

A celebration of the life of Andrew Paul Cooper

15 January 1954 – 7 October 2022

11.30am, 1 November 2022, The Appleyard, Avenue of Remembrance, Sittingbourne



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Andy was born in Marple, Cheshire on 15th January 1954. He lived beside a canal with his parents, Ben and Enid, and his siblings, Gerald, ten years older and Janet, five years older. It was what we all imagine a 1950s childhood to have been, with freedom to run along the canal, holidays to Blackpool taking advantage of the free travel Ben got as a railway worker, and a love of Airfix kits, planes, football and the Apollo moon missions.

In football, his big passion was Stockport County. He started going to matches with his Dad, and remained a lifelong supporter, and went to games whenever he could. Ben's job as a railway engineer meant that it was commonplace for Andy to see all sorts of engines taken apart, another passion which would last for his whole life, and those moon missions – he made several visits to the Space Centre over the years, and was a keen follower of NASA all his life.

He learnt to ski in Scotland while at school and had many ski holidays with various friends over the years, and then with Margaret and finally as a family.

Andy went to Derby to study Geology. Roger Cundy will now share his memories of those days:

Jon Wass and myself had the good fortune to be at Derby College with Andy from 1972 until 1975 studying for our degrees. Here we developed a deep friendship, enjoying all activities academic including poker games in the bar, pinball in the Student Union, darts in the local pubs and following heavy metal bands whenever we could.

We often went on off the cuff jaunts to pursue other cultural activities to cities such as Leicester, Nottingham and London. I recall the police pulling us over in the early hours one morning on the M1 thinking we were a pop group. This costing Andy and myself three penalty points and a fine for an insurance offence.

While at college Andy introduced us to the Happy Aardvark Hunters Club (HAH) which he formed at school previously with his friend Geoff Nicholls. Henceforth he was known as The Chairman.

At college Andy, John and myself formed a five-a-side football team known as Cricklewood AFC which although had a record number of supporters only succeeded in winning the wooden spoon trophy during the 1973/74 season.

It was during our latter years at college that we started to go on holiday together travelling through Europe with the Trevor and Don (John's old school pals). In those days Andy was pretty unorganised so instead of giving him an exhaustive list of items to bring along he used to turn up with a tin of mince pies (his mother had made), a jar of silver shred marmalade and himself. During these holidays we travelled through many European countries taking on board new experiences such as windsurfing and snorkelling in Crete, horse riding in the Camargue, playing the Portuguese and Italians at football and Bull-running in Pamplona.

We all stayed in contact after college and I was fortunate to know all of his family up in the Marple area. He introduced me to skiing when we went up to Aviemore in his new Escort XR3 and was kind enough to ask me to be best man at his wedding.

I have a photograph somewhere of Andy chasing after the end of a rainbow, unfortunately he wasn't quick enough to reach it, but later he did find his pot of gold in Margaret and the family.

Although his life has been tragically cut short we are all grateful for the many happy memories we hold so dear.

Trevor also has fond memories of those trips to Europe: *"In many ways they were some of the best times I ever had when we were single and had our whole lives ahead of us. We saw so much of many countries in Europe and I have never lost the passion to visit new places that we developed then."* Apparently, though, they only found one aardvark in all that travelling, in Antwerp Zoo.

After graduating, Andy had various temporary jobs such as delivery driver and petrol pump attendant before eventually getting a job with an oil company which took him first to America for training and then to Egypt as a mud logging engineer. Starting to go bald in his 20s, he enjoyed making good use of a Shakespearean quote from The Comedy of Errors: *"There's many a man has more hair than wit"*.

When his two nieces, Janet's daughters, Louise and Helen, were born, he spent a lot of time with them as he had time at home between spells on oil rigs.

Louise will now talk to us about her uncle.

Cuddly Uncle Andrew joined the Cooper household on the 15th January 1954 as the youngest brother to Gerald and Janet our Mother

Being five years younger than Mum it was Janet's responsibility to take Andrew to school. A chore she had to bear, which Uncle Andrew liked as it gave him kudos with his peers being seen with 16 year old girls!!

