Twin Tracks by Roger Bannister

I interviewed Sir Roger and Lady Moyra Bannister for *Oxfordshire Limited* *Edition*’s castaways series so became aware of Roger’s energy and the range of his achievements. Talking to me, he emphasised his research into neurology and how he was part of the explosion of knowledge achieved in his life time from which we benefit.

Anyone involved in sport owes Sir Roger a huge debt. Read his autobiography *Twin Tracks* and you will discover his passion that no one should be denied access to sport because of poverty and his pivotal role in the idea of ‘Sport for All.’ He was persuasive and was the first chairman of the Sports Council.

Roger describes how President Carter sent an envoy, to persuade Margaret Thatcher that we should not participate in the Moscow Olympics. She agreed and Roger (as chairman of the ICSPE) was asked to encourage athletes not to go. But Roger refused and took a strong stand in favour of participation. Imagine the consequences! If we had not participated in the Moscow Olympics − no gold medal for Sebastian Coe! Coe would not have overseen the 2012 Olympics of which the UK is justly proud and which gave the world an image of an inclusive, welcoming and achieving nation.

For readers, like me, who rarely delve into sports biographies - I recommend this book. I was engrossed from the start − reading it from cover to cover over two days (and nights). Roger has us empathising with the years of enormous effort that went into training and eventually to the specific desire that the first man to break the four minute mile be British. His description of May 6, 1954 is full of tension and suspense. We know that he succeeded with the help of his friends − the two Chrises − but for a moment the reader suspends belief and is there with nothing inevitable about it.

Sir Roger’s description of the fifties transports us to breathing the air, eating the rationed food and aware of the knowledge and the lack of it at the time. His description of his love of running is poetic but when he writes about science, the scientist in him takes over. You sense his underlying passion but you read the facts.

Roger writes of the experiment on himself researching the causes of death by heat illness of British soldiers in Aden. He told me, without emotion, how he designed a heat chamber and injected himself with pyrogens but Moyra interrupted saying “Yes and when he came through the door - he was green. I’m not exaggerating … he could have killed himself.” Roger writes affectionately and proudly of his family and Moyra brought warmth and an added richness to his life. If *Twin Tracks* goes to a reprint I recommend adding a few of Moyra’s paintings or sketches to the blocks of photographs.

Twin Tracks is published by the Robson Press priced £20