RONALD CASELEY

EULOGY – 29 May 2025

Thank you everyone today for coming to say goodbye to my father-in-law, Ron Caseley.

We have an international line-up. Like Eurovision but without San Marino.

I can’t name everyone but I would especially like to welcome:

Marion, Ron’s sister, is here, looking sprightly as ever. All the way from Bromley. Along with Uncle Joe. Just as sprightly but definitely taller. And Ron’s nephew Jonathan, also from South East London.

All the way from Switzerland is Ron’s older daughter, Caroline, along with her husband John and Ron’s grandchildren, Joshua (from Glasgow) and Kaya and Zara from Zug.

Ron’s other grandchildren, Maxine and Amy, are now resident in Berlin and Amsterdam.

We welcome nieces and nephews from Germany, Babette, Udo and Thomas.

And also from Germany, Gordon and Elise, whose parents Tommy and Hildegarde were lifelong friends of Ron and Anke.

Visiting from the Standard Athletic Club in Paris, we have some more old friends of Ron and Anke, James and Naomi Moore.

We have some former Standard Athletic Club members, now representatives of the LADP: Les Anciens de Paris. Bob Wilkinson and Alain Demalherbe. Mike and Helen Orrin.

Frank and Jackie McKay.

And last but not least, my wife, Annette, who has spent more than 2 years looking after Ron after he moved back to London in January 2023.

Many of you saw Ron in Magnolia Court in what we would all agree were not his best years; but even during those he was still able to raise a glass or two with old friends in restaurants and pubs all over London indeed as far afield as Hammersmith. Even in those later years Ron was of course particularly partial to the Savoy and J Sheekeys; never a man to economise on the finer things in life. Thank you to everyone who helped Annette in the last couple of years. She wants me to say it meant a lot to her. And it did. So thank you all again.

And now, back to the beginning.

Ron was born in Catford on 11 November 1935.

And died in Barnet on 25 April 2025.

Aged 89.

Those are the numbers.

Ron was a chartered accountant.

So he was good with numbers.

He knew that, had he been born a couple of months later, in 1936, that year was 44 squared: 44 x 44 = 1936.

And of course you will all have worked out that this year, the year of his death, is 2025, is 45 squared: 45 x 45 = 2025.

Some kind of symmetry there.

Indeed, Ron demonstrated his skill with numbers giving the Father of the Bride speech at my wedding in Versailles in 2000. Telling a story which featured South Africa; the carrying of gold bullion in bags on a plane and Cardinals at the Vatican City accepting bribes [Allegedly] which entirely baffled his audience but left us in no doubt that Ron’s meteoric career progression had been entirely well-earned. Ron was pretty much always the smartest man in the room.

We spent a memorable holiday debating the 3 doors problem: you’re on a game show and told there’s a prize behind one of 3 doors. You pick a door. Then the host opens a door and shows you there’s no prize behind it. So it must be behind one of the other two doors. Should you stick with the door you first chose or switch?

Ron and I spent several hours over the course of several days debating this classic problem. Happy to go into more detail with any of you about it in the Clissold Arms afterwards if you like.

But the numbers of course don’t tell us much about Ron or his life.

Or about Ron and Anke. Anke and Ron.

Lifelong partners; party hosts and party guests.

But Ron did have a life before Anke.

At birth, Ron weighed, by his own account, as much as a 2 pound bag of sugar in old money.

1 kilogram.

Ron’s survival therefore was a miracle, again by his own account.

And the reduced size of his lungs prevented him from representing England at rugby. And football.

And Athletics. And squash.

And Golf. And Bridge. OK to be fair Ron hated Bridge. And much preferred snooker.

Ron’s Grandfather, Alfred Percy Crook, was a moneylender. Ironically Ron’s father, Leonard was a police officer: a station Sergeant at Brockley and then Eltham before he retired.

