

In memoriam

Steuart James Mew (OC 1942 - 49)



Steuart Mew, who died on 27 February 2016 at the age of 83, was born in Purley, the younger of two children of George Mew and Gladys Parker. For the first 34 years of his life he lived in Caterham, following in his father's footsteps by attending the School as a day boy.

George Mew (OC 1912-1915), who was Caterham born and bred, was a Lloyd's broker. Steuart's mother came from Sutton Coldfield in Warwickshire.

Steuart described his academic career as "undistinguished". He had many tales to tell of life in Caterham during the war. He left school at the end of the Spring Term of 1949 before taking his Higher School Certificate exams, having concluded that a state scholarship for university entrance was unlikely to be achieved.

Steuart was a competent sportsman, favouring hockey and cricket and obtaining House colours in the former. He excelled at badminton, representing Surrey as a junior and, with his partner Rodney Southwell (OC 1944 - 1952), winning the All-England Junior Men's Doubles championship.

Steuart joined Hogg Robinson, a firm of Lloyd's brokers, as an office boy. After national service in the RAF from 1950-2, he went back to Hogg Robinson and found himself promoted to a claims broker, thereby starting a 40-year stretch working in the Underwriting Room at Lloyd's.

Life took a dramatic turn in 1953 when he contracted polio. A June 1976 Caterham School Magazine article about Steuart commented that the experience "might have left him a disappointed and embittered man". He was away from work for a year, most of it spent in hospital and rehabilitation, learning to walk again. The June 1976 article continued: 'From this he emerged with his spirit unbroken, characteristically describing himself as "luckily left with only paralysis of the right leg."' Needing a sitting down job, his boss at Hogg Robinson put him in touch with A.L. Sturge, a Lloyd's syndicate. For the rest of his Lloyd's career he was an underwriter, first with Sturge, and then, in 1976, with his own syndicate, S.J. Mew and Others (syndicate 342). He was a Lloyd's institution, affectionately known in the market as "Mr. Cat" He met Lavender (Terry) Armitage, a trainee nurse at University College Hospital, on a blind date at the Prospect of Whitby pub in Wapping in 1955. They married in 1958 and had three children, Graeme (OC 1968-1977), David (OC 1972-1977) and Sarah. There are also five grandchildren, Olivia (OC 2003-2005), Calum, Jade, Katryn and Kieran. The family moved from Caterham to Farnham, Terry's home town, in 1966.

Despite his disability, Steuart remained active in sports activities – as an administrator and a coach – with the Old Caterhamians RFC, the Surrey Badminton Association, Whiteoaks Cricket Club (of which he was the long-term President), the Bourne Club and, more recently,

the Farnham and District Sports Association for the Disabled. He took up golf in his forties, adapting his swing to accommodate his disability.

He was for many years a Foundation Member of Caterham School and served the OCA in a variety of capacities, including two terms as President in 1976-77 and 1984-85. He was totally dedicated to the School and the Association. Steuart and Terry were omnipresent at events at the School for decades.

Terry was a wonderful cook and host. There were many memorable dinners and parties at Medlar Cottage in Farnham, the family homestead for over thirty years. It also became a second home and sometimes a refuge for many of Graeme, David and Sarah's friends.

Much of Steuart's work involved North American business and he and Terry forged many lifelong friendships in the US and Canada. It was not entirely coincidental that, by separate routes, both David and Graeme have ended up living in Canada.

After taking an early retirement from the Lloyd's market when mobility became more challenging, Steuart and Terry continued to travel, regularly going to Canada to see David, Graeme and their Canadian families and taking annual holidays in Scotland and short breaks and pub lunches with "the Gang", a tight-knit group of friends from the Caterham area of sixty-plus years standing.

Steuart, always self-deprecating and modest, was a wise, loyal and reliable friend. Even as he slowed down, eventually becoming wheelchair-bound, he maintained his sense of humour. He possessed effortless charm and always had a twinkle in his eye.

Suddenly and quite unexpectedly, Terry died in September 2015. As well as being his wife for over 57 years, she had also become Steuart's carer as his mobility became more limited. Steuart was characteristically positive in his outlook despite this terrible loss, pronouncing himself determined to continue to live at home. And for a while, with the care and support of Sarah and Jade, that is what he did, enjoying his garden, outings and the regular stream of friends who dropped by for a chat. He attended some Rugby World Cup matches in October 2015, including the Final, and as recently as early January, he was still able to go over to Caterham and to enjoy meals out.

After the recurrence of an intestinal obstruction, Steuart was admitted to Frimley Park Hospital on 13th January. He then went on something of a medical rollercoaster ride over the weeks that followed, which he endured with his usual good humour. He was improving well enough to be moved to a rehabilitation ward on 24th February. Unfortunately a urinary infection then took hold of him two days later and that was apparently enough to set off a chain reaction so that, despite the best efforts of the medical staff, by the morning of the 27th it was clear that the end was approaching. Steuart agreed that it would be best to stop medication and oxygen support and it did not take long after that for nature to take its course. He did not suffer at the end and went out on his own terms.

Steuart is survived by his three children, his five grandchildren and his sister Margaret (who is married to J. J. Hilton (OC 1941-1947)).