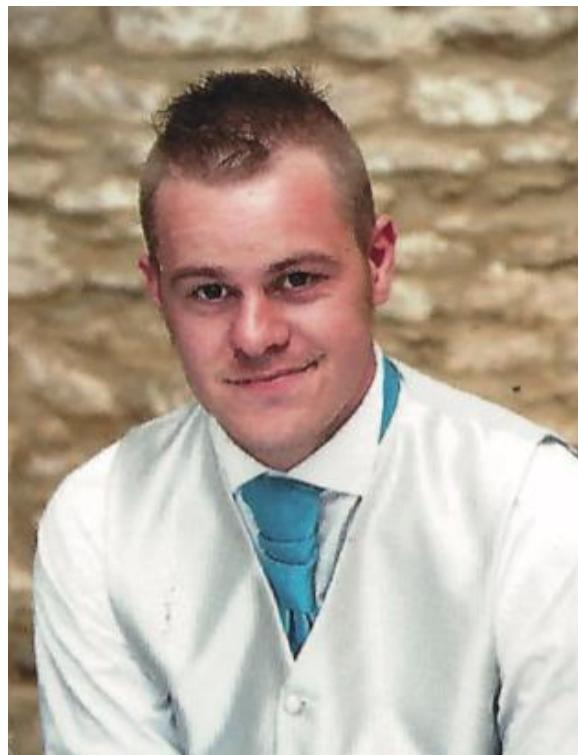


A celebration of the life of



James Leverton 1988 - 2019

12pm, Monday 29 April 2019
Kingsdown Crematorium, Swindon

Ian Hembrow, Humanists UK
humanist.org.uk/ianhembrow

E.Taylor & Son
www.etaylorfunerals.co.uk

Remembering James

Let's look back on James' life.

He was born at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford on 15 June 1988, the youngest child of Sue and her late husband Colin.

Ronald Reagan was in the White House, Rick Astley was in the charts, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* was in the cinemas, and the world was gearing up for the Summer Olympics in Seoul, South Korea.

Colin had served as a mechanical engineer in the Royal Air Force, and having met Sue at Brize Norton, the family settled in Carterton.

Sue's parents, Mabel and Fred, were a big, warm presence throughout James' childhood - their home an open house for anything that he and his sisters got up to. And the family dog, Bob, was another close companion.

James went to the Edith Moorhouse primary school, and then onto Carterton Community College and later Burford School.

As a student with undiagnosed Dyslexia, education was difficult for him - he masked the troubles he had with learning by becoming the class clown, which in turn earned him the reputation (among staff at least) of being difficult and troublesome.

So it's a shame but no surprise that, as Michelle put it, he "*pretty much checked out by the age of 11*" and dropped out of school completely by the time he was 14.

Like many young people who have this sort of experience, this took James into a negative period during which he got into quite a lot of trouble, including taking and driving cars. In fact, he managed the rare feat of being disqualified from driving before he even had a licence!

But help was at hand when he started going to the Allandale Centre in Carterton, where he met a wonderful youth worker, Shelley.

Here was an adult who accepted and respected James just as he was, without judgement for whatever had gone before. Shelley encouraged him to volunteer at the Centre - helping other young people to deal with some of the same issues he'd already faced.

This sort of work and the haven of the Allandale Centre unlocked James' caring instincts, and he won a scholarship to study for a Degree in Youth Work at Ruskin College in Oxford.

Later, while he was working as a youth worker for the armed forces charity SSAFA at RAF Brize Norton, he found himself accompanying young people to school open evenings - and encountering some of his former teachers.

I hope that - once they got over their astonishment - they were suitably impressed and good enough to acknowledge how James had turned himself around and put his skills to positive use.

His achievements were certainly noticed and appreciated by others, since in his early 20s he was invited to and attended a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in recognition of his work with young people. Something of which he was rightly proud. The RAF's community head has also written to

say what an outstanding contribution James made to the young people of Carterton.

In his teens, James took up martial arts - Kickboxing, Taekwondo, Muay Thai, Cage Fighting and MMA, through which he met another important person and longstanding role model, Chris Hoyle.

If the photo on the booklet is anything to go by, I sense James could be a furious competitor, and he certainly excelled at many other sports, especially hockey and athletics, where he took part alongside Michelle, plus football, basketball, tennis... If it moved, James would play it.

Similarly, with Carl and Alastair, James developed a passion for cars - especially those classic VW Golf MK Is, which he'd strip, restore, customise, trade or swap.

From around the age of 15, James began to experience dizzy spells - when he was playing sport, or the passenger in a car. Eventually, this was diagnosed as a Chiari malformation, a rare condition in which the back of the brain extends into the top of the spine.

For this, he had major surgery - something that, typically, James made no effort to hide when he later had a zip tattooed along the scar at the back of his head!

His first operation was successful, but he needed further surgery in the coming years and found the side effects of the medication he took to relieve pain increasingly hard to cope with.

The hospital neurosurgeon who cared for James at this time, Richard Stacey, shared some sound advice. When asked about the safety and wisdom of continuing with martial arts and other sports, he simply said: “*James, go out and live your life.*”

James did exactly that, and some happy relief came his way in 2016 when he met Tina. Within a few months, they’d moved in together, and Tina got an early taste of her new partner’s spontaneous ways.

Setting off one day for an alleged visit to the Cotswold Wildlife Park, they drove instead to Wales to acquire an adorable, fluffy Airedale Terrier pup, Oscar. Oscar is, I’m told, still adorable but now roughly equal in size to Tina...

In their time together, Tina and James enjoyed several holidays - to the Canary Islands, Sardinia, Greece and Kraków in Poland, where he was able to see some of the relics of the Nazi era, including the former camps at Auschwitz and Birkenau.

This might seem an odd choice for a holiday, but James had a deep fascination with History, which he and Michelle would spend hours discussing and debating late into the night.

Over the last few years, the strain of living with his brain condition, and the repeated ups and downs of recovery and illness began to tell on James.

When he was no longer able to work, he became prone to periods of deep depression and self-harm. He would motivate himself to get through these, but never quite fully bounce back, and so his energy and resilience were gradually drained.

Given this, it's understandable that he was anxious about the future and was unhappy that he perhaps could no longer be the person he wanted to be. Few people though have the clarity of thought and courage to make the calm, considered choice he did.

Michelle told me that James was a big fan of Harry Potter, so I'll finish this part of our gathering with some words from those books - spoken mainly by Dumbledore.

"Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light."

"The ones we love and who love us never really leave us. We recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble. They are alive in us, and show themselves plainly when we have need of them."

"To have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us protection forever."