

# A celebration of life

# Dr Tom Hering

7<sup>th</sup> April 1935 – 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Trent Valley Crematorium, Friday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021, 12:30

*a personal goodbye*

Humanist  
*Ceremonies*

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We are all here today, both here and online, near and far, to remember Tom Hering - but while you gather to mourn his loss and to say your final farewells, we are also here to remember all the good things which formed part of those 85 years of life.

It's a "celebration" because we are here to celebrate his life ...

– a much-loved dad, grandpa, brother, companion, friend and colleague ...

– a skilled and well-respected mycologist ...

– an academic and a popular teacher ...

– a writer, a guitarist, and an artist ...

– a lover of nature and wildlife, of theatre, music and opera ...

– a lover of life itself ...

You will all know what makes you remember Tom – it might be a particular look, a turn of phrase, a slightly eccentric manner, his enthusiasm for his many activities, his encyclopaedic knowledge, his thoughts and his opinions, or perhaps just the smell of his pipe ...

Let's celebrate his life and remember the man that he was.

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### **Tribute by Martin Wilson**

Tom was nearly nine years older than me and we were not brought up together. My first clear memory of him was probably in 1949, when he was almost 14. This was during school holidays when he and his sisters, Anna and Norah, were staying with our Mother and my Father in our very small house (with no running water or electricity) in Nancledra, Near St.Ives in Cornwall. Tom was always my big brother who I looked up to and greatly admired. I missed all three of them very much when they went back to London.

I admired his academic success at Cambridge and later his work at Nottingham University. In addition to this work he always impressed me with his amazingly detailed knowledge on a whole range of subjects unconnected with his scientific studies. Although I studied history at university, I often felt that he knew more about history than I did and I had to be very careful before challenging any points he made on the subject. To me he seemed to have a photographic memory!

In more recent years he often visited Lili and me in Brighton from where we arranged visits to the Downs, National Trust Properties, Glyndebourne Operas and many wildlife sites. I shared many of his interests in politics, history, travel, music and above all wildlife.

One great memory for me was Tom with his pipe. Smoking was normally banned in our house, but an exception was made for my big brother and I like to remember him relaxing in front of our log fire smoking his beloved pipe.

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## Tribute – The Life of Tom Hering

Tom was born, **Thomas Frederick Hering**, on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1935 in London. His family lived in Sussex, but had a distinguished and complex background. His father Frank was German – a philosophy graduate who worked for an illegal newspaper and was imprisoned by the Nazis for his trade union activity. His mother Kitty was daughter of an Irish physicist who had discovered his own eponymous “Troughton’s rule”. The family had escaped Berlin a year or so before and moved to London with his older sister Anna, and his younger sister Norah was born in 1938.

It wasn’t really a happy childhood. His parents’ marriage collapsed, and Tom was sent to boarding school from the age of 4. Tom himself wrote that this was “a ridiculously young age, and for years we had nothing that we could call a proper home”. During the war, his father was in the Army, so Tom would stay with his mother in Cornwall in the school holidays. Kitty remarried in 1943 and had another son, Martin.

Writing about these years, Tom said of himself and Norah ... “I think we both emerged from this experience determined that, if we ever had children of our own, we would do everything we could to provide them with the sort of secure and happy home background that we never had”. I think you will all judge that he succeeded.

He boarded at several schools: first Hyde House, near Exmouth, then on to Beacon Hill School in Cornwall – originally formed by Bertrand and Dora Russell. A progressive education with modernist ideas – perhaps that was the start of Tom’s left-leaning political and social outlook. It was certainly the start of his climbing adventures – Tom remembered climbing over the barbed wire protecting the transatlantic telegraph cable at Porthcurno or on the seating of the Minak Theatre high up on the cliff above the beach. He finally caused offence by climbing on the cross in the village square!

Then on to Stotley Rough in Surrey at age 8. They were taught by several notable Cambridge dons, but he most remembered the science teacher who didn’t know much about science, and didn’t know how to use a microscope properly. Tom challenged him about calling a daisy a flower, when actually it is an inflorescence. His scientific rigour had begun! The school recognised that he was a bright one, and he took his school certificate early.

In 1949, aged 14, he moved to Quintin Grammar School in Upper Regent Street, and was finally able to live with father Frank and his new wife Lotte in Belsize Avenue, North London. Here the biology teacher was particularly good, and taught Tom how to use a microscope properly – a skill he continued to use for the rest of his life.

At 17, after completing 4 A levels, Tom was not old enough to go to University, so he worked for a year as a technician at the Royal Free Medical School. His scientific skills increased, but he was also developing his sense of social equality – when younger sister Norah was considering a career in nursing, it was Tom who asked “why not a doctor?” and set her on the path of her future career.

He went up to Magdalene College, Cambridge in 1953 and obtained his BA in Natural Sciences. There he met many life-long friends, including John Hudson, later his brother-in-law.

