

I have been asked to speak on behalf of David's many friends and colleagues at Keele – at least the younger generation of them! I see many present who have known David far longer than the mere 46 years I can claim, so I must apologize to them for speaking also for them.

I first met David at interview for the post of Examinations Officer, in his Senior Tutor's Office, together with John Hodgkinson, the Registrar and Alan Treherne, from the Admissions & Tutorials Committee. David and I both learned a lesson that day, which affected all the many interviews both of us have conducted since. When he asked me back into the room saying, "Mr Clifford, there's one more question we'd like to ask you", which in my innocence I assumed meant they'd forgotten one they'd asked the other (nine!), I was of course asked if I would accept the post. As I had another interview due, for a post I wanted even more, if you can believe that, I asked if I could have a couple of days to decide. David wanted to say no, but John Hodge said that, as they hadn't asked any of the candidates if they were in a position to accept if offered, they should allow it. (They then spoke to the runner up, who made the same reply, and the second runner up who was very keen – I then had to travel back with him on the London train!) Ever since that day, both of us have ended every job interview by asking if the person in front of us was still a firm candidate, in a position to give a decision if offered.

I started in August 1976, just as David was going on holiday for 2 weeks! Ever since his return, however, he was an unfailing guide and wise mentor – he even taught me years later how to use Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheets in after work sessions.

Early August was his usual holiday time, with two school age children, and the need to be back for A Level results and Keele re-sits at the end of the month. Every year, on his return, our dear friend, the late Jane Minto, and I would sit down with him to brief him on everything that had come up in his absence. We used to joke that there was always something where he would say “well as you’ve done that, I’ll back you on it, but I would probably have done (the other option). One year Jane insisted, rather against my better judgement, that we try telling him we’d done the opposite of what we had, and see how he responded. We did, and he said “Good, that’s exactly what I’d have done”. We then owned up and, with a twinkle, he replied “yes, I rather thought you had”. How he knew, I shall never know!

Another August, I always remember, his Secretary was missing, and there was a delay in getting a temporary replacement, so he brought a very youthful Esther in to answer his phones. (Sorry Esther!) I still have a very vivid recollection of hearing her say “No, I’m sorry, you can’t speak to Dr Cohen at the moment, he’s very busy” – whether to a re-sit failure, an applicant or the Vice-Chancellor I do not know!

I used regularly to go to the SCR Bar for a lunchtime sandwich (some things don’t change, at least till Covid), and every week I would bring him back, as Honorary Wine Steward, a note of anything that needed ordering. After some months of this he said we ought to regularize the position, and would I like to stand at the SCR AGM to be his Deputy. So I became a member of the SCR Committee - which, sadly, I still am today. David had a lot to answer for there! Every year, at the end of July we undertook a stocktake of the Bar, for the annual accounts, sometimes lasting 2 hours, although we got faster and faster as years passed.

Afterwards, David and Mary used for many years kindly to host me at their house in Springpool for an evening meal, before I headed home.

Our friend Professor David McNaughton, who had recently become the first ever Deputy Senior Tutor when I arrived at Keele, working part-time alongside his duties as a Lecturer in Philosophy, has asked me to say: "Given that this was a new post, David put a lot of work into training me in all the things that the office covered and was happy for me to deputise at some national meetings. He was very kind and welcoming, and I learned a great deal about how university administrations operate, which was very useful to me when I later became Head of Department.

Apart from the opportunity to meet many students on his behalf, I was sent to schools to talk about Keele and University entrance generally, which I think a very good practice." David McNaughton is very sorry not to be here.

One final story, if I may. One year, David hosted a visiting party of Egyptian University Registrars, and we held a lunch for them in Keele Hall. At one point in the main course he leaned towards me and said "do you think there is bacon in the sauce with this chicken?" He then beckoned over Ken Walshaw, then Head of Catering – sorry if you're here Ken – and asked him to check. (He had of course stipulated there be no pork in their meals.) Unfortunately that instruction had not been applied to the sauce, Ken reported, and David said "well, they'll never guess, and it would only upset them if we told them, but I don't think I will eat any more."

David was a great friend as well as a kind and generous boss, and I and all his friends miss him very much. Rest in Peace David.