

## Sparky

Stephen Mark Notcutt Champion

March 6<sup>th</sup> 1942 – 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2026

### **Sparky's Early Life adapted from Geoff Notcutt's eulogy:**

Mark was born on March 9<sup>th</sup> in 1942. His mother, Geoff's Aunt, was one of 6 children born into the family home in Ipswich. This meant that Mark had several cousins growing up around him, and they often got together during the war years and early post war years.

Two of his cousins Stephen and Judith remember Mark as being a very energetic child, often disappearing for hours on his bike. Clearly this enthusiasm for exercise continued well into his later life. We have seen a lot of his running exploits in Qatar with the Hash House Harriers, and more recently with the very sociable Herts Hash House Harriers.

He also took up windsurfing in Qatar, where he had the habit disappearing across the Gulf on his board. Going back to his early life, things were not always easy. His father James was away on active service, and it soon became apparent that Mark was dyslexic, something that was not well understood in those times.



Mark and Rupert

Schooling was not easy for him. In 1956 his mother died and the tragedy was compounded when his elder brother Rupert died in a climbing accident on the Matterhorn in 1959. Mark had already decided to make a clean break of things and in 1958 he enrolled in at Army Apprentice College, leading on to joining the Royal Engineers for start of his main career path in Surveying.

In this role he started his travels, with spells in Singapore, Brunei and in the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. Ray will say a bit more about his army life. He left the army in 1968 to join Hunting Surveys, working mainly in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, Oman, Abu Dhabi, as well as Greece, Ethiopia and Nigeria.

After completing further training he became a specialist in Hydrographic Survey, which took him back to Nigeria for Shell Oil, followed by projects in Iran, UAE and Qatar. He clearly loved his time in Qatar, spending around 5 years there and occasionally working in between his windsurfing exploits.

After this he took up work the North Sea and the USA, before finally resting his itchy feet in St Albans. Mark and his cousin Geoff reconnected several years ago at various family events, that included one of my significant birthday parties.

With the decline in his health over the last two years his cousins, Geoff and Martha, would see a lot of him, and a delight in these difficult times was when they meet a number of his loyal and trusted friends, especially those in the Hash House Harriers, some of his neighbours, and his wider circle of



longstanding friends from his times abroad. They were a significant part of his later life, and Geoff and Matha take this opportunity to thank them all.

Mark was a kind, generous and trustworthy man. The mutual sections of his friends and especially his god children are a testament to this. We will miss him!

### **AROUND THE HORN**

**(Sparky's own words on himself, written for an edition of the Qatar Hash magazine)**

Your Hash Horn Sparky, alias "the Sunshine Man", alias Stephen Mark Notcutt Champion was born in the middle of the war (that is why he is still so skinny) in Northampton.

He was considered a reasonably normal child but later his parents had difficulty in finding schools that could educate him, sending him to the four corners of Britain. At one of the schools, Bembridge on the Isle of White he took up the trumpet and was soon playing in the school orchestra, but they weren't satisfied and dragged him away and finally flung him in the Army to become a soldier and a surveyor. I loathed the three years training, well the military and bullshit, though I enjoyed everything else that took me away from it.

I was probably saved from committing suicide by my musical talent as I managed to get out of most square bashing and inspections by practising in the band and playing at parades. The only snag was that I had to perform the task of duty bugler. The worst call of course could have been Reveille as one was supposed to get up and play it from the centre of the parade ground.

I would make sure that the head of my bed was always positioned directly beneath the window so that all I had to do was to put my hand out and grab my bugle, open the window, pull myself half out of bed thrusting the instrument out through the aperture, play the required notes and slither back beneath the bed covers.

The orderly sergeant never cottoned-on when he came around some minutes later to wake us.

Release at last came and I was sent to the then British North Borneo and Sarawak to do the first proper survey since Cook was around. Cook incidentally would name all the highest peaks after his women, we wondered if there was any relationship, the shape and height of the peaks and the way his ladies were endowed on what he had achieved.