Ron was evacuated during the war to the countryside. Lancashire. To be fair he never showed any great love for the countryside, unless it had a golf course on it, but it’s possible evacuation gave him a taste for travel.

While in Lancashire, Marion tells me the headmistress, who hated evacuees, told Ron he would never amount to anything. A bit rude, it seems to me. Different times obviously.

Hold my beer said Ron.

At school in London after the war, Ron excelled in everything. His report cards are things of beauty.

As was his handwriting. My daughters well remember postcards from Ron on his travels written in the most beautiful handwriting we had ever seen. Not something our daughters inherited I should say. Probably because my handwriting is illegible.

Ron was the smartest boy at Brockley County School (they put him up a year). Anke framed his report card from 1952 when Ron, aged 16, was placed first in his class in English, History, Geography, French and Maths. Although, disappointingly, only 3rd in German (probably the other reason Anke framed it). It didn’t hold him back…

Notably, the report card shows Ron chose not to study RE: Religious Education. Ron was very much from the “And may your god go with you” school of thought. Which is why we are here rather than in Westminster Cathedral.

Ron decided that going off to University to learn how to drink a pint of urine from your own rugby boot wasn’t a sensible option. He wanted to earn money. So Ron went off to do his accountancy exams so as eventually to qualify as a Chartered Accountant.

But his career was rudely interrupted in 1953 by 2 years of National Service; (not abolished until 1960). It’s fair to say Ron was unimpressed by the rigours of the British Army or the usefulness of being able to march up and down in time. Having done it, he didn’t think it was of any use whatsoever and wouldn’t recommend it to anyone.

He did, however, explain to me that he learned how to kill a dog with your bare hands [take the back legs and pull them apart]: a useful skill for those of us who live in North London and one which I passed on to Maxine and Amy at an early age: “Your grandad always said to me”.

And he participated in one of the very first acts that form part of the Legend of Ron: his role as tank navigator in an incident for which Ron always maintained he was never responsible.

Ron used to love telling this story and I will try to do it justice.

Picture an English Tank in 1954 in Germany. Near Munster. South of Hamburg.

Driven and navigated by an English Crew.

Of young national servicemen.

Including Ron as navigator. But not the driver (he would always add at this point.)

Driving across the German countryside. (For this was in Germany). In the middle of the night.

Possibly returning from a public house.

Which they may have visited.

And had a few drinks in.

Suddenly a railway line appears in front of the tank. And the crew decide they can cross it no problem. Before the train arrives.

And there is just the smallest misjudgment.

Leading to the train colliding with the tank and being de-railed; the picture appearing on the front page of the local newspaper; with a report that miraculously nobody had been hurt.

Ron’s line: “I wasn’t driving the tank; I was only the navigator” didn’t appear to entirely convince the authorities who demoted him from tank navigator to a safer desk job where he couldn’t damage any more trains.

After finishing his national service, Ron moved back to London from Germany, finished his accountancy exams and then decided the 1960s would be more fun in Paris. Which at the time wasn’t part of Germany…

[Just reminding everyone of the chronology.] So off he went. In 1962. Looking like Michael Caine. And very much prepared to blow the doors off.

Just to pause there. Ron never forgot where he had come from. Literally given that until a few months ago he could still tell me that it was Chris Duffy who scored the winning goal for Charlton in the 1947 Cup Final.

And Caroline remembers how keen Ron was to give his daughters the opportunities and experiences that he hadn’t had when he was younger. He talked about his daughters all the time (Caroline worked in Jersey when she was younger for a firm of lawyers Ron had worked with and was surprised Ron had told them all about her)

It barely needs saying in this company because we all know it to be true; but Ron was always the most generous man to his wife, his daughters, his friends, his family and to everyone he knew.

Rising up the ranks in Sedgwicks, Ron became intimately acquainted with every high class eating and drinking establishment in Paris. And they with him. From Harry's Bar to the Oasis, otherwise known as the Brasserie de L’isle Saint Louis, Ron was a much-loved regular at all of them.

