

Memories of Mark

Most lawyers seem to write or at least contribute to dull textbooks. I am no exception. Next month OUP will publish the fourth edition of my 500 page tome about construction adjudication. Recommended for insomniacs everywhere. I began work on it only a few days after Helen told me about Mark's death. It is therefore dedicated to his memory, something which would, I think, have surprised and possibly horrified him: it is that boring. It is also dedicated to the little-known 13th century crusader, Sir Herbert of Crewe. More of him later.

I first laid eyes on Mark in September 1971. It was a curious introduction. When I arrived for my first day at boarding school, I found on my bed a copy of the school magazine. We new boys sat there, flicking through this incomprehensible new world trying to work out the hidden code. One photograph was particularly puzzling. It featured two boys: one with fair hair and a subversive look in his eye; the other, with a pudding bowl haircut, looking like an adult that had been shrunk down to teenage boy size. Underneath was the baffling caption: **The Long Sutton Brass Rubbing Society**. Little did I know that these two curious-looking individuals would become lifelong friends. The boy with the wild eyes was Julian Sands, the actor. The scaled-down adult was Mark.

If you had been told then that one of those two would go on to make a handsome living as an actor, you would have put your money on that being Mark. He was, and I think always remained, a consummate performer. Even as he scaled the heights here in Oxford, there was always a twinkle in his eye which suggested to me that, at least at times, he was playing the part of the benign and mildly eccentric academic. I try to do the same: who shall I be today? Twinkly judge? Aloof judge? Enthusiastic judge? Of course, the plan always goes out of the window and I invariably end up playing the role of grumpy judge.

Three of Mark's performances will always remain with me. In **The Enemy of the People**, he played Dr Stockmann and he and my friend Greg would stand there going through those long

interminable speeches, waving their arms about to alleviate the boredom: ours and theirs. The proceedings were enlivened by the fact that neither of them were word perfect, so they would suddenly lurch into Act 3 in the middle of Act 1, before one or other of them jumped back to roughly the right place a few pages later. Ibsen is pretty hard-going; so nobody ever noticed the difference.

2 years later, in **Oh, What A Lovely War**, Mark was spellbindingly good as the floundering Field Marshall Sir John French. In one of the best scenes in the play, despite his inability to speak the language, he is trying to explain to his French counterpart the details of his plan of attack. “We will attack the Germans here!” boomed Mark “at the clump of trees. Le clump de trees!”.

And then there was Mark’s opening monologue at a review at the Playhouse here in Oxford in 1979, which we were both in, and which boasted the title “**Where are you Batman, now that we need you?**”. Mark was up first and he pretended to “audition” the audience to make sure that they could cough, fidget, and rattle their crisp packets in a way befitting an Oxford audience. It took real charisma to carry that off. Of course, he was the best thing in it.

By the time I left school in 1976, Mark had become one of my closest friends. I saw him on a number of occasions, often in Oxford, during his first year as an undergraduate here. But I was still pleasantly surprised when at the end of that year he suggested that I might like to accompany him hitchhiking around Europe. It was the first of three enormously enjoyable holidays that we had together, whose stories now, sadly, only I can tell.

Our friends were sceptical of our chances of success on that first holiday. **Many were of the view that we would end up spending 3 weeks in the suburbs of Calais.** But how wrong they were. We hitched all the way down through France and Italy, as far south as Naples, and then back up through Germany. There are so many memories of that first trip: the hotel in Paris when, at breakfast, we were surprised to discover that all of our fellow guests were young women in their 20s. It was only at the end of the meal that Mark whispered to me that it was plainly a brothel. Mark chatting up lorry drivers in lorry parks on the motorways and then

persuading them to take us hundreds of miles hither and yon (as he would say). We got one lift on our way out from Mâcon in France to Florence; on the way back we went in one jump from Passau to Zeebrugge. The holiday was my first exposure to Italy and Mark was, as you can imagine, the perfect guide.

Emboldened by our success, the following summer we went to Istanbul on the train. That is the real Orient Express. With a day stopover in Belgrade to buy a Bulgarian transit visa – they did things properly in those days – we spent 10 days tramping the length and breadth of Istanbul. Mark was enraptured by all of it although I noticed that, although he raved about the obvious sites, he was often more interested in the rather scruffier piles of undistinguished brickwork which he tracked down in the Old City. This was my first realisation that his beloved Byzantines often produced some pretty rubbishy construction work.

After 10 days in Istanbul we went out into Asia Minor and ended up at Nicea, Troy and then Gallipoli, with Mark explaining everything as we walked. I spent my time marvelling at **all the stuff he knew**: how had he absorbed so much information? Osmosis?

On our way home, high up in the Balkans, after passing through Plovdiv (which Mark called the armpit of Europe) he began to complain that somebody was putting ground glass into his stomach. Once he was back at Oxford, it became clear that he had contracted hepatitis from the endless glasses of tea that he insisted on drinking with the locals. It was a rare example where my preference for beer worked in my favour.

Three years later, in 1982, just before I started as a pupil barrister and before Mark was offered his fellowship at Oriel, we did it a final time. This time, Mark was already out in Asia Minor, and I joined him. It was quite an adventure, undertaking that journey on my own in the days before mobile phones: Coffee smuggling into the old Yugoslavia; The blowing up of the locomotive in Macedonia and my subsequent arrival in Istanbul just the 23 hours late. At the end of it the most there would be was a message in the Post Office in Seljuk telling me where he was likely to be on any given date. It was an uncertain undertaking; I don't think I would have risked it for anyone but Mark.

That trip was notable because Mark went to various obscure places in the Menderes valley where he believed he would find the remains of castles that were so far undocumented. On at least two occasions he did just that. He would rootle about in the fields and on the slopes, whilst I was deputed to take the locals off to the tea shop and while away their day, so as to keep them away from what he was doing. **This presented something of a challenge, since the only Turkish I knew was “çhok güzel” which means very good or very beautiful.** However, I was able to converse with them for hours about football (for some reason they knew a lot about the Arsenal team of the early 70s: chok guzel), and the women in the TV show Dallas (about whom the men were obsessed: chok guzel). When I wasn't doing that, I was in a number of Mark's photographs of undistinguished bits of stonework, but for scale purposes only.

Whilst we were away, we sent our old Latin Master postcards in the style of Pliny the Younger (who as you will all know, was the sycophantic Roman Governor of that region). Mark used to start his postcards as if he was writing to the Emperor “Dear Twajan, I just wanted you to know everything is going wonderfully here, thanks to your benign and enlightened rule...”.

In addition, Mark invented an ineffectual medieval crusader who, no matter where he was and what he was doing, always stopped at 4 'o' clock in the afternoon for tea. He had a scruffy and inept manservant. I – obviously - was the manservant: Mark was the crusader whom he called...Sir Herbert of Crewe.

I miss them both very much.