



Richard Francis McLaren
1946-2022

Richard's career was unexpected. No recent member of his family had previously been ordained. However, he took his conscience seriously and explored ways of becoming involved in the community. He worked as a curate at St Luke's Charlton and then at St Mary Abbots, followed by a post as Honorary Curate at St Marylebone Parish Church. In each situation he set up some new community initiative and one of his proudest productions was an article for the Town & Country Planning Association's magazine. His natural charm and determination made him an excellent fundraiser for the Organ and Healing Centre at Marylebone. Richard subsequently worked as a Honorary Curate/Priest in Charge at St Mark's Regents Park. Throughout this time he was using his ability to think out of the box – sometimes a very long way - helping to build the organization that he is most often associated with: ACE now known as A+C.

At home, he loved music – especially Bach, Handel and the Baroque composers – travel, food, art, his step-grandchild Kasper and his beloved cat Lucky (renamed Mr Mushushuu after the guardians of the Babylon temple now in the British Museum). He was an excellent writer and correspondent. His acute design sense was at its most original in his exuberant flower arrangements.

So much else could be said but the tribute reprinted here is an eloquent pen-portrait of a complex and diverse personality.

A Tribute at Richard's Funeral by Sir Kenneth Carlisle

8th March 2022

He christened us.
He married us.
He buried us.
He enchanted us.
He connected us, and
He supported us.
He enlightened us. He loved us.
And we loved him.

Richard gave joy and wisdom and fun to the important ceremonies in our lives. It seems almost unimaginable that we are gathered here today to say farewell to Richard. A funeral is, rightly, a sombre occasion. But it is impossible to think of Richard and not smile. It is the twinkle in his eye. His mischievous sense of humour. His love of pleasure. His warmth and irrepressible vitality. His skill in detecting and teasing the pompous. His generous, warm-hearted goodness. His sense of fun. Richard was also a man of profound faith and I believe he would want us to follow his example and dwell on the gaiety of life, a quality which he brought to every gathering.

But all lives are made of layers of experience that make us who we are, and the layers in Richard's life went deeper than he sometimes let on. Behind that zest was a man of deep seriousness and a genuine commitment to justice. You could say he came by it naturally. He was from a family who believed in public service. His grandfather was a Member of Parliament - a Liberal - and his father Martin was the Conservative MP for Bristol North West, a key marginal, where Richard enjoyed canvassing in several close elections. Richard was only 33 when Martin died and was very close to and proud of him. Martin was indeed remarkable. He had been Captain of the School at Eton and became a major in the Grenadier Guards during the war, returning home to work on the planning of the D Day landings. Together with Richard's elegant and devoted mother, Nancy, and his younger brother Francis, they were a close-knit family. Richard would talk of family holidays walking in Devon and Scotland or skiing in the Alps.

And then a tragedy: a fire at their home in which Francis died. Three years younger than Richard, and aged ten, Francis's death would deeply imprint the family.

After this tragedy, Richard became especially close to his Uncle Guy and his cousins Mary and Michael. Then a miracle: three years later his mother had another son: Patrick was born. And Richard flourished at Eton: clever, creative and in the top tennis team! He won a place at Mansfield College Oxford and gained a Diploma in Social Studies with distinction. It was during his years at Oxford that he began to look at life through a very different lens. On leaving Oxford he went to work at Coventry Cathedral, focusing on urban problems. It was there that he developed his interest in town planning and in theology. This led to two years as an Education Welfare Officer in Lambeth, and then a stint with the Town and Country Planning Association from where he set up and got funding for the urban studies centre in Canterbury. After his ordination in 1975 he joined St Luke's Parish in Greenwich where he founded the Shelter Group. But his greatest success came during his 15 years at St Marylebone. Here he led the team and raised the funds to convert the crypt into a new Healing and Counselling Centre. This was a pioneering endeavour. It united an NHS surgery

with a voluntary sector counselling service, combining for the first time spiritual, physical and mental healing. He even managed to raise funds for a new organ at St Marylebone, bringing together his interests in healing, urban issues and music!

