

Paul Mann

Paul has been taken away from us at the age of 62, just a few days after his birthday. For many of us this is an age when life begins again. We can relinquish certain responsibilities, take life easily, spend more time with family and friends and look forward to retirement.

Sadly, not for Paul. He was diagnosed with one form of cancer on the 3rd November and it spread quickly. He put up a brave fight but it was diagnosed too late to do anything about it.

It was a terrible shock, particularly as Belinda was given the “all clear” herself after some lengthy and gruelling treatment just 4 weeks before Paul was diagnosed. So instead of re grouping and getting their lives together again, the family had to face up to yet another terrible crisis, while carrying on as if nothing had happened. For them, 2016 was a truly horrible year.

There must be questions about how Paul’s conditions eluded the medical profession, why Belinda had to fight and fight again for his care and why, when his final moment came, there was no-one there to help him die with dignity and without pain.

Paul was a very modest, self-effacing man. He would have been amazed and probably embarrassed at the crowd which has come here today in order to say farewell. It is a testament to the high regard in which this very decent, gentle man was held in the community, and I know the family would like me to thank you all for coming and for your support. I hope that will continue in the months ahead, for that is when they will probably need it most.

Paul was a much loved, husband, father and friend, and will be sorely missed by all who knew him. His kindness, tolerance, generosity and understanding are legendary. He worked and played hard, he was fun, articulate, warm, a devoted fan of rock music and good ale, a generous host and a dutiful son.

Paul was a real “village man”, a stalwart of the pubs, and a supporter of many local activities. We are sure the entire community of South Cheriton and Horsington will send their deepest sympathies to Belinda, Jemima, Huxley and Charlie at this difficult time. And his many friends will mourn his passing. He will be missed for a long time.

But let me tell you a little more about him.

Paul was born on 21st December 1954 in Bridport Hospital, the nearest place to the family home in Beaminster.

He moved to Wincanton when his father Alan became the boss of Wincanton Food machinery at Coles Yard. Although leaving Beaminster was a wrench, Paul soon settled down at Sexey's school and quickly made friends.

Among them was Mark Routh who recalls that Paul was a free thinker, always to the right or left of a mainstream argument or concept. Quietly spoken, he was nevertheless capable of many pranks and japes. He once concocted a spoof conjuring act with, of all things, skittle balls. How do you make a skittle ball disappear?

Paul was a very good high jumper, but his membership of the "Apathy Club", of which he was the co-founder, meant that he could not take it seriously enough to compete.

Much more important was music, hippy hair, cigarettes, and hide and seek. Actually seek and hide. They used to seek places where it was possible to enjoy an illicit cigarette, and hide there when anyone came looking. Paul was apparently most adept at this clandestine art.

Roy Apsey a close friend at the time - and Paul's Best Man at his wedding to Belinda- recalls "Paul had a great group of close pals in his late teens and early twenties - Roy, Mike, Andy and Denis just to mention a few - and to a man their hair was extremely long, but not as **wide** as Paul's!!"

Paul went to study biological science at the University of Sussex in 1973. By then his hair had become his trademark, and if you ask his university friends what their first memory of Paul was, they all say his hair.

I've had considerable trouble getting people to remember anything else from those days. In unison they've all reminded me of the old adage that if you can recall the sixties and the early seventies then you weren't really there! Well, Paul and his hippy pals **were most certainly there!!**

Sussex University counts three Nobel Prize winners, 14 Fellows of the Royal Society, six Fellows of the British Academy and Paul Mann amongst its graduates, but the ambitions of Paul and his friends, who quickly became the coolest group on the campus, were rather more grounded.

Paul's group, all of whom are here today, are Ben Benjamin, Pete Simmons, who has flown over from the USA to be here today, Steve Haywood, and in their final year, Brian Williams.

Ben remembers Paul's huge head of hair and a huge suede coat on first meeting, as does Steve. They all met on their first day, and remained firm friends and house-sharers throughout their university careers.

If you can remember a TV series called "The Young Ones", blend it with "The History Man", add a dollop of "Animal House" you will get the picture.

In 1974 there were two General Elections. Universities were a hot bed of Student revolution. Scores of rival left wing groups fought with each other to gain an ascendancy over innocent student minds. Paul and the "Gang of Four" were above all this, moving out of Brighton to large houses in the country, which they rented, first in Hassocks, then Ditchling for the last year, where they were joined by Brian.

