

TRIBUTE TO JOHN HOPKINS

18 December 1936 to 19 September 2018

I first met John in December 1968 when, as a shy 17 year old, I went to Downing College, Cambridge for interview. For a boy with limited horizons, and a life thus far restricted to Wakefield, Scarborough and, exotically, Falmouth, this journey was quite forbidding. I travelled by train to Peterborough, and from there on to Cambridge.

So in a hired suit, which was a little too short in the leg, I climbed up the staircase and knocked timorously on the door of P3.

"Come" was the loud response from within. I entered to see two people staring at me – John Derry, the History Don and John, knocking the tobacco from his pipe into a bowl and assessing me with friendly, warm bespectacled eyes. "Sit down Phillip", he said, and before I could do so, he fired "Now, look here, Phillip, how many Blues will you get us?"

Accordingly, I was accepted to read History some 10 days later, and from October 1969 to June 1973, I spent 4 of the happiest years of my life at Downing and with John in a "loco parentis" relationship.

I did not study Law, but John was always my Tutor and to a degree acted as my guardian. Whatever scrapes I got myself into, John bailed me out – sometimes literally! In late 1969 and early 1970 Downing was in lock down as a result of the Garden House riots, a tamer sequel to the Paris Student riots of the previous year. During this period, John and Cherry both had to endure some terrible, vitriolic abuse from radical students, as he was perceived then to be the right wing enemy. Some of that abuse was directed at their two young children, which was indefensible. Throughout all of the period, John and Cherry handled themselves perfectly, and rose above these childish antics.

Eventually, life at Downing returned to normal and John continued to be one of the finest teachers of Law in the country. As far as I was concerned, he continued to be a mentor, ally and friend.

I remember that in June 1972 John arrived at Fenners on his bike. He stood on the long leg boundary waving a piece of paper at me, as I struggled slowly to 50 against Sussex. When I got out, and walked to the Pavilion, he said to me - "A 2.1 Phillip, bloody marvellous. Well done".

John originally told me that you could do 2 things at Cambridge not 3. You could play hard and work hard. You could work hard and socialise hard. You could play hard and socialise hard. But you could not do all 3. I tried to prove him wrong! They were wonderful days.

More importantly, John and Downing gave me new horizons. They encouraged me to think on a grander scale about the world and what could possibly be achieved. For this, I shall always be eternally grateful.

There are only a few people whom you meet along the way who merit the accolade "great". John was most certainly one of them. I shall never forget his direct legacy to me; and I am sure that there are hundreds of others who feel exactly the same.

He was a pupil at Queen Elizabeth Grammar School (Junior School) from 1943 to 1948, and yet he was still lecturing my youngest son, William, in Equity and Trusts Law at the London City University Law School in 2008. "Are you Phillip's son?" – he said to William. "Yes sir", was the reply. "Then you will do just fine!"

John's affection for QEGS was life-long. He never forgot that he was an Old Savilian and was delighted to serve as an honorary member of the Old Savilians' Club's Council. John and John Derry were friends of Ronald Chapman, a further link with QEGS, and the school owes a lot to both for their friendship and support over many years.

One last anecdote, which is absolutely true:- 1975 – Queenstown South Africa. My future wife's brother, Ian Greig, was about to come out of the SA Army (2 years service) and his father wanted him to go to college in England. Ian was a sportsman, not an academic. I rang John – "John, Phillip here. I'm in South Africa. My future wife's brother, also brother of Tony Greig, the England Cricket Captain, would like to come to England to study. He is not particularly bright, but he will get you 3 Rugby Blues and 3 Cricket Blues. What do you think he should do?"

There was a pause down the line, until I heard these words "Send him to me, Phillip"... "What, for an interview?"...."No, just send him". And so, another family member came under his influence and spell. Somehow, he got Ian a degree, but Ian reciprocated by getting his 3 Rugby and Cricket Blues!!

They were different times. It would not happen today. But John's influence at Downing and over his young students' lives will live on for a very long time.

He was an outstanding human being.

Phillip Hodson
