1st open BBC Palamos (650 miles) in 1978 and he said at the time that that wonderful performance was his biggest thrill in his many years in the sport! His winning pigeon was his wonderful 1975 bred blue chequer hen, 'Per-Mare Per- Terram', which is the Latin motto, which translates as 'By Sea-By Land'. On her build up to her Palamos win she had training, including an Avranches (150 miles) race, and then was sent to Palamos (650 miles) just half way up on her third flight and sitting fifteen day old eggs. She won the Palamos race by one and a half hours clear and lifted ten trophies. After the event Russ was offered £3000 for his great hen, which was a great deal of money at that time and he turned it down, and she went on to breed some good winners for the Dowden loft. Her sire, the blue cock 'Leather Neck', was bred by Russ' friend, Bill Reed of

Northumberland, from a Dowden stock cock and he is also a champion racer, winning the BBC 'Spanish Diploma' in 1977. This great pigeon won: 1975: 25th section, 62nd open BBC Palamos (923 birds): 1976: 29th section, 64th open BBC Palamos (1,144 birds), 1977: 30th section, 51st open BBC Palamos (1,040 birds) and is the sire of 1st open BBC Palamos. A once in a lifetime pigeon! The dam of 'Per-Mare Per-Terram' was Russ' good hen, 'Chico', and she had won 25th open BBC Palamos. Russ sent only two birds to the BBC Palamos race in 1978, with both being clocked and both of them scoring well up in the open result.

Russ flew successfully on both the South and North Road in his local clubs, the Hillside FC and the Manor Park FC and had two lofts in his tidy garden, one for south and the other for north road. He joined the British Barcelona Club when it was formed in 1964 and all his hard work and dedication over the years was put into winning premier positions in that great organization. The North road loft produced some outstanding racers for Russ in the form of: 'The Lerwick Red Hen' winner of 1st club (by four days), 2nd Federation Lerwick (643 miles): 'True Grit', the winner of several premier positions and flying Thurso (544 miles) twice, Lerwick (643 miles) twice, Barcelona (670 miles) and the Faroe Islands (800 miles): 'The Lerwick Pied Cock' winner of 1st Federation Lerwick (643 miles), 6th Federation Lerwick and 8th Federation Lerwick. The very smart lofts were all well ventilated, including vents at floor level, which Russ considered to be a very imported feature and he was very much against overcrowding the loft. He had his own family of birds, based on the Putmans / Wegges and Van Den Broucke bloodlines and they won from 60 through to 600 mile for the Dowden loft and others. The birds in the loft were mainly blue and red chequers, and the Putman pigeons came from Bob Brookfield of Alverstone, with the Wegges being obtained from F. Crowley of Finsbury Park.

The birds were raced on the natural system and a favourite wind up was to use the mirror in the boxes of the younger racing cocks. Russ was a small team racing man and kept no stock birds, and fed a good mixture, with pellets and olive oil added. Incredible as might sound he fed his birds on acorns, barley and pellets in the winter months, with linseed added for the moult. The old birds were fed by hand twice a day up to 250 miles and then were put on the hopper for the long distance events in June and July. The young birds were also fed twice a day by hand and if some did not trap after exercise they were locked out and missed a feed. He was a great believer on pairing up on the new moon and the yearlings were paired up in January, the two year old birds in February and the older racers were mated in March, all on the new moon. Russ maintained that following the new moon system, the birds lay their eggs quicker and they breed better youngsters. A few fantails and tipplers were kept as feeders, so as to take the burden of the racers. When sending to the long distance events he liked his candidates sitting 12 to 15 day old eggs or feeding a small single youngster, and he liked their moult to be on one the first three flights, saying after its third flight the pigeon was passed it peak.