There were numerous incidents involving cars – first a blue mini, and later an orange Triumph Spitfire. Paul was not averse to taking one way streets the wrong way or driving round the pedestrianised areas of the university in order to take short cuts, sometimes with Pete on the roof or the bonnet. On one occasion, they had an unplanned encounter with a sunken path which had been newly laid across one of the lawns. As a consequence, two students with unexplained but identical injuries to their noses turned up at the student union bar later that evening.

Paul loved music and took up the guitar at university, taught by Steve, who was always one or 2 lessons ahead. Paul picked it up most days, even in later life. He never mastered it, and probably knew he never would. To travel hopefully is better than to arrive.

Paul's friends describe him as a beautiful friendly guy, utterly laid back and unfazed by anything – even having a door ripped off your car by your best friend.

But there was steel within Paul. He was never afraid to square up and defend his friends and family and fight for the causes he believed in.

Listening to their memories it is a miracle that any of them graduated.

Paul achieved a 2.2 BSc, and returned to Wincanton, where he joined Wincanton Food Machinery, part of Unigate. As most people know, Wincanton was then the centre of a major dairy industry, with associated

engineering and transport functions, most of which have now sadly left the town.

Paul's role was in research and development, where his considerable mechanical and engineering skills were used to develop packaging systems, machinery safety guards and a vacuum forming process for plastics manufacture, which was patented in 1982. All this without any formal engineering training.

But don't get the idea that Paul had become a white-coated boffin. No – the party continued. By now Paul had graduated to a Lotus Elan, still in the garage at Cabbage Lane, and met another lifelong friend, Jerry Knight, who many of you will know better as Jerry of Jerry's Electrical, Wincanton.

Jerry had come up from his native Cornwall looking for work, and ended up in Wincanton Food Machinery at Coles Yard. He and Paul hit it off immediately and became firm friends. Jerry remembers meeting Paul for the first time, noticing he had odd socks and thinking "I can get on with this guy". Paul and Jerry have been going out for a pint every Wednesday ever since they met, right up to the week before Paul died.

In those days the Red Lion was the place to be in Wincanton, and again, people have some difficulty in remembering the highlights, but several people have told me that it was habitual to leave the Red on a Friday night, Go to the Bull at Brewham and climb through a window and join the lock in. The Landlord would often retire to bed, leaving the customers to settle their bills. They all did.

In 1978 Paul and Belinda, who had met in 1973, started going out together and they married in 1983, here in Horsington, on the 3rd September. Many people who were there are here today – including Roy Apsey the best man. All will remember the shock when Belinda said "obey" as part of her wedding vows.

Roy says on Paul's stag night, all was going well until they left the pub when Paul decided to headbutt the pavement a couple of times! There was then a mad search for frozen peas to reduce any swelling that might spoil Belinda's plans for perfect wedding photos at Horsington House the next day.

After marriage, Paul threw himself into building work, first at South Street, and then at Cabbage Lane. Oh, and there was the little matter of raising a family. Jemima, Guy and Charlie.

He was an excellent builder, joiner, electrician and plumber (not to mention motor engineer), and he transformed his properties. It was hard work. On being informed that the footings he was digging (by hand) for his new conservatory, needed to be extended by a further metre in depth, Paul set to and dug them out. He would never be beaten.

This spirit continued right up to his illness, and the house in Cabbage Lane is a testament to his skill, expertise and energy.

Paul had a few more career moves to make. In 1984 he joined Pecar Machinery Sales in Wincanton as a sales engineer responsible for plastics processing equipment.

In 1989 he joined FAG (UK) Ltd selling process control electronics equipment, and during his time there he achieved a 30 per cent increase in sales volume.

And in 1995 he joined AFM Food Machinery here in Wincanton, his father's business which rose from the ashes of the old Wincanton Food Machinery, selling dairy product manufacturing and packaging machinery worldwide. Paul was still working there a few days before his death, trying to secure orders to provide for his loved ones.

I do not apologise if I have spent more time describing Paul's leisure activities than his serious academic and business achievements, but it would be wholly untrue to say that Paul was not a serious person. He took a great interest in politics, and indeed his few successes in betting were well-placed wagers on political upheavals like the Brexit decision and the election of Donald Trump. He played Bridge and Chess, and studied languages.

But the fact is that Paul never cared very much for position, power and wealth. Like the man in Rudyard Kipling's "If":

"If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same"

And that was Paul. He was a wonderful friend to me, a tireless striver for the people he loved, and I never heard him say a bad word about anyone.

His testament is the large number of people here today, including people who have been constant and loyal friends since the day they met him and have travelled across continents and oceans to be here.

He was truly a gentle man.

So Goodbye Paul. We will miss you.

Richard Gaunt

10 January 2017