The Borneo jungle, contrary to normal belief, was found to be a very hospitable place, if one could put up with the leaches, so long as one didn't try and play around with a native girl that was

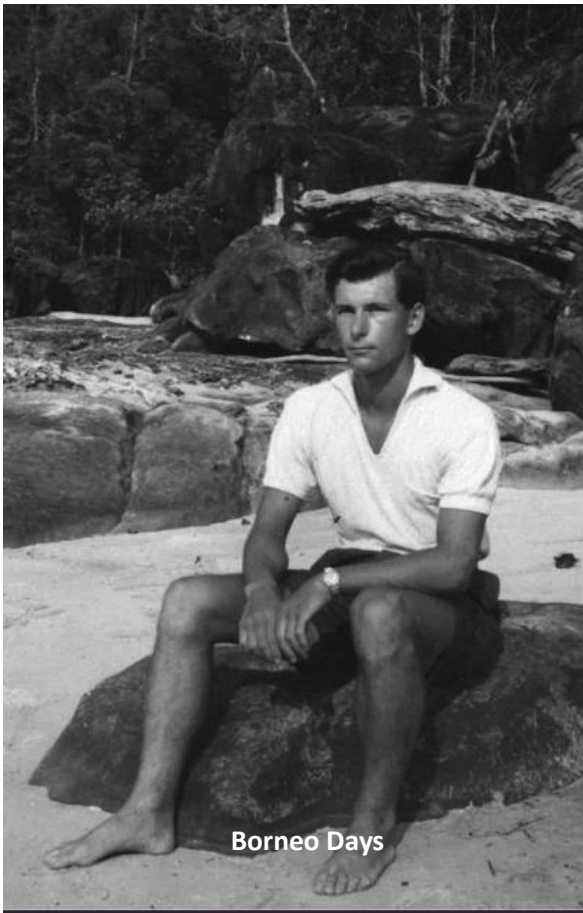


'claimed' as our hosts were the original and still practising head-hunters. It was always of

## AROUND THE HORN

### Your Hash Horn

Paramount importance to show friendliness to everyone, particularly the chief as we depended on



Borneo Days

them entirely for canoes, porters and our heads! The way to show your appreciation was to show that you were enjoying yourself at the parties that they threw for us at every village we stopped at.

On one occasion I must have done particularly well on the rice wine which is pretty potent stuff as after watching their dances which were not a lot removed from a Highland Fling, I felt that the time had come for me to show them the Scottish version, in doing so I broke through the bamboo floor and vanished, falling ten feet to the ground beneath.

I did not find it funny, but they were in stitches, you could say I made my mark with that long-house that night as I am told that the Chief had seven dusky maidens to carry me to my bed! I have kicked myself ever since for not doing anything about it!

At last, after three years in and around Borneo and numerous adventures whose stories I will tell another time, I had to return to the Army survey branch in Britain, and after a further three years too close to the military and with diminishing prospects of any more adventures, I bought my

final release for a hundred and fifty quid and joined Hunting Surveys.

I was sent immediately to Oman and went under the mis-apprehension on my first job as a 'civvy' that life would be soft and great socially, but when I was met at Azaiba air strip (1968), I was given a tin trunk and told to repack my gear and that I wouldn't be requiring my dinner jacket as I would be living in a tent for the next six months and wouldn't be meeting anyone other than a few jerboas, foxes and gazelle.

My host was more or less correct; I hadn't realized that companies had to be run commercially and that Huntings was run by ex-army men!

After numerous other delights and adventures in the Nigerian swamps, the deserts of Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and being violently seasick whilst endeavouring to work in hurricanes in the North Sea, I was incredibly grateful indeed to come to Qatar which I find is paradise.



Looking like a 'Cold-war' Spy

## Mr X on Sparky's time with Herts Hash House Harriers

Native Americans have a saying "Never judge a man until you have walked a mile in his shoes!" even if the shoes are not a matching pair and have cardboard insoles to cover up the holes in the soles.

With a last name of Champion the Hash name of Sparky was a fitting one [Other Spark plugs are available!]

Sparky was probably one of the gentlest of souls to have ever graced our Herts Hash. Never offending anyone, nor did we ever hear him swear once, a lesson that some others, like our RA should adhere to?

As we know that Sparky spent a lot of time abroad, with his time in the Army, and as a company surveyor, including his time surveying the Himalayas, adventures of which he rambled on to Ketchup [He trained as a surveyor!] in a tale as long as the Himalayas themselves!

After years of Hashing with Qatar Hash, clocking up 190 Hashes with them, he first Hashed with us on Herts Run Number 1264, Sunday 18th January 2009, at the Plough Tyttenhanger Green, not far from his home over in St Albans, after he moved back to the UK. He completed just over 300 Trails with Herts, his total would have been double that but he only Hashed at weekends, missing Mondays for being away working on his parents' property in Suffolk during the week.