Tom stayed on at Cambridge to complete his PhD - The Biology of *Helico Basidium perpereum* – that’s the violet root rot, a menace to carrots and asparagus. John also did a PhD, and they shared flats together.

Tom was a keen walker even then, and there were several walking and cycling holidays ... to Wales with Norah, to Scotland with John, to the Isle of Skye on his own, accompanied only by the persistent, typically Scottish weather.

At the Cambridge University Youth Hostel Group he first met Charles Clement. Charles can't be here today, but he has written about their mountaineering trips – initially to Snowdonia and the Lake and Peak Districts – then onwards to the Austrian Alps in 1958, a trip that Charles and Tom organised. The expeditions were made economic by travelling on the Inghams special train, the price of which included many nights in Austrian Alpine Club Huts. In 3 weeks they crossed crevassed glaciers in snow and mist, scaled multiple peaks including the highest in Austria at nearly 3800m, lost their way and spent the night in a ruined hut, and consumed enormous quantities of goulasch soup.

Charles describes Tom as the ideal walking and climbing companion, a trusted partner on many of the best climbing and mountaineering days of their lives, a lovely man and the easiest person to get on with, who confronted difficulties with a quiet determination to overcome them. Tom was always the most intrepid - always ahead, higher, and faster- and his knowledge of plants, and fungi, enabled him to add much interest to their excursions.

There followed trips to the Bernese Oberland beneath the north wall of the Eiger and to the Munros and ridges of North-West Scotland. But John Hudson is going to tell us now about one particular trip, and share some thoughts about Tom.

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<b>“Thoughts about Tom”</b>
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<b>John Hudson</b>
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(No script provided - thoughts included Norah, holidays, Magdalene reunions and Stratford)

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In 1959, with his doctorate completed, Tom began work for the Nature Conservancy Council, at Merlewood Research Station, in the Lake District alongside Juliet Frankland who became renowned as a world expert in fungi. Juliet and her husband Raven also became firm friends.

During those years, he worked on fungal succession in leaf litter, and published a number of papers in distinguished journals. More importantly, he met Jenny Dewhurst – who was working as a technician at the station. They began courting, and enjoyed sailing the Dewhurst family dinghy ‘Valkr’ on Lake Windermere. Tom recalled a memorable occasion when they capsized and were left sitting on the upturned boat for over an hour waiting to be rescued. Perhaps that cemented the relationship – they were married in 1963 in Windemere.

In 1965, he was appointed Lecturer, and later Senior Lecturer, at the School of Agriculture of the University of Nottingham and he worked there until his retirement in 1990. Over the years he supervised many students, and PhDs. He was a very popular lecturer with the students, teaching mycology and plant pathology. I’m told that his classes were always much larger than those of his colleagues – he was just a bit more entertaining – more creative and personal – perhaps something of an eccentric scientist.

In 1966, Tom and Jenny moved to Langley Drive in Kegworth, where he was to live for the rest of his life. Ruth was born in 1972 and Caroline in 1975.

Tom enjoyed sailing and, in 1975, built a ‘Miracle’ class sailing dingy from a wooden kit - the ‘Jenny Wren’.

Sadly Jenny suffered from poor health for a number of years. In February 1983 she died, leaving Tom as a single parent of 2 young daughters, aged 10 and 7. Over the following years he worked hard to give his daughters the happy family home, with the occasional adventure, that he felt he had been deprived of.

In 1985, he was successful in securing a sabbatical at the Washington State University. But it wasn't just academic interest that took him overseas – Tom wanted a change of scene for his daughters too. Tom, Ruth and Caroline lived in Pullman, Washington State for 6 months, the two girls attended local schools there. Over the years he took his girls on many other international trips - many of them involving walking and camping, another of Tom's lifelong passions.

Tom had joined the British Mycological Society in the 1960's, and in 1986 he set up the Leicestershire Fungus Study Group with Richard Iliffe. He was instrumental in the running of this group, led many of the forays with Richard and was a valued and highly respected member. He was the Leicestershire County fungal recorder from then until the end of his life. When he took on the database, it had 3000 records, by the end, with his characteristic diligence and meticulous nature, it grew to 55,000. Many will remember hearing him recording into, or listening back to, his trusted dictaphone, listing the specimens found during the day. He was a regular at both the Leicestershire and the national BMS field meetings – Richard remembers that he was always very good with new members and with people unfamiliar with fungi. He was very patient, and would take time and effort to show them the ropes. He was a quiet, conscientious, modest and private individual and it was only when you got to know him better that you realised what a deeply intellectual and kindly man he was.

From 1996 until 2018 Tom was companion to Lynne Mansell-Long. Over the years Tom and Lynne enjoyed many cultural events and fine food. They went to Glynebourn several times. They took lots of holidays to foreign places, including Egypt, Paris, Prague, Ecuador, Italy, Canada, Greece, China, Mexico and Russia.

In 1996, Tom started attending a Creative Writing Course in Nottingham, which transformed into a regular Creative Writing group of friends. He enjoyed writing short, thought-provoking pieces. Janice Fox from the writing group is now going to read us a "letter to Tom".