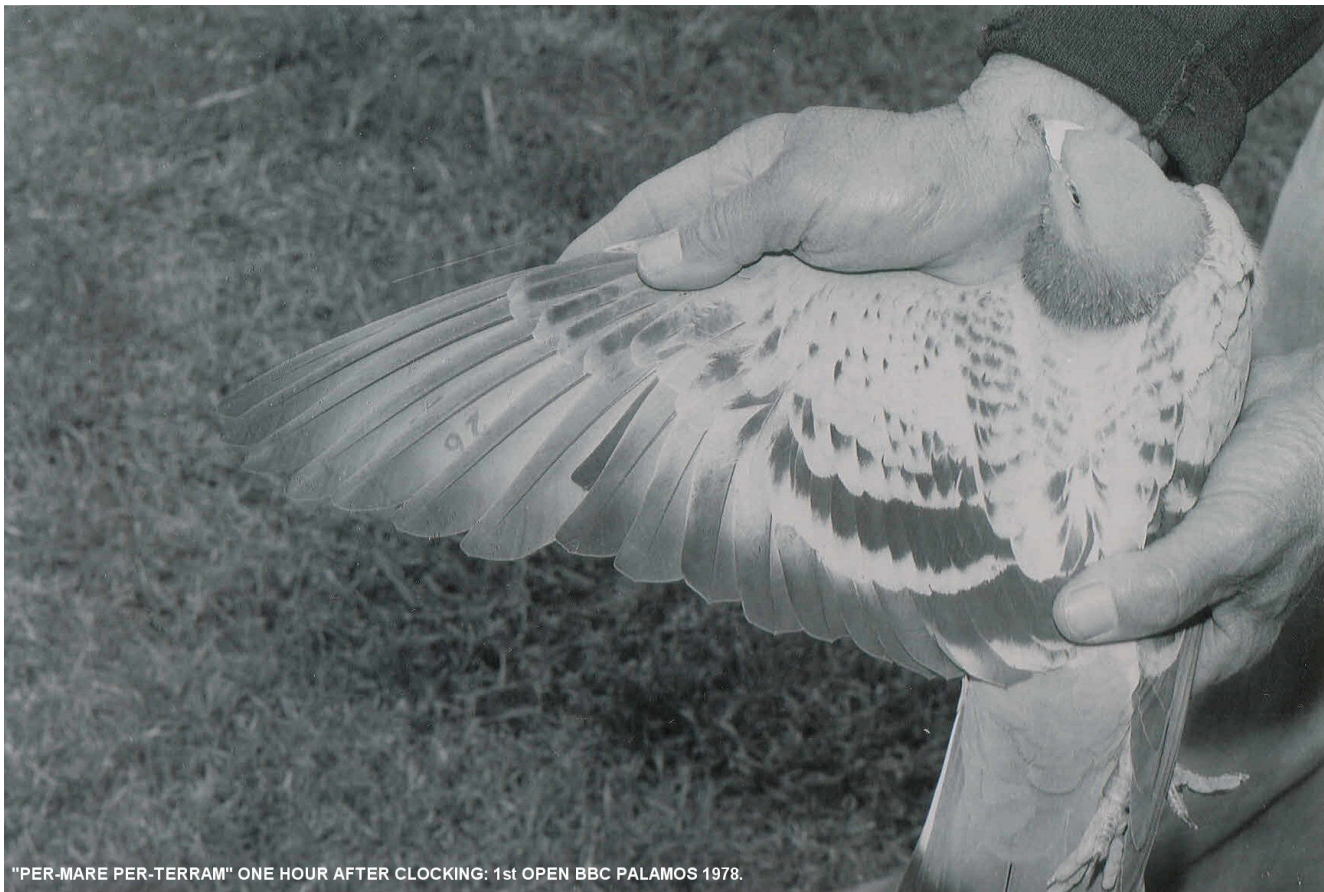
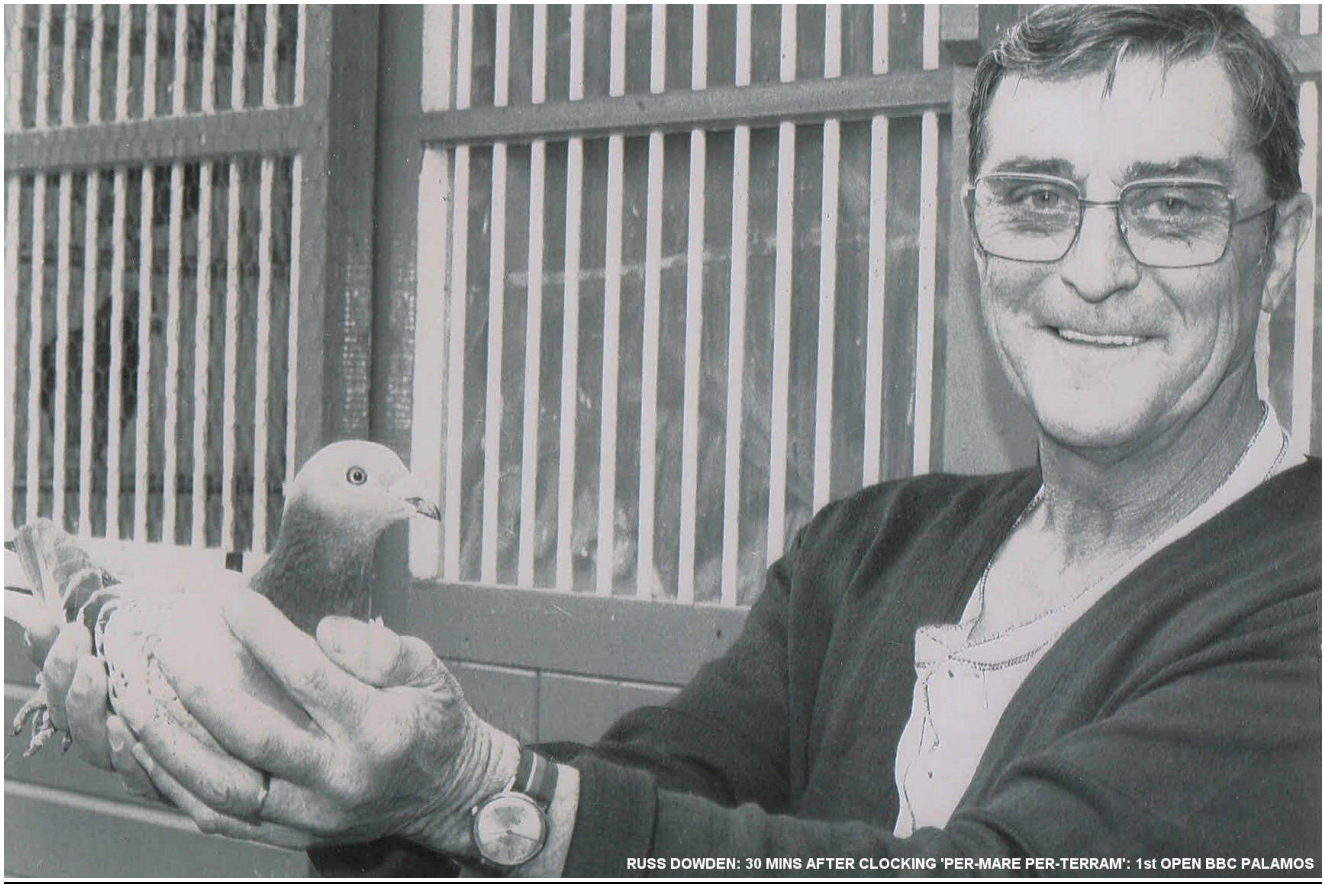
Some of Russ Dowden's premier long distance highlights racing in the London Columbarian Society and British Barcelona Club were: 1959: 17th British section International Barcelona (674 miles): 1961: 36th British section Barcelona: 1962: 3rd British section Barcelona: 1963: 11th British section Barcelona: 1964: one bird verified British section: 1967: 40th British section Barcelona: 1968 45th section, 138th open BBC Palamos (650 miles): 1969: 17th section, 47th open BBC Palamos: 1971: two birds sent 26th, 27th section, 64th, 65th open BBC Palamos: 1974: 60th section, 158th open BBC Palamos: 1975: 8th, 25th, 123rd section, 25th, 62nd, 241st open BBC Palamos: 1976: 19th section, 47th