He appeared with his Hash-horn, which he loved sounding as the Pack set off on a Sunday Morning, enthusiast blasts to rouse the Hash in to running, these would excite packs of countryside working dogs, horses and Hunt Saboteurs, in the urban environment the same horn would awaken shift workers and hungover students alike from their slumber.

Sparky's setting a Trail as the Hare often left a lot to be desired, he never indicated to the Knitting Circle any hints as to which way to search when the Keenies were off on a long, long Falsie he was also known for.

There was also the UK Ex-Qatar Hash Trail from Hertford Rugby Club, where he co-Hared with TBT OBE, both getting lost on their own Trail, tis was compounded by the fact that the 'Beer Stop' was at the Hertford County Yachting Club, of which TBT OBE is a member!



He was awarded the Qatar Hash-it of the Year in 1980 for setting the 'Worst Run of the Year', beating a lot of contenders for this title, this run (Qatar H<sup>3</sup> No.83) set behind the Transmitter Station at West Pay, reputedly first in fog then later in darkness – what a disaster! Hares: Nick Kirby (Gripper) Mark Champion (Sparky) Date 9<sup>th</sup> January 1979

On one Herts Trail in Barnet, he was leading the Front Runners, when he disappeared off down through to some garages behind a row of shops, there was no trail there at all, he went

down there to see a garage that he used to rent there many years ago

He was always active, Running on the Hash, Walking, Skiing, Cycling on his bike, one of which he spent an age locking up outside of the Robin Hood in St Albans, we did wonder who would ever think of stealing this as it had wooden fruit boxes strapped to it as panniers, it was as bad as Granville's delivery bike from TV's Open All Hours, then there was Wind-surfing – which he later admitted he preferred to do at night in the warmth of Persian Gulf, while naked!

Sparky also followed the Rugby, he attended some of the 'Double Header' Saracens games the Hash went to en masse. He always appreciated when the Herts Hareline would include the 6-Nations, or World Cup, games and TV timings for après Trail enjoyment, where, *Sacre Bleu* he would wear the French National Top even though cheering on England. *Allez les blanc!*

Sparky was extremely generous, rather spending his money on others that on himself, it never bothered him that he had no heating after his boiler was condemned in the mid 1980's. On a couple of his milestone Birthdays, he treated everyone to far too much food and drink, everyone there will recall the Birthday at the St Albans Organ Museum where we had a large tray of sandwiches per person.

Nor, the birthday at the Two Willows in Welwyn Garden City where he had paid for and selected his choice of sandwiches, copious trays of egg sandwiches came out, Hashers looked for meat or cheese option were surprised that all the sandwiches were egg and nothing but egg, some the Hash would be egg-bound by the time they left.

He came for a generation where nothing was wasted, his breakfasts were all regimented and measured out in exact quantities, he would often arrive at the Hash with his flask of hot beetroot juice to drink before setting off on the Trail.

One day I asked Sparky if he had had his measured out his Breakfast, to which he replied that he had a change, this time it was baby squid in its own ink, on toast!

Having never heard of such a thing, a week later he would bring a tin along to the Hash the, a small cylindrical, red labelled, can similar to the ones you'd get sardines in. these also made an appearance at the Mersea Island Herts Hash Camp-out weekend. When asked where purchased this, as it's not a familiar sight UK shops, he said he bulk bought a load when he was in Malta!

The small can was examined, this was the first time we realised that Sparky was not one for taking any heed of a 'Sell-by' or display until dates on produce. Waste not, the want not attitude again.

Then there was the 10 Year Old Haggis that he complained was taking up space in his freezer, apparently it was too large for one person to eat on their won, but he wasn't going to throw it out, he still had it another ten years later - I believe that TBT OBE is now the official keeper of said Haggis?



At the Gibbard Garden Beer Festival he brought along a box Maltesers and fig rolls as his contribution to the picnic, we soon learnt that after 10 years Maltesers from a large mass and are pretty much soggy inside.

Sparky certainly had an appetite, and again nothing was wasted, there was also an innocence to him, he never had a toasted marshmallow until he was in his seventies, when we had a South African Harriette with Herts, she held a 'Charity Braai' (Barbeque) while the Rugby World Cup was being staged. In the evening twilight

the over the embers, Marshmallows were toasted, of course Sparky burnt his mouth not realising how insanely hot they become under the crusty shell.

