

Edmund King QC

On Christmas Eve 2020, we lost Edmund King. He was 45.

It is difficult to accept that he is no longer with us. This is not least because he always made his presence felt. You knew if Edmund was in the room. He had a determined energy and he made you laugh. He was engaged and engaging right up to the end.

Edmund was undoubtedly one of the greatest lawyers of his generation. He achieved much in his short life. He went from the Dragon to Winchester, where he was a Scholar and Joint Head of School. From there, he went on to Balliol and took a prize-winning First in Jurisprudence. On the way, he obtained a Distinction in Mods in Philosophy and French and rowed in the first VIII. At Balliol one of his tutorial partners was Louise Hutton, whom he later married. He went from Balliol to Harvard as a Kennedy Scholar. He was called to the Bar in 1999 with the top scholarship from the Inner Temple. He was a star from the outset. He had a top-flight Commercial and Chancery practice with a heavy diet of oligarchs, oil and gas, hedge funds, tax, banking, shipping and bonds. He took silk in 2018 and continued his stellar practice. Had he not died of cancer, there was no judicial office which would have been closed to him. He would have made a considerable contribution to the law in the future as he had done in the past.

But all of the above tells you very little about Edmund. Indeed, it would be easy to be misled by the exceptional achievements on his CV. A large part of Edmund saw himself as an outsider. He put down his hard work and determination to his mother, Ruth, who died of cancer when he was 13. His exceptional CV does not reveal that he succeeded as much in life as in law.

Working with Edmund was always fun. Face to face was his preferred approach and ideally over food, which was a major factor in case preparation. There were urgent discussions of interesting (and sometimes not so interesting) points of law or fact. Granularity was the order of the day. Lengthy voicemails were the second-best method of communication. In Court, forests of post-it notes would be combined with observations which could not fairly be described as *sotto voce*. There was a search for analogies to sum up the case – sometimes seemingly without limit. In general, the crescendo of case preparation was the conclusion that only a fool could reject his suggested submissions (which occasionally did happen).

His approach to his beloved professional life is neatly summed up in the article he published in October 2020 during the period he was forced to call his retirement. It is entitled “How to lose a case”. It is essential reading for any litigator. The article also sums up Edmund: charming, engaging, insightful, different, useful and very funny. It is amusing because it accurately observes what

is really going on - from the perspective of a wry, intelligent, slightly cynical, warts and all lover of humanity.

Edmund was not just a brilliant and insightful lawyer, he was a wonderful colleague, friend, mentor, father, brother, son and husband. Although his professional world was one of controversy and conflict, he was an outstanding human being who really cared about others. He would always provide a different, insightful and sometimes blunt perspective. He was kind, thoughtful and dutiful in the best sense. He did not take things for granted. It pained him when he had unwittingly caused offence or upset. He was forgiving of the faults and shortcomings of others. He wanted to make the world a better place. He was much loved as a result.

Edmund had a particular love of family. He always spoke with kindness and affection for his father and brothers and approached family issues with the same care and concern that he took to litigation. He and Louise decided to move out to Oxford for the sake of Arthur and Emma. It was not an easy decision for two busy and successful practitioners, but typical of their courage and thoughtfulness. It was not the only decision they made for Arthur and Emma, who are each a remarkable testament to Edmund and Louise's values. He was rightly very proud of them both (as he was of Louise). The family are a much-loved part of the Oxford community. They are famously generous, kind and thoughtful hosts. Edmund became a Governor of the Dragon providing a different perspective to

most. The school flag was flown at half-mast as “a mark of our deep respect for Edmund”.

The last few months of his life were as extra-ordinary as they were unexpected. Edmund was determined to make the best of it. He was surrounded by his family and friends. He continued to make them all laugh as usual, but with the addition of his wry observations on the highs and lows of his medical treatment. He believed that plenty of food was essential: lobster noodles, Beef Wellington as a lunch appetiser or the Connaught. There was no hint of self-pity. Just an overt expression of gratitude for the richness of the life he had lived and for the gift of his family and friends.

VERNON FLYNN

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