

20th November 2009

This wonderful tribute to Simon Bishop was written by Des Lambert Principal of Plumpton College, Ditchling, Near Lewes, Sussex and read at the funeral.

Simon Bishop was Head of Plumpton College Netherfield, Battle.

People often comment that one of the strengths of the College that Simon worked at is that, because of its culture and ethos, it has uniqueness in that the students and particularly the staff form a caring, supportive, and above all a very close family.

People comment on the *Plumpton family*.

Simon was right at the heart of this college family and he embodied everything that the college stands for and what it strives to achieve.

During the many years that he worked with us he was consistently the most supportive, hard-working, caring, loyal, helpful, reliable, visionary and inspirational member of staff and everybody admired and loved him.

You couldn't be in his company and fail to be cheered by his optimistic and positive outlook.

The College has received many condolences in the last two weeks and they all mention how much of a pleasure it was to be with Simon. Several use the words 'a great guy' or 'inspirational man' or 'he was always so positive and enthusiastic.'

As a College we will all take a long time to come to terms with our sudden loss.

Simon came to the college with his parents in 1970 when he was 12 when his father was appointed as college farm manager. His father was a good farmer and Simon learnt at the feet of a good master. I used to look at Simon sometimes and think how he was beginning to look like his father. Not too sure if he agreed with me.

When he left school in the mid 70s he worked on the college farm where I first knew him. He then went to Writtle College in Essex to study an HND in Agriculture. I remember asking him why Writtle and he said that he didn't want to be far from Sussex, friends and sport. He was a bit parochial at times and used to get worried about going into Kent. Following college though he then travelled the world for a bit, like you do at that age, and then joined us as a full-time member of teaching staff in 1983.

He was part of the team delivering courses to young people, students and farmers largely in the east of the county from Heathfield eastwards.

In those early days we had a base at the Heathfield Rural Studies Centre based at Heathfield Community College and as the work increased we developed an extra centre at the Pestalozzi Children's Village at Sedlescombe.

We had little security of tenure at these centres and some were pretty basic and as Simon rose to lead the teaching team in this area we were very keen to have a place that we could call our own and develop as we wanted to.

Simon was constantly looking for an opportunity to fulfill this wish and eventually in September 1988 we took on the tenancy of Crowhurst Farm at Mountfield part of the British Gypsum estate.

This farm hadn't been loved and was quite rundown but Simon was so enthusiastic about it and I remember going there with him and the Principal at that time to have a look at it before we took it on.

I remember saying to him *Simon we need a vision here*.

This didn't bother him. One of his great attributes was that he always had a vision for something, he just looked on problems as something to solve, he looked beyond the initial difficulties that would deter lesser men and he always had a plan of how something could develop.

He worked so hard to develop this farm and it was developing to become an excellent centre but unfortunately in 1992, for reasons outside our control, we had to leave.

This blow would have made a lesser person give up.

But not Simon.

He found Ivyland Farm and we moved there in 1992.

In the early days it was very basic but Simon had his vision of how it could develop and he worked tirelessly to get it to the successful centre that it is today.

Over the years he planned and developed horticultural facilities, classrooms and farm buildings, developments which included our novel 'zero carbon earth walled classroom' or *the mud hut* as he affectionately initially called it.

I remember talking to him about rammed earth walled buildings and saying to him 'do we know anything about this sort of construction' and he said *no idea - but we will work it out somehow* and he did.

He had this great *can-do* approach to life and an optimism that was always contagious.

More recently he was developing further College centres at Brightling and Flimwell.

He had a great sense of humour, always teasing in a nice way and joking.

He developed at Ivyland a place for all students, those with difficult learning needs, those with troubled backgrounds, employers and farmers and for those who used Ivyland as a stepping - stone for courses at the main college or elsewhere.

He had such a healthy agricultural disregard for bureaucracy and the finer points of financial auditing.

He liked the term *-get a real job*.

He had fairly fixed ideas I think what *real jobs* were.

As agriculture and education got more weighed down with paperwork, he said to me once, in a Simon sort of way, that in his view the length and number and verbosity of reports and plans that people did and asked for were inversely proportional to their value and that those asking for all this paperwork should *get a real job*

If he thought that something was important for his students then he would do it.

We used to speak on the phone most days and one day he said he was concerned that many students were coming to college without a breakfast and never had a hot meal in the evening and he was going to start a cafe /dining room facility at Ivyland using all the home grown produce grown and reared at the centre.

In his anti-bureaucracy way he thought he wouldn't involve Environmental Health too much, because they would hold things up, and we would use the cash from sales to keep the enterprise afloat. His plans were slightly thwarted initially in that many students paid with meal vouchers and we ended up with no cash and a pile of meal vouchers which we didn't know what to do with.

About eight or nine years ago Simon developed an increasing focus on the difficult plight of farming in this part of the world. It was at a time when small farms in particular were increasingly struggling.

To try to support the small farms in the area along with Common Cause and other partners and financed by leader + funding he developed the *Centre for Sustainable Food and Farming* based at Netherfield Place Farm adjacent to Ivyland.

This was an enormous accomplishment, achieved against a background initially of some scepticism and disbelief in its potential and value.

Simon had a vision though and he never gave up. It is a centre that encapsulated all of Simon's beliefs in terms of sustainable farming. It has gone from strength to strength and last year was recognised by the European Union as one of the flagship leader + projects in the UK. It was an accolade he thoroughly deserved and I know he was proud of it.

He was also proud of the award he received from the High Sheriff of Sussex for his work with disadvantaged youngsters.

Above all Simon was a caring person, he cared for his family, he cared for the community that he lived in - he was a governor of the village school for many years - he cared for the college, he cared for his students and he was so proud of their progress. When he was at the main college

he used to try to make a point of finding and talking to the students that had progressed from Ivyland to see how they were getting on.

He cared for his group of loyal staff based at Ivyland and other centres and he cared deeply for the acres of Sussex and their livestock that he was responsible for.

I think as you walk those Sussex acres in the future Simon will never be far away.

As a College we have suffered an enormous loss, we feel it deeply and our thoughts are so much with Tessa, Becky, James and Holly whose loss is obviously far greater.

I know it is perhaps a small consolation for you, but there are so many young people whose lives are the better for Simon's vision, care and hard work and there are a great number of people in the wider rural world whose lives Simon touched and enriched through his love of Sussex and its farming.

In the very difficult times that, as a family, you're going through, try and remember that, and as a College and a group of loving friends we will try to as well.

Simon Bishop died in a tragic accident on the 6th November 2009.



Plumpton College, Ditchling Road, Lewes, East Sussex

Telephone 01273 890454. Email enquiries@plumpton.ac.uk

Web site www.plumpton.ac.uk

Plumpton College at Netherfield, Ivyland Farm, Netherfield, Battle, East Sussex TN33 9QB

Telephone 01424 838873. Email angie.wilkins@plumpton.ac.uk

www.plumpton.ac.uk

Plumpton College at Netherfield, Centre for Sustainable Food and Farming,

Netherfield Place Farm, Netherfield, Battle East Sussex TN33 9PY

Telephone 01424 775615. Email info@thenetherfieldcentre.co.uk

Web site www.thenetherfieldcentre.co.uk

This tribute may not be reproduced in any form without prior consent of Des Lambert

Plumpton College – 12th January 2010