



# **Professor Derek Keene**

## **A Farewell Ceremony**

27<sup>th</sup> December, 1942 – 19<sup>th</sup> April, 2021

Wednesday, May 5th, 2021

1pm, Honor Oak Crematorium.

Celebrant: Jo Beddington

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Funeral Directors:

Clare Harriott, Poetic

Endings

***'Vespers of 1610: Ave Maris Stella', Claudio Monteverdi***  
*performed by The Sixteen.*

Welcome to all of you – those who are here, and those watching from afar, who are no less a part of what we say and do today.

My name is Jo Beddington, and I have been asked to lead this non-religious ceremony by Derek's family. Everyone is welcome, and there will be a time set aside for personal reflection or private prayer.

We are here to say goodbye to a remarkable man – Professor Derek Keene, whose recent death has deeply saddened those who knew and loved him.

Today's ceremony will be short and simple because the times demand it to be, but the love and respect at its heart remain unaltered and it will be filled with the words of the family he loved and with those of the people he worked with. It will be rooted in a celebration of a man who had a deep intellectual curiosity and a fascination with the world around him.

We come together to share memories of Derek in the presence of others who have known and cared for him, and to recognise that, although no longer a visible part of your world, that Derek will remain a member of your family and a fondly remembered friend or colleague through the influence he has had upon you and the very special part he played in the story of your lives.

We mark a great loss, but also to celebrate Derek. All that he was. All that he achieved.  
All that he enjoyed and all that he shall continue to mean to you.

We say farewell to his body but not his essence.

I hope that, in the course of today, you will find moments of personal memory to treasure and the chance to see how Derek gave shape, meaning and value to his own life, a life that began in December 1942, when Derek was born into war-time Britain, the only child of Harry and Anne Keene.

His parents hailed from the north, but brought their son up, first in Holloway, then, from the age of 7, in the brand-new suburb of Northolt, which Derek saw as his childhood home.

His family tell me that he was especially close to his father, a keen local historian who took his young son along to help at the excavation of a

moated, medieval manor and awakened Derek's early fascination with history.

Derek excelled at grammar school, so much so that he was once accused of plagiarising an essay – something that still annoyed him many years later. He also loved woodwork, and the school workshop in particular, which planted the woodcraft seed from which his friends and family would benefit throughout his whole life.

To his parents' immense pride, he gained a place at Oriel College, Oxford. There he was part of the privileged cohort who received a transforming education through the grammar school experience. Derek would want us to point out that, while Oxford was important in shaping careers, it was the state that made it all possible...

He went on to study for his DPhil. on the early history of Winchester. He joined the archaeological excavations and the following publication-project there, and completed his DPhil.

Suzanne was the archaeological conservator for the Winchester excavations. She found herself gravitating towards the tall, dark historian who was the proud possessor of a decrepit Austin A40 van, an equal to her aged Fiat 600. After several vehicle breakdowns and three seasons of excavations, Suzanne and Derek were a couple and then married when she graduated from the Institute of Archaeology in 1969.

Frances was born in 1971 and Thomas in 1974. And while both Suzanne and Derek excelled in their fields and working lives, they also worked hard to maintain their home life at Long Park, the house they bought together in a hamlet 5 miles from Winchester. Surrounded by fields and woods, with a large garden, the children grew up in the freedom of the countryside.

Family holidays frequently revolved around the 'Blue Guide' which directed them to historical sites, in particular, churches - where once, the whole family got locked inside a church in Toulouse when the clergy went out to lunch.

Derek, ever practical, acquired an excavation shed from the Winchester dig that was transported on the back of a lorry to the back garden, complete with archaeologist's graffiti, and which became his workshop. There he made all manner of things such as the children's beds, swords for the pirate outfits they wore to the Lord Mayor of London's tea party and a sofa made from an old greenhouse.

Derek and Suzanne created an extensive vegetable garden, with a large bed of asparagus that the family loved to eat, and spinach and beetroot that some were less keen on at the time.

After 5 years of commuting between Winchester and London Derek and Suzanne moved the family to their new home in Erlanger Road. The big house became their new sanctuary, a hub where the children's friends (and theirs), were always welcome.

