

*A Tribute To*

# *Garry John Apps*

*15th July 1964 - 14th January 2022*



*Prepared and conducted by Peter Allison*

*Humanists UK Accredited Celebrant*

*[humanist.org.uk/peterallison](http://humanist.org.uk/peterallison)*



Humanists UK is a registered charity no. 285987 and limited company no. 228781 in England and Wales. Humanists UK, 39 Moreland Street, London, EC1 V8BB, 020 7324 3060

## *A Tribute to Garry - The Man of Kent, the sport and the music*

### The Man of Kent

Garry John Apps was born in Chartham, Kent on 15th July 1964 to parents Fred and Jean Apps. He attended both primary and secondary schools in Chartham, the latter being affectionately known as the Chartham College of Knowledge. He was incredibly clever; full of self-acquired knowledge, with an inquisitive mind. He enjoyed growing up in the countryside and soon developed a deep-rooted love of nature, particularly wild flowers. He once commented that he would like to buy his own woodland plot, just to sit in and enjoy its peace, surrounded by bluebells and daffodils.

He was the youngest of four, his siblings being Les, Martin and Linda, and over time their large family expanded; Garry became uncle to many nephews and nieces. He was married twice, to Carrie and then Jo; who he had first met when they were nineteen; and they had two sons Seb and Reuben. The two boys massively inspired Garry to re-engage with his two real passions in life: sport and music.

Garry, or Boffa as he was known when he was young; short for Boffin, as he always seemed to have his head in a book, usually about dinosaurs or history; was a working class boy at heart. For sixteen years he worked for various estate agents in Canterbury, before becoming a drinks rep for United Distillers. I'm told he could make the perfect gin and tonic, after training as a drinks mixer. He worked as a ganger for Ovenden, and built a section of the M2. He was logistics manager for Multi Services Kent, or MSK. This role took Garry to plenty of magnificent buildings, as the MSK Group would take on high profile jobs in site logistics and refurbishment such as Ascot racecourse, Battersea Arts Centre and Kew Gardens Temperate House.

Garry's quick brain gave him an incredible sense of humour; with his sharp wit, he was always quick on the draw, with the perfect response at the perfect time. He was a great dancer, very good at jiving. "You can jive to anything" he would say.

He enjoyed cooking, and had a real passion for baking. He delighted in well-made Victoria Sponges, and other cakes too, and was a regular and enthusiastic visitor to the tea rooms and bakeries of Deal. He was even fluent in the Australian WI rules for judging sponges.

Garry the nature lover enjoyed gardening. He shared an allotment with friends Dom and Andy; a place not simply for growing things, but a place to meet friends, drink beer and put the world to rights. Jo bought him a greenhouse for their home in Bridge; they would listen to radio comedies and music together, drinking gin and bitter lemon, as the sun set.

Garry was always incredibly proud of his two boys. There is a beautiful symmetry in how they each found their own passions for sport and for music; two of the major influences in Garry's own life; and how they inspired him, just as he inspired them.

### The Sport

Garry loved sport: cricket, football (as a lifelong Spurs supporter) and most of all rugby. He was a member of Canterbury Rugby Club for over thirty years, and he took Seb weekly to play in the Junior League, and Seb's involvement helped Garry to reconnect with the playing of the game. He loved the camaraderie of the club, and who better to tell us more about that than his good friend Ken.

"It's a great honour and privilege to be standing up here today and speaking on behalf of Garry's rugby mates. And looking around there are a lot of us here.

I first met Garry when I relocated from London to Canterbury in 1993. Although already getting on in age I decided that I wanted to continue to play rugby and that the local club would be a good place to meet people and make new friends.

I met Garry during that first season and although at the time I was playing for the 3<sup>rd</sup> XV he took me under his wing and ensured that I was quickly ensconced into the Zingari. I think Garry recognised a kindred spirit in that while we both enjoyed playing the game, we both also enjoyed the off-field activities.

Garry played a large part in the running of that Zingari side on and off over the next ten years. Initially he played in the backs as a full back or winger, a member of the clean shorts brigade! In later years he saw the light and became a utility forward – nothing to do with his diminishing speed he would say – just that he fancied a cuddle with his mates in the scrum on a cold winter's afternoon. As a forward I recall he played in every position in the scrum except prop which was probably very wise.

He was dedicated to the grass roots game, and in particular to the lower sides and ladies side at the club. He always fought our corner with the club hierarchy to ensure we had sufficient recognition and had our voice heard. In later years when Seb was playing in the junior section he did just the same.