Andrew was given the task of carrying the newly born Louise his first niece into the house. Unfortunately, Andrew only had hold of one of the carrycot straps and I gently rolled onto the ground. As you can see no damage done and a great bond was formed although poor Andrew had lots of teasing over this.

Andrew would always be ready to play with a growing Louise and was looking after me four years later when my sister Helen was born.

A doting Uncle to both Helen and I he would always be the first to play with new toys at Christmas-even the slide situated in the lounge as there was snow outside!

Christmas was a very special time and Uncle Andrew always came home for Christmas. One year he actually flew on Christmas Eve and two very excited little girls ran outside as his car arrived. After lots of hugging he exclaimed "Girls you will never guess who I saw fly past my plane"

"Who Uncle Andrew?"

"Father Christmas with his sleigh pulled by reindeer and all piled up with presents". Mum said our faces were full of awe and wonderment and it certainly made Christmas that year.

When Shep joined our household in 1980 Uncle Andrew had the dog join in our fun - playing football in the back garden and lots of walks.

As our respective families grew Andrew became a doting great uncle to both Joel and Laurence and Christmas continued to be important and we had many fun times at Cedar Road.

As Roger's already mentioned, in 1982 he bought his beloved "Chaney" – a silver XR3i, the boy racer version of the Ford Escort with fuel injection. You can tell how much he must have loved Janet in that he let her use it while he was out of the country.

In 1984 he left the oil business and joined British Telecom (BT), having retrained himself as a computer programmer. In those days, as some of you will remember, you didn't just buy a computer and plug it in, you had to have a specialist to set it up. Andy travelled around doing this in his first job with BT, including doing some work at Bletchley Park, for which he had to sign the Official Secrets Act. He was very proud to have walked in the footsteps of Alan Turing, even though he knew little of the place's history at the time.

In 1985 Margaret joined the same team. In 1986 they started going out and they married in 1993. Robert was born in 1994 and Phoenix in 1997.

Andy loved having his own family and sharing experiences. They travelled a lot and did many things together. They all loved skiing, roller coasters, beach holidays, board games, escape rooms and more. In 2019 the four of them had their most amazing holiday ever when they went to South America. They walked along the equator in Quito, visited the Galapagos Islands, and went to Machu Picchu.

Andy's favourite roller coaster was the Colossus at Thorpe Park, the world's first ten-inversion roller coaster. The family's addiction to this hobby took them around the country and around the world. They had three trips to Florida in pursuit of their desire for that adrenaline rush.

He called himself a renaissance man as he liked to think he knew a little about a lot of things – hence his love of trivia, puzzles and quizzes, which were a regular part of his routine. Rob remembers how, when they were children, he would always come out with random science facts – probably the reason Rob did aerospace engineering at university, and Phoenix did physics.

Andy loved music, and was eclectic in his tastes, from the minimalists like Brian Eno, to the hard rock of Genesis and REM, to Holst. The only music he didn't like was jazz. He tried to teach himself the guitar. Indeed, there are several guitars in the house, mostly covered in dust. And he had a vast record collection which the rest of the family wouldn't listen to.

He became a member of Humanists UK and espoused the idea that no act of kindness is ever wasted, and would always try to help anyone whenever possible. In fact, they had family membership, and they often went to the summer Convention, building a two week holiday in Ireland around the most recent, in Belfast. Andy finally made it to the Giant's Causeway, a geologist's dream location

Andy retired when he was 60 and shortly after was diagnosed with haemochromatosis – where the body retains too much iron. The treatment was simple – have blood taken every two weeks – and soon the gout-like pains and aching joints had gone. The only snag was that Andy really HATED needles.

