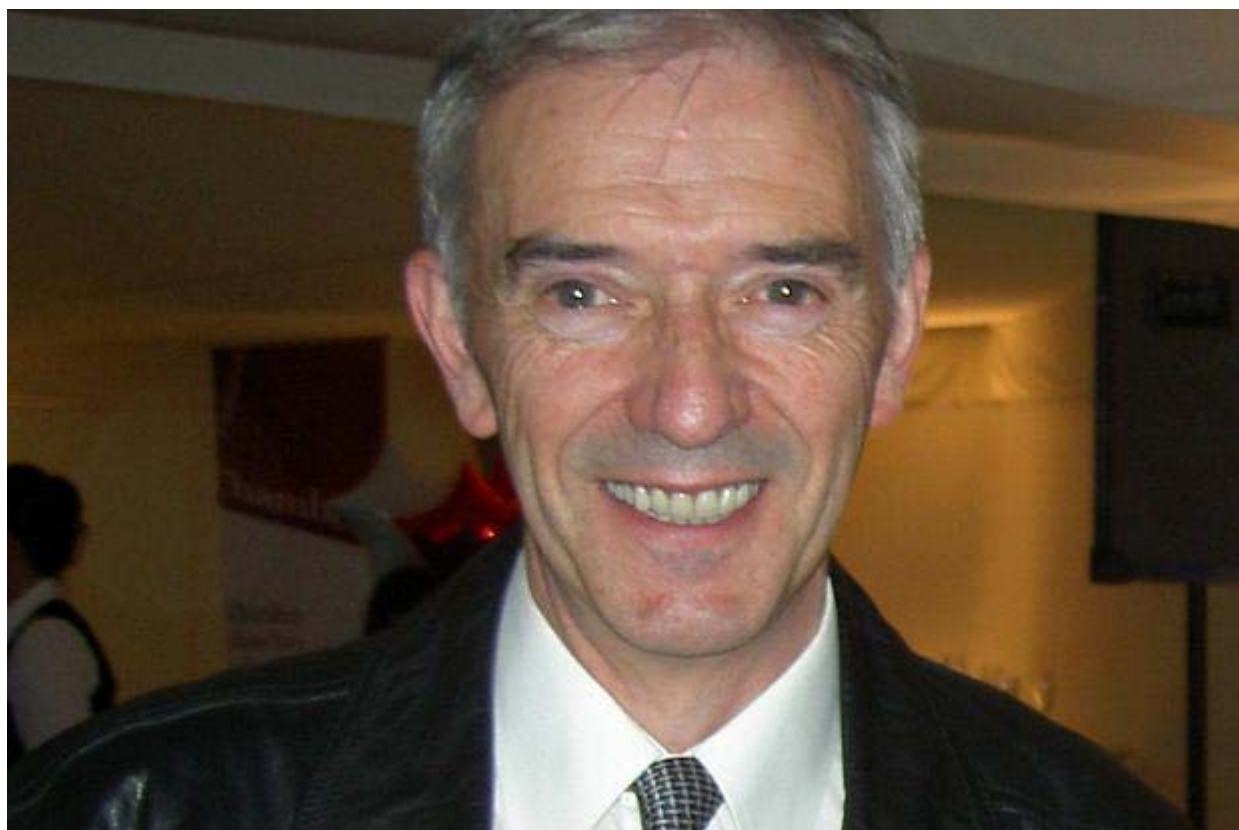


Derek Arthur



Derek Arthur, crossword compiler, at the reception after the Times Crossword Championship in Cheltenham

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Mathematician and puzzle aficionado who set The Listener crossword, acclaimed as the most fiendish of all

Derek Arthur was the co-editor of *The Listener* crossword, widely acknowledged to be the most challenging cryptic puzzle of all.

Derek William Arthur was born in Lerwick, Shetland, in 1945 in the last days of the war. He attended the Anderson Educational Institute and graduated from the University of Edinburgh with first-class honours in mathematical science before going on to gain a DPhil at Wadham College, Oxford, in 1972. His thesis was entitled *Numerical Approximation in One or More Dimensions*.

He began his career in teaching at Trinity College Dublin in 1971. There he soon met Alison Brockhouse whom he married the following year. Arthur received his doctorate on his wedding day. Three sons followed.

He took up a lecturing post in 1973 in the school of mathematics at the University of Edinburgh. There he remained until his retirement as a senior lecturer in 2005. In addition to his main teaching activities, he devoted much time to student welfare. This dedication was perhaps later reflected in the care with which he encouraged and dealt with the many crossword setters under his editorship, who came to appreciate his patient but firm approach.

While at Edinburgh, he also published a two-volume distillation from his lecture material as *Applicable Mathematics and Mathematical Methods*. He also worked for the Open University for some years.

His interest in crosswords was long-standing. He started solving cryptic puzzles in the 1960s, progressing within a few years to more difficult puzzles, such as *The Observer's* Azed and the Mephisto puzzle in *The Sunday Times*. He became a regular solver of *The Listener* crossword when the puzzle was still in the now-defunct BBC magazine (it ceased publication in 1991, but its famous crossword continued to be published in the *The Times* on Saturdays).

His introduction to that most difficult of cryptic crosswords had come from his father-in-law, who enjoyed solving *The Listener* crossword. He challenged Arthur to try a puzzle from an old book of *The Listener* puzzles to see if he could do as well with words as he did with numbers. The challenge was clearly met — and enjoyed — because he continued to solve the puzzles. He later took up crossword setting, and his first *Listener* crossword appeared in 1999.

His love of *The Listener* crossword and the compulsion to enter every week for its annual competition occasionally led to elaborate schemes to obtain the puzzle overseas in the days before it appeared online.

Such was Arthur's prowess at solving it that when Mike Rich, one of the co-editors of the puzzle, died in 2002 he was invited to turn from poacher to gamekeeper and take over Rich's position. In his letter of acceptance he acknowledged the lengths to which he had gone to get his weekly fix, writing: "I have now given a lot of thought to your e-mail and have discussed it with my wife. We are agreed that I should accept the offer: me because it is such an exciting prospect (and a great honour) and she because she can have holidays not punctuated by touring paper shops and internet cafés."

He brought all the precision and innovation of his academic life to the editing task, showing a formidable accuracy in amending clues for fairness and soundness, as well as proofreading. He was also instrumental in setting up a dedicated website for *The Listener* crossword, saying: "I currently master six websites with varying degrees of activity, so why not add a seventh?"

His crossword-setting pseudonym was Viking. The name reflected his origins in Shetland and the VI also referred to the idea that Arthur may have been a 6th-century king. His last *Listener* crossword appeared in August this year. He also set regularly for the *Financial Times* and played a significant role as joint editor of the second edition of the *Chambers Crossword Dictionary*.

Arthur's retirement from lecturing left him more time to pursue his other interests. As he

wrote to a colleague: “I am very much enjoying retirement, although busy as you guessed. But the work is more enjoyable, I don’t have to travel and I can play music while I do it.”

His musical interests were wide, from Bach — whose cantatas he was gradually collecting — to Havergal Brian. He was involved in the running of a series of chamber recitals in Peebles, where he lived after moving from Penicuik a few years ago, and he greatly enjoyed the research necessary for writing programme notes for these. His other interests included cooking, reading and walking.

He is survived by his wife, Alison, and three sons.

Derek Arthur, crossword setter, was born on May 6, 1945. He died of a pulmonary embolism on October 9, 2010, aged 65

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