After a Trail in Potters Bar the over, there were only three of us left in the very busy Admiral Byng, we had to sit in a small booth-like are with two guys who were eating Sunday lunch. One had ordered a steak, which was more than well done and appeared to have the texture of the soul of an old leather boot, the guy obviously had trouble cutting the steak and ate everything else on his plate, pushing the meat to one side. Once he had put his knife and fork down, this was Sparky's queue to ask if he could have the steak, he was given the go ahead and he picked it up and ate it all!



Waste not, want not!

On Trail in Baldock, there was a Held Check (A regroup) by a small Post-Office, there on top of a bin was a paper plate with 'Party food' on it, this was nothing to do with the Hash at all but it didn't stop Sparky from eating a sausage-roll and a sandwich, while the rest of the Pack cringed as they awaiting the Hare to arrive.

At one Herts Hash Christmas weekend breakfast were being served, Sparky grabbed one plate about to be handed across the table, he then tucked-in but halfway through he started to say that he didn't order scrambled eggs, he carried on eating, then he said that he didn't order other items on his plate, he was right, he didn't order them as it was My Lil's Breakfast he had hijacked.



No abrasions would stop Sparky!

dusted himself off, questioning why he fell over a tree root he was met with 'What did you expect in a pine wood? This was not going to curtail his Hashing in anyway.

A couple of weeks later he tripped up a kerb in the back of Hertford, again he picked himself up, again he was determined to continue with the Hash, but after having two falls so close to each other he decided that on his next Herts Hash outing he was taking no chances. He arrived and began his famous 'faffing around in the back of his car getting ready. This time it took even longer,

There was a time when Sparky had a fall in a pine wood on top of Hitchin Hill, he clipped a tree root and broke his glasses and split his nose, he picked himself up and



Skater-Boy Sparky at the Meridian Line

for he strapped on knee and elbow pads and donned a helmet that made him ensemble something akin to a BMX Rider, or Skater Boy, something akin to the gear that Skye Brown would wear. After two weeks of this protective wear, he abandoned them due to the heat summer.

Sparky came along to another Herts Hash Christmas Weekend that year, but without the knee and elbow pads, however, for safety's sake the RA wrapped his arms and legs in Bubble-wrap before the Hash set off on Trail, he ran the whole trail wearing the bubble-wrap, even to the Beer Stop at a local Pub, where the locals thought that a Morris Dancing Side had overdone things the night before.

The mystery of the Post Code, Sparky was baffled by the concept, he thought that this would take you right to your destination, even though I explained that one code can cover over 200 properties and some distance!

We were about to set off on the Hash Trail from the Anchor in Wadesmill, when I received a call from him to say that he had followed the post code and had arrived, but he couldn't see the Pub? Asking where he was, he said the road sign said he was on Anchor Lane, things were sorted when I told him to drive a quarter of a mile to the other end where the Pub was.

Thankfully we never had to explain what3words.



Sadly, Sparky didn't wear his hearing aids, a disconnect that did not help him, or us. Though he was the only one to sleep through on the normally tranquil Mersea Island Herts Hash Campout weekend, where he hadn't realised his car keys were in his pocket as he went to sleep, the distinctive sounding the locking and unlocking of his little Fiesta's doors, as well as the indicators flashing and even the alarm sounding

If he gave those of us who drink, and use public transport, a lift back from the Hash, we had to endure not one, but two different satnavs, one Tom-Tom and one Garmin on full volume, one male and one female voice giving similar dictions at the same time. No doubt other Satnavs are available!

Probably the most infamous time was on a Hash Trail crossing the A10 by-pass, which can even be busy on a Sunday, to access the dual carriageway the Pack had to pass through a tall deer fence, with a gate that had a large sign bolted to it stating that the gate must be closed to stop Deer from getting on to the A10.

Having crossed over, some of us looked back to see that Sparky was standing by the hard-shoulder but had left the gate wide open behind him. No amount of hollering would work, he just couldn't hear us, so I had to dodge the traffic two more times to go back and close the gate, the gate is now forever known as 'Sparky's Gate' by any of the Hash driving to or from Puckeridge!

At the Waterside Inn, in Ware, before the Hash, and on the way back from the loo, Sparky became trapped like a bluebottle in between the two double set of fire-doors. We had to fetch the bar staff who kindly helped us get him out without setting the alarm off.