Meanwhile Anke Wittekind left Germany and moved to Paris. To study at the Sorbonne. It was 1963. [In the director’s cut of this tribute I now explain I was born in 1963 and launch into a long… Cut]

So there we are. Take yourselves back to 1963. Or Google it kids.

Ronald Caseley. The smooth talking young accountant who dressed and spoke like Michael Caine in the Ipcress File (1965), described by Wikipedia as a style icon of the 1960s’ That was Michael Caine. Not Ron. That wasn’t Anke’s impression, however. “If you want to date me, lose the Michael Caine glasses” said Anke. And get something more à la mode.

What to do? Only one choice. Happy wife. Happy life. As the saying goes. Anke Wittekind married Ron Caseley in Paris on 18 February 1967 and they celebrated their Emerald wedding anniversary in 2022. (55 years).

Anke’s older daughter was born on 4 January 1968. Anke and Ron had agreed that she would be called Ann. However, having left the hospital Ron told me he changed his mind and registered her name as Caroline with Ann only as her middle name. Having done this deed Ron returned to the hospital and told Anke who, perhaps unsurprisingly was cross. And called Ron many bad things. In several languages.

Ron took note. Two years later, on 7 April 1970, Anke gave birth to her second child in Paris. Ron rushed Anke to hospital hoping against hope for a boy this time. He’d been there only a few minutes when a French nurse came out, said she was looking for an English man in the waiting room, and upon Ron disclosing his nationality, told him that his wife had had a girl. Damn said Ron. Or something like that. These were different times I should point out to everyone here under 50 years old. Particularly to all the women.

“Are you sure it’s me you’re looking for?” said Ron. (Possibly channelling his inner Lionel Richie. Google it kids.) Apparently not. Another Englishman, by the name of Dickin Drew, who was also a friend of Ron’s was in fact the father of the daughter announced by the French nurse. That baby was called Jenna Drew. Ron in fact had another 30 minutes of hope before the nurse ruined it by telling him of the arrival of a second daughter, Annette. This time Ron didn’t dare change the name. I can only imagine what Anke promised to do if he failed to carry out her instructions on a second occasion.

Caroline and Annette’s childhood followed a predictable and happy pattern. Anke and Ron were regulars at the Standard Athletic Club in Meudon and would spend many happy hours there and in the bars and restaurants of Paris socialising with everyone. Anke would play bridge, knit, talk and drink. Ron didn’t like bridge or knitting… Generous hosts, they also took advantage of what appears to have been a gap in the laws of France relating to drink driving if it was after 1am and you only lived a couple of miles round the corner. Different times, I should point out, to everyone here under 50 years old…

In his prime, Ron played rugby for the Standard Athletic Club. On the wing. Well out of trouble he used to tell me. John Gibson, who can’t be here today, told us he well remembered Ron’s long, rangey runs down the wing and his big grin after a successful touch-down. Evenings at Harry’s Bar (their Club House), became their favourite watering hole and there’s still a picture of their team from 1966-67 behind the front entrance. That’s just a fantastic memory of Ron so thank you to John for reminding us. We should all be so lucky as to be immortalised by a picture in Harry’s Bar.

One of Annette’s earliest memories of Ron is of being driven to a bar in Paris by Anke where Ron was conducting a rousing chorus of a particularly raunchy rugby song with an audience of Ron’s teammates. You may all be wondering where this tribute is going now; but don’t worry. Although I have over the past couple of weeks been down many rabbit holes on the internet featuring “Wild rugby songs of the 1960s and 70s” and “Filthy Limericks” you can rest assured I have only done that using my wife’s laptop and I am absolutely not going to lead you in a call and response version of Lily the Pink or the Lobster Song by “Ron and the Rude Boys” whose chorus features some prudent advice about testicular hygiene. Perhaps later in the Clissold Arms…

Ron ended his glowing career at Sedgwicks by retiring at the ripe old age of 55 to concentrate on improving his golf. Ron and golf are another source of tremendous Ron Memories. I had the pleasure of playing (and losing) to him on multiple occasions. Notwithstanding that I was a full 28 years younger and used to think I was reasonably good at the game.