Derek developed his joinery skills in the cellar whilst also turning his hand to most other DIY tasks from bricklaying to plumbing, (which was definitely not his forte).

As an urban historian, Derek saw the urban fabric of early medieval Winchester on a much larger scale in London. He succeeded in obtaining funding for his Cheapside project, and a small team was generously hosted in the Museum of London. He collaboratively established the Centre for Metropolitan History at the Institute for Historical Research, where he took an entrepreneurial approach to raising funds throughout many challenging periods.

In 2008 he became the Leverhulme Professor in Comparative Metropolitan History and later Director of the Institute.

The St Paul's Fabric Advisory Committee played a special part in his life. His work with

St Paul's was, amongst his many achievements, a source of great pride to him.

He was lead editor of the seminal book on the history of St Paul's Cathedral, an enduring record of the Cathedral's history through time.

Outside of work, outings were a big part of family life, with visits to a huge range of art and museum exhibitions, and also to the Kent countryside, often incentivised by cake. These expeditions were a chance for everyone to share wide interests and knowledge with Derek, ranging from curatorial art history to historic landholdings and trade, the shortcomings of rubbish disposal in the countryside, or the simple enjoyment of the outdoors - as reflected in his traditional Dorset hedge laying, scything and woodland management of the family field in Dorset.

Derek often cooked family meals, having learnt to cook from Suzanne. She pointed him in the direction of classical Indian cookery which everyone enjoyed and of which he was very proud. He had challenging tastes in food including tripe, pigs' trotters, and brains, which the family were less certain about! He set a marvellous example to the children, demonstrating that even in the 1970s men could cook - indeed, aged 7, Tom once said he would only be able to marry if he learned how to cook.

In 2001, Derek and Suzanne both retired. Derek continued to work on historical research and to collaborate with colleagues when he wasn't

busy in the cellar with the professional woodturning lathe he'd bought on retirement.

He enjoyed the freedom to go on his many long walks especially over mountains and moorland. And he was immeasurably happy with the arrival of his grandchildren, Ruan, Bryn, Eiros and Eryn who he loved dearly.

In 2017, this brilliant man was diagnosed with Alzheimers and his family rallied to ensure his final years were as comfortable and fulfilling as they could be. During this time, they have fond and lasting memories of a family outing to Hampton Court Palace which Derek had last visited as a child.

His Alzheimer's meant that his family had time to say goodbye to Derek, and he to them.

Always interesting, always interested...Professor Derek Keene died on the 17<sup>th</sup> April, and he is greatly missed by his family and by the wide academic community of which he was part.

## **MEMORIES:**

### **SUZANNE:**

This is such a sad occasion. But these are some of the many things I really want to remember about Derek...

His adventurous nature made Derek very special for me. As an undergraduate he joined expeditions - notably to Chad, travelling through Libya. During the trip he caught amoebic dysentery and had to be hospitalised. He never forgot this experience and frequently told us how superior Libyan hospitals were to British ones. His recent spell in hospital did nothing to change his opinion. (Actually, it did pretty well).

Holidays were a chance for an adventure. Not for us the package tour! In my little Fiat 600 we drove all the way to Jugoslavia (as it was then) in 1969, on a mission to find an example of a fulling mill (ask me afterwards!). And we found one! Perched over a mountain torrent, shuddering with the force of the water and the blows of the machinery. We visited a remote monastery down alarmingly steep gravel tracks - Derek and the priest conversed in Latin, which was useful. We loved it that we could travel round freely in that peaceful and friendly country, as

it was then, although the ferocious thunderstorms certainly were a challenge for camping.

We loved to travel. We toured round Arizona and New Mexico in an enormous American RV - complete with bathroom and kitchen. Driving it held no fears for Derek after his experiences with trucks in the desert. When I attended a conference in Australia it was his idea to hire a 4WD camper van and head off into the outback. We saw abandoned gold mines, fairy wrens and sulphur crested cockatoos, kangaroos and wallabies. We met friendly people who told us stories about the history of those remote places.

Then there was the time we made a fascinating visit to Montana, just to see what it was like. Not many people holiday in Montana!

Even deciding to buy our house down the road was a bit of a risk. It had dry rot, and several ceilings had to be replaced. And that was just the start of it.