It would be impossible to number the thousands of people who benefitted from Richard's creative ministry, breaking down barriers and daring to push the church into the real world. At the same time, he found time to tend to the smaller flock of his own 'family.' He buried both of my parents. He married Carla and me - and much enjoyed being musical director of our wedding as well as Priest in Charge. And he christened our son Sam. He presided over all these occasions with wit and warmth, adding his thoughtful sermons and his belief that God was present.

Richard may have been a man of the cloth, but he lacked any self-mortifying asceticism. Although not one of nature's Conservatives, he came up to Lincoln to help me canvas during the 1987 General Election. He loved talking to anyone who would open their door and advised them that he was as bemused as they that the Government was privatising the water industry. But I have no doubt that his charm and empathy won over many doubting voters. Yet Richard being Richard, also booked dinner for the three of us in the only restaurant in Lincoln that featured in the Good Food Guide. I was very nervous about being seen in Lincoln's most expensive restaurant, my constituency being as marginal as Martin McLaren's in Bristol. But Richard and Carla—also not one of Nature's Conservatives—scoffed at my squeamishness. The best I could do was to sit with my back to the rest of the diners hoping they would not see me; but of course, it was an exuberant and delicious dinner, and livened up the rigours of the campaign.

Although Richard always brought his best self to every occasion, his life knew sorrow. As William Blake, the poet, put it: "Joy and woe are woven fine. A clothing for the soul Divine." His beloved father Martin died when Richard was only 33 and did not live to see all that his son would create. Richard became the stalwart support to his mother Nancy for the rest of her long and remarkable life, support that was called for even more when, in 1990, her youngest son - and Richard's 'little brother' Patrick - died suddenly.

Over the years those of us who loved Richard and benefitted from his kindness, generosity, sense of fun and spiritual understanding, wished that he had one more thing in life: a true companion. Well, all I can say is that Diana was worth the modest wait. I'm quite sure that everyone here today will feel joy that Richard met Diana in 2000. I love the story of that meeting. They agreed to meet at Richard's flat to see if they could work together in their various current ventures: Diana wanted help with an art initiative in Lambeth Palace and Richard needed help with a project for education in Coventry Cathedral. It won't surprise you to know that Richard turned up half-an hour late, just as Diana had given up and was leaving. Luckily, she was still there and they found that they had a lot to talk about and many shared interests. They built on these joint enthusiasms over, as Diana described them, the next twenty eccentrically vibrant years. And Richard whole-heartedly embraced Diana's family, especially Diana's son Hugh, his wife Anne and grandchildren Kasper and Annika.

They moved into their home at Stoneleigh Abbey in 2006, where they created a sanctuary that reflected their love of beautiful places and objects. With the help of Christopher, who began life in England as one of Nancy's horticultural scholars, they also developed a beautiful garden.



Philanthropy had brought them together and they continued to develop their mutual interests, particularly in Richard's case with ACE and art in sacred space. Later they took over the Martin McLaren Memorial Trust, the exchange of horticultural students between the United States and the United Kingdom which Nancy turned into a lasting institution in the horticultural world.

Richard's energy and determination somehow survived the illnesses that challenged him physically over the years. One example...recently he decided to tackle a problem over his grandfather's grave. In 1914 Francis McLaren was the youngest Member of Parliament, the 'Baby of the House', when he joined the Royal Flying Corps. His plane crashed on the last day of his training in 1917. His grave was designed by Lutyens, but it had become almost a ruin. With tact and tenacity - and predictably, generosity - Richard negotiated with the interminable authorities and experts and had the memorial removed to the Montrose Air Museum. A triumph.

We are here because we knew and loved Richard. We are here because he enriched our lives. We are here because we are lucky to have had him guide us through so many of the events of our lives. Today I'd like to think we are still being guided by Richard. He knew sorrow but brought love and fun. He loved pleasure, luxury even, and beauty but was dedicated to 'One Equal Music.' He was unique and brave, he adored his friends and family, and I think I can honestly say that he was adorable.

For all of us gathered here to say goodbye, 'Joy and Woe' are indeed woven fine. 'Woe' because we are saying farewell. And 'Joy', for a life which was such a good part of our lives. We will be forever grateful.