

A celebration of the life of Ian Leslie Picking

24 October 1947 – 19 December 2022

10.30am, 30 January 2023, Charing Crematorium



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Ian was born in Mitcham in 1947, the eldest of Moyna and Leslie Picking's three children. Leslie worked as a rubber commodities broker in the City. Ian did not have an easy childhood, because he was teased at school for wearing a caliper, and it may be this that started his habit of being something of a loner.

But he did have some close friends when he was younger, and went regularly with Paul, Len and Chris on 18-30 Club holidays.

His first job was as a telephonist at the Automobile Association (AA) in Leicester Square, and that remained his career, morphing over the years from telephony into customer service. He worked mostly for big companies, or public services, like BT, his final job before retirement being with Marks and Spencer (M&S) in Canterbury.

I like to include a poem which celebrates the person or their work to include in a ceremony, but I was not so hopeful of finding a positive poem about telephonists or customer service representatives – most of what's written is to be honest a bit grumpy. And then I found this, the winner of the 2015 National Telephone Day competition, which calls for an International Telephone Day, and perhaps captures a bit of the magic of the job.

A Call for INTERNATIONAL Telephonist's Day

*A NATIONAL day? That seems so last year
Today should be global, for all, far and near
We and the world are here to rejoice
Our talented people and their beautiful voice*

*Our switchboard ambassadors are handpicked and rare
Their smiles can be heard when they're speaking 'on air'
With skill, wit and patience they hit the right tone
When charming our callers at the end of the phone
The device our teams use, each day without scare
Is a wonder of science, a creation extraordinaire
Mr Bell was the genius who discovered one day
How to speak through a wire to folks far away
He invented a method that allowed his own voice
To be heard the world over, in a place of his choice
What used to be magic, science fiction or mystery
Was made real by this Bell, on a great day in history
The 10th day in March was the day it occurred
The dawn of an era, a triumph of the spoken word
Since those early days, the telephone's conquered
The nation, the world and the sky, it's bonkers!
Let's remember the man whose invention made way
For what should become an INTERNATIONAL day
Thank you Mr Bell, you're a hero with brain
Today is for you, bring on the champagne!*

Ian was married twice, first to Wendy and then to Terry. Terry was Irish, and they used to go to see her family in Cork, where Ian developed a fondness for Irish pubs which lasted the rest of his life. After the end of his second marriage, he moved in with his Mum in her flat in Jesuit Close in Canterbury staying on there for over 25 years after her death in 1997.

He loved music, wrestling, and his own company, and though he got on well with people at work, he doesn't seem to have built strong friendships in later life. While Deborah was still living in Kent, he used to come each year to their annual barbecue. Occasionally they went to concerts together, the most memorable being to see the Rolling Stones at the old Wembley Stadium. They were right up the front, and Deborah remembers as much about her fear of the mosh pit as the concert itself.

And then, suddenly he was gone, alone at home, from heart disease he may never have known he had. Deborah was worried when she didn't hear from him, and asked Andrew, her son, to go and check on him, which he did, only to find he had died.