

## Eulogy for Paul Hannon

I first met Paul on a train to Llandudno in 1976, on the way to the Easter conference of the National Union of Students. Paul was carrying copies of the radical Liberal magazine *Liberator*, which he edited. We got talking then, and it felt like we never stopped talking, as we tried to make sense of our politics and the world.

For many years, Paul was like an elder brother to me. He took me under his wing in the 1970s. We went to Lewisham together, with a gang of others, to try to stop the National Front from marching.

Paul took me to Grunwick, to support the strikers. We took the tube to Dollis Hill, a place I had previously thought was a fiction conjured up by the satirists of *Private Eye*. As we left the Underground station, we could see ahead of us hordes of newspaper sellers. Every Trotskyist faction you had ever heard of, and many you hadn't. And the Communist Party. *Morning Star?*, said one of the sellers. *Morning, Wonderful*, said Paul.

Paul would sometimes visit me at University in Bangor. On one trip, driving on to Manchester, Paul fell asleep in a lay-by. He woke to find a police car with its blue lights blazing. Feeling a little vulnerable, as someone carrying an Irish passport at the height of the IRA's bombing campaign, he was relieved when it suddenly headed off on some other errand.

Over the decades we sometimes worked together. First, at the British Association for the Hard of Hearing, where Paul was Director. That time overlapped with 1981's Royal Wedding between Charles and Diana. *The Sun* newspaper rang us to ask whether we could find it a lip-reader so that they could monitor the conversations of the Royal Couple on the balcony of Buckingham Palace.

We declined. We were republicans after all.

That same year, Paul was elected as a Liberal to Berkshire County Council. Or, as Paul would often remind us, the Royal County of Berkshire. There he honed his skills in debating and began a 40-year career in local government, becoming Leader of Newbury District Council, then chair of planning as a Labour member of Newport City Council, after he married Siobhan, then as a community councillor in Manorbier, then in Fakenham. He put the service into public service.

Paul, like many of us, spent much of his political life navigating the borders of Liberalism and the Labour Party.

Paul believed in the power of local communities to find solutions. He was convinced change came from the grass-roots. He understood that public institutions themselves can suffer from group-think and knew that critics, even constructive critics as he was himself, would often be cast out as mavericks and dissidents. He had no time for sycophants and time-servers.

Paul's debating skills and natural intelligence were noticed in the Liberal Party and he became very prominent, chairing the Assembly Committee of the Liberal Party with distinction. He chaired the Defence debate in Eastbourne which caused a major split in the Alliance with the SDP in 1986. He carried himself with authority. He defused crises with wit and humour. Paul had a practical wisdom which meant he looked to find solutions rather than wallow in problems, and that was recognised by the party leadership.

Paul's professional career was also successful. He was a leader in the voluntary sector. He was always an internationalist. He had been studying to be a vet at the Royal Veterinary College in London, but left without graduating to take up a job with the anti-poverty charity War on Want.

His love of animals was reflected in his role as chief executive of the Blue Cross animal charity. As International Officer of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, he had a major focus on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, or CITES, the international agreement between governments which aims is to ensure that trade in wild animals does not threaten their survival. This took him into the field of international and European lobbying, and he acted as a rapporteur to the CITES Animal Committee in Guatemala in 1995.

Paul and I linked up again in consultancy in the 1990s, where his local government and European experience was

particularly valuable. As I later made my own way into elected politics, Paul was there for me again.

I was due to be best man at Paul's wedding to Siobhan in 2009. But by the time we got there they had already married in Las Vegas!

The reception was held at Newbury racecourse, where Paul and Siobhan had had their first date. Paul had spent a lot of money at race-courses over the years. This was the first time he had ever come away with a prize!

Paul's stag party was in London, the night Ireland played France in a World Cup play-off. One of Paul's Arsenal heroes Thierry Henry handled the ball twice to give France the winner. There was no VAR then. Paul however was philosophical as we cycled back to our hotel.

I'm sorry, I'll read that again. Paul however was philosophical as we were cycled back to our hotel in an open rickshaw.

Family, of course, was central to Paul. His love for his two daughters Eilis and Holly, from his marriage to Sally, was unsurpassable and he was so proud of the young women you have become.

His joy in his marriage to Siobhan, and his love for her, was clear and they spent happy times in Newport, in Manorbier, in Fakenham and latterly in Lincoln, as well as lengthy stays in Ireland. They both enjoyed the benefits of Irish passports,

which gave them a particular perspective on the madness of UK politics since 2016.

Siobhan's love for Paul has been obvious throughout, not least in these last years as they came to terms with Paul's illness and Paul relied increasingly on Siobhan's love and care.

Paul was a devoted Catholic. We have felt Paul's faith in every moment of this beautiful service today. We know that Paul is watching us now, ensconced in his new local – I'll call it the Heavenly Arms – and I am sure we can all hear him say 'Cheers – it's your round!'

Siobhan, Eilis, Holly, I hope you feel today our love for you in this time of sadness, as we share with you so many memories of Paul – memories of a life well lived.