

IN MEMORIAM

ANTHONY CONRAD SIMONS (COUNTY HOUSE 1950-51)



Anthony Simons, who has died aged 83, spent only four terms at Reading School, leaving after O Levels, family circumstances precluding him from the higher education for which he was eminently equipped. He had become senior ordinary member of the junior section of the Debating Society, was an assistant librarian and had gained Certificate A in the CCF.

Instead of going on to A Level, Anthony began work as a freight clerk with British Rail at Henley-on-Thames before joining the Royal Air Force. He served for three years and there followed a career in the Estate Duty Office in Shepherd's Bush, during which he qualified in law.

He was a genealogist, a linguist, a member of his local Alliance Francais, of Gray's Inn, of The Worshipful Company of Scriveners, an oblate of Belmont Abbey.

Anthony was unmarried but took a benevolent interest in the members of his family, who greatly valued his friendship. He had a strong faith; his nephew, Richard Hopgood, said at the funeral service in St James Roman Catholic Church, Twickenham that 'piety for him was about the substance not just the form'.

Old Redingensians at the service included the Membership Secretary, the Archivist, Father T P (Timothy) Gorham OSB (1967-71) who was amongst those officiating, and former Captain of School D E H (Denis) Moriarty (1943-54). KCB

The following tribute to Anthony was given by Denis.

I met Anthony at Reading School 68 years ago. He joined us late, aged 15, wore a sports jacket rather than the regulation grey flannel suit, and his shoes lacked polish. That, as well as his manifest intelligence, set him apart, the butt of an occasional heartless schoolboy tease. Some of his tormentors - they were never, thankfully, bullies - taunted him with his second name, Conrad, unusual and distinguished. His adolescent voice was on the break, oscillating from high pitch crack to the impressive basso profundo in which it settled. If only his more imaginative music mentors had encouraged him to believe that no-one is tone deaf, he could I'm sure have made a fine choral singer. Alas, in his words, he was left in life only to growl the prayers and responses.

For one so bright, it was sad he left us before A levels and the certain university place for I believe domestic reasons - the jigsaw of all this only unfolded in later life- and after a short passage as a railway freight clerk - we heard - not the most likely of service recruits, he had signed up to the RAF for 3 years rather than the compulsory 2 of National Service, the better to enjoy the modestly higher rates of pay.

We then lost touch for 20 years or more, punctuated significantly by chance meetings that seemed to point to a revived friendship - in an Oxfordshire country lane, out for a walk in a floppy tweedy cap - on the London tube - and on his way to work at the Estate Duty Office in the building opposite my office in Shepherd's Bush, and just around the corner where my family had made its London home. His story unravelled: life had undoubtedly been a struggle, but he was determined and had prevailed and was established.

He was shy and retiring, sometimes, in his own words, socially not at ease, 'gauche' - a loner, but not lonely - for he loved good company, good food and wine - and he was kindly, humble, an innately loving and lovable man. He was proud of his nephews and nieces who stemmed from his large sibling family. He was naturally celibate, restrained, perhaps, in showing his emotions, but enjoyed the company of women. He had a keen sense of humour, dry, acerbic but always affectionate and often self-deprecatory - never inimical to the English way of doing things.

He had an informed sense of political and social concern and migrated from the conventional right of his schooldays to an enthusiastic canvasser of the Liberal Democratic cause in an area where it could really matter.

He loved institutions and, radical liberal as he was, respected history that brings us to where we are. Away from his own full-time working day, he had qualified, remarkably, as both solicitor and barrister, although he never practised as a barrister. At the Estate Duty Office, he became expert in the detail of grossing up works of art for the old inheritance tax. He adored Gray's Inn where he was a proud member, chivvying and fussing in his gown, generously entertaining his guests at his mess where he served as Senior in Hall. He delighted in dining with me in St John's College, Oxford and staying under its Laudian roof. Archbishop Laud had been an old boy of our school.

We lunched at each other's London Clubs - he enjoyed counting the number of busts of Gladstone at the National Liberal Club where he was a member - and we were both admitted within a year of each other to the Worshipful Company of Scriveners in 2004. He was a most loyal friend, enjoyed anecdotes, gossip that was never really malicious, and he was a convivial companion. Eccentric, living alone, set in his ways, yes, but his life - despite the chaos and cackhandedness to which he regularly and amusingly referred - was orderly: his meticulous manuscript and careful syntax in speech as in writing testify to that and he was fulfilled in the parameters he set himself and within which he felt comfortable. If it was the 3.40 he was determined on taking back to Twickenham, there was no way he could be inveigled into another glass of port.

At our annual reunion lunch we sang our school song. It exudes the confidence of early 20th century England and in recalling the noble voices of the past goes on:-

Let us in their footsteps tread
And make this our ambition
That men may say when we are dead
They kept their school 's tradition.

Some of that hyperbole, mellowed by the context of its time, tickled Anthony pink

Write my epitaph, he told me, as one who kept his school's tradition. He returned to this yearly with that infectious cascade and chortle of a laugh. It was a throwaway remark, self-deriding, not too serious, and intended more perhaps as a pricking of laudable and well-intentioned bombast. But in essence I sense he knew, and we his fellows know, there is an unashamed element of pride with which we share and embrace the spirit in which he lived his life - he was in the best of traditions we wholly admire.

The thread which bound his life together was his faith - the Roman Catholicism he embraced in early middle life and which brings him here today at the last. He immersed and informed himself in the teachings, doctrines and history of the church, its religious orders, its liturgy, and surprisingly for the growler that he was, in the beauty of Gregorian plainchant. He was never conspicuously but profoundly devout and we pray for him all the benefits of the charity, faith and hope in which he lived his life. There could be no more appropriate moment in which to pray the prayer of that faith - requiescat in pace. May he rest in peace.

Farewell old friend. Thank you and thanks again. Go forth on your journey and may flights of angels sing you to your rest.

Denis Moriarty 17 July 2018

A C Simons born 27 February 1935 died 18 June 2018 aged 83