Derek loved music and today we're hearing some of his favourite composers. Sadly we weren't able to include Moondog, Steve Reich and Mussorgsky, just some of the other music he loved.

I am so sad to have lost Derek, although he could be infuriating (unlike me, of course). He was so creative and inventive, not only in research. Until recently he could solve so many of life's practical problems. He was always up for doing something different, and we had endless interesting things to talk about, one of the highest tributes one could pay anyone. I miss him.

## **FRANCES:**

### **Lessons from Dad.**

Love walking - although it took a childhood for me to agree with you.

Always visit the church when you go somewhere new.

Be curious. Don't take things at face value. Dig beneath, evaluate, think critically. And if in doubt and it's to do with administration - they are usually useless and have got it wrong.

Take the long view, look at where we've come from to understand where we might be going.

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Learn to cook. Eat well. And keep trying new things - like the time you encouraged me eat Oysters aged 9 - even if it means spitting them out.

Eat together as a family, often, with 'lively' conversation - even if that results in your teenage daughter tipping a bowl of spaghetti on your head, out of sheer frustration that you appear to know everything.

Map reading is a vital skill.

Do the things that interest you, you don't need to be conventional or follow the pack.

Understand you have agency - don't wait for other people to give you permission.

Persistence is key - if it matters to you, don't give up easily.

You can put up with a lot more than you think, especially when it comes to personal comfort. But it's good to have the right equipment, and the best you can afford.

Good design really matters.

Read. A lot. And widely.

Travel in the world, independently, and if you get stuck, know that people are kind and will help you.

Embrace cities and all that they have to offer but understand true solace can be found in the wild and the remote.

Make bridges. Between people, places, ideas, time - you'll get there quicker and people will remember you for it (ref St Swithen's Bridge).

## **THOMAS:**

### **Walking and Holding Things.**

For three nights, we slept in a one-man tent while walking in the north of Scotland, through the Noydart peninsular, which is Britain's last true wilderness. Dad had assured me the tent would be big enough for two - it wasn't. On the first night, we pitched the tent on a high mountain ridge in the snow and clouds. I slept on top of my rucksack because, in the dark, we'd pitched my end of the tent over a large hole. We woke to incredible views that dissipated any grievances I had about my poor night's sleep - caused by his feet bashing against my head, and the wind flapping the tent against my face.

Rain was definitely a big feature of our walks. We would stride through the rain for hours at a time, our thoughts contained within our rain-hoods - occasionally stopping to read the map, get our bearings, or eat a cold tin of sardines with cold pitta bread for lunch.

In the sunshine, we had slow and meandering conversations about the landscape and the ways it had been worked and lived in. About making things and discussing how anything from different types wood, our camping equipment, or cities fit together. On one Scottish mountainside, we both fell asleep in the sun after lunch. Years later, Dad often remarked that it was the best sleep he ever had. I distinctly remember having to gently wake him, and how special those moments were.

Always holding things. I helped Dad fell some trees in Dorset, and had to hold the ropes to guide them to the ground - but was certainly not allowed to use the chainsaw. Holding and waiting to pass him screws as he built shelves in my bedroom at Erlanger Road. Holding bits of wood and tools when he built the new shed in Long park Winchester. I loved learning how to make things from him as he did from his dad - though I will try to make sure that Eryn and Eiros, wait less, and use the tools a bit more than I did!

I will now read this note that Dad wrote about a box he made for me - which is one of my most treasured possessions.

#### Description of box

*I made this box from a small broken branch of Cyprus wood that I picked up in the 'white mountains of Southwest Crete in 2001. It was in a valley called Achlada just below and to the southwest of the mountain called Strifomadi. The actual place was in the ravine below some ruined huts once used by shepherds. Much further down the valley is the village or little town of Konstoyerako, scene of some fierce fighting in WWII. The wood is twisted, has many splits and was quite difficult to work. For the lid, I kept to the shape of the branch. The finish is beeswax.*

#### **VANESSA HARDING:**

I am honoured and moved to have this opportunity to speak about Derek, whom I knew for more than 40 years, since his first London project, the Social and Economic Study of Medieval London: the first of a succession of groundbreakingly innovative and successful research projects, on which he built the Centre for Metropolitan History at the Institute of Historical Research. Derek was particularly good at thinking about how large and seemingly intractable questions could be addressed using an



unconventional approach, and at putting this into practice in the projects he led; the Centre also attracted associate researchers and projects of high calibre, making it a centre of historical excellence.