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Dear Tom,

I don't suppose you had any idea, dear Tom, how much we'll all miss you. Nearly every week for many years we have shared our writing time with you and, although you were a quiet presence, you were very much there and your occasional absences left us incomplete. You surprised us with your stories and the range of your knowledge and your authoritative reading style. It must have been very hard for you when your eyesight started to fail and you found it difficult to read your own writing. When it was your turn to lead us, you always presented us with such a stimulating idea and brought out the best in us. I know we meant a lot to you and that you enjoyed our lunches, first at John Lewis with Barbara and Ann, and later in the pub with a group of us.

I'm glad you had other new interests on your retirement. Your weekly art classes balanced out your life and I wish we had seen more of your work. And your voluntary work for the local library, taking books to housebound or simply isolated people. How they must have looked forward to your visits.

You were highly educated and carried this lightly. I found the fact that you went to boarding school at only four very unnerving. It made me humble that you survived it so well. I don't know about the rest of your schooling but felt privileged to share your college reunion at Magdalene, Cambridge. I'm sorry that your companion, Lynn, was no longer able to share those things with you and I was touched that you asked me to accompany you on what, for you, was such an important occasion. Covid stopped us going to the opera but we both enjoyed the theatre and your views on plays were always thought provoking.

You used to say that you would like me to meet your daughters and now I have met them in the saddest of circumstances. They were so lucky to have a father with so much love to give and to whom bringing them up was such a pleasure. It must have been so hard for you all when your wife died while the children were so young, seven and ten I think.

Once at the Playhouse with Julie we happened to see you with Lynn when she needed a great deal of support and we were very touched by your gentleness towards her.

I hope you realised how fond of you we all were. We were also in awe of your career as a respected mycologist. I hope I still have the photo of a rare toadstool which was your Christmas card one year. My daughter, as a keen plant person, was fascinated by your breadth of knowledge.

We're so glad you managed your trip to India before Covid would have made it impossible. You led such a rich inner life. It is a blessing that you died so peacefully with your beloved daughters at your side and trust that you will rest in peace. It was such a pleasure to know you.

This is selfish as you will never get this letter, but I trust that you would not have been surprised by it.

As always, Janice, on behalf of your writing friends.

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So ... what else?

Well, he liked to be busy, efficient and cost-effective. That creative writing group began at 10am – his free bus pass only began at 9:30, and it took more than 30 minutes to get there. That was a quandary! It took Margaret Kinder, his friendly and caring neighbour, a while to persuade him that it was worth paying for the extra fare.

He worked out how to solve the Rubik's cube soon after it was released, without the help of any book or guide.

There was the skiing – the last holiday only 3 years ago, and he was keen to do another. He couldn't always manage to stay upright, but he loved the experience and the mountains, and he was very impressed with the ski-pass discount for octogenarians!

Then there's the painting - which he really enjoyed. Watercolours of landscapes, coastlines, buildings. There are many masterpieces created by Tom – the walls of his house are full of his paintings.

He became a grandpa – to Arthur and Dan. He was so very proud to have grandchildren. They have memories of many walks, day trips and interesting conversations, and of playing board games together.

His politics had always been progressive. He was a member of the Labour party and the Fabian Society. He joined Ruth and Caroline on an anti-Brexit march in London. He was appalled by Trump and relieved to see his defeat.

For more than 20 years he volunteered his services to help others ... for the National Trust, where he led holidays in the UK ... as a support volunteer through the Enrych scheme for Chris English – a seriously disabled artist in Loughborough with whom he became good friends ... and for Books on Wheels – where he borrowed books for the housebound elderly.

He was a great reader himself – mostly classical, historical works - he would persevere with a book even if not enjoying it – but he would also read things like 50 shades or the Da Vinci code just to see what it was about – then disapprove ... not really his cup of tea. He sometimes read French novels in French. He spoke some Russian, and of course was good in German.

He liked cricket – but he didn't really understand the ways of sports fanatics – he had been known to march in and announce the score of an important match to a family of fans who had been carefully avoiding that knowledge before watching the TV recording.

He enjoyed his garden, particularly the joy of producing his own fruit and vegetables. He grew a plethora of gooseberries and quince, and made more jam than he could eat. He was not really big on neat and tidy – he liked the birds and the wildlife – and of course the fungi!

And of course there was the pipe. Every day began with a pipe and the Guardian crossword – and in his final illness, cleaning those 4 pipes was one of the first things to do on getting home from the hospital.

He remained active – Youth Hostel group reunions, long walks until very recently; a solo holiday in India in 2019; multiple fungus forays – including covid-safe trips last autumn, reporting that it was an excellent season.

He remained in good health until last autumn when he developed diabetes. Then in January, the diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. He deteriorated rapidly. On Monday 15<sup>th</sup> March there was no pipe – the girls knew something was wrong. He was admitted briefly via A&E but died peacefully the same day with Ruth and Caroline at his side.