We were rarely short of players in those early days, in no small part due to Dickie and Garry's vast list of contacts. While other clubs would telephone and cancel a game at short notice because they could not raise a side [Sevenoaks springs to mind], Garry took pride in the fact that we never or very rarely had to cancel at short notice, and we usually turned up with fifteen players. This was no main feat in the days before email and mobile phones. Often frantic phone calls had to be made from the clubhouse telephone just prior to departing for an away fixture to drag somebody out of bed to play.

Garry also introduced young blood into our team from a previously untapped resource in the form of young players from the junior section of the club and local schools. He called these youngsters his "young pups" and they obviously brought a new dimension to our game – mobility and speed. It is significant that a number of the young pups are still playing today or still come to support the club on a Saturday afternoon. It is a mark of the respect they have for Garry that a number of them are here today. They can look back and remember the encouragement they were given by Garry at the start of their senior playing career.

One memorable event from those days was my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday party. It was an all afternoon and evening affair in our back garden. When the party had finished Garry and one of the “young pups” (now a farrier in Australia I understand) started to drunkenly serenade my wife under our bedroom window. Gill took umbrage at this and tipped a bucket of cold water over their heads. Garry never forgot this and would frequently remind me about it.

There are so many happy memories of those early days playing for Zingari. One such memory from 2001 is the legendary drop goal that Garry scored. For those not versed in rugby it is fairly unusual for a forward to score a drop goal – it’s a skill most often attributable to one of the clean shorts brigade. Our games always carried a short report in the Gazette and on 22 March 2001 this drop goal was duly reported thus *“a piece of individual skill from athletic second row man Garry Apps was the defining moment of the game...finding himself in space he sent over a beautifully judged drop goal from 26 metres.”*

Another cutting from January 2001 says *“back row man Garry Apps galloped through several tackles from 25 metres out to score his side’s second try”*. Garry carried that cutting in his pocket from that day onwards and every time we met he would take it from his pocket and say to me “have I ever told you about my drop goal...”!

For a number of years Garry organised an annual Zingari dinner. These were usually held in a room above the Plough and Harrow pub in Bridge and inevitably were riotous affairs. Prizes were awarded in various categories, some of which I cannot repeat here! Stories were told, songs were sung, beer was consumed, and these events were always a fitting finale to our season.

I think Garry hung up his boots in 2002 or thereabouts due to a shoulder injury which had first started giving trouble several years earlier. I soldiered on playing intermittently for a couple of seasons but finally called it a day in 2004. At this time the 1<sup>st</sup> XV was still in the area leagues and each season the side was making progress towards the National Leagues.

A group of us took to supporting from the touchline, an eclectic group of former players and enthusiasts, and a group which still convenes to this day for home games if possible. We have watched the progress of the club up through the leagues into the position we now occupy in National 2, and nobody could have been more delighted than Garry of the progress Canterbury RFC has made over the years. Garry always carried out forensic analysis on the other clubs by looking at their websites in the week before a game and was able to impart his insider knowledge to the rest of us. During the game he would also follow the scores in the other league matches on Twitter so that after the game we could discuss the various ramifications about the results in the league.

During the game we stand at the same place on the touchline and generally talk about life, rugby, beer and other pressing philosophical matters of the day. We offer our own analysis of the game and try and assist the referee in his decision making with some friendly touchline banter. Garry was the master at this with his quick wit and repartee. If an opposition player was penalised for being offside early in the game Garry's voice would be heard addressing the referee, "He's been doing that all afternoon sir!", causing a ripple of amusement amongst our supporters. For those of us that are ex-players it's also a time for reminiscing about great deeds on the field of play in former years and possibly some embellishment of our own prowess. Garry would usually take the drop goal cutting from his pocket at some point and say, "Now have I told you about my drop goal.....?"

Occasionally during the season pre-match lunches would be arranged. These could be very sociable affairs and another opportunity to philosophise about rugby and life and of course they involved beer, red wine and an excellent three course lunch. Woe betide anyone on our table winning the raffle and choosing Dickie's vegetable box rather than a tray of beer!

About ten years ago Garry indulged his love of home-grown food by acquiring an allotment which he tended with friends Dom and Andy. Garry was self-appointed head gardener while Dom was drinks monitor (a stash was kept in the allotment shed) and Andy was the spade operative. Garry was inordinately proud of the vegetable and soft fruit produced on the allotment, so much so that the boys entered a leek growing competition with another allotment holder. The competition was judged in the local pub. Garry's leeks won by default when it was discovered that the other entrant had bought his in Marks and Spencer!

Our occasional forays to watch an international at Twickenham or to visit the St Lawrence Ground to watch the cricket were memorable occasions. At the T20 Garry generally managed to blag our way into a sponsors area or private box.