One of Sparky's highlights for every year was the annual Ex-Qatar UK Reunion Hash, since he was the Qatar H<sup>3</sup> Hash Horn and Hash Master in Sept 1978. Sadly, his annual treat was taken

away from him a few years ago, when UK Ex-Qatar Hash deemed him too much of a liability, he was later cheered up when the Herts Hash rallied around, inviting him to another our Christmas Weekend on us.

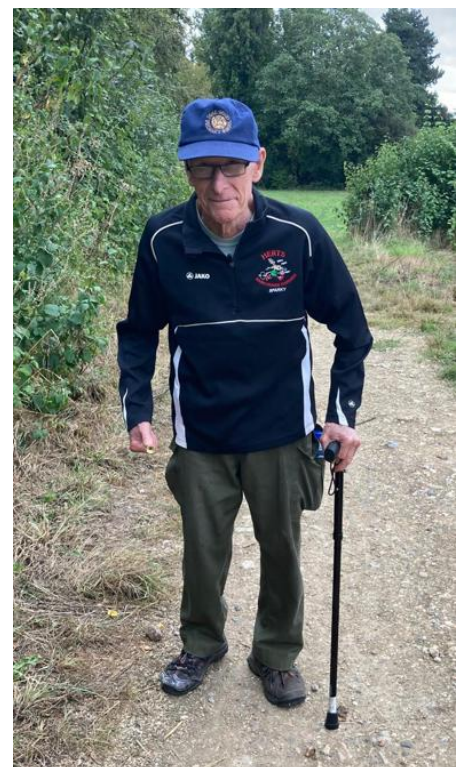


When he finally gave up his driving license, the Herts Hash must thank as Milf, TBT OBE, Kylie and others, who would drive around to his maisonette to pick him up, and to take him to the Hash, even if it made them a little late due to more faffing around.

He still had a pace on him, marching along with his Herts Hash Walking Stick, which he really appreciated. He did occasionally stop, briefly to pick up elastic bands, which he had hundreds wrapped around the gear stick of his car. I did wonder though, if there was another reason than hoarding for all of these elastic bands? If you don't know, it was via his stationary bills, that the CIA caught Pablo Escobar by tracing the \$2,500 a month that he spent on supplies of elastic-bands to his hide out, which were used to put around the rolls of 100 Dollar bills! Did Sparky have a secret off-shore business?

There came a point where we had to have 'minders' for him, to keep an eye out and grab a hold of him when he was about to march out in to the on-coming traffic, no one would forget the time at Sleepshyde as the Trail crossed both sides of the very busy dual-carriageway, Milf had to grab his jacket to restrain him from potential disaster!

On his very last Hash Trail, which was with Herts, TBT OBE had picked him from Vesta Lodge, to attend my Birthday Trail at the Royston Club in St Albans, 21st April 2025. By this point he had a walking frame but insisted that he and TBT go out, following the Trail as far as the Camp Play Area by the allotments before he began to flag. When the Hash returned to the club, Sparky was back from his jaunt out, but had fallen asleep at the table. Sparky awoke and was happy to accept and dispatch a Down-Down



The Herts Hash would like to thank Martha and Geoff for all they have done for Sparky in the twilight of his life, we would also like to thank those of the Hash, who went to visit him in Vesta Lodge where thankfully he seemed happy in himself, though the stories were becoming a little faded.

On one visit after a Herts Hash Trail, Sparky had a large crowd visit him, after he had just gone to bed, he was probably the talk of the care-home the following days, for amongst his crowd of visitors were Harriettes from Toronto, Canada, and Florida in the USA, all bustling into his room to see him.

Sparky was extremely proud of the tree he planted in the grounds of Vesta Lodge, visible from his room window, I believe the tree came from a local Garden Centre, though other garden Centres are available I can recommend Notcutts at Smallford.

Finally, I cannot finish without mentioning George, Sparky's lifelong pal!

On a Hash in Harpenden, we returned to the Cross Keys in the High Street, where after the Trail the some of us went to the outside Gents to change, and after going to the loo, with Sparky standing at the other urinal, there a sudden panic from Sparky "Good Lord! I can't find George!" he cried. I looked around and there was no other person in the Gents, then it dawned on who, or really what, George was. George would inspire the phallic shaped cake Psycho baked for one of Sparky's milestone Birthday.

On! Up! Sparky to that great Hash amongst the stars with 'G' Gispert

Remember Old Hash-Horn never die, they just wilt.....

Mr X