He was an active member of the local Labour Party and after retirement enjoyed meeting up twice weekly to deliver leaflets. He felt this kept him fit and took pride in almost being able to keep up with Georgie, the fastest dropper off of leaflets on the North Kent coast. And as we will hear, he was the unofficial photographer for the local Labour Party, a dab hand at producing that perfect picture of a Councillor staring indignantly at a pothole.

Roger Truelove will now talk to us.

Our friend Andy Cooper was a decent man with a high functioning moral compass, who cared deeply about social, political and environment matters.

He was a clever man, interested in a wide range of topics and a considerable ability to retain detail. He had a high premium in the transfer market for Quiz night team membership and the bookmakers regularly made any team he was in favourites.

He was a very active and important member of our local Labour Party. Inter alia, he chaired our branch, audited our accounts, trudded the streets with leaflets, acted as our resident photographer and managed our social media accounts.

His technical acumen was vital to some of us. He accompanied me whenever I wanted to buy a laptop and was very frequently on hand to help when confronted with functioning problems on those laptops.

He and I spent some great days watching cricket at the St Lawrence cricket ground at Canterbury and at the Oval. His love of sport was not just about the spectacle and the competition, but also the detail. He followed the details of Lancashire cricket very closely but his most marked sporting passion lay in a modest direction.

Though he would probably be the only member, he had every right to be the President of the Kent branch of the Stockport County Supporters Club, if such a niche organisation existed. He followed every minute of their matches on his phone, and when they came south, he travelled to places like Dover and Bromley to see them play. He liked to do that on his own, like a pilgrim visiting a holy citadel.

He was also a supporter of Manchester City, not quite at the same level of intensity as Stockport, but sufficient for him to glean pleasure from City winning, or United losing. His aversion to Manchester United was only equalled by his aversion to the Conservative Party or to anyone who threatened the natural environment.

Loyalty came naturally to him, loyalty to friends and to our political party. But, of course, his greatest love was for his family, whose devotion to cerebrally challenging games was only part of the cohesive glue that holds a happy family together.

That Stockport County passion certainly attracted attention. Stu (Andy's barber) said "Andy was a true gentleman, one of my most loyal and favourite customers and certainly my only Stockport County fan." And Sandy McGregor, Member of the WhatsApp group "County Match Day" with Andy, said "So sorry to hear the news about Andy, I met him through the Stockport County mailing list in the mid 90's. We met a few times when he was up for matches and visiting family. The mailing list has evaporated but the WhatsApp group has proved a fine way of keeping in touch and it was good to see Andy's name popping up again." Sandy organised a collection last Saturday and donated £120 to Kent Wildlife Rescue Service from Stockport County supporters in Andy's memory. He made other friends through his passion for football too. John Mullane (current organiser of the Fantasy Football League Andy was in) wrote "I did have the pleasure of meeting Andy a couple of times and he was a lovely man, generous, smiling and happy. It will be a duller world without him."

Andy loved wildlife – there was always a pair of binoculars in the kitchen to encourage birdwatching. In 2021, Andy and Phoenix started volunteering with the Kent Wildlife Rescue Service, scrubbing out cages and aviaries every Sunday, and he sometimes helped to feed baby foxes and squirrels. It was a real privilege to get up close and personal with the rarer creatures, like a black swan.

In 2018, Margaret took early retirement and so they started doing more things together. During lockdown, they undertook a garden makeover. This was a mammoth task, demanding the removal of a vast ivy hedge, but they just kept at it. And this year, as well as their trip to Ireland, Andy and Margaret finally got to go on a long delayed trip to Vienna, Prague and Berlin, much postponed because of covid.

But suddenly, he was gone, a cold turned to pneumonia which put too much strain on the heart condition that no-one knew he had.

Margaret has asked me to read this message from her:

Andy was a kind and generous man who inspired and supported me throughout my career and everything else I ever got involved in or wanted to do. He was my rock and my best friend for over 36 years. We shared so much as a family and he was so proud of our two fantastic children, Robert and Phoenix. We had so many brilliant adventures and were really enjoying growing old disgracefully together. I fully intend to continue doing so.