

MFG

Golders Green Crematorium – 19.8.2015

1. That song *Die Nebensonnen* – “The mock suns” – from Schubert’s *Winterreise* – seems an apt opening to what I have to say about Michael. He had an expression – “All dawns are false” – which he would roll out from time to time at some minor set back but in fact his life was a long one, just a few months short of his 94th birthday, and filled with rich experiences.
2. I first met Michael 40 years ago in 1975 when I started my second six months’ pupillage in the set of chambers then headed by Leonard Caplan QC at 2 Harcourt Buildings in the Temple. Michael was not my pupil master but, after I had begun my tenancy in Chancery Chambers in Lincoln’s Inn, we struck up a close friendship which continued until the very end of his life. I had come back to Harcourt Buildings one evening for some reason I cannot now remember, and he invited me to dinner. He took me to the Grange restaurant in Covent Garden, which has not existed for many years, but which, to my relatively youthful eyes, was quite a swanky place. There he was greeted as a well-known patron under the name “Mr Bell”. I must confess that this clandestine approach to identity was slightly

disconcerting but, from his perspective, the adoption of the name “Bell” was a convenient, simple and logical solution to booking a restaurant with a difficult name. Looking back on that evening, I can see, at the very beginning of our friendship, some of Michael’s essential characteristics: great charm when he wanted, a certain impetuosity, an inclination to high living and considerable style, and an intermittent eccentricity in abandoning normal conventions.

3. But there was always much more to Michael than that. He was one of the most cultured and widely read people I have ever encountered, extraordinarily knowledgeable about history from ancient times to modern, a lover of the arts in all its forms (except for post- impressionist art or modern classical music), fluent in French, German and Italian, widely travelled, a proud Englishman who loved this country’s great institutions.
4. His character was inevitably moulded to a considerable extent by his background. He was an only child, which always gave him a great sense of independence and self-reliance. His father’s family was Jewish but his father’s parents cut off relations when he married Michael’s mother, a non-Jew. Michael himself was brought up in the Anglican tradition but he never professed any great personal faith. Characteristically, he loved the beauty of church architecture and of the liturgy as literature.

5. Among the earliest photographs of him as a toddler he is to be seen with a little dog. He always loved dogs and he had a string of Irish Kerry blue terriers. After we became friends, I celebrated with Michael every year, the birthday of his favourite, Winkle, who lived to be over 100 dog years.
6. Michael's mother had a formative influence on him, and it was she who, before WWII took him, when he was still a teenager, to Germany in a prop plane from Croydon airport. His love of Germany and his desire to speak German started from that time.
7. Michael went to Gresham's School where he was a prefect and head of his house. He was very proud of his acting experience there, especially his performance in Auden's *The Ascent of F2*. From there he went to Oriel College, Oxford, where he took a war time degree. He was a member of the Officers Training Corps, and, on leaving university, was recruited to the Sherwood Foresters. He served in North Africa and Italy during the war. At its end, with the benefit of his knowledge of German, and as a captain, he was put in charge of thousands of German prisoners of war at Caserta in south Italy. So began his lifelong love of Italy. It says much about Michael's civilized approach that he became quite friendly with a number of the German prisoners of war. Some of them kept in touch with him after the war, and at least one came to visit his family home in Mansfield.

8. After returning to Oxford for a short time to further his studies in law, Michael took up a criminal pupillage with Christmas (or, to his friends, Toby) Humphreys, one of the leading criminal juniors at the Bar and later a judge at the Old Bailey and a celebrated Buddhist. Michael eventually entered the chambers of Leonard Caplan at 2 Harcourt Buildings, where we were later to meet. That was a mixed common law set, undertaking a wide range of criminal and civil work. By the time I was a pupil there in early 1975 it was still a relatively small set but it had a good reputation, with 4 well-regarded QCs, of whom 2 were specialists in civil law and 2 in crime. Michael was essentially a civil practitioner and an able one. John Critchley, who was in chambers with Michael for many years, will say more about Michael's chambers life in a separate tribute.

9. Michael's abilities and achievements outside his professional life were considerable and in some respects outstanding, enabling him in due course to make his mark on a wider stage. He loved the theatre, opera, orchestral works and was extraordinarily widely read. I remember the occasion when he was nearly 90 and we were in the offices of Camden's social services trying to arrange wardened accommodation for him and he struck up a conversation about Cicero, interspersed with latin quotes, with a rather

startled but highly impressed young council employee, a graduate in classics.

10. Every year for some 30 years we travelled to places all over in Italy, and to Germany, Russia, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Sweden and France. One of our last trips, when he had become very physically disabled, was a cruise from Istanbul to Venice, passing along the Bosphorus, across the Aegean, through the Corinth Canal and up the Adriatic. One of the enduring memories of him on that trip was his insistence on climbing Mount Olympus, determined to experience and enjoy every minute of the visit. He was the most engaging and delightful of travelling companions, always interested and interesting, trying dry martinis across the world, including Harry's Bar in Venice, enjoying good food and discussing the day's adventure.

11. Every year from his 80th birthday until he became too physically and mentally frail, we celebrated his birthday in the Plaza Athenee in the Rue Montaigne in Paris. The fact that it had been Marlene Dietrich's favourite haunt in Paris made it both adequate and essential for dear Michael, regardless of expense.

12. By the time I met Michael, he had already established two impressive personal collections: a collection of 18th Ludwigsburg porcelain figures and

a collection of English silver, mostly 18th century. The silver collection had by then all but disappeared due to an unsuccessful business venture in Holland which he had guaranteed. But his love of antique silver and his great knowledge of it continued. When, in due course, what had started as a small family trust of shares in a private factory set up by his former next door neighbour in Mansfield, the Whiteley Trust, became one of substance when Vickers bought the company for a significant sum, Michael was able with his fellow trustees and with the agreement and co-operation of the Whiteley family to benefit great British charities and institutions. There are too many to mention them all now. In addition to the National Trust, which is represented here today, two that were especially dear to him were the Victoria and Albert museum and the Ashmolean in Oxford. With his guidance and encouragement the Whiteley family have been important benefactors of both and were critical financial contributors to the refurbished silver galleries in the V&A, including the sacred silver gallery. In that way, Michael, the Whiteley trust and the Whiteley family have played a part in the cultural landscape of the nation – an enduring and worthy tribute to Michael's life. He was justly immensely proud when both the V&A and the Ashmolean honoured him.

13. Michael only ever made one positive wish concerning his death – that his ashes should be scattered off Capri ; so typical of Michael – a beautiful thought, the grandest of gestures but wholly unbudgeted. I will miss you greatly, my dear friend and mentor. *“Auf wiedersehñ”*

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