



Dear Vegan Society member or supporter

I am sorry to inform you that Donald Watson, the founder of The Vegan Society, has died at the age of 95.

Although Donald was very good company, he valued his privacy. So I feel privileged to have met him several times. We regarded each other as friends.

In this pamphlet, you will see an obituary composed by his daughter Janet, some photographs, and some quotes from the man himself, taken from an interview I recorded in 2002.

Although his physical fitness began to fail from age 94, his mind was as sharp as ever until the day he died. The photograph of him reading the first issue of his 1944 "Vegan News" was taken not long before he died.

A few representatives of The Vegan Society attended the funeral in Keswick, by invitation of the family. The hymns reflected his deep love of nature and there was a touching tribute from his daughter Janet. A violinist friend played a piece which Donald himself loved to play. Donald was laid to rest beside his late wife, Dorothy, who died some years ago.

We shall not see his like again.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'George D Rodger'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'G' and 'R'.

George D Rodger  
Chair of Vegan Society Council

*My greatest achievement? Well, it's in succeeding, I think, although I mustn't be the judge, in my own estimation, in achieving what I set out to do. One can hardly rise higher in one's opinion of one's life in general, than to feel I was instrumental in starting a great new movement which could even not only change the course of things for Humanity and the rest of Creation, but alter Man's expectation of surviving for much longer on this planet.*



**D**onald Watson, founder of the Vegan Society and originator of the word 'vegan', has died at his home in Keswick at the age of 95.

The son of a headmaster in the mining community of Mexborough, South Yorkshire, he was born into an environment in which vegetarianism, let alone veganism, was unknown. Donald's parents, however, encouraged and supported their three children in determining their own paths in life, a liberal approach which enabled Donald to formulate ideas which were both challenging and controversial. He held his parents in great esteem, and often expressed his gratitude for their wisdom in accepting, if not understanding, his philosophy.

*The propagandist has to get the message across somehow. In my early days I accepted that the pen is mightier than the sword, and the pen in my case was a typewriter.*

An obviously sensitive young man, Donald responded to the harshness and brutality of much which he observed in the industrial and farming community in which he grew up early last century, and he developed a great reverence for and in-depth knowledge of the countryside. An acute observer of the natural order and perfection of creation, this throughout life became his inspiration and guide, and led him to question man's place in nature and his relationship with other species.

He became a vegetarian at the age of fourteen, although he knew of no others who followed this precept. A self-critical and free thinker, throughout his life he always responded to his inner convictions, regardless of any personal inconvenience or difficulties which this might entail. He was a quiet, strong-minded perfectionist, an abstemious man – teetotaler and non-smoker – who tried to avoid contact with any foods or substances which he regarded as 'toxins'. Never one to criticise others, he himself never felt that his way of life demanded any personal sacrifice; rather, he puzzled at the risks, as he perceived them, which others took so readily.

*I seem to be taking on the world virtually single-handed, with no recognised qualifications other than a conviction that, with all the conceit I can muster, I am right, and they're all wrong! It's a dangerous state of mind, but one which, sooner or later, one can't dispel, and one has to go that way.*

On leaving school at the age of fifteen, he became apprenticed to a family joinery firm where he perfected the skills necessary to continue a life-long love of working with wood, later (from the age of twenty) becoming a teacher of this subject. He taught in Leicester, where he also played a large part in the Leicester Vegetarian Society, and later in Keswick, where he was able to enjoy his love of fell-walking and organic vegetable gardening until very shortly before his death.

*I certainly don't seek fame in any form, except when I'm dead and then, only because the idea I spawned will be progressing, generation after generation.*

From his early conversion to vegetarianism, he later came to view the abstention from the use of all animal products as the logical extension of this philosophy. A committed pacifist throughout his life, he registered as a conscientious objector in the war, and faced the harshest challenges to his ethical position. It was at this time that the need for a word to describe his way of life, and a society to promote its ideals, became apparent; together with his wife, Dorothy, they decided on the word 'vegan' by taking the first three and last two letters of 'vegetarian', - 'because veganism starts with vegetarianism and carries it through to its logical conclusion', and the Society was founded in 1944. Donald ran this single-handed for two years, writing and duplicating the newsletter, and responding to the increasing volume of correspondence.

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*Man's greatest mistake throughout all recorded history, is through trying to turn himself into a carnivore, which is absolutely contrary to natural law.*

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From these early beginnings, more than sixty years ago, the world-wide movement which exists today developed, with the word 'vegan' appearing with increasing frequency on food labelling and restaurant menus.

Donald continued his life quietly in Keswick where he taught for twenty-three years; also working with the Cumbrian Vegetarian Society, campaigning through the local press on matters important in his home community, and, together with his family, enjoying his love of the mountains.

For several years after his retirement from teaching he devoted much time to working as a guided walks leader. Other leisure-time activities included cycling, photography and playing the violin, and while not a party political supporter, he took a keen interest in political issues throughout his life.

He never sought any recognition for his early work in founding the Vegan Society, and indeed actively shunned the limelight, concerned only that his vision for a more compassionate way of life in harmony with the natural order should take root and grow. He was concerned to confound his many critics who claimed that he could not survive on his proposed diet by proving that he would not only survive but survive well and free from the need for doctors' interventions until his final days.

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*I did appeal to my readers to suggest what the name might be, and I had a list of very bizarre suggestions, but, in an inspired moment, I settled for the word 'vegan', which was immediately accepted and, over the years, became part of our language and is now in almost every world dictionary, I suppose.*

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*I suppose within the next ten years, one morning I won't wake up. What then? There'll be a funeral, there'll be a smattering of people at it, and, as Shaw forecast at his own funeral, there'll be all the spirits of all the animals he'd never eaten. In that case, it will be a big funeral!*

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Within the last ten years of his life he climbed many of the major peaks of the Lake District. He viewed his home and garden in Keswick as his 'little piece of heaven', and died peacefully there, with his family with him, on 16th November 2005.

Donald Watson, founder of the Vegan Society and originator of the word 'vegan'.

Born 2 September 1910, in Mexborough, South Yorkshire.

Died 16 November 2005, in Keswick, Cumbria, aged 95.

*I sometimes feel that we had reached a watershed and if I hadn't formed the Society, someone else may have done it, very soon, although it may have had a different name.*





Joseph Connolly / VegNews Magazine

*I think the genie is now out of the bottle, no-one can ever put it back, to the ignorant days before 1944, when this seed was planted by people full of hope, full of aspiration that surely this idea would attract enough followers for it at least to survive.*

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and originator of the word 'vegan'

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