Derek himself was a scholar of exceptional range and grasp. He bridged the disciplines of documentary history and practical archaeology, speaking the language of both, though his later career was more focused on history than archaeology; he extended his range from his first enthusiasm, medieval urban history, to consider aspects of 20th-century metropolises worldwide.

He retained a wealth of knowledge from his wide and eclectic reading, and this enabled him to make connections between topics and to recognise significant correlations or conjunctions. It is fitting that his final appointment was as Leverhulme Professor of Comparative Urban History at the Institute, since comparative history was his forte: the ability to draw insights from one topic or approach and apply them to another, to better understand and explore their relationship. I think what I most admired about him as an historian was his ability to look at a given fact or accepted interpretation – the ‘received wisdom’ we were all taking for granted – and perceive something different. He brought this penetration of thought and freshness of perspective to everything he tackled; he never rested on his laurels, or indeed at all.

If volume 2 of Winchester Studies, on medieval Winchester, was his personal magnum opus, his other publications in a diversity of forms and places reveal the breadth of his interests. Winchester, London, and the early history of towns and cities remained a consistent theme. His engagement with comparative history is embodied in his many contributions to edited collections on capital cities, town and countryside, lords and towns, urban markets; his commitment to urban history and the material past by, for example, his membership of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, the International Commission for the History of Towns, and the British Historic Towns Trust.

Since his death, tributes have circulated in various urban history networks. Friends and colleagues recall his energy, enthusiasm, engagement, generosity, and friendship; his willingness to discuss ideas and support new projects; the fact that he always had something new and valuable to contribute. We will miss that combination of eager enquiry, intellectual curiosity, immense learning, and above all that gleam in the eye as his interest was caught and kindled.

I would like to read part of a poem by Robert Burns, ‘Epitaph On My Own Friend’ ,which I believe captures our thoughts;

*The friend of man, the friend of truth;  
The friend of age, and guide of youth:*

*Few hearts like his, with virtue warm'd,  
Few heads with knowledge so inform'd:  
If there's another world, he lives in bliss;  
If there is none, he made the best of this.*

We are now going to pause and take a moment for you to be alone with your memories of Derek in the light of your own thoughts and beliefs.

**REFLECTION:**

***'Ave Maria', Josquin des Prez,  
performed by Bremen-Weser-Renaissance.***

In love and respect we have remembered the life of Derek Keene and recalled the person he has been. Now we come to the end of this ceremony. It is time to make a final farewell.

Here, in this last act, in sorrow, but without fear, in love and appreciation we commit Derek Keene's body to its natural end, secure in the knowledge that a life lived with love given and love received, is a life complete.

*To everything there is a season,  
And a time to every purpose on earth:  
A time to be born, a time to die  
(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)*

*I have desired to go  
Where springs not fail,  
To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail  
And a few lilies blow.*

*And I have asked to be  
Where no storms come,  
Where the green swell is in the havens dumb,  
And out of the swing of the sea.  
(Gerald Manley Hopkins)*

We gather memories to us as we go, we piece together the meaning of what we are from the special, cherished memories which we create with those we touch throughout the days of our existence. And when they are

finally over, we, in turn, become memories, treasured memories which remain and resonate down.

So it is that Derek lives on in your heart.

He will also live on through the continuation of his work and the influence he has had on the researchers that follow.

His legacy is assured.

I know that Suzanne, Frances and Thomas would like to thank everyone for joining us today, and look forward to a later date when Derek's life can be celebrated more fully.

As we leave today, we do so to the music of Ornette Coleman playing a piece of jazz that Derek loved, please enjoy it.

When you see Derek in your mind's eye, may his eyes be shining at excitement at a new project, or may he be crafting some wonderful wooden bowl.

And when you think of him, let a smile light up your face, because, in a very real sense, everything that truly remains of Derek, remains with you, leaves with you and goes with you.

***'Peace', written and performed by Ornette Coleman***