

A tribute paid to the memory of Richard Beacham, in St George's Church , Dunster

It is a great privilege for me to be here to pay this tribute to Richard, following such beautiful reading by his sisters.

Earlier I walked up the hill to see the location of the grave in the deep red earth - in that lovely setting surrounded by wonderful trees. It reminded me of that great poem of Philip Larkin's The Trees, which begins:

The trees are coming into leaf
Like something almost being said.
The recent buds relax and spread,
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Richard and I met within days of us both going up to Nottingham University, in October 1960. We soon came to know each other well. We trusted each other.

He was an active member of the Carnival Committee, which I chaired. We - and the others, worked hard and achieved the record amount for any rag week in the history of the university (in spite of it taking place during the Cuban Missile Crisis!). Later we were both founding members of the University- Borstal Link, which forged ties between young lads in borstal and us idealistic undergraduates. We took them Youth Hostelling, free of any constraints, and two years running we went on camps at Sedbergh in the Fells. This was a very successful initiative and continued for several years after we had graduated.

Richard was very sympathetic to the lads, but he was not soft-centred and never lost sight of why they were, in effect, in prison. Some of us younger students were simply 'wanting to do good' (which we hope we did). Richard knew what he was doing; he marked himself out as being a 'man amongst boys'. He was respected by us all. At that time he demonstrated that he was quite exceptional - as his earlier service in the Army had indicated.

When we graduated we all went our various ways: I went off as the first ever VSO to Sudan, where I taught for two years in a strong and impressive secondary boarding school for boys, teaching English language and literature to Arabic speaking Sudanese. Richard went off to join CDC. Although I was useful, I was an amateur; Richard went off to the World as a professional.

Five years after we left Nottingham he was back from South Africa and by then I was working in the docklands of Hull. We were invited to his wedding (Julia and I had

married earlier that summer) and were with Judith and Richard on their wedding day, Saturday 7th December, in Penwortham. It was a very happy day - and I always attribute that day as the day Julia and I created our first son. That was a red-letter day for both Richard and Judith, and ourselves.

By then I was very aware of Richard's great qualities as a person: he was calm, most able and very stable. He was wise, reassuring, insightful and utterly reliable. He was a person of absolute integrity. As well as all these things he was great fun. That laugh! Who could ever forget that. We had a lot of fun together - at university, later and in recent years, when our working lives were over.

At that point I read the tribute written by Justin, Nigel and Judith.

"He had the ability to change with the times whilst never losing sight of his values and beliefs." I added "What an accolade!"

Can I take you back to the trees?

Philip Larkin goes on to say:
"Is it that they are born again
And we grow old? No, they die too.
Their yearly trick of looking new
Is written down in rings of grain...."

...Last year is dead, they seem to say,
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh."

These past two years have been a great strain on Judith, the boys and their wives - as they were for Richard. But he achieved a quartet of happiness in these last weeks:

- his 40th year of married life with Judith
- the arrival of Finn to Anne-Marie and Nigel
- the marriage of Justin to Rachel
- his 70th Birthday.

If Richard was Prince Hamlet, I was merely Horatio.

So like Horatio I can say:

“Good night, sweet Prince
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.”

Rod Usher