open BBC Palamos: 1977: 30th section, 51st open BBC Palamos: 1978: two birds sent, both clocked 1st section, 1st open BBC Palamos.

The birds were trained at ten miles every evening, weather permitting, from the west at Southampton and Chichester on the east side. At the weekends the birds were singled up at Bovington, which is near to Weymouth, a 45 miles fly to the home loft and quite often they were trained from the north to get them thinking. With only a small loft set up and a very limited nest box space, Russ had to be a very hard task master and if a pigeon made two mistakes, no matter how well it was bred, it was out. Russ had many friends all over the pigeon racing world, especially in Malta, and in 1969 was invited to the Island to be the guest of honour at the NRPS prize presentation, and presented Muscat Brothers with their trophies for winning 1st Brindisi (420 miles) that season. Many of Russ' pigeons bred winners for other fancier and two of the most prominent were, Mr. & Mrs. Perren's wonderful hen, 'Barcelona Beryl', winner of: 1966: 1st open British section Barcelona International and she was bred from a Dowden red chequer cock, winner of: 1959: 17th open British section Barcelona International. The other hen that was bred from Russ Dowden and Frank Thorn bloodlines was Mr. & Mrs. Randall's wonderful hen, 'Lady Jane', and she was six times on the clock from Palamos and Barcelona, winning the BBC Spanish Diploma. There you have, the late Russ Dowden, one of the legends of the BBC Palamos race!

