

*A Humanist Ceremony
to Celebrate the Life of
Christopher John Sowden
11th January 1950 – 14th October 2018*



*Conducted in the presence of his family and friends
on Friday 9th November 2018
at Park Wood Crematorium*

*Service taken by
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John was born on 11th January 1950, growing up in Wyke with his brothers and sisters and leaving school aged fifteen. He worked in various jobs as a lad: down the pit, in a bakery and as a coach builder at Dews Garage. He found his forte when he joined IMI Cornelius, or Paxman's as it was then, as a refrigeration engineer. He started on the shop floor, but ended up in design and development, and his position took him all over the world, from Ireland to Nigeria, Spain to Saudi Arabia. John was at IMI Cornelius for twenty-five years, and then spent nearly twenty more working at Britvic, before he retired at sixty.

It was back in 1967 that he first met Cath, through friends and the local youth clubs. When he first asked her out he only had a pushbike, but not long after he became the proud owner of a motorbike. John was always mechanically minded, and he and his mate Donald built a bike from scratch; only trouble was, they built it up in Donald's bedroom, and when it came to it, the only way they could get the completed machine out of the house was to ride it down the stairs and out of the front door; it's fair to say Donald's mum wasn't best pleased!

John and Cath got married on 26th June 1971 at St Mark's Church in Low Moor, and spent their honeymoon on the Norfolk Broads, which sounds awfully romantic, except that they went with two other couples, so they could save money on the boat. One thing about John that never changed was his cautious approach to spending! Though that never seemed to apply when it came to gadgets; he was always happy to shell out for the latest phone or computer, though then had no idea how to work the thing, and would have to ring Machala and get her to come and set it all up. Even to the end he was still at it, picking Cath up one day and announcing, "We need to go to Bradford to get my drill," another new addition he had ordered and not told her about.

John never ceased to amaze Cath; every day he had either done something that he shouldn't have, or not done something he should; when he used to pick her up from work the first words she would say to him when she got in the car were, "What have you done now?" Unfortunately, she got so used to his antics that on the one occasion he genuinely did try to be romantic it backfired; he ordered a bouquet of flowers to be delivered for Cath at home, but Cath sent the delivery man away saying, "They're not for me." When John explained they really had been for her, all she could say was, "What have you done now?"

John was delighted when he and Cath welcomed their children, Neil and Machala, to the world, and both his kids agree that he was not a normal dad; life with John was always exciting. He wanted to stand out from the crowd, and was an early adopter of Australian rugby shirts, long before anyone else was wearing them. Neil and Machala remember fabulous Bonfire Night celebrations, when John would invite everyone on the street round, including random people just passing by. They had many great holidays as a family, mostly spent camping, mostly in the rain, and Neil and Machala reckon they must have been round every single castle in Scotland and Wales, apart from the ones with an entry fee. They remember their dad one year being so impressed with a special contraption he had brought on holiday which would allow him to brown several slices of toast at once over the campfire. They also remember it failing miserably to work, and John taking it out and booting it across the field in disgust. When they upgraded their holidays to the slightly

warmer climes of Jersey, John loved to go exploring, especially round all the historic coastal defences, including the ones you definitely weren't supposed to be climbing over.

For some of the camping holidays John and Cath joined forces with the rest of Cath's family, and Neil and Machala and several of their cousins were treated to a lecture from John on one occasion up in Inverness. He had borrowed a blow-up dinghy for them to use out on the water, and had it tied to a tree while he ran through the health and safety regulations, at great length. Finally satisfied he had impressed upon the children the need for responsible behaviour when messing about in boats, he then proceeded to take a running jump into the craft, and went straight through the bottom of it.

John was always one to throw himself wholeheartedly into anything he did. For several years in the early eighties his interest was in caving; Cath would take the kids for a walk on the moors while he scrambled around underground. When his mate Alan introduced him to the joys of fly-fishing he would go every week, as well as spending weekends away fishing in Scotland and Wales. John met Alan in the pub; his local was The Junction, and he liked to call in there for a drink, and do the quiz; Machala said she tried quiz night once with her dad, and it was the drunkest night she's ever experienced.

John always retained his love of motorbikes, going over to the Isle of Man to watch the TT Races a number of times, and twice marshalling there, alongside his good friend Mick. From his first machine as a teenager, John was always the proud owner of a motorbike, though admittedly his last one lay in pieces since 1973. He bought himself a Triumph, then proceeded to dismantle it past the point any bike has been dismantled before; that bike sat in boxes for years, and John finally sold it, still in boxes, on the same day he died; even when he couldn't speak, he could still show his appreciation for a good deal.

Neil took after his dad in his propensity to take apart anything from BMXs to lawnmowers, and John was always happy to help with his projects. He wasn't quite so happy the night Neil brought a live chicken home, concealed in a cardboard box, and left it in the garage overnight, unbeknownst to his dad; when John went in there later and saw the box, he made to throw it out and was accosted by a rather disgruntled hen flying out at him; it's fair to say the whole street heard his opinion of Neil that night! Neil has chosen a recording for today, in tribute to his dad; it was a favourite of John's, that he played many a time on the radiogram. This is Capstick Comes Home.