The last time we went to Twickenham together was November 2018 for the All Blacks game. I'll try and give you a snapshot of the day: train from Canterbury to St Pancras; Garry says we need to get a tube from Euston to Richmond but first of all he knows a small bar in front of the station; we go there and have a beer then Garry announces he knows a pub around the back of the station; we go to this pub and have more beer; then Garry gives me an ultimatum, "we're going to have a curry at some point today – I don't mind if it's now or after the game – your choice!"; I can see where this is going and elect to have a curry for an early lunch; Garry says he knows a curry house almost opposite the pub so off we go over the road to the aptly named Sizzling Bombay. This place looks completely underwhelming and inside it's all formica and plastic. Garry assures me it does the best onion bhajis in town so I bow to the master's knowledge and we have onion bhajis and chicken vindaloo in a paratha bread wrap –possibly not the best combo given the amount of beer we are about to consume! Then it's off on the tube to Richmond and Garry thinks we have time for a quick pint at the White Swan; pint consumed in double quick time in order to walk to Twickenham Stadium in time for the kick-off (the queues for the buses are too long). We arrive at Twickenham and take our seats just before kick off, watch the haka, then Garry slips off and comes back with some beer to see us through the first half. At

half time he sends me off to buy more beers to see us through the second half. After the final whistle (we lost by one point) we have arranged to meet a friend Andy in a bar inside the stadium so more beer. Hooked up with Andy we head off on foot to Twickenham but somehow get waylaid and find ourselves in a small Shepherd Neame pub in St Margaret's where we meet Rich Tony and his Canadian wife who buys us more beer (if you want to know more about Rich Tony and his wife ask me later in the bar). Then it's off to Richmond to catch the tube when Andy falls into the hedge and by now it's raining hard and we are dishevelled and in danger of missing the last train. So Garry makes the executive decision to get a cab to St Pancras. That day was like an endurance event but hugely enjoyable and all the better for the pleasure of Garry's company.

If I had to describe Garry I would say he was idiosyncratic. He had an encyclopaedic knowledge of current affairs, sport, music and trivia, and also a ridiculous memory for recalling bygone events. He was charismatic and a loyal friend, and he always had time for a conversation. He could also be infuriating but I loved him for it. I will miss his humour and the easy banter but most of all I will miss his friendship.

Our thoughts at this time are with his family Jo, Seb and Reuben.

We should be honoured that he was both a member of our club and more importantly, our friend. He was a great club man and will be missed."

*Ken Hymas*



## The Music

In addition to sport, music was a huge part of Garry's life. He appreciated all manner of genres, with a vast knowledge of all things musical. He was a self-taught piano and guitar player and loved to be surrounded by music from an early age

While visiting New Orleans in his twenties, Garry once played piano on stage with the great Sammy Rimington, one of the last remaining New Orleans trad. jazz clarinet players. We heard Sammy Rimington's sweet clarinet tones on "Bugle Boy March" at the start of today's ceremony.

We will hear more of Garry's top songs today, chosen by Seb and Reuben. Seb recalls listening, with Garry, to the Sound of Philadelphia by "MFSB" - the funky theme music for the long-running TV music program Soul Train; they would make each other laugh as they performed dance "walkdowns" in the style of the dancers on the show.

Garry enjoyed regular Saturday morning music sessions at home in Bridge; he might have a ska half hour, or a disco half hour, or bluegrass, country, blues, folk, brit-pop, soul; the list goes on. Garry's taste was very eclectic indeed, and he was always interested in hearing something new. When Reuben brought a ukulele home from primary school, Garry decided he would teach himself to play. Very soon, Garry became immersed in the local music scene, through Reuben's involvement with gigs and festivals.

Garry had previously sung at the occasional karaoke, and then, after jamming and busking with Reuben for a while, he eventually plucked up the courage to take part in an open mic night at Deal's Landmark Centre, playing and singing. Afterwards, he was heard to comment that he was pleased he had done it, but once was enough.

Garry was never religious. In fact, once, after meeting Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Garry had commented that Tutu was one of only three religious people that he admired. The other two; Reverend Al Green and Sister Rosetta Tharpe; he admired for their musical prowess, rather than their spiritual beliefs.

Without warning, Garry died a few weeks ago, aged just fifty seven. He had enjoyed a typically joyful week; a nice drive to Elham with Reuben, a laughter filled weekend visit from Seb, a sunny day reading his book on Deal pier, apple and pear crumble at the garden centre, and the Thursday night quiz at Canterbury Rugby Club with plenty of good old friends. His team were the reigning champions, with Garry, the polymath, taking charge. After the quiz, he drove his friend Dom home, and then returned to his own flat, where an aortic aneurysm suddenly and unexpectedly took his life.