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Ken Richmond

JULY 10, 1926 - AUGUST 3, 2006

Olympic wrestler and actor who became the last of the men who struck the symbolic J. Arthur Rank movie gong

KEN RICHMOND was an Olympic medal-winning wrestler and the last of the bare-chested musclemen who struck the enormous gong during the credits of J. Arthur Rank films. In the best cinema tradition, it was all an illusion; the gong was made from plaster or cardboard, with the hitter miming his heavy stroke and the sound made by a diminutive percussionist hitting a 2ft-diameter cymbal.

Kenneth Richmond was born in London in 1926. When he was small his father left the family and he was brought up close to Rank's Pinewood studios.

A youthful fascination with films led him to become an extra in several important productions, including *Henry V* (1944) and *Blithe Spirit* (1945).

He was a lifelong pacifist and towards the end of the war spent several months in jail as a conscientious objector. He then spent nine months working on a whaling ship that went to Antarctica but on his return continued taking walk-on parts in films.

He had been keen on judo at school and in the late 1940s began wrestling. At 6ft 2in (1.9 m) and 19 stone (120 kg), Richmond was well-suited to his sport and won a bronze medal in the freestyle heavyweight category in the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki and narrowly failed to win a medal in the next Games in Melbourne. However, he had won a gold medal in the 1954 Commonwealth Games in Vancouver and a bronze in 1950 in Auckland.

In the mid-1950s he was chosen as the J. Arthur Rank gong model, following a former circus strongman, a former heavyweight boxing champion and a film extra. Richmond had further bit parts, often as a wrestler or Roman soldier, and also did odd jobs.

His life changed in the late 1960s when he spoke to Jehovah's Witnesses who had called on a neighbour who was out and was attracted by the group's pacifist beliefs. Within a year he began working full-time for the group, and spent two years in Malta as a missionary.

Back in Britain, he moved around the country as a circuit and then district overseer, supporting himself by doing odd jobs, including window cleaning.

Richmond continued wrestling after becoming a Jehovah's Witness, for a time appearing in the *Guinness Book of Records*, and gave up

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only when his religious work left him with insufficient time for the sport. However, he then took up windsurfing, at which he excelled, winning medals into his late sixties, and was still very active until a car accident five years ago left him with serious chest injuries and breathing difficulties.

Richmond was an archetypal gentle giant, who held firm but quiet convictions and rarely talked about his life in film. He was also an untrained but skilled mechanic, restoring a wrecked car and combining two decrepit scooters into one roadworthy vehicle, which he and his wife then took to Switzerland on holiday.

His wife, Valentina, predeceased him. He is survived by a step-daughter.

Ken Richmond, wrestler, actor and Jehovah's Witness district overseer, was born on July 10, 1926. He died on August 3, 2006, aged 80.

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