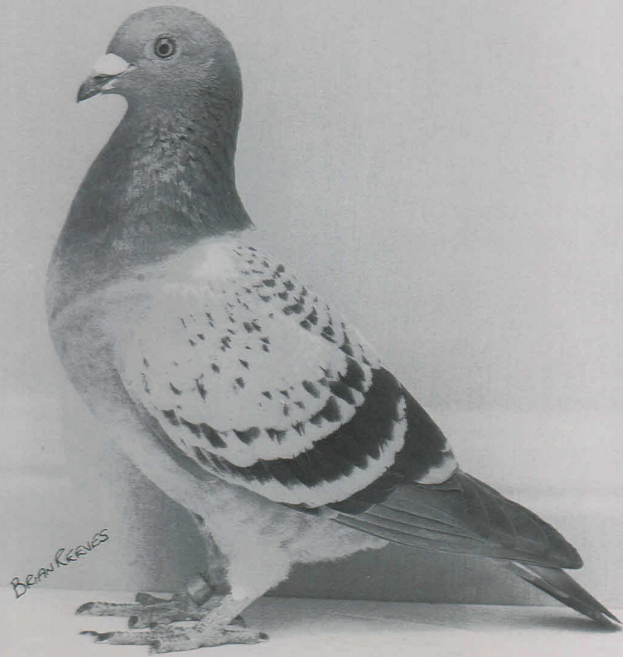
TEXT & PHOTO BY KEITH MOTT (www.keithmott.com)





"PER-MARE PER-TERRAM"

Raced by Russ Dowden



1978: 1st sect, 1st open BBC Palamos (650 miles)

"LEATHER NECK"

Raced by Russ Dowden



British Barcelona Club Spanish Diploma Winner 1977:

1975: 25th sect, 62nd open BBC Palamos (923 birds)

1976: 29th sect, 64th open BBC Palamos (1144 birds)

1977: 30th sect, 51st open BBC Palamos (1040 birds)

"THE RED LERWICK HEN"

Raced by Russ Dowden



1983: 1st club (by four days), 2nd Federation Lerwick (643 miles)

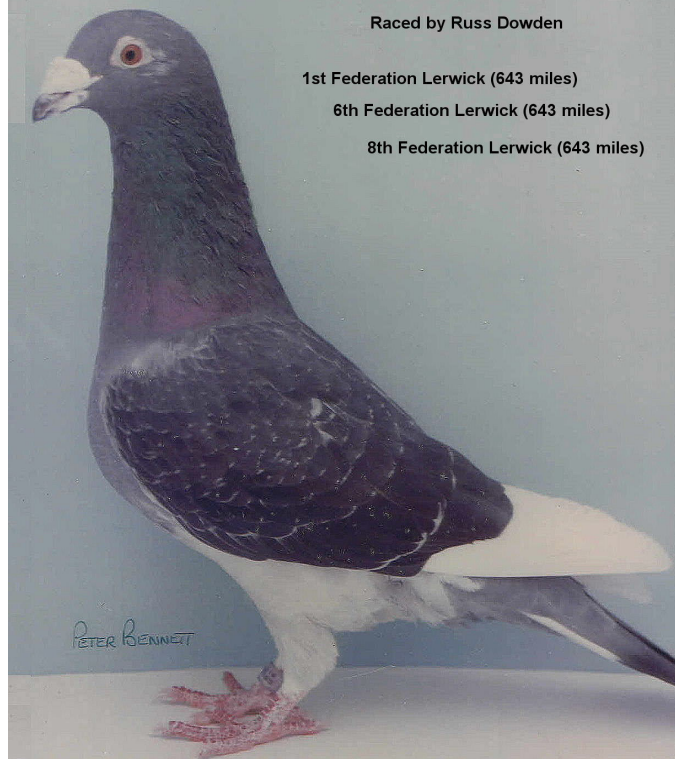
"THE LERWICK PIED COCK"

Raced by Russ Dowden

1st Federation Lerwick (643 miles)

6th Federation Lerwick (643 miles)

8th Federation Lerwick (643 miles)





RUSS DOWDEN: ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO 1936.