



Paul Stanton

Paul Stanton, who came up in 1982, obtained his BA in Jurisprudence in 1985 and the Degree of BCL in 1987 (having gone off to take Law Society Finals in 1986), and who was elected a St Edmund Fellow in 2004, died on April 29th, 2020, at the age of 55.

An obituary for one of one's students is liable to be penned with a heavy heart. This one certainly is; but the story of Paul's association with the College is one of joy and poignancy: joy at what was accomplished; and regret that there was still so much to look forward to. To begin at the beginning. In the late 1970s, and coinciding with Derrick Wyatt's coming to the Hall as Tutorial Fellow in Law, a steady stream of applicants (not only for law) from the comprehensive schools of Kirkby in the Liverpool Borough of Knowsley applied in September, came for interview and gained admission in December, and came up the following October. As far as one can tell, the impetus for all this was a headmaster cut from traditional cloth, and applicants blissfully free of self-doubt. Paul came to us from St Kevin's, said then to be the largest comprehensive school in the country, and took Oxford in his stride and on his own terms. Scouse wit would have been more than enough to see him safely through, but he really took to the law. It was a bonus that his year group was remarkably diverse and (as it has indeed remained) remarkably coherent; Paul suited the College and the College suited him. For many, the Oxford years are a journey. They were for Paul, though in his case that journey seemed to be down from Liverpool on the train for the first tutorial of the week, and back up north once the second tutorial was done, with the materials for the following week gathered together and bagged up so that they could be properly read. In those days, which now seem to have been impossibly carefree, the wise Liverpoolian half of the tutorial team exercised Nelsonian judgment while his Kentish junior just watched and marvelled at how smoothly and how well it all worked.

Paul went into legal practice. In fact, he had been in it long before he graduated. He had a profitable side-line as weekend photographer, retained by a local Knowsley solicitors' firm whose clients could, by tripping on the wonky paving stones of the borough, acquire a cause of action for negligence against the local council which just paid out, no questions asked. Paul, his camera, and his measuring stick, were often to be seen prone on the pavements, gathering evidence for the claim. When in due course he set up in legal practice in his own right it was back in the north-west, doing the kind of personal injury work in which knowledge of the law is useless without business acumen, a state-of-the-art bullshit detector, and an instinctive feel for human psychology. We may have helped him with the first of these, but as to the rest, he had it all before he arrived, and we neither damaged nor dented it. His practice was, by all accounts, a resounding success; when he reached 50 he sold it to free up more time for his other pursuits.

One of those pursuits was charitable fund-raising and charitable giving: the College benefited, along with local hospitals and children's charities. He played golf; but was happiest when busiest. Making his contribution to the education which he felt had given him so much was a constant theme. His generosity to the College was reflected in our electing him a St Edmund Fellow. It was not only money, but devoted interest in our mission and our welfare, that he offered us; his relationship with the College was personal, and intense. He knew, however, that there was more important work to be done elsewhere. Back in Knowsley, the destruction wrought on the state education system by inexplicably dreadful 'school reforms' had trashed whatever hope there had once been for people from Paul's home town: in 2017, the last school in the borough to be still offering A levels announced that it was closing its sixth form. St Kevin's had been run by a fine, serious, headmaster who was single-minded in his devotion to the best interests of his students. He retired; and St Kev's is now only a name and a Facebook memory. Paul, though, took more careful aim, deciding to become involved with his former primary school (or what had replaced it) by joining and energising the Board of Governors. He threw himself into the task of trying to help build a school which could offer today's



students what his school had given him, forty years ago. He will have been single-mindedly brilliant at it.

News of Paul's illness, which came out of the blue two Christmases ago, was shocking; his fortitude in holding it at bay for as long as he did was awesome. His family – his wife, Colette, and children Paul and Isabelle – will be inconsolable; his friends will be immeasurably sad. But though Paul's untimely death is another blow in what is proving to be a thoroughly evil year, his life and his association with the College are things to be grateful for. They give us something to treasure, even if we have to do it while banished from the Hall, and separated from those things which Paul valued: valued perhaps more highly than we remember to do ourselves.

Friday 1 May 2020, Professor Adrian Briggs