Music: Capstick Comes Home by Tony Capstick

It was Machala who first took John along to a Bradford Bulls match, though as a youngster he did used to go and see Bradford Northern play with his dad. The fact that Machala got free tickets through her work may have helped swing it to start with, but it didn't take long before John was hooked, on the game and the team. He even wove Bradford Bulls beads into the rather fetching rat-tail that he sported, a hair do that did eventually meet its end for charity. John was a season ticket-holder at the Bulls for several years, and once he retired he started to volunteer for the club, ending up going in pretty much every day. He knew everyone there, and they knew him, describing him as 'a fantastic volunteer who played an essential role in the club's production. All the work he took on around the ground was for the love of the club at no expense. Everyone is deeply saddened by his loss and he will be

sorely missed.' Cath wanted to say how much she appreciated the support she and the family have received from the Bulls, and the recognition they have given to John.

John was always there for Neil and Machala, when they were growing up and in their adult life. Machala described how her granddad passed away when she was only thirteen. Having never been to a funeral before, her dad took her under his wing, sitting with her on the second row through the service. But, she said, "Dad got a lot of his sense of humour from Granddad, so when the Hamlet cigar music (officially known as Air on a G String by Bach) came on I started to giggle. I remember Dad hitting my leg gently to stop me, but too late – Grandma had heard me, turned around and gave me her hardest stare, but this made it worse as both me and Dad started to giggle. I explained later that I expected Granddad to sit up from the coffin and smile at us all."

John was delighted when Neil and Machala found love themselves, and welcomed Fiona and Chris into the family. And he was overjoyed to become a Granddad, to Matthew, Callum, Josh and Robbie. Fiona said he was like a big kid himself when he was with the boys; he loved being on the beach with them, taking them fishing, and sharing his love of rugby with them, even if Callum did insist on supporting Leeds.

His grandchildren have shared some of their favourite memories of their grandad.

Matthew said:

What I will remember the most about him is his smile and chuckle he would do whenever he was being cheeky. He taught me a lot especially when it came to fishing and that I will always keep with me. I remember a time when I went to visit him and he asked me to look in the kitchen sink for him and I saw a huge fish that I wasn't expecting and it freaked me out and it made him laugh. He was a very kind and caring person but he also loved a joke every now and then. I will miss that the most.

Callum loved the time he spent fishing with his granddad and will always have that memory of him, plus many others.

Josh said:

Well I'm grateful for the things he did for me and I always enjoyed going out fishing with him. He didn't have a care in the world, like the time in Dunelm when Grandma and Aunty Mau came back and saw him throw a bean bag across the aisle at me jokingly. And he'd do anything for anyone no matter what.

Robbie remembers when he was little and his granddad lifted up the floor boards in their house and he was allowed to venture down there; unknown to Grandma he was desperate for a wee so his granddad said, "Just have a wee down there, no-one will know." Robbie also loved when his grandma and granddad would come and visit as he knew that everyone would be going somewhere up the road and he would get to ride in his granddad's car.

John helped Neil and Fiona to move up to Newcastle, driving the van up and cursing as their cat got loose and ran under the pedals. He got on better with their dog, a Staffie/Shar

Pei cross ironically christened Bonny, as she was, according to John, the ugliest dog in the world. He was very fond of her though, and she of him, mainly because he used to take her out for a sausage and tomato sandwich every day when he was dog-sitting.

John would genuinely help anyone, with anything he could, which included fitting boilers. He was a handy man to know, and famous for the state of his garage; it looked like he had been burgled, but he knew exactly where everything was, and could spot a screwdriver out of place at twenty paces.

Once Neil and Machala were old enough to be independent, John and Cath made the most of the chance to travel, and enjoyed some great holidays in Europe, going to Germany and Belgium, and spending several Christmases in Benalmadena in Spain, along with Mick and his wife Karen. For their silver wedding anniversary they took an extra-special trip to the United States, taking in New York, Washington, New Orleans and Florida and having an absolute blast. For John's 60th birthday they didn't get quite so far afield, but the family did take John to East Kirby to fulfil one of his dreams: taking a ride in a Lancaster Bomber.

In recent years John and Cath's favourite holiday destination was Paphos in Cyprus, and they made the decision to move out there four years ago. They had a fabulous three months in Paphos, and made some lovely friends locally, but in the end decided to move back to the UK because of John's failing health. He may have gradually found himself less able to do the things he loved, but some things about John never changed. He always remained as adventurous, and enthusiastic about life, as he ever was; he remained a strong man, and certain of his own mind – Machala said if you asked him to do something he didn't agree with, nothing could make him do it, and conversely if you didn't ask him he would do it anyway; he remained a typical Yorkshireman, always appreciated a bargain; and he continued to take delight in winding people up, especially Cath! Which leads us to the song we're going to hear now, which John chose specifically to annoy the love of his life. As we listen, take the time to think of John, and the times he has made you smile.