Ron was what we used to call “a wily old pro” in golfing parlance. He would trundle the ball 150 meters down the fairway. Usually along the ground. And then another 150 meters to the green. Usually along the ground. And then chip onto the green. Usually along the ground. He would get himself within range of a two putt at worst. All the way along the ground. Extremely effective and avoided the risk of hooking or slicing the ball miles out of bounds Ron was able to play the same shot with every club in the bag and usually keep the same ball all the way round.

This was a tremendous strategy at Ron’s local course in St Cloud. But (again according to John Gibson) less successful at courses such as Bovey Castle which features the River Bovey winding through its grounds. Ron was able to deploy a full range of expletives to describe the disappearance of his typical shot into a watery grave on courses like that.

Playing golf with Ron gave you an excellent idea of what an amusing man he was. The gift of perfect comic…. Timing.

Another of his golfing buddies, Neil Anderson, recounts a story of playing with Don Mowbray, who was at the time struggling to still play golf.

The guys are on the Eiffel Tower par 3 at St Cloud.

Ron and Neil had played good shots into the green and had both thanked someone for teaching them to play golf.

Don stepped up and, addressing the ball said, “I don’t know who I’ll be thanking for this shot.”

Quick as a flash, and just as Don is about to hit the ball, Ron whispers. Loudly enough to be heard. “You can thank us for playing with you.” Very unhelpful for Don. But extremely amusing for Neil.

[Neil I should add also recalled Ron’s story about “derailing a train with his tank” suggesting Neil hadn’t himself entirely accepted Ron’s defence that he was navigating not driving…]

Retirement didn’t stop Ron from touring the world as a non-executive director, randomly bumping into his friend from Australia, Bill Robinson, at board meetings around the globe organised by chance at fine hotels with excellent restaurants and wine cellars.

And indeed after Ron’s retirement, he and Anke devoted themselves to their children, grandchildren, London, Paris and international travel.

They visited the Great Wall of China. “Once you’ve seen one wall, you’ve seen them all, haven’t you”, said Ron.

They sailed down the Danube. They went to Japan and the Maldives. They were invited to attend an endless stream of glamorous events around the world with friends they had known for decades and who all adored them.

Some of you will remember, I spoke at Anke’s funeral in December 2022 and before that went through my old emails from Anke almost all of which enclosed photographs of a holiday or party. As I said, the highlight was a series of photographs in 2011, when Anke was 71 and Ron was 76 remember, entitled, “Pictures from a 3 day party in a convent”.

Extraordinary. A 3 day party. In a convent. Sounds like a European Arthouse movie. But this was IRL as the kids say.

Anke wearing an ankle length sparkling grey dress.

Ron wearing a dinner jacket and looking like Michael Caine with better spectacles.

After Anke’s funeral, the host of that party came up to me and said he thought it had been his party and everyone had had a fantastic time. That’s what I loved about Ron and Anke, they lived life to the full; loved to party; and in our hearts we should always picture them together resplendent in evening dress and holding a glass of champagne.

Ronald Caseley. He made life happen.

And he took joy from life.

He would have enjoyed Charlton Athletic’s play-off victory last Sunday.

Almost as much as he in fact enjoyed the relegation of my team, Shrewsbury Town, a few weeks before he passed away. If only there was a German word for Schadenfreude we used to say…

Ron missed Anke after she passed but for him it seemed as if she was still with him every day. Annette and Caroline got used to being addressed as Anke: he never got used to her absence.

Ron, it was an honour and privilege to be your son-in-law. May you rest in peace with Anke.

Thank you everyone for listening.

29 May 2025