

Paddy Sanford-Johnson obituary

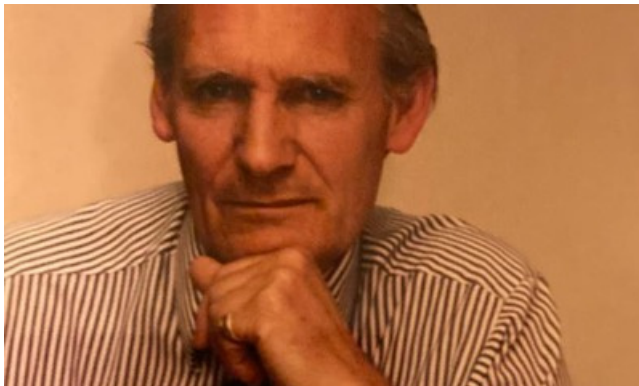
Publication Date: 2023-07-05

Author: Unknown

Section: Technology

Tags: Computing, Other lives, Tennis, Wimbledon, obituaries

Article URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/jul/05/paddy-sanford-johnson-obituary>



Paddy Sanford-Johnson, who has died aged 92, was a systems specialist in early computers and a Wimbledon tennis umpire. He was both multit talented and quick-thinking. His first job was as a salesman at Unilever, but he moved to IBM in 1957, when only a dozen or so British companies used computers. On realising the impact this new technology would have, “systems” became his byword. Over the next 25 years he developed computer strategies for major corporations and governmental bodies – from the Royal Parks to Premium Bonds to the Royal Naval Stores. During a year in Liverpool he set computers up for the regional hospital board and its 35 hospitals, and later spent a year in Belfast at Gallaher, at the time the world’s largest tobacco company, changing sales and stock control methods. At the Rank Organisation, he began with accounting procedures and within five years was involved in most aspects of the group – Rank Xerox, cinemas, records, and TV and radio manufacture. In 1971, he founded his own consultancy but merged with an American group AT Kearney after the mid-70s recession, handling major projects in Europe and the UK. Illness brought this venture to an end in the early 80s, but later Paddy became a headhunter for major international companies, cornering the market in computing assignments. For a decade he was part of significant forward-thinking organisations: the British Computer Society, the Institute of Computer Science (dissolved in 1974), and the London governing board of the Institute of Management. He was invited to become a chartered engineer and in 1988 was one of the first 100 freemen of the newly formed Worshipful Company of Information Technologists. He was made a freeman of the City of London. Born in London during the Depression, Paddy was the only child of Margie (formerly Stone) and Benjamin Sanford-Johnson. He was educated at St Cyprian’s school, Eastbourne, and Eastbourne college, both of which were evacuated during the second world war. He took up running in his teens to get out of the way of bullies and was a keen squash and tennis player. When he left school paid work had highest priority, but he kept his sports kit in his car to use when free time allowed during his peripatetic career. Living at one point in Birmingham, he became a line judge at Edgbaston, then qualified as an umpire. He never missed an Olympics, accumulating annual leave to coincide with them, and was dedicated to following rugby, wrestling and motor racing. Umpiring at Wimbledon (before the computer-created Hawk-Eye) provided other challenges: from 1955 to 1984 he adjudicated on line calls and irate competitors such as John McEnroe. He took early retirement in 1991, later renovating a house in France, where he spent half the year and where ferocious table-tennis battles were popular, as my husband, Paddy’s younger cousin, discovered. He rarely beat him. Paddy is survived by his second wife, Wendy Kettle, whom he married in 2006; two daughters, Jemma and Sam, from his first marriage, to Annie Tayler, which ended in divorce, and five grandchildren.