

Eulogy given by Jonathan Leigh during the Old Blundellian Day 2019 Chapel Service and Commemoration Service for Paddy Armstrong

Paddy Armstrong, 1945 to 2018

1. At home, there are two photographs of the senior school dated 1995 and 2004 respectively. In the middle is a smiling Paddy as ever in red socks, clearly at ease in his own skin. Please hold the image along with the changed nature of Blundell's – 360 pupils in '95; 560 in 2004. Initially as then Chairman of the Governors Frank Grenier can vouch, it was most alarming in unsteady waters and then, an ever increasing delight, as we became confident. Whatever schemes we tried to make work, Paddy, in a host of different roles was always there – imaginative, driven, supportive and fun – this word keeps on coming. His mission was to find solutions not look for problems.
2. What were his particular skills? He made anyone feel at the centre of his universe, whether you were nine or ninety, chief executive or the least known person in the room. Paddy could make you believe that you could achieve the goals set, either small or large; a most rare attribute. My 90-year-old mother in law was taught, with great swagger how to handle a Humax machine; so much so that she exulted in NOT passing on this pricelessly gleaned information to the rest of our family ... but it was Paddy who taught her patiently and efficiently. He was both technically adaptable and adept. He exuded energy and love of life – one never had dull moments when he was around – his combustion engine was ceaseless, giving out to others all the time.
3. Let's drill into the years of those two photos a little more. Pre '92 he had already been Housemaster of Milestones and Francis House, as well as Director of Sport but John Rees passed him over as the "genius" (his word) who would make a triumvirate of management work, which included Derrick Denner and Douglas Rice. Paddy was Director of Studies. Jolly effective they were as a trio, plus Nick Swarbrick as a rock-like Second Master, encouraging and positive to a new Head Master. Meetings were flat managed but crisp, effective and fun ... a relaxed productive pleasure, even when it was not plain sailing. Somehow, in changing times the group showed that, not only all could all be well but it jolly well would be ... and so it was – in time.
4. Full co-ed came, flexi-boarding arrived; Paddy and I along with David Fursdon, liked to think that we, at Blundell's, invented this concept on a cold November evening in the Library at Fursdon House; Paddy was there for reform and much more besides.
5. In '96 Paddy became Finance Director. Combined with the might of the late Robert Breare as Chairman of Finance, and given huge support by David Fursdon initially as Vice-Chairman, then Chairman, Blundell's leapt forward. The roll of numbers and the academic results accelerated and Sport and extra-curricular did not miss out either ... naturally much of that was down to multiple others, many of whom are with us today.
6. Now, in 1999, came the big moment of buying St Aubyn's and bringing it to Blundell's, transferring it to Milestones. Here we were joined by John Smith, builder, another pretty

permanent fixture who was key to this developmental time. Paddy always found a way to use him again and again.

7. The St Aubyn's deal was sealed in a series of quite tense meetings at the offices of Veale Wasborough in Bristol. Paddy got hold of the concept and drove it through – not without some alarms – Mike Bull member of the GB and also CEO of the mid Devon Council must have got used to looking the other way as he drove past a new building rising fast from the ground whilst planning permission took a month of Sundays to be agreed. It HAD to open on time with St Aubyn's actually closing and nearly 400 pupils about to transfer ... happily it did (just), and we celebrated with a cricket match the evening the builders handed over, between them and colleagues (Smith builder versus Smith Groundsman) with Paddy at the centre of proceedings ... a moment for true thankfulness and rejoicing.
8. In the next three years before handing on the bursary and reverting full time to the Development and OB work which he seemed to do by osmosis, the modern languages block, the Colin Beale Centre and the new Westlake were all brought along ... most things fell into place, though perhaps not quite all. Few if any finance Directors have had the gift of the gab to succeed in moving the Sanatorium 5 times in seven years ... Paddy did.
9. The last pupil I had in common with Paddy was a girl at Marlborough, Tahira Chawla, daughter of Vishal who was in Paddy's Francis house. It is too easy to forget Paddy's totally natural and understanding relationship with adolescents of every kind. He was an assiduous guardian to Tahira, just as he was to multiple others ... when I inquired of her how she got on with Paddy she just said... "Oh Paddy; he's cool!" That he was, but in the warmest possible sense of the word. He had a light touch ... he was a one off yes ... not a typical schoolmaster but not a typical anything ... just Paddy – Sportsman/scientist/traveller anywhere, everywhere, any time – traditional and progressive ... optimist in a world which is all too glum ... laid back but not – highly organised (far more than he would like you to believe!). The Einstein quotation on his plaque says it all.
10. Sue Rumble wrote to me: "Paddy was the life and soul of a Blundell's Christmas party the day before he died." That was the way he would have wanted it ... though of course he was snatched away from family and friends far too soon ... evergreen or so it still feels six months on; surely he is just about